

WHO IS LEADING, LEADER OR STORY?

The Power of Stories to Lead

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Introduction

Narrative research has become more and more common in business and organization studies over the last two decades (Barry & Elmes 1997; Czarniawska 1995, 1997; Boje 2001). Behind the emergence of the narrative turn in business studies lies the linguistic turn, which has its background in philosophy (see Rorty [1967] 1992; Fisher 1985). Generally, philosophers have been interested in the problems of language and its role in human life and existence for a long time. There have been debates on such issues as to what extent philosophical questions are basically linguistic questions or, ontologically, what is the relation between language and reality (whatever the latter is)? These debates have reverberated in organization studies such that organizational reality has come under consideration from the linguistic and discursive point of view. (Grant & Keenoy & Osrick 1997.)

Organizational reality has been conceived of as, at least in part, discursively constructed. Discourse has been understood as language usage. Where as a formal language system (grammar) exists outside of time, place or situation, discourse is bound to temporal and spatial presence and immediacy. It matters how language is used in organizations because linguistic conventions and styles form and shape discourses which define the conceptions of reality and prevailing practices. Thus, stories as discursive entities, in whatever

situations they appear in organization, also participate substantially in the formation of organizational reality. (Fisher 1985; Bruner 1991; Gergen & Thatchenkery 2006; Broekstra 1998; Woodilla 1998; Brown & Humphreys 2003; Phillips 1995; Phillips & Lawrence & Hardy 2004; Weick & Sutcliffe & Obstfeld 2005.)

In this article we focus on how stories are engaged with power in organizations. We do not examine leaders as such, but how stories they tell may have power to lead. Thus the definition of leader or leadership is quite narrow. Several definitions of leadership have emphasized the idea that leadership is a process whereby somebody influences a group of people (Northouse 2004). Thus is a matter of interaction which occurs between a leader and her/his followers. Because this study focuses on power of stories, not the interaction between a leader and followers, it is not necessary to define leadership more profoundly.

Here we are also following the idea presented by Parry & Hansen (2007) that a story can be seen as leader. Because of this, our main research question is that how stories can lead? Our argument, which we elaborate below in the theoretical part of this article, is that it is the stories which are leading.

The linkage between stories and leading in an organization is based on the ability of stories to mediate and shape organizational reality. Stories are able to

convey knowledge, values and emotions in the organization (Gherardi & Poggio 2007). Thus, they have an influence on the organizational culture, and on the atmosphere, trust, understanding of strategy and everyday flow of information in an organization. However, it is worth noticing that although stories are occasionally mentioned as tools for the management (e.g. Denning 2005), we do not take it for granted that the use of stories in management is mechanistic or fully controllable. Instead, in the discursive world the producer of an utterance cannot completely control how her/his utterance will be received and understood. (Ricoeur 1991a, 1991b; Gadamer 2004; Schütz [1932] 2007.)

There are certain questions which require elaboration when studying power of stories to lead in the context of organization. First, to enable the inquiry of the relation between stories and power in general, one must consider narrative ontology and epistemology. In the case of narrative ontology, we ask how human beings in the world are mediated by stories and how stories construct social reality. If a human being is conceived of as a creature who is capable of understanding the world, other human beings and her/himself, as this article proposes, the meaning-mediated relation between a human being and her/his world and life must be dissected.

Second, when inquiring into the effects of storytelling on organizational reality, issues concerning power should be recognized. Traditionally power has seen as a sovereign relation between a leader and her/his followers, and that a leader's task as getting her/his followers to do what s/he wants, including what they would not otherwise do (Clegg 1998; Clegg et al 2006). A leader can exert her/his personal authority or her/his position in the organization or use various coercive means. However, the traditional concept of power is far too simple and misleading, and thus uninteresting for an inquiry into storytelling leadership. It simplifies the power relations of organization into individual relations and

ignores the discursive character of meaning-mediated organizational reality. It is misleading because organizational stories are a part of the discursive world and thus out of reach of the traditional concept of power. Thus we are focussing here on the idea of disciplinary power.

Third, the focus is on language, specially the use of language, i.e. discourses. A leader uses language in an organization to enunciate something about the character of the organizational reality, and these utterances have meaning in the organization. The utterances may be speech, written texts, arguments or other kinds of diverse discursive representations. These utterances are usually referred as discursive practices (see Clegg 1998; Clegg et al 2006). This directs our attention especially to the process of interpretation of stories and to the elements of a story according to which meanings are constructed.

