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Organizing (for) the Future: How Organizations Manage Things to Come

Antenarration in Ongoing Strategic Change: Using the Story Index to Capture Daunting and Optimistic Futures

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Abstract

Strategic organizational change is a complex, future-oriented phenomenon that is critical for any organization. Traditional means of inquiry have struggled with the difficulty of capturing the future; thus, the methods for managing things to come remain scarce. In this chapter, we contribute to managing strategic change, and thereby the future of the organization, by developing the Story Index (SIX) method. The method facilitates a better understanding of how organizational change takes shape in the discursive reality before materializing in concrete terms. SIX is an analytical process combining antenarratives and narrative rationality to reveal the emerging meanings and rationales of change among different organizational levels resonating positively or negatively with the future.

Introduction

Because strategy is inevitably future oriented (e.g., Golsorkhi et al. 2011; Sajasalo et al. 2016), the character and nature of the future is one of the most problematic and reflected-upon issues of strategic change in organizations. While understanding the past and present situation establishes the basis for action in organizations, a more detailed grasp is needed of how future-oriented understanding(s) and responses to the projected future(s) emerge in organizations (see Beckert 2016; Chiles, Bluedorn, and Gupta 2007). This requires a more thorough appreciation of how emerging meanings in organizational reality related to the future and strategic organizational change are constructed in organizational discourse (Gioia and Chittipeddi 1991; Boje 2008; Sajasalo et al. 2016).

In this chapter, we aim to further the understanding of the role of stories in future-oriented (prospective) organizational sensemaking. Stories are a fundamental part of organizational discourse and a central means of conveying and constructing meanings in organizational communication (Grant and Marshak 2011). Narrative approaches have established themselves as an integral part of organizational change and strategy-as-practice literature (see, e.g., Brown and Thompson 2013; Sonenshein 2010). For instance, the journal *Organization* devoted a special issue to the topic (see *Organization* vol. 16, no. 3). In their introduction to the special issue, Brown, Gabriel, and Gherardi (2009, 323) highlighted the importance of stories for managing change: "Change spawns stories and stories can trigger change. Stories can also block change and can define what constitutes change." Consistent with this idea, Sonenshein (2010)

and Vaara and Reff Pedersen (2013) addressed the role of sensemaking, narratives, and discursive understanding in future-oriented strategic change. Boje (2011b) and Boje, Haley, and Saylor (2016) highlighted the role of antenarration in the context of organizational change. Our chapter aligns particularly with the work of Vaara and Tienari (2011), who applied antenarratives to reveal emerging legitimation and resistance in organizational storytelling during a strategic change in a financial organization.

Narratives are generally understood as well-formed and crystallized accounts of events having a beginning–middle–end (BME) structure and a rather permanent state of being. Stories, however, differ from narratives in that they lack a stable structure and emerge in informal everyday situations in organizations (Boje 2001, 1–6). In situations of strategic change, organizational discourse contains several stories conveying information, opinions, beliefs, and even facts regarding the change and future of the organization, making it challenging for the organizational members to make sense of the unfolding events.

Stories have an important role in making sense of dynamic and complex organizational change (cf. Boje 2008; Vaara and Tienari 2011). According to Weick (2001), sensemaking is an ongoing process through which people create an understanding of the everyday organizational realities they face. It is a matter of identifying, sketching, interrelating, and interpreting multiple ongoing organizational discourses, particularly stories (Berti 2017). The time aspect is intrinsic to sensemaking in that sensemaking takes place here and now, but its time referent may be the past or the future.

Because strategic change is formed by a host of events and actions with a future orientation, there is always a need to understand events to come. Boje (2008) elaborated on the ideas of antenarrative and prospective sensemaking. Both are useful for our purpose in this chapter. The prefix “ante” refers to something that comes before or first. Thus, an antenarrative is something emerging and existing before a narrative. Boje (2008, 13) defined antenarratives as “prospective (forward-looking) bets (antes).” In terms of sensemaking, narratives with a stable BME structure connect with Weick’s (2001) concept of retrospective sensemaking. Antenarratives, on the other hand, represent prospective sensemaking (Boje 2001, 2008). One more conceptual clarification is still required: in line with Boje (2001, 2011a), when developing our method, we treat stories as antenarratives—characterized by fragmented, incomplete, incoherent, unplotted, and nonlinear speculations.

