

# **The Role of Stories and their Evolution in Highly Risky Environments: The Darwin Expedition in Patagonia**

## **Abstract:**

Since the 1990's, the storytelling approach has been developed by consultants who use it as a management tool to influence their subordinates. However, according to the founding works of the storytelling approach, stories are spontaneous, and not created and conveyed by managers or outside participants. We chose this approach and tried to determine how stories can play a role beyond an influencing tool and how they evolve chronologically and in different environments. With this in mind, we chose to examine an expedition consisting of about ten mountaineers whose goal was to cross the Cordillera Darwin in Patagonia. Our study gives stories new functions and shows the evolution of stories in different environments.

## **Résumé :**

Depuis les années 90, le courant du "storytelling" s'est particulièrement développé sous l'influence de consultants qui l'utilisent comme un outil d'influence des managers à l'égard de leurs subordonnés. Pourtant, dans les écrits fondateurs du courant "storytelling" les récits sont spontanés, non médiatisés, ni par un manager, ni par un intervenant extérieur. C'est dans cette perspective que nous souhaitons nous inscrire en essayant de savoir quelles sont les fonctions des histoires au-delà de l'outil d'influence et comment elles évoluent en fonction du contexte et du temps. Pour ce faire nous avons choisi la configuration d'une expédition composée d'une dizaine d'alpinistes dont l'objectif était de faire la traversée de la Cordillère Darwin en Patagonie. Cette étude propose de nouvelles fonctions des histoires et montre l'évolution des histoires en fonction du contexte.

## **Key Words:**

Storytelling, Expedition, Uncertainty, Narratives, Context

## INTRODUCTION

We all know stories: Tales from our childhood or accounts of our daily life (Giroux and Marroquin, 2005). They represent a way of action for practitioners and consultants (Orr, 1990; Picard, 2006). In management sciences, stories are officially considered as a tool for understanding situations and offering. These studies are based on the storytelling approach. The process of storytelling can be seen as the observation of individuals telling stories (Boje, 1991). In many studies based on this approach, stories are mainly created and conveyed under managers' supervision (Kleiner & Roth, 1997; Brown & Duguid, 1991). They are usually viewed as a management tool to influence their subordinates. Accordingly, ordinary narratives and small stories are less valued than big, often strategic, stories (De la Ville and Mounoud, 2005).

However, a closer look to them indicates that some stories, such as small stories, can play other major roles, e.g. sensemaking (Weick, 1995), re-enchanting the world or integrating new employees (Lorino, 2005). Besides, stories must be contextualized (Czarniawska, 1996). More specifically, Weick's (1993, 1987) studies have suggested the importance of these stories in changing contexts. In changing contexts, stories must also take time into account (Lorino, 2005). There are two temporalities, that of the narrative and that of the reality described in the narrative. Few studies have tried to contextualize stories and analyze how they chronologically evolve.

Hence, we will examine the following questions: **what roles do stories play within changing contexts? How do they evolve chronologically and in different environments?**

To answer these questions, we chose to study the expedition of a small climbing group. Their goal was to be the first to cross the Cordillera Darwin in Patagonia from East to West from late September to early November 2009. The team, consisting of about ten highly experienced climbers, was entirely autonomous, even under emergency conditions. We found it interesting to study this expedition because the Darwin project took place in a changing context with a high level of risk and uncertainty. Moreover, we followed the events in real time and could therefore contextualize the narratives of the different team members.

First, we will try to prove that the concept of story is more than a mere management tool used to influence others. It can play different parts according to the situation. Second, we will unveil our empirical research strategy and prove that the Darwin expedition is especially interesting for our study. Third, we will come back to our original questions, and develop and

conceptualize them. We will try to discover new theoretical approaches by comparing our results to the literature.

## **1. THE ROLE OF STORIES AND THEIR EVOLUTION IN CHANGING CONTEXTS**

We will explain why stories can play different parts (1.1) and why both the context and the evolution in time need to be taken into account (1.2).

### **1.1 Narratives, a Multi-Part Concept**

The role of narratives consists in organizing a set of different events and characters in a common, acceptable and understandable temporal framework (Adam, 1999). This power to be meaningful, which characterizes narratives, has led organizations to look into the stories told in them (Delaville and Mounoud, 2005). Researchers have thus very early studied the big stories – and sometimes the small ones - told within organizations (Gabriel, 2000).

