Article

Narrative Reflection as a Means to Explore Team Effectiveness

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to explore how teams make sense of their effectiveness over time by telling their team story. We selected five team stories from health care teams perceived by the organization as effective. We analyzed their stories using three-level narrative analysis, which addresses the temporal, social, and normative complexities of narrating effective teamwork. Two story types were identified: *developing effectiveness stories*, which represent stories about a transition from ineffective to effective, and *continuous improvement stories*, which represent relatively consistent high performance. This distinction seems to indicate differences in the way teams engage in and profit from narrative reflection, and how they relate to the organizational context. Our findings showed that narrative reflection provides insights into incongruence between teamwork elements, invites members to exchange perspectives, and reveals lessons learned for future recycling. Future research could explore how composite stories might provide insights for other teams to reflect on.

Keywords

teamwork, team effectiveness, narrative approach, qualitative research, team stories

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Many studies have focused on mediators and moderators of team effectiveness (Mathieu, Maynard, Rapp, & Gilson, 2008; Pescosolido, 2003), assuming its evident value for organizational functioning. However, these studies have emphasized a focus on member attitudes to the exclusion of underlying, ongoing meaning-making processes that drive them, and consequently this conventional view tends to oversimplify the complexities of teamwork. Several studies have shown that teamwork can be characterized by conflict and difficulties in communication, decision making, and operational conditions (Apker, Propp, & Ford, 2005; Finn, 2008; Opie & Buchanan, 1997). These complexities require a more dynamic approach to address the social processes of teamwork (Finn, 2008; Finn, Learmonth, & Reedy, 2010; Martin & Finn, 2011) as well as the significance of language in constituting what it means to be a team.

A sensemaking perspective to teamwork shifts the focus from attitudes toward the ongoing process of producing and reproducing a shared sense of meaning that informs and constrains action and identity (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). Sensemaking draws attention to stories and storytelling in organizations, as "narratives are structures through which events are made sense of rather than just being representations which convey meaning" (Rhodes & Brown, 2005, p. 171). Stories have been assumed to serve multiple functions, such as sharing knowledge (Santoro & Brézillon, 2006), making sense of past events and actions (Riessman, 1993), establishing common values (McCarthy, 2008), negotiating personal and social roles, and constituting social relations, identities, and images of a team (Czarniawska, 1997; Finn, 2008). From this point of view, team members do not merely *talk about* team effectiveness, but through talk they constitute their experiences, actions, and identity of effectiveness over time. In this article, we focus on how team narratives can function, in particular, as a means for reflection and learning among team members (Abma, 2000; Brown & Duguid, 1991).

Former studies have highlighted the benefits of reflective processes of storytelling for greater role understanding, and for improving teamwork and sustainability (Goldsmith, Wittenberg-Lyles, Rodriguez, & Sanchez-Reilly, 2010; Iedema & Scheeres, 2003). However, these studies have mostly limited their focus to individual stories and thematic analysis. The importance of reflecting on past events, both for improving the reliability of mental models and for learning from experiences, has been foregrounded in studies involving after-event review (Ellis, Mendel, & Nir, 2006). However, while after-event review especially focuses on cognitive processing and reasoning, narrative reflection focuses on how people gradually gain insights by sharing stories and explicating experiences in interaction with others.

In our study, narrative reflection was first elicited by asking health care teams to narrate their team story for research purposes. Second, narrative reflection was enriched by narrative analysis of these stories by the research team. In this article, we take a narrative approach to sensemaking in organizations in which we address the following question: How do teams make sense of becoming effective over time? While the adopted narrative approach is consistent with the sensemaking literature that is more commonly used in organization studies, it adds a distinct method of narrative analysis with storylines at its core (Burke, 1969; Murray & Sools, 2015). We conclude by reflection on how this narrative approach may open up new avenues for making sense of team effectiveness in research and practice.

A Narrative Approach to Team Effectiveness

Although a narrative approach is increasingly used in organization studies, there is no consensus regarding how to define narrative or story (note that these concepts are generally used interchangeably). Divergent definitions of narrative are provided by scholars from a variety of disciplines (Riessman, 2008). Definitions range from those focusing on structure and form (e.g., the Aristotelian definition of story structure having a beginning, middle, and end, along with definitions involving sequences that are ordered in time and place) to rather loose definitions that reduce narrative to little more than metaphor. Riessman (2008) explicitly distinguishes between storytelling and other discourse forms such as chronicles, reports, arguments, and questions-and-answer exchanges. Browning's (1992) classical article "Lists and Stories as Organizational Communication" emphasizes that organizing (e.g., teamwork) is continuously constituted by forms of communication. He provides numerous contrasts between lists and stories and their respective functions. While lists contain expert knowledge and are static, instructive, and factual, stories contain local knowledge, personal experiences, and are temporal, social, and disturbing to logic and norms (Browning, 1992). In contrast with strategically designed, functional lists of information, stories unfold naturally and provide understandings located in time and space (Browning, 1992). Boje (2001) extends the spectrum of the definition of narrative with his concept of ante-narrative. This concept represents everyday organizational storytelling and highlights its fragmented, incoherent, and unplotted character. Boje (2001) writes, "[The stories] can be told without a proper plot sequence and mediated coherence" (p. 3).

The narrative approach we used in this study is based on storyline (pentadic) analysis (Bruner, 1986; Burke, 1969; Murray & Sools, 2015) and encompasses both fragmented, non-linear, and collectively produced

narratives and coherent narratives that have a beginning, middle, and end. Burkean storyline analysis originates from the humanities but has been proposed from its outset as applicable to a variety of genres ranging from philosophical frameworks to newspaper articles to everyday gossip. Storylines can be more or less fully developed, and relatively solid or more fluid and emerging. Perhaps more importantly, storylines are not considered to be functioning independent of a reader or listener but rather are constructed by researchers based on more or less elaborated accounts. These accounts are, from a narrative approach, considered to be co-constructed in an organizational context.

From a narrative perspective, creating and maintaining team effectiveness can be understood as an ongoing narrative process of producing, reproducing, and modifying the group's identity as one that is perceived as effective in achieving its goals (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). The narrative approach we adopted (Murray & Sools, 2015) can be used to address three complexities relevant to making sense of teamwork effectiveness—temporal, social, and normative—because these three complexities relate to three levels of analysis (detailed in the Method section). By bringing this three-level approach to team stories, we integrated content- and structure-oriented narrative approaches with those that are more discursive, thereby offering a multilevel understanding of team effectiveness. We now describe how each of the complexities addresses underlying, ongoing meaning-making processes that drive teamwork.

