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MERGER STRATEGY AND CROSS-CULTURAL INVOLVEMENT AND POLYPHONY

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Abstract

We present a dialogic performance of the cross-cultural dynamics of a merger. We are studying how diverse living stories are emerging and developing in the interplay with centripetal cultural narratives. At the same time the retrospective narratives of the past are coming into conflict with the living story ways of constructing and reconstructing the organizing of the company. We look at the polyphonic manner of living story (Bakhtin 1981: 60) in the context of a merger gone array. The merger becomes thoroughly dialogized, until the grander narrative is initiated to corral the excessive heteroglossia (Bakhtin 1981: 273). In short, the value of the paper is in showing how the ideal of dialogic relationships did not materialize in all departments of the organization with a dire consequence.

Keywords: storytelling; narrative; polyphony; dialogue; sociomaterial; culture; centripetal; centrifugal; strategizing; merger; acquisition; organizing; Bakhtin;

Theoretical framework

In this article, we approach cross-cultural merger strategy by applying the storytelling approach combined with Heideggerian life-world ontology. We draw on Bakhtinian dialogue and on Shotter's entanglement between dialogicality and sociomateriality (Shotter 2011) as a framework for understanding "world-making" across cultures.

Life-world is understood as being-in-the-world (Heidegger 2008). The notion addresses the inseparable structures between "being" and "world". We are already in the world through a bodily, practical engagement with the world before we make the world an object of our reflections. This world is the world that we already share with others as we are in it as Being-with-one-another. This world is shared as a cultural world. In our practical engagement, we learn to know it as a world with which we are familiar and within which we feel at home and can dwell. In this bodily engagement, we achieve a practical, cultural sense of the familiarity and the meaningfulness of this world.

Interpretation completes the meaning production by defining, differentiating and conceptualizing meanings (Heidegger 2008). Meanings are thus identified, organized and structured. It is through these processes of organizing meanings in terms of similarities and differences that we develop our worldview and construct cultural boundaries and identities such as: I, me, you, them, and us.

Interpretation is not only a fulfilment of practical understanding. As the reflected understanding becomes part of our historical, cultural background, it is also a fore-structure and a fore-conception of understanding (Heidegger 2008). In one way, it helps bring about a pre-understanding, a sort of familiarity that enable us to act meaningfully in the new, emerging situation. In another way, it is a prejudice (Gadamer 2005) that may distort our understanding of our experience. The relational, dynamical constructions of culture and identity may become static and stereotyped if the prejudiced fore-structure and fore-conception are dominating the understanding.

Heidegger thus distinguishes between interpretation and understanding. Whereas understanding addresses the being-in-the-world as a primordial bodily, practical engagement with the world, interpretation is a reflected understanding. In this reflection, our worldview emerges as an organization of the world based upon the bodily sensed similarities and differences. They become objects of cognitive distinctions and categorizations in our consciousness and may clothe and distort the more primordial Being-one's-Self (Heidegger 2008: 167).

By storytelling, we mean the dynamic interplay between grander narratives of the past and more emergent living stories of participants, as well as challenging antenarratives. Living story is ontological in its Being-in-the-world, its aliveness primordially in lived-life from birth to death. In this case it is the birth to life threatening death of a merger.

A proper tragedy for Aristotle is a coherent and linear narrative, the "imitation of an action that is complete in itself, as a whole of some magnitude... Now a whole is that which has beginning, middle, and end" (Aristotle, Roberts & Bywater 1954: 233).¹ Grand narrative (Lyotard 1979/1984) requires for legitimacy either an aesthetic or structural form (such as Aristotles beginning, middle, & end) or a claim to be appropriated from little narratives [petit recit] (p. 60, Lyotard) what we call a web of living stories. "The grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is speculative narrative or narrative of emancipation" (Lyotard, 1984: 37). Lyotards grand narratives secure legitimation in a "pragmatic protocol" that is put into play in institutions by recounting them, listening to them, and assuming narratee and narrator roles in them (p. 22-23). This "popular narrative pragmatics" is a "language game known to the West" that provided "immediate legitimation" (p. 23). Grand narratives up until World War II certified themselves as legitimate "without recourse to argumentation or proof" (p. 27). Examples are the grand narrative of universal history of the life of the spirit in German idealism, the narratives of liberation of socialism and Marxism. Following Walter Benjamin (Benjamin 2006)² Lyotard sees the rise of technology and changes in the organization of work, as leading to a decline in the legitimacy of grand narratives of speculation and emancipation (pp. 37-38). Institutions of higher education, universities, are now "called upon to create skills, and no longer ideals" (emancipation of humanity) or search for truth (p. 48). The grand narrative pragmatics have changed from "is it true" to "is it efficient?" "is it salable" and ""what use is it" (p. 51).

Stories are treated as living stories from birth to death. It is situated in the life-world, in its being-in-the-world (Boje 2014a: 6, Boje 2014b: 1). Living stories are life-world stories as they are told in the here and now moment and are stories about things, self, others, events and the world as we live the world and as we live our understanding (Gadamer 2005). They are in an open-ended process of becoming throughout life often without beginning or end.

Telling, listening to and interpreting stories in the moment of life are dialogical engagements between storytellers. Dialogues are an existential condition of human life:

"Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. He invests his

¹ Aristotle's poetics was written 350 BCE.

² Originally published in 1936

entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium.” (Bakhtin 1984: 293).

Living stories thus provides access to different life-worlds and enables living stories to merge: “Every thought and every life merges in the open-ended dialogue” (Bakhtin 1984: 293). Due to this merger, living stories become multivoiced stories. The voices are those involved in the dialogue in the present here and now as well as the internalized voices from the past. Based upon expectations to the other’s future reactions to an utterance, the dialogue also draws on voices from the future. The voices utter worldviews through language used in different social, cultural and historical context. Thus utterances are heteroglossic (Bakhtin 1986: 428), meaning “another’s language in another’s speech” (Bakhtin 1981: 324). Polyphonic, heteroglossic dialogues allow living stories of life-worlds to merge culturally, socially and historically and produce new multivoiced living stories. New storytellers may access the storytelling arena and others may leave it. Thereby, the web of living stories (Boje 2014b: 13) expands and changes.

The relations between voices are discussed by Bakhtin in terms of centripetal and centrifugal forces in the life of language and culture (Bakhtin 1981: 272). Whereas centripetal forces are related to centralization and unification, and involve homogenizing and hierarchizing influence, centrifugal forces are decentralizing processes that open up the door for other alternative worldviews uttering questions, doubts, criticism, counter-arguments and different interpretations. Centrifugal forces allow diversity, dissensus and heterogeneity and polyphonic truth to come into play in the “great dialogue” where all voices participates with equal rights (Bakhtin 1984: 71). Centripetal forces may instead lead to monologue. A monologue voice is someone who knows and possesses the truth, who closes down alternative worldviews, who makes the other an object of own consciousness and who denies the other equal rights and responsibilities. “A firm monologic voice presupposes firm social support; presupposes a *we* – it makes no difference whether this “we” is acknowledge or not” (Bakhtin 1984: 281).

