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Driving Change With Narratives

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1. Introduction

Change is a central concept in business and management. It is addressed under different names, such as organizational restructuring, transformation and development. It is a vital part of most theories, methods and approaches dealing with organizational development, even if change and change management is not always addressed explicitly. Despite this interest for developing knowledge, methods and approaches for change, more than 70 % of organizational change programs fail or get stalled (Boonstra, 2004).

In this paper we outline a method for driving change with narratives and thereby to support change management and change facilitation. The overall research question is:

How can the power of narratives be used to drive a change process and how can a change manager drive the change work as a narrative?

There is by now a rather substantial literature on narratives in organization theory (e.g. Czarniawska, 1993; Boje, 2001; Gabriel, 2000), but very little of this research has focused on narrative as a support for a change manager. Most books on management change describe techniques for change in a prescriptive way or try to formulate criteria for successful change.

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 be a tool for managing change processes. The context of the study is a multinational industrial company, which is

about to implement a new IT solution for the manufacturing and logistics processes. The goal for this change project is to roll out a system in order to standardize business processes and increase collaboration in the company.

The approach is to use narratives as *drivers* – where the organizational change project itself is seen as being equivalent to a myth, tale, or story. The purpose behind using narratives in this way is to organize change management work in a way that allows the participants in the change project to see their contribution in a larger context. This will hopefully increase motivation to change, as well as the acceptance of new roles and ways of thinking.

To use myths and stories this way is myth is old. It can, however, still be used in modern organizational change work. According to Campbell (1973) myths seem to address archetypical human cognitive patterns. A person can often 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.

In the work that precedes this paper we have discussed ways to use myths, tales and stories as *triggers* in change management work to create an atmosphere devoted to creativity and motivation (Bolin, Bergquist & Ljungberg, 2004). This is done by:

- Listening, describing and analyzing myths and stories to challenge old mindsets.
- Using the form of myths and stories to describe problems and challenges the organization is struggling with.
- Visualizing myths and stories in the form of drawn pictures.

The previous study was conducted with the help of group activities as well as individual activities during a period of six months. The goal was to trigger an iterative process where storytelling and reflections about myths were related to specific problems, challenges and goals related to the organizational change at hand.

In this paper a reflective action research study in a large multinational company is presented. Here, the challenge was to *drive* the organizational change assignment as a narrative through exercises that were conducted both at group and individual level. The overall objective in both case studies is to develop a method that can reach individuals within an organization via stories, myths, and tales. The goal is to drive the change process 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 are particularly powerful since people are affected by myths on a much deeper and subconscious level than many methods commonly used in change management work, and thereby give rise to an effective inner communication where the individual can see his or her role and route to the goal in a

wider organizational context.

The paper is outlined in the following way: first we briefly describe change and change management; then we introduce the concepts of myths and narratives as means for driving organizational change; then account for the methodological approach; after this we present the case, followed by discussion.

2. Change Management

Change is a vital part of most theories, methods and approaches dealing with organizational development. It is addressed under different names, such as organizational restructuring, transformation and development. Despite this central role of the change concept, several authors have reported on the high percentage of failure (more than 70 % according to Boonstra, 2004) in change projects to achieve their intended goals. Among the most important reasons for this are, according to Kotter (1993), lack of visions, failure in communicating the vision and failure in making the employees committed. Other reasons are for example (Boonstra 2004):

- Inadequate policy-making and strategic management
- Existing organizational structures
- Power and politics in organizations
- Individual uncertainties and psychological resistance to change
- Organizational culture

Also Kotter (1993) notices the tendency to underestimate the role of diversity in organizational culture as a hindrance towards reaching change goals in organizations. In this paper we focus on organizational culture. By taking a social constructivist perspective it becomes possible to take into account the whole organizations' beliefs, interpretations and opinions. Here focus is not on the employees' behavior per se, but on language, or what Morgan calls management of meaning (Morgan, 1996). The cultural perspective is one of the most important when improving the creativity in a change management process, because the standards and values within an organization influence the course of action for change and the ways problems along the way are addressed and solved. Culture organize behaviors and hence the members' of the organization ability to change (Schein1992; Cummings & Worley 2001). Social relationship builds on the rules, habits, language, communication, symbols, and definitions of reality that groups use as starting points for mutual interaction. In this perspective change managers have a lot of difficulties in changing standards because they have come to see their own way of behaving as adapted to its purpose.