First, *temporal complexity* is concerned with how stories connect past, present, and future, which is relevant to how teams make sense of their development over time. When a team is formed, for example, there might be ambiguity about the nature of the group, what value it offers, and its position within the organizational environment (Aldrich & Ruef, 2006). Over time, team members develop certain agreements about common goals and distinguish practices to work effectively. The importance of developing shared knowledge over time has also been acknowledged in prior research of mental models (e.g., cognitive representations of team tasks, the team and team interactions; Cannon-Bowers, Salas, & Converse, 1990). Temporal complexity addresses both the development of events and actions by asking numerous questions. Specifically, this approach aims to address the discrepancy between what was supposed to happen and what actually happened by examining *why* there was a discrepancy. Furthermore, this approach delineates what worked for this team and what should be done differently in the future (Ellis, 2012). By taking this approach, the team identity can also be determined by defining who we are as a team, where we come from, and examining defining moments in our past (Schultz & Hernes, 2013). Consequently, a

narrative approach offers a periodic and historical view on teamwork, focusing on "adaptive change of identity from one period to another" (Schultz & Hernes, 2013, p. 17).

Second, the *social complexity* of teamwork is essential for understanding the process of co-constructing a story, a key part of all storytelling, but in the case of a team story, it is of particular importance. The performance of stories is an essential part of team members' sensemaking (Boje, 1991). For example, people can use different words and styles when telling the story to compose different impressions of themselves for different audiences, making the stories highly variable and sometimes political (Boje, 1991). A study by Sprain and Hughes (2015) showed that whether a teller is considered an expert depends upon the significance of both the teller's *narrative positioning* in the storytelling and the *relevance of the story* to the central topic of discussion. As such, they concluded that storytelling plays a role in establishing interactional identities.

Narrative positioning is based on the idea that team members constantly strive to shape their personal identities through the ways they position themselves in relationship to others and are being shaped by discursive forces (Davies & Harré, 1990). Sensitivity toward the relative positioning of people during interactions seems helpful when exploring the extent to which people can agree on what counts as effective. Retrospective sensemaking may evoke many possible meanings, as performances never represent a complete story. Through the reminiscences of a team history, topics are introduced, negotiated, and embedded in team members' knowledge. This process of co-construction reveals how teams constitute their identity and action by using and reproducing stories. While some stories are made meaningful (selection) and preserved (retention), others are not. A vital part of a team's story selection and retention seems to be whether the retained story is both believed and doubted (Weick et al., 2005). Another related aspect is how team members build upon each other's stories and engage in disagreement and discussion around complex issues (Ryfe, 2006). Studies on public deliberation demonstrate that storytelling promotes equality and provides space for distinct opinions and viewpoints and a critical understanding of political issues (Black, 2008; Sprain & Hughes, 2015). Therefore, team members do not merely reflect on and make sense of past experiences but also negotiate "which events are bracketed and labeled in ways that predispose people to find common ground" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 411).

Third, *normative complexity* draws attention to the wider context in which norms for effectiveness are indexed (Coupland & Brown, 2012). Stories connect the individual with the larger organizational (and societal) norms and values, which affect the *enactment* and interpretation of valued identities

(Weick et al., 2005), and what counts as individual and as team responsibility (Hollenbeck, Beersma, & Schouten, 2012). In terms of sensemaking, this means that the construction of effectiveness becomes a multi-level interactive process between actors and their work context (enactment) that are made meaningful (Weick et al., 2005). So, when considering normative complexity from a narrative approach, team effectiveness is not based on objective measurements of expected output but on the selection of criteria from "a broad range of cognitive, normative, and regulatory forces" that the organizational context provides for assessing effectiveness (Weick et al., 2005, p. 417).

Method

Research Context

This study was conducted at a solution-focused health care organization for intellectually disabled people. This organization offers residential and ambulatory care and daytime activities to 2,300 clients in about 90 different locations in the Netherlands. At each location, one or more teams operate to provide comprehensive health care services. In 2005, the solution-focused work approach was adopted as the main work approach in the organization, which was actively implemented through trainings, workshops, and video interaction guidance. This future-oriented and pragmatic work approach focuses on best practices and *doing what works*, by emphasizing strengths, qualities, and talents of people (De Shazer, 1985).

Data Collection

Five health care teams were selected on the basis of two selection criteria: (a) identification by the regional directors as effective and (b) above average scores on the employee satisfaction survey of the previous year, which measured motivation, effectiveness, efficiency, involvement, loyalty, customer focus, performance, satisfaction, absenteeism, employee turnover, role clarity, and engagement. Informed consent was given by a representative team member, speaking on behalf of the team. The teams operated in different work settings and had different numbers of team members (see Table 1 for an overview; all names are pseudonyms).

Focus group interviews were conducted with the five selected teams to elicit team reflections among team members and co-construction (Gaskell, 2000). Advantages of focus group interviews include the possibility for team members to help each other in the reconstruction of certain events from a shared past and the revealing of underlying reasoning and thoughts through

Table 1. Overview of the Participating Teams.

Team	Type of care	Number of interview participants
Red Yard	24-hr care	14
Citadel	Ambulatory care for families	6
Bellahove	24-hr care	17
Freebird	24-hr care	5
Blue Ivy	Daycare children	6

group discussion (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). The focus group interviews were conducted by the first author. The teams were aware of the selection process and the team-effectiveness lens of the researcher. Every interview started with an adaptation from the lifestory interview method (McAdams, 2001). This method involves an individually written assignment in which participants are asked to think of their life as if it were a book with chapters, identify each chapter, and outline each chapter's content. The adapted version for use in the focus group interviews was as follows: "Imagine you are going to write a book about your team, what would the index of the book look like?" After that, a list of themes of every member's input was created to subsequently ask questions that might extract stories about each theme. These questions included, for example, "Which people were involved?" and "What were the consequences for the team?" The role of the moderator was one of the curious, not-knowing observer (Gaskell, 2000). Whenever team members, either individually or as a group, became proactive in questioning each other, the moderator remained in the background. The interviews lasted 1 to 1½ hr, and were video-recorded and transcribed verbatim into a total of 203 double-spaced pages.

In addition, the first author visited each team for 1 week. She attended and observed various interactions among team members, such as informal and formal meetings between two team members, official team meetings with the manager, and informal breaks. Observations of these experiences were noted and processed into a global impression of every team with attention paid to activities, team composition, atmosphere, team interactions, work patterns, and notable events. These insights served to enhance understanding of the team context and improve the data interpretation and analysis.

