From spinning yarns to organizational impact: Storytelling in management practice.
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From spinning yarns to organizational impact:
Storytelling in management practice

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Abstract
This developmental paper explores two differing conceptualizations and manifestations of storytelling in management practice: (1) intuitive and (2) intentional. It derives from one of the first empirical studies into storytelling in management practice that examines calls in the practitioner and semi-academic literature for greater use of storytelling by managers. Our findings are such: intuitive storytelling happens in everyday interaction between organizational actors and is unplanned, unconscious and informal. Intentional storytelling is a vehicle through which managers communicate in a planned and purposive manner. While both manifestations can achieve similar outcomes in terms of listener response, the difference between them is the extent to which managers are aware of storytelling within their own communication practice and to which they consciously choose to tell a story to create a certain organizational impact. We identify potential limits of intentional storytelling and outline three potential areas of overlap between the two manifestations.

Key words: management, organization, storytelling

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Introduction

“Storytelling works” is a mantra shared by many management practitioners, and they claim to use it purposively, intentionally, like a tool (see Brown et al., 2005; Denning, 2005). In the practitioner and semi-academic literature storytelling in management practice is advocated, like a magic bullet, to communicate effectively, build culture, share knowledge, and manage change (e.g. Armstrong, 1992; Neuhauser, 1993; Kaye, 1995). But the question of how storytelling in management practice is conceptualized and manifested is less clear. This is pertinent as the term ‘storytelling’ is used so widely and loosely in organizational settings as to (almost) become meaningless (see Gabriel, 2000). Hence, empirical research is required to enhance the current understanding of storytelling in management practice and to identify how it is manifested in organizations, for example, consciously (as per the practitioner and semi-academic literature) or subconsciously as something that happens in everyday human communication (e.g. Bruner, 1986; Fisher, 1989).

Our research is one of the first empirical studies into this phenomenon and has identified two main manifestations of storytelling in management practice: (1) intuitive storytelling and (2) intentional storytelling. The former draws on the academic literature that conceptualizes humans as natural storytellers and storytelling as a natural form of communication (e.g. Bruner, 1986; Fisher, 1989). Our analysis suggests that storytelling is indeed an important part of organizational life, even though organizational actors may not conceive it as such. The latter builds on the semi-academic literature on storytelling in management practice that conceptualizes storytelling as a skill that can be acquired, developed and employed intentionally by managers (e.g. Brown et al., 2005; Denning, 2005). Our findings indicate that some management practitioners do have the ability to employ storytelling in such a more instrumental fashion, but that it is not a widespread practice.

This developmental paper seeks to integrate those two strands of literature to provide a better understanding of the conceptualizations and manifestations of storytelling in management practice as we explore how managers tell stories in interaction with each other and with their subordinates. Our contribution is two-fold. Firstly, we contribute to the overall conference theme by revisitting one strand of academic literature on storytelling that, while providing important insights into human interaction in organizations, has not featured prominently. Secondly, we seek to contribute to the track theme of how management is achieved in
increasingly complex organizations by offering novel insights into the manifestations and limits of storytelling in management practice.

**Theoretical background**

*Storytelling in organizations*

The use of narrative and storytelling in the study of organizations over the last twenty years has focused on understanding organizations, their actors and their interactions through the narratives and stories that they tell (see Rhodes and Brown, 2005; Gabriel, 2008 for summaries). A central assumption of such research is that storytelling is a fundamental form of human communication (e.g. Bruner, 1986; Fisher, 1987; Polkinghorne, 1988) and that it is also the preferred currency of organizational communication (Boje, 1991). Storytelling is memorable (e.g. Morgan and Dennehy, 1997), combines factual information with emotions, values and norms (Weick and Browning, 1986) and enables organizational actors to establish coherence (Linde, 1993) and make sense of their experiences (Weick, 1995). An organization’s stock of stories is therefore widely considered as a manifestation of its culture (e.g. Washbourne and Dicke, 2001).

There has been ample evidence to suggest that organizational actors tell stories all the time in organizational settings. Some storytelling may be entirely conversational (e.g. Norrick, 2000) with organizational actors intuitively sharing funny or thought-provoking experiences with others in order to build relationships or to share knowledge (Brown et al. 2005). Other storytelling may be used to encourage others to see an issue from a different angle, particularly in ambiguous circumstances (e.g. Allan *et al.*, 2002), thereby shaping organizational actors’ cognition and behaviour (e.g. Hansen and Kahnweiler, 1993) and exercising influence and control (e.g. Wilkins, 1984).

