This article is downloaded from

http://researchoutput.csu.edu.au

It is the paper published as:

Author/s: McMullen, C. and Braithwaite, I.

Title: Narrating an emerging cross-sector partnership: From Brand Orange to Taste Orange

Conference title: European Conference on Research Methodology (ECRM) for Business and Management Studies (ECRM 2013)

Dates: 4-5 July, 2013

Place: University of Minho, Guimaraes, Portugal

Pages: 1-9

Abstract:
This paper uses a narrative approach to explore the emergence of a cross-sector partnership established to engage in collaborative marketing activities to promote a regional Australian city as a food and wine tourist destination, as well as promoting the food and wine of the region to large urban markets. Cross-sectors partnerships involving diverse stakeholders from public and private sectors experience significant challenges in mobilising these diverse partners to act collaboratively to achieve collective outcomes. One way to examine cross-sector partnerships is from a communication perspective where organizations are seen as being constituted primarily through communication patterns (Koschmann, Kuhn & Pfarrer 2012).

The narrative approach that we take in this study helps us to understand the dynamic process at play in the emergence of a cross-sector partnership and explore the role of communication in its constitution. The approach taken locates our study in an emerging body of work that conceptualises organisation as a social process and generatively studies organisations in ways other than the dominant rational scientific traditions, traditions that abstract and generalise and lose touch with practice in the process.

Our particular interest is the insights that can be gained from applying this communicative perspective to an emerging cross-sector partnership. Specifically, we look at three newsletters written across the three-year initial funding period for a collaborative marketing project for a regional area and the food and wine from this region. By conceptualising these newsletters as a narrative that gives direction, coherence and clarity during the period of emergence, we can explore the role of communication as this marketing alliance emerges into a successful partnership.

Use of narrative inquiry enables us to (1) work with the temporal aspects of an emerging organisation; (2) provide an alternative perspective on practices for mobilising a variety of stakeholders undertaking collaborative activity; (3) illustrate the contribution narrative inquiry can make to the study of marketing implementation in collaborative marketing activities and; (4) more broadly contribute to strategies to achieve cross-sector partnership outcomes.
Narrating an Emerging Cross-sector Partnership: From Brand Orange to Taste Orange

Cathi McMullen, Ian Braithwaite
Charles Sturt University, Bathurst, Australia
cmcmullen@csu.edu.au
lbraithwaite@csu.edu.au

Abstract

This paper uses a narrative approach to explore the emergence of a cross-sector partnership established to engage in collaborative marketing activities to promote a regional Australian city as a food and wine tourist destination, as well as promoting the food and wine of the region to large urban markets. Cross-sectors partnerships involving diverse stakeholders from public and private sectors experience significant challenges in mobilising these diverse partners to act collaboratively to achieve collective outcomes. One way to examine cross-sector partnerships is from a communication perspective where organizations are seen as being constituted primarily through communication patterns (Koschmann, Kuhn & Pfarrer 2012).

The narrative approach that we take in this study helps us to understand the dynamic process at play in the emergence of a cross-sector partnership and explore the role of communication in its constitution. The approach taken locates our study in an emerging body of work that conceptualises organisation as a social process and generatively studies organisations in ways other than the dominant rational scientific traditions, traditions that abstract and generalise and lose touch with practice in the process.

Our particular interest is the insights that can be gained from applying this communicative perspective to an emerging cross-sector partnership. Specifically, we look at three newsletters written across the three-year initial funding period for a collaborative marketing project for a regional area and the food and wine from this region. By conceptualising these newsletters as a narrative that gives direction, coherence and clarity during the period of emergence, we can explore the role of communication as this marketing alliance emerges into a successful partnership.

Use of narrative inquiry enables us to (1) work with the temporal aspects of an emerging organisation; (2) provide an alternative perspective on practices for mobilising a variety of stakeholders undertaking collaborative activity; (3) illustrate the contribution narrative inquiry can make to the study of marketing implementation in collaborative marketing activities and; (4) more broadly contribute to strategies to achieve cross-sector partnership outcomes.

Keywords: Narrative, place branding, cross-sector partnerships, collaboration, marketing implementation

1. Introduction

Our work on this research study has its origins in practice. We first came across the story of Brand Orange in 2008 when undertaking research on local farmers’ markets. Orange is a regional Australian city with a population of around 40,000, located three hours west of Sydney. Looking at the Orange Farmer's Market website we found links to a wealth of documents on a local collaborative food and wine marketing partnership with the provisional title, Brand Orange. Cross-sector partnerships involve diverse stakeholders from public and private sectors and experience significant challenges in mobilising these diverse partners to act collaboratively to achieve collective outcomes. The stated aim of this place branding project was to continue building an integrated wine/food tourism industry by increasing awareness of the ‘Orange’ brand, increasing visitor numbers and average visitor spending. There was a focus on achieving greater recognition and opportunities for local wines, delivering more of these wines into urban markets and consolidating Orange's reputation as a place of great wine and food.

