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Abstract

Company change stories are often constructed around a linear series of 'successful' events which serve to show the company in a positive light to any interested external party. These stories of company success sanitise this process and offer data for change experts to formulate neat linear prescriptions on how to best manage change. This position is criticised in this paper which draws on processual case study data to argue that change is a far more complex muddied political process consisting of competing histories and ongoing multiple change narratives which may vie for dominance in seeking to be the change story. A central aim is to demonstrate the analytical importance of identifying and unpacking frameworks of interpretation which are utilized in organizational struggles over change outcomes. Understanding how change stories are managed also highlights political process and draws attention to the ways in which power is exercised. As such, the paper calls for the more widespread use of the concept of 'competing histories' and 'multiple change narratives' in theories which seek to explain processes of organizational change.

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Abstract: Organizational change stories are often constructed around a linear series of 'successful' events that serve to show the company in a positive light to any interested external party. These stories of company success sanitize complex change processes and offer data for change experts to formulate neat linear prescriptions on how to best manage change. This article criticizes this position and argues that change is a far more dynamic political process consisting of competing histories and ongoing multiple change narratives which may vie for dominance in seeking to be *the* change story. A central aim is to identify and unpack narratives of change in order to highlight a number of theoretical and methodological implications for management research. It is argued that post-hoc rationalized stories should not be used as a knowledge base for prescriptive lessons or theoretical developments, nor should research data simply be presented as a single authentic story of change. The need to study change overtime and to accommodate multiple stories that may be reshaped, replaced and modified raise critical data collection and data analysis issues, as well as important questions on the place of the conventional case study as a conveyor of research findings. As such, the article calls for the more widespread use of the concept of 'competing histories' and 'multiple change narratives' in longitudinal studies that seek to explain processes of organizational change.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE STORIES AND MANAGEMENT RESEARCH: FACTS OR FICTION

INTRODUCTION

> Organizations are the fundamental building blocks of modern societies. Studies of why and how they change are crucial for analysing social change…We need encompassing schemes for understanding what is happening to us, and for putting local actions in historical and global context (Aldrich, 1999: 346).

In studying why and how organizations manage complex change initiatives a growing body of knowledge has emerged and the company case study has become a longstanding vehicle for presenting findings. The way the change story is told and data presented generally varies within management research and is often tailored to meet the expectations of the intended audience. In longitudinal qualitative studies, the researcher often presents his or her interpretation of events (an organizational change story) that is based on a systematic analysis of complex and detailed data. Within these data, there are often competing stories of change, conflicting interpretations, and a range of different experiences and views and yet, in the final presentation of the case study many of these stories are not told (often for practicable reasons). As such, there is always dilemma and compromise between being faithful to the data and yet also working towards the creation of a readable case study that engages an audience and supports key arguments. In contrast, studies that focus on single individuals or groups, or those that simply take a snapshot of accounts, often present far less contested stories of change. Although the coherence and logic of these stories may be attractive, their simplification of complex change processes may ultimately provide

misleading information on change management. This is most noticeable in the more popularised management texts where anecdotal stories of 'successful' change are often used to promote key ingredient approaches to change management. In there various forms, stories of change can act as powerful conveyors and receptacles of knowledge, but we rarely reflect on the creation and organization of this knowledge or critically assess the way in which this knowledge is documented and presented. These and other issues are addressed in this article that provides an analysis of organizational change stories. It is argued that concepts such as, 'competing change narratives' and 'multiple change histories' provide useful aids to understanding processes of change. It is also argued that there is a need for further reflection on the role of the researcher as an 'author' of case studies as well as the place of change agents as conductors and scriptwriters of company change initiatives.

COMPANY CHANGE AND STORIES OF SUCCESS

In the conceptual development of management change initiatives, such as, knowledge management, the learning organization or best practice management, social science knowledge is often used to formulate 'new' approaches (Jaffee, 2001). Following the conceptualisation of a change philosophy or strategy, these ideas may become popularised through various forms of publication and media coverage (see for example the work of Kotter, 1996). With the liberalisation of world trade and the entry of new fast-growing economies into a more highly competitive and global market place, many companies are continually in search of change programs to improve their competitive position. This concern with the successful management of change has stimulated demand for simple change recipes to solve complex

organizational problems (Albrecht, 1992; Hammer and Champy, 1993). These managerial prescriptions for change are generally presented in the form of a rational historical development with each new development representing an improvement on previous ideas (for a discussion of these developments see Burnes, 2000: 9-146; Hatch, 1997).

