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Contents and Functions of Dramatizations in Team Decision-making

Abstract

This study examines the contents and functions of dramatizations in natural team decision-making. Theoretically, the study employs symbolic convergence theory (SCT) to understand decision-making as a complex phenomenon constructed in symbolic communication. Observational meeting data and thematic interview data from an autonomous team in Finland were analyzed. A fantasy theme analysis and an inductive, rhetorical discourse analysis revealed three rhetorical visions and seven functions of dramatizations in the team's decision-making. Visions represented social, righteous, and pragmatic master analogues. The functions of dramatizations were legitimizing independent and current decisions, reinforcing past decisions, arguing, leading, embedding decisions, and controlling decision-making. Symbolic realities were constructed and refined before, during, and after decision-making. The processes of creating and using dramatizations were intertwined and simultaneous. The interview analysis showed the team was aware of many of these processes. The applicability of SCT in team decision-making research and training is discussed, specifically in connection to communication competence.

Keywords: symbolic convergence theory, team decision-making, fantasy theme analysis, rhetorical discourse analysis, communication competence

Introduction

Decision-making is a crucial aspect of team communication and an essential element of organizational behavior. Decision-making is also one of the key competence areas in all task-oriented group and team communication. A common site for team decision-making is

meetings, where information is shared, actions are reported, and problems are solved (Halvorsen & Sarangi, 2015), among other functions.

Interest in effective and ineffective group decision-making has been prominent in communication research for more than 60 years. Process-oriented research focuses on how decision-making occurs and develops, while outcomes-oriented research examines the effects of decision-making on, for example, decision quality (Frey, 1996). Another way to distinguish streams of research is to divide them into mediational, functional, and constitutive perspectives. The mediational perspective approaches communication as a medium through which information, knowledge, and skills are shared. The functional perspective emphasizes rational, normative, and vigilant standards for decision-making processes. The constitutive perspective, used in this study, is social constructionist and aims to understand how social environments are constructed in and are related to decision-making (Hirokawa & Salazar, 1999).

Decision-making has most commonly been treated as a rational communicative process during which members evaluate a problem, and alternatives to solving it, by utilizing information that helps them achieve a stable goal (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005). In communication research, the functional perspective has been prominent (Frey & Sunwolf, 2005). It has aided the prediction and explanation of decision-making outcomes through examining inputs and processes, often in controlled laboratory settings (Hollingshead et al., 2005). It has also guided the identification of relevant communication competencies in group decision-making (e.g., Beebe & Barge, 1994; Gouran, 2003).

The functional approach is prescriptive, aiming to identify ideal functions, conditions of, and barriers to effective group decision-making. However, while decision-making in ideal models and zero-history groups might be a straightforward, rational process with clear goals, this is rarely the case in natural groups (e.g., Hollingshead et al., 2005; Poole, 1999), such as

teams in work life, where decision-making is usually a contextual and long-term sense-making process. Decisions are shaped by post hoc rationalizations and symbolic justifications for future operations (Poole & Ahmed, 2015), as well as relationships and responsibilities within and outside the group (Tracy & Standerfer, 2003). Furthermore, in laboratory studies teams often face novel tasks, while in natural teams members often have previous experience and knowledge of their tasks (Klein, 2015). Social science approaches and discourse studies have begun examining organizational decision-making as not merely rational but also bound to context and social settings. However, there is a need to extend studies across various workplace contexts (Halverson, 2015).

This study is a qualitative examination of decision-making in work team interaction, utilizing a constitutive, social constructionist perspective. This study has two aims: (1) to understand what kind of symbolic realities are constructed with dramatizations and (2) to understand how these realities are used in team decision-making. The symbolic, fuzzy, and at times irrational nature of decision-making is approached using symbolic convergence theory (SCT, e.g., Bormann, 1972, 1982, 1996).

Symbolic Convergence Theory

SCT is a framework for studying how individuals come to share a common symbolic reality (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001). The symbolic–interpretive theory emerged from a rhetorical perspective (see Frey & Sunwolf, 2004) and assumes that humans by nature interpret, make sense of, and give meanings to people, events, objects, and signs around them. When people share their symbolic interpretations in interaction, they sometimes converge, creating a basis for a shared symbolic reality (Bormann, 1996) and a group identity (Poole, 1999). The theory originated from Bormann and his colleagues' work on developing fantasy theme analysis, a method of identifying and organizing the shared symbolic reality of groups (Bormann, 1972, 1982). Four basic concepts of the theory are the dramatizing

message, fantasy theme, fantasy type, and rhetorical vision. These concepts are hierarchical –

a rhetorical vision is built of fantasy types and themes, which are created in dramatizing

messages.

A fantasy is represented in *dramatizing messages* (or dramatizations) that refer to

another time or place instead of the "here and now" (Waldeck, Shepard, Teitelbaum, Farrar,

& Seibold, 2002). They depict real or fictional characters and contain elements of a drama,

such as scenes, a plot, heroes, and villains. They may be for example elaborate stories, jokes,

or wordplays. Dramatizations form and simplify social realities and allow sense-making of

confusing, complex, ambiguous, or even chaotic events (Bormann, 1996; Olufowote, 2006).

At times in group interaction, a dramatization catches others' attention, and they begin

polishing and adding to the dramatization, often with excitement and enthusiasm. This causes

the dramatization to form a chain reaction. A *fantasy theme* represents the content of a

chained dramatization. Fantasy themes allow people to interpret experiences similarly

(Bormann, 1996). They may be hyperbolic and exaggerated but also less fictitious depictions

situated outside the present moment (Bormann, Knutson, & Musolf, 1997).

Fantasy types emerge through repetition, as similar fantasy themes generalize in

communication (Bormann, 1996). They are stock scenarios that refer to the original, more

intricate scenarios of fantasy themes (Bormann, 1982). For example, a group may have

shared several fantasy themes depicting them dealing with their perceived external threats.

Although the original fantasy themes are separate and have differences, when told and re-

told, they will begin forming a fantasy type that refers to the group and its threats. The group

may reference an entire fantasy type in their dramatizations, rather than retell the separate

fantasy themes. Thus they produce a category or a "genre" of themes that group members

recognize and are familiar with.

As these types stabilize, generalize, and integrate, they form *rhetorical visions,* that

represent the common symbolic realities of a group (Olufowote, 2006). Rhetorical visions have been identified to reflect three different types of master analogues. These master analogues—the righteous, social, and pragmatic—represent the values and structure of the rhetorical vision and guide how members explain the phenomena they entail and act upon. A rhetorical vision reflecting a righteous master analogue emphasizes morals and issues of right, wrong, just, and unjust. A social master analogue stresses interpersonal relationships, trust, humaneness, and caring (Cragan & Shields, 1992), while the pragmatic master analogue highlights effectiveness, realism, and hard-headedness (Bormann et al., 2003). Multiple rhetorical visions in groups are commonly thought to compete with and contradict each other (Bormann et al., 2001).

