

A NARRATIVE APPROACH TO CHANGE MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

Change projects put a high demand on people's ability to change mindset. It requires motivation and commitment to take on another perspective than the existing one. Common methods like BPR, and TQM, tend to fail in motivating and engaging people sufficiently to reach the goals. In this paper we outline an alternative method for driving change management. We propose the use of myths, tales, and stories as triggers in change projects in order to create a creative and dynamic atmosphere in which change can be achieved. Even though there is by now a rather substantial literature on narratives in organization theory, very little research has focused on narrative as a vehicle for change and organizational development. Myths are interesting because they serve as a tool for formulating and recapturing a worldview; they integrate people into organizational culture and they can guide people in their individual psychological development.

Keywords: Change management, narrative, myths, action research.

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1 Introduction

Change projects put a high demand on people's ability to change mindset. It requires motivation and commitment to take on another perspective than the existing one. Common methods used today include process management, Business Process Reengineering, Total Quality Management, and Six Sigma. However, it has been shown that, even when provided with enough resources, financing, and time, projects do not reach expected goals (see e.g. Kotter 1993). These methods fail to motivate and engage people sufficiently to reach the goals.

In this paper we outline an alternative method for driving change management work, based on the use of narratives. The overall research question is:

How could we use myths, tales, and stories as triggers on group level in workshop situations in order to create a creative and dynamic atmosphere in which change can be achieved?

Even though there is by now a rather substantial literature on narratives in organization theory (e.g. Czarniawska, 1997; 1998; Boje, 2001; Gabriel, 2000) very little research has focused on narrative as a vehicle for change. Myths are interesting for change management and organizational development because of their three basic functions: they serve as a tool for formulating and recapturing a worldview; they integrate people into organizational culture; and they can guide people in their individual psychological development May (1991).

In an ongoing action research study we investigate how stories and myths can be used as a method to create a creative and dynamic organizational culture during a change project and thus be a tool for managing change processes. The context of the study was a merger between two consultant companies, where one of the key issues was to create motivation and engagement for integrating the different organizational cultures to one, both as viewed internally and as seen by customers.

Myths and stories were used as triggers to create an atmosphere devoted to creativity and motivation surrounding the change project:

- by listening, describing and analyzing myths and stories to challenge the old mindsets.
- by using the form of myths and stories to describe problems and challenges the organization was struggling with.
- by visualizing myths and stories in the form of drawn pictures to find new ways of communicating change to the project participants.

This results in a change process driven by and reflected through myths and stories. The work was conducted with the help of group activities as well as individual activities during a continual period. The goal is an iterative process where storytelling and reflections about myths are related to specific problems, challenges and goals. In the paper we will more thoroughly describe the role of the facilitator who chose the myths and stories which served as a foundation for the narrative change work. To read and explain a narrative put high demand on the leader who will use it in the organization.

In our study, the organizational change assignment at hand was combined with exercises that were conducted both at group and individual level, to enhance participants' ability as storytellers and to increase their understanding of the basic structure of myths. The objective of this method was to reach individuals within an organization via external communication, through stories, myths, and tales. The result is that the change process is driven by and perceived as a myth. The myth in question will share the same elementary building blocks as, for instance, a classical Greek myth (Campbell 1973). Myths as bearers of insight is particularly powerful since people are affected by myths on a much deeper and subconscious level, giving rise to an effective inner communication.

The paper is outlined in the following way. First we relate to change management theories and discuss the concept of motivation. Second an account of myths and narratives will be given in relation to organizational and change management issues.

After that a section on method is followed by the research case. The case is presented and discussed. The papers ends with conclusions.

2 Change Management

Change is a central concept in business and management. It is a broad term closely linked to concepts like organizational restructuring, transformation and development. There are many and varied approaches to organizational change. One can think of change as monolithic and revolutionary, differentiated and incremental, or invisible and continual. Even if change and change management is not addressed explicitly, it is a vital part of most theories, methods and approaches dealing with organizational development.

