

The contribution and challenges of Narrative data in interorganizational research

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Abstract

Purpose of the paper and literature addressed:

The aim of the paper is to polish the use of qualitative methods in inter-organizational research by discussing how narrative approach can be applied into inter-organizational research. The paper relies the key literature related to narratives: narrative cognition (Bruner 1986), narrative interviewing (Mishler 1986, Flick 2004), data gathering and analysis methods (Elliot 2005, Riessman 2002, Coffey & Atkinson 1996,) Czarniawska 2002) are discussed to enhance identification of narrative type of data and comprehension of its special features compared to “answers”. The paper discusses how narrative data can be gathered, analyzed and reported and how narrative data can contribute inter-organizational research.

Research findings:

Narratives differ from answers because the informant chooses and orders the relevant issues through telling and relates the details into the context. Narratives have the point, the plot and temporal structure. Narrative data provides active data, multivoice data and accessible data to sensitive issues, and topics that are difficult to grasp through questioning.

Main contribution and implications:

The paper contributes to the IMP literature by increasing methodological understanding of differences between qualitative interviewing methods in inter-organizational research. The narrative data differs from answers due to its structure and characteristics and therefore inter-organizational researchers should identify it within their qualitative data sets and exploit it in more explicit and thoroughgoing ways.

Key words:

Narratives, qualitative methods, qualitative data, interviewing, data analysis, reporting, inter-organizational research, story telling

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a great deal of interest in the concept of narrative and its applications. Narrative crosses the usual disciplinary boundaries: it has been taken up as a useful analytic tool by researchers with very diverse backgrounds, such as psychology, history, sociology, philosophy, literacy research and linguistics, in which narratives have long tradition (Riessman 2002; Elliot 2005), but there is a growing interest to utilize narratives also in business research.

Ontologically, narratives can be considered as the very essence of human behavior and a fundamental mode of thinking; we often organize and transfer our knowledge in a narrative form (see for example Bruner 1986; Williams, 2006; Pace, 2008; Linde 2001). In everyday business, firms represent and market themselves to the public audience and clients through narratives, business managers tell stories about their career or sales triumphs and disasters, and engineers in a particular project provide stories about how and why particular choices were made (Linde 2001, Heikkinen 2000). Narrating is what researchers do when they construct case descriptions and what informants do when they convey the details of their experiences (Riessman 200; Czarniawska 2002,). Master narratives of theory and conceptual narratives are abstract narratives that the researchers produce about the world on the basis of their research (Gergen 1994, Saastamoinen 1999, Riessman 2002).

There are various ways how the concept of narrative can be employed in research and what kind of methodological assumptions investigators make. Narrative research is not a method or a paradigm; instead it is a fragmented set of references related to narratives. Narratives can be related to epistemological questions, data, the way to conduct interviews, a method of analysis, or the way to write scientific reports (Riessman 2002, Czarniawska 2002, Linde 2001, Coffey & Atkinson 1996, Heikkinen 2000, Saastamoinen 1999). All these uses can be applied in inter-organizational business research as well. This paper will focus on narratives which can give new insights as well challenges to inter-organizational research.

Despite of various ways to understand narratives, most investigators share certain basic understandings: a narrator creates a plot from disordered experience, and the events structure the story temporally and spatially, and one action is viewed as consequential for the next (Riessman 2002, Elliot 2005). Narrative is a story with beginning, the middle and ending; this has been acknowledged since Aristotle, and the form of narrative can be oral or written (Linde 2001, Elliot 2005, Coffey & Atkinson 1996). The scope of the narrative can vary from an entire life story to a brief topically specific story describing specific event (Flick 1998). From ontological and epistemological viewpoints, a narrative approach usually shifts the paradigm toward constructivism, since human knowledge is no longer regarded seen from “the eye of God” reflecting a coherent and universal view on reality; instead, plurality and contextuality are emphasized (Heikkinen 2000).

The interesting point in narratives is that they are to provide vital type of understanding: According to Bruner (1986), narratives provide narrative cognition that differs from paradigmatic cognition that is based on logic proposition and clearly defined classifications and it aims to affirm about the conceptual truth. Narrative cognition instead is based on thematically and naturally progressing narration and it aims to affirm the listener/reader with a more holistic way because affective elements and empathizing

elements are also involved and through narrative simulation, the listener/reader is able to reach experiences better. Bruner (1986) states that both ways produce qualified data, but the narrative knowing has been overshadowed by the paradigmatic cognition in research.

This paper discusses narratives as data type, gained through interviewing, particularly, in inter-organizational research. Narrative is a type of data that differs from example answers to as a response (Polkinghorne, 1995). Narrative points out the structure of narrator in the form of narrative, instead of the structure of researcher in the form of questions and answers, and this distinguishes a narrative approach from other qualitative data, such as theme interview data. Using narratives as data aims to capture the subjective experiences instead of attaining data through structured research design such as the question-answer scheme of traditional interview (Flick, 2002). This article adapts that narratives have two main roles in research: on the other hand, the research may use narratives as data by utilizing informants' first-person narratives about their own experience, but on the other hand the researcher produces a rational narration and the "master narratives" of the theory about the world and the topic on the basis of narrations about what happened in the field (Heikkinen 2000, 47; Riessman 2001, 696; Czarniawska 2002). Thus, the main streams are the narrative of the informant and the narrative of the researcher. These narratives are methods of presenting analytical and theoretical knowledge.

Narratives are increasingly used among business researchers (for example Edvardsson et al. 2008; Keaveney 2008), but the researchers have not discussed the essence of narrative data in recent studies which indicates that there is still room for polishing methodological aspects within qualitative methods among business researchers. There is very little literature about utilization of narratives in business research, even if researchers do use methods and solutions, where knowing the essence of a narrative approach could be advantageous.

The distinctions between qualitative interviewing methods such as in-depth, semi-structured, and standardized survey interview are acknowledged, but still it is useful to bring the major differences within the qualitative research into sharper focus (Elliot 2005). A central difference between traditional qualitative research interview and narrative interviewing is the subjectivity of cognition and role of the informant. The advantage of a narrative data is that narration requires from an informant more than just answering: the informant has to tell all relevant things in order to produce a comprehensible story. In conventional interview the informant may control their answers and adjust his/her answers to questions (Saastamoinen 1999).

Business researchers studying inter-organizational phenomena should be interested in narratives within their data, if they use qualitative interviews as data or study a sensitive topic. Actually, many researchers gather narratives anyway within their interviews despite of acknowledging it. Also an interest in process and change over time and an appreciation of the temporal nature encourages to utilize narratives, since narrative data type suits well with research themes that are related to time, the chains of events and time periods, since narratives can reflect the change of time and processes (cf. Leijon & Söderbom, 2008; Elliot, 2005). Business researchers also often write case descriptions on basis of stories gathered from the field. According to Riessman (2001), narratives are quite close to case research. Narratives enable to capture people's experiences and to empower research participants and allow them to contribute to determining what the most

salient themes are in the area of research (see Elliot 2005).

There is lack of knowledge on narratives within inter-organizational research and how narratives special features affect in data gathering, analysis and reporting.

