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Matthew A. Hawkins, Fathima Z. Saleem

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The omnipresent personal narrative: story formulation and the interplay among narratives

Matthew A. Hawkins and Fathima Z. Saleem

Department of Marketing Management, ESADE, Ramon Llull University, Barcelona, Spain

Abstract

Purpose – Stories draw meaning from narratives. The resulting narrative component in a story is entirely personal or contains fragments of organizational and/or societal narratives. Therefore, understanding how stories obtain these narrative fragments is critical to offering valid interpretations of narratives based on stories. In an effort to advance narrative research, the purpose of this paper is to address this fundamental question: How do stories obtain their reflected narrative fragments? Without a firm understanding of how stories draw meaning from narratives, the critical role of disentangling compound narratives from stories – interpretation – remains suspect.

Design/methodology/approach – The findings are drawn from extant research and prior conceptualizations, and the story formulation model is introduced.

Findings – Through the introduction of the story formulation model, it is shown that personal narratives are omnipresent within collective narratives. Additionally, the analysis indicates there are two stages in which narrative interaction occurs, during the formulation of stories and during the formulation of narratives.

Originality/value – The findings have significant impact on the interpretation of stories, as well as furthering the understanding of how stories draw their meaning from narratives. In particular, the omnipresence of personal narratives within stories is particularly relevant for interpreting stories and narratives. Therefore, this paper offers a framework in which to conceptualize the story formulation process and contributes to story and narrative analysis research methodologies.

Keywords Narratives, Storytelling, Narrative interaction, Narrative analysis, Story formulation

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

Narratives and stories not only offer invaluable insights to managers and researchers, but also have the potential to address a wide range of organizational phenomena (Pentland, 1999). Individuals use stories to make sense of their lived experiences; and, academic researchers use stories that draw from people's narratives to build theories (Weick, 1995; Pentland, 1999). This is possible because narratives are "the reflective product of looking back and making sense of stories constructed to make sense of life" (Flory and Iglesias, 2010, pp. 116-17). Research designs that employ story or narrative analysis are better able to offer critical insights into individual mindsets than other research methods (Gabriel, 1991; Polkinghorne, 2007; Flory and Iglesias, 2010). Additionally, the circulation of stories contributes greatly to organizational learning (Czarniawska, 1998; Brown *et al.*, 2005).

Story and narrative analyses are often called on in investigating and understanding organizational change. In order to facilitate the deconstruction and reconstruction of reality during periods of management initiated change managing and shifting

organizational conversations are important responsibilities for change agents. The
result is the "existing tapestry of linguistic products and characterizations" (Ford,
1999, p. 486) of the organization are re-woven in ways that supports management goals
(Ford, 1999). As individual discourse changes, their actions and the actions of others
begin to change (Heraclesous and Barrett, 2001). In other words, during times of
change, conversations and stories told within the organization need to be altered so
that the overarching narratives that weave throughout the organization complement
the change. The role of narrative researchers varies from observing and interpreting
these changing conversations, stories and narratives in order to explain organizational
action (Smith and Keyton, 2001) to offering guidance to future change managers and to
develop theories (Eden and Huxham, 1996). For instance, Corvellec and Hultman's
(2012) (this issue) societal narrative analysis of the conversations surrounding waste
management is a prime example of conversations changing at the societal level that
ultimately influence changes in organizational narratives and discourse.

In addition to the importance of narratives in managing organizational change,
narratives take several different forms within organization studies. This includes
research that has been written in a story-like manner, such as the paper on the ethos of
critique by Babsøll (2012) (this issue); research that collects stories; and, research that
looks at organizational life as story-making (Czarniawska, 1998).

As a qualitative research method, narrative and storytelling research involves an
interpretive component. However, while researchers have been active in interpreting
stories because of their ability to reflect an individual's narratives, they have ignored
explaining exactly how narratives get embedded in stories. Without a firm
understanding of how stories draw meaning from narratives the critical role of
disentangling compound narratives from stories — interpretation — remains suspect.