What really made change efforts explicit and central for many consultants and practitioners was the trend of process orientation that started in the early nineties (e.g. Davenport and Short, 1990; Heygate and Bebach, 1991) and further developed to the popular Business Process Reengineering (BPR) approach (Hammer, 1990; Hammer & Champy, 1993).

Here the process is seen as the heart of the organization, and the process must create value for the customer. In the process oriented organization, all activities related to a task are managed as one single operation performed by an individual or a dynamic customer-focused business team (Womack et al., 1990; Hammer and Champy, 1993; Keen, 1991). The most important components in the BPR-approach are customer focus, flexibility and a revolutionary redesign of the business enabled by information technology. However, the approach was criticized for not living up to its expectations, it tended to underestimate the impact of culture and the process maps were often too idealized to work in practice. Several authors criticized it for being a new variation of Taylorism, a modest idea turned into a destructive fad (see e.g. Davenport, 1995). By now the BPR fad has passed, but the process focus lasts.

Another wide spread approach is change specifically focusing on quality, like TQM and similar approaches that seek incremental and continuous improvement of established work practices (Hackman and Wageman, 1995). From the beginning quality was seen as equal to a number of deficiencies. Quality was a measure of number of errors for each produce unit. Over time quality came to mean functional quality, i.e. the function they fulfilled for the customers. Today quality is often discussed as perceived quality, i.e. quality is about satisfying the customers' need at lowest cost. Also TQM has been

criticized, e.g. for generating bureaucracy and for making organizations slow to change (see e.g. Hackman and Wageman, 1995).

Yet a widely spread consultant approach is Six Sigma, a tool to drive changes in quality work and cost reduction. By reducing costs, shorten cycle times and increase customer satisfaction the productivity is optimized. The method means that a measure based work practice focusing on process enhancement is introduced (Eckes, 2001). This method is associated with high costs, because it requires much preparation and educational efforts, which means that organizations must put in much time and resources for the change.

Despite all different approaches there is a high rate of failure in change projects. Most of these perspectives are based on a rationalistic and mechanic world view, underestimating the complexity of change, the strength of peoples attitudes and values and the importance of having a shared meaning. Among the most important reasons for failures are the lack of visions, failure in communicating the vision, and failure in making the employees committed and to underestimate the role of culture (Kotter, 1993).

By instead taking a social constructivist perspective the whole organizations' beliefs, interpretations and opinions are taken into account. The challenge is to understand how "institutions think" (Douglas 1987). Here focus is not on the employees behavior per se, but on language, or what Morgan calls management of meaning (Morgan, 1996).

2.1 Motivation

People's motivation is important for change efforts to succeed. How do you motivate people in a change process? Motivation is the driving force that is supposed to make individuals act and behave in a certain way.

There are a plethora of theories of motivation. Some of the most well known are Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1970), and Herzberg's (1966) two factor theory. Maslow's hierarchy of needs consists of lower order needs that are satisfied externally (physiological and safety needs) and higher-order needs that are satisfied internally (social, esteem, and self-actualization needs). Herzberg's two factor theory relates intrinsic factors (motivational factors) to job satisfaction and extrinsic factors (hygiene factors) with dissatisfaction. Intrinsic factors are achievement, recognition, acknowledgement, responsibility, work itself if it is stimulating, and self-actualization.

Extrinsic factors are company policy and administration, management, work conditions, production arrangements, salary, relationships with management, peers and subordinates. In change management approaches, a focus on extrinsic motivation is the most common. However, extrinsic awards for behavior tends to decrease motivation, especially if the behavior was previously rewarded intrinsically.

Thus, to motivate people to take active part in a change process, and to change their own behavior, both their intrinsic and extrinsic factors for motivation are important.

Despite this, in most change processes it is mainly the extrinsic factors that are focused. Because of this people do not become deeply engaged. To achieve commitment and engagement from people in change projects one need to focus much more on what motivates people intrinsically.