The centripetal monologue closes down the living story process trying only to tell one story. Therefore centripetal monologue can be related to the narrative (Boje 2014a). In the literature, narratives are referred to as grand narrative, master narratives and as BME narratives. The BME narrative is a structured story of events with a beginning, middle and end such as the strategy of a company. The narrative can also be understood as the collective, institutional memory of an organization (Boje 2014a: xix). As a collective memory, the narrative is the shared retrospective story of the past and relates to Heidegger’s notions of fore-structure, fore-conception and categorization.

This fore-structure encompasses the definitions and prejudices that clothe the I and the other and have form-shaping force (Bakhtin 1984: 280). Being a collective memory that is stuck-in-the-past, the narrative is neglecting the subjective experience of remembering (Linda, Adorisio & Boje 2014: 2), silencing the living stories, limiting what gets told by organizations (Boje 2014a: 3) and distorting the people’s living stories (Boje 2014a: xix). The narrative is related to the voices of “they” who only know the general situation” (Heidegger 2008: 346).

Whereas the centripetal narratives are retrospective sensemaking of the past, the antenarratives are prospective sensemaking of the future. They are bets on the future arriving (Boje 2014a: 10); those many possible paths and directions in which an organization and people may move. By taking actions on possibilities, possibilities become potential; a potentiality-for Being (Heidegger 2008: 357-358). Taking action is a way of working with destiny; of making some possible and attractive fu-

tures more potential than others; of preventing some possible futures from happening. The anticipation is related to fore-sight; the sight of what is coming; a warning signal (Boje 2014a: 256) to be understood, interpreted and acted upon.

These bets on the future connect the narratives of the past with the living stories of the present. The centrifugal forces open up the storytelling for new possible futures, whereas the centripetal forces fuse the many possibilities into just one antenarrative bet on the future. At that point, a new narrative emerges. The storytelling triad model is pictured in figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about here

The dynamic relations among centripetal, retrospective narratives, centrifugal living stories of the moment of life, and the challenging prospective antenarratives are in the core of the strategy process. Understanding organizations and strategy from a life-world perspective implies a fundamental paradigmatic shift away from a “being” to a “becoming” perspective. The “being” perspective is rooted in a substance ontology emphasizing the properties, attributes and characteristics of individuals, things and organizations. Adopting the “becoming” perspective entails a shift from the assumption of a “ready made” world to ongoing “world-making” (Nayak, Chia 2011: 282). The world is complex, messy, unknown and ceaselessly changing, and in this passage of moving on, new possibilities are unfolding. The strategy process is a matter of wayfinding, sensemaking and coping in this messy world (Chia, Holt 2009) from birth to potential death. The strategy-making is the process of retrospectively making sense of the past and proactively of the arriving future, thereby creating new possibilities and shaping future.

Retrospectively, we can draw on our background history, culture and practices when reacting in new messy situations spontaneously or unthinkingly. Thus history and culture becomes an integrated part of strategizing and organizing³: “...strategy-making must be construed as a collective, culturally shaped accomplishment attained through historically and culturally transmitted social practices and involving dispositions, propensities and tendencies” (Chia, MacKay 2007: 236). Centripetal forces are necessary in order to make sure that the organization does not move in a multitude of different directions due to centrifugal voices in the dynamic meshwork. The centrifugal voices are reactions to and sensemaking of events of daily living and part of our moment-to-moment lives. Thus, messiness is continually produced in the complexities of daily living. Centripetal forces are striving to achieve some kind of cultural order in this messiness. Centripetal cultural forces serve to produce a common cultural ground for present behaviour and for future activities. (Morson, Emerson 1990). Thereby, they establish centripetal narratives as collective memories that integrate the organization as opposed to centrifugal dissolution.

In this theoretical framework for understanding cross-cultural merger strategy, we have so far accounted for storytelling as dialogical relations between centripetal retrospective narratives, centrifugal living stories, and challenging antenarratives. However, Heidegger addresses a practical engagement not only with human beings but also with things as beings. The materiality of the world is an important part of strategy world-making.

³ The verbalizing of strategy and organization is advocated by Weick to re-envision organizations as processes rather than states (Weick 1979, Whittington 2003). The focus on the practices of strategizing and organizing is adopted by the strategy-as-practice approach (Jarzabkowski, Paul Spee 2009, Whittington 2006, Fenton, Langley 2011).

We are thereby approaching a performative framework of the entanglement of dialogicality and sociomateriality in performing practices (Shotter 2011). Dialogicality is understood in the Bakhtinian sense whereas sociomateriality is used according to Barad (2007, 2003). Sociomateriality addresses the mutual enactment of meanings and materiality in the material-discursive practices of everyday life.

Following Barad and Bakhtin, Shotter points at a more primordial structure than a cognitive, mental engagement with the world. This more primordial engagement is a bodily engagement based upon a “direct material engagement with the world” (Shotter 2011: 2).

The bodily material engagement with the world is much in line with Heidegger’s being in the world and “ready-to-hand” structure (Heidegger 2008: 98). The ready-to-hand structure concerns the useful and therefore meaningful interconnectedness of equipment such as tools, materials, natural products and even nature. What we perceive is thus not the entities with respect to their properties, characteristics and attributes (the “present-at-hand”), but the relational meaningfulness of the entities as they are used in a meaningful connection to each other. We are participant parts of creating this meaningfulness, as we are being-in-the-world as Being-with-one-another (Heidegger 2008: 158).

The material-discursive practices do not occur as an inter-action but as an intra-action that connects our internal movements of feelings with the world of events. By being in the world through this bodily engagement, we find “events happening to us and within us – as a movement of feeling that comes [...] – that we ourselves have not initiated” (Shotter 2011: 4). Thus, the internal processes of our body entangle with the processes of the material world in an inseparable structure of intra-actions. The movement of feelings arises as part of what Shotter expresses as “our outgoing exploratory activities and their incoming results” (2011: 10). Understanding the movement of feelings as part of our primordial material engagement with the world relates to Heidegger’s Being-attuned (Heidegger 2008: 172). We are in the world by moods prior to cognition, and we are attending to the world from this inner state-of-mind.

Those movements of feelings that relate us to our surroundings are the base structure of defining similarities and differences in new ways. They are vague almost unnoticed signs of thoughts of directions, of new ways of relating to our surroundings, of new ways of understandings of differences and similarities, and thereby of new ways of configuring the world (Shotter 2011). An unfinalized world of endless possibilities is thus constantly unfolded in the here and now moment of life. In this sense, matter is not stable things or stable entities, but “a doing” (Barad 2007: 151) that is constantly shaped, reshaped and materialized through our responsive intra-actions and flow of activity. Through the intra-actions, we are thus “participating parts” (Shotter 2011: 2) of the world of things-in-their-making.

