

Managing Organizational Change

Process, Social Construction and
Dialogue

Second Edition

Lecture Notes Chapter 4

4

CONSTRUCTING CHANGE THROUGH NARRATIVE AND STORYTELLING

Learning objectives

By the time you have completed your study of this chapter, you should be able to:

- Elaborate on the role of narrative in interpreting the context of change.
- Appreciate the role of narrative in constructing change.
- Distinguish between cultural and voice narrative.
- Evaluate the role of narrative in critiquing institutional practices.
- Discuss the role of storytelling in narrating job and organizational situations.
- Evaluate the role of storytelling in the social construction of change.

Let us keep in mind that effective change does not happen spontaneously. Our **objective** in this chapter is to explore the role of stories and narratives in co-constructing change

- Narratives and stories permeate every aspect of human life.
- Narratives and stories are everywhere and organizational life is full of them.
- Both play an important role in constructing change.

In line with the social construction perspective, the change agent needs to be a good listener.

A change agent needs to be able to gain an understanding of the background of conversations regarding change.

Theme for discussion: What is the role of background conversations in managing resistance?

Let's start by looking at storytelling ...

- A story can deliver a complex idea. Telling a story can prove useful for coping with rapid change.
- Stories can prove useful for motivating others.
- For inspiring others and for sparking attention.
- For promoting trust and compassion.
- Also, for sharing experiences of change.
- Communicating more about one self and one's own values.
- Stories can prove useful for *counteracting* talk aimed at promoting resignation and complacency.

Current stories: These are the stories taking place right now. They might, or might not, differ much from the pre-existing ones. Even when they differ, people continue to recite the pre-existing stories to organize and make sense of the present.

Pre-existing stories: These are the stories that encapsulate previous experiences. People use them to relate to the past and/or to simplify the present.

Importance of narrative

- **A narrative simply recounts a sequence of events, which might or might not have a definitive theme, or resolution.**
- **A narrative can capture diverse voices, desires and aspirations of people.**
- **From that angle, a narrative is important because it can help us capture the reality of the change situation at hand.**

Any difference between narrative and stories???

Answer: No general consensus as to how they differ

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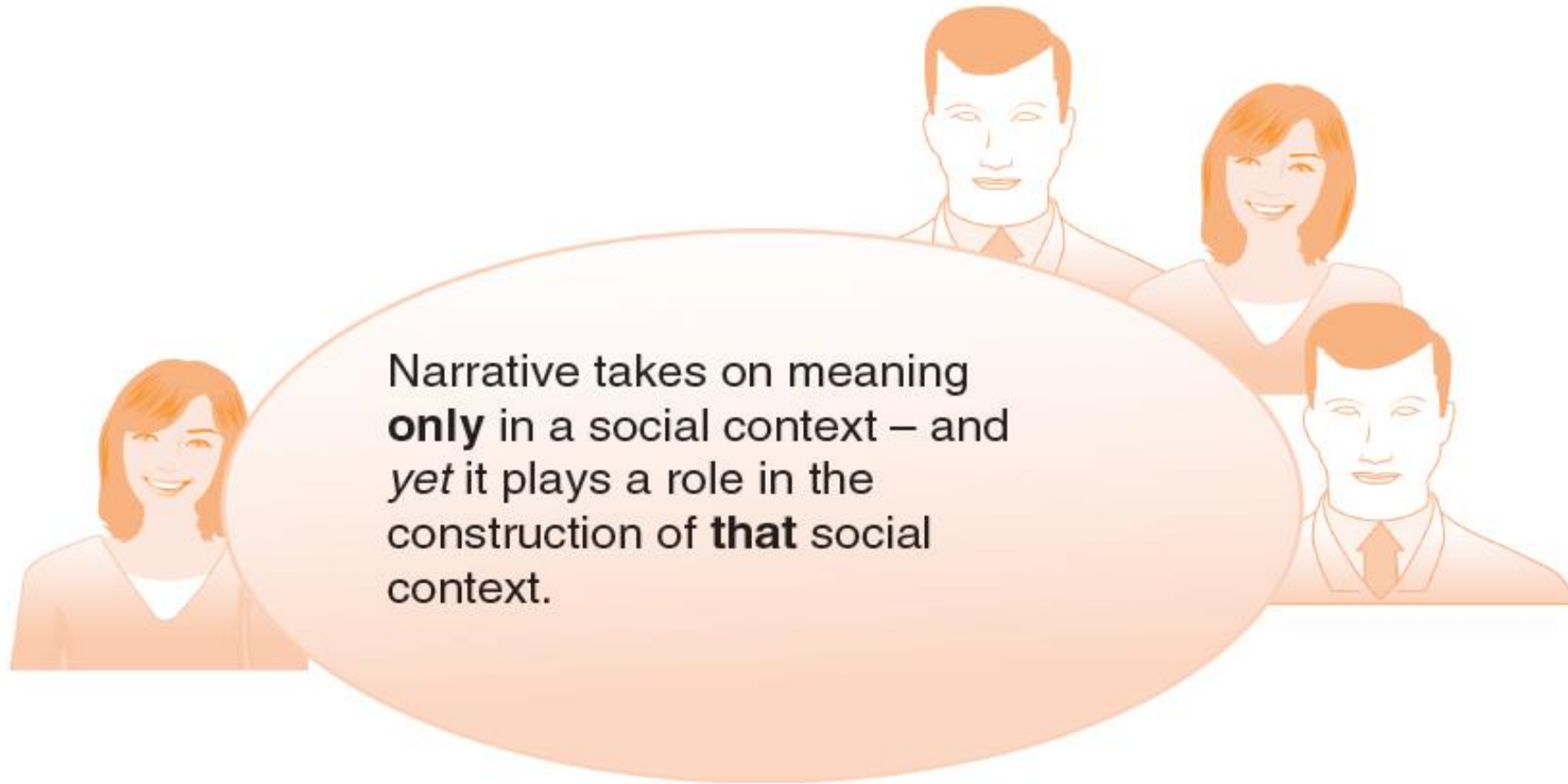
In general, a narrative tends to be much more *open-ended*, much more fluid in the sense that it allows for future changes, revisions, or expansions.