In an effort to advance narrative research, this fundamental question is addressed:
"How do stories obtain their narrative reflective component?". Drawing on extant
research and prior conceptualizations we suggest that personal narratives are
omnipresent within collective narratives. This finding has significant impact on the
interpretation of stories as well as furthering our understanding of how stories obtain
their reflected narrative fragments. This process is explained through the introduction
of the story formulation model. Therefore, this paper offers a framework in which to
conceptualize the story formulation process and contributes to story and narrative
analysis research methodologies, in general.

This paper begins by establishing the conceptualization of narratives and stories,
followed by elaborating on the three levels of narratives and the importance of the
storytelling context on the formulation of a story. Next, the story formulation model
(see Figure 1) is introduced and its ability to guide the researcher through the process
of navigating and interpreting stories is discussed. We elaborate on the interplay that
occurs among the three levels of narratives and, finally, the reader is left with some
concluding remarks on how working within the story formulation model impacts
future organizational research.

What are narratives and stories?
Narratives as cognitive frameworks
Narratives and stories have been operationalized, or defined, in numerous and
sometimes seemingly incompatible ways. It is recognized that the field has had
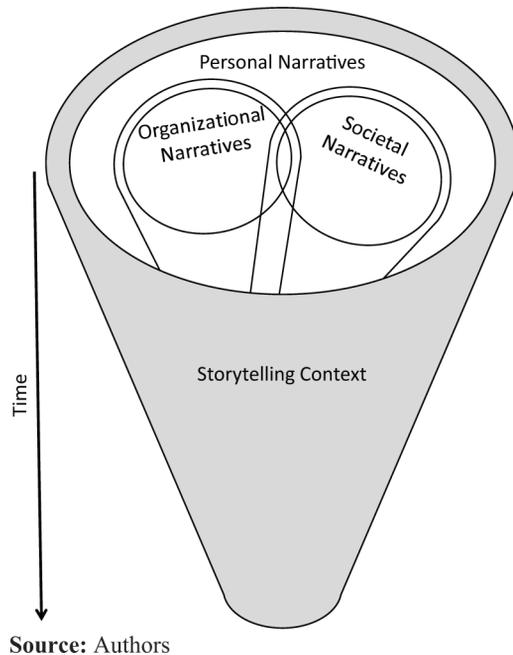
Figure 1.
Story formulation model

Source: Authors

disagreement over defining story and narrative for considerable time (Boje *et al.*, 2004). Gabriel (2004) even asserts that defining narratives and stories only serves to restrict the concepts, but a clear definition of each is essential to understanding their roles in qualitative research. A list of definitions for narratives and stories generally seen in management research is presented in Table I. The table shows the varying and at times overlapping definitions that are used in management research.

Confusion can arise since narratives, and to some extent stories, can describe two completely different concepts. Narrative is a label given to the cognitive frameworks that guide a person's actions, as we argue. However narrative is also a written or spoken style. Similarly, individuals use stories to make sense of their lived experiences and to organize these experiences within their narratives, which is our position. However, people write stories, some of which stay close to historical truth and plausibility while other stories are classified as science fiction (see Rimmon-Kenan, 2002 for a review of different forms of stories and narratives). Boje (2001) argues that stories are constructed in a fragmented manner that is difficult to interpret; only in retrospect when stories are ordered chronologically in a continuous fashion do they become narratives (e.g. Metz, 2003). While Bartel and Garud (2009) argue that narratives can already have a plot and structure. Further, other authors use the term narrative and story interchangeably (e.g. Bryant and Wolfram Cox, 2004).

The *Journal of Organizational Change Management* released a special issue in November 2010, stemming from the 3rd Conference on Rhetoric and Narratives in Management Research held at ESADE in March of 2009. Accordingly, as this special issue stems from the 4th Conference on Rhetoric and Narratives in Management Research held at ESADE, we build upon the definition of narrative held by this

