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Team decision-making in workplace meetings: The interplay of activity roles and discourse roles

Kristin Halvorsen [a,b,*], Srikant Sarangi [c]

[a] NTNU Social Research, Dragvoll Allé 38B, 7491 Trondheim, Norway
[b] Department of Language and Literature, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 7491 Trondheim, Norway
[c] Danish Institute of Humanities and Medicine/Health (DIHM), Aalborg University, Kroghstræde 3, DK-9220 Aalborg, Denmark

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Abstract

Decision making in team meetings has become routine organisational practice in contemporary work life. Beginning with a theoretical discussion of role positioning at the micro-interactional level, the present study adopts as its analytic focus the management of participant roles, specifically the interplay of activity roles and discourse roles, in examining interprofessional meeting talk and decision making. Weekly meetings for optimising maintenance plans on offshore oil and gas wells on the Norwegian Continental Shelf were recorded and analysed within the framework of Activity Analysis, which combines sequential nature of turn-taking with the structural components of a given activity type vis-à-vis role-relationships among participants. Our findings show that interprofessional meeting talk in this activity type is characterised by shifts between discourse roles and activity roles in complex and overlapping ways, thus affording the meeting participants the opportunity to cumulatively add to the joint production of decisions based on their organisational role-responsibility and expertise. The present study points to the need for further differentiation of role categories in the participation framework, especially with regard to professional/institutional discourse.

Keywords: Participation framework; Discourse role; Activity role; Workplace discourse; Decision making; Activity analysis

1. Introduction

In recent years there has been a growing body of workplace communication studies adopting discourse analytic and social pragmatic frameworks (Angouri and Marra, 2011; Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 1997; Holmes and Stubbe, 2003; Koester, 2006; Sarangi and Roberts, 1999; Schnurr, 2013; for an overview see Sarangi and Candlin, 2011). Parallel to this, a discursive turn is noticeable in organisation studies (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000; Grant et al., 2004), steered by disciplinary contributions from psychology, anthropology, sociology and discourse studies, among others. This is reflective of the contemporary workplace moving away from traditional hierarchical structures to more team-oriented work practices, with team work and team talk in decision making gaining increasing relevance. Of particular significance is the focus on meetings which have become routine organisational practice underpinning how intra- and inter-professional collaboration is accomplished in situ.

Team meetings in organisations take different shapes and serve different functions. It may be useful to distinguish between ritual meetings which are characterised by reporting/exchange of information and meetings which are targeted at problem solving and decision making in high risk scenarios. We are concerned here with the latter type of meetings within an international oil and gas company, namely the meeting for optimising maintenance plans for oil and gas wells located on the

* Corresponding author at: NTNU Social Research, Dragvoll Allé 38B, 7491 Trondheim, Norway. Tel.: +47 48245135.
E-mail addresses: kristin.halvorsen@samfunn.ntnu.no (K. Halvorsen), sarangi@hum.aau.dk (S. Sarangi).

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Norwegian Continental Shelf. In order to optimally coordinate the maintenance activities, professionals from several departments meet weekly to decide how to prioritise limited and shared resources across a field of oil and gas installations. Decisions made at this front line, operational level are crucial for the day to day functioning of the organisation and have significant economic, environmental and safety consequences. The site is representative of a form of meetings in the industry under the heading *Integrated Operations*, which is an overall industrial strategy for overcoming boundaries between professionals, fields of knowledge, departments and organisations. In the attempt to integrate what traditionally have been functional silos, one significant move has been to establish interprofessional and cross-functional arenas for decision making.

Our focus is on how interprofessional team decision making is accomplished in the meeting activity type. The research question can be posed as follows: Within the activity type of an interprofessional meeting, how do the participants occupy and shift between specific activity roles and discourse roles in their attempt to arrive at decisions? And by extension, how can such shifts in role-relationships offer useful insights about tacit professional practice?

The paper is structured as follows. First, we outline our conceptual framework of role-positioning in activity types, drawing a clear distinction between activity roles and discourse roles and showing how discourse roles afford shifts in activity roles, and vice versa. Second, we revisit relevant discourse analytic studies of meeting talk, paying special attention to studies on team decision making. Before undertaking data analysis, we offer details about our data setting and the framework of activity analysis. The analysis will explore the affordance of activity roles and discourse roles available to the participants within the given activity type. We suggest that the dynamics of role positioning in this meeting setting facilitates contingent decision making.

2. Conceptual framework of participant roles: linkage between activity roles and discourse roles

Over the decades the notion of role has been theorised at the interface of disciplines such as psychology, sociology and anthropology (see Sarangi, 2010a for an overview). Goffman (1961) marks a point of departure with his focus on role performance (or role enactment) and his conceptualisation of role as a basic unit of socialisation: ''it is through roles that tasks in society are allocated and arrangements made to enforce their performance'' (p. 77). In social encounters, according to Goffman (1961, 1981), participant roles, unlike social roles, can be understood in terms of *participation framework* and shifts in *footing*. His claim that ''[. . .] all who happen to be in perceptual range of the event will have some sort of participant status relative to it [. . .]'' (Goffman, 1981: 3) challenges the folk categories of participation, i.e. speaker and hearer as pronounced in speech act pragmatics. His participation framework differentiates more nuanced participant roles such as Author, Animator, Principal, Overhearer, Bystander, etc.

Among others, Goodwin (1981), Thomas (1986) and Levinson (1988) have offered different typologies of participant roles. However, Irvine (1996) critiques more generally the decompositional approaches that devise participant categories as universal, decontextualised and finite in numbers. Her empirical focus, insult poems in rural Senegal, makes evident the activity-specific constraints and opportunities in any encounter and the need for contextual sensitivity in analysing participation. She suggests a few primary roles with subtle sub-categories closely related to activity-specific goals and frames, and stresses the need to separate between participant roles at an utterance level and at a speech event level.

