

Advancing Polyphonic, Multi-layered and Authentic Narrative Inquiry: Actor Sensemaking during Transformational Change

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Abstract: This paper foregrounds multi-layered and polyphonic narrative inquiry to elucidate an authentic representation of the intersectional sensemaking processes of organisational actors. This can afford particular value during the complex and dynamic circumstances of transformational change, as exemplified within the narrative tension of the joint venture Communications Sector Provider case examined in this study. The approach is panoptic and deeply situated within the context of understanding meaning-making. This is achieved by adopting a multiplicity of embedded, creative and integrative approaches to narrative elucidation, evaluation and articulation, supported by robust triangulation and process transparency. The original framework STRIKE - *Structured Interpretation of the Knowledge Environment* is demonstrated to afford particular value as a diagnostic and prescriptive observational tool, based on Wittgenstein's (2001) picture theory of meaning. With notable attention to non-somatic artefacts, STRIKE surfaces actor sensemaking and emergent narratives in situ. In addition, creative art and visualisation techniques optimise the conduits for direct participant expression, augmenting the traditional focus group method to enhance the capacity for *all voices to be heard*. The collocation of narrative data within context benefits authenticity and advances the production of coherent and cohesive findings. A holistic, multi-dimensional, multi-textured and representational understanding of the problem situation emerges. This brings the criticality of human interaction with the physical as well as the social environment in order to create meaning to sharp focus. It is through an intersection of human-material, social-technical dialogue, across physical, textual, linguistic and visual dimensions, that organisational actors maintain, recreate and reinterpret their individual and collective identity as a means to navigate and make sense of, the complex self and group challenges catalysed by transformational change.

Keywords: narrative inquiry, authenticity, polyphony, sensemaking, transformational change, STRIKE

1. Introduction and aims

Within the qualitative paradigm and an emergent range of mixed methods studies, advancing recognition of the value of narrative inquiry is evidenced (Clandinin and Connelly 2000; Jackson 2011). As a broad definition this approach “*captures personal and human dimensions of experience over time, and takes account of the relationship between individual experience and cultural context*” (Etherington 2012). Researchers are navigating highly storied, ambiguous, dynamic and idiosyncratic contexts, exploring aspects such as emotion, time and imagery and need to capture the rich processes of social representation. There is a move “*away from description*” (Mello 2002, p232) to work with proximal and sometimes transactional representations of what the data shows. An increasing number of studies are described as narrative, but as a broad, nebulous term these vary significantly (Riessman 2008), notably with distinctions in the paradigmatic stance adopted and the emphasis placed on form or content (Spector-Mercel 2010).

Underpinned by classical pragmatism (Dewey 1988) alongside interactive constructivism (Neubert 2001), this study adopts an innovative, integrated, multi-layered approach to narrative inquiry, synthesising form, content and critical reflexivity. It aims to advance understanding of actor sensemaking during transformational change, finding new ways to surface and negotiate meanings and findings in narrative data, working across the complex nexus of reality and representation (Mello 2002). The intent is polyphonic: to enable voices to be heard and for meanings to be transparently elucidated and authentically preserved, thereby communicating

the lived experience of the actor lifeworld (Habermas 1984). The criticality of human interaction with the physical as well as the social environment in order to create meaning is also asserted.

The paper commences with an expansive discussion of the nature of narrative inquiry. This is followed by an explication of the research methodology and introduction to the contextual setting. The case study of a newly formed joint venture communications service provider in the midst of transitional processes and practices presents a dynamic, underexplored source for narrative analysis. Method selection is then fully justified with particular attention to the original framework STRIKE – *STRuctured Interpretation of the Knowledge Environment*. An integrative evaluation of results is supported by the transparency of interpretation, assemblage and articulation of narrative data, with validity enhanced through robust triangulation. The paper concludes with a synthesising discussion of findings, review of methodological approach and implications to benefit research and practice.

2. The Nature of Narrative Inquiry

2.1 Perceptions of truth

Narrative is ubiquitous, natural, **familiar** and diverse in form (Barthes 1977), affording “*sequentiality*” (Bruner 1990, p43) and providing an organising framework of temporality. Interactional, evolutionary and transactional in orientation, narrative connects knowing and telling to enable the construction of shared understanding of spaces, actions and events, developing social knowledge and benefiting both individual and group sensemaking. Tropes, notably metaphors, are frequently employed to describe the lifeworld within narratives and “*imply a plausible understanding of phenomena*” (Green, Alpaslan and Mitroff 2010, p.48). It is argued that a robust examination of narratives can move beyond a primary consideration of structural and linguistic properties of verbal interactions and texts, to incorporate extended visual and physical place-based dimensions as an extension of the actor’s sense of self, as exemplified by artefact demonstration and associated symbolism. This assertion brings the need to explore *the truth* of narrative inquiry into sharp focus.

Despite Austen’s (2013, p3) popular assertion that truth must be “*universally acknowledged*”, difference and diversity of perspectives is considered more representative, aligning with a postmodernist position (Caputo 2013). The nature of truth may be considered from varying dimensions: a correspondence with the actuality of the world, the consensus of experienced viewpoints, coherence to an integrated belief system, and a pragmatic perspective embodying truth with practical utility. Narrative inquiry challenges modernist, traditional perspectives on truth and reality, the nature of knowledge, ways of knowing and the essence of self. Verisimilitude or the appearance of reality may be considered a criterion of a narrative way of knowing (Rorty 1979). Lived experience is emphasised as a catalyst for the social creation and construction of narrative knowledge through shared stories and their associated meanings (Bruner 1990). The knowledge gained through narrative inquiry is therefore “*situated, transient, partial and provisional; characterized by multiple voices, perspectives, truths and meanings*” (Etherington 2013).

