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"External guest speakers, Curse or Blessing?"

A study on external guest speakers and the personal fables they carry out, to see if, and mainly how, they can establish collective sense-making and centring within an organizational context.

Master Thesis

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Abstract

Purpose The purpose of the paper is to explain how executives can make effective use of fables provided by external guest speakers to create a situation of collective sense-making and centring, based on the story used in a policy making context of a private, Dutch for-profit organization (fictitiously called Con-Zelo recruitment agency in this article).

Design/methodology/approach The approach involved collecting and analyzing the 'Swimming for gold' fable as part of seven months phenomenological and symbolic study, to confirm organizational sense, identify categorized themes and analyze the process of creation. In which co-author Volkers, as a former member, had access to the organization and familiarity with the organization its history.

Findings The findings emphasize that both fables and myths can in fact establish organizational sense and centring based on categorized themes. Most important is that fables shared by an external guest speaker should not be considered as a singular event, but as start of a process; a true vehicle for collective sense-making and centring. Organizations can then do so through changes and alignment in all five types of cultural artifacts.

Originality/value This paper provides additional value by bridging the gap between theory and practice. Besides illustrating that fables do in fact contain the power to promote a particular point of view, specific meaning and or values and therewith establish organizational sense and centring. This study includes the documentation and cultural analysis of the fable, and illustrates the fable as a vehicle or process for collective sense-making and centring. Furthermore, the suggested fable-stretching model is a so called 'soup-to-nuts' approach that can serve as a blue-print for organizational researchers and change agents interested in using external guest speakers and the personal fables they carry out, to establish collective sense-making and centring within an organizational context.

Keywords corporate storytelling, remythologizing, corporate culture, sense-making, centring, guest-speakers, fable vs. myth.

Introduction

There is general consensus among researchers within the field of organizational storytelling, that stories represent an 'exchange between two or more persons during which a past or anticipated experience [is] referenced, recounted, interpreted or challenged' (Boje, 1991, p. 8).

Studies within organizational literature on the usage of stories are wide ranging between different areas of focus; describing stories as a key-managerial tool (Denning, 2004; 2005; 2006; Brown et al, 2004; Boje, 2001), examining the persuasive power or rhetoric of stories (Aristotle, 1991; Heracleous & Barret, 2001; Creed, et al. 2002; Green, 2004; 2009; Brown, et al. 2012), exploring the organizational context in which the story is embedded (Hansen, 2006; Bryant and Cox, 2004; O'Connor, 2000) and identifying the ways in which the story is interpreted (Fronda & Moriceau, 2008). Studies like these demonstrated the role and benefits of storytelling in; problem solving and action research (Mitroff & Kilmann, 1975), innovation and new product development (Buckler & Zien, 1996), socialization of new employees (Louis, 1980; 1983), learning (Helmer, 1989), organizational renewal (McWhinney & Battista, 1988; Snowden, 2000a,b), employee engagement (Post, 2004; Denning, 2005; Brown et al, 2004) and good employer practice (Kaye, 1996; McKee, 2003; Madlock, 2008).

Much of this research shows how these stories are socially constructed as people interact (Stacey, 2001; Boje, 1991). And how they are used, as a vehicle for collective centring and collective sense-making, to 'make sense' of organizational changes (Boje, 1982, 1991; 1995; McWhinney & Battista, 1988; Chreim, 2007; Reissner, 2005; Gabriel, 2000; Boyce, 1995). Anyway, these theories explain that stories represent one mechanism through which organizational culture and organizational culture change can be described and explained (Briody et al, 2012). And that it can be used to promote a particular point of view, specific meaning and or values as well as reinforce core cultural ideals sometimes referred to as a hegemonic-narrative (Vickers, 2008).

The stories referred to within these studies, however, are so called sagas, urban-myths, epic-myths, organizational myths or simply myths; described as stories that address the founding ideals of the organization (Higgens & McCallister, 2004; McWhinney & Batista, 1988; Snowden, 2000 a,b).

The hypothesis is offered and elaborated by Sievers (1986), that motivation is a surrogate for meaning, i.e. for the meaning of work and life which is increasingly lost. Any attempt towards discovering existential dimensions of meaning can only be accomplished through external motivation. Thus, when motivation becomes a surrogate for meaning, and meaning in work is destroyed, people need increasingly to be externally motivated. Guest speakers are more and more commonly seen within today`s business; because they can bring in new perspectives, communication styles and expertise within a specific field (McNett, 2001; Murray, 1988; Varvel, 2001a, b). The stories they share however, are not myths but so called fables, that are novel and do not address the founding ideals of the organization and can, as explained, promote a particular point of view. However, if they can convey specific meaning and or values as well as reinforce core cultural ideals, as do myths, remains the question.

To respond on these timely concerns, we analyze if the use of these fables shared by guest speakers; do indeed differ from the usage of myths. The goals of this study, therefore, are to identify the shared meaning and purpose that emerged from external corporate storytelling processes within the organization studied, and therewith see if indeed collective sense-making and centring has occurred. Then, to categorize themes which are indicators within the fable shared and analyze if they reflect the organizational reality, to confirm the direct link between the fable themes, the championed logics and the collective sense. After this have been confirmed we wish to examine and describe external corporate storytelling as a vehicle or process for collective sense-making and centring, to provide a blue-print for further practical and theoretical usage of fables shared by guest speakers.

A private, Dutch for-profit organization of 150+ members (fictitiously called Con-Zelo in this article) was the focus of this study. As a former member, co-author Volkers had access to the organization and familiarity with the organization its history.

Briefly, the research design involved a story told in a structured storytelling event after which the study participants reflected together on the story told and heard. This storytelling event was conducted with all 150+ members, including Volkers, in one region of the Netherlands during an annual conference. The theme expressed during this event was used as an organizational theme, providing a possible touchstone story.

"On March 12th 2001, I was diagnosed with leukaemia. After a stem cell transplant I was lucky to recover. On August 21st 2008, I became Olympic Champion 10 kilometres open water swimming." (Van der Weijden, 2010)

The story captured the essence of Con-Zelo`s current market position, expressing the collective sense of the participants, and enabling the participants to collectively centre on the meaning they shared.

Theoretical Framework;

Our theoretical framework is designed to help us in answering the research questions, as described earlier. The main aim is to see how previous studies have defined myths in relation to the process of collective sense-making and centring, as well as how they have described this process and its possible outcomes. Studies done on storytelling organizations that are based on the use of myths, can possibly provide us with guidelines for empirical research, and will be needed to expose the difference with fable usage.

Theoretical Framework; Stories, Sagas, Myths and Fables?

Thus, storytelling appears to be an excellent tool to promote a particular point of view, specific meaning and or values as well as reinforce core cultural ideals (Vickers, 2008). According to Gardner (2011) the main reason why this occurs is because stories speak to both parts of the human mind; its reason and emotion, which makes them meaningful and relevant. In other words, stories help people to make sense of situations; by telling them why and how.

Stories 'discipline by defining characters, sequencing plots, and scripting actions' (Boje, 1995, p. 1000). By stories, we mean 'an oral or written performance involving two or more people interpreting past or anticipated experience' (Boje, 1991, p. 111). In this definition, stories do not necessarily require beginnings, middles, or endings, as they do in more formal and restrictive definitions (Bruner, 1990).

According to Boyce (1996), the most frequently referenced research on organizational storytelling is the study by Clark (1970, 1972) on 'organizational saga' (Clark, 1972, p. 178). In his definition of this organizational saga he links a charismatic leader and strong purpose with a claim of unique accomplishment. Later, Mitroff & Kilmann defined a similar description of an organizational story that captured the unique quality of an organization as an 'epic myth' (Mitroff & Kilmann, 1975, p. 18). Fuelled by Funk & Wagnalls`s (1972) description of myths as being stories that speak to deeply rooted questions within society, revealing their central worldview and the framework for the self-identity of the culture and the individual within a universal context, Mitroff & Kilmann argued that an 'epic myth' gives meaning to organizational members by summing back to the unique quality of an

organization; they do so by firstly sharing stories about an ideal organization, and then, sharing stories about the actual organization.

Further research commonly described sagas, urban-myths, epic-myths, organizational myths; within the context of this paper hence combined referred to as myths; as being stories about key players and events, deeply rooted within the organization its history as for instance early pioneers or product triumphs and failures that address the founding ideals of the organization (Higgens & McCallister, 2004; McWhinney & Batista, 1988; Snowden, 2000 a,b). Snowden (2000a) notes that the essence of these myths is their unconscious power, that construct the organization its shared values and norms, and therewith establish organizational sense. He further defined another set of stories as being fables. Snowden (2000a) notes that within the field of storytelling, myths and fables are commonly considered as having the precise same meaning but that they, however, differ significantly. He explains that fables are structured to be told by a storyteller in such a manner and complexity, that the audience is unable to repeat the story but remembers the message, and that fables do not address the organization its founding ideals or roots and can therefore be told in various directions. Furthermore, there has not been made any assumption in his article nor, to our knowledge, by others about the fable its capability to construct the organization its shared values and norms or sense; where it did so about myths. Therefore it remains questionable if fables brought to surface by external guest speakers, are in fact capable of performing as a vehicle for collective sense-making and centring.

