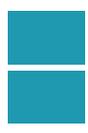


ARTICLE



A Narrative Approach to Working with an Organization in Conflict

Nikolaj Kure
 John Winslade

Submitted: January 2010

Accepted: February 2010

Published: July 2010



Abstract

This article is about how to apply narrative practices as tools for mediation in organizations. It offers a range of theoretical reflections that guide the use of narrative practices in this context and illustrates these points by analyzing an organization in conflict and a subsequent narrative mediation process. In particular, the paper discusses the implications of transferring narrative practices from a context of two-party mediation to an organizational context.



Keywords

mediation, conflict resolution, narrative, narrative mediation, discourse, positioning, organization, deconstruction, externalizing

INTRODUCTION

Narrative mediation in relational conflicts has been extensively addressed (see for example Cobb, 2004; Cobb, 1994; Cobb, 1993; Winslade, 2006; Winslade, 2003; Winslade & Monk, 2009; Winslade & Monk, 2000; Winslade, Monk & Cotter, 1998). This paper adds to this work by reflecting on how narrative mediation practices can be shaped when transferred from the context of two-party relational conflict to one of organizational conflict. The change of contexts calls for a number of reflections of both a theoretical and a practical nature. In this paper we particularly focus on two aspects. First, we briefly conceptualize how organizational conflicts are produced discursively. We suggest that organizational conflicts are conditioned by a web of privileged and marginalized organizational discourses that function as a background for negative positioning, and we argue that this understanding of organizational conflicts gives rise to an alteration of the mediator's gaze and practice. Second, we reflect on the concrete, practical ramifications of using

narrative practices in multi-relational settings such as an organization.

These points are illustrated through a case study of a Danish health organization (called here Centre for Motor Disabilities, CMD) which is an interdisciplinary research team. At this centre, it is assumed that muscular pain is the result of a complex network of physiological, psychological and social factors that all play a part in producing and maintaining pain. As a result, a doctor, a social worker, a physiotherapist, a psychologist, and an occupational therapist have been recruited to establish a multi-perspective team that can treat patients holistically. Recently, members of the organization have experienced patterns of conflict and frustration in their decision-making practices. The conflict is not paralyzing the organization's practice, but it does cast a significant negative shadow over the organization's life. The first author of this paper interviewed all seven team members twice (the team consists of the specialists mentioned above and two secretaries), participated in a number of staff meetings, and organized a two-day seminar where narrative practices were used as mediation tools.



LITERATURE REVIEW

Narrative practices were developed in a therapeutic setting by Michael White and David Epston (White, 2007; White & Epston, 1990) in the 1980's and 1990's. Drawing upon Bruner's (1986) conception of identity as a narrative construct, White and Epston developed a number of retelling practices that proved extremely helpful in various therapeutic contexts (see for example Freedman & Combs, 1996; Payne, 2006; White, 2007; White & Epston, 1990; Zimmermann & Dickerson, 1996). Building on this promising prospect, mediators have since made use of narrative practices in their effort to resolve conflicts (see for example Cobb, 2004; Cobb, 1994; Cobb, 1993; Winslade, 2006; Winslade, 2003; Winslade & Monk, 2009; Winslade & Monk, 2000; Winslade, Monk & Cotter, 1998). This approach, known as narrative mediation, is theoretically supported by Foucault's concept of discourse as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1969, p. 49). In particular, narrative mediators focus on what can be coined 'relational discourses', which are local systems of meaning that shape the identities of the parties in a relationship. These relational discourses map onto larger, more pervasive, discourses, or orders of discourse, but at the personal level, they are manifest through the 'positioning' of each of the parties in a power relation (Davies & Harré, 1990; Drewery, 2005; Winslade, 2006). For instance, when neighbor 1 responds to neighbor 2's suggestion to fell an inconveniently placed tree with the following response: "Could we be reasonable just for a second, please?"; neighbor 1 positions neighbor 2 as 'irrational' and represents himself as more legitimately 'rational'. The prioritized modernist discourse of rationality constructs neighbor 1 as privileged and qualifies neighbor 2 as an incompetent speaker whose perspectives and opinions are unworthy of consideration.

