

Narrative Inquiry and the Study of Collaborative Branding Activity

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Abstract: This paper examines the distinctive features of narrative inquiry, reviews how narrative has been taken up in a range of disciplinary areas, and argues for the use of a narrative approach to the study of social processes in marketing organisation. An illustration is provided of narrative analysis of an exemplar case with the aim of surfacing tacit knowledge and drawing lessons from practice on a successful collaborative branding activity. A series of practices, including accounting, justifying and empathising are identified as important in the development of this emergent branding project. The findings resonate with Boje's (1991) contention that being able to perform stories is an underrated yet important management skill that can assist organisation members to make sense of what is going on and to effect change.

Keywords: narrative, narrative inquiry, branding, cross-sector partnerships, collaboration

1. Introduction

Narrative inquiry has at its core a focus on the study of experience as it is lived. This directs attention to narratives as a means of studying aspects of society 'finding meaning in the stories people use, tell and even live' (Ospina and Dodge, 2005: 143). In this paper we examine the distinctive features of narrative inquiry, briefly review how this approach has been taken up in a range of disciplinary areas, and illustrate the use of a narrative approach to explore collaborative branding activity in a regional food and wine district in regional Australia.

Why should researchers engage in narrative research? To appreciate the contribution of narrative inquiry, Dodge, Ospina and Foldy (2005) argue, requires: (1) deep knowledge of the logic of narrative inquiry; (2) an acknowledgement of its diverse approaches; and (3) attention to judging its quality. We will use these points to frame the discussion to follow on the nature, scope and use of narrative research. The subsequent presentation of a case analysis will highlight in a specific and concrete way some of the possibilities available when implementing a narrative approach. Our purpose in undertaking this particular research was to draw lessons from practice through detailed analysis of an exemplar case. We wanted to surface tacit knowledge and identify key practices involved in mobilising diverse stakeholders in the development of an emerging cross-sector partnership. Tasked with building awareness, visitor numbers and reputation for a regional food and wine district.

A narrative approach is well suited to 'illuminating the social world' (Ospina and Dodge 2005: 151) and its use opens up new possibilities for examining collaborative branding activity in emergent cross sector partnerships in ways we argue promote a more complex understanding of the dynamic and relational aspects associated with this multi-stakeholder activity. Using a narrative lens to study a process reflects the temporal orientation of narrative and means that the process can be studied through an unfolding story. Narrative work can also focus on construction of identity – individual or collective.

This paper unfolds in a series of stages. First, we provide a background on narrative inquiry and outline guiding principles for designing and conducting narrative research. This is followed by a narrative analysis of an exemplar case study of a cross-sector branding project. Finally critiques, limitations and contributions of narrative inquiry are canvassed.

2. Background to narrative inquiry

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 and Clandinin 1999; Casey 1994) and sociology (Denzin 1997; Gubrium and Holstein 1998). Narrative has secured its place in social science research, as Denzin and Lincoln declared, 'Today few in the interpretive community look back with scepticism on the narrative turn. The turn has been taken, and that is all there is to be said about it' (2003: viii).

Narrative inquiry is based on 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). Narrative can be characterised as a 'way of knowing' (Hatch and Wisniewski 1995). Jerome Bruner, was influential in gaining credibility for the use of a narrative approach in psychology, a discipline that had been dominated by experimental studies and a concern with prediction. In *Actual minds, Possible worlds*, Bruner (1986) argues that narrative modes of knowing function as a central form of human thinking. Stories are a way of knowing and have knowledge in them. He contrasts this mode of thinking with the dominant logio-scientific based on proof, argumentation and hypothesis driven discovery. So the turn to narrative can also be viewed as a turn away from inquiry that aims to establish universal relationships between abstract concepts (Fenton and Langley 2011).

