

Temporal Structuring in Project Organizing: A Narrative Approach

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Temporality is at the heart of project organizing, yet it has received surprisingly little theoretical attention within the research field. Implicitly, most work in the field has taken an objective view of time which “exists independently of human action: [is] exogenous, absolute” (Orlikowski & Yates, 2002) and project organizing is “time-paced” (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997). More recently, others have taken a subjective view of time as “socially constructed by human action; culturally relative” (ibid), and project organizing is an emergent phenomenon creating a “negotiated order” (Strauss, 1988). Drawing on their own research in project organizing, Orlikowski & Yates (1994) move beyond these binary views by drawing on practice theory in which time is “constituted by, as well as constituting, human action” through “temporal structuring” (2002).

The concept of temporal structuring aligns with recent work on “projectivity” as the forward-looking dimension of temporality (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; Mische, 2009). Drawing on the phenomenology of future-perfect thinking (Schutz, 1967; Schutz, 1973), they emphasise the inherent subjectivity of the future while retaining a goal-oriented perspective on action. They then call for more research on how actors generate new possibilities for thought and action regarding the future. In this generation, “narrative construction” plays a central role as actors “locate future opportunities in relation to more or less coherent causal and temporal sequences” (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998: 989). They also follow Schutz in arguing that the project is a fundamental unit of action in projectivity. Our analysis will build on these insights and combine projects and narratives by arguing that the generation of project narratives is a central task of temporal work in strategic organization.

Our theoretical contribution in this paper, therefore, will be to develop a perspective on temporality in project organizing which will allow us to give full weight to the multiple meanings of the word “project” as noun and verb. We will do this by drawing on the concept of “projectivity” with narratives at its heart. This will show how time-pacing in project organizing is used to create the negotiated order of the temporary project organization through narratives that embody future-perfect thinking. We will thereby develop a *narrative perspective on project organizing* which defines *project narratives* as those performative narratives which project an intended future. We will further develop the theoretical insights that this perspective can generate with a case vignette of the Eden Project. Discussion and conclusions follow to lay out the research agenda that our theoretical contribution implies.

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Temporal Structuring in Project Organizing

There is growing awareness of the importance of time and temporality in organization theory (Ancona, Okhuysen, & Perlow, 2001; Lord, Dinh, & Hoffman, 2015). Reviews of the literature tend to emphasise cross-cultural contrasts in “eastern” and “western” perceptions of time articulated in dichotomies between “Kairos” and “Chronos”, process time and clock time, and subjective and objective perceptions of time (Reinecke & Ansari, 2015). Orlikowski and Yates (2002: 686) criticize this dichotomization in the following terms:

Focusing on one side or the other misses seeing how temporal structures emerge from and are embedded in the varied and ongoing social practices of people in different communities

and historical periods, and how such temporal structures powerfully shaped those practice in turn.

This dichotomization pervades contemporary theorizing in project organizing. The objective perception of time is central to the paradigmatic systems paradigm of project management as a strategic planning discipline (Cleland & King, 1983; Morris, 2012). At the heart of the systems perspective is the work breakdown structure (WBS) which takes the intended output of the project and breaks it down into a series of inter-related tasks which can then be assigned to appropriately skilled teams for execution (Morris, 1994). All tasks have an estimated duration (whether probabilistically estimated or not) and an implicit or explicit resource loading. Fundamental to the inter-relation between tasks is their sequential (and hence temporal) dependence in that many tasks can only be started once pre-requisite tasks have been completed. The combination of task duration and sequential dependence creates a schedule which arrays tasks through time and thereby identifies the longest sequence of tasks through the array where the earliest and latest finish times for each task are all equivalent, and there is, therefore, no slack between them. This sequence is usually known as the “critical path” for the project and identifies its shortest possible overall duration. This temporal sequence can be presented analytically using critical path analysis and associated schedule risk analysis techniques such as Monte Carlo, and graphically by using presentational tools such as Gantt charts. Time is also central to the budgetary analysis of the project. The principal tool here is cost-benefit analysis (CBA) which takes the estimated budget for the project and “discounts” through time the cash flows for the project – both expenditure and income from utilising the output once delivered – to create a “net present value” upon which the allocation of financial resources to the project can be decided. While CBA is conducted at a high level of abstraction, the interaction between the budget for the project and the schedule analysis above provides the basis for the “performance measurement baseline” for the project against which the budget is managed through time using earned value analysis (authors, 2010).