Thus, we start the elaboration with a following configuration and proposition. A leader tells stories which have some kind of a structure and content, and narration occurs in a social situation and at a particular time. The storytelling situation creates a relation between narrator and listeners, which situates the leader as a narrator and the followers as listeners both joined in membership of the situation and knowledge delivered and mediated in the situation (cf. Lyotard 1985). This membership constitutes the basic precondition for storytelling leadership, because without it there cannot be a relation between narrator and listeners which enables the reception, interpretation and understanding of the stories told.

But, we add some critical points which stems from postmodern narrative theory (see Parry & Hansen 2007; Boje 2008). We do not take it for granted that stories have a tight formal structure always and their meanings are fixed by the storyteller. Instead, stories in an organization appear as dispersed and there emerge wide range of interpretations in

various kinds of discursive practices. Here we focus on the power of a story to lead.

The Data

The empirical data consist of thematic interviews. The interviews took place during September 2005 - July 2007. Altogether 12 individuals were interviewed, of whom seven were from the strategic echelon (member of management group) and five from the operative echelon (middle management and supervisors). Eight of the interviewees were male and four female, and varied in age from less than 30 years to nearly 70 years.

The interviewees were in superior position in their organizations and they were from both the public and private sector organizations and from different lines of business (e.g. banking business, forestry industry and municipal administration). The duration of each interview was on average approximately 1 hour 20 min and every interview took place in each interviewee's office. All the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed (totalling some 120 pages of transcribed interview text).

The process of selecting interviewees was done of two phases: in the first phase we looked for individuals, who are known as storytelling leaders (both in media and random organizations). What made these individuals as leaders was that they all participated to the process of influencing other people by telling stories, and they were nominated as having this skill by their colleagues. We found 14 individuals, and these we contacted in the second phase. Eventually 12 individuals agreed to an interview. The identity of each interviewee is coded (hidden) for research ethical reasons.

Our data sets a limit to the scope of the empirical analysis. We can not analyse how the stories told by the interviewees were received in the organizations they were told. Our data consists only of interviews with the leaders, not with other members of the organizations. Thus we concentrate on the stories themselves in our

analysis. Our purpose is to investigate linguistic elements in the stories which convey such meanings which may be descriptive, prescriptive and contain ethical principles. By this definition we delimit our analysis to concern only the stories, not how the personnel interpret them. Instead of interpreting stories on behalf of the personnel, we interpret the stories as any other kind of symbols or cultural manifestations. These interpretations are based on collectively shared frameworks of understanding.

Stories, discourse and power

Understanding Stories in Organization

In this section we discuss about and elaborate the conditions thorough which the understanding of stories is possible both in the general and in the organizational context. Understanding requires that the stories and life, and vice versa, have something to do with each other. Stories must resemble life in one way or another, and one must be able to recount life in narrative form. The same also holds in organizations: organizational stories must resemble life and the action which takes place in organizations. This resemblance does not mean that all such stories have to occur in organizations themselves; instead, stories need to consist of features or content which have meaning and relevance to the members of the organization. For example, the content of a story may include some kind of moral lesson or precept. In elaborating the relation between stories and life we follow Ricoeur (1991a), and start with the same problem or paradox: stories are recounted, not lived; life is lived not recounted.

There seems to be an insurmountable gap between life and story. In trying to surmount that gap, attempts must be made from both sides. From the side of life there is the question of how a story can imitate life; from the side of story, the question is: what are the features of life which recall narration? From the

hermeneutical point of view stories mediate three relations: between a man and her/his world, between a man and other human beings, and between a man and her/himself. In the first relation it is a matter of referentiality, i.e. the ways in which a story refers to a world somewhere. The second relation is about communication, and the third relation reflects self-understanding. (Ricoeur 1991a.) Hence, analysis of the plain inner structures of a story does not reach the world in which people, and also leaders in organizations, recount their stories. Furthermore, we notice that an inquiry into leaders' stories is situated in the field of hermeneutics when the meaning relations between stories and organizational reality are being dissected.

How a story can become closer to life as lived? Ricoeur (1991a) argues that no text is completed until in the act of reading. According to Ricoeur (1991a), a text is discourse which is fixed by inscription. Inscription transforms an evanescent discourse into a temporally constant text. This feature of a text makes it possible to return over and over again into a text. While discourse disappears in time, constant text can be interpreted and reinterpreted. Stories may also reach a text-like constancy when they become memorialized into folklore or oral tradition of an organization. Thus stories which are a part of organizational oral tradition can be considered as texts.

