

Strategy Narrative

Importance of narrative

From the point of view of organization

- If you don't provide the plot for what has happened and what will happen, others (employees, media, customers...) will emplot the events and activities
- Since strategies are known to be difficult to understand and to memorize and to identify with, they should be presented in a form of a plausible and compelling story

From the point of view of an individual member of an organization

- You give and make sense through stories: Narratives are the way of getting your message across, way to influence people

Stories/narratives: an easy formula

- **Stories start with a time marker, or a place marker**
- **Stories have characters (and dialogue)**
- **Stories have something that is unanticipated**
- **Stories have a trajectory: i.e. they go somewhere or are expected to go somewhere**

Some broad but widely accepted views to narrative

- Our need for chronological and causal connection defines and limits all of us – helps to make us what we are (Scholes 1981, p. 207).
- Narrative is a primary and irreducible form of human comprehension, a defining characteristic of human intelligence and of the human species (Mink 1978)
- In the course of human evolution, we have learnt to think in terms of narrative
 - Human culture began and still goes on by passing stories from one to another
 - Brains are structured "narrative-wise", we think in terms of narrative
 - We have a capacity and a need to fill in the gaps – see things as stories

Narrative defined (in organizational studies)

- A text (or speech) that involves temporal chains of interrelated events or actions undertaken by characters (Gabriel 2004: 63)
- A text that presents events developing in time according to (impersonal) causes or (human) intentions – to become a narrative, there must be a plot (Czarniawska, 1998: vii & 2)
- A symbolic presentation of a sequence of events connected by subject matter and related by time (Scholes, 1981:205), typically involving humans or other sentient beings, from whose experience we can "learn" (Toolan, 2001)

Four main ways of applying narrative to study strategy

- 1) Focus on Strategy Discourse or Strategic Management as a grand narrative
 - The way how we see strategy is influenced by the grand narrative: narrative approach assumes that tellings of strategy fundamentally influence strategic choice and action, often in unconscious ways (Knights & Morgan, 1991).
- 2) Focus on "texts" and tellings that encode organization's strategy
 - Investigating organizations' **strategy** texts (written or oral accounts/statements) (**as narratives**)
 - Investigating organizations' **strategic** texts (**as narratives**)
 - Investigating organizational members narrative sensemaking of strategy through their **narrative accounts** (e.g. collecting interviews where the members tell about strategy)

..cont.

3) Focus on sequence of practices, events and actions in organization's strategy process

4) Focus on narrative/storytelling practices in strategy development or implementation

- Using storytelling for constructing strategies in workshops (e.g. scenario-planning)
- Collecting (typically members' or customers') stories about the organization (also ante-narratives, possible 'stories-to-come')

(Example article by Küpers, Mantere and Statler (2013) Strategy as Storytelling : A Phenomenological Collaboration. Journal of Management Inquiry.)

**Strategy is not only produced and
"consumed" in and through
strategy narratives but *strategic*
narratives as well**

Strategic narrative

- **What they are:** Compelling stories explaining the company's strategic vision of its future business opportunities and strengths
- **What they do/aim to do:** Produce a discourse of direction for the organization and its different stakeholders
- **Where can we find them:** Reproduced in the corporate communication and other organizational texts of the company
 - Human Resources Management related communication
 - Marketing communication and brand management
 - Strategic shareholder communication and investor relations

Functions and audiences of strategic storytelling

- HRM – employees
 - Provides a set of values and goals that can guide the decisions that employees make in their daily work – ensures that everyone is working towards the same goals
- Marketing – customers
 - Articulates the brand-promise for the customers of the corporation
- Shareholder value management – investors
 - Catches the attention of investors and raises expectation

A compelling story?

- What is compelling? = What makes a good story?
 - Good story appeals to both mind and heart, it is interesting (containing something unanticipated, containing a lesson) and memorable, connects with the audience and their life-world
 - Story format: (see the next slides) usually having the basic elements of
 - **Main character/hero/heroine** with some extraordinary wisdom/insight/courage, and/with a calling
 - **Path/journey** the hero chooses to embark on
 - **Obstacles** the he/she faces but is able to overcome
 - (often with **helpers**)
 - Resolution (end) where the main character reaches the goal)
 - **audience** (a compelling story and a good storyteller takes into account those whom the story is told to)
 - E.g. linguistic styles, phrases, metaphors, figures of speech and **visual form** central to the development of a compelling story



(Some) story formats

”Before-After-Bridge”

(one of the most popular and easiest to implement copywriting and storytelling formulas)



Before: Show your readers the world with Problem.

Paint a picture of their world with the Problem, before your solution. Make sure what you're identifying is in tune with what the reader is really experiencing.

After: Show your readers what the world would be like with Problem Solved

Describe the future world once their problem is solved. How does it look like? Would they be interested in that world? What benefits do they get?