To understand how people evaluate the “truth value” of the stories and narratives they encounter, we will utilize the narrative rationality framework (Fisher 1989). All narrative accounts (narratives, antenarratives, and stories) have a rationality of their own. Fisher (1989) proposed a narrative paradigm with its own conception of rationality enriching the logico-scientific rational world paradigm. Narrative rationality consists of two elements: coherence and fidelity. Coherence refers to the experience of how well the narrative or story is composed, while fidelity is about its plausibility.

We will establish how strategic change can be made visible and a subject of analysis to address change-related meanings manifested in ongoing antenarration and narrative rationality. For this purpose, we propose a new method, the Story Index (SIX), offering a means to understand prospective sensemaking and rationales related to organizational change, which are difficult to capture with traditional means of inquiry. We contribute to the understanding of how strategic change-related discourse becomes meaningful in organizations (cf. Vaara and Tienari 2011; Brown and Thompson 2013) and what rationalities are involved. This facilitates more informed responses to the future by organizations in their effort to manage things to come.

Story Index: Theoretical framing

Due to the overemphasis on the rational aspects of organizational life, storytelling, stories, and narratives have typically been considered irrational and, as such, solely belonging to the unofficial and unmanageable side of organizations (Gabriel 2000). However, an appreciation has begun to emerge of the importance of subjective ideas, beliefs, emotions, and ethical assessments as the building blocks of organizational rationality—constructed and communicated through storytelling (Gabriel and Griffiths 2004). As noted, for instance, by Laine and Vaara (2011) and Grant and Marshak (2011), future-oriented strategic change becomes existent and thus discernible only in organizational discourse. Furthermore, meanings associated with issues allow responses to them, making sensemaking a crucial phenomenon for all organizational activity.

The SIX method aspires to make future-oriented strategic change discernible and available for observation by grasping the flux of meanings in organizational storytelling (Boje 2008, 2011a). An index refers to a sign that is connected to a phenomenon. Just as smoke is associated with fire (cf. Fiske 1990), future-oriented, strategic change–related storytelling may contain “smoke” that indicates “fires” in the discursive organizational reality. In our analysis of organizational stories utilizing SIX, we aim to identify the fires and their meanings signaled by the smoke of the discursive and narrative elements related to ongoing future-oriented organizational change processes. The metaphor of smoke denotes the early signs that guide us to the actual strategic change process discursively constructed to have starting and ending points (Grant and Marshak 2011). In this respect, SIX helps us to recognize the dynamics involved in strategic change and to sense how the organizational members perceive the future. In terms of managing organizational change, it is important to understand whether the future holds optimistic or daunting notes for the organizational members.

Antenarratives, prospective sensemaking, and narrative rationality

Stories and storytelling—antenarratives in particular (Boje 2001)—shape the emerging meanings of the organizational reality related to the future and are therefore important influencers of the resultant responses and activity. Antenarratives may assume several forms, such as linear, cyclic, vortex, or rhizomatic (Boje 2011a, 7, 13), assuming differing orientations toward the future. Linear antenarratives refer to future-perfect sensemaking that is concerned with situations where complete situational knowledge of outcomes is lacking. Linear

antenarratives relate to the future as a continuum of the past and present—often appearing in preparations for the future by setting goals—and are therefore common in strategic planning.

Cyclic antenarratives orient to the future in a nonlinear fashion and build on the idea that a cycle recognized in the past will repeat itself predictably at some later point. While there is some practical indication of the cyclic nature of the stock market, for instance, or in the life-cycle models that appear in the management literature (Boje 2011b), the foundation for such assumptions is as shaky as those that espouse linear, extrapolative thinking.

