Moving Away from Chronological Time: Introducing the Shadows of Time and Chronotopes as New Understandings of ‘Narrative Time’

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Abstract. This article aims to present and explain ‘time’ as a theoretical and a narrative concept. Most studies of change management define time as chronological time. This article presents two alternative time definitions: the shadows of time and the chronotopes, pointing toward understanding time as an asymmetric literary genre in futures studies of change management. Key words. chronotopes; narrative; narrative time; organizational change; shadows of time; time

Time is central in studies of storytelling (Bakhtin and Holquist, 1981, 1993; Morson, 1994; Ricoeur, 1981) and of organizational change (Kanter et al., 1992; Lewin, 1958), while studies of organizational change have given less attention to a narrative approach to time (Andersson, 2005).

Recent contributions to the field of organizational change witness a strong trend toward narrative studies of organizational change (Brown et al., 2005; Bryant and Cox, 2004; Collins and Rainwater, 2005). Collins and Rainwater (2005) argue that stories create organizational realities (Collins and Rainwater, 2005: 20). Organizational change involves a process of constructing and sharing new meanings and interpretations of organizational activities.

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I have observed four different traditions in studies of narrative or discursive change in organizations. The first tradition is describing how stories and storytelling can help or improve change in organizations. This tradition does not define change as a narrative concept (Barry, 1997; McWilliam and Ward-Griffin, 2006). The second tradition argues that change is created through language and discourses of change. In this tradition organizational change is the process of constructing and sharing different discourses of organizational activities (Andersson, 2005; Bryant and Cox, 2004; Collins and Rainwater, 2005; Grant et al., 2005). The third perspective is a literary genre perspective, understanding change as narrative genres (Downing, 1997; Gabriel, 2000; Monin and Monin, 1997). In this tradition change occurs through different kinds of genre stories (e.g. romance or tragedy). Downing (1977) embraces the relations between certain narrative genre and different understandings of organizational change. The last tradition understands change as the many voices in organizations (Boje, 2001; Ford and Ford, 1995; Hazen, 1993; Jabri, 2004). In this view change emerges in the polyphony of storytelling, where different storytellers, through their storytelling capacities, perform different stories. All four traditions share emphasis on change as a socially constructed reality, as negotiated meanings and as an intertextual phenomenon. In this article, I give less attention to the two first traditions, as their ontological focus is not specifically related to narrative conditions. In contrast the latter two traditions are viewing narrative conditions as essential for organizational change, due to their ontological focus on narratives, meanings and changes.

Inspite of these studies of organizational change, I argue here that we still lack studies focusing on the concept of time, highlighting the consequences of defining time as a theoretical concept in studies of organizational change. By that I mean that the mentioned four traditions all define change as a chronological time event in stories or in discourses. Very few perspectives allow us to examine the impact of time, not as an empirical given event, but as a theoretical concept in studies of organizational change (Anderson, 2005). In this article I wish to expand the existing body of literature on narrative change by focusing on a new concept of ‘narrative time’. The central argument of ‘narrative time’ is that time is not a pre-given chronological event, but a theoretical concept, that must be defined and thereby become something else than a chronological time event in a story. I define ‘narrative time’ as open time, that is, time can be defined in many different ways; as historical time, as living time, as foreshadows of time or as time bound to space.

The limitation of many narrative studies is that change becomes visible when change events are described as chronological time events. These studies focus on the sense-making emerging from changing event, instead of on how these events represent different understandings of time. Translating time to a theoretical concept opens up the possibility of time becoming the result of narrative studies of organizational change rather than the starting point.
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To elucidate the latter, I am applying two narrative time concepts: shadows of time and chronotopes. Gary Morson’s concept of shadows of time refers to how time is entangled with the past, the present and the future. Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of chronotope argues that time and space are always linked. The two examples of narrative time are from a medical ward and chosen because they expose the limitation of chronological time and highlight central narrative conditions of time, specifically how time can be related to literary experience and is relational.

My findings reveal how change is explained as foreshadows, sideshadows and different chronotopes. Thereby the change process in the ward becomes a storytelling process of different stories of time. The overall purpose of the article is, by empirical illustrations, to demonstrate theoretically, how using ‘narrative time’ can create new understandings of organizational change.

The first section presents narrative studies of organizational change and time as a narrative concept. The second section presents empirical findings from an ethnographic study in a rehabilitation hospital north of Copenhagen, Denmark. The concluding section discusses the contribution of narrative time to studies of organizational change.