Therefore this paper aims to discuss the main characteristics of narratives and analyze the opportunities and challenges that emerge when narrative data is gathered, analyzed and reported. Since the narrations and verbal answers differ, their analysis should differ as well (cf. Heikkinen, 2000) and therefore it is important to understand the particular features of narrative and their impact on latter phases of research. In this paper, narratives are considered especially as an interview data type (the informant's narration). Furthermore, special features of narratives provide both opportunities and pitfalls also in analysis and reporting phases and therefore the paper analyzes also how narrativeness within data impacts on latter phases of research, when the researcher builds new "analytical" narrative on the basis of informants narrations.

The purpose of the paper is to polish use of qualitative methods in inter-organizational research by analyzing the features and the use of narrative data. The paper discusses how to identify a narrative within the data sets, how to intentionally gather them, how to analyze and report them.

In social sciences, the narratives are established, but their focus is on the individuals' viewpoints and experiences (see for example Elliot 2005). Czarniawska (2002), however, relates narratives also to organization studies. In inter-organizational research, persons are sources of information that may provide narratives on inter-organizational exchange and inter-organizational phenomena, such on the organizations or units and on business relations in which they are involved. Assumably when narratives are applied to organizational research, some new challenges as well contribution emerge, because the informant does not speak on his/her personal life but on phenomenon that exists between organizations. Therefore, secondly, the paper analyzes how narratives fit with inter-organizational phenomena and what kind of challenges and opportunities emerge.

The paper provides also examples and experiences on using narrative data in inter-organizational research. These comments and examples are based on experiences studying initiation of business relationships. This reflective aspect is encouraged by good examples from Czarniawska (2002), Riesmann (2002), Dubois and Gadde (2002) who had revealed for researcher colleagues their personal experiences on using a particular method or a procedure.

This article is intended to be an introduction to narrative studies that could be useful in inter-organizational business research. Various aspects to narrative data are analyzed and linked to inter-organizational research. Due to multidimensionality of narrative approach, it is impossible to analyze each dimensions of narrative, and therefore this article includes also references to the narrative literature to guide researchers who want to learn more about any particular aspect.

The following discussion is organized into four sections. The first section provides an overview on narratives and their core features. The following two sections introduce narrative data with active features, and discuss what distinguishes narrative data from qualitative data, and how this kind of data can be gathered, analyzed and reported. The final section concludes with a summary of what has been learned from the use of narrative approach in business research and the advantages and challenges.

THE NARRATIVE - WHAT IS IT?

The simplest definition of narrative comes from Aristotle in his *Poetics*; a narrative is a story with *beginning, the middle, and ending*. To elaborate further, a narrative is organized around actors, actions, motives and scene which create characters and setting. Narrative has a plot consisting of causally related episodes and a chronological structure that usually contains several stages that contribute to a final solution. The narrative can be a long story, such as a life story, or a brief topically specific narrative. The form of presentation can be oral, written, filmed or drawn (Linde 2001, Coffey & Atkinson 1996, Czarniawska 2002, Elliot 2005).

The narrative differs from other verbal and conceptual entities because its structure that is created by the narrator through *choosing and ordering*: In narratives the narrator creates a plot from disordered experience and the events, structures the story temporally and spatially, and one action is viewed as consequential for the next (Riessman 2001). The phases and the elements are placed in their context by the narrator whose role is thus emphasized. There can not be an enormous number of events in one story, so the narrator chooses and sorts the events in the narration based on their assumed relevance in the story, and thus the informant him/herself produces *causality*; in other words the narrator is plotting that is about producing a narration: heterogeneous elements are integrated into a one whole text or story. According to Elliot (2005) “a narrative can be understood to organize a sequence of events into a whole so that the significance of each event can be understood through its relation to that whole”. When the elements of the narration are related through “*plotting*”, an individual event is seen as an episode that has a meaning in the network of events and episodes (Heikkinen 2000). The narrator needs to decide how much detail to include in the narrative: if the narrator provides too much detail the listener may become bored or will focus on aspects of the narrative that are not salient, but, if not enough detail is provided, the listener may misunderstand what the speaker is trying to communicate (Elliot 2005). Elliot (2005) speaks also about “*casing*”; that is an explicit evaluation of relevant events and experiences but also by the very act of structuring them into a story.

The temporal quality of narrative is conceptualized with the plot that relates events to each other by linking a prior choice or happening to a subsequent event (Polkinghorne 1995, Elliot 2005, Saastamoinen 1999). A plot usually involves a change in situations (Elliot 2005). Events have a certain order and our culture especially uses linear temporal structure (Gergen 1994). *Temporality* or chronology is widely accepted as a key feature of narrative form (Elliot 2005). The causality has not been universally recognized as a necessary feature of narrative, in the way that temporality has been (Elliot 2005). However, Gergen (1994) emphasizes the causality and argues that the narrator chooses events that are causally related. Elliot (2005, 8) discuss the role of causality: “ a causal explanation suggest that a particular event will invariably be followed by a necessary outcome, a narrative provides an account of how one event followed another under a specific set of circumstances”.

In narratives, the elements – the actors and events – are placed into a particular context, in other words, they are situated in the time, place and culture. Various levels of contexts and levels can be distinguished in narratives, such as social, cultural, individual and corporate levels (Williams, 2006). Interorganizational business relations are embedded in diverse ways: economic organizations are constructed socially and

historically since relationships have their own histories that link them into their context. Furthermore, network relations are embedded temporally (companies are bound to past, present and future), spatially (international, national and local space and geography usually play a role in business networks), politically (the ongoing political processes provide explanations of network evolution), technologically (companies are dependent on specific processes and product technologies). Additionally, each actor is embedded in a specific market with certain offerings, clientele, and operations, which provides a context for their actions (Halinen and Törnroos 1998). So, assumingly the narrator illustrating a phenomenon within business relations will link the narrative elements with these context levels.

Understanding the link between the narrative and the real world with various contexts can be opened with Ricoeur's mimesis. According to Ricoeur, a narrative text is imitating the real world but not about presenting it as itself and this imitation can be called "mimesis". Ricoeur (1984, 1991) and Laitinen and Kaunismaa (1998) see that there are three levels in the mimesis-imitation: firstly, to understand a narration, preunderstanding is required since action is always related to its context, the physical place and the time and the culture. Secondly, a narrative is a configuration of separate events through plotting, since the plot integrates the separate actions, actors and events; the events are not separated any more, and they have meaning because they are related to each other. (Ricoeur 1984). Thirdly, the narrations are applied to listeners own understanding: what is the point that the narration clarifies. (Laitinen and Kaunismaa 1998).

The narrative *structure* (a beginning, the middle and an end) distinguishes it from other verbal and conceptual entities. The elaborated structure of a narrative consisting of six elements is originally introduced by Labov and Waletzky (1967; 1997, see Elliot 2005, Gergen 1994, Coffey and Atkinson 1996). The elements of structure are the following:

- the abstract - a summary of the subject of the narrative, what is the story about
- the orientation – time, place, situation, participants
- the complicating action – what actually happened
- the evaluation – the meaning and significance of the action, "so what"
- the resolution – what finally happened
- the coda- the ending and the exit.

