Available online at www.sciencedirect.com
ScienceDirect
International Journal of Project Management xx (2014) xxx–xxx
International Journal of Project Management
www.elsevier.com/locate/ijproman

"Drop your boat!": The discursive co-construction of project renewal. The case of the Darwin mountaineering expedition in Patagonia☆,☆☆

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Received 31 October 2013; received in revised form 19 February 2014; accepted 20 February 2014

Abstract

When a project faces an unexpected, ambiguous and risky environment, "drop your tools" often comes up against the reluctance of the actors to accept and implement its renewal. Our contribution aims to explore how team members discursively co-construct the sense of their situation and accept to "drop their tools". Drawing upon a real-time, in situ ethnographic study of a mountaineering expedition in Patagonia, we conducted a discursive analysis of a project renewal episode. Our paper first contributes to shed light on an unexplored phenomenon: the construction and acceptance of "dropping the tools". Second, we add to the literature on project renewal. Third, we show how team members make sense in real-time of their environment by drawing on four discursive practices (re-wording, reframing, focusing attention, and reaffirming team cohesiveness) in order to construct and accept project renewal.

Keywords: Managing project; Managing team; Project renewal; Sensemaking; Discourse analysis; Unexpected environment

1. Introduction

"*Drop your tools!*"! During the Mann Gulch fire of 1949 in Montana, thirteen smokejumpers were killed while attempting to escape the fire, in ignoring the order issued by their team leader to drop their heavy tools, which were slowing them down. This episode aptly highlights how team members might fail to make sense of a fast-changing, ambiguous and risky environment and be unsuccessful at "dropping their tools", even when their lives are at stake (Weick, 1993, 1996). In project-related situations, team members may be forced to cope with ambiguous conditions, which can lead to dramatic changes (Engwall and Westling, 2004; Gersick, 1991). Yet instances of teams actually "dropping their tools" have not received much attention.

What is happening then in practice within the team, how do team members make sense of their environment, and what are they doing and saying before having to drop their tools and accept project renewal? The objective of this paper is to explore how team members discursively co-construct the sense of their situation and accept to "drop their tools". For this purpose, we collaborated with linguists in conducting a discursive analysis of a project renewal episode within a highly uncertain, volatile and risky environment (Weick and Sutcliffe, 2007). We drew upon an ethnographic study, performed in situ and in real-time,

☆ Data from the Darwin expedition were collected in situ by Y. Giordano, G. Musca, M. Perez and L. Rouleau, as part of the "DARWIN" project financed by France's National Research Agency (ANR, reference: ANR-09-BLAN-0341-01, www.projet-darwin.com).
☆☆ Note: We are grateful to Eric Pezet, who set up the "DEOS" working group made up of researchers in management and linguistics at Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense (France).
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http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2014.02.006
0263-7863/00/

of a mountaineering expedition in Patagonia, whose objective was to accomplish the first-ever crossing of the Cordillera Darwin range (approx. 150 km long), located west of the large island of Tierra del Fuego in close proximity to Cape Horn. Difficulties accessing the Cordillera via the planned boat crossing undermined the project's initial purpose. This boat, used as an itinerant base camp, was an essential project component and critical to team survival (by providing food, gear and a potential means of rescue as the expedition progressed). At the beginning of the studied episode, i.e. nine days after the expedition launch, the boat still remained blocked by the storm far off the Cordillera range, and the alpinists were still waiting for the weather to improve. After two days of intense discussions and log writing, the crew accepted to "drop their boat", which entailed completely transforming the expedition strategy (by climbing the Cordillera in the opposite direction, in complete autonomy without relying on the base camp).

Our analysis examines the influence exerted by the various forms of language during this co-construction process of project renewal as the episode played out. This effort highlights the key role of four discursive practices introduced into the process, namely: re-wording, reframing, focusing attention, and reaffirming team cohesiveness. Our paper contributes to studies carried out in the field of project management. First, we shed light on an unexplored phenomenon: the construction and acceptance of "dropping the tools". Second, we add to the literature on project renewal. Third, we show how team members make sense in real-time of a highly unexpected, ambiguous and risky environment by drawing on discursive practices in order to construct and accept project renewal.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Managing projects within unexpected and ambiguous environments

Within fast-paced, unexpected and uncertain environments (Weick and Sutcliffe, 2007), action takes place through an ongoing flow of constant change (Chia, 2003). What happens then from a practical perspective in a project setting? In traditional and normative project management models, this issue is basically treated in terms of risk management and control procedures, which serve to limit impacts from the environment on projects (with the famous illustration being "A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge: PMBOK® Guide", Project Management Institute, 2013). The focus lies in identifying the type of event exerting influence on projects and then determining appropriate solutions. These events may be categorized according to both their impact on project objectives and the potential to predict their occurrence (e.g. by distinguishing risks, changes and deviations - Hällgren and Maaninen-Olsson, 2005; Nicholas, 2001). While in all these cases project management models' advice on using control tools under real-world conditions, the authors studying project actor practices note that "*it's neither the plan nor the methods nor the tools that correct deviations*" (Hällgren and Maaninen-Olsson, 2005:18). As Geraldi et al. (2010:548) point out, "*there is an increasing awareness that unexpected events will happen (…). Little help can be found in the project management literature on how individuals respond to unexpected events.*" The project-as-practice approach (Blomquist et al., 2010; Cicmil et al., 2006; Gerardi et al., 2008; Söderlund, 2005) is thus intended to better understand how project actors are actually involved and how teams cope with unexpected and uncertain situations.

These situations are often treated by implementing a type of approach and protocol reserved for "unexpected events" (Geraldi et al., 2010; Söderholm, 2008). The common unit of analysis is the single unexpected event. Responses may be anticipated through organizational overview (Geraldi et al., 2010) or else according to the type of action introduced (e.g. innovative action, busy meeting schedules, short-term coordination Söderholm, 2008). The tactics employed by actors may also be analyzed by taking the perspective of a mobilized knowledge "strategy" (i.e. the ability to rely upon previous experience, the need to explore new knowledge or take advantage of preexisting knowledge, Hällgren and Maaninen-Olsson, 2005), the ambidextry competence of leaders and their ability to change the mode (exploitation vs. exploration) when needed (Aubry and Lièvre, 2010), or by resorting to the sequence of decoupling and re-coupling deviations with other project-related activities (Hällgren and Söderholm, 2010). Recurring interactions between members (both internal and external to the project) and communication, whether formal or informal, are viewed as pivotal to understanding the project (Scarbrough et al., 2004) as well as to providing the appropriate responses to unexpected events (Geraldi et al., 2010; Hällgren and Maaninen-Olsson, 2005). These considerations however are only rarely observed in situ, and a real need exists to focus on the behavioral aspects of project management and expose what project managers are *really* doing in response to unexpected events (Geraldi et al., 2010).

