

Contesting the dominant narrative: expanding the multistory cultural change approach

Multistory
cultural change
approach

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to expand the theory on multistory cultural change by showing how a dominant narrative on construction safety dynamically interrelates and is contested on multiple intertextual levels in an organizational field of organizations contributing to the recovery of houses in an earthquake region.

Design/methodology/approach – An ethnoventionist research approach was adopted in which interpretation of data to find narratives and designing interventions went hand-in-hand.

Findings – We found four distinctive composite narratives besides the dominant narrative to which five actors refer in their accounts, thereby contributing to three types of story patterns. These narratives disclose the taken-for-granted ideas and beliefs that characterize the challenge of changing organizational culture. One intervention, which intended multiple stories to touch the surface, was highlighted as a multistory intervention.

Research limitations/implications – Further research could extend the knowledge on other change interventions that contribute to multistory cultural change processes.

Originality/value – Adopting an ethnoventionist approach to provide deep insights on an unfolding cultural change process for both scholars and practitioners.

Keywords Narrative, Cultural change, Multistory, Story patterns

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Several studies have focused attention on multistory and multiauthorship approaches regarding changing organizational culture (Akarsu *et al.*, 2018; Buchanan and Dawson, 2007; Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). The main purpose for this stream of research is to study and problematize dominant narratives, reveal hidden assumptions and show how some narratives are privileged over others through narrative struggles (Vaara *et al.*, 2016). Maitlis and Christianson (2014) argue that because organizational actors create their own sense of what is going on, insight into their narratives is crucial for understanding cultural change. In this paper, a dominant and contested safety narrative is studied by revealing five composite narratives and personal accounts in an organizational field of companies that contribute to recovery and strengthening of houses in an area that is plagued by earthquakes. Focusing on more than one narrative and a variety of actors (Boje, 1995; Buchanan and Dawson, 2007) not only broadens the insight into what is going on during such a process in terms of alternative narratives but also sheds light on the reasons why the dominant narratives do not always produce change (Gabriel, 2000). Actors adopt discursive power to support or contest change (Vaara *et al.*, 2016) and contribute to story patterns that are adopted for different personal agendas (Reissner, 2011). Several authors stress the need to



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expand the multistory approach in the direction of revealing the processes of contesting in the narrative struggles (Gabriel, 2000; Rhodes and Brown, 2005; Akarsu *et al.*, 2018), the personal accounts of a variety of actors (Fenton and Langley, 2011) and the story patterns to which these actors contribute (Reissner, 2011). This requires a focus on contesting by both “individual” and “composite” narrative interactions (Vaara *et al.*, 2016, p. 10).

In this organizational field (Hardy and Maguire, 2010) of earthquake-related companies, several types of companies work together. A Dutch crude oil company (fictitiously called DOC) has been producing gas in this region for a long time. As an effect, earthquakes in this area increased, which created damage for its inhabitants like cracks in the walls and chimneys falling of the roof. DOC gave rise to a consortium Safe Housing (abbreviated to SAHO), with the assignment of organizing these damage declarations and contracting construction enterprises. Because the construction sector is a high-risk sector with frequent injuries and even disability retirements (Social Affairs and Employment Inspectorate, 2016), restoring all these houses creates risks for both construction workers and citizens of these houses. As these construction incidents and fatalities are caused by ways of thinking that invite unsafe behaviors (Social Affairs and Employment Inspectorate, 2016), DOC gave the team of consultants the assignment of influencing the safety culture of construction companies through a platform called SAFECON. The consultants engaged in several activities, such as: visiting construction sites to talk to craftsmen; coaching managers from different construction companies; facilitating internal safety programs for construction companies; leadership courses for managers and so on. The first author worked as a consultant-researcher for this platform during the entire study.

