

# Making Sense of Stories: A Rhetorical Approach to Narrative Analysis

**Martha S. Feldman**

*University of California at Irvine*

**Kaj Sköldbberg**

*Stockholm University*

**Ruth Nicole Brown**

**Debra Horner**

*University of Michigan*

## ABSTRACT

In this article we show how an interpretative methodology of narrative analysis is beneficial for the study of public administration. We demonstrate the use and usefulness of a method for analyzing narratives that is based in concepts from classical rhetoric and semiotics. The method allows researchers to make more available the unstated, implicit understandings that underlie the stories people tell. We show how we have used this method to examine our data about change in city administrations. This article is a step-by-step demonstration of our method of narrative analysis and an illustration of how this method can be used.

Scholars of public administration and public policy have recently focused attention on the use of narratives and narrative analysis.<sup>1</sup> Although this approach has an air of novelty, studying stories and other forms of narrative as they occur within administration and policy dates back some time, and considerable scholarship in the field of organizations and management has recognized the importance of the narrative lens.<sup>2</sup> Stories are useful to both participants and observers of organizations because they are a basic tool that individuals use to communicate and create understanding with other people and for themselves. Stories are used to make sense of organizational life (Weick 1995) and to communicate the sense created (Orr 1996). Stories carry information relevant to decision making (Czarniawska and Sköldbberg 2003; Martin et al. 1983) and enable participants in policy and administration to “predict, empower and even fashion change” (Boje 1991, 124). Stories have been said to mediate reality and construct political space and are critical constitutive forces in politics and public policy making (Schram and Neisser 1997). People outside

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Czarniawska 1997; Fischer and Forester 1993; Hummel 1990, 1991; Maynard-Moody and Kelly 1993; Price 2003; Roe 1994; Schram and Neisser 1997; Sköldbberg 1994, 2002; Yanow 1996, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Clark 1972; Mitroff and Kilmann 1975; Selznick 1957. See also, for instance, Akin and Palmer 2000; Boje 1991; Boyce 1996; Gabriel 2000; Jeffcut 1993; Martin 1982; Martin et al. 1983; Morrill, Yalda, and Adelman 2000; Orr 1996; Weick 1995.

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organizations, such as scholars, have demonstrated both the study of organizations *as* narratives and the study of narratives and stories *in* organizations as ways of making sense of the world of administration (Czarniawska 1998; Hummel 1990, 1991).

Our own work, for example, makes use of individuals' stories in understanding how abstract plans for change initiated in organizations are translated into changes in the way people accomplish their day-to-day work (Feldman, Brown, and Horner 2003). Through the collected stories of participants in two city administrations, a rich picture of how they are bringing about change emerges. Specifically, we have looked at stories about how plans were translated into new ways of accomplishing work. Organizational members told stories about satisfying change, which results in changes in the way work is accomplished, and unsatisfying change, which does not. Often stories contain narrators' understandings of specific "recipes" for change. Stories about changing, both those in which people felt that changes satisfied the plan and those in which they did not, reveal what enables or inhibits changes in work. In order to understand research participants' stories about change, we use a methodological technique that opens up their narratives to an analysis of the internal arguments they make. Our analysis reveals an implicit logic in the explicit examples of actions and understandings of our storytellers. This analysis enables us as researchers to uncover the process of how change plans have translated into specific, and sometimes unanticipated, changed actions in these cities.

Why narratives, in particular? Narratives are useful data because individuals often make sense of the world and their place in it through narrative form.<sup>3</sup> Through telling their stories, people distill and reflect a particular understanding of social and political relations. Stories are a common, habitual method people use to communicate their ideas. Barthes extols narrative's universality, noting that "all classes, all human groups, have their narratives . . . narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself" (1977, 79). In other words, we are likely to find our research informants providing us with information by means of narrative.

Narrative form can be loosely defined as a sequence of events, experiences, or actions with a plot that ties together different parts into a meaningful whole (Czarniawska 1998; Franzosi 1998). The information presented in the narrative is valuable. Through the events the narrative includes, excludes, and emphasizes, the storyteller not only illustrates his or her version of the action but also provides an interpretation or evaluative commentary on the subject. In addition, the sequencing of narrative form is important because its structure reveals what is significant to people about various practices, ideas, places, and symbols (Young 1996).

Generally, the job of the narrative researcher is to interpret the stories people tell (Riessman 1993). As the narrative analysis has to do with "how protagonists interpret things" (Bruner 1990, 51), narrative analysts tend to ask why the story was told that way and what the storyteller means (Franzosi 1998) by looking at form, structure, and content. How does the narrator tell the story? What does he or she include or exclude? Some researchers focus on the structural links among concepts or "semantic grammar," showing that both the structuring of narratives and their content reveal key insights. Some researchers examine the narrative as a whole, whereas others break it down into component parts (Allport 1962; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zibler 1998). But whether taking

3 Several authors have made this point. See, for instance, Bruner 1990; Gee 1986; Mishler 1986; Riessman 1993.

a holistic or categorical approach, the researcher takes on a particular methodology for making an interpretation.

In this article we detail one specific kind of methodology we found especially useful for our research on organizational change in public administration. To be clear, there are lots of different ways to perform narrative analysis. We do not assert this method as the definitive way to practice narrative analysis. It is particularly useful for its ability to reveal the implicit and underlying logics of a story.

The present article studies narratives *in* organizations. Specifically, we analyze the stories that participants in public organizations tell in order to understand their arguments and claims about change in context. The stories we have analyzed in this project have helped us understand the process and nature of organizational change. Some of our findings are reported below. The particular concern in this article, however, is to explore how to process the wealth of information provided in stories.

We demonstrate the different stages of our methodological process and discuss the insights gained about organizational change from our research. We first introduce a specific element of narrative: the story. We discuss the nature of stories and why they are both important to and facilitate the interpretation of meaning. We then present the concepts that underlie our particular way of analyzing narratives. We provide four examples of stories from our own research and walk through the process of analyzing them. Finally, we discuss how we used the data that resulted from the analysis and possible other uses.

## **ANALYZING STORIES**

### **Narrative and the Story**

The terms *narrative* and *story* are often used interchangeably. They have many of the same characteristics, such as chronological order (Labov and Waletzky 1967) and thematic ordering of events (Czarniawska 1998). In this article we draw a distinction between the encompassing narrative and, embedded within it, stories. A story is a subset of narrative. There are narratives that are not stories but, in fact, are more encompassing. We understand the encompassing narrative to be the grand conception that entertains several themes over a period of time. In our research the stories were part of larger change narratives and often illustrated the change narratives. A change narrative might make the claim that empowerment is an engine of change. A story exemplifying this narrative would tell us how empowerment changed the actions of specific people in a specific time and place.