Moreover, in the studies cited above, it is indeed possible to zero in on an event with an identifiable cause (e.g. technical malfunction). Once this identification step has been completed, the challenge lies in defining the solution, though it should not be overlooked that understanding the causes of such events may already be a very challenging task on its own. This fact will be evident whenever the project must interact not only with unexpected events, but with an entire environment that reveals itself to be incomprehensible, ambiguous and highly volatile. Project success may be jeopardized and/or the project may lose its meaning. Actors are at a loss when attempting to understand the situation since practically nothing is happening as expected. The situation may be interpreted in a variety of ways, and many typical frames of reference seem inadequate. This situation of lost meaning followed by reconstruction can also be observed in situations of "*conceptual turnaround, where work changes dramatically over a short period in time from ambiguity and fuzziness to structure and direction*" (Engwall and Westling, 2004:1558). In this case as well, traditional management techniques have little effect and the turnaround takes place once participants have successfully produced a shared conceptualization of the project mission.

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2.2. The sensemaking process when projects lose their meaning

Within highly disruptive and ambiguous environments, projects may lose their momentum and even their meaning. Such interruptions in project dynamics provide typical occasions for sensemaking (Weick, 1993, 2004). The interrupted project might still provide a frame, with the restoration occurring within this frame (Weick, 2012), but it may become problematic if the overall environment is highly unexpected. More specifically, a project may lose its meaning and status due to a lack of overlap between tacit and explicit underlying reasons, loss of purpose (when resources for project meaning, such as social resources, identity or structure, have been depleted), or loss of attention to ongoing events and environmental complexities (Weick, 1993, 2004). "Drop your tools" may be used as an allegory for an individual's reluctance to cope with a threatening, ambiguous and unexpected situation and then come around to accept it and redirect action (Weick, 1996). Dropping the tools offers one means among others to reconstruct the meaning and carry out a project renewal. "*To drop one's tools is simultaneously to accept mutation and to modernize remembered values or to believe the past as well as doubt it. These complex simultaneities are the essence of renewal*" (Weick, 1996:302). However, as observed in the Mann Gulch episode (Weick, 1993), it appears especially challenging to "drop one's tools", update interpretations of the situation and renew a project in the face of increasing threat. Moreover, even if an individual is able to revise his interpretation (as Dodge revised his of a 10:00 fire in the Mann Gulch episode), it is extremely difficult to share this interpretation with others and convince them (Dodge was indeed unable to convince his fellow crew members). This difficulty involved in "dropping tools" and the resistance to accepting unexpected situations, even when survival is at stake, has also been observed in other settings, such as the South Canyon fire disaster, where twelve firefighters perished, or accidents involving seamen or fighter pilots (Weick, 1993, 1996).

Possible explanations have been suggested, including an illusion of control by holding onto the tools, unfamiliarity with alternatives, reluctance to admit failure, social dynamics such as pluralistic ignorance, a misunderstanding of consequences or a reticence to drop the tools that are central to one's identity (Weick, 1996). Furthermore, team members' attention is scattered among competing criteria (such as the effectiveness of fire line construction and obstacles). *"Survival is only one among many criteria that are operating when firefighters try to interpret a fire that intensifies in ambiguous ways. It is precisely because people persist in making complex tradeoffs among multiple criteria amidst ambiguous cues that they fail to realize they are in serious trouble.*" (Weick, 1996:306). Moreover, the various criteria do not have the same meaning for every team member at every point in time. How then are interpretations shaped within a group at the time of renewal?

2.3. Language and real-time sensemaking in a project renewal context

Language plays a critical role in both interpreting the environment and rebuilding meaning; this role includes discursive tactics such as reading, writing, goal-setting, dialoguing and storytelling (Boje, 2001; Cunliffe and Coupland, 2012; Weick, 2004, 2012). The importance of stories for sensemaking in organizations, towards achieving the dual purpose of ascribing meaning to a situation and providing a blueprint for action, has already been highlighted (Brown, 2006; Colville et al., 2012). But what if the situation is so ambiguous and change so rapidly that a story cannot be recalled in order to introduce sense? This question remains unexplored (Colville et al., 2012). The antenarrative perspective (Boje, 2001; Whittle and Mueller, 2012) intends to capture what is happening within the flow of lived experience upstream of the coherent and linear story told by "officials". Moreover, narratives are "*also spontaneous acts of interpretation and meaning-making that are often improvised, situated, contested, and responsive performances that are contextually and temporally sensitive*" (Cunliffe and Coupland, 2012:68). However, the role of improvised, real-time discourse in the interpretation and meaning-making of an unexpected and ambiguous situation remains unexplored (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010). Moreover, very few studies have actually been conducted in situ, given that these processes are most often reconstructed after the fact, with considerable difficulty imposed upon actors to recall the sequence of events, interactions and dialogues ex post. We are thus specifically seeking to fill this gap by studying the linguistic forms through which such a co-construction step takes place both in dialogue as "the more basic source of renewal" (Weick, 2004) and in writing (logbook entries in the present case).

The purpose of our paper is to contribute to exploring the role of language in the real-time co-construction of interpretations and meaning in a project renewal setting. We develop these insights through an investigation of oral and written discursive productions. We base our analysis on a conception of language as action (inspired by Austin (1962), (1969), Récanati (1978)) as well as on the notion of co-construction of meaning between speaker and listener during interactions, as perceived through a detailed analysis of linguistic forms. Our aim therefore is to explore the following question: how do team members discursively re-construct in real-time the project meaning and accept its renewal?

3. Methodology

3.1. The case study

Mountaineering expeditions and polar expeditions provide interesting settings for exploring organizational topics such as team dynamics, leadership and decision-making in unexpected and risky environments (Giordano and Musca, 2012; Kayes, 2004; Rix-Lièvre and Lièvre, 2010; Tempest et al., 2007). Such expeditions can be viewed as project teams (Hällgren, 2007), and are unique opportunities to "learn about managing the unexpected" (Aubry et al., 2010). Our analysis relies on data from the "Darwin" mountaineering expedition in Patagonia (www.project-darwin.com). No detailed maps or GPS data for these unexplored mountains have ever been generated. Complex technical difficulties, combined with very hostile

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climatic conditions, had prevented the completion of previous expeditions. Faced with unknown mountaineering challenges, rough seas and violent storms, the Darwin expedition team had to cope with numerous unexpected conditions and events (Söderholm, 2008; Weick and Sutcliffe, 2007). The main characteristics of this expedition are summarized in Table 1.

