

## What Can a Communication Perspective Add to Organization Studies?

A discussion around ongoing research

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#1 // Working together in the Space  
between Expertise and Ignorance

#2 // Improving the Capacity of  
Healthcare Organizations to Act on  
Evidence in Patient Safety

## #1 // Working together in the Space between Expertise and Ignorance

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*Refer to this article:*

Mengis, J., Nicolini, D., Swan, J., & Waring, J. (2009) *Learning at the Fringes. The Case of Accident Investigation in Healthcare*, presentation at the Organizational Learning, Knowledge and Capabilities Conference 2009 (OLKC), April, Amsterdam (Holland)

## Interdisciplinary Collaboration and Knowledge Integration

Questionable assumptions:

- In order for cross-disciplinary collaboration to be beneficial, knowledge must be integrated across disciplinary boundaries (e.g. Eisenhardt & Santos, 2000, Grant, 1996)
- In order for knowledge to be integrated, collaborators must share a minimal 'mutual knowledge' or 'common ground' (e.g. Alavi & Tiwana, 2002, Bechky, 2003, Carlile, 2004)



What forms of common ground are developing in cross-disciplinary collaboration?

What are the processes and practices through which common ground is evolving?

## Building Common Ground as Learning?



Learning without aiming to become a ‚legitimate peripheral participant‘ or ‚full participant‘ (Lave & Wenger, 1991)?

- ▶ Develop the sufficient interactional expertise to understand the dependencies of their work without acquiring substantial expertise

## Developing Interactional Common Ground

- ▶ **Develop a shared vocabulary**

*„We often use very different terms for expressing the same or (laughing) for something else“*

(insurance specialist on collaboration with IT experts)

- ▶ **Learn how to ask questions**

*„Information is something, which I do not know yet. And frankly, how can I pose the right questions on something of which I do not know that it exists?“*

(insurance specialist)

- ▶ **Identify dependencies and interactions**



## Legitimizing Ignorance

### ▶ Discursive legitimization of ignorance

Bioengineer: The one question I have for you is, let's say you did get contamination, did you see the ammonia increase at all?

Sensors' expert: Ammonia, but what do you mean?

Bioengineer: They should start producing some ammonia because they're metabolizing. Did you see any?

### ▶ Institutional legitimization of ignorance

e.g. middlemen as 'interactive specialists' or 'boundary spanners' (Levina & Vaast, 2005)

### ▶ ▶ Reciprocal acknowledgement of ignorance implies the acceptance of a form of mutual dependence, expectations, and obligations

## Conclusion

### ▶ Integrating knowledge as a practice of (common) grounding:

- Both developing common knowledge AND dissecting differences and dependencies (legitimizing ignorance!)
- Common knowledge as interactive expertise:
  - developing shared vocabulary
  - building capability of asking questions
  - identifying dependencies and interactions)
- Differences in knowing marked by: processes of categorizing and positioning (both expertise and ignorance)