Data Analysis

We used a three-level narrative analysis (see Figure 1). The distinction between the levels is derived from positioning theory (Van Langenhove & Harré,

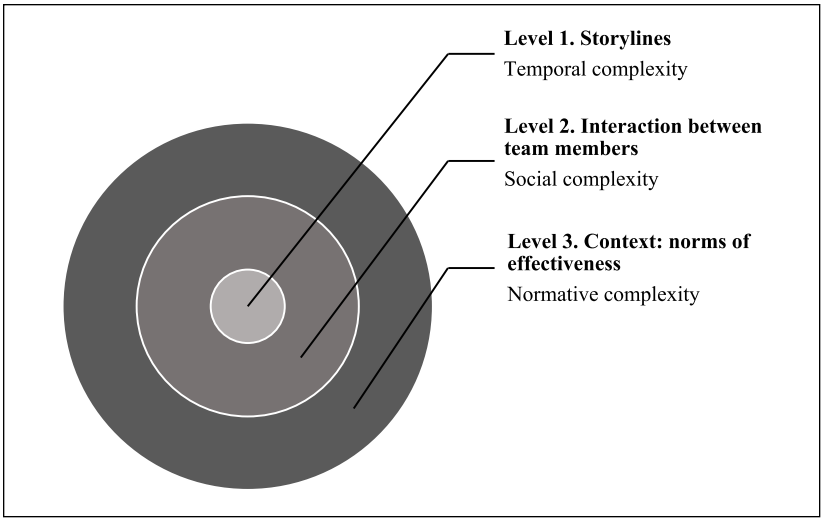

Figure 1. Levels of narrative analysis of team stories.

1999). Bamberg (1997) first introduced the three-level analysis to narrative research, and this methodology was consequently elaborated by incorporating Burkean storyline analysis for Level 1 (Murray & Sools, 2015).

In its most elaborated and systematic form, this method of analysis "starts with the unique words of the participants and gradually moves up to include wider contexts and become more theory driven" (Murray & Sools, 2015, p. 139). That is why levels are conceptualized vertically, as each level of analysis builds on the preceding one below it, although the actual analysis is an iterative process between levels. In our study, we used a comprehensive analysis including all five steps in Table 2 from introduction to comparative analysis. The three levels in Figure 1 align with Steps 2 to 4 in Table 2. These three levels are briefly described below.

Level 1: Story and transition. A complete storyline is comprised of five story elements that are connected into a meaningful whole: (a) setting, the background of the story; (b) agent, the main character in the story; (c) acts and events, what is done and what happens; (d) means or helpers, what helps accomplish the purpose; and (e) purpose, why or for what the story develops. Burke (1969) as well as Bruner (1986) assumed that a story is told in response to a breach (e.g., an imbalance between two story elements, indicative of an interruption of taken-for-granted sensemaking). The researcher actively

Table 2. Step-by-Step Guide to Narrative Analysis.

Part	Step
1. Introduction	1. Formulate case title
	2. Introduce case
2. Storyline analysis	3. Formulate storyline title
	4. Identify and describe storyline elements and breach
	5. Write narrative summary of storyline
	6. Draw conclusions regarding your research question based on steps 3-5 and discuss your findings
3. Interactional narrative analysis	7. Positioning of storylines
	8. Positioning of storytellers/listeners
	9. Conclusion and discussion of what is at stake
4. Contextual analysis	10. Positioning of storylines in the wider social, societal, and political context
	11. Positioning of storytellers/listeners and interactional patterns in wider contexts
5. Comparative analysis of storylines, interactional patterns, and/or contexts	12. Make comparison of similarities and differences between cases

Source. Murray and Sools (2015, p. 139).

constructs a pentad, which draws attention to the coherence between story elements as well as to what motivates or drives the plot of a story, based on the researcher's close reading of selected excerpts, sentence-by-sentence. This constructive and interpretive process was conducted by the first author and critically reviewed by the co-authors at various stages until agreement between researchers was reached.

Level 2: Interactional analysis. At Level 2, we analyzed how the storylines were negotiated by the different team members. In line with Van Langenhove and Harré's (1999) positioning theory, our interactional analysis focused on how team members adopted or countered a certain version of reality by means of (a) interactional dynamics, (b) co-construction of stories, or (c) introducing personal effectiveness or team-effectiveness stories (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004; Harré, Moghaddam, Cairnie, Rothbart, & Sabat, 2009). In addition, we considered all utterances in a particular situation as context-specific answers rather than neutral claims (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Sools, Engen, & Baerveldt, 2007).

Level 3: Contextual analysis. At Level 3, we compared the storylines and positioning at Levels 1 and 2 with the organizational definition and story of team effectiveness, developed within the context of the solution-focused approach, which we developed in a previous Delphi study. The context-specific definition and consequent storyline of team effectiveness which was previously developed (Lohuis, van Vuuren, & Bohlmeijer, 2013) was (a) professionals, (b) who work together, (c) using their strengths, (d) to achieve their goals (e) in a healthy organization. By framing the context-specific definition according to the five story elements that make up storylines (Burke, 1969), we aimed to facilitate systematic evaluation of effectiveness on the third level of analysis. Then, the organizational storyline of an effective team involves the following:

a. Agent (i.e., professionals): Motivated, competent, innovative, taking responsibility, flexible, studious, complementary;
b. Acts/events (i.e., working together): Helping each other, honest and clear communication and feedback, permanently searching for improvements, clear appointments, doing what works, short communication lines;
c. Means (i.e., strengths): Expertise, personality, and skills;
d. Purpose (i.e., in terms of various goals): Client satisfaction, employee satisfaction, positive appearance to clients, relatives and other teams, continuous personal development;
e. Setting (i.e., healthy organization): Trust between team members, fun, engagement, pride, trust in and from management, sense of safety.

Results

In this section, we start with an introduction to the five cases, and then provide a description of commonalities and differences between team stories at all three levels of analyses (see Table 3). After closely reading all team stories, we identified two types of team stories: (a) *developing effectiveness stories,* in which teams go through a transition from ineffective to effective, and (b) *continuous improvement stories*, in which teams have relatively consistent high performances. While the first type included a transition of the team from a before (not effective) and after (effective) situation, the second type showed a personal development story of how a team member came to identify with the team. We now first describe the commonalities and differences between the five cases as presented in Table 3, noting the makeup of the team and its context, key themes in the team story, the main storyline, and how agency is attributed. Finally, we present an in-depth analysis of the storyline

Table 3. Commonalities and Differences Between the Five Cases on Three Levels of Analysis.