Narrative definitions	"Narrative is the reflective product of looking back and making sense of stories constructed to make sense of life" (Flory and Iglesias, 2010, pp. 116-17)
	Narrative is "an utterance or a text whose intention is to initiate and guide a search for meanings among a spectrum of possible meanings" (Bruner, 1986, p. 25).
	"Narrative is a way of understanding one's own and others' actions, of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, and of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time" (Chase, 2005, p. 656)
	"[N]arratives…portray events in a structured manner and offer a particular point of view on a situation through the use of plot" (Bartel and Garud, 2009, p. 110)
	"Narrative form can be loosely defined as a sequence of events, experiences, or actions with a plot that ties together different parts into meaningful whole" (Feldman *et al.*, 2004, p. 148)
	"What makes narratives different from other texts is a clear time sequence and what makes stories different from other narratives is plot" (Gabriel, 2004, p. 2)
	Narratives should include the social structure of the actors while a story may not contain enough information to provide such an account. Typically narrative text has a chronological sequence, focal actors, narrative voice, an evaluative frame of reference and marks of content and context (Pentland, 1999)
	"A narrative, in its most basic form, requires at least three elements: an original state of affairs, an action or an event, and the consequent state of affairs", and a plot (Czarniawska, 1998, p. 2)
	"A 'narrative' is something that is narrated, i.e. 'story'. Story is an account of incidents or events, but narrative comes after and adds 'plot' and 'coherence' to the story line" (Boje, 2001, p. 1)
Story definitions	Stories are best viewed as "a reflection of a unique personal and very subjective experience" (Goosseff, 2010, p. 145) rather than an objective, verifiable fact
	"By a story, I mean an oral or written performance involving two or more people interpreting past or anticipated experience […] In this definition, stories do not require beginnings, middles, or endings, as they do in more formal and restrictive definitions" (Boje, 1995, p. 1000)
	"Stories are instantiations, particular exemplars, of the grand conception" (p. 149) with a beginning and end (Feldman *et al.*, 2004)
	Stories "reflect the deep structure of a narrative, and they are used to explain and interpret the surface structure, which is the *text* or the *discourse*" (Pentland, 1999, p. 711, italics in original)
	"Stories, I will argue, are poetic reconstructions of events in which the accuracy of the narrative is sacrificed in the interest of fulfilling vital needs and desires, sometimes unconscious ones, shared by organisational participants" (Gabriel, 1991, p. 428)
	"Story is […] 'ante' to story and narrative is post-story. Story is an 'ante' state of affairs existing previously to narrative; it is in advance of narrative" (Boje, 2001, p. 1)

Definitions of stories that overlap with narratives/overlapping definitions	"Stories are emotionally and symbolically charged narratives" (Gabriel, 2000, p. 135). "Stories usually have a plot, characters, [involve] narrative skill, aim to entertain, persuade or win over" (p. 22)
	"If one defines narrative as a story with a beginning, middle, and end that reveals someone's experiences, narratives take many forms, are told in many settings, before many audiences, and with various degrees of connection to actual events or persons" (Manning and Cullum-Swan, 1994, p. 465)
	"[A] story consists of a plot comprising causally related episodes that culminate in a solution to a problem" (Czarniawska, 1997, p. 78)
Table I.	"Generally, narratives are understood as stories that include a temporal ordering of events and an effort to make something out of those events: to render, or to signify, the experiences of persons-in-flux in a personally and culturally coherent, plausible manner" (Sandelowski, 1991, p. 162)

community. Specifically, a "Narrative is the reflective product of looking back and making sense of stories constructed to make sense of life" (Flory and Iglesias, 2010, pp. 116-17). This view offers a few significant advantages over other views. In particular, the narrative label can be applied at the personal, organizational or societal level and allows multiple stories to be bundled together to form narratives. Additionally, the concept of narrative is not artificially restricted, addressing Gabriel's (2004) concerns.

It should be clear that narratives are viewed as the cognitive framework that guides an individual in making sense of experiences. However, narrative construction is not always based on text or utterances as argued by Bruner (1986); rather as Chase (2005) indicates actions, material objects (Doolin, 2003) and images (Gagiotti, 2012) are often taken into consideration when constructing narratives (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994a). Accordingly, our narrative conceptualization embraces the interpretivist perspective that through interpretation researchers can "unmask the hidden symbolism of stories, reading them as depositories of meaning and expressions of deeper psychic, interpersonal, and social realities" (Gabriel, 2000, p. 16).