From a cultural perspective the aim is often to actively involve individuals in the change process.

Several forms of intervention have in recent years been proposed for this purpose, such as game simulations (de Caluwé & Vermaak, 2003), large-scale interventions (Bunker & Alban, 1997), and broad system interventions and conference methods (Weisbord, 1992; Jacobs, 1994).

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. Herzberg's two factor theory relates intrinsic factors to job satisfaction and extrinsic 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 tend 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 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 processes must therefore inspire and create the intrinsic motivation among people by building on their own values. This requires three things (Kotter, 1993): *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 positive change climate.

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. Organizational culture is often a "function" of the history of employees and leaders. Company policies and strategies are ways by which management try to communicate what they regard as "good" values. Symbols, metaphors and narratives could also communicate these values. An important difference between traditional corporate communication and story telling is that stories are more dynamic and open for the individual to engage in and relate to personal experiences. Myths, stories and fairy tales can therefore be important instruments for change facilitators because they embody value systems and norms in a narrative form (May, 1991).

3 Myths and Narratives

According to Paul Ricoeur narratives must split against a chronologic report of incidents. Stories as activity consist not only of putting together one episode to another. Narratives are also a question of constructing meaningful units of disconnected events/situations. The art of telling a story demands similar skills as when listening to and understanding a story.

Narratives seem to be a universal human activity (Ricoeur, 1985). It is fundamental for all human thinking and creating of knowledge. When telling stories we create meaning based on our experiences. Through narratives we also construct and communicate our opinion of the world, to others and ourselves. We make moral values formulate judgment and ethic rules. Our stories will then be the keys to cultural as well as personal worlds of meaning. Narratives create structure, connection and meaning to our experiences, something we create daily to make the world around us more comprehensible. Through the form of stories impressions and experiences become arranged in a form, which make the world perspicuous and easier to handle. The chaotic will be settled, and the fragmentary becomes experienced as a whole. In that way stories can be regarded as dealing with deep existential as well as psychological, cultural and social meaning. Stories provide suggestions to answers to who we are and where we are going (Adelswärd 1996; Thörn 1997a).

During the last decade stories and storytelling have become more accepted in scientific contexts as a form of knowledge. Social life is today being more recognized as discursively constructed. Through language as a social activity, identities, relations, values, and organizations are constructed. This construction of social reality is a complex process, which takes place on an institutional level as well as between people in everyday interaction. Since middle of the 80:s a new cross discipline research field called narrative studies has emerged. Narrative theory and analysis is today to a great extent developed, used and discussed in anthropology psychology and organization theory. Narratives in organizations can be perceived in at least three ways: Organizational research paraphrased in form of a tale ("tales from the field"); Organizational research collecting stories from the organization ("tales of the fields") and organizational research looking at organizational life as storymaking and also organizational theory literature critique (Czarniawska & Sköldbberg 1998b:135).

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 as bearers of 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 they support identity creation by answering the question "Who am I?" 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. As stated in the introduction myths seem to address archetypical human cognitive patterns (Campbell, 1973) based on the argument that a person can relate to a myth he is not previously familiar with it, and that myths, like other discourses, seem to talk through man without him knowing it (Lévi-Strauss, 1995). 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 the 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. Single persons do not make decisions: teamwork is the 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 myth 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.

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).

4. Method

4.1 The setting

The study takes place in a multinational company that five years before the study merged with another multinational company. A challenge was that both companies had unique processes and IT solutions. 2004 a project started with the mission to create centralized common core business processes and common core IT-system, infrastructure and approach. Decisions were taken to adapt best practice within the companies. In a pre-study all local production control and logistics processes were identified and mapped “as-is” and “to-be”. All present local systems were identified. An implementation and change management plan was developed. The project involves approximately 11000 people on different levels and from different countries. For the employees it will hopefully improve opportunities for job rotation and competence development. An important reason for the change was to exchange unique old IT-system to eliminate the risk for “single competencies” (i.e. unique competence on legacy systems) and reduce IT-cost.

The challenges for the project was to create a shared interpretation of the project objectives and a common strategy to reach them; to ensure that the project members share the same values, attitudes and behaviour; and to motivate end-users to adopt processes and new IT- systems.