This paper considers narrative from the perspective of both multi-dimensional means of elucidation and evaluation alongside the lived-through phenomenon of the actors, synthesising form and content. Aligning with a paradigm shift from realism towards constructivism and additionally, a postmodernist cultural shift (Huttunen, Heikkinen and Syrjälä 2002), this interpretative approach is considered germane to advance understanding of the intersection between culture, experience and change (Clandinin and Connelly 2000).

3. Foregrounding Authenticity

Authenticity is a nebulous, elusive term, primarily defined indirectly and negatively through its antonyms – thereby emphasising *what it is not* (Oxford Dictionaries 2010). Identifying direct descriptors from a

philosophical perspective, Sartre (1965, p90) considers authenticity as “*having a true and lucid consciousness of the situation*”, making the association with the correspondence theory of truth. It is further described as the coincidence of subject consciousness alongside its own objective reality (Sartre 2003). Authenticity has been explored in relation to sincerity, genuineness and honesty although there are specific distinctions as exemplified by differences in social, relational and personal/self-directional emphasis, alongside manner and content (Cambridge 2010). Indeed Golomb (1995) asserts that such comparisons are neither equivalent nor synonymous.

Applied to the research domain, authenticity is sometimes cited interchangeably with truth (Scott 2007) but is primarily discussed with respect to dimensions of reliability, validity and triangulation. These influence the approach and methodology adopted and assessments of quality, meaningfulness or worth, from the lens of both the researcher and the ultimate research audience (Bush 2012). As a multidimensional phenomenon, authenticity impacts across the entire research process: from researcher role, ethics and processes of critical reflection; to data collection, evaluation and representation. The authenticity of narrative research is specifically debated (Winter 2002; Holloway and Freshwater 2009). It is recognised that “*Story-tellers acknowledge that they alter stories*” (Tversky 2004, p389) and this potential for distortion and misinterpretation during verbal articulation is cited as high as 60% in one study (Tversky 2004).

This paper argues that authenticity may be addressed in consideration of the inherent relationships between the artefacts, people and places which underpin it (Jones 2010). This perspective is supported by the theoretical lens of social-materiality (Latour 2005; Johri 2011) which opines that social, technical, human and material dimensions are linked and re-linked, with meanings, properties and respective boundaries entangled, temporal and subject to constant reproduction (Pickering and Guzik 2008). An authentic representation of the actor narrative may therefore benefit from employing a creative range of integrated, multi-layered methods to surfacing, evaluating and presenting *full* narratives (Tversky 2004), across physical, textual, linguistic and visual dimensions, all embedded within place.

4. Types and Purposes of organisational narratives

4.1 Targeted and Emergent

Continually framed, styled and shaped in consideration of audience and purpose, an organisational narrative may afford intent to persuade to action, to re-tell, to bind, to educate and/or to inspire. This can develop and strengthen social capital through reaffirmation, creation or redirection, as reflected in Cohen and Prusak’s (2001) indicative taxonomy of stories which range from organisational myths, to hero, failure, war and stories of the future conceptualisations. Unique, temporal and closely aligned to identity, organisational narratives necessitate a level of congruence and controllability to communicate espoused values and core business activity and can also form a bridge across historical roots to future direction.

Organisational narratives may be identified under alternate names: the *spin* associated with public relations management (Lamme and Russell 2010); the *sagas* (Mahadevan 2009), *myths* (Cohen and Prusak 2001) and *legends* of corporate cultural history (Gabriel 2000), *folklore* and *folk-art* embedded in traditions (Bruner 2002) and the powerful *brand story* that binds community affiliation (Muniz and Schau 2005). Web 2.0 and Social Media conduits such as the Blogosphere and Twitterverse afford an increasingly active role in targeted narrative development to cultivate or establish brand identity or to achieve specific intervention aims using population segmentation. They also provide a catalyst for more emergent forms which may be public or employee driven (Millard et al. 2011).

The association between narrative and the construction or deconstruction of identity (Riessman 2008) can be profound and merits evaluation from an actor perspective, post significant organisational change. Along with social foundations, it is argued that narrative as identity may also be considered an inherently aesthetic

phenomenon: deeply felt, embodied and capable of being accessed and interpreted through different presentational forms (Bell and Bell 2012).

5. Narratives and transformational change

It is through narratives that actors bind themselves to one another (and their organisation) and further, recreate themselves. This can give meaning, enable sensemaking, and maintain the truth of self-conceptions of role and identity (Mahadevan 2009), especially during times of change or crisis (Bruner 2002). This can afford rich insight into the perceived human experience of change. Additionally, there exists a dynamic and inter-relational nexus between metaphors and narrative that can be heightened during transformational change processes and practices (Küpers 2013).

The knowledge intensive UK Communications industry therefore provides a germane contextual background for this study. This dynamic environment faces complex and interrelated challenges including evolving consumer behaviour, context-based services and convergence which impacts data architecture and markets across media, networks and associated devices (Orr 2013). This is therefore a knowledge intensive sector experiencing transition. Described as “*the new core competency*” (Ross 2009), joint venture agreements are increasingly utilised to provide financial, economic and operational synergies across supply chains.