Stories are instantiations, particular exemplars, of the grand conception. They respond to the questions of “And then what happened?” or “What do you mean?” Ricoeur, summarizing Gallie (1964), explains:

A story describes a sequence of actions and experiences done or undergone by a certain number of people, whether real or imaginary. These people are presented either in situations that change or as reacting to such change. In turn, these changes reveal hidden aspects of the situation and the people involved, and engender a new predicament which calls for thought, action, or both. This response to the new situation leads the story toward its conclusion.  
(1983, 150)

Although they frequently contain digressions or tangents, stories can also be distinguished by their distinct arc from beginning to end; that is, the story takes us from one specific place

to another. As Franzosi describes, “The events in the story must disrupt an initial state of equilibrium that sets in motion an inversion of situation, a change of fortunes—from good to bad, from bad to good, or no such reversal of polarity, just an ‘after’ different from the ‘before,’ but neither necessarily better or worse” (1998, 521). In this way, stories are interpretations of actions that have occurred in a particular sequence (Fisher 1987). Stories provide rich data that express movement, interpret ideas, and describe from the storyteller’s perspective how things used to be and how they are, as well as how they should be.

Narrative data can be gathered from many different sources. Interviews and documents both readily provide narrative data. The narrative materials from which we draw our stories are interviews about organizational change conducted among employees in the city administrations of Charlotte, North Carolina, and Grand Rapids, Michigan. These interviews often have one or more general themes. In this case the interviewer was asking about how the administrations were undergoing new change regimes. In the midst of these interviews, interviewees often gave examples of how initiated change processes played out in changing the way work is accomplished. These examples are our stories.

### **The Need for an Analytical Strategy**

Although all of us are generally adept at interpreting the stories we are told in our everyday lives, rigorous methods of analysis are useful when we interpret stories for research. This requisite is rooted in the very nature of stories, first, because they frequently contain multiple meanings and, second, because storytellers rely on tacit assumptions shared with their listeners. In addition, stories are often told in such a way that the listener gets the *gist* of the story, but when the oral communication is transcribed as written text, the reader has difficulty deciphering the meaning.<sup>4</sup> Thus, stories are loaded with embedded, sometimes hidden information. Outside the moment of telling, it is necessary to find a more in-depth means of grasping the meaning. This process of digging deep pays off. The in-depth analysis of the stories that participants tell provides insights not only into what is happening but also into the understandings of the participants about why and how it is happening.<sup>5</sup>

By revealing the process of interpretation, the researcher demonstrates to the reader his or her assumptions behind the generation of theory and thus allows the reader to assess the validity of the interpretation. With an interpretative study such as ours, describing the coding and analysis facilitates whether one rejects or accepts the findings as valid, yet this task presents a particular challenge because of the emergent, collaborative, and intuitive methods applied. As Lofland and Lofland write, “Because of the open-ended and creative dimensions of the analytic process, a description of the concrete operations composing it does not entirely capture what goes on” (1995, 181). This article is a conscious effort to outline as much of the process as possible for someone else to use this method if he or she chooses. There is inevitably room for others to add their experiences and interpretations about how to do this kind of narrative analysis. In the spirit of making explicit the assumptions of our analysis and enabling other researchers to engage in similar analyses,

4 Per Deborah Keller Cohen, e-mail communication, May 2002. Also see Kintsch 1979.

5 For research that develops this point, see Alvesson and Sköldböck 2000; Feldman and Sköldböck 2002; Morrill, Yalda, and Adelman 2000.

we precisely detail and explain the following system of narrative analysis. The approach we advocate here involves a rhetorical analysis of stories, an approach that surfaces underlying logics and assumptions implicit in the story.

### **A Rhetorical Analysis of Stories**

The method we have developed and used is based on concepts derived from logic and semiotics. Both of these traditions have been used to assert the definitive meaning of a communication, event, or argument. Logic, for instance, has been used to assert scientific truths (Toulmin 1969). Our use of these concepts differs from that approach. We appropriate these concepts of classical scholars to explore social interactions and constructed meanings, rather than mathematical reasons and logic. As we are interpretive researchers, our work engages the meaning embedded in narratives, rather than the external validity of probability claims. In this sense our work bears a resemblance to the work of Stone (1988). She makes the case that reasoned analysis is political because “it always involves choices to include some things and exclude others and to view the world in a particular way when other visions are possible” (1988, 306).

Moreover, we suggest that one can expose implicit understandings in narrative, reason, or representational practices, without also claiming that this is the only way to interpret a narrative. This is in line with scholars of politics and public policy who highlight the implicit in the narrative voice in order to expose alternate narratives relevant to the current political and organizational situation (Cruikshank 1997; Schram and Neisser 1997). Indeed, our analysis is based in the presumption that we live in a social world characterized by multiple interpretations and that as people tell stories these numerous interpretations are manifest in multiple and sometimes conflicting logics. Thus, it is not only the concepts but also the way we apply them that creates the method or analysis we propose.

Two concepts drawn from the studies of semiotics and rhetoric lie at the heart of our approach to narrative analysis: opposition and enthymeme. Traditions of narrative analysis from both rhetoric and semiotics recognize that one way of creating meaning in discourse is through attention to opposites embedded in discourse (Feldman 1995; Feldman and Sköldbeg 2002). Elements of the story often have meaning based on what they are implicitly contrasted with, in other words, what they are *not*. For example, a sign saying “Exit” only has meaning in the context of other signs or other potential signs that say “Entrance.” Thus, what you are meant to do when you see the sign “Exit” makes sense because of your understanding that you are inside of something and, therefore, there is presumably an entrance as well as an exit. In the same way, a storyteller can create a sense of what is right about something without ever talking about it, only by talking about what is wrong with its opposite. A story of good management, for instance, might begin with a discussion of bad management. Some oppositions are not as obvious as the good/bad dichotomy. For example, one of our narrators interviewed in Charlotte told a story about change in which he complained about employees who are not innovative and only work within the current rules. One opposition for this story emerged as *following rules* and *problem solving*. This is reminiscent of the saying “sometimes you have to break the rules,” which is perhaps a surprising sentiment coming from a supervisor and can provide insights about this narrator’s recipe for change in his organization. In sum, when a storyteller describes a situation, one way to uncover meaning is by looking closely at what he or she is implying is its opposite.

In our analysis, the companion to oppositions and another method for revealing underlying structure is a concept from classical rhetoric called the enthymeme. Generally speaking, an enthymeme is an incomplete or “careless” logical inference. That is, enthymeme takes the form of an argument or, more formally, a syllogism, one of whose parts is missing.<sup>6</sup> Often, and most typically, the missing part is the major premise, but sometimes it may also be the minor premise or even the conclusion. A second but somewhat less recognized property of the enthymeme is that it is a plausible, likely, or probabilistic inference, rather than a logically binding one (as in a perfect syllogism).

