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‘SMART goals’ and ‘HR language’: technologised literacy practices and counter-conduct in the workplace

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Abstract: This study examines the use of literacy practices in a performance management system which aims to produce reflective practitioners, and how these practices were discursively resisted by staff. It employed a linguistic ethnographic research method, drawing on interactional data, interviews, field notes, and documentation to examine technologised literacy practices. These practices were a form of technologisation of discourse in the workplace, and were usually forms of writing connected to the performance management system that worked to also position reviewees as reflective practitioners. However, running parallel with these was a form of discursive counter-conduct that variously portrayed these practices as *HR language*, *KPI language* or *managese*. Implications for workplace discourse, and the interplay between institutional and professional discourses, are explored.

Keywords: performance management; organisational discourse; literacy practices; technologisation of discourse

1 Introduction

This paper focuses on the literacy practices of the performance management (PM) system at an Australian university language centre, which centred on identity management of workers. It emerged from a linguistic ethnographic study which investigated the relationships between discourse, power and professional identity in PM (Luke 2023). PM describes any organisational system designed to measure or improve staff performance in an organisation (DeNisi and Pritchard 2006). Such systems are composed of meetings and documentation, involving engagement with texts throughout the process. Therefore, they are amenable to study by linguistic

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ethnographic and discourse analytic methods which focus on literacy practices, that is, social practices that in some way involve writing or text (Barton and Hamilton 2005).

While PM has the explicit aims of managing the work practices of employees and aligning them with organisational objectives, a key means by which it achieves this is through identity management (Townley 1993). Employees are assumed to be autonomous agents, and PM meetings may more closely resemble therapy or counselling sessions than directive management conversations. This can be seen as one aspect of a broader shift to focusing on managing communication in workplace settings (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007; Mumby 2016), which aims to administer the organisation less through hierarchical relations and more through acting on culture and values. The production of certain kinds of worker subjectivity is central to this (Alvesson and Wilmott 2002).

Following a brief literature review focusing on workplace literacy and technologised literacy practices, and an explanation of the context and linguistic ethnographic methods used in this study, we demonstrate through close analysis of extracts from interviews and PM reviews how a set of literacy practices implemented by management worked to produce a certain kind of subjectivity amongst teachers. This subjectivity is that of a reflective practitioner, who sets goals connected to their professional development, and then reflects on their achievement. While this subject position seemed largely accepted by teachers, the discourse also faced resistance in the shape of a covert form of discursive counter-conduct (Foucault 2007). We conclude by considering what this study can tell us about the tensions between institutional and professional discourses, and the value of the notion of technologised literacy practices for understanding new public and neoliberal management practices in higher education, and modes of resistance to them.

2 Literature review

2.1 Workplace literacy practices

Towards the end of the 20th century, literacy and language researchers identified a set of significant changes to working practices they termed the “New Work Order” (Gee et al. 1996). New literacy practices were associated with team working, problem solving, and the devolution of quality control to local teams. Workers were increasingly expected to produce textual representations of their work, recording it

in writing in standardised forms to enable it to be reflected upon, checked or 'audited'. This led to an increasing 'textualization' of work (Iedema and Scheeres 2003), as practices involving writing and engagement with texts increasingly became part of people's everyday working lives, even in workplaces which previously had little writing in them, leading to the production of new kinds of reflexive worker identities.

Quality control practices introduced initially in industry spread to public services, partly driven by the 'new public management' approach which sought to increase accountability in the spending of taxpayer money. In educational contexts, reporting and audit demands of both local institutions and broader policy, inspection and funding requirements all contributed to increasing the intensity of work and the pressure on staff (Hamilton 2009; Troman 2000), with the sources and purposes of paperwork demands often unclear (Ball 2003).

The textualization of work is not new. Texts and their intertextual relations are to some degree constitutive of organisations (Smith 2001), and managing texts (and the processes of recontextualisation that connect them) is a key way to exert order on the organisation as a whole. Brandt (2001) shows through interviews with American workers how literacy gained increasing social and economic value during the 20th century. However, changes in workplace technologies have facilitated its rapid expansion. Farrell et al. (2021) argue that the third industrial revolution – the introduction of information technology into the workplace – was key to enabling the expectation that workers should produce replicable and routinised texts, both for quality assurance purposes and to ensure the flow of work, often at a distance from the work itself.