According to Delaville and Mounoud (2005) the concept of narrative can encompass several names (story, tale, saga, account), which can be often used indiscriminately. Beyond their apparent diversity, narratives have similar patterns and motifs. Reuter (1997) distinguishes several steps common in all narratives: the initial situation, the apparition of a disturbing element, the “raveling” inducing a chain of actions which leads to the outcome or “unraveling”, and the final situation. We will therefore use the words “stories” and “narratives” indiscriminately.

Narratology, the theory and study of narrative structures, approaches narratives in two ways: as a text and as an act of communication (the process of storytelling) combined with a live performance (Giroux and Marroquin, 2005). We will study this act of communication. We consider narratives as a subject to understand the process of storytelling when observing people telling a story (Boje, 1991).

The storytelling approach originates from Orr’s (1987, 1990) studies on people repairing photocopiers at Xerox. The author has identified the different functions of stories in organizations: Stories can solve problems, spread knowledge, improve skills, and build individual and collective identities. Many researchers in management have become interested in stories (Llewellyn, 1999; Brown, 1998; Patriotta, 2003; Wilkins, 1984; Hopkinson, 2003; Jameson, 2000; Taylor and Lerner, 1996; Demers *et al.*, 2003; Giroux and Marroquin, 2005). In their studies, stories are mainly created and conveyed under managers’ supervision

(Kleiner and Roth, 1997; Brown and Duguid, 1991; Boudès, 2000; 2004). They are considered as efficient factors to implement their authors' ideas (Gamot, 1997). For instance, Sullivan (1988) explains that narratives are a tool to motivate subordinates. Similarly, according to Kipnis and Schmidt (1988), one of the main roles of management is to influence other individuals. Language is the ideal instrument to reach this objective and messages can be divided in different influencing strategies (Gamot, 1997). Accordingly, the storytelling approach can be used in consulting, which aims to spread individual experiences to other areas of the organization (Picard, 2006).

The studies that only analyze stories as influencing tools reduce the complexity of organizations because they underestimate the role of ordinary stories in their training (De la Ville et Mounoud, 2005). Besides, in the founding works of the storytelling approach, the characters in the event reported play a central part: The stories told are spontaneous, and not created and conveyed by managers or outside participants (Picard, 2006). Communication is a two-way or multilateral interaction and stories are kept in their oral forms: They appear as a joint structure. Therefore, it is difficult to believe that all the stories from an organization are created to influence others (Picard, 2006). According to Lorino (2005), they can be seen as a dominating tool, but there is more to them. They can also help to integrate and seduce individuals, and generate emotions. Finally, narratives are meaningful and potentially give leverage for action.

*(i) Stories as a way to manipulate and dominate others*

Narratives can be seen as a tool of power and domination (Bowles, 1989; Hopwood, 1987; Foucault, 1975; Habermas, 1970). More specifically, these authors have suggested that narratives help to build social structures based on domination and power. Management values (e.g. profitability or productivity) would therefore incline individuals to make sense in a highly undisputable way (Mumby, 2004). Sensemaking is the backyard of an elite (Heracleous, 2006) and other individuals are not entitled to it.

*(ii) Stories as a way to integrate*

Narratives could also represent a tool for welcoming and socializing new members in organizations. They could be a way to reinforce commitment (Wilkins et Martin, 1979; Brown, 1982). According to Boyce (1996), "the degree of member familiarity with the dominant story of the organization might indicate the member's level of adaptation to the organization" (Boyce, 1996, p. 6 quoted by Lorino, 2005). According to Gabriel (2001),

narratives bring emotional support. This approach tackles many subjects related to identity issues, agreements, strategic alliances, learning processes, corporate strategies, collective experiences, change, joint strategies, and knowledge (Piette and Rouleau, 2008).

*(iii) Stories as a way to re-enchant the world*

According to Lorino (2005), many theoretical studies, especially anthropological ones, has defined narratives as a way to “re-enchant” organizations and fight against the historical tendency to dehumanize them due to the domination of technical and economical rationalities. Narratives therefore represent a vehicle for seduction when resorting to poetical and symbolic languages. They create more emotions than logical understanding.

