

Towards a Hermeneutics of Narrative Identity: A Ricoeurian Framework for Exploring Narratives (and Narrators) of Strategy

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With notable exceptions, the organization studies literature has tended to exclude a consideration of time from considerations of narrative identity. Building on the work of Ricoeur, and starting from the position that narrative identity is dynamic and rests on a temporal structure, it is suggested that narrative identity emerges from the poetic composition of one or many narrative texts. Drawing upon Ricoeur's conception of narrative identity, an analytic framework is developed and encompasses a dialectic where narrative is described as the path of character, and character as the path of narrative. Narrative identity, in conclusion, is a reflexive consideration of a character's ethical intentions: how a character aims to live a good life, with and for others, in just institutions. The paper suggests that there is value in developing a hermeneutics of narrative identity principally because the notion of narrative identity helps to clarify the relationship between character, plot, and ethics. In addition, the framework has value because it can be applied in the modest space of an organizational setting and to a collective or a community as well as to an individual. The limits of the framework are briefly explored and in closing the paper suggests ways of addressing the key questions that emerge from the study.

Keywords: Narrative, Discourse, Identity, Strategy, Ethics

With notable exceptions, the organization studies literature has tended to exclude a consideration of time from considerations of narrative identity. This paper takes a contrary view, building on the work of Ricoeur: that narrative identity is dynamic and rests on a temporal structure that arises from the poetic composition of a narrative text. While Ricoeur's work is broadly philosophical in orientation, if we bring it into dialogue with the traditions of organization studies, it suggests a valuable approach to the narrative interpretation of lived experience and specifically to the dynamic nature of narrative interpretation.

To explore this dynamism in narratives of organizing, the paper introduces an analytical framework developed from Ricoeur's conception of narrative identity in *Time and Narrative* (I: 1983, II: 1985 and III: 1988) and the related study, *Oneself as another* (1992). Such a framework, as a sketch for a hermeneutics of narrative identity, clearly has value. For example, according to Mischler (1986, p. 82), one of the central questions raised by narrative theory is how to account, in both theory and analysis, for the relationship between the events of lived experience and the expression of those events in a narrative. Secondly, there are studies influenced by postmodernist thinking that appear to make a radical distinction between narrative and lived experience (Gergen & Thatchenkery, 1996). Linde (1993), for example, argues that the actual facts of a person's life are irrelevant to her study. "All we can ever work with is texts of one sort or another" (p. 14). This paper suggests that one way of dealing with issues such as these, rooted in the linguistically mediated nature of the reality of lived experience, is to draw on the philosophical hermeneutics of Ricoeur and his work on time, narratives, and narrators.

The key phenomenological moment in narratives occurs, for Ricoeur, where narrators challenge their sense of self and actively explore the actions and behaviors of themselves and

those others that challenge their sense of self. Ricoeur has described this by reflecting initially on the relationship of time and narrative (1983), in the interplay of references among the horizon of expectations (the narrator's future), the space of experience (the narrator's past) and the untimely upheavals and initiatives of the narrator's present. Time in effect exists, says Ricoeur, only in the narratives of humans acting or suffering in this temporally grounded present. It is this interweaving refiguring or construction of time, therefore, that an analytical framework to explore narrative identity must attempt to capture.

The framework described here, therefore, encompasses a dialectic where narrative is described as the path of character, and character as the path of narrative. Narrative identity, in conclusion, is a reflexive consideration of a character's ethical intentions: how a character aims to live a good life, with and for others, in just institutions. It is here that there is value in developing a hermeneutics of narrative identity, accounting for temporal dynamics in the narratives of organizational actors. In addition, a hermeneutic framework of this kind could also be applied to a collective or a community as well as to an individual.

After positioning this framework in the context of the literature associated with narratives in organization studies, the paper proposes a systematic three-stage framework for narrative identity, based on Ricoeur's writings in *Oneself As Another* (1992). Stage one considers the dialectic of selfhood and sameness. It considers how the interconnectedness of events constituted by emplotment in the narrative brings into opposition elements of the self that are "permanent in time", or stable, with elements that are diverse, variable, discontinuous, or unstable. This analysis begins to develop what Ricoeur calls a dialectic of character that is internal to the character, where the narrative appears as the path of the character and the character appears as the path of the narrative. Part of this character analysis also involves an analysis of what Ricoeur calls "role," in which a character passes through the stages of (i) possibility, (ii) action or inaction, and (iii) completion or incompleteness.

In stage two, clarity is sought on how narrative theory reveals a connection between plot and character and how this extends the field of practice into the ethical sphere. Ricoeur defines the iterative cycling of a character's life plans between more or less distant ideals that are specified through the praxis of narrative.

In the third stage, the narrative component of self-understanding derived from analyzing character, plot, and the relation between them is contrasted with the ethical drivers that motivate characters. This is because the characterization of selfhood is not without fundamental ambiguities and conflicts on the ethical plane. Significantly it is only the notion of narrative identity that helps to clarify the relationship between character, plot, and ethics. So the final analysis explores the narrative conflicts contrasting obligation, duty, and personal conviction. In this analysis, Ricoeur's unashamedly humanistic conclusion is that narrative is the laboratory of ethical and moral judgment. Here, telling a story is what Ricoeur (1992) describes as "deploying an imaginary space for thought experiments in which ethical and moral judgment operates in a hypothetical mode" (p. 170).