Applying a multi-faceted narrative lens towards the joint-venture case affords a heuristic depth and breadth of inquiry into the sometimes congruent but often conflicting layers of individual, collective and organisational story. Buy-in to both the legitimacy of integration processes and the new organisational form is acknowledged as core to successful partnering outcomes (Gole and Morris 2007). Change occurs through people: their complex connections, relationships, stories, community memberships and collaborative actions. It is therefore critical to enhance understanding of the affect of transformation on the organisational actors required to accept, legitimise and actualise change, notably the means in which individuals internalise, rationalise or even resist the *new* narratives. This study addresses a lacuna of empirical research in this area.

6. Research methodology

Complex evaluations of *real-world* scenarios frequently necessitate robust consideration of situated actions and problems and a combination of different, flexible approaches to investigation. Alongside the problem situation itself, the methodological aspects of any research activity are dependent on the paradigmatic commitment allegiances of the researcher(s), with epistemological and ontological commitments defining the paradigm (Johnson and Duberley 2000). To develop nuanced contextual understanding, a qualitative approach is adopted, informed by classical pragmatism (Dewey 1988) alongside interactive constructivism (Neubert 2001). This affords full consideration of experience, habit and communications embedded in context and awareness of the researchers’ perspective as both self and distant-observers.

Narrative inquiry is selected as the most appropriate means to explore the experiential life-world of actors whilst affording researcher self-reflexivity. From an ontological perspective, a narrative inquiry considers organisational life as a storied reality. Epistemologically, knowledge is constructed within this reality and expressed through language conveyed in varying forms that can be difficult to elucidate. Additionally, data collection is informed by the emic perspective of the principal investigator as an insider-researcher. This enables enhanced acceptance and capacity to acquire understanding in praxis, alongside specific awareness of internal cultural dynamics. The interpretation of narrative meaning may be impacted by the researcher’s perspective alongside the storyteller’s (Mello 2002) and therefore may be influenced by insider-status. The risk is purposefully mitigated by the reflexive balance achieved through the non-insider, etic position of the co-author.

7. Research Setting and Introduction to Data Collection

The anonymised case study, referred to as Firm-JV, was formed as a 50:50% joint-venture between Communications Provider Firm A, an established market leader with a highly defined brand image and 20 years sectoral experience, and less established competitor Firm B. References made to previous organisational culture all relate to Firm A - the headquarter site under study being populated by its former employees. The alliance strategy centres on cost leadership through optimisation synergies, cost reduction and consolidation. It is internally openly described “as a *move away from* product innovation leadership and customer intimacy”, thereby a significant change in superordinate goal. A major restructuring and rebranding programme was launched in Q2 2012. Research was conducted in Q3 2012 using a panoptic range of direct and indirect methods.

7.1 STRIKE - STRuctured Interpretation of the knowledge environment

Underpinned by a socio-material lens (Latour 2005; Johri 2011) and aligning with the “*visual turn*” in narrative inquiry (Riessman 2008, p181), it is argued that systematic observation of the physical environment can illuminate organisational practices, cultural norms and values and further, be revelatory of the individual and collective narratives of the actors within. Whilst it must be recognised that knowledge can only reside in the consciousness of a sentient human being, the physical knowledge environment can and will involve non-somatic artefacts and additionally, be indicative of, and intersect with, the actor’s social environment.

STRIKE is a framework, which when instantiated, becomes of model of the domain under consideration. It considers these non-somatic, material artefacts from which both tacit and explicit individual and group narrative signifiers may be interpreted. STRIKE is based on Wittgenstein’s (2001) picture theory of meaning which has three levels. The *pictorial* level allows for a synthesis of all the elements as they are perceived by the actors in the environment. The *representational* level depicts the configuration of these elements to constitute legitimate knowledge in the context under consideration. Finally the *logical* level, the most abstract of all, would indicate which level of learning would be possible in these circumstances, revealing whether actors have wide options or are constrained to a narrow trajectory, and elucidating power dynamics in the lifeworld. It therefore can afford a highly integrative and multi-layered tool for narrative inquiry.

STRIKE advances the system analysis tool STROBE (Kendall and Kendall 1984) and has been subject to robust ex-ante and ex-post study validation, drawing on the Design Science Research Method (Heje, Baskerville and Venable 2012). Development was influenced by researcher concern that methodological reliance on individual and/or group participant story-telling may result in increased potential for misinterpretation due to accounts of distortion (Tversky 2004), groupthink, nostalgia (Gabriel 2000) or “*Emotion contagion*” (Goleman 2005, p104), impacting the authenticity of representation. Additionally, STRIKE’s neutral and unobtrusive nature can counteract against issues of power relations between researcher and researched (Clandinin and Connelly 2000). It is opined therefore, that STRIKE affords a path that can avoid attenuation of the data captured, so that as much of the characteristics of the system in focus as possible can be presented to the interpretive activity. The inter-relationships between actor and environment are preserved.

Office walk-through sessions were conducted to enact the STRIKE framework. Eight explicit environmental elements were appraised: office design, aesthetics, workspace decoration, supporting equipment, knowledge sources, clothing, branding and exterior presentation. Photography was used to provide an additional layer of understanding to the people-place narrative and actor sensemaking processes; enriching observation, aiding reflection and supporting researcher neutrality (Tonge, Moore, Ryan and Beckley 2013).

7.2 Focus groups

Johnson and Scholes’ (1999) cultural web framework aided examination of organisational culture and the deeper level assumptions, beliefs and shared artefacts of the actors within. The target audience for sessions

was middle management whose beliefs are notably influential in turbulent conditions (Coltman, Devinney and Midgley 2008). This provides an alternative means of surfacing narrative alongside STRIKE to achieve more complete understanding.