3.2. Data collection and analysis

The data analyzed were collected during an assessment of the Darwin expedition (Musca et al., 2010), which combined a longitudinal study with a real-time in situ ethnographic study over the 6-week field expedition (Rix-Lièvre and Lièvre, 2010; Van Maanen, 2006, 2011; Yanow, 2009). Based on previous analyses of the expedition (Musca et al., accepted for publication), one particular episode occurring on Days 9 and 10 could be selected as the study target. Events during these two days exerted tremendous influence on the overall project, which at the time was being entirely reframed while retaining the same overall objective of crossing the Cordillera. The two researchers (including the 1st author) remained in the boat with the alpinists throughout the two days and directly observed all discussions and group reflections taking place. They were able to collect multiple data: many recordings of meetings and discussions (55+ pages of transcripts of conversations held during D9 and D10), videos and the online logbook (part of the Darwin's expedition website) regularly updated by team members (9+ pages for these two days). All of which was completed by the researchers' logbook entries. This study provides a unique opportunity for a joint in-depth analysis involving researchers in the fields of management and linguistics.

The discursive data analysis protocol calls for identifying pertinent characteristics, drawing the lines of communication and detailing our approach. We propose an overall assessment focusing on the data characteristics and their corresponding means of communication in tabular format (see Table 2).

Our linguistic approach is not primarily interactional. It is more heavily focused on the close relationship existing between general contextual characteristics and recurrent linguistic forms. According to our methodology, both text and speech are basically examined as linguistic output, composed of linguistic forms and structures featuring an array of patterns and constraints. We also consider that discourse arises in relation to an external referent and various external conditions that imbue it with meaning. This external environment is the topic of the studied speeches and texts: it embodies what has occurred as well as what is bound to occur (be it an event, group of events or overall environment). As such, it is intertwined with our current sphere of interest, spanning the expected and unexpected, whether in the realm of the conceivable or the unthinkable.

To understand how team members co-construct and make sense of this project renewal process, we selected two types of data produced on Days 9 and 10, each of which refers to a different form of speech and contributes to renewal co-construction (Bakhtin, 1966): the transcripts of conversations held and posts in the logbook. For both of these types, our analysis categories were derived using induction, with feedback between data interpretation and the language-driven process. The category selection criteria consist of frequency and pertinence. The emphasis is not only on repetitive forms that, in reality, reflect the "idled" status of the expedition while waiting to cross the sound, but also on forms that incorporate the unexpected into a dynamic balance between negative and positive. As such, three types of entries could be distinguished. The first one is related to the modes of anticipation, as observed mainly in conversation: the way actors devise actions they intend to accomplish, along with the ensuing events. The second entry is related to the modes of rewording what is happening, as observed both during conversations and in the logbook: recollection, repetition, reformulation, i.e. finding ways to depict the sequence of events, accepting this depiction, and setting out to transform it. The third entry is related to so-called "concessions": concessive markers, like "but" or "nonetheless", indicate the exact margin between what is expected and what actually occurs, when reality does not match expectations. Concessive statements constitute a kind of protocol for accepting what appears to the actors as a negative outcome. These three entries are found time and time again when examining how the authors speak, represent and relate this outburst of the unexpected, the "differential" between expected and unexpected, and how in posting these statements they give sense to a change in plans and then actually proceed with an admission of such change.

Table 1
Main characteristics of the Darwin expedition.

Team composition	12 mountain guides and alpinists: a leader, a second-in-command, 1 to 7 alpinists, 1 in charge of finances, and 2 cameramen Boat crew: a captain, 1 to 3 sailors Researchers: 4 (split into 2 teams of 2) Chilean guide Webmaster
Period	Preparation: October 2008–September 2009 Field expedition: September–November 2009 (six weeks, non-negotiable project completion date)
Objective	1st-ever crossing of the Cordillera Darwin Range
Complexity	High: unexplored territory, no maps, difficult meteorological and maritime conditions, uncertain access and itineraries Requires high level of autonomy and commitment (no rescue possible) Potential life-threatening challenges.

4. Discursive co-construction and acceptance of project renewal

4.1. When the expedition loses its meaning: the renewal episode

During the episode singled out for study (Days 9–10), the expedition project had lost its meaning when exposed to the effect of several components acting simultaneously. The very meaning of the expedition had come under threat. The alpinists struggled to interpret this new situation. Their mountaineering expertise was of little utility at this point; moreover, they had become less active and underlying team cohesiveness was being strained (Fig. 1).

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Table 2
Factors relative to data characteristics and corresponding means of communication.

Form of speech	Conversation	Blog
Medium	Oral	Written
Speakers/authors	All team members	Selected team members
Audience	Addressed recipients (Goffman, 1981): all team members	Addressed recipients: family members, academic partners, friends and sponsors.
	Unaddressed recipients: no external audience for these conversations	Unaddressed recipients: undetermined (website)
Time and place of communication production	During events (production conditions closely correlated with events)	At the end of the day (production conditions delayed relative to events)
	Group conversations	In shared quarters but relative isolated production conditions (late evening)
	In shared quarters	

4.1.1. The impossibility of reaching the Darwin Cordillera was undermining the entire expedition

On Day 9, one-fifth of the total allocated time had already elapsed since the beginning of the project (out of a total 40-day expedition calendar). Despite multiple attempts on previous days, the Nueva Galicia boat was still immobilized by the storm, with all team members aboard, some 150 km from the Cordillera Darwin range. At 5:30 am, the captain once again attempted to pass Cape Froward (an especially critical point along the Strait of Magellan for navigators) in order to reach the Cordillera range, and once again this attempt was unsuccessful. During the afternoon, the captain made a fresh attempt with the same outcome. Even though the objective of the expedition was to accomplish the first-ever crossing of this range, the alpinists were still waiting for the sea to calm while fearing that the boat would sink. They began doubting the viability of the whole project. In fact, their "Darwin's Dream" (a name they chose to symbolize embarking on this crossing challenge) seemed to be taking a nightmarish turn. Setting out to conquer a set of unknown mountains in one of the world's last remaining unexplored regions was indeed a tremendous challenge and the source of much of their motivation. The alpinists knew that this undertaking would be extremely difficult and risky, yet they had not anticipated that just accessing the Cordillera could be so arduous. Since their arrival at Punta Arenas, they had faced an ongoing series of unexpected difficulties stemming from maritime conditions (an inadequately equipped boat, multiple technical incidents, a captain unable to exude confidence, unsuccessful attempts at navigating, etc.). The inability to reach the Cordillera constituted a major breakdown that threatened the entire expedition, which was losing its meaning.

The crew of alpinists all met in the boat's common area (around 15 m^2) (Figure 1) to discuss among themselves, in trying to interpret and make sense of the ongoing situation. Many issues were ambiguous: How long would the storm last? Would the boat ever be able to reach the Cordillera even if maritime conditions improved? What were the alternatives? In their eyes, the captain had lost credibility due to many previous incidents and his lack of reassurance (he admitted his "bad feelings about the boat"). However, their status as mountain guides offered no advantages in seeking to understand the course of events. For one thing, they had no particular expertise dealing with a maritime environment, and even less so in these southern waters around the Strait of Magellan (considered as the world's largest marine cemetery). Moreover, their usual frames of reference were of no utility. The experiences shaping their professional identity were not very applicable under these circumstances. The fact that this identity had become

Fig. 1. The alpinists squeezing into the boat's common area.