Power (1999) identifies the consequences of this shift to an 'audit society' as both increasing demands on workers and damaging relationships of trust between workers and management. Ethnographies of workplace literacy (e.g., Belfiore et al. 2004; Hull 1997) show how workers in many kinds of workplaces responded to new literacy demands, actively choosing how (and whether) to engage with such practices. When they chose not to, what management interpreted as a lack of literacy skills was frequently better understood as an active choice to resist.

2.2 Technologisation of discourse in the workplace

Within the University Language Centre – the research site for this study – new literacy demands related to the PM system took the form of a technologisation of discourse. Technologisation of discourse refers to the deployment in organisations of

expert discourses on communication, the design of discourse practices in those organisations, and training of staff in these practices (Fairclough 1996). Frequently, these technologised discourse practices are taken from other domains of social life (for example, therapeutic or business discourse) and applied in new areas (Cameron 2000; Fairclough 1996). As such they are frequently deployed in organisational change such as 'new public management' and the importation of managerialist discourse practices like PM into public institutions. Empirical data exploring technologisation of discourse in organisations is, however, rather thin (although see Katz 2001; Räisänen and Linde 2004).

Since the technologisation of discourse is a sociolinguistic phenomenon frequently located in organisations, its study can go some way towards answering questions which animate research into organisational, institutional, and workplace discourse. The study of workplace discourse frequently seeks to find connections between the interactional order of text production and the wider institutional order of the organisation (Arminen 2016; Sarangi and Roberts 1999). The notion of technologisation of discourse offers one way to understand this, as an institutional intervention into the moment by moment unfolding of the interaction order. Technologisation of discourse as a sensitising concept also offers another way to understand the relationship between institutional and professional discourses in the workplace. Institutional discourse describes logics and discourse practices that form and regulate institutions, such as procedures for accountability (Roberts 2011), which in this instance would include PM. Professional discourse, on the other hand, refers to forms of communication and semiosis which are part of the work practices of professionals, such as teachers. Technologisation of discourse, as a form of institutional discourse, offers a way to understand how institutional discourse can work to regulate professional discourse.

The empirical study of technologisation of discourse in workplace can in turn illustrate how such a control of discourse engenders resistance, resistance which is here termed 'discursive counter-conduct' (Foucault 2007; Odysseos et al. 2016). Counter-conduct is a reaction to attempts to regulate conduct, generated and shaped in response to the particular form which that regulation takes, that enables some degree of escape from the workings of power and government while not being out-and-out resistance (Odysseos et al. 2016). Such resistance, however, needs to be seen as a contingent social act, in part conditioned and composed by the logics and practices it resists. Rather than a mythic "locus of great Refusal" (Foucault 1976/1990 p. 96), counter-conduct is a specific form of resistance to attempts to regulate conduct. Since the technologisation of discourse is an attempt to regulate the semiotic

conduct of workers, discursive counter-conduct is an apt term to describe how such regulation is resisted.

3 Data and method

3.1 Context of site and background

The research site was a University Language Centre in Australia. The Language Centre's role was to teach English to international students who spoke English as a second or other language, and who wanted to study at the university. Teachers formed the largest group of employees at the Centre, and were the only staff who participated in the study. In the Australian higher education system, PM was introduced as part of a series of neoliberal reforms in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Anderson 2006). At the Centre, the PM system had faced a long history of staff resistance. This arose from an incident where a manager tampered with a PM document used in a job application, an incident which almost led to the police being called, and which created widespread staff distrust. This led to a decade of infrequent and haphazard implementation of PM at the Centre from 2000 to 2010.

This changed in around 2010 when a new director, Roger (this and all other participant names are pseudonymous), started at the Centre. Roger was keen to integrate the Centre more closely with the university. One of the means for this was to reintroduce regular PM meetings. This reinvigorated system used the wider university's PM system, including its documentation. A junior manager, Lucy, was tasked with running the system, and she developed a 'Centre model' for completion of the form and the conduct of the meetings. This new 'Centre model' had reflective practice as its main organising principle, with staff encouraged to set goals for the coming year, and subsequently reflect on their achievement of those goals. In order to implement this new reflective approach, Lucy and other Centre managers undertook a number of initiatives. Staff training sessions were conducted on how to complete the form according to the new Centre model, as well as how to conduct themselves at the PM meetings. Training sessions were also conducted with reviewers (usually junior managers or senior teachers) to make the new Centre model clear.