Conflicts are understood, from this perspective, as the end results of such marginalizing and polarizing positioning practices. Consequently, narrative mediators focus on the redistribution of the discursive resources that are drawn upon in such positioning practices by cooperating with the persons in conflict to build alternative relationship stories (Winslade, 2006). If this is successful, a new discursive background is constituted, which potentially short-circuits the current polarizing positioning practices. The discursive underpinning of the conflict is eroded and, as a result, the conflict is either dissolved or a basis for smooth negotiation of outstanding issues is established.

A number of studies have shown that narrative practices are useful mediation tools in the resolution of conflicts that involve two-party relations such as couples (Winslade, 2003; Winslade & Monk, 2009) or neighbors (Winslade, Monk & Cotter, 1998; Monk, Winslade, Crockett & Epston, 1997). In the light of this promising trajectory, a new ques-

tion emerges: Can narrative practices be applied for mediation in conflicts within organizations?

Before setting out to answer this question it seems important to clarify how a conflict in a two-party relation differs from a conflict in an organizational context. In this paper we draw on the work of Winslade and Monk (2000) in defining a relational conflict as a conflict that involves two parties who are in polarized positions from where they find themselves unable to move forward. An organizational conflict, on the other hand, is defined as a systemic pattern of positioning practices that concentrate marginalizing lines of force (Deleuze, 1988; 1995; Winslade, 2009) and negatively define various groups and individuals across an organization. At times, but not always, such negative definitions can lead to a pattern of domination that brooks no opposition or challenge. Thus, an organizational conflict goes beyond specific interpersonal communications and constructs patterns of negative definition of various persons across an organization. A conflict between two parties in an organization, therefore, is not an organizational conflict unless it is part of a larger pattern of negative positioning practices that involve other persons in the organization.

THE ORGANIZATION AS A SPACE FOR DISCURSIVE STRUGGLE

When mediating it is important to be reflexively aware of how a conflict is created and what drives a conflict. The mediator's theoretical conceptualizations guide their vision and, consequently, practice. In this section we develop an understanding of organizational conflict that may help to establish a gaze that qualifies the use of narrative practices in an organizational context.

As described, mediation in relational conflicts aims to open up background relational discourses for inspection that, according to Foucault, operate as "the great anonymous murmur of discourses" (Foucault, 1989, p. 27) against which relational identities are being constructed. The effect of these discourses behind people's backs is then made available for challenge. We suggest making a distinction between relational discourses and organizational discourses. Relational discourses are those that shape identities in a specific relation. Organizational discourses, on the other hand, are those that shape practices across various fields, or planes of practice, in an organization. Thus, we suggest a view of organizations as a range of practice fields (such as the fields of decision making, management and communication) all of which are shaped by organizational discourses that establish positions from which people can act and speak. Importantly, discursive positions incorporate a conceptual repertoire and a moral location for people who accept this position as their own (Davies & Harré, 1990). As such, subject positions provide people with a specific



way of seeing the world and a way of acting morally in this world. In other words, on taking up a subject position, a person assumes a moral intention as a guideline for their actions. Based on these reflections, we proceed to analyze which discourses are shaping the practice field of decision making at CMD. We do so by asking the analytical question: what are the moral intentions in structuring decision-making practices in the organization?

Looking at CMD with this question in mind, it appears that the practice field of decision making is being predominantly shaped by a discourse of professional equality: all members of the team seem to espouse a moral commitment to equal status with regard to each other's professional training and background. Thus, the empirical material shows that two decision-making practices are dominant in the team's behavior. First, the majority of the team members apply a cross-functional gaze when diagnosing the patients. When observing the patients, the gaze is not limited to a strict mono-functional vision, but is directed to all dimensions of the patient (the physiological, social, and psychological). Second, the team members tend to communicate about the patients in a reflective manner that implicitly recognizes the possibility of other perspectives. The occupational therapist, Josephine, for example, formulates a suggestion as a hypothetical reflection:

"In that case, I might think about proposing that she [the patient] is seen by Pernille [the psychologist]."