	Teams				
Levels of analysis	Red Yard	Citadel	Bellahove	Freebird	Blue Ivy
1. Storylines and transitions					
Storylines	Developing effectiveness story	Continuous improvement story	Developing effectiveness story	Continuous improvement story	Developing effectiveness story
Before transition storyline	"In the beginning, we even had a blacklist"	"In the beginning I always had the idea I should take care of the clients"	"It did not go well between colleagues and the location manager"	"I was struggling to keep my head above water"	"At one point all team members were focused on themselves"
After transition storyline	"Now we focus on what is going well and what can be improved"	"I have been working much more professionally thanks to this team"	"The new manager was a relief"	"This is a more mature team"	"We stand behind each other in what we want"
Breach	Imbalance between the purpose of getting things done and unmotivated team members and lack of openness	Imbalance between performance expectations as part of the team culture and own capabilities to meet these expectations	Imbalance between the manager's goal to get things done and resisting team members and a distrustful work environment	Imbalance between personal purpose to grow professionally and a competing, rigid and formal work setting in a former team	Imbalance between the team's purpose to find a balance between feelings and professionalism and a manager who was not able to give clear expectations and responsibilities
Change agent(s)	Blacklist	Team members	External character	Manager/new colleagues	External character/team members

(continued)

Table 3. (continued)

Levels of analysis	Teams				
	Red Yard	Citadel	Bellahove	Freebird	Blue Ivy
2. Interactional positioning					
Interactional dynamics	Negotiating	Confirmatory and questioning	Complementary	Confirmatory	Sympathizing
Degree of co-construction	Medium	Low	High	Low	Medium
Relationship between PE and TE story	TE story as condition for PE stories	PE gives meaning to TE list	TE story as condition for PE stories	PE story gives meaning to TE list	Mutually reinforcing
3. Norms of effectiveness					
Referrals to the organizational story of effectiveness	Concentrating on one or two story elements	Covers a broad range of story elements	Concentrating on one or two story elements	Covers a broad range of story elements	Covers a broad range of story elements
Degree alignment with solution-focused work approach	High	High	Medium	High	High

Note. PE = personal effectiveness; TE = team effectiveness.

of team Red Yard using two selected excerpts that represent their team development.

Commonalities and Differences Between the Five Team Stories

Team Citadel consisted of eight female team members and one male manager. This team was characterized by a high average level of education. Compared with the other teams, the team members had worked together for a relatively long period on this team, with an average of 5 years. The team was divided into different sub-teams with two or three team members taking responsibility for the same clients. Due to the work setting of ambulatory care, the members worked independently of each other, visiting their own clients in their homes. The central office was occasionally used for administration, meetings, and to discuss work situations. The working culture was characterized by professionalism, equality, responsibility, and studiousness. This working culture was demonstrated by the team's attention to work transfers in which many examples were exchanged to illustrate expectations or concerns, emotional acknowledgment in difficult situations as well as thorough process evaluations, discussion of ambiguities, and the giving of compliments.

Six (75%) team members attended the interview, no manager was present. The interview was initially slightly restrained, but after a while, the participants' involvement increased. Respectful interaction values were recognized throughout the interview. Most of the stories told were about personal development; participants listened with interest to each other's stories, sometimes confirming them, and sometimes showing curiosity by asking questions.

Co-created talk consisted more of lists and evaluations than narratives of situations over time. Their lists, which appeared as taken for granted, seemed to function as a framework for their team stories. The team storyline showed stability over time, with dedication, enthusiasm, and emphasis on learning and development as common themes. An example of a personal development story, relative to the team context, is reflected in this transition: "In the beginning I always had the idea I should take care of the clients" to "I have been working much more professionally thanks to this team." In this example, one of the team members (Maggy) was positioned as the main agent ("I"). She described the dedicated work setting of this team by stating that "because everybody on the team works that [dedicated] way . . . then you do not dare to take it easy." Maggy's purpose was to be promoted from assistant coach to coach, and she diligently worked to reach her goal by assuming particular challenging tasks.

While this transition reflects a success story, the implied breach seems to be an imbalance between the team setting in which everybody is expected to learn, and the task of fulfilling these expectations by each individual team member. As Maggy said, "I found it quite difficult in the beginning, and now I think I just go for it. And you get more and more confident to take initiatives. And hey, yeah, it's also a lot of actual practicing." This storyline highlights the solution-focused principle of goal orientation and using one's own strengths. It also represents a complete picture of story elements as included in the organizational story of effectiveness. Compared with the other team stories, team Citadel mostly emphasized the agentic role of the team members in becoming effective.

Team Bellahove provided 24-hr care to clients with various psychological and physical problems. The team consisted of 19 young people, male and female, and a manager who had recently started. They worked together in a 3-year-old apartment building that consisted of four floors, with about 10 clients on each floor. Most team members had worked in the team since its inception, and a few team members had previously worked together at a different location before moving together to the current site. The relatively large team was divided into two sub-teams, with one focusing on nursing/physical care and the other on psychological care. Team members shared a small office for administrative tasks and information transfer. The working culture was characterized by fun and humor, informal relationships, and a feeling of belonging, demonstrated by joking and laughing, talks regarding private matters, joint activities outside work, and a substantial amount of communication.

Seventeen (90%) team members attended the interview. The conversation started out lively with much interaction. Participants were very open in telling their stories and often gave distinct evaluations. There was a high level of co-creation, which contributed to (re)producing a shared history. The members quoted their former manager to illustrate her way of acting. They often laughed during the interview, made jokes, and interrupted each other. The manager attended the interview to acquire more insight into the team history and to share his own first impressions about the team. He remained largely in the background. Group dynamics in team Bellahove showed a high degree of participation and distinct evaluation, indicating the presence of trust and openness. Recurring themes showed an ambivalent mixture of support, openness, misunderstanding, and solidarity.

The team storyline contained two main episodes featuring a transition from "It did not go well between colleagues and the location manager" to "The new manager was a relief." The previous location manager utilized team members as a means to reach her goal. Team members did not know what to expect and had no control over their own work. Moreover, the manager's impersonal

treatment of team members as objects led to a distrustful situation and resistance. This breach was resolved by this previous manager's departure. In this transition, we recognized a transition of team members from isolated individuals ("We felt that we were all alone") to team members belonging to a collective with a purpose ("In the end, I think we all personally squared our shoulders, as it were, like we were going to make something of it. And I think that that was the decision and the transformation"). The new manager was referred to as "a person" and "human," thereby assuming the characteristics of the desired humanization of the team. The change agent responsible for this transition was presented as a *deus ex machina* (an external character; that is, a regional director who enters the floor to change the situation), while the team itself did not act as an attributed agent in changing the situation.