With this paper, we show how several composite narratives contest the dominant narrative and the way several actors in the organizational field contest it in individual narratives. We thereby provide insights into the narrative dynamics of cultural change while building on previous multistory studies. We aimed to write this paper for both scholars and change practitioners, by reporting on an inside and in-depth experience of the narrative struggles in the unfolding of cultural change (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2016; Buchanan and Dawson, 2007). In this paper, we adopt Vaara *et al.*'s (2016) definitions of story, narrative and account. The research questions for this paper are: How is a dominant narrative contested on multiple intertextual levels in an organizational field? What multistory interventions contribute to cultural change processes? In Section 2, literature on contesting and story patterns is explained. Section 3 deals with the methodology, while in Section 4, the results are presented. Section 5 presents the discussion and our conclusions.

2. Contesting and story patterns

When a narrative prevails over other narratives, it does not mean that it cannot be contested (Hardy and Maguire, 2010). In this paper, we explore processes of contesting by revealing the composite narratives on a macro level (Vaara *et al.*, 2016) of several stakeholder groups within the organizational field. Secondly, we look into the way the dominant story is contested on the micro level by five actors and the story patterns to which they contribute. Reissner (2011) showed how people in three distinct firms and cultural change processes contested change and contributed to three story patterns. These patterns specify different types of contesting and gaining influence. We will shortly elaborate on Reissner's story patterns.

Organizational actors engage in a narrative interpretative process of sensemaking to deal with uncertainty and attribute meaning to work events and organizational change (Reissner, 2011; Maitlis and Christianson, 2014). Narrative power means that these actors, such as managers, employees or change agents, use their discursive power to sustain certain stories, while pushing other narratives away for the purpose of social control (Grant and Marshak, 2011; Clegg *et al.*, 2006; Reissner, 2011). This pattern contributes to stories of “influence” and

of “deception, silence and taboos” (Reissner, 2011, p. 598). The effect is that certain topics are not discussed anymore, often exactly the topics that are subject to change, thereby stagnating processes of change. Moreover, the stories can be used and abused by actors and should therefore be critically examined by researchers (Reissner, 2011). In the study of Brown (1998), it is shown how power holders are aware of the importance of gaining legitimization for their change narrative by framing themes and issues in such a way that others can be convinced. While some actors are more influential than others (Grant and Marshak, 2011), some narratives will die out while others become more influential as time passes (Reissner, 2011).

Reissner (2011, p. 598) also found stories of “the good old days.” In “good old days” narratives, the past or future is contrasted with the present to stress or dismiss certain experiences or other stories (Gabriel, 1993). This nostalgic story pattern relates to feelings of loss that people experience when their work changes. In nostalgic accounts, the problematic present is weighed against an idealized past (Gabriel, 1993). Ybema (2004) extended this idea by adding nostalgia to it. Nostalgia reflects an attempt to get away from a problematic present by sketching an ideal future and the promise that this future is within reach (Ybema, 2004). It combines emotive triggers such as anxiety for, in this case, a construction incident, with utopian desires for progression in the area of construction safety. Managerial plans, visions and other traditional forward-looking management concepts all relate to the domain of nostalgia. However, Ybema (2004) stresses the subjective and narrative aspect of these managerial activities.

3. Methodology

In order to understand the dynamics and meaning of these processes of contesting in narratives, the research approach was interpretative for the large part (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012). However, since the first author combined a role of consultant and researcher by working for platform SAFECON, interpretation of data and designing interventions went hand-in-hand (Briody *et al.*, 2012). Since the research incorporates organizational ethnographies to develop intervention strategies with an intention to produce change (e.g. Bate, 1994), the proper term is an ethnoventionist research approach (Marrewijk *et al.*, 2010). Ethnoventionist research is characterized by reflexivity of the researcher as well as the people under study, a multistory and longitudinal orientation, deep understanding through involvement with an eye for the multilayered context (Marrewijk *et al.*, 2010). This approach differs from a participatory action research approach in its focus on producing ethnographic data and the applicability for a multilayered and large-scale context; participative action research mainly focusses on local processes for theory development (Marrewijk *et al.*, 2010).