Storytellers often have enthymemes embedded in their stories (Feldman and Sköldbberg 2002). Although enthymemes are characterized as incomplete and careless, they are in fact customary, even necessary, habits of everyday speech. It would not be natural for us to articulate what both speaker and listener accept are basic, taken-for-granted facts that often constitute the premises in classical arguments. Alternatively, by leaving unspoken the potentially controversial or not taken-for-granted aspects of the argument, the speaker may stave off disagreement. As Feldman and Sköldbberg put it, “Part of the persuasive quality of the enthymeme, then, is that the audience supplies some of the information. Presumably what the audience supplies, the audience also believes or will be induced to believe” (2002, 277). When controversial premises are explicit, they are likely to invite questions, resulting in both turning the attention of the listener from the desired conclusion to the controversial premise and reducing the credibility of the story (Bennett and Feldman 1981). Because people often avoid stating knowledge that is either taken for granted or controversial, their stories will often involve enthymemes.

Our analysis allows us to present the implicit argument made by the storyteller. Our concern is not with whether the argument is right or wrong or whether the events in question actually happened but, rather, with the understandings that the storyteller is expressing through the story. This task is directly related to the larger epistemological stance that contends that human communication in all of its forms is imbued with what Fisher calls myths—“ideas that cannot be verified or proved in any absolute way” (1987, 19). People tell stories in order to convince, and our concern is with the understandings that they are trying to convey through their stories.

We use these rhetorical and semiotic concepts in the manner described below to provide a systematic surfacing of the arguments used by the storyteller. The concept of the enthymeme provides the researcher with a tool to transform the implicit parts of the arguments into explicit and analyzable data. Because stories often have multiple arguments, this form of analysis facilitates disentangling the various arguments in a story. Often one syllogism serves as a stepping-stone to other arguments in the story.

## **COLLECTING STORIES**

In a substantive discussion of the theoretical background and empirical results of this research, we would engage in a more comprehensive description of the sample and the process of collecting the data. This would allow us both to draw a richer picture of the specific context of the research and to reassure the reader of the depth and thoroughness of our understanding of that context. The focus of this article is on the *process* of narrative analysis rather than the results. Accordingly, our aim here is to give only a brief summary

6 Aristotle, *Rhetoric* I.2 (see 1954).

of the data as background for the analyses that will be presented in later sections. The full data set used for the larger study includes observation, documentation, and informal conversations as well as these formal interviews. The transcribed interviews, however, provide the appropriate data for this analysis.

The data for this article were gathered in two U.S. cities: Charlotte, North Carolina, and Grand Rapids, Michigan. Feldman conducted interviews in both cities. Her first contact in Charlotte was during an interview with the deputy city manager in 1997. This led to a follow-up trip in November 1998, when she conducted formal interviews with five top managers and two mid-level managers. Also in 1998 she went to Grand Rapids for a two-hour-long meeting that included six members of the top executive team, the president of the largest employee union, and three employees who had been active in a cultural-transformation process going on in the city. Subsequently, she conducted seven individual interviews with Grand Rapids city employees from a variety of positions and departments. The average duration of interviews in both cities was one hour. In our current research (using the method described in this article), we focus on the transcripts of the fifteen interviews from the two cities: eight from Charlotte and seven from Grand Rapids.

## **ANALYZING INDIVIDUAL STORIES**

### **From Transcript to Story**

Our analysis began with the identification of the stories contained within each interview. A research assistant who had an interest in public management extracted stories from the interviews. The research assistant was provided with several examples of stories and was asked to find all other stories that were told in the interviews. As noted above, the general criterion for identifying stories is that they illustrate through specific exemplar. Storytellers use the story format to convey meaning to the listener in concrete terms, sometimes discovering and working out meaning themselves as the story is constructed. They rely on the “then what happened” convention of story narrative to depict a theoretical process enacted in real life. Thus, our stories naturally emerged periodically during the course of an interview as storytellers sought to attach appropriate examples to broader themes of the discussion or, conversely, used stories of particular events to locate an explanation of or answer for a general question. The interviews yielded 154 stories, ranging in length from five sentences to one and a half pages.

One assumption underlying the creation of this database of stories was that a story could indeed be identified. This turned out to be a pretty good assumption. During the course of story analysis, there were only five cases in which one researcher could not see the story in the text at the outset of analysis but another one did and was able to make the story apparent. The most common discussion we had about the appropriate identification of stories was whether the text was a story or a description. We defined a description as a list without a plot. Thus, a person may list the things that are necessary for change to occur but not show how they are related to the change coming about. However, in the end we did not find any description that was misidentified as a story. There were four instances in which we found that what the research assistant had thought was one story, we thought were two because they contained different themes. And once, we decided that what the research assistant thought was a separate story was more appropriately viewed as an extension of the previous story.

**Example #1**

Here is an example of one of the stories embedded in an interview from Charlotte. The storyteller is a manager in the water department. We will use this story to demonstrate the various stages of our analytical technique:

BE#6: “The Right Thing for the Right Reason”

I would hope that we have folks in the organization who have a higher calling than simply to say that this is all a gain. We’re not approaching it that it’s like a gain and the idea is simply to beat the private sector. What we’re saying is this is a way of us doing business. It is a cultural change, and it’s really to provide the best service at the lowest cost for our rate payers. What my mantra has been: “best service at lowest cost” and “what we are now doing is the right thing for the right reason.” When we started we were doing the right thing for the wrong reason. If you look at it as a political issue and a gain, then you do the right thing—which is, I think, the competitive situation—but you do it for the wrong reason—political—then you will wind up with this temptation to play that game. The wrong reasons were political reasons: the reason we ought to look at privatization and competition is because, number one, we know the private sector can always do better and, number two, we want to reduce the size of government . . . that the whole issue is head count. And that’s a political issue. I reduced this number of heads. Those are the wrong reasons to look at this issue. The right reason is that . . . by using competitive forces in the marketplace what you do is have a powerful tool; and it is one tool you have to help your organization to be better.

**From Story to Analysis**

As with each of the stories from our data, the analysis of this story took place on three levels. The first level was identifying the story line. The story line is the basic point (sometimes points) that the analyst thought the interviewee was trying to make about change. This was a simple, yet essential preliminary step in the analysis because stories often contain multiple lines of argument. Therefore, identifying a story line, or coming up with a one or two sentence summary of the story, compelled us to be very clear and concise about the argument or arguments we wanted to concentrate on in our analysis. The story line could be constructed differently, for example, if we were interested in questions of management style or power, but the topic of our study is organizational change, so we constructed story lines based on the views they shared about it. We created a story line that summarized how we thought the specific story related to the overarching narrative of organizational change. In summarizing the story line, we kept in mind what was both explicitly and implicitly told.

The story line we constructed for the “Right Thing” story is as follows:

This is a story about how the reasons for engaging in competition are important to success. The narrator talks about how competition with the private sector makes for better business and improved service, but it has to be done for the right reasons, which are not political. The narrator tells us that when they started out they were doing the right thing for the wrong reason but that now they are doing the right thing for the right reasons.

In this story, the storyteller is expressing his understanding of the different reasons to engage in competition. Notice that there are several subplots in the story, including ideas



about providing the best service. However, we decided to focus on the main point of the story about change: the interaction between the storyteller and what the right reasons are for competition. One could, of course, focus primarily on a subplot rather than the central theme of the story, and to the extent that the subplot is developed, it could form the basis of an alternative analysis.