Fundamental to the systems paradigm in project organizing is a clearly specifiable output – a defined future state – against which plans can be made for its achievement (Morris, 2012). It can be captured visually as in figure 1. Although some recent developments in the systems paradigm such as agile approaches have relaxed the specifiable output criterion, they have done this by reinforcing the objective perspective on time by “timeboxing” through time-paced iterative development cycles (van Oorschot, Sengupta, & Van Wassenhove, 2018). Iterative analysis and learning from past experience (previous projects) produces a clear decision point which is supported by both CBA which relates benefits to costs in a positive way and a clear project duration without which the discounted ratio of costs to benefits could not be calculated. This defined future state is then delivered through time by controlling against plan and deviations from that plan in terms of schedule and budget are temporally defined as “overruns”.

The emphasis on general managerial skills and hence mainstream organization theory led to growing awareness of a distinctive aspect of project organizing – the temporary project domain (Bakker, 2010; Burke & Morley, 2016) in contrast to the permanent owner and supplier domains in project organizing (authors, 2014). The temporary project organization is defined by its temporality by being determinate (Burke & Morley, 2016); that is to say, the project organization will cease to exist at some agreed point of time in the future, and all stakeholders are aware of this at project inception. While that date may shift as the project unfolds, its existence in principle is never in doubt. This introduces a further objective temporal dimension into project organizing, the life cycle (Ancona et al, 2001) through which project organizations move progressively over time (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995; Morris, 1994).

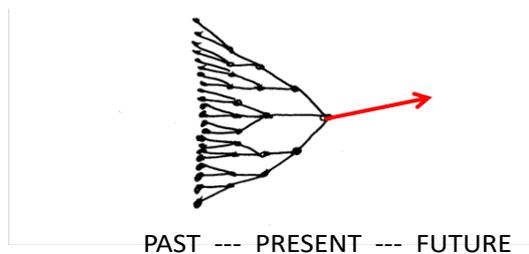


Figure 1 Temporality in the Systems Paradigm in Project Organizing

Over the last 20 years, there has been a growing critique of the systems paradigm in project organizing on the grounds that it frequently failed to live up to expectations, and that a different approach is required (Hodgson & Cicmil, 2006; Winter, Smith, Morris, & Cicmil, 2006). There have been many responses to this challenge (Padalkar & Gopinath, 2016; Svejvig & Andersen, 2015), but an influential one may be called the *actuality perspective* which focuses on the “lived experience” of leading project (Cicmil, Williams, Thomas, & Hodgson, 2006) and proposes a distinctively subjective perspective on temporality in project organizing. The actuality perspective on project organizing draws heavily (Van Der Hoorn & Whitty, 2015) on a phenomenological perspective on time (Heidegger, 1962) which is both subjective (Blattner, 2005; Hoffman, 2005) – what Heidegger calls “world time” - and also has ontological dimensions. This perspective pays attention to “drift” (Kreiner, 1995; Usher & Whitty, 2017) and “flow” (van der Hoorn, 2015) in project organizing where the past, present, and future are ontologically fused (Blattner, 2005). A similar perspective which does not necessarily draw on Heidegger can be found in post-modern perspectives on organizational change and hence project organizing as “becoming” (Packendorff, Crevani, & Lindgren, 2014; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). Perspectives derived from some aspects of complexity theory stress the

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importance of “emergence” in complex project organizing (Daniel & Daniel, 2018; Galdi, Maylor, & Williams, 2011) to similar effect.

Without suggesting theoretical consensus, we would argue that all these contributions share a subjective perspective on temporality in which project organizing is achieved through an emerging negotiated order (O’Leary & Williams, 2013; Strauss, 1988) in the manner shown in figure 2. The focus of research attention in the actuality perspective is on the lived experience of managing projects in the present, and that the future end point of the project cannot be usefully determined (Kreiner, 1995) or be projected from past experience due to the inherently uncertain nature of that future. Thus figure 2 presents a subjective perspective on time where the future is emergent from the present (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). It shows how sense made of the present and past entails enactments which evolve through time by selection and retention (Weick, 1979) as project organizations construct their futures.