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significantly weakened contributed to the loss of project meaning. The alpinists had been pushed out of their comfort zone and could not rely on their standard practice or expertise.

They subsequently began to realize that the weather forecasts were far from reliable, and this held for local broadcasts as well as those relayed by the router from France. In their profession, they were accustomed to counting on such forecasts to decide if a climb was indeed feasible. In the Himalayas for example, router forecasts are now extremely reliable and provide accurate indications of possible time windows. In this instance however, the team was not convinced of forecast accuracy, even though its impact on the project outcome was tremendous: would they remain idle for just a few more hours or would it take days or even a week or two to break the impasse? The worst-case scenario would simply imply an end to the project.

Team members were also destabilized by the rapid-fire succession of events. For an entire week, plans were being revised several times a day. The leader was making every effort to adapt and alter the program as local conditions evolved (e.g. leaving Punta Arenas/staying put/leaving again/detecting an anomaly/continuing on course/ turning around/lifting the anchor again/stopping/forming one team/splitting into two teams). But the pace of these changes was so fast that the initial goal of the expedition seemed to get lost along the way. The leader's level of tension had become apparent and the team was no longer hiding its concerns. The benchmarks they thought to be firmly in place were immediately challenged, to a point where: "*no one here would dare issue a forecast spanning more than eight hours*" (logbook entry), a realization that would also seriously derail the project.

Which alternatives were available should the boat continue to remain blocked? At this point, the expedition leader emphasized the need to: "*Be ready to come up with something else*". He began presenting other options, in mentioning the possibility of some alpinists taking a plane or boarding a cargo ship that, presumably, delivered supplies once a week to Puerto Williams (at nearly the opposite end of the Cordillera). A lengthy conversation then took place, attended by all team members, in the boat's common area. The leader, along with the alpinist in charge of finances, Alpinists 1 and 2 and the second-in-command provided most of the input; they tried to build various hypotheses (reliability of weather forecasts, alternative means of transportation) and questioned their potential subsequent involvement. The mood of participants was especially tense. At the end of Day 9, the leader concluded: "*Under no circumstances should a decision be made hastily*".

4.1.2. From stating "the impossibility of planning a crossing without the boat" to the "drop your boat" acceptance

On Day 10, the boat reached a small harbor. The team had partially come unraveled and risked splitting up altogether. The leader, Alpinist 1, along with the alpinist in charge of finances headed off to Punta Arenas in search of alternative solutions. The other team members stayed around the boat and accomplished various tasks until the middle of the afternoon (storage and verification of expedition equipment) and even played a football game with local fishermen. The leader then called the captain from Punta Arenas, but difficulties in comprehending the local language (Spanish) and culture only compounded the poor phone connection. Given the limited operability of satellite phones, communication was rendered nearly impossible, with only snippets of information being transmitted. Apparently, the leader was asking the team (or some of its members, but it's unclear which ones) to leave the Nueva Galicia boat with all their equipment and food, return to Punta Arenas and board a cargo ship that would transport them to the other side of the Cordillera, at Yendegaia (B, Fig. 2).

After this announcement by the captain, team members reconvened and all remained together in the boat's common area, spending the rest of the day engaged in a collective discussion of the new plan and assessing the situation. They grew more reticent since they felt deprived of critical information regarding the procedure by which the new plan would be successfully implemented. Difficulties communicating with the three off-site team members raised concerns over the purpose of the revised underlying plan. To "drop the boat" and board the cargo ship would imply dramatic changes to the overall project: it would create a situation of complete autonomy and the need to carry heavy loads without any base camp or rescue possibilities for at least two weeks. It would also require making the crossing of the Cordillera range from east to west (see Fig. 2: from B to A, instead of from A to B), with the most severe mountaineering difficulties to be faced at the outset, in addition to advancing against the prevailing wind direction. Such a scenario, after initial examination during the pre-expedition phase, had been rejected for these very reasons.

Team members were also uncertain about who would eventually make the crossing and who would stay behind on the boat. The fact that the base camp boat had stalled, coupled with the accompanying inactivity, added to this loss of meaning. They spent many hours attempting to interpret and build plausible accounts of the new plan, devising new alternatives and ultimately deciding to "drop the boat". The second-in-command was initially reluctant to adopt this plan: *"It's impossible to cross against the wind… I don't see why we would head to Yendegaia"*. Alpinists 4 and 5 were also extremely doubtful. A major debate ensued: who would be boarding the cargo ship (critical to the formation of climbing teams and mountaineering strategies); with which equipment (depending on the strategies adopted to conquer the range); could food and supply needs be determined accurately; and which potential consequences could spell disaster for the project's key issues? Another call from the leader interrupted this discussion. Alpinist 2 reported some of the details he was able to glean despite the poor-quality connection. The alpinists however were still not convinced; more specifically, the second-in-command and Alpinists 2 and 4 questioned whether or not the Nueva Galicia would ultimately be able to reach the Cordillera. This concern seemed to take on considerable importance for them: *"Crossing without a boat was unfathomable"* (Alpinist 2). Moreover, such a change meant "*ignoring assistance needs*" and embarking entirely on their own, which would "*fundamentally alter the spirit of this crossing*" (second-in-command). Alpinists 3, 4 and 5 all tried to take a step back and reconsider the revised plan. *"As we grow impatient here,*