Here Josephine reflects upon whether she wants to propose her suggestion before she can even begin to propose it. Arguably, these decision-making practices are organized by a discourse of equality. Observing patients with a holistic gaze meta-communicates that all perspectives are equally important. Likewise, speaking in a reflective mode suggests that all proposals articulated will be assumed to be equally justifiable. In other words, the majority of the decision makers speak and act from a moral position that is produced by a discourse of equality.

Inspired by Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) account of discourse theory, we argue that different organizational discourses will frequently engage in a struggle for dominance, including, ironically, a discourse that is named 'equality'. Thus, we prefer to think of organizational discourses as systems of meaning that strive to determine social activities by defining their subject position as the 'proper' social identity in the organization. If we analyze CMD from this point of view, a discourse of difference that challenges the discourse of equality becomes visible. We shall explain these two discourses with reference to some examples. In particular, two members, Thomas and Pernille, seem to be adversely positioned by this discourse of professional differences. They both prefer to observe the patient strictly from their own mono-functional perspective and believe that the quality of the treatment is enhanced if the team

members stick strictly to their own functional perspectives. Furthermore, instead of wording treatment proposals as reflections, they prefer to formulate their proposals as knowledge-based expert assessments. We will argue that this position is produced by a discourse of professional difference. Thus, both practices seem to be structured by the moral intention to activate the team's differences in functional perspectives and knowledge resources. The practice of observing the patient from a strictly expert perspective and of wording suggestions as expert assessments is based on an implicit assumption that the team holds a number of differences that should be activated. In other words, the position from which Thomas and Pernille talk shapes a decision-making rationale in which differences are valued and should be made explicit.

The ongoing struggle between these two discourses is expressed as a hierarchy of a dominant and marginalized discourse. In the case of CMD the discourse of equality dominates the discourse of difference. Analytically, we have determined this by means of what we term 'double descriptions'. Double descriptions appear when a member simultaneously observes two subject positions of which one is explicitly preferred but nevertheless feels obliged to assume the other. In the empirical material a number of such descriptions appear which clarify that the discourse of equality rules the field of decision making. For instance, on several occasions Thomas describes how he prefers to act in accordance with the position dispersed by the discourse of difference (i.e., he explicitly makes it clear that he prefers to formulate his perspective as an expert assessment), yet in fact he chooses a tentative, reflective voice. These sequences show that the position of the equality-seeking member is privileged at CMD, and, consequently, that the discourse of equality has managed to suppress its discursive opponent.

Seeing organizations as discursive hierarchies helps to understand the emergence of organizational conflicts. It allows for a distinction between privileged and disadvantaged social positions. The dominant discourse singles out a privileged social position, whereas the position produced by the subjugated discourse is marginalized. We suggest that organizational conflicts are the results of discursive power operations that distribute privilege unequally in the organization through the control of discourse and the allocation of discursive positions. Specifically we suggest that persons who assume marginalized subject positions risk being negatively defined by persons supporting the dominating discourse. On such occasions, the experience of the negatively defined person is not having their identity recognized as legitimate, which may likely be followed by a "struggle for recognition" (Honneth, 2006). Such struggles are often destructively expressed in the shape of intimidation of others' preferred identities, which, in turn, may force others to struggle for their own recognition. Thus, the hierarchical discursive structure legitimizes practices of negative positioning which drive and escalate conflict patterns.



In CMD, Thomas and Pernille, who assume a position generated by the discourse of professional difference, are subject to these negative definitions. Both are indirectly, but systematically, urged to suppress their ambition to make the differences among team members explicit. For example, Thomas describes a situation where the team is in process of deciding whether or not a patient should be offered assistance when doing physical exercises. Thomas knows from previous experience that this type of patient needs such support, but says that somehow he is not permitted to word his knowledge as an expert assessment. Instead he is urged to formulate his knowledge in a reflective manner. As he puts it, he can do nothing more than “peep like a bird”. We will argue that Thomas, in this situation, is subjected to a negative definition. His intention to apply his specific knowledge is not acknowledged and is overruled by his peers. Indirectly he is told that his contributions to decision-making practices are not appropriate, or ‘proper’, and instead he is offered a more ‘correct’ position in the decision-making practices, in this case the reflective position.