At the time of data collection, then, the PM system comprised completion of PM documentation, which was often seen as synonymous with the system as a whole. It also involved one annual meeting between the reviewee and a reviewer, who was either a senior teacher at the Centre or a manager, as well as an optional mid-year

'check in' meeting. The purpose of the meetings was to give teachers a chance to reflect on their achievement of goals and to discuss goals for the coming year, but also to make sure the reviewee's documentation was correctly completed.

3.2 Linguistic ethnography

Several data sets were collected and analysed as part of this study. Twenty seven pages of field-notes were taken over 18 months, which allowed for data to be collected from key events in the PM process, such as training sessions, as well as other incidental references made by workers and managers at the Centre to the PM process. Ten semi-structured interviews were also conducted with managers and with continuing and casual staff. Thirteen PM meetings (just over 6 h and 25 min) were also either audio- or video-recorded; while multimodal data were collected through video recording meetings, these did not prove salient to the current study. Finally, short post-meeting interviews, along with documentation shared by the participants in the collection of interactional data, provided further warrants for claims made about the discourse and social practices analysed. Luke's position as a member of the organisation meant that data were collected and analysed under strict ethical protocols; all names used in this study are pseudonyms, and any identifying data has been anonymised. All participants provided informed consent for this research, and ethics approval was granted by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee (reference number 5201500422).

Linguistic ethnography (LE) provided both the main epistemology and methodology of this study (Rampton et al. 2014; Tusting and Maybin 2007). LE gave a principled way to explore relations between language and context in the PM system at the Centre, in contrast with other work on the discourse of PM which has tended to focus more exclusively on features of the interaction order of PM meetings, and/or the role of documents as artefacts in those interactions (see, for example, Asmuß 2008; Lehtinen and Pälli 2021; Mikkola and Lehtinen 2014). LE's acknowledgement of context as something neither to be ignored nor assumed (Blommaert 2005) allows for an analysis of the interpenetration of contexts in institutional discourse (Cicourel 1992), and thus an analysis of the 'total linguistic fact' (Rampton et al. 2014; Silverstein 1985).

LE also provided a key way to both account for and capitalise on the fact that Luke, the first author and main researcher, was a member of the organisation being studied. LE affords a means to 'make the familiar strange' both through attending to

fine-grained interaction analysis (Rampton 2007), and more broadly through an explicit acknowledgement of researcher or 'positional reflexivity' (Reynolds 2023). Not only does this work to overcome possible biases in interpretation, it also turns the researcher's position as an insider into a means to understand members' perspectives on social practice. LE 'inwards-outwards' directionality turns the researcher-member's understandings of the site into another data source and means to make sense of data.

Several forms of discourse analytic and qualitative data analysis methods were used within the LE approach outlined above. The interviews were analysed using grounded theory inductive coding (Charmaz 2006; Corbin and Strauss 2008), with *in vivo* coding used where possible to privilege participants' voices (see Appendix 1 for a list of the main codes as well as salient subcodes). Interactional data from the meetings were then analysed using communicative activity type analysis (Linell 2010; Reynolds 2018), which affords an understanding of interaction in its institutional context (Sarangi 2010). In this approach, detailed note-taking on interaction in the meetings, on a turn by turn basis, was made according to the dimensions outlined by Linell (2010), covering:

1. the framing dimensions of the meetings, such as the roles of participants, and shared purposes;
2. the internal interactional organisation, focussing on areas like turn-taking, sequence structure, the role of artefacts, and participant positioning; and
3. the broader sociocultural ecology of the meetings, such as how they related to other texts, or other parts of the organisation.

Field notes and documentation were later analysed using thematic analysis, and coded using key themes that had already been developed in the analysis of interactional and interview data. Finally, short post-meeting interviews, along with documentation shared by the participants in the collection of interactional data, provided further warrants for claims made about the discourse and social practices analysed.