The second level of analysis we engaged in identified the opposition(s) implicit (and sometimes explicit) in the story. As described previously, looking for oppositions allows the researcher to uncover the meaning of a key element of the discourse by analyzing what the narrator implies the element is not. This part of the analysis required a second assumption: that for each story an opposition could be identified. Rather than force oppositions into stories that did not have them, this assumption was put to the test for every story. In fact, most stories (78 percent, 120 of 154) contained multiple oppositions, and all stories contained at least one opposition.

The main oppositions associated with this story include right and wrong reasons, political and nonpolitical reasons, and then and now. The storyteller is clear that there are right and wrong reasons to engage in competition. The wrong reasons are “political,” which he defines as “we know the private sector can always do better and . . . we want to reduce the size of government.” The right reasons are that “by using competitive forces in the marketplace what you do is have a powerful tool; and it is one tool you have to help your organization to be better.” This reason is, by implication, nonpolitical. His organization used to engage in competition for the wrong reasons but now engages in competition for the right reasons.

Building from the story line and oppositions, the third level of analysis assumed that an argument could be identified and represented in an inferential, logical form. This assumption led us to reproduce the story in the form of syllogisms, logical arguments that help the storyteller express the ideas in the story. The process of constructing syllogisms was the next step in making explicit the storyteller’s arguments.

This step is where the concept of enthymeme is important (though not all syllogisms constructed were enthymemes). Strictly speaking, enthymemes are syllogisms in which one or more of the parts are not articulated or are probabilistic. For our analysis we focused primarily on what was articulated or explicit because we were not always in a position to determine whether a statement was a fact or a probability. Even restricting the definition in this way, 88 percent (703 of 798) of our syllogisms were enthymemes. This high proportion of enthymemes makes sense because these stories were told to persuade, the specific purpose Aristotle identified as the appropriate use of this logical form. Thus, though it is the creation of syllogisms that is the next step in revealing the underlying logics of the story, without the concept of enthymeme, this step would be difficult to implement for many stories.

The first syllogism for this story is not an enthymeme but, rather, a syllogism that is completely explicit. This first syllogism provides a kind of bottom line for this storyteller:

*Competition makes your organization better. We compete. Therefore, we have a better organization.*

The second and third syllogisms have an implicit major premise and conclusion. We often found that constructing the implicit part of the major premise involved identifying some type of value or judgment about whatever was explicit in the story. In this case it was the

value of what it means to do the right thing for the wrong reasons. The storyteller tells us that competing for political reasons will result in the “temptation to play that game.” Just prior to this story, the interviewer had asked about the possibility of competition leading to an emphasis on short-term gains at the expense of long-term provision of high-quality service. This is the game the storyteller is referring to. The storyteller tells us what he has in mind is a “higher calling”: it is related to providing “the best service at the lowest cost” and helping “your organization be better.” From these statements we infer that he considers playing the game to be a failure and providing the best service at the lowest cost to be success. Although he never says explicitly that doing the right thing for the wrong reasons results in failure whereas doing the right thing for the right reasons results in success, we felt it was a reasonable interpretation of the combination of statements he makes. Thus, the second and third syllogisms are below. For ease of identification, the implicit statements are capitalized:

*DOING THE RIGHT THING FOR THE WRONG REASONS RESULTS IN FAILURE. The wrong reasons for competition are political reasons. THEREFORE, ENGAGING IN COMPETITION FOR POLITICAL REASONS WILL BRING ABOUT FAILURE.*

*DOING THE RIGHT THING FOR THE RIGHT REASONS RESULTS IN SUCCESS. The right reason for competition is that it helps your organization do better. THEREFORE, ENGAGING IN COMPETITION TO HELP YOUR ORGANIZATION DO BETTER WILL RESULT IN SUCCESS.*

The construction of these syllogisms illustrates the importance of understanding context and not trying to perform this analysis on stories that are completely removed from their context. In this case an important understanding came from the surrounding material in the interview. In other instances understandings from observations or other interviews were important. These contextual understandings enabled us to triangulate and have more confidence in our interpretation of the particular words used in the stories.

### ***Collaborative Analysis Process***

We used a collaborative process to accomplish each of these levels of analysis. Mutual questioning and debate were integral to our process. Although a single person can perform this method of analysis, we found that the synthesis of our multiple perspectives generated a strong foundation for our interpretation. Through our collaborative process we gained a better understanding of the meaning of each story, a necessary step for identifying similarities and differences across stories. Ongoing weekly or biweekly meetings of the analytical team allowed us to maintain continuity in the analysis and interpretation of the data, to raise questions and concerns about the method, and to contrast individual insights. Prior to each meeting, two of the four researchers analyzed a set of stories in detail, and three of the researchers, including the person who conducted the interviews, participated in discussions of each story to compare and combine the individual analyses. Discrepancies were discussed until they were resolved to the satisfaction of all. Consistent with interpretive analysis, we did not assume that there is one way to see these stories. Indeed, we often found that there were at least two levels of argument: a general statement about what makes for good or effective organizational behavior and a more specific level about how to enact that behavior. Often one analyst would focus on one level, and another would

develop the other level. For an interpretation to remain part of the final analysis, each analyst had to be convinced that the storyteller was making this argument and that the argument was a key point of the story.

The analytical process did not change dramatically over the course of analyzing 154 stories, a process to which each of the researchers devoted approximately twenty hours per month for eight months. The repetition of analysis, instead, convinced us of the power of the technique to make the implicit explicit and to reveal the arguments that a storyteller is making. Although the process did not change, different stories do raise different issues. For that reason, we provide additional examples and, for each, show the three levels of analysis.

### **Example #2**

The next story is also from a manager in Charlotte. It is about what managers need to do in order to empower their employees, the particular kind of change promoted in this story:

B#11: “We Won’t Bring You His Head”

By the way, just as sort of a concluding note, the world of empowerment has its perils. My favorite example was we had some bus service problems when the city council was informed. Well, one of the reasons was we sent several to Atlanta for the Olympics. No one would have noticed except we wound up with on-the-street delays in service, so the city council was very curious and ask[ed] the city manager who approved sending buses to Atlanta to help with the Olympics. Of course, in the new world order the decision maker was about four levels down. And our argument was, hey, it comes with the territory. *You* might not have made that decision. *I* might not have made that decision, but that’s *where* that decision should be made. Shame on us that we didn’t have additional information at that level in the organization so that that person either felt comfortable checking it out above or knew the potential consequences or whatever so that now we won’t bring you his head either.

The storyline for “We Won’t Bring You His Head” was interpreted as follows:

Sometimes people at lower levels of the organization make mistakes. In an empowered organization these people can make big mistakes. The job of the managers is to make sure that these people have the right information so that they can make good decisions and to deal with political fallout when they don’t.