The period during which this longitudinal research took place was March 2015 until May 2017, in which several research materials were gathered. First, field notes were made on conversations that struck the researcher as the most notable (Wolfinger, 2002). Second, SAFECON materials (website, blogs and photo and film) were gathered. Special attention is paid to one intervention: a movie that the SAFECON team developed to discuss a moment that relates to several field players and dominant narratives. This intervention characterizes the ethnoventionist approach because it demonstrates a way to intervene locally in multistory settings. Moreover, movies can be used as a generative tool to discuss urgency for change (Vaara *et al.*, 2016). Third, from the SAFECON safety leadership course for several groups of managers from the field, photos were made of the written safety interpretations of approximately 200 participants. The movie was also shown in this course. Fourth, 10 construction workers, eight leaders from DOC and the five members of the SAFECON team were interviewed by three students. Besides, three safety officers from SAHO were interviewed by the consultant-researcher. A semistructured, narrative interview approach was adopted for all interviews as described by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009).

For further analysis, research materials were imported to ATLAS.ti version 1.0.51. The materials were closely read to interpret emergent meanings in the narratives (McClellan, 2014; Deetz and Alvesson, 2000). To structure the data and code all the materials, a holistic content method was adopted (Lieblich *et al.*, 1998, p. 62). Personal accounts and composite narratives were discovered from these analyses (Polkinghorne, 1988). In the results section, both composite narratives are presented as well as a selection of illustrative narrative fragments of one actor per composite narrative. These “vignettes” (Reissner, 2011, p. 598) are personal accounts and illustrative for the composite narratives. For the structure of the composite narratives on safety, we focused on the way actors stress or dismiss the importance of safety in narratives (Van Ooijen *et al.*, 2019).

4. Results

In this section, the results from the study are presented. First, the composite narratives, personal accounts and story patterns are revealed. The last paragraph describes the way a movie was used as a change intervention. Table I and Figure 1 present the organizational field, the composite narratives and patterns per stakeholder group.

4.1 DOC’s narrative: goal zero, we care

Management and directors of DOC contribute to a narrative on safety, dominating the field. In 2005, there was a fatal incident with employees of the company that still fuels the narrative of many of the interviewees. Recurrently, the risk of fatalities is part of the conversation: *The risk of a fatality is greater in construction work, for instance with the preventive measures, than the chance of a fatality because of earthquakes (77:10)*. Managers express personal mission statements regarding safety at work, caring for others and a collective purpose to eliminate the number of incidents. DOC’s parent company has implemented lifesaving rules based on company-wide incident research. People working for DOC are used to high standards when it comes to safety and comply to the postalgic mantra of goal zero, we care. Most of them worry about a construction incident in the earthquake region because of the money-driven and macho attitude of builders. However, they do not want to be too authoritarian and argue that a safe culture has to come from the builders themselves. They try to stimulate SAHO and builders to work according to the law and lifesaving rules by including this in their contracts with field parties. However, the following passage shows how another storyline contradicts the dominant story of “Goal zero, we care”:

So normally I say yes, that is if someone does a piece of work, installs a pipeline or builds a platform, then we normally say that is our full responsibility, so safety management is ultimately our responsibility. (. . .) Sometimes you have to keep your distance, for example contractors in (. . .), who are actually controlled by the government party, but because you are paying, you expect them to do something about it, and that is a distance contract, where we take responsibility for the best practice and to have everything as good as possible. But we do not take formal responsibility for accidents, for example . . . (73:1).

Throughout the entire political discussion about DOC, we have to keep a distance. . . and because that eventually can be operationalized, you cannot take responsibility for all safety issues or management on the ground (73:2).

Table I.
Overview of composite narratives and patterns

| Stakeholder | Composite narratives | Story patterns |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|
| DOC | Goal zero, we care | Influence, postalgia |
| SAHO | Work the process | Influence |
| Managers of construction companies | I want to, but I can't | Deception, silence and taboo |
| Employees of construction companies | I will fix it | Deception, silence and taboo |
| SAFECON | Managers, take control | Postalgia |