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 and Foldy 2005). Narratives are suited to representing social phenomena in their full richness and complexity (Hinchman and Hinchman 1997) and can provide a particularly generative source of knowledge about the meaning people find in their everyday working lives. In narrating, a narrator communicates and captures nuances of event, relationship, and purpose. These would be lost in the abstraction process central to the logico-scientific model - where abstraction permits categorisation and correlation with a focus 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 and Hatch 2001).

Growing interest in and use of narrative inquiry coincides with a greater interest in process. 'Narrative models of knowing are models of process *in process* ... personal narratives describe the road to the present and point the way to the future' (Josselson 1995: 35 as cited in Goodson and Sikes 2001). It should be noted, however, that the narrator's view of the process is through a lens of the present, a retrospective account of process.

Narrative approaches have 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. They identify several key contributions of narrative research in organisations - a focus on temporal issues, a way to view processual characteristics of organisations and to analyse the continuous construction of identity.

A narrative approach is appropriate in situations where researchers aim to understand in an integrated and temporally coherent way (Rhodes and Brown 2005) complex social processes and life as it is lived. 'Narratives are forms of social action... they are inescapably social phenomena... they are produced and circulated in social contexts'. (Atkinson and Delamont 2006: 169). Narrative research has the capacity to reflect the complexity of individual and social lives, the ambiguity and the contradictions. It can elicit practical and personal knowledge stories that can be used to understand and communicate subtle aspects of tacit knowledge and organisational

life. Further, attention can be focused on social, institutional and cultural practices that shape narratives and the construction of identity both personal and organisational.

As the 'narrative turn' enters its fourth decade there is considerable concern being expressed about the need to clarify and defend the boundaries of narrative inquiry to preserve its distinctiveness and rigour (Sector-Mersel 2010). As narrative research has increased in popularity there has been a corresponding propensity for low quality research that appropriates the terminology of narrative while disregarding its complexities (Clandinin, Pushor and Orr 2007).

While there is diversity and pluralism, there are certain defining characteristics of narrative research that are generally agreed upon. In the following section we discuss these features and how they inform and guide the practice of narrative research. This discussion is in no way exhaustive or definitive but is designed to provide a sketch out the boundaries and issues involved in narrative inquiry.

3. Engaging in narrative research

Narrative inquiry is diverse. This diversity, in terms of origins, methods and disciplines, is highlighted consistently in handbooks, chapters and articles on narrative (Sector-Mersel 2010). How research is conducted will reflect the researcher's interest and assumptions about the world (Rosenwald and Ochsberg 1992). The field contains realist, postmodern and constructionist strands makes agreement on a range of issues difficult. There is no template for a narrative research study. Narrative work, however, is always interpretive from the framing of the conceptual question, selection of participants and the gathering of narrative material, through to interpretation and representation of findings (Josselson 2006).

Five key characteristics of narratives can be highlighted (Ospina and Dodge 2005) and these help to create some sense what is meant by the term *narrative* in narrative inquiry as distinct from the increasing common colloquial use of the word. Narratives are: (1) accounts of characters and selected events occurring over time with a beginning, a middle, and an end; (2) retrospective interpretations from a particular perspective; (3) focused on human intention and action; (4) part of the process of constructing identity (the self in relation to others); and co-authored by narrator and audience.

A number of these elements can be drawn together defining narratives as:

about people (characters) who act (events) in space and time; typically across a sequence of events (temporality). The narrative form (structure) is the said to hold the content together (what the story is about – its plot) and sequentially arrange the story units (orientation, complication, resolution, closure) into a more or less coherent whole. (Bamberg 2012)

When viewed in this way, narratives available for study are not just limited to life stories and material from extended interviews. There is a wide range of opportunities to examine narratives in various naturally occurring settings as well as collecting them specifically for research purposes through interviews (Atkinson and Delamont 2006).

Having collected narrative material there are a myriad of ways in which this material can be analysed. For instance, attention can be given to the structure, the language used or the way in which narrators position themselves and others. Analytic choices made at this point and questions posed both influence whether a particular piece of research would be classified as narrative inquiry.