The change management facilitator must therefore inspire and create the intrinsic motivation among people by building on their own values. This requires three things: first to be clear about the expected results and values in the change project. Second to have a clear and understandable change vision. Third to be aligned with the values of the people to be lead. To understand individuals values and attitudes is important in order to create a change friendly climate and to motivate people to change.

People's values and the culture are important factors in the resistance or engagement to change. Individual norms, work practices, dress code, attitudes to customers and the company are all part of the culture of a company. Culture is often a "function" of the history, its high profiled employees and leaders, its most important events. Company policies and strategies are ways to communicate what the management regards as "good" values. Values could also be communicated by symbols, metaphors and narratives. One instrument for change facilitators is therefore myths, stories and fairy tales, since they embody value systems and norms (May, 1991).

3 Myths and Narratives

3.1 Myths

Myths, tales and stories are recognized in all societies and times as bearers of wisdom as well as norms and values. They are often understood to bear almost archaic knowledge about the human psyche. Myths, tales and stories can also be seen as an active intermediary for analyzing and reflecting over situations. A myth or a tale can create meaning in a situation that otherwise might seem meaningless. It has therefore

been natural to connect myths and stories to processes of change. Myths are story-patterns that can guide groups and individuals in times of change.

This has made myths interesting for scholars dealing with organizational issues. A myth can be seen as a drama that starts with a historical event and advances into a new character as a method that guides coworkers and help them orient themselves in the world. From an organizational point of view myths have been seen as a way to promote the organization's values and norms and also as a way to tie workers to the organization and its goals and values by providing a sense of identity and connectedness with the organization (Snowden 2002).

Myths and stories tend to promote entireties more than the specific. They can combine conscious and unconscious dimensions of human experience. Myths can blend past and present, individual and societal which is staged in the form of a story that is passed on from one individual to another in an organic and ad hoc fashion. While empiricism address "objective facts", myths and stories speak to human experience in a social or organizational context.

If an organization is regarded as a process, change work becomes sub-processes within the overall organizational process. Myths and stories can be used as a way to express experiences and thereby help members of the organization think, feel, become conscious and react on the change, coworkers and their own role in the process.

Myths as guides in change work are interesting because:

1. They support identity creation by answering the question "Who am I?" An example of a corresponding myth is Oedipus trying to figure out who he is.
2. They create a sense of connectedness: Oedipus gathers his men in the war against the Trojans.
3. Myths can support moral and ethical values. Mythical stories are often about good and bad, what actions are respectable or not.

Even if a myth is old, it can still be used in modern organizational change work. Myths seem to address archetypical human cognitive patterns. Campbell (1973) argues that a person often can relate to a myth even if he is not previously familiar with it. Anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1995) even suggested that myths talk through man without him knowing it. To that we can add that myths, even ancient Greek myths or variants of them, still are retold or referred to in everyday situations, which seems to be an expression of their relevance. This does, however, not mean that they are

interpreted the same way today as in history. On the contrary, myths are reinterpreted on the basis of actual circumstances, which also is important for explaining why they still are relevant. We have to think about myths as tools for making sense of the world based on generally accepted concepts like “the hero” or “the enemy”.

Myths can speak about organizational entities, such as a family or a company. By starting the other way around, and relating an organizational entity to an appropriate myth, it can help seeing and understanding roles and social interplay within this entity as well as in relationship to the surrounding world. Myths and stories have an important role in the social construction of reality and the social construction of change and incitements for change. It is therefore not surprising that scholars such as Paul Ricoeur (1985, 1988) who discusses literature and Barbara Czarniawska (1997, 1998) who discusses organizations, understand stories and myths as a way to recognize social life in itself. Myths create both familiarity and distance.