This storyline shows a solution-focused transition in terms of empowering employees. Whereas the first manager relied on her own skills and knowledge, the second manager emphasized the dedication and skills of the team members, as they noted, "Respect for us [the team members] and letting us know that we are doing a good job." Looking closer at the organizational story of team effectiveness, we recognized that most attention was given to the setting. A trusting co-relationship with management was central and explicitly addressed. Little attention was given to the professionals themselves in terms of taking responsibility.

Team Freebird consisted of five team members of mixed genders and ages, and was characterized by a high average level of education. The team provided 24-hr care to elderly clients with needs related to financial, relational, and addictive problems. The team was part of a larger unit consisting of two other teams at the same location that provided care to other age groups. The atmosphere in the team was relaxed and calm, demonstrated by their taking time for their work transfers, quiet and cautious appearance, and little interaction due to their individual working shifts. The working culture was characterized by respect, shared responsibility, and a focus on team members' strengths based on impressions from their working meetings.

All team members attended the interview. There was no manager present. After a cautious start, participants demonstrated increased motivation to narrate their story and openly evaluated their own experiences in the team. The stories tended to be personally oriented, but members did confirm and complement each other's stories. They were open in what they thought of each other and how they experienced each other as team members. They seemed to know each other well.

This team story was characterized by continuous improvement over time, with consistent attention toward the person–job fit. Examples of this theme were stories about team members who changed their positions within the

team and between teams to better suit their personal needs. Their stable team storyline provided the background for one of the team member's group identity story to evolve. Henk worked in another team at the same location before, where he experienced an imbalance between the work setting (competing, rigid, formal) and his purpose to grow. The location manager was ascribed with agency in the member's transfer. Team Freebird was described as a scene where he "landed on his feet," a team that had transparent processes and clarity in agreements. His current team members were ascribed with agency in creating a relaxed work scene in which Henk was able to work on his purpose to develop professionally. The result of his team transfer seemed to be an improved person-team fit and greater personal effectiveness. More importantly, narrative reflection on contrasting experiences between the teams helped Henk recognize his value and purpose:

> Perhaps that [imbalance] was my blind spot . . . and it was indeed noticed by Cecile [the manager]. And at one point she cut to the chase and simply asked me if I would like to switch to another team.

In fact, a focus on one's own strengths and abilities clearly corresponds within the solution-focused approach. Also, a closer analysis shows that the storyline covers the total range of story elements of the organizational story of team effectiveness.

Team Blue Ivy can be seen as a collective of different teams at one location, providing care to children with mild to severe intellectual and physical disabilities. The different teams consisted of two or three team members, each taking care of their own group of children. During the day, the teams did not interact much. Besides the team members, a large number of independent experts, such as physiotherapists and speech therapists, were working on location. The working culture was characterized by a dedication to client care, involvement, creativeness, and a positive appearance to relatives, demonstrated by the way team members took time for talking to parents, their warm and caring attitudes toward their clients, their sensitivity to clients' signals and needs, and their creative gift when saying farewell to a colleague.

A mixture of team members from the different sub-groups attended the focus group. There was no manager present. Their stories had a strong emotional tone, and team members showed their sympathy for each other. Recurring themes were the loss of clients, the hard and soft sides of work, and personal growth. The atmosphere was relaxed but lacked energy.

The team storyline reflected a recurring tension between feelings and professionalism, illustrated by the quote,

> I think it is inherent to this type of health care setting. . . . We are quite good with people, but when it comes to feelings and stuff. . . . When it comes to professionalism, we can still learn a lot of the business industry.

A main transition years ago, referred to as the "big chapter," was a shared event put forward to illustrate this tension between team members' feelings and professionalism. The setting was described as messy, unprofessional, and lacking guidance, with the main agent depicted as "Everyone on his own and God for us all." In other words, members were acting as individuals on their own behalf. The manager at the time was expected to help the team resolve the controversy and find a balance between professionalism and team members' feelings. However, he was not able to do so, as he seemed unable to provide clear instructions regarding the expectations and responsibilities of the team members. His actions (e.g., promising the same pastry to multiple people) resulted in team friction with everyone focusing on their own interests. At one point, the manager was not taken seriously anymore. The two team members who told this story ascribed themselves agency in changing the situation by means of involving a regional director.

The current situation showed a collective in which members increasingly cooperated in a self-managing way based on personal involvement as they searched for solutions and supported each other. Thus, after the transition, the motto "Everyone on his own and God for us all" had been reframed in a positive way to "self-directed." This transition corresponded with the solution-focused approach which encourages empowerment and self-management. In relationship to the organizational story of team effectiveness, not only the setting and corresponding actions were given great attention, but also other aspects, such as group qualities and individual work attitudes.

Team Red Yard consisted of 15 team members, mostly women. They provided 24-hr care to clients with various psychological problems. Three and a half years ago, the team moved from their old work location to a newly built building. Meanwhile, the team composition significantly changed, especially after the arrival of a new location manager. The team was characterized by a variety of personalities, each reflecting different work styles. They did not manifest as a collective, but they all seemed to respect the different personalities within the team. The manager was often present and seemed to have a significant impact on the working culture and decision making. There was a positive atmosphere with attention to sociability and domesticity. The working culture appeared open, responsible, and creative, with a great sense of providing client satisfaction.

All team members attended the focus group, except for the presence of one member. Although the study design excluded the manager from the

interview, the members insisted that their manager be invited, so the manager attended the interview as well. During the interview, the atmosphere was relaxed. The stories told were more individual stories than co-creations, although team members had quite similar experiences. The manager had a directive role and inserted extra information.

The previous sections reported a high-level recount of the results of this study; more detailed reports are found in Table 3. In the next section, we describe how Table 3 was created by using one team, Red Yard, as an example. Specifically, we illustrate the in-depth analysis of the storyline of team Red Yard by means of two selected excerpts that represent their team development to reveal the processes that occurred to derive our aforementioned results.

Developing Effectiveness Story: Team Red Yard

Level 1 storyline. In the team story of Red Yard, we identified a developing effectiveness story with a transition from an old to a new situation. The title we propose to capture the transition depicted in the storyline is *In the beginning, we even had a blacklist, but now we focus on what is going well and what could be improved*. To construct this storyline, we closely read how and what is narrated in the following vividly told excerpts about a shared memory involving a blacklist.

Excerpt 1. Mailing with a cc: A very nasty way of working

Josje: And everything was mailed with a cc to the location manager. Unbelievable!

Manager: Yes, and the funny thing is . . .

Josje: That was really very awkward! Honestly! (. . .)

Ann: It was definitely a bit awkward back then.

Josje: It had a bit of a gossipy undertone. That was it.