So in placing Ricoeur's conception of narrative identity at the crossroads between a praxis of action and a praxis of ethics, narrative serves as a natural transition between description and prescription. The notion of narrative identity—from a narrative as well as a psychological perspective (Singer, 2004)—becomes a guideline for extending our understanding of the practical sphere beyond the simple actions of characters in a story. The actions refigured or

constructed in narratives are complex and rich in explorations of an ethical nature. It is this richness and complexity that this multilayered reflexive framework strives to tap.

Before sketching out the hermeneutic framework in detail, however, this paper sets out to locate the Ricoeurian framework in the context of key contributions in the organizational studies literature associated with strategy as narrative.

From Strategy as Discourse to Strategy as Narrative

Strikingly in parallel with the psychology and sociology literatures (Ochs & Capps, 1996; McAdams, 1996; Franzosi, 1998), the literature of organization theory has been looking explicitly at narratives and discourses of organizing for two decades (Czarniawska and Gagliardi, 2003: 1). The role of narratives has been described as central to an understanding of the social construction of organizational phenomena (Czarniawska, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2004). For me, the modern roots of organizing as a specific linguistic practice emerge most clearly in the ideas of Eccles, Nohria and Berkley (1992). It was these researchers who articulated the notion that the narratives of organizing that we call strategy were explicit language games:

[A]ll forms of strategy might be seen as having the character of what the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein called 'language games' [emphasis in original]. Dissatisfied with the traditional view that language simply 'draws pictures' of an existing reality, Wittgenstein introduced the idea of a language game to explain that there isn't any one right way to view the world. By his account, all we really have are different language games that define the conventions by which we agree to talk and act. (p. 88)

Note that "games" here is used in the sense of different view rather than turn taking over time. At much the same time, Knights and Morgan (1991) offered a supportive if critical approach to strategy as a discourse:

[S]trategy as a discourse is intimately involved in constituting the intentions and actions from which it is thought to be derived. Strategy, then, is an integral part and not independent of the actions and practices that it is frequently drawn upon to explain or justify. (p. 268)

While explicitly dealing with narratives of organizing, neither group of authors looks explicitly at the impact of time on creating dynamic narratives. Rather they see strategy narratives as a collection of linguistic repertoires. Hendry (2000) follows suit, positing strategic decisions as elements in a strategy discourse, while Lilley (2001) writes on the very language of strategy itself. Seidl (2003) goes further, exploring the role of general concepts of strategy in the practice of strategy and Mantere and Vaara (2004) bring the concept more fully into the narrative sphere, exploring the metaphoric construction of strategy. These largely still appear, though, as relatively static explorations of discursive elements.

Even Barry and Elmes (1997), who gave two striking reasons for adopting a narrative approach to strategy, focused on a somewhat static version of narrative theory. However, almost overnight they created the notion of strategy as narrative and made broadly acceptable the idea that using narrative theories to unpack the practice of strategy was workable in the mainstream organization studies literature:

We are interested in examining strategy as a form of narrative... Although some researchers have discussed ways in which strategic texts and authoring processes act as sequential sensemaking devices... few have systematically described strategy using formal narrative concepts or models. (p. 429)

The first significant attraction of Barry and Elmes' (1997) approach is their suggestion that narrative emphasizes the simultaneous presence of "multiple, interlinked realities and is thus well positioned for capturing the diversity and complexity present in strategic discourse" (p. 430). This plurivocal perspective helps us to support a constructionist turn (Mir & Watson, 2000) and leads us away from the language as a mirror to reality perspective.

The second key strength of the Barry and Elmes (1997) paper was its pointing out that narrative encompasses the telling and the told:

Strategies can be examined as artifacts: their rhetoric, tropes, metaphors, and sequencing can be identified, compared, and evaluated in various ways. Strategy can also be examined as a narrative process, one in which stories about directionality are variously appropriated, discounted, championed, and defended. (p. 432)

So here we have an answer to the uncertainties of the broader strategy as discourse movement. With the conception of strategy as narrative, texts and authoring processes are inextricably intertwined. The form of narratives of strategy is inevitably shaped by how strategic stories are socially constructed (Berger and Luckmann, 1966).

Barry and Elmes' (1997) single paper provoked broadly supportive responses almost immediately (Ireland & Hitt, 1997; Bedeian, 1997) and the paper has become much cited in the literature. Their approach, using the work of Russian formalists as an analytical tool, was novel and credible. Nevertheless, surprisingly few researchers have built solidly upon its foundations. This may be because although the authors view strategy as narrative, they adopt a communication perspective on narrative, focused on using narrative figures and motifs as mechanisms for inspiring greater understanding of strategy. However, the choice of analytical tool still misses the significant structural aspects of narrative which would help explore temporality and the dynamism of the strategy-making process. In essence, Barry and Elmes' opted for a narrative approach that offers insight but that is simply not dynamic enough to capture the everyday reality inherent in strategy as narrative.