Four audio-recorded sessions were undertaken over 12 days: two contemporaneous in orientation and two retrospective, comprising 10 actors of equivalent position per group (N=40). Focus groups were selected for their capacity to observe collective sensemaking in praxis (Boje 2008), notably the relational action of storytelling which could not be achieved through individual interviews. Attention was afforded to semantics, semiotics and potential memory bias. To optimise conduits for expression, participants were provided with artistic materials alongside access to ArtPad (2013), a self-directional, engaging and connective web 2.0 drawing application and Wordle (2013), an intuitive visualisation tool which affords high participant control.

7.3 The assemblage and evaluation of narrative

The identification of narratives and indeed the selection of those offered for articulation in this paper, is based on employing a panoptic, reflexive and integrated range of interpretation approaches and analytical formats. Guidance was drawn from Green et al.'s (2010) discussion on tropological understanding, alongside Winter's (2002) principle of dialectics, with a focus on *polyphony* or the means in which different voices may be heard. The researchers also adopted a critical reflexive and sensemaking stance to support emergent evaluation and questioning of data, including consideration of the impact of nostalgia and emotions on the narratives elucidated.

The evaluation draws on the work of Mello (2002) influenced by Mishler (1995), by endeavouring to *collocate* narrative data within context in order to benefit authenticity and produce coherent and cohesive findings. This involved the use of operations as a means of thematic boundary, specifically considering the forms of *textual* (patterns, symbolism, plot structures); *transactional* (physical and visual context, relationship between teller and told, purpose) and *socio-cultural* (social and therapeutic functions; cultural interpretation, ceremonial information). The depth and breadth afforded through the multiplicity of different data sources also aided this collocation process. Additionally, participant direct quotations are employed in an inter-textual relationship with the overall text, rather than as separate "adjuncts".

Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative inquiry space provides an appropriate scaffold to introduce and assess situated findings, affording continuity by progressing through the dimensions of the past, present and future whilst considering the interaction between personal and social elements. Salient exemplars of narrative are presented and evaluated across the range of methods utilised, demonstrating multi-layered, collocated narrative interpretation in praxis.

8. The past

Focus group artistic output is revelatory of the strength of former culture, as illustrated in Figure 1.

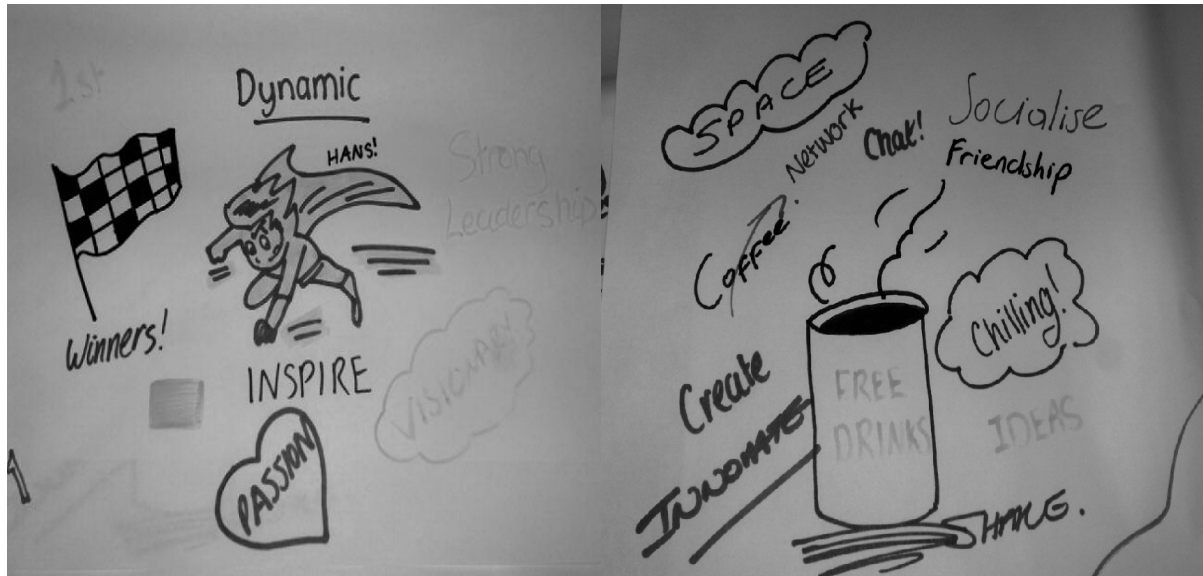


Figure 1: Group retrospective perspective of Firm A culture by free-hand drawing

A passionate response and evidence of the important historic and symbolic cultural context is afforded. The vibrant colour and imagery observed echoes the creativity and enthusiasm collectively exhibited, a confidence that anything is possible under “visionary” leadership. Traditions of innovation, creativity, space and norms of informal socialisation are also indicated.