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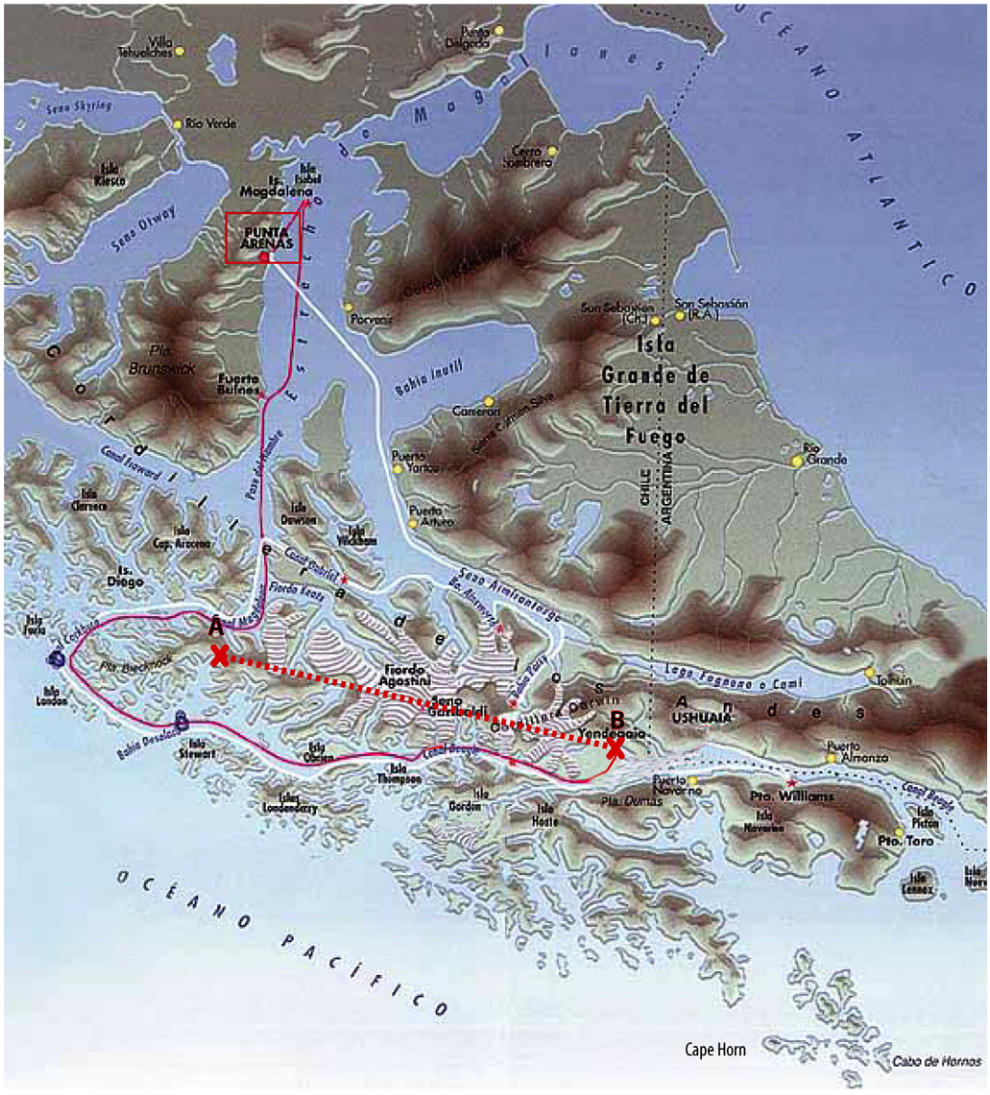

Fig. 2. Map (Canal de Magellan and Cordillera Darwin).

I've got the impression that we're going… leaving on a project that we haven't yet fully mastered." (Alpinist 4).

The second-in-command concluded that an in-depth discussion of all these concerns with the other three alpinists was necessary. He established a third (adequate, this time) phone hookup with the leader, who provided additional details on certain aspects of the new plan. He then returned to the common area and reported the leader's revised plan. The boat would be "dropped" and the Cordillera crossing performed in the opposite direction without the services of a base camp boat. The team would be reassembled, as initially designed, since all members (including the onboard researchers) would ultimately "drop the boat" and board the cargo ship for the other end of the Cordillera. This time, the alpinists raised no further objections and accepted the new plan. The second-in-command then assigned the tasks and the alpinists diligently set out preparing their belongings. Their questions were no longer focused on the plan itself or on the updated strategy, but instead on logistics and what to pack or leave behind.

4.2. The discursive co-construction of project renewal

In order to understand this project renewal episode, its underlying stakes and the way in which team members wound up accepting their new challenge, we conducted a linguistic analysis of the conversations and accounts accompanying or relating these two days, by singling out the three inputs previously selected, which underscore the reorientation process that had taken place. The linguistic analysis presented above, as based on these three inputs, has exposed the discursive procedures through which group members transitioned from a "loss of meaning" to a state of "renewal". It has led us to identify three discursive practices relative to project renewal: (a) wording and rewording the unexpected, (b) reframing and (c) focusing attention. Throughout this entire episode, conversations and narratives also contribute to co-construct group cohesiveness (d).

4.2.1. Wording and rewording the unexpected

When describing what is happening at the present time, the discourse tends to employ a process of rewording reality.

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Rewording plays a very important role both during spoken conversations and in writings.

In the team's conversations, the most noticeable part of rewording involves series of repetitions that seemingly occur for each idea, each commitment and each decision (see (1) in Table 3). This reliance on repetition undoubtedly goes hand in hand with the specificities of oral speech. Yet such an extremely high frequency of repetitions and rephrasing also acts as a way of mimicking the hardship associated with initiating any one of the alternatives presented. Rewording sequences enabled the various actors to consider the situation from several perspectives and in several stages, in addition to finding a way to assemble potentially contradictory elements and jointly craft a representation acceptable to all. Messages overlapped and phrases spoken were repeated, with each repetition moving closer to a collective validation of the intended meanings. Other forms of repetition appeared in writings, especially when repeating concessive statements that contrasted the hope of crossing the strait with the failure to achieve this crossing, as exhibited in (2), (3) and (4). During this series, a repetition of the same set of conditions led to rehashing them time and time again. Progress however is also perceptible, as witnessed through the verb tenses used in the concessive statements, from the past tense in (2) to the future tense in (4), which indicates here the actors' desire to control their own destiny.

4.2.2. Reframing

The reframing process involves a step of removing the initial frame, at which point all typical reference frames must be renounced, in favor of mobilizing alternative frames. Paying greater attention to new actors (such as the route planner, the captain, a fisherman, a local guide) serves to broaden the range of possible courses of action. Reframing entails making sense of the unexpected; as seen above regarding concessive statements, team members are better able to cope with their unexpected environment by projecting themselves into the future. The unexpected is also expressed through a greater number of hypotheses. The recorded transcriptions of conversations suggest a thorough airing by the various agents of possible future outcomes (e.g. nice weather vs. inclement weather) and of the corresponding potential courses of action. This airing took the form of a series of hypothetical statements, as observed in (5). Uncertainty had become pervasive and prevented deciding in favor of any one of the competing alternatives. It was as if the decision-making mechanism had gone awry. An extensive use of auxiliary verbal constructions can also be detected. Many of these constructions place emphasis on initiating action, by expanding the number of preliminaries to an extent that would be considered comical if the stakes involved weren't so critical (see (6), or the half-hearted plea illustrated in (7), or the circuitous suggestion in (8)). It seems that taking action had been replaced by trying to initiate the beginning of action. In fact, this lackadaisical form of conation proved to be a kind of precursor to the fate of this expedition itself, which would never succeed in even beginning. Yet on the other hand, this focus on preliminaries announces what will ultimately recast the expedition from Yendegaia: small victories and trials instead of completing the full-blown itinerary.

The mode of narration specific to the logbook also contributes to this reframing process. The logbook is basically characterized by inserted narration, associating delayed and direct reporting in a way that mimics the crisis and its resolution. A direct reporting of the crisis is especially apparent whenever the narration takes aim at the future, with future tenses being placed into interrogative sentences (9). Use of the interrogative form is a strong indication that the speaker's thought process is operating in sync with the written record, hence without even the slightest perception of future conditions. This time offset is on display in other passages, as characterized by the use of narrative past tenses that seek to order events, at least on a temporal scale. This retrospective narration has reorganized the facts in such a way that while the unexpected has not been vanquished, it has at least been "incorporated".