Here reading refers more widely to the different ways texts are received than in the every day reading words, which is based on the visual perception of letters. No text in itself contains a comprehensive set of codes which enables its complete interpretation and full understanding. Instead, texts open up a variety of worlds for reading and interpretation and understanding emerges when the meaning horizons of the text and the reader encounter each other. Text in itself is not a closed entity, but a projection which opens up a new and not-yet-experienced world (Ricoeur 1991a). In the case of a story, reading opens up an inexperienced horizon

of meanings which consists of different actions, characters and plotted events.

Thus, understanding a text requires fusion of the horizons of meanings between a text and a reader (Gadamer 2004), and this occurs in the act of reading (Ricoeur 1991a). In the act of reading the expectations offered by a text and a reader's experiences of life converge. With the help of the imagination these expectations and experiences become interpreted, and the reader's life has membership in the world of a story. Reading a text connects the reader to the horizon of meanings opened by the story, and the understanding of a text occurs through the reader's horizon of experiences. Thus, stories are not only recounted, but they are also lived in the imagination. This is how a story as a text becomes closer to life as lived. In the organizational context, this is also the basis for the understanding of the stories that leaders tell.

How does life come closer to story? Ricoeur (1991a; 1991b) proposes three ways in which life comes closer to story. The first is what he calls the semantics of action. Human action becomes meaningful through the concepts of natural languages in such a way that it is understood as aims, projects, circumstances, states of affairs etc. In this sense meaningful action differs from physical movements and behaviour. Meaningful action includes a subjective sense of reason for the actor (Schütz [1932] 2007). Behaviour may seem to be an unintentional reaction to stimuli, but action is meaningful in a way or another for the actor. What is important is that the meaning of action arises from the concepts which accompany action. The ability to understand action through concepts provides action with same kind of structure that stories have: action is organized in relation to time, space and human sense of reason.

Second, understanding of action is based on symbolic resources which consist of signs, rules and norms which mediate and articulate the meanings of action. Without these symbolic resources the

recounting of action is not possible. As human beings we all share an immanent arsenal of symbolic means of expression which constitute the contexts and conventions for the depiction of actions, and rules by which to understand an action in a certain time and place. Symbolic resources exist before a certain action is performed and thus they are initial conditions for the legibility of that action. For example, a gesture, such as the sudden closing and opening of an eyelid, can be interpreted as wink, and thus not only as a mechanical and physiological tic. (Ricoeur 1991a; about wink see Ryle [1949] 1990; Geertz 1973.)

Third, understanding action is not limited only to the resemblance between action and its conceptual descriptions, nor the symbolic mediation of this resemblance. In the broadest sense action can be seen as containing temporal structures which call for becoming recounted. Ricoeur (1991a, 29-30) speaks here about the “pre-narrative quality of human experience” and refers to stories which are not yet told. Such potential stories exist, for example, in courtrooms or in psychotherapy sessions, in which the story is constructed during the session. In this sense action and life contain a temporal structure which is congruent with a plot of a story, and this structure becomes articulated when a potential story comes into existence.

From the ontological point of view the possibility of using stories in organizations is tied to the idea that there a resemblance exists between story and life, even though they never fully meet or merge. It is also the basic condition of the understanding stories told by a leader.

Epistemology of leaders' stories

The epistemological question is: what kind of knowledge do stories convey? Stories that a leader tells in an organization have functions similar to those of stories in general: teaching/learning, advice, delivery of values, diversion of actions etc. This is why we focus on ideas according to the dimensions of knowledge as proposed by Lyotard (1985).

What is knowledge and what its relation is to stories? Usually the knowledge which stories convey is considered to cover a broader area than modern academic or scientific knowledge. Scientific knowledge is typically enunciated by denotative clauses. The clauses depict the state of affairs or phenomenon, and they can be proved true or false. The knowledge that appears in stories is not limited only to expressions in denotative utterances, but also consists of expressions which say something about what is right or wrong, equity and fairness (ethical utterances), beauty and gracefulness (aesthetic utterances), or they demand that people to do something (prescriptive utterances). (Lyotard 1985; Fisher 1985; Cohn 2006.) In addition, utterances may have a performative function, i.e. we do something by saying (cf. Austin 1962). Thus stories are capable to convey a wide body of knowledge which can be applied to the social world and to life itself. This is also the case in the organizational context and with leaders' stories, in which the knowledge they impart is not typically scientific but more as the common sense kind.

The connection between utterances and the social world surrounding them defines the validity, eligibility and adequateness of the knowledge mediated by stories, also in cases without a particular claim to truth. Knowledge that stories convey becomes assessed in relation to collective conceptions of ethics, models of action and ideas about reality, whether a matter of evaluative, inciting, encouraging or descriptive utterances. This does not mean that such utterances have to be accepted or are in line with collective conceptions, but they must be available for social assessment and negotiation through shared codes of meaning (Lyotard 1985). In this study our aim is to trace such utterances in stories which reflect the manner how stories have power. This aim is based on the feature of stories that they can convey denotative, aesthetic and prescriptive utterances.

