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# The Role of Narratives in Organisational Change

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## Abstract

Organisational change has been studied for many years generating classical management literature of how to view and handle change, but contrasting the more classical theories, narratives, or stories, can be used to study change. In human sciences, narratives are referred to as a family of concepts that have in common a storied form. This study aims to develop and exemplify a narratological perspective of organisational change that is created through socially constructed, multi authored and competing stories. This study will discuss and attempt to answer the following research question: What is the role of narratives in organisational change? By gathering, presenting and analysing narratives from employees surrounding a reorganisation this study shows that competing narratives play a significant role in employee sensemaking, identity creation and organisational politics. The findings of this study illustrate how the same organisational change is interpreted and understood by individuals in the organisation through collective and personal sensemaking. Also, narratives facilitate the creation of identity, alterity and organisational image.

**Keywords:** Organisational Change, Narratives, Sensemaking, Identity, Political Motives

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# Introduction

Weick and Quinn (1999) argue that change is its own genre of organisational studies and that there are therefore many different aspects and approaches to investigate it. Organisational change has been studied for many years generating classical management literature of how to view and handle change, such as with Lewin's (1951) change model characterised as the three steps of *unfreeze, change and refreeze*. Further, a large part of the literature deals with specifically organisational change failures with for example Kotter's (1995) eight step model discussing how to prevent failures and what to do in order to succeed with change. However, these step models of change, even if they are distinct and convenient, seem not to grasp the complexity of reorganisations. It is commonly referenced that 70% of all change efforts fail as estimated by Beer and Nohria (2000). Even though this number might lack empirical evidence backing it up it is still widely acknowledged in the field (Hughes, 2011). While learning from past failures of organisational change can be highly beneficial in preparing for future ones (Weick & Sutcliffe), the large focus on them tied to classical change management theory has also been criticised as outdated (Worley & Morhman, 2014). By (2005) also critically reviewed traditional change management where he concluded that a lot of the theories and models in place can be contradictory and lacking in empirical evidence but are an "important first step towards constructing a new framework for managing change" (p. 369).

Contrasting the more classical theories, narratives, or stories, can be used to study change. In human sciences, narratives are referred to as a family of concepts that have in common a storied form. A story is narrated by connecting a sequence of consequences and different events are chosen, organised, linked, and deemed as meaningful for a specific audience (Riessman, 2005). Buchanan and Dawson (2007) also categorise stories, anecdotes, reports, and other accounts as narratives. Czarniawska (1998, p.2) has a narrower definition and explains that a narrative, in its most essential form, consists of "an original state of affairs, an action or an event, and the consequent state of affairs". For a narrative to become meaningful and to make sense, a plot must be introduced (Czarniawska, 1998) that links the events together into a structure (Boje, 1991). In other words, a narrative is a spoken or written text that chronologically connects a series of events or an action (Czarniawska, 2004). Stories and narratives are also generally more commonly used during unstable times in order to share and understand more turbulent events (Peters & Austin, 1985) which leads us to narratives in organisational change.

Currie and Brown (2003) discuss that narratives are especially useful when studying organisational change as the complexity of change includes in the individuals' roles and motives that affect change. Similarly, when Dawson and Buchanan (2005) studied technological change, they concluded that contrasting stories of the complex and political change process compete with each other to become the leading change account. We therefore chose to study organisational change from a narratological perspective to understand more of how change is perceived. We find that the classical change management perspective does not

fully capture the complexity and how individuals perceive change which is why we chose the narratological approach. Additionally, a lot of literature focuses on the failure of change, such as from Hay, Parker and Luksyte (2021) who analysed change failures through narratives. This study instead aims to develop and exemplify a narratological perspective of organisational change that is created through socially constructed, multi authored and competing stories. This study will discuss and attempt to answer the following research question: What is the role of narratives in organisational change?

## Theoretical Framework

In this study, we will use sensemaking, identity and political motives to explain and analyse the narratives found at the case company. Theory of sensemaking will aid in understanding how employees have interpreted organisational change, identity theory will help us understand why certain stories of change have been selected to be considered “the truth”, while other contrasting stories end up in the shadows. Lastly, political motives through narratives will facilitate understanding of how the employees have rationalised organisational change but first we will give an overview of how organisational change can be characterised through narratives.

### Narratives and organisational change

Organisations can be described as storytelling systems (Boje, 1991) where stories are being told to make sense of new information and change. Stories are fragments of organisational experiences that come together to shape a seemingly rational collective account that will guide individual practices and actions. However, change can be accounted for and written from many different angles, depending on who is the narrator (Clausen & Olsen, 2000). Tsoukas and Chia (2002) describe change as “multi-authored” and Buchanan and Dawson (2007) mean that multiple stories are an essential part of change as they capture experiences as well as influence and shape change. To explain these multiple stories that sometimes are contradictory, we will use the term “decoupled” (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) to explain how actors maintain and identify with an official and ceremonial narrative but at the same time deals with practical implication with locally created narratives. Narratives can also affect the direction and outcome of change, narrators, or change agents, are therefore not only story tellers, but they are also shapers of the change processes (Buchanan & Dawson, 2007). Narratives do not only describe past events, but they also seek to shape future causes of change. As described by Buchanan and Dawson (2007), stories of change constitute and shape the change process that they describe and therefore narratives can be seen as both accounts of change but also the change in itself. Stories and change are closely intertwined and affect one another as stories, both about the past and the present, shape and are shaped by the change process (Dawson & Buchanan, 2005). Therefore, the outcome of change can potentially be explained by how it is narrated and authored (Dawson & Buchanan, 2005).

A good story, or a story that sticks, is not necessarily the “truth” and as Grant, Hardy, Oswick and Putnam (2004) describe from an organisational discourse perspective, “truth”, or accuracy and objectivity, is unattainable as there will always be contrasting versions from the same events (Brown, 1998; Fincham, 2002). On the other hand, one should be careful to think that people are lying as the accounts are “real” to the understanding of the respondent and it influences the actors’ understanding and behaviour (Dawson & Buchanan, 2005). The stories that stick or win the internal battle for being the dominant narrative of an organisation, do so because of the credibility and influence of the narrator, their storytelling skills, political tactics and facts about the unfolding event (Ng & De Cock, 2002). Martin (1982, p296) argues that for maximum effect and impact of a story, managers should “make the story as concrete as possible”. However, as Buchanan and Dawson (2005) explain, a powerful story is coherent, compelling, engaging, and robust but at the same time flexible enough to be altered without damaging the credibility of the author.

