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Narratives and work

new perspectives on the practice of organizations

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COMMUNICATION & LANGUAGE at work

Narratives and work: new perspectives on the practice of organizations. Editorial.

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This special issue sets out to study the interrelation between narratives and work within a broad context of organizational and institutional frameworks and research fields. The articles each consider various roles and functions of the concept of narrative in a work environment. As such, the special issue contributes to the increasing tendency among organization and communication scholars to understand the existence and practice of organizations through a narrative lens (Frandsen, Lundholt and Kuhn, 2017).

The first article entitled “Analysing group agency through narrative interviews – Cooperation and crisis in coexistence education organizations in Israel” by Lena Kahle discusses the premises of group agency by analyzing narrative interviews with actors in Coexistence Education in Israel. With specific focus on Jewish and Palestinian Israelis cooperation in non-profit educational organizations and conflictual encounters, the article focusses on the reflection of societal power structures and the impact of the minority-majority relationship in the analysis of agency. The study of three selected cases reveals various findings. As an example, it is argued that social conflicts do not only play a role in the personal process of change or for political commitment in general but are also a constant source of difficulty within working contexts. The social relevance of these professional and political spaces in which colleagues are also comrades and friends, makes dealing with conflict complex.

The second article is entitled “The assembly and circulation of science: An analysis of the necessity (yet lack) of narrative strategies in STEM curricula” and is written by Julia Kiernan. This article positions narrative as a needed, but often lacking, communicative resource for STEM (i.e. Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) professionals. With particular focus on the ability of narrative to increase comprehension, interest and engagement in the communication of science to a non-expert audience, the article pays attention to the importance of communicating effectively with public audiences. Here, narrative is introduced as a tangible approach to obtain an open dialogue and eventually improve the citizen-science partnership. The article is finalized by three suggested initiatives to meet the most urgent challenges for science communication: 1. Create interdisciplinary, team-taught courses, 2. Create STEM courses that value public audiences and 3. Engage with the media and deal with controversy in classrooms.

The third article “Making sense of the Corporate Philosophy: Dialogic employee engagement, and narrative positioning” by Cindie A. Maagaard, Astrid J. Schleiter, and Marianne W. Lundholt contributes with a narrative positioning perspective on employee engagement. With a dialogic approach to employee communication, the study provides an understanding of employee communication as a question beyond the classification of bottom up or top down communication. This framework brings forward an understanding of ways in which small stories and other narrative utterances constitute identity and agency in concrete and specific situations.

The fourth article “A multimodal discourse analysis of positioning and identity work in a leadership development practice. A combined dialogicality and small story analysis” by Ann Starbæk Bager shows how interaction

in a leadership development forum can be reflected and analysed from a narrative-in-use perspective. The article contributes a methodological frame for analyzing positioning and identity work in organizational setting by combining analytical grips from dialogicality studies and small story analysis. This entails that a multimodal discourse analysis is conducted of the positioning and identity work accomplished in a research and dialogue-based leadership development forum in a university setting. One of the most noticeable findings of the study is the illustration of ways in which different socio-material setups shape identity work.

The final article “Relating antenarrative, narrative, and living story – managerial reflections on how to apply antenarratives in future world making” by Marita Svane provides a study of David Boje’s concept of antenarratives and their relation to narratives and living stories through the work of Bakhtin and through the lenses of a quantum storytelling perspective. The study contributes to the conceptual development of the antenarrativist position by way of linking it to Bakhtin’s heteroglossia. Moreover, the paper makes suggestions for essential managerial capacities and practices to be cultivated to antenarrative management practice.

As this brief introduction to the articles of this special issue reveals, there is a great variety of topics and methodological approaches to the study of narrative and work. Some concepts such as agency and small stories recur in several articles which corresponds to a recent increase in scholarly interest on issues related to those specific terms. This special issue only contains a small fraction of contemporary research studying the interrelation between narratives and work. The field is open to further exploration of intriguing research within the study of narratives and work to increase our understanding of organizational practice today and in the future!

References

- Frandsen, S., Kuhn, T. & Lundholt, M. W. (2017). Introduction. In S. Frandsen, T. Kuhn & M. W. Lundholt (Eds.), *Counter-Narratives and Organization*. London: Routledge.