Narrative Organizational Change Studies

Narrative change studies are not considering language as a medium that brings about change, but rather that change occurs in language and thus brings about an altered state of affairs (Ford and Ford, 1995: 542). A main condition of the narrative approach is, therefore, that organizational change is story-driven, that is, change occurs in stories of change, and when members of organizations tell stories about change events to make sense of change.

The dominant literature on narrative organizational change has analysed the generic narrative structures in organizational change stories (Barry, 1997; Barry and Elmes, 1997; Downing, 1997; Gabriel, 2000; Grant et al., 2005; Jabri, 1997; Monin and Monin, 1997; Oswick et al., 2005). Many of these scholars are inspired by either Joseph Campbell’s work in psychology (Campbell, 1949) or Northrop Frye’s work on myths in critical literature (Frye, 1957). By operating with archetypes of stories, Frye emphasizes the importance of the plot as a particular narrative guide to sense-making.

The work of Stephen Downing is one example (Downing, 1997). Downing applies a typology of plots to explain the narrative conditions of change in organizations. He analyses the plots of stories and how they serve as guidelines for the characters/actors when making sense of change processes (Downing, 1997: 230). Downing’s studies illustrate that managers often describe organizational change in terms of romantic myths, whereas employees do it by way of tragic myths. The task of the management is then, according to Downing, to manage and solve the conflicts caused by these contrasting change stories.
As mentioned in the introduction, other scholars have analysed the polyphonic conditions of narrative change (Anderson, 2005; Boje, 2001; Hazen, 1993). Many of these scholars draw inspiration from Bakhtin’s work on literary criticism (Bakhtin and Emerson, 1984). These studies conceive change through the present dialogues. Hazen explains it like this:

If we conceive of organization as many dialogues occurring simultaneously and sequentially, as polyphony, we begin to hear differences and possibilities. We discover that each voice, each person is his or her center of any organization, and it is from each of these dynamic centers that change occurs. (Hazen, 1993: 16)

The common contribution of both the narrative genre and polyphonic approach is the illustration of the different kinds of change stories appearing in organizations and explaining the interaction and variety of understandings of changes and stories in organizational life.

I wish to expand the existing body of narrative literature on change by focusing on how stories of change all bear understandings of time. In my case, a restructuring of the daily work of nurses and social workers in a medical ward, decided by the hospital management, provokes employees to tell change stories reflecting their understanding of the event. Some tell tragic stories and others romantic stories of change. These stories all contain understandings of narrative time. By analysing these understandings of time it becomes possible to explain why the ward staff convey different understandings of the unit change and how organizational change can be understood as ‘narrative time’.

In traditional studies of organizational change, time is often understood as chronological time, the ticking of the clock, and focus on meeting hours, dates, months and years are all examples of chronological time. In relation to sense-making, chronological time is not very helpful, because it divides time into small sequential units. Thereby meaning can only be created in short sequences of times.

Narrative time is open time, which means that time must be defined; it is left to the storyteller or the listener to define time as, for example, chronological time. Time can be defined in many different ways as historical time or as personal inner time. An example of the latter is that in chronological time, I may be sixty, but in inner time I feel as if I were forty-years-old.

Ricoeur combines time and narrative and defines historical time by two time concepts: cosmic time, that is, the time of the world, and lived time, this is, the time of our lives. In his book ‘Time and Narrative’, he combines time and narrative, arguing that cosmic time can become lived time to the extent that it is articulated in a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full significance when it becomes a condition of temporal existence (Ricoeur, 1988). Thereby time is not only one concept but entails several understandings and consequences, making time open to interpretation. I now turn to the two other concepts of narrative time mentioned earlier—those of Gary Morson and Mikhail Bakhtin, respectively: the shadows of time and the chronotope.
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Shadows of Time

Foreshadowing and sideshadowing are narrative time concepts that define time as asymmetric. While the past is given, the future is open, and the present represents the possibilities of the moment. The past, the present and the future are different times that have different degrees of openness. Past and present are the most asymmetric, because we can shadow ourselves in a potential future while we are manoeuvring around in present time. The shadows of time reflect the relations of past, present and future.

Foreshadowing is an already told future that sends signals back to the present by backward causation.