The latter implies agency with organizational actors being portrayed as being able to shape how organizational actors think about the organization and behave within it. It is such storytelling (which we call *intentional* in this paper) that seems to have inspired management practitioners to experiment with storytelling in their own practice and subsequently advocate it as a management tool (e.g. Armstrong, 1992; Neuhauser, 1993; Denning, 2000). We will examine the associated literature in the following section of this literature review.

*Storytelling in management practice*

Since the early 2000s, there has been an increase in publications advocating storytelling as a management tool that can be used purposively, intentionally in interaction with others. This
set of publications, which we call the semi-academic literature, largely derives from anecdotal evidence from the authors’ experience as managers (Brown et al., 2005; Denning, 2005). The semi-academic literature draws eclectically on philosophical, anthropological, sociological and psychological sources, and it has two main yet connected assumptions. Firstly, humans are storytellers by nature (Fisher, 1989) and secondly, they are able to process information in story form more effectively than information gained through more abstract forms of communication (Bruner, 1986).

On the basis of these assumptions, claims that ‘storytelling is one of the most effective tools leaders can use’ (Denning, 2004, p. 122) have been developed, and the alleged power of storytelling to communicate effectively, share knowledge, build culture and manage change has been advocated in a similar vein (e.g. Brown et al. 2005). We do not wish to depreciate the authors’ knowledge, expertise and wisdom; however, we contend that it is problematic that claims made by the semi-academic literature regarding the intentional use of storytelling in management practice are almost entirely based on anecdotal evidence. The semi-academic literature therefore lacks a clear conceptualization of storytelling in management practice, its manifestations, its limits and its limitations.

Research background

The starting point of our research has been the claims of the semi-academic literature, which have intrigued us both in a supportive and more critical sense. The focus of our qualitative and inductive investigation has been conceptualizations and manifestations of storytelling in management practice, both from the teller’s and the recipient’s perspective. Our research is social constructionist (Berger and Luckmann, 1966) and based on the assumption that organizational actors construct their social realities through the stories that they tell to themselves and others (Bruner, 1991). We seek to understand management practice through a narrative methodology (Spector-Mersel, 2010), i.e. through the stories that our research participants tell us, the researchers. We do appreciate, however, that not all interview excerpts quoted in this paper are stories in their own right as many stories told in the interview are fragmented and incomplete (see Boje’s 2001 notion of ante-narrative).

There are three main elements to our research: (1) a case study with an organization that uses storytelling explicitly to manage change (a public-private partnership which we call NorthService Ltd.); (2) a control case study with an organization that does not use storytelling explicitly (an educational institution which we call NorthEdu) to examine the extent to which organizational actors tell stories; and (3) a number of expert interviews with reflective storytellers (e.g. practicing managers, management consultants, trainers,
facilitators, coaches, academics with management responsibility) to explore further the application of storytelling in management practice. This paper will draw on the first two elements to explore the intentional and intuitive use of storytelling in two distinct organizational settings.

Our main method of data collection is narrative interviewing (Mishler 1991), a largely open-ended form of qualitative interviewing in which interviewees are encouraged to tell their accounts of personal experience (or story, see Reissner, 2008) within the organization. Our interviewees come from diverse backgrounds with regard to their position in the organization, the length of service and their age. Table 1 provides a summary of details of the data collection in our research.

Table 1: Data collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Time of data collection</th>
<th>No. of interviews</th>
<th>Size of data set (mins audio of recording)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NorthService Ltd.</td>
<td>Sep – Nov 2010</td>
<td>25 individual</td>
<td>2,000 mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NorthEdu</td>
<td>Jan – Mar 2012</td>
<td>25 individual</td>
<td>1,000 mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experts</td>
<td>May 2011 ongoing</td>
<td>7 to date</td>
<td>450 mins to date</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data are analyzed inductively using thematic analysis (King and Horrocks 2010), starting with multiple readings of the interview transcripts and free coding according to pertinent themes in the literature as well as themes emerging from the interview content. These themes are constantly compared with one another and with the literature, building the coding framework. We have employed NVivo software to aid data management as we are dealing with a large number of qualitative interviews and also some internal documents.