Vortex antenarratives assume a form from which there appears to be no escape. When an antenarrative takes the form of a vortex, much of the story is invisible to the author and the audience alike, appearing to be dictated by circumstances over which no one has control. In vortex antenarration, the future emerges haphazardly once the vortex takes over, and the connection between the past and the future is random, as the field of possibilities is countless and totally unknown.

The key facet of rhizomatic antenarratives is movement: they tend to extend in all directions (either aboveground or underground) in the organizational reality. A rhizomatic antenarrative extends underground in a latent manner, and when uncertainty (e.g., organizational or market change) enters the organizational flux of stories, it shoots up sprouts around the organization and grows rampantly (Boje 2011a, 2011b). Rhizomatic antenarratives contain mostly past

connotations that resonate with the present situation, forming a web of meanings that strengthen each other and eventually influence the emerging conception of the future.

Prospective sensemaking is especially integral to future-oriented strategic change, but it is similarly important for all ongoing change endeavors in organizations. This makes the antenarrative perspective a relevant vantage point for better appreciating the nature of strategic change and managing it by allowing for considerations of the dynamics and future-oriented nature of the process. Strategic change is inevitably a form of ante-something; it is a bet (ante) for the future by which an organization aspires to seize events to gain control of them. Therefore, antenarratives communicated in the course of strategic change can function as transformative agents related to the future, as shown, for instance, by Vaara and Tienari (2011).

Narrative rationality (Fisher 1989, 62–64) suggests that human beings have an inherent awareness of narrative probability formed by two components: coherence and fidelity. First, people examine and test the coherence of the stories they encounter. It is a matter of configuration: How do the parts of a story hold together? Do they form an understandable whole? Second, people ruminate about how the stories relate to their lived experiences. They seek to determine whether the stories portray the world in a manner that they find believable—a test of fidelity. By testing both the coherence and fidelity of experiences, human beings determine what counts as reality (Fisher 1989).

The perceived truth about a given matter is a result of juxtaposition. There is no story that is not embedded in other stories (Fisher 1994; see also Auvinen, Mangelaja, and Sintonen 2010). Assessing what is true involves a judgment of fidelity, which is determined by the facts that appear in a story (“facts are facts”). Fidelity is also determined by the values that appear in a story—the match between the idea of subjective ethics and the soundness of the values that emerge in the interpretation. Therefore, as values inform reason, it is indispensable to weigh the values in a discourse to determine their worthiness as a basis of belief and action (Fisher 1994).

In the following, we apply the idea of narrative rationality as a framework to examine the reasoning (i.e., the rationales and motives) that emerges in the antenarration of our case organization’s members related to the future-oriented strategic change.

Research site, data, and methodology

Our illustrative case organization is the largest financial institution in Finland, the OP-Pohjola Group Central Cooperative (OP-Pohjola), with about 12,000 employees and EUR 1,251 million in total assets (OP Financial Group 2016a). We focus on its largest bank, Helsingin OP Bank Plc (HOP), employing some 700 people.

We gained full access to the organization in 2012 to study its strategizing (cf. Whittington 1996). In early 2014, during an interview round focused on strategy implementation, we found

ourselves amidst a massive strategic change. The most recent round of interviews occurred during what had been announced as a major merger process that would unfold from spring 2014 onward, providing us with an exceptional opportunity to witness the strategic change process in real time. Figure 1 outlines recent major events concerning HOP and the involvement of the research team with the organization.