Foreshadow is a spatial metaphor for a temporal phenomenon, it is a shadow cast in front of an object; the temporal analogue is an event that indicates (is the ‘shadow’ of) another event to come. An object in our path may cast a shadow backward, so that we reach the shadow before reaching the object casting it; and from experience, we may know to expect the object when we encounter the shadow. (Morson, 1994: 431)

The consequence is that the present becomes a preparation for a hypothetical future. One of the problems of foreshadows is, that the tellers are losing their openness toward other possibilities in the process.

The shadow does not cause the object ahead, but is caused by it, even though we encounter the shadow first. Morson offers an example:

When a storm foreshadows a catastrophe, the storm is there because the catastrophe follows; it is an effect of that future catastrophe visible in temporal advance much as the shadow of an object may be visible in spatial advance. Because the future is already there, it is substantial enough to cause earlier events and to send signs backward. (Morson, 1994)

Sideshadowing represents a possibility that might have been taken, but was not. Sideshadowing is the possibility we ignore by accepting the actual story as the only possible one.

Whereas foreshadowing works by revealing apparent alternatives to be mere illusions, sideshadowing conveys the sense that actual events might just as well not have happened. In an open universe, the illusion is inevitability itself. Alternatives always abound, and, more often than not, what exists need not have existed. Something else was possible, and sideshadowing is used to create a sense of that ‘something else’. Instead of casting a shadow from the future, it casts a shadow ‘from the side’, that is, from the other possibilities. Sideshadows conjure the ghostly presence of might-have-been or might-bees. Sideshadowing restores the possibility of possibility. Its most fundamental lesson is that to understand a moment is to grasp not only what did happen but also what else might have happened. Hypothetical histories shadow actual ones. (Morson, 1994: 699)

Morson describes how time and shadows of time permit us to catch a glimpse of unrealized but realizable possibilities; sideshadowing demonstrates that our tendency to trace straight lines of causality (usually leading to ourselves at the present moment) oversimplifies events, which always allow for many possible stories.
These time concepts can open up a dynamic view of the shadows of time, by pointing at the relations among the past, present and future. In an organizational setting, change can occur as a foreshadowing of time, if change events are already predictable in the future of organizational plans. Sideshadows reflect the way in which employees understand the present in relation to change events that might have occurred, but never did. The shadows of time describe how time is a relational phenomenon that always appears in relation to other times.

The Chronotope

The chronotope is another narrative time concept underlining that time cannot be understood without a spatial dimension: time and space are intertwined. In Greek ‘chronos’ means time and ‘topos’ means place. The author of the concept, Bakhtin, wanted to find a chronotope in different literary genres, which gave characters most freedom and creativity.

Bakhtin’s crucial point is that time and space vary in qualities; different social activities and representations of those activities presume different kinds of time and space. Time and space are therefore not just ‘mathematical abstractions’. (Morson and Emerson, 1990: 367)

Morson and Emerson stress that time and space are narrative elements that change form in different literary genres.

Each chronotope has several part chronotopes that relate to it in different ways (see Table 2). The encounter at the pub can symbolize the everyday, and the encounter at the castle can symbolize the fairytale.

Morson describes how time and space are linked to different literary genre:

In Greek romances, there are no moments of choice, because fate determines all. Things happen to the hero and heroine; ‘the initiative in this time does not belong to human beings’. In certain other adventure genres, there are occasional nodes of pure freedom separated by mechanical causal consequence. But in the realist novel, every moment contains a small measure of choice. This prosaic concept of time, in which a small but real measure of choice exists at every instant, characterizes the novelistic chronotope and differentiates it from other narrative forms. It also leads to a moral emphasis not on dramatic decisions at great moments, the stuff of romance, adventure, and the heroic, but on small decisions at every ordinary moment. (Morson, 1994)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Foreshadowing</th>
<th>Sideshadowing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>Already told future</td>
<td>A possibility that might have taken place but didn’t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequence</td>
<td>The present becomes a preparation for an hypothetical future</td>
<td>Asks questions of what might have happened</td>
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Morson refers to the same genre as Bakhtin; the realist novel, as the genre granting most freedom to characters.

The chronotopes illustrate that different genres have different time and space dimensions, and they do not all include choice. In my view, there are stories of organizational change, in which the characters have different kinds of freedom to influence change.

The chronotope is also relevant in an organizational change setting because it ties change stories to place and space. When patients tell stories of how time is passing slowly in the hospital waiting room, the latter is part of understanding the time spent there. Chronotopes underline that change is happening in a certain time and space. Often studies of organizational change do not give much attention to describing the place or space where change decisions are made or change events occur.