Participant roles at the utterance level can be called *discourse roles*, which is akin to Goffman's (1981) production and reception roles. Sarangi and Slembrouck (1996) point out that discourse roles, referring to the relationship between the participants and the message, are fundamentally dependent on social mandate. Participant roles at the speech event level can be termed *activity roles*. Drawing upon Levinson's (1979) notion of 'activity types', Thomas (1986) suggests activity role as central to participation structure. Activity role refers to the relationship between participants and the activity type in which the participants are embedded, for example, meeting chair, meeting members and minutes-taker (see Section 4.2).

Many researchers – although not explicitly invoking the notions of 'activity role' and 'discourse role' – concur that static descriptions of role ignore human agency and the skilful negotiations in which people engage as they shape and form meaningful social interactions (Cicourel, 1972; Jackson, 1998). Hilbert (1981) gave an early description of role as a resource for social members, claiming that ''roles are not behavioural matrices to be described and explained but are conceptual resources actors use to clear up confusion, sanction troublemakers, instruct others in the ways of the world, and so forth'' (p. 216). Likewise, Halkowski (1990) conceptualised 'role' as an interactional device, thus moving away from role as a self-evident, social-scientific resource for analysis. Within social psychology the concept of 'positioning' is an attempt to overcome the constraints of traditional role theory by paying due attention to local context, episodes, storylines, access and opportunities for action (Davies and Harré, 1990; Harré and Van Lagenhove, 1999). From a discourse analytical perspective, the argument for a more dynamic conceptualisation of role urges us to acknowledge how participant roles (i.e. activity roles and discourse roles) are accomplished situationally and in activity-specific ways, especially in professional settings (Housley, 1999; Linell, 2009; Sarangi, 2010a). By adopting or assigning particular discourse roles, participants implicitly make claims about their role positioning and relationships with co-participants, and at the same time redefine or reframe the activity in which they engage (Bennert, 1998). In light of the research question posed earlier, our analysis will show how

participants in a meeting context shift across available activity roles and discourse roles in arriving at decisions. In what follows, we review selectively relevant studies that have addressed meeting talk.

3. Literature review

Meetings are a key arena in which organisations are ''talked into being'' (Boden, 1994) and where roles and responsibilities are negotiated (Cooren, 2007; Taylor, 2006). For the purposes of the present paper, discourse analytic studies of meeting talk will be clustered in two strands: studies focusing on interactional features of meeting talk; and studies addressing the focal theme of decision making.

Micro-interactional studies have characterised meetings as speech exchange systems or speech genres that differ from other forms of workplace talk and from talk in informal encounter. Formal meetings are routinely planned in advance, with structured agendas and goals as well as clearly delineated participation structure. However, as meeting talk unfolds the interactional dynamics is more fluid and contingent (for comprehensive reviews, see Asmuss and Svennevig, 2009; Schmitt, 2006; Svennevig, 2012). The specific conventions for regulating the talk in this setting are the resources for participants in 'achieving a meeting' (Cuff and Sharrock, 1985; Handford, 2010). Members will move in and out of the meeting proper and this will be marked by transitions in the speech exchange system (Atkinson et al., 1978; Boden, 1994; Deppermann et al., 2010). These transitions are seen as emergent collective accomplishments wherein nonverbal resources are an integral part.

The activity role of the chair is a distinguishing feature, with a mandate to manage access to the floor, control contributions and formulate decisions and conclusions – a structuring device for managing interaction (Angouri and Marra, 2010). Boden (1994) shows how in any single meeting there will be an implicit negotiation regarding the role of the chair and whether s/he assumes or is assigned this role. When the chair lacks seniority, s/he will defer to participants or explicitly call on the mandate of the chair, or even distance himself/herself from the acts of authority inscribed in the role (Pomerantz and Denvir, 2007; Potter and Hepburn, 2010).

Studies of meeting interaction show that it is often difficult to identify when a decision has been made and even whether a decision has been made (Boden, 1994; Miller et al., 1999; Sarangi and Roberts, 1999). Rather than being a singular statement, decision making in meetings is a process consisting of incremental activities with many minor intertwined steps. Cicourel (1986) has rightly pointed out that decision making in organisational settings cannot be reduced exclusively to technical rules or context-free inference and knowledge. Local interaction and organisational resources and constraints are essential to this process. Huisman (2001) issues a directive for confronting decision-making theories with empirical data from actual talk ''[. . .] so that our understanding of decision-making is enhanced'' (p. 84). With regard to the topic of decision making in team meetings, Halvorsen (2010) provides a systematic review, identifying empirical studies from a variety of professional contexts, ranging from business settings to education, health and social care. The reviewed studies below generally contribute to illustrating how decision making is bounded not only rationally, but also socially and interactionally, thus anticipating our analytical focus on activity roles and discourse roles.

Several studies focus on the ways in which organisational hierarchies, and implicitly organisational roles, mediate interaction in specific ways. Wasson (2000) and Graham (2009) demonstrate how organisational structure and hierarchy influence the use of mitigation strategies for handling disagreements, resulting in complex face-saving strategies for handling a consensus-oriented business culture and the multiple hierarchies of a hospital, respectively. Kwon et al. (2009), focusing on a senior management team meeting in a multinational company, draw attention to how macro- and micro-dialectics play out over an extended period of time, explicitly addressing the emergent nature of decision-making processes. Housley's (1999) study of the flood support team is primarily concerned with roles at a social-organisational level, such as social worker or lay volunteer, while drawing attention to how roles are interactionally accomplished. In the context of school meetings concerning children with special needs, Mehan (1983) addresses role relations more specifically and shows how institutional roles and authority reside in the mode of presentation at the linguistic/interactional level. He illustrates how language structures role relationships, and how such role relationships in turn provide the grounds for the authority of the claims and recommendations made (see also Sarangi (1998), on the dynamic inter-relationship between reportability and evidentiality in interprofessional meetings). Similarly, Hall et al. (2006), in the context of social work case conferences concerning parental neglect of children, demonstrate how the moral characterisation of the mother becomes a precursor to decision making. In their study of problem solving talk among engineers, Angouri and Bargiela-Chiappini (2011) report how procedures are ''anchored to past experiences and shared perceptions of professional practices and hierarchies in their workplace'' (p. 223).