Theoretical Framework; Past Conceptualizations of Organizational Storytelling

According to Boyce (1996) research on organizational storytelling has mainly focused on two perspectives: social constructivism and organizational symbolism. She notes that social constructivism emphasizes the processes of symbolic interaction and meaning-making; openly connecting social construction, story, and organization; and organizational symbolism is emphasizing the kaleidoscope of symbols and meanings sustained in organizations.

Studies on social constructivism are built upon research done by Berger and Luckmann citing that 'Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product' (1967, p. 61), arguing that all knowledge, including common sense, is derived from and maintained by social interactions. The authors presented the idea that 'institutionalization occurs whenever there is a reciprocal typification of habitualized actions by types of actors' (1967, p. 54), explaining that when people interact, they act upon the understanding that both

perceptions of reality are related, and that when they act upon this understanding; their 'common knowledge of reality' becomes reinforced. Since this common sense knowledge is negotiated by two or more members, they will be presented as being an objective reality, which will influence those who were not involved in the original process of negotiation. They noted that these values or logics must be created over a period of time with the individuals all performing or supporting these actions. Where social constructivism is largely a reaction to the assumed certainty of scientific or objective efforts to explain reality, it is seen as a source for premodern, modern and postmodern studies (for additional readings on this topic, see appendix). The main contributions, research on social constructivism has made, are on how stories can stimulate socialization of new employees (Louis, 1980; 1983), causes behavioural and attitudinal commitment (Berger & Luckmann, 1967) and stimulates organizational control (Wilkins, 1984).

According to Dandridge et al. (1980) organizational symbolism conveys the underlying character, ideology, or value system versus logics relation, of an organization. Smircich and Calas (1985) further explain that it does do through interpreting symbolic discourse, identifying themes, and linking meaning to action. In their article, Dandridge et al defined four symbol-carrying aspects or cultural artifacts of organizational life, that are directly connected with the overall rubric of the organizational culture literature, and could be used to convey these underlying characters, ideologies, or value system versus logics relations, namely: stories and myths; ceremonies and ritualized events; company logo; anecdotes and jokes. Organizational culture is broadly defined as the pattern of shared values and norms that distinguishes one organization from another, and mentions one more cultural artifact in addition, to the four distinguished by Dandridge et al namely; certain physical attributes such as the use of space, interior and exterior design, and equipment (Higgens & McCallister, 2004). Higgens & McCallister (2004) further demonstrate the importance of modification in cultural artifacts, when radical change is to be achieved. Arguing that organizations that do not also manage existing cultural artifacts build in barriers to failure, because existing cultural artifacts support the old values and not necessarily the new ones.

Boje, defined the storytelling organization as a 'collective storytelling system in which the performance of stories is a key part of its members sense-making and a means to allow them to supplement individual memories with institutional memory' (1991, p. 106). Our study therefore draws upon the description of story and storytelling as a symbolic form by which groups and organizational members construct shared meaning and collectively centre on that

meaning, commonly described as collective sense-making and collective centring (Boyce, 1996).

The theory of sense-making finds its roots within the study on organizational symbolism (Weick, 1969; 1976; Louis, 1980). 'Collective sense-making can be understood as the process whereby groups interactively create social reality, which becomes the organizational reality' (Boyce, 1995, p. 109). Collective centring on the other hand, can be described as the process by which a person, group or organization fundamentally focuses or organizes and thus achieves unity (Mink, et al., 1979). Or more specifically, the process within a particular organization of focusing on its organizational essence (Boyce, 1995). According to Boyce (1995) the everyday conversation of organizational members as well as the formal communication of managers are ingredients in the construction of this shared meaning.

An approach to collective sense-making and centring proposed by McWhinney & Battista (1988) illustrates a dynamic model known as remythologizing. Remythologizing 'summons back to consciousness the founding ideals and the oft-told tales that helped establish and maintain an organization's identity, thus linking the primal energy with present conditions' (McWhinney & Battista, 1988, p. 53). More specifically, remythologizing refers to the revitalization or rebirth of organizational myths of origin. The theory proposed three stages: bringing founding myths to organizational consciousness, reviving the founding myths and recommitment to the revitalized myth. A process existing out of the identification of logics imbedded within the organization its founding myths, the regain of the wholeness that underlies the organizational culture, and within the final stage the myth is retold with new understandings and interpretations. According to McWhinney & Battista, this revitalized tale provides the direction, energy and sense for the current situation and may therefore in some cases produce completely novel directions.

Within earlier work on collective sense-making and centring, Boje et al. (1982) described a strongly related theory to remythologizing called myth-making. They described myth-making as an adaptive process in which organizational members create logics which attributes meaning to their activities. They suggested that a myth 'narrows the horizon in which organizational life is allowed to make sense' (1982, p. 18), suggesting that organizations are sated with competing ideologies and goals that resulted from the uncertainty infusing them. They suggested four stages within the myth-making process where they categorized myths according to their function and effect. These stages are myth development, solid myth, myth

split, and myth shift. They applied these stages within a life-cycle concept based on different stages of acceptance and susceptibility for change.

As mentioned earlier, both studies are strongly related. The difference however, is that remythologizing focuses on the unconscious power of myths and symbols, where myth-making does not. Another critical point of discussion seems to be the role of additional sets of stories, fables, that have grown around the founding myths. McWhinney & Battista`s (1988) argued that these other sets of stories might become a formal obstacle of remythologizing process and that they should therefore, at all time, be limited. Boje et al. (1982) however, embraced these additional stories and introduced the concept of myth-exchange. In this concept he argued that these additional stories should be maintained because they can help people to bracket their own mythic thinking, entertain the thinking of others, and bring no disturbance to the original myth. Nevertheless, the remythologizing process gained more support under further research, which ultimately led to Boje favouring the remythologizing process above his own work in his later studies on role of storytelling in the collective sense-making and centring process (1991; 1995). Further research conducted to date has explored other applications of storytelling through this process for managers and practitioners. These studies demonstrated the role and benefits of storytelling through collective sense-making and collective centring in; problem solving and action research (Mitroff & Kilmann, 1975), innovation and new product development (Buckler & Zien, 1996), socialization of new employees (Louis, 1980; 1983), learning (Helmer, 1989), organizational renewal (McWhinney & Battista, 1988; Snowden, 2000a,b), employee engagement (Post, 2004; Denning, 2005; Brown et al, 2004) and good employer practice (Kaye, 1996; McKee, 2003; Madlock, 2008).

Furthermore, research on organizational storytelling within the field of communication theory and anthropology, shows how the use of rhetoric, through either written text or speech, articulates organizational sense (Boyce, 1995; Creed et al. 2002; Green, 2004; 2009; Brown et al. 2012). Heracleous and Barret (2001) noted that organizational sense as meaning and purpose are encoded within 'discourses', a generalization of the concept of written and spoken conversation to all modalities and contexts (Foucault, 1977). Where rhetoric does not play a significant role within our study, it does so within more recent work on organizational storytelling. Therefore additional readings on this topic can be found within the appendix.

Theoretical Framework; A Brief Overview of the Main Findings

Throughout the theoretical framework we have looked at past conceptualizations of organizational storytelling, the main findings that will fuel our further study are;

- The thought that organizational storytelling is a vehicle for collective centring and collective sense-making (Boje, 1991; 1995; McWhinney & Battista, 1988), counts as the foundation for a significant amount of further research that has been done within the field.
- Research on storytelling as a vehicle for collective centring and collective sense-making has shown how the use of myths, that address the founding ideals of the organization, can establish organizational sense and centring through the use of remythologizing and myth-making (Boje, 1982, 1991; 1995; McWhinney & Battista, 1988; Chreim, 2007; Reissner, 2005; Gabriel, 2000; Boyce, 1995). On the use and effect of fables however, no similar assumptions have been made, so far.
- To establish an 'organizational reality', collective sense, values or logics must be created over a period of time with individuals all performing or supporting these actions (Berger and Luckmann, 1967).
- When change is to be achieved, organizations that do not also manage existing cultural artifacts build in barriers to failure, because existing cultural artifacts support the old values and not necessarily the new ones (Higgens & McCallister, 2004).

These essential factors will be used as guidance throughout the empirical study.

Method: Participants and Procedures

Approach

A private, Dutch for-profit organization of 150+ members called Con-Zelo was the focus of this study. As a former member, co-author Volkers had access to the organization and familiarity with the organization its history. The study reported here involved a story told in a structured storytelling event after which the study participants reflected together on the story told and heard. This storytelling event was conducted with all 150+ members, including co-author Volkers, in one region of the Netherlands during an annual conference. This event enabled an exploration of purposeful storytelling as a means by which a group can collectively centre itself on purpose and construct shared meaning (Boyce, 1995).