This material-discursive intra-action is entangled with dialogue in which we are participant parts. The vague feelings and signs of thoughts are expressed through the dialogical chain of spontaneous responses.

Merging cross-cultural life-worlds thus reaches the more primordial engagement with the world through heteroglossic dialogues and sociomaterial intra-actions. The movement from bewilderment caused by the loss of the familiarity of the known cultural world to feeling at home in a new emerg-

ing cultural world is a movement of feelings. The feelings are signs that we sense of new possible ways of understanding similarities and differences, making boundaries and relations between entities dynamical and open-ended. This forms the base for the emergence of a world-in-the-making. Similarities and differences are continuously reconstructed in the moment of life. Thereby cultural boundaries and perception of cross-cultural differences are dynamically created in the moment of life; open for changes.

We are thus participant parts of this cultural world-in-its-making. We participate as being-in-the-world as being-together-with-others. The sociomaterial construction of the world is entangled with heteroglossic dialogues. Through the heteroglossic dialogues, polyphonic living stories of life-worlds merge and emerge: “Every thought and every life merges in the open-ended dialogue” (Bakhtin 1984: 293). Both culture and identity constructions are dynamically changing as part of sociomaterial, dialogical world-making. As Ingold phrases it: “Since the person is a being-in-the-world, the coming-into-being of the person is part and parcel of the process of coming-into-being of the world” (Ingold 2000: 168). Cross-cultural life-worlds merge and emerge due to the heteroglossia of performed languages.

Merging across cultures is a dance between centripetal narratives, centrifugal living stories, and challenging antenarratives of the future. Both centripetal and centrifugal forces are needed to merge life-worlds on the move towards an arriving future. This is illustrated in figure 2.

Centripetal, retrospective and moody narratives may, however, distort the understanding of events that happens on the move and impact on how we make sense of the arriving future and the choices we take on different bets on the future:

“while we are a part of the passage of space-time-materiality we can make near future and near past changes that [...] alter the passage of events, because we are in attunement with different events and making choices about different bets on the future” (Boje 2014a: 14).

The methodology of the case

The knowledge of the concrete company is created through interviews with the CEO, 5 managers and 6 employees from the three different houses that constitute the company, and from the different professional occupations throughout a period of one year. 18 interviews have so far been conducted and taped. Some of these interviews serve as background information. Others are directly useful for the study of the multi-participatory strategy process and are transcribed. Unfortunately, the breakdown of the relation with the department that left the company happened only three months after the initiation of the research process. At that time, no interviews had been made with the employees that left the company. After the split, the relations were chaotic and tensed, and, shortly after, a lawsuit was brewing. Consequently, we could not access those employees; this is a limitation of the study. The only direct expression of their experiences of the course of events is a farewell letter that was emailed to the whole organization. However, the stories and attached feelings mentioned in the letter were also addressed by the remaining colleagues during the interviews. The letter and the interviews in question revealed other alternative narratives than those that were dominating and prevailing in the organization. These alternative narratives enriched the retrospective sensemaking of the course of events. Furthermore, the time perspective from the beginning of the research process

and until now enabled us to some extent to follow the dynamics of the retrospective self-critical reflective sensemaking process in the company.

The knowledge is created through a localist approach to interviews (Alvesson 2003) within the framework of a dialogical, postmodern study (Deetz 2001). This approach emphasizes that knowledge of the company is emerging in the communication with the company. The interview occurs as a dialogue or conversation during which the researcher and the interviewed person together produce knowledge of the company. Consequently, the interviews were not prepared with pre-formulated questions. Questions were instead emerging as a natural part of the conversation. Some of them were shaped as retrospective sensemaking narrative questions and prospective antenarrative sensemaking questions (Boje 2014a).

The knowledge created in the here and now moment of the conversation is a local, situated knowledge implying that the interview is interpreted in its social context (Alvesson 2003). By interviewing the organizational members at this micro level, multiple worldviews are voiced revealing the polyphonic voices, the dissensus, and the fragmentation of the organization. In the postmodern approach to organizational studies, dissensus and fragmentations is assumed to be the natural state of organizations and societies (Deetz 2001). Taking this approach allowed us to listen to different local stories, some of which reflected dominating organizational narratives; others reflected local retrospective and prospective reflections.

Theories are used as lenses (Deetz 2001) through which we may start to see what previously was unconscious and hidden before our eyes. As lenses, theories may help new understandings of the empirical phenomenon to emerge. In this concrete study, storytelling, dialogue and sociomateriality are used as lenses to understand the organizational breakdown of relations despite the multi-participatory strategizing process. The story was unfolding throughout almost a year before the writing process began. To begin with, the story was written and thereafter rewritten several times as part of being in dialogue with the theoretical lenses. The theoretical conceptual framework changed and conceptually developed from being in dialogue with the empirical story. The dialogue between theories, empirical data, the researchers and the participants from the company is in fact an example of a sociomaterial dialogical research process. The knowledge constructed in this article is thus the result of our retrospective storytelling of the emerging knowledge socially created by the participants in the process.

The case story

The context is a six-year old merger within the agricultural business. It is a non-profit association that is owned by its customers. The company consists of three “houses”, each located in three different cities within the same region: Beta City, Delta City, and Alpha City. Beta City and Delta City belongs to the same organization. The merger takes place with Alpha City in 2008. The merger was strategically a good decision that takes into the consideration that the market is highly competitive with a decreasing number of customers and many competitors. The industry is therefore characterized by a high degree of mergers and acquisitions.

The strategic end economic advantages of the merger were clear enough. Due to the merger, the company became the largest consultancy company in its main market area. It also became the fifth largest agricultural cooperative in Denmark, thereby reinforcing the image of the company. By merging Beta/Delta, Alpha eliminated one of their biggest competitors in their market area. Furthermore, the merger implied access to each other’s resources and competences within different

professional fields and provided the basis for rationalization. Thus the number of employees was significantly reduced and one of the original four houses was closed down. The main motivation for the merger was, however, to strengthen the market position and competitive force as well as the financial, economic situation of the company in order to survive in a continuously decreasing market.

Despite the obvious strategic and economic advantages, the stories in the company reflect that the merger did not make sense to all members of the new organization. Especially in Alpha, the resistance was strong among several employees, customers and owners. Originally, Alpha was to merge with another company but when that attempt failed, merging with Beta/Delta seemed to be the best alternative, Beta/Delta being a strong competitor. However, not all organizational members, customers and owners agreed upon this decision and it was only voted for by a marginal number of voices at the general meeting.

Despite the strategic advantages, the idea of the merger was thus not equally attractive to both of the organizations. They had a history of being competitors with a good deal of hostility between employees, customers and owners. Merging the two organizations implied clashes between different identities, values and meanings: “We have always talked about them in Beta City; that we really did not like them. But no one really explained why [...]. Suddenly we were told that we should merge. It felt a little like marrying our worst enemy”. Lily, Alpha City, team leader.