We identified two main oppositions from this story and story line: *management and politicians* and *micromanagement and empowerment*. We then thought more about how these oppositions help define the argument of the story. *Management and politicians* is an interesting opposition, for typically one might expect to see management placed opposite workers. Here, management sticks up for the employee who made a mistake against the finger-pointing and potential retribution of city politicians. Another explicit opposition makes clear that these players were operating under different conditions: the “new world order” and the old. These different conditions we defined (coded) as empowerment, whereby employees can make informed (or uninformed) decisions on their own, and micromanagement (implicitly supported by the politicians), whereby every decision must be approved at the highest levels.

There are three syllogisms developed from the “Won’t Bring You His Head” story. Our first syllogism draws on the *managers and politicians* opposition but focuses particularly on the argument being made about what managers do. You will notice that it is an enthymeme. The storyteller does not explicitly state either the major premise or the conclusion. For ease of identification, all implicit statements are capitalized:

*MANAGERS STICKING UP FOR THEIR EMPLOYEES IS A SIGN OF GOOD  
MANAGEMENT IN AN EMPOWERED ORGANIZATION. We stick up for our employees.  
THEREFORE, WE ARE GOOD MANAGERS.*

While the second premise is stated, it is not in the words we used here. What our narrator actually says is “shame on us [the managers]” for the mistake that was made and that, although the politicians might want to punish the offending employee, “we won’t bring you his head.” This example helps to illustrate that explicit statements in syllogisms do not have to be taken verbatim. Indeed, the process of analyzing meaning often demands that we translate specific idioms from the story—“we won’t bring you his head”—into a more general articulation of the theme—sticking up for employees.

The second syllogism was generated from the first, with an implicit first premise. Although the second premise and the conclusion are explicitly stated in the story, we had to fill in the major premise with the implicit assumption about decision makers:

*DECISION MAKERS MAKE MISTAKES. We allow lower-level people to make decisions.  
Therefore, our lower-level employees make mistakes.*

Earlier we claimed that explicit statements need not be taken verbatim from the text. So where do our implicit statements come from? By their very nature, implicit statements are difficult to pin down. They arise both from impressions of the stories as a whole and by deduction from the explicit elements of the argument that appear more readily. For example, in the above syllogism, the minor premise and the conclusion, both explicit, call for this kind of major premise. By looking at the elements that are explicit, we can triangulate back to the unstated element(s). In addition, the basis within the story for this particular major premise is when the storyteller says “it comes with the territory,” with *it* implying mistakes. Here, by surfacing the underlying premise, we make clear a part of the argument that, upon first hearing, might simply be taken for granted but once laid out can be given specific attention. What does it mean for this organization that managers believe that decision makers make mistakes?

Last, the third syllogism reflects the second opposition, *empowerment and micromanagement*. Both the major premise and the conclusion are implicit, but because the minor premise is explicitly stated, we can infer much of the argument:

*EMPOWERMENT WORKS IF MISTAKES CAN BE MADE. We stuck by an employee who  
made a mistake. EMPOWERMENT WORKS FOR US.*

Again, we can look back to the story to find traces of the implicit elements of the argument. Here, we knew the storyteller wanted to make a point about empowerment given his introduction to the story. Looking back at the original story text, without this reconstruction of the argument, we might have thought that this story was warning

*against* empowerment. Notice how the storyteller begins with the warning that “the world of empowerment has its perils.” We found, however, that the storyteller wants to show us *how* empowerment works in his organization and what some of the obstacles are. The change they made was possible because they not only had a policy of empowerment but also embodied that policy by believing in it and enacting it even under duress. Unpacking the various arguments embedded in the story and taking a close look at what is being said and left unsaid often generate this kind of surprising understanding.

### **Example #3**

The third story we present is particularly good at showing the arc of meaning that is created through a series of syllogisms. The story is about the creation of a team through colocation and the development of a culture. The storyteller is from Grand Rapids and is describing the creation of a development team, composed of people who are not in the same organizational unit. The development team had recently been moved to a new office building where members would be colocated rather than being located in their organizational units:

SC#3: “Different Perspectives”

I think there have been a couple [key moments]. He [a manager] continued to conduct team meetings on a regular basis even before we located here and has got us working toward identifying what the mission is, which I think is pretty instrumental in establishing a culture. He has continued to encourage us as we continued to meet on a regular basis to develop a group identity, joint beliefs, to identify jointly what the issues are surrounding our quote predicament or opportunity, and to look for joint solutions and seek ways of making this a strong and successful effort. There’s about twenty of us who are on this floor from all those offices, including Building Inspection, Zoning Enforcement, Planning, Engineering, Storm Water Management, Traffic Safety, Water Utilities; and so we come at development from different perspectives. There’s a certain enriching opportunity here. We can learn each other’s job a little better and I think do a better job in the eyes of the developer just because we understand each other’s perspective a little better.

The story line we created from this story is as follows:

This story is about teamwork. By coming together to discuss the mission, we establish a group identity to solve problems together. A diversity of perspectives provides an opportunity for enrichment, understanding, and learning among our group.

“Different Perspectives” includes a number of oppositions. One of the main oppositions is between *teamwork* and *working alone* (or in isolation). A manager facilitated this team approach even before different parts of the organization were physically located in the same building. Another opposition gives meaning to the idea of teamwork: teamwork involves having a *diversity of perspectives compared to a dominant way of thinking* (or one way of thinking). Because there were people from so many different offices, there were many different perspectives on development. The implication is that these people need to coalesce as a team to be able to “do a better job in the eyes of the developer.” The opposite is everyone keeping to his or her own office, with individual goals and ways of thinking. Establishing a culture is important to coalescing as a team.

*Communicating* is a means of achieving it, and *not communicating* would result in not developing the ability to work together as a team.

From these oppositions we went into more detail to analyze what the oppositions may mean in terms of the storyteller's argument. The first syllogism we constructed is completely explicit:

*Getting together regularly produces group identity and enables you to think about a mission. We get together regularly. Therefore, we have group identity and a mission.*

In this syllogism the storyteller is clear that getting together produces a shared identity and mission, which they have.

Building a path from the conclusion of this statement, we then constructed another syllogism that begins with an implicit major premise:

*GROUP IDENTITY AND MISSION ARE NECESSARY TO CREATE A CULTURE. We have group identity and a mission. THEREFORE, WE HAVE CREATED A CULTURE.*

Note that this syllogism is related to the one before it. What the storyteller said was "working toward identifying what the mission is, which I think is pretty instrumental in establishing a culture." Words like *culture* are often taken for granted. The meaning of culture is tacitly assumed. Yet this syllogism allows for a more specific reading, noting that group identity and mission are what the storyteller means by creating culture:

*CREATING A CULTURE WILL ENABLE US TO UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER'S PERSPECTIVES. WE HAVE CREATED A CULTURE. Therefore, we will understand each other's perspectives.*

Both the major and minor premises of this syllogism are implicit. The minor premise is the conclusion from the previous syllogism. The storyteller jumps from talking about the creation of culture toward the beginning of the story to understanding each other's perspectives at the end of the story. The listener is left to put together what could be a controversial statement—that creating a group identity and a mission will enable them to understand each other's perspectives. In fact, "establishing a culture" is often seen as a process of getting rid of differences in perspective rather than facilitating the "enriching opportunity" that the storyteller describes here.