## Sensemaking

Boje (1991) explains that “storytelling is the preferred sense-making currency of human relationships” (p.106) which means that individuals use narratives as a way of interpreting certain situations and make sense of them (Weick et. al, 2005). Cunliffe and Coupland (2012) argue that this sensemaking of narratives is an ongoing process embedded in people’s lives to interpret ongoing interactions of everyday life, but sensemaking can also occur in the stories retrospectively being told as a way to rationalise people’s behaviours and frame the past (Bruner, 1991). Sensemaking of narratives is therefore also widely being used in organisational studies, Morente and Ferràs (2018) for example studied the narratives of entrepreneurs and found how they practically identify and handle uncertainties through sensemaking of their stories. Another benefit that Weick (1995) brings up when discussing sensemaking theory in an organisational setting is that it can highlight the employee perspective and show how employees are interpreting and rationalising situations which can differ drastically from a management perspective and show competing narratives. Buchanan and Dawson (2007) further discuss competing narratives and the importance of getting different narratives to get a deeper understanding of how individuals react and interpret events and experiences and not only show “different stories”. This is shared by Brown and Humphreys (2002) who tie competing narratives to personal sensemaking as the same event through the individuals’ interpretations and rationalisations can bring contrasting stories. The personal sensemaking is also affected by what the individual has experienced before the event and their specific knowledge on what is transpiring (Leitch & Davenport, 2005). Brown, Stacey and Nandhakumar (2008) studied how project team members made sense of their work and found that the individuals had different interpretations and understandings of the same events in their project, even though they were seen as agreeing on several details.

On the other hand, Buchanan and Dawson (2007) describe the iterative process of sensemaking where narratives that are shared by several people over time result in influencing each other to the extent where people share the same interpretations of events.

This process is then characterised as collective sensemaking where both the individual and the group narratives together construct the meaning of ongoing events and experiences (Currie & Brown, 2003). Currie and Brown (2003) further describe collective sensemaking as individuals intentionally sharing their stories to co-construct narratives with others that are geared towards benefiting them depending on their personal identity in the organisation.

## Identity

Currie and Brown (2003) studied narratives to understand organising processes of managers and middle managers and highlight the importance of narratives to define individuals' identities and how they compare and combine into the group's shared identity. Their case study, examining several change processes imposed by senior management at a UK National Health Service (NHS) Hospital, show how the narratives and stories about these changes could differ between senior managers and middle-managers. These, sometimes contrasting, views were explained as the two groups defining their identities to what they considered desirable and what made sense to them. Grant (2008) further discusses the way shared group identities can influence other people's perspectives by generalising the ideas and creating a broader identity that spans over several individuals in an organisation.

Further, Czarniawska (2008) describes how identity and alterity interplay in image construction of organisations. Identity being "who we are" and alterity meaning "who we are not". The study investigates how these organisational images are constructed and how they are used. By looking at the construction of city images of Warsaw, Rome, and Stockholm, Czarniawska (2008) could see that it was important for the city management and politicians to compare one's city to other, desirable, cities in Europe. Also, how important it was to differentiate and oppose one's city to cities perceived as different. For example, the city management and politicians in Warsaw in the late 1990s argued that a subway was needed to solve problems connected to urban transportation, but also, because a national capital, like Warsaw, needs a subway. Only one other European capital did not have a subway - Tirana, the capital of Albania, which was described to be the opposite of Warsaw in many ways. Another important aspect in the alterity process of Warsaw city image was the comparison to Johannesburg made by the World Bank, an investor in the transportation project, suggesting an above ground transportation solution. This suggestion gained few followers in Warsaw and being compared to an African city was not popular, as some Eastern Europeans were annoyed that their situation was juxtaposed to that of an African country.

Organisational images are constantly being produced and maintained by actors, both within and outside the organisation, in discourses and conversations about the past and present. These images are used to attract and manage employees and investors, to legitimise and guide actions as well as control media and compete with other organisations (Czarniawska, 2008). Czarniawska (2008) further explains that the interplay between identity and alterity must be interlinked with the strategy of an organisation. As new institutionalism argues and the term isomorphism explains, organisations in the same field tend to look and act the same (Powel &

DiMaggio, 1991). Isomorphism presumes identification mechanisms, but as Czarniawska (2008) explains, there is a strong need for differentiation and uniqueness. One of these mechanisms can be described as the terms of automorphism (Schwartz, 1997), which is the identification with, and the positive attitude towards one's own distant past.

## Political Motives

Going back to the study of organisational change at a UK NHS Hospital conducted by Currie and Brown (2003), they show that narratives can be used to produce, maintain, and reproduce power structures and asymmetric power relations within an organisation. The UK government's attempt to gain acceptance of the entrepreneurial model in the NHS was only partially successful because of the various counter-narratives created by media, academics and hospital workers stopping the government gaining hegemonic control. Further, the study shows that legitimacy is a key concept and a political resource that is required for individuals and groups to obtain consent and acceptance of others. For instance, both senior managers and middle-managers at the hospital legitimised and motivated their actions and beliefs by building a narrative that they had patient care as central value. Noon, Jenkins and Lucio (2000) similarly describe that rationalising an event, such as organisational change, can be used to justify specific agendas and help ensure the employees' engagement and compliance.

Dawson and Buchanan (2005) studied technological change and argue that narratives are not just good stories, they are tools to cement a certain perception of events. Therefore, narratives can be useful in the political arena of an organisation where influence, status and advancements are at stake. These narratives can also enable groups or individuals to influence decision making and the directions an organisation is taking to better suit their agenda (Wilkins & Thompson, 1991) and differences in these motivations are one of the reasons why competing narratives are formed (Leitch & Davenport, 2005). Taylor et al. (2002) argue that the collective sensemaking can deliberately be influenced by individuals to help further their goal, for example leaders that help shape the narratives to promote their agenda to stakeholders.

## Methodology

### Study Setting

To assist the reader in understanding the background of the study, a short introduction of the chosen case company will be provided as well as a description of the context. The case we have studied is a reorganisation, TED 3.0, taking place during 2021 and 2022 at a Swedish multi-international company. The organisation, hereby referred to as Company AB, has in the past reorganised several times to better meet the demands of the market. Company AB, with headquarters in Stockholm and production sites and sales offices in the Americas, Europe,

Africa, Asia and the Pacific, employs about 14.000 people all over the world and operates within the manufacturing industry.

The reorganisation directly and indirectly affects a large number of employees, but we will focus our study on the functions located in one of the office and production sites in Sweden with in total approximately 2500 employees. This selection was firstly made due to the potential in access of data, as one of us has connections and contacts at the site that can aid the data collection. Silverman (2015) argues that convenient access to data is a valid guiding principle for the data collection strategy and keeping it simple is to be preferred if possible. The second reason for narrowing it down to this particular site is because of the importance of the functions and the people working there. The site is a central point in the organisation and has been subject to several previous changes and is at the heart of the current reorganisation.