Perhaps better positioned to deal with time and process are the exemplars of the "strategy as practice" philosophy (Jarzabkowski, 2004), such as Whittington (2001) who has long championed the concept of strategy as a social practice, and Vaara, Kleymann and Seristö (2004), whose longitudinal empirical work makes a clear constitution of strategies as discursive constructions. Also of interest is the work of Laine and Vaara (2004), actively developing a framework to highlight the discursive construction of strategy and strategy work. In a significant work Samra-Fredericks (2003) has analysed live boardroom talk in a richly detailed ethnographic study to delineate strategists' techniques for influencing strategy.

Importantly, it is in these longitudinal studies, drawing on various data sources, that scholars can in some depth explore how strategy emerges through the use of naturally occurring language, or narratives in real-time, as it were. These few examples notwithstanding, much of

the organization studies literature does not offer an explicit study of the dynamics of the narrative process.

Time in Narratives of Organizing

Many narrative theories have been used to explore organizing and organizations (Boje, Alvarez & Schooling, 2001), from the postmodern Tamara-like worlds of Boje (1995) to pre-modern myths and fables (Gabriel, 2004). However, in only a few narrative studies could we argue that researchers have explored time and narrative in the dynamic Ricoeurian sense (Ricoeur, 1980). This is not intended as a major criticism. Even, from the world of literary criticism, Genette's narrative figures (1980) are broadly freeze-frame or static pictures, though Genette does in part consider duration, frequency, and, later, speed (1988).

Ricoeur's conceptions of narrative, however, offer to capture the real dynamism of organizational life: his powerful conception of mimesis (from pre-understanding, then through representation to followability) acts as a journey towards understanding, for instance. As one exemplar, Boje (2001, p. 108-121) explores this aspect—mimesis—thoroughly.

A second example, Currie and Brown (2003) explore how individuals and groups make sense of events in their working lives through authoring. This has a greater focus on time than Brown and Humphreys (2002), in which identity narratives are well to the fore in an exploration of nostalgia. Both these papers though could afford to be even more explicitly dynamic in nature, foregrounding as they do interview data that could be described as post rationalizations of a change process, or of events in the past. Nevertheless, Currie and Brown's (2003) work is worth exploring for its aspiration to explore individual and shared narratives as part of a jointly negotiated sensemaking process:

One way in which we collectively make sense of (or enact) our social world is through jointly negotiated narratives. In seeking to represent complex patterns of human interaction there is a tendency for people to construct their experience in narrative form. (p. 564)

A helpful collection of papers on the subject of time and organizing edited by Whipp, Adam and Sabelis (2002) reminds us that "time is an essential feature of social and organizational life" (p. 1). And Grand, Bartle and Rüegg-Stürm (2004) summarize a thread of research in the mainstream strategy literature explicitly dealing with time and speed. None of these papers though deals directly with a narrative approach to time.

In this brief resumé of work dealing explicitly with both time and narrative, perhaps the most striking paper of recent years, tackling head on Ricoeur's dynamic conception of narrative and time and identity, is Cunliffe, Luhman, and Boje (2004). As the authors rightly report:

...[T]ime is a crucial, yet often taken for granted aspect of research because our temporal presuppositions, particularly whether we experience time in objective or subjective ways, influence how we study organizational life... We suggest that [researchers'] experience and consciousness of time is not so straightforward and that... we need to embrace more nuanced and dynamic notions of temporality as a means of grounding our research in human experience. (p. 262)

Cunliffe et al. (2004) take the bold step of offering a re-storied notion of time and narrative called Narrative Temporality, a nexus of the work of Paul Ricoeur with Jean-Paul Sartre. This takes the notions of time and history Ricoeur supposes in *Time and Narrative* (1983, 1988) and incorporates the reflexive consciousness of temporality from Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1943, 1956). This seems an unnecessary nexus, in my view, as there is already much reflexivity in Ricoeur, especially when one incorporates Ricoeur's notions of memory and forgetting from *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004).

However, this brief exploration of the literature of time and narrative in the organization studies literature serves mainly to highlight the extensive nature of the gap that exists here.

The Difficulties of Theorizing from Narrative Data

The difficulty of theorizing from process data is well understood (Langley, 1999), and so it is helpful that both Langley (1999) and Pentland (1999) have tackled the problem of theorizing explicitly from narrative data. Langley describes narrative as a sensemaking device at a number of levels. Narratives can be considered merely as data from which to draw a contextualizing case study, she suggests, but more importantly—from a constructivist perspective—they can also be the main product of the research. “The aim is to achieve understanding of organizational phenomena—not through formal propositions, but by providing ‘vicarious experience’ of a real setting in all its richness and complexity” (p. 695).