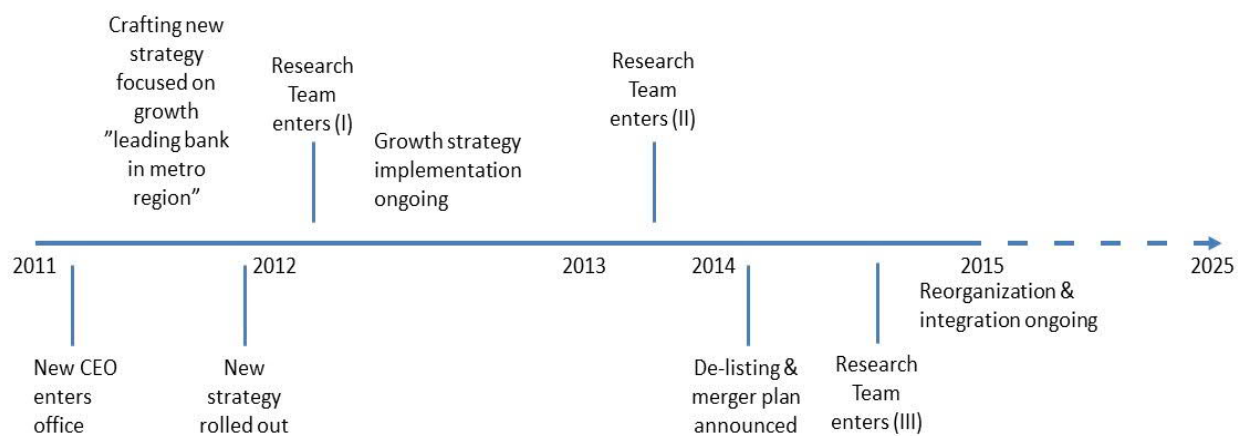


Figure 1. The timeline of central events and data gathering

Our research strategy is qualitative and interpretative (see Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008). Altogether, 30 interviews were conducted while the strategic change was ongoing (February 2014–October 2015), covering all organizational levels: the OP-Pohjola top management and the HOP top management team (Tier 1), as well as the middle management and the operative personnel at HOP (Tier 2). Snowball sampling (Patton 2002; Laumann and Pappi 1976) was utilized to find the informants. The representatives of HOP senior management were asked to identify individuals representing both tiers for further interviews. All informants—16 representing Tier 1 and 14 for Tier 2—agreed to the interviews. The interviews lasted between

30 and 90 minutes each, resulting in 24 hours of recordings with 400 pages of single-spaced transcription.

The themes of the semi-structured interviews included the background of the interviewees, the communication of the ongoing strategic change, and the interviewees' subjective understanding of it at the time. The interviewees were invited to discuss their conceptions of the change process and anticipated actions, which made our data especially suitable for the antenarrative approach (cf. Boje 2001; Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008).

Producing our findings involved applying the SIX method by first resorting to antenarrative theme analysis (Boje 2001; see also Auvinen 2012) to identify emerging meanings in our data in the context of a future-oriented, ongoing strategic change. We sought to sketch the unfolding experiences of the interviewees, which resulted in capturing two antenarratives closely resembling the forms suggested by Boje (2011b). Next, to evaluate how the antenarratives hung together (coherence) and whether they appeared plausible (fidelity), we applied Fisher's (1994) narrative rationality framework. Finally, we synthesized the previous steps to produce a condensed picture of the strategic change by piecing together the antenarratives. This last step aimed at clarifying how the rationales worked as shapers of the future-oriented meanings relevant to the ongoing strategic change to capture its dynamics. In other words, SIX allowed us to observe the smoke in the antenarration and to identify the fire it represented in the discursive organizational reality: whether the antenarrative appeared positively or negatively charged. Figure 2 summarizes our process of applying SIX.