The connection between shadows of time and the chronotope is their common starting point; time is an open concept and by reflecting on the shadows of time and the literary genres of the stories, the possibilities of time can be kept open.

Particularly in an organizational change context, this understanding can open up a more reflective understanding of time. By applying narrative time in the analysis of organizational change studies, change emerges in the specific organizational space in stories of past, present and future times.

Research Method

The following stories were gathered during field studies in a physical rehabilitation hospital, Esbønderup, located in the countryside north of Copenhagen, Denmark. The medical ward is responsible for the specialized rehabilitation of patients after treatment in orthopedic, rheumatologic, medical and neurological wards. The patients are often amputees, arthritis patients, people coping with cerebral hemorrhage or injuries sustained in falls. The hospital is part of the Metropolitan Health Care Region in Zealand and receives patients from all the major somatic hospitals in the area. It is recognized as a specialized rehabilitation hospital with a strong tradition for cross-professional collaboration among therapists and nurses and cross-sector collaboration among municipalities and the hospital.

Table 2. Examples of chronotopes and part chronotopes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chronotopes</th>
<th>Part chronotopes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fairytale Castle</td>
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<tr>
<td>Every day Pub</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Biographic Road</td>
<td>Salon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Idyll Salon</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Carnival Marketplace</td>
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(Source: The Danish Bakhtin society).
The ward is staffed by a head nurse, a physician, nurses, social workers and assistant nurses, approximately twenty employees in total. The employees also include a counsellor and a number of occupational therapists and physiotherapists; these are located in other clinics, and only attend the rehabilitation ward when required.

The employees have been working in the ward for many years, they meet for social events outside the hospital, and the ward management, the doctor, nurses and social workers collaborate closely. The therapists do not work in the ward, but have separate training facilities. Every morning the ward staff meet to talk about the patients. On Wednesdays they meet with doctors and therapists to discuss the patients. All employees (nurses, social workers, doctors and therapists) are women, except for the vice-director of the ward.

Change in the ward concerns the daily work structure and involves establishing a new work team called the ‘unit’ to take care of all the student nurses in the hospital. Certain nurses are appointed counsellors to the student nurses in the new unit. The Board of the Hospital has approved establishing the unit in this specific ward due to its good reputation for social and technical skills.

The field studies included observations and interviews over a six-month period. The first part included three months of observing participants’ everyday life in the ward, following day and night shifts and meetings. The idea of spending so much time in the ward before the interviews was to become familiar with the employees, their daily routines and to uncover organizational themes from the bottom-up perspective.

I conducted twenty in-depth narrative interviews with the employee groups in the ward. Each interview lasted from one to three hours and was conducted as trustful conversations and dialogues. Interviewees were selected to represent each of the professions that included the hospital board, four nurses, two social workers, an occupational therapist, two patients, the two ward managers, two physiotherapists, the social counsellor, the change consultant, two physicians and four municipality nurses coordinating discharge meetings with the ward on behalf of the municipality. All interviews were taped and transcribed (see Table 3).

The interviews were conducted as narrative interviews addressing ordinary events in the everyday life of the employees, who determined the interview themes. We had but one opening requirement: ‘tell us about your day, from when you meet in the morning’. The interview technique served to induce storytelling (Czarniawska, 1998) and included form questions instead of content questions; ‘Can you tell more about this event?’, ‘Can you give an example?’, ‘Um, yes, can you illustrate that?’, ‘How does this happen?’.

The research question was ‘What narrative understandings of time are identifiable in the change stories of the unit?’. The analysis revealed the presence of the concepts of shadows of time, literary genres and chronotopes.
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Table 3. Interviews

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Ward interviews</th>
<th>Hospital interviews</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chronotopes</strong></td>
<td>Night nurse (office)</td>
<td>The hospital board (meetings)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Social workers (office, patient rooms)</td>
<td>Change consultant (meetings)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nurses (office, patient rooms)</td>
<td>Counsellor (patient room)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Doctor (office and meetings)</td>
<td>Municipality nurses (meetings)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sideshadows</strong></td>
<td>The doctors in the ward (it could be different)</td>
<td>Municipality nurses (telling about practice in other hospitals)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nurses (it could be different)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social workers (it could be different)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Foreshadows</strong></td>
<td>Heard of ward (the unit is already there)</td>
<td>Change consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hospital board (unit is already there)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A story is defined by a simple but resonant plots and characters involving narrative skills, entailing risk and with the aims to entertain or persuade. (Gabriel, 2000: 22)

The small stories of the unit change are parts of a greater story about working days and events. Table 3 gives an overview of the interviews and illustrates the sample of stories about the unit.