Pentland's argument that narrative is especially relevant to the analysis of organizational processes is often quoted, but could be clearer. First, Pentland, like Barry and Elmes, focuses a good deal on the static snapshots of narrative figures as coding frames. Secondly, he argues, correctly, that explanatory process theories must be based on something other than simply descriptive narratives. And he argues with insight that explanatory process theories must be based on deeper structures not directly observable. However, he offers little in the way of narrative analysis techniques or theories for accessing the deeper structure of narrative. He simply suggests that “in the domain of process theory, stories are constructs. More precisely, stories help explain the relationships between events in a process or narrative” (Pentland, 1999 p. 711). But what these indicators in the narrative text are, other than stories, Pentland does not make plain.

Pentland's (1999) most valuable contribution, building on the work of Weick (1995), is when he points out the critical nature of narratives and stories: that “people do not simply tell their stories—they enact them” (although he does not deal with the issue of enactment at all in the body of the paper) (p. 716). And this leads to a key point: that strategy or organizing as narrative cannot be separated from the issue of the strategist or actor as narrator.

The Role of the Narrator in Narratives of Organizing

Considering the role of the narrator in organizations, this paper's framework builds on Riessman's (2002) important observation that narrative “extends the interpretive turn” (p. 217). For me narrative analysis takes as its object of investigation stories themselves, but recognizes that they are delivered in first-person accounts by respondents of their own experience:

The purpose is to see how respondents in interviews impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives. The methodological approach examines the informant's story and analyzes how it is put

together, the linguistic and cultural resources it draws on and how it persuades a listener of authenticity. Analysis in narrative studies opens up the forms of telling about experience, not simply the content to which language refers. We ask 'Why was the story told that way?' (Riessman, 2002, p. 218)

Clearly, also, because narrating is fundamentally an interpretive human activity, this means that narrators' narratives in turn have a number of fundamental interpretive attributes, according to Bruner (1991):

- they are organizing accounts of events occurring over time;
- they are retrospective interpretations of sequential events from a certain point of view (harking back to Weick's retrospective take on sensemaking);
- they focus on human action, the narrator's and others;
- narrating plays a role in processes of identity construction ;
- and narratives are coauthored by their audience.

If the narrating of narratives is an interpretive human act, then a number of issues arise concerning narrators and the act of narration:

Central is an increased interest in people as knowledgeable, socially accountable agents, concerned to be the authors of their own (socially constructed) individuality or identities. This ... involves a change in standpoint from the detached, theory-testing spectator, or reader of situations, to the interested, socially involved and responsible actor or author, as well as a shift from a one-sided process of investigation (in which only investigators are active) to a two-way, negotiated, multi-sensory interaction or transaction (in which both the investigated and investigators take part. (Shotter, 1995, p. 125)

In short, I conclude that at the heart of the Ricoeurian framework I will shortly outline, is an intimate concern with interpreting strategy as narrative and strategists as narrators. This builds on the underdeveloped issue in both Barry and Elmes (1997) and Pentland (1999): the issue of who is the narrator and what is the purpose of narrating. Shotter (1993, 1995) and Shotter and Cunliffe (2003) describe this theme as that of the manager as practical author.

How and Why is Narrative Identity Analysis Useful?

Narrative identity analysis is perhaps the most useful single method of exploring personal identity and how it changes over time, argues Ricoeur (2002) in *Oneself As Another* (p.18). Not only does narrative act to structure the temporal character of human experience it also brings to a summit, in narrative identity, a transitional and relational function between the description and prescription of lived human experience, its suffering, and its possibility. This involves a significant revision of our very concept of action, suggests Ricoeur (1992, p. 152).

Narrative identity essentially discloses itself in the dialectic of selfhood and sameness, and extends from a concern with the emplotment or scripting of action through to a dialectic of character. This is the decisive step in the direction of a narrative conception of personal identity, Ricoeur says (1992, p. 143), passing from a consideration of action—or the emplotted sequence of narrated events—to a consideration of character—who it is that performs the action. Interestingly, Ricoeur transfers to character the operation of emplotment. This leads to

an idea that characters may themselves be considered plots, interweaved or configured with considerations of obliged roles, ethical intentions, rewards and punishments.

Another way of approaching this, Ricoeur suggests (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 146), is to describe narrative as the path of the character, and vice versa, while narrative identity, he concludes, is a reflexive consideration of a character's ethical intentions: how a character aims to live a good life, with and for others, in just institutions.

The value of a framework for narrative identity analysis is that the development of the notion of narrative identity moves a consideration of narrative far beyond a straightforward sequencing of emplotted action, because "the actions refigured by narrative fictions are complex ones, rich in anticipations of an ethical nature" (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 170). Telling a story about our ethical intentions is "deploying an imaginary space for thought experiments" in which moral judgements operate in a hypothetical mode. In the exchange of experiences which narrative performs, actions are always subject to approval or disapproval and agents are always subject to praise or blame. In other words, albeit simplistically, Ricoeur suggests that in narratives we fundamentally draw distinctions between the actions we consider ethical, or good for their own sake, and those actions that impose themselves as obligatory, morally, that we consider as duties. We also judge the actions and intentions of others in the same process, which only serves to position our own actions as more (or less) ethical. The outcomes of such an analysis are a clear sense of self-esteem, combined with a clarity on what exactly are our convictions.