The reorganisation was initiated by the CEO in the summer of 2021 and at first a select few top managers were involved together with external consultants, to form the future organisation. A project team was put together to develop and execute the change and when the project team found it necessary, people from the organisation were involved to give their opinion and knowledge on how to execute the vision of the reorganisation. At most, 150 people had signed an NDA (non-disclosure agreement) and were involved in the project called TED 3.0. The majority of managers were informed about the reorganisation through a “town hall meeting” in November 2021 and all affected employees were informed the day after. When the official information was released, the organisational structure was completed down to tier level three, starting with the CEO at tier 0, and all levels below were to be worked out and set before the reorganisation going live on 1st of January 2022. There were some departmental differences in timeline and involvement in the project, depending on how big of a change the reorganisation was to current ways of working, for example some departments in Operations did not go live with the reorganisation on the 1st of January, but are instead planning to execute the change in Q3 2022.

The nature of the reorganisation was to decentralise and organise functions as per four newly created business units (BUs) based on four different customer segments. The aim is to be closer to the end-customer and empower autonomous functions to operate in the best interest of the specific BU. The outside world is changing, and Company AB has great opportunities to break into new markets and to cement their market leading position in already existing ones.

## Design of the Study

The aim of this study is to develop and exemplify a narratological perspective of organisational change that is created through socially constructed, multi authored and competing stories. In order to do this, a qualitative, constructionist research approach was chosen where we find meaning of what the data presents and how it was presented. Further this study follows grounded theory which Charmaz (2006) finds to fit the constructionist



approach well. Especially, when it comes to analysing the data as the data mainly focuses on people's accounts and perceptions of events rather than what objectively has happened (Charmaz, 2006). This ties into the study as it is not possible or even desirable to objectively account for what happened during organisational change, but instead focuses on the accounts of the people involved and how these narratives can be explained and what role they play in organisational change. The units of analysis are in qualitative research generally these participants' accounts (Silverman, 2015) which fits the aim of the study as the individuals' stories of organisational change are being analysed. To complement the individuals' interviews, additional data in form of documents and two videos from the announcement of the reorganisation were studied to help form the narrative being portrayed on the company's internal website. What further characterises grounded theory as a method of analysing data is that the data is not analysed in order to test a hypothesis, which this study does not attempt to do, but instead constructing theories and inducing a hypothesis (Silverman, 2015; Charmaz, 2006).

## Data Collection

For the primary data collection method, semi-structured and in-depth interviews with employees within the organisation were chosen. This was done not only to gain information about the accounts of what the interviewees have experienced, but also to construct narratives of how they perceived the change. The study therefore includes our participation in creating meaning of the data collected, following the constructionist approach (Silverman, 2015). The initial selection of interviewees was made on the basis of being affected by the reorganisation, TED 3.0, at Company AB which led to a better understanding of which people within the organisation have been involved in the change process to other degrees, leading to additional interviews. A total of 21 interviews were held with interviewees varying in their level of involvement where, by the end no further information that greatly deviated from previous interviews was found, showing that data saturation was deemed sufficient (Silverman, 2015). In order to get an overview of the range of different levels of interviewees and their level of involvement in the change process, we divided them into four groups. The first group is the project group where we interviewed two members from, because they were part of the change process initially, we refer to them in the empirical section as their own group. The rest of the interviewees are then divided into three tiers, reflecting their positions in the new organisation. The interviewees are not ranked within each tier, for example Interviewee Top Tier one (TT1) does not hold a higher position than Interviewee Top Tier 4 (TT4), see *table 1* below.

<b>Project group</b>	<b>Top tiers</b>	<b>Middle tiers</b>	<b>Bottom tiers</b>
Interviewee PG1	Interviewee TT1	Interviewee MT1	Interviewee BT1
Interviewee PG2	Interviewee TT2	Interviewee MT2	Interviewee BT2
	Interviewee TT3	Interviewee MT3	Interviewee BT3

	Interviewee TT4	Interviewee MT4	Interviewee BT4
	Interviewee TT5	Interviewee MT5	Interviewee BT5
		Interviewee MT6	Interviewee BT6
		Interviewee MT7	Interviewee BT7

Table 1 - Interviewees

Furthermore, as the study follows grounded theory, the interviews did not consist of having prepared the same interview questions for each interviewee, instead after completing, transcribing, discussing and coding each interview, questions for the next interview were adapted (Charmaz, 2006).

## Data Analysis

Following Grounded Theory method, the data collected was analysed through coding alongside the interview process where first, the interviews were coded into initial (first order) codes where what was being said in a sentence or paragraph was discussed and summarised in other words. This process took place after each interview in order to get more familiarised with the data and potentially prepare new questions for upcoming interviews once new topics of interest were brought up. After having coded the first order of six interviews, we then continued to compare and sort the first order codes into broader second order codes. After having coded half of interviews' second order codes, we then in turn further discussed and overarching themes and phenomena were found. By coding the interviews as they were being conducted new themes were being discovered that were not thought of beforehand (Charmaz, 2006), for example how cascading the information through the organisation led to different interpretations as they did not originate from the same source and seeing the possibility of connecting these interpretations to translation of change.

## Ethical considerations

Some ethical concerns to consider when conducting in-depth interviews is privacy and confidentiality (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). In this study, all interviewees have been anonymised and an oral consent agreement was concluded at the start of every interview. The consent agreement clarified that the interviewee would be anonymous in the report, as well as towards the case company, that the transcriptions would be deleted once not needed anymore, that they will have the opportunity to proofread their specific quotes used in the report and that data would be presented with integrity of the person in mind. To assure anonymity of all participants names, titles and gender specific pronouns have been removed. Instead, the interviewees have been divided into four groups based on their level of involvement in the reorganisation and their tier level in the organisation. To distinguish when another interviewee is being quoted the interviewees were given a specific code. All interviewees were sent their specific quotes, in order to secure the correct interpretation of the person's accounts and consented to the quotes being presented in the report.

Another ethical consideration was the personal involvement of one of the authors to Company AB and the implications of them being an insider. One of the consequences frequently being discussed when conducting a study with an insider is influencing the interviewees' answers (Fleming, 2018). Although not all interviewees had a personal relation to one of the authors it needs to be noted that the data collected is potentially affected by this. In order to mitigate the study of concentrating on an insider perspective, all interviews were conducted with both authors present and coded through mutual discussions to not lose an outside perspective. It should also be noted that this study following a qualitative research approach, is not too heavily focused and concerned with keeping objectivity at all cost. Instead, the authors' personal connections and experiences help shape the study and find interesting connections that could have been lost to a sole outside perspective (Silverman, 2015). In this study, one author being an insider also proved to be helpful in the data collection process, not only facilitating the ease of access to data but also when asking key follow up questions during the interview due to what Potter (2018) characterises as familiarity to the industry.