Narrative analysts interrogate intention and language – how and why incidents are storied, not simply the content to which the language refers. For whom was this story constructed, and for what purpose? Why is the succession of events configured this way? What cultural resources does the story draw on, or take for granted? ...What does the story accomplish? (Riessmann 2008:11)

This approach relies on preserving extended accounts and treating them as analytic units rather than fragmenting accounts through use of thematic categories commonly used in other forms of qualitative research (Riessmann 2008).

With the complexity involved in narrative analysis, it is difficult to focus on a range of narrative practices simultaneously. This makes the practice of 'analytical bracketing' useful in facilitating a focus on one aspect of narrative practice (for example how the story is being told) while temporarily deferring concern about what is being told (Gubrium and Holstein 1998).

Having completed a narrative analysis what knowledge claims can be made? Narrative inquiry of the past few decades has focussed on how stories are told rather than discovering 'truth' in the data. Since the 1980s there has been marked by a shift from realism to narrativity. In the reading of narrative accounts, attention is now given to the process, product and consequences of reportage itself, not just to the scenes being described (Rosenwald and Ochsberg 1992).

In analysing interpretive practice we do not aim to derive the real – 'their world' or 'their story' ... Rather our goal is to make visible how practitioners of everyday life constitute, reproduce, redesign or specify locally. What the institutional and cultural contexts of their action make available to them (Gubrium and Holstein 1997: 115).

Greater consideration is given to the constructed nature of the social world and the multiplicity of experiential realities that might be created. For example:

For any inquiry into one's own practice there are many possible stories to tell. For every story that is told, there are many possible meanings to interpret. Stories about practice are not mirrors of experience; like all texts, they are constructed by the author with certain intentions in mind (Lampert 2000: 68).

A further consideration for narrative researchers is attending to the way stories of experience are embedded within social, cultural, linguistic and institutional narratives (Clandinin 2013). Narrative inquiry must always extend beyond the personal and attend to the social and cultural context in which stories are told.

Having conducted narrative analysis, it is necessary to have a means to evaluate the quality of the research. Questions of validity, reliability, and generalisability lack relevance in the context of narrative inquiry. Validity addresses the concern of whether accounts are 'accurate' or 'valid' representations of reality. This may be relevant if one is taking a realist perspective. However, taking the view that multiple realities exist and that data reflect the researcher's and the participant's mutual constructions, concerns of 'truthfulness' and 'validity' are replaced by concerns with communicated situated experiential realities. As Holstein and Gubrium (1995: 9) state,

The validity of answers derives not from their correspondence to meanings held within the respondent but from their ability to convey situated experiential realities in terms that are locally comprehensible. Do they resonate in the context in which they were produced?

Reliability, in the traditional use of the term, looks at consistency across repeated investigations, in different circumstances and with different investigators. However, in narrative research, it cannot be expected that answers on one occasion will replicate those on another because they emerge from different circumstances of production (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). This is considered one of the strengths of narrative inquiry.

Generalisability refers to the claim that results can be projected to a wide range of specified circumstances beyond those studied in the research. A focus on generalisability would diminish the value of the local and particular, a key aim and strength of narrative work. The lack of relevance of traditional concepts, such as

validity, reliability and generalisability, does not mean that all narrative studies are judged to be of equivalent quality and that standards can not be set for narrative research.

A set of principles that we have found useful (drawing on Garman 1996) are set out below. *Verite*: Does the work ring true in terms of consistency with accepted knowledge in the field? Or if it departs, does it address why? *Integrity*: Is the work structurally sound? Does it hang together? Is the research rationale logical, appropriate and identifiable with an inquiry tradition? *Rigour*: Is there sufficient depth of intellect, rather than superficial or simplistic reasoning? *Utility*: Is the work useful and professionally relevant? Does it make a contribution to the field? *Vitality*: Is it important and meaningful? Do metaphors, image, visual communicate powerfully? *Ethics*: Is there evidence that privacy and dignity have been afforded all participants? *Verisimilitude*: Does the work represent human experiences with sufficient detail so that the portrayals can be recognisable as 'truly conceivable experience'. Does this research render accounts that readers not only read but feel and believe?