This study is phenomenological and symbolic, based on thoughts that groups and or organizations that interact will develop their own culture (Patton, 2001). First, it was for us important to identify the shared meaning and purpose that emerged from external corporate storytelling processes within the organization studied, and therewith see if indeed collective sense-making and centring had occurred. Then, we needed to categorize themes that are indicators within the fable shared and analyze if they reflect the organizational reality, to confirm the direct link between the fable themes, the championed logics and the collective sense. In phenomenology, one asks, 'What is the meaning, structure, and essence of this phenomenon for this person or group of people?' (Patton, p.104). Ideally, through this phenomenological research, it was possible to see congruence with shared purpose and meaning in the link of the story told and actions taken and sense conceived by organizational members (van Manen, 1996). We did so by interviewing eleven organizational members, and openly asking them to identify the key-themes they remembered as being shared by storyteller Van der Weijden, and reflected these themes on the values/logics rooted within the original story as well as the ones championed within the organization as confirmed by Con-Zelo's CEO and responsible for the policy making context.

After the establishment of organizational sense and centring was confirmed. We examined the process of external corporate storytelling as a vehicle or process for collective sense-making and centring, by analyzing how the cultural artifacts were managed within the organization. Through symbolic we were capable to distinguish, 'what common set of symbols and understandings had emerged and applied to give meaning to people's interactions' (Patton, 2001, p. 81). For this all twelve respondents were asked to identify the five symbol carrying artifacts as used within Con-Zelo, and to express the impression it left on them.

The design of our study was influenced by leading case-studies performed within the field of organizational storytelling, as a vehicle for collective centring and collective sense-making by Boje (1991; 1995), McWhinney & Battista (1988) and Boyce (1995), as well as within symbolic by Higgens & McCallister (2004) on the use of cultural artifacts to champion certain values and norms, organizational logics.

Data collection

The forms of data analysis that were used are: twelve examining interview transcripts and field notes or observational summaries, to create domains which are objects, events, or ideas that have meaning to the organization its culture (Cresswell, 1998; Patton, 2000). These field

notes or observational summaries were based on a ten months period, November 2010 - August 2011, during which Volkers was actively involved in the organization`s storytelling process, and are subsequently recalled. We used 'bracketing' to ensure the research is not affected by Volkers his bias, suspending his beliefs through validation with twelve expert interview transcripts, so that a description about the phenomenon is not contaminated with the researcher its bias (Munhall, 1994).

CON-ZELO: Introducing the Organization

Con-Zelo is a Dutch private, for-profit recruiting agency, devoted to attract unemployed candidates and matching them to temporary or permanent positions jobs with client companies. The organizational members are generally higher educated, bachelor or equivalent; middle and higher class; and differ ethnically. Con-Zelo has 150+ members working 34 hours a week, on average, in a structurally flat organization. There is one chief executive officer (CEO), seven regional managers at mid-manager level, 50 establishment managers, and circa 100 human resource (HR) -consultants. The establishment managers as well as the HR-consultants are located around the Netherlands. The headquarter its operation also has several other staff including upper-level staff and other secretaries, as a marketing and accounting division. However, these persons were not involved in this study.

Con-Zelo has grown out till a top 10-player recruiting agency in the Netherlands, over the last years. However, even though this position, it remained a rather small player in comparison with their competitors; multi-national organizations as Randstad, Adecco and Manpower. These multi-national organizations apply economy of scale tactics to outcompete smaller size companies, like Con-Zelo, on price and or quantity. Con-Zelo therefore operates by focusing on their own strengths; quality of service through accessibility, honesty and promises.

The organizational members function with relative high autonomy in their approach towards both candidates as well as prospects and client companies. Decisions made by these organizational members on regional level, directly affect and reflect the national organization. Therefore a clear sense of organizational mission and values is required, for all its members.

Con-Zelo: The Storytelling Event

The structured storytelling event was conducted in January 2011 with all 150+ members, including Volkers, in the Utrecht region of the Netherlands during an annual conference. The event took four hours and included; (1) a review by its CEO to inform Con-Zelo`s members

of previous activities, reviewing fiscal information for the past year. (2) external fable shared by Van der Weijden, providing a possible touchstone story. (3) a presentation by the CEO regarding the directions the business will take in the future, actively linking and interpreting the hidden subtext of the fable with practice.

Review by CEO to inform Con-Zelo its members of previous activities, reviewing fiscal information for the past year.

During the review on the past year, the CEO explains that the Dutch recruiting market still experiences the after pains of the 2008 global financial crisis, considered by many economists to be the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s (Pendery, 2009), and this is reflected within Con-Zelo its financial results. This is not surprising, since according to Graaf-Zijl et al. (2010) recruiting agencies found themselves hardest hit because of its strong dependency on labour, the first retrenchment in times of crisis. As a result of this difficult and seemingly ongoing position, the workforce of Con-Zelo was highly demoralized.

> *"Our workforce found itself in a negative spiral; the economic downturn and disappointing market foresights broke down the moral and there was no, short, sign of recovery. As a result, our employees turned into doom-thinkers that lost faith and easily gave up when things got tough, especially in their approach towards prospect companies." (CEO at Con-Zelo, 2012)*

CEO realized that he needed to break this downward spiral and inject its workforce with new sense, meaning and purpose; he did so by corporate storytelling. CEO explains his decision; "I gain my own inspiration from people with a real story... stories are an endless source of inspiration... people simply love to tell, listen and retell stories... and so do the employees of Con-Zelo." *(CEO at Con-Zelo, 2012)*. To provide a framework CEO invited Maarten van der Weijden, a well-known Dutch athlete, to share his personal story.

External fable shared by Van der Weijden, providing a possible touchstone story.

Maarten van der Weijden (31 March 1981) is a Dutch long distance and marathon swimmer born in Alkmaar, the Netherlands. Van der Weijden was known as a promising swimming talent in his youth, becoming Dutch national champion at several elements including the 400, 1500 meter freestyle and 5 km open water. However, in 2001 he was confronted with leukaemia and his career was more than likely to be over. Recovered from cancer he made his comeback on professional level in 2003. In 2004 he swam across the IJsselmeer, a lake in the

Netherlands, breaking the former record by almost 15 minutes and herewith collecting a significant amount of money for cancer research. His personal goal since he was a child, was to become World Champion, which he managed to fulfil when he won the 25 km at the 2008 World Championships in Seville. At the Beijing Olympics, on 21 August 2008, Van der Weijden astonishes enemy and friend by winning Olympic gold in 10 km open water, and marked the end of a long and tough road. Later that year, he announced the end of his professional swimming career during his acceptance speech as Dutch Sportsman of the year.

In the story he shared with Con-Zelo its 150+ members, he reflected upon this long and tough road; in which he described the last meters in his golden race on the Beijing Olympics in very detail. While reflecting his life-path, he provided a different angle on dealing with cancer and life than most others; he speaks of undergoing instead of fighting and being lucky instead of conquering. His story is therefore rather controversial and is full of determination, tactics, passion and all above, realism (Van der Weijden, 2010).

A presentation by the CEO regarding the directions the business will take in the future.

As mentioned earlier, Con-Zelo found itself within a global economic downturn and disappointing market foresights and thus no, short, sign of recovery. Reaping the fruits of the story provided by Van der Weijden, CEO was determined to beat the odds.

> *"I felt the story provided by Van der Weijden was an excellent metaphor for the position Con-Zelo found itself in at that very moment; and more importantly, that it proposed a possible outcome." (CEO at Con-Zelo, 2012)*

CEO herewith refers to the realism Van der Weijden highlights, that some aspects in life are beyond grasp; targeting on the global economic downturn and disappointing market foresights in the case of Con-Zelo, and that luck in those situations is needed. However, Van der Weijden further points out that through determination, passion and tactics (knowing your competitors) the best could be made out of a bad bargain. To inject the organization with new sense, purpose and meaning, CEO therefore championed *Determination*, *Tactics* and *Passion;* to help the organizational members adapt as well as possible to the bad situation. Overall the fable and CEO expressed the importance of membership and the development of identification with the organizational purpose.

Con-Zelo: Collective Sense-Making and Centring

April 2012, one year after the storytelling event, eleven members of Con-Zelo, excluding Volkers, were asked to indentify key themes of the story provided by Van der Weijden. The themes that emerged, as indentified by participants, are shown in figure 1, together with the values / logics rooted within the original story as well as the ones championed by the organization. The themes, as indentified by participants, are ranked from top-till-bottom in *'most recalled'* order, displaying the number of recalls by participants between brackets.

Figure 1: The emerged logics from the storytelling event in relation with narrative paradigm.

Logics rooted within the original- story	Logics championed by the organization	Themes indentified by participants
Realism	Determination	Following dreams (11)
Determenation	Tactics	Staying down to earth (10)
Tactics	Passion	Never give up (10)
Passion		Beyond grasp (10)
		Knowing your competitors (8)
		Having a clear game plan (8)
		Making choices (2)
		Courage (1)
		Cutting loose ends (1)
		External drive (1)

Source: Eleven examining interview transcripts taken with organizational members of Con-Zelo, as well as notes from Van der Weijden, M. (2010). Beter. The Netherlands: Ambo

This material gathered is analyzed, firstly by identifying and cross-checking the logics named by participants and afterwards applying the narrative paradigm (Fischer, 1987) for the containment of possible touchstone elements. This structure is similar to the 'myth-making' structure used by Boje et al (1982) and Boyce (1995), arguing that themes and logics are strongly related.