3.2 Roles and plots in myths

In today's organizational work teamwork and continuous learning is important. Decisions are not made by a single person and teamwork is a common way to make evaluations and solve problems. Organizations are characterized by diversity, internal competition and conflicts around power and prestige that can become threats against long-term future strategies. Still members must strive towards a common goal. The myths of Protheus is an example of a myth that addresses modern firms and their dependence on change as well as consequences of change for the members of the organization. The Greek god Protheus represents the myth of change. Every time Protheus enters a difficult or dangerous situation he alters to another shape that gives him protection – a tree, an animal or an insect. Based on this myth one can talk about a Protheus-like way of dealing with change, threats and complexity. Campbell (1973) has shown the uniformity of myths from different parts of the world, what he calls the monomyth. Campbell's example is myths about the hero. The plot is organized around three stages: “separation”, “initiation” and “return”. Typical roles are prince, king, queen, princess, trickster, guardian and helper. The roles support the plot that is moving through the three stages: the hero gets a call; he has a helper at hand; the hero is tested by having to solve a number of tasks. Campbell mentions dragon-fighting, crucifixion, finding the elixir. At the end the hero returns and saves the princess.

Such a myth can be used in an organizational context to raise consciousness about strategies to solve problems, showing best-practice, i.e. to organize change work. By using myths a creative situation can be established that will help team members to deal with old problems in a new and unexpected way. Establishing a mythical way of organizing people can be a way to reduce immediate and practical problems, and thereby opening up for possible solutions.

3.3 Using mythical symbols as change agents

The symbolic dimension of social activities is quite easily related to symbols used in myths. Symbols in myths have been discussed in a wide variety of research contexts, such as linguistics, philosophy, anthropology and semiotics (e.g. Levi-Strauss 1966, 1995; Barthes 1997). However, it is important to separate signs from symbols. A sign has a relatively fixed meaning while a symbol is more open and related to other symbols. In a myth context the symbol is connected to roles and plots. The symbol feeds sense-making in an associative figurative fashion and becomes related to individuals' backgrounds, experiences, personalities etc. Using symbols as change agents takes advantage of stressing the open associative dimension, not reducing symbols to fixed signs.

Using symbols in myths as change agents means to draw on myths as a narrative that contains time, action, actors, goals threats that solutions. An important factor in change work is to understand how people act in a period of turbulence. Based on prototypical myths the following change agents can be identified as symbolical resources for change work:

- The Antagonist: The evil, the villain with whom the hero finally has to fight. E.g. troll or an evil queen
- The Giver: Those who put the hero to a test, give the hero a magical object
- The Helper: Assists the hero when it really matters
- The Wanted: The beautiful princess who disappeared, marries the prince
- The Hero: He who decides to act, accepts the challenge, who wins and ascends the throne
- The Mandatory: He who encourages the hero to act, requires the assignment carried out, abundantly rewards the one that carries the assignment. E.g. King or Queen

- The Delusive Hero: Believes himself to be at his best, claims to have carried out a heroic deed, loses by being exposed and punished. E.g. The Loser

These actors can be related to a set of basic tasks or situations that occur in myths as well as in organizational change work:

- Predicament: The problems the actors try to solve
- Intentions: What the actors try to do
- Actions: What the actors do to achieve their intentions
- Objective: The tools the actors use.
- Causality: The effects (both the predicted and unpredicted) of realizing the acts
- Context: The many details surrounding the actors and the acts
- Surprises: Everything unexpected happening in the story.

The different roles are actants in the model corresponding to the action-models (or functions) that the actants might pursue according to a certain plot. These models were also the one used in the action research case described below (Chapter 4 and 5).

4 Method

4.1 The Setting

During 2003 the consulting company Guide acquired Astrakan, a similar but smaller consultant company. Both firms are known for being strong brands and having competent and professional consultants. It was seen as important to merge the two companies in a way that made the Astrakan personnel feel really welcome to Guide. Therefore a special unit with 35 persons was set up to work with the integration process. 16 people in this new unit came from Guide and the rest from Astrakan.