We suggest that organizational conflicts frequently result from such discursively driven processes of negative definition. The discursive hierarchy in an organization distributes power and entitlements unequally, resulting in systemic patterns of positioning that negatively define various groups or individuals across the organization. Importantly, these negative definitions are driven by a hierarchy of organizational discourses that go beyond specific relations in the organization. The dominant organizational discourse (in this case the discourse of equality) shapes the preferred practices in the organization’s practice fields. Patterns of negative definition are thus established and those individuals or groups who have these definitions assigned to them are relegated to a marginalized position in the organization. On this basis, we suggest that the narrative mediator working with organizations in conflict should look for the positioning effects of the dominant discourses in an organization that are likely to be fueling conflict. In particular, it seems helpful to assist the organization to examine how the dominant discourses in an organizational context are effectively constructing privileged identities and suppressing others.

ENGAGING IN THE DECONSTRUCTION OF DISCURSIVE HIERARCHIES

Below we give an account of a possible way of using narrative practices when working with an organization in conflict. Guided by the above theoretical account, we direct our attention to how narrative mediators can cooperate with an organization in reorganizing its discursive hierarchy, and thereby create new conditions for positioning practices.

Using Jacques Derrida’s (2004) term, we engage in a ‘deconstruction’ of the discursive hierarchy. In Derrida’s analysis, any discourse is distinguished from another discourse by its constitutive difference. At CMD this is expressed by the team defining itself in opposition to the traditional health system. Team members repeatedly stress how they are different from a traditional hospital section in terms of their horizontal structure and democratic decision-making processes. According to Derrida, this “setting of differences” reflects a construction of the discourse of equality that establishes itself in its difference to the discourse of difference represented by the traditional health system. However, the construction also contains within it the seeds of a deconstruction of the discourse. When the discourse of equality needs the discourse of difference to constitute itself, it must contain an inherent lack that the discourse of difference complements. If this is the case, then the setting of difference is also implicitly a deconstruction of the discourse of equality. The function of the discourse in the organization needs the tension with another discourse to organize relations between people. As such, the setting of differences both constructs and deconstructs the discourse. Any discourse is thus inherently unstable. No discourse can constitute itself as a stable identity if it always needs another discourse to become itself, so a discursive hierarchy must be equally unfinished and unstable. The discursive hierarchy that produces organizational conflicts may seem stable but is in fact vibrating or quivering, as the hierarchy is in a constant process of deconstruction. For the narrative mediator the main task, consequently, is to assist the organization in taking advantage of this inherent instability to reorganize its discursive hierarchy.

WHY NARRATIVE PRACTICES?

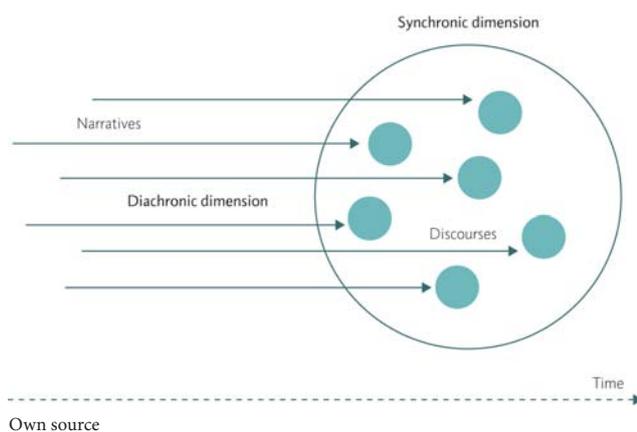
So far we have argued that organizational conflicts are driven by a hierarchy of organizational discourses and that it is the task of the mediator to assist in reorganizing this discursive field. At this stage an important question arises: Why are narrative practices interesting in this context? Why not discursive practices?