Following the publication of Peters and Watermans (1982) best-selling book *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best Run Companies*, there has been a whole plethora of recipe books on successful change. Some of the more successful publications have been written by what Huczynski (1993) terms as the 'Management Gurus' and 'Celebrity Professors' (see also, Collins, 2000; Jackson, 2001) such as, Kanter (1985 & 1990), Handy (1994 & 1997) and Kotter (1995 & 1996). In the case of Tom Peters, he has continued to promote actions for success in books, such as, *Thriving on Chaos* (1989), *Liberation Management* (1993) and the *Circle of Innovation* (1997). A theme running through this and much of the guru management literature is the need for managers to act as leaders of change and to be proactive in the search for strategies that will make organizations more competitive. There is also an emphasis on working together as a team, of closing the divide between managers and workers in the promotion of a united front and a strong unified culture. However, this popular rhetoric masks the complex reality of living with change and often downplays resistance, political process and change failure. This popular literature (Hamel, 2001; Handy, 2000) contrasts with the findings and analyses from more detailed academic studies of organisational change (see for example, Buchanan and Badham, 1999; Knights and Willmott, 2000). What is interesting about these more critical studies is not only the importance given to the political contextual dynamics of

change (Collins, 1998; Kelemen, Forrester and Hassard, 2000), but also to the influence of organisational narratives in shaping change outcomes (Czarniawska, 1998). As such, the relationship between political process and change stories is examined in more detail in the section that follows prior to an assessment of the role of the case study in management research.

FACTS OR FICTION: MULTIPLE AND COMPETING NARRATIVES OF CHANGE

Bradley and her colleagues draw attention to the power of workplace stories in the way they can sustain certain stereotypes and promote misleading assumptions about particular individuals and groups (Bradley, Erikson, Stephenson and Williams, 2000). They demonstrate how the feminization of work and the growth in part-time jobs is often crudely explained and justified by the myth of globalization. They stress that although these stories capture some of the changes that are occurring (that is, they are not entirely inaccurate) they also present misinformation that can mislead and result in unfounded generalisations. These generalisations in turn influence strategic decision-making about change in organizations, such as, in the need to adopt flexible employment structures to meet the competitive demands of global competition (Bradley et al, 2000: 3). Their studies show how stories that take the form of workplace myths often provide a generally accepted explanation that while limited, misleading and partial, can nevertheless shape company change strategies. In a similar way, stories about change are often used not only to make sense of everyday workplace experience, but also to influence the actions and decisions of others. There can be an intentionality that lies behind the story – an attempt for A to get B to do

something B would otherwise not do – that highlights the political nature of stories that seek to shape change in certain preferred directions.

In moving towards a more critical appreciation of the relationship between organizational change stories and political process it is important to not only examine the creation and shaping of change narratives as an individual sense making device, but also as a more collective group process. The influence and role of these individual and group accounts of change also need to be examined over time, for as Czarniawska (1997) indicates, individuals often search for meaning in the construction of stories that makes sense of situations, events or actions, which may not have been understandable at the time of their occurrence. A story may therefore help people to make sense of a change experience that has already happened. As such, the story is not simply an objective account of events but acts as a sense-making device of lived experience.

In relaying individual lived experience through stories the audience (in a social, familial or work setting) may encourage the storyteller to revise their position or account to accommodate other explanations (that may be seen to provide a more 'realistic' and/or 'acceptable' story). In this way, individual narratives may be reshaped and developed in response to others as an individual seeks to confirm their own sense making of personal experience. However, unlike group narratives, these autobiographical accounts of work experience are constructed to service an individual's search for meaning (see, Weick, 1995) and are not generally used to influence the decision-making of others. In contrast, collective narratives can be used as a powerful political tool to influence decision-making. The drama of a change

story (Czarniawska, 1997) may be relayed in terms of a sequence of events (this happened, and then this happened causing this to happen), in which various individuals and groups may be afforded different roles and status as for example, change champions or resisters of change. The time and space of events may be contracted and the messy nature of change may be collapsed into a more logical rational series of n-step stages. Moreover, a number of key lessons may form part of the central 'moralizing' message of the story promoting prescriptions of how things should be managed in future. These dominant change stories may continue long after the initial protagonists have left an organization and in some cases, may become part of the workplace culture (see Bradley et al, 2000). Although there are always alternative stories and competing narratives, it is argued here, that it is the dominant stories that reach a level of general acceptance, which are the stories that influence decision-making and the pace and pattern of change in organizations.