Launched in January 2006, the Brand Orange project was funded for a three-year period by state and local government and the Orange Region Vignerons Association. The New South Wales government envisaged Brand Orange as a pilot project that could potentially be replicated in other regions. An Executive Officer was appointed and in consultation with stakeholders, work began on establishing an
umbrella brand for the marketing, promotion and development of the Orange region, based primarily on wine and food tourism.

What grabbed our attention were the sheer volume, diversity and richness of documents accessible from the Brand Orange website and local government websites. These documents include Brand Orange newsletters to stakeholders, local government documents, presentations outlining the branding approach, prospectus documents for members, media releases, news and lifestyle articles. Most interesting at first glance were three newsletters (ranging from 12-16 pages each) written by the Executive Officer at various points across the initial three years of the project when an emerging organisation was coming in to being. We read these three newsletters as a narrative producing coherence and continuity to this developing partnership.

Reading the newsletters we felt that we were stepping back in time and experiencing part of how this not-for-profit organisation had emerged. Brand Orange – which later became Taste Orange – was lauded as a success story that the state government felt worthy of replication in other regional areas. At the end of the first two years of the project recognition of the district’s reputation as a wine tourism destination moved from 42nd to the top 6 in Australia (Taste Orange 2008). This was a significant outcome given that Orange is the newest wine district in Australia with first plantings in 1980. According to the Executive Officer of Brand Orange monthly visits to the region showed a 500% increase across the 3rd and subsequent year of the project, that is, December 2007 – December 2009 (Currie 2009). This was during period when domestic tourism was down nationally.

Brand Orange successfully brought together a range of diverse stakeholders, created an identity beyond the individual member organisations, crossed the public-private sector divide and at the end of the three year funding period had conducted a program of successful collaborative marketing activities. In addition, it has extended its scope beyond food and wine to include accommodation and a variety of other local businesses. These collaborative marketing activities, both within and outside the region, were conducted under a regional umbrella brand - Taste Orange. Our focus in this paper is on the establishment phase of the branding project and our analysis will be concentrated on three newsletters published over the first two years of Brand Orange project. The branding aspects of this project from a consumer perspective are outside the scope of this particular paper.

What is relevant about place branding in this particular study is that the process of place branding is usually carried out by a partnership between public and private sector stakeholders (Hankinson 2010). A place has to be marketed through partnerships, both formal and informal (Warnaby et al. 2002). Partnerships implementing place or destination brands require a framework that embraces clearly defined organisational arrangements and good communications (Hankinson 2009).

One way to examine these cross-sector partnerships is from a communication perspective where organizations are seen as being constituted primarily through communication patterns (Koschmann, Kuhn, Pfarrer 2012). As we became more familiar with this case we observed that this cross-sector partnership narrative exhibited certain characteristics associated with entrepreneurial narratives (both individual and industry). These included the need to inspire confidence, establish a common ground for communication with a variety of audiences and validate the unique contribution of the organizations (O’Connor 2002). However, they have the additional challenge of creating a collective identity beyond the separate organisational identities of the individual members. They also need to develop collective agency to achieve their goals (Koschmann et al 2012). This collective agency reflects the interdependence of the members and when successful results in outcomes that exceed those that could be achieved by members working independently.

A narrative approach is well suited to “illuminating the social world” (Ospina & Dodge 2005: 151) and its use opens up new possibilities for examining collaborative activity in emergent cross sector partnerships in ways we argue promote a more complex understanding of the dynamic and relational aspects. It provides a number of key advantages. Firstly, it well suited to the complexity and richness of everyday practice. With Brand Orange it provides a way to examine a branding collaboration in a very concrete and detailed way. Second it enables a process focus as process can be studied through the unfolding story. Third, narrative work can focus on construction of identity – individual or collective.
Our research focus is on the key practices involved in mobilising diverse stakeholders in the development of an emerging cross-sector partnership and how can these practices be better understood through the use of narrative inquiry. Questions of interest include: How might these newsletters represent/construct the work that was involved in bringing people together and keeping them together through the development of and implementation of collaborative marketing activities? What work are these newsletters doing in providing continuity and coherence whilst mobilising a diverse group of stakeholders in the development of a brand? How does this change across the life of the project?