The studies reviewed here give empirical depth to the co-constituted relationship between organisational roles vis-à-vis participant roles and the emergent nature of decision making. Some of the studies highlight the activity specificity of participation; however, to our knowledge the concepts of activity role and discourse role have not been employed systematically in the analysis of workplace meeting talk targeted at decision making. We aim to take Goffman's concept of participation framework one step further by undertaking a more systematic approach that allows for capturing the

dynamics of role positioning as it relates to the specifics of the activity type, including role-relationships as well as the agency of individual participants. We hope to establish the relevance of these concepts through our detailed analysis of the plan optimisation meeting, but first a description of methodology and the analytical framework is in order.

4. Methodology and analytical framework

4.1. Data and methods

The data for this paper is part of a larger study on decision making in an operational business setting. The first-named author conducted ethnographic field work in an international oil and gas company over a period of eight months during 2010, attending and recording key meetings in operational planning. The plan optimisation meeting was one such meeting, observed throughout the period and recorded on five occasions, later supplemented with four more recordings, totalling five hours of meeting talk. Following usual ethics clearance surrounding informed consent, the recorded data has been transcribed and anonymised. (Transcription conventions can be found in Appendix A.)

The meeting in question is the weekly planning meeting in which decisions on task prioritisation and resource allocation are made with regard to oil and gas wells on a field of offshore installations. Well service tasks, also called well intervention or well work-over, are tasks for performing maintenance or treatment that will restore, prolong or enhance the productivity of the wells. The interprofessional meeting is designed to attend to the optimisation of the well service plan with the purposes of maximising production and minimising loss, while ensuring safe operations. Decision making in this setting concerns a myriad of small and large decisions, some more consequential than others, and some more visibly so than others. The outcome of decision making can be a specific task prioritisation, a change in the current plan, or a decision to postpone or delegate the decision due to lack of information or lack of decisional power.

The tasks and installations on the field are tightly coupled through shared and limited resources (such as beds in the living quarters, electric power, equipment, expertise, etc.). This means that changes in one part of operations might trigger changes elsewhere, and the consequences of change for current and future tasks, within well service or other areas, must therefore continuously be assessed. In addition, operations offshore frequently face challenges and changes that affect planning. These changes can be related to unforeseen events, such as a halt in the drilling process, delay with vendors, mistakes or unexpected hold-ups, or simply be caused by adverse weather conditions preventing work from being done.

An explicit motivation for gathering this group of people is to ensure that all relevant and available expertise is involved and that repeated rounds of discussions on decisions are avoided. What would be most practical for the well service team might for example conflict with what is cost-efficient from a production management point of view. There is not one person or unit who has access to the full picture of all constraining factors in the current plan. The well service plans must in other words be coordinated with a range of other operational plans in other departments and across the field of installations offshore. We can anticipate how shifts in activity roles and discourse roles in meeting talk are going to play a central role in negotiating decisional processes and outcomes.

Approximately 10 people attend the meeting in their organisational roles representing up to six different departments. The discussion is conducted in English. Two to three participants are native speakers of English; for the rest of the participants, English is a second or foreign language. All participants are onshore, in the same room, gathered around a meeting table. There are two large screens on the wall used for displaying the current well service plans. The meeting participants safeguard different aspects of the operations through their areas of expertise or their organisational role-responsibility within a specific domain. Broadly speaking, there are two categories of meeting participants – those with a management background and those with an engineering background. In addition, there is the meeting chair who also holds a coordinator role for Production Optimisation. This is an organisational role with a certain authority, although not invested with formal decisional power.

Given the contingent as well as cumulative nature of decision making, the analytic section will centre around one decision making episode, from the identification of a problem with the plan, through discussion of options, to a closure of the episode and transition to the next agenda item. The analytic focus, as already announced, will be the interplay of activity roles and discourse roles in relation to discourse types in decision-making trajectories.

4.2. Analytical framework

In light of our research question and the conceptual model of participation framework and role-positioning, our analytical approach is Activity Analysis (Sarangi, 2000), Sarangi (2010b), which is based on Levinson's (1979) seminal notion of 'activity type' that views language as primarily indexical, with meaning dependent on its contexts of production/reception. Following Levinson (1979), meetings are a prototypical activity type, defined as socio-culturally recognised entities that are goal oriented and involve specific constraints on participants in terms of contributions, style and structure. This echoes Goffman's (1961) conceptualisation of an *encounter* as "[. . .] sanctioned orderliness arising from obligations fulfilled and

expectations realised, and therein lies its structure'' (p. 19). Levinson's notion of activity type has been reappraised by Sarangi (2000; see also Linell, 2009) with special reference to institutional/professional domains of language use. According to Sarangi (2000), ''[t]he notion of activity type appeals for various reasons: it takes into account cognitive, historical and genealogical dimensions, as it links these to interactional patterns and structural configurations'' (p. 6). Gu (2010) makes a similar point when arguing that activity type is an interface between langue and parole, between society and the individual.

The categorisation of an activity type is not an either-or matter, but rather one of more-or-less in the spirit of prototypes. In this sense, a given structural/sequential/stylistic form can deviate from what is taken as prototypical, with corresponding inferential schemata linked to the goal of the activity type (Levinson, 1979; Sarangi, 2000). As activity types are not pre-structured, likewise interactional trajectories within an activity type are not pre-structured. For instance, participants' organisational roles can determine who participates in a meeting but the exact nature of their participation in the meeting talk is bound to be dynamic and of a negotiable nature. It therefore becomes imperative to consider how participant roles are accomplished in and through activity roles and discourse roles in meeting talk.

Activity Analysis pays adequate attention to the sequential organisation of talk but extends the scope to consider how sequences of talk are embedded in the overall structure of the activity vis-à-vis participant role-relationships (Sarangi, 2010b).[1] Activity Analysis therefore begins with the structural, sequential (interactional) and thematic maps of an entire activity type (see Appendix B for examples). Structural and sequential maps can also be undertaken for parts of an activity type, e.g., decision-making trajectories. This mapping exercise affords a necessary anchorage for data interpretation in a focused and sustained manner, in this case an analysis of how activity roles and discourse roles are accomplished sequentially, structurally as well as role-relationally.