Gabriel (2000) whilst arguing that stories provide a powerful lens with which to study organizations, nevertheless cautions against simply equating the concept of 'story' to any form of narrative. For Gabriel, the narrative craft of storytelling is about sense making. Stories can be used to discredit certain views of the world and to create and sustain other versions of reality. A well-constructed story is likely to be a good vehicle to promote a certain view, especially when it is combined with an effective storyteller. Not unlike the concept of workplace myths put forward by Bradley and her colleagues, Gabriel (2000: 5) views stories as a special phenomena whereby 'stories interpret events, infusing them with meaning through distortions, omissions, embellishments, and other devices, without, however, obliterating the facts'. In this sense, Gabriel draws a distinction between 'facts-as-information' and stories that are

viewed as 'facts-as-experience'. There is a clear line that is drawn between stories (that represent embellished accounts), where the factual accuracy of the text cannot be challenged, and narratives (factual accounts) that claim to offer an objective account of events (Gabriel, 2000: 27-8). It is argued here however, that this distinction too simplistic as organizational stories that attempt to be viewed as *the* authentic account of change are in practice part of a political process evidenced by the way they are created, maintained and elevated. In representing one of a number of possible accounts, the notion of there ever being an undisputed, authentic and timeless account of organizational change is indeed questionable. In other words, whilst there may be a generally accepted change story at a given time (a dominant narrative) such stories are often rewritten over time and co-exist in an organizational context that will comprise other alternative, competing and conflicting accounts of change.

Gabriel's discussion of organizational stories nevertheless remains useful and illuminating on a number of dimensions. For Gabriel (2000), stories and story telling is viewed as a poetic activity in which the text may be embellished, elaborated and refashioned. Stories can provide the language we use to describe the world (Watson, 1994) and in entertaining and persuading audiences they generally consist of a collage of rich plots and characters. He identifies four main types comprising: comic stories (with emotional qualities); epic stories (that emphasise struggles); tragic stories (that focus on undeserved misfortune); and romantic stories (that are marked by love and humanity). Unlike the stories presented by Boje (1991), which are viewed as terse 'labels of stories' (Boje's stories are drawn from case study interview transcripts), Gabriel takes a folklorist position and draws a distinction between true organizational stories (with action, plot, storyline and characters that endure over time), the more

fragmented accounts (or proto-stories put forward by Boje) and factual accounts. As he states:

> The classification of stories into different types was the hardest part of the processing. Some stories instantly fell into a well-established type, such as comic or epic or were hybrids of two or more types (e.g. comic-tragic); yet several were not easily classifiable in spite of several iterations. Several things gradually became clear. First, that the same 'events' may feed different types of story. Secondly, that certain narratives described events purely as facts, devoid of emotional or symbolic content. There were often responses to the question regarding the most significant event an individual had witnessed during his or her service with an organization. After trying different alternative labels, these narratives were eventually classified as 'reports' or 'descriptions'…. A third classification issue arose in connection with those terse narratives that had a very thin plot. As has already been mentioned, they were eventually classified as 'proto-stories'. (Gabriel, 2000: 32)

This distinction between proto-stories, factual descriptions and organizational stories that persist over time, with plots and characters, whilst useful, is limited when we start to apply these concepts to individual and group experiences of the political process of change. For example, in constructing public accounts of change, individual experience is often recast, lost or hidden within a broader collective narrative that purports to tell *the* story of change. These stories are much in evidence in change programmes where multiple and competing narratives often co-exist and yet, our case histories typically talk of a single story of change in companies, such as, Toshiba or

Microsoft. The stories typically present change as a chronology of events with a clear beginning and end point, with a tendency to follow the ruling view or dominant collective voice, as Czarniawska and Sevon explain:

> Although our story is about change and therefore about ideas which succeed, it is worth mentioning here that a ruling paradigm has a deadly power to reject ideas which are perceived as challenging it. (Czarniawska and Sevon, 1996: 37)

In drawing attention to the dual role of collective organizational change stories as a vehicle for making sense of group experience and in acting as a political lever to influence change, there is an important relationship between the storyteller and audience, and the context in which the information is being relayed. The intentionality behind the story is not simply about group sense making but about gaining support for the creation of a dominant narrative that services particular objectives and yet, is also plausible as an explanation of the experience of company change. Such organizational change narratives are never fully complete, as they generally remain open to change and reformulation. Different individuals and groups may also use change stories in different ways, as it is not only in the creation of a commonly accepted story but also in the telling of the story that decisions can be influenced. In other words, the multiple stories of change that co-exist in organizations are often refashioned, reworked and elaborated in attempts to explain, persuade, educate, convince and shape views on the causes and direction of change. They may be composed and presented as an accurate chronological account, they may

reflect competing stories of conflict and dispute, or accounts may be variously modified to fit different audience expectations.

Although there are always going to be different views, perspectives and stories on change that will co-exist within organizations, the poignancy of stories, in being able to influence the views and attitudes of others, make them powerful political tools in the orchestration and management of change processes. As a consequence, dominant narrators may actively construct and sustain a particular story within the context of other competing voices and views. These competing stories on change reflect the power relationships between certain individuals and groups, and the political process by which certain 'voices' get heard and others remain hidden and/or are silenced. Past events may be rewritten in the construction of a story that seeks to influence current decision-making. This story may also be informed by future expectations and as a consequence, is open to further modification and revision over time. The multiple stories of change (at the individual and group level) may remain hidden in studies that draw on data from a small group of people (especially, for example, studies that simply focus on senior management). Even in studies that draw on the experiences of employees from a range of different positions, some of the alternative views and stories of change may be withheld or silenced in the promotion of a dominant account. Unlike the stories put forward by Gabriel (2000), those involved in the reshaping of a dominant story of change often seek to promote an *authentic* account of change. The storytellers seek to engage their audience with their version of events with the intention of gaining a broader ownership and acceptance of 'the way things actually happened'. Outsiders may further develop their own stories but feel unable to promote these accounts openly and may even endorse the dominant

view in more public situations. As such, there co-exists organizationally 'accepted' stories of change, alternative and competing stories, and underground tales that although hidden may provide a powerful vehicle for making sense of experience (they may also, for example, serve to sustain resistance or scepticism of change). Within this rich tapestry of organizational stories, the stories and their storytellers are often concerned with relaying experiences of change that are accepted as authentic (or at least legitimate and not simply an embellished fiction), even though they may recognize that the version of events presented reflects certain vested interests.

When a story is generally endorsed and accepted as the 'authentic' official version of events (even if many know it not to be so) then it may be viewed as a useful store of knowledge from which 'accurate' information on how to best manage change can be drawn. In practice however, drawing on such knowledge may further increase the likelihood of problems during programmes of change. In other words, dominant organizational change stories may tell us more about power and politics than how to best manage change and yet, they are often used in this way in the popular management literature that prescribes a best practice sequence of steps to managing change. Such a perspective also raises issues about the relationship of group stories to the way individuals narrate their own characters in their individual storytelling of processes and events. As such, there is a need to accommodate multiple change narratives in the more critical processual accounts of workplace change (Dawson, 2003), and to move beyond snapshot analyses that tell us little about the process by which organizational change stories are shaped and remobilised over time. However, this also raises a number of methodological issues and questions on data collection,

data analysis and the use of the case study as a vehicle for presenting data on change management.