Intuitive storytelling: From spinning yarns...

Before we can discuss intuitive storytelling as a manifestation, we need to attempt to define storytelling as an overarching term. As definitions of storytelling in the literature vary considerably, we have asked our research participants for their definition of storytelling in management practice, and they regard it as a means to share experience (first hand, second hand or even fictitious) in order to get a particular point (message) across to the audience in an open-ended and creative manner.
Intuitive storytelling is one such manifestation of storytelling that is unplanned, subconscious and informal and that takes place in everyday interaction between organizational actors. NorthService employee Catherine summarizes intuitive storytelling well when she says ‘[my manager] gets his point across without us realizing what he’s doing, but I don’t think he realizes that either’. Intuitive storytelling happens in the present with limited retrospection and reflection and, in the words of NorthEdu middle manager Lance has a pivotal role in ‘managing, influencing, working with others’ (see also Brown et al., 2005).

Our research has identified distinct instances in which organizational actors engage in intuitive storytelling, some of which are about sharing mundane experiences with one another. NorthService line manager Hermione, for example, in conversation with the interviewer highlighted the following instance:

*Interviewer:* … When you hear the term story what comes to mind, what’s your first thought?
*Hermione:* Just telling a tale.
*Interviewer:* Tale meaning?
*Hermione:* Relating an experience or telling a … I don’t, know I’m not articulating very well, I’m sorry.
*Interviewer:* Is it true, is it fiction or can it be either?
*Hermione:* It can be either. So for example, I went diving the other weekend and I’ll tell my colleagues the story of how I fell out of the shower in the chalet, and it’s a story and it’s a funny tale and it’s true, but I’ll tell it like a story.
*Interviewer:* Why would you tell it to them?
*Hermione:* Because it’s funny (laughter) and if it can cheer people up and you know coming to work isn’t just about work, coming to work, because you spend an awful long time here and if people have a bit of a laugh or a smile while they are here then it makes it fun and more important.
*Interviewer:* So it’s about building relationships, maintaining relationships, engaging with staff?
*Hermione:* Yes.
*Interviewer:* May it also be about you telling them indirectly, “this is the kind of person I am?”
*Hermione:* Oh very much so. I mean at the end of the day I’m a manager and I have to make decisions that might not be popular, but that doesn’t mean that you can’t have a personal relationship with your staff. And I
don’t want to be everybody’s friend because you cannot be when you are there to manage people, but nor do I just want to be a dictatorial manager who doesn’t have any personal relationship with my staff whatsoever.

Hermione’s telling of her falling out of the shower seems to have been an intuitive act, responding perhaps to subdued Monday morning mood among her team. It is a story of an experience that does not portray her in a very positive light. Nevertheless, it is apparently an important interaction between Hermione and her colleagues that helps maintain their relationship. While Hermione stresses that she does not regard it as useful to establish friendship among her team because she may to make difficult decisions impacting on them, she contends that personal relationships between manager and staff are important.

NorthEdu employee Keira suggests that her manager’s telling of apparently mundane instances allows her insights into her manager’s personality (see also Brown et al., 2005) and enhances the quality of interaction with that person.

… One individual can quite easily stop a meeting and tell you something entirely random and completely personal about their life and that’s probably what’s helped enhance my relationship with them to be honest. I struggled for a long time with this person, a very senior member of staff, but the more I see of their personality come through in these little glimpses of meetings where they seemingly forget where we are for a moment, yes the easier I find to work with them and the more I understand, the more respect I think I have for them. Particularly in some of the things you find out about someone, you do it’s easier to kind of pitch and hold someone because of where they are, the position they’re in, and actually hearing about someone’s kind of life you start to realize that they probably don’t have that much that’s different to your life.