Themes

Following, Boje et al (1982) and Boyce (1995), the participants were asked to identify themes and provide feedback, related to the expressed logics. This because Berger and Luckmann (1967) noted logics must be created over a period of time with the individuals all performing or supporting these actions.

Passion; The phrase 'Following dreams', used by the participants, captures the deep passion Van der Weijden embeds for his sport. Van der Weijden had one dream; to become a world champion, and for this he did everything. He does, however, mentions that he could have only done this through his true passion for swimming (Van der Weijden, 2010). Ultimately, this was experienced as a metaphor for Con-Zelo its members work-life situation. Suggesting that organizational common goals can only be achieved, when members are truly passionate in what they do.

> *"Van der Weijden expressed the importance of passion... he managed to achieve his personal goal of becoming world champion, after recovering from cancer... He further noted that if you are not completely passionate or certain about the things you do, you should find something of which you are, because life is relative... therewith meaning that since you spend more time at work than at home, you better enjoy your work."*
> *(Employee NK, HR-Consultant, 2012)*

Determination; Phrases as 'Never give up', 'Courage' and 'External drive' appeared to best describe the determined strive of prestige essential in the story of Van der Weijden. According to the participants this theme stood symbol for the lack of faith and determination the earlier mentioned 'doom-thinkers' showed. This shaped the idea that determination will eventually pay off and encouraged the organizational members to keep the faith.

> *"If you think of what Van der Weijden went through, how many obstacles he had to take; before he reached his ultimate goal... that makes you think... During the approach of prospect clients, many obstacles will doom up as well; however, if you stay focused and determined on moments like that... it will all be worth it in the end"*
> *(Employee AB, HR-Consultant, 2012)*

Tactics; The phrases 'Knowing your competitors' and 'Having a clear game plan', were mentioned as strongly related metaphors that captured the essence of Van der Weijden its story as well as the current market position of Con-Zelo.

> *"Van der Weijden knew his limitations, and realized that he wasn't the fastest swimmer in the race. However, he also knew the limitations of his competitors and therefore outsmarted his competition on the very essential moment; resulting in the golden medal... Con-Zelo is not the biggest nor cheapest recruiting agency, we do however have one unique selling point that differs us from the competition; US, the people that work day-in-day-out for Con-Zelo, and still dare to be honest... This personal and unique strategy turned out to be very effective in our client approach..."* (Employee JT, HR-Consultant, 2012)

Realism; Participants used the phrases 'Staying down to earth' and 'Beyond grasp' to describe the essential influence of luck and being honest, mainly towards yourself. The story of Van der Weijden showed them that, indeed, some influential aspects are beyond grasp. In the story of Van der Weijden this aspect was the unfortunate catch of cancer, and in Con-Zelo its case this was symbolized by the influence of the 2008 global financial crisis.

> *"Van der Weijden was unlucky to be diagnosed with cancer, however lucky to recover. During his story he seemed so rational about life and the influence of luck... some things are indeed beyond our grasp, in his case cancer; but in our case the financial crisis and its effects on the market..."* (Employee AB, HR-Consultant, 2012)

Summarizing Analysis

As the participants provided feedback on the identified themes, as shown, a significant amount of the respondents centred more and more on the logics rooted within the story; Passion, Determination, Tactics and Realism. These logics, however, were described as themes directly related and linked to the organization its situation and values; "At Con-Zelo, we..." and "As we do as Con-Zelo...". According to Mink et al. (1979), Boje et al (1982) and Boyce (1995) this is, in fact, an indicator of collective centring sense making. The fable provided by Van der Weijden seems to successfully injected the organization with new organizational sense; something that therefore not defers from the use of myths.

Point of interest, witnessing the results, might be the logic; Realism. This logic was a key logic in the story provided, but not championed by the organization. Even though, this logic was described as the key theme by the participants and became part of the 'organizational reality' (Boyce, 1995, p. 109). This indicates that storytelling within Con-Zelo was in fact a co-creative process for creating a shared purpose, wherein even though Con-Zelo had a high

level of social control it became apparent that its members were partly responsible for the creation of the shared purpose. Boyce (1995), however, explains this by the fact that both the everyday conversation of organizational members as well as the formal communication of managers are ingredients in the construction of this shared meaning or sense within an organization; which seems as an appropriate explanation following these results.

Since these results seem not to defer from the use of myths, and it can therefore be concluded that the fable provided by Van der Weijden in fact established collective sense and centring within the organization; further attention will be given to the actual process of organizational storytelling as a vehicle for collective centring and collective sense-making.

Con-Zelo: Organizational Storytelling as a Vehicle for Collective Centring and Collective Sense-Making

Where we yet demonstrated the collective sense within Con-Zelo rather than the process of creating. We now focus on the process of organizational storytelling as a vehicle for collective centring and collective sense-making. In this we specifically look at what common set of symbols and understandings had emerged and applied to give meaning to people's interactions (Patton, 2001).

Where Con-Zelo could be described as a textbook study of how to make successful use of organizational storytelling provided by an external storyteller. We look more deeply in the organized treatment of how cultural artifacts were used to establish a sense-making process and made this case so successful.

This material, gathered by expert interviews with members responsible for the implementation of the story in the policy-making context, is analyzed and cross-checked with the interviews and experiences of employees that underwent the process. This design is strongly related to the work by Higgens & McCallister (2004) on the use of cultural artifacts to champion certain values and norms, organizational logics. We therefore chose to systematically describe many of the actions these members, responsible for the implementation, took to achieve success by using cultural artifacts as the focal point of their actions (Brenneman, 1998; Bethune, 1998; Flynn, 1997; Higgens & McCallister 2004).

How Con-Zelo used Cultural Artifacts to Successfully Implement Organizational Storytelling as a Vehicle for Collective Centring and Collective Sense-Making: A Case Example

As mentioned earlier, organizational storytelling is known as a **vehicle** for collective centring and collective sense-making, suggesting a process. The storytelling event as described at Con-Zelo, on the other hand, was one singular interaction. CEO realized that to gain the maximum positive spin-off, storytelling should indeed be handled as a process and or vehicle. He therefore used the story provided as a start sign for a symbolic race, and made use of organizational symbolism; to convey the underlying meaning and purpose, or logics of the organization, over the long run. More specifically, Con-Zelo made use of symbol-carrying aspects or cultural artifacts of organizational life, as defined within the studies on organizational culture, namely; (1) the defining values and norms; (2) myths and stories; (3) language systems and metaphors; (4) rituals, ceremonies, and symbols; (5) physical surroundings (Higgens & McCallister, 2004).

Aligning identifiable values and behavioural norms within Con-Zelo;

Starting Con-Zelo its cultural artifacts management effort with a draft of the identifiable value systems and behavioural norms, or sense, because these are what they ultimately trying to change. As mentioned earlier, Con-Zelo championed the logics; Passion, Determination and Tactics. Con-Zelo, as shown, succeeded not only in this; but created an 'organizational reality' (Boyce, 1995, p. 109), based on the championed logics as well as creating a sense of realism. According to Brown et al (2012) these established logics form the unwritten rules about what is expected and acceptable behaviour within the organization. Or in other words, they provided Con-Zelo its members with behavioural norms.

Aligning myths and stories within Con-Zelo;

Where McWhinney & Battista`s remythologizing (1988) and Boje`s myth-making (1982) concepts both solely suggested the use of myths, to construct the organization its shared values and norms. Con-Zelo used an external story, or fable, provided by former Dutch swim champion Maarten van der Weijden; to inject the organization with new sense of meaning and purpose (see; Con-Zelo: The Storytelling Event).

Aligning language systems and metaphors within Con-Zelo;

As mentioned earlier, Con-Zelo used the story provided by Van der Weijden as a start sign for its collective centring and collective sense-making process, and did so through the establishment of a symbolic race. This symbolic race was named; 'Swimming for gold', directly referring to the pursuit of Van der Weijden of becoming world champion, and provided a blueprint or map for the recovery of Con-Zelo. The races characteristic for Van der Weijden its recovery; the 2004 charity race Ijsselmeer, 2008 World Championship Seville and 2008 Olympics Beijing, were therefore used as milestones and stages within the process. All these stages took four months individually, and therefore one full year combined. Within the race typical indicators applied within the recruiting market as utilization rates; provisioning rate on arrow; new applications; visits to prospects and suspects; and margin budget pursue; were referred to as 'swim-meters' to indicate the progress made by all 50 establishments. For each race the finish was set on an overall increase of ten percent per establishment.

Race 1. Charity race IJsselmeer 2004 (January 2011 – April 2011), the race that symbolized the comeback, but more importantly, the recovery of Van der Weijden. Passion was the main theme of this stage, because Van der Weijden realized that 'every meter could be his last' and that 'this was one way he could say *thank you*, to the researchers and doctors responsible for his recovery' since the revenue went to a charity supporting cancer-research. For Con-Zelo this stage therefore also symbolized the comeback of moral; and Passion was therefore championed within the organization. The slogan 'Enjoy the ride' was communicated throughout the entire organization in various ways; further discussed within the physical surroundings. According to the participants this championing of passion succeeded very well, witnessing nine out of eleven declaring a positive boost of sense and purpose after the storytelling event.