This paper proceeds in a series of stages. First, we locate our study providing a background on narrative inquiry and examining specifically the role played by narratives in emerging organisations. This is followed by a narrative analysis of an exemplar case study of a cross-sector collaborative marketing initiative. Finally we discuss the contribution of a narrative approach to study emergent organisations in not-for-profit sectors, marketing implementation in collaborative marketing activities and more broadly contribute to strategies to achieve cross-sector partnership outcomes.

2. The role of narratives in emerging organisations

Narrative research is interdisciplinary in its origins, including elements of literary, historical, anthropological, sociological, psychological and cultural studies (Casey 1994). Renewed interest in narrative from the 1980s can be seen in a range of fields including psychology (Bruner 1986; Mishler 1992; Gergen 1992; Polkinghorne 1995), education (Connelly & Clandinin 1999; Casey 1994) and sociology (Denzin 1997; Gubrium & Holstein 1998). Narrative approaches have additionally made a considerable contribution to management and organisation theory. Rhodes and Brown (2005) in a comprehensive review of narrative approaches in management and organization theory, identify five principal areas where a narrative inquiry has been directed: (1) sense–making; (2) communication; (3) learning/change; (4) politics and power; and (5) identity and identification.

Narrative inquiry is based in the premise that, as human beings, we come to understand and give meaning to our lives through story. Narratives compose and order life experiences. By being structured and recounted through story form, experiences are accounted for and given meaning and significance (Usher 1997). The narrative turn has opened up new pathways for research that focus on interpreting social events and understanding the intentions and meanings of social actors, rather than just explaining and predicting their behavior (Dodge, Ospina & Foldy 2005). In narrating, a narrator communicates and captures nuances of event, relationship, and purpose that are dropped in the abstraction process that permits categorisation and correlation in the logico-scientific model where the focus is on propositions or rules that connect categories of behaviour to categories of actors and situations. In contrast, narrative thinking places these elements into a sequenced, contextualized statement with a plot (Tsoukas & Hatch 2001).

To demonstrate the potential value of a narrative approach in emergent organisations we discuss two studies that promote the use of a narrative lens to study organisational innovation and acquisition of capital from external sources. In a recent study on the role of narratives in sustaining organizational innovation Bartel and Garud (2009) propose that while designs and processes are necessary for innovation to occur they may not be sufficient. They argue that innovation narratives are key cultural mechanisms that facilitate the productive social interactions needed in the implementation of organizational designs and processes. One of the key aspects in this coordination through narrative is the translation of ideas across the organisation so that they are comprehensible and appear legitimate to others. They also highlight the need for both coherence and flexibility in narratives. They point out that narratives are especially instrumental in socialising newcomers and creating a common ground of social action within organizations. Also that narrative allows for flexibility in social interactions by presenting information, ideas or practices in a manner that is evocative.

In a similar vein, in a study of the role of entrepreneurial narratives, Martens, Jennings & Jennings (2007) argue for the effects of story telling on a firm’s ability to secure finance from external sources. Obtaining adequate capital is vital for survival and growth but it is widely recognised as a complex and challenging task. A particular challenge for entrepreneurial firms is that in their early stages of development they lack a track record and are requiring potential funding parties to make a leap of faith with limited information and uncertainty about the value of the firm’s entrepreneurial opportunities and their capacity to exploit them. In this context, a narrative provides: (1) a means to communicate a
coherent story about the firm and the opportunities it is developing; (2) construct an identity for the firm and; (3) work towards reducing the ambiguity and complexity around the situation of the organisation.

Martens et al. (2007) identify the three ways in which narratives can work towards enhancing resource acquisition for entrepreneurial organisations. Firstly by communicating identity that is comprehensive and memorable. Second, by communicating current and intended actions, making sense in an ambiguous situation and communicating insights. It is argued that strategic plans presented in a narrative form create a richer picture for the audience, including illustrating the developments in the writer’s insights (Shaw, Brown & Bromiley 1998), contributing to making those actions appear more justified or plausible in the given context (Barry & Elmes 1997). Finally, they argue that interest in the activities of the company and commitment to financially supporting those activities are enhanced by narrative work.

“Narrative scholars argue that successful stories don’t just provide inform readers; they generate interest and commitment, thereby motivating audience members to act in a manner consistent with the author’s intended outcomes” Martens et al. (2007:117).

In summary, these studies can inform in a range of ways our discussion of the role of narratives in developing and coordinating collaborative marketing activities in emerging cross sector partnerships. First, through translating and communicating ideas and plans in rich and evocative ways that justify and enhance legitimacy of past actions and future plans. Second, by assisting in socialising newcomers and creating a common ground to facilitate collective action. Third, facilitating the ongoing construction of a coherent conception of identity and intention (Kuhn 2008).

