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The Manufacturing Company

Meeting data

Out of the three CofP meetings to be analysed from the manufacturing company, one is a departmental CofP, whilst the other two are meetings from larger, company-wide CofPs, comprising members from across four of the company’s departments. The departmental CofP meeting is of the Services Department, and is chaired by one of the company’s two female directors. The wider CofP meetings of the Product Review Team and the Business Control Team are both chaired by males. The Product Review Team Chair is also one of the company’s eight male directors. The Business Control Team meeting is supposed to be chaired by another male director. However, he gives his apologies at the last minute and instead nominates a middle-management level male to take his place. All three meetings are regular encounters. The Services Department and the Product Review Team hold monthly meetings, whilst the Business Control Team holds meetings on a weekly basis.

Approximately two months before I began this fieldwork, the manufacturing company underwent considerable re-structuring: as a result, all of these CofPs are fairly new. Whilst all participants have been managers within the company for at least two years and tend to know each other well, having previously been part of differently structured CofPs, the three CofPs examined in this chapter are in the fairly early stages of development.

The Services Department

There are 11 members of the Services Department, six females and five males. One female member is the Chair’s personal assistant and
departmental secretary for the CofP, leaving an equal number of female and male managers. After the company’s restructure, the Services Department is composed of two sections, supply and engineering. Whilst all supply section members were part of Carrie’s old departmental CofP, called the Distribution Department, the engineering members are new. Supply members could thus be perceived as more established members of the CofP than their engineering counterparts, although the remit of the CofP is different. All members’ details are summarized in Table 6.1.

The monthly Services Department meeting is both a retrospective and planning meeting, with Carrie being responsible for reporting back and disseminating updates. She then allocates a turn to each subordinate to report on their ‘whereabouts’ over the next month, and finally opens the floor to all members to give the opportunity to bring forward any problems/issues that may have arisen, as well as enabling them to seek clarification on any issues already brought up. This meeting may therefore also include problem-solving. The encounter commenced at 9 a.m. on a Monday morning in the open plan Services office, and ran for 45 minutes. I had been given a tour of the Services Department when shadowing secretary Jackie on a previous visit, and had observed a number of CofP members engaging in their professional roles. I accompanied Chair Carrie to the meeting, and she outlined the pattern the meeting would take beforehand. After the meeting, we spent half an hour engaging in informal talk and she gave her assessment of what had taken place. Carrie opens the meeting in the following manner:

Example 1
1. Carrie: Morning everyone (. ) hope you all had a good weekend (. )
2. okay we’ll get going then with my report (. ) sizing survey

Carrie engages briefly in stereotypically feminine small talk, using conventional phatic tokens to re-establish contact with her subordinates after the weekend. She then signals the ‘official’ start of the meeting with the discourse marker ‘okay’, using collective ‘we’ as part of a brief agenda-setting, informing members that the meeting will begin with her report. She then moves on to the first topic.

There are 42 directives issued overall in the Services meeting, and Carrie is responsible for issuing 37 (88.1 per cent) of these, as would be expected by her role as Chair and direct superior of all present. The majority of her directives are mitigated. She draws upon a range of