*(iv) Narratives as a way of sensemaking*

According to Bruner (1996), narratives are the most common way for ordinary people to make sense. They are meant to create meaningful and coherent systems between the members of an organization. They enable them to share common meanings, build (individual and collective) identities, better understand the real world, learn, and improve their knowledge (Piette and Rouleau, 2008). Gabriel (1991) explains how stories are created in unusual situations and impact organizations. Narratives help to understand past events and better apprehend the future.

Table 1 summarizes the different roles of narratives:

**Table 1: Roles of narratives**

<b>Roles of Narratives</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Theoretical Approach</b>	<b>References</b>
Manipulate and dominate	Narratives as a tool of power and domination	Critical Theories	Foucault, Bowles (1989); Hopwood (1987).
Integrate	Narratives as a tool for reinforcing commitment, welcoming and socializing new members in organizations.	Constructivist Approach	Wilkins & Martin (1979); Boyce (1996); Brown (1982)
Re-enchant	Narratives as an irrational	Anthropologically	Mc Whinney & Battista

the world	vehicle for seduction. Create more emotions than logical understanding.	Inspired Works	(1988)
Make Sense	Narratives as meaningful stories.	Interpretativist Approach	Weick (1995); Tietze, Cohen & Musson (2003); Giroux & Demers (1998); Fairhurst & Putnam (2004); Putnam (1983); Gabriel (1991); Smircich (1983); Crider & Cirillo (1991)

In short, the same organization can create stories not only to manipulate others, but also to integrate them, re-enchant the world or make sense. As we are going to analyze it, the role of stories can depend on the situation they are created in. Besides, narratives are not just a top-bottom influencing technique; other individuals can take part in their creation.

## 1.2 The Evolution of Stories in Uncertain Situations: A Rather Unexplored Approach

Narratives refer to events they report, but also events told within the story (Lorino, 2005). Narratives must be contextualized, but they also play a part in creating the context (Giroux et Marroquin, 2005 ; Czarniawska, 1996). Accordingly, special attention must be paid to places, circumstances and participants (Helmes, 1993). The authors who have studied the process of narration have observed that the audience can affect the narrative (Mandelbaum, 1989) and become a co-narrator (Boje, 1991; Westley, 1990). With this in mind, Taylor (1993) has tried to connect the discussions at the micro level with the corporate discourse at the macro level. Even though some authors have tried to contextualize narratives, only few empirical studies have been carried out (Giroud, 1996). The storytelling approach has been created in the 1990's to tackle the problems of permanent environmental changes. According to Salmon (2007), it is "the best vehicle for the ideology of change, the discursive form of a mutating organization." Some authors (e.g. Weick, 1995) have suggested that narratives are essential in critical situations because they enable individuals to change their roles and their forms of action. Sensemaking is thus the major role played by narratives. Narratives enable them both to interpret past events and guide future actions. According to Weick (1995), an

organizational system which values stories as well as telling stories in the process of sensemaking would be more reliable than a system which values accuracy. As pointed out by Kahane (2005), narratives allow us to temporarily leave the real world before coming back to it later (Christian and Boudès, 1998). Temporality therefore plays a major role in narratives (Ezzy, 1998; Brown 1999; Giroux). Philippe Lorino (2005) distinguishes two main types of temporalities: That of told events and that of the narration. He even suggests a third temporality, that of actions where the narration takes place. However, the chronological evolution of stories is a rather unexplored approach in changing environments.

In sum, we studied the different potential roles of narratives and the importance of contextualizing narratives, especially in changing environments. Hence, we will examine the following questions: **what roles do stories play within changing contexts? How do they evolve chronologically and in different environments?**

## **2. THE DARWIN EXPEDITION**

After presenting the Darwin expedition, we will precisely explain why we chose to study this expedition and the method we used.

