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Setting the same goals, traveling to different futures

Olli-Jaakko Kupiainen

*Aalto University, Department of Industrial Engineering
and Management*

On a global scale, we should move away from the current mantra – lowest BOM [bill of materials] cost. We are moving in the right direction by looking at “total costs.” What we really have to do is at “maximizing “total earnings.” This is achieved by lowering BOM costs in some cases and increasing them in other cases to hit the sweet pot for this product. (Actor15827)

Organizational goals

- **Visions of the future that reflect the organization's aspirational levels to achieve a certain outcome**
- **A central part of modern organizations (Mohr, 1973)**
- **Macrolevel constructs**
- **Interaction at the microlevel has a central role in goal-striving (Linder & Foss, 2018)**
- **Discursive “if-then” plans (Gagné, 2018)**
- **“If-then” plans integrate goals at the micro- and macrolevel**

Temporality in organizational changes

- **Temporality** refers to the past, present, and future (e.g., Hernes, 2014)
- **Objective or subjective time** (e.g., Orlikowski & Yates, 2002)
- Subjective time: “***The experience of the past, present, and future, which occurs in individuals and collectives mentally travel through, perceive, and interpret time***” (Shipp & Jansen, 2021, p. 299)
- Linear time: simplistic view on changes (Dawson & Sykes, 2016)
- Subjective time helps to understand changes (Dawson, 2014)

Temporal work

- **“Work”** refers to organizational members’ **reflective and purposeful efforts to shape or change their organization** (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019)
- **Discursive elements** = different texts used in the organizational context can be used for shaping the organization (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019)
- **Temporal work** = Organizational members’ engagement with temporality (past and/or present and future) and goal-striving for the organization. Temporal work aims to shape or change the organization at the macrolevel through various future narratives at the microlevel

Narratives in organizational changes

- Temporality and narratives – how subjective time makes changes meaningful (Cunliffe et al., 2004)
- Subjective time and narratives – **what could change** (Ybema, 2010)
- **Narratives blend current activities with imagined futures** (Rindova & Martins, 2021)
- **Multiple narratives** exist simultaneously (Barry & Elmes, 1997)
- **Competing views** (Dawson & Buchanan, 2005)
- **Organizational narratives** – not full stories (Vaara et al., 2016)
- Organizational change narratives – **the role of the researcher** (Cunliffe et al., 2004)

Research Questions:
*How do organizational members address
organizational goals by constructing different
futures?*

Methods

Case organization: Nokia Corporation

- Former giant in mobile phone industry and lost its position approximately 2010-11
- Difficulties in innovation
- Several changes:
- The change of CEO
- Employee reductions
- Strategic change
- Outsourcing



Data and corpus creation

- Primary data is from **enterprise social media** and its public discussion forum (e.g., Leonardi et al., 2013; Leonardi & Vaast, 2017).
- Secondary data sources: books, press releases, newspaper articles, documentaries
- **Data reduction** and the focus on the message threads that focused on changes between May 2010 and June 2011
- **Inclusion criteria:** Message opening and its relation to ongoing changes
- Approximately 2,000 pages of text

Data analysis and findings

- **Three different goals** (technological, financial, and customer-orientated) that emerged from the **primary research material** were triangulated with the secondary research material.
- Previous interest in temporality literature & **future** as an inclusion criteria

Six different future narratives

1. Present-future
2. Past-present-future
3. Past-present-unachievable future
4. Nostalgic future
5. Catastrophic future
6. Fantasized future

Further analysis

- An interpretation of the past: **The past is not always present**
- An interpretation of the present: In most future narratives, the **present is unsatisfactory**
- An interpretation of the future: The **future is controllable**
- **Goals are achievable**
- Discursively create discontinuity from the present to the future
- Organizational members often offer **solutions to meet the goals in the future**



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When organizational members discursively create different future narratives through organizational goals, they make change meaningful. It is important for organizational members to provide solutions to change an unsatisfactory present, create “if-then” plans, and have a perception of a controllable future. They engage in “future-making”

Contributions to the literature

Organizational goals:

- Discursive goal-striving
- The dynamics of goals: integration of microlevel interaction and macrolevel goals
- Goals are more important than previously thought

Temporality:

- Controllable future through subjective time: the necessity of changes to meet the future goals
- Change talk could produce changes because employees vocalize their interpretations
- Discontinuity from the present to the future through “if-then plans”



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Thank you!

Comments and Questions:
Olli.kupiainen@aalto.fi



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