However, the all narratives do not include all of these six elements (Elliot 2005), and therefore the narrative structure should be taken more liberally, but still keeping the main structure requirements in mind.

The following narrative by a CEO of an advertising agency is from the data of the research and concerns the use of references in customer acquisition: even though a narrative is short it still follows the structure of a narrative even with a concluding coda:

Recently we got a new potential client and we showed some references - we have some big known clients on banking industry. When the home appliance representative recognized the bank advertisement and liked it, it was a really positive matter. But when we showed a few old jobs from their branch, to illustrate that we know the problematic spots of electronics business - we had dig the archives -it made him feel warm inside. We went up the notch in the consideration set. References are indeed very, very important.

The story has "*the point*" since the narrative is usually told because of certain reason;

story is constructed surround a certain *topic* and a key issue or event relevant to the point forms the core of the story (Coffey and Atkinson 1996, Saastamoinen 1999, Elliot 2005, Gergen 1994). The point can sometimes be quite unexpected and usually a relatively trivial issue or event is seen as sufficiently unexpected to make it interesting and meaningful (Elliot 2005). The scale of the narrative's point can vary from long biographies to short episode of an event or from a personal event to epochs and periods (i.e. the depression in 1990) (Flick 1998, Goffey & Atkinson 1996; Saastamoinen 1999). The shade of the narration can be positive - such as positive success stories that are told to cheer success and to advice others - or negative, such as failures, catastrophes and morals stories that are told to warn others (Coffey and Atkinson 1996, Saastamoinen 1999, Gergen 1994).

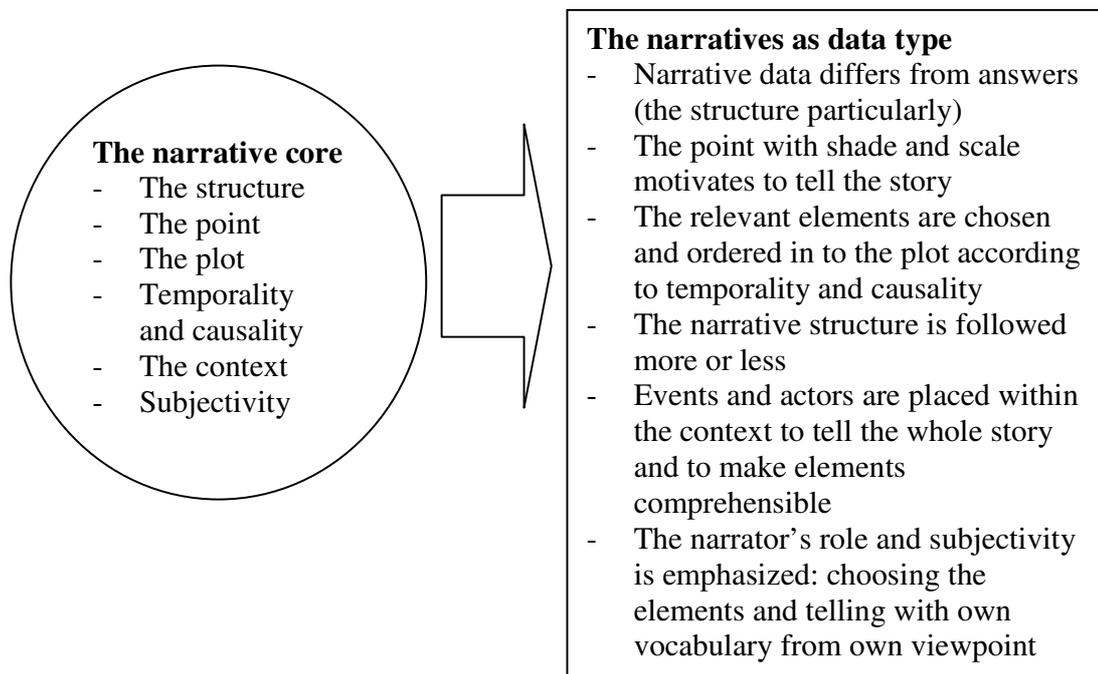


Figure 1 The narrative core and narrativeness in data

Narrative form is a natural form of data and provides "narrative cognition" (Bruner 1986). Bruner distinguishes paradigmatic cognition that is based on logic proposition and clearly defined classifications, and narrative cognition that is based on thematically and naturally progressing narration. Bruner (1986) states that both ways produce qualified data, but the narrative knowing has been overshadowed by the paradigmatic cognition in research. According to Bruner (1986) these two types of knowledge aims to affirm the listener or the reader differently: paradigmatic cognition aims to affirm about the conceptual truth, and narrative cognition aims to affirm the reader with a more holistic way because affective elements and empathizing elements are also involved. Thus the reader is able to reach experiences better through narrative simulation, because beside the actual cognitive information, there are also contextual understanding and affective elements (Heikkinen 2000). Broad range of authors from various disciplines stresses the effectiveness of the narratives and narrative form: narratives are comprehensive, memorable, emotionally evolving, persuasive and therefore effective (see Pace, 2008,

Morgan et al., 2007; Leijon & Söderbom, 2008). Narratives arrest attention, they provide multi-sided and highly situated interpretations, and they provide concrete incidents and experiences that are difficult to argue against (see Winterbottom et al., 2008; Reinard 1988; Jabri and Bounder (2001). Therefore the form of narratives emphasizes their usefulness as “anecdotal evidence” and exemplars. Through telling and hearing narratives, also the tacit and the explicit knowledge are transferred, demonstrated and learned: to be part and member of an institution or a group, one needs to know what the stories of the group are, what events in the past are judged to have relevance to the present, and what values the stories exemplify (Linde 2001).

The core features of narratives are summarized in the figure 1 and linked to the narratives as data type.

NARRATIVE DATA – THE INFORMANT’S NARRATIVE AND ITS CONTRIBUTION

Narrative data differs from answers (cf. Polkinghorne 1995; Flick 2002) due to their distinct features such as the narrative form and the characteristics such as choosing and ordering made by informant. The content of the narrative data is in prose form, and it is relatively freely produced, but however, the characteristics of the narrative – such as beginning, the middle and ending, and the plot with temporal structure – are required. In narrative material, the informant expresses the happening through their own telling which distinguishes narratives from answers to as a response (Polkinghorne 1995). Narrative interview data points out the structure of interviewee in the form of narrative, instead of the structure of interviewers or researcher in the form of questions and answers. This distinguishes a narrative approach from other qualitative approaches and qualitative data, such as theme interviews.

Narrative data can be gathered for example through interviews, observation, diaries and written stories and thus the form of the data can be oral, written or even audiovisual (Elliot, 2005; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Pace, 2008). Narrative data can also be a part of the whole data set: for example the data in a questionnaire form can be consisted of numeric, answer and narrative data.