Stories draw from narratives

Stories are unique in that a singular story can fully reflect a narrative but other times multiple stories need to be bundled together to understand the narrative it was drawn from (Sandelowski, 1991; Pentland, 1999; Smith and Keyton, 2001; Boje *et al.*, 2004; Feldman *et al.*, 2004; Gabriel, 2004; Chase, 2005). From the reformist perspective, oftentimes additional sources of data or narrative artifacts such as television scripts are consulted (Smith and Keyton, 2001) or public observations are conducted in order to contextualize the story, thereby creating the narrative (Polkinghorne, 2007). Boje (2001, p. 11) argues that organizational narrative analysis based on certain authorities and relying on ordered tales results in the construction of a shallow narrative that hides too much. Thus, the identification of organizational and societal narratives demands that stories are collected from more than one individual. In particular, research focused on organizational change is encouraged to consult additional narrative artifacts in order to adequately contextualize stories.

Understanding that stories draw meaning from narratives, and taking the advice of Gabriel (2004) to avoid restricting the definition, conceptualizations of stories that involve the inclusion of plots or adhere to chronology are excluded (Bruner, 1990; Czarniawska, 1997; Gabriel, 2000; Feldman *et al.*, 2004). Mishler (1986) argues it is often difficult to determine when a story begins and ends when multiple stories are presented in one speech act. Therefore, we draw on Boje (1995) and Goosseff (2010), and argue that stories are oral and written acts that are constructed by reflecting upon past experiences.

Although a number of key texts suggest various techniques of studying narratives (e.g. Boje, 2001), less emphasis has been given to how stories draw their narrative component from the different levels of narratives. To address this question, the three narrative levels are broadly discussed; with predominate focus on personal narratives and stories, before narrowing in on the story formulation process. Story-based organization research typically focuses on oral stories; therefore, the proceeding analysis of the story-narrative relationship will be artificially restricted to personal stories obtained through interviews.

Formulation of personal stories
Three levels of narratives
Storytelling produces stories that draw from an individual's overarching narratives. This argument has three key assumptions. First, the stories told must have a connection with, at least, a personal narrative (Polkinghorne, 2007). Second, the story must be connected to a lived experience or stem from a story the individual heard, but it cannot simply be a fantasy. Third, the connection between the story and the narrative is intelligible to the researcher. For instance, the third assumption can be addressed through follow-up interviews, a good understanding of the storytelling context and sharing the interview transcripts with the interviewee (Mishler, 1986).

According to Gabriel (2004) stories can be categorized into three different levels: individual, group and societal narratives. Personal narratives are the overarching themes that an individual uses to make sense of their experiences. Group or organizational narratives are overarching themes that run across a collection of people. As such, the main characteristic of organizational narratives is that members of an organization have similar cognitive frameworks to organize experiences. For example, a key organizational narrative that facilitates sense making in the organization would be its highly competitive culture, which makes employees competitive and goal oriented. Their actions/stories would be difficult to interpret without referring back to the organizational narrative of competitiveness. Societal narratives are overarching sense making themes that run across multiple members of a society. Societal narrative analyses can be classified under the macro-textual analysis category (Manning and Cullum-Swan, 1994).

Each narrative level possesses multiple narratives, in that there is no one single personal or societal narrative. However, the strength of each narrative varies. Additionally, narratives, just as stories, can be interpreted differently (Boje, 1995, 2001; Feldman *et al.*, 2004; Flory and Iglesias, 2010) and thus communicate different meanings to different people (Krippendorff, 1980; Gabriel, 1991; Boje, 1995). The polysemous nature of stories (Boje, 1995) does not imply that there are unlimited meanings; rather understanding the context of the story can reduce the quantity of plausible meanings (Heraclesous and Barrett, 2001).

Organizational research based on collecting stories (Czarniawska, 1998) requires the researcher to have a clear understanding of which narrative level is targeted. Stories can be used to challenge dominant narratives or to exert dominance over emerging narratives (Gabriel, 2004). Therefore, personal stories may not solely reflect personal narratives. Instead, the story could also reflect a sub-group within the organization struggling to control an organizational narrative (Pentland, 1999).

When a researcher solicits a personal story from an interviewee the story can reflect elements of personal, organizational and/or societal narratives. The large, personal narrative circle in Figure 1 represents the totality of potential narratives a story can reflect. Embedded within an individual's personal narratives are organizational and societal narratives. Besides the fact that an individual needs to personally experience an event to form a story around it, the organizational and societal narratives are embedded in personal narratives. This is because our personal knowledge determines what we assert and believe (Polanyi, 1962), in effect forcing a personal narrative imprint on all our stories. Frank (2002) strengthens the embedded argument by arguing that the story selection indicates who they are and are not. Thus, societal and organizational narratives are embedded in personal narratives.