Another set of statements in the story helps to forestall the interpretation that establishing a culture is about getting rid of differences. The storyteller suggests that the diverse perspectives themselves have positive qualities. The use of the positive terms *learning*, *enrichment*, and *understanding* leads the reader to interpret the creation of culture as something that is enriching rather than impoverishing:

*DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES CREATE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ENRICHMENT, LEARNING, AND UNDERSTANDING. We have many perspectives. Therefore, we have opportunities to be enriched, learn, and understand.*

The major premise is implicit. Diverse perspectives may create many things. They may lead to confusion, fragmentation, and the inability to accomplish work. In this case,

however, the storyteller makes a connection between diverse perspectives and enrichment, learning, and understanding by juxtaposing these two ideas.

The fourth syllogism provides us with the storyteller's final point. The ultimate reason to engage in establishing a culture is to serve the client better. In this case the client is the developer. The following syllogism is entirely explicit in the story:

*Understanding each other's perspectives will enable us to do a better job in the eyes of the developer. We will understand each other's perspectives. Therefore, we will do a better job in the eyes of the developer.*

The syllogisms enable us to move from one part of the argument to another until we create an interpretation of the story that captures in a logical form some of the ideas that the storyteller expresses about how to bring about change. The syllogisms constructed in this story often build off each other, highlighting those practices that lead to a satisfying interpretation of change. The storyteller describes the path they are taking to create a satisfying change (an "enriching opportunity" in which they "do a better job in the eyes of the developer") out of their "quote predicament or opportunity" (having representatives from several different organizational units colocated in the development center). They are "establishing a culture" in which they "understand each other's perspectives" and "look for joint solutions."

One can, of course, come to this understanding without using our method. Our method, like any other analytical tool, provides a systematic path that is reassuring to both the researcher and the audience. It is easy to get lost in a story. The identification of oppositions and construction of syllogisms provide the researcher with a metaphorical flashlight if not a compass. The method also provides a way to show others how the understanding was achieved.

In performing this analysis we welcomed the generation of new ideas and often found that the syllogism form itself invites multiple interpretations. Generating syllogism after syllogism was also complemented by the synergistic aspect of our collaborative analysis. Indeed, we could have kept going, creating new syllogisms all building from the last. However, we limited the creation of syllogisms by continually asking ourselves, "Do the syllogisms create new meaning about our subject of interest, organizational change?" At times we did reject syllogisms or stopped interpreting stories when we agreed that continuing was not directly related to understanding more about organizational change.

#### **Example #4**

Our final example is another story from Grand Rapids. This story again illustrates the development of meaning over several syllogisms. This manager is discussing a plan for changing the interactions among employees in her division:

WO#11: "In Mud Up to Here"

And the other thing that really surprised me was the culture of the Water Department, particularly of my division—I have billing, customer service, phone-in credit and cashier, meter setters, meter readers, and meter repair staff. And there was such a division between those groups and an animosity between certain areas. That was amazing to me because they were so interdependent on each other. Because of the animosity they were making things more difficult

for whoever got the work after them, and there was little interaction between the groups and little understanding between the groups of what one and the other did. I talked to people in the building who were upstairs and had never been downstairs. And they knew nothing about that operation, and yet they take calls about it all the time. And those kinds of things I found amazing because they are so connected. . . . They know the words. They know the concepts, but they never see it. And when you see them put meters together in chambers so that you know why something can go wrong or you know what could happen when a meter gets bad or things like that.

It was surprising to me because when I came I spent the first three months just doing that . . . going out and being a meter reader for a week, going out and maybe trying to build a meter from scratch, going out and setting meters. And they loved getting me in the pits underground with spiders, and rats, and all those kinds of things—they really had fun with that—and I was in mud up to here. . . . That was real important in getting respect and understanding when we talk about something I know what we’re talking about. I can visualize it. I can know the part. I can know the problem, and I know how important it was to me, and I realize that the other people don’t have that. For whatever reason it hasn’t occurred, and we’ve really been segmented. And any time you get that “nobody-works-in-that-department” attitude in every division, nobody works. ’Cause they don’t understand.

So one of the things we discussed is getting a checklist, starting it in 1999, and by the year 2000 every one of our employees will get this checklist. They have to have gone to the waste plant. They have to see a meter set, have to see a meter rebuilt, they’ll have to spend time with a credit rep dealing with delinquencies, spend time with a billing rep and writing some bills. . . . That’s a big thing. It’s like you get empathy for each group for what the other group does.

The story line for “In Mud Up to Here” is:

Lack of understanding of what different parts of the organization do makes it difficult for those different parts of the organization to work together. When this manager first came, there was real division and animosity among different groups in her division, even though the groups were interdependent. Work was difficult. Division was a result of lack of interaction and understanding. She modeled interaction and understanding by going out in the field.

Based on the “In Mud Up to Here” story and story line we identified three main oppositions: *animosity and understanding*, *segmentation and integration*, and *being told something and experiencing it*. These oppositions help distill the argument of the story. The storyteller describes the current segmented situation in her department where there is division among different employee groups, both physically and emotionally. She then contrasts this with a change plan for fostering interaction among groups by creating a checklist of “field trips” taking employees to each work section of the department. The theory behind this plan is based on the other opposition, the distinction between being told something and experiencing it. The storyteller’s own adventure of going out in the field, in the pits with the rats and the mud, is used to show that the process of physically undertaking the work of others helps one understand what it means to do that work.

We developed four syllogisms from the “Mud Up to Here” story. The arc of these syllogisms moves from (1) an argument about why change is needed, to (2) a plan for change, to (3) an argument about why that plan will work. The first two syllogisms below



describe what the narrator feels is unsatisfying about the work situation. You will notice that these syllogisms are all enthymemes. The storyteller does not explicitly state the major premise in any of them:

*WHEN THERE IS ANIMOSITY AMONG PEOPLE IN DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE ORGANIZATION, THEY MAKE EACH OTHER'S WORK MORE DIFFICULT. There is such animosity among people in certain areas. Therefore, they make work more difficult.*

*WHEN PEOPLE IN DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE ORGANIZATION DO NOT UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER'S WORK, THEY ARE LESS EFFECTIVE AS AN ORGANIZATION. There is little understanding among the groups. THEREFORE, THESE PEOPLE ARE NOT EFFECTIVE.*

These syllogisms explain why we should be concerned about animosity and lack of understanding. In the first case, the storyteller is more explicit about the cause of the problem: "Because of the animosity they were making things more difficult for whoever got the work after them." On the other hand, she simply assumes that the listener knows that lack of understanding is negative: "They knew nothing about that operation, and yet they take calls about it all the time." She leaves it to the listener to fill in the conclusion that the lack of understanding affects the organization. By constructing the syllogism, we reveal that this storyteller sees the lack of understanding as a threat to effectiveness.