I found in total fourteen stories of the unit in the twenty interviews. The selected three stories are representative of the fourteen stories and illustrate different temporal understandings.

Findings: Illustrations of Narrative Time

Three different stories of the hospital unit are presented below, representing different temporal understandings of the unit. More stories could be presented, but the purpose of the selected stories is to illustrate narrative time in organizational change. The three stories represent the different chronotopes and shadows of time in all the stories told.

The Consultant Story

The background information of this story was gathered in a long qualitative and narrative interview with a change consultant in the hospital. The consultant is a nurse who has been working as such for many years. Her job is to identify and implement qualitative improvements in the hospital. The other nurses in the units refer to her as ‘desk nurse’ as she carries a higher salary than they do, but they don’t respect her, because of her distance to the everyday life in the unit.

The change consultant tells about the idea of introducing a unit in the ward:

I got the idea for organizing a special training unit in one of the hospital wards from an article. Each trainee nurse would be allocated at least two senior nurses as supervisors. This approach was very different from the
traditional way of organizing practical training with one nurse being assigned responsibility for one trainee nurse and all trainees distributed among the wards. My idea was to concentrate the training environment. Previously, trainee nurses would soon become familiar with all colleagues in the ward. The new model implies that they are primarily in contact with the two supervisors in the unit who are particularly trained for this task. I discussed the idea of a training unit with my colleagues and tried to find out if it would evoke positive response at management level. If this were not the case, I might as well abandon the idea at once. The hospital management supported the idea and decided to implement it. At the same time management decided which ward would host the new training unit, opting for one that it found well-functioning and possessing the resources necessary for managing the task.

Later on at a meeting with the ward about the project, the response was predominantly negative. From an earlier series of meetings on the issue, the employees were of the opinion that the proposed unit was something that they could test, if they felt like it, and they were now totally confused. They could not understand why the unit had to be located in their ward and not in another one, and why the idea had to be implemented in such a hurry. In other words, some of the employees felt they had not been given the opportunity to air their opinions on the issue and felt brushed aside. But it is not so important what the employees in the ward think about the unit project as it usually takes some time for them to accustom themselves to new ideas. I was prepared for the possibility that the idea might meet resistance at the ward level.

The consultant tells how she conceives an idea which challenges the status quo, must fight for it against the employees as some of them are opposed to the ward housing the unit, but in the end wins as management supports her idea, and the employees must adjust to the concept being implemented in their ward. In her story, the plot takes the shape of a journey toward the unit, and as the initiator of the unit idea, the consultant takes on the role of heroine. Her story has features in common with the universe of the romance, making a social drama of the unit and related events taking place in the hospital organization. She describes the employees’ resistance to the idea, yet is confident that they will accept it over time. The plot unfolds as a description of the adventure (Downing, 1997: 235; Frye, 1957: 23) with elements of the epic story: an adventure, a search for the golden age in time and space, where the hero goes on a journey, fights the necessary fight and is victorious and an epic story invites the audience to marvel the hero’s achievements (Gabriel, 2000: 60).

Two space and time dimensions are presented in the story: the meeting with the hospital management and the meeting with the ward. Both meetings become the turning points of the story: the management accepts and the staff resists. The story is thus an epic story with the hospital meetings as time and space dimensions. The author recognizes the importance of having meetings with the managerial level to get the idea through the system. Without their support she would abandon the idea (external faith).
The hospital meetings thereby become the specific time and space for her actions and involvement in the unit.

Her relations to the employees as characters in her story are influenced by her use of foreshadows. When management has accepted the idea, the information meeting with the ward is told in an already narrated future, with the implementation of the unit as the only possible outcome. As Boje points out in his article from 1991, storytelling performance is important in storytelling systems (Boje, 1991), where employees’ abilities to listen, tell and interact are major competencies. The author’s storytelling skills convince management to accept the idea. They accept her story as a legitimate way of testing new ideas in the hospital. Her storytelling thereby brings entrepreneurial competence to the hospital. The limitations in her story are linked to her understanding of the employees. She shadows their future with no choices, because their future is already told.