Patty: Well, yes it was actually meant, at least that is what I can recollect very clearly, to kick someone's butt. Because if you did not send a cc, then it would simply not be done.

Josje: Then nothing at all was accomplished.

Elly: That was indeed a very nasty way of working.

The words "gossipy" and "nasty" indicate a negative and unsafe *setting*. Based on the team members' use of pronouns, we see that no *main agent* is defined, they refer to a neutral "it" or "that." While the described *act* of cc'ing emails seems initially quite common within a working context, the fraught setting highlights that this way of communicating between team members is considered highly inappropriate. The purpose of cc'ing these emails is framed in pragmatic terms, namely to "kick someone's butt" and to "get things done," indicating the lack of motivation or commitment of some team members that is presented as a given throughout the interview. These non-motivated team members are vaguely referred to as "someone." The downside of cc'ed emails is their "gossipy undertone." Both the sending and receiving of emails are considered negative, as the senders can be blamed for gossiping and the receivers can be blamed for not being motivated. The story logic seems to be that the means for achieving the purpose of "getting things done" lies in team members becoming motivated. The breach between means and purpose is solved ineffectively by evoking vague, indirect acts that circumvent blame.

The unsafety depicted in this storyline is further elaborated as follows:

Excerpt 2. In the beginning we even had a blacklist

Manager: Yeah, and in the beginning we even had a blacklist, eh.

Many people: Yes.

[. . .]

Elly: Tell us a little about what the blacklist is (.) that is pretty serious.

(Elly laughs)

Manager: The blacklist contained all the things that did not run smoothly. One can hide them, but they are recorded in a blacklist. So in order to, so to say, get the sting out of it again, we tried to say it.

Patty: It did not last long.

Manager: It was all over with quite quickly. But it was not difficult to unearth the people who genuinely had to write things down in a blacklist, they did surface: They emerged quite easily. So that in itself was indeed a way to—how shall I say it—create more openness.

This excerpt lacks details regarding a main agent. While the manager introduces the presence of a blacklist into the storyline, there is no

information about an acting person. Instead, the blacklist is endowed with some agency (e.g., collecting all the things that did not go well). Considering its negative connotation, it comes as a surprise that the blacklist actually serves as a *means* to create more openness. So, while the blacklist initially indicates a lack of safety and openness for face-to-face communication, it is reframed as a way to create openness, which is presented as a new, desirable way of achieving the purpose of getting things done. This reframing continues through the team member Ann's evaluation later on during the interview when she remarks that cc'ing emails is not experienced as inappropriate anymore: "According to me it is not bad anymore that everything goes in a cc to Vera (manager), because we are already there, yeah." This preferable work setting that was finally reached by the team is consequently named as a setting that focuses on "What is going well and what could be improved."

Level 2 interaction. In the two excerpts presented above, there are three potential audiences: (a) the moderator (who wants to get information about their team history), (b) the manager (who holds a hierarchical position), and (c) fellow team members (who share equal positions as well as the experiences being discussed). Three storytellers (the manager, Josje, and Patty) take the lead in determining the topic of the story, while the others respond to their input. The role of the moderator is minimal.

In Excerpt 1, Josje introduces the cc'ed email storyline and sets the scene for debunking a perceived negative situation by using strong evaluative words with exclamation marks: "Unbelievable!" and "Very awkward! Honestly!" Ann validates this way of positioning the storyline by repeating the evaluation "awkward." Consequently, Josje nuances her initial stronger evaluation with "a bit of." This nuancing is then taken up by Patty who provides an explanation for the cc practice, which she presents with some distancing, in a factual way (indicated by the words "It was actually meant" and "a recollection") rather than as her personal opinion. Patty's explanation is validated by Josje by affirming its purpose, which puts the sending-cc storyline into a more positive light. Elly's consequent remark that "it was indeed a nasty way of working" is ambiguous in the sense that it is unclear whether she refers to the sending-cc practice or the situation that nothing at all was accomplished. All in all, the negotiation in this excerpt can be viewed as an attempt to make negative events a topic of discussion. We can assume that the targeted audience for this storyline are the fellow team members and the manager, as they do not offer the moderator much explanation about the contents of the cc'ed emails.

In Excerpt 2, the manager seems to build upon the space created for the negative evaluation by offering a concrete example, for example, the

blacklist. Again, not much explanation is given. Together with most team members' affirmative "yes," this indicates that the team members are familiar with the story. Elly then encourages the manager to explain the blacklist, once again in an ambiguous way, by adding the strong evaluative remark, "pretty serious," accompanied by laughter. The manager takes up Elly's invitation by providing an explanation about the function of the blacklist in a factual manner. Although she starts her explanation with the blacklist in an acting role, in the end she carefully identifies with the blacklist practice ("we tried"). Patty makes an effort to undo this attempt by attributing personal agency through her statement: "It did not last long." This impersonal positioning is consequently taken up by the manager, who makes a distinction between those people who were and those who were not a legitimate target of the blacklist; thereby, once again, legitimizing its function. By explicitly separating the *genuine people* from *non-genuine ones* and by presenting this separation as an accomplished fact, the manager was able to signal a clear break between the necessity for a blacklist in the past from the new more open work setting.

This team openness, which was identified at the Level 1 analysis as a solution to the breach, can also be observed throughout the focus group interview, where explicitly mentioning people's names is a recurring practice stimulated by the manager. As Ann, for example, states, "Vera has really insisted that we be open with each other like, 'come on now, do not say *people*' but just mention the names." In this way, through a close reading of the interaction at Level 2, we gain more insight into the dilemmatic negotiation of openness that is necessary for the transition between the before-and-after situation depicted in the storyline at Level 1.

Level 3 contextual norms. The team's storyline transition from "all the things that did not run smoothly" to a "focus on what is going well and what could be improved" corresponds very positively with the solution-focused approach promoted by the organization. Moreover, looking toward future solutions and moving beyond past problems is also consistent with a solution-focused approach. Upon closer examination within the context of the organizational story of team effectiveness, we see that in the team's sensemaking, some elements receive more attention than others. Motivated agents are central and explicitly addressed as well as the means of honest and clear communication. Regarding the acts and events bringing about this change, we have little information other than the act of distinguishing between genuine and non-genuine team members has become easier. The expertise, personality, and skills required to make this distinction are not specified but rather implicitly performed by the manager in interaction. The pragmatically framed purpose

of the team storyline ("getting things done") is quite distanced from the humanizing goals specified in the organizational definition of effective solution-focused work. Trust and a sense of safety were the setting features most at stake in the storyline and interaction of Team Red Yard. To conclude, the team storyline and interaction are only partially aligned with the organizational storyline. A humanizing purpose is missing, the element of acts/events is vague, the safety of the setting is not guaranteed, and aspects such as pride, fun, and engagement are missing. Based on this narrative analysis of gaps and storyline inconsistencies, reflective questions arise regarding what might contribute most to improving this team's effectiveness. Possible solutions, for example, might include adjusting the purpose, explicating expertise and skills, and complementing a one-sided portrayal of the other elements.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, we explored the potential of narrative reflection for increasing team effectiveness by examining how teams make sense of their own effectiveness over time. The proposed three-level approach allows locating each team's position within its sensemaking process toward becoming an effective team. Such customized feedback may help teams improve their effectiveness and formulate future actions. Below, we present the insights gained from the five cases in this study and show how every level of analysis has its own value for understanding how team effectiveness is narratively constructed.