Another major reason for the dispute was the economic performance of the two companies. At the time of merger, Alpha experienced that their own company was successful in gaining profits, whereas Beta/Delta were performing below expectations. As the management omitted to create an opening balance sheet, this dispute was never clarified. The balance was never settled. Thus the issue of who contributed the most was an ongoing dispute, inflaming the relationship, and difficult to counteract in the following years. The present CEO decided not to attempt to restore the historical figures, but urged the three houses to start to look forward instead of backward.

However, at the time of the merger, the conflicting, critical voices were raised openly in public media. Many employees and customers started to leave the company to join the competitors as a protest against the merger. This tendency continued for some years in the aftermath of the merger and significantly weakened the performance of the company.

The years following the merger were very challenging due to ongoing disagreements, conflicts and disputes. In two and a half year, the organization thus experienced four different CEOs and a board of directors who discussed their disagreements in the public media. A drop in customer and employee satisfaction reflected the lack of trust in the company and the management. Not surprisingly, this development resulted in a growing deficit increasing from DDK 6 million in 2008 to 11.5 million in 2009. This was seriously endangering the survival of the company.

This was the situation when the present CEO was hired in September 2010 to turn around the company. In September 2010 the deficit was estimated to 7.8 million. The result for 2010, however, reached a deficit on 3.5 million which may relate to the cost reduction initiatives made by the CEO during the last months of the year. The following year, the company made a surplus on 1.5 million and in the end of 2012 on 3.5 million. However, this performance is endangered in the aftermath of the resignation of the whole department in October 2013 due to the loss of customers, consequently, 2014 is predicted by the CEO and several employees to be a difficult year. The company was already in a challenging situation as the revenue decreased from DDK 140 million in 2010 to 120

million just before the resignation. The loss of customer caused by the resignation of the department did not make this situation any easier. Therefore, the CEO is aware that continued cost reduction will not save the company. It would also be necessary to invest resources in the development of new business opportunities and the acquisitions of new customers, and to increase sales in the existing market. Furthermore, it is expected that the company will need to merge again within a few years.

As regard the economic benefit from merging the two organizations, no efforts had been done to carry through the needed rationalization of the merged company until 2010. According to the CEO's stories, the previous management was not prepared for the challenges related to the integration phase, meaning that little or no efforts were made to connect the different voices. In fact, the critical voices in Alpha expressed the fear that the merger in reality was an acquisition. They feared that the central administration, which was located in Beta City, would not listen to Alpha being the smaller of the two organizations. The previous management did not address the negative construction of the other in the process of identity and culture formation. Neither did they initiate discussions on the future organization and strategic development of the merger. In fact, they ceased to act, hoping that time would help the process of integration. In order to avoid exacerbating the negative constructions and the fear of having being taken over, the management decided to maintain the original organizational structure of three separate houses. Thus the benefits from rationalization were not achieved.

One of the main tasks for the new CEO was to begin a new strategy process to develop the company and to build bridge between the two companies. He aimed at developing a shared strategy that all members of the organization could identify with. In order to make the strategy of new company shared, he involved all members in a social construction process, giving room to the voices of both of the organizations. Despite this practice and at a certain point, a whole department in Alpha City decided over the weekend collectively to leave the company and join a competitor. This came as a shock to the company leaders and gave birth to storytelling sensemaking about the happening.

An overview of the course of significant events happening during the first 6 years of the merger is provided in figure 3.

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Insert Figure 3 about here

Dialogical performance of the strategy

The new CEO thus decided to facilitate a multi-participatory, bottom up strategy process, involving all employees and managers in the organization and also a large number of customers and owners. Separately and simultaneously, he facilitated a multi-participatory strategy process for the board of directors. The purpose of the strategy was two folded. First of all, the new strategy should create new bets on possible arriving futures and frame how the company could work to make attractive futures more potential. Secondly, it should help integrate the organizations by creating more directionality about the future development.

The process was initiated by a process of formulating the strategy. The members of the organization were asked to identify strategic issues which then became building blocks of the strategy. In the implementation process, the CEO developed a project organization and established a project group for each strategic issue. All members of the organization could volunteer to participate in the strate-

gic activities next to their operative tasks. Almost half of the organization volunteered; thus commitment was high.

In the strategic groups, the strategy continues to be developed and changed through their polyphonic living stories. Antenarratives are worked out and presented as business proposals. If accepted, they become institutionalized narratives until they are challenged by new antenarratives and discussed again in the strategy groups. The strategy is kept dynamic and alive in these multivoiced processes, hardly without interferences of the CEO:

”The strategic groups run their own life right now. More or less. [The CEO] is actually not part of our strategy group. Once in a while, he is informed about the things that we work on. And only if he thinks that something is way out, then he interferes.” Jill, Delta City, employee.

The strategy process is described by one of the employees as an “ongoing journey.” Every year, the CEO invites the organization to participate in an evaluation of the strategy work. During those strategy days, the participants make sense of the emerging strategy, retrospectively and prospectively:

“We work with it all the time. Every year, we evaluate it; what we are doing, where we are heading, what we need to focus on...” Lily, Alpha City, team leader.

Overlooking cross-cultural, polyphonic processes

This strategy process initiates simultaneous, ongoing intertwined dynamics of culture, strategizing and organizing. The organization had to be changed to enable the strategy process and its dynamical interplay between strategy formulation, ongoing strategic group work activities, and strategy evaluation days. During these activities, the participants were therefore mingled across Beta City, Delta City and Alpha City in different groups. Thereby the multivoiced strategy process was facilitated. At the same time, strategizing also initiated an ongoing organizing process for performing practices in new ways.

Mingling across cultures was a way of disturbing the fixed cultural boundaries between the local organizations and give rise to more polyphonic, centrifugal living stories at the expense of the centripetal cultural forces of each organization. By organizing the strategy process as a cross-cultural involvement, the CEO assumed that the strategy would make sense to the members as they had all taken part in the making of it. He was consciously and explicitly aware of the social construction processes. He also assumed that it would further a cross-cultural integration between the organizations and path the way for a commitment to the strategy and identification with the company as one organization.

The dialogical performance of the strategy process could not prevent the upcoming crisis and the breakdown of relations with the department in Alpha City. Retrospectively the organization tries to make sense of this shocking event, as they never expected it to happen. After all, the strategy was facilitated as a process of social and cultural interaction between voices from both organizations. One of the dominating retrospective narratives concerns the cross-cultural hatred and antagonism. According to this narrative, the strategy process was a success as it did integrate the remaining organization of Alpha City, Delta City and Beta City, but it could not bridge across the resistance of those employees, customers and owners who were against the merger from the beginning off.

This retrospective cross-cultural narrative is rooted in perceived fixed cross-cultural boundaries between the two organizations and is used to explain the line of causality between the world as it was and the world which it became. Throughout the course of events, it has functioned as a dominating narrative for making sense of the resistance against the merger strategy. The narrative does not capture the cultural dynamics involved in the merging process. The conflicting interplay between centripetal narratives and centrifugal living stories and the heteroglossic process was overlooked.