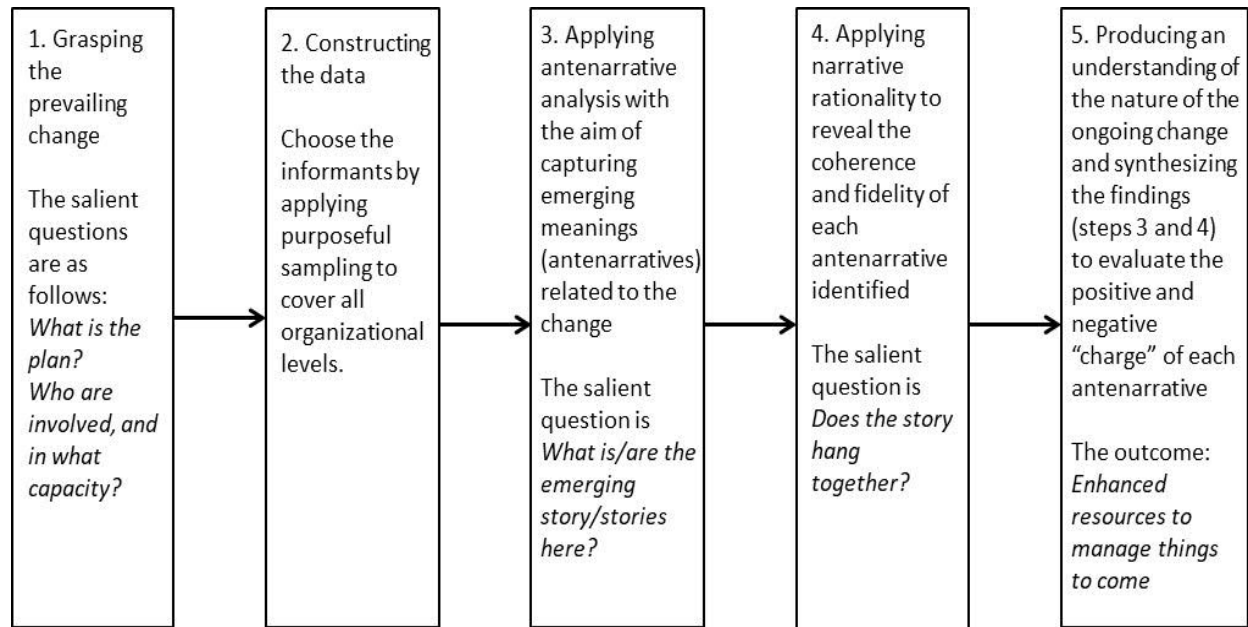


Figure 2. The Story Index method about here

Results: Using SIX

Since early 2012, HOP has been aiming at growth with an ambitious goal of “becoming the leading bank in the metropolitan region” (see Sajasalo et al. 2016). A major step in the projected growth path was a planned merger of two banks: HOP (wholly owned by OP-Pohjola) and Pohjola Bank (publicly listed), which would benefit the owners of OP-Pohjola in the long run (e.g., Helsingin Sanomat 2014). The arrangement aimed to improve the competitive position of OP-Pohjola by enabling new funding and reducing overlap by creating a single organization in the Helsinki metropolitan region (OP-Pohjola 2014).

To illustrate the usability of SIX in capturing prospective sensemaking and the resultant projections of the otherwise unknown future in the form of optimistic and daunting antenarratives, we outline the elements of each and the narrative rationalities involved.

Optimistic future: The leading bank antenarrative

After the merger plan became public, the chief executive officer of HOP restated the strategic goal:

The aim of the new bank is to reach first place in the metropolitan region in all business lines. As a group, we have a huge potential for growth here. For now, we are the contender. (OP-Pohjola 2014)

A central theme in the antenarrative, which we term the “leading bank antenarrative,” is growth. The imperative for growth appears as a canonized discourse within Tier 1 management, emphasizing HOP/OP-Pohjola’s active role in industry transformation. A senior manager (Tier 1) of OP-Pohjola frames the need for growth as a must to secure the future:

No growth today means no result tomorrow—and the day after tomorrow, we are no longer ... Banking, you know, is a balance sheet business.

A growth path for HOP was set in its official strategy with a time frame—2025 (see Sajasalo et al. 2016)—highlighting the assumption of steady growth, which was only to be accelerated by

the planned merger. The leading bank antenarrative therefore resembles what Boje (2011a) called the “linear antenarrative”: the past, present, and future form a continuum that is expected to be realized as planned.