4 Analysis

Our analysis of the discourse of the PM system at the Centre highlighted two examples of what we have termed 'technologised literacy practices'. These were mandated literacy practices connected with the completion of PM documentation

that were examples of technologised discourse: they were taken from literacy practices normally not associated with the professional practices of the teachers, were designed and implemented by the management, and often required training. This occurred in training sessions for staff, but also in the PM meetings themselves, where proper completion of the document was an important goal. These technologised literacy practices, as can be seen below, were an important means by which teachers participating in the PM process were positioned as reflective practitioners. While several technologised literacy practices were identified in the PM system at the Centre, two are analysed here: writing SMART goals, and writing action steps and KPIs. These and other literacy practices also proved to be an important point around which staff resistance to the process was reconstituted through the discursive counter-conduct which labelled these practices as 'HR-language'.

4.1 Technologised literacy practices: writing SMART goals

Writing SMART goals was an important technologised literacy practice in the PM process at the Centre that positioned reviewees as reflective practitioners. SMART goals are a method for both thinking about and recording goals, as Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound. The use of SMART goals derives from business practice (Doran 1981), and they were first popularised by General Electric in the 1980s (Kerr and LePelley 2013). Lucy rationalised their use thus:

> *A lot of people would say 'Increase student success', but they didn't actually know how they would measure it. So so I've tried to make it more measurable and concrete like 'I wanna develop 1 new lesson for ITP. Did I do it? Yes'.*

Already here it can be seen how SMART goals as a technologised literacy practice were designed to position reviewees as reflective practitioners, with Lucy's heteroglossic voicing of an idealised reviewee reflecting on their achievement of a goal.

References to SMART goals in the interactional data were most prominent at the end of sequences of interaction in the meeting where reviewees reflected on their inclusion of certain goals in their PM documentation. Discussions of the SMART goals functioned as a form of institutionally ratified device for assessment. They

were particularly prominent in the interactional data taken from the meetings where the reviewee was undertaking the process for the first time, and was unaware of the literacy practices that the Centre promulgated for the document's successful completion.

A salient example of this comes from the end of a meeting between Ken, a reviewer and senior teacher at the Centre, and Tina, a casually-employed teacher. Towards the end of the meeting, Tina asks for feedback on how she has completed her document. Ken's initial response can be seen below (see Appendix 2 for transcription conventions).

Data extract 1

1	Ken:	I think, you might need to/
2		um, think-
3		y'know how we had the SMART ..
4		=sort of= .. idea,
5	Tina:	=yes=
6		==yes/ yes yes//
7	Ken:	==I think the *measurable/ um, part,
8		you might need to think about/
9		=like ..= put more *numbers in,
10	Tina:	=oh// OK,=
11	Ken:	==like =how= do you know/
12	Tina:	=yeah=
13	Ken:	==if you um .. are achieving/
14		each of the goals//
15		or not//

Ken's repair in line 2 to explicitly orient *SMART .. sort of.. idea* aligns his feedback with the wider institutional technologisation of discourse through SMART goals. More telling, however, is Ken's following account of why Tina should include SMART goals, which also establishes an idealised subject position of the reviewee as a reflective practitioner. This can particularly be seen in lines 11–15, where Ken provides reasons for writing goals as SMART goals. His rationale is that writing the goals in this way lets the reviewee later know whether they had achieved those goals. He assumes that the reviewee is interested in achieving these goals, and that they are willing to reflect on this achievement. Thus here the technologised literacy practice of SMART goals, and the subject position of the PM reviewee as a reflective practitioner, are intimately intertwined in the discourse of the meeting.

4.2 Technologised literacy practices: writing action steps and KPIs

Action steps and KPIs (key performance indicators) were other forms of technologised literacy practices in the Centre's PM system that worked to position reviewees as reflective practitioners. While the origin of action steps is unclear, KPIs derive from business management and their translation to higher education through new public management (Shore and Wright 2015). They were closely linked to SMART goals, as action steps referred to writing items on the PM form into discrete, 'actionable' steps, and KPIs referred to measures to know that these items or goals had been achieved. However, while SMART goals worked as an overall orientation to writing items on the form, and were only referred to in the spoken discourse surrounding form completion, action steps and KPIs were reified in the written text of the PM document. This can be seen in Figure 1 below.

The beige section at the top, labelled 1, is part of the existing structure of the form prior to completion by employees. In this section, the reviewee is prompted to add both action steps and KPIs, written either as imperative sentences or questions directly addressing them. The participant's action steps and KPIs can be seen in part 2, and are written as imperatives. Writing action steps and KPIs as imperatives in this way was the most common or accepted form for writing these, although some might write these as a single block of prose.