Complex cross cultural dynamics

The fixed cross-cultural narrative mentioned above only grasp the cross-cultural dynamics between the two organizations. However, the process of organizing and strategizing towards a new arriving future is also a cultural change process that complicates the cultural dynamics of the merger. The CEO phrases this change as a movement away from a “family culture” towards a “business culture”. He explains this process as a reaction towards the changing institutional environment including the cessation of government subsidiaries to the agricultural associations in 2003, an increasing level of salaries in general at that time, and the growing complexity and business orientation of agricultural farmers. All of this changed the premises for running a business. According to the CEO, the employees were not used to think business oriented as regard the use of time, earnings, and invoicing. Thus, together with others in the organization, the CEO envisions a change towards a more “business oriented culture”. This cultural change process is therefore not an open-ended process as assumed in a “becoming” perspective. It achieves its directionality from the vision of what a “business culture” is as a contrast to a “family culture”, and thereby it resembles a “being” perspective.

Even though the two cultural processes are intertwined, the analytical distinction is useful as it challenges the cross-cultural narrative as regard the way it retrospectively makes sense of the breakdown of relations. The resistance may not only be caused by historical cross-cultural hatred and antagonism but may also be due to critical voices against the future cultural development of the company. The critical voices represent alternative prospective antenarratives of the future.

In this manner, we are approaching the complex dynamics and conflicting interplay between centripetal cultural narratives, centrifugal living stories through which culture changes, and challenging antenarratives of the cultural becoming of the organization. This interplay is part of the dynamics between culture and strategy in the merger process; and a part of the breakdown of relations.

Strategy as a centripetal and centrifugal dance

Even though the strategy is spoken about as an open, involving and dynamic process, centripetal process are at stake both in the making of the strategy and in its use as an institutional frame for the development of the company.

The strategy process is based upon the leadership philosophy of the CEO according to which participation creates commitment, ownership, identity and accountability. Participation is a way of internalizing the strategy, making it meaningful, and thereby integrating the participants in the same social construction of reality. This is the centripetal, cultural force of a multivoiced involvement.

Secondly, the strategy is to create a shared multivoiced directionality towards future. This indicates a search for consensus on and commitment to an agreed upon strategic direction. The search for consensus and multi-participation arise, however a dilemma. At the one hand, the CEO has a clear depiction of the cultural changes and strategic development, the company needs to go through in

order to survive. At the other hand, this worldview cannot be imposed upon the strategy, if the multi-participation should be trustworthy. Acknowledging his position as a significant other, he chooses not to participate directly in the activities of formulating the strategy but leave the process to be facilitated by external consultants. Thereby, he is able to create a trustworthy narrative that the strategy process is owned by the employees. The CEO's statement: "It is your process, you made the strategy," is a widely accepted narrative:

"I would say, that the strategy and the things we have; that is not something somebody has made. That we have made on our own. It is something we all participate in." John, Delta City, employee.

"We all joined the strategy process, also those who chose to leave the company. They participated just as actively in it as anybody else. [...] It is properly the greatest success of interconnectedness; that we all take responsibility. We know what is in the strategy. We know what to do to make it work". Philip, Alpha City, employee.

Even though his withdrawal makes the strategy process more centrifugal, it is still a dance with the centripetal forces. Being a significant other and participating in the living stories of everyday life, his voice would be listened to carefully by all members of the organization. The multivoiced, heteroglossic process indirectly carried his voice in the strategy process. This minimized his risk of a result pointing in a much different direction than his own. In this way, all members of the organization are part of co-authoring the strategy process.

Being accepted by the organization, the strategy becomes an institutionalized BME narrative. As such it is a powerful mechanism for guiding and legitimizing the expected behaviour and for framing the discourses in the organization. Used in this way, the strategy works as a centripetal force that frames the living stories in the company. Dissensus is accepted within this framed direction for the development of the company. At these directional premises, the strategy process is open for more centrifugal processes in the strategic groups. These premises leave it to discussion whether the dialogues are performed as truly great dialogues or more as democratic consensus seeking monologues.

Severe critical discussions of the strategic direction are centripetally closed by the CEO: "If they themselves have been part of making the strategy, then they can also subject to it." This centripetal use of power is legitimized by the grander and widely accepted narrative that the multi-participatory strategy process is owned by the members of the organization.

This is a leadership dance between consensus and dissensus, between centripetal closing narratives, centrifugal opening living stories, and centrifugally challenging new antenarratives. It does create problems as it turns out that the grander narrative of the strategy is incapable of bridging the polyphony of living stories in the dynamic implementation of the strategy.

Culture and identity clashes and the loss of merging living stories

The challenge of bridging the polyphony of living stories is tied to the difference between a fixed conceptualized narrative language and the richness of dynamic, polyphonic meanings in real life languages. Real life language are languages of cultural forms of life: "...to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life."(Wittgenstein 2010 § 19). Meanings of words are woven into their activities of their forms of life: "the meaning of a word is its use in the language" (Wittgenstein 2010 § 43). Real life languages are thus quite different from a conceptualized language that resem-

bles what Bakhtin (2004: 23) refers to as: “the clichéd language of [...] literature textbooks”; a theoretical and depersonalized language.

The process of formulating and conceptualizing the strategy has resulted in a strategic language detached from the dynamic language of living stories. It has become more abstract and impersonal as the richness of polyphonic meanings is reduced. The use of strategic and business oriented concepts such as “result created engagement” reflects the change toward the business oriented culture. It is a focal point of the strategy and relates to behaviour. Being detached from the real life languages of the cultural forms of life, the empty concepts of the strategy are subjected to prejudiced and contesting interpretations. The different cultural forms of life in the organizations give birth to different ways of practicing and doing “result creating engagement”. Thus the fixed conceptualized language of the strategy cannot bridge the polyphonic dissensus of dynamic meanings.

Cultural prejudices can turn dissensus into cultural conflicts between competing understandings and worldviews. Such a cultural prejudiced conflict developed in the company in relation to the core of the strategy. The unfolding of “result creating” became part of tense discourses all over the organization. How should this strategic concept materialize in performing practices? During these discourses, news concepts such as “sales”, “customer centric”, and “performance management” appeared and were also subjected to discussions

In the attempt of making sense of the breakdown of the relations, the organizational members try to understand the significance of those discursive conflicts. Their retrospective, narrative sensemaking reflects perceived differences across meaningfulness, values and identities of performing activities and of organizing relations. They picture a combat between at the one hand the world view of the department and at the other hand the worldview of the CEO and those fragments of the organization that committed to the strategy. The discursive conflicts address both the cultural change towards a business culture and the merging of cross-cultural organizations.