To demonstrate the value of a Ricoeurian narrative identity analysis, this paper derives a framework from elements of the volume *Oneself As Another*. The framework as defined here could then be used to explore three fundamental questions:

1. How might narrative be considered a laboratory of moral judgement?
2. What does a consideration of character in action do to a consideration of personal identity?
3. And how does character appear as the path of narrative and narrative appear as the path of character?

A final question, concerning how narrative identity might apply to or arise for a collective, could also be addressed.

Briefly, the framework for analyzing narrative identity (see Figure 1) follows two stages or passes through one or more narrative texts, followed by a third interweaving refiguring explored in more detail in the next section:

- First stage analytical pass through narratives: how does narrative emplotment oppose what is permanent in time with what is different, variable, and discontinuous in time?
- Second analytical pass: What are the dialectics of character over time?
- Third stage interweaving refiguring: what are the mutual implications of emplotted actions and character especially as regards the ethical intentions of the character? (See Figure 2)

In exploring Ricoeur's philosophy linking narrative theory and ethical theory in the notion of narrative identity, through the development of an analytical framework, this paper hopes to

explore the theoretical propositions implicit in Ricoeur, perhaps making the propositions more explicit. And it is here that the most ambitious of aspirations for this paper lies: to broaden the appreciation of Ricoeur's philosophy as applied to the field of organization theory.

Why is Ricoeur Worth Exploring Now?

Ricoeur's notion of narrative identity appears most clearly defined in the third volume of *Time and Narrative* (Ricoeur, 1988). Ricoeur (1992) suggests narrative identity may be "a structure of experience capable of integrating the two great classes of narrative" [history and fiction] (p. 114), and this has immense value. It leads Ricoeur to suggest a chain of assertions: first, that self-understanding is an interpretation and secondly that this interpretation of the self is fundamentally mediated through narrative (among other signs and symbols), borrowing from history or fiction. What Ricoeur then turns to in *Oneself As Another* is not so much an opposition or interweaving of narrative theory with time, as an interweaving of narrative theory with ethical theory, where the concept of personal identity—the who that is acting or suffering—becomes central to the discussion.

So in *Oneself As Another* the concept of a dynamic narrative identity becomes clearer as Ricoeur establishes new boundaries to the construction and reconstruction over time of its different dimensions. For instance, in *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur suggests that narrative identity encompasses both harmony and dissonance, in history and in fiction, especially when the discordance in question is temporal. Ricoeur extends his interest in narrative and time in *Oneself As Another* by suggesting that narrative identity mediates between two kinds of permanence in time: first the idea of selfhood as character, with its unbreakable habits, but also the idea of self-constancy, or keeping one's word, which Ricoeur perceives as more of a voluntary action. In *Oneself As Another*, however, the fundamental mediation is between description and prescription, between what is and what ought to be, and while there is still a dimension of time involved here, the key focus is on self-understanding and self-interpretation. This hermeneutic view of the self and narrative identity therefore includes another dialectic: the idea that narratives are both lived and told, a place where identity is not merely descriptive, but prescriptive. It is here that the strength of personal ideals, our ethical intentions, help individuals construe and reconcile their identity as both "who I am" and as "someone that I am not yet."

While these poles or dimensions can be mediated through various signs and symbols, it is narrative's temporality and emplotment that are central to self-interpretation, says Ricoeur. In fact, says Ricoeur, this extends to the narrative unity of our whole life, which becomes not just a continuum of separate events, therefore, but rather a narrative of our threefold present, where our past, present, and future experiences or actions are structured or mediated by our experiences of the past, our expectations of the future, and the upheavals of the present. And while narrative identity and ethical identity are not equivalent (Ricoeur, 1988, p. 247), the ethical aspects of our narrative identity is something Ricoeur gives primacy to. Our ethical intentions are clearly central to our sense of self and our personal identity, judging by their major role in the stories that we tell.

Although Ricoeur's oeuvre, and *Oneself As Another* in particular, may prove inspiring from a theoretical and philosophical standpoint, few have brought Ricoeur's work to a more pragmatic level and actually applied it to the modest everyday world of organizations. In other words, although Ricoeur has been appraised from the perspective of organization theory, no-

tably by Boje (2001) and by Cunliffe, Luhman and Boje (2004), Ricoeur's themes in *Oneself As Another* have not been widely used or explored.

A Three-Stage Narrative Analysis Framework

This paper proposes a three-stage framework for narrative analysis based on Ricoeur's ideas in *Oneself As Another*. Before an explanation of the framework itself, though (see Figure 1), it is important first to get a sense of a Ricoeurian theoretical underpinning for the frame.