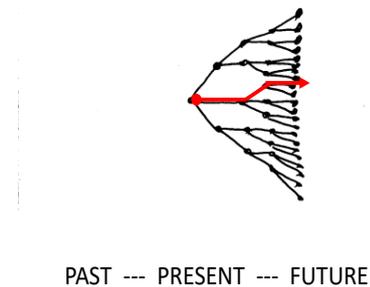


Figure 2 Temporality in the Actuality Perspective on Project Organizing

Both the subjective and objective perspectives offer considerable insights into the challenges of project organizing. Project organizing is demonstrably goal-focused, as shown in figure 1 – if there is not an intended outcome, resources are not mobilized for a project and the temporary organization does not exist. On the other hand, project organizing demonstrably fails to meet those intended outcomes on many occasions in multiple ways as suggested by figure 2. This suggests that we need to move beyond the stark duality of competing objective and subjective perspectives on time in project organizing and draw on the concept of *temporal structuring* (Orlikowski and Yates, 2002) to do so. We further suggest that the concept of “projectivity” (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998) allows us to take this agenda further forwards. The principal theoretical concern of Emirbayer and Mische is the nature of human agency in the context of developing a relational sociology (Porpora, 2015). They argue that human agency is fundamentally temporal with a “chordal triad” of the “iterative” which

reflects on the past, the “projective” which generates the future, and the evaluative in which experience is contextualized in the present. Our concern here is the projective, which has a “dominant tone” of “narrative construction”. While not all narratives are about projecting, we suggest that narratives are the principal way in which we imagine the future and hence their generation is an important aspect of temporal work.

Emirbayer and Mische draw heavily on Schutz’ phenomenology in developing their argument. While Schutz’ (1967) principal aim in developing his phenomenology of everyday life is methodological, showing how sociology can actually achieve Weber’s aim of providing explanations adequate at the level of meaning as well as cause, he develops an ontology that offers much insight for theorists of temporality in project organizing. He argues that all purposive action, as opposed to reactive behaviour, has the nature of a “protention” or a vision of a completed future state which gives present meaning to that subsequent action which will bring forth that future state. Thus while the protention is cognitive in that it exists as a perceived state, it is qualitatively different from a “retention” which is inherently a perception about the past. However, because the protention, like a retention, is perceived as completed, “the planned act has the temporal character of pastness” (1967: 61) and is therefore thought of in the future perfect tense. This is formulated as “will have been” in English; French and German have analogous tenses, although Russian does not.

The distinction between action and behaviour is crucial for Schutz. He defines behaviour not just as an instinctual, non-reflective, activity, but as a conscious, social activity in a way that is similar to “being-in-the-world” (Heidegger, 1971; Heidegger, 1962). However, Schutz moves on from Heidegger who holds that “projecting has nothing to do with comporting oneself towards a plan that has been thought out” (Heidegger, 1962: 185) by arguing that it is precisely this thinking out that distinguishes behaviour from action. As Schutz argues in clarifying the differences between himself and Weber:

“Any conscious experiences arising from spontaneous activity and directed towards another self are, by our definition, social behavior. If this social behavior is antecedently projected, it is social action” (1967: 146).

In developing this perspective, Schutz emphasises the motivational aspect of future-perfect thinking, showing how it provides the future-orientated “in-order-to” motive for an action in the present, rather than the past-orientated “because” motive for action. He is also careful to distinguish future-perfect-thinking from pure fantasy by the criterion of the feasibility of the act.

“The possibility of executing the project requires.... that only ends and means believed by me to be within my actual or potential reach may be taken into account by my projecting.... that all the chances and risks have been weighed in accordance with my present knowledge of possible occurrences of this kind in the real world” (Schutz, 1973: 73).

However, the act remains an “empty” protention; it is an abstraction which indicates the direction of travel, but not the journey whose steps remain to be filled in:

“Projecting like any other anticipation carries along its empty horizons which will be filled in merely by the materialization of the anticipated event. This constitutes the intrinsic uncertainty of all forms of projecting (Schutz, 1973: 69).

Figure 3 presents temporality from the narrative perspective on project organizing we are proposing in which organizations strategically pretend the completed act in a project narrative and then orientate their managerial action to filling in the act through project organizing, choosing between multiple paths as they do so. It shows how future-perfect thinking pretends a desired end state or outcome for the project that leaves the filling in, and hence the lived experience of the project, to be negotiated through time (Strauss, 1988). We can conceive of the filling in through the project lifecycle as a progressive reduction of uncertainty through time as a learning process (authors, 2010) and the determined future state as the pivot of “endgaming” (Pitsis et al., 2003) where socially constructed future deadlines are reified to shape present action. The processes of filling in require the mobilisation and motivation of large resources from stakeholders which are ordered through the endgaming process. In a very practical sense, endgaming is what drives the arrow of action from right to left in figure 3 even though time’s arrow objectively and subjectively flies from left to right.