This use of KPIs and action steps was part of the new Centre model for PM document completion initiated by Lucy, and was closely connected to the use of

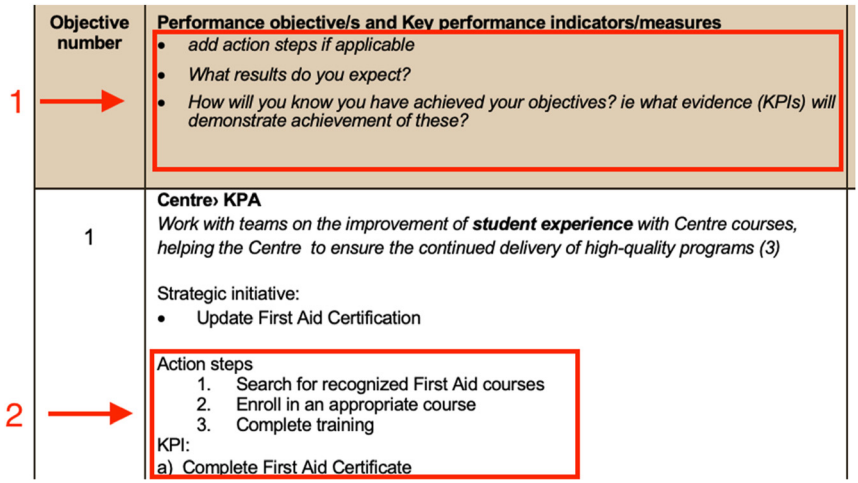

Figure 1: Action steps and KPIs (taken from a research participant's PM form – parts in red have been added).

SMART goals. Lucy described some of the changes she had been involved with as follows:

> *Putting clear headings about what about what programme you wanted to do, and then some action steps. So it was in in sort of trying to help people make the goals smarter*

To managers such as Lucy, then, the two literacy practices were clearly linked. As with SMART goals, the correct completion of action steps and KPIs was conveyed to staff through training sessions. However, neither the prompts on the form seen in Figure 1 above, nor the staff training sessions, were sufficient, particularly for staff new to the system. As a result, at several points in the interactional data collected from the meetings, reference was made by the reviewers to the need for action steps and KPIs, and these further illustrate how technologised literacy practices such as action steps and KPIs worked to position teachers as reflexive/reflective selves.

One example can be seen in Diane's first PM meeting with Hailey, her reviewer. Much time was spent at the beginning of this meeting describing the literacy practices connected to the form, as Diane's form had not been correctly completed prior to the meeting. Hailey refers to action steps in her extended account of how to complete the form at the beginning of the meeting.

Data extract 2

1	Hailey:	so under =the heading you would have=
2	Diane:	=({[p] })=
3	Hailey:	==concrete action steps//
4		action steps//
5		so what are the action steps/
6		you're going to do concretely//
7		=so number one= would be
8	Diane:	={[p] ooh} =
9	Hailey:	=={[sound of writing] attend .. / all .. /UEP3, meetings//
10	Diane:	==oh OK
11	Hailey:	==for =example=
12	Diane:	=you need,= you need, =specifics/=
13	Hailey:	=*specifically=
14		what would you do// would you express an *interest,
15		to develop new materials

In this excerpt we see the idea that goals in PM documentation need to be *concrete* (lines 3 and 6) and *specific* (lines 12 and 13), perhaps connecting this to the notion of 'specific' in SMART goals. Nevertheless, Hailey clearly orients to the idea of action steps in lines 3–5, and takes time to model them for Diane, possibly as this was Diane's first time participating in the PM system. These literacy practices are linked to broader activities that the reviewee is expected to assume in connection with the setting and completion of their PM goals. Hailey first poses the rhetorical question, *what are the action steps/you're going to do concretely*, closely linking the notion of action steps with actions undertaken outside the PM process, in the professional life of the reviewee. Hailey then models writing an action step, before again posing the

question of what Diane or any reviewer would do. Thus, the writing of action steps is interleaved with the setting and completion of goals in professional life, a key feature of a reflexive/reflective self.