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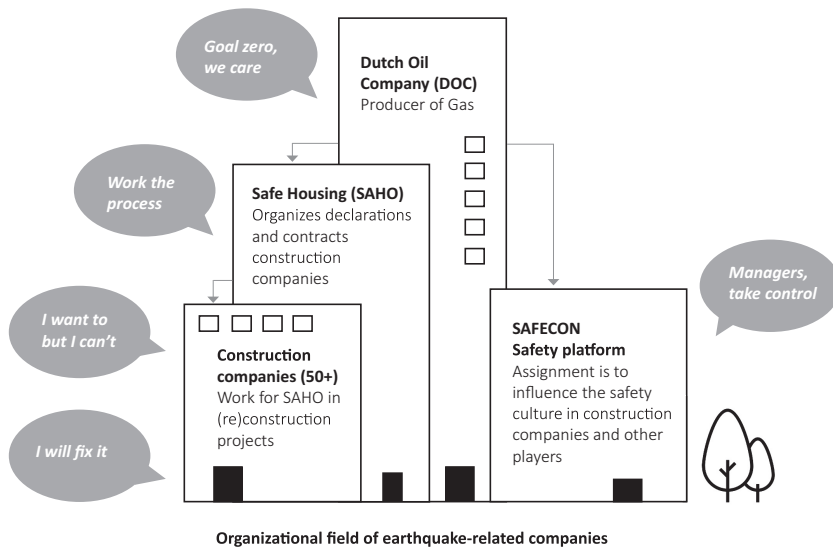


Figure 1.
Overview of
organizational field
and narratives

To silence the moral story of “we care,” it is necessary to interpret the current safety situation as acceptable. Because if not, the field position of moving away could be challenged by the story of “Goal zero, we care.” One of the managers explains this as follows:

Yes, I have visited several construction sites, I went . . . If I compare it with . . . Hah, hah . . . You can do better of course, but you are at the level that people regularly wear a helmet, they have safety shoes, scaffolding is set up according to reasonable norms. They don't always use scaff tags, like in the oil and gas industry, but it looks decent (73:14).

4.2 SAHO's narrative: work the process!

For the people from SAHO's safety department, their main role is being an advisor for operation, to be a safe and good promotor of work. The safety officers from SAHO have a lot of interaction with construction companies in the field. They visit construction sites that are assigned by SAHO and are available for safety questions. It is unbelievable to them that some builders do not know the construction law, do not think about safety measures when they prepare and execute their work. They are not satisfied with the way builders deal with safety and see the problem as a lack of knowledge and an inability to think and work ahead. One of these safety officers explains:

Our world of safety professionals is the problem (. . .) Someone gets an assignment for a job, people think he knows what he is doing, and they do not think about the risks of the professional, because they think: he is the professional, but he has to work on scaffolding that has not been adjusted for his job, he improvises etc. Those things did not come out of nothing, they don't just happen. We live in a time of compartmentalization in which everybody demarcates their work (7:20).

In the interviews, the safety officers say “Goal zero” is not part of their vocabulary, although working toward it is worthwhile. Based on Dutch construction law, SAHO has designed a process flow that builders and other contractors should respect when they work for SAHO. It entails the making of specified safety plans in the design and execution

phase of a project, by which they want builders to think about safety in advance and document working methods and risk assessments. One of the challenges for these safety officers is not being too dominant. The safety officer explains how he notices that people feel monitored by his work:

SAHO manager X came up to me. Two weeks ago, he drove onto the parking lot and I just looked in his car, I am not sure if I even noticed it was him. But of course, I saw something. He comes to me in the break and says: you saw it, right? I say: what do you mean. He: I was using my mobile phone in the car (a lifesaving rule). I: Oh, yes, I saw it. Manager: Yes, you can always say something to me, there is nothing wrong with that. I felt like shit at that point, then I thought: so, you see me as someone who is monitoring you! (7:34).

These men are critical toward the incongruent position that SAHO takes now and then which they explain by a lack of experience with and knowledge on safety. Striking for them was an operational manager who expressed his concern in a negative way about a construction company that reported safety incidents to SAHO. The Dutch construction law and the working process play an important role in this narrative, that is why the title of the narrative is: work the process. The words and sentences of DOC's "Goal zero, we care" narrative are present in the narrations of people working for SAHO and reveal the influence of the "Goal zero, we care" narrative.