4.2.3. Focusing attention

These processes are carried out in particular through reliance on repetition. The repetition technique may be applied to replaying someone else's words. The decision made here by the expedition leader was first reported by the boat captain, then by the alpinist able to reach the leader by phone, and once again by the second-in-command following another exchange with the leader. Over the course of these repetitions, the position of the individual proffering the statement changes: Alpinist 2 remained inside the transmission loop, while the Second-in-command assumed responsibility for the leader's decisions. This shift depended on the different status of these two "spokespersons" (Alpinist 2 was an experienced team member, while the other was acting as "second-in-command"). It was also apparent in their respective forms of speech. Let's compare (10) and (11): a subjunctive construction introduced by the verb "request" within the framework of reported speech is replaced here by a future tense with a highly assertive tone in an independent proposal. The Second-in-command provided only few answers, but at least from a rhetorical standpoint his answers were efficient when reducing uncertainty to two parallel alternatives (if …if construction in 11), or when summarizing the entire set of logistics, as if real planning was taking place (11). Hence, without contributing any substantive new information, the Second-in-command successfully reorganized information in order for the project to make sense.

Rewording exercises also serve to gain acceptance of project renewal. The implementation step then focused on both the actual physical tasks (e.g. packing belongings) and the initial stages of assigned actions (i.e. use of auxiliary verb constructions, along the lines of "begin an attempt to consider"). Through their conversations, team members were able to collectively identify, step-by-step, "areas" where they could count on one another to build partial strategies. This sequence targeted familiar turf (as in "crafting a plan"). Members were hard-pressed to imagine at the outset how the project might evolve overall yet still proceeded by identifying and constructing various potential alternatives as a team. Such a process contrasts sharply with the serious communication difficulties encountered, involving weather forecasts, maps, etc. Members also turned their attention to the physical aspects of the expedition as well as the next steps.

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Table 3
Excerpts illustrating the discursive practices. Italics added by the authors.

a) Wording and rewording the unexpected	(1) *But if he accepts the information we've been given by (the route planner), then he should say: "Yes, okay we might actually be stuck here a few days", at which point, another solution has to be anticipated straight away*. And this alternative may very well be - and let me emphasize the word "may" — *heading back to Punta Arenas*. (Leader, Day 9) *Conversation* (2) Hope is restored, today's a good day, *but our hopes were quickly dashed* when we noticed right away that *the boat had turned around*. (Day 9) (3) The wind is blowing northwesterly. Are we going to try again? *Yes, here we go, but an hour later: about face* and back to our *bahia* camp for the night. (Day 9) (4) Only (the Chilean guide) will remain aboard the Nueva Galicia and then meet us as soon as possible. *But* should the poor weather persist and our boat/base camp be unable to reach us, *we'll have to change the planned Cordillera Darwin crossing itinerary*. (Day 10) *Logbook*
b) Reframing	(5) If the boat can make the crossing, then we can proceed by splitting into two teams. (Alpinist 2, Day 9) (6) Based on indications available, the situation is not expected to improve. That's the way things look today, it would be very surprising for conditions to be better tomorrow, etc. So we've got to discuss this with Alpinist 1 and see what (the route planner) says, *but let's be prepared to come up with something else,* right! We need to prepare because… (Leader, Day 9) (7) If we can get there in four days, *we can at least try to envision that*. Since if we're still here in another four or five days, the whole expedition will be in peril. (Leader, Day 9) (8) Who can stand this! It means that at least we're… we're on-site and at least *we can start to do whatever it is we can*. (Alpinist 2, Day 10) *Conversations* (9) The wind is now blowing northwesterly. *Will we be making* yet another attempt? (Day 9) *Logbook*
c) Focusing attention	(10) Afterwards… what about it! Afterwards, we'll have to wait and see. Our hands are somewhat tied because later on there'll be huge uncertainties, right! (The leader) has requested that… for us to take a look… to glance at the map and for us to devise a… a strategy around a departure from Yendegaia. (Alpinist 2, Day 10, after the first call with the leader). (11) And we'll set up the base camp at Yendegaia while waiting for this boat to reach us. *If the boat gets here early enough*, then we can completely revise our strategy and return to the initial plan. *Now if the boat is delayed, which is entirely possible, then we'll figure out a new strategy leaving from Yendegaia*; otherwise, we won't make it into the Darwin Cordillera before quite some time. (The second-in-command, Day10) *Conversation* (12) In our creek, the water is placid; *we took advantage of the conditions* to launch our kayaks and test out our kayaking skills. (Day 9) (13) The rest of the team decided *to take advantage* of their afternoon to stretch their legs on land. The first few hours were spent verifying the equipment. (Day 9) *Logbook*
d) Reaffirming team cohesiveness	(14) Hope is restored, today's a good day, *but* hopes were quickly dashed since we could notice right away *that the boat had turned around*. *Despite it all*, everyone was still in a good mood for breakfast. (Day 9) *Logbook*

Despite being immobilized by an unrelenting succession of unexpected events, they remained able to "begin remote actions". Recurring questions over the tasks to be carried out were ultimately answered once the Second-in-command listed the specific tasks and assigned roles following his phone interview with the leader. Each participant was then able to accommodate the ultimate change in plans. This step of focusing attention on "things to do" is clearly visible in logbook entries. It takes the specific form of repeating verbs like "to take advantage of" (examples 12 and 13), which are often associated with the concessive form. Inaction triggered by the inability to cross or to launch the expedition is presented like an "opportunity" to be "exploited" in order to try out equipment, learn how to use the various instruments, explore the vicinity, etc.

4.2.4. Reaffirming team cohesiveness

The spoken word mobilizes and establishes a collective response (collective statements, i.e. the "us" written in log entries, indicate something positive and place the speaker in a context relative to readers), once again contrasting with the seriously strained communications experienced among remote actors (route planner, and the three team members who traveled to Punta Arenas).

The conversations and narration made it possible to maintain group links and organize action, despite the fact that an unexpected environment and disruptive events were capable of isolating actors and deteriorating group camaraderie. Even though the team situation was not, technically speaking, "extreme" during these two days, some extremely vital issues were indeed at stake (e.g. itinerary choices, team composition, equipment decisions, food supplies, potential rescue routes), and these were of tremendous importance to survivability in the mountains. The many meetings and discussions convened during this period sparked collective exchanges regarding these very issues, in addition to keeping the lines of communication open among team members and breaking through the isolation.