However, this is more about filling in than pretending and leaves open the question of how the future-perfect is projected. Projects of all sorts build on imaginations about the future. We argue that strategic organization is constituted by the anticipation of future outcomes that subsequently guide and give sense to conduct to project organizations. Project organizations are designed with explicit and negotiated goals and purposes or they do not exist as temporary organizations (authors, 2014). The pretended futures in relation to projects are aspects of the present, however. They are pretensions in the sense that the actor imagines the future state of affairs to have arisen already, enabling him or her look back on the present situation and the steps connecting the present with the future. The imagination of a particular future, and the imagination that it has already materialized, are the foundation for acting (as opposed to behaving) in the present and propose that this imagination entails three complementary and intertwined types of temporal work – convincing oneself, convincing the team, and convincing stakeholders. We further propose that project narratives constitute the performative intent that allows these imagined futures to be projected and communicated.

Narratives of the future

Narratives are unique discursive constructions that provide essential means for maintaining or reproducing stability and/or promoting or resisting change in and around organisations (Vaara et al., 2016). Our argument builds upon narrative theory (Ricoeur, 1984) which conceives narratives and narration as meaning making through time and individual experiences. Central to Ricoeur’s understanding of narrative is its capacity of human experience of time:

A new relation between time and fiction corresponds to this notion of the world of the text. And it is, to my mind, the most decisive one. I shall not hesitate to speak here, despite the obvious paradox of the expression, of the ‘fictive experience of time’ in order to express the properly temporal aspects of the world of text and the ways of inhabiting the world that the text projects outside of itself. The status of the expression ‘fictive experience’ is most precarious. On the other hand, in effect, our temporal ways of inhabiting the world remain imaginary to the extent that they exist only in and through the text. On the other hand, they constitute a sort of transcendence within immanence that is precisely what allows of the confrontation with the world of the reader (Ricoeur, 1984: 6).

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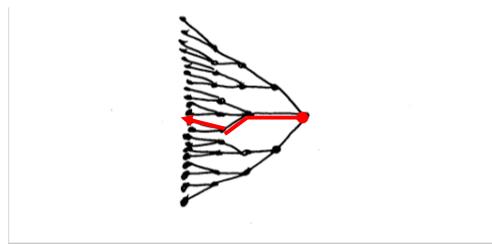
We follow the arguments developed about narrative temporality as a polyphonic perspective on time through which people construct a more holistic and embedded narration of experience (Cunliffe et al., 2004). Thus, the performance of narratives takes place in practical circumstances and in moments of time and context in which meanings may vary. Narratives thereby generate unique discursive spaces which may unfold over time to create shared discursive spaces. The present, past, and future is experienced thereby through a unity of perpetual referring, meaning that our reflection is influenced by our currently experienced moments in time and the future moments we may be anticipating. Thus narratives of the past, the present and the future are based on resources that enable but also constrain articulations and emergent “antenarratives” are seen as ‘bets’ some of which may succeed and become institutionalized parts of organizational strategy (Vaara and Petersen, 2013). During strategy-making, organizations (re)construct narratives that reimagine the past and present in ways that allow the corporation to explore multiple possible futures but for a narrative to guide strategic choices it had to be coherent, plausible and acceptable by most stakeholders (Kaplan, 2008; Barry and Elmes, 1997). Narratives are often repeated in organizations because repetition serves to stabilize particular meanings (Dailey and Browning, 2014; Sonenshein, 2010) and elite policy makers use plotted, plausible and repeated narratives to shape the reactions of those in their environment (Abolafia, 2010). Narratives are often seen as strategic with an explicit intention of persuading the audience (Brown, 2006), and can therefore be defined as “performative” (Callon, 1997).

Building on this research, we define project narratives as those coherent, performative narratives that project an intended future for the organization that will subsequently be filled in (in the sense defined by Schutz) by project organizing. In other words, project narratives with performative intent are about getting something done and therefore about action in the sense defined by Schutz. Project narratives include those that are pitched by entrepreneurs to appeal to potential external financiers (Manning and Bejarano, 2017; Garud et al., 2014) and those that are articulated in competition with each other to obtain resource allocations from internal sources (Kaplan, 2008; Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013). They also include complementary narratives around challenges such as innovation in temporary project organizations (authors, 2019a) and counter-narratives in opposition to the performative intent (authors, 2019b). Thus “long-term projects also require sense to be made of future possibilities by reflecting on anticipated situations in order to influence design decisions made in the present” (Alderman et al., 2005: 384).