In this case one of the authors is an industrial PhD student who is also working as a management consultant. In the following text we refer to her as “the facilitator”. The multinational company engages her during one year. In this role she has to act professional and as an “authority” by helping the change project to create understanding and knowledge of why the change should take place in the organization and to get people to act in accordance with new processes and systems.

In a beginning of a large change project like this most focus is to coach the project team and to have dialogues concerning the new business and IT processes with the plant members. One challenge is how to get 80 project members (different countries, different languages, internal and external consultants and own company employees) to act in a holistic way, to share the same attitude and behave so that the project reach determined objectives.

To go from a decentralized to a centralized way of driving logistics and production processes will demand a lot of change management activities concerning holistic views on processes and roles in the project. One success factor will be people’s involvement and their opportunity to use their experience, knowledge and personal skills. Values are then a very important factor.

The management of the buying company is trying to transfer its best practices concerning processes and IT-systems in a very centralized fashion to the company being bought.

Management has decided to implement four core values in the Business/IT change project: *Passion* - to work in the spirit of enthusiasm and joy which creates energy; *Creativity* - to be open minded and drives to see if there is other ways to solve problems or find new solutions; *Goal oriented* - to focus on common goals and less on own individual goals: and *Teamwork* - to collaborate and work holistic.

4.2 Reflective action research

Levin (2002) describe action research 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.

Producing knowledge about practice demands distance. For the project facilitator, who has double roles in the organization as both consultant and researcher, it was important not to get stuck in “taken for granted truths”, that is studying things that one already know or think one knows. There are three ways to keep distance to the practice: through self-reflection, dialogue and research (Bengtsson, 1993). These three ways were in the study implemented in three scientific tools used: diary, observations, and interviews guidance in the research sessions.

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 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.

During autumn 2004 it was decided to make the study as a reflective action research (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). To solve the research question, knowledge is generated in an interactive process in which actors act, reflect on their actions and pay attention to the way they generate new knowledge.

To separate this study from the facilitators common change management consultant tasks the authors decided to have special research sessions.

There were two reasons for that. *First*: In IT change projects there is normally no or little knowledge or experience of reflective action research or narrative method. *Second*: On the one hand the facilitator’s dependence as consultant will always influence the research, and this is important to reflect on. On the other hand, taking on the role as a researcher made it possible to reflect on the consultant role and to act more freely. As a paid consultant the customer expects “right and all”

answers from the facilitator in contrast to a researcher who wants the customer to interact to find the answer.

In this action research case, the change manager used myths, tales, and stories to *drive the change process*:

- 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.

4.3 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 was personally asked if he or she 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 three persons from the change management team (one manager and two consultants). The number of meetings were set to 7 occasions and a total of 40 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 driving the change management process.

First all participants gave their personal and professional view on how they perceived the project scope and how to drive the change. This gave everybody a good understanding of the others' presumptions about change management. 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 the change management process. It was seen as very important to find alternative way to motivate and engage people in the project. 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 the change management project 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 solution should be presented internally in the company. 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: create a discourse aimed at sharing different company views, and interpretations of history; develop a common vision for the future; engage the participants in creative activities; searching for action plans to reach desired goals; facilitate a collective prioritizing among action issues.

5. The Case: To find a narrative for driving the change management project

A series of six meetings were set up. The first three occasions dealt with the basics of myths and narratives, and with practicing how to tell and write good stories. The purpose was to develop personal skills in a narrative way of thinking. During the following three occasions, narratives were used to reach the change management project goals through narratives. The purpose was to develop the talent to analytically analyze and reflect on a myth, tale or a story into a change management perspective. Model 1. summarizes the result of the change management project.

A narrative (The hare and the snail)	Beginning	Middle	End
Change management plan	CM strategy & plan	Dialogue, knowledge,ownership, acceptans	Training
Business/ IT Project deliverables	Business case development	IT-system development	Implementation new processes and IT solutions

Model 1. The alignment of the change management plan and the narrative structure.

In the following text we will account for the creation of the different parts in the model. The process started with identifying the business and IT deliverables. These were compared with the different stages in the change management plan. Three phases were identified: beginning, middle and end. The

next step was to create an narrative that could drive the change management plan and there by included Business / IT deliverables. In the next sessions this process will be described.