Another aspect that is important to note about narratives in organisational change is that the listener is part of the creation of narratives. Listeners can be called co-producers (Boje, 1991) of narratives as blanks and gaps in stories are being interpreted and filled in with personal experiences and assumptions. Also, in the case of research, listeners who are researchers choose and influence the stories and narratives that are reported, even if the researcher tries to construct an "objective" account from the outside (Buchanan & Dawson, 2007). As previously mentioned, the goal of this study is not to aim for complete objectivity and what this means for our study is that we by choosing which accounts and stories to present are constructing narratives and we are thereby, as Dawson and Buchanan (2005) put it, "authors of change narratives" (p. 862).

## Empirical Findings

In the following section, our empirical findings will be presented where the accounts from the interviewees and other relevant data collected together construct narratives. What we found was that there were both shared and competing narratives of the organisational change at Company AB and the most relevant and significant ones are being presented below.

### Historical anchorage of organisational change

To fully understand the narratives surrounding TED 3.0, one must revisit and look into previous changes at Company AB. The company has a long history of adapting and changing, both their products and the organisation, depending on societal needs and shifts going back to the 17th century. A long history of innovating, producing, and selling different kinds of products and machines which the company is very proud of. The organisational heritage of innovation is heavily communicated, not only to the market, but also internally to employees.

When officially announcing the reorganisation to the employees, a short clip of the Vice President (VP) was released and shown explaining the rationale of the reorganisation and why it is the necessary next step for the company. However, the first minutes of the clip is dedicated to Company AB's history and the VP opens with "I am actually sitting here in [production site], where it all started over 300 years ago, I am proud to be here, and I think we all should be proud of our heritage and where it all started". He then continues with:

From [product] to [product] to [product] to [product] to [current product], and now we are truly a global leader in [the industry]. And to take the next steps I think it is important that we actually dwell on the past and how we have succeeded. What do we stand for as a group, and what do we stand for as a division? We are truly innovative, we have a passion for our products, we have a passion for our people and that keeps us striving ahead and striving forward, let's keep that with us.

Not a lot of communication material is saved from previous changes, but a similar clip to the one described above was found on the company intranet concerning the implementation of the current strategy, published in 2019, where the previous VP also stressed the heritage and history of change within the company, saying "We have proven this with over 300 years of successful business at [Company AB]. Reinventing ourselves, embracing new opportunities". They then go on saying that the journey is going to be exciting and that they are looking forward to it. Going back to the clip regarding TED 3.0, the VP finishes the clip also commenting on the journey the organisation has ahead, again tying in the past and innovative history of the company:

Now, is this going to be easy, is this journey going to be plain sailing, of course not. But we have been through these journeys before. And we, you, us as a team will get there (...) So let's embrace this change, let's take it as we can as we have for many many years and really drive the change forward.

The VP was not alone in focusing on the past when talking about TED 3.0. Several interviewees described the company as being used to these types of big reorganisations, one put it as the company having change "in the DNA" (Interviewee TT4), another interviewee described the company as "not known as a strong process company, but it is entrepreneurial and it is fast-paced" (Interviewee MT5), both referring to the long history of innovative changes in the company. Some interviewees had been working at the company for several years, it is not unusual that employees stay 10-20 years, or longer, at Company AB, and therefore could give personal accounts of previous reorganisations taking place in more recent years. The main reorganisations the interviewees talked about were the reorganisations called "One Company AB" taking place in 2008/2009 and the reversification of the same in 2014, the TED 1.0 in 2017, the TED 2.0 executed in 2019 and the current reorganisation, TED 3.0. The "One Company AB" had the aim to find synergies and organise the company under functions serving the whole company, regardless of product or end-customer. This reorganisation was described as a failure by the interviewees that had been with the company at the time, especially the previous CEO was highlighted to have failed in their attempt to reorganise the company, and as Interviewee TT3 put it "it went to hell, that reorganisation. It

ends with the CEO [name of CEO], [they] had a breakdown and was on sick leave. Yeah, it was actually awful.” One specific event was mentioned during this reorganisation to have been detrimental to the company, and that was the merger of two factories in the US. The CEO at the time, who also was acting Chief Operating Officer (COO), had questioned if it was necessary to have two factories in the US and if it would be possible to merge the two, and the American organisation replied according to Interviewee MT6:

“Of course, we can do it, it cannot be that difficult.” This had devastating consequences for the company. A real, real crisis because our largest factory that makes [product] gets a meltdown and in the spring of 2011 when we make this merger we cannot deliver to our customers, it's real chaos. [The CEO] goes on sick leave and we have a new interim manager and then [the CEO] gets fired.

Among the success stories heavily communicated by the company, of how it has been able to change and stay relevant for a long period of time, there are stories of failed reorganisations, such as the one above, among the employees.

In contrast to “One Company AB”, the reorganisations called TED had, and have, the aim to focus more on end-customer meaning organising the company as per functions defined by different customer types, rather than organising the company by product categories. In the clip, the VP stresses, several times, that this shift is needed due to “a closing window of opportunity, our competitors are not standing still, we all know that. Some of them have made some fairly bold moves in the recent months and years”. The narrative surrounding the outside world and competitors can also be seen in other communication materials, in a short presentation clip regarding the current strategy one of the main messages is that the outside world is changing, and the company must do so with it. This narrative is shared and enforced by employees that recognise the uncertainties in the world right now and how the world has changed during the recent years, mainly due to the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, and that the company must keep up with the times. And as interviewee PG1 expressed it “organisation design, it's never done, you know, it should never be done.” referring to that customer needs change, target segments evolve and competitors change, “so therefore we need to accept it.” (Interviewee PG1).

## Frequency of Change and COVID-19

Working at Company AB means you most likely will experience one or two reorganisations. As stated in the previous section, the company has since 2008 conducted five major reorganisations, where the last three have been conducted in a time period of five years. Several interviewees explained that change is a vital part of the company's identity, one interviewee believes that “..most employees have a positive attitude towards change, I don't think they would appreciate working here if they didn't” (Interviewee MT3). Similarly, another interviewee explains that the company is very good at “trying out new things in order to test, learn and modify” (Interviewee TT4) and that is important in order to stay relevant on the market. However, this narrative of overall having a positive mindset towards change and the company being good at conducting frequent larger reorganisations is also met by a

contrasting view that the changes are being implemented too frequently with the time frame in between being too short, as interviewee TT4 puts it:

I think it takes some time as it needs to settle down a little bit and then you need to be kind of at peace doing these *lessons learned* afterwards and understand how to benefit from the experience. You can't do it right after you throw a hand grenade into the department like that.

The need for time to let the new organisation take its shape and develop as intended before launching the next reorganisation was mentioned by several interviewees. Some processes at the company are conducted with yearly and/or monthly cycles, meaning the new organisation only has time to practice these cycles once or twice before new teams or new contact persons should conduct them. Several of the interviewees shared the opinion of the reorganisations being “maybe a little too close together” (Interviewee TT3) and that some employees are feeling worn out and tired of the company’s reorganisations. Another interviewee stated that “my first reaction was: Oh no, here we go again, another change process” (Interviewee BT3) when the current reorganisation was announced.