SCT and Team Decision-making

SCT is valuable when studying decision-making in natural teams, because groups interpret their successes and failures, as well as make and implement plans in symbolic communication, as Bormann (1982) describes. Decision-making in natural groups often relates to the past, present, and future (Poole & Ahmed, 2015), much like symbolic communication, such as dramatizing. Bormann (1996) also noted that even if groups aim for rational, logical decision-making, dramatizations will likely occur. This relationship between the rational and the irrational is a key focus of SCT (Bormann, 1982).

However, SCT has not been applied much in recent team and decision-making research and has faced critique. Olufowote (2006) noted that the theory has brushed aside issues of power relationships, multiple identities, and the chance that not all members might gain from fantasies equally. This critique was recently addressed by Zanin, Hoelscher, and Kramer (2016), who found that dramatizing in a rugby team also produced divergence through antisocial, isolating, and conflicting rhetorical visions. However, the authors concluded that *divergence may prevent destructive processes*, such as groupthink, by enabling

critical evaluation and diversity of perspectives.

The decline of scholarly interest in SCT has also been attributed to the theory's lack of explanatory power (Poole, 1999), as well as researchers not recognizing the theory's applicability to modern, complex organizational concerns (Olufowote, 2006). An important avenue for SCT research is examining how dramatizing influences central team phenomena, such as decision-making. Numerous studies document the occurrence of symbolic convergence, but there is little knowledge on how symbolic convergence relates to effective group interplay, as noted by several researchers (e.g., Hirokawa & Salazar, 1999; Poole, 1999; Waldeck et al., 2002). SCT does not make deterministic claims about the influence of symbolic convergence on decision-making. However, as group values, motives for action, etc., are grounded largely in symbolic communication, they will likely influence decision-making. Yet, there is little knowledge about what these outcomes may be, or for example, which dramatizations will form chains and how they will influence decision-making (Poole, 1999).

Several scholars have suggested different functions of dramatizations in decision-making. Groups may, for example, *use fantasies as incubators* when dealing with difficult or complex decisions. Tension caused by unsuccessful decision-making may launch members into dramatizing about seemingly unrelated issues, to "experiment with ideas, to play with concepts and wild suggestions and imaginative notions" (Bormann, 1996, p. 109). Dramatizations may result in fantasies with a double meaning related to the problem and ultimately cause a solution to pop into the group's collective mind. Members may also deliberately *use dramatizations as a method of persuasion,* even by planning appropriate and effective dramatizations beforehand (Bormann, 1982, 1996). Thus, dramatizing can be conscious and unconscious, as well as accidental and goal-oriented (Bormann, 1996).

Hirokawa and Salazar (1999) proposed that the significance of dramatizations in

decision-making might differ from task to task. Ambiguous tasks or turbulent environments may require *dramatizing to create a shared understanding*, whereas familiar issues might not.

Waldeck et al. (2002) suggested that as symbolic convergence leads to higher degrees of group norms, commitment, and culture, groups with high convergence will also likely be in agreement regarding appropriate techniques of information processing, criteria for evidence, and decision-making procedures. A similar idea was proposed by Jablin and Sias (2001), who suggested that fantasy themes might contain shared knowledge structures of effective communication in groups. Fantasy themes may be especially important containers of such knowledge in natural teams, which develop symbolic convergence over time and across interactions. However, groups may not always be aware of their dramatizations or may "accidentally create a consciousness that is more or less conducive to good problem solving without being aware of what they are doing" (Bormann, 1996, p. 99).

In sum, SCT can offer insights into team decision-making communication as a rational and irrational, complex phenomenon affected by symbolic realities produced in interaction. However, research has focused mainly on describing the content of symbolic realities and less on the effects that these realities have on decision-making and/or team communication in general. To better understand the process and the effects of dramatizing on team decision-making, two research questions were formulated for this study:

> RQ1: What kind of a shared symbolic reality is constructed by dramatizing in team decision-making?

> RQ2: What functions do dramatizations serve in team decision-making?

Method

Research Setting

The data for this study were collected from a Finnish work team. The team forms a co-operative association and works on various small- and large-scale cultural projects,

including the performing arts, graphic design, and workplace training. They operate with various clients, such as academies and businesses, as well as designing and implementing productions with other cultural and societal agents.

Small co-ops have become a common way of organizing work in Finland, especially in the culture sector (e.g., Sivonen & Saukkonen, 2014). The team can be labeled an entrepreneurial team (e.g., Schjoedt & Kraus, 2009), as it is autonomous and is not embedded within any organization. The team members are also collectively responsible for the co-op's operations and finances. During the data collection, the number of team members varied from seven to eight. The team comprised two founding members (T2 and T3 from here on), who started the business 10 years before, and other members who have worked for the team for three months to six years (T1, T4–T10). Before forming a co-op, the team had operated for several years as an association, of which the other founding member (T2) was the chair.

The team works in smaller units and as a whole. Members gather weekly at the co-op's shared workspace to discuss matters related to projects, finances, and so forth. The meeting is a site for sharing work-related information, giving feedback and support to others, and making all major decisions regarding the co-op.

Data Collection

The team was informed about the study, and members' permission to gather and analyze data was acquired beforehand. Two team meetings were videotaped over a period of six months. The first meeting was one hour and two minutes in duration, and the second was two hours and 59 minutes. The researcher was present to make field notes but did not participate in discussions. The data were transcribed verbatim on 137 double-spaced pages.

In addition, thematic, open-ended interview data were gathered from the team (N=7) between the two meetings. These data were initially gathered for another study (Horila, 2015) on the team's communication competence. The interview themes focused on members'

understandings of communication competence, including leadership, relational development, and decision-making. Altogether, these data produced 174 double-spaced pages of transcription. However, for the purposes of this study, only interview segments about discussions of decision-making and/or dramatizations were included.

The meetings and the interviews had seven participants. However, the co-op underwent personnel changes between the meetings, and the second meeting lacked two previous members (T5 and T7 in the first meeting) and had two new participants (T8 and T9 in the second meeting). In addition, one interviewee (T10) attended neither meeting. Thus, the total number of participants was 10.