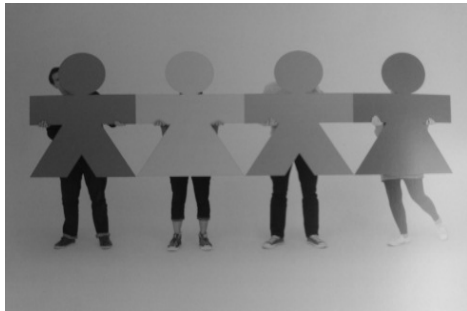
During discussions, a sense of nostalgia and moreover grief for the past was evidenced in word selection, specifically the cumulative effect of choices such as “loss”, “recall”, “longing” and “mourning”. Equally, actors expressed a will for continuation using terms such as “resistance”, “preservation” and “entrenched”. The credibility and self-awareness of participants was noted in their adept use of linguistic devices including expressive sounds to emphasise a point, and by kinesic communication through purposeful body language. This echoes the dialogic/performance dimension of narrative discussed by Riessman (2008).

9. The present

Core dimensions emergent from the STRIKE assessment are presented in Table 1. These specific elements were selected for articulation as they were considered highly representative of the overall evaluation, on the basis of the consistency and coherency of themes which emerged using the collocated narrative approach. To aid transparency of this review process, an example is provided. Focussing on the photographic material, for each dimension over 20 images were taken and assessed through the operational analysis technique, supported by descriptive content coding in an approach congruent with the work of Tonge et al. (2013).

From this evaluation a salient narrative emerges: *a dominant discourse of dissonance*. This description encapsulates differences in the interpretation of narrative meaning: an aesthetical juxtaposition between bold, individualised personal workspaces and neutral monomorphic public spaces; actor/ community petrification of officially defunct branding and the introduction of the “new” joint venture brand, and a tension between personal and organisational knowledge management. The surfacing of emotional narrative and identity articulation from physical and visual dialogue and associated folk-art symbolism is also illustrated. A pictorial, representational and logical level of interpretation is evidenced (Wittgenstein 2001).

Table 1: Elucidating the Salient Narrative through STRIKE: *A Dominant Discourse of Dissonance*.

Environmental Element	Description with Photography
Office Aesthetics and Workspace Decoration	Disconnect is observed between public and private areas. The clean lines, precision and subtle branding of public spaces contrasts with the vibrant personalisation of workspaces which display Firm A branded artefacts. Personalisation of desks is typical, with objects (mugs, coasters) and team-building memorabilia associated with Firm A heritage and <i>officially</i> defunct branding prominent. This implies nostalgia, reflects pride and is revelatory of the importance of identity expression. It is also illustrative of culturally significant folk-art (Bruner 2002). Finally, there are examples of ironic humour such as snippets of newspaper cartoons in the style of them-us, notably the theme that the “workers” know more than senior management.   Firm-JV Public Presentation Workspace Decoration
Branding	New Firm-JV posters and internal magazines lack characterisation and communication of values. There is minimal observation of actors wearing newly rebranded clothing. This “faceless” approach is a distinct contrast with the highly personalised, metaphorical, fun, visual and value-laden imagery previously used. This remains prominent in many workspaces, notably exemplars with motifs or metaphors associated with long-standing brand values or professional behaviours e.g. the productive, successful, caring “Busy-Bee”.   Firm-JV Exemplar Poster Character-based Firm A Poster

Knowledge Sources	Employees and a few specific team groups maintain personal libraries and individual subscriptions to professional bodies which may indicate self-directed or professional grouping personal knowledge management norms. There is also evidence of the importance of image and demonstration of expertise, notably the publicising of personal knowledge stocks e.g. certificates and membership materials in desk areas. Company magazines rather than industry journals are observed which infers a lack of external knowledge flowing into the firm. There is no evidence of organisational membership of industry professional bodies and no posters/leaflets to publicise benefits or associated events. A shared area that previously housed a continuing professional development loan-scheme library has been replaced with a space for external client meetings.  Exemplar Personal Library  Replacement Library Space
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The demonstration of Firm A branded artefacts, folk-art and associated value metaphors indicates strong cultural internalisation and is considered an example of representation and reification, aligned to organisational memory. It stands in contrast to the *“imposed and negative change”* synonymous with the new joint venture firm. It is opined that actor legitimisation is built upon this shared physical dialogue. Despite the contemporaneous focus and unobtrusive observational perspective of STRIKE, the narrative of the past remains omnipresent. The elements of STRIKE are indicative of two different landscapes and an overarching and dominant discourse of dissonance which maps along the pictorial-representational-logical configuration previously described.

This cultural disconnect aligns with focus group findings. The four cultural webs produced were evaluated to establish central themes, aided by radar chart comparison. Figure 2 is an innovative presentation of the aggregated data. This is a complementary, supportive tool rather than directly part of STRIKE itself, designed to provide synthesis and optimise communicability. It was created through a percentage conversation of participants individually instantiating a particular element of the cultural web whereby 100% equates to everyone agreeing to its importance. The order of the dimensions around the diagram is not significant: all aspects are equally weighted. 100% is positioned centrally to represent the convergence point of the dimensions of culture, facilitating awareness of the element(s) which most contribute to the underlying organisational paradigm.