The visual representation of the story formulation model (Figure 1) simplifies the personal to organizational and societal narratives relationships for presentation ease; whereas in reality, the relationship is quite complex. Stories can contain compound narratives: narratives that can be rightfully classified as organizational and/or societal as well as personal, signified by the overlapping of the narrative spaces. Further, individuals can and do have contradictory narratives. These contradictory narratives exist, for example between organizational and personal narratives. Personal narratives can indicate that hard work and perseverance are the keys to success, but in their organizational narratives nepotism might have more to do with success. The interaction among narratives is discussed later in the text, but the context of the storytelling situation is a central force in determining which narrative is reflected in the story (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994a).

Storytelling context
While a story is being created it is adjusted as the storytelling context is evaluated. Stories are not fully formed in the minds of individuals waiting to be recalled. Rather, stories are constructed during the storytelling process (Mishler, 1986; Clandinin and Connelly, 1994a; Feldman *et al.*, 2004). Storytelling is not only a method to share knowledge and values (Gabriel, 1991; Brown *et al.*, 2005; Bartel and Garud, 2009; Bonet and Sauquet, 2010; Parada and Viladás, 2010) but is also a personal reflective process in which individuals make sense of past lived experiences (Bruner, 1990; Sandelowski, 1991; Boje, 1995; Pentland, 1999; Boje, 2001; Feldman *et al.*, 2004; Chase, 2005; Polkinghorne, 2007; Bonet *et al.*, 2010; Flory and Iglesias, 2010; Simpson, 2010). As such, during the storytelling phase individuals continue to make sense of their experiences; thus, the story is created, refined and adjusted as it is told (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994a; Feldman *et al.*, 2004).

The storytelling context is fundamental in determining how the story is formulated. In order to understand human action, it is important to understand their intentions, and in order to understand human intention, the setting in which they make sense cannot be ignored (Schutz, 1973). And, by extension, the specific mix of narratives contained within the story is impacted by the storytelling context.

Simpson's (2012) (this issue) article provides an example of the storytelling context impacting the stories being told. When one of the characters, Mary, attempts to resolve an organizational conflict she selects a setting that she believes to be less constraining. Specifically, Mary selects to hold the conversation in a pub where the traditionally male dominated church context is not so overt. In sum, this political act altered the storytelling context producing stories reflecting different narratives than had they met in one of their offices.

Mishler (1986) and Clandinin and Connelly (1994a) remind us that the interviewing or storytelling context consists of more than just the physical setting and the subjects' past experiences. The researcher is also part of the storytelling context, where the style of dress, gender and perceived social standing of the researcher can impact the story told by the interviewee. Since stories are not predefined but emergent, the interviewer becomes a co-creator of the story (Chase, 2005; Polkinghorne, 2007). Not only does probing and questioning participants and the mere observing of the conversation alter the stories being told, but also one actually becomes part of the conversation. In the words of Clandinin and Connelly (1994a, p. 1), researchers enter "the middle of a nested set of stories – ours and theirs". Although the storytelling context is crucial in story formulation and interpretation, other aspects such as the narrative voice, evaluative context and focal actors are vital to interpreting the story and the narrative components (Pentland, 1999; Rimmon-Kenan, 2002).

Regardless of the degree in which the story is impacted by the researcher's presence, collectively the storytelling context plays a fundamental role in the story development process. For many researchers, identifying the connections between stories and narratives is the exciting but challenging part of story and narrative research. As readers of story-based research, the connections drawn by the researcher provide insights that would have otherwise gone unnoticed. However, as critical readers of academic research, determining the validity of the connections drawn by the researcher is what makes story and narrative research suspect, especially to researchers residing in more traditional paradigms.

Interpreting narrative reflecting stories

The following section elaborates on the role the storytelling context has on story interpretation. Stories are gathered by researchers because they contain rich insights into a person's cognitive framework and the meaning of these stories is lost if they are divorced from context (Mishler, 1986; Gabriel, 1991; Clandinin and Connelly, 1994b). Additionally, the implications stemming from the story formulation model has on story and narrative analysis deserves attention.