In selecting a case study we have decided to follow an exemplar of longitudinal strategy narrative research (Dalpiaz and Di Stefano, 2018) and use an archival approach. For us, this has the advantage that we can capture articulations of the future state while knowing what the outcome of those projections was. The disadvantage is that our sources also largely share this hindsight and reporting of the original projections may be biased. This is to a degree mitigated by the fact that our two principal sources are prepared independently which will give a degree of triangulation on the case. We therefore present this as an illustrative case vignette supporting theoretical development rather than an empirical contribution to theory.

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PAST --- PRESENT --- FUTURE

Figure 3 Temporality in the Narrative Perspective on Project Organizing

Temporal Structuring through Project Narratives: The Eden Project

The Eden Project (www.edenproject.com) in Cornwall is one of the most successful UK Millennium projects opening in March 2001 to provide an outstanding experience to double the number of visitors envisaged in the 1997 business case. A large covered biome provides a humid tropical environment, while a smaller one provides a warm temperate environment totalling between them 2.1 hectares. The cool temperate environment is in the third, uncovered, outdoor biome. An education centre – The Core – opened in 2005. Constructed in a redundant south-facing china clay pit, the project presented an enormous range of challenges and provides a vivid example of the power of “telling future truths” (Smit, 2002).

In 1993, the UK government established the National Lottery to fund, amongst other good causes, the Millennium Commission. Its purpose was to celebrate the forthcoming second millennium with calls for “a scientific or engineering project that becomes one of the wonders of the third millennium” (Ball, 2013). Amidst disparaging remarks about Æthelred, the English king at the time of the first millennium, the call was for a future-orientated initiative that would excite and inspire. A number of projects of various kinds were supported by the Millennium Commission with the aim of celebrating the coming of the third millennium and leaving a lasting legacy. The most successful of the 12 larger Landmark projects (Millennium Commission, 2003) was The Eden Project. The idea for Eden was prompted by the garden festivals of the early 1990s which attempted to regenerate run-down urban areas and distilled from a conversation over a bottle of whisky in a farmhouse kitchen one night in May 1994. The driving forces of the early days of the project were Tim Smit who had rescued and opened to the public the Lost Gardens of Heligan in 1992 (Smit, 2000) and Jonathan Ball a successful local architect. The two complemented each other with Smit’s horticultural expertise and fluid ability to articulate compelling narratives, and Ball’s architectural expertise and extensive networks amongst the higher echelons of both Cornish and London society. These latter

connections included official roles for the Royal Institute of British Architects, and membership of one of the grander gentleman's clubs.

The "mission statement" of the project they generated in the autumn of 1994 read:

To create under one roof a range of natural habitats found on planet Earth... An international resource designed for research, education, and public enjoyment to herald the new Millennium, bequeathing a gift of incalculable value to those who will follow us ... our hope for and belief in the future (cited Ball, 2013: 190).

Funded by pump-priming money from the local government sources, a mix of Smit, Ball, other local players, and horticulturalists energetically developed their ideas. These ideas were captured in a variety of architectural sketches in both plan and elevation, sometimes prepared on restaurant menu cards. They resulted in Eden being submitted as the UK entry to the architectural Venice Biennale in 1996. The project was possibility and not fantasy to due to the launch of the Millennium Commission earlier that year. An outline proposal was submitted in April 1995. The first paragraph of that submission read:

The concept of the Millennium is rooted in recognition of that significant midnight when we look backward to the past and forward to the future simultaneously. Its social value lies in concentrating our minds on past achievements, present problems and future possibilities. Any project designed to mark this transition should excite interest, understanding and involvement in shaping a desirable future (cited Ball, 2013: 21)

However, the outline proposal was turned down as underdeveloped but this did not faze Smit. Upon receiving the news, he said to Ball: "we're going to bluff it out. We're going to tell everyone that we have caught their [the Millennium Commission's] imagination and have been asked to work it up some more. And what's more, we're not going to take no for an answer" (Smit, 2002: 73.)

A significant re-think was required and the team decided to assemble some of the leading players in the UK construction industry to add credibility to their efforts. However, funds were very tight, and so these players were recruited through Ball's personal contacts on the basis that they would not be paid unless the project were successfully funded. Remarkably, they agreed to participate. The architects, Nicholas Grimshaw and Partners, worked on developing the design concept. They soon realized that their original idea (a reprise of Grimshaw's Waterloo International Terminal) would not work propped against the side of the clay pit, because the structure was too heavy for the span and the ground too uneven and continually changing due to continued working of the pit for clay. The inspiration for Grimshaw's final design was a soap bubble that can mould itself to whatever surface it alights upon; their technical solution a geodesic dome. The erection of the structure on the 858m long ground beam required the largest freestanding scaffold in the world, followed by installation of the cladding panels by abseilers. Civil engineering works included moving 800 000m³ of fill by the construction manager McAlpine JV. This consisted of Sir Alfred McAlpine plc and Sir Robert McAlpine Ltd who came together for the first time since the firm had split in 1940 because it was "the ultimate construction project" (Smit, 2002: 99).