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have been many-sided for Company AB, both negative and positive. In some ways it has pushed the company to develop and adapt, many times taking significant decisions in a short period of time with limited information about the situation. During the pandemic, the Swedish Public Health Agency recommended all who had the ability to work from home to do so, to minimise and contain the spread of the Coronavirus. Company AB took a step further and instructed all employees who had the possibility to work from home to do so, to ensure the safety and health of their employees. Some interviewees remarked on the timing of the reorganisation with reference to the situation that the majority of all employees had been working from home for nearly two years, some had been onboarded during the pandemic and not had the chance to properly meet their team and managers. To inform employees of TED 3.0 through TEAMS meetings was not appreciated by some of the interviewees, that accounted for the difficulties in delivering the message in a good way and seeing and understanding the reactions from their employees.

Further, Company AB has been negatively affected by the consequences of COVID-19 pandemic with multifaceted supply chain issues, as many other companies. Problems started with the lockdown in China in early 2020, with strategically important ports closing or operating at reduced capacity resulting in disturbances and unbalance in the logistic network all over the world. For company AB this meant deliveries of components to their production facilities, as well as outbound deliveries to customers, were delayed or stopped resulting in all time high back log. Some interviewees expressed that their teams had been under immense pressure and stress during the pandemic, and conducting a reorganisation during these uncertain times was expressed as not ideal, as interviewee TT4 put it “to have it at the same time as we have this whole situation with getting hold of electronics and raw materials, steel, plastic and energy prices just exploding and it's like .. It was not an ideal timing”. However,

the timing, according to higher management, could not have been better since the pandemic has had a positive effect on the financial performance. The company has delivered record high operating profit, increase in sales and strong operating margin during the pandemic years. Interviewee PG1 commented on the momentum this has given the company and “because of great financial performance and great momentum, timing was good” (Interviewee PG1). The reorganisation in its nature was not a cost-saving one, rather the opposite and it is part of the overall company strategy, the strong financial performance accelerated the timeframe of TED 3.0.

## Split opinions and motivations for the reorganisation

Whether the reorganisation would put the company on the right course or not was perceived differently by the interviewees. There were some that found the change to be beneficial to the company and saw TED 3.0 as a continuation of previous TED reorganisations, cementing an already decided direction for the company. Others did not see any connection at all to previous reorganisation, meaning that this way of organising the company is a completely new idea. However, most interviewees agreed that it was the right way forward for the company as a whole, as one interviewee (Interviewee TT1) explained “TED 3.0 has the right ambitions (...) which I believe to be best for the company” and another interviewee agreeing on the strategy that this reorganisation is working towards: “it is good for the company that we have this focus” (Interviewee MT6), referring to further the launch of key products and to break through in emerging markets. However, some did not agree this was the best way forward for their particular department, one interviewee (Interviewee MT1) expressed their initial concerns as:

I'm so used to everything we do; we try to do it more efficiently and my first reaction was that this organisational change will bring more complexity. I fully understand what the company and the division want to achieve, and I support that direction, but I could not initially see that this was smart for our function.

The concern that the decentralisation would make some function more costly and inefficient was shared by other interviewees. Most parts of the organisation were cut and divided between the four BUs down to the lowest tier and that was not expected as it was difficult to see how that would benefit the business, “I was surprised at how deep they chose to cut into the structure. I was surprised that the factories were divided, the factories and purchasing.” (Interviewee MT6). Many of the departments being split up into the different BUs in TED 3.0 reorganisation had not been subject to bigger change for a long period of time. The previous TED reorganisations had not been as comprehensible and dramatic as TED 3.0, leaving some departments more or less untouched, giving them the opportunity to streamline their processes and organisation. The realisation, that the reorganisation was dividing functions and teams that for long had worked towards finding synergies, “was quite hard, I think. I would say that for those of us who work in the back end as we say, it was very difficult because they went in and split us” (Interviewee TT4).

The division of the organisation was painful in other aspects as well, it did not only break up teams that had worked together for a long period of time, it also created friction between the newly created BUs. When the new organisation was being formed some interviewees perceived other managers to act in an egoistic manner, Interviewee TT5 thought some to be “very egoistic (...) individuals who are good at playing that type of game and make it seem like it is for the greater good”. This type of behaviour could take its form in contacting employees and discussing the reorganisation with the motive to secure them to their team or BU, even though that tier level had not been formally discussed yet. Some individuals were seen to “build empires” and that was provocative to others. The internal politics have had its consequences and as one employee (Interviewee TT5) reflected:

Yes, but it comes at a very high price. There were very many relationships at that level that were extremely damaged and are still today. Extremely much damaged between individuals, above all driven by the fact that there were a number of leaders who were very selfish.

Friction was not only created by egoistic behaviour by individual managers, when the reorganisation went live 1st of January 2022 many things were still unclear, especially the newly created roles, shared responsibilities and governance created friction between people and departments. Some top managers in the new organisation had dual and/or acting roles resulting in split focus and unclear directions on how the new organisation should function. As interviewee MT6 commented: “organisation interpreting their mission in ways that made it really messy” and it being “one of the reasons why we've got so much friction and ambiguity between the BUs”. A practical example illustrating this was the unclarity of how the sales organisation should be divided between the BUs, as a certain type of product might be part of and included in one BU on paper but another BUs sales organisation having approximately 90 % of the sales. Questions such as who should create the sales forecast or how to handle investment that is beneficial to more than one BU had not been resolved when the interviews were conducted in March of 2022.

On an individual level, interviewees explained that some middle-managers had difficulties accepting the reorganisation as it affected their position and status within the organisation. As Interviewee BT3 explained, when departments were being moved or divided, some middle-managers had to report to a new senior manager. In some cases, this resulted in questioning of the middle-manager’s technical competence as the new senior manager had a different view of leadership, meaning you have to be a specialist in their part of the organisation rather than a general manager. Also, as many teams were split in two or three, it resulted in less direct reports for some middle managers, and this was sometimes difficult to accept. One project member was frustrated that some middle-managers took the reorganisation too personally and thought “the design is not about individuals. It's more about the roles, about the responsibilities. It's about the deliverables” (Interviewee PG1).



## Being involved in the change process

The concern of, and difficulties to understand, how the business would benefit from the decentralisation into four separate and autonomous BUs was expressed as top management not understanding the processes and how the business works, that “the problem arises further down where most people sit, at my level (...), where they [top management] do not have a good understanding [of the business]” (Interviewee BT3). It was concerning to some in the company that “the inner circle around CEO with the reorganisation (...) there were a lot of people who had a rather vague idea of how it really works out in the organisation” (Interviewee MT6). Some of the people doing much of the heavy lifting in the project group had only been in the company less than a year. Similarly, Interviewee MT7, also recognized the lack of understanding for how the business works from a discussion about:

...websites for example, we should not have separate websites for the BUs, however in all seriousness someone said “yes, but we probably want that”... And then I felt that now you have to calm down. We do not have separate websites for these different customer groups because it will be completely wrong.