As an intermediary form of knowledge, stories interpolate the narrator and the listeners in to the social order. This emphasizes both the situational feature of the narration and the structures and content of stories. Narrations are often institutionalized in such a way that only certain actors have the right, duty, responsibility or power to recount stories in a certain place and time. This privileged position may be based on age, gender, social rank or occupational group. (Lyotard 1985.) In organizations this position is usually imposed to leaders, or leaders have, at least, a special role when organizational stories are recounted. Social positioning is not merely determined by faceless institutions, but also by the narration itself (Lyotard 1985). Listeners become participants to the story when the narrator recounts the story explicitly to them. Thus, the situation of the narration produces social inclusion and exclusion.

Presence in the situation is not, however, the only criterion for membership, because a story may contain elements which make listeners partakers by positing them as characters in the story or getting them to perform certain tasks. In our case, personnel of the organization are incorporated into the mountain story. They are immanent participants of the story, regardless of their appearance in the situation of narration.

Power of stories that leaders tell

The concept of power requires a clear comment in inquiring into leaders' stories. Because the stories told by leaders and stories in general, produce and shape organizational reality in a discursive manner (Boje 2001; Czarniawska 1995, 1997; Parry & Hansen 2007), the traditional conception of sovereign power does not apply here. Sovereign power means direct command, and can be illustrated in the following way: A getting B to do something that B wouldn't otherwise do. (Foucault 1980 [1975]; Clegg 1998; Gordon 2006). There are two reasons why we distance us from the concept of

sovereign power. First, stories cannot have this kind of coercive influence on something or somebody. Although stories consist of prescriptions, advice, rules, ethical principles and values, they do not in themselves compel anyone to act. Second, the idea of sovereign power does not recognize the discursive character of the construction of reality. It is assumed, mechanically and realistically, that in the exercise of power there clearly exists a subject, who uses that power, and an object, who is the target of that use of power.

The idea of disciplinary power, presented by Foucault (1980 [1975]) is more suitable for an inquiry into the power of leaders' stories. The core idea of disciplinary power is that power appears anonymously through diversified institutional practices which regulate and shape the actions of individual agents. Disciplinary power does not result from the exercise of sovereign power. Instead, it grows gradually in through negotiation by and between multiple institutional agents and is mediated by discursive practices. Furthermore, its regulative function is based on its ability discursively to create and maintain a sense of normality in people's everyday lives. (Clegg 1998; Clegg et al 2006 Gordon 2006.)

Moreover, it is relevant to ask what kinds of agents are able or entitled to define or regulate conceptions of reality and normality. In the case of leaders' stories, a leader does not have the kind of sovereign power that could be used to compel subordinates to do things which they wouldn't do otherwise. But, by telling stories, a leader can participate, as one agent among others, in the discourses which define the organizational action and reality. The discursive definition of organizational reality consists not only of descriptive utterances, but also of prescriptive, normative and ethical utterances, i.e. utterances which say something about how things should be or what is valued in the organization. Starting point for our analysis is that the mountain

story participates to the construction of the organizational reality by being a discursive element which shapes the imagery of the organization.

What, then, is the power of leader in organization if s/he is not exercising sovereign power? Parry & Hansen (2007) have stretched the anonymity of the leader to its extreme by arguing that leaders do not lead by telling stories, but that stories do the leading. This is an interesting viewpoint, but also challenging. It presupposes that the position of the speaking subject is minimal, almost non-existent. It is like the concept of the voice in a story (cf. Genette 1980) which refers to an idea that in a story told by a leader it is not of a leader her/himself who is narrating it, but it is an internal narrator of a story. Thus, in this case, a relation between speaker and listener is not taken for granted. It follows that no causality exists between a leader's intention and the actions of the listeners. It also implies that stories cannot function, to quite a commonly employed metaphor, as tools for a leader (cf. Denning 2005; Clark & Salaman 1996).

In taking up the gauntlet of investigating the claim that stories themselves have the power to lead, the first task is to examine the impressiveness of stories. We use the term impressiveness instead of influence because it indicates looseness of the relation between story and organization. We consider that the term influence refers more to the causality between stories and actions in an organization that is suggested by impressiveness. The traditional conception of causality does not fit into the discursive and storytelling approach. Causality was defined by Hume in 1874 in terms of cause and effect (Niiniluoto 2007). In Hume's definition cause is an entity from which another entity follows, thus all former entities are always and necessarily followed by the subsequent entities. Furthermore, there is a temporal difference between the existence of cause and effect: cause always emerges before effect. Causality is also asymmetrical. If A is a cause of B, B cannot be a cause of A.