Ball managed to convince all of these firms together with some of the leading international consultancies such as Ove Arup and Davis Langdon to work for free to develop the design while Smit

and the team lobbied the Millennium Commission. The Commission did not fund development work prior to full bids, and so it was not obvious anything was amiss and the team struggled on private donations and small grants. By mid-1996, the lobbying achieved results and Eden was back in the competition with a submission due in December with a budget of £74.3m. The news that Eden had been successful was announced in May 1997, and so the McAlpine JV was notified as preferred bidder for the delivery phase of the project in June 1997. The relationship was reinforced by appointing a Director of Sir Robert McAlpine to the Eden Board in 1998. This relationship would be of enormous benefit later during construction when the project nearly ran out of cash owing the JV millions and the McAlpine director steadied the boat by saying “we’re still here”.

Funding came from a wide variety of sources - Millennium Commission funds only provide 50% of the total capital requirement of nearly £80m. Smit’s credibility with the success of Helligan enabled seed corn funds from the county (Cornwall), local charities and private interests. The ability of Ball to network both locally within Cornwall and nationally garnering enthusiastic commitment was impressive, mobilising the right people to solve difficult problems - particularly those associated with finding the other half of the funding for the project. These skills encouraged the head of a neighbouring county, Somerset, to back publicly the Cornwall project for European Commission structural funds at his own county’s loss. At the formal signing of the legal agreements for the finance Eden’s legal lead noted that “the most extraordinary thing about it all was that we’d persuaded such a wide group of people, many of whom would have found it easier to walk away, to stay at the table and find a reason for saying yes”. (Smit, 2002: 227).

With the funding announcement, the project reached a turning point:

There comes a time in all great ventures when the talking has to stop. We’d created the constituencies, we’d talked the hind legs off donkeys, we’d been snake-oil salesmen with attitude and a dream to peddle, but turning a dream into a reality needs iron in the soul, money in the bank, and military organization (Smit, 2002: 117).

Finally, the clay pit was purchased in October 1998, and the construction contract signed in January 1999. By this time, the McAlpine JV had worked for nearly two years without a contract, as had most of the consultants. Intensive construction on site started in February 1999, and the complete facility opened in March 2001 ahead of schedule and to budget. Eden is a remarkably successful project; Smit ascribes this success, fundamentally, to “the act of faith that enabled so many people to sign up to Tinker Bell Theory was a testament to the Spirit of Eden taking hold” (Smit, 2001: 102). In that sense, “Eden was never about plants and architecture, it was always about harnessing people to a dream and exploring what they are capable of” (Smit, 2002:159).

Discussion: Narratives in Project Organizing

What might be the broader theoretical implications of this case vignette? A first observation is that we can see three types of temporal work in the case. The first type is *convincing oneself*. The project promotor’s willingness to let present action be guided and determined by protentions depends on his or her acceptance of the projected future as realistic and relevant. Promotors have to convince themselves about the achievability of the act, which suggests the importance of faith. Smit emphasized the importance of Tinker Bell – the fairy who only exists if you believe in her (Barrie, 1995). We suggest that projects only exist if actors believe their narratives and so generating

personal faith in the project narratives is the first kind of projective temporal work. This is echoed on the Channel Fixed Link project by the Chair of its Board:

If I was to sum up the overriding ethos which governed the directors ...it was the unarticulated faith, difficult to define or explain, but an abiding faith that we would get there in the end (Henderson, 1987: 15).

The second type of temporal work is *convincing the team*. As soon as the context changes from individual human action to group action we encounter new requirements in the “materialization” of cognitive work (Stigliani and Ravasi, 2012). Smit did this in a “snowballing” way, first convincing Ball and then working closely with him to convince the rest of the project team in a process where each played to their strengths combining Smit’s vision and Ball’s networks. The project team has to adopt and subscribe to the same protention if they are to coordinate their efforts and collaborate on the same project. The protention of some actor – a project champion - has to be believed by the other parties in the project. Thus, the project participants have to convince each other about the achievability of the projected acts constituting the project. If some participants in the project team are not convinced about the achievability of the projected act it is not likely that they will let their current action be guided and directed by the project narrative. When that is the case, the project team disintegrates. The importance of this can be seen in the way in which Ball convinced the other members of the team from the supplier domain to work on the project without recompense in the early phases, and also to act as stabilisers during later crisis points in delivery. The early phases of the shaping of many projects are essentially speculative, with no income stream to reimburse efforts, so such motivation is essential. The second type of projective temporal work is therefore forming a team which shares and espouses the project narrative and is committed to the actions required to achieve it.