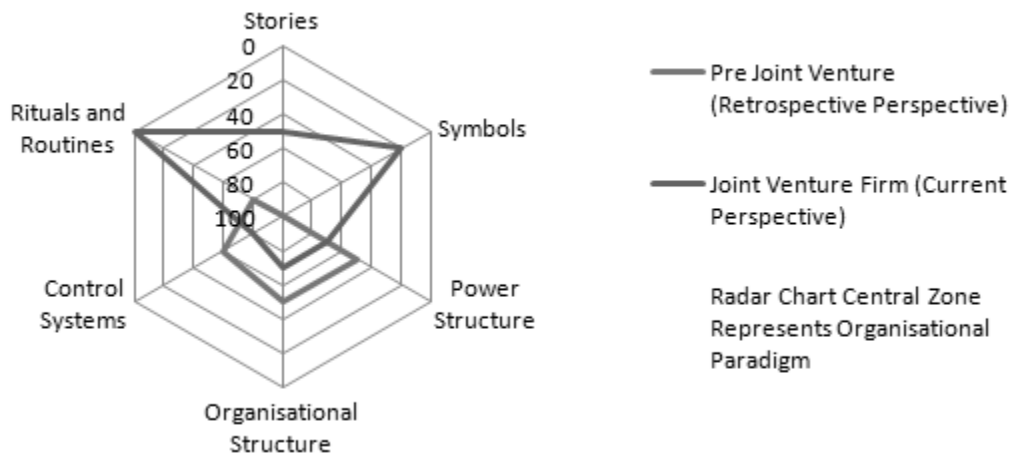


Figure 2: Radar chart comparison of cultural webs

This perspective foregrounds the importance of Stories and Symbols to the pre-joint venture life-world as cited by 100% of participants. Such highly valued dimensions are disassociated from the new organisation as exemplified by the comment, *“the only new stories are communication gaffs - a case of least said”*. It is past sticky stories that are positively shared as a form of cultural continuation and identity assertion, as supported by the prominence of Firm A artefacts and value metaphors observed across STRIKE, ArtPad and Wordle.

10. The future ?

Focus group ArtPad output provided consistently powerful interpretations of Firm-JV's future, as illustrated in Figure 3. The Artpad example was created by one participant and the Wordle visualisation produced by a subgroup with word size representative of *their* chosen emphasis.

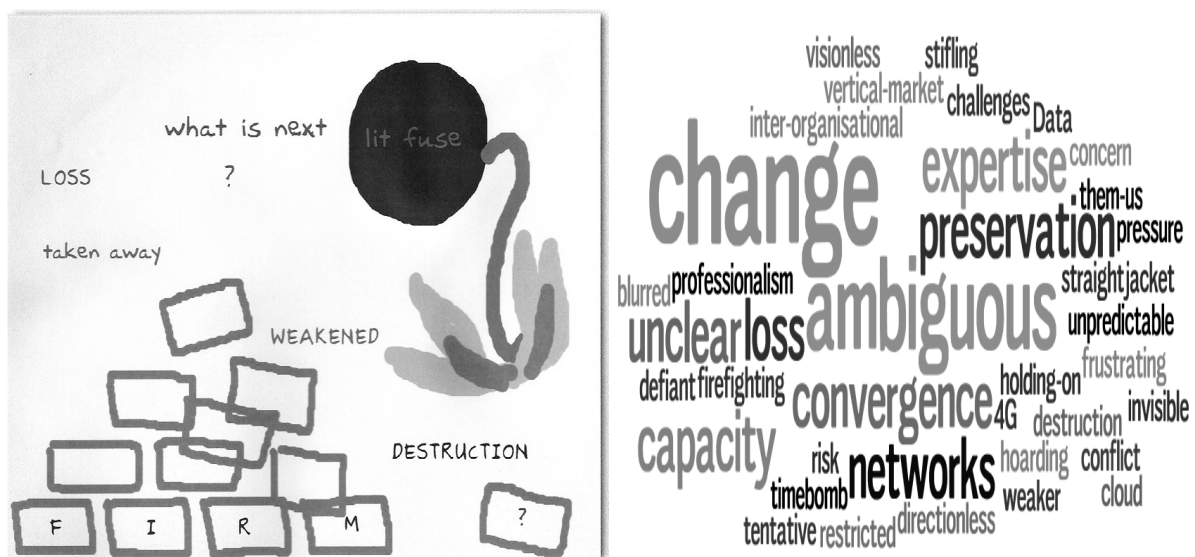


Figure 3: Actor perspective of firm-JV's future using ArtPad and Wordle

Elements of destruction, loss and a weakened position are emphasised alongside ambiguity towards a future that is synonymous with change. In the cloud visualisation, evidence of actor resistance is inferred from the selection of “*preservation*”, “*defiance*” and “*holding-on*”. Choices related to professionalism and technical skills are also expressed, which may be regarded as an assertion of expert identity as a means to navigate difficult change, aligning with the findings of Mahadevan (2009). The metaphor of “*lit fuse*” and “*timebomb*” is striking across both examples. From the evocative imagery a metaphor of DNA destruction is inferred: the building blocks of the organisation are being taken apart. This interpretation is supported by concerns raised in group discussion, exemplified by the comment “*I feel like I am fighting to hold on to our heritage*”, alongside the nostalgic symbolism identified during STRIKE evaluation.

11. Triangulation of narrative methods of inquiry

STRIKE findings were evaluated against those from the focus groups to explore the specific narratives or stories that are interpreted to underpin an overall emergent discourse of dissonance. The intent was to examine whether findings are confirmed, reversed, modified, supplemented or would benefit from additional inquiry (Kendall and Kendall 1984). In this research, a high degree of congruence is observed as demonstrated in Table 2, through two exemplar emergent stories of resistance to change and acculturative stress. These are both indicative of the importance of the actors’ self-conceptualisation of identity, continuance and professional influence through narrative.

Table 2: Matrix triangulation of primary narratives

STRIKE Analysis	Focus Groups: Evaluation Across Conduits
Story 1: Resistance to Change	
Continuing display of Firm A branded artefacts and folk-art through desk decoration, alongside literature with established cultural metaphors. The cumulative effect of physical symbols is powerful; they are tangible, omnipresent and can evoke a sensory response (Pratt and Rafaeli 2001).	Word selection infers resistance, notably choices such as “ <i>preservation</i> ”, “ <i>defiance</i> ” and “ <i>holding-on</i> ”. Particular responses are highly revelatory: “ <i>I feel like I am fighting to hold on to our heritage</i> ”.
Certificates of expertise and adherence to respected standards are prominently displayed. Visibility of professional and technical knowledge is considered important.	There is also a resistance tone based on professional and technical knowledge. Actors imply it is <i>they</i> that know what is in the company’s best interests: “ <i>It’s important to show we know what we are doing, that our skills can take the company forward, we need to make things happen as senior management don’t have a clue, especially matters technical</i> ”.
Story 2: Acculturative Stress	

<i>Juxtaposition between:</i> The prominence of artefacts associated with cultural heritage, reflecting pride and identity. Alongside the continuation of Firm A branded dress code, these ritualistic behaviours may be considered evidence of <i>mimesis</i> (Potolsky 2006). Desk space is highly personalised with demonstrations of individual eclectic dimensions: typically nostalgic, bold and blazoned in colour. <i>and:</i> The monomorphic, aesthetic design style of the new joint venture entity which is neutral and non distinct as exemplified by corporate posters which lack character and personalisation. Visual identity, established as an important element of pre-joint venture culture, is perceived as at threat.	Social comparisons concern less favourable organisational circumstances as opposed to the past, a potential indicator of acculturative stress (Vaara 2000). ArtPad and Wordle output is evocative of this condition, as exemplified by the “<i>what is next?</i>” statement and <i>lit fuse</i> and timebomb imagery. It is supported by focus group commentary: <i>“It feels too soon, I am mourning what we did before”.</i> Juxtaposition is perceived between personal and social identity. In Firm A social identity is strong: <i>“...it made you feel like you belonged; proud, confident and excited”</i> By contrast, identification with Firm-JV is currently perceived as an embarrassment: <i>“Communication gaffs are becoming legendary now... it’s embarrassing.”</i>
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12. Synthesising Discussion

In congruence with the study by Mahadevan (2009), actors employ multi-layered narratives as a means to construct themselves and to unite as a group. In this research, this specifically relates to preserving the self-conception of identity achieved through cultural, brand and value synergy with Firm A. Actors reveal lives strongly defined by the corporate lived self. This was a positive, aspirational experience pre-joint venture as this life-world afforded a distinctive personality, strong values and visionary leadership. A sense of loss and concern for continuity is evident with the preservation of motifs and symbolism of the former brand constituting a shared code of member-to-member communication. This sustains value homophily, behaviours and narrative memorialisation (Bell 2012). Narrative as identity is also related to asserting a perceived degree of influence or control through resistance narratives to overcome powerlessness; and by narrating professional expertise through the juxtaposing statements of their work value, skills and purpose, as opposed to the directionless leadership which “*has no clue*”.

Within the boundaries of “*imposed and negative change*”, there is evidence of ironic display (Johannson and Woodilla 2005) through humour; front stage dramatic display (Goffman 1969) via artefact presentation and the use of metaphor and decoration to maintain the critique of the *Other*, namely the organisational narrative espoused by senior management. Narrative brand processing (Escalas 2004), a way to facilitate a consumer connection is indicated here as a highly powerful narrative arc for the organisational actors working adjunct to it; a means to interpret the meaning of their experiences by fitting them into the brand story.

Firm-JV is indicative of an organisation held in tension, underpinned by a dominant discourse of dissonance. Reflecting on Aristotle’s three dimensions of rhetorical justification; logos, pathos and ethos (Brown, Ainsworth and Grant 2012), tension between competing logics is emergent. Individual and collective stories are striking for their emotion-evoking pathos; informed by history, established values and norms and imbued with nostalgia. This contrasts with the logos or logic focussed rhetoric which underpins the new espoused

organisational narrative, the approved rhetoric for change that is demonstrated in functional aesthetics and attempts at acculturation. The organisational story has become dissonant from both individual and the socially constructed collective narrative of the actors within.

Problems are identified in terms of narrative relevancy, coherence, future orientation, and core competency as encapsulated in the brand and its actor ambassadors. It is often assumed that reactions to market conditions such as joint ventures cause creative destruction (Schumpeter 1942), but there remains a danger that competences which are core but hard to articulate are in fact unintentionally destroyed.

12.1 Methodological benefits and the contribution of STRIKE

The overall approach demonstrates a robust methodological bricolage which addresses *"the need for multiple ways of seeing"* (Kincheloe, 2005, p327). It is argued that the integrative, multi-layered, reflexive and triangulated approach can enable the resultant narratives of research (Clandinin and Connelly 2000) to be more grounded and therefore, more likely to be valid and authentically representational. Polyphony and narrative richness is addressed through the adoption of an inventive, systematic and multi-layered combination of data collection, analysis, integration and articulation techniques. These allow the *semantic layer to become more transparent. Increasingly granular understanding of how meanings are constructed, maintained and used by organisational actors becomes possible. In this case, it identifies significant dissonance between the actor narratives and that espoused by the organisation.*

STRIKE richly elucidates the importance of human interaction with the physical as well as the social environment to create meaning echoing the social practice findings of Suchman (2007) and enhancing understanding of how actors make sense of and respond to their life-world. The method is congruent with the sociomateriality dimension of this study, surfacing the influence of non-somatic artefacts on narrative development and expression, and providing deep interpretative insight into actor sensemaking processes. The STRIKE framework affords potential to operate in diagnostic and prescriptive mode regarding the issues identified. As an example, the framework can be used in diagnosis to indicate organisational change; the case firm could be said to be an adhocracy moving to a machine configuration (Mintzberg 1980). In prescription, a focus on the findings pertaining to specific elements can aid targeted intervention mechanisms.