### **2.1 The Darwin Expedition: A Typically Changing Context**

The expedition we studied was intended to be the first crossing of the Cordillera Darwin in Patagonia from East to West, from late September to early November 2009. If they had succeeded, they would have been the first French team to do it and the second in the world. The team, which consisted of about ten highly experienced climbers, was entirely autonomous, even under emergency conditions. They used a boat as their base camp. The expedition was divided in two phases. The first phase, which was delayed because of many technical and logistic problems, allowed the climbers to realize after a few days that it was impossible for them to cross the mountains as planned. The first phase was first observed by two researchers and then by two other researchers from October 10<sup>th</sup> onwards. The strategy changed during the second phase: They did not try to cross the whole Cordillera, but they occasionally summited a few peaks instead. The boat left the climbing team in Bahia Pia where are Mount Shipton and other peaks that have never been summited. One of the

researchers accompanied the team to collect more data. The team leader stayed on the boat and coordinated the operations while a second group traveled to Cape Horn to capture on film the landscapes. The team who landed in Bahia Pia consisted of eight climbers and one researcher. They were left totally on their own for a few days. The boat had to leave as blocks of ice could have fallen and the Chilean authorities prevented it from staying nearby glacier Pia.

Two elements were especially interesting for our study. On the one hand, the Darwin project was taking place in a changing environment with a high level of risks and uncertainty. Considering the high number of crevasses and the constantly changing weather conditions, the climbing team constantly had to make strategic decisions that could be critical for their survival (Roberto, 2002). Among other difficulties, fjord Pia was almost unexplored and a rescue team would not have been able to reach the place where we were as blocks of ice were falling and winds could reach over 120 mph.

On the other hand, we followed the events in real time and could therefore contextualize the narratives of the different team members. We kept in touch with the climbers more than expected as they could not cross the Cordillera. The strategy they chose was to climb a few summits and come back to the base camp (either on the boat or nearby the glaciers) where we were waiting for them. We could therefore closely watch the interactions between the team members.

## **2.2 The Obvious Choice of a Longitudinal Study**

We chose to conduct a longitudinal study for two reasons. First, we wanted to give a theoretical background to the study of narratives in management. Conducting longitudinal studies is a relevant way to analyze rather unexplored phenomena (Yin, 1994; Langley, 1999). Second, we wanted to contextualize narratives. It must be noted that very few studies in management examine data in real time and in situ (Van de Ven, 1992, 1999). Yet, only the close study of project teams can help to better understand how participants act and interact in a well-defined situation, at the micro level rather than at the corporate level (Koenig, 2003). To collect data, the researchers took notes and used audio or video recordings.

It must be noted that the study followed a hybrid exploration process (Thiétart, 2001) by combining fieldwork and theory.



We collected more than fifteen narratives during almost 11 days. We considered it was a narrative when the following elements were combined: An initial situation, a “raveling” inducing a chain of actions which leads to the outcome or “unraveling”, and a final situation (Reuter, 1997).

**Table of the recorded narratives**

<b>N°</b>	<b>Dates of the recording</b>	<b>Length</b>
1	October 14 <sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m.	9 min
2	October 16 <sup>th</sup> at 8:30 a.m.	6 min
3	October 16 <sup>th</sup> at 12:20 p.m.	5 min
4	October 16 <sup>th</sup> at 9:00 p.m.	1h20
5	October 17 <sup>th</sup> at 9:00 p.m.	12 min
6	October 20 <sup>th</sup>	19 min
7	October 20 <sup>th</sup>	30 min
8	October 21 <sup>st</sup>	30 min
9	October 21 <sup>st</sup>	12 min
10	October 21 <sup>st</sup>	20 min
11	October 21 <sup>st</sup>	20 min
12	October 23 <sup>rd</sup>	40 min
13	October 23 <sup>rd</sup>	14 min
14	October 24 <sup>th</sup>	5 min
15	October 25 <sup>th</sup>	11min

**Table of the written but not recorded narratives**

<b>N°</b>	<b>Date of the recording</b>
16	October 15 <sup>th</sup>
17	October 20 <sup>th</sup>

We had not been able to record some of the recordings because we did not have time to bring our recorder. So, they were written down.

We started collecting data about the narratives a few days before we arrived in Bahia Pia till a few days after. The second part of the expedition was totally unexpected. No one had considered that the climbers and the researcher would have to land in Bahia Pia and stay on their own for some time.

We will now present our results.

### **3. RESULTS**

Our results contextualize the stories told by the mountaineers.

