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Symbolic Interactionism and the Cell Information Board

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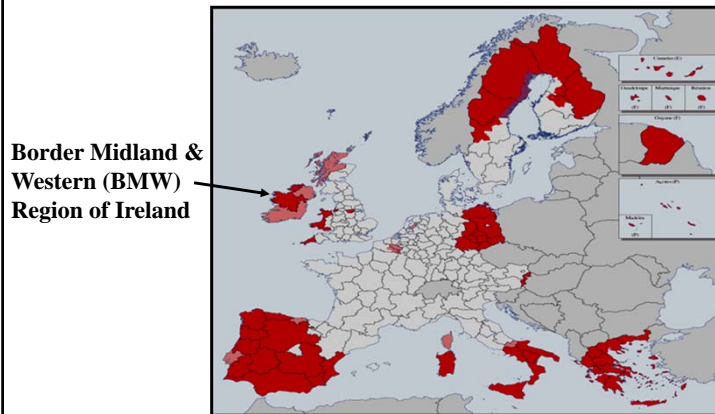
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Tilburg June 2013

Agenda

- **Motivation**
- **Signs, Symbols and Symbolic Interactionism**
- **Dialogical Action Research**
- **AR Study Site: APC by Schneider Electric**
- **Observations**
- **Summary**

Motivation: *Innovation study*



Border Midland &
Western (BMW)
Region of Ireland

EU Objective 1 regions

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Point-Of-Departure:

- Claudio Ciborra in “*The Labyrinths of Information: Challenging the Wisdom of Systems*” argues that the position of information and communications technology (ICT) in organizations requires a shift from the present focus on the “scientific paradigm” to an “*alternative centre of gravity: human existence in everyday life*”.
- This paper is the story of an *alternative centre of gravity*

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Information Systems

- An information system is a system which assembles, stores, processes and delivers information relevant to an organisation (or to society), in such a way that the information is accessible and useful to those who wish to use it, including managers, staff, clients and citizens. An information system is a *human activity (social) system* which may or may not involve the use of computer systems. [Buckingham et al. (1987)]
- An information system is an arrangement of components that interact to support the operations, management, and decision - making information needs of an organisation. [Whitten, Bentley and Ho (1986)]

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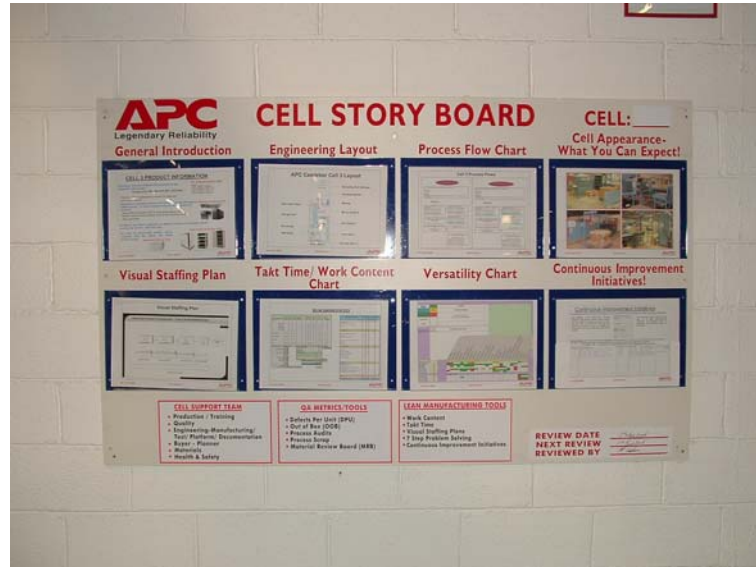
A Cell



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An Information Board

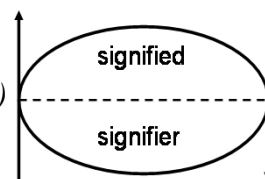


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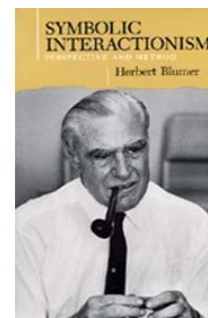
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Signs, Symbols and Symbolic Interactionism

Semiotics after de Saussure (Chandler p. 14)



- Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.
- The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows.
- These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters.



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Dialogical Action Research

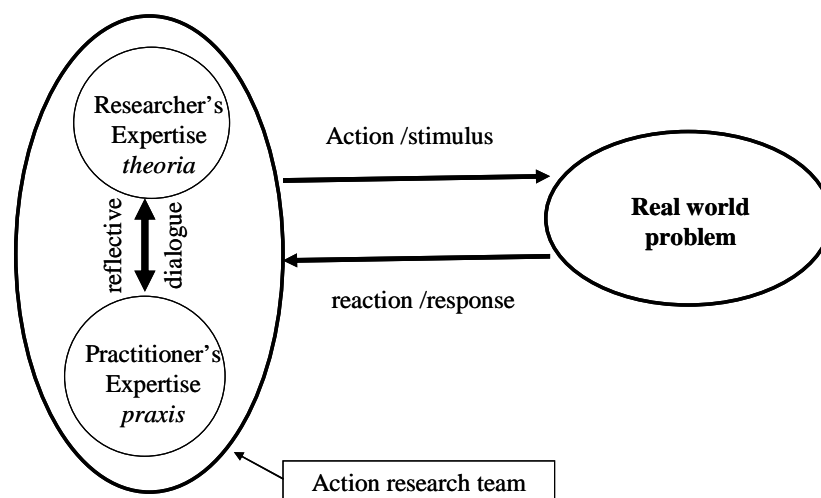
- **Action:** address real-life problems
- **Research:** contribute to theoretical knowledge
- **Dialogical AR : Mårtensson & Lee (MISQ 2004)**
 - “reflective one-to-one dialogues” : practitioner & researcher
 - “reflect on, learn from, and remedy managerial problems in the organization”
 - ongoing dialogue is an *interface* between *theoria* and *praxis*

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dAR topology

Mårtensson, P. and Lee, A. S. (2004) Dialogical Action Research At Omega Corporation. *MIS Quarterly* 28 (3), 507-536.