STUDYING CHANGE: CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON MANAGEMENT CASE STUDY RESEARCH

The modification of change stories to meet audience expectations has important methodological implications for studying change in organizations. For example, if we collect longitudinal data on multiple and sometimes competing stories on change, that are also revised and reformatted overtime and in response to audience expectations, then it raises the question of how should these 'stories' be presented in a coherent way to provide greater insight and understanding of the change process. In accommodating competing narratives, we would need to move away from an examination of emerging patterns, common themes and accepted views to an analysis of plots, chronologies, major and minor characters, political process and power relations. We may turn our attention to the assumptions that lie behind the construction of a chronological narrative of causality. This would signal the need for multi-level analyses of data and a consideration of the implications of competing narratives both for an understanding of the place of organizational stories in the context of work and also, for the further development of conceptual frames for understanding organizational change. Our research strategy and methods might require revision in order to tap into the rich tapestry of organizational stories, not only as they exist at any point of time, but also as they emerge, shift and compete over time by different individuals and groups. The final question of how to present such data for public consumption turns attention to the written case study and how researchers

often find themselves in different roles as analyst, storyteller and chronicler. These different roles that the researcher may occupy as an author warrant further critical reflection and discussion, especially if the authoring and audience relationship has implication for the production and organisation of knowledge on change management. This leaves open an important question about the role of the case study for management education and disseminating knowledge on change.

To put it simply, the written case study presents a particular narrative of change which necessarily provides a partial accounts of views and events. The post-analytical case narrative is an interpretation of data that is necessarily selective. The author can never be totally outside of the analysis but is part of the process in writing and refining the case story. For example, the researcher and case writer may revisit data at some later date, he or she may reanalyse data and in so doing, identify new themes and patterns. We are influenced by the changing contextual conditions that surround our lives and direct our attention to certain elements of the data and not others. As such, not only is the case write-up by a researcher today likely to differ to what would be written by the same researcher using the same data in ten years time, but other researchers analysing the data may also draw out different issues, themes and interlocking patterns. This possibility for multiple interpretations does not devalue the research, but draws attention to the way others interpret and makes sense of the world. It also highlights the benefits of presenting data in the case study write-up in order to allow for some interpretative flexibility.

Unlike oral stories, which may be more rapidly adjusted to meet the changing needs of audiences, the written case study is often more tightly constrained. Pettigrew

(1990: 280) identifies four levels of output. First, the analytical chronology that clarifies the sequence in which events occur. Second, the diagnostic case which is essentially an analytical chronology with some strategic recommendations thrown in for presentation and discussion with management. Third, the interpretative theoretical case, where there is an attempt 'to link emerging conceptual and theoretical ideas inductively derived from the case both to stronger analytical themes within the case and wider theoretical debates in the literature' (Pettigrew, 1990: 280). Fourth, the comparative analysis across case studies to draw out patterns that are more generalizable. This meta-level analysis across cases is seen as the highest level of output. However, there is a tendency to elevate analysis that could be viewed as more 'scientific' in drawing on a larger body of comparative case material to strengthen the generalizability of the data and thereby, downgrade the contribution of multiple and divergent stories.

Within larger research groups, there may be pressure placed on the researcher to formalize and codify their approach. As Hinings (1997: 496) notes: 'multiple researchers and multiple cases raise continuing issues of internal validity and the reliability of data. Ensuring that all those involved in the research are following agreed procedures of interviewing, observation, coding and so on, is a basic way of dealing with the issue.' He goes on to suggest that a more pressing yet negative need for codification is because publication in prestigious US academic journals requires clarity on these issues. Reviewers' concern and scepticism of the write-up of qualitative research may largely stem from the papers not meeting reviewer expectations that have been forged by the dominance of nomothetic standards in North America (Hinings, 1997). This push for standardization and codification would

again move us away from an approach that is able to accommodate multiple narratives and competing stories of change, in taking into account the political dynamic process of change in the workplace. Consequently, a dilemma facing the management researcher is how to disengage from convention in the publication and output of research findings. If the more prestigious refereed academic journal is the target, then there are likely to be far more constraints on the form and content of the written case study.

In an attempt to counterbalance this notion of 'higher level' outputs, Figure 1 provides a characterization of four different types of case study that are written with a particular audience or outlet in mind. The written case study can take various forms ranging from the summary accounts of key events through to long and detailed post-analytical explanations of change. More broadly defined, a case study can be used to refer to the experience of an individual subject, an event, a piece of legislation, a future scenario (see, Riley et al. 2000: 100-2), or it may aim to 'provide experience and practice in managing skills through "hands-on" sets of exercises to enhance an awareness of "how to do it" issues' (Clegg, Legge and Walsh, 1999). In this latter case study collection, each chapter is well structured with clear objectives and a session outline is provided for teaching purposes. Among these many different types of case study, those concerned with capturing processes of change in organizations often range from the short compressed summary to the larger research-based monograph. These are represented in Figure 1, which is intended to be a guide (rather than a definitive typology) on case studies on organizational change.