To mitigate this problem interviewees expressed that “perhaps it would have been even better if they had involved more people” (Interviewee BT5). Instead, employees in the parts of the organisation that were most affected by the reorganisation felt overlooked and interpreted that the project group “do not feel that they needed to know how it works [in the business]” (Interviewee MT6). However, a member of the project group recognised the difficulties and risks of involving too many people but expressed that “I would have liked, from a transparency perspective, that more managers had been involved earlier [in the process]” (Interviewee PG2). The level of involvement of people also brought up feelings of being overlooked in the reorganisation due to not being involved enough. One manager found that having positive feelings towards a change process is more due to leaders making people feel involved rather than the idea and nature of the change itself: “It’s not about information, it’s about inclusion and involvement” (Interviewee MT4). One interviewee (MT2) explained that they felt left out and described feeling that the select people were chosen due to favouritism:

Remember when you had gymnastics when you were a kid and you had two captains to choose members and you lined up the whole row of kids and you had to say: I want you, you and you ... and who do you choose first? The ones you’re friends with.

Apart from feeling left out, the feeling of being overlooked was also shared by other interviewees. As mentioned previously, when the reorganisation was officially announced to the employees, the organisational design was not complete and all departments below tier level four were not mentioned in the presentation. This was interpreted by some interviewees that they might not be affected by TED 3.0, but later it would show that their department would also be split into the different BUs, “They never mentioned [our departments] in any of the presentations at the beginning, maybe not so much in the end either, that [our departments] are untouched, but that’s not how it turned out. We are of course affected” (Interviewee BT6). Similarly, a manager from a different department explained that while

they were being mentioned in the initial presentations of the reorganisation, the scope of how many people included in this department was being disregarded: “I feel that it sends a bit of disrespect to the organisation that you are a bulk.” (Interviewee MT4). In Company AB, some departments are significantly bigger than others even though they have the same tier level, for example a manager at R&D or Operations can represent 100s of employees but they were involved at the same stage and to the same extent as managers with only 2-3 direct reports.

## Communicating the reorganisation

TED 3.0 was initiated from top management and the working process and information flow before the official announcement moved from tier level to the next when it was necessary to involve that tier for input on the organisational design. As the change initiative was structured top to bottom, it led to the amount of people involved to gradually increase, starting with the CEO, consultants and project group, and further cascading down the organisation. The middle-managers being involved further down in the organisation were therefore not all directly in contact with the change initiators but received the information from their manager, and one project group member (Interviewee PG1) explained the communication issues as a result of information being passed along and therefore interpreted differently:

This is where we did have some problems (...) We started getting into tier four, we made some good progress in some BUs, in some areas less so. And then when we began to involve a few more, say middle managers, the message hadn't really been either given or received from tier one to tier two to tier three. Meaning it could be misinterpreted.

This story was shared by another project group member that explained that the project was trying to mitigate the information being up for interpretation by setting up a communication plan where select people from higher management were attending the meetings where the reorganisation was discussed and presented to the lower tier and cascading the information down. When discussing which people to bring in to help strengthen the message of the change, the project considered but decided against asking the CEO to attend the meetings: “We could have brought the CEO in, for example, but we didn't think we needed to.” (Interviewee PG2). However, the CEO not being visible during the reorganisation process was understood by some interviewees as part of the reason for some information becoming unclear further down in the organisation, as one interviewee explained (Interviewee MT4):

It would have been quite valuable to get [the information] from the source directly and I think that these steps in between lead to everyone putting their interpretations in afterwards and when I heard the CEO say something I felt that yes, if we had heard it directly, we might have made less detours in some areas. (...) So yes, interpretations are dangerous.

The communication issues of the change was further explained by an interview in the level of involvement of the external consultancy firm that was viewed by some as a middleman between the CEO and the rest of the company “I would have wished that our CEO was a bit

closer and that you could talk to them directly and discuss this and not just have [the consultancy firm] there as some kind of project manager/secretary” (Interviewee TT3).

## Summary of Empirical Findings

The stories the interviewees told together with the other material collected through official documents and video clips constructed several different both shared and competing narratives; such as the company’s history of conducting many reorganisations being seen as part of the company and important to stay relevant on the market meeting the counter narrative of employees feeling worn out of another reorganisation being implemented. Another important narrative constructed is “us vs. them” where the reorganisation has divided parts of the organisations and caused friction between some departments. The empirical findings also show another kind of division where top management is seen as focusing on the overarching strategy and leaving the implementation up to the rest of the organisation that might not benefit from the reorganisation for their specific department, constructing the narrative of “top vs. bottom”. These narratives will be further discussed from the earlier presented theoretical framework.

## Discussion

In order to develop and exemplify a narratological perspective of organisational change that is created through socially constructed, multi authored and competing stories the narratives presented and constructed from Company AB are re-examined. This discussion does not attempt to investigate the factual accuracy of the narratives but instead discusses them through the theoretical perspectives of sensemaking, identity and political motives to examine why competing narratives are created and what role they have in organisational change.

### The role of sensemaking in organisational change

The interviews at Company AB showed both shared and competing narratives that through sensemaking can facilitate a larger understanding of how these narratives were constructed and how they influence and affect the reorganisation and company overall. This together with previous studies (e.g., Weick et al., 2005; Buchanan & Dawson, 2007; Currie & Brown, 2003) help shape the role of sensemaking in organisational change.

The way Buchanan and Dawson (2007) describe collective sensemaking through co-created narratives in order to understand change can be used to explain how the company’s history of conducting frequent change initiatives is part of the interviewees rationalising why they are implementing several change processes. The authors point out that it is an iterative process where over time individuals influence each other’s narratives through sharing their own stories and in turn creating collective interpretations of what has occurred (Buchanan & Dawson, 2007). What we found in this case is that several of the interviewees shared the

narrative of the frequent changes being part of the company. This was influenced by the way the reorganisation was presented to the company in the official release in addition to the employees and managers influencing each other by talking about the frequencies of changes in the company. Currie and Brown (2003) further explain collective sensemaking through several people coming together and intentionally negotiating how to construct the narrative. This means that shared narratives do not necessarily equal collective sensemaking, but that there is an intention when influencing and co-constructing a narrative. While it is difficult to examine the intentions of individuals discussing changes in a break room, this narrative shows co-creation especially through the official material as it presents an image of how change is a part of the company's history. Grant (2008) explains that creating an organisational narrative influences the view people have on that organisation which in this case is that frequent change has been necessary for the company to stay relevant for that many years. The intentionality is therefore shown by the drivers of the change in showing the necessity, and the company's history for the reorganisation as positive.