Bridge: Here's how to get there

Now that they know what it looks like to be on the other side, show them how to get there... with your solution.

Features-Advantages-Benefits

Originally designed for product-oriented stories. This helps product designers and managers describe and present their products in terms of benefits, not features.

Features

The facts and characteristics of what you're about to describe

Advantages

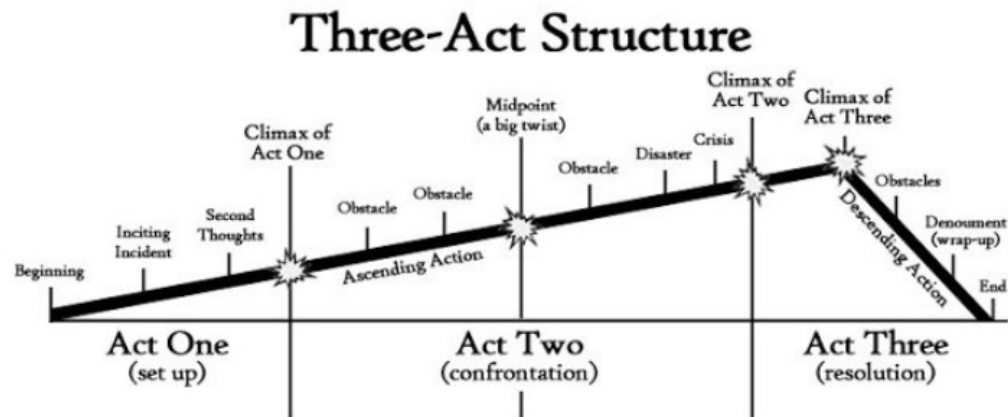
What the features do.

Benefits

Why someone should care about the advantages provided.

Three-Act Structure

(e.g. most Hollywood movies follow this template, as it has been proven to be a successful method of storytelling)



Setup

In the first act, the setup, you introduce the main characters and the setting where the story is taking place.

Confrontation

In act II, usually the longest part of the entire story, the main character will encounter obstacles and problems in the form of people, objects or setting that will deter her from solving the problem. These obstacles will appear in rising frequency, at times seemingly close to solving the problem, yet will be prevented from doing so.

Resolution

After a period of struggle with her problems and obstacles, the main character will finally prevail and the story wraps up. It is also this period of time where the main character is shown to have grown beyond what she was at the start—and is now a different person.

Hero's Journey

Hero's Journey is the common formula used in heroic tales where a hero embarks on a journey, suffers a crisis, wins the crisis and returns transformed.

The Ordinary World

The hero's life prior to leaving for his/her quest

The Call To Adventure

The event that informs the hero a major change is coming

Refusal Of The Call

The hero will first attempt to ignore or avoid the call.

Meeting With the Mentor

The hero will meet a special mentor that will aid him/her in his/her quest.

Tests, Allies and Enemies

The different people who the hero will meet that will either help or prevent him/her from completing the quest.

Crossing The Threshold

Your hero finally moves on from his life and embarks on the quest.

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The ordeal

The fight between the hero and the enemy.

Reward

The hero receives a reward for defeating the enemy.

The Road Back

The hero travels home and fights (possibly) with lesser enemies.

The Resurrection

The hero proves worthy of the reward he has received.

Reward

The hero receives a reward for defeating the enemy.

Return With The Elixir

The hero finally reaches home and receives his accolades.



Example of using story format in strategic planning. A hero's journey

The call	Context	Hero	"Dragon"	Journey	Outcome
We have set the goal of achieve [X] and be recognized as a leader in [Y], according to [measure Z]	We have been successful in the past... but we cannot count on that in the future, because the world is more [complex/regulate d/whatever] than before	But we are the [who we are]! Our legacy of (e.g. resilience/innovation/whatever] is alive today and part of our work	However, there are external or internal challenges and obstacles we must fight (must-win-battles with these "dragons")	That's why we have to [e.g. adopt new models of our work/ learn new ways of working/whatever]	When we succeed in our journey, the result will be [e.g. new markets/a better place to work/whatever that is desirable]
	Could be something like: Customer has more choices More regulation	List qualities people must display List our (perhaps unique) competitive qualities	What are they? Could be such as: Our siloed culture Outdated systems or processes"	Could be such as: Start internal training programs Renew recruitment processes Mergers&acquisitions	E.g. A sustainability leader Best place to work

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XP6SDgQvYPg> (Fortum energy company)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LMf0gLr3k6w> (Kela, the Finnish governmental social insurance institution)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uq8ZyTCvmgo> (SRV, construction business company)

- Our question: 1) what is good in each story (what works) 2) what doesn't work in your opinion? (why does it impress you or why not – what makes it (or doesn't make it) memorable/memorizable
- Finally, in small groups, choose one of these stories and come up with suggestion(s) of how the story would be even better – or more compelling?