Session 1 and 2: Introduction of the theory of narratives

The facilitator started the meeting with a three minute long 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 sad 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 favour. 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".

This introduction was successful. The group was attentive and engaged in their listening to the story. 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).

Another exercise was about listening to the narrative about “The wild boar and the tiger”. The purpose here was that the facilitator wanted to see if the participants could 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 goal here was to show how an animal story from India can give an explanation to how social organizations function, and that problems and challenges found in all organizations regarding power and co-existence can be described and conveyed in an old story.

After listening to the story the group discussed and reflected about the tale. They also compared situations in the story to situations and common challenges in the project.

Through the discussions an insight evolved 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.

Session 3 and 4: How to write stories

The next two sessions, lasting 6 hours each were introductions on how to write a story. First there was an individual exercise to write a story about something that was perceived as significant for that individual. Then each person presented the story for the group followed by a discussion about the individual story.

The idea was to learn how to write and present a story and to reflect on ones story together with others.

The participants enjoyed this very much. It was easy for each one to see the core components in the individual stories and the values and attitudes the authors wanted to communicate.

Next exercise was going through the phases in the approved change management plane for the Business/IT-project, the specific project steps and the steps in the approved IT-method. We then analysed the change management plan in comparison to the components of narratives (phases, hinders, roles etc).

Session 5: Analysing and reflection narratives perspective and change management perspective

Next session took 6 hours and was a rehearsal of narrative theory. The idea was to control what knowledge had been learnt and to get reflections from the participants. In order to do this, the story of “The Wizard of OZ” (phases and roles etc.) was used.

The group also had to do individual work by reading books about all kinds of myths, tales and stories. The task was to find useful narratives in relation to the Business/IT change project’s difficulties and possibilities.

The group found the session challenging. They enthusiastically worked with linking narratives to change management. Despite the positive feedback the group found it difficult to transform narratives to use them for managing change. It demands creativity and fantasy to find a myth, tale or a story as a metaphor for describing the challenge, phases, and roles that the change project is about.

Session 6: Analytical session: to transform the change management project into a narrative context

In this session the facilitator went through the values in the Business/IT-change project: passion, creativity, goal focus and teamwork. The group could not by themselves find a narrative for the change project, so the facilitator suggested a myth and a tale to inspire group.

One myth and one tale were proposed that the facilitator considered were communicating the values passion, creativity, teamwork and goal focus. These stories also included the typical narrative phases and roles. The examples were “The Trojan Horse” and “The Hare and the Snail”.

The group members read and discussed the narratives by themselves. The group then choose “The Hare and the Snail” to be used in the change project. The task was to choose the narratives with most relevance for the change project, but the group was not satisfied with the stories in their original form. The “Hare and the Snail” was chosen, but the group also reworked the original narrative into a version that according to them better suited their goal. The group finally presented the following version of the story:

The hare and the snail

The hare was hopping along, but suddenly stopped in mid-hop. He’d arrived at the edge of a road, and he really didn’t like roads. “Get across as quickly as possible,” he thought to himself. Then he caught sight of a snail. It was black and long and straight, and it was moving along the road, its antennae stretched ahead.

The hare puckered up its eyebrows in puzzlement, looking for the snail’s legs and feet.

“Why do you have only one foot?” he asked.

“Because that’s the way things should be,” answered the snail. “One goal and one foot. If you have more feet, like you do, then one foot will want to go one way and the second another way, and you’ll get nowhere at all.”

”I’ll get nowhere?” laughed the hare. “To me it looks like you’re the one who’s getting nowhere. So where exactly are you headed?”

“See that tree over there? The one that’s taller than all the others?” asked the snail and pointed with its

”Call that a tree? That poky little thing that’s barely standing, poking every which way with its bare branches?” said the hare. “In the forest, let me tell you, trees look a lot different.”

“The forest – what a barbaric word!” sniffed the snail. “Along this road, all the trees have been trimmed, every branch and every leaf has its own predetermined place and significance.

Because each of these trees is a milestone on the road to victory. Never mind, be off with you and try to understand that you have no business bothering people who are on the right road.”

“Hold on, I’ve changed my mind,” said the hare. I’m determined to overcome my fear of roads and follow this road all the way to the goal and see how things work out. And I’m pretty sure I’ll get there before you do.”