There are various ways what kind of epistemological and methodological assumptions and strategies the researcher can use while utilizing narratives as data (Riessman 2002, Elliot 2005). Some narrative researchers adopt the constructivist approach, some the realism or naturalism. Realist approach treats the narrative as a resource for collecting detailed information from respondents when constructivists focus also on subjectivity of knowing. (Elliot 2005) However, even adopting realistic approach, the interactional form of the interview is seen important (Elliot 2005). According to Flick (2002, 103), the narrative and the factual experiences and events, should not be considered as analogous. Factual data which can be verified (such as dates and places), and the members of “realism” in particular usually aim to collect many stories from the same milieu or event, and to reveal the patterns or the collective experience (Riessman 2002).

The nature of narratives may also affect the chosen research strategy. The possible emerging findings and the active role of informant in research may request more data-oriented research strategies. Flick (2002) mentions, that a narrative approach and its procedure is adequate for developing grounded theories, and gradual sampling strategy

according to the theoretical sampling is convenient.

The core features of narratives emphasize some features of narrative type data, such as activeness, multivoicity and comprehensibility and accessibility which are discussed next (see the figure 2). After that we move to discussing how to conduct interviews to evoke narratives.

Narratives as “active” data

Narratives can be gathered intentionally within narrative interviews (for example Flick 2002) but they can emerge within structured interviews. Narratives occurring during interviews have usually considered as wrong tracks that slow down pumping information out of the informant. The informants are asked to answer clearly and shortly in the interviews, but still many of them say “you need some more background first” and instead of a strict answer, the researcher might get a long story about the context, antecedents and events, which creates a scene for the answer. (Czarniawska 2002, Riessman 2002)

The researcher can perceive narratives as “wrong tracks” might emerge because informants tell something that the researcher was not actively seeking. For example, Riessman (2002) describes how their research team studied divorce and asked the main causes of separation, and instead of expected a list, they usually got a long story as a response, and first these stories were considered as digressions. However, later she realized that participants resisted the researchers’ efforts to fragment their experiences into thematic codable categories, and therefore they told stories about the years of the marriage with troubling incidents in order to create context for the asked causes. Also Czarniawska (2002, 735) notes that the researchers ask their informants to abstract and to generalize, but still many respondents say “Let me tell you first how it all started” and want to offer some background information through telling a story. The result can be a rich narrative, which might or might not be finally summarized along the lines the interviewer had in mind. To summarize, the informants may tell through narratives something that researcher did not ask but what is relevant for the focal research topic, and thus these new emerging themes may challenge the researcher to reconsider, should they be involved in the research. Dubois and Gadde (2002) mention this as “redirection” of research.

Thus, narratives can be considered as more “active” qualitative data than for example interview answers. Dubois and Gadde (2002) distinguish active and passive research data. Activeness of data means that the researcher finds something unexpected or something that was not originally in the focus of research. The most data collecting is usually based on the current framework, and the aim is to search for specific data that fits in the framework, and thus the researcher reaches “passive data”. Instead, when the researcher stays more passive, i.e. during observations, the data is more “active”. I see that the narratives can be considered as an active data, because the informants are able to choose and shape the information and actively provides data that they consider relevant. The emerging “active” themes might occur without or with the researcher’s influence. Elliot (2005, 9) argues, that “the very telling of a narrative represents an evaluative act” and telling a narrative suggests that certain events are reportable by virtue of their significance or their unusual or unexpected qualities. Additionally, narrative can point out the unusual schemes, since stories combine traditional “the usual story” elements with

spontaneous and creative “but this time” aspects (Czarniawska 2002), and that can reveal something new for the researcher, if she/he is willing to acknowledge and to grasp it.

However, letting the informant narrate spontaneously does not mean, that narrative data is a sort of “random” data; the specificity of the interview and the research topic should be communicated to the interviewee, even if the interviewee is given the chance to introduce the new topics of his/her own (Flick 2002). Thus the activeness of data can be and should be restricted and directed towards the focal research area. The active features of narratives requires different kind of interviewing skills, since the researcher has to be more patient and a creative listener to distinguish the interesting new tracks from misleading wrong tracks and to encourage active telling.

I faced the activeness of narratives when studying role of references in initiation of business relationship within professional services. Because there was only little academic literature about references and they were studied only on industrial marketing, I started to gather some narratives on how buyers and sellers used references when they aimed to initiate new relationships. The informants with their narration, however provided stories, how referrals, recommendations, and reputation acted together with references. Narratives provided rich active data that was not tightly structured and it allowed examining new sides of the phenomena. Informants repeatedly told stories how they used several channels parallel and references, referrals and reputation were mixed. A story on one initiation of a relationship also provided chain of new stories on new initiations because emerging relations usually produced further relations through access opportunities which strongly emphasized interconnectedness. When telling their stories, informants named primarily people, and secondarily firms which stressed social embeddedness and suggested that in reference and referral actions the significance of individuals as actors was emphasized. These decisive empirical findings launched the “re-direction” described by Dubois and Gadde (2002) and as a result, I changed the focus of the research from references to “reference communication” referring to references, referrals and word-of-mouth, and reputation.

Narratives as accessible data

Narrative data might also provide access to sensitive issues that are difficult to grasp through other data gathering procedures. Narratives allow the informant pick the relevant issues and articulate them with their own words and link the details in the complex background information. For example annoying incidents and persons are not presented per se – instead the “annoyance” is described with the informant own telling and explained by linking the annoying phenomenon to its context and by expressing causal relations behind it.

Some sensitive or negative phenomena such as conflicts and problems within business relations or themes related to trust are more difficult to capture. In such situation, narrative data may contribute. For example, Keaveney (2008) studied conflicts between marketers and engineers in high technology companies by using narrative data – although without using the term narratives but “open-ended-question”. She (2008, 656) wrote that this kind of data resulted “not only categories of conflict attributions but also detailed verbatims that vividly illustrate the conflict and highlight specific issues that create conflict between marketers and engineers”. Narrations can also describe negative issues can be such as lack of skills of the staff (for example Harker, 2004) or negative emotions

towards work (Miller et al., 2007) and clarify the frustration and anger that are experienced by business people and reveal black side of politeness and respect on the part of opposite party of business relations. Narratives capture the background knowledge of situations and diverse personal experiences that stress subjectivity of the information. Through telling a narrative the informants are allowed to express their views and experiences about the issue with their own words at their own pace, which may provide more easily information on sensitive issues. The narratives as “soft” method, focusing on narrator’s own description, offer opportunity to approach sensitive, hidden or troubled topics (. Because narrative is a natural form to convey knowledge, it provides accessible data for study tacit processes and socialization. The temporality of narratives supports studying processes.

As an example on sensitive topics, word-of-mouth is acknowledged to be difficult to capture because of its informal and incidental nature (cf. Helm 2003, Cornelsen & Diller 1998, Gremler & Brown 1999, Villanueva et al. 2008, Keh & Xie 2008) and in such situation survey methods cannot easily capture the variation of respondents’ various conceptions (Keh & Xie 2008). In my experience, utilizing narratives as data provided significant advantages in investigating phenomenon that seemed to be sensitive and difficult to capture but the method provided also extra challenges. For example, most of informants provided only short answers when they were asked the questions about word-of-mouth, but however, the same informants later within the same interview spontaneously told much richer “whole” story in the form of narrative. Dilemma however occurred, since they wanted me to understand the case through telling the narrative, but at the same time they did not want to tell their experience to wider audience due to sensitiveness of business relations. Therefore they sometimes asked me not to use and report some sections of narratives. Thus, narratives enabled to capture the phenomenon, but new problems occurred in the reporting phase.