The two companies were quite similar, however, the core business idea was different. Astrakan was used to short projects, teamwork and in house jobs, while Guide usually created long term recurring relationships with their customers and worked with the customer at their site. At Guide there was a focus on creating dynamics, working with responsibility and having “fun at work”. Astrakan had focused on entrepreneurship, competence and theoretical work in developing methods. The idea was to merge these two organizational cultures into one that integrated the best practices from both.

4.2 Using narratives in action research

The integration project, which was launched during autumn 2003, was set up as collaboration between the two organizations. The goal was to make the two cultures act as a team in order to generate synergy effects by creating a new work atmosphere that was characterized by creativity. This was done by focusing on the development of a new price model for projects using narratives as a main method. The project can therefore be described as an action research case where change management work is accomplished with the use of narratives.

Action research is described by Levin (2002) as a way to increase the knowledge about social systems by trying to change them. This is done through systematic attempts to develop organizations and decrease the distance between theoretical knowledge and practical work. Action research promotes testing a theory or a method on a real case to understand the practical implications of the theory or method and to provide a solution to a specific problem.

In this case one of the authors is an industrial Ph.D. student who is also working at Guide as a consultant, which created possibilities for managing change work using a narrative method. In the following text we refer to her as “the facilitator”.

Action research pays attention to analysis on an individual level as well as the relationship between individual and group levels and theories about organizations. In this study, such course of action proved vital since an important task was to be able to promote creativity among the members of the team. Problem solving was a shared goal both for the researcher and the practitioners.

An important step in action research is to establish cooperation with the members of the team that is built on mutual trust and exchange of reliable information. The researcher encourages members' gathering and analysis of information. The researcher uses participant observation, interviews, questionnaires and exercises of different kind. Varied forms of dramaturgy and staging are also possible methods. The result consists of problem solving that is of use for the whole social system, in this case the integration unit. The choice of action research as the main method was thus based on the facilitator's belief that this change project needed drive on the conjunction of three elements: research, action and participation. Since the team with a limited amount of participants should establish new knowledge under time pressure, it was seen as necessary that the facilitator took an involved and participating role.

4.3 The narrative action research case

In this action research case myths, tales, and stories were used as *triggers* on group level in workshop situations as a way of creating a creative and dynamic atmosphere in which change management work could be conducted;

- by listening, describing and analyzing myths and stories to challenge the old mindsets.
- by using myths and stories as a form to describe problems and challenges the organization is struggling with.
- by visualizing myths and stories in the form of drawn pictures.

This resulted in a change process driven by and reflected through myths and stories. The work was conducted with the help of group activities as well as individual activities during a continual period. The goal was to achieve an iterative process where storytelling and reflections about myths were related to specific problems, challenges and goals. In the paper we will more thoroughly describe the role of the facilitator who choose the myths and stories which serve as a foundation for a narrative change work. To read and explain a narrative put high demand on the leader who will use it in the organization (Czarniawska, 1998).

4.4 Planning and executing the research

After the researcher had been appointed facilitator for the team, the case was conducted according to the following scheme:

Commissioning the search: Every member of the project team were personally asked if they wanted to participate in the group. They were informed about what the project was trying to achieve, both on a concrete level and about the new method of using myths, stories and tales as an approach. It was seen as very important that the members of the project group felt motivated for the task.

Identifying the participants: The group consisted of 6 persons from both Guide and the newly bought company Astrakan. 2 people were managers and 4 consultants. The number of meetings where set to 8, each period lasting 3 hours.

Searching a structured change process: The first meeting alerted the change work and its focus on discovering a new creative way to find forms for a pricing model for new services.

First all participants gave their personal and professional view on how they perceived pricing models of IT-services and how the services should be presented to customers. This gave everybody a good understanding of the others' presumptions about different business models in this specific area. For the facilitator this was a way to create a shared history and letting every participant understand how the world looks according to the other participants.