However, this co-constructed narrative meets a competing narrative of some interviewees explaining that they are feeling that the changes are happening too frequently. This can be understood as personal sensemaking like Buchanan and Dawson (2007) see it as an individual interpretation of events to get a deeper understanding. In this instance, while overall agreeing that change is positive and needed, they personally are showing feelings of being worn out and tired of participating and implementing another reorganisation. The way the event of the reorganisation is being rationalised differs from being seen as positive to increase customer satisfaction to negatively affecting the individual that has to deal with the change. Particularly interesting about seeing these competing narratives through sensemaking is that it shows that the same person interpreted one event differently. Generally, the same event is interpreted differently by two separate people through personal sensemaking which results in competing narratives as discussed by Currie and Brown (2003) where middle and senior managers' narratives differed due to their personal interests and stakes. This way of understanding competing narratives can instead be used to examine the different interpretations of the timing of the reorganisation. The interviews showed two different sides to thinking whether the timing was good or not. One being that the timing was good due to financial performance being up and enabling this reorganisation as it is a financial investment as new roles are being created. The other being that the timing is bad due to the pandemic affecting logistical difficulties that take up time and effort to resolve. Implementing a big reorganisation while most employees are working from home was another reason brought up to see the timing as poor. Analysing through Brown and Humphreys' (2002) way of seeing personal sensemaking to be influenced by the individuals' roles in a company can help to understand the competing narrative. The timing being seen as positive was brought up by a project team member whose role is to generally see the bigger picture and how the reorganisation benefits and fits into the company's overarching strategies. The timing being poor on the other hand was rather brought up by managers not in the higher tiers and seeing how the timing affects their already busy work and creating difficulties in informing their teams on the reorganisation as they could not all be gathered together in the office. This also shows an overarching theme found through the narratives of "us vs. them" which highlights

the differences in personal sensemaking of how the interviewees interpret the events and create meaning.

Apart from the opinions on the timing of the reorganisation, there were more narratives that tie into the division of what the project members or higher management think versus the managers from lower tiers. One of which is regarding the reason for the change and how it is beneficial to the company, the idea of the reorganisation to become closer to the customer and increase customer satisfaction was something all interviewees agreed on being an overall good idea. However, this reorganisation through decentralising into four separate BUs led to some departments being split up and meant for some interviewees that their way of working was changed for the worse as they did not see the decentralisation to benefit their specific department. As Weick et. al (2005) describes sensemaking to be about creating meaning of an event retrospectively, the question becomes what has the split meant for the specific departments? What we have seen in this case is that after starting to implement these changes, the reorganisation was further interpreted as causing friction between departments due to the difficulties of fairly dividing which department is in charge of something that both departments previously worked together on. The way this narrative was told can be understood through interviewees rationalising that top management was not that familiar with the day-to-day business and did not know how the extent of the reorganisation would affect lower parts of the organisation.

Buchanan and Dawson (2007) discuss the way narratives can help shape future organisational change through especially sensemaking. Weick et al. (2005) bring up an example of sensemaking where after the event has happened the question of *what do we do now* is the one that brings meaning to the event. So, for this instance, what does it mean if we understand there to be a division between top management focusing on the larger strategy while overlooking how the reorganisation affects all parts of the company and how does it affect the future? As several interviewees brought up, they found that the division was due to a lack of involvement of people that are closer to the day-to-day operations and by discussing these narratives and bringing them forward it can affect the way future organisational change is handled.

## The role of identity in organisational change

Similar to previous studies (e.g., Currie and Brown, 2003; Grant, 2008; Czarniawska, 2008), it could be observed at Company AB how stories expressed by interviewees served to facilitate the creation of identity, alterity and image. It had the role of rationalising the reorganisation, influencing employees and aiding actors to make sense of their situation.

The creation and importance of identity could be seen through the short clip announcing TED 3.0, but also through the expressions from interviewees that Company AB has changed in “the DNA”. Identity is an important factor in organisational change as it guides how people and groups act, feel and think about a certain event (Currie and Brown, 2003, Czarniawska, 2008), and at Company AB it played an important role when announcing and implementing

TED 3.0. In the short clip shown to all employees, the VP spends several minutes revisiting the company history. By doing so, the reorganisation is rationalised through historical anchorage, and an identity of constantly being in change is presented and that it has been a key success factor in Company AB's history. This furthers the notion that TED 3.0 is part of a continuous development identity and therefore inevitable. This narrative is enforced by the employees playing on the analogy of having change in the DNA, supporting the narrative of change being inevitable as it is part of the identity, even part of the genetic code of the company. This narrative is not only used to rationalise the reorganisation in itself, it also seeks to influence the change process and the outcome of the change. As described by Buchanan and Dawson (2007), stories of change can be used to shape future causes of change and the outcome of them. By creating a sense of "who we are", i.e., a company that has survived and thrived through constantly changing, the narrative seeks to influence the employees to accept and embrace TED 3.0.

One could also see a clear case of alterity creation when the reorganisation TED 3.0 was announced. As described by Czarniawska (2008), alterity is the contrast to "who we are", in other words, "who we are not", and is an important part of image creation as it too guides people's actions and feelings. By focusing on competitors, that they have done bold moves in the last months and years implying they are catching up and are challenging Company AB in their place as industry leaders, allows Company AB to further rationalise TED 3.0 as inevitable. Because, if competitors whom Company AB do not identify with, are starting to become and operate like Company AB, there is a risk of Company AB's identity and image becoming shallow and, in a way, obsolete. Similarly, in the image creation of Warsaw, Czarniawska (2008) could see that being compared with the African city Johannesburg was not popular with politicians and city management in Warsaw as it did not further their vision and identification as a European capital, with a subway. The same can be seen in this case, competitors becoming dangerously similar to Company AB does not support their vision of being industry leaders. This behaviour of separating one's organisation, or city image, with other organisations is in contrast to what new institutionalism (Powel & DiMaggio, 1991), is teaching us about isomorphism. Organisations have a strong need for identification and can therefore start to act and become like other organisations in the same field. However, Schwarts (1997) and Czarniawska (2008) explains this can be done through automorphism, which still implies a strong need for identification, but rather than turning to other companies, organisations turn to their own past. Company AB has created a successful narrative based on past innovations and reorganisations and identified with the history of the company to set them aside from their competitors.

Interestingly, and rather paradoxically, the same past Company AB builds its identity and alterity on, does not only tell stories of successful reorganisations. In more recent years, the reorganisation called "One Company AB", tells the story of a change that was detrimental to certain operations of the business, and some employees have memories of it being a catastrophe for the company. Additionally, how likely is it that, with over 300 years of history, all reorganisations and changes have been successful? But this is not part of Company AB's identity and image, the failed reorganisations, and can be explained by what

Grant et al. (2004) say about narratives, it does not necessarily have to be the truth. Including the failures of past reorganisations would not serve the purpose of the narrative of being a company in constant change. This implies that identity and image creation is closely linked with political motives of organisational change, as the purpose with the "Change in our DNA"-narrative is to influence employees to accept and embrace TED 3.0.