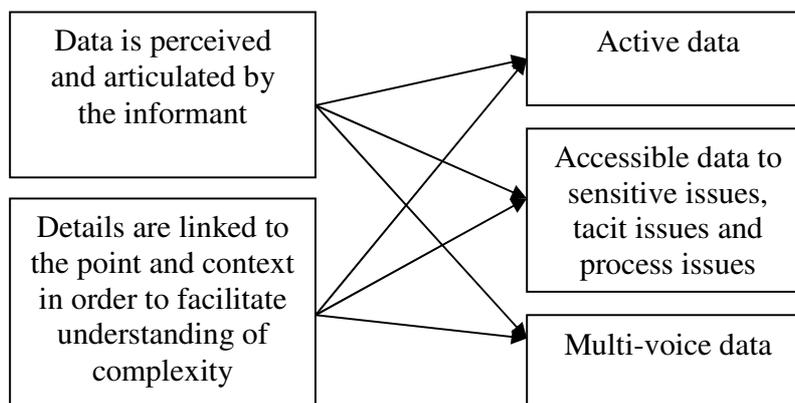


Figure 2 The narrative’s contribution to the features of the data

Because narratives can be gathered not only by accident but intentionally, conducting narrative interview is discussed next.

HOW TO GATHER, ANALYZE AND REPORT NARRATIVE DATA

How to gather narrative data

When planning to gather narratives within interviews, it is important to understand what distinguishes narrative interview from qualitative interview such as in-depth or semi-structured interviews. In structured interviews the aim is to gain information about the certain topic in a certain style and form but in interviews seeking to enable emergence of narratives, instead, the aim is to give more space to situation and the informant to formulate the information through telling a narrative and choosing and structuring the elements that the informant itself perceives relevant. Also the active role of the interviewee particularly distinguishes the narrative interview from other qualitative data gathering methods, such as theme interviews.

Mishler (1986) discusses the link between in-depth interviewing and argues that paying attention to the stories that respondent tell might lead to a radical re-examination of the standard practices adopted in qualitative interview research. Similarly, Flick (2002) emphasizes that open interview and narrative interview are clearly separate methods, because of interviewers “not-asking” role and the structure of narratives, but at the same time he suggests, that instead of mythologizing narratives in the programmatic way, the roles of the interviewer and the interviewee and dialogue between them could be discussed further.

The main point of a narrative interview is that the interviewer uses methods that aim to conduct the story of the informant so little as possible, or, the interview situation is aimed to be so everyday situation, that people produce narrative spontaneously and naturally. Thus, oral narratives can be gathered either through questioning or “naturally” during i.e. observation. The narratives can be gathered through for example the episodic interview, biographies and active interviews (Flick 2002, Coffey and Atkinson 1996, Saastamoinen 1999, Holstein & Gubrium 1995). The interview can concern one long narration such as time periods and biographies, but the narrative can also be a part of interview and concern shorter events and incidents.

Another question is, how to find the “happy medium” between stimulating narratives of interviewees and phrase deepening questions due to thematical direction and limitation (Mishler 1986, Elliot 2005, Flick 2002). Narrative interviews are stimulated with opening questions, the narrative-generating questions (Hopf 2004). The generative narrative question refers the topic of the study in order to simulate the interviewee’s main narrative, but the specificity of the interview can also be communicated to the interviewee by using material such as a text or a picture (Flick 2002). Respondents are also likely to find it easier to talk about specific times and situations rather than being asked about a very wide time frame or situation in general (Elliot 2005). Flick (2002) recommends first to provide the freedom for interviewees to tell their story, if the interviewee begins narrate after stimulating question. It is important that informant is not interrupted with questions or evaluations. Instead, the interviewer should act as a listener by supporting and encouraging the narrator to continue, and later, when the narrative is in its end, unclear fragments are checked with questions (Flick 2002). Also Elliot (2005) warns researchers to avoid interrupting a story: “If you stop a story because you think it is irrelevant, you will cut off not just that one but a whole series of subsequent offers of information which will be relevant”. Often a story is formed as a response to a previous

story, and it has as an indirect or direct relation to a problem or issue described in a previous story (Linde 2001). Explicit “entrance” and “exit” talk or implicit cues such as laughing signal that story is coming and indicate when it is in the end (Gergen 1994; Riessman (2002).

In the episodic interview the interviewee is not requested to produce one long narration, but instead several narratives about the research topic through the periodical invitation to present narratives or chains of situations. Episodic interviews seek to exploit the advantages of both the narrative interview and the semi-structured interview since episodic narratives act as an approach to the experiences relevant for the subject under study and at the same time, with the key questions concerning the situations, the interviewer has more options to direct the interview. In episodic both the data types “narrative” and “answer” are utilized (Flick 2002, 109). For example the following short set by CEO of an attorney agency pursues the form of a short narrative in the middle of answers: *Recommendation is a main way to get new clients. Usually it goes the way that a former client recommends. On the other hand often it can be banks that recommend us, right now we have a new client to whom a bank manager had recommended us, and he bothered to come to the first meeting too, almost as a godfather.*

Holstein and Gubrium (1995) introduce active interview as a narrative producing method, but in this case the interview is positive “provocation” and discussion between the interviewer and interviewee. In active interview the interviewer and the interviewee together produce the narration through conversation: both parties are equally active, because the interviewer listens actively and activates and provokes the interviewee to discuss. Narratives can also be caught at focus group interviews (cf. Harker, 2004). Critical incident technique can also be related to narrative methods (see Burns, et al., 2000; Keaveney, 2008; Pace, 2008).

Because gathering and provoking narratives within interviews is more unconventional than questioning interview questions, conducting an interview with narrative dimension is not always easy for either the interviewee or the interviewer. Even if many authors (Riesmann 2002, Mishler 1986) emphasize that interviewees are likely spontaneously to provide narratives, if they are allowed, some authors have described situations, in which they have failed to obtain narratives, even though this was the clear aim of the interview. This raises questions about the most effective ways to encourage respondents to provide detailed stories in interviews. (Elliot 2005). Particularly, the roles during interview and structure of narrative interview differ from structured or semi-structured interviews, in where participants are more used to. Although telling stories is common in everyday conversation, the space dedicated totally to narration is rarely given in interviews, and many forms of research interview suppress stories because interviewee limits answers to short statements, or interrupts narratives when they do occur. In my own experience, during interviews the interviewees are sometimes insecure about whether their narrations are good enough and they are worried that they are not “answering the question”. The usual comment during interview is: “I am just talking and talking, and there certain is nothing for your research. What was your question?” (And my question in these cases has usually been an invitation to narrate their experiences about a certain situation.)