Linear antenarratives, while problematic in terms of simply extrapolating from the past into the future, remain widely used in strategic planning (e.g., Hayes 2014). Linear antenarration resorts to retrospective sensemaking, with the expectation that the past will repeat itself. Therefore, change is interpreted as a logical and rational step that inevitably leads to the future goal. While the leading bank antenarrative outlines an end for the process in 2025, a senior manager (Tier 1) of OP-Pohjola provides a rationale for setting such a concrete milestone and tones down the generally held perception of it within the organization as binding:

A given year [2025] was set to mark the time by which we want to achieve the goal. It really doesn't matter if the goal is met that exact year. It symbolizes that we believe the goal is achievable within some reasonable time frame.

The rationality embedded in the leading bank antenarrative mostly emerged through fidelity, particularly in the form of sound reasoning (Fisher 1994). The setting of a publicly listed part and a cooperative part co-existing within the same group is framed as not serving the best interests of the main owner, OP-Pohjola, the group as a whole, or the owner-customers of the cooperative group. The recurring need to consider the minority shareholders' interests in the

listed Pohjola Bank was portrayed as a hindrance to the unity and best interests of the whole group.

From the majority owner's perspective, the constant balancing between the differing interests of the owner groups was counterproductive to the growth effort. Therefore, eliminating the influence of the minority owner represented sound reasoning from the group's perspective, as explained by a senior manager (Tier 1) of OP-Pohjola:

Managing a hybrid organization was becoming harder. Making it work at all required a very permissive style of management toward the listed part of the group ... it can't be that the majority owner [over 1.5 million owner-customers] needs to constantly be asking 30,000 minority owners' [of Pohjola Bank] permission: "Is it okay if we do this?"

Coherence (Fisher 1989, 1994) emerged in the leading bank antenarrative. The narrative revolved around the imperative for growth, which is in line with stories in other relevant discourses, such as the universal economic growth discourse (e.g., Rodrik 2003) and the imperative business growth discourse (see Binswanger 2009; Gordon and Rosenthal 2003), emphasizing the importance of various external forces seen to force business organizations to seek growth. The organization appears in control of its destiny in the leading bank antenarrative: while challenged by the external environment, it is able to achieve the needed growth through methods of its own choosing, and by doing so, achieve its future aspirations.

Therefore, the future view constructed in the leading bank antenarrative clearly represents optimism.

To synthesize, we find that the leading bank antenarrative gained coherence and fidelity for those involved in the growth imperative discourse. Growth appears as an inescapable necessity of the banking business and the overriding rationale for securing the future. Consequently, from the perspective of ongoing strategic change and prospective sensemaking, the leading bank antenarrative is the smoke that indicates the fire of the growth imperative.

Daunting future: The digitalization antenarrative

One major external force appearing to drive change in the banking business, ostensibly exceeding all others, is digitalization. The main features of this antenarrative are intensifying competition brought about by a new breed of international and domestic competitors at the fringes of the industry building on digital service provision. The organization is portrayed as in urgent need of preparation for the unconventional competition enabled by digitalization.

Ultimately, digitalization appears to challenge the entire existence of industry incumbents. An excerpt from the top management of OP-Pohjola (Tier 1) typifies the firmly held belief that digitalization will fully and irreversibly revolutionize banking:

The disruption caused by digitalization means the whole financial sector will be totally reinvented in the next few years ... the business model needs to be totally constructed anew.

While digitalization appears as a force of nature from the perspective of top management, this assessment raises some criticism lower down in the organization as a distortion of reality. This means the top management has either been persuaded by the digitalization hype without due critical thinking or has become alienated from the everyday reality of the organization. For Tier 2 representatives, digitalization appears less revolutionary, giving rise to dissatisfaction with the top management's digitalization excitement:

Digitalization seems to drive strategy nowadays ... sure, it will change things ... there are still those of us who believe face-to-face interaction is needed; not everything will be digitalized. Looking at things from the HQ may give the illusion that everyone operates digitally. Lots of average Joes and Jills, however, still need real people to advise them—and an occasional pat on the back when dealing with the major financial questions of their lives.