With regard to temporal complexity, we were especially interested in storylines that addressed transitions in team effectiveness. However, two of the five teams did not include storyline transitions at the team level. Based on that finding, we differentiated between *developing effectiveness stories* (as told by the teams Red Yard, Bellahove, and Blue Ivy), in which teams pass through a transition from ineffective to effective, and *continuous improvement stories* (as told by teams Freebird and Citadel) in which teams have relatively consistent high performance.

Because people engage in storytelling especially during periods of change or (potential) conflict, teams with developing effectiveness stories might engage in narrative reflection more automatically than teams with continuous improvement stories. However, another possibility is that the distinction between the two story types is not so much between teams engaging in explicit narrative reflection or not, but rather between their different ways of engaging in reflection. After all, both story types have breaches that give rise to storytelling aimed at mending the breach in taken-for-granted sensemaking. While continuous development stories might be more like fragmented ante-narratives (Boje, 2001) embedded in reflection-in-action, developing

effectiveness stories might give rise to so-called *big narrative reflection* involving more fully fledged storylines (Freeman, 2006). This proposition is supported by the fact that teams with continuous improvement stories used relatively more listing and argumentation than teams with developing effectiveness stories. In addition, developing effectiveness stories involved more detailed narration at the team level, while relatively sparse continuous improvement stories at team level were complemented by detailed personal development stories of individual team members. Through these personal development stories, members gave meaning to effectiveness lists and argumentation.

The content and structure of team stories also provide insight into team effectiveness as it evolves over time. Within the structure, team members connect single story elements that enable them to identify, for example, the change agents in their stories. Interestingly, in both teams Bellahove and Blue Ivy, change agents in their stories were assigned with formal authority and decision-making powers. In contrast, teams Citadel and Freebird assign newcomers agency in providing fresh ideas that positively changed the effectiveness of the team. The latter approach probably has a different impact on perceived effectiveness and guides for action than a team story in which an external character has to intervene to save the team from total despair (as shown in the team stories Bellahove and Blue Ivy). In teams Citadel and Freebird, the team is part of the solution. A proposition could be that the more agency that team members assign to themselves in their stories about becoming an effective team, the more team members can contribute to effective team identity construction. It may be interesting to further explore the role of change agents in the stories of, for example, self-managing or multi-disciplinary teams and how it influences their identity construction. Such future research could lead to insights into how the temporal complexity of teamwork enables teams to make sense of the breach that led to a transition and to identify effective knowledge gained for future recycling.

Regarding the social complexity of teamwork, we noticed that teams with continuous improvement stories showed, in particular, confirmatory dynamics, while the teams with developing effectiveness stories showed more co-constructing and negotiation dynamics. Negotiation showed the presence of multiple meanings and claims, while confirmatory and complementary dynamics further solidified the organizing process of *retention*. Retention was expressed differently among the teams. In team Bellahove, multiple tellers collectively constructed a team story, complementing and completing each other's sentences, demonstrating unity in remembering and sharing a narrative truth. This process of co-constructing a story seemed to function as a binder between team members. Ryfe (2006) suggests that "the appeal of a

singular narrative is that it provides individuals not only with cognitive understanding of what happened, but also with a moral sense of what ought to be done next" (p. 84). Ryfe's statement is demonstrated in the way team Bellahove understood their manager's shift as an effective transition. This understanding, in turn, may have influenced the way the team gave meaning to the significant role of their manager, and, in most likelihood, Bellahove may reuse this understanding of the agency of an external character when similar situations occur in the future. Consequently, Bellahove's narrative reflection served their identity construction at the moment of telling and provided its future directions.

However, highly co-constructed team stories may limit the group's ability to see multiple perspectives or consider alternative stories or reconstruction. A way to construct new ideas or alternative stories could occur when retained stories are doubted by new team members, which may lead to new exchanges and negotiation (Choi & Levine, 2004). This dynamic is demonstrated by team Red Yard, where negotiation between versions of stories characterized their selection process. While the manager seemed to set the tone in the second part of the storyline, her storyline was not immediately accepted. Certain efforts, such as laughing and contrasting claims ("It did not last long"), consequently contributed to the selection of story parts that were made meaningful or refuted the story development.

In teams Citadel and Freebird, we recognized confirmatory dynamics in sharing personal effectiveness stories and co-constructing their effectiveness list. This reflection process seemed less focused on identity construction, but more like image building. Their personal stories validated their own effectiveness list, thereby proving their effectiveness to their external audience (interviewer) and perhaps their relatively new team members. While they seemed to benefit less from the opportunity to make sense of their former situation to guide future actions (which showed their taken-for-granted frames of reference), their narrative reflection may have functioned as a way to enable new team members to empathize with shared frames of reference (as also recognized in Blue Ivy) and become part of the team.

Our findings indicate that teams with developing effectiveness stories especially profit from narrative reflection in terms of positive identity building, and teams with continuous improvement stories provide space for learning and sharing best practices. These findings are reflected in how the teams with continuous improvement stories allowed much space for individual input and sensemaking. As such, their personal effectiveness stories may contribute to maintaining their identity as an effective team. In combination with enumerating a list of effective team characteristics, they co-constructed certain standards that individual team members could relate to without reducing

space for multiple voices. Considering the processes of believing and doubting the story, future research could explore whether co-constructed team stories stimulate feedback and reconstruction more than effectiveness lists that are supported by personal development stories.

With these intimate observations of the differing interactional dynamics among the teams, it would be interesting to examine how forms of storytelling might contribute to certain discursive functions and/or the other way around. Retelling their team stories, we identified different forms and functions of co-constructions, such as an emphasis on asking questions to learn about and from each other's experiences and an emphasis on negotiation as a way to reach common ground. While we are aware that the different number of group members in the participating teams may have influenced the degree of negotiation and co-construction, we also recognize certain patterns within the developing effectiveness stories and continuous improvement stories as mentioned above. Future research could further explore the role of group size in addressing the different complexities in narrative reflection, as well as taking into account the working structure in the teams. For example, the team members of Citadel worked more individually and less dependently on each other, which might have explained the team's fewer shared stories.