The third type of temporal work is *convincing stakeholders*. Project teams do not operate in isolation. They owe their existence and resources to important stakeholders in their context of operation. Public, political and financial support must be obtained and maintained to get any project going. It is no longer sufficient to convince oneself or the other members of the project team. It is also necessary to convince internal and external stakeholders, particularly holders of financial resources, which generates competition between teams (Kaplan, 2008; Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013). Crucial to the success of the Eden project was convincing the Millennium Commission that it was a viable project – and convincing oneself and the team that it was viable are crucial first steps in this process. Convincing stakeholders also included convincing many different potential providers of the other half of the finance in the form of matched funding, the officials of a competing county, and, finally the visiting public. Since such external stakeholders are not held responsible for achieving the projected act, their criteria for accepting protentions may be more contingent and less emotional than oneself or the team, but the original narrative of a perfected future retains its motivating force. Here we need to address the legitimacy (Garud et al., 2014) of the narratives generated and whether the narrative can combine both credibility and novelty (Barry and Elmes, 1997). In the Eden case, credibility for the narratives was achieved through both Smit’s track record with the Heligan project and Ball’s networks amongst the right people in the right places. Novelty was achieved through the scale of the vision generated – Eden was, and remains, unique. It was this novelty combined with credibility which convinced many of the stakeholders.

A second observation is the importance of “project peripety” (Engwall and Westling, 2004) which we reformulate as shift in emphasis from project shaping narratives to project delivery narratives as the project organization fills in the projected act. Smit shows how projects move from peddling dreams to “iron in the soul”, yet we know little about how these transformations take place. As Smit suggests, arguably the relationship is more one of transition rather than opposition, and one of the research challenges is how narratives make the transition – or peripety – between these two perspectives. Related to this observation is the point that the script of project narratives may be different either side of this peripety. In the early, shaping phases of the project the narrative is outwardly broadcast in an inclusive way as the project garners resources. In the later, delivery phases of the project resources are largely in place and the project organization is committed to “filling in” the protention through endgaming (Pitsis et al., 2003).

Project narratives, we propose, are about connecting the future with the present and the past in with performative intent in strategic organization. These are inherently temporal in nature; project narratives are dynamic throughout project life cycle. At different stages of the project lifecycle the project narrative plays different roles. Before the project begins it is important to establish a project shaping narrative which is then presented in the form of visualizations and documentation (i.e. becomes formalized) and communicated to various stakeholders: to garner finance from investors, to mobilise key suppliers, and to convince regulators to approve the project. At earlier stages of the project lifecycle project sponsors aim to establish and sustain a coherent and consistent shaping narrative about the projection. Their responsibility is to communicate clearly and persuade project team members to understand and diffuse the project narrative. This can be done by rehearsing the same project narrative over several times so that everyone understands and relates to the project narrative in their day-to-day work whereby it becomes storytelling. At later stages of project life cycle, the project narrative may need to be modified and updated to a delivery narrative to infuse the culture of the project delivery organization, yet project leaders are also expected to be consistent with the original narrative of the project mission.

Figure 4 about here

We can summarize these arguments as shown in figure 4, which shows the temporal structuring of project organizations. The project shaping narrative throws forwards the protended act. By convincing actors, their teams and resource-rich stakeholders it charters the project organization. Action is required to fill in the protended act which is endgamed by the project delivery narrative. Filling in has the process structure of variation, selection and retention (Weick, 1979), but always in the context of the project shaping narrative. If the shaping and delivery narratives move too far apart then the project will likely be abandoned. This is always a significant possibility because filling may be highly contingent and error-prone (MacKay and Chia, 2013). Frequently the outturn budget and schedule is outside the expectations raised for stakeholders in the shaping narrative with inevitable implications for the evaluative dimension of temporality once the act is achieved and the temporary project organization closed down.