Analysis process

This study takes a rhetorical discourse analytic approach to team decision-making. Discourse analysis encompasses various approaches focusing on the construction of social reality through meanings, forms, and patterns of talk and text (Putnam, Stohl, & Baker, 2013). Rhetorical discourse analysis examines symbolic language, metaphors, and narratives. It focuses on broader patterns than more micro-level discourse methods, such as conversation analysis (Putnam, 2005). In this study, rhetorical discourse in team meetings is approached as both producing and reflecting decision-making (see Putnam & Fairhurst 2001). Rhetorical discourse analysis is used to study decision-making as discursive practices and sense-making processes related to the past, the present, and the future (see Halverson, 2010; Hendry, 2000). Decision-making in natural groups consists of activities and choices nested in other choices (Poole & Hirokawa, 1996). Pinpointing where, when, and sometimes whether a decision has occurred at all can be difficult (Halvorsen & Sarangi, 2015).

The analysis was done in three phases. In the first two phases, observational data were used. First, episodes of decision-making interaction were identified. Sequences of interaction in which members discussed past or future decisions or engaged in present

decision-making were identified. To define the boundaries of the episodes, a topical focus was adopted. Thus, if the team for example exited a decision-making topic but returned to it later, these segments of discussion were coded as belonging in the same topical episode.

Twenty-six topical episodes of decision-making interaction were identified. Topics ranged from small procedural decisions to complex decisions with unpredictable, multifaceted consequences. Episodes dealt with past, present, and future decisions.

The first phase of analysis consisted of conducting a fantasy theme analysis (Bormann, 1972) and corresponded to the first research question. The second phase consisted of a novel inductive analysis of the functions of dramatizations, corresponding to the second research question. Interview data were used in the third phase, in which segments related to decision-making and dramatizations were analyzed in relation to phases one and two.

Analysis and Findings

Phase one: From fantasy themes to rhetorical visions

The first research question was approached using fantasy theme analysis (FTA; Bormann, 1972). FTA is a method of qualitative rhetorical analysis developed concurrently with SCT. It is used to identify and capture symbolic realities, in small groups and in larger rhetorical communities (Bormann, 1982, 1996). SCT holds that meaning, emotion, and motive for action are located in messages (Bormann, 1972) and are observable from interaction, by means of a fantasy theme analysis (Bormann et al., 2003). The analysis consists of applying the basic concepts of SCT to identify the origination, chaining, and content of fantasy themes in communication (Olufowote, 2006). However evident the symbolic convergence of a group may be, it is important that research substantiates the phenomenon from data (Broom & Avanzino, 2010). This is done by identifying repetition and hierarchically arranging dramatized material to understand (possible) overarching rhetorical vision(s).

First, all of the decision-making episodes were read through to identify the ones that contained at least one dramatization. 22 of the 26 episodes were included in the FTA. Next, fantasy themes were identified. All chains of dramatizations were first identified. Their contents were analyzed, and similar or identical chains were placed in the same coding category (cf., Zanin et al., 2016) and labeled fantasy themes. Dramatizations that did not lead to a chain reaction were left out of this phase. Nineteen fantasy themes were identified from the decision-making episodes.

The dramatized contents of each theme were compared and analyzed in relation to each other and identified to collapse into seven fantasy types. Once the types were identified, the formation of rhetorical visions was examined, by identifying themes and types that converged into larger-scale visions (see Zanin et al., 2016). The contents of the drama, the characters and scenarios, the sanctioned and praised acts, as well as emotions and values inherent in the dramas, was examined in detail (see Bormann, 1972). Three rhetorical visions were identified. Each vision and how it unfolded in the fantasy types and themes is presented hierarchically in Table 1 (for a similar visualization, see Broom & Avanzino, 2010).

First vision: We are brought together by artistic interests and strong relationships. A social master analogue drives the first rhetorical vision of the team. In the vision, a sense of communion related to interests in work and interpersonal relationships is foregrounded with dramatizations. One independent fantasy theme and three fantasy types consisting of six fantasy themes supported this vision. The independent fantasy theme "Personal motivation and interest is crucial" highlights acknowledging personal motivation and interest in artistic work in decision-making. The first fantasy type "acknowledging well-being in decision-making" converges from fantasy themes, in which members dramatize the importance of their feelings in decision-making and their desire to keep their artwork stress-free. The following example depicts the emphasis on avoiding stress with T6 dramatizing her

stress reaction and unwillingness to participate in an upcoming gig:

1   T6: "I had a terrible anxiety attack last Monday when I realized that it's [a gig] in the middle of my

2   two-week holiday, so it kind of breaks off my holidays and if it's, if we chose to take [a production]

3   there, we would have to warm it up and what not and I can't, I don't want to. So if we could."

4   T3: "Let's cancel it."

The second fantasy type, "speaking for everyone" converges from fantasy themes depicting a shared competence for speaking and deciding for the team as a whole. Team members fantasize about knowing how others might think or decide in a current, hypothetical or past situation. They also imitate or anticipate each other's reactions and opinions. In the following excerpt, the type emerges simply when T2 dramatizes the unwillingness of the entire team to perform for 300 euros by referring to the personal pronoun "we" (line 1), causing T6 to agree and add to this (lines 2 and 5):

1   T2: "Yeah, but it's not like *we* will prepare anything staggering for three hundred [euros]."

2   T6: "Yup, nothing staggering. I mean it's not even worth it to prepare something by yourself for three

3   hundred."

4   T2: "Yeah, that would be insane."

5   T6: "It's like a dumping price for just one [person]. I mean to come up with something just for them."

The third fantasy type "approaching decisions with humor" manifests in jokes about individual members' personalities, habits, or skills and the customs of the whole team. The fantasy theme "we can joke about each other" arises in one episode in two separate chains. The topic of the episode is deciding when to have a break. Lines 4–12 include a fantasy chain about the smoking habits of T8 and T1, while lines 14–17 include joking about T3's antics:

1   T8: "Do you ever take cigarette breaks?"

2   T3: "Yep, like right now we could take a cigarette break which can also be used for exercising."

3   T8: "Yeah"

4   T2: "Oh no wait, you can't go because you have to look over the contract with T1, but everyone else

5   can."

6   T8: "Oh damn, and I'm the one who demanded it."

7   T3: "Oh wait, T1 wants to smoke!"

8   T8: "T1 will smoke as well. We'll go over the contract out in the snow, holding pencils, squatting."

9   (team members laugh)

10   T1: "It's so hard to even enjoy a cigarette anymore."

11   T8: "Yep."

12   T2: "Well damn go ahead and ruin yourselves then."

13   T6: "Let's take it [the break] now as we will completely change the subject."

14   T3: (throws himself on the floor) "Yes, yes, we definitely need a break! We must get oxygen and blood

15   to flow into the brain, take different positions, and mix the left and right sides up."

16   T6: "That's T3's, (laughs) T3's warm-up speech, foreplay, (imitating) okay we need different positions,

17   blood to the head, oxygen, oxygen!"