Theoretical Underpinning

Beginning with key definitions, the paper takes up Ricoeur's view that narrative identity is dynamic and rests on a temporal structure that arises from the poetic composition of a narrative text. A practical hermeneutics of narrative identity, as initially framed in this paper, would therefore be useful because it could be applied to a collective or a community as well as to an individual. Collectives are constituted in their identity, suggests Ricoeur, by taking up narratives that become for them their actual history. This is a history composed of events that a community defines as epoch-making, says Ricoeur (1988), "Drawing specific meaning from their capacity to found or reinforce the community's consciousness of its identity, its narrative identity, as well as the identity of its members" (p. 187).

The framework should therefore tell us something about how narrative identity is developed, in and around an organization, perhaps, but it should also tell us something about organizing generally.

The value of a narrative identity analysis for research becomes clear when we consider that the key phenomenological moment for Ricoeur occurs in narratives where narrators challenge their sense of self and actively explore their actions and behaviors (and those of others) particularly those that challenge their sense of self. Ricoeur has described this by reflecting initially on the relationship of time and narrative (1983), in the interplay of references among the horizon of expectations (the narrator's future), the space of experience (the narrator's past) and the untimely upheavals and initiatives of the narrator's present. Time in effect exists, says Ricoeur, only in the narratives of humans acting or suffering in this temporally grounded present. It is this multiple interweaving refiguring, or construction, that this framework attempts to capture.

Finally *Oneself As Another* is built on three intertwined philosophical strands—it offers an approach to self-identity with linguistic, practice-oriented, and narrative dimensions. As these are currently considered important themes in organization theory, the value of a practical framework to apply them to one or more narrative texts should have some value.

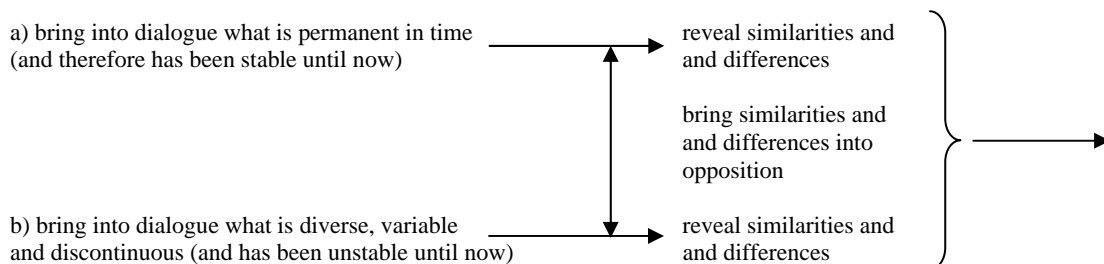
Proposed Analytical Method

The paper proposes a systematic three-stage analysis of narrative identity in one or more narrative texts, based specifically on Ricoeur's writings in *Oneself As Another* (1992). The framework is shown in simplistic form in Figure 1.

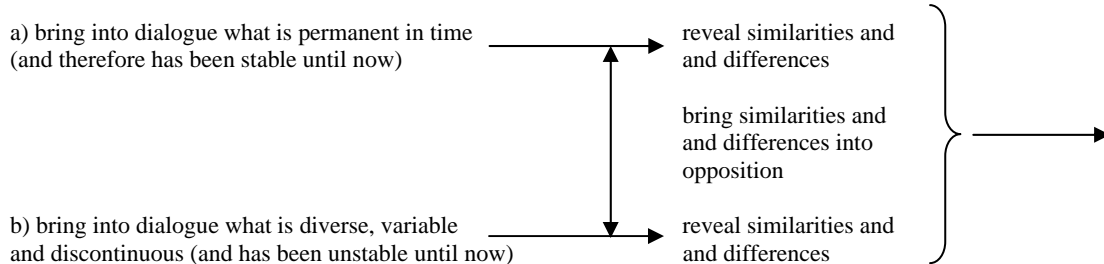
Stage one is to consider the dialectic of selfhood and sameness in the interconnected series of actions or events in the narrative corpus. This is conducted by considering how the interconnectedness of events constituted by emplotment in the narrative brings into opposition ele-