4.3 Managers' narrative: I want to, but I can't

When the facilitators from the platform SAFECON meet the managers of the construction enterprises, for instance, in the safety leadership courses, they stress the urgency to work safely. However, they also say how it is often hard to bring this idea into practice. When a project is executed, often they are not around and they seldom hear about safety issues. They do not believe they are able to prevent construction incidents. They challenge the "Goal zero, we care" idea and argue it is a bit exaggerated:

I have a neighbor who works at DOC, well, I have a child for whose birthday they came to, and they work as a subcontractor at DOC. The boys had a small incident with a teleporter, when the power failed on the platform and both boys were up in the box. Since then, they have to have three men at the telehandler in DOC. Yes? While one remains on the ground. Well then, I think: we all have a mobile phone in our pocket, so why does that man have to be down there? (Laugh) That's the case, and then they have explosive free mobile phones at the DOC as well. So, then I think, they exaggerate a bit. (18:11).

Often, they explain how rules and procedures are not helpful and that they only create a lot of form-filling. The safety plans they have to write for the consortium SAHO only contribute to paperwork and unsafety, they say. Private individuals often see safety as a debit entry, while professional promoters are not well informed on the matter of safety either:

For instance, we tell our client that we cannot do the job for safety reasons. That we should do it in another way to do it safely. And then, I hate this, there is a freelancer, yes, and he will do it. And then they say: oh, that contractor is way too expensive (. . .) But they (freelancers) still don't comply with the rules. And then it is still a question of money. (. . .) Look, someone who is fortunate, I say, he will not have so many problems with it. But someone who is not so fortunate, who wants it as cheap as possible, say. And then money plays a role again. (18:23)

It ties safety to money, so the logic in this narrative is – safety is a debit entry. Most managers express a fear of losing the client when safety measures are incorporated in the safety plan. Although safety is important, managing employees and the price that clients want for their services makes it hard to work safely. The narrative of "Goal zero, we care" is an influential story here, but it provokes narratives of deception and taboo: "I want to, but I can't."

4.4 *Employees' narrative: I will fix it*

Employees of the construction firm value the freedom to manage their work and safety themselves. Many of them experienced an injury themselves but seem to accept both the risk and the injury. They argue that rules and procedures collide with the working circumstances and that they are not important. Workers enjoy the freedom to make their own decisions and when an operational or safety issue pops up, they prefer to solve problems themselves. Management concerns, such as staying within budget or planning, influence the way employees execute their work. Employees say that they need to balance several concerns such as working safely, working on time and working within budget. Often, they are very loyal toward their manager, who is regularly the owner of the firm. Although these employees have a high risk of injury, they merely accept this risk. An example of the dilemmas they face is:

That situation, that was with another employer, not with Y, but we were on one, we had a small house, and there was a gutter at four meters 50. And at four meters was the jetty. Then that roof went up below 60 degrees; pretty steep, so I placed a ladder on it and fast, fast, fast. I step on the ladder and it slips, slides off the jetty and I shoot down and I end up in the neighbors. So yes, that happens. (21:9).

Employees are often in a position in which they believe they have to fix issues resulting from the estimation errors of others:

That architect, who had made a drawing, made changes in those drawings, but not in his overall drawing, so then you get that you get two different drawings. (. . .) and then it turned out to be 'hey, now those measurements do not work anymore' because those sizes on one drawing were so much higher and on the other sizes they were still on the old sizes and yes remained that space between them. Then I had to fix that mistake (21:14).

On the one hand, employees believe they are working safely, while stressing their own capacities to assess the risks. On the other hand, this narrative reveals a deception with the way people ignore the safety of people executing the work – the employees. The way their managers regularly ignore the importance of safety fuels their silent deception:

With my previous employer you had the simplest and the cheapest mouth caps. Then you could just as well not do anything. Ear plugs or hearing protection? He did plugs and said quietly to me; 'I meet the minimum requirement' (21:16).

4.5 *SAFECON's narrative: managers, take control*

In short, the SAFECON consultants believe the root cause of unsafety is the idea of safety as a debit entry, the absence of inspection in the field, management that does not show safety leadership and a general lack of attention to safety. SAFECON's cultural change narrative focuses on creating situations in which managers of construction firms and of other companies in this organizational field take more responsibility for safety. However, this starts with another kind of conversation, they argue. One of the SAFECON consultants explains:

Another type of conversation is about the extent to which you want people to think about safety. That it's worthwhile to approach people as professionals and thereby inviting them as professionals to think about how can we do this safely? And not, I'll just say how you should do this, these are the rules and sign here please (83:3).