Race 2. World Championship Seville 2008 (May 2011 – August 2011), Van der Weijden achieves his ultimate goal of becoming world champion. The road was difficult and grievous, but he never gave up and through determination he achieved. Where determination characterized this race of Van der Weijden, it also did within this stage at Con-Zelo. Con-Zelo used the slogan 'Do your very outmost', to champion this logic and establish an eager and resistant work-force.

Race 3. Olympics Beijing 2008 (September 2011 – December 2011), the icing on the cake; Van der Weijden winning gold on the Beijing Olympics. Most critics wrote him of as

even having slight a chance of getting near the podium. However, Van der Weijden surprised friend and enemy by finishing first. Van der Weijden explained his success as knowing his competitors and having a clear game plan. He knew his own strengths and the others their weakness. Con-Zelo championed the logic Tactics in this last race, through the slogan 'Believe in yourself'. This because CEO knew his competition and was convinced that Con-Zelo could outcompete them by focusing on their own strengths, quality of service through accessibility, honesty and promises.

Aligning symbols, ceremonies and rituals within Con-Zelo;

To give meaning to its member`s interactions, Con-Zelo aligned the symbolic race with a set of symbols and ceremonies. First, to further stimulate the feeling under the workforce of participating in a race, Con-Zelo launched a live ranking scoreboard that displayed the progress made by all 50 establishments in 'swim-meters'; indicating the exact scores on utilization rates; provisioning rate on arrow; new applications; visits to prospects and suspects; and margin budget pursue. This scoreboard could be consulted during every moment of the day on the organizational intranet, called Con-Zelonet. All establishments were also informed by a weekly status update through the company newsletter. Since, ceremonies are also important conveyors of values (Higgens & McCallister, 2004), celebrations of successful campaigns, were used to reward certain values, and to raise the morale of the workforce. Reward ceremonies were held for those who achieved the objectives, of ten percent per establishment, set for the singular stages or races; rewarding each with a financial bonus. The 'winner' of each stage, that gained most progress and thus most growth, was rewarded with a certificate and flowers in addition.

Aligning the physical surroundings found within Con-Zelo;

Physical surroundings can work as a constant reminder and convey important messages to those who work in an organization. Con-Zelo therefore designed posters that displayed the slogans; '*Believe in yourself*', '*Do your very outmost*' and '*Enjoy the ride*', and pictured a swimming Van der Weijden in a frame characteristic for Con-Zelo, using the company`s colours. The posters were distributed to all establishments, with the instruction to assemble it on a highly visible position. According to the respondents, this resulted in a constant reminder on the championed logics as well as on the race they participated in, and functioned as a trigger for dozens of clients to ask specific direct questions about its meaning. Further, Con-

Zelo provided its members with swimming equipment; swimming goggles, stopwatches and swim caps, as a reminder and start sign for each new stage or race.

February 2012, the Dutch recruiting market is still struggling however, recovery seems to be on its way. Con-Zelo set an all-time personal record on bases of revenue and profit, and has been voted 'best recruiting agency' of the Netherlands, an unprecedented success for an organization of its size (Q&A, 2012). Con-Zelo scored maximum in 17 of the 18 indicators, ranging from best business partner to best service provider, based on feedback of candidates, employees as well as client companies. Dedicating this success to the process as earlier described might seem as a long-shot, however, CEO does, and explains that he feels that the fable provided the organization with a common goal, faith and the guidance needed.

Study findings

The study on the effects and construction of fable usage organizational storytelling within Con-Zelo, demonstrated these findings;

1. Fables can construct and convey the organization its shared values and norms, logics, and create organizational sense; and therefore seems not to differ from the usage of myths.

2. Organizational storytelling through the usage of a fable provided by a guest speaker was a useful vehicle for collective sense-making and collective centring in the case of Con-Zelo.

3. Themes that were characteristic for the fable shared, were indicators for collective sense within the organization.

4. The fable shared by Van der Weijden was a closely related metaphor to the organization its situation, it symbolized the current and ideal situation.

5. The process for creating a shared purpose as described is co-creative, wherein despite a high level of social control it became apparent that members were partly responsible for the creation of the shared purpose.

6. The effect of fables provided by a guest speaker for creating a collective sense, could be extended and stretched over time through changes and alignment in all five types of cultural artifacts.

Discussion

Earlier in this study we envisioned that there indeed occurred a situation of collective sense-making and centring within Con-Zelo. Con-Zelo showed how a fable, or story, provided by an external storyteller can construct and convey the organization its shared values and norms, in this case; passion, determination, tactics and realism. Conflicting the founding perceptions within organizational storytelling research of McWhinney & Battista`s (1988) as wel as Boje et al. (1982), that only myths can be used as a vehicle for collective centring and collective sense-making.

As the Con-Zelo case shows that collective sense-making and centring could be achieved with the use of external fables based on one singular interaction, through changes and alignment in all five types of cultural artifacts. It reveals that storytelling is indeed a process or vehicle for collective sense-making and centring. This process, however, seems strongly related to the theories of remythologizing and myth-making, as proposed by McWhinney & Battista`s (1988) and Boje et al. (1982). Though, since collective sense-making and centring through remythologizing and myth-making are both based on the use of myths, instead of external fables, the main difference seems to be the one of providing context. With this we mean that myths are addressing the founding ideals of the organization, themes are yet interpreted and linked to specific meaning and behaviour by its members; they are already placed within a certain context, the 'organizational reality' (Boyce, 1995, p. 109) and therefore make sense already; whereas fables are completely novel within the organizational context and thus need to be linked and or placed within a certain context. Furthermore, where Mitroff & Kilmann (1975) argued that an 'epic myth' gives meaning to organizational members by summing back to the unique quality of an organization; by firstly sharing stories about an ideal organization, and then, sharing stories about the actual organization. We saw that the fable shared by Van der Weijden, functioned as a perfect metaphor for both the ideal organization as well as the actual organization. It can therefore be said that the line between fable and myth, within the situation of Con-Zelo, became thinner and thinner whilst the organization provided more and more context.

Where we have shown how the categorized themes within the fable provided by Van der Weijden are indicators of, and reflect upon, the organizational reality; as Boyce (1995) revealed in relation with the organizational myth as well. And since both the everyday conversation of organizational members as well as the formal communication of managers are

ingredients in the construction of this context, shared meaning or sense. The Con-Zelo case exposed that guidance and constancy through changes and alignment in all five types of cultural artifacts are therefore essential within the policy-making process of collective centring and sense-making through external storytelling; to prevent members for misinterpretation of themes, and therewith possible failure.

A Blueprint; fable-stretching

Where Con-Zelo could be described as a textbook study on how to make successful use of external organizational storytelling, it provides a blueprint that could help other organizations make use of this tool. As did McWhinney & Battista`s (1988) and Boje et al. (1982) described their theories of remythologizing and myth-making in very detail, to provide guidance in the organizational use of myths. So do we describe and explain the steps that characterized the process Con-Zelo undertook to make a case for collective sense-making and centring with the use of an external fable based on one singular interaction. We name this process ***fable-stretching***; implying that values or logics, hidden within the subtext of a fable, should be stretched over time to become part of the organizational reality, since collective sense-making and centring is known as a process. Stages within the fable-stretching process are rather similar to the ones described within the theories of remythologizing and myth-making, however, the ones described here are typical for the usage of fables instead of myths.

Stage 1. *Identify the underlying drives or values needed within the organization;* This stage starts with an in depth analysis of the current organizational sense. When this underlying sense is indentified, a draft could be made of drives or values needed within the organization. As shown in the Con-Zelo case, CEO had a clear strategic approach that needed passion, determination and tactical thinking by its organizational members to succeed.

Stage 2. *Finding the right fable, and telling it in the right way;* This stage is typical for the usage of fables provided by guest-speakers. While the range of different fables and guest speakers becomes more and more extensive, it is important to ascertain one that fits the organizational situation and possesses the underlying drives or values needed within the organization. Con-Zelo made use of the story provided by Van der Weijden, one that addressed four specific logics or logics; of which three identified by CEO as needed drives.

Stage 3. *Bringing to surface the fable;* In this stage the fable is told, accentuating the themes that characterize the underlying drives or values needed within the organization. Van

der Weijden described, on request of CEO, his Olympic golden race in very detail. This because this role symbolized tactical insight, which CEO considered as the key asset for future growth.

Stage 4. *Reviving the fable;* Similar as described within the remythologizing process, by McWhinney & Battista`s (1988), this stage goes back in history to regain the wholeness of the fable that underlies the organization. Or in other words; it links, and summons back, the original fable with the organizational situation; creating context. CEO referred to situations Van der Weijden faced, as a metaphor for situations the organization found itself in.

Stage 5. *Recommitment to the revitalized fable;* In this stage the story or fable is retold with new understanding and in various new ways; to sum back the story or fable to the organization its consciousness. Con-Zelo used organizational symbolism, changes and alignment in all five types of cultural artifacts, to metaphorically and systematically sum back the championed logics towards its employees.

The five stages of fable-stretching parallel the remythologizing and myth-making cycles, to revitalize organizational sense. As said, these stages are based on a successful attempt of Con-Zelo to use a fable as vehicle for collective sense-making and centring.