As the proceeding discussion implies the solicited story could have been an organizational story with no adjustments to the model. This is because organizational stories are still embedded within personal narratives; only the interpretation process is adjusted to account for personal narratives contained within the story. Organizational researchers typically increase the number of respondents in order to determine which themes weave across stories solicited from multiple individuals. For societal stories, the quantity of respondents is increased even more to account for different groups of individuals to identify themes that weave across differing groups. In sum, collective narratives require collections of different narrative artifacts from different respondents (Boje, 2001).

For the sake of clarity, the following discussion has been artificially restricted to one type of narrative artifact: stories. Extant research includes various other artifacts such as images. For example, Gaggiotti (2010) demonstrates that corporate images impact organizational narratives.

The following sub-sections elaborate on the three key components that researchers should give particular attention to when interpreting narratives: first, the storytelling context; second, the central role of personal narratives; and third, the notion of time in storytelling.

Contextualization of storytelling

Any story formulation model should respect the role of context, as this has been consistently argued for within the story reporting literature (Mishler, 1986; Gabriel, 1991; Clandinin and Connelly, 1994b; Franzosi, 1998; Frank, 2002; Feldman *et al.*, 2004; Polkinghorne, 2007). One of the primary reasons to select a story-based research design is the fact that stories carry meanings (Krippendorff, 1980; Gabriel, 1991; Boje, 1995; Frank, 2002; Flory and Iglesias, 2010); demonstrate the process of knowledge and value sharing (Gabriel, 1991; Bartel and Garud, 2009; Bonet and Sauquet, 2010; Parada and Viladás, 2010); and, shed light on how an event was experienced (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994a, b; Gabriel, 2004; Atkinson and Delamont, 2005; Elliott and Davies, 2006) that other methods cannot obtain. The story formulation model enhances story-based research by maintaining the central role context plays in interpreting stories by constraining the narrative space within the storytelling context.

Centrality of personal narrative

The embedded nature of organizational and societal narratives in personal narratives is a central feature of the story formulation model. Every lived experience, including hearing others tell stories, is interpreted though an individual's personal narratives. In regards to experiencing a heard story, the impact of personal narratives is evident in the fact that stories are retold differently and have different meanings to each person (Krippendorff, 1980; Gabriel, 1991; Boje, 1995, 2001; Feldman *et al.*, 2004; Brown *et al.*, 2005; Flory and Iglesias, 2010). Additionally, Polanyi (1962) argues that passive experiences tend to have no impact on a person's conceptual framework. Bruner (1990) further argues that stories and sense making are not needed if the event did not challenge an existing view of reality. Therefore, the event described through stories demonstrates active conceptual framing by the individual. Additionally, the act of selecting a story indicates what is and what is not important to a person, this selection process reflects personal narratives (Frank, 2002; Feldman *et al.*, 2004).

Since fragments of personal narratives are contained in all stories, qualitative researchers should account for them in their analyses. Researchers interested in organizational and societal level narratives, in particular, are urged to take a more holistic perspective in research designs (Patton, 2002). This will help researchers more confidently state that the reported narrative is in fact, personal, organizational or societal.

Incorporation of time

Storytelling is a process that involves both thinking and speaking. Further, stories are created throughout the entire storytelling process both by working out the story as it is

recounted (Feldman *et al.*, 2004) and through the interaction of the interviewer (Mishler, 1986; Clandinin and Connelly, 1994a; Chase, 2005). The story formulation model explicitly accepts the notion of time through the length of the storytelling context funnel. As time progresses and as the story is created, the possible narratives drawn from decreases. This is why multiple stories are often collected to form narratives (Pentland, 1999; Sandelowski, 1991; Smith and Keyton, 2001; Boje *et al.*, 2004; Feldman *et al.*, 2004; Gabriel, 2004; Chase, 2005).

Additionally, the time it takes to formulate a story can be of great importance for the analysis of stories (Mishler, 1986). This can be particularly true if the focus is on the interactions among narratives during story formulation. Pauses and corrections could be indicators of the interviewee making sense of the experience as they tell the story.