Keira’s reflections suggest that her manager’s random storytelling no longer irritates her, but enables her to understand more of her manager and to increase her respect for that person. There is a suggestion that Keira may have felt inferior due to a perceived gap in hierarchy and status in the earlier relationship and that storytelling has bridged that gap over time. However, NorthEdu employee Ruby suggested in conversation with the interviewer that intuitive storytelling may have an even more fundamental role.
Interviewer: … I have to infer from the way in which people talk to me, if they tell me stories and also what they tell me, although there’s very little because when I ask them about communication, they think it’s all about the business, the operational side of things rather than probably the side of things where there’s more story, the chit chat, the anecdotes, how are the children doing, has the dog recovered from whatever. … People take it for granted and when I’ve probed they’ll say “oh of course we do that”.

Ruby: It does feel odd when like the [head of section], people think he’s odd because he doesn’t do any of that, it just seems slightly unnatural, you know what I mean.

Ruby’s short sentence suggests that her manager’s lack of intuitive storytelling and the interaction that it allows with subordinates seems unnatural to her and makes him being perceived as ‘odd’ by team members. The implication is that a lack of intuitive storytelling by a manager and a subsequent lack of personal interaction can be counter-productive for their interaction.

Hence, intuitive storytelling in organizations enables organizational actors develop and maintain (professional) relationships with one another that in turn allows for the delivery of operations, goals and objectives. However, intuitive storytelling is instinctive, and most research participants seem unaware of this storytelling in daily interaction with others. Despite such a lack of awareness, many research participants told stories intuitively and unprompted during the interview (see Bruner, 1986; Fisher, 1989) by using phrases like ‘let me give you an example’, ‘there was a case last week’, ‘this is something that happened to me when’, ‘let me illustrate this’ and ‘I remember’ followed by a story (see Reissner, 2008). Instances like these imply that most organizational actors tell stories in interaction with others and that they decide intuitively, using what NorthService line manager Chris describes as ‘sixth sense’, when to use a story and which story from their repertoire to use.

… to organizational impact through intentional storytelling

Intentional storytelling is planned and executed for a particular purpose; it is a means to achieve a particular end (such as more effective communication, increased knowledge sharing or better change management, see Brown et al., 2005). Our research has shown that some managers are aware of their storytelling practice in this manner, and we suggest that this manifestation of storytelling in management practice is therefore more closely related to the notion of a ‘tool’ that can be acquired and subsequently used when required (see Denning, 2005). While we are critical of an instrumental understanding of storytelling that advocates
its use in numerous managerial situations for a range of purposes (as many practitioner sources seem to suggest), our research indicates that some managers do use storytelling intentionally in some contexts.

For instance, NorthService managers intend to direct organizational actors towards a common goal (see Denning, 2005) by “telling the story of the organization”, i.e. by attempting to formulate the vision, mission and identity of the organization in story form. NorthService middle manager Jonathan, explained his understanding and the organization’s use of storytelling as follows:

The story-telling to me is you are telling people where you are on a journey … and if you haven’t got the view of where the journey’s going, then you can’t really tell a story of how we’re getting on to achieve that. I think you are setting the scene about what you want to achieve and telling the story of how we’re getting there. … I do think the one thing that’s missing in the storytelling is the view of where we’re going and telling people how this all fits together, how this project into that project, why we’re doing this project to get to here, why you’re involved in that, why we’re doing this. Things like performance management have been a very hard thing to deliver, because of the massive change in culture to people to manage by objectives rather than just manage by sitting at your desk. … Had we had a view of where we were going and why we were doing [it] and how it all fits together, I think it would be much easier to kind of sell that area. So the story to me needs to be around where we are going and what we all can do to help us get there and why we’re doing all the things we’re doing.

Jonathan’s understanding of storytelling is somewhat instrumental – communicating to NorthService employees the joint journey into the future to encourage them to actively create this future in a joint effort. The focus of such storytelling on explaining the rationale and expected outcome of the many different change programmes taking place in the organization as well as organizational actors’ role in them.

Moreover, storytelling provides organizational actors with contextual information about the wider environment in which the organization is operating and to help them make sense of change and their own experiences (sense-giving, see Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991; Dunford and Jones, 2000). In explaining that the change programmes will lead to a reshuffle of
individuals, senior manager Adam stresses the importance of making the wider context known to organizational actors:

People do want to know the bigger picture because even if it’s just about them, you know, [they wonder] how does it impact on me? So it’s their world that you are interested in. There’s lots of things that impact on your world, and I think that the story element actually puts that to me in a language that people will hopefully understand. You know if you say we are going to release two FTE, 1.9 FTE, 1.6 FTE, you’d think well I don’t know 1.6 of a person, so it’s a case of people, they need to know what happens to them and what the future is, because otherwise they are going to be pretty, pretty miserable if they think … ‘well what’s the point?’ You know, everything will fail because the chances of you meeting targets and KPIs are reduced. It’s that fear of the unknown and it’s trying to get that known.