We turn now to the study of a particular case of an emerging organisation making use of a narrative strategy (either knowingly or intuitively) to mobilise a group of stakeholders to engage in collaborative branding activity.

4. Using narrative inquiry to explore collaborative branding activity

To set the scene for this narrative analysis we first discuss two studies that promote the use of a narrative lens to study organisational innovation and the acquisition of capital by entrepreneurial firms from external sources. In a recent study on the role of narratives in sustaining organisational 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 organisational designs and processes. One of the key aspects in this coordination is the translation of ideas throughout the organisation so that they are comprehensible and appear legitimate to various stakeholders. 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 organisations. Also that narratives enhance social interactions by presenting information, ideas or practices in a manner that is evocative.

In a similar vein but a different context, Martens, Jennings and Jennings (2007) in their study of entrepreneurial narratives, argue that story telling is influential to 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 require 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.

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. 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 narratives for emergent organisations provide a means to: (1) communicate in a rich and evocative way a coherent story about the organisation - constructing its identity and making more tangible the

opportunities it is developing; (2) create a sense of common ground with internal and/or external stakeholders and; (3) work towards reducing the ambiguity and complexity around the circumstances of the organisation.

In the coming section we demonstrate the use of a narrative approach to help understand and enhance the practice of collaborative branding activities and cross-sector partnership development more broadly.

4.1 Background to the 'Brand Orange' Case study

Our work on this research study has its origins in practice. Launched in January 2006, the Brand Orange project was funded for an initial three-year period by state and local government and by the Orange Region Vignerons Association. An Executive Officer was appointed and in consultation with a diverse group of private sector 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. Orange is a regional Australian city with a population of around 40,000, located three hours west of Sydney.

We first came across the story of '*Brand Orange*' in 2008 when undertaking research on local farmers' markets. Looking at the Orange Farmer's Market website we found links to a wealth of documents about a local collaborative food and wine marketing initiative that linked state and local government funding to local food and wine producers under the umbrella group of *Brand Orange*. What grabbed our attention about this place branding collaborative partnership 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, membership prospectuses, media releases, news and lifestyle articles. Most interesting were three newsletters (each ranging from 12-16 pages) written by the Executive Officer at various points across the initial three years of the project.

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 known as '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 8 in Australia (Taste Orange 2008). 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).

The stated aim of this place branding project was to continue building an integrated wine/food tourism industry by increasing awareness of the 'Orange' regional brand, increasing visitor numbers and lifting visitor expenditure. 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 that offered great wine and food.

Our key focus in our narrative analysis is on the establishment phase of the branding project and our analysis concentrates on three newsletters published over the first two years of Brand Orange project. We read these three newsletters as a narrative, producing coherence and continuity to this developing cross-sector partnership.

4.2 Research design

In examining the Brand Orange project we have characterised the organisation as a cross-sector partnership. 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 (Koschmann, Kuhn, and Pfarrer 2012). In tourism and destination marketing cross-sector partnerships are

common bringing together various levels of government along with diverse range of businesses in the tourism and the hospitality industries.

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.

The use of documents provides an alternative data source to the more commonly used interviews in case study research. Documents published during the time of interest 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 and 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 and development 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.

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 as a model for other regional areas i.e. it can 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. The data covers a time period of three years so gives a longitudinal perspective to the analysis. This temporal aspect to the data is critical when considering the process of the development of the initiative. From the 50 available documents we selected the three information rich newsletters for intensive analysis. These documents were well 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.