Applicability, Contribution and Future Research

While the study had been designed to facilitate direct observation of collective sense-making, it demonstrated briefly the collective sense, and largely the process of constructing the shared meaning. Within interviews, stories that were told, indicated collective-sense making; that was similar as within the usage of myths. Therefore brief attention was given to demonstrate this phenomenon rather than to the process how this occurred. However, since our main intention was to demonstrate the construction of this meaning, thus the common set of symbols and understandings that emerged and had been applied, another study might be needed to demonstrate the emerge of collective sense on bases of fable usage.

Furthermore, where our study implied that content or structure of the fable; i.e. content that embodies the current and ideal organization, as aligned within an 'epic myth' (Mitroff & Kilmann, 1975), might be from critical essence. Further research could therefore focus on these factors and characteristics of fables that if, and if so, how influence the process.

The organization Con-Zelo is similar to other private for-profit organizations wherein members share meaning, ideas and possess a high level of autonomy in accomplishing organizational goals. Therefore the findings and the fable-stretching process as described within this research, are thought to be applicable towards similar organizations. Though, a strong believe prevails the authors, that the fable-stretching process will also be applicable, and possibly even more successful, in more closed organizations wherein organizational members possess less autonomy and policy makers with a higher level of social control. In this situation, as described, there will be no or less case of co-creation, and therefore less to none room for misinterpretation. However, more studies are essential to demonstrate and ascertain these thoughts.

The contribution this study made to the literature of organizational symbolism and organizational culture is the brief demonstration of how the usage of a fable established collective sense and centring within an organization, something that was thought to be solely possible through usage of myths. Furthermore, it carefully examined and in very detail described the process of fable usage as a vehicle for collective sense-making and centring; resulting in the theory of fable-stretching.

There is much to learn about the usage of fables or stories provided by quest-speakers, as a vehicle for collective sense-making and centring, in the interest of creating shared purpose. Because of the timely and growing concerns plus dependency, this study has taken a step in that direction by showing that external storytellers and the personal fables they carry are in fact a BLESSING.

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Weick, K. (1976). Educational organizations as loosely coupled systems. *Administrative Science Quarterly* , 1-19.

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Methodology

Introduction

This methodology will give an explanation of why and how we have decided to conduct their empirical study. The choice of method has clearly depended on the problem under study and its circumstances (Flyvberg, 2006). They first give a description of the research approach and methods, explaining why it suits our objectives. The methodology then continues to discuss sampling, data collection and present further argumentation of how the data analysis was performed and finalizing the methodology where the critique of method of this particular thesis is discussed.

Research approach and methods

The empirical study was done to answer our main research question; "*How executives can make effective use of fables provided by external guest speakers to create a situation of collective sense-making and centring*" This question is preferably answered by taking a qualitative study approach, which best answers "how?" and "why?" research questions that are used in an exploratory purpose (Marshall, 1996; Yin, 2003). More specific, this study can be regarded as phenomenological and symbolic, which is subjected to the qualitative approach, based on thoughts that groups and or organizations that interact will develop their own culture (Patton, 2001). In phenomenology, one asks, 'What is the meaning, structure, and essence of this phenomenon for this person or group of people?' (Patton, p.104). Phenomenology is considered to be both a philosophy and a qualitative research approach (Kerry & Armour, 2000; Walton & Madjar, 1999). Phenomenology attempts to explain the meaning of human experience (Husserl, 1967) and describe the human world (Koch, 1999) and to find the essence, or the root causes of the phenomenon (Patton, 2001). The study reported here involved a story told in a structured storytelling event after which the study participants reflected together on the story told and heard.

While Corbin and Strauss (2008, p. 12) argue that "qualitative research allows researchers to get at the inner experience of participants, to determine how meanings are formed through and in culture, and to discover rather than test variables", Merriam (1998) contributes that qualitative research aims to understand the meaning people have constructed and how they experience their world. Since the purpose is to study the influence of gaining commitment

through corporate storytelling by external guest speakers, with commitment and embodiment as elements which are complicated to quantify, the researchers believe that the qualitative method is the best applicable to this research. This is supported by Landahl & Skärvad (in Tekin, 2004), who say that it is most suitable in researches where it is hard to quantify data, such as attitudes and value. Through extended research and information gathering, combined with the insights of our respondents, the researchers wish to get a deeper insight in the influence of the essential elements of corporate storytelling by guest speakers and how this reflects the outcomes on the employees.

In order to conduct a thorough research, data has to be collected, analyzed and presented. According to Christensen (Tekin, 2004) there are two different types of data, *secondary* and *primary*. The difference between them depends on when and how the data is collected. This research consists of both primary and secondary data.

Secondary data is defined as data that has been gathered beforehand by other people or researchers and has been used for other purposes (Tekin, 2004). Examples of these can be gathered from journals, books and case studies (Christensen, 2001). According to Christensen et al (2001) secondary data is most relevant in the beginning of the research process. The secondary data provides the researchers a basic knowledge and understanding of the subject.

For the secondary data collection we started with the online publication *Leadership: Top Ten Journal Articles on Storytelling,* by search engine BioMedLib™ in collaboration with researcher on storytelling S. Denning and published by well-known business publisher Forbes. With the most important journal articles present, we investigated the usage and direct link with the research purpose and thereby we could identify the applicability of these articles. Due to the references in the articles stated above, we were able to conduct a further research and extension of secondary data. During the extended research the researchers identified the studies by Boyce (1995), Boje (1991; 1995) and McWhinney & Battista (1988) as key studies and most related to this research. These were used as base for further conduction of research.

Primary data is according to Christensen et al. (2001) most often collected through observing or interviewing individuals or groups of individuals. The primary data contributes and adds new practical insights to the collected secondary data. While the observation method focuses on the observation, based on the interests of the researcher, the inquiring method focuses on

the interrogation of the respondent. According to Holme & Solvang (Tekin, 2004) the inquiring method can be derived into 4 different ways for the collection of data: Internet interviews, face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews and questionnaires. For the collection of primary data telephone, Skype™ and face-to-face interviews were held as well as field notes or observational summaries, based on a ten months period (November 2010 - August 2011) during which Volkers was actively involved in the organization`s storytelling process, which were subsequently recalled.

For this research Con-Zelo is used as a case study. A case study is a study wherein an entity is studied as a single unit and has clear boundaries (Holloway, 1997). More clarified, a case study is an investigation of a single organization, event, process or program (Merriam, 1988). The boundaries of the investigation are clarified by the questions asked, the used data sources and the personal setting involved (Holloway, 1997). The advantage of a case study is that the researchers generally use a number of sources in their data collection, such as observation, documents and interviews, to illuminate the phenomenon from all sides (Holloway, 1997). This will give a better insight to the application and results of the subject researched. As earlier mentioned, Con-Zelo has used corporate storytelling in the last years to motivate and spark their employees with different stories which led to different results. This makes it interesting to investigate how corporate storytelling by external guest-speakers is used and its impact. However the advantages give the researchers an exclusive insight, the researchers have to be carefull in making assertions about generalisability on the basis of a singular case (Holloway, 1997).

Interview Sampling

Marshall (1996, p. 523) states that 'An appropriate sample size for a qualitative study is one that adequately answers the research question', a number that in practice usually becomes obvious as the study progresses. This requires a flexible research design with an; '… interactive, cyclical approach to sampling, data collection, analysis and interpretation'.

Con-Zelo is a private, for-profit recruiting agency, spread nationwide in the Netherlands with 150+ members working in a structurally flat organization. There is one chief executive officer (CEO), seven regional managers at mid-manager level, 50 establishment managers, and circa 100 human resource (HR) -consultants. The establishment managers as well as the HR-

consultants are located around the Netherlands. The headquarters' operation also has several other staff including upper-level staff and other secretaries, such as a marketing and accounting division. However, these persons were not involved in this study.

The sampling was made by using both preliminary theory as well as judgement of the researchers who developed the following basic steps for selection of case studies:

• Firstly, the researchers interviewed the CEO of Con-Zelo, to establish a clear idea of the policy making context; what the intentions and purpose were, as well as how the fable was implemented (more specifically, through what common set of symbols they conveyed the championed values).

• Secondly, the researchers interviewed eleven other employees within Con-Zelo, throughout the whole organization to retrieve information from the recipients of the story on how the event was received and what the main values and or themes they remembered or thought of when the recalled the story.

After this data was retrieved, we crosschecked if the intended policymaking purpose accorded the outcomes on how it was perceived by the organizational members. Furthermore, we identified through symbolic what common set of symbols were used to convey the championed values. We felt confident that twelve examining interviews throughout the organization were the appropriate sample size, since there appeared to be consensus among members and the outcomes aligned with previous studies.