One type of narrative relates to the perceived clash of identities: “They said they were not salesmen but consultants. When I started to talk about sales, my head was almost chopped off. We almost had to find a synonym to sales”, the CEO. “There is a lot of talk about the change from counselling a farmer to counselling an enterprise”, Philip, Alpha City, employee. The shift of identity also involves the farmers as customers and owners: “Some of them thought, it was a waste of money [the strategy process]. Many of those, who were employed in Alpha City, were also married to the customers. And some of the customers had a lot of focus on the cost and the usefulness of the process, stating “we are after all just an association of farmers”” Lily, team leader, Alpha City.

These narratives indicate how both the strategy process and its focus on “result creating engagement” conflicts with the identity constructions of the employees and the customers and owners. These identity constructions collide with the cultural movement: “We move from being an association to becoming a business”. The CEO. Accordingly, the critical voices against the strategy and the merger can be related to identity conflicts.

The lack of identification shines through in a farewell letter written by one of the resigning employee. Using the repeated phrase: “It is not OK...”, the employee addresses several managerial decisions that conflict with his values and opinions. The letter reflects conflicting values and a lack of identification with the course of development in the organization: “My decision [...] is solely made to put pressure on the management to realize that the present course of development does not lead

to a better consultancy service to the customers, neither in Alpha City, nor anywhere else in the company.” The letter and the narratives of the CEO express conflicting views on consultancy service and customer relationship. The CEO relates these conflicts to the shift from a family culture to a business culture. Consequently, the legitimization of the worldview is not accepted as it conflicts with the strategic course of the company.

Besides values and identity, the perceived loss of the familiarity of an already known, cultural world is also addressed in the retrospective narratives: “For 20-30 years, people around had known each other quite well. They were used to draw on their shared experiences and history. They had tight relations. It felt like beginning from the beginning off again. The intimacy was lost.” Lily, Alpha City, team leader. She has been part of the process all the way, as she has worked together with them for 20 years in the same department. She was the only person left behind, when they left the organization. The change from “they” to “it” reflects her identification with the loss of familiarity and intimacy. They were familiar with their own way of organizing relations and behaviour for the sake of themselves and the customers. The merger strategy challenged this practical sense of usefulness and meaningfulness in their performing practices and relations.

These perceived differences of identity, values and meaningfulness are all retrospective narratives that gradually developed through the sensemaking of the breakdown. The grander BME narrative of the strategic conception of the future development was incapable of bridging the differences. It was contested by the cultural counter-narrative of the department. The polyphonic strategy groups were assumed to bridge the differences but apparently only few from the department participated due to their lack of identification with and commitment to the cultural and strategic direction. Their resistance became a centripetal narrative of a counter-culture whereas the remaining part of the organization in Alpha City committed to the strategy:

“We had no strategy. At that time each department took care of its own work. We did what we thought would be most useful, to optimize our own achievements”. Philip, Alpha City, employee.

“We needed something in common. It functions really well both for the employees and the managers. It gives us a sense of direction. Lily, Alpha City, team leader.

“It could be that some of them did not agree on the direction and had difficulties in subjecting themselves to it. [...] We had very strong cultures both in Alpha City, Delta City and Beta City. It has been difficult to mingle the cultures and to agree on the direction and the actions we should do.” Lily, Alpha City, team leader.

Gradually, the critical voices of the department were viewed as an expression of a negative, complaining culture: “A lot of people here were getting tired of their negative attitude towards everything.” Lily, Alpha City, team leader. Reflecting on the course of events, the CEO realized that he ended up paying much less attention to their voices. Thus the centripetal narratives and the ceased communication minimize the exchange of living stories. Heteroglossic merging across different life-worlds is disrupted and the pathway for the breakdown is prepared.

Towards a performative dialogical, sociomaterial understanding of merging cultural life-worlds

The storytelling of the cross-cultural merger illustrates the complexity of the interplay between the centripetal, cultural narratives, the centrifugal living stories, and the challenging antenarratives of the arriving future. In the following discussion, we unfold three significant challenges of the interplay. Following Boje, Shotter and Barad, we thereafter propose the interconnection between dialogicality and sociomateriality as a promising framework for understanding the interplay in cross-cultural merger strategies.

One major challenge is the centripetal circle of a fore-structured understanding. The centripetal circle is initiated when understanding is detached from the bodily, reflexive engagement with the world. The circle cognitively reproduces and reinforces the fore-structured narratives. The reproduction of the fore-structured understanding reflects an interpreting process that is not any longer rooted in a sensitive, embodied and self-reflexive disclosing engagement with the world. The understanding of the actual experience of events becomes distorted by the prejudiced narratives of the past. Thus the centripetal circle of the cultural dynamics tends to reinforce static perceptions of boundaries, such as “us-them” categorizations. Moreover, a locked fore-structured understanding of the world may be reproduced in the perception of the arriving future, resulting in a linear prejudiced antenarrative. The strength of the centripetal forces in such fore-structured narratives draws a veil over the emergence of something new. The fore-structured understanding is constituted by static categorizations of similarities and differences producing fixed boundaries and relations between entities. Thus perceived cultural differences and identity constructions become static and devastating to the open-ended becoming of the world and the disclosure of new antenarrative possibilities. The field of possibilities is thus reduced to the development of sameness. In the case, this is illustrated by the fixed constructions of identities and cultural borders between the department and the rest of the organization.

Another major challenge is related to the conceptualized approach applied in the strategy process which is rooted in the assumption of a representational language. This linguistic approach furthers the disconnecting to the life-world of living stories.

Making sense of the world by using a conceptual language implies an understanding of the world at the distance. The unfolding of strategic concepts by referring to new concepts resembles a conceptual, cognitive design of the world using concepts as building blocks. Examples are concepts such as “result creating engagement”, “customer centric”, “business culture”, “performance management”, “sales”, and “key account management”. Trying to understand the meaning and values of these concepts simply by putting thoughts in expression becomes a mental construction of the world. World is made an object of the constitution of the mind. However, a shared understanding across life-worlds cannot be reached through a subject-object interaction; it needs to be rooted in the performing language: “They agree in the language they use. This is not an agreement in opinions but in forms of life” (Wittgenstein 2010 § 241). The interaction produces socially constructed narratives of an already existing world but fails to root this construction in the real life language of performing living stories. It fails to communicate through the heteroglossic performing language embedded in sociomaterial activity.

This challenge shines through in the case. Agreements in opinions about the implementation of the strategy were reached in the interplay between the strategic groups and the top management. Agreements in opinions on the content of a conceptualized strategy do not bridge the differences of values, identities, and meaningfulness of performing practices. It is only a conceptualized bridge

across life-worlds. Consequently, practices and behaviour did not change in the department despite the strategic agreements in opinions.