Ricoeur (1988), sees 'narrative' and 'story' as being almost synonymous.

Bakhtin (1986) holds a very similar view to that of Ricoeur. Bakhtin (1986) equates narratives with utterances (conversations) people make as they come to talk with each other.

Other theorists have maintained that there is a difference between story and narrative.

Leitch (1986) sees 'closure' as a distinguishing characteristic of stories (as opposed to narratives).



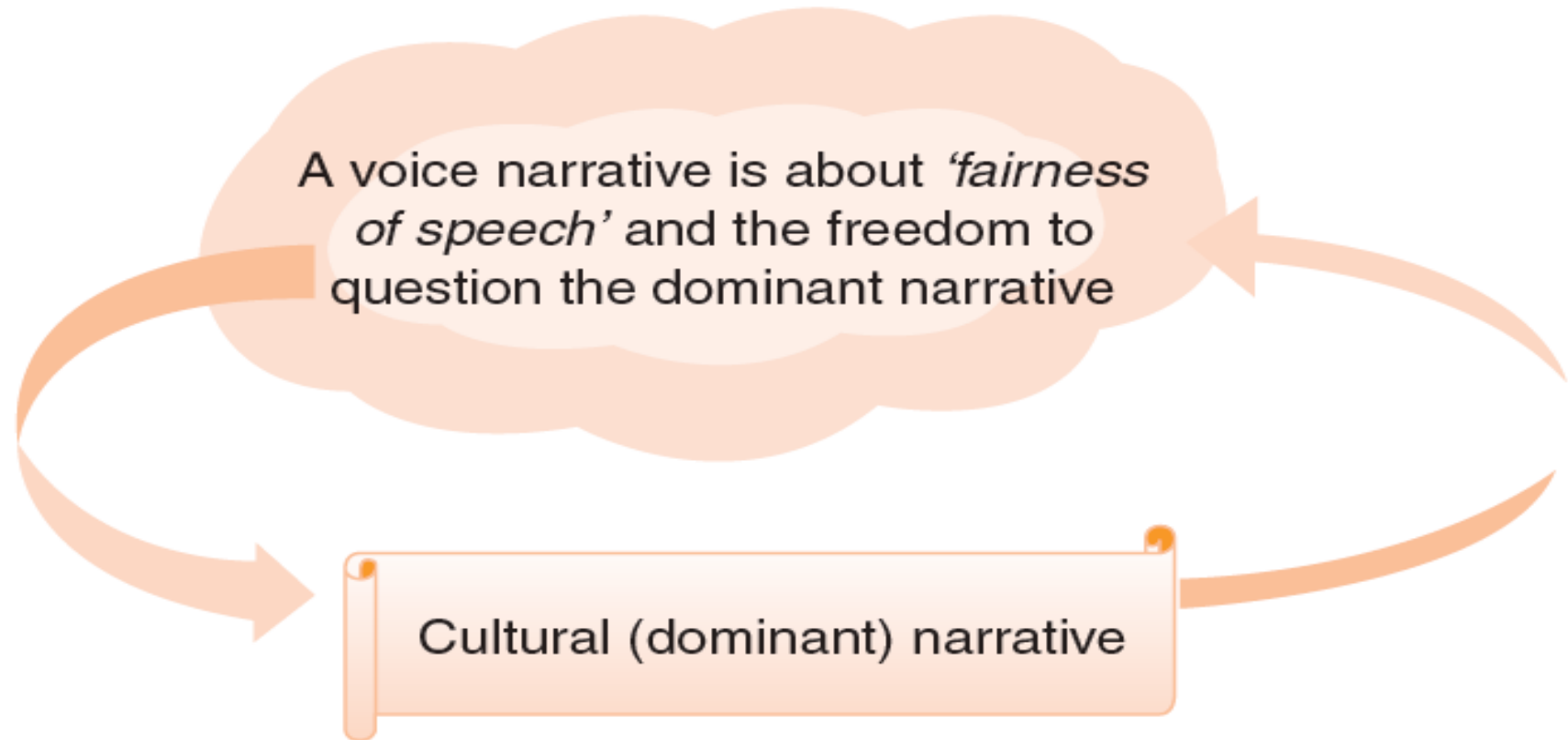
Typology of Narrations

According to Laurel Richardson, we need to distinguish between cultural narrative and that of voice representations.

Cultural narrative being the one told from the point of view of senior management.

Cultural narrative is recited through top management directives, focus on cost reduction, formal metrics, KPIs as well as through other, less formal channels such as company newsletters and websites.

Voice narrative is the one belonging to those who are being 'silenced', or 'marginalized', by the dominant narrative.



Importantly ...

- Let's remember that there will always be a dynamic (interactive) relationship between cultural narrative and that of voice narrative.
- A conscious search for both types of narratives provides the change agent with valuable knowledge of issues and concerns as her or his agency is initiated and as change takes place.

Thank you