FIGURE 1
A Systematic Framework for the Analysis of Narrative Identity

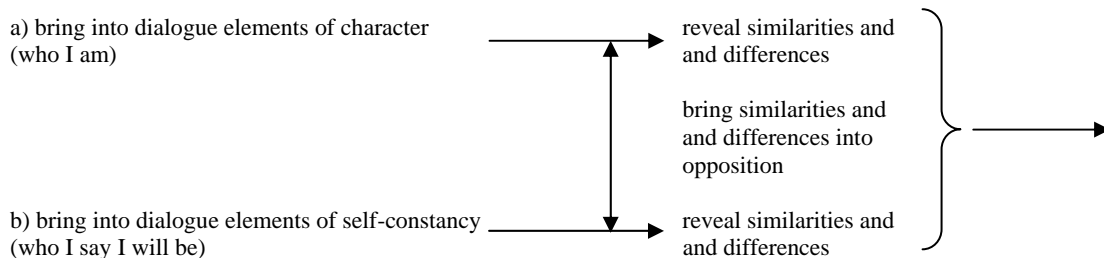
First dialectic: the dialectic in plot



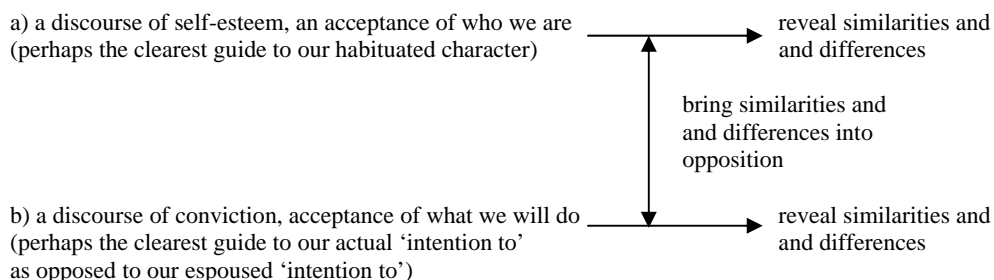
Second dialectic: the dialectic in character



Third dialectic: narrative identity as the reflexive interpretation of character and self-constancy



Emergent elements of narrative identity:



ments of the self that are permanent in time, or stable, with elements that are diverse, variable, discontinuous in time, or unstable.

In stage two, the analysis begins to develop what Ricoeur calls a dialectic of character that is internal to the character. This is where the narrative appears as the path of the character and the character appears as the path of the narrative. Part of this character analysis also involves

an analysis of what Ricoeur calls “role,” in which a character passes through various stages of action:

- the possibility of action,
- the possibility of commencing action or of remaining inactive, and
- the possibility of completing an action or leaving it incomplete.

In the third, interpretive phase, clarity is sought on how narrative theory reveals a connection between plot and character and then considers how this extends into the ethical sphere. Ricoeur explains this as the iterative cycling of a character’s life plans between more or less distant ideals that are specified through the praxis of narrative. Here, the narrative component of self-understanding derived from analyzing character, plot, and the relation between them is contrasted with the ethical drivers that motivate characters. This is because the characterization of selfhood is not without fundamental ambiguities and conflicts on the ethical plane. Significantly it is only the notion of narrative identity that helps to clarify the relationship between character, plot and ethics, says Ricoeur. So the final dialectic explores the narrative conflicts contrasting obligation, duty, and personal conviction. In this analysis, Ricoeur’s (1992) unashamedly humanistic conclusion is that narrative is the laboratory of ethical and moral judgment. Here, telling a story is what Ricoeur describes as “deploying an imaginary space for thought experiments in which ethical and moral judgment operates in a hypothetical mode” (p. 170).

Discussion: Narrative Identity and the Ethical Aim

To demonstrate the practical value of a Ricoeurian narrative identity analysis, the narrative identity framework should be used to explore the three fundamental research questions listed earlier. A preliminary approach to the questions can, however, be sketched out here.

How might narrative be considered a laboratory of moral judgment? The question Ricoeur (1992) raises over this reflexive self-interpretation is whether the narrator is living a good (or ethical) life?

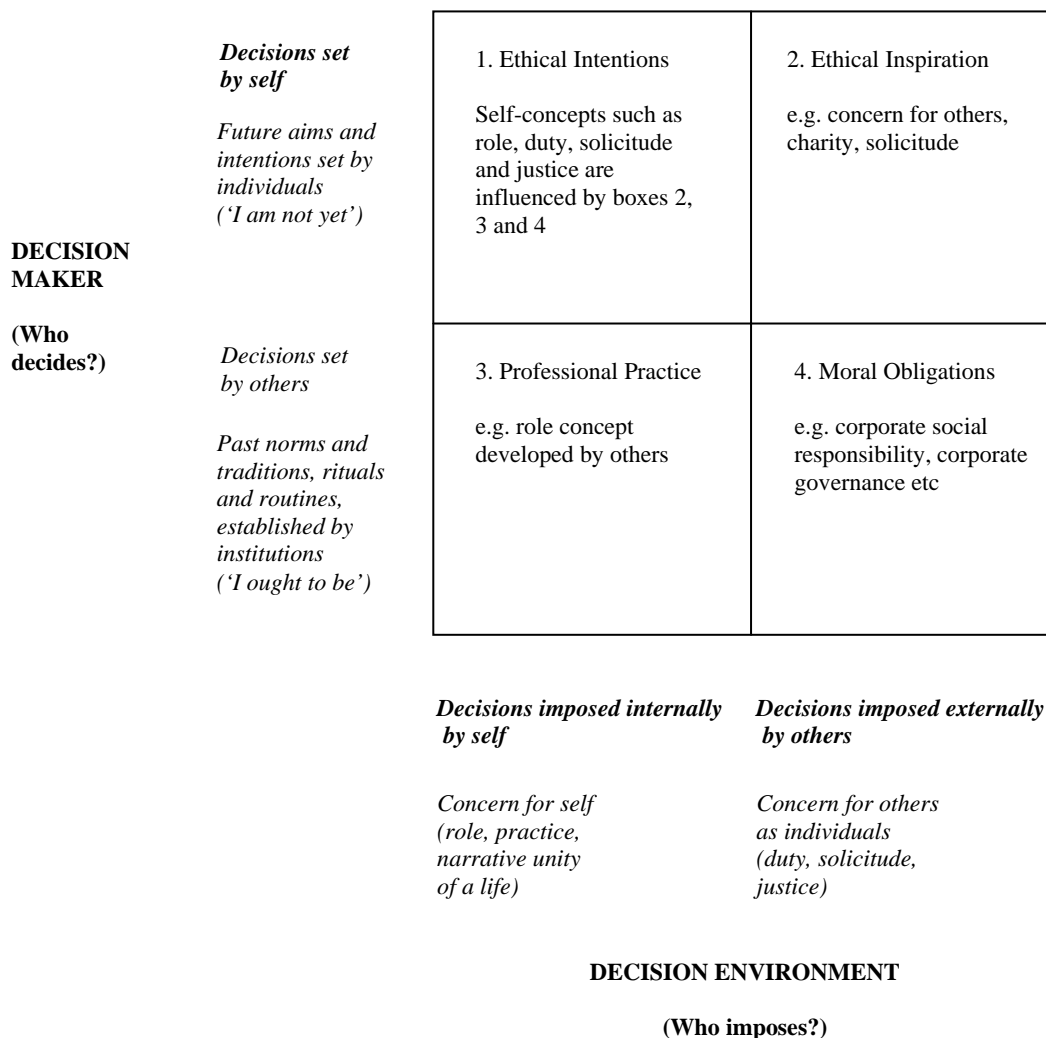
This experiential evidence is ... when the certainty of being the author of one’s own discourse and of one’s own acts becomes the conviction of judging well and acting well in a momentary and provisional approximation of living well.
(p. 180)