The digitalization discourse portrays features of what Boje (2011a, 2011b) referred to as a vortex antenarrative. The digitalization antenarrative assumes the form of a pressing external force that is perceived to have unspecified—yet unavoidably coercive—implications for the organization. The issues in the digitalization antenarrative present solely negative implications for the organization. The likelihood of the organization maintaining its current mode of operation appears non-existent: fundamental changes are depicted as being inescapable in the immediate future.

The financial sector incumbents see the effects of digitalization as severe threats beyond anyone's control. The external force is so pressing that even the prospect of opportunities created by the emerging competitive landscape does not feature in the antenarrative. The digitalization antenarrative paints a picture of a matter of life and death. To survive the projected turmoil, the incumbents must reinvent both their business models and the organizations themselves to justify their existence in the future.

The digitalization antenarrative appears to have gained coherence (Fisher 1994) for those involved with the strategic change, especially at the top of the organization. The digitalization antenarrative represents an inevitable and insurmountable problem for them, as digitalization and its effects simply cannot be avoided. The strategic change is therefore constructed as being a compulsion in the face of an inescapable fact. While the overall digitalization excitement met some resistance at the lower reaches of the organizational hierarchy, it clearly had no impact on the received wisdom regarding the effects of digitalization on the financial sector. Therefore, the future view constructed in the digitalization antenarrative presents a daunting future and paints a picture of an immediate need for thorough strategic change to avoid peril.

To synthesize, the rationality of the digitalization antenarrative emerges through coherence. Several elements in the digitalization antenarrative itself and in the discourses related to the external environment adhere to create coherence for the antenarrative, which thus lends plausibility to the prospective sensemaking upon which it is based. The digitalization

antenarrative is closely connected with recent global developments in business, such as the effects of digital convergence on the hard-hit media industry (e.g., The Economist 2012). These recent trajectories elevate the importance of the external forces that are seen to coerce business organizations to seek ways to transform themselves at the risk of otherwise being eliminated by new, nimble competitors. The digitalization antenarrative is the smoke that indicates the fire of a threat to the existence of the organization. The smoke is so thick that it appears to disarm critical thinking at the top of the organization.

Discussion and conclusion

In our application of SIX, we identified two emerging future-oriented storylines: the leading bank antenarrative (linear) and the digitalization antenarrative (vortex), with contrasting orientations toward the future of the organization and the industry. The leading bank antenarrative appears both legitimate and empowering in terms of prospective sensemaking. The digitalization antenarrative appears legitimate as well, but in terms of prospective sensemaking, it is discouraging. However, both are examples of antenarratives in which external influences feature prominently. As discussed above, they differ from one another in that the leading bank antenarrative revolving around substantial growth in the future (2025) depicts the external environment as enabling and malleable through the organization's own initiatives, whereas the digitalization antenarrative portrays the external environment as hostile and unavoidably coercive, even life-threatening.

While both growth and digitalization appear to be widely accepted, almost self-evident imperatives within the business community, they manifest rather differently for the members of the case organization. Both the growth and digitalization imperatives imply changes that must occur within the organization. The growth-oriented, leading bank antenarrative assigns strong agency to the organization: the organization is in control of its destiny, and the outlook is therefore positive. The digitalization antenarrative portrays the organization as a business survivalist pressured by an almost omnipotent digital revolution. In the emerging digitalized competitive landscape, the question is fundamentally about survival through transformation under severe pressure. In this antenarrative, the organization has little or no power to control events. The digitalization antenarrative strips the organization of its agency and places it at the mercy of malicious external forces, making the organization's future look daunting.

However, the response of OP-Pohjola to the projected optimistic and daunting futures captured here through SIX illustrates how prospective sensemaking, the emerging meanings related to the future, and responses to the projections interrelate in an attempt to manage things to come. In the fall of 2015, OP-Pohjola commenced a process in which both the optimistic and daunting future outlooks intertwined to produce a bold new direction for the organization. The strategy was clearly a response to the earlier prospective sensemaking, especially the daunting future view of the digitalization antenarrative.