We argue that causality as described above cannot exist between a story told by a leader and the action occurring in an organization. It necessitates that every story, A, told by a leader, will always and inevitably be followed by action, B, on the part of the members of the organization. Thus the idea of causality should be understood more loosely, by asking, how is the impressiveness of a story created?

Psychological type of causality cannot be properly applied in the argument that stories do the leading, as it is based on the idea that action is caused by an actor's belief and will that s/he will act in a certain situation in a certain manner. Hence the motivation to act emerges from a psychological state of mind (Laitinen 2007; Dancy 2000). For example, person X acts in a certain way, because s/he believes that someone else, person Y, needs that kind of action, and this also creates the will to act. Nevertheless, this approach leaves open the question about the basis for the belief and will of person X. Thus, instead of a psychological state of mind, one should direct the attention to the state of affairs, i.e. the situation itself and its social context. (Laitinen 2007.) The situation itself imposes certain social norms, values and normative demands on the actors. The will to act a certain manner is to accept the normative demands which the situation sets, externally to the actor.

In an organization, it is the organizational culture which sets and conveys the motivating social norms and values. Discursive elements, which evaluate, advise and define the social action in the organization, become sediment in organizational culture. (Alvesson & Berg 1992; Parker 2000; Trice & Beyer 1993; Hancock & Tyler 2001.) These elements produce the conception of a state of affairs, which may motivate the actors. This is the basis for the impressiveness of the organizational culture. Furthermore, if stories also participate in the construction of the organizational culture, it is reasonable to claim that stories have power to lead. In

other words, stories which become sediment in the organizational culture produce an organizational reality which can become institutionalized as the normative basis for the exercise of Foucaultian disciplinary power. In organizations some stories acquire hegemony, but the position of the narrator may also have an influence on the process of sedimentation.

The Task of Analysis

In the introduction we argued that, first, there are two dimensions in the telling of stories by a leader, the structure of the story itself and narration as a social event. However, our data limit the analysis such that we have only indirect access to the social situation. The data do not cover storytelling events as such, but consist only of descriptions of those situations by the leaders interviewed. Thus we have decided to analyse the data on two levels. The first level consists of the stories proper which are embedded in the interview speech and which have an identifiable plot. These are the stories which the interviewed leaders have recounted to their followers. The second level consists of the speech in context, where the leaders describe and ponder the situations in which the stories were told.

Secondly, we stated that our starting point is inquiring into how the stories can be said to lead. Thus the purpose is not to investigate whether or how the leader's intention has been realized in the organization. We also posed the questioning of what a leader means by her/his story. In addition, we proposed that there can be no direct causality, cause and effect, between the stories told by a leader and the actions taking place in an organization. Instead, we suggested that stories may become impressive in an organization by becoming sedimented in the organizational culture. Thus, stories can define and shape conceptions of organizational reality and motivate action.

These two starting points define our research task and data analysis. The

aim of our analysis, then, is to investigate the prescriptive, descriptive and ethical elements included in stories proper to see how it is that stories are able to lead. Prescriptive elements concern what someone should or must do. It is not only a matter of imperatives or commands, but more general tendency to get someone to act in a desired way. Stories set states of affairs in narrative form which in turn, should motivate the action. These states of affairs also contain ethical elements which justify the action in a given state of affairs. Because stories in themselves, regardless of the narrator, consist of prescriptive and ethical elements, they are able to function as leaders. Furthermore, stories also need descriptive elements, which depict the states of affairs.

We applied actant analysis, as developed by A. J. Greimas (1979) to investigate the relations between the actors appearing in the stories told, with the aim of trying to make visible the normative and ethical elements which could motivate these actors. The actant model posits six actants all of which are present in all stories. Here we do not use actant analysis to find universal elements in the stories, but as a heuristic means to perform a practical analysis. Actants in stories function to initiate and further the action. These actants are: the subject, which is the central actor of the story or sequence of a story; the object, the objective or target of the action of the subject; the sender, which assigns the subject a mission and motivates the subject to achieve the object; the receiver, goal or destination of the story or process in which the action becomes evaluated; the helper, which supports the subject in the latter's mission; and the villain, which tries to forestall the fulfilment of the subject's aims. Although there are only six actants, there may be manifested by unlimited number of actors in particular stories.