The relevant participant roles are derived from the main purpose of the meeting activity (plan optimisation) as well as the project's interest in decision making. Production roles have therefore been categorised as *Presenter*, *Responder*, *Assessor* and *Elicitor*, all of which relate to information, problems, options, opportunities, experiences, expert opinions or decisions. As all the participants are ratified receivers with speaking rights, reception roles in this meeting can usefully be distinguished in terms of *Addressee* or *Audience*: the former is a targeted receiver with listening obligations whereas the latter is only peripherally targeted with partial listening obligations. This is a particularly relevant distinction in this meeting setting in which the participants have very different organisational role-responsibilities and domains of expertise. The topical focus will determine which participants are positioned as Addressee or Audience at any given interactional moment.[2]

This distinction is closely linked to the activity roles in this meeting, which can be simply categorised as chair and participant. The role of the chair, held by the Coordinator of Production Optimisation, is a dual one. She not only chairs the meeting, she also contributes as a participant significantly on content, both in terms of frequency and volume as visible in the interactional mapping (cf. Map 2b, Appendix B). The meeting participants can be further categorised as *primary* or *secondary participants*. Some participants assume or are assigned more central positions than others, similar to the case presenter role in Mehan's (1983) study. Some will provide more information or have a higher stake in the decisions made, depending on their organisational role but also their professional experience, personal engagement, strategic interests, etc.

As will become clear in our data analysis section, the performance or enactment of activity roles and discourse roles as well as continuous shifts between such roles are facilitated through *discourse types*. Sarangi (2000) expands Levinson's notion of activity type to suggest that activity types are composed of discourse types. Discourse types are ways of characterising forms of talk and interaction, whether these are verbal or nonverbal. Examples of discourse types for the purposes of the current paper can include proposal formulations, question–answer sequences, concessions followed by proposals, minimal responses followed by assessments, etc. We see such discourse types as the building blocks of discourse roles and activity roles within the meeting activity type. For example, it is through the choice of discourse types (e.g., proposal formulation, assessment token) that the meeting chair can change his/her footing as chair and participate as an ordinary member. In this regard a given discourse type derives its meaning from the activity type in which it is embedded vis-à-vis participant roles (see Culpeper et al., 2008 on advice as a discourse type). In sum, activity roles can be indexed through discourse roles, and discourse roles through discourse types, to provide a more systematic account of participation framework.

5. Data analysis

Given the complexity of the meeting activity which is our analytical site, here we select one decision making episode divided into three sequential excerpts. The episode illustrates well the patterns we have found across the data set in terms of

[1] The Activity Analysis framework and the notion of 'activity type' should not be confused with Soviet psychological Activity Theory (Leont'ev, 1978) or Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) (Engeström, 1987).

[2] The receiver roles of addressee and audience of an utterance are not always easy to identify as an outsider analyst even with the benefit of video recording. A specific person or group might be targeted through the mere topic of the utterance, e.g. a drilling-related topic targeting drilling personnel without explicitly stating so. But the utterance can equally be seen as targeted at anyone in the meeting who might have information relevant to the topic.

the shifts in different role types. The first two excerpts illustrate the affordances of the activity type in terms of role positioning as well as the dynamic shifts in activity roles and discourse roles. The last excerpt, in which the final decision is made and the meeting moves on to the next agenda item, the analysis focuses on how the routine shifts in roles facilitate decision making.

The scenario is as follows. The well service plan needs to be changed because the drilling rig is covering one of the wells that is scheduled for maintenance. The Well Service Manager (WSM) proposes that the well service crew move to other tasks instead. But an alternative option is being presented, namely that of skidding the rig, which implies moving the rig on rails away from the well. This is an unusual option as only this particular installation has the rails for moving the rig and it would involve coordinating with other units in the organisation in order to execute the move.

5.1. The affordance of activity roles and discourse roles

Twenty minutes into the meeting and three minutes into the phase in which platform B is being discussed (cf. map 1 in Appendix B), the problem in the plan is presented by Wells Service Manager (WSM). The alternative option is jointly constructed by Production Optimisation Manager (POM) and the Chair/Coordinator Production Optimisation (CPO), followed by a sequence of assessments and responses. For purposes of illustration, we signal how categories of activity role and discourse role can be systematically mapped on to the transcript, but not necessarily corresponding to single utterances and turns.

Excerpt 1 (A2/8/190)

Organisational role acronyms WSM = Well Service Manager CPO = Chair/Coordinator Production Optimisation POM = Production Optimisation Manager POE = Production Optimisation Engineer DRE = Drilling Engineer		**Discourse role**	**Activity role**
1. WSM	we are happy but the issue- there is something that is wrong there you see ((pointing to screen)) if- we can pull in eight (.) but not in sixteen. the rig is covering that (.) so we have to go from eight and then have a-	Presenter	Participant
((a few turns omitted; WSM is corrected by several participants, it is well six, not eight))			
2. WSM	yeah six and sixteen=six we can pull right now		
3. CPO	so what would you do=so will you do: [GLT then?]	Elicitor	Chair
4. WSM	[so I need to do-] I need to do- then we have to go to some of the other, either restim in eh- in eleven or GLT in two or something.	Presenter	Participant
5. POM	why not [skid the rig]	Presenter	
6. CPO	[move the rig]		
7. WSM	hm?	Responder	
8. CPO	move the rig	Presenter	
9. WSM	should we just move the rig?	Assessor	
10. DRE	yeah we can [move it]	Responder	
11. POE	[why not?]		
12. DRE	xxx okay,		
13. WSM	°okay°		
14. POE	It's skiddable @@ [@xxx@]		
15. WSM	[skidding that is-] no. but we need to- then we are skidding over to the other [side]	Assessor	

16. POE	[yeah?]	Responder
17. WSM	and then we are going to skid back	Assessor
18. POE	so rig up in the rig then and skid the whole rig	Presenter
19. WSM	=we could maybe use the rig xx no xx- is there any maintenance- something going on in this rig? [is it-] ((to DRE))	Assessor