As well as listing case study types, Figure 1 also draws attention to the importance of the audience in shaping the presentation of the data and the write-up of the case study. The structure and content of the case material is generally shaped to meet the expectations and requirements of the intended audience. In being aware of the audience (or intended outlet), the researcher may focus more on the details of events and their sequence (chronicler), the contextual flavour of processes of change and key characters or groups (storyteller) or the contribution of the empirical study to theoretical developments and conceptual debates (academic analyst). Typically, a more systematic and formal approach is used in a company case write-up or in the submission of an academically rigorous article for journal publication. There is always a sense in which the writer acts as a scholarly analyst in seeking to unravel and explain change. However, in what might appear as a less analytical and more descriptive approach to the case study write-up (in the composition of teaching case files) the author may act more as chronicler cum storyteller in the construction of a case narrative. In practice, this distinction between the analytical and descriptive is a false one as any search for an authentic scholarly account is misplaced (the data is always open to multiple interpretations).

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

Figure 1 categorises four common types of written case study, namely: the company case write-up, the teaching case file, the academic book chapter, and the refereed journal article. There are of course other types of case studies that could be added, such as, the research monograph and the skills-based case scenario, but no attempt is made here to provide an exhaustive list. The main aim is to discuss some of the more

common forms of the written case study. In our first example, the company case write-up, the researcher may opt to submit a compact executive case history or a rather longer and more detailed chronicler description. In both cases, the written submission would normally be checked for factual accuracy by the participating organization. It also provides the company with an opportunity to identify any issues or comments that they may feel are commercially sensitive and should not be published. One advantage with more weighty submissions is that once the company has cleared the data the researcher then has a larger body of material that can be used for a range of different purposes. At this stage in the process, there is generally little attempt to integrate academic themes and theoretical debates into the case study write-up. The main intention is to gain company agreement that the material can be used for the purpose of academic publication (the currency of many academic careers). Once the material has been checked and released by the participating organization, the researcher is able to use this body of material for a series of publications. As a consequence of this approach to a case study write-up, the researcher is however constrained by the final story that is agreed and at times, modified by the participating company. The author typically presents a single narrative account of change which even when able to accommodate different views and experiences of change, generally remains limited as a partial and particular version of change events. Alternatively, researchers could attempt to engage the organisation in debates on the fallacy of single accounts and the value of a more differentiated and critically reflective approach. The concept of multiple narratives could be used in the presentation of not one, but a series of different change accounts. These different change stories could then be used to highlight not only the complex and muddied processes of change but also, to draw out practical lessons and question some of the simple assumptions

behind recipe approaches to change. In practice, a number of different stories (case narratives) could be written rather than focussing on the production and refinement of a single account of change.

In the case of using change data to create a case study for teaching purposes, the author may purposefully leave out certain actions or events in order to steer the teaching case file in a particular direction. For example, the case may be written to exam the role of leadership in managing change, the importance of communication, or sources and causes of resistance. The tutorial teaching case file can also be written as a type of summary case history that is able to capture the basic chronology of change in a readable way whilst raising a number of key discussion points or 'problems' for student debate. These readable case descriptions can be used in tutorials or as part of a management development programme. In being condensed, the teaching case files can be used unseen (without the need for prior student preparation), in contrast to book chapters that normally need to be read and analysed prior to tutorial group discussions. However once again, these case files can also be written in a different way to draw out some of the limitations behind a single view or story of change. In the case of longitudinal processual research, it is possible to write summary case files from data collected over different periods of time to highlight how stories of change can be rewritten in different contexts to support particular objectives or viewpoints. In this way, the material can be used to examine the concept of multiple histories as a way of understanding the political nature of change stories as a shaper of organisational decision-making.