The case analysis

We start with a story we have named “The mountain”. Its context is the economic crisis in the banking business which took place in Finland at the 1990s. It is a story told by a bank manager and its topic is how the crisis was coped with. It contains many metaphors and it is actually constructed from metaphors. A metaphor is a figure of speech which transfers meaning from the source domain to the target domain by resemblance, and simultaneously creates a new understanding about the target domain (Morgan 1997; Fiske 1992; Ricoeur 1977; Fiumara 1995; Grant & Oswick 1996; Cazal & Inns 1998). Hence, the metaphors in the stories told by a leader can also create new understanding of the organizational reality.

The following extract from the interview contains both the story proper, i.e. The mountain, and the contextual speech of the leader. It was originally a continuous sequence of speech, but we have divided it into three parts for easier reading. These are the core metaphor, i.e. the presentation of mountain metaphor, the explanation of the metaphor, and the sub-metaphors with their explanations. The name of the organization is concealed for ethical reasons and in the extract it is named as Bank X.

This [story] was constructed when our brand new banking business started up in the autumn of 1996. It had progressed so far ... there were some 100 people working on that project, and it was being done merely bit by bit. We drew a picture of our vision, which - surprise, surprise [refers to an earlier story of constructing the triangle model about the vision and strategy of their bank] - was a picture of a mountain that was reminiscent of a triangle. So ... there's this mountain there, there are also some other mountains behind it ... On the mountain there are various ledges and the sun is shining ...

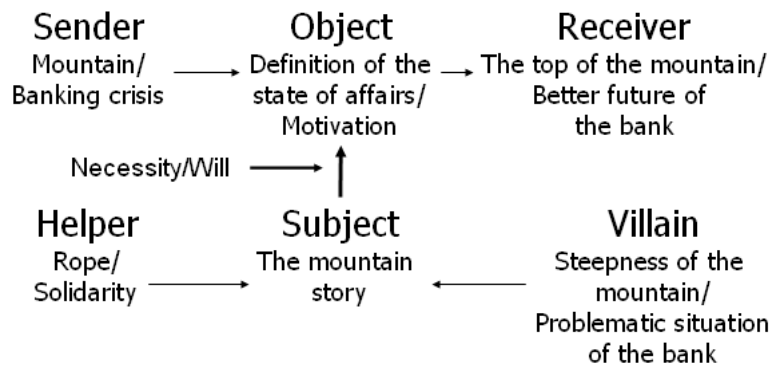
the higher up you are, the warmer it is. Then we drew the employees of Bank X all along the mountainside and they all had backpacks on their backs ... you can see them climbing there ... They are all connected by a rope. They are all hanging onto that, and our slogan became “we will do it”. It was about encouraging, maybe spurring people on [at the time of the bank crisis], and we wanted to frame this picture and hang it on the walls, for all of the units ... for suitable places. We were creating confidence that our new bank would rise up, and make it all the way to the top.

Here the story is also that ... when you put this backpack on, you will possess all the required know-how. You have all the equipment you need to ascend in the banking business. And the idea of the rope was that no-one will fall by the wayside ... that everyone will be supported and everyone's knowledge is needed and so on. And this was the wild thing about it, it soon became as a slogan ... It was suitable, because it was like the history of the crisis situation that the banking business was in. We had to establish a brand new bank, and these people had been in very wretched situation for 5 years and not knowing whether or not the activity here will go on, or how it will go on. It was excellent in this situation that the whole gang, who were all there on the mountainside and everyone will be supported, and we put even better equipments in the backpacks and then ... that everyone had their hands firmly on the rope, no-one will fall. Instead, they are hankering to ascend up there, to sunnier meadows” (S2, Chief executive officer)

We apply actant analysis by modelling The mountain story from two directions. First, we posit the story itself as the subject actant with the aim of examining the descriptive, prescriptive and ethical utterances that the story contains. Second, we model the story from the point of view of the listeners by positing the personnel as the subject actant. Here we also utilize the second level of the

data, i.e. the text surrounding the embedded story. The purpose of this modelling is also to examine the elements which would motivate action. Model 1 illustrates the actant setting in The mountain. For every actant an interpretation of the metaphor is given.