Secondly the group agreed on a shared view on future pricing models. It was seen as very important to find alternative pricing models to increase profitability in future IT-business. The purpose of this exercise was to create a shared vision about what is a desirable future or solution to the focal problem of the group.

Thirdly the group had to take part in a number of exercises to find solutions to problems related to pricing models and come up with solutions to these problems. The purpose with this exercise was to identify action plans for addressing the focal problem.

Fourth and last the group ran through the solution and gave suggestions for how this new pricing model should be presented internally in the company as well as externally at the customer's site. In doing so, a concrete change activity was initiated to structure a follow-up process aimed at sharing achievements and learning. This exercise integrated five processes described by Greenwood and Levin (1998), namely:

1. Create a discourse aimed at sharing different company views, and interpretations of history
2. Develop a common vision for the future
3. Engage the participants in creative activities, searching for action plans to reach desired goals
4. Facilitate a collective prioritizing among action issues
5. Link planning to action, action to group and highlight specific actions

The outcome was a set of action issues that participants wanted to pursue collectively.

In the study, the organizational change assignment at hand was combined with exercises that were conducted both at group and individual level, to enhance participants' abilities as storytellers and to increase their understanding of the basic structure of myths. The objective of this method was to reach individuals within an

organization via an organic process of communication, through stories, myths, and tales. The result is that the change process is driven by but also perceived as a myth. The myth in question will share the same elementary building blocks as, for instance, a classical Greek myth (Campbell 1973).

5 The Case

5.1 Selling the Case

Introducing the idea of driving change management by narratives within an IT-company can for a practitioner be seen as a unconventional suggestion. The present situation of most IT-companies in Sweden is that they are confronted with the balancing of giving priority to short term aims, as e.g. to keep consultants fully booked, compared to working with business development and to find creative methods and concepts that hopefully could lead to new business opportunities in the future. The IT-consult market is characterized by strong competition and perpetual attempts from clients to reduce costs. Working with internal projects is thus nothing usually prioritized.

The first phase in driving the case was therefore to convince management and other stakeholders about the relevance of the project. Thus, the first matter in question was to make the manager approve the idea of an action research project at the new Organizational development department.

The Organizational development unit consisted partly of old Guide staff and partly of new staff from the incorporated company Astrakan. The manager was persuaded by conveying the facilitator's consultant experience regarding change projects. In the second phase the idea was put forward to all the 36 individuals in the Organizational development department. During a monthly meeting with the Organizational development department the facilitator had the opportunity to present the idea of driving changes with an approach never earlier tested on an IT-consultant company.

At the meeting the facilitator started with a three minute speech trying to catch the interest of the audience by reciting an abstract of Homers' Odyssey about "The Trojan horse":

"During ten years followed attack on attack and still the Trojan walls stood. Great heroes had fallen in Patrokolos and Hector. Achilles was hit in the heel by Paris. The campaign turned out to be the worst ever for the Greeks. Inspired by Athena, Odysseus came up with an ingenious plan. He had a horse of wood to be built

and persuaded some warriors to hide in the belly of the animal. The Greek navy was to give an impression of leaving Troy as they in reality anchored beyond the closely situated island of Tenodos. One morning the Trojans discovered that the Greeks had broken camp and remaining was only one large wooden horse. They opened up the city gates. The prophet Laokoon feared that this was a Greek stratagem. He threw a javelin at the horse making it a stuck in the timber with a hollow sound. Would it not be better to destroy it? Then some shepherds arrived drugging the Greek Sinon. He said he had escaped from the Greek camp and told the story Odysseus had impressed on him. The horse was a gift from the Greek to Athena and that it must not be destroyed which would make the goddess feeling insulted. If on other hand the Trojans pulled it into the city they would be sure of her favor. Thus the horse was brought in to the city of Troy. That night Sinon released the shut-in warriors. At the same time the navy reappeared and the city was attacked. The Greek sat the town on fire, looted on all it treasures and killed the inhabitants. The old king Priamos was strangled in front of the family altar. The following morning Troy was in ashes and ruins”.