The views on *the role of the interviewer* vary from a listener (for example Flick 1998, Elliot 2005) to an active debater and provocator (for example Holstein and Gubrium 1995). The interviewer who wants to encourage the production of narrative during an

interview must also be an active listener and signal interest and maintain the relationship between parties (Flick 1998; Elliot 2005). Because the telling oral story is a group process, the listener is not expected to be passive but instead to participate and to empathize through non-verbal cues, short responses or back channel utterances such as 'right', or 'hmm', and by asking additional questions (Elliot 2005, Mishler, 1986, Flick 1998; Linde 2001, Riessman 2001).

The *atmosphere* in a narrative interview should be relaxed, since a person will need the 'conversational space' to tell a story to another person (Elliot 2005). In narrative interviews the researcher should be patient, since people do not "rush" to stories and therefore some "warming" questions should be made to elicit actual narratives (Elliot 2005). My own experiences confirm these notions, because for example humor was very important in creating trust during interviews and I have noticed that the most confidential or important narratives were told by the informants after some laughing. Also the compatibility of the interviewer and interviewee, such as sex, similarity and familiarity, can affect gathering narratives (see Burns, Williams and Maxham 2000).

Elliot (2005) sees that interview with a narrative approach usually lasts from an hour and a half to two hours and she suggests using a tape recorder, because otherwise the narrative itself, pauses, and intonation will be lost. Practical problem is the amount of data (Flick 2002) and the point that the data do not follow the researcher's structured pre-categories but using computer-aided tools such as N'vivo to govern the data may help. Software programs assist to manage large amount of data and to code text segments with similar features under the same category and to retrieve and search for text segments that have been allocated to the same category (Kelle 2004; Bazeley 2007).

Being able to narrate is not easy, and people have different kind of competences to narrate (Flick 2002, Coffey & Atkinson 1996) and therefore there is a danger that some narrators with excellent communication competencies and the form of narration can overtake the actual content of the narrative (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). Encouraging respondents to become more active in the research process may also lead to the need for greater sensitivity to the ethical issues (Elliot 2005). Conversational atmosphere and interviews carried out in an informal manner, may easily take on the character of an intimate conversation between friends and this type of interview technique can lead to exploitation. Respondents might have to recall and express also unpleasant events and things, but on the other hand, respondents can also enjoy narrative interviews, since they can feel the research a worthwhile project to contribute to and be part of, and they can enjoy the unusual opportunity to talk at length to someone who is interested (Elliot 2005).

How to analyze narrative data

The distinct features of narrative data should have impact also on how the data is analyzed. However, there is no single analytic approach or a list of procedures that can provide the definition for narrative analysis, instead there is a multitude of different ways in which the researcher can engage with the narrative properties of their data (Mishler 1986, Elliot 2005). Researchers in social sciences have borrowed ideas about narrative structure from literary studies and socio-linguistics (Elliot 2005) and most of these ideas can be utilized in economic studies as well. Some researchers focus on the explicit content of an account, i.e. what happened and why, and other researchers pay more attention on the structure of the plot, its coherence or complexity, the style or genre of the

narrative, and the choice of metaphors and other images that are invoked.

Previous literature suggests some typologies for the analysis linked to the narrative approach. Polkinghorne (1995) distinguishes two analysis types on the groundings of Bruner's two cognition types: in the analysis of narratives, the paradigmatic cognition is used and the data is classified in categories deductively or inductively, and the narrative analysis, the story itself is the object of investigation and the aim is to create the thematic plot, to make a synthesis, a new narrative, on the basis of the data. As an example on the latter, the historians collect evidence from multiple resources in order to tell a story (see also Heikkinen, 2000). Researchers studying business and inter-organizational phenomenon also construct case descriptions on the basis of various data, which may include interviews (including narratives, too), reports, statistics and other material.

There are multitudes of different techniques and approaches that can be employed in analysing narrative data (Elliot 2005). First, researchers can be interested in the content of the narrative and focus on the actual events and experiences that are recounted in a narrative: what are types and characteristics of events and actors. According to Elliot (2005), these kind of categorical approaches are near traditional content analysis. Second, researcher may be more interested in the structure and the form of the narrative and analyze the story, i.e. the way in which the story is put together, what the text says and how it says it. For example the often-cited structural model of narratives proposed by the American socio-linguists Labov and Waletzky in the late 1960s could be used as an analytical frame and the schematic elements of the narrative structure could be identified and analyzed, but however, given the frequency with model is cited, there are relatively few empirical studies that actually adopt their complete structural framework as a guide for analysis (see Elliot 2005; Coffey & Atkinson 1996). The form of narratives can be analyzed by categorizing a genre borrowed from literature (such as epic, comedy, or tragedy) and by investigating the direction of the plot (such as progressive, regressive, or a steady line) (Elliot 2005). For example, Leijon and Söderbom (2008) differentiated two types of top management narratives: the positive progressive builder narrations and cleaner narrations. By focusing also on the structure or form of the narrative, researchers can avoid analyzing only the content and enrich the analysis by investigating the functions of different elements within the story (Reissman 1993; Coffey and Atkinson 1996; Elliot 2005). Third, the interest may lie in the performance of narratives – the interactional and institutional context in which narratives are produced, recounted, and consumed (for example Riessman 2002).

How to evaluate research following a narrative approach

Critical discussions about the method (see Flick 2002) have emphasized the limit of narratives as a data source, and therefore the research question is guiding, whether narratives suit it or not, and whether other sorts of data should be combined. However, it is important to note that narratives itself do not allow the researcher to gain access to factual experiences and events (Flick 2002).

Narratives may enhance the internal validity because the method prevents respondent's experiences from becoming fragmented, and this may imply that the method would produce data that are more accurate, truthful, or trustworthy compared with structured interviews that ask each respondent a standardized set of questions. (Elliot 2005). The triangulation - that is use of complementary methods, theories or data - is

intended to compensate for one-sidedness of research and leads to a broader and deeper understanding of the research (Steinke 2004, Flick 2004b) and by using both narratives and answers gathered through interviews can increase within-method triangulation (Flick 2004b; Flick 1998), since the method combines two separate data types by utilizing narratives and thematic answers. Some authors see that internal validity is improved by the use of narrative because participants are empowered to provide more concrete and specific details about the topics discussed and to use their own vocabulary and conceptual framework to describe their experiences (Elliot 2005). Other events before and during interview can affect on narratives and this question concerns the validity of data (Flick 2002). External validity is about how far the finding relating to a particular sample can be generalized to apply to a broader population, and narrative researcher is in the same position as other researchers with qualitative methods: the reader is left to make up his/her own mind how far the evidence of specific study can be transferred to offer information about the same topic in similar settings (Elliot 2005).

How to employ narrativeness of data in reporting

Utilizing narrative data and acknowledging the characteristics of narratives may encourage researchers to employ narrativeness also in their own reporting. Elliot (2005) condenses that “once we start to become aware of, and pay closer analytic attention to, the narrative structures within empirical data, it becomes difficult to ignore them in our own work - - Researchers make selection, have opinions about what is significant and what is trivial, decide what to include and what to exclude, and determine the boundaries, or beginnings and endings, of their accounts.” However, using narrative data might evoke some reporting challenges, too, as the previous examples have shown. Therefore both aspects are discussed next.