In the opening phase, WSM assumes the discourse role of Presenter as he provides an account of the conflict on well sixteen (turn 1). WSM is responsible for the practical realisation of the well service plan, executed by the crew members offshore, and he is concerned about the feasibility of the plan and what arrangements are practical in terms of transportation, equipment, material, expertise, etc. At this moment, he has identified that the drilling rig is covering the well where maintenance work is planned; so they will need to find an alternative sequence of actions in their plan. The chair takes on an Elicitor role when she first asks what WSM 'would' do in a hypothetical sense, but then quickly adds a proposal in the form of a question (''so what would you do = so will you do: [GLT then?]'', turn 3). WSM is the primary addressee of CPO's question, while other team members are positioned as audience at this point. WSM then responds, initially in first person singular pronoun but self-repairs to use the collective pronoun 'we' signalling the perspective of the well service crew or unit (turn 4). Representatives of the Production Optimisation team are focused on prioritising the wells with the highest potential for production, and it is perhaps not surprising that it is POM who presents an alternative solution to the ones presented by WSM (''why not [skid the rig]'', turn 5). As POM self-selects and presents the option of skidding the rig, he shifts from an audience position to an active Presenter role. We notice CPO presenting the same option in an overlap (''[move the rig]'', turn 6): the proposal is in a way jointly constructed by the two participants. WSM initiates a repair (''hm?'', turn 7); he does not appear to have heard the proposal, and CPO consequently repeats the proposal in turn 8 (''move the rig'').

Now that the alternative option has been introduced, WSM again assumes the role of addressee of the proposal and through his question in turn 9 (''should we just move the rig?''), he issues a request for information and assumes the role of Assessor. At this point, two of the engineer participants enter the floor, both taking on the role of Responder to WSM's elicitation. DRE first mirrors WSM's turn and responds positively (''yeah we can move it'', turn 10), repeating it exactly, while POE overlaps this response with a negative formulation but signalling agreement (''why not?'', turn 11). This is followed by DRE's inaudible response, which from the intonation sounds like a reassurance token (''xxx okay,'' turn 12). In responding to WSM's elicitation, both POE and DRE support POM's and CPO's proposal to skid the rig, and after WSM has acknowledged their response weakly, in a low volume (''°okay°''), POE continues reassuring, in a humorous manner, that it is in fact feasible to skid the rig (''it's skiddable @@ [@xxx@]'', turn 14). Both POE and DRE clearly know the conditions offshore and the installation in question, which happens to be one of the few installations that have a rig that can be moved on rails (skidded). Through self-selection and assuming a Responder role, they position themselves as primary participants in this sequence of talk, while in other parts of the meeting they hold a secondary participant status.

Following the responses from DRE and POE, WSM in turns 15 and 17 assesses the proposal to skid the rig by formulating the implications of this proposal which is negative, namely that it requires them to skid the rig first to one end of the installations and then back again. POE overlaps with a short question in turn 16, again taking on the Responder role in order to support the option of skidding the rig (''yeah?''). He proceeds in turn 18 to take on a Presenter role and launch a solution to the problem WSM has indicated (''so rig up in the rig then and skid the whole rig''). It is easy to imagine other, more moderated ways in which he could have chosen to present this proposal, for example through a question to the Drilling Engineer (''Do you think we could rig up in the rig?'') or through a more mitigated expression of opinion (''I believe we could rig up in the rig before skidding it''). Instead he presents a bold proposal, and through it he claims a legitimate primary participant status with the opportunity to contribute without being prompted or invited, and without thereby (re) framing the activity as one in which these kinds of discourse role are allowable and accessible for participants without formal authority. No one challenges this role positioning. WSM immediately moves to assessment again, first by partially agreeing to the option and secondly to assess further by probing for more details about the situation on the rig and potential other obstacles (''=we could maybe use the rig xx no xx- is there any maintenance- something going on in this rig? [is it-]'', turn 19).

We see several discourse roles in play in this brief excerpt; Presenter of problems, Elicitor of solutions, Responder of solutions, and Presenter of alternative solutions. The same discourse role of Responder, for example, is realised differently, one with a confirmation and reassurance, and the other with a negatively framed elicitation accompanied by humour, and with different levels of modulation.

5.2. Shifts in activity roles and discourse roles

The discussion of skidding the rig continues in the next excerpt, but takes a turn as the chair interrupts WSM to present a concern regarding a piece of information she has picked up in an earlier meeting that day. There has been a problem with the fire and gas detection on the drilling rig and this might exclude the option of skidding it.

Excerpt 2 (A2/8/207), continued from Excerpt 1

Organisational role acronyms CPO = Chair/Coordinator Production Optimisation DRE = Drilling Engineer WSM = Well Service Manager		**Discourse role**	**Activity role**
19. WSM	=we could maybe use the rig xx no xx- is there any maintenance- something going on in this rig? [is it-] ((to DRE))	Assessor	Participant
20. CPO	[wha- wha] what about the node eh i- is [sue]		
21. WSM	[hm?]	Presenter	
22. CPO	the fire and gas node issue up on °rig sixtysix°		
23. DRE	yeah that is maybe-	Assessor	
24. CPO	[we have eh-]		Chair
25. WSM	[no w- w-] bo bo bo [bo]		Participant
26. CPO	[we have] a deviation right now on-	Presenter	Chair
27. DRE	I don't know- that is a rough issue	Assessor	Participant
28. WSM	they have also this electrical issues [that's kind of xxx-]	Presenter	
29. CPO	[yeah that's what I'm talking about]		
30. WSM	there is some tests on-going [today]		
31. DRE	[okay]		
32. WSM	but still they haven't found the reason		
33. CPO	yeah I know but can we consider whether it's practical to skid the rig to do well sixteen or whether it could be (.) best on- (.) later.	Elicitor	Chair

As WSM is assessing the option of skidding the rig in turn 19, CPO overlaps at a transition point in order to present a piece of new information that could potentially affect the decision about skidding the rig (''[wha- wha] what about the node eh i- is [sue]'', turn 20). She poses a question regarding some problems with the electricity on the rig, and the fact that she chooses a question format is interesting in itself, as it points to the temporal and contingent nature of information in this setting as well. The node issue might have been solved in the hours between her learning about it and this meeting. WSM initiates repair (''hm?'', turn 21) and CPO provides a more detailed presentation of the issue (''the fire and gas node issue up on °rig sixty six°'').