Second vision: We have enemies and allies. The second identified rhetorical vision of the team is righteous. It manifests in fantasies of the benefits and challenges of collaborative work outside the team, as well as the financial difficulties the team experiences. The vision consists of two fantasy types and seven fantasy themes. The first fantasy type "collaborating with other small agents is important" emerges through fantasy themes praising the advantages of sharing expertise with others, underlining a sense of similarity and mutual support between cultural agents and expressing the difficulties of balancing collaborative relationships and sensible business with other small agents.

In the following excerpt, the fantasy theme "we are in this together" arises as the team discusses finding collaborators from the local university for a project on poverty. Team

members 5 and 6 have previously discussed "knowing nothing" about universities. In this excerpt, however, the members end up joking about researchers' financial situations similarly to the way that they joke about their own financial troubles. In lines 1–3, T2 and T5 discuss seeking out a researcher studying poverty. In line 4, T4 jokes about finding a researcher who is poor, to which T2 and T5 (lines 5–6) react to by repeating the statement, and T3 (line 7) adds to the discussion with the expression "slumming it."

1   T2: "I think, we should send out a message and ask around, from people, who know someone who is

2   doing research on poverty. Or has done a dissertation or, or something."

3   T5: "Is currently doing one."

4   T4: "Or does it as a hobby."

5   T2: "As a hobby" (chuckling)

6   T5: (laughs) "Does poverty as a hobby."

7   T3: "Someone who is slumming it."

Money represents an enemy and an obstacle in the second fantasy type "money guides our actions," which is illustrated in themes about doing anything for money, being underpaid, and envisioning a financially secure future. In the following example, members discuss getting a trainer to help them develop a specific area of the performing arts. The suggested trainer is a friend of T6, who brings up (line 1) that the team should pay the trainer. This causes T8 to refer to the fantasy type (line 2) with a reference to a previously introduced fantasy theme "our small size justifies our actions." T2, T3, and T6 react with laughter and agreement:

1   T6: "But where would we get money for it? We should be able to actually pay this person and not like."

2   T8: "We don't have to pay her, she's a friend, we don't have to pay her."

3   (T2, T3, and T6 laugh)

4   T6: "Mm-hmm"

Third vision: We are learning decision-making together. A pragmatic master

analogue guides the team's third rhetorical vision. The vision consists of two fantasy types

and five fantasy themes. The first fantasy type "we need to develop this" converges from

themes in which the team members critically reflect past incidents where they have been

naïve and not resource efficient in decision-making. The following excerpt depicts the

fantasy type in an episode where the team is discussing contract issues. T6 stresses the

relevance of signing written contracts by dramatizing the team's kindness and blue-eyedness,

which is a Finnish expression referring to being naïve (lines 1 and 3). T2 adds to this (line 4)

with the dramatization of a "shitty taste," added to and polished by T3 and T5 in lines 5 and

7:

1   T6: "We're still way too kind in relation to how kind others are, in business."

2   T2: "Yes yes, absolutely."

3   T6: "And blue-eyed, we're constantly and always blue-eyed."

4   T2: "Yeah that deal with [a company], it kind of left a bad, shitty taste in my mouth."

5   T3: "Let's hope that the taste can still be rinsed away. With piss."

6   (team members start laughing)

7   T5: "Yeah, by taking on some even pissier deal and rinsing with that."

More encouraging scenarios are envisioned in the second fantasy type "we can do

this," illustrated in fantasy themes about learning from past mistakes, becoming better at

utilizing competencies, and assigning tasks. The following excerpt shows the team

dramatizing T1's role in the team as appropriate for being in charge of contracts. This

pragmatic discussion then turns into a fantasy chain about being a prick (lines 2–5) and

further about instructing clients to sign contracts with T1 (lines 6–13):

1   T2: "And even if you make the deal with a friend, a friend for a gig, when T1 does the official contract,

2   then in a way. It, it kind of makes it easier, then you don't have to be. You don't have to be the prick."

3   T1: "I can be the prick."

4   T2: "Yeah or you don't have to be a prick as you're doing your job and we don't have to, it makes it

5   easier."

6   T5: "Because we can say it already when agreeing on something that we have a producer, and they

7   will contact you."

8   T2: "Yeah, yes."

9   T6: "The contract making policy, I mean we could, you know (as if speaking to a client), we have this

10   kind of policy, and I have nothing to do with it."

11   T2: "Yeah, T1 will call you."

12   T6: "Yeah, T1 will call you, and we can sign the contract beforehand."

13   T3: "I can't promise I will be funny, but my lawyers will contact you." (others laugh)

Phase two: Functions of dramatizations

The second phase was an inductive examination of the functions of the dramatizations. The interest was not in the contents of dramatizations but in what was done with such messages and how patterns served to "construct, alter, and produce" (see Putnam, 2005, p. 188) decision-making. Single and chained dramatizations were examined from all 22 episodes containing them.

In some episodes, dramatizations occurred briefly, while other episodes were filled with them. To understand the functions of dramatizations, the following questions were posed: At what point in the episode do dramatizations occur? What happens before and after them? How do dramatizations shape the interaction? Do they cause a shift in discussion? What happens when dramatizations from competing rhetorical visions collide? Working

chronologically through each episode, congruent patterns were discovered, sorted, and combined. Altogether, seven functions were identified (see Table 2).

Reinforcing a shared past decision. In two episodes, dramatizations are used to reinforce a shared past decision. An earlier collective decision is brought up and its benefits, anticipated consequences, and justifications are retold with dramatizations, causing it to be reinforced.

The following excerpt illustrates this function in a discussion about making contracts that ensure proper and timely fees for the team. T6 brings up a previous decision about having the co-op's producer (T1) prepare all contracts. T6 states that the team has not been firm enough in signing written contracts by dramatizing according to three fantasy themes: "we should assign tasks according to roles" (lines 1–2), "we are too naïve" (lines 2–7), and "we can learn from mistakes" (line 7):

1 T6: "About these contract problems, we decided that all accepted offers are rotated to T1, and contracts

2   will be created. 'Cause there have been incidents where we, each of us have separately agreed on a gig

3   or something, and a contract has never been made and there's no, we have no kind of protection if a

4   customer cancels the night before. Or I mean. One of us gets sick and what, what do we do? Luckily,

5   that hasn't happened. Well, there was that one gig that got canceled, and we could have done that other

6   gig at the same time. That was also agreed on as friends and when it got cancelled we suddenly lost the

7   other gig and didn't get anything. This contract issue. And I mean, we're learning here, all the time.

Legitimizing past independent decisions. The second identified function of dramatizations concerns legitimizing independent decisions and occurs in five episodes. Decisions made by members independently outside the meetings are brought up to the attention of the entire team. Members then dramatize their responses, legitimizing the decisions.