Narrative interactions

The review of prior literature and the development of the story formulation model reveal that the three levels of narratives interact. Our analysis indicates there are two stages in which narrative interaction occurs: during the story formulation, and during the narrative formulation. Accordingly, the interaction between narratives during story formulation will be discussed first; then the interaction during narrative formulation will be addressed. The paper will then conclude by offering ideas for future research and summarizing the implications of our findings.

Story formulation
A story's meaning is a reflection of an individual's narratives. The resulting narrative component in a story is entirely personal or contains fragments of organizational and/or societal narratives. Therefore, understanding how stories obtain these narrative fragments is critical to offering valid interpretations of narratives based on stories. Researchers can explore marginalized narratives or take a deconstructivist approach to the stories (Boje, 1995). Further, one can apply Heraclesous and Barrett's (2001) framework to the emerging narratives; regardless of the analytical perspective taken, the narrative components still need to be disentangled.

The lived experience is the springboard in which the potential stories and narratives are generated. The experience impacts an individual's narratives, in varying degrees. Therefore when the storytelling process begins the personal narrative is initially reflected in the developing story.

However, collective narratives are embedded within the personal narrative space. Interviewer-prompted storytelling interested in organization-based stories can result in stories drawn from personal and organizational narratives. The story selected by the individual can instantly contain both narrative levels or the story could begin drawing entirely from personal narratives and then adjust to include organizational narratives. It is important to remember that this story selection process starts in the respondent's mind. This process can be relatively fast or prolonged, depending on the nature of the story.

The interaction among narratives can occur during the story formulation process through a few channels. During the evaluation of the storytelling context the interviewee can adjust their story. Non-verbal behavior from the interviewer could be interpreted by the interviewee, indicating that they disapprove of the story, or probing questions could direct the story towards another angle, for instance. O'Connor's (2002)

study of an internet start-up during the dot-com bust shows that entrepreneur success depends, in part, on their narrative sense making; the ability to adjust stories depending on the context. Larry Prusak (Brown *et al.*, 2005, pp. 40-42) presents a story of a bank executive on an off-the-record visit to a bank manager. The manager was visibility shaken by the surprise visit and took some time to read the context in order to determine the appropriate stories to tell. Thus, the interaction among narratives and the resulting reflected narrative fragments vary depending on the context and abilities of the storyteller.

Narrative interactions can also occur due to the fact that the interviewee continues to make sense of the event while telling the story. For example, the respondent might be telling a story of how they feel about a fellow co-worker. During this process societal narratives could be pulling his discourse towards an equal rights narrative while his story initially contained anti-female employee sentiments. As the story is formulated the interviewee will then adjust the trajectory of the story. Occasionally, interviewees will even interrupt themselves to re-adjust the story because they are re-making sense of the event.

Gelis (2012) (this issue) presents an interesting metaphor implying that dominant discourses exhibit gravitational fields pulling surrounding discourses into their field. Although he argues for organizations as being gravitational fields of discourse, this metaphor is applicable at the personal level. In the example above, the societal narrative is pulling the personal narrative towards an equal rights view. Researchers should consider implementing research designs that take a holistic approach. This includes gathering data from multiple angles or voices to provide a richer and more in-depth interpretation of the narrative interaction as well as to increase confidence in their findings (Patton, 2002) to account for narrative interactions during story formulation.

Narrative formulation
Narrative interaction also occurs at the narrative formulation level. Corvellec and Hultman's (2012) (this issue) organizational and societal narrative analysis of the conversations surrounding waste demonstrates the fact that as conversations change at the societal level there is pressure for discourses to change within an organization. In this case, individuals within the organization were reluctant to adjust their personal and organizational narratives regarding the value of waste. Additionally, Simpson's (2012) (this issue), while not entirely focused on societal changes, does revolve around the Church of England's responses to growing societal and organizational narratives to "run a parish like a business" while still maintaining their traditional spirituality and ministry work.

Applying Corvellec and Hultman's (2012) (this issue) study to our story formulation model shows that organizations need individuals capable of telling stories that override organizational and personal narratives; especially when organization objectives are threatened if stories do not reflect the new, emerging narrative. The incineration industry was not ignorant to the changing societal narratives; organizational leaders were reluctant to act on these new narratives because they ran counter to both the organizational and their personal narratives. For organizational change researchers, this case also demonstrates the added importance of properly understanding the context when using narrative research strategies.