**The Social Worker Story**

The second story of the unit is told by a social worker (a one-year education). She is part of one of the work teams in the unit and she is a younger woman. Many of our interviews with young social workers resembled this story, being fragmented and not reflecting any strong opinions or emotions.

After the introduction of the unit there are more people in the ward; this affects the ward office, where we are planning the daily work. All the meetings in the office are now taking more time, and are demanding more resources and attention from the participants. Since the meetings are taking more time, all other tasks during the day are delayed. As a consequence, the patients’ lunches are delayed. The patients have noted that we are running around with their lunch, and it must be strange to eat while five people are running around with the plates and cups. Also we are very busy trying to coordinate the practical tasks.

More people also mean that small things, such as the size of our rooms, take on a new meaning. As our kitchen and office can only hold four or five people, we sometimes run out of space and are short of chairs. Then the noise is getting worse, and it can be difficult to concentrate when so many people are walking in and out of a small room. We have asked for more chairs for the ward office, but it has long prospects. It’s not because we are busier, but things are taking more time when we have three students asking questions all the time. As a mentor in the unit, I can see that my colleagues in the other working/nursing group without students have more patients, and are more stressed. It’s not fun to see how they run around looking desperate, I want to help them, but am not able to.

This story is partly a realist story of the everyday life in the ward after the student nurses have arrived. According to Barthes, the narrative or plot of a realist novel is structured around an opening enigma or puzzle (Barthes, 1957). The puzzle of the social worker’s story is how to manage everyday work without chairs and with new people. The story only partly relates to the
realist genre, due to its missing closure. There is no solution to the situation and no harmony in the end of the story.

The time understanding in the story is relying on a certain time and space dimension: the office in the ward as the meeting place for all the employees. The ward office is the meeting place for morning meetings, student supervision and calls to municipalities and hospitals, and the story is about how the new unit is creating more traffic in and out of the ward office. The storyteller uses the office as a part chronotope illustrating how time (less time for the patients) is connected with office time. At the end of the story side opportunities are shadowing her understanding of the situation, she wants to help her colleagues, who are now busy with more patients, but she cannot. Her situation is understood in relation to a sideshadow, that she could help her colleagues in the other teams if things were different.

This story reflects a fragmented storytelling style, which Boje (2001) points towards. The story is allowing the storyteller to step outside the conflict. Instead of being a victim of the unit, the storyteller is telling a story of being a more pragmatic observer of the implications of introducing the unit.

**The Senior Nurse Story**

The third story is by an antagonist senior nurse. The head of the unit told us she was a highly valued nurse because of her long experience with patient care. She was, against her wishes, appointed supervisor of the new unit exactly because of her long experience, and that led to a bitter story attacking the management and the unit:

Right from the beginning I was against the project and my appointment as supervisor in the unit. In my daily work, I strongly emphasize direct and continuous contact with the patients, and bringing together all student nurses in one unit would inevitably become a strain on both the employees and the patients, because less time would be allocated to contact with patients. Having two trainee nurses in tow makes it difficult to sit down and talk with a patient when required such as in the case of grief. Therefore, I don’t at all feel like being a supervisor in the unit as it prevents me from doing my job satisfactorily, but I felt under pressure and conceded in order not to risk losing my job. But I am also bitter and unable to understand why nobody would listen to me when I argued for the idea being untenable—taking my long experience into consideration. The introduction of the unit resulted in the attitude that you can like it or lump it because you cannot change the plans. No one in the ward doubts that the storyteller is against the idea, and in time she becomes one of the strongest opponents to the unit. The supervisor tells that she is against the unit, but dares not back out. She is working in the unit despite the fact that she finds it reduces her contact with the patients. Her story is thus one of decline and portrays her as the victim. She can predict this decline, but is unable to do anything about it. The events in the story are her appointment as supervisor, against her will, and the formation of
the unit. The storyline reflects bitterness and uncertainty; the storyteller describes herself as under pressure, bitter and unable to understand. The story thus has elements of tragedy: an undeserved misfortune, declining status and unintended consequences; emotions of pain, grief, anxiety and guilt (Frye, 1957: 207). The tragedy describes how a heroine falls from success to dangers and humiliations; the plot is about disaster (Downing, 1997: 235). The part chronotope in these storylines is the unit, how the presence of the student nurses has changed her daily life in the unit. She describes how she has less time for the patient in the unit because supervising takes so much of her time. Her time understanding is thereby related to her work in the unit, which is described as a prison, her literary genre gives her little choice in relation to her situation. In her story she explains her destiny by a sideshadow: how they could have listened to her, but didn’t. She understands the present as a result of what did not happen. This is a very strong use of sideshadowing and illustrates how events that did not happen are used to make sense of what did happen.