In the following example, T1 expresses wanting "absolution" for declining a web site package offer. First, T1 dramatizes the salesperson's persuasiveness (line 1), to which T3 adds (line 2) with a similar experience. T1 then dramatizes her physical and mental state during the discussion (lines 3–4), after which T6 confirms agreement with T1's decision. She playfully dictates a reply to the offer (lines 5–6), referring to the brief talk as "lengthy discussions." T2 and T1 agree with this. T3 then suggests (line 9) that instead of buying the product, the team should offer them their own products, such as a program for their pre-Christmas party. T9, T6, and T2 add to this (lines 10–12), contributing to the fantasy theme "I'll do anything for money":

1   T1: "They're so good at talking, they're so good."

2   T3: "That's why I once scheduled an appointment with them. They were so convincing on the phone."

3   T1: "And it was a weak moment for me. I'd just come home from work, I was starving and trying to

4   eat at the same time."

5   T6: "But yeah (as if dictating to T1), after lengthy discussions in our weekly meeting, we have come

6   to the conclusion that we do not need this service."

7   T2: "Uh huh, nope"

8   T1: "Yep, no thanks"

9   T3: "But if you need some program for your Christmas party, contact us."

10   T9: "Mmhm yeah"

11   T6: "Well, maybe not a Christmas party [the meeting is held in December]" (laughs)

12   T2: "Or maybe something for the spring. Any kind of program."

13   T3: "For the after-Christmas party, yes."

Legitimizing current decisions. In six episodes, dramatizations were used to legitimize current decisions immediately after they were made. In the following example, the team discusses their upcoming development day, which includes a potluck party. T1 states

that she is out of money, and T2 suggests that T1 should not have to bring anything; T6 agrees. Immediately after, T1 dramatizes performing a dance instead (line 1), sparking fantasy chains about twerking (lines 2–5) and underwear (lines 7–12), adding to the fantasy theme "we can joke about each other." These chains legitimize the decision that T1 does not have to buy anything, and the team exits the topic.

1   T1: "I can surprise you all with a little dance."

2   T6: "That would be good.—A twerking performance (imitates twerking)!"

3   T1: "I can't dance like that."

4   T2: "But don't start twerking in the canoe, otherwise you'll fall down."

5   T1: "Oh, that's right. I'll figure something out. I'll write down [in the minutes] (pauses) surprise."

6   T4: (shouting) "Surpriiise!"

7   T6: "My surprise is that I'm not wearing any underwear."

8   T4: "Ta-daa!"

9   T5: "Guess what I'm not wearing!"

10   T4: "That would be a lot dirtier if it were my surprise."

11   T7: "Well, that wouldn't even be a surprise."

12   T4: "It's normal for me not to wear underwear."

Arguing with dramatizations. Three episodes include arguing with dramatizations. Members use dramatizations to accentuate opinions, to illustrate experiences and previous decisions, and to anticipate the possible consequences of decisions.

In one episode, the team discusses applying for a grant meant to fund a multi-professional project about inequality. Members start throwing around ideas for a suitable theme. First, T2 suggests alcoholism, after which T5 suggests immigration and dramatizes the possibilities for co-operating with agents working with immigrants (fantasy theme "sharing expertise is beneficial"):

T5's dramatization does not lead to a chain reaction, and T2 makes another suggestion, this time about poverty. She refers to a project on poverty that was put on hold before and dramatizes that it should not "be buried forever."

The following excerpt shows T2 arguing for poverty, as a personal and, therefore, interesting issue (lines 1–2). At first, T7, T5, and T3 (lines 3–6, 8) poke fun at T2's argument. However, T6 joins the dramatization, and T2's dramatization ends up catching on with the rest of the team. They quickly start dramatizing their personal experiences and societal remarks about poverty (lines 11–23). T2 breaks the fantasy chain and implies (line 24) that a decision to choose poverty as the theme has been reached:

1 T2: "Poverty interests me more than immigrants. Although I don't know why, maybe as an issue

2 it's personally closer."

3 T7: (laughing) "How great would that be taken out of context. I'm more interested in poverty than in

4 immigrants."

5 T5: "A new slogan for the True Finns."

6 T7: "Exactly."

7 T6: "Poverty as an issue is a bit more multidimensional. There are so many types of poor people."

8 T3: (chuckling) "Yeah, because immigrants are always—"

9 T6: "Of course, immigrants, too, but then again, none of us have any personal link to immigration."

10 T5: "Personal touch on the matter, yes yes yes but—"

11 T1: "And now it was just on the news that rich people who—"

12 T5: "Yeah, people who make four and a half thousand a month have to see debt counselors."

13 T1: "Yeah, because they are in so much debt. And four thousand euros are not enough to cover their

14 expenses. Which seems irrational, if I had four grand every month, I'd be swimming in the money

15 (gestures swimming)."

16 T4: "Well yeah, but that's relative."

17 T5: "I would be pissing honey every month (laughs)."

18 T6: "But that's how it goes; it's ostensible because the expenses are the same."

19   T3: "If I could piss honey, I would be rich."

20   T7: "Yeah, if you get more than a thousand a month, you feel rich."

21   T1: "Although at one point, I made more than two grand every month, still at the end of the month it

22   was—"

23   T4: "When you reach a certain level, you kind of—"

24   T2: "But good that it's there [in the minutes]. Let's start taking action on it."

This remark is not challenged. Instead, the team begins discussing the implementation

of the decision. In this episode, all three rhetorical visions are present: T5's unsupported

dramatization and the fantasy chains about money represent the second vision, while T2's

dramatizations represent the first and third rhetorical visions.

Leading with dramatizations. The function leading with dramatizations occurs in

five episodes. Dramatizations might be used by one or several members to persuade others or

guide them in decision-making. In some cases, previous decision-making discussions are

referenced by those attempting to lead others. The use of dramatizations differs from arguing,

as none or very few opposing dramatizations are identifiable in the episodes.

In one episode, T2 persuades T6 to opt out of a project, by using dramatizations. First,

T2 implies she is concerned about T6's well-being ("decisions should be based on well-

being," lines 1–2) and then envisions that T6 would not be available to participate in possible

gigs during the project ("we should be more resource efficient," line 2). She then suggests

using an intern to save on fees ("our small size justifies our actions," lines 2–5). Finally, T2

reinforces a shared past decision by reminding the others they have agreed to compensate for

her salary using other sources of income ("we should be more resource efficient" and "little

strokes fell great oaks," lines 5–8). This sparks a chain reaction between T6 and T2 (lines 9–

17) that turns into the wordplay "having all the chickens in the same hennery" (line 13),

echoing the fantasy theme "we should be more resource efficient." T3 adds to it in line 18

(wordplay on a Finnish saying implying getting two things done at the same time). T6 repeats

this wordplay (line 19, and finally promises (line 21) and declines. The topic is then exited:

1   T2: "It would be reasonable for you to opt out. Because you'd be busy every night, and what if we sell

2   gigs? It would get difficult, plus for your own well-being's sake. I was thinking, what if we ask

3   [name]? I don't know if she can sing but she could work as an intern for it, then in a way, we'd get.