“Well, if you want to race, I dare say I’ll meet your challenge,” said the snail and shot a sneering glance at the hare’s strange legs.

The hare started right on the signal and shot off at high speed. But he was immediately recalled by the fox, who had been appointed to judge the competition between the hare and the snail.

“Here, are you deaf and blind?” shouted the fox. “Didn’t you hear that every tree here is a milestone along the road to the Ultimate Goal? And don’t you understand that you have to stop at each and every one of them and pay homage, awaiting a new starting signal?”

“I hadn’t really reflected on that,” answered the hare. “I’ve got to think a bit about this first.”

The hare lay down. He looked from tree to tree with distaste.

“I don’t like this one bit,” he mumbled. “I think there’s something scary about this long row of mutilated trees. Milestones! Homage! It’s crazy!”

He turned and looked back toward the snail, which was pulling itself forward slowly but surely. With the emphasis on slowly.

The hare relaxed, and soon he was asleep. But he dreamed he was running. The magpies up in the trees saw how his legs twitched.

He woke up with a sudden start. And at that very instant the snail reached the finishing line and was being congratulated by crowds of animals who normally were mortal enemies of one another but who had now got together to honour the victor.

The hare took a few hesitant steps forward. Then he just sat back and glared with his big round eyes. And he couldn't believe his ears either, because all around him he could hear shouts of "The snail is faster than the hare!"

"I absolutely refuse to accept this!" shouted the hare as loud as he could. But nobody heard him.

He forced his way through the crowd to the fox.

"Look, you're smart and intelligent, and you certainly have a way with words. By all means claim that the snail has more perseverance than I have, but when it comes to speed, there's absolutely no comparison," he appealed.

"Listen, my friend," said the fox severely, "had you forgotten that this was a race? In every race there are rules. You dreamt that you were running, but in reality you didn't take a single step towards the goal. And that's what the race was about – the first to reach the Victory Tree would be declared the winner.

"What difference does it make if you are fast, if you can't persevere long enough to reach the goal?"

Mutual presentation of the change project in a narrative form

It was planned that the change manager in the action research team should tell the tale "The Hare and the Snail" for the whole change project team during a workshop day. 80 people from the whole project were gathered to be informed and to have discussions concerning the status in the project. That was the first step to introduce the narrative approach to the whole change project.

Unfortunately the time schedule didn't allow the change manager to end the day with this story. The plan was then to launch it at the next change management event later in 2005.

6. Discussion

The change management project has many participants with different ideas on how to reach the project goals. How can we in this context use the power of narratives to drive the change management in order to reach the objectives? This was the research question introduced in the beginning of the paper.

The first step for the group was to find a narrative that can be used as a metaphor for the whole project. A Narrative that includes similar challenges hinders, possibilities, roles etc in another context. The group had to learn how to put something known in an unknown context. This could be a way to reach people and motivate them in a deeper way.

At the beginning it was hard for the group to change mindset. The facilitator had to lead the sessions and guide them to split the approved change management plan and the Business/IT project deliverables in three different stages. These sessions resulted in a model (figure 1) that made it easier for the group to see the three dimensions together.

This model would help the project members to know where in the project process they are. What kind of challenges, hinders, possibilities, and roles characterize this phase and what distinguish the phase from the others phases in the change management process.

The group decided that the most important parts are to inform and create understanding for the values in the project (passion, creativity, goal focus and teamwork). That is one success factor in order to reach the project objectives. The group then choose the tale “the hare and the snail to be used in the change project”. The beginning of the tale is about the meeting between the hare and the snail. In the project the first phase is to inform about vision, goals, strategies and group dynamics issues (for example values, attitudes, behaviour).

We can see that the group could identify from the text the value *Teamwork* from example the phrase:

“Because that’s the way things should be,” answered the snail. “One goal and one foot. If you have more feet, like you do, then one foot will want to go one way and the second another way, and you’ll get nowhere at all.”

The value *Goal focus* they found from for example the phrase:

“Hold on, I’ve changed my mind,” said the hare. I’m determined to overcome my fear of roads and follow this road all the way to the goal and see how things work out. And I’m pretty sure I’ll get there before you do.”

“Well, if you want to race, I dare say I’ll meet your challenge,” said the snail and shot a sneering glance at the hare’s strange legs.