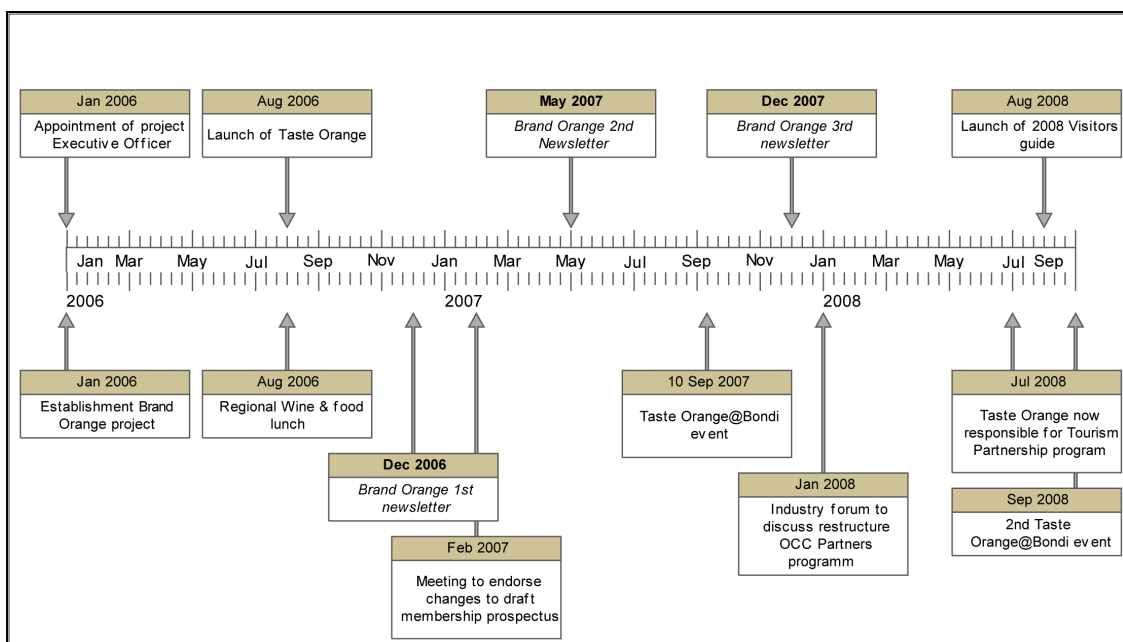


Figure 1: Brand Orange timeline 2006 to 2008

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 and Graebner 2007). It is the capacity for illustration rather than any claims to generalisability that is the strength of the single case study approach. As textual analysis involves fine-grained data analysis it is 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.

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 to a goal (Gergen and 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 is being undertaken and can be interpreted through careful textual analysis.

An abductive research strategy was 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 and Sköldbberg 2009). Our research has been shaped by the specific theoretical positions we have adopted.

5. Narrative analysis of the Brand Orange project

5.1 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 document 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.

Emerging organisations need legitimacy in a way that is assumed in existing organisations (Golant and Sillince 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 is needed 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.

Table 1: Brand Orange phase 1 – Foundational work*

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

* All excerpts sourced from Brand Orange Newsletter No 1.

These narrative excerpts provide a clear illustration of what Brown, Stacey, and Nandhakumar (2008) call 'narratives for others', strategic constructions designed to manage others' impressions. Accountability can be addressed through the telling of stories that and engage with and render sensible the complexity, ambiguity and unpredictability of organisational life.

5.2 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 manner. Selected excerpts in Table 2 illustrate this.

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

Intentions	Practices	Illustrative excerpts
<i>Achieving collective action</i>	Marshalling consent	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..
	Managing conflict	The most acceptable membership is likely to be...
<i>Maintaining connection & community</i>	Facilitating purposeful social interaction	The usual format is an informal supper followed by a tightly structured hour of reviewing the project to date and prioritising future planning.