No one takes a direct Responder role at this point to provide the information that CPO calls for in turn 20. Instead there is a sequence in which DRE and WSM take on the Assessor role, considering the implications of this issue for the decision they are making. DRE indicates familiarity with the issue and acknowledges its relevance for the decision in a contingent fashion (''yeah that is maybe-'', turn 23). WSM assesses the information through an emphatic utterance that resembles a halt sound (''[no w- w-] bo bo bo'', turn 25), as if to stop the discussion right there. In turn 27, DRE again assesses the relevance and the problematic nature of this issue (''I don't know- that is a rough issue''). CPO, on the other hand, turns to the entire group with a non-directed presentation in a summary format that explains what this new topic is about (''we have a deviation right now'', turn 26), which can be seen as a switch to her activity role of chair, ensuring that all participants in the meeting understand the nature of the issue being discussed. In turns 28, 30 and 32, WSM shifts to a Presenter role as he provides information about the node issue (''they have also an electrical issue [that's kind of xxx-]'', turn 28; ''there is

some tests on-going today'', turn 30); and ''but they still haven't found the reason'', turn 32). CPO signals the givenness of this information (''Yeah that's what I'm talking about'', turn 29 and ''yeah I know'', turn 33); with this reformulation she shifts to her activity role as chair again and the discourse role of Elicitor, calling on the group to discuss whether it is still practical to skid the rig (turn 33).

Excerpt 2, like excerpt 1, clearly illustrates the dynamics of the meeting and the shifts in activity roles and discourse roles via discourse types. In terms of discourse roles, the Presenter role is taken up by both managers and engineers, by personnel from different departments, and by the chair. We have seen WSM presenting problems (turn 1), options (turn 4) and information (turns 28, 30, 32); POM presenting alternative options (turn 5); POE presenting alternative options (turn 18); and CPO presenting problems (turn 20) and information in the role of chair (turn 26). The Assessor role is taken up by WSM (turns 15, 17, 19, 25) and by DRE (turn 23, 27), which involves assessing information, options or problems that are proffered by the Presenters. The Elicitor role is part of the activity role of chair (turns 3 and 33); however, responses are also elicited by WSM in turn 19, by calling upon DRE to contribute with his specific expertise. CPO, in her double role as chair and coordinator of production optimization, moves between the activity roles of chair and primary participant without any explicit markings. In excerpt 1, she can be seen to occupy the role of chair through the discourse role of Elicitor in turn 3 (''so what would you do='') while positioning herself in the activity role of primary participant via the discourse role of Presenter of option in turn 6 (''move the rig''). While CPO has a specific responsibility for facilitating the meeting, she is not the only one who can assume the role of chair through discourse types characteristic for this role (cf. Angouri and Marra, 2010 on 'chairing DTs'). Her pre-assigned role of facilitator gives her privileged access to certain kinds of discourse types, but this is not exclusive to her in this particular meeting setting.

To summarise thus far, activity roles and discourse roles shift dynamically as all participants can potentially adopt any discourse role – Presenter, Responder, Assessor and Elicitor – at a given point in the interaction. The roles of addressee and audience, of primary and secondary participant, are in a constant flux; the occupancy of such roles depends on topical relevance, decisional power, as well as personal-professional judgments. The question is: what function do these dynamic shifts in role positioning serve in achieving the meeting's goal of deciding on task prioritisation and optimising the plan in an uncertain and frequently changing operational setting?

5.3. The emergent nature of decision making

The routine shifts in discourse roles facilitate a range of options in terms of organisational role positioning, which in turn influences a specific interactional trajectory of reaching decisions. The next excerpt follows the previous one and brings the discussion of whether to skid the rig to a close. Following the problems surrounding electricity, the chair calls upon the participants to discuss whether it is practical to skid the rig after all (turn 33). Rather than responding to this elicitation explicitly, WSM returns to one of his earlier options (turn 34).

Expert 3 (A2/8/222), continued from Excerpt 2

Organisational role acronyms CPO = Chair/Coordinator Production Optimisation WSM = Well Service Manager WSE = Well Service Engineer		**Discourse role**	**Activity role**
33. CPO	yeah I know but can we consider whether it's practical to skid the rig to do well sixteen or whether it could be (.) best on- (.) later.	Elicitor	Chair
34. WSM	I would have taken then the- complete well two, take well six, and then I think we have both available (name of WSE) because then we have gained two or three days- three or four days.	Presenter Assessor Elicitor	Participant
35. WSE 36. WSM 37. CPO	four yeah. [yeah] [okay]	Responder	
38. WSM	and then continue with the production.	Presenter	Chair
(5s)	((everyone looks at the screen, physically still, except for POE2 who writes in his book))		
39. CPO	o:kay. Anything else on platform A?	Elicitor	Chair

(5s)	((everyone is physically still, looking at the screen, POE2 continues writing))	Assessor	
40. CPO	ehm- platform B? ((moves on to the next agenda item))	Presenter	Chair

In turn 34, WSM is responding to CPO's request to reconsider the option of skidding the rig. He first initiates a hypothetical scenario signalling an alternative option but then self-repairs and formulates a proposal in the directive mode. He implies that he is not in favour of skidding the rig and instead proposes to change the sequence of tasks in the plan: first finish well two and then take well six. As he is presenting a hypothetical scenario and a mitigated proposal (''I would have'', ''I think''), he is positioning himself in the discourse role of Presenter of a new option, albeit through hypothetical and mitigated formulations. But he also offers assessment of this option in terms of the availability of the wells and the time frame of this scenario, and he is directly addressing WSE by name, eliciting his support.