The following syllogism reflects the theory behind the speaker's plan to remedy the unsatisfactory current situation. If the problem is lack of understanding, then how can she remedy it?

*INTERACTION CREATES UNDERSTANDING. I plan to require my employees to interact. Therefore, they will generate more understanding.*

This syllogism summarizes the narrator's theory of how to bring about change: interaction is what creates understanding. This syllogism is drawn from her final comment that, when you have people go see what people in other divisions do, "it's like you get empathy for each group for what the other group does."

In the final syllogism, the second opposition, *being told something and experiencing it*, is represented. It further defines and stresses the importance of interaction:

*UNDERSTANDING MEANS MORE THAN JUST KNOWING WHAT OTHERS DO, IT MEANS EXPERIENCING IT. I will have my employees experience other employees' jobs. THEREFORE, THEY WILL UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER.*

For this narrator, interaction takes place through physical movement. Both the major premise and the conclusion are implicit, but because the second premise is explicitly stated, we can infer much of the argument. These syllogisms present an argument about change that we found useful in explaining a theoretical argument about how to change daily work practices. Although the particulars are specific to the story, the overarching argument represented here contends that new rules can change employees' mind-sets about work, which then leads to improvement in work practices. Constructing the syllogisms for this story enables us to see these connections.

Constructing syllogisms makes it easier to analyze very specific parts of each argument; it also provides the opportunity to show how each argument progresses through a series of syllogisms, one building on the next. This is particularly effective given the multilayered nature of stories. We found that, within the stories, concepts often seem to blend together, vocabulary is naturally imprecise, and several points might be made concurrently during the course of the single story example. Our narrative approach helps to sort through the mixture of meanings and highlight a particular line of argument. Generating story lines served as an interpretive lens and oriented us to the set of arguments we would focus on. Then, using the oppositions as clues to the implicit theory, syllogism construction enabled us to make the argument explicit.

We want to acknowledge and emphasize here that, although it is important to be mindful and search for the multiple meanings embedded in a story, the researcher must also realize that he or she cannot extract all possible interpretations. The above elements are single versions of a broad array of interpretations that could be made of this storyteller's meaning. In fact, we explicitly did *not* seek to draw out *every* possible interpretation. Instead, our criterion for inclusion was whether it was central to understanding change. We asked each other, "Are we missing something important about how change occurs if we don't include this?"

### **USING THE ANALYSIS**

Now that we have demonstrated the ins and outs of our approach, we turn to the question: What can a researcher do with this analytical strategy? In keeping with our narrative perspective, we think that one way of answering that question is to tell the story of our own research findings developed out of this technique.

### **The Coding Process**

At this point in a qualitative analysis, some researchers might find themselves overwhelmed with discrete units of data, in our case, nearly 400 oppositions and nearly 800 syllogisms. Once we have each of these microinterpretations, how do we integrate them into a way of understanding what change means to these organizations? In our case, we found it useful to begin by coding the data.

Decisions about coding depend on the software being used and the kind of analysis the researcher intends to pursue. The issues we raise here relate specifically to the method of analysis we present. (There were many other decisions that related to the content of our research.) As we embarked upon coding, we found that we needed to make some decisions about what constituted a unit of analysis in the data—that is, exactly what would get coded? For example, should each storyteller's compilation of stories constitute a single "document"? No, each story became a separate document because we were interested in sorting or indexing the stories themselves, across all narrators. Should oppositions be separated or grouped together? Separated, so that we could group by theme. Answers to these questions arose through thinking ahead about which components it would make sense to assign a code. For example, we decided that we needed codes for each part of the syllogism but that they should not be segmented into constituent parts (i.e., major premise, minor premise). We wanted to be able to find all of the syllogisms with, for instance, implicit major premises, but because a major premise only has meaning in the context of

the rest of the syllogism, we did not want to extract all of the implicit major premises by themselves. In sum, we thought that it was important to be able to code elements of the analytical strategy that are independent. This resulted in our identification of specific text units for story, story line, opposition, and syllogism, with additional codes attached to each syllogism describing the three parts. Once we outlined what would be coded and how, we used a qualitative software program to help us organize the data.

Our approach to thematic coding was both inductive and iterative.<sup>7</sup> In other words, we allowed the theory to emerge from the data through multiple rounds of analysis and interim explanation building, rather than beginning with a preexisting set of theoretical propositions. Although we were familiar with the wide literature on organizational change, we did not want to choose a theoretical model a priori but, instead, build one from the data. Thus, our insights were “grounded” in theory without “testing” any predetermined set of hypotheses about what we would find. We began with a list of relatively concrete, descriptive categories focusing on specific content, for example, “rules,” “competition,” and “performance evaluation.” As coding progressed, but before we even completed a first round of coding for all of the stories, more general, abstract categories were added. As you might expect, not all of the original codes panned out. For example, we initially included an abstract code for “change” but rapidly found that, by their very nature, almost every story included some aspect of change. Change was so ubiquitous that it did not need its own code. Although we suspected this, we continued to experiment with finer categories of the change concept (status quo, process of change, etc.), but they were eventually discarded. Looking for commonalities among our more specific categories, we found that one after another storyteller spoke about either changes in the way things were done, changes in the way people thought about their jobs, or both. These clearly fit into the established theoretical concepts of structural rules and understandings (or, as we coded it, mind-set).

### **Generating a Theory of Change**

Once we had coded all of the data within each story, we moved to an analysis of the codes themselves. The following section is one example of how we used the coding of the arguments to generate new ideas about the process under investigation: organizational change. The coding allowed us to explore questions we had about comparisons between the two cities. Participants in Charlotte described their change regime in terms of “structural” change, which was largely characterized by overhauling work rules and responsibilities. Charlotte’s plan for change involved reducing the number of departments (and department heads) from twenty-six to thirteen and flattening the hierarchies within each department. The Grand Rapids change plan was called “cultural transformation” and sought to change how people think about their jobs and the beliefs, emotions, and commitment people brought to their work. The reformers conducted “visioning” events that focused on values, what values they held in common and what values they wanted to promote. As a result, we expected to see differences by city in our new coding categories.

We thought that it would help us understand more about the differences between the two cities to compare the prevalence of these categories in stories told by different storytellers in each of the cities. It is often useful to confirm intuitive conclusions by simply tallying the various codes, just to get a sense of “what is there” (Huberman and Miles

<sup>7</sup> Various texts are available that discuss inductive coding. See, for example, Glaser and Strauss 1967; Huberman and Miles 1994; Lofland and Lofland 1995; Yin 1994.

1994). Given the emphasis on rules in Charlotte's change process and on understandings in the Grand Rapids change process, we anticipated that these elements would vary accordingly in the stories. However, we were surprised to find that this was not so. In fact, there is an almost uncanny similarity in both the number of stories and the number of storytellers that focus on these categories. In both Charlotte and Grand Rapids, every storyteller has at least four or five stories that touch on issues of rules. In fact, 81 percent of the stories (124 of 154 total stories) have a mention of rules, and storytellers from the two cities bring it up the same amount of the time (82 percent versus 79 percent, or fifty-seven versus fifty-five stories). Similarly, while 74 percent of Grand Rapids stories talked about mind-set, 71 percent of Charlotte stories also refer to mind-set, even though the city intentionally initiated a "structural" change process focusing on rule changes. These findings provoked us to go beyond the storytellers' own depictions of the change as specifically cultural transformation or structural change and look more closely at how they were describing how change to work was achieved.