In other words this question could be considered to focus on self-esteem and the reconciliation of everything we have done with our past, present, and future sense of self (see Figure 2).

What does a consideration of character in action do to a discussion of identity? Narratives which describe a character in action, either the habituated, involuntary character or the self-constancy of keeping one’s word, are the opposition of character with plot and as such are the very embodiment of narrative identity. In the process whereby characters confirm or refute the elements of their identity, they are constructing their narrative identity and so these moments are critical to search for in analyses of empirical data. It may be that we are able to recognize the poles of the self-constancy dimension, the things we consciously say we will do or think we will do. But the poles of the character dimension, character as the habitual, learned, and sedimented routines, we may not be able to see.

How does character appear as the path of narrative and narrative appear as the path of character? This is related to the connection between narratives lived and told. If narratives describe the actions and interconnected events as lived by characters in a narrative and as told by narrators, then the characters are living a plot told by themselves as narrators. But as narrators they are operating the process of emplotment, also. This mutual interweaving of lived and told plots makes it likely that narrative identity can adequately be seen as a structure of lived experience, particularly by collectives, it would appear. In addition, the narrative of interconnected events is also the path woven by a narrator/character through the construction processes of ethical intentions. In other words, as a character in a narrative explores the different events that challenge their sense of self—or that help them to balance role and perceived role, duty and perceived duty—they build a picture of the extent to which they believe they are living a good life (how good?), with and for others (which others?) and in just institutions (which institutions? And how good are they?). It is a portrait also interweaving evidence of self-esteem and conviction, that mixture of duty and role, moral obligation, and ethical intention. It is in a capitulation of narrative identity that the person is not merely the one who tells the story, or merely the one about whom the story is told, but the subject “appears both as the reader and the writer of its own life,” says Ricoeur (1988, p. 246).

FIGURE 2
A Systematic Framework for Analysing Ethical Intentions in Narrative Analysis



Conclusions

The limits of the framework mainly concern the unstable mixture of fabrication and actual experience that comprise narrative identity and the inability even of narrative to capture the internal nature of moral character and ethical intention. It must be said however, that the blend of narrative fact and fiction, memory and forgetting are all implicit aspects of the reflexive framework Ricoeur inspires.

In conclusion, then, this framework paves the way for a more detailed development of a hermeneutics of narrative identity, which is dynamic and rests on a temporal structure that arises from the poetic composition of a narrative text. Because our stories ultimately have an impact on our personal and organizational identities (Ochs and Capps, 1996), understanding the processes through which we construct, co-construct and reconstruct those narratives would be useful. Indeed, a hermeneutics of narrative identity would be particularly valuable because it appears to be applicable to a collective or community as well as to an individual. It shifts our attention to the relationship between narrators, their networks and the narrative sequences they narrate. In other words, we find that individuals and collectives are constituted in their identity by constructing narratives that become for them their actual history (Ricoeur, 1983; Brown and Humphreys, 2002; Cunliffe *et al.*, 2004).

In placing Ricoeur's conception of narrative identity at the crossroads between a praxis of action and a praxis of ethics, narrative identity serves as a natural transition between description and prescription, between 'what is' and 'what should be'. This notion, then, of narrative identity, becomes a guideline for extending our understanding of the practical sphere beyond the simple actions of characters in a story. The actions refigured or constructed in narratives are complex and rich in explorations of an ethical nature and it is this richness and complexity that this multi-layered reflexive framework strives to tap.

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