A third challenge is the question of controlling or balancing the interplay between the centripetal, retrospective narratives and the centrifugal living stories. This question addresses whether world-making is produced through a monologue, perhaps concealed as a democratic monologue, or through a real centrifugal dialogue. At the one hand, the CEO consciously thinks in terms of social construction: “In fact, the world is constructed by the employees themselves. It does not help that I think I have another construction. If their construction of the world is like that, then I have to relate to it and try to understand why it is constructed like that.” At the other hand, he also works consciously with the construction of narratives in his leadership practices. In this quotation, he refers to the dominating narrative in the department: “The narrative that our company would never succeed... I have worked hard on changing that narrative. And I must say, exactly at that point, we have tried to get a grip on them.” He continues to speak about wrong and correct narratives, about identifying the owners of the narratives, about working on the narratives in order to change them, and about controlling the narratives.

The control of narratives is a struggle to restore trust and image internally and externally to the company. The collective resignation of a whole department created a shock wave to all stakeholders and was breaking news in the local media. Living stories of why it happened and why it was not foreseen expanded. Trust and image was severely damaged as the management, the strategy, and the company was subjected to open discussions in media and everywhere in the local society. Customers started to desert the company. Living stories were thus expanding, threatening to end up in the centrifugal dissolution of the company. The narrative, the CEO had created during his first two years of management, was contested for its trustworthiness and therefore incapable of bridling the polyphony of living stories in expanding webs. Restoring trust and image was improved as the remaining employees in favour of the cross-cultural merger strategy raised their voices in the living stories, expressing their support to the management and the strategy.

Constructing the world by creating centripetal narratives in social interaction appears to some extent to be based upon centripetal, democratic monologue, only embracing those polyphonic voices who commit to the narrative. It cannot embrace and it cannot bridle the polyphonic voices of divergent living stories. To control the construction of narratives is to use narratives and language as leadership tools for internalizing a cultural shared worldview in the company and its future development without reaching out for the dissensus of centrifugal diverging living stories. Gradually, the CEO realizes: “I did not listen enough.” Thus, the centripetal narratives cannot bridge the differences between identities, values and meaningfulness.

To understand the process of merging life-worlds, we need to address the centrifugal, performing, living stories and to shift from “inter-action” to “intra-action”. Thereby, we are moving into the performative understanding of world-making.

This performative understanding of dialogicality and sociomateriality enlightens the sensemaking of the breakdown of relations in the cross-cultural merger even further in two ways. Firstly, it throws light upon the commitment of some employees in Alpha City to the strategy despite the cross-cultural differences and lack of trust. Secondly, it provides further understanding to the resistance of the department.

In the case, one of the ways of approaching “result creating engagement” is by beginning to position the customer in the centre of the organization; this refers to the concept “customer centric”:

”It is detrimental to the customer if the cattle consultant says to the farmer: ”You should increase the number of cows and then grow corn on your fields, because that is the best forage for cattle”, and the crop consultant says: “You can’t do that. The soil is not usable for corn. You have to grow grass”. And then the economy consultant says: “No, you can’t increase the number of cows. There is not enough money to finance that. And it will just increase the costs elsewhere”. They have to attend the customer meeting together and discuss an integrated solution with the customer, so that the customer does not have to talk with the consultants separately. Relational consultancy is vital to the customer experience. Today we are better at performing this.” The CEO.

The idea of working relationally was resisted by the department but positively received by the other employees in Alpha City since the present way of organizing and performing activities produced many internal conflicts and problems. In order to control damage after the exit of the whole department, the remaining employees in Alpha City and the houses in Delta City and Beta City had to support Alpha City in coping with the tasks and customers who started to leave the company. To cope, they began cooperating about the customers, thereby learning new ways of relating to the surroundings:

“Because we counsel at the level of an enterprise and not at the level of a single man – then we get into the corners to the benefit of the customer. It is the customer who should benefit from us working closer together. We have discovered he did not get the whole benefit when we worked separately. That we have realized now that we work together across our different disciplines.” Philip, Alpha City, employee

The practical understanding of relational consultancy emerges as the participants use their specialized knowledge, skills, practices and equipment in new relations which turns out to be usable and meaningful to the customer, the colleagues and the company in new ways. Through dialogical and material-discursive practices, the consultants and customers produce knowledge on new useful and meaningful relations between equipment such as crop, cattle, money and between useful relations of the specialized skills and practices. The boundaries of similarities and differences are constituted in new ways, making relations dynamic and new possible solutions to the business problems of the customer emerge. Thus, they become participating parts of the world of things-in-their-making in the living moment: “It is in the living moments between people, in practice, that utterly new possibilities can be created, and people “live out” solutions to their problems” (Shotter, Katz 1999: 81).

As part of the organizing and strategizing processes and as part of coping in new challenging situations, the employees begin to work more relationally across borders. With some employees, a growing sense of shared identity and directionality starts to emerge according to this conversation:

John: “At that time [before the new CEO], we did not feel that we were one big family. But his way of approaching this made us feel more like being employed in ONE organization. It was a long journey because we had to get used to it but both the social and professional cooperation is much different today.” John, Delta City, employee.

Jill: “It has become much better, but to begin with, I think we all were frustrated, because we were used to manage our own little house. And there was a feeling of... did we dare share with the others? Or would they play games with us? That has disappeared today.” Jill, Delta City, employee.

This feeling of belongingness also starts to shine through in the storytelling in Alpha City.

By dwelling in the world, moving around, exploring and performing, and by experiencing the movements of feelings, we may sense the emergence of “something” and follow those vague signals of directionality that may lead to new possible cultural configurations of the world. However, to a large extent, this depends on the mood of those movements of feelings. Anxiety may disrupt our dwelling in the world and thereby our noticing of the vague signals. The mood manifests in how we are and how we are faring and may even make us turn away (Heidegger 2008: 173).

According to Heidegger, the feeling of anxiety arises when we fail to find the world meaningful, no longer feel at home in it, and sense the possibility of a world without us. This state of mind is reflected in the letter written by the resigned employee. The use of the words: “afraid, fear, uncertainty, frustration, powerlessness, unsafe” exhibits feelings related to anxiety. The words are related to managerial decisions such as dismissals of employees, expensive courses, pressure on performance and earnings, and the doubt if disagreements with the management would lead to dismissals. It refers specifically to the dismissal of the team leader of their department as the catalyst effect that made all members of the department finally agree collectively to resign, except from one – Lily – who always had stayed loyal to the strategy and the management. She was excluded from the process by the members of the department.

The letter manifests how at least this employee is internally attuned towards events that happened to him and within him. Through this letter, we get a glimpse of a dialogical, sociomaterial intra-action with the world that differs from the employees who commit to the strategy. The anxious feelings may have increased through the years due to the many critical events that happened in the aftermath of the merger and due to the trend in the market: the deficits, the untrustworthy figures, four CEOs within 2½ years, the cost savings, the dismissals, the declining number of customers and tasks, the steady decline of earnings and the pressure on performance through new performance management systems.