The academic book chapter can also take a number of different forms. Typically, there is some integration of certain concepts with data analysis in addressing academic debates or in comparing findings with other comparable studies. One common structure is where the chapter opens with an overview of the appropriate literature, prior to case analysis, conceptual development and academic discussion. Although written for an academic and student audience, these case studies sometimes provide richer descriptions (post-analytical narratives) than those written for submission to a refereed academic journal. In writing the case for a respected academic journal concepts may be revised and developed, and data analysis is typically integrated with the literature in order to illustrate and debate scholarly issues. The illustrative use of data is often used more sparingly in journal articles when compared to book chapters, although there is certainly instances where this would not be the case. But yet again, there is a generally accepted format in the writing of scholarly articles that prevents any author from radically deviating from accepted ways of doing things. Failure to comply to set standards and submission requirements or to conform to the expectations of academic reviewers would result in the article being rejected. Thus, a scholarly outlet for the presentation of this type of material in multiple forms would be required in order to further develop and debate the contribution of such an approach. While there are many different formats that the written case study can take, they are often developed and shaped to meet the expectations of their intended audience or to meet the requirements of the proposed outlet for publication. It has been argued here that the concepts of 'competing change narratives' and 'multiple change histories' provide a step in the right direction in drawing attention to the temporal character of stories and the political processes involved in their construction. It has also been suggested that authors might consider

writing a number of different case narratives around a single change process that draws out different stories and interpretations of change. The accommodation of multiple change narratives raises a host of methodological and theoretical concerns that require further critical reflection and analysis. Whilst this article has attempted to raise some of these issues in discussing change data and the use of the case study format, critical questions on how to best study and present change stories in an accessible way that adds to our stock of knowledge still require further debate and discussion. As Byatt (1991: 350) has noted: 'all old stories, my cousin, will bear telling and telling again in different ways'.

CONCLUSION: ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE STORIES AND MANAGEMENT RESEARCH

This article has argued that within organizations there will always be a number of competing narratives on change and that these 'stories' are also likely to reflect the power relationships between certain individuals and groups, and the political process by which certain 'voices' get heard and others remain hidden and/or are silenced in the shifting terrain of organizational life. In many cases, it is possible to identify a dominant company narrative on the organizational history of a change initiative, however unless the story of change is maintained, it is likely to be modified, redefined or replaced as other competing accounts emerge. Past events may be rewritten in the construction of a narrative that seeks to influence current decision-making. This narrative may also be informed by future expectations and as a consequence, is open to further modification and revision over time. However, the tendency in the study of change programmes is to look for, examine, and construct, a single story (or case study) of change, rather than to identify and analyse competing narratives of change.

In examining narratives of change, it is important to consider the authors of change (which includes the various individuals and groups who attempt to make sense of change, as well as trade unionists, managers, change agents, external collaborators and so forth), as well as the audience and the role of change stories in organizational decision-making. The dominant change narrative as a representation of power-relationships and the 'company' view on change can be counterbalanced by alternative stories that may capture the grubby and painful aspects of change. Stories of resistance, of contestation, conflict and co-operation and those that stem from different individuals and/or groups who seek to make sense of their experience of change, all add to our understanding of the actual process of change. How we present these multiple accounts within the case study format is often constrained by the expectations of our intended audience and the need to publish our research in scholarly journals. A basic typology of common case study formats was presented and discussed. It was shown how the author might take the position of chronicler, storyteller and/or analyst in using the narrative form in a case study write-up that sets out to accommodate the expectations of the intended audience. Although the use of the narrative approach allows the writer to capture some of the complexity and ambiguity of change, the researcher has nevertheless, sifted, selected and interpreted data in a way that is likely to reflect their own conceptual and research interests. Another researcher, carrying out a similar study but looking through a different theoretical lens, is likely to produce very different results. In part, this is because the researcher is not in a position to take themselves outside of their own conceptual frame in carrying out this type of research. Furthermore, the process of data analysis - which at its simplest requires the breaking open of individual accounts into multiple

fragments that are then recombined in ways to present a post-analytical case study narrative - is not independent of the researcher. In this sense, the researcher is also an author of a narrative that they have shaped.