WSM receives a confirming response from WSE in the form of a nuancing of his estimated time frame (''four'', turn 35), supporting his rationale for doing wells two and six first and, after four days, by which time they will have finished well two and six, well sixteen will be accessible again. In the turns that follow, WSM's proposal meets with approvals from WSM (''yeah [yeah]'', turn 36) and CPO (''[okay]'', turn 37). WSM then continues with his reasoning around the alternative plan, and having received support from WSE, closes his proposed future scenario (''and then continue with the production'', turn 38).

What follows this sequence is a long silence spanning five seconds, in which the participants look at the screen without making any comments or displaying any visible nonverbal cues. This silence is followed by CPO resuming her activity role as meeting chair to forecast a conclusion of the discussion with a pre-closing marker (''o:kay''), accompanied by the discourse role of Elicitor (''anything else on platform A?''). Yet another long silence follows (5s) as no one responds to the question, with everyone's gaze directed at the screen. This stretch of silence is followed by the chair opening up the next agenda item, platform B. The decision has been made of tackling well two and six before well sixteen, and the option of skidding the rig has been left behind. The meeting moves on to the next platform on the agenda and does not return to this issue.

The sequential positioning of the silence here is characteristic of this interprofessional meeting activity type, and it is interesting to consider the tokens of silence as a discourse type in its own right with a specific function. The participants all look at the screen, not in a manner that suggests they are intensely assessing the proffered option; it is rather a more neutral posture without any nonverbal behaviour such as nods, frowns or sighs. Rather than representing uptake of the Assessor role, we interpret this silence as the occasioning of the role of Responder, in this case collectively. The participants might be contemplating WSM's scenario, but they might also just be waiting for a topic closure. If the silence was a sign of reluctance to express dissent, there would most likely be nonverbal markers of this or verbal responses to the silence (see Schnurr and Chan, 2011 on silence as a discourse marker of disagreement). In an interprofessional meeting context like this, the silence might function not necessarily as explicit consent, but as a signal that there is nothing more to add, no questions unanswered, no information held back – at least as far as the participants' current status of knowledge is concerned. In this case, silence in a collective sense may function as a strategy for adopting the proposed decision in a manner that allows for efficient transition to the next topic with minimal break and minimal repetition. There has been a discussion, followed by a feasible option, and unless or until any other issues come up, the decision just formulated will assume the status of a team decision. The participants do not see it necessary to spend time affirming or repeating the decision in a warranted fashion, and there are few instances of gist formulations or summaries in general in the meeting.

6. Discussion

One key finding emerging from our data analysis is the fluid interplay of discourse roles and activity roles through the use of discourse types. Discourse types – which resemble conventional speech acts – can then be regarded as a basic unit of analysis. However, beyond conventional speech acts, discourse types extend to accommodate activity-type specific communicative behaviour, including silence. For example, the discourse type of presenting an option (e.g., ''why not skid the rig'', ''move the rig'') may originate from different participants in different role-relationships, with potentially different functions and meanings. As we have seen, presenting an option is a prevalent discourse type in our meeting dataset aimed at optimising the maintenance plan.

Like discourse roles and activity roles, discourse types are realised in complex ways. The discourse type of presenting an option/solution is manifest differently, for example through the discourse role of Responder, if the option/solution were to be elicited (e.g., Elicitor: ''Are there other options?''; Responder: ''Why not skid the rig?''). It is therefore useful to see how discourse types are dialogic and stretch over single turns and single utterances. In excerpt 1, through his assessment in turn 19 (''=we could maybe use the rig xx no xx- is there any maintenance- something going on in this rig? [is it-]), WSM uses a discourse type which consists of two parts – ''partial agreement + further assessment'' – allowing him to take on the

discourse role of Assessor of the option presented and thus ratify his position as a primary participant in the meeting. Similarly, the discourse type of ''presentation of option'' can be responded to in different ways as a basis for re-defining the role-relationships between participants, or even the very boundaries of the activity type.

Our data analysis also points to the nuanced nature of role-positioning. In excerpt 1, we saw the Production Optimisation Engineer self-selecting on four occasions when the topic of skidding the rig was topicalised (''[why not?]'', turn 11; ''It's skiddable @@ [@ xxx@]'', turn 14; ''[yeah?]'', turn 16; and ''so rig up in the rig then and skid the whole rig'', turn 18). POE's role positioning reflects some of the opportunities this particular activity type affords. He assumes the role of Responder and Presenter through short, unmitigated utterances that position him as knowledgeable about the conditions offshore and the specifics of the drilling rig. He easily occupies the role of Presenter and positions himself as a primary participant. Following Thomas (1986), these can be seen as complex participant roles (both producer and receiver roles) which are manifest through complex illocutionary acts.

The primary or secondary participant status is not necessarily linked to amount of speech or number of turns. A manager participant might very well be accorded the role of primary participant from his or her mere presence and a discourse role of Assessor even if they do not express themselves verbally. Other participants might rarely assume a primary participant role, as they attend the meeting only to pick up relevant information. Similarly one could imagine someone being cast in a secondary participant role, despite their efforts to assume a primary participant role, through consistently being ignored by the other participants. Secondary participants can, however, choose to participate should they find it relevant or strategic to do so, and might acquire a primary participant role related to specific topics. In excerpt 1, we saw both POE and DRE occupying the floor and explicitly supporting the option being launched, providing additional information and using their expertise to assess the option of skidding the rig.

What is characteristic of decision making in this operational setting is the closeness to the ebb and flow of operations, continuously faced with changes and adjustments of tasks and plans. Decisions made are potentially short-lived and burdened with great uncertainty as the operational situation changes and the consequences of change are not always easily assessed: they rely on a range of interrelated factors. The decision made on such a contingent basis can be glossed as 'based on what we now know, the optimal sequence of activities is x, y, z' or 'unless something comes up, we'll do X' – and that 'something' can be events that prevent X from being done or that present other actions as more efficient than X in terms of production and/or safety. The decision to go with well number two was made without too much deliberation and could consequently be overturned with ease after the meeting if, for example, it turned out that the electric issue on the rig was resolved in time and that there would be no other obstacles to skidding the rig. If the team spends too much time deliberating each decision, it will have been a waste of time if there is a change in the prevailing circumstances. The meeting needs to assure that decisions made are based on thorough interprofessional exchange/assessment of information and at the same time efficient decision-making procedures have taken into account the high likeliness of change. Any consequent changes do not necessarily amount to a sense of time wasting nor do they undervalue the purpose of meeting talk.