We suggest making a distinction between a synchronic and a diachronic dimension. A diachronic perspective looks at how an organization developed over time, whereas a synchronic perspective concentrates on the current structuring of the organization without reference to its past. Organizational discourses operate in a synchronic dimension. The analysis of CMD shows that a number of discourses (the discourses of equality and difference) operate simultaneously in shaping practices in the various fields of an organization. In the diachronic dimension, on the other hand, we find the organization’s narratives. These are the results of collective everyday communication processes that evolve over time (Boje, 1995; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1997). When colleagues



talk and gossip, in effect they construct stories about what has happened, is happening, and what will happen in the future in the organization. These stories will highlight competences, values and principles (or the lack of these) of protagonists in organizational narratives. Our main assumption is that an organization's discursive hierarchy is shaped through the everyday narrating processes. Storytelling in the diachronic dimension shapes organizational discourses in the synchronic dimension (as indicated in figure 1). For example, if the team at CMD successfully knit experiences of the holistic treatment approach into a coherent story that highlights the value of equality, the discourse of equality is supported and regenerated. If this assumption holds true, then the telling of new stories will reshape the discursive hierarchy in the organization and structurally alter the conditions for negative positioning practices. In the following section we develop a number of ideas about how narrative practices may be used to this end.

Figure 1. Diachronic/synchronic dimensions of narratives and discourses



A NARRATIVE MEDIATION APPROACH

In this section we propose three ways of working with narrative practices in organizations: stimulating an organizational sense of contingency, using externalizing language, and building alternative practice field stories.

Stimulating an organizational sense of contingency

Mediators working with organizations in conflict are often met with the assumption that conflicts are an inherent and unchangeable part of the organization. Conflicts are seen as disputes between fundamentally contradictory and irreconcilable parties. However, the rationale of deconstruction implies that there must always be cracks in the

discursive hierarchies that produce conflicts. The dominant discourse cannot monopolize social practices, as it is always challenged by competing discourses that pop up and allow for alternative practices. The discursive hierarchy 'shivers' and is constantly on the verge of forming a new shape.

The first task of the mediator is thus to stimulate a sense of contingency among the members of the organization. As a mere precondition for meaningful mediation dialogue, the parties must realize that existing conflicts are the results of contingent decisions that can be changed. On this basis, the mediator should aim to establish an unstable and open discursive field that lets people see the 'cracks' in the discursive hierarchy and makes other possibilities for social action visible. In practice, the mediator may achieve this by meta-communicating that change is possible, for example by drawing on experiences with organizations that managed to change their conflict patterns, by asking questions that stimulate a sense of urgency about resolving conflicts, by inquiring into people's desire for change in the organization or by inviting participants to voice their preferred future in the organization.

Externalizing language

When some sense of contingency is established, the stage is set for the use of externalizing language (White & Epston, 1990; Winslade, Monk & Cotter, 1998) for talking about problems. Externalization is a rhetorical mode that makes a distinction between the problem and the person. It articulates problems as external forces that have momentarily taken over the social life of a person, a relation or an organization, rather than viewing them as essential to the 'personhood' of the protagonists. Consequently, problems are talked of as an 'it' or 'them' and they exercise their 'evil' influence on individuals, so that conflicts are not seen as the result of some members being immanently 'conflict-provoking'.

In the resolution of organizational conflicts, the use of externalizing language is supported by at least three rationales. Firstly, separating the problem from the person(s) helps to avoid identification and blame. Much conflict resolution (especially through the legal system) is based on the opposite idea, namely that only when the responsible parties are identified is it meaningful to engage in resolution processes. On the contrary, narrative practice argues that pointing fingers at guilty parties will likely only further enhance polarization. Secondly, externalizing conversations render conflicts tangible and addressable. Thirdly, externalization stimulates the telling of new stories. When problems are placed outside the persons involved, the likelihood of discovering new stories is enhanced. If problems, on the other hand, are articulated as essential parts of the persons involved, curiosity about alternative stories is blocked. What would be the use of building alternative stories, if the blame was already fixed on particular, conflict-



producing individuals? In responding to an organizational conflict, care needs to be taken to phrase the externalized description of a problem in language that does not subtly leave a group of people (for example one department) bearing the burden of blame. In other words, it is of no use to avoid the effects of individual blame, if you then leave the blame at the feet of a whole group of people.