4.3 Discursive counter-conduct: 'HR-language'

Along with technologised literacy practices, and their attempts to position workers as reflexive/reflective subjects, came a form of discursive counter-conduct that framed the discourse of the PM system as 'HR-language'. The first signs of this counter-conduct can be seen in staff accounts of literacy difficulties with the PM documentation, despite the implementation of the 'Centre model'. A number of staff described having difficulties with completing the form. Literacy issues were often raised as a topic in meetings, particularly with teachers participating in the PM system for the first time, as seen in Sections 4.1 and 4.2 above. The management were cognisant of these issues. Steve, a junior manager at the Centre, said that getting teachers to complete any paperwork, including paperwork connected to the PM system, was difficult. Lucy, in an informal chat in the Centre kitchenette, said that trying to get staff to successfully complete the documentation was like 'pushing shit uphill'. It was due in part to such literacy issues that the 'Centre model' was introduced; nevertheless, data from the study showed that literacy issues continued. This need to participate in literacy practices outside those needed for teaching duties means that the completion of the PM documentation is an example of the textualisation of work (see Section 2.1), which can in part explain these literacy issues.

There was also an affective dimension to staff resistance. The amount of paperwork that the PM system required, along with teachers' existing duties, led to some resentment. Around the time of the first PM meetings when data were collected in 2015, many teachers complained about the amount of work. The issues connected with this textualisation of work, however, went beyond simply adding to teachers' workloads. Teachers at the Centre described feeling uncertainty and fear about how the PM system would be used or what the outcomes of participating in the process would be, in an echo of Tusting's (2014) participants expressing similar feelings about workplace audit cultures. Victor, a long term continuing teacher at the Centre, described these feelings thus:

> *I guess the issue is really what comes of the PM and D? … What happens our front page gets sent to HR, that gets filed away. What happens with that, you know?*

Similarly, Upton related his uncertainty and fear about the PM system and how it was used.

> *It* [the PM system] *does introduce a little bit of a fear factor to be honest. I have a fear that if I don't tick off my self-designed KPIs then I won't achieve satisfactory in my review*

Correlated with both the literacy issues that staff had with the PM system, and teachers' negative feelings about the means and ends to which it was put, was a resistance to the very nature of the language used. Staff often characterised the language of the PM process as difficult. Ed, a long term casual teacher, described the language as *obscure*, and said that many other casual staff had difficulty understanding it. Karen, a senior continuing teacher, also described the language of the system as obscure and said that it had an elusive quality. This failure or reluctance to understand the nature and purpose of the language of PM derived from it being outside the typical discourse practices of the teachers. Harpreet, for example, a casual teacher at the Centre, attributes her lack of understanding to the fact that she had largely worked as a teacher in her professional life, rather than working in an office setting, and thus was unacquainted with it.

A number of other staff went even further, describing it as a different language altogether. Karen and Ed, long-serving teachers at the Centre, referred to the language of PM as *official language.* Diane, in a post-meeting interview, called it *KPI language*, an obvious reference to the technologised literacy practices described above. Harpreet described the language of the PM system in these terms:

> *… it's not in English, to put it bluntly … It's HR language. Yer yer yer KPAs and you know the motto of what the organisation stands for and all this other stuff*

Her comments again show that technologised literacy practices – this time the use of KPAs (key performance areas), another technologised literacy practice associated with the Centre's PM system – are oriented to as evidence that the language of the form is different, *HR language*. Another teacher, Upton – a continuing teacher who had until just prior to the data collection period been a casual teacher – characterised the language of the PM system as *managese*.

> *I do think it's important to understand how to speak that language. There are other teachers who have resisted the kind of managese that's found in these um talk of KPAs and KPIs.*

Again, Upton orients to the technologised literacy practices of KPIs as evidence that the language of the PM system was a different language. Upton's attitude towards this language is however a little different to others, here explaining that it is important to learn. In the same interview, he attributes his attaining a continuing role at the Centre as due in part to becoming more proficient in this language.