For Adam, storytelling is about translating something abstract (such as FTEs) into something real and personal for organizational actors (such as an answer to the question ‘what does my future hold?’), and this notion has come up repeatedly in the interviews. NorthEdu middle manager Lance, for instance, reflected on his storytelling practice as follows:

In [my area of work] you end up talking in abstract terms and some folk deal with that very well, but mostly even the most well educated people like to have something substantial. … I often use something that I’ve encountered at work or personally but mostly work experience that helps with that and it’s an education tool as much as anything else. … It’s basically to provide a bit of context for a lesson or context for, we deal with a variety of different things at [NorthEdu] or anywhere and you know, one of my jobs I feel is to make my team and others within the department better at their jobs so ultimately they can get my job, and I don’t feel paranoid about that, I feel that the better the folk are around me the better [NorthEdu] does and I’m one of those people that like to promote that sort of thing. So I like to manage and stretch people a bit, I like to give them targets and I like to give them things to do that would maybe take them outside their comfort zone, new skills, new ability, help them through that, mentoring and coaching, but I often use storytelling as a way of sort of like,
people can remember a story much better than they can sometimes remember a general discussion and I often use that.

For both Adam and Lance, storytelling is linked to some tangible outcome in the organization, as Adam refers explicitly to targets and KPIs at NorthService Ltd. and Lance more generally about the quality of staff within NorthEdu. Both emphasize the contextual nature of storytelling, providing both message and context / rationale for a particular purpose and / or to achieve a particular end. NorthService line manager James provides a slightly different angle to this discussion by explaining that information communicated in story form (through examples of personal experience) is put in simpler and therefore more accessible language than used in organizational processes and procedures or legal updates.

If you try to get a message across in plain business language, you are going to lose interest and people do not want to know. Whereas if you can make it … a bit more down to earth, a bit more interesting, if it’s related to something, a lot more people understand, then I think the message gets across faster.

James agrees with Jonathan, Adam and Lance in that storytelling provides an added quality to the mere transmission of information; it provides context, explanation, substance and allows the audience to understand a message comparatively quickly and easily. Storytelling also seems to add a ‘hook’ to which the audience can relate, which is difficult to find in more abstract and therefore bland sources of communication (such as organizational processes and procedures).

Hence, intentional storytelling is employed consciously by managers to achieve particular goals, which can either be explicit (e.g. a target or KPIs) or more general about the quality of work within the organization. The managers’ reflections quoted above suggest that they use storytelling with intent; they seem to have a repertoire of stories drawing on their own experience that they will use to translate, illustrate and contextualize in order to help organizational actors understand the message more quickly and easily. While it is difficult (if not impossible) to relate an individual’s storytelling practice directly to an organization’s performance, our research indicates that storytelling adds a different quality to interactions and professional relationships.
Intuitive and intentional storytelling?

Our analysis suggests that both intuitive and intentional storytelling contribute to building and maintaining professional relationships between managers and subordinates as well as effective transmission of information. Some research participants who are aware of their own storytelling practice have identified the need to build (professional) relationships with others quickly in order to meet their own targets, and they suggest that intentional storytelling helps them communicate more quickly and effectively who they are (see Brown et al., 2005; Denning, 2005). But with such awareness also comes acceptance that intentional storytelling has to be as authentic as intuitive storytelling. NorthService middle manager Alexander, for instance, explains that in storytelling

the core of it absolutely has to be supportable and true. … People can tell if you’re lying, and nobody wants to be thought of as a liar, particularly when you are trying to build rapport with others. It’s about being credible, believable and supportive.