The rationale of externalization is consistent with the analysis of CMD that shows that the conflict is not anchored in 'evil' persons but is fueled by the organization's discursive hierarchy. The mediator invites the participants to see the conflict as a result of external forces that are haunting the organization. One way of doing this would be to ask the participants to get together in pairs and reflect on what problems have taken over the organization. These problems could be written on a whiteboard where they materialize the common enemies that stand in the way of the organization's preferred future. In contrast with mediation in two-party relations, it is important to externalize problems that affect the organization's practice fields: if only problems that affect concrete relations are externalized, mediation efforts may solve relational problems, but will not be targeted towards more complex organizational conflicts.

Building new organizational narratives

When conflicts have been successfully externalized, the task is to build new organizational narratives. A narrative consists of a number of organized events, highlighting competences and values, performed by the persons involved in the story. Thus, a process of spotting untold events or experiences is developed, bringing to the foreground competences or values which have been forced into the background by the conflict, so they can serve as the building blocks for the construction of new stories. There is a similarity here with the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach to organizational change (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987), but a fundamental difference is that the narrative approach builds on the identification (and externalization) of problems, whereas AI practitioners begin by focusing on the organization's current resources. AI, moreover, places explicit value on inquiry into the positive, whereas narrative practice does not make the same distinction between positive and negative aspects of functioning, preferring to see these as products of the discourse to be deconstructed.

At this stage, we suggest that two circumstances must be taken into account when transferring narrative mediation from a context of mediation in two-party relations to an organizational context. First, the theoretical account of organizational conflicts leads to a changed focus on retrieving hidden organizational experience. Mediators who engage in two-party conflict resolution interview the parties about past events in the relationship in the hope

that values and competences that have been masked will surface. However, in organizational conflicts, the focus should change from discovering experiences tied to 'persons-in-relation' to experiences tied to 'persons-operating-in-practice-fields'. In short, the mediator should encourage the organization's members to investigate forgotten experiences about concrete organizational practice (for instance decision making) in order to reiterate hidden values and competences carried by the members of the organization.

Secondly, the practical circumstance that more people are participating in an organizational mediation than in two-party mediation implies that the interview process must be altered. In traditional narrative conversations participants are interviewed directly by the change agent. However, in this context we suggest that participants interview each other in order to allow all members the time to tell their story. Thus, we propose a structural change in the interview process from a mediator-participant-relation to a participant-participant-relation. An example of such a process is recorded by Winslade and Monk (2008), in a chapter co-written with Allan Holmgren, on a series of outsider witness processes within an organization.

Consequently, the concrete mediation process is based on an interview guide prepared by the mediator beforehand. This guide could be organized using the structure of the so-called Position-Map 1. This map consists of four phases: naming the problem, mapping the effects of the problem, evaluating the effects, and justifying the evaluation.

Following this structure the first section of the interview could invite the interviewee to elaborate on the problems or dilemmas that most significantly influence their work life, and to give these problems and dilemmas appropriate names. The interviewee could be asked, "What would be suitable names for the problems or dilemmas that influence your team?" Next, the effects of the problems could be mapped by questions such as "How does 'X' (the problem) make you think and feel about yourself in the organization?" or, "What would you call the atmosphere that 'X' creates in the team?" and, "What would you call the position that 'X' creates for you as a colleague?" In talking about problems as external forces, this line of interviewing stimulates taking a position against the problem.

Taking a position against the problem could be further actualized by inviting the participants to evaluate the effects of the problem. "Do you like the effects that the problems have on the team?" If the participants evaluate negatively, we see this as an entry into retrieving preferred organizational practices, competences and values. Questions might be asked that stimulate participants to justify their negative evaluation by describing preferred practices in the organization. The participants could be invited to elaborate on questions such as, "When you do not like the effects of the problems, can you describe how you would prefer the team members to act and communicate? If possible, give



examples from your everyday life,” or “Which values in the organization would support this preferred practice? If possible, give examples,” and, “Which competences in the organization would gain a bit more space if your preferred organization became reality? If possible, give examples”. The intention is that these questions result in the discovery and increased visibility of un-storied events or hidden values or competences.