The plan optimisation meeting, with its affordance of shifts between different discourse roles and activity roles, provides for a flexible utilisation of the participants' broad range of competencies and experiences. Simultaneously, efficiency is ensured by avoiding extended rounds of confirmations or formulations of decisions that might very well be overturned by other events. This kind of activity affords the strategic use of discourse roles via discourse types on a moment to moment basis, dependent on the participants' sense of engagement and obligation, as well as expertise. The different discourse roles, constituted in identifiable discourse types, also afford unmarked, seamless shifts in activity roles, from chair to participant, or from secondary participant (audience) to primary participant (addressee) and vice versa. This interactional dynamic opens up a range of options in terms of social and organisational role-positioning for the meeting participants in their joint and cumulative production of decisions on a contingent basis. In an operational context, this can be seen as a convergence of expert labour that is efficient for decision making in a setting characterised by high risk and frequent change.

7. Conclusion

In a constantly changing business context, the interactional level is where organisational members handle, implement, or resist change, and the concept of discourse role, closely linked to activity type and activity role, provides an analytic entry into ''the core of organising'', in this case decision making trajectories in team meetings. This case study has looked at the interplay of activity role and discourse role vis-à-vis discourse type as an analytical focus for examining team decision making. Discourse types and discourse roles are here seen as the building blocks of activity-specific roles (e.g., chair and participant) and as resources for realising organisational roles (e.g., manager, engineer, and specialist). As discussed in our conceptual framework, the concept of role is regarded as dynamic and fuzzy, which proves to be useful in analysing interaction at a micro-level, while acknowledging inconsistencies, complexities and overlaps in how participants achieve communicative goals. The indeterminacy of discourse roles provides strategic means for participants in their pursuit of specific communicative goals – both individually and collectively. In studying meeting interaction in a workplace setting, the concepts of activity role and discourse role allow the analyst to probe further the interactional mechanisms

participants draw upon to negotiate their participation by adopting and assigning to others various participant roles. By operationalising these concepts and showing how they can be mapped on to interactional data in a workplace meeting setting, the study extends Goffman's participation framework. This is something we hope future research in other interactional settings will take forward.

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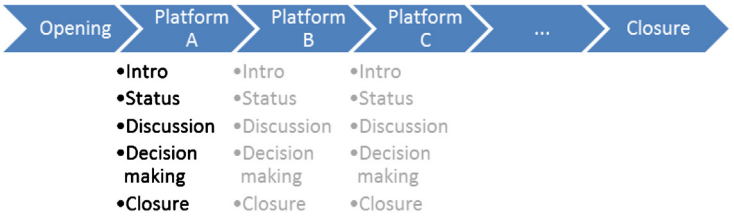
Appendix A. Transcription conventions

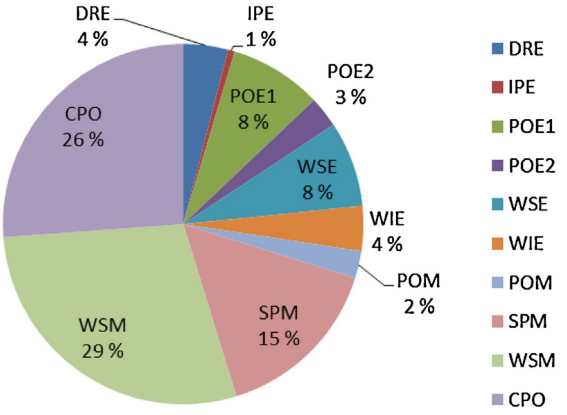
[word]: overlapping talk
.: micro pause
(3s): pause in seconds
Word: increased emphasis
WORD: louder voice (with the exception of abbreviations)
°word°: softer voice
XX: inaudible word
XwordX: uncertain transcription
@@: laughter
Word-: truncated word or phrase
=word: latching to previous utterance without pause
((word)): comment to transcription
(word): anonymised information

Appendix B. Examples of activity type mapping

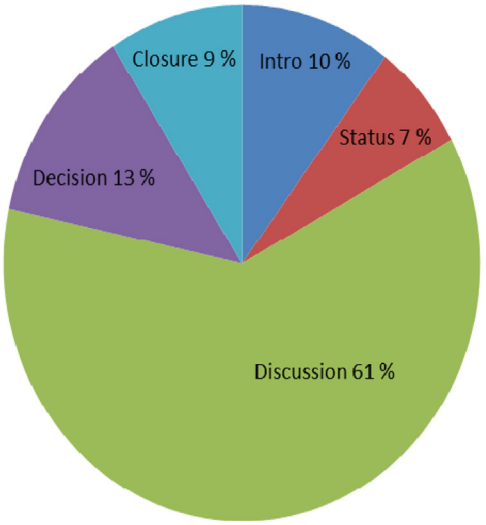
See Maps 1–3.



Map 1. Phase structure.



Map 2a. Distribution of turns by frequency.



Map 2b. Distribution of chair's turns by phase.

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Kristin Halvorsen is in the final year of her PhD at NTNU Social Research and the Department of Language and Literature, Norwegian University of Science and Technology. The title of her thesis is ''Interactional dynamics of team decision making. Discourse analytic studies of operational planning meetings in the petroleum industry''. Prior to her PhD project, she worked with a contractor to the oil and gas industry in Norway on topics related to internal communication and team interaction.

Srikant Sarangi, formerly at Cardiff University, is currently Professor and Director of the Danish Institute of Humanities and Medicine/Health (DIHMH) at Aalborg University. His research interests are in institutional/professional discourse studies (e.g., healthcare, social work, bureaucracy, education) and applied linguistics. He is author and editor of 12 books, guest-editor of five journal special issues and has published nearly 200 journal articles and book chapters. Address for correspondence: Faculty of Humanities, Aalborg University, Kroghstræde 3, DK-9220 Aalborg, Denmark.