Finally, with regard to the normative complexities of teamwork, we recognized both temporal and social aspects that were linked to organizational effectiveness and solution-focused principles. Four storylines clearly reflected transitions of solution-focused change, mainly a focus on what works and a focus on positive reinforcement and team empowerment by the manager. Strikingly, while the organization actively implemented the solution-focused work approach through an extensive training program, no team mentioned this transition as part of their team story, apart from one team member of Citadel that linked it to her personal development and the value of following trainings, in general, for the sake of team building. Overall, the team stories fit the organizational work approach. It would also be particularly interesting to conduct this research design within perceived dysfunctional teams to compare how they produce and modify team challenges, manage conflict situations, and address solution-focused aspects during their narrative reflection.

Regarding the coherence and completeness of the team stories in this study, we recognized most referrals to the context-specific frames of effectiveness within the teams that told a continuous improving story, which is assumed to be a more complete and coherent team story. Within the teams with a developing effectiveness story, except for team Blue Ivy, we recognized referrals that were concentrated more on one or two story elements

instead of all five story elements as outlined. A possible explanation for the exception might be the timing of the teams' main transition that occurred years ago. Given that team stories provide understandings of what worked in the past, it might be that the more diverse the team transitions told, the wider their collection of best practices and lessons learned. When a holistic approach to team effectiveness appears in the stories told, the team member's alignment of best practices with the solution-focused work approach becomes more apparent, for example, in those stories highlighting how team members took responsibility and built on their own strengths. From a managerial point of view, this alignment may indicate the team's current position on its pathway to effectiveness.

In addition, our three-level analysis enabled us to obtain insights into how the content of the story (Level 1) corresponded to the process of storytelling (Level 2). For example, team Red Yard emphasized the importance of openness, while their storytelling showed that some topics were actually not openly discussed. While possibly indicative of politeness strategies, this lack of discussion on certain topics may also indicate a team's desired values, which still need to be developed in practice, or a team might possibly proclaim organizational norms (Level 3) while not being aware of behaving in an opposite way. As such, connecting findings across different levels of analyses explicates contrasts and convergences, which contributes to raising consciousness in teams and organizations.

In summary, the three levels of our analysis are connected into a meaningful whole that provides a starting point to further explore the underlying dynamics of team effectiveness over time. One strength of this study was the open nature of the group interview. Starting with an individually written assignment with an open question, we avoided prompting the team members in certain directions. Of course, their knowledge of the research lens could have influenced their selection process of themes. However, research in small-group deliberation addresses that participants, when given little direction from a facilitator, are more likely to produce a set of competing narratives (Ryfe, 2006), which contributes to rich understandings and different learning processes (Abma, 2000). Therefore, we aimed to derive understandings from more naturally occurring reflections within the teams instead of gathering a more complete account of experiences in a theme-oriented format. This said, we also recognize that narrative research is inextricably entwined with narrative ownership and the multiplicity of narrative meaning (Smythe & Murray, 2000). Unavoidably, we were actively involved and engaged in formulating meanings of the participants' narrative accounts and expressions in this study.

Practical Implications and Future Directions

We experienced the value of storytelling for the participating teams. Sharing their stories about important events, people, and experiences, the teams gained insights into their own and others' sensemaking of actions and motives. Their interest in each other's versions and interpretation of events may have enhanced their understanding of colleagues' actions and shared ideas of what effective teamwork means over time. Problems in teams are often caused by an absence of examination and reflexivity of their processes. A team story interview can help teams make explicit who they are, what they value doing, and to visualize future changes (Agar, 2005).

When managers and team members become more aware of the impact of storytelling and narrative reflection, they might be in a better position to influence and create positive team dynamics and team-effectiveness constructions (Davis, 2008). Compared with other forms of reflection and learning activities, such as after-action review and post-incident discussion (Ellis, 2012), narrative reflection offers different advantages and possibilities for learning on all three levels.

First, whereas after-action review focuses on the analysis of particular actions or decisions to formulate lessons and improve performance, a storytelling approach is based on the relationship between actions and the environment, and provides insight into the temporal complexity and what is at stake. Incidents or developments never occur suddenly but take place due to a continual combination of circumstances and/or actions. Stories provide nuanced images of how characters, actions, means, purposes, and settings are connected and possibly incongruent with each other.

Second, narrative reflection provides space for exchanging one's own perspectives without judgment. Topics are not classified as successes or failures and do not focus on solutions, decisions, or consensus. As such, stories' openness to interpretation makes it possible to insert deviant perspectives without antagonizing other participants (Polletta & Lee, 2006), allowing the team to highlight the team's social dynamics and invite members to develop their own group identity stories. Future research could also include everyday storytelling to expand the current knowledge about sensemaking processes that underlie and influence effectiveness construction and action in everyday practice (Gold & Watson, 2001).

Third, while concrete task performance and crisis situations are suited for evaluation in an after-action review, narrative reflection may contribute to teams' ongoing identity construction within the professional context, revealing which stories remain preserved and influence team's mental models. The activity of storytelling may enhance teams' ability to achieve consensus about effectiveness norms that guide effective functioning (Ryfe, 2006).

Also, when teams experience conflict situations, a team story interview might be helpful to analyze the problem from a holistic viewpoint and identify the breach to formulate next steps. This approach offers space for personal motives and considerations, and shows the way in which participants make connections among relevant parts in their stories. Team narratives of effective teams also have the potential to become a source of knowledge for other teams and for the organization. They contain local insights beneficial for team building and for other teams that deal with the same fundamental issues. Building on the team stories in this study, a next step could be to generate a composite story of all team stories that could provide insights into best practices in becoming an effective team. As such, a composite story would provide a reference framework to which other teams can relate.

Narrative reflection complements action-oriented and effectiveness output evaluations by means of its emphasis on sensemaking and its inherent recognition of the complex interactions between people in a professional context. Managers could encourage team members to share stories, for example, at the beginning of every team meeting, or when new team members enter the team. Given the power of narration to capture complex experiences, a storytelling culture may contribute to reducing difficulties in communication and conflict situations, and augment continuous learning.

Overall, we believe that we have offered a stimulating first step in theory building for the study of team effectiveness from the perspective of narrative reflection. We hope future researchers will be encouraged to explore multilevel narratives in other contexts, enhancing our understanding of team-effectiveness development and related organizational issues.

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