4   If we don't get a grant or anything, then she would probably do it for free or at least her pay could be,

5   you know. I mean it would (laughs) leave more money for us. Because I won't get, as we agreed we

6   will decide that if we don't get a grant, then I will direct it, and I will be slowly paid back from the fees

7   from gigs. There wouldn't be such an intense financial pressure on us."

8   T6: "Yes, and what would be sensible about it is that, now with [a project] with kids, I mean that's also

9   the case with [a partner] but. But having these, you know separating these things."

10   T2: "Yeah and then it would be possible for us to go on a gig with you if the others are somewhere."

11   T6: "Yeah."

12   T2: "Not having all the chickens in the same hennery (laughs)."

13   T6: "Yeah exactly then, in a way—"

14   T2: "I just made that up."

15   (Members start laughing, the conversation pauses briefly)

16   T6: "Yeah, that that's exactly what I meant, not having, you know."

17   T3: "Then, we can have the chicken pissing in two directions."

18   T6: "The chicken can piss in two directions.——I think I've kept this hanging cause I've had a feeling

19   like, are these moments when I'm allowed to, you know, to say no? I've made very arbitrary promises.

20   (T6 and T5 laugh). I promise I will say no."

Embedding dramatizations. Decisions are also embedded in dramatizations. In three

lengthy episodes, the decision itself is not made explicit. Instead, during the course of the

deliberation, dramatizations of the past, or of possible consequences of decisions, become

dramatizations of decisions that have already been made. To simplify, the team goes from

dramatizing the consequences of possible decisions ("if we did this, it could cause that") to

dramatizing the consequences of existing decisions ("as we do this, it will cause that").

In one such episode, the team discusses preparing a large-scale cultural production, an issue that they had previously left undecided. The topic is brought up by T1 when the team is going over each member's expectations for the upcoming year. T1, T3, and especially T2 favor going through with the production. T6 expresses hesitancy and uncertainty. In the following example, she dramatizes possible financial and resource allocation problems of the project if it is not funded:

1   T6: "But the truth is that if we don't get funding, if we get offers for gigs or something like that… I

2   mean, fingers crossed and toes too that we could, we could [get funding]."

However, she joins T1, T2, and T4 in envisioning possible schedules and venues for the project. Here, all members speak in conditional sentences. Then, the team exits the topic for almost an hour. The following excerpt shows T2 returning to the topic and dramatizing according to the fantasy theme "I can decide for everyone" that they should "just decide to do" the production (lines 1–2). T3 supports this and dramatizes his argument (lines 3–6), based on describing a past production and envisioning the future of this possible production (the fantasy theme "Art should be stress-free"):

1   T2: "Shouldn't we just decide to do it and just do it and not have to, you know. It's really tiring to go

2   through this let's do it, let's not do it, let's do it, you know, dwelling on this."

3   T3: "Let's do it. I mean one nice thing about doing [a previous production] was that from the very

4   beginning, we had this idea about doing it because we wanted to, and trying to keep stress out of it.

5   If we could do that now, just sort of throw it out there. In a sense keep the structure of it light. Do it

6   lightly. It would be nice to do it. Anyway. Let's do it."

After these propositions, T6 still expresses doubts but once again joins the others in

envisioning possible partners for the project, still using conditional sentences. The topic is again exited (for eight minutes). As the team is discussing venues for another upcoming project, T6 herself returns to the topic (line 1) implying that they have decided to do the production and to do it at a certain venue, although no such decision is explicitly found in the interaction. T3 then dramatizes combining two productions in the same space (lines 2–3), with T2 agreeing (line 4). The team is no longer speculating about whether the production should be done but are envisioning how to combine it with another production:

1   T6: "That [venue] was on my mind but as we're doing [the production] there, would that be a bit silly?"

2   T3: "We could rent [the venue] for three months: September, October, November. Then blast there,

3   start right away with the production and rehearse [the other production] there the whole time."

4   T2: "That would be great. Okay well, let's keep that option open."

Controlling dramatizations. Last, the seventh identified function was controlling the timing, length, and topics of dramatizations. Naturally, some controlling inevitably occurs alongside all dramatizations. Someone always starts the dramatizing, and similarly, someone has to choose to discontinue participating in the dramatizing. In most cases, fantasy chains ended "on their own," with the dramatizing slowing down, usually resulting in a brief silence. In several episodes, after this either T1, T2, or T6 continued with non-dramatizing talk.

Although several members were observed starting, picking up on, or ending dramatizations, T2 was identified as controlling dramatizations by directly interrupting them or preventing them from happening. In the following example, the team is discussing the following year's schedules. T2 suggests locating a certain performance in the spring (line 1). After T6 has acknowledged this suggestion (line 2) and T2 has confirmed it (line 3), T4 begins a seemingly unrelated discussion about T8 directing a performance, which turns into a fantasy chain about T8 and T4 producing an adult film (lines 4–7):

1   T2: "Should we locate the performance here?"

2   T6: "To spring?"

3   T2: "To spring (writes down), in some form"

4   T4: "Has T8 ever directed anything? (T8 shakes head) Maybe you should force yourself now?"

5   T8: "I'll force myself to direct something, force myself to direct an adult movie or something."

6   T6: "Should T4 maybe force himself to act in it?"

7   T8: "Yeah, T4 forcing himself, that's a good starting point"

Members T4, T6, and T8 continue the fantasy chain. After a while, they begin joking about all team members forcing themselves to try new things in the following year (lines 11–17). T2 does not participate in this chain but interrupts it (line 11) and redirects the conversation back to the topic of scheduling. After this, the dramatization is exited:

8   T6: "I could force myself to compose something for it, I've no idea how but."

9   T8: "Put some piano music in there"

10   T4: "Should I also try to force myself to dance in it or something?"

11   T8: "We're headed towards the unknown, this year."

12   T6: "Yes, by force, all of us."

13   T8: "Facing our fears."

14   T6: "Not even fears, just facing stuff we don't like to do."

15   T8: "I just don't like this."

16   T4: "Stuff I hate."

17   T6: "Yeah"

18   T2: "Anyhow, should the premiere for the performance be in August or September?"

Phase 3: Analysis of interview data in relation to phases one and two

   The last phase of the analysis was done using interview data in which team members

discuss their own understanding of decision-making and issues related to dramatizing, such as story-telling, humor, joking, anecdotes, etc., in the team. This was done to examine the team's awareness of their own dramatizations, to achieve a fuller understanding of dramatizations in decision-making, and to ensure the rigor, credibility, and coherence of this study (see Tracy, 2010).