Our focus in this paper on the collaborative marketing activities in a cross sector partnership that help develop a place brand, draw on and is illustrated by findings from a narrative analysis of a case study of an exemplar. In the coming section we demonstrate the use of a narrative approach to help understand and enhance the practice of cross-sector partnership development more broadly and specifically place branding.

3. Narrating an emerging cross–sector partnership: From Brand Orange to Taste Orange

Narrating organizations consists of telling about organizations using a narrative structure, that is, a sequence of events or plot (Czarniawska 1998). Examining this emerging cross sector partnership through a narrative lens includes a focus on: (1) how work is enacted through narrative to retrospectively account for what has been done; (2) how identity work is done; and (3) how complexity and ambiguity are addressed by presenting a cohesive narrative around the project and imagining a future for the project. The process of documentation renders particular aspects of marketing work more visible.

This study can be described as a theoretical reflection based on an illustrative case study. An abductive research strategy has been adopted with theory and research intimately intertwined (Blaikie 2010). As researchers we have spent alternating periods of immersion in the relevant documents and periods of withdrawal for reflection and analysis of data. Categories have been developed through an iterative process of going back and forth between theoretical concepts and the data (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2009). Our research has been shaped by the specific theoretical positions we have adopted.

The particular case selected for examination – Brand Orange was chosen for two key reasons (1) the organisation has been recognized for its success in meeting the objectives of its branding initiative and a model for other regional areas and could thus be considered an exemplar; and (2) a large volume of documents (approximately 50) relating to the branding initiative are publically available online. This provides an extensive data source on the project. This data covers a time period of several years so gives a longitudinal perspective to the analysis. This temporal aspect to the data is critical when the considering the process of the development of the initiative. For this particular case study we have selected a group of 3 documents for intensive analysis – documents that are suited to addressing the research question. A timeline for the Brand Orange project from 2006-2008 is presented in Figure 1. Dates of each newsletter and milestones for the project are highlighted.
The selection of an exemplar reflects purposeful sampling designed to provide an 'information rich' case from which a great deal can be learnt about issues of central importance to the project (Patton 2002). Working with a single case study allows for the development of a 'rich story', an aspect often missing when multiple case studies are used (Eisenhardt & Graebner 2007). It is the capacity for illustration rather than any claims to generalisability that are the strength of the single case study approach. As textual analysis depends on very detailed data analysis it recommended that within a data set there should be a focus on only a few texts or parts of texts (Silverman 2003). Thus we have limited our analysis to selected extracts of the three newsletters.

The use of documents in a case provides an alternative data source to the more commonly used interviews in case study research. Documents published during the time illustrate the phenomena in its real-time context (Yin 2003) rather than the retrospective accounts that generally characterize interview data where accounts can be compromised by memory loss and rationalisation (Dahlin, Fors & Öberg 2006). In analysing the three newsletters we are not looking at narrative as a transparent representation of what went on and why. Rather, our attention is directed to the way in which a narrative strategy has been used (consciously or unconsciously) to mobilise a diverse group of members to act in ways to their collective benefit during the emergence of this organisation. No attempt is being made to project findings from this case to a general population. Yet we would argue that the findings of this study are transferable more broadly to cross sector partnerships and place branding initiatives.

Narrative analysis can take many forms reflecting the research question and the researcher's theoretical orientation. We could examine the plot constructed across the three newsletters, for instance, as a progressive narrative showing advancement towards a goal (Gergen & Gergen 1997). Or we could look at the discourses that are drawn on in the telling of stories within the newsletters. However given, the limitations of space we will restrict our analysis to the work that is being done in the each of the three newsletters. This approach aligns with the studies discussed earlier. The sections dealing with each newsletter have been named to reflect the aspects of work that appear most critical in that document. Within each of these sections we undertake textual analysis to draw attention to the way language has been used to invoke and mobilise stakeholders. What will be demonstrated is that while the newsletters give an account of the project to the various stakeholders, much more complex work can be observed through careful textual analysis.
3.1 Phase 1: Foundational work

The first of the newsletters was written at the end of the first year of the project informing members of progress. The document was a 12 page colour documents made available electronically and in hard copy. Its stated aim was to ensure that members were kept well informed about the progress of the Brand Orange project, and to provide a forum for discussion and feedback. A key theme that emerged in our analysis was establishing legitimacy both for the project and the project leader. Table 1 displays excerpts to illustrate this work and how it had been enacted. The narrator’s intentions have been interpreted by the researchers through close engagement with these texts and relevant theory. As with any interpretive work other researchers and the newsletter’s author may ascribe alternative intentions.