This preservation of group cohesiveness could be witnessed to a greater extent in the concessive statements: over the course of these two days, the infeasibility of crossing the strait engendered negative effects (e.g. waiting, impatience, fear of failure), which in turn potentially threatened group harmony. Concessive forms allow transitioning from a negative effect (*hardship*) to a positive one (*calm and good mood*), as exhibited in (14). In this instance, the concessive statement produced what could be called a work of positive representation (undoubtedly intended for readers). However, the group itself was thereby reaffirming its cohesiveness in rallying around a strong commitment. Even though

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alpinists' questions during these two days of uncertainty targeted the overall mission purpose and raised doubts over the wisdom of proceeding, their concerns had since been directed towards practical aspects: what gets left behind and what gets packed in terms of equipment, food and medicine. Expedition guides focused on the tasks at hand under their responsibility, which rekindled a sense of identity and expertise. They began to prepare the packs and distribute equipment. This project renewal stage restored meaning to the expedition, as team members broke out of their lethargy and concentrated on tasks assigned within the scope of the new plan.

Our linguistic analysis has offered a close-up of how a renewal step is jointly constructed through and by the statements of project actors and moreover allows identifying the "tactics" by which actors are able to restore meaning to a project. Our findings suggest that team members co-construct project renewal through four discursive practices: wording and rewording the unexpected, reframing, focusing attention, and reaffirming group cohesiveness.

5. Discussion

A study of this renewal episode offers the opportunity to better understand how individuals coping with a threatening, ambiguous and unexpected environment make sense of it and accept to "drop their tools". We will now discuss why, in the case of this Darwin expedition episode, team members decided to "drop the boat", as opposed to the reluctance shown by fire-fighters to drop their tools in the Mann Gulch episode (Weick, 1993).

In both episodes, individuals were confused, with communication between team members and their leader extremely strained and the proposed alternative initially evaluated as a riskier option. Moreover, the ongoing situation did not correspond to the initial plan (a 10-hour fire in Mann Gulch/a 36-hour navigation delay in the Darwin expedition). Other elements however differed substantially between the two episodes. For one thing, even though vital issues were at stake in both settings, the need to act was less imminent for the Darwin team than in Mann Gulch. As the expedition project faced setbacks, team members did not remain isolated, as opposed to the Mann Gulch accident, which witnessed depleted social resources and decreased levels of interaction. In the Darwin episode, even though the departure of three members (including the leader) partially upset team cohesiveness, the other alpinists stayed in close contact and interacted with one another. Dialoguing and updating the logbook were both instrumental actions in reconstructing meaning from this situation of stalemate and incomprehension. The fact that the alpinists had already considered the possibility of an east-to-west crossing during the pre-expedition phase (although this option had been rejected specifically because of all the difficulties raised) might have helped them accept this potential plan when it was eventually announced. Also, while the boat was indeed a key component of this expedition, it was not part of the alpinists' identity (for most of them, it was the "foreign" part of the project), as opposed to the fire-fighters' tools in Mann Gulch.

Furthermore, for the Darwin case, the group structure could be held intact. Team members' level of activity towards accomplishing the expedition was admittedly rather low (as the boat was immobilized by the storm). This lethargy however was not completely widespread since three of them left for Punta Arenas to seek alternative solutions, while the other members spent their day as a team testing and organizing equipment and even getting in a game of football with Chilean fishermen. Throughout the week, the leader had placed emphasis on maintaining a minimum level of activity *as a team*, despite being confined to the boat and unable to initiate exploration of the Cordillera range. To maintain team cohesiveness, the schedule called for GPS training sessions, kayak outings, water supply replenishment trips, and extensive exploration of the banks. Although this immobilization period raised the level of impatience and desire to "take action", alpinists "*took advantage*" of it to make sense of their situation through discussions and logbook entries.

More precisely, they draw on discursive practices to construct and accept this renewal. Through *rewording* the course of ongoing and future events during their conversations, team members constructed plausible accounts of unexpected and ambiguous situations. In repeating what they did not understand, they initiated a step-by-step process to consider the situation from other perspectives and isolated certain stabilizing elements to help provide a sense of the present and near future situations. At the same time, inserting the narrative of this episode into the logbook served to sort the various elements open to debate and assess their temporal and causal progression: the situation was unexpected and ambiguous yet still offered a storyline leaving room for action. Through *reframing*, the alpinists could phrase hypothetical statements and consider the possibility of engaging in future action. Their current frames, based on past experience, were of no assistance in reducing ambiguity. Team members sought to build new frames; with an extensive use of concessive structures, they gradually embraced what was initially perceived as a negative. In so doing, reframing helped them cope with an unexpected environment by projecting themselves into the future. Step-by-step, they were then able to give a sense of the situation. Entering the retrospective narration into the logbook, which allowed "reorganizing" current and upcoming events, prompted the team to undertake exploratory action. In fact, three team members returned to Punta Arenas in search of information on possible alternatives. By *focusing attention*, they isolated relatively stable and familiar elements amidst a flow of ambiguous events, thus enabling each participant to build acceptance, step-by-step, of the renewed project and move towards its implementation. In relaying the leader's spoken words, the various "spokespersons" helped focus members' attention on the tasks they would need to accomplish, by repeating what the leader had said. Trust and familiarity with the leader were essential to win acceptance (as opposed to the Mann Gulch episode, where fire-fighters were relatively unfamiliar with the leader and had limited trust in him). The forms of speech used also contributed to the efficiency of what the spokespersons had to say. Ultimately, the conversations and narration served to strengthen group links throughout the Darwin episode (*reaffirming team cohesiveness*), again in contrast with Mann Gulch, as part of an effort designed to ensure that the project group did not decompose as project sense was being lost. During all the waiting and misgivings, bonds between team members actually grew stronger (Table 4).

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By virtue of this analysis, we illuminate the conditions under which individuals are capable of "dropping their tools", as well as with the types of discursive practices they can rely upon to proceed. Many issues however remain unanswered. While the "drop the tools" effect clearly appears in a positive light in certain situations (such as the Mann Gulch and South Canyon cases), its consequences may be more ambiguous in other cases. *"Finally, since peripety is a result of a sensemaking process, the interpretation that was enacted at the peripety might very well turn out to be inaccurate or incorrect."* (Engwall and Westling, 2004:1574).

Does "drop the boat" result in missing the opportunity to begin the crossing from the planned point and according to the planned itinerary, which perhaps would have resulted in the first-ever crossing despite the initial delays? Should team members have been better advised to wait for the weather to calm, albeit without a reliable meteorological forecast? Subsequent events do not allow drawing a definitive conclusion. On Day 11, the alpinists boarded the cargo ship and reached the Cordillera at Yendegaia, from which point they began crossing the Cordillera from east to west. Ironically, the Nueva Galicia boat was finally able to cross the Strait of Magellan and arrived at Yendegaia the next day. After five days of advancing into the Cordillera however, alpinists faced an impenetrable mountainous relief. The Cordillera could simply not be crossed via this route. They were forced to revise plans and focused their efforts on ascending a few summits, yet the "Darwin Dream" of completing the first-ever crossing of the Cordillera would remain a dream.