The extent to which the language of the PM system was not understood by teachers, however, is doubtful. In a particularly significant part of the interview with Harpreet, she was asked which language on the PM document she could not

understand, and apart from KPAs she was unable to identify which language was unclear. Besides confusions between KPAs and KPIs (an error which even Lucy made on occasion), few if any staff had trouble understanding the language of the form; instead, issues tended to arise from the literacy practices and overall layout of the document. These issues were perhaps due in part to these literacy practices lying outside the scope of teachers' ordinary work. There was, however, also a sense that these practices were quietly resisted by teachers, in a form of discursive counter-conduct. Evidence for this can be seen in Diane's description of KPAs as lying outside her work, described in Section 4.1, as well as in the excerpt from Upton's interview above where he refers to teachers who have resisted the language of the PM system. Teachers' designation of the language of the system, therefore, can be seen as a performative rather than a simply descriptive act. The framing of the language as 'HR-language' can thus be seen as a form of counter-conduct (Foucault 2007), a discursive representation of the PM by the teachers which resists the imposition of these institutional literacy practices largely unrelated to their professional duties.

Despite this counter-conduct labelling of the discourse of PM as 'HR-language', it is important to note that, apart from the language, many teachers saw the new Centre model as beneficial, particularly with its focus on reflection. Thus an important theme to emerge from coding the interviews was "mixed feelings". Harpreet expressed her opposition to the language of PM, but her approval of the opportunity to reflect on her work situation:

> *Right so definitely the language of this written document was not the relaxed bit. What was relaxed was the way that Hugh approached talking to me about it, and getting me talking*

The good side of *getting me talking* was not just the discussion with Hugh, her reviewer, but also the broader developmental aspects for her teaching, as the meeting prompted her to reflect on what had gone well in the past, and to highlight aspects of her teaching that had since developed, as can be seen in these two quotes from her interview:

> *it was quite good to just reflect on what kind of had gone well and stuff*

> *I think looking back at this now, the stuff that I've got that that I've implemented in the classroom (0.5) is … maximising the things that Hugh drew attention to that were good*

Victor, a continuing staff member, was another teacher with mixed feelings. He was critical of some of the more bureaucratic elements of the PM process, along with how it could impose extra work outside typical duties for teachers. Nevertheless, Victor felt that the process had contributed to his development as a teacher, as it allowed for *a little bit of self-analysis for yourself*, and that *it gives you pause to focus and plan*

you- the year ahead. Even Karen, a long-term continuing teacher and a persistent critic of the PM system, admitted that she felt the new Centre model was *a 1,000 times better* than what it had been previously.

5 Discussion and conclusion

The use of certain literacy practices in the PM system at the Centre, such as SMART goals, action steps, and KPIs, were, therefore, more than simply guidance for teachers for how to complete documentation. They showed clear signs of being forms of technologised discourse, as these literacy practices were taken from another area of social life – in this case, business – and applied to the textual practices of teachers, as part of a broader set of reforms to higher education which can be labelled new public management (Cameron 2000; Fairclough 1996). These literacy practices were also technologised as they were consciously designed and deployed by management, and staff were trained in these practices (Fairclough 1996). The purpose of these technologised literacy practices is that they are constitutive of a particular identity, in this case that of a reflective practitioner (Giddens 1991; Schön 1983).

This instantiation of a reflective subjectivity in technologised literacy practices was not untroubled. While the subject position of the reflective practitioner was largely accepted by the teachers, the technologised literacy practices which in part helped to invoke it were contested by the discursive counter-conduct labelling of the PM system as 'HR language'. This is in some sense a reaction to the technologised literacy practices, given the frequent mention of KPIs and other such literacy practices when framing the PM discourse as *obscure*, *managese* or *HR language*, or even as *KPI language*. This discursive counter-conduct can be understood as performative, in that the technologised literacy practices and the broader PM discourse are often framed as unrelated to teachers' professional practice, thus denying their usefulness or relevance. This contestation through differing indexical orders (Silverstein 2003) is revealing in several ways.

The different ways in which the discourse of the PM system was understood can be seen as an outgrowth of differences between institutional and professional discourses (Roberts 2011; Sarangi and Candlin 2011; Sarangi and Roberts 1999). Certainly, some of these dynamics can be seen in the differing ways of describing the discourse of the PM system, particularly in relation to technologised literacy practices. Technologised literacy practices functioned as a regulating discourse, a metalinguistic discourse both directly regulating PM reviewees' literacy practices as well as indirectly their professional identities. The power of such literacy practices derived in part from the broader institutional imperative that mandated PM for both continuing staff and for casual staff seeking continuing employment. More directly

though it was implemented through the pastoral power of staff training sessions, and suggestions by reviewers in PM meetings. The broader combination of techniques of domination and techniques of the self thus marks the PM system at the Centre as a form of governmentality (Foucault 1982; Rose 1999), where the conduct of teachers is directed via pastoral power through the inscriptive practices of the PM system (Martin and Waring 2018).