#### **3.1 When Feeling Depressed, Stories are a Way of Escaping or no Story**

Before arriving to Bahia Pia, we were grounded in Bahia Yendegaia for more than a week. The place was only inhabited by a Belgian woman living with a local man. We did not know when we could leave the place. We had to wait for a tide big enough to free the boat, but the coming tides were not favorable. In short, the expedition had been delayed for technical and administrative reasons; the climbers had realized that they would not be able to cross the Cordillera; and the expedition was jeopardized as the boat was grounded. So, their spirits were very low. During indecisive periods, climbers such as Doc and Momo told their travel stories in Tanzania and described the beautiful landscapes to get away from it all. Some people really enjoyed it:

*"I like mornings, there're always loads of stories"* (Matthieu, October 22<sup>th</sup>)

Yvan told the story of a wild boar hitting his car and the way he tells stories often made his team laugh. However, stories were gradually becoming less and less usual. The evening when he heard that the cargo boat which was supposed to get the team out of Yendegaia will not come, Yvan, who was usually very talkative, retreated into silence.

In sum, stories can be a way of escaping and cheering up when the situation is disastrous.

#### **3.2 While Waiting or Being Stuck, Stories can have a soothing effect**

Some stories were apparently told by the climbers to calm down and reassure themselves and the team. They often appeared as heroes in the stories. If we compare the situations when they

tell stories with the contexts of the stories, we can observe that the more static the situation is, the more heroic the stories are. When we finally left Bahia Yendegaia after being grounded for a week, the results are particularly appalling for the climbers. They will not cross the Cordillera and the team was divided in two. The first team was heading towards Cape Horn and the other one towards Bahia Pia, but no one could tell if, less than two weeks before the end of the expedition, the climbers would come back with any victory. One of the most striking characteristics in the project was that the strategy changed countless times. As the events and the weather conditions were so unpredictable, it was very difficult for the leader of the project (Yvan) to take the right decision, considering that the factors could change at any time. A few days before arriving at Bahia Pia, Yvan was, as usual, telling stories. While eating, he explained that he had trained a group to use the GPS and one of the trainees called Bernard had told him that his system was unsatisfactory. According to Bernard, he knew a far better system. At the end of the training, Yvan asked experts what they thought about it and they confirmed Yvan's use of the GPS.

*"A day when I was explaining to our former president who died in a crevasse, poor man..., so he asked me 'Tell me about this story...'. I told him 'It's no use'. He replied 'I'm not surprised'. I asked him why and he told me 'Bernard, I love him, but he's got a one-track mind. Well, basically, wherever he went... he went to Courchevel and one of the guys asked me one day 'Could you teach Bernard's system?' I burst out laughing. Wherever he went, he explained his thing, and what's more it's dead boring to do, but you know, when you present your thing, it's impressive, you look smart. And three years, four years later, I was in the Pyrénées and Dom was there again. It was a retraining course for guides and some of it was about the GPS, they wanted guides to learn how to use the GPS, and here he was at it again, I said to myself, no way, he's nice but please give it a rest, change the subject." (Yvan, leader of the expedition, October 16<sup>th</sup>, in the morning)*

A few years later, Claude, who had so much criticized Yvan, eventually ended up doing GPS trainings with him. It must be noted that this story proved Yvan had made the right decisions. When we arrived in Bahia Pia, we landed without the leader of the expedition who stayed on the boat because he had to coordinate the operations and he had injured his knee. He could not therefore accompany the team. When we met up with him on the boat to leave the area, he told us stories in which he had acted bravely. He told us about his sporting achievements, his

journeys and the mountains he had climbed. He told us the story about the body of the man he had found in the mountain and climbed back down so that he could be buried. He organized his funeral with his widow at a distance. When we were in Pia, the other team members also told stories. The very poor weather conditions were preventing them from climbing. So, they decided to wait for better weather conditions and take a day off. In the end, the day was very sunny, so they realized they lost precious time. The team members spent the day relaxing and talking. One of them told how he had rescued a climber:

*“And it’s true, but there is worse, I was in such a hurry, I wanted to climb down quickly, and when I arrived to the belay station, a guy was hanging in mid-air as an animal covered in blood, and I had nothing with me, no spare rope. So, I reinforced the belay station, made a pendulum, lifted him up, and after a few minutes he was in my arms, and he opened his eyes. He told me ‘What happened? Where am I?’ He asked the same question ten times, twenty times and of course his right side was a total wreck, and the rescuers arrived and told me ‘Oh, is it you Dominique?’ I told them ‘Throw the winch and I clip it to him’, but the rescuer said ‘No, no!’ and he slid down, he arrived close to me, I told him ‘You have to get him to the hospital’. And another rescuer slid down, so I took my radio and told them ‘Get the hell out of here and take him to the hospital’. And I found myself back alone”.* (Dom, October 21<sup>st</sup>, in the afternoon)