As mentioned, a chronological list of events is not a narrative. Recovered events, therefore, must be organized into a coherent storyline. One way that this “performance of meaning” (Bruner, 1986) can be stimulated is by means of the technique described in narrative therapy as the “outsider-witness group” (White, 2000). This process could start by each pair offering a summary of their interviews with all participants. The larger group could be divided into smaller groups of two or three who are asked to witness their colleague’s account of un-storied events and hidden values.

The technique includes four steps (outlined more fully in Winslade and Monk, 2008). First, the outsider-witness group selects an expression they have particularly noticed in the summaries of the interviews. (For example: “We noticed that she said that she preferred to use functional perspectives more actively in decision making.”) The exact phrasing should be used in order to make sure that there is a direct link to the concrete utterances. The second task is to offer an image of the person telling the story. (For example: “We see her as a lioness fighting for the patients’ well-being;”) which aims at highlighting the intentions, competences, and values of the person being witnessed. In the third and fourth phases the outsider-witness teams are asked to reflect on how the accounts are resonant in their own organizational lives, (“We have talked about how we recognize the ambition to take more care of our patients;”) and to account for how the story has transported the out-

sider-witness group to some new territory where they can see or think differently about practices in the organization. (“We have talked about how using our functional perspectives a little bit more might add quality to our decisions.”)

This process opens the space for crafting alternative narratives of organizational practices. The flurry of newly recovered events constitutes material that can be organized into narratives articulating hitherto untold organizational values and practices. Thus, the participants are given the opportunity to collectively author alternative stories by linking events into a coherent story about the organization’s preferred practices and values. At the same time these diachronic narratives effectively alter the synchronic system of power relations in the organization.

Here we have laid out and explained the rationale for a set of practices that are built upon the theoretical assumptions outlined above. They are specifically designed for the context of organizations in which conflict troubles relationships across a field of practice rather than simply the relationship between two individuals. It is beyond the scope of this article to demonstrate these practices in more detail in action.

The main point of our argument is to open up a perspective on organizational conflict resolution that focuses upon the narratives at work within a discourse field rather than within a personal relationship. Future study needs to be devoted to the further application of these principles in organizational contexts. We hope that this work will direct attention to the differences between relationships and discourse fields. The former concept pulls our thinking towards the domain of interpersonal exchanges between individuals and the latter redirects our gaze to the discourses that organize and give shape to a multitude of interpersonal exchanges among groups of people. We believe that the field of conflict resolution can benefit from widening its focus in this direction. ■

■ References

- BOJE, D. M.** (1995). “Stories of the storytelling organization: A postmodern analysis of Disney as ‘Tamara-land’”. *Academy of Management Journal*. Vol. 38, iss. 4, pp. 997-1035.
- COBB, S.** (2004). “Fostering coexistence in identity-based conflicts: Towards a narrative approach”. In: A. CHAYES; M. MINOW (eds.). *Imagine Coexistence*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Pp. 294-310.
- COBB, S.** (1994). “A narrative perspective on mediation: Toward the materialization of the ‘storytelling’ metaphor”. In: J. FOLGER; T. JONES (eds.). *New directions in mediation communications research and perspectives*. Thousand Oaks: Sage. Pp. 48-66.
- COBB, S.** (1993). “Empowerment and mediation: A narrative perspective”. *Negotiation Journal*. Vol. 9, iss. 3, pp. 245-259.
- COOPERRIDER, D.; SRIVASTVA, S.** (1987). “Appreciative inquiry in organizational life”. *Research in Organizational Change and Development*. Iss. 1, pp. 129-169.
- CZARNIAWSKA, B.** (1997). *Narrating the organization: Dramas of institutional identity*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.