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Figure 4 shows that projecting and filling in empty horizons are fundamentally different processes that should not be confused with each other. Actual consequences and outcomes cannot be explained by the protention. It always implies specific contexts and situationally adapted action in the context of complexity and uncertainty. There is therefore no direct causal link between actor's cognitive efforts and eventual state of affairs. The link is performative and hence motivational. It also shows how strategy as a desired future state is projected are constituted through project narratives where shaping project narratives mobilize the resources required for the project from stakeholders while delivery project narratives facilitate endgaming to coordinate execution through the life-cycle of the temporary project organization. While these narratives are principally linguistic, including story-telling, they can also include symbolic narratives such as the fish tank symbolising the project narrative of the Sydney Waste Water project (Clegg et al., 2002). Project shaping narratives enable the project mission to be projected into the future as a completed act. Project delivery narratives constitute the filling in of the project mission through endgaming around task execution and milestone achievement.

Our narrative perspective on temporal structuring in organizing research suggests a number of fruitful lines of enquiry. One is whether particular tools and techniques are used more comprehensively in projective temporal work than evaluative and iterative temporal work. We suggest that visualisation tools are likely to be more widespread. While projective spreadsheet and textual analyses will surely play an important role, they are unlikely to engage the prospective faith of agents – visual artefacts such as sketches, drawings, 3D visualizations and the like are more powerful here (Comi and Whyte, 2018) and were extensively used in the early phases of the Eden project. This observation suggests that connecting projective temporal work in strategic organization with the design thinking research (Elsbach and Stigliani, 2018) would be fruitful.

A second line of enquiry is the return to the evaluative dimension of temporality once the protended act has been achieved. After the project is completed, narratives of project successes are developed as embodied, for example, in our sources for this vignette which share a common shaping narrative but offer very different delivery narratives (Ball, 2013; Smit, 2001) – indeed Ball's narrative is an explicit counter-narrative to Smit's. At this stage, project narratives become promotional in nature both for the supporting stakeholders and for the careers of the project team. Debates can also be intense around the "success" of the project organization in delivering and the evaluative narratives can be unstable over time. For instance, the evaluative narrative of Sydney Opera House project has changed from "great planning disaster" (Hall, 1982) to icon of Australian modernity (Murray, 2004) over the course of 30 years.

The final line of enquiry is into counter-narratives. Our focus on performative project narratives in this paper has occluded the importance of critical counter-narratives that oppose all or part of the dominant narrative (Frandsen et al., 2016). Much more attention is required to how "antenarratives" (Vaara and Petersen, 2013) compete to become dominant, how counter-narratives are marginalized or not, and how performative narratives change over time. Detailed longitudinal work using both ethnographic and archival methods is required in order to be able to identify the types of "plots" (Riccœur, 1984) that generative performative and non-performative narratives in projectivity.

Conclusions

Our narrative perspective on temporal structuring in project organizing draws on Emirbayer and Mische's theory of agency and Orlikowski and Yates' theory of temporal structuring to articulate a perspective which transcends the objective and subjective perspectives on temporality in and proposes a narrative one. As Smit says, "no one has a monopoly on dreams, but only a rare few discover the alchemist's act of making them real" (Smit, 2002; 14). Understanding how dreams become true is, we submit, central to project organizing, and faith in the future created by that project is crucial part of that alchemy. This allows one to convince oneself as the basis for convincing others. Thus convincing oneself, convincing the team, and convincing internal and external stakeholders are types of temporal work central to temporal structuring in project organizing. This conviction is, we suggest, generated through project narratives. Project narratives can be represented in textual, verbal and symbolic forms. The ways narratives are constructed, spoken about, represented in visual and symbolic forms, and how these become changed over time shape the ways we act upon them. The future is uncertain, yet by paying closer attention to the language we use, to the narratives we construct, to the actions we take will help us to create the future that we want to create.

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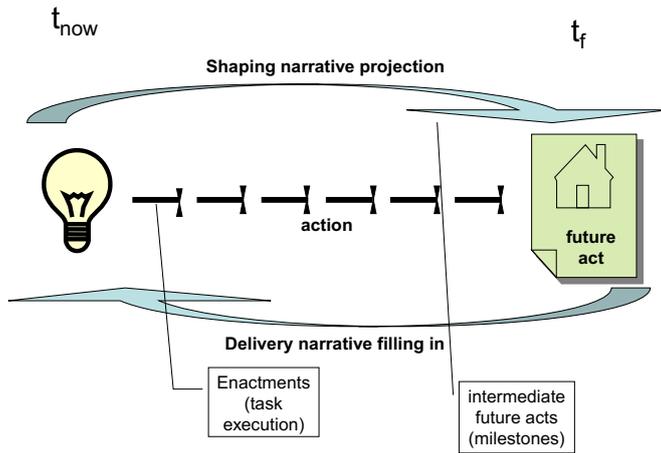


Figure 4. A Narrative Perspective on Temporal Structuring in Project Organizing

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