Data Collection

We have accumulated our primary data from interviews; a specialized form of communication conducted for a specific task related purpose (Downs et al 1980). The interviews took the form, which can be labelled as *semi-structured (Graziano & Raulin, 2004).* This is a combination of the *full-structured interview,* where everything in the interview is set, and the *unstructured interview,* where nothing within the interview is set. The semi-structured interview is characterized by a so-called interview guideline that follows a specific structure, but gives the interviewer the possibility to adapt and modify the questions based on what seems most appropriate to the interview (Graziano & Raulin, 2004). This gives the interviewer flexibility to react and pursue certain things he/she finds worth revealing, gives room for additional questions for further discovery and additional judgment of respondent's

opinions, values and attitudes (Lantz, in Tekin, 2004). This is why we believe the semi-structured interview was the most applicable for our paper, since we were reliant on comprehensive answers from the respondents and these answers are not single-sided within this matter. (Holliday, 2007) We are aware of the fact that a fully-structured interview is easier and better applicable for comparison with other interviews, but thereby we would take a risk of not acquiring the comprehensive data we need for analyzing or misinterpreting the data by the restricted questions. The unstructured interview was not considered at all.

The researchers interviewed the following persons:

Interview date	Name	Position	Company
13th April 2012	CEO	CEO	Con-Zelo
20th April 2012 / 15th June 2012	Employee, JM.	Establishment manager	Con-Zelo
26th April 2012	Employee, NK.	HR-consultant	Con-Zelo
26th April 2012 / 3rd August 2012	Employee, AB.	HR-consultant	Con-Zelo
26th April 2012	Employee, SH.	HR-consultant	Con-Zelo
27th April 2012	Employee, JvV.	HR-consultant	Con-Zelo
27th April 2012	Employee, LM.	Establishment manager	Con-Zelo
27th April 2012	Employee, JvB.	HR consultant	Con-Zelo
27th April 2012	Employee, AW.	HR consultant	Con-Zelo
26th April 2012 / 20th June 2012	Employee, JT.	HR consultant	Con-Zelo
20th June 2012	Employee, AG.	Establishment manager	Con-Zelo
20th June 2012	Employee, SK.	HR consultant	Con-Zelo

Because all the respondents are located in the Netherlands, the researchers carried out their seven interviews by Skype™ / telephone and only five face-to-face; each interview took around 30 minutes. Three interviews were done face-to-face after a Skype™ / telephone interview had already taken. This was done because it was felt that the previous conceived information was lacking, or that more information could be conceived. Throughout the interviews we used interview questions prepared in advance, but on all occasions there were

complementary questions asked as the interviews carried on. This complemented the view and gave additional information to the answers of the prepared questions. Occasionally, we called the interviewee back with additional questions to retrieve more information or conformation and verification of the proclaimed information.

Analysis

Analysing evidence is the least developed and most difficult aspect of performing case studies (Yin 2003). Miles and Huberman (1994) defined qualitative analysis as a process of three activities: data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification, activities that were all successfully introduced and used interchangeably in our analysis. The researchers realize that their anticipatory data reduction started already when they decided upon conceptual framework, research questions, cases etc. This on-going process is a part of the analysis while summarizing the primairy and secondairy data, trying not to strip the data from the context in which it occurred (Miles & Huberman 1994). The qualitative data was later summarized into structured text and a table for good data display; another form of analytic activity that incorporates data reduction.

The final analysis activity included verification of data and conclusion drawing where an ongoing discussion between the investigators served as a tool to minimize biases. Miles and Huberman (1994) describe how researchers from the start of data collection begin to decide what things mean, conclusions that should be held lightly, maintaining openness and scepticism. Conclusions may be verified when the analyst proceeds with writing, reviewing, discussions with colleagues, data interpretation etc. "The meanings emerging from the data have to be tested for their plausibility, their sturdiness, their "confirmability" - that is, their validity." (Miles & Huberman 1994, p.11).

The final verification and conclusion was made after all data had been collected, this to make sure that everything was analysed with a similar mindset and to avoid any premature conclusions. The researchers then used the data display of the case story and compared them with the theoretical findings. They believe that all activities of the analyzing process benefited from the fact of multiple researchers to get a better insight and avoid bias. Huberman and Miles (2002, p. 14) state that "the complementary insights from different team members can add to the richness of the data and their different perspectives increase the likelihood of

capitalizing on novel insights from the findings. Further, the multiple observations can enhance the confidence in the findings since convergent perceptions add to the empirical grounding of the hypothesis, while conflicting perceptions keep it from premature closure".

Critique of method

According to Flick (2006) the qualitative research method is more flexible in gives a wider possibilities for modifying, but at the same time this makes it more difficult to compare the gathered information from the respondents. Due to the semi-structured interviews to gather the required data, where spontaneous questions can be used to deepen out specific topics, every interview conducted is unique and therefore harder to compare with the other interviews.

Besides this there is also the criticism to in what extend an interview can be regarded as completely objective (Flick, 2006). In contrast with a quantitative research, qualitative research through interview is more regarding the interpretation of the answers of the respondent. Herein lie the strength, but also the weakness of this type of interview. Especially semi-structured interview can't be regarded as completely objective. According to Holloway (1997) qualitative research is impossible to be regarded as objective. Researchers try to achieve objectivity by distancing themselves from respondents to gain an unbiased perspective (Holloway, 1997).

The study could have been larger in order to gain a better external validity of the findings. However we choose to focus on a single case with the aim towards adding new insights to the usage of corporate storytelling trough guest speakers. Hence, the findings from this case are therefore considered to be applicable on other firms with a similar aim. The contribution is therefore targeted towards those organizations and not to any other organization.

References used for Methodology

Boje, D. (1995). Stories of the Storytelling Organization: A Postmodern Analysis of Disney as "Tamara-Land". *The Academy of Management Journal,* 997-1035.

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Downs, C., Smeyak, G., & Martin, E. (1980). *Professional interviewing.* New York: Harper & Row.

Flick, U. (2006). *An introduction to Qualitative Research. .* London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Flyvberg, B. (2006). Five Misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative Inquiry* .

Graziano, A., & Raulin, M. (2004). *Research Methods: A process of Inquiry.* Boston: Pearson Education Group Inc.

Holliday, A. (2007). *Doing and Writing Qualitative Research.* London: Sage Publications.

Holloway, I. (1997). *Basic concepts for Qualitive Research.* Oxford: Blackwell Science Ltd.

Huberman, A., & Miles, M. (2002). *The Qualitative Research companion.* Thoasand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Husserl, E. (1967). In W. Gibson, *Ideas: General introduction to pure phenomenology.* London: George Allen & Unwin.

Kerry, D., & Armour, K. (2000). Sport sciences and the promise of phenomenology: Philosophy, method, and insight. *Quest* , 1-17.

Koch, T. (1999). An interpretive research process: revisiting phenomenological and hermeneutical approaches. *Nurse researcher* , 20-34.

Marshall, M. (1996). Sampling for Qualitative research. *Oxford University Press* .

McWhinney, W., & Battista, J. (1988). How remythologizing can revitalize organizations. *Organizational Dynamics* , 46-58.

Merriam, S. (1988). *Case Study Research in Education.* San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Patton, M. (2001). Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods. *Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications* .

Tekin, R. (2004). *The Inluence of Reward Systems on Employee Line of Sight - A research about the increasing efforts to further align employees with the organization.* Högskolan i Jönköping, Internationella Handelshögskolan. Jönköping: Jönköping University Library.

Walton, J., & Madjar, I. (1999). Phenomenology and Nursing. In I. Madjar, J. Walton, & ed., *Nursing and the experience of Illness: Phenomenology in Practice* New York: Routledge. 1-16

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Additional list of references

This literature list includes additional readings that have been considered for, but not all included in, our theoretical framework.

There is an wide variety of publications within different fields of study on organizational storytelling. As mentioned within our article, the two main perspectives could be identified as; organizational symbolism and social constructivism. However, since the line between these perspectives are rather vague, and storytelling is no exact science, we listed studies from five different perspectives within this list of additional reading, in order to gain full understanding of the subject.

As appears from the additional references, the study on organizational storytelling is no 'new topic'. In contrary, main or founding studies have been done in the 80's and 90's. However, since our study focused on the use of guest-speakers, a timely and unexplored concern, we felt confident our study would be complementary to these founding studies.

Research on the social construction of reality

The social constructivist perspective is one perspectives informing this additional reading.

Research that has been done from the **social constructivist perspective** *on ways of understanding reality;*

- Berger, H. S., & Luckmann, T. (1967). *The social construction of reality.* New York: Anchor.
- Boyce, M. (1995). Collective Centring and Collective Sense-Making in the Stories and Storytelling of One Organization. *Organization Studies*, 107-137.
- Brown, M. H. (1982). *That reminds me of a story: Speech action on organizational socialization.* University of Texas at Austin: Unpublished doctoral dissertation.
- Fischer, W. (1987). *Human communication as narration: toward a philosophy of reason, value and action.* Columbia, SC:: University of South Carolina Press.
- LeShan, L. (1976). *Alternative realities.* New York: Ballantine.
- Louis, M. (1983). Organizations as culture bearing milieux. In E. Pondy, *Organizationa symbolism.* Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

- Louis, M. (1980). Surprise and sense-making: What newcomers experience when entering unfamiliar organizational settings. *Administrative Science Quarterly* , 225-251.

- McWhinney, W., & Battista, J. (1988). How remythologizing can revitalize organizations. *Organizational Dynamics* , 46-58.