The researcher can present the study or a part of the study in a form of narration (for example case description), and in such situation the researcher is a “narrator” who chooses the elements of narrative data and constructs the research report of them. In this analytical story making, all data elements are not included, since through “narrative smoothing” the researcher polishes the plot. For example, Dubois and Gadde (2002) describe how the researcher constructs “the case” and how it transforms according to of what theoretical phenomenon the case is about.

Firstly, narratives might encourage the researcher to examine and report his/her role when gathering and analyzing narratives. Reflexivity means the tendency to examine and analytically to reflect upon the nature of research and the role of the researcher in carrying out empirical work (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000, Elliot 2005). Even if the realist tale (originally Van Maanen 1988, see Elliot 2005), is perhaps the most common type of research account with features such as the absence of the author from the text, narratives may provoke or encourage the researcher to write more reflexive confessional tale by documenting the practical elements of the research process and by bringing the author highly visible within the text, and confusions, difficulties, and the fieldworker’s relationships with narrative producers are articulated in the research report. Some researchers have noted the development of dissatisfaction with the traditional realistic presentation that dryly reports results but does not demonstrate the experiential side of research, such as the multiple experiences of the data-collection process or the vitality and colourfulness of the research issue (for example Dubois & Gadde 2002; Matt 2004).

The acceptability of a scientific text is however dependent on the rules for research and writing of the particular scientific community (see Matt 2004).

Secondly, using narrative data might encourage the researcher to complicate the usual and “one truth” reports with his/her research report. From a narrative approach, the research reports are considered as products, not as records. (Heikkinen 2000; originally Zeller 1995), and instead of preserving the image of objectivity through rhetoric ways (originally Zeller 1995) a narrative approach can give space for research narrations that sometimes separate out the general grande narration with their multiple voices and multiple layers (Heikkinen 2000). For example, entrepreneurship researcher Hytti manifested that she was irritated by that entrepreneurship was always illustrated in two stereotypical ways: the other type of stories were success stories “from poverty to richness” and the other type was “she works hard for money”-like stories about 24 hours/7 days entrepreneurship. By giving the voice to entrepreneurs in the report and by letting entrepreneurs’ various narrations to illustrate the diversity of entrepreneurship it was able to shake up these traditional perceptions and stereotypes.

Thirdly, in reporting (and analysis phase) the researcher might also construct new narrations on the basis on narrative data, as the narrative analysis type suggests. In such cases, the researcher might write the report in a story like fashion. Czarniawska (2002) discusses how in organization studies coherent narrative constructions called “tales of the field” can be constructed out of various materials. First she suggests focusing on the context that is understood as a scene where the event takes place. Even if it is obvious that there are different stories, in “story making” the researcher usually seeks “the voice of the majority”, and the differences are usually minimized by presenting them as variations of the same story. Czarniawska illustrates with a case, how the construction of “simple” story making is ramified by using several information sources and outsources of data, and different voices and differing opinions. The researcher develops the plot further, and the plot will become more detailed and the story points are distinguished. Additionally, a subplot to the main plot may be introduced. Czarniawska mentions, that researcher usually steps outside of the plot to comment on its development. Thus the narrator presents him/herself as an “justified teller”, since according to Czarniawska (2002, 742) the researcher attempts to create “an ethos of the author who has heard many such stories and therefore earned to right to summarize them all”.

Even though there are many good reasons to make up a consistent narrative out of many partly conflicting ones or fragmented ones, the researcher has the authorial responsibility for the narrative he or she constructs and responsibility to respect the original narratives and to admit the existence of opposite views about the new “narrative”. Czarniawska (2002, p. 743) notes, that “in multivocal story there are many narratives, as in a postmodern novel; all tell the story, and the researcher does not have to take a stand on which is “right” or “wrong”. She elaborates further and suggests that scientific writers could imitate authors role in literary; “sometimes it is not to say, which story is correct, but to make the reader understand why the stories differ as they do.”

These kinds of views might inspire researchers to write their reports in new ways: the literary discourse and scientific discourse in writing can for example be mixed (Heikkinen 2000). If the knowledge is formed as a more multi-voiced and multi-level entity, this can also affect reporting style. Czarniawska (2002) suggests that at least writers could leave traces of different dialects, different idioms and vocabularies, and not

always homogenizing them into a “univocal scientific text”. Narratives also allow subjectivity to emerge in reporting phase: for example, narratives allow the first persons, when modernism usually uses passive (cf. Heikkinen 2000).

When allowing multiple voices and narrations in research reporting, problems related to confidentiality in reporting might occur. It is a key ethical principle that the anonymity and privacy of informants is respected, but however, once attributes and experiences are ascribed to a particular case in a research report it can be very difficult to ensure that the case does not become recognizable; because of the unique nature of case histories and the specific constellation of attributes the individuals and actors are likely to be identifiable by those who know them (Elliot 2005). Elliot (2005, 143) refers to Lieblich’s sociological study about kibbutz community, where sixty-one individuals’ narrations were intended to include in the book, but however, some of informants asked to withdraw their stories from the research. Once the book was published and read by the members of the community, however, there were new ethical challenges: the research publication revealed the experiences of participants through the narrations to other community participants and these disclosures harmed relations between members. For example, one mother was upset by the stories of her daughters since they revealed negative experiences of her daughters. Similar risks and ethical challenges will occur also in business research. For example, when studying a relationship or a network, several actors with their differing views are involved, and other parties may recognize the actors and individuals behind stories. If there are negative disclosures, this can be harmful for business relations.

In my experience, the unconventionality of narrative interviews do raise some challenges in reporting. The respondents often stressed that “I’ll tell you this but you cannot report this further” and therefore some delicious stories and cases remained only in recording tapes but they could not be presented in the research report. However, these hidden stories were helpful in analysis phase since they helped to understand the phenomenon in general, but sensitive comments and issues were reported in more anonymous or indirect ways.

NARRATIVES IN INTER-ORGANIZATIONAL RESEARCH: SUMMARY OF THE OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES AND “RESEARCHIAL” IMPLICATIONS

This study contributes by building awareness of narratives in organizational and inter-organizational research and by polishing use of qualitative methods within inter-organizational research. Additionally, the study provided new understanding on narratives within inter-organizational research by studying organizational narratives instead of purely personal narratives that for example sociology is more focused to. The paper also illustrated and concluded some opportunities and challenges that narrative data bring to inter-organizational research.

To conclude, a narrative tells about a certain topic and contains chosen events ordered according to the plot. Narrative has a structure from the beginning to the ending, and this structure also includes the meaning, why this certain narrative is told. Narrative utilizes narrative cognition that is based on “holistic themes” without strict categories, because the events, actions and actors are related to their context.

Narrative is a natural form of data and provides “narrative cognition” and knowledge

and it should be distinguished from “answers” (cf. Polkinghorne 1995; Bruner 1986). A narrative reveals the advantages and opportunities of narrative cognition (see Bruner 1986) that is previously neglected as a knowledge type in research. Simply acknowledging the distinction between narrative and paradigmatic cognition might inspire researchers to utilize narrative data in their research.