Perhaps the Cordillera could not have been crossed even as initially planned without incurring all sorts of risks beyond the initial project scope. By "dropping their boat", the alpinists were dropping the set of plans and strategies laid out in advance and accepting the challenge of improvising in situ. They decided to wait and see what would happen later on, basing their decisions on the situation at a future point in time (relative to the weather, potential presence of the boat, type of terrain encountered). They gave precedence to the approach by showing their adaptability: crossing the Cordillera in the opposite direction, forgoing the itinerant base camp, heading out in complete autonomy (thus without the possibility of a backup or supply route), having to decide what to keep and what to leave behind (not everything was to be "dropped"). These considerations wound up "complicating things" (Weick, 1979). Auxiliary constructions provide a good measure of just how complicated things had become. At the same time, the leader was opting for action over waiting and demonstrated this preference for action through "small wins" (Weick and Sutcliffe, 2007), which allowed concentrating on "trying to start contemplating". This combined complexity of thought with simplicity of action (called "*simplexity*", Colville et al., 2012) seemed to embody what was needed to cope with a highly complex and dynamic environment.

Table 4
Comparison of the Mann Gulch disaster (Weick, 1993) and Darwin expedition.

Similarities between Mann Gulch and Darwin expedition	Specificities of the Darwin expedition
- Confusion among participants - Unexpected, ambiguous and threatening situation - Ongoing situation different from the initial plan (a 10-hour fire in Mann Gulch/a 36-hour navigation delay for the Darwin team) - Proposed alternative initially evaluated as a riskier option - Communication between team members and their leader extremely strained	- Vital issues *but* less imminent action required - Low level of overall project activity *but* continued team-building activities (during 8 days) - Team partially separated (departure of 3 alpinists including the leader), *but* other team members stayed together and interacted - The alternative had been previously considered - Boat: key component of the expedition *but* not a central component to the alpinists' identity - Intense communication among team members assembled until acceptance of the revised plan - Logbook entries - Familiarity and trust in the leader

6. Conclusion

Our joint exploratory study between researchers in management and linguistics has sought to provide a response to the call in favor of a project-as-practice approach (Blomquist et al., 2010). Drawing from an in situ, real-time ethnographic study of a mountaineering expedition, we can now address the more general issues associated with renewal in a project-related context: how do team members co-construct and make sense of a project renewal effort in highly unexpected and uncertain environments?

First, we shed additional light on an unexplored phenomenon: the construction and acceptance of "dropping the tools". Previous studies have mainly focused on explaining the reluctance to drop one's tools (Weick, 1996), especially within accident contexts. Examining the case of a team that successfully dropped its tools serves to enhance our understanding of the way in which actors are able to cope with a breakdown in the course of a project. As observed in cases of escalating commitment (Staw, 1981), the consequences may be either positive or negative, and it is difficult to determine one vs. the other in advance. Perhaps the best course would be to advise a "wise attitude" as a mode of resilience, with wisdom lying somewhere between "excessive confidence and excessive cautiousness" in seeking to improve adaptability (Weick, 1993).

Second, our paper has added to the literature on project renewal. Project breakdowns have been primarily studied from the standpoint of a radical change taking place between two relatively stable periods (Engwall and Westling, 2004; Gersick, 1991). The turnaround episode (Engwall and Westling, 2004) marks the transition from a situation characterized by ambiguity (problem-setting) to one characterized by the unexpected (problem-solving). Nonetheless, despite actors' best efforts to collectively build meaning, some environments display a continuous succession of unexpected and ambiguous situations. "*Consequently, a project which has already passed through its peripety may be forced to abandon the defining conceptualization and revert to a new frustrating stage of ambiguity, exploration and problem-setting*" (Engwall and Westling, 2004:1574). Indeed, our study has characterized how a project renewal episode playing

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out in an environment both unexpected and ambiguous may not lead to transitioning from one problem resolution mode to another.

Third, our paper shows how team members make sense in real-time of a highly unexpected, ambiguous and risky environment by drawing on discursive practices in order to construct and accept project renewal. We have contributed to exposing the key role of three discursive practices as part of this ongoing sensemaking process: a) Rewording, b) Reframing, and c) Focusing attention. A fourth discursive practice, which entails d) Reaffirming team cohesiveness, helped strengthen bonds among team members throughout the expedition in spite of the threatening environment. Moreover, by illuminating real-time sensemaking under time pressure (limited time frame to accomplish the goal), we provide insights on the way a temporary organization (Lundin and Söderholm, 1995) relates to its environment — particularly to an extreme environment (Hannah et al., 2009) — and how team members are able to cope with it.

Our findings have a number of implications for both academics and practitioners. Academics will discover how in coping with project threats, discursive practices are combined with action to co-construct and eventually accept a project renewal. Studies on sensemaking processes and linguistic analyses can then inform to a great extent how projects are being managed in practice. Moreover, ethnographic studies, involving the in situ collection of detailed data, are particularly well adapted to conducting such analyses, thus making it possible to grasp the emergence and hesitations inherent in sensemaking processes within the framework of a steadily weakening project mission.

This research also provides practitioners with keys to understanding how a project is unfolding and hence equipping them to proceed with a proper analytical approach. In an unexpected environment, no guarantees are available regarding making the "right" decision. Vigilance however is to be exercised with respect to actors' behavior in situations involving both a loss of sense and inactivity, in placing special emphasis on discursive practices. More specifically, it is critical for individuals to be able to meet and discuss, to create a conversation "space", while recognizing that simultaneously posting entries in a logbook may help instill meaning into the situation. Moreover, maintaining group cohesiveness constitutes a fundamental and complementary component in the work being carried out on project sense.

Many leads are still worth exploring. The efforts to maintain group cohesiveness could be assessed in greater detail from the standpoint of: type of interaction (Weick and Roberts, 1993); power — who is being granted the ability to give meaning to situations? (Näslund and Pemer, 2012; Whittle and Mueller, 2012); leadership (Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien, 2012); and groupthink (Janis, 1982). Future research could also be conducted around the interplay between discursive practices and action through a given project renewal episode. Darwin expedition team members relied on such practices as a means of making sense of their own situation and progressing towards an action plan. From a recursive standpoint, their action of working through the breakdown created the situation they subsequently had to face and wound up affecting how the crisis actually played out (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010). Research on this interplay between discursive practices and action could be extended to encompass the entire expedition. Such a follow-up would serve to identify interaction patterns and determine how these discursive practices ultimately developed and whether others in fact appeared. Further research is needed to explore these leads in other organizational contexts.

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Please cite this article as: G.N. Musca, et al., 2014. "Drop your boat!": The discursive co-construction of project renewal. The case of the Darwin mountaineering expedition in Patagonia, Int. J. Proj. Manag. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2014.02.006