Table 1: Brand Orange phase 1 – Foundational work*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intentions</th>
<th>Practices</th>
<th>Illustrative excerpts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Establishing legitimacy</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>It is a year when a lot has been achieved…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>There was a very high level of support expressed for the project progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justifying</td>
<td></td>
<td>This foundation building work during the year places us well for the roll out of our</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>major events in Sydney next year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building connection &amp; community</td>
<td>Reassuring and empathising</td>
<td>It’s a hard year to ask anyone to be patient. But we are now in an excellent position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>to get down to the really exciting part…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognising contribution to date</td>
<td></td>
<td>2006 involved you ... showing vision, commitment and more than a decent dash of trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>mixed with optimism and nothing left to lose. 2007 is where you justifiably get to see</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articulating a vision</td>
<td>Advocating an entrepreneurial</td>
<td>2008 we need to have been not only successful in delivering to members - we need to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>orientation</td>
<td>be looking down the nose of independence from State funding.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* All excerpts sourced from Brand Orange Newsletter No 1.

Emerging organisations need legitimacy in a way that is assumed in existing organisations (Golant & Sillence 2007). For emerging organisations the establishment of legitimacy is important to secure resources and other forms of support. The placement of reporting of progress in the very early stages of the first newsletter suggests a choice has been made that this accounting needs to be done before further discussion of the project can be introduced. Lists are provided to enhance the sense of completeness and passive voice used to enhance the factual status of the account by removing the presence of the author in this section. Following the account there is justification and contextualising of the critical role of this groundwork as a basis for activities in the coming years. As well as informing members there is an attempt to involve and include members. This is performed through empathy and reassurance that progress is being made. There is also a very clear articulation of the imperative for the organisation to be self-funding by the end of the three-year funding period.

3.2 Phase 2: Collaborative work and collective agency

The second newsletter was distributed at the midway point in the project. Given the limited time frame to achieve results from the three year funding commitment there is pressure for decisions to be made and for the “collective inertia” often observed in multi-partner projects to be avoided. An important decision to be negotiated with members is the venue for a major event in a large metropolitan area. Detailed analysis of this stage highlights the challenges in deciding at what stage to invite member feedback on the specifics of planned activities. The capacity to direct without appearing to dominate and to marshal consent requires skilful narration. One technique used by the narrator is a repeated...
series of “if” questions to present the key points of her position in a structured and systematic way building the weight of her argument in a cumulative way. Selected excerpts in Table 2 illustrate this.

**Table 2: Brand Orange phase 2 – Collaborative work and collective agency**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intentions</th>
<th>Practices</th>
<th>Illustrative excerpts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achieving collective action</td>
<td>Marshalling consent</td>
<td>If this is our target do we really want … If a target audience has to make a conscious effort…. If we showcase wine in true partnership…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Managing conflict</td>
<td>The most acceptable membership is likely to be…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining connection &amp; community</td>
<td>Facilitating purposeful social interaction</td>
<td>The usual format is an informal supper followed by a tightly structured hour of reviewing the project to date and prioritising future planning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* All excerpts sourced from Brand Orange Newsletter No. 2

At various points conflict is addressed in an indirect way through vagueness. Vagueness, strategically used, can help consensus with strategic ambiguity providing the space for equivalent rather than shared meanings (Weick & Browning 1986). Attention is given to the social interaction but it is combined with purposeful activity.

3.3 Phase 3 – Identity work: Building a heritage and imagining a sustainable future

The final newsletter has a celebratory tone acknowledging the success of the endeavour and reflecting on both collective identity and future directions. Table 3 illustrates how identity is partly defined through differentiation from other regions. There is also a very clear trajectory for the organisation.

**Table 3: Brand Orange phase 3 – Identity work and imagining the future**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intentions</th>
<th>Practices</th>
<th>Illustrative excerpts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identity work</td>
<td>Defining and differentiating</td>
<td>We are not like any other wine region - we’re young, energetic, spirited, small, boutique, quality, family, community based with the best food industry of any wine region in Australia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagining the future</td>
<td>Advocating an entrepreneurial trajectory</td>
<td>We have an opportunity in the New Year to prove that we can manage our own destiny, publish credibly, build a solid financial base and expand the services to industry and community in partnership with local government.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* All excerpts sourced from Brand Orange Newsletter No. 3

**Concluding comments**

What is evident from the narrative analysis in this study is that collaborative activity in a cross-sector partnership involves much more than getting stakeholders together and working through steps in a plan. This analysis has presented a picture of one such project in a vivid way highlights the complex relational and communicative work that may be undertaken in successful cross sector partnerships and other multi-partner collaborative ventures.
References