Future research and limitations

The preceding discussion highlights that the three narrative levels can build on one another. The incineration example demonstrates that societal narratives can impact organizational and personal narratives. However, personal and organizational narratives can resist the incorporation of societal narratives, even to the detriment of their well-being, as it can result in the organization's business model becoming outdated. This interaction process requires further investigation, but prior empirical research clearly demonstrates that personal narratives can be impacted by organizational and societal narratives.

The story formulation model provides the necessary stepping stone needed to theorize and empirically demonstrate the movement of personal, organizational and societal narratives. This analysis has limited its attention given towards the compound narratives represented by the convergence of the embedded organizational and societal narratives. This area is particularly ripe for exploration, especially for organizational change management. As both Corvellec and Hultman (2012) (this issue) and Simpson's (2012) (this issue) studies show, this is exactly the area where important organizational change happens, where societal and organizational narratives meet.

Moreover, future narrative research can explore the required strength of personal narratives to influence organizational and societal narratives. With the increase of social media and other technology platforms, individuals have the resources to impact societal narratives with little effort. In the past, an individual's personal narrative would need to accumulate mass and strength to impact societal narratives, now societal narratives, can be overthrown in hours simply by uploading a video or posting a comment on a webpage. Within organizations, leaders typically have the power to frame discourse but, as Mouton *et al.* (2012) (this issue) discuss, leaders are not the sole controllers of organizational discourse. Thus, approaching this topic from inside and outside organizations is warranted.

As noted earlier, our analysis and the resulting story formulation model were artificially restricted to one type of narrative artifact: stories. The revelation that collective narratives are embedded in personal narratives needs further exploration when applied to other narrative artifacts, such as images or architecture (Brown *et al.*, 2005). Refining the story formulation model to include images and other narrative impacting artifacts, especially in organizational change research where fully understanding the change process context is important. Iglesias and Bonet (2012) (this issue) argue that brands are co-created and their meanings are dependent on the conversations that surround the brand offers an intriguing view of brands as a societal narrative artifact. Linking brands to narrative artifacts could further guide brand managers in this new era of persuasive brand management.

Conclusion

The use of stories to understand organizational change is not new; however, how stories obtain their narrative components has received little attention. This is unfortunate due to the omnipresence of personal narratives. Without properly understanding how stories obtain their narrative components, the interpretation of stories becomes problematic. The introduction of the story formulation model and surrounding discussion was intended to focus attention on this issue.

Additionally, through the introduction of the story formulation model, the interactions among narratives and the storytelling context were explored. In particular, our review of narrative and story research reveals that personal narratives include fragments of collective narratives. This finding has not been commented on before, to our knowledge. Therefore, the role of the researcher in interpreting stories was discussed considering this finding.

The interpretation of stories is dependent on contextualization and the incorporation of time. Attention was given to the impact the interviewer has on co-creating the story with the interviewee. Further, the centrality of the personal narrative was introduced with an urging to take a holistic approach to research in order to understand fully and report on the narratives revealed through story analysis.

Our analysis also included a discussion of narrative interactions during story and narrative formulation. During the story formulation process, differing narratives are at odds with one another within the story. This pulling occurs because of storytelling context clues or because the interviewee is re-making sense of the event and adjusts the mix of narratives. The narrative formulation section drew from Corvellec and Hultman's (2012) (this issue) analysis of societal and organizational narrative conflict. It was shown that organizational and personal narratives can prevent emerging societal narratives from taking hold. Additional research is needed to fully understand the interactions between narratives during story and narrative formulation, but it appears that Gelis's (2012) (this issue) gravitational pull metaphor is a good starting point.

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About the authors
Matthew A. Hawkins is a PhD Candidate at ESADE Business School, Universitat Ramon Llull, Barcelona, Spain. He is a member of the Research Group in Brand Management and Consumption at ESADE and his research interests include brand meaning and brand extensions. Matthew A. Hawkins is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: Matthewallen.hawkins@esade.edu

Fathima Z. Saleem is a PhD Candidate at ESADE Business School, Universitat Ramon Llull, Barcelona, Spain. She is a member of the Research Group in Brand Management and Consumption at ESADE and her research interests include internal branding, internal brand communities and social media marketing.