Model 1



The mountain appears as the central metaphor and its purpose is to define the state of affairs which is present in the story. The mountain signifies the situation of the bank in the context of the banking crisis prevailing at the time in Finland. Furthermore, the definition of the state of affairs appears as the object actant: the bank is in economic crisis. The definition focuses on the inner situation of the bank, and it is directed towards the personnel of the bank. The Sender is the economic crisis of the banking business in Finland in general. It initiates the action, which is improvement in the economic status of the bank. The top of the mountain represents the better future of the bank, and is the Receiver. The meaning of the top is dual. There are two symbols of a better future: to reach the summit is to reach sunlight (away from darkness) and warmth (away from chilliness). The direction of the proposed action is uphill and the task of the personnel is to climb the mountain. Solidarity, represented by the rope, is an important

element of the metaphorical climb and thus it is the Helper. The steepness of the mountain, defined as the Villain, illustrates the hardship caused by the economic crisis and the problematic situation of the bank.

The mountain metaphor itself is the descriptive element of the story. It defines the state of affairs in relation to space and time. It organizes the imaginary space such that it also manifests the system of power implied in the metaphor. In the foucaultian (1980 [1975]) sense the mountain metaphor sets limits on the zone in which the disciplinary power of the organization is effective, and on the actors in the zone. Here the space occupied by the personnel is limited to the mountainside, which represents the inside of organization. In this definition the personnel are seen as striving towards a common goal as a group, not as individuals. Thus, it is not only a matter of confining the personnel within their organization, but also assigning them the same and shared task. By this way the mountain metaphor limits the personnel's

field of action, orders the direction of the action and tries to forestall the possibility of deviant action. The rope as a metaphor of solidarity is of special interest. It links the personnel spatially and excludes nonconformists. The rope has also prescriptive feature: those who do not tie themselves to the rope, will fall. Hence, one must tie oneself to the rope and commit oneself to the goal of organization to avoid losing one's job.

The temporal organization of the mountain metaphor connects the past, the present and the future such that they form a temporal structure, which is typical of stories in general (cf. Foucault 1980 [1975]; Rimmon-Kenan 1991). The past has brought the present (climbing up the mountainside), and the present is a moment which has to be left behind to reach the future (to the sunlit, warm mountain top). In this way the mountain metaphor becomes a story composed of a certain sequence of events, and in which the present is a propositional event for a bright future. The expectation of the future can also be considered as motivating element in The mountain.

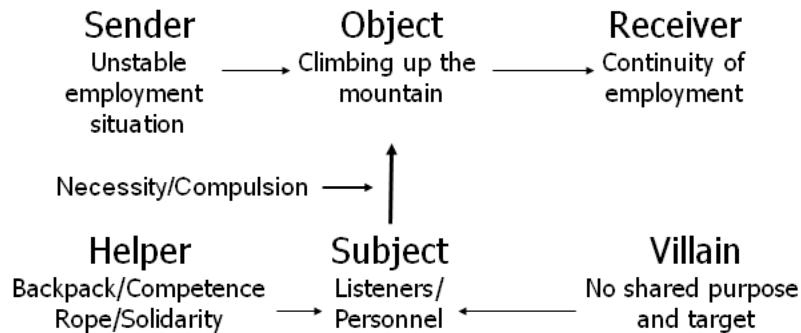
The spatial and temporal organization of the mountain metaphor illustrates how disciplinary power intrudes discursively into the reality of the organization and engages with the processes of defining states of affairs. Similarly, a physical space may evoke power structures and positions by assigning people different positions (Foucault 1980 [1975]), the metaphor organizes the personnel of organization in a fictitious

space. It limits the sphere of action to climbing up the mountainside and simultaneously intensifies and rationalizes the organization. The temporal structure also compresses time and makes it unidirectional.

After analysing the description of the state of affairs, how then do we proceed to analyse the prescriptive elements of a story? In constructing the actant model (Model 1) attention needs to be paid to the relation between the Subject and Object in accordance with the modality of that relation. Modality refers to a mode of action, e.g. something might happen accidentally, because of necessity, compulsion, obligation, responsibility, habit or will. In The mountain, the modality of the action is necessity, because coping with the banking crisis, i.e. climbing to the top of the mountain, is presented as the only way to survive. The other modality which the story implies is the will of the personnel to climb up. Thus, the target of the story is a redefinition of the state of affairs in the following way: personnel must want to climb the mountain. Moreover, the contextual text surrounding the story presupposes that the bank will overcome the crisis, which in turn motivates the will.

The listeners, the bank's personnel, are positioned as the subject actant in the second modelling of the mountain story (Model 2). This modelling is mainly based on the second level of the interview extract, which is the contextual text.

Model 2



As climbing the mountainside represents the banking crisis and the problematic economic situation of the bank to the bank management, it represents the threat of losing their jobs for the personnel. The threat appears in the contextual text in the third paragraph of the interview extract where the leader notes that the employees have worked five years in a situation of insecurity regarding the continuity of their jobs.