They say leaders should be firm and set the boundaries for their employees: "On a number of points it is better for leaders to just say, these are the rules and you have to comply to them"

(83:5). The SAFECON consultants see the effect of DOC's influential, postalgic story of "Goal zero, we care," of which the introduction of DOC's lifesaving rules is an example:

But when we started with the platform, we paid attention to the lifesaving rules, because we noticed that they evoked resistance among builders. They said: 'what do I have to do with these rules? I have got to make work-related calls in the car, those other eight rules will probably be nothing either' (84:13).

Here we see how DOC's postalgic story is received with feelings of skepticism and even resistance. Developing safety leadership implies time and focus from management to safety; for instance, by stimulating employees to share experiences, dilemmas and issues regarding safety. Conversational approaches are stressed as a way to stimulate change. The team argues that builders have a moral obligation to manage safety and should say no to an unsafe project more often: "we ask contractors the question: At what moment will you say to your client: I won't do this, what do you need, and how tough do you dare to be" (83:19). The team is also critical about the safety platform and questions whether the chosen interventions will change the safety culture within these organizations:

While at an organization where we have been working for a while, we also run into the fact that it is about this: do you wear your helmet? And then I really think, shit. With this organization we have been working for a while, and then we still have to talk about whether the helmet is on? Pfoeh! Then we think, our interventions are not working.

SAFECON's postalgic narrative intends to escape the problematic situation (in which institutional forces pull on managers of construction firms) by stressing a distinct future in which the conversation among several field players changes (manager–employee, but also client–contractor) and managers take control and pay more attention to safety. On the one hand, this postalgic story is inviting and positively formulated, but on the other hand, there seems to be a fear of not succeeding and the possibility of a construction incident in the field.

4.6 Movie of a multistory moment

To highlight the ethnoventionist approach and achieve this paper's aims, we pay attention to the way SAFECON consultants developed a movie of a multistory moment. A project leader of DOC aired his concerns with SAFECON that he did not hear any safety reports by "I know things are happening in the field right now" (32:6). While he stressed his concerns, he wondered when he should stop the whole operation to take the appropriate measures. In the meantime, one of the manager-owners of a construction company that was working for SAHO had just acquired a series of chimney projects. At every house on the list, the old chimney had to be removed and replaced with a new, lightweight chimney. SAFECON was invited to record one of these projects. During that day, two carpenters stepped on the roof without taking proper safety measures. Another remarkable moment was when a SAHO inspector drove by to check whether the carpenters were able to assist him at an urgent chimney project a few blocks further down the road, which was accepted by their manager at the office. While he waited in his car, he sent a text to one of them saying "hurry up" while adding a smiley to his message (27:1).

A week later, one of the SAFECON consultants organized a safety meeting with a group of carpenters from different construction companies. One man from the chimney project happened to also be present. The consultant asked the group whether they step on roofs without roof-edge or fall protection. All say that they do not do this, only when they are properly leashed. At the coffee machine, the SAFECON consultant showed an image of the carpenter on the roof. He laughed and said: "that's me!" The carpenters explain that engineers and safety officers do not want to hear these kinds of stories (26:1): "There is the theory. Actually, we all know that it happens, but we don't talk about it" (26:2). This example

represents several cases of construction workers that have explained to the SAFECON consultants how they feel reluctant to talk to their managers or others about the unsafe actions that they have to perform to make sure the project is finished in time and/or within budget. Often, they also stress how they are confident they can work safely without following procedure. Moreover, they believe that it is their job to solve the issues resulting from the estimation errors of others. Managers rely heavily on the self-steering capacities of their workers and are not actively searching for what happens during the execution of a project. In the following weeks, SAFECON interviewed all people involved in the chimney project, what they did and why. From this event, SAFECON developed a film script and movie. In the movie, several hidden, taken-for-granted ideas and beliefs are revealed.