The surprising similarities between the stories coming out of the two cities led us to think more about our categories and to desire a better understanding of what meanings and relationships the categories implied. The numerical analysis was not an end in itself but, rather, helped us move beyond a simple interpretation and toward a more complex analysis of the data. We returned to the syllogisms to look at what more they could reveal about the rule and mind-set categories. In stories that contained more than one syllogism (91 percent, 140 of 154), the syllogisms often constituted an interconnected series of arguments. Looking at all of the syllogisms related to one story revealed links among the several arguments. As shown in example #4, "In Mud Up to Here," many of the sets of syllogisms describe aspects about the *movement* between rules and mind-set. For example, the first syllogism might articulate an argument about how a new rule generates a new mind-set, followed by a syllogism that articulates how the new mind-set contributes to a change in work practices. The syllogisms allowed us to see the links—the pathways and intersections—among changes in rules, changes in understanding, and changes in practice. The syllogisms revealed the means or the routes of change.

We then used what we understood and returned to the text of the stories themselves. This was a crucial step in the interpretive process. Although the syllogisms are useful tools for extracting and clarifying the meanings within the stories, it is also important to analyze them in the context of the story, the interview, or the case as a whole, as discussed earlier. It was during this return phase of the analysis that, looking at stories and syllogisms in conjunction, we concluded that the narrators' recipes for change implied a combination of the enactment of both rule and mind-set changes through daily practice. Thus, in Grand Rapids, where they began with "cultural" transformation, they also enacted it through creating development centers and checklists. In Charlotte, they had rule changes that mandated empowerment and competition, but neither change would have been effective in the absence of the "right" mind-set. Both domains realized changes, regardless of whether the original change plan focused on rules or understanding (Feldman, Brown, and Horner 2003).

## DISCUSSION

We have shown how we applied this analytical tool to the interview data we have. There are other facets of this approach to narrative analysis that we envision as useful tools.

For example, Feldman and Sköldbberg (2002) suggest that we could look specifically at the implicit statements in our syllogisms to view what is either controversial or taken for granted in these organizations. Having interviewees discuss the implicit statements in follow-up interviews might be another way to use this analysis to create deeper understandings of the ways in which these organizational participants think about change. This might help to shed light on whether the statements are taken for granted or controversial.

Other researchers have begun to take this technique in new directions and to extend its use to data from a variety of sources. For instance, in Brown's (forthcoming) ethnography about the politics of everyday life for African American girls participating in an after-school empowerment program, she uses this particular narrative analysis drawing on participant-observational data to re-create a counternarrative that demonstrates how political space is constructed within the organization. In her analysis, syllogisms capture the contradictions of providing girls tools to challenge structural and societal conceptions of girlhood while simultaneously reifying normative stereotypes. The syllogism analysis enables her to analyze various implicit theories about what the program should be doing.

Price's (2003) work on medical abortion (RU-486) and emergency contraception analyzes stories of pro-life and pro-choice advocacy groups, legal advocacy groups, and medical and health professional associations as well as stories in the mainstream media and in congressional and Food and Drug Administration testimony. In this work she has used the syllogism analysis to find logics that run across many different stories and to show how narratives construct archetypal characters that are simplistic representations of policy arguments. She argues that narrative is an important policy tool because audiences draw conclusions about policies based on the assumptions about the characters that are implicit in the stories.

The use of any analytical tool must be related to the question being asked of the data. The ways scholars use this analysis will vary by the content of their research questions and the kinds of data they have. What researchers do once they have completed the analysis or how they use the analysis to address their questions will vary as well.

## **CONCLUSION**

Interpretive social science is an important part of the scholarly repertoire. It is particularly useful in helping us understand the processes that social actors engage in to make sense of their reality and to guide their actions. Understanding the interpretive processes used by social actors requires an act of interpretation on the part of scholars. This has been referred to as the double hermeneutic (Giddens 1984). Though we, as social actors, engage in a process of continuing interpretation, we, as scholars, cannot simply rely on the interpretive processes we use in our uncritical everyday stance. Although positive analytical techniques may at times help us understand *what* sense is being made, interpretive techniques are most useful in helping us understand *how* the sense is being made (Guba and Lincoln 1994; Lin 1998). And it turns out that how people interpret their reality is often integral to what sense they are making (Weick 1995). Therefore, developing specifically interpretive techniques of analysis is particularly important.

Our narrative analysis revealed a great deal of information about the stories embedded in interviews and allowed us to go more deeply into each storyteller's world. Using the idea of enthymeme from classical rhetoric allowed us to make more transparent the way that the

storytellers were making sense of their reality and the changes they and their organizations were undertaking. Understanding their interpretation process allowed us to move away from the categories that the storytellers explicitly provided and to gain a deeper understanding of the change process, thus enabling us to move in the direction of the Giddensian (1984) “double hermeneutic” referred to above. This technique of filling in the missing part of the argument guided our interpretations and challenged us to go further into the meaning of the story.

Constructing and interpreting syllogisms allowed us to move beyond the popular terminology that people often use to characterize (and sometimes obscure) what is happening when change occurs. While our storytellers often spoke in terms of *culture* or *structure*, our analysis provided a systematic way to explore what our storytellers meant when they used these words. Our analysis of the way storytellers in both cities described *how* change was occurring allowed us to gain a deeper understanding of the process of change that they were experiencing and of their understanding of the process of change. In particular, it showed that there was an underlying process taking place in both cities that transcended the “structural” and “cultural” categories that the storytellers explicitly provided.

In this way, although our methodology focuses on the stories people share, in our analysis we came up with a story about their story, relying on interpretations that privileged both explicit and implicit meanings. To be clear, we do not suggest that we, as researchers, know better than our storytellers. Instead, we take the role of interpreting or translating the understandings expressed to us by practitioners. Our analysis increases the capacity of the researcher by providing a means of surfacing the implicit as well as the explicit.

The results of our analysis suggest that stories tend to be underutilized as a source of data. We show that stories can be mined for information that is otherwise neglected, thrown out, or labeled as missing. What is unstated but implied may be missed, discounted, or difficult to articulate to others. We have found narrative analysis an important tool for recovering—some may say uncovering—meaning in data. Our method of narrative analysis provides us with a means of making explicit what storytellers say.

This article presents one particular procedure for analyzing narratives, one that combines an analysis of the form of the text with a reading of the content. Our effort has been to show why we have found this method useful and to provide the reader with some guidance about how to implement the method. As with any interpretive research process, the strength of the method relies on the multiple readings that one text invites, and in this case, we attempted to make more transparent the process in which our particular reading is grounded.

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