- Wilkins, A. (1984). The creation of company cultures: The roles of stories and human resource systems. *Human Resource Management* , 41-60.

*As explained, social constructivism is seen as a source for **premodern, modern and postmodern studies**. Therefore a sum of the main research that has been done on these perspectives.*

- Balsamo, A. (1987). Un-wrapping the postmodern: A feminist glance. *Journal of Communication Inquiry,* 64-72.

- Best, S., & Kellner, D. (1991). *Postmodern theory: Critical interrogations.* New York: Guil-ford Press.

- Burrell, G. (1988). Modernism, postmodernism and organizational analysis 2: The contribution of Michel Foucault. *Organization Studies*, 221-235.

- Clegg, S. (1990). *Modern organizations: Organization studies in the postmodern world.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

- Cooper, R., & Burrell, G. (1988). Modernism, postmodernism, and organizational analysis: An introduction. *Organization Studies*, 91-112.

- Denzin, N. K. (1986). Postmodern social theory. *Sociological Theory*: 194-204.

- Hawes, L. C. (1992). Postmodernism and power/control. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 39-47.

- Parker, M. (1992). Postmodern organizations or postmodern organization theory? *Organization Studies*, 1-17.

- Rosenau, P. (1992). *Post-modernism and the social sciences: Insights, inroads, and intrusions.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Research within the field of Organizational Symbolism

The organizational symbolism perspective involves the construction of meaning in organizations and attaching it to form; it has therefore been cast as an aspect of the organizational culture literature.

- Barney, J. B. (1986). Organizational Culture: Can it be a source of sustained competitive advantage? *The Academy of Management Review*, 656-665.

- Berg, P. (1985). *Organizational change: As a symbolic transformation process.* In P. J. Frost, L. F. Moore, M. R. Louis, C. C. Lundberg, & J. Martin (Eds.), Organizational culture: 281-299. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

- Blumer, H. (1962). *Society as Symbolic Interaction*, in Arnold M. Rose: Human Behavior and Social Process: An Interactionist Approach. Houghton-Mifflin (1969).

- Blumer, Herbert (1969). *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Burrell, G., & Morgan, G. (1979). *Sociological paradigms and organizational analysis.* London: Heinemann.

- Dandridge, T., Mitroff, I., & Joyce, W. F. (1980). Organizational symbolism: A topic to expand organizational analysis. *Academy of Management Review*, 77-82.

- Deal, T. E., & Kennedy, A. A. (1982). *Corporate cultures: The rites and rituals of corporate life.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

- El-Namaki, M. S. S. (1992). Creating a Corporate Vision. *Long Range Planning*, 25-29.

- Gagliardi, P. (1992). *Symbols and Artifacts: Views of the Corporate Landscape.* Hawthorne, NY: Aldint de Gruyter Inc.

- Harris, T. E. & M. D. Nelson (2008). *Applied organizational communication.* Lawrence Erlbaum Associates: New York: NY.

- Higgins, J., & McAllaster, C. (2002). Want Innovation? Then Use Cultural Artifacts that Support It. *Organizational Dynamics* , 74-84.

- Higgins, J., & McAllaster, C. (2004). If You Want Strategic Change, Don't Forget to Change Your Cultural Artifacts. *Journal of Change Management* , 63-73.

- Johnson, G. (1992) Managing strategic change; strategy, culture and action, *Long Range Planning*, 28–36.

- Lange, C. (1991) Ritual in business: building a corporate culture through symbolic management. *Industrial Management*, 21–23.

- Lissack, M., & Roos, J. (2001). Be Coherent, Not Visionary. *Long Range Planning* , 53-70.

- Mahler, J. (1988). The quest for organizational meaning: Identifying and interpreting the symbolism in organizational stories. *Administration & Society*, 344-368.

- Shrivastava, P. (1985) Integrating strategy formulation with organizational culture, *Journal of Business Strategy*, 103–111.

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- Quigley, J. (1994). Vision: How Leaders Develop It, Share It, and Sustain It. *Business Horizon* , 37-41.

- Schein, E. (1984). Coming to a New Awareness of Organizational Culture. *MIT Sloan Management Review , 25* (2), 2-15.

- Siehl, C., & Martin, J. (1990). Organizational Culture, A key to financial performance? In B. Scheider, *Organizational Climate and Culture* (pp. 241-281). New York: Jossey-Bass.

- Trice, H. M., & Beyer, J. M. (1984). Studying organizational cultures through rites and ceremonies. *Academy of Management Review*, 653-669.

- Wilkins, A. (1984). The creation of company cultures: The roles of stories and human resource systems. *Human Resource Management*, 41-60.

Research on storytelling as a process

Since there is a thin line between the two approaches previously discussed, there is a significant contribution on storytelling research that describes storytelling as a process and finds itself within both perspectives.

*Some research has described storytelling as a **vehicle for collective centring and collective sense-making**. Here a sum of the main research that has been done from this perspective.*

- Boje, D. (1995). Stories of the Storytelling Organization: A Postmodern Analysis of Disney as "Tamara-Land". *The Academy of Management Journal*, 997-1035.

- Boje, D. (1991). The Storytelling Organization: A Study of Story Performance in an Office-Supply Firm. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 106-126.

- Boje, D. (1991). Consulting and change in the storytelling organization. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 7-17.

- Boje, D., Fedor, D. B., & Rowland, K. M. (1982). Myth making: A qualitative step in OD interventions. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 17-28.

- Boje, D., & Dennehy, R. (1993). *Postmodern management: America's revolution against exploitation.* Dubuque, IA: Kendall-Hunt Press.

- Boje, D. (2001), *Narrative Methods for Organizational and Communication Research*, Sage; London.
- Boje, D. (2005), *From Wilda to Disney: living stories in family and organization research*, in Clandinin, J. (Ed.), Handbook of Narrative Inquiry, Sage, London.
- Boje, D (2008), *Storytelling Organizations*, Sage, London.
- Boyce, M. (1995). Collective Centring and Collective Sense-Making in the Stories and Storytelling of One Organization. *Organization Studies*, 107-137.
- Brown, T.L. (2003), *Making Truth: Metaphor in Science*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, IL.
- Buckler, S., & Zien, K. (1996). From Experience, The Spirituality of Innovation: Learning from Stories. *The Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 391-405.
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- Louis, M. (1980). Surprise and sense-making: What newcomers experience when entering unfamiliar organizational settings. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 225-251.
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- Snowden, D. (2000). The art and science of Story or 'Are you sitting uncomfortably?' : Part 1: Gathering and harvesting the raw material. *Business Information Review* , 147-156.
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Research in Communication Theories

Another approach to the study of story resides within the field of communication theory, exploring the usage of language through either written text or speech.

*Research that described the use of story as a managerial tool, a key **leadership competency** about knowing how to deliver a story effectively combined with knowing the right story to tell.*

- Boje, D. M. (2001). *Narrative Methods for Organizational and Communication Research.* London: Sage.

- Brown, J.S., Denning, S., Groh, K., Prusak, L. (2004). *Storytelling in Organizations: Why Storytelling Is Transforming 21st Century Organizations and Management.* Boston: Butterworth Heinemann.

- Czarniawska, B. (1997). *Narrating the Organization: Dramas of Institutional Identity.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Denning, S. (2006). Effective storytelling; strategic business narrative techniques. *Executive excellence. Vol 34* , 42-48.

- Denning, S. (2004). Telling Tales. *Harvard Business Review* , 122-129.

- Denning, S. (2005). *The Leader's Guide to Storytelling: Mastering the Art & Discipline of Business Narrative,* Jossey–Bass, San Francisco.

- Eisenberg, M. (1984) Ambiguity as strategy in organizational communication. *Communication Monographs*, 51: 227–242.

- Scholes, E. (1997). *Handbook of International Communication.* Aldershot: Gower.

- Simmons, A. (2002) *The Story Factor*, Basic Books, New York.

- Tichy, N. & Cardwell, N. (2002). *The Cycle of Leadership: How Great Leaders Teach Their Companies to Win.* New York: HarperBusiness.

*Research that described the use of story as a powerful managerial tool, a key **leadership competency** describing the key elements of the 'perfect' story; heightens direction, vision and strategy; follows a life-cycle; defining characters; sequencing plot; and scripting actions .*

- Beder, S. (2002). Environmentalists help manage corporate reputation: changing perceptions not behaviour. *Ecopolitics,* 1 (4), 60-72.

- Brown, A. (1995). *Organizational Culture*. London: Pitman.

- Denning, S. (2006). Effective storytelling; strategic business narrative techniques. *Executive excellence. Vol 34* , 42-48.

- Dowling, G.R. (2006). Communicating corporate reputation through stories. *California Management Review*, 49 (1), 82–100.

*Research that described the **benefits of story usage** within the field of communication theory, showed stories can foster employee engagement; internal communication; good employer practice; and employer engagement.*

- Barker, R.T., & Gower, K. (2010). Strategic application of storytelling in organizations. *Journal of Business Communication*, 47 (3), 295-312.

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Critical perspective

As final perspective we would like to list some studies done, informing the **critical perspective** *and highlighting* **limitations** *on storytelling.*

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