There are plenty of research areas in inter-organizational research in which narration can contribute (see the figure 3). Narratives can offer new fresh ways to gather data and conduct for example interviews, since they offer a different kind of data compared with the answer type data. Therefore narratives might amend the organizational studies in diverse ways: they provide access to holistic contextual stories with causality, multivoice phenomenon, and sensitive issues. They provide active data, and might improve validity of the data, triangulation. Narratives might offer new type to analysis processes. Furthermore, narrative information provides different kind of understanding.

Also challenges might emerge in data gathering and reporting due to interview conventions, sensitivity and ethics. Participants are more used to structured interviews, and because the questions in the usual sense of the word are not asked, the informant has more space and power to decide what and how to tell about the topic, and this can make the situation challenging to all parties. The researcher has to learn to be patient and active listener and get used to “waste time” when listening to the narrations but at the same time she or he needs to gently guide the narrator to stay within the research area.

Narratives fit with some research topics, such as sensitive topics, the informants are allowed to express their views and experiences about the issue with their own words at their own pace, usually in a good atmosphere. Narratives fit also in topics that are related to process and change over time. A narrative approach may fit, when the context is blurred and multiple information sources with multiple voices are used. Case studies are useful in exploring inter-organizational relationships because they capture the dynamics of the studied phenomenon in a specific context (Halinen & Törnroos 2005) and narratives support this kind of approach. Narratives studies the focal phenomenon in their context, and thus this can be a one potential way to study i.e. networks that are strongly related to their context (cf. Halinen and Törnroos 2005). The narratives as “soft” method, focusing on narrator’s own description may offer opportunity to approach sensitive, hidden or troubled topics, such as conflicts or social embeddedness. A narrative approach may give new insights how to conduct interviews, and the potential spontaneous narrations may have better acceptance during interviews, if the researcher is aware of narrative type of data and knowledge and their special positive features.

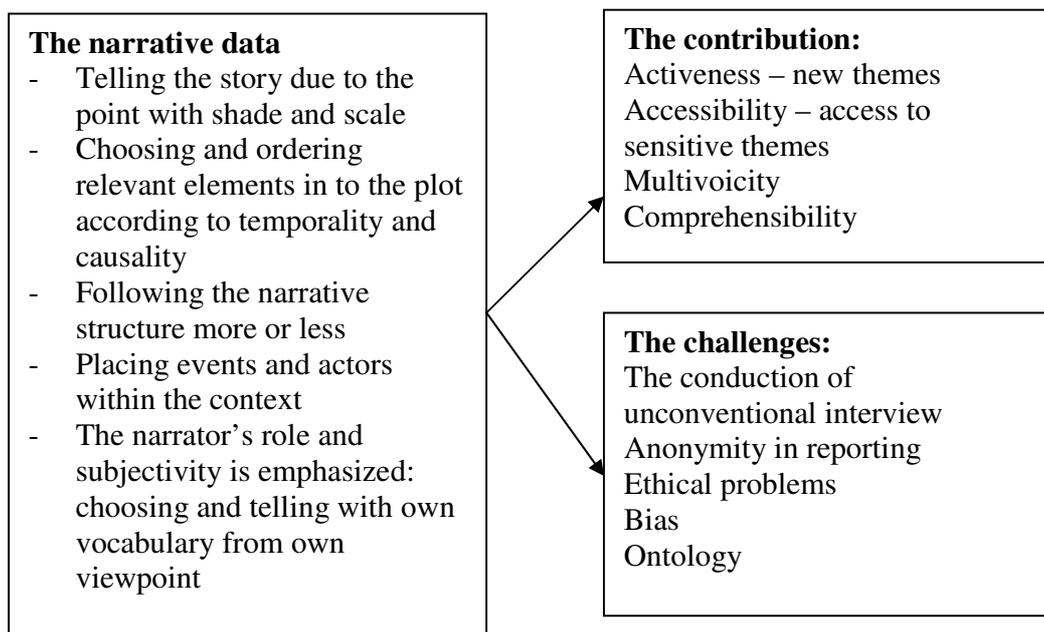


Figure 3 Narrative data and the contribution and the challenges within inter-organizational research

A narrative approach activates informants to “use their voice” and produce narration from their own viewpoint and this allow them to contribute to determining what the most relevant themes are in an area of research. The movement away from structured interview schedules toward giving research respondents more opportunity to provide narratives gives the informants more space, so the new emerging research topics can emerge. If the informant evaluates an event as worth telling, it suggests that certain events and actors may contain something interesting viewpoints to the topic. Among the business researchers is discussed how the theory and the contemporary business life could be linked better, and how to focus on topics that are scientifically challenging and interesting, but at the same time benefit the business life. Narratives might reveal this kind of research themes if the scientific knowledge of the researcher and contemporary issues on the field described by the informants are combined. This might encourage researchers to be open also to data-oriented methods and inductive and abductive research strategies. Hence, active data gained through narratives might reveal new research ideas emerging from the true business world. Instead of treating spontaneous narratives as waste of interview time and wrong tracks, they could be considered as an active address of the informant.

Some ideas related to analyzing data can be borrowed from a narrative approach. Narrative analysis, based on the structure of narrations, can reveal structures of business processes of different kind, their differences and similarities.

Writing a research report can be more transparent and, if the researcher considers him- or herself also as a narrator and is aware about his/her own choices when writing the report. Additionally, a narrative approach challenges the researcher to reflect his/her own position, knowledge and relations to the focal research, when she/he writes the research report as an outcome of the research (Saastamoinen 1999). The researcher chooses the point, the purpose and topic of the research and the elements from theoretical and empirical world that fit to the framework. So, the researcher creates a whole research from separate elements, and therefore reflexivity has important role.

A narrative approach brings also new ethical and methodological challenges concerning anonymity and confidentiality. Encouraging respondents to become more active in the research

process does not automatically result in a more ethical methodology, but instead, leads to the need for greater sensitivity to the ethical issues (Elliot 2005). For example, when studying a relationship or a network, several actors with their differing views are involved, and other parties may recognize the actors and individuals behind stories. If there are negative disclosures, this can be harmful for business relations. When allowing multiple voices and narrations in research reporting, problems related to confidentiality in reporting might occur. It is a key ethical principle that the anonymity and privacy of informants is respected, but however, once attributes and experiences is ascribed to a particular case in a research report it can be very difficult to ensure that the case does not become recognizable; because of the unique nature of case histories and the specific constellation of attributes the individuals and actors are likely to be identifiable by those who know them (Elliot 2005).

Narratives in inter-organizational research can be related to personal or organizational events and topics. If the research focus is in relations or networks, and several actors from several organizations are involved or an organization, a relationship between organizations or a network is a research unit, there certain will be multivoice information and multiple narrations about the focal topic. Through narratives it is possible to identify a plurality of voices instead of assuming that “organization” is one amorphous grouping of people who all agree and possess a unitary agenda for the organization or a relationship.

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