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Case Study – APC Ireland (now APC by Schneider Electric)

- APC Ireland
- Acquisition by Schneider Electric
- Supply Chain Challenges
- Innovation key corporate objective
- Time of Major Transition



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Research Approach:

- **Researcher- temporary company employee**
 - In addition to the real day job!
 - No commercial relationship
- **Pilot Study ~ 22 interviewees, 50 hours**
- **Action Research project**
 - Meetings every two weeks *removed* from day to day work
 - 22 hours of recorded interactions ~ approx. 60,000 words
- **41 Days on site**



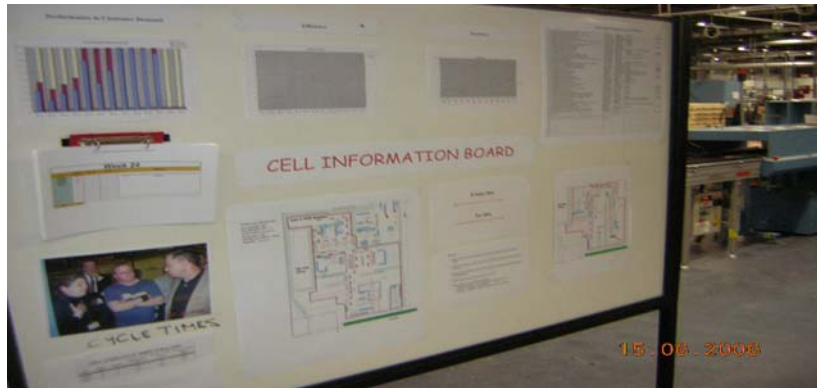
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Observations:

- Cell Information Board: Real-time IS
- Short Interval Management (SIM)

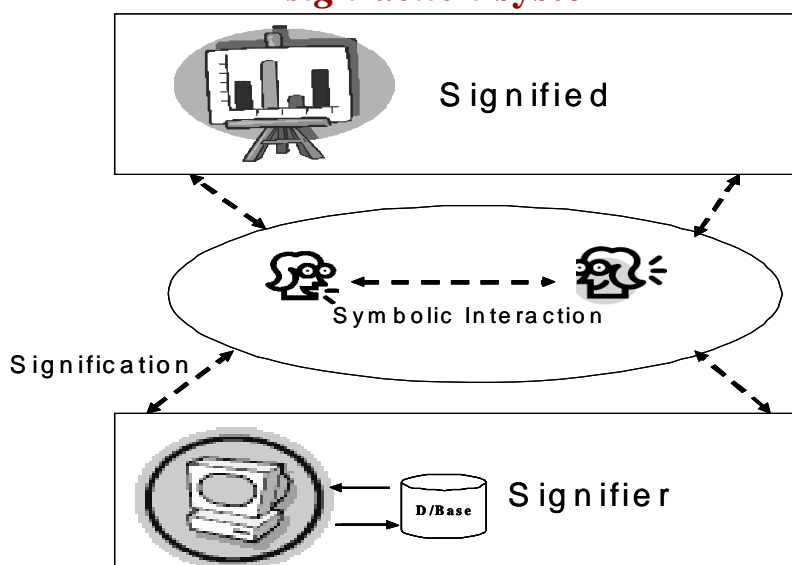
"The SIM process gives visibility to everyone on the floor; it drives closing things off; it encourages people to come forward with their suggestions. Those are things that make the difference". Practitioner



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A conceptualization of an information system as a *sign-action system*



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Observations:

“SIM was instrumental in the plant receiving a National Award for Health and Safety”.

SI perspective: The joint action of a group undergoes a process of formation and is a result of the interlinking of separate acts.

“SIM drove an organisation change from the bottom-up.”

SI perspective: the people acted based on a collective meaning.

“The SIM process gives visibility to everyone on the floor; it encourages people to come forward with suggestions.”

SI perspective: The human person must construct and guide his or her action.

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Observations:

“SIM is based on standard Lean processes but has been adapted for the Schneider production system.”

SI perspective: The empirical world is the central point of concern.

“SIM process is providing a mechanism to harness process innovation. The SIM process allows for natural creativity.

SI perspective: A network does not function automatically but from acts of people.

The amount of suggestions being captured by the SIM process was significant.

SI perspective: the operators reacted to the symbolic nature of the SIM process sheet

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Summary

- Innovation Study
- Engaging a Practitioner
- *Theoria* meets *Praxis*
- Creating Space
- Return to original definitions of IS
- Orlikowski and Iacono (2006) “*a diversity of perspectives, methods and theories*”
- IS as a sign-action system



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Thanks

- Reviewers
- APC by Schneider Electric staff
- Colleagues
- Questions?

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