In writing the case study the researcher may choose to use confirming and complimentary data and reject or dispel discrepant, deviant and outlier material. However, if the researcher chooses to open up the study to an examination of multiple narratives and competing histories then this will have important methodological implications as well as raising presentational issues. For example, it is fairly common in conducting a case study analysis of company change to use interview accounts as one data source that is broken down and recombined with other accounts in constructing a case story on the process of change. However, if we wish to pursue the study of not only dominant but also competing change stories, then we will seek out accounts that add to a common narrative or provide alternative stories on the process of organizational change. We may seek to identify and interview particular groups of employees over time. Our interest lies not only in their experience of change, but in their evaluation of other and emerging dominant accounts of change. These accounts can then be combined with our own observational work that can add to the texture of stories in providing an analysis of the contextual landscape within which change takes place and stories are told. In writing up our data, individual or group accounts could be used to present a 'story' on change and presented in a rather different format to the traditional case study. We could annotate a series of alternative stories around a dominant narrative or we could compare and contrast different dominant narratives over time and examine how accounts of change are refined and rewritten. There may be certain themes or concepts, such as, employee resistance or the notion of change

fatigue that may benefit from a perspective that is able to accommodate multiple accounts. Under such an approach contradictory data is integral rather than marginalized and multiple narratives, that may themselves change over time, remain central to explanations of change. Furthermore the use of common terms, such as, 'failure' or 'success', could be contrasted over time and compared across stories that capture the lived experience of change. In engaging in such an analysis, we are better able to question core assumptions and critically reflect on processes of change. This in turn raises questions on how to present such material to the participating company that challenges the traditional key event history of a change programme. The researcher may thus seek to alter the perceptions of the intended audience by moving outside of audience expectations in writing a rather different piece or set of 'stories' for the company that offers different interpretations and evaluations of change events and actions. As such, we may further our engagement with companies in a rather different examination and presentation of the way change unfolds in practice.

Although it is important to accommodate and convey multiple accounts, it will not always be appropriate to present a mosaic of stories. For example, a teaching case file may be written to focus on a particular element of change within which other details may not appear. Recognizing the existence of multiple narratives does not necessitate their presentation in all written forms and yet, it does directly question attempts to displace contradictory data in the pursuit of some form of objective authentic account. This search for the 'truth' of 'successful' change has misdirected attention towards best practice recipe guidelines that have done little to improve the 'successful' management of change. There is a body of knowledge captured in these competing and often unheard stories that warrant careful analysis and should be part of our

research agenda in examining change in organizations. Too often conflicting data and contradictory stories are deemed problematic, especially in those studies that wish to identify an authentic timeless account of change. The search for such an account is misplaced and in cases where the story reflects a sanitized company view, simply adds to our current state of knowledge on managements' post-hoc rationalization of change. In other words, although we may examine the way a particular narrative emerges as a dominant story and is maintained, refined or perhaps replaced over time, stories are not per se the domain of the powerful. They provide platforms of resistance for the powerless and are a useful way of blending so called organizational 'facts' with the fiction of change management in questioning assumptions imposed on the workplace by more 'powerful' others.

The multiple narratives and competing histories that occur within organizations also draw attention to the way authors of change mould particular narratives in attempts to influence decisions or to steer the change in certain preferred directions. As such, it is important to understand how organizational change narratives are themselves influenced by the shifting positions associated with organizational authoring and audiencing roles. For example, internal authors may have less concern with detail and accuracy and more interest in the credibility and potential support that may be given to the position taken. Stories that convey the complexity of change yet appear 'muddled and confused' may prove less acceptable than a logical step-by-step story that presents a clear chronology of events. The simple and accessible story of change may provide authors with a more legitimate platform from which to influence the views of others. Paradoxically, such stories may be used to inform management practice even though the explanations and causal links embedded within the narrative

reflect an ulterior objective to influence others through playing to the expectations of the intended audience. In this we come full circle, and see the potential to close the false separation between theory and practice in a more thorough understanding of the place of change narratives. For it is perhaps ironic, that the politically acceptable and legitimately rational account may do little to capture the realities of change and yet may be used as a bedrock of knowledge in the distillation of practical lessons for managing change. There is thus a need for more critically informed research that address the theoretical and methodological issues associated with the study, analysis and presentation of multiple accounts of change. In so doing, management research should move away from any misplaced search for an authentic account of change and recognize the importance of stories and competing narratives to understanding the process of organizational change.

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