<http://journal-of-conflictology.uoc.edu>

Nikolaj Kure, John Winslade A Narrative Approach to Working... ■

- DAVIES, B.; HARRÉ, R. (1990). "Positioning: The discursive production of selves". *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*. Vol. 20, iss. 1, pp. 43-63.
- DELEUZE, G. (1988). *Foucault*. S. Hand (trans.). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- DELEUZE, G. (1995). *Negotiations*. M. Joughin (trans.). New York: Columbia University Press.
- DERRIDA, J. (2004). *Positions*. A. Bass (trans.). London: Continuum.
- DREWERY, W. (2005). "Why we should watch what we say: Position calls, every day speech, and the production of relational subjectivity". *Theory and Psychology*. Vol. 15, iss. 3, pp. 305-324.
- FREEDMAN, J.; COMBS, G. (1996). *Narrative therapy: The social construction of preferred realities*. New York: Norton.
- FOUCAULT, M. (1969). *The archeology of knowledge*. London: Tavistock.
- FOUCAULT, M. (1989). *Foucault live (Interviews 1966-84)*. Sylvere Lotringer (ed.); John Johnston (trans.). New York: Semiotext.
- HONNETH, A. (2006). *The struggle for recognition: The moral grammar of social conflicts*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- LACLAU, E.; MOUFFE, C. (2001). *Hegemony and socialist strategy*. London: Verso. 2nd ed.
- MONK, G.; WINSLADE, J.; CROCKET, K.; EPSTON, D. (eds.) (1997). *Narrative therapy in practice: The archeology of hope*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- PAYNE, M. (2006). *Narrative therapy: An introduction for counsellors*. London: Sage.
- WHITE, M. (2007). *Maps of narrative practice*. New York: Norton.
- WHITE, M.; EPSTON, D. (1990). *Narrative means to therapeutic ends*. New York: Norton.
- WINSLADE, J. (2009). "Tracing lines of flight: Implications of the work of Gilles Deleuze for narrative practice". *Family Process*. Vol. 48, iss. 3, pp. 332-347. DOI 10.1111/j.1545-5300.2009.01286.x.
- WINSLADE, J. (2006). "Mediation with a focus on discursive positioning". *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*. Vol. 23, iss. 4, pp. 501-515.
- WINSLADE, J. (2003). "Narrative mediation: Assisting in the renegotiation of discursive positions". *The International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*. Iss. 4, pp. 64-74.
- WINSLADE, J.; MONK, G. (2008). *Practicing narrative mediation: Loosening the grip of conflict*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- WINSLADE, J.; MONK, G. (2000). *Narrative mediation: A new approach to conflict resolution*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- WINSLADE, J.; MONK, G.; COTTER, A. (1998). "A narrative approach to the practice of mediation". *Negotiation Journal*. Vol. 14, iss. 1, pp. 21-41.
- ZIMMERMAN, J.; DICKERSON, V. (1996). *If Problems Talked: Narrative Therapy in Action*. New York: Guilford Press.

■ Recommended citation

KURE, Nikolaj; WINSLADE, John (2010). "A Narrative Approach to Working with an Organization in Conflict" [online article]. *Journal of Conflictology*. Vol. 1, Iss. 1. Campus for Peace, UOC. [Consulted: dd/mm/yy].

<<http://www.uoc.edu/ojs/index.php/journal-of-conflictology/article/view/vol1iss1-kure-winslade/vol1iss1-kure-winslade>>

ISSN 2013-8857



This work is subject to a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 3.0 Spain licence. It may be copied, distributed and broadcasted provided that the author and the source (*Journal of Conflictology*) are cited. Commercial use and derivative works are not permitted. The full licence can be consulted at: <<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/es/deed.en>>



About the authors

Nikolaj Kure
nku@asb.dk

Nikolaj Kure obtained his PhD in September 2008 at the University of Aarhus for a project on narrative techniques as a means for organizational change. He now holds a position as Assistant Professor at the Centre for Corporate Communication, University of Aarhus. His major research areas include: organizational change, narrative practices, conflict resolution, and organizational decision making.

John Winslade
jwinslad@csusb.edu

Dr John Winslade is a Professor of Counseling and Associate Dean of the College of Education at California State University San Bernardino. He also works part-time as an Associate Professor at the University of Waikato in New Zealand. He has been active in the development of narrative practices, particularly in relation to conflict resolution. He is also the Editor of Explorations: An Online Journal of Narrative Practice.



**CAMPUS
FOR PEACE**



www.uoc.edu