The previous day, Momo had told us the story of his client who had fallen 420 meters in Norway and how he rescued him with his digital tracking device. Momo found the exact location of the man. The two other climbers who accompanied him were looking for him 20 meters further away. They were petrified when they found the body. But Momo was not impressed. He removed the snow from his mouth and the injured man was saved.

In brief, we realize that the more blocked the situation is, the more stories where they play an active role climbers are telling: They climb mountains and rescue lives. They may try to reassure themselves that their skills and abilities are good enough.

### **3.3 When Facing Imminent Danger, Stories can Stave off your Fears**

When we arrived in Bahia Pia, the climbers soon realized that it would be very difficult to reach the summit because of snowstorms. On the second day, they got caught in a snowstorm in an area surrounded by crevasses. When we met up with them in the evening around a fireplace, they were bursting with stories in which one or several characters die in a mountain accident. Many people died in the stories told by the climbers that evening.

*“I always tell this story, just talking about it makes me shiver. It was during a retraining course for guides, we get together for 3 or 4 days with the trainers including Dom and Yvan. A shrink was there too. They tried to make us talk about the events in our lives as guides which were the most striking, the most frightening, how we viewed death. Everyone talked in turn, the younger and the older people. There was a man above 70 who never said hello to anyone in the morning and the shrink managed to make him talk and the third day, when it was his turn to talk, he hung his head and talked about an accident where his client was dead. It was the first time he talked about it, it happened when he was 25 or 30. He never talked about it to his family or his friends. And he talked about it and he started to cry. They are farmers, they don’t usually talk about death. That generation had to live with terrible secrets, the new generation shouldn’t do the same. It’s too hard.” (Momo, October 16<sup>th</sup>, in the evening)*

Dom and Doc, both climbers, told the story of two bodies they had found in Tahiti. Dom could also have died in this dangerous place because blocks of ice were falling. Pinpin said he remembered a terrible accident that took place a few years ago and where a group got caught in an avalanche. Several people were killed in the accident.

In short, it looks as if the closer the danger is, the better stories can stave off your fears about death.

### **3.4 When a Decision has to be Made, Stories as a Way of Convincing**

Some stories can support an idea. When we were in Bahia Pia, Dominique went back over the previous day’s accident where the climbers had gotten caught in a snowstorm and barely avoided a crevasse. They could not read the GPS and did not know exactly where they were going. Dominique used a story to prove his team members that his spotting system was shrewd.

*“I’ll tell a story tonight [He speaks to the researcher.] I’ve prepared it, I’ll tell them tonight a story on the GPS, actually two because they refer to my own experience, friends who are unfortunately no longer with us, something tragic happened to them and they shouldn’t be forgotten, we have to remember them.” (Dom, October 20<sup>th</sup>, early evening)*

He told the story of a highly experienced guide who got lost in a mountain, even with a GPS. Then, Dominique came back to the idea he had made earlier and that the other climbers had dismissed. His idea was to drive branches into the ground as a landmark. His method was then approved by all team members.

### **3.5 When Everything Seems to Go Wrong, Stories as a Kind of Lucky Charm or Premonition**

One of the most striking elements in the expedition was that nothing happened as planned. For example, the expedition was delayed by more than 10 days because we did not get permission to leave with the boat; it was impossible to cross the Cordillera; and the boat was grounded for a week in Bahia Yendegaia. The climbers gradually replaced rationality with fortune and the will of the mountain.