The attunement is reflected in the retrospective narrative manifested in the letter and reproduced in the prospective sensemaking of the future. The anxious mood reinforces the centripetal cultural narratives as regard defending their cultural known world including already existing performing practices, values and identities. They struggled against a cultural process towards a future in which they could not see themselves and which increased their level of anxiety. Therefore they continued to repeat their antenarrative of a doomed company. Thus the attunement impacts on the course of the cross-cultural merger.

Consequently, the movements of feelings are a critical part of the interplay between centripetal narratives, centrifugal living stories, and the challenging antenarratives of becoming future. The movements of feelings arise in the intra-actions between performing, living stories and signalize possible new futures. However, the moods caused by past events are integrative parts of centripetal narratives. As such, the centripetal moody narratives may distort the understanding of those vague signals. The moody attunement is a critical and primordial obstacle for merging life-worlds.

The analysis based upon the performing framework of materialized performing living stories thus pinpoints attuning of moods through which we relate to events and merging performing practices as primordial structures of merging across different life worlds.

Findings and Research Implications

We found that the happening strengthened the multivoiced process as the groups from the two organizations became closer, found more directionality, and shared identity. There were signs of strong disagreements and an upcoming crisis but these signs were not taken seriously. These signs were largely misunderstood due to the centripetal cultural narratives distorting the understanding. They overlooked the significance of the movement of feelings in the moving from bewilderment to feeling at home in a new emerging cultural world. After the split, the fights in the living story arena are continuing and expanding as the customers are beginning to take part in the storytelling. The web of living stories keeps expanding as the conflict escalates. The manager is thus struggling to restore trust and image through a centripetal narrative internally and externally to the company.

The research implications are that it is the dynamic relation between centripetal (focusing) narratives and centrifugal (expanding) living stories that can be traced in the ongoing process. Shotter says that a profound conceptual shift is needed to a process approach that entails as well "a shift from living out our lives in inter-action with the others and othernesses in our surroundings to living within intra-actions with them; a shift from living in a world of already made things to a world of things-in-their-making; from life as being only 'in' certain things (organisms) to things having their life only 'within their relations' to the flowing processes occurring around them" (Shotter 2011: 2). The limitations of the study are that it is about a single merger, and we do not intend to generalize beyond that. At the same time, it is the study of the lived experiences in the moment of event-ness of Being-in-the-world that has the specificity to unravel interesting mysteries. For us the mystery is the relation of the heteroglossic forces that Bakhtin's polyphony approach allows us to study.

Our Bakhtin analysis has these practical implications. First, the grander narrative, the manager created in the internal and external community, was incapable of bridling the polyphony of devices, the proliferation of ever more living stories, expanding the web of differences (Bakhtin 1984). Gadamer (1975: 367) makes the point that "to conduct a dialogue requires first of all that the partners do not talk at cross purposes." The living story web expanded in ways that so many cross purpose proliferated; no single monologic narrative would contain the storm. Secondly, the dialogical relationships entangled with the sociomaterial intra-actions within which we are related to our surroundings through the movements of feelings. Merging cross-cultural life-worlds occurs through the heteroglossia of performing, living stories.

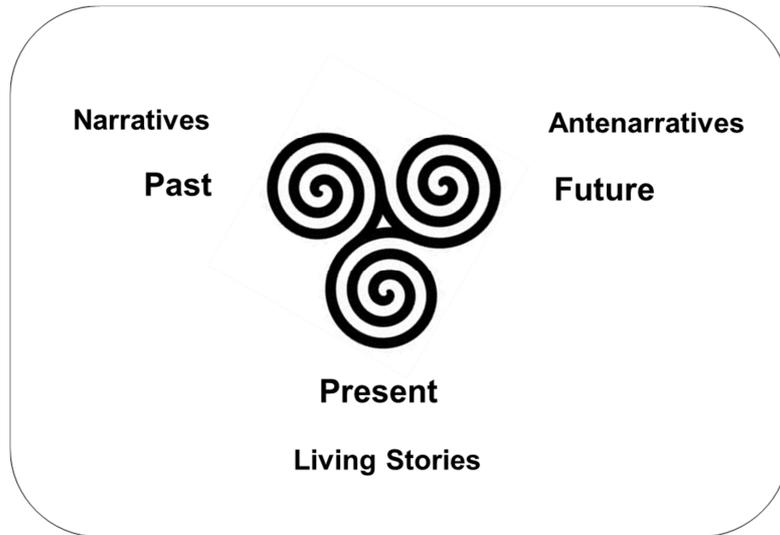
The entanglement of heteroglossic dialogues, sociomaterial discourses, and the attuned movement of feelings forms a base structure of the merging processes across different life-worlds. Neglecting this base structure is part of the process of the breakdown of the relations and why the ideal of dialogical relationship did not materialize in a whole department in the organization. The moods of the movement of feelings impact on the way we are and how we are faring from bewilderment to feeling at home in new emerging situations. Our attunement with events heavily impacts on our sensing of possible futures and choice of path to follow. The department chose another path to follow.

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Figure 1 The Storytelling Triad Model



Slightly modified version. (Boje 2011: 2)

Figure 2 Merging Lifeworlds

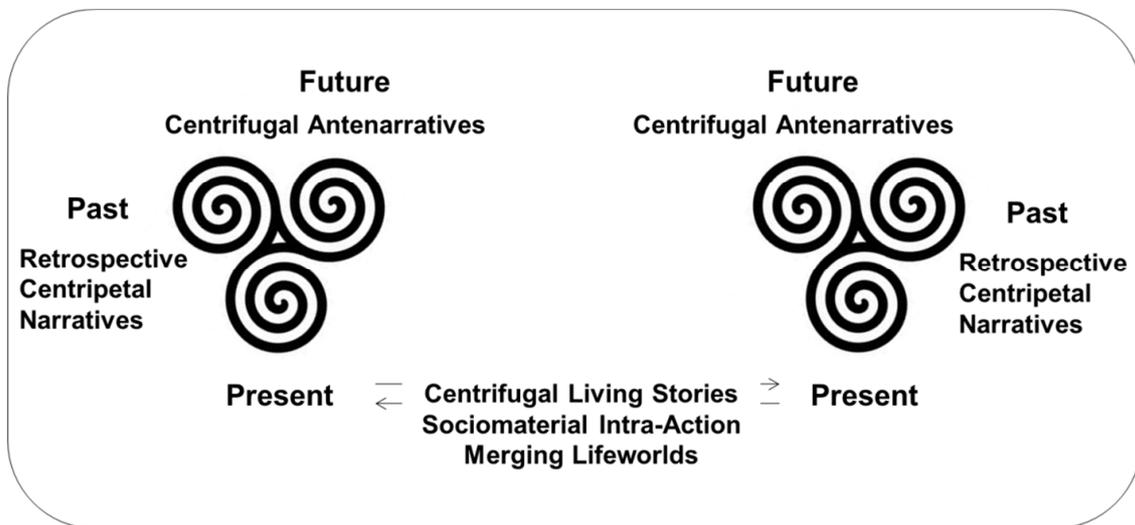


Figure 3 The Course of Events