With this introduction the facilitator wanted to engage the audience by catching their interest at a more unconscious level than what is usually the case when speaking about change management. She then related the myth to small selections from her experience as change manager. This myth shows many characteristics of change processes that were similar to those in the organization: change takes time (ten years in the myth); a strong change manager is needed who able to motivate and engage his subordinates; participation and cooperation from everyone is required in order to reach the goal (e.g. Sinon); creativity is required to reach the goal (to build a wooden horse); someone has to die in order to create new points of view (the old king is strangled).

The first phase of selling the research project to the relevant stakeholders was successful as the facilitator got permission to carry out the experimental change project. The consultants thought the subject was exciting and challenging.

5.2 The Change Project

A series of eight meetings were set up. The first four occasions dealt with the basics of narratives and exercises how to tell stories and how to write good stories. The first meeting was about deciding which application areas people would like to focus on in

the exercises. The group decided to work with marketing and especially the pricing models used by IT-consultant firms.

To find out if the approach was interesting enough to spend so much time on, it was decided to try it for two days and four hours each day. After that an evaluation would be carried out. If the sessions turned out to be successful the project would continue with 8 occasions at 3 hours each. The following two days were spent doing a series of exercises.

Exercise 1 was about listening to the narrative about “The wild boar and the tiger”. The purpose here was to change arena and to get an insight that an organization and its threats and possibilities can be described and understood based on a narrative written thousands of years ago. The reflection from the group was positive. Reactions were that no one had considered that by listening to an animal story from India it was possible to recognize and to get an explanation of how a social organization function or that problems and challenges found in all organizations regarding power and co-existence can be described and conveyed in an old story. Each in the group gave his verbal view on what the story was about. All participants had the same view on what the story communicated and what it wanted to convey. A climate of joy and engagement was created in the group when they realized that through this story they could discuss the kind of “law of the jungle” practices that existed in the organization. Through the story it had become clear that conflicts were timeless and general problems to any organization. The story drew attention away from their own company creating a fictive arena that could be used for reflection.

The next exercise was to draw a picture or occurrence from the narrative about the wild boar and the tiger. By using the picture as a mode of expression, reflections were drawn away from the discursive to the illustrative and narrative as a mean to convey something that was perceived as important.

In *exercise 2* the meaning of a metaphor and its significance was discussed. The group drew objects not belonging to a certain environment in order to promote creativity.

Another exercise was to visualize a dream-state regarding the Organizational development department in order to capture descriptions of future scenarios: “What does the best setting look like? Who are the participants? What do we have to offer? Which feeling do we want to convey within the group and towards the market?” The group was divided into sub-groups where the participants had to reach an mutual picture and paint it together.

Exercise 3 introduced something unknown into the familiar. In the exercise either the position or the organization were new to people. They had to describe a scenario of how to sell an existing or a new service to a known or unknown client.

Exercise 4 was a questioning exercise: An exercise regarding the training how to ask the “correct questions” (“How do we market complex services from the Organizational development department to prospective buyers?”). The facilitator wanted the group to try to see sidetracks to the normal procedures, which in general was a very prompt process to find solutions and answers before a correct analysis had been made, not regarding whether the correct questions had been asked or not.

Exercise 5 was an introduction and short information regarding creativity and humor. An exercise with argumentation was carried out.

Exercise 6 focused on why this new pricing-policy was established. This issue was coordinated with Guide’s pricing-patterns in order to try to find the nucleus of tomorrow’s pricing-patterns to find out what purposes and needs were behind present pricing-patterns.

Exercise 7 started with a narrative about the crutch and the stick. The facilitator wanted the group to use their fantasy and then tell a made-up story. Each person had written a story during a limited period of time and were asked to perform it to the others.