There is some evidence too that the discursive counter-conduct arose partly from professional discourse practices differing from institutional discourse. Literacy issues with PM documentation, and the lack of understanding of the system's language, were in part attributable to a lack of familiarity as teachers with the language of HR. Evidence that the counter-conduct was related to the professional discourse practices of the teachers would also include Harpreet's comments on her unfamiliarity with the language as a teacher, as well as descriptions of the language of PM as *obscure*. The differences in discourse practices between the language used by teachers, and that of the PM system, then become emblematic of differences between teachers and management (Agha 2006), and these differences were articulated through notions of the language being *HR-language*, *KPI language* or *managese*. Despite these differences, the 'character' of the reflexive practitioner (Fairclough 2013) went unchallenged by the teachers, due perhaps to its familiarity for teachers through English language teaching and English for Academic Purposesteacher professional socialisation and development. Thus the teachers' discursive counter-conduct functioned as "a subterranean stream" (Braverman 1998: 104) of resistance against technologised literacy practices, a form of infrapolitics (Scott 1990) that subtly contests the hegemony of institutional discourse. Here, this discursive counter-conduct took the form of a second-order indexical framing (Silverstein 2003) of the language of the PM system as being, variously but relatedly, *HR language*, *KPI language*, or *managese*, and worked to performatively keep the system at bay.

The main contribution of this study is to elucidate how literacy practices can be technologised and deployed in the service of new public and neoliberal management of organisations, but also how this is resisted. Research and theoretical work on the technologisation of discourse has until now largely focussed on spoken discourse, and the context for this technologisation has for the most part remained unexamined. This study extends the notion of technologisation of discourse to literacy practices imported from business discourse into higher education, and utilises ethnographic research methods to trace how the management at the University Language Centre deployed these technologised literacy practices. These same ethnographic research methods also revealed how the technologised literacy practices became the object of discursive counter-conduct through second order indexation of the literacy practices as 'HR-language'. Thus while institutional discourse can be seen here to laminate professional discourse, this process does not go uncontested.

Appendix 1: Interview codes

Main codes	Relevant subcodes
Attitudes to performance management	"Doing performance management because it's a good idea"
	Fear of performance management
	"It increases the feeling of alienation"
	"It's a thousand times better"
	Uncertainty about performance management
The centre as an organisation	
Changing the performance management system	"Making the process meaningful"
	"Performance management has been a bit haphazard"
	"Performance management is now back on track"
	"The centre and its performance management were toxic"
Completing the form	The CET model for completing the form
Conducting the meeting	"You get a bit of feedback and one-on-one time with a manager"
Performance management and broader contexts	–
Performance management and language	Literacy concerns and performance management
	"It's important to know how to speak that language"
	Official language
	"The instrument is incredibly complex"
	"Tick the box"
Performance management and staff	–
Performance management and teaching	–
Performance management as a reflective activity	"It was good to reflect on what had gone well"
	Performance management as establishing your identity
	Performance managementt as self-analysis

Appendix 2: Transcription conventions

Transcription conventions for interactional data were adapted from Gumperz and Berenz (1993), with additional notation derived from Jeffersonian transcription (Jefferson 2004).

/	Slight fall in intonation, suggesting more to come
//	Final fall, usually indicating an end of turn
?	Final rise
,	Slight rise, suggesting more is expected
–	Truncation, self-correction, and/or interruption
.	Pause of half a second or less

(continued)

..	Pause of between half and 1 s
…	Pause of greater than 1 s
=OK=	Indicates overlap boundary
==	Indicates latching onto previous utterance
::	Lengthened segments (e.g., m::)
*	Accent or prominence
**	Extra prominence
[looks at form]	Nonlexical phenomena, either vocal or non-vocal
{[lo] and the next one?}	Nonlexical phenomena occurring at the same time as speech
( )	Unintelligible speech
(number two)	A good guess at speech which is difficult to understand

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