When the video was shown to people in the field, the consultants asked people about what they saw, asking questions like: How do you relate this moment to safety? What should the leader, the client and the carpenter do, in your opinion? What ideas and beliefs can you find that guide behavior? The movie was used to start the conversation on safety, stimulate people to reveal their implicit ideas and beliefs on safety, invite people to share their own stories and collectively deepen insights on how to develop the safety culture in these organizations. As one of the consultants argues: "What struck me is that no one saw this as unusual. This, or similar issues, also happen in our work environment. With this, this film immediately evoked personal stories; what about us?" (118:1). Concluding, the movie not only revealed several taken-for-granted ideas and beliefs in narratives and the way these narratives influence the workplace, it also provides insight on designing change interventions.

5. Discussion and conclusions

This paper reports on a multistory and ethnoventionist study on a cultural change program on safety in the organizational field. Against the background is a team of consultants that try to influence the safety culture of several organizations in an organizational field through a platform called SAFECON. The research focused on the way several composite narratives contest a dominant safety narrative and the way story patterns evolve by looking into five personal accounts. We found five distinctive composite narratives in this field. The five actors refer to these composite narratives in their accounts, thereby contributing to several story patterns. DOC's "Goal zero, we care" is a dominant postalgic narrative that strongly exists in the accounts of DOC colleagues, while other actors react to it. The company's history of DOC in which a fatality took place still influences the conversations. Managers actively refer to the incident, recount personal experiences and stress the importance to work safely. Interestingly, the selected account of DOC also shows some ambivalence on Goal Zero. In SAHO's "work the process" narrative, goal zero is a bridge too far and is contested by a more moderate interpretation of safety. The safety officer reveals how safety narratives, with their rules, provoke feelings of being controlled and the need to explain yourself. With managers of construction companies another story pattern arises; the word exaggeration is used when referring to the "Goal zero, we care" narrative and it results in a pattern of silence and deception. It is easy for DOC to say "Goal zero, we care" since they have the big budgets to calculate safety; it is the argumentation of construction managers. For employees from construction companies, the dominant narrative is "I will fix it." The pattern of deception and taboo is that employees accept the fact that everything that should have happened earlier on eventually means that they have to fix it.

SAFECON's narrative is "managers, take control" and creates another postalgic pattern; sketching a future that differs from the current convictions of builders about safety – motivating them to take control. With the movie, an example is given of how an influential safety narrative results in employees covering up and lying to the outside world regarding what really happens in the workplace, reflecting a pattern of deception, taboo and silence. By

revealing these composite narratives and these personal accounts, it becomes clear how a dominant safety narrative is contested at the macro level and the way several story patterns evolve.

Both composite narratives in the struggle and the personal accounts contain different forms of contesting by their different story angles, distinctive issues and typical words and jargon. These composite narratives and stories provoke reactions in other narratives, for instance, stories of taboo and deception as reactions to an influential story like “Goal zero, we care.” These processes of contesting and story patterns characterize the challenges of changing organizational culture. Thereby, this paper presents a deep insight into processes of cultural change (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2016) whereby the ethnoveinist approach helped to reveal several ethnographic materials and narratives in a large-scale field of organizations, while it also helped to present a particular way of multistory intervening in local multistory settings. This paper expands the multistory approach by showing in depth how safety can become a taboo and how an intervention like a movie stimulates dialog and change on taken-for-granted ideas and beliefs – so often the aim of cultural change programs.

Practically, this paper provides a model for cultural change scholars and practitioners to study and/or contribute to multistory cultural change processes. First, working with composite narratives (macro) and personal accounts (micro) worked well in this research. It provides an overview of a complex and layered cultural change process in an organizational field. Second, the movie intervention shows how focusing on a specific moment on which several composite narratives intertwine produces an opportunity for dialog on the often hidden taken-for-granted ideas and beliefs. We argue that changing organizational culture requires conversational interventions by which multiple stories can touch the surface and can be explored, discussed and changed. Our study is limited in its claims of success in changing the culture of organizations in this organizational field. Further research could extend the knowledge on change interventions that contribute to multistory cultural change.

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