One could also see that local identities were decoupled (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) from the main organisational narrative of continuous development. Some departments at Company AB have in past reorganisations not been affected and have to a large extent remained the same over a long period of time, with minor changes to the organisational structure. This has in turn enabled them to create a strong sense of who they are and how they contribute to the company. One department, who for long have worked hard being as efficient as possible in their operations, had a difficult time accepting TED 3.0 as it would mean making the department more costly and inefficient, with more middle-managers and decentralising activities that has been done centrally. Not only would it mean that a lot of the hard work that's been done to achieve the level of efficiency was futile, but it also meant the department had to go against their own identity and become something they for long had tried not to be. This process of re-identification created a lot of pain to, and resistance from, these parts of the organisation. Further, as Currie and Brown (2003) explain, the contrasting views of organisational change is not only explained by the different groups forming their identity, but it also ties into sensemaking. It made sense to the people working in certain parts of Company AB to be as cost efficient as possible and therefore created an identity based on that. When the opposite was imposed upon them naturally, they tried to resist it. This was to some extent expected by top management and the project group for TED 3.0, but it was underestimated. Rather naive, it was seen as a problem that the idea of the reorganisation was interpreted differently the further down it was cascaded. From a narrative perspective, a reorganisation will always be up for interpretation as change is co-constructed and multi-authored (Clausen & Olsen, 2000; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002), and is a natural part of organisational change.

## The role of political motives in organisational change

As seen in previous studies, (e.g. Currie & Brown, 2003; Dawson & Buchanan, 2007), it too could be observed at Company AB that narratives surrounding TED 3.0 were used to even out power relations of dominant narratives, even out power relations between different actors in the organisation and to rationalise certain events during the change process.

Through the stories told about TED 3.0, a clear case of narratives being used for political motives and purposes could be seen at Company AB. As discussed in the section about identity, a narrative with historical anchorage have successfully been built of constantly being in change to rationalise and legitimise the reorganisation and to influence the employees to embrace TED 3.0. Further, the timing of the reorganisation is legitimised with the argument that because of great financial performance and the tail wind that has brought the company,

building a narrative that it is “capitalising on momentum” that the company can conduct this type of reorganisation at this time. However, a counter narrative to this could be seen through the account of employees being worn out and tired due to the immense pressure they’ve been under during the COVID-19 pandemic, implying the timing of TED 3.0 was not ideal. This is enforced by other accounts of reorganisations being too frequent at the company, seeking to influence how often the company conducts reorganisations. As described by Wilkins and Thompson (1991) narratives, such as the one just described, can be used by groups or individuals to influence decision making and the direction of a company. The wish for the reorganisations to “settle” and to have a period of “peace” in order to do “lessons learned” could be realised if this narrative of reorganisations happening too often wins ground. These types of narratives are also used to even out power relations (Currie & Brown, 2003), in this case the power relation to the dominant narrative of Company AB having change in its DNA. There is a clear power asymmetry between the two, and one narrative could be seen as having hegemonic control (Currie & Brown, 2003) and the other trying to break that control.

Interestingly, the same employees accounting for the timing of TED 3.0 and frequency of change not being ideal, also account for and participate in the creation and maintenance of the narrative of change being one of the success factors of Company AB. This shows that two competing narratives can be created and enforced by the same person and that political motives through narratives are a complex process. On the one hand, the employees are influenced and identify themselves with the dominant narrative of embracing change, but on the other hand trying to make sense of their feelings of being worn out due to their work situation. This can be described as another case of decoupling (Meyer & Rowan, 1997) between an official narrative and local narrative.

Another way political narratives can be used in organisational change is, as Dawson and Buchanan (2005) describe, as tools to affect the political arena of a company, especially when influence and status is at stake. Through stories of how some managers took the reorganisation at Company AB as an opportunity to “build empires”, how some acted egotistical and how others played political games when forming the organisation, a narrative of “us versus them” has been created. This could especially be seen between the different BUs and the split of the organisation was described as painful. Not only because it challenged sensemaking and identity for employees, but because it has created friction between the different units. This narrative can help employees rationalise and establish an explanation why some had more influence and advancement than others, much as Noon et al. (2000) describe how individual agendas can be justified through narratives. Another level where the “us versus them”-narrative could be seen was between top management, who initiated the change, and the rest of the company who was on the receiving end of the change. Stories of how some top managers and employees surrounding the CEO not understanding how the business works, taking its form in for example discussions if the BUs should have separate websites or not, is an attempt to break the hegemonic control and even out the skewed power relation the top of the company has had in a change process characterised as top down.



## Conclusion

In summary, this study has through a narratological perspective described how organisational change is created through socially constructed, multi authored and competing narratives. Organisational change can be a complicated affair and through studying narratives surrounding it the complexity and diversity of the change processes can be revealed (Currie & Brown, 2003). By gathering, presenting and analysing narratives from employees surrounding a reorganisation this study shows that competing narratives play a significant role in employee sensemaking, identity creation and organisational politics. The findings of this study illustrate how the same organisational change is interpreted and understood by individuals in the organisation through collective and personal sensemaking. Also, narratives facilitate the creation of identity, alterity and organisational image. These had in turn the role of rationalising the reorganisation, influencing the employees and aiding actors to make sense of their situation. Further, the narratives could also be used to even out power relations of dominant narratives, even out power relations between different actors in the organisation and to rationalise and legitimise certain events during the change process.

This study shows, as many have before (e.g., Boje, 1991; Brown, 1998; Dawson & Buchanan, 2005; Currie & Brown, 2003), that organisations, especially organisational change, is a multi-authored event where stories compete with each other for dominance and influence. It further strengthens and contributes to the theory of organising to be that of storytelling in practice. That implies that when studying organisations, researchers should include different accounts of the phenomena studied in order to capture the complexity of organisational life. This study also shows that an identity of having “change in the DNA” can be created, and rather successfully, even if the past entails failed reorganisations. Then, from a narratological perspective, the focus on organisational change failures in past literature can be questioned as it does not seem these failures are being considered when creating certain narratives of change.

Going forward, further considerations should be given to the focus of success stories when creating narratives about organisational change. Some scholars (e.g., Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007) argue that we have much to learn from past failures and that organisations can benefit from focusing on the possibility of failures. What is found at Company AB is in contrast to that, and it would be interesting to explore why that is. Further, it would be interesting to add the dimension of how narratives about change evolve over time. As this study contributes to the knowledge about narratives of change at a specific point in time, it would be interesting to see how these narratives change in order to facilitate sensemaking, identity creation and the political motives. Therefore, future studies should aim for a longitudinal study to be able to capture the added complexity of time and development of narratives. Also, this study does not consider how narratives told by different people join together or how they spread in an organisation. This knowledge would be insightful to understand how sensemaking and identity on a macro-level develops.

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