* All excerpts sourced from Brand Orange Newsletter No. 2

Following Goffman (1967) this work could be described as ‘face work’ where situations are explained, interactions smoothed and tensions mitigated (Brown et al. 2008). 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 and Browning 1986). Attention is given to the social interaction but it is combined with purposeful activity.

5.3 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 imaging the future*

Intentions	Practices	Illustrative excerpts
<i>Identity work</i>	Defining and differentiating	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.
<i>Imagining the future</i>	Advocating an entrepreneurial trajectory	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.

* All excerpts sourced from Brand Orange Newsletter No. 3

Identity and narrative are closely linked. Narratives can help bring emergent organisations to life with people constructing, in different ways, meanings and identity from organization events and experiences. Further narratives establish and maintain connections between people who may or may not know each other personally (Rhodes and Brown 2005).

Across the several year time span of the emergence of this collaborative branding activity – ‘Brand Orange’ to ‘Taste Orange’ - we can witness the translating and communicating of ideas and plans in rich and evocative ways that justify and enhance legitimacy of actions to date and lay the groundwork for future plans. Enhancing

and building on this is the socialising of newcomers and creation of a common ground to facilitate collective action. Finally, the narrator uses these newsletters for facilitating the ongoing construction of a coherent conception of identity and intention (Kuhn 2008).

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 linear plan. This analysis has presented a picture of an emerging project in a vivid way that highlights the complex relational and communicative work undertaken in a successful cross-sector partnerships. The extent and nature of this work would not have been evident if a more abstracted and potentially generalisable investigation had been conducted with a large sample size.

6. Concluding comments

We have argued in this paper for the use of a narrative approach for the study of social processes in marketing organisation and illustrated how narrative analysis of an exemplar case can surface tacit knowledge and draw out lessons from practice. A series of practices, accounting, justifying and empathising were identified as important in the development of the emergent Brand Orange project. These findings resonate with Boje's (1991) contention that being able to perform stories is an underrated yet important management skill that can assist organisation members to make sense of what is going on and effect change. The framing and focus of our study represents just one in a myriad of potential sets of decisions and directions in which this study could have been taken. The particular path selected reflects our concerns, choices and constraints as researchers.

Whilst narrative inquiry affords interesting and varied possibilities is not without its limitations or critiques. Researchers who would be identified as supportive and even influential in narrative research raise three substantial concerns. First, there is concern expressed about research that is labelled narrative – without any systematic narrative inquiry. Atkinson & Delmont (2006) argue passionately for the need to adopt an analytical rather than a celebratory stance on narrative. While they stress the importance of narrative and narrative analysis, all too often they believe “narratives are collected and celebrated in uncritical and analysed fashion” (Atkinson & Delmont 2006:166). Common weaknesses are researchers assuming that informants' accounts 'speak for themselves' and also failing to acknowledge the social and cultural context of accounts given.

A further concern is one raised by Czarniawska (2006) on the differing capacity and interest by people in relation to story telling. She describes her own difficulty/disinterest in constructing her own life story and cites Strawson's (2004) argument that not everyone may share the compulsion to weave their lives into a coherent study. Some people prefer non-narrative devices such as tables, lists or taxonomies.

Finally, Josselson (2006) highlights the limitations of narrative research in accumulating knowledge. She raises the question of how theory can be advanced without reifying or losing the richness of the narrative basis. One way of responding to this challenge, she suggests is to take similar approach to cross case analysis and work at the conceptual level layering studies, looking for commonalities and difference and helping build support for patterns as a means to go beyond individual studies to larger frameworks of understandings. It is important to note however, that these repeated patterns remain situated and that the understandings generated are only ever provisional.

Common to all these concerns presented is a need to consider and account for the logic that underlies narrative inquiry and the knowledge claims that can be made from rich, local and particular studies of social life. Narrative inquiry has significant scope to contribute to understandings of social (including organisational) life but it needs to be practised in a manner that plays to its strengths rather than its limitations.

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