What previously presented itself as a threat in the form of digitalization now appeared as a tentative opportunity to be captured based on the strengths of the organization (wide

customer base and strong balance sheet) to offset its weaknesses by investing EUR 2 billion over five years (IT systems, R&D, mobile platforms/applications, etc.). The organization would gradually change from “a plain financial services provider to a diversified services company of the digital era with strong financial services expertise” (OP Financial Group 2017). Thus, the organization—clearly recognizing the need to respond to the threat of digitalization to keep alive the positive future dominating the growth antenarrative—effectively switched its orientation toward digitalization and redirected its focus from a defensive stance to an offensive one.

Recent management literature has criticized the traditional view of change as a rational, linear process from a present to a well-defined future state according to a plan (cf. Sonenshein 2010). Instead of steady progress toward a known future, change is increasingly depicted as having no clear beginning, middle, or end (Boje 2011a). This features prominently in our case as well. The vision-state of transforming into a modern diversified services company was framed as a gradual change to take place over several years. While the clearly outlined progress of change processes has been questioned lately, management is still considered a key group in overcoming resistance in organizations by breaking down existing meaning constructions.

This attitude implicitly assigns the rest of the organization the narrow role of change resister and leads to overlooking the perspective of the change recipients (Bartunek et al. 2006; Ford, Ford, and D’Amelio 2008). However, promoters and resisters emerge in all organizational levels in our findings. Resistance evidently wells from the constantly emerging organizational

meanings (antenarration) rather than from individual members or organizational positions, which lends support to the critique of the traditional unfreezing–change–refreezing modeling of change processes (cf. Sonenshein 2010; Brown and Humphreys 2003). Rather than following such a linear course, organizations only become altered through the perpetual sensemaking of their members regarding both the present situation and unknown future states.

Our findings show that it is important to make the prospective sensemaking and experiences of organizational members at all levels visible to facilitate a better understanding of how organizational change takes shape in the discursive reality before it materializes in concrete terms. Change emerges through the activities of individuals in their daily work, which makes the change-related sensemaking of individuals and small groups an important subject of study for change management, as Vaara, Sonenshein, and Boje (2016) noted in their review of the literature addressing organizational stability and change. Our findings show how SIX offers guidance for managing change by bringing the change recipients and the discursive elements of ongoing change to the fore, as called for by Bartunek et al. (2006) and Ford, Ford, and D'Amelio (2008), among others.

Moreover, our findings highlight the need to pay closer attention to the socially constructed nature of change that SIX is able to capture, and therefore provides an alternative to the tendency in functionalist accounts of change to focus on observable actions alone (Brown and Humphreys 2003). This is crucial not only for a better understanding of the nature and dynamics of organizational change, which essentially is about occurrences in the tentative

future, but also for a better sense of how future-oriented understanding in organizations is constructed through prospective sensemaking. As sensemaking can be said to occupy a central role in the materialization of organizational change, prospective sensemaking can be said to be equally important—if not more so—in attempts to grasp the otherwise unknown future.

We argue that SIX is suitable for examining the inherent elements of strategic change and the related prospective sensemaking not only in our particular case, but also in other situations of strategic change through analytical generalization (cf. Yin 2013; Simons 2015). Emerging from our findings, one theme that stands out is the importance of discourse and its capacity to do things in organizations. Both change and the future are fundamentally socially constructed phenomena and are promoted or blocked through the use of language (see Bartunek et al. 2006; Brown and Humphreys 2003; Ford, Ford, and D'Amelio 2008). While the importance of language and discourse has recently gained recognition in the management literature (cf. Sonenshein 2010; Vaara and Tienari 2011; Boje et al. 2016), the applications of storytelling and antenarration are still underdeveloped (cf. Vaara, Sonenshein, and Boje 2016) in change management and related fields, warranting future studies focused on the capacity of organizational stories to act as powerful change agents.

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