The Creation of Change by Chronotopes and Time Shadows

The three stories are in different ways illustrating how understandings of time result in change in the unit. Table 4 illustrates shadows and chronotopes in the stories and the consequences of different temporal understandings.

The three time shadows are: foreshadow (the already told future), the present time and the use of sideshadows (what could have happened but did not). When the consultant is telling about the unit in a foreshadow she gives the people in the ward few choices to participate in the future. When the present is captured in a sideshadow in the senior nurse story the understanding of the change is always related to what never happened. In contrast to these stories the present time story reflects choices and problems in the present, but in this case also relates to constrains (she wants

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<th>Time concepts/stories:</th>
<th>Story 1</th>
<th>Story 2</th>
<th>Story 3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shadows of time</td>
<td>Foreshadows: the unit is an already told future</td>
<td>Present time: how the unit has changed working life</td>
<td>Sideshadows: They didn’t listen to me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow change consequences</td>
<td>Few choices for the people in the ward</td>
<td>Choices and problems in the present</td>
<td>The present is captured in sideshadows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronotopes</td>
<td>The idyll</td>
<td>The every day</td>
<td>The biographic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part chronotopes</td>
<td>Meetings in meeting room</td>
<td>The office life in the ward</td>
<td>The daily work in patient rooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronotope change consequences</td>
<td>The unit is created in meetings and discussions</td>
<td>The unit is created in office and ward life</td>
<td>The unit is created at the disadvantage of work with patients</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
to help but cannot). Thereby the time shadows illustrate the asymmetric understanding of time.

The three chronotopes in the stories are: the idyll, the every day and the biography. The consultant is telling a romantic and idyllic story of the unit; the social worker is telling a story of the introduction of the unit effecting the everyday life in the ward and finally the senior nurse is telling a story linked to the biographical genre, not written down, a story about herself and her understanding of the unit.

The part chronotopes linked to these are: the meetings in the idyll story, the office ward in the everyday story, and the patient room in the last story. This analysis contributes to elaborate on the literary concepts of part chronotopes. The historical salon in the idyll story is in an organizational context replaced with the meeting; this is the place for polite and friendly conversations in contemporary organizations. The historical road as the part chronotope in biographic stories is here replaced with the patient rooms, the public road in the hospital, filled with beds, people and ‘travellers’. The historical pub as the encounter in everyday life is replaced by the office in the ward, as the meeting place over a cup of coffee in a busy working day. The stories show how the unit is understood and discussed differently in different places in organizations; seen from the ‘patient road’, the unit allows less time for patients, seen from the ‘meeting salon’, the unit is a great opportunity for the new students, seen from the ‘local’ office, it entails a busier everyday life. The different chronotopes are important places from which to understand and create the unit change.

Discussion—Organizational Change as ‘Narrative Time’

A central contribution of the case analysis is that successful change stories are not translatable to other organizations or organizational levels because time and space vary and matter (Hassard, 2001). The understanding of the unit is related to specific organizational spaces. The results embrace the importance of organizational spaces as meetings and offices; phenomena to which traditional change management studies literature pay little attention. The first result also concerns change as a microscopic change. This finding supports the writings of Tsoukas and Chia (2005) in their work on rethinking organizational change. Tsoukas and Chia criticize mainstream studies of organizational change as an exceptional effect produced under specific circumstances by certain people. They suggest an ontological understanding of organizations as places of becoming ongoing flows of continuously changing characters. In their work, they call for studies of microscopic change, which come from incremental creeps or drifts or, as Chia writes, ‘microscopic change reflects the actual becoming of things’ (Chia, 1999). The unit change can very well be described as a microscopic change, not coming from ‘big reforms’, strategies or central regulation. The analysis of the unit can be seen as a microscopic analysis of change reweaving the employees’ webs of beliefs and habits of action in response to local circumstances.
Furthermore, these stories reflect the asymmetric understanding of time; the social worker is in the present, when students are arriving in the ward; the change consultant is in the future, and the senior nurse in the past telling about the unit. Both sideshadows and foreshadows are used to understand the unit. The senior nurse’s understanding of the unit is created as a sideshadow, and the analysis thus illustrates the strong forces of sideshadows in the process of sense-making. It is not always the chronological events that enjoy a monopoly of sense-making in stories; also events that never happen are important. The change consultant’s understanding of the unit is also interesting, because the unit is established after the board meeting as an already told future of the ward. Foreshadowing is perhaps the essential narrative condition for innovative organizational stories, capturing the infinity of future change. These findings thereby reflect that narrative time is always related to a storyteller (Jabri, 2004; Morson, 1994). Storytellers and their temporal understandings are thus key elements in understanding organizational change.