Hence, there is no clear dividing line between intuitive and intentional storytelling. While some interviewees spoke explicitly about their intentional storytelling practice, there seems to remain an element of intuition as they decide which story to tell in a particular situation and in what manner. Some interviewees, it seems, are semi-aware of their use of storytelling as they share their experiences with their staff in order to aid their development. Rather than directing their subordinates towards a prescriptive course of action (in NorthService employee Eveline’s words ‘go away and do A, B and C’), telling them a story about their experience allows managers to involve their subordinates in determining a future course of action. NorthService employee Catherine explains her line manager’s storytelling practice as follows:

He’ll say “well, I’m not going to tell you what to do, but I’ll give you an example of something that happened to me”, and you think “oh, right”, and you just take it from there.

It is difficult in such instances to determine whether the manager tells stories intentionally or intuitively, particularly as the manager in question was not part of the interview sample. We suggest that there is likely to be a mix of both intuitive and intentional as the manager may have learned through experience that subordinates react more positively towards his / her sharing of experience (and hence continues to use it with some intent) without being fully aware of what he / she is doing. Similarly, as NorthEdu middle manager Lance explains in
the following interview excerpt, something intentional may turn into something more intuitive over time:

Originally I think [storytelling] started out as a purposeful thing, but I just think it became part and parcel of how I interact with colleagues, so I think it’s become largely just one of the things I do … on a regular basis.

Hence, there is overlap between intuitive and intentional storytelling which is difficult to ascertain in detail as managers can tell stories intuitively, intentionally, or semi-intuitively depending on the situation and purpose of communication. Our interviewees have also highlighted dangers relating to intentional storytelling if it is not used sensitively, as NorthService line manager Timothy reflected:

If team morale is low and you introduce a sunny vision at the wrong time, that will trigger a negative response. I think you’ve got to be very careful [when using stories]. As a team you will always get the odd individual who is negative, but if the whole team’s morale is down and you try to paint the vision of a brighter future, then you get a very cynical response. ... I just know that from past history, if I put something to the team at the wrong time, when their morale is not high as a team then it’s a disaster because it creates a negative response. If they are ready to look forward and you can paint something for them, then they’ll go with you. If their heads are down and they’ve just been trampled on or whatever has happened to them and their morale’s down, you try and bring something forward as a vision and they don’t like it at all, you’ve got to deal with issues and gradually life them, so the story has got to be a different story if you are using one, it’s got to be a different type of story.

Timothy warns of perceiving storytelling as a shortcut to effective management or perhaps even as a panacea for resolving a range of organizational issues (e.g. Syedain, 2007). He demonstrates awareness of the context in which storytelling takes place, and we suggest that intuition is crucial for managers to judge when to tell which story in which fashion before telling it. In such situations intuition and intention become intertwined.

**Conclusion**

Managers tell stories to their peers and subordinates in daily interaction, but what differs is the extent to which these stories are told intuitively and/or intentionally. The difference
between intuitive and intentional storytelling is the level of awareness that managers have of their own communication practice and how this is translated into a deliberate decision to impart a story to achieve a particular outcome. Intentional storytelling is premeditated and requires storytellers to analyse their storytelling practice and to reflect upon it to develop their skills further (see Reissner and Pagan 2012). Stories are more frequently told intuitively (see Bruner, 1986; Fisher, 1989; Allan et al., 2002) endemic to the interactions that build (professional) relationships with others that help achieve their own and the organization’s goals.

Our analysis has identified at least three different ways in which intuitive and intentional storytelling overlap. Firstly, managers may be semi-intentional when telling stories, having learned from experience that their subordinates are more receptive when they share their stories with them. They are likely to use such storytelling with some intent, even though they are not aware of their own storytelling practice. Secondly, managers may use storytelling intentionally at first, but over time storytelling becomes intuitive and they tell stories without much awareness. Finally, intentional storytelling requires some degree to intuition to judge a storytelling situation correctly in order not to produce counter-productive results.

In conclusion, we have identified two distinct yet interrelated conceptualizations and manifestations of storytelling in management practice and the ways in which they may overlap. We have outlined the possibilities of storytelling in management practice with regard to the building and maintenance of professional relationships and the transmission of information, but we have also highlighted potential limits of intentional storytelling in particular. Our findings provide a more sophisticated understanding of what storytelling in management practice is, how it is employed by managers and how employees reflect on their managers’ storytelling practice.

(4,998 words)
References


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¹ The names of the participating organizations and all research participants’ names have been altered to protect their identities.