François told stories which could be considered as a premonition. For instance, he told the story of Appolo 13 and all the problems the crew had encountered. According to François, what is important is not that the cosmonauts had met with difficulties, but rather they eventually managed to go into space. Besides, they became famous thanks to all the problems they had. The story was told when we were discussing the fact that some of the climbers would go to Bahia Pia to summit a few peaks, which was not initially planned. A rescue team would not have been able to reach the place and the climate was especially hostile. Later, when we arrived in Pia, it seemed as if we were dogged by bad luck. When the weather was supposedly clear according to the router, fierce storms were breaking, which prevented the climbers from coming near Mount Shipton. Conversely, the climbers had decided to take a day off as it was supposed to rain, but it turned out to be the nicest day in the week. During this day, Pinpin told us a story in which he used his intuition instead of his logic. Pinpin did not want to climb a mountain with his clients on that day. The other groups who went anyway got caught in an avalanche. Thus, climbers’ logic gradually fades when facing difficulties.

In short, we noted that stories can play a different role according to the situation: (1) When feeling depressed, stories could be a way of escaping; (2) when facing imminent danger, stories could be used to stave off their fears; (3) while waiting or being stuck, stories could be a way of reassuring themselves; (4) when a decision had to be made, stories could be a way of supporting their ideas and convincing others; and finally (5) when everything seemed to go wrong, stories could be a kind of lucky charm or premonition.

#### **4. DISCUSSION**

In this part, we will come back to our original questions, and try to answer them.

##### **4.1 Role of Stories in Changing Situations**

In our study, we realized that narratives could play different roles. It is impossible to firmly and definitely categorize the role of a story. A climber can sometimes tell a story that can be considered as a premonition, to assert his skills, or to stave off his fears. It may be the case for the story about Momo's client who had fallen 420 meters and that Momo had managed to locate and rescue against all expectations. This story can be viewed as a way of asserting his climbing skills, staving off his fears of accident, or as a premonition because the mountaineers were going to climb a mountain. This case reinforces the idea that narratives are complex, can play several roles at the same time, and are linked to unexpected events (Czarniawska, 1998). Our study also suggests that considering narratives as a manipulating tool has to be somewhat qualified. Resorting to narratives in order to control others can be a conscious or subconscious decision (Simircich, 1983). We may try to both reassure others and ourselves in a tough situation. It is not bound to be a deliberate manipulation.

Besides, narratives can be collectively improvised. It is not always a socially organized enterprise. In some stories, two climbers were both at the place of an accident (e.g. Dom and Doc in Tahiti), and built the story together, telling it in turns. Even if the leader of the expedition is the one telling the most stories, probably because he is the most talkative, other climbers also tell interesting stories if they are contextualized. Our study revives the founding works of the storytelling approach (Orr, 1987, 1990; Brown and Duguid, 1991) insofar as narratives are spontaneous. They originate from a two-way or multilateral interaction whose goal is not always defined in advance.

Our study therefore proves that narratives formed in changing environments can be a joint, spontaneous creation, and play several roles at the same time.

## 4.2 Stories evolving according to the situation

Even though stories can sometimes support an idea, they usually belong to time. We have realized that stories evolve through time and according to the situation. The closer danger is (e.g. having to come back to summit a peak very difficult to reach), the more stories include dead people. Conversely, we could infer the situation the climbers are in from the stories they are telling. Besides, the worse the situation is, the further away of reality the stories are and the less they talk about mountains. Stories refer instead to holidays and trips. Finally, the less logic is used, the more climbers tell stories akin to premonitions. The movie *Appolo 13* in which the cosmonauts meet so many difficulties that they will eventually die is told when the situation is unpredictable and a small climbing team is about to land on Bahia Pia to summit a few peaks. Finally, the longer the climbers wait, the more active they are and they become heroes in their stories.

Contextualizing narratives therefore enable us to refine Lorino's (2005) typology who distinguishes different temporalities: The temporality of told events and that of actions where the narration is set.

## CONCLUSION

After showing that stories can play different roles and few authors have studied the evolution of stories in changing environments, we explained why it was interesting to study the Darwin expedition. It is usually difficult for researchers to find a situation where there are many stories and they can contextualize them when told. It may explain why so few studies examine this topic. We were lucky to be able to follow the climbers during the whole expedition, collect some stories and contextualize them on the spot.

Our fieldwork enabled us to highlight several types of stories which played different roles, not necessarily linked to the manipulation. We also indicated that the stories depend on the situation where the teller is. We noted that (1) when facing imminent danger, stories could be used to stave off their fears; (2) while waiting or being stuck, stories could be a way of reassuring themselves; (3