The interview data were first read through several times. Then, extracts related to decision-making and/or dramatization in the team were picked up. Thirty-five extracts were identified and included in the analysis. They ranged from short statements to longer discussions between the researcher and the interviewee.

Next, the identified extracts were categorized as those that related to the contents and/or functions of dramatizations. The interview data strengthened the analysis with both supportive and broadening notions of dramatizing in the team.

Findings related to the contents of dramatizations. Regarding the fantasy theme analysis, most interview remarks supported the findings from the observational data. The central contents of the first rhetorical vision, well-being and humor, were acknowledged in the interviews. All members expressed valuing time that is detached from being effective and goal-oriented, to just "chat and joke around" (T4), and share stories with one another. Members expressed great appreciation for their interpersonal relationships, strong humor, and shared storytelling. They attributed their shared sense of humor as forming in the group over time but also as a prerequisite to working in the team. Their sense of humor was also seen as common to those who work in the performing arts, as "a strong culture to which people have grown into" (T6).

The findings showed an interesting contrast to the findings from the observational data, regarding the second rhetorical vision. In the meetings, money was dramatized as a common enemy of the team. However, in the interviews, money was described as dividing

the team. Team members mentioned money as a difficult decision-making topic, often leading to decisions being postponed and discussions turning into heated, emotional arguments ridden with self-defense. T1 says, "It has often turned into self-defense and quarreling about how much each person should get."

In the meetings, the team members dramatized a need for effective use of resources and better decision outcomes (third vision). In the interviews, the team members focused on better decision-making processes in relation to dramatizations. Although storytelling, humor, etc., were appreciated, the team members identified that sometimes dramatizations took up too much time, making decision-making ineffective. The team had tried different solutions to this issue, such as using an hourglass to control the duration of the "how are you" round in the beginning of meetings but had given it up as members had felt uneasy about it. They had since tried out a new policy, in which time for storytelling and sharing personal matters was allocated at the end of meetings:

> T6: "Half of our meeting time consisted of idle talk. We decided to first try dealing with the stuff on the agenda and then go (slaps hands together), all right, how's everyone doing?"

Findings related to the functions of dramatizations. In the interviews, members discussed three of the identified functions of dramatizations. These were leading, embedding, and controlling of dramatizations.

Leading with dramatizations was especially attributed to T2 and T6, who also mostly implemented the function in the observational data. Interviewees noted that these members have the authority to steer decision-making. They were described as enthusiastic, loud, full of ideas, and persuasive. These qualities were seen as an asset and a challenge. For example, expressing differing opinions may be avoided due to fear of being "attacked":

> T1: "T6 is, and also T2, if they disagree about something, they will surely bring it up, which is great and good, but at times the way it is brought up, it's not always, it's very difficult to oppose. And if you oppose them it feels like you are under attack and you just think, maybe it's easier to just accommodate

to this situation."

T6 also recognizes strong leadership as occurring in decision-making, attributing this to T2:

> T6: "we need some sort of juxtaposition, what usually happens is that T2 would like to do something, and she gets others excited to do it, or I guess the worst-case scenario is that no one dares to stand up to her, and then we do it."

The embeddedness of decisions was recognized in the interviews. Members described occasional confusion about whether decisions had been made or merely discussed. T7 describes such an incident related to the team's decision to limit dramatizations in meetings with an hourglass marking the time for storytelling. He had assumed no decision had been made:

> T7: "the matter was left hanging in the air --- and I was surprised when I was handed the hourglass, because I had been left with a totally different impression about the matter"

Regarding controlling, several interviewees noted that especially T2 uses her authority to control dramatizations. She was noted to for example, guide the team back to the decision-making topic when they went off-topic:

> T10: "At times when we're discussing, for example, where to order food from, the discussion wanders off—and then everything becomes a mess, and no-one remembers what we were discussing anymore. (laughs) In situations like that, T2 is the one who says, okay, Chinese food, I'll make the call."

Others described this as unpleasant and preventing moments of peer support and much-needed idle time, while some saw it as helpful in keeping the team from wandering off topic.

Discussion

This study contributes to the articulated need to study the relationship between fantasies and their consequences (e.g., Waldeck et al., 2002) by uncovering the contents and functions of dramatizations in team decision-making. The dramatizing and chaining of fantasies occur in, and have an effect on, decision-making. Symbolic realities are constructed and refined before, during, and after decision-making. The processes of creating and using

symbolic realities are intertwined and simultaneous.

The analysis showed three rhetorical visions in the team's decision-making interaction. They reflected shared symbolic realities of friendship (first vision), enemies and allies (second vision), and learning (third vision). Furthermore, seven functions of dramatizations were identified from the team's decision-making. They are reinforcing a past shared decision, legitimizing past independent decisions, legitimizing current decisions, arguing with dramatizations, leading with dramatizations, embedding decisions in dramatizations, and controlling with dramatizations.

In addition to actively using dramatizations in decision-making, the team members were aware of their frequent dramatizations. They referred to the regular and at times obscene humor, stories, and anecdotes shared, as well as decision-making discussions being sidetracked by several types of dramatizations. The results also illustrate how the studied team constantly tried to balance dramatizations with non-dramatizing interaction in decision-making.

Implications for Team Decision-making in Work Situations

The methods employed in this study were useful for studying the decision-making of a parallel, entrepreneurial, and creative team. The results may resonate especially with long-term creative teams. Much of their work requires reflecting, evaluating, and planning throughout different phases of work. Decision-making largely comprises communicating and recommunicating decisions until they are "embodied in action" (Hendry, 2000, p. 973). The results also show how decision-making occurring outside team meetings is embodied in dramatizing talk used to legitimize decisions.

Through dramatizations, the team grounded fundamental values, goals, enemies, and allies, which, in turn, shaped background assumptions, argumentations, as well as criteria of competent decision-making. Especially the first rhetorical vision shows, that in addition to

resource efficiency and sensible business, this long-standing team highlights social relationships, cohesion, and well-being. These are not usually central themes in decision-making research emphasizing rationality and functionality (Hollingshead et al., 2005) that often focuses on short-term teams.

Despite criticism, SCT and FTA have a lot to offer for team research. FTA allows for the observation of what is considered meaningful, valued, motivating, punishable, etc., in teams. The team appeared to have shared knowledge structures of, for example, resources, expertise areas, external threats, and relationships within and outside the team. These structures influence how and what types of decisions are made.