The commonality vision is one of the goals in the project. It is obvious that the 80 members of the project will have different opinions. The tale makes it possible to get a distance and to see this task in a *humoristic way*. *When people hear below phrase they can smile.*

”Call that a tree? That poky little thing that’s barely standing, poking every which way with its bare branches?” said the hare. “In the forest, let me tell you, trees look a lot different.”

To reach the objective it is important for the project that everyone knows their roles and responsibilities. Some people in the project don't find this so important and some find it very important. The change manager wants to express the importance of this and you can also hear it in the tale:

"The forest – what a barbaric word!" sniffed the snail. "Along this road, all the trees have been trimmed, every branch and every leaf has its own predetermined place and significance.

The change management group did try to create a story where the values and objectives of the change process are conveyed. It is interesting that the group took the original tale and reconstructed it in order to present it at the first mutual meeting with all the project members.

The group have transformed the original tale to this form. To construct the story so it fits into the way they want to express the change management process. They have also put their own reflection from the tale in the last phrase:

"What difference does it make if you are fast, if you can't persevere long enough to reach the goal?"

In all organizations it is common that all projects starts with an introduction concerning the method and approach to be used in the project. (This project will continue for at least four years.) In our case the method was narratives.

We found it natural to separate this group exercises in three parts. *Preparation*: To let the group be introduced in narrative theory and practise. From these exercises we can conclude that it is easy to get attention by introducing a myth. People find it interesting, and joyful to listen and reflect around narratives. *Accomplishment*: We could also see that even though they find it very challenge to see the potential in a feasible myth, tale or at story an then mapped this one in a change management process they find it very difficult to do it by themselves. In this case the facilitator first tried to see if they could produce an organizational story on their own to represent the Business /IT change project. The result was no. They tried to write a story called " from spike to loaf" to represent the project. The story was too thin to use. It would have taken to long time to develop the story with all components as a myth or a tale.

The reflection here is that it takes time to develop this accomplishment through analytic procedure. The group must be very familiar and focused on the change management issues. They also need to learn how to transform this knowledge in a narrative context.

To reflect over the insight and meaning from myths, tales and stories need a lot of time and creativity. Maybe that will always be an issue for the facilitator in cases like this. It takes maybe years to get this skill to transform narratives to a shape useful in change management processes?

The last part was to introduce the narrative for the whole Business/IT change project group. Unfortunately the change manager did not get the chance because of the delayed schedule on the planned workshop day. Therefore we cannot see the effect on the whole group yet.

Next part will then be to introduce the tale “The Hare and the Snail” within the whole group in the Business/IT change project to communicate the values, attitudes and behaviour in a narrative context. We will then evaluate what impact the narrative approach had on the project.

The purpose behind using narratives is to give the change management work a more solid base and allow the participants to see their contribution in a larger context. This will, we argue, increase their motivation to change, as well as increase their willingness to accept new roles and ways of thinking in a changed organization.

7. Conclusions

In this paper we have described a reflective action research in which myths and stories were used as a *driver* in order to facilitate change work on both individual and group level. The first three occasions dealt with the basics of myths and narratives, and with practicing how to tell and write good stories. On the last three occasions the sessions focused on finding a narrative that could be used as a metaphor for the entire project. The narrative included similar challenges, hinders, possibilities, roles etc as the change project itself but in another context.

Even if we cannot draw any bold conclusions from the results so far, some issues have been 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. The facilitator also must be able to communicate this to the group and use various forms of exercises to make the group enter a narrative mode of thinking.

Talking about the myth and its actors helps people not to be stuck in their prevailing mindsets, linked to the current state of affairs in the organization. Using myths and narratives seem to be a possible way to communicate and infuse the values inherent in the narrative to the change project at hand. Narratives makes it possible for members of the organization to embrace the change work according to their own cultural preferences, as a way of coping with organizational cultural diversity that has been addressed by the literature as a recurring problem.

Using narratives was completely new in the studied organization. By using this approach, the group has worked in a completely different way than they are used to. It did, however, work well as an enabler for creating an inventive environment.

The purpose behind using narratives is to give the change management work a new approach and stimulate the participants to see their contributions in a larger context. This can increase their motivation to change, as well as increase their willingness to accept new roles and ways of thinking in a changing organization.

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