The change in the subject-object actant relation from necessity/will in the first model to necessity/compulsion in the second model is two-fold. First, the Sender and Receiver change between the models from general societal crisis to a concrete personal and individual threat. In the first model it is a matter of issues at the organizational level and in the second model of issues at the individual level. The principle that was articulated in the first model want to climb the mountain, is transformed into the form one have to climb the mountain.

Second, the modality of will consists of two subcategories: deliberate and non-deliberated will (cf. Aristotle 1997). In the first model there is deliberate will the purpose of which is to lead the organization to survive the crisis. To some degree, at least, a systematic element is connected to the deliberate subcategory of will which the mountain metaphor implies. The composition of the mountain itself is a systematic effort to master the process. In contrast, the will assigned to personnel is not deliberated by this group of individuals. Instead, it is non-deliberated even, paradoxically, constrained from outside.

Finally, we would like to say few words about the sedimentation of stories in the organizational culture. Although our interview data do not allow us empirically to investigate the process of sedimentation, there are some hints in the contextual part of the interview extract which allow us to comment on the process. The narrator describes in the extract how his drawing of the mountain was put on the walls of all the organization's units, visible to everyone. By displaying the drawing in public it became a collectively readable object which has the possibility of becoming institutionalized in the organizational culture. In this case, it is the public display of the story which the sedimentation process requires. Moreover, it means that the story transcends the spatial and temporal limitations of the original moment of its narration by being read by more people than the number of listeners in the original situation. It creates an organization-wide membership which no longer requires presence in the original situation.

We argued earlier that the possibility for the collective evaluation of stories is tied to their structural elements. In the case of the story analysed here, the metaphor of the mountain is the element which enables collective readability. Metaphors are collectively readable figures of speech and thus they mediate between situational and public understanding. Furthermore, collective or public readability enables the ethical evaluation and assessment of stories, i.e. meditation on how one should act in the light of the models of action they convey. It calls for an answer to the question: is the state of affairs

described by the story valuable enough to initiate the desired action? In the social sense it is a matter of the legitimating the story in the organization.

Conclusions

In this article, which focuses on the relation of stories and leadership, our main theoretical argument was that stories may have power to lead themselves, not the leaders who recount them. We justified the argument by elaborating the idea, which stems from the hermeneutics of Ricoeur (1991a & 1991b) and Gadamer (2004), that any text is completed in the act of reading. The meaning of a text is constructed through its interpretation in the moment of reception. Hence, this principle breaks the connection between narrator and listener such that a narrator can have no direct influence on her/his audience. Furthermore, we also favoured the concept of disciplinary power against the traditional one of sovereign power. In studying stories and storytelling, the concept of sovereign power is not applicable, because it requires that there exists at least a mild causal relation between an utterance and action. The causal argument that any story A is always followed by action B does not hold. Instead, we utilized the concept of disciplinary power, which focuses on the discursive practices through which power infiltrates the organizational culture. Our argument was that stories, as participants in organizational discursive practices, also construct the meaning-mediated organizational reality which defines the desired action in the organization.

In the empirical analysis we concentrated on the descriptive, prescriptive and ethical elements of a specific story, The mountain. Our aim was to show how these elements produce conceptions about the state of affairs and may motivate action without a leader issues commands. The mountain depicted and defined metaphorically the current state of affairs of the bank organization, and the limits of possible and desired actions. The metaphor of the mountain was the main linguistic figure which mediated between the story and its audience. It enabled the descriptions, prescriptions and ethical

principles of the story to be read. There were also other metaphors in which various elements were embedded. The rope symbolized the solidarity of the personnel, the backpack illustrated the competences of personnel, and the steepness of the mountain represented the economic crisis that the bank was trying to avoid. All of these metaphors mediate meanings regardless of the intention of narrator.

It may be reasonably asked whether, despite our claim that it is the story which leads, that is it not still the case that the story has been told by a leader and thus the teller-leader is still leading? We would reply that we do not exclude the role of the narrator completely. It is true that someone tells a story, but the impressiveness of the story nevertheless lies in the text. It is the story that the listeners are interpreting, not the intentions of the narrator. The descriptions, prescriptions and ethical principles inherent in a story endure beyond the moment of narration.

We offer some ideas for further research into stories and leadership. Because here we were unable to answer the problems of how the stories are received, the empirical data should be expanded to cover the listeners as well, i.e. personnel. This would open the way to elaborating on the more specific role of the stories from the standpoint of disciplinary power. It would also enable more detailed examination of the sedimentation process and thus the relation between discourse, stories and the organizational culture.

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