However, research should embrace the theory in diverse ways. For example, researchers (Zanin et al., 2016) recently showed that multiple visions can compete and complement each other. This study showed three rhetorical visions, which did not seem to threaten each other. Despite some members' ability to lead others with dramatizations in situations where two or more visions were present, the visions themselves did not seem to be in competition or threaten each other. Instead, they showcased the team's symbolic reality from different angles and levels, highlighting interpersonal relationships (first vision), relationships with other groups and context (second vision), and issues of learning and competence (third vision).

Dramatizations and Team Communication Competence

Symbolic convergence has been suggested as useful in team communication and decision-making, by, for example, offering an incubator for creativity and aiding in the creation of shared understandings of tasks, environments, and effective and appropriate decision-making (e.g., Bormann, 1996; Hirokawa & Salazar, 1999; Kafle, 2014; Waldeck et al., 2002). While not directly confirming such claims, the results of this study give rise to considerations about how to use dramatizations competently in decision-making.

Communication competence is typically defined as the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable effective and appropriate communication (e.g., Backlund & Morreale, 2015). In the context of groups, communication competence has mostly been approached from a functional, individual perspective (e.g., Beebe & Barge, 1994). A need to explore group-level and processual elements of team communication competence has been pointed out (e.g., Jablin & Sias, 2001; Shockley-Zalabak, 2015). FTA can be used to explain what is considered competent both regarding decision-making processes and outcomes. The first and second visions showed shared interpretations of values, relationships, and contexts influencing decision-making *outcomes.* The third vision highlighted the team's values related to decision-making *processes*. Members valued resource effective decision-making, while simultaneously they valued humor, storytelling, "idle time," and relational support. A key issue in their attempt at competent decision-making, thus, was balancing the (seemingly) idle dramatizations with effective, goal-oriented interaction.

SCT includes three evaluative concepts: *shared group consciousness, rhetorical vision–reality links, and fantasy theme artistry* (see Bormann et al., 2001). *Shared group consciousness* refers to whether fantasy themes construct coherent rhetorical visions or remain scattered. A *rhetorical vision–reality link* represents the accuracy of the vision and whether it is based on evidence or facts; a vision with no such link would result in a "chaotic rhetorical environment" (Cragan & Shields, 1992, p. 202). Groups also have to implement their decisions in their surrounding environment (Hirokawa & Salazar, 1999), suggesting that a rhetorical vision–reality link is important for effective and appropriate rhetorical visions in work teams.

In addition to producing coherent and accurate visions, dramatizations should be *used* competently to enhance decision-making and team interaction in general. *Fantasy theme artistry* relates to how creative, novel, and attractive dramatizations are in captivating others

to participate in the dramatizations. Such artistry might be attributed to a rhetorically skilled individual, but more often, it is a product of the entire group (Bormann, 1996). The ability of a group to pick up dramatizations, make sense of important matters through them, and make the shared values, goals, threats, etc., visible can be seen as a component of competence.

When mirrored with the results of this study, the team had coherent, shared group consciousness in decision-making, built with individual- and group-level fantasy theme artistry. However, attention should be paid to the processes by which such a shared group consciousness is created.

There was experienced and observable imbalance in the team regarding who gets to define and use dramatizations. This imbalance highlights the importance of Olufowote's (2006) call to examine issues of power, politics, and conflict and criticism of over-egalitarian assumptions of SCT. In this team, it seems that some members have more power to create, steer, or end dramatizations than others. These members' dramatizations were more likely to be picked up and to affect decision-making outcomes. This may be an issue of individual skillfulness but also relate to, for example, histories and status within the team, as members with more authority in dramatizing were both long-standing members, and the other one also had history as the leader of the team. Allowing someone with a leadership role or position to control dramatizations may not bode good for the relationships, diversity, or quality of decisions in a team. For example, Tourish (2014, p. 89) called for leaders to harness "the productive potential of dissent," especially in the early stages of decision-making to encourage creativity and different positions. This remark echoes the remarks made about the benefits of divergence to decision quality by Zanin et al. (2016).

Dramatizations should also be balanced with non-dramatizing interaction. Although dramatizing may release tension and boost creativity, groups should verify decisions derived from fantasies, by carefully and systematically evaluating the solution and its quality. The

studied team did not actively engage in this activity; the team often exited decision topics shortly after dramatizations. Although dramatizations are a way to co-create and sustain a shared understanding of the team and its tasks, teams would likely benefit from distancing themselves from dramatizations and rationally discussing decisions afterward.

The results of this study offer interesting opportunities for team training and consultation work. Teams could be made aware of the dramatizing nature of decision-making and team communication in general. This could include scrutinizing which dramatizations are picked up or have already become full-blown fantasies. Discussing the extent to which team members experience their rhetorical vision(s) to be created with shared fantasy theme artistry and reality–vision links could benefit teams. Can everyone participate in dramatizations, and are differing visions allowed to exist? Teams might also benefit from reflecting on how they incorporate the rational and irrational in decision-making.

Limitations and Future Directions

There is variation in how evident fantasies are in groups and how much data are needed to study them. The studied team's ample use of dramatizations combined with a rigorous line-by-line analysis of the team's interaction processes proved the amount of data sufficient (see Tracy, 2010). The analysis displayed the phenomenon of dramatizing in team decision-making in a novel and versatile fashion. The findings of this study bring forth interesting possibilities for future research.

The combination of observational and interview data produced a rich understanding of the phenomenon and proved a useful methodology for studying the dramatizing nature of decision-making. The findings of the interview analysis largely paralleled the observed contents of dramatizations. Regarding the functions of dramatizations, the interview analysis led to new findings and renaming of several existing findings. For example, the function "controlling dramatizations" was initially recognized from the interview data as the team

members themselves discussed it, and then it was located in the observational data.

The dataset used in this study does not allow examination of the "life cycle" of rhetorical visions from creation to the terminus (Bormann, 1996) or the entire trajectories of decisions. Thus, it is impossible to estimate the full effects of dramatizations on decision-making. However, this would likely be a challenge with any natural team's decision-making. This challenge could be tackled with longitudinal research. Such research could show how changes in membership, resources, relationships, team dynamics, etc., affect dramatizations and decision-making over time. Further research could also broaden the understanding of various functions of dramatizations by examining different types of teams.

The issues of power, hierarchy, and equality recognized in previous research and this study bring forth an important dimension of dramatizations and team communication competence: ethics. The dimension of ethics is central but may often be overlooked at the expense of goal achievement when communication competence is discussed (see Jablin & Sias, 2001). Based on these results, it is important to look further into the ethical aspects of creating symbolic realities and using them.

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