Table 4 points towards several surprising conclusions. First, that the different chronotopes have different change effects. In the works of Bakhtin and Morson the primary genre that gives the characters freedom and choice is the realist novel. In these findings, the use of different chronotopes has different organizational consequences. The idyll and romantic story of the unit is a great entrepreneurial story, which can mobilize management and thereby support the findings of Downing, that is, how management prefers romantic stories of change (Downing, 1997). The realist story gives the characters more choices, they are not solely dependent on management as in the two other stories, and the characters can demand more chairs.

Second, the stories illustrate how mythic features in the construction of the stories are not leaving the characters many options. But the stories also illustrate the power of romantic and tragic stories—the power of persuasion and emotion, which are missing in the realist story. Therefore it is difficult to point toward, one best narrative genre of change in an organizational setting. The analysis indicates a need for further research to understand the dynamic relation between freedom and persuasion in stories of change.

Beyond Chronological Time in Studies of Change Management

Defining change as chronotopes or shadows of times highlight specific time dimensions. Chronotopes refer to the literary genre condition of time and underline the genre condition of time stories and how the office space allows certain stories.

Shadows of time refer to the asymmetric time dimensions, how stories of time often relate to the past, present and future. Many change management studies are implicitly focusing on future time, how change is necessary to obtain a certain position in the future (Staudenmayer et al., 2002). They have thus a normative understanding of the future as the most important temporal goal. The case analysis showed how employees are working both
in the past and in the present, while the change consultant refers to an already told future. The essential result of Morson’s concept of shadows of time in organizational change studies is to reflect on the limitations of an ‘already told future’, and accept another strong meaningful time concept: sideshadows, understanding time in relation to what never happened. Therefore, it is important to include both backshadowing (Hassard, 2001) and sideshadowing in future studies of change management and not only focus on future time.

In contrast to chronological time, the two narrative time definitions allow time to become a concept related to sense-making. Being divided into small time units, chronological time does not possess the same sense-making abilities as narrative time definitions. One could argue that chronological time, which is used in most studies of organizational change, only allows sense-making in small separate units, while chronotopes and shadows of time open up stories of how time and space are intertwined.

In this article I have suggested a new language and conceptualization for understanding time in narrative analysis of organizational change. I have argued that the notion of narrative time provides a useful approach to narrative analysis and I have illustrated how this approach helps elucidate new aspects of understanding time as a narrative concept. In particular, the analysis has demonstrated how understandings of space and shadows capture time as a meaningful phenomenon. Paying attention to these different definitions of time allows us to see the ways in which change is created, revealing the storyteller’s understanding of change in relation to different temporal conditions to which previous studies have paid little attention.

This perspective adds to previous studies that have not specified how time is understood in stories, as they are mostly referring to chronological time. Furthermore, the three stories help us understand the temporal nature of change stories, and that storytellers have many different ways of understanding time, showing the subjectivity of organizational change. While I have specified the role of narrative time in stories of change, there are issues that need be explored in future research. I have only discussed two narrative time concepts; other concepts such as Ricoeur’s historical time can help us explore narrative time as a truly open concept. Anderson’s (2005) study of US project teams makes a specific contribution in demonstrating how project teams use double voice quotations during their attempts at organizational change. He argues that members represent future voices as ways of translating between organizational practices, identities and situated utterances, using the Bakhtin concept of the genre of speech to understand change in organizations.

Narrative time has a great deal to offer. It illustrates how the temporalities of stories contribute to organizational change as a concept of freedom, instead of constrains. When the temporalities of stories become the analytical focus of change analysis, we are left with a novel understanding of the role of time in organizational change.
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