For the researcher, STRIKE's systematic approach to data analysis and assessment militates criticisms of methodological rigour in observational techniques and affords standardisation potential, appropriate for verification and longitudinal studies. Fully combinable with interactive qualitative methods, STRIKE can also confirm, negate or explicate findings as part of triangulation. For the practitioner, reflecting on the organisational development challenges expressed by Gallos (2006), the method can afford benefits to support diagnosis and prescription, targeted interventions, overall change management, organisational health and cultural benchmarking. It is argued therefore that STRIKE presents particular value for bridging the frequent dissonance between theory and practice, with usability for researcher and practitioner. For an audience, the highly communicable and visual style allows "the reader into the process" (Dickie 2003, p51) of interpretation and analysis.

The creative techniques ArtPad and Wordle also demonstrated effective contributions to support polyphony. As explored by Hoang and Kjørlién (2008) in the contemporary art domain, *"ArtPad embraces a fragmentary and causal way of connecting parts to a story that resists the static structure of a beginning, middle and end"*. One participant commented that they found the technique gave freedom and control to respond to the topic *"on their terms"*. Wordle was also beneficial and enabled the participatory production of culture visualisations by members of the group themselves, echoing the intent of Viégas, Wattenberg and Feinberg (2009).

Finally, the authenticity of representation aim is supported across multiple facets of the inquiry. The approach affords a multiplicity of perspectives, using direct and indirect techniques and a creative range of conduits for

expression. This is opined to optimise the potential for participant engagement to encourage a depth, breadth and richness of data and further, reduce the potential risk for misinterpretation and distortion (Tversky 2004). These methods are also multi-layered and transverse situated physical, textual, linguistic and visual dimensions.

Techniques such as the collocation of data and matrix triangulation, alongside process transparency, are also effective and support traceability and comparison of the emergent narratives. Finally, the insider-researcher principal investigator position was effectively supported by the outsider member role of the co-author; providing balance, aiding critical reflection and creating a creative space for interpretative dialogue (Dwyer and Buckle 2009). It is argued that this overall methodology reduces the potential for the misinterpretation of narrative (Heje, Baskerville and Venable 2012).

13. Conclusions

This research responds to the call for a more holistic (Smeyers and Verhesschen 2001), diverse (Riessman 2008) and authentic (Holloway and Freshwater 2009) perspective towards narrative inquiry which optimises the potential for participant voices to be heard. It also promotes wider discourse on narrative analytical process techniques (Mello 2002) and contributes to the advancement of people-place theory using visual methods (Tonge et al. 2013). The study foregrounds a structured, cohesive, multi-layered and polyphonic approach to surface, evaluate, integrate and articulate a multiplicity of perspectives, benefiting authenticity of representation, process transparency, researcher reflexivity and the capacity to judge quality (Speedy 2008).

The structured use of innovative multi-method, multi-layered and multi-textured tools enables multiple lenses on narrative as part of methodological bricolage, encapsulating actors' physical, textual, linguistic and visual dialogue. The STRIKE framework demonstrates notable benefits as an unobtrusive, integrative and systematic tool, germane for usage in verification and longitudinal narrative inquiry. STRIKE's capacity to be deployed in opposite directions of inference *viz* prescriptive or diagnostic mode affords particular pragmatic potential. Further, creative techniques such as ArtPad and Wordle provide rich expressive control to the participants and surface new conduits for narrative dialogue. It is argued that this overall approach can facilitate the development of full rather than minimalist narratives, moving beyond elements of time and space to explore and surface dimensions of causal relationships, voice and emotion (Tversky 2004).

The research supports the pictorial turn (Mitchell 2005) as a counterpoint to the widely recognised linguistic turn in business and management research: combining [synchronic](#) and [diachronic](#) elements of story to provide new means of seeing (Bell 2012), both for researcher and audience. Further, the importance of organisational historiography is revelatory; providing a means to contextualise issues and enhance comprehension. Although historical knowledge should not dictate current perspectives, it is argued that it provides a prism in which to view, reflect upon, interpret and evaluate findings which can benefit research investigations and practice interventions (Down 2012).

The study specifically elucidates the complex and intersectional sensemaking processes of organisational actors, with the overarching discourse of dissonance between the authorised corporate and lived actor experience of narrative richly interpreted. Further, the social context of authenticity also emerges strongly. As Williams (2004, p200) asserts: *"we need each other in order to be anybody"*. The study demonstrates the association between transformational change and the use of narratives to maintain, recreate and/or reinterpret individual actor and/or collective group identity, advancing the work of Mahadevan (2009). The importance of human interaction with the physical as well as the social environment to create meaning is foregrounded.

Although there is no evidence of the dark organisational *miasma* or extreme toxicity developed by Gabriel (2012), a deep concern regarding cultural, value, brand and core competency erosion and the changing

superordinate goal is nonetheless identified. The rich intellectual capital of this organisation can be perceived to be at risk. The petrification of narrative is employed by actors as a form of continuance, of identity preservation, memorialisation and moreover assertion, which may be interpreted as their most accessible form of resistance to change.

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