Exercise 8 was to work with narratives in the following: In an exercise a real scene where brought in, i.e. the setting of a company from the news-letter IT West (covers IT-world news of West-Sweden), where Guide were to sell the service with a new form of pricing. The purpose was by means of a narrative to convey a new pricing model to the client. The group created a scenario in the form of a tale.

Exercise 9 took departure in innovations in nature. Animals should be matched with innovations found in today’s society that had the animal world as prototype. The idea was to find new solutions from other environments than the one’s where people usually work.

Evaluation of the study was carried out in the form of a personal discussion. The group found that both listening to and expressing narratives, both verbally and in writing, was an enjoyable way to work. They expressed a feeling of excitement and challenge with the different exercises as a way of breaking old patterns. The project group decided to continue the study with the next eight occasions.

5.3 Creating stories and myths.

While the first four occasions dealt with learning how to tell stories and how to write good stories, the last four occasions dealt with setting up a relevant consultant scenario where narratives could be used to promote change. The scenario was built around a pricing model and a specific client.

The pricing model was decided to be a fixed price to the client. The customer was decided to be the City of Gothenburg to whom Guide was to arrange a service in the form of a role model for the process of developing a new city plan. This process is characterized by many involved actors and delegated decision making on a number of different units in the city administration. The concept was going to be presented to the client in a narrative form.

In the group it was discussed in what manner it was possible to use a tale or myth to describe and sell a commission to a client. Suggestions with proposals of different stories from personal experiences were suggested. Group members told stories from Guide that could be good metaphors for this kind of assignment. It was finally decided to use an internal Guide story about a comical situation happening at an Italian restaurant because of uncertainty in the communication between “client” and “supplier”.

The story was named “Lennart and the peas” and goes like this:

One Guide consultant was extremely allergic to a certain kind of food and always carried a list with ingredients he couldn't eat. At the restaurant he gave the list to the waiter. The waiter however made the interpretation that it was a list of ingredients that the customer wanted to have. The outcome was of course that Lennart became terribly sick.

Each group member prepared a suggestion considering the specifics of different aspects of the project. The results were to be worked into the story about “Lennart and the peas” and presented two weeks later at a group meeting.

5.4 Sharing history

Using narratives created a way of cooperation that is unusual within Guide. By working together with stories, often taken from the organizational life, a sense of shared meaning and shared history was created.

The members of the group used narratives as a way to deal with unknown situations. They learned how to make up, tell and write stories from different perspectives. The

group thereby achieved a common language making it easier to communicate using symbols and metaphors describing IT-related occurrences in the organization. By sharing histories, writing histories and telling histories the group created a common history around the project that could be reused and spread in the organizations for others to use.

6. Conclusions

We have experimented with the use of myths and stories to increase the openness for change at group level in eight workshop situations. The first four occasions dealt with the basics of myths and narratives, and with practicing how to tell and write good stories. In the last four occasions narratives was used in a case based on real problems relevant to the company and the consultants participating in the experiment.

Even if we cannot draw any bold conclusions from the results so far, some issues can be raised.

Using a method like this requires that the facilitator or change leader have the ability to find appropriate narratives and myths and also have the ability to see the connection between a concrete change process and the similarity in a tale, myth or story.

Talking about the myth and its actors helps people to not be stuck in their old mindsets, linked to the current state of order in the organization. Using myths and narratives seem be a possible way to communicate and infuse the values inherent in the narrative to the change project at hand.

Using narratives was nothing common in the studied organization. By using this approach, the group have worked in a completely different way than consultants are used to. It did however work well and created a creative climate with many challenging proposals for solutions. One of the participating consultants even tried it out in a consultant engagement outside the experimental research project. He persuaded a group of salesmen to make an invitation to a seminar in the form of a narrative. 2500 clients were to be invited to a seminar prior to a client event. The salesmen initially found it to be unserious, and that it might be perceived as unprofessional by the clients. After a while they were persuaded to give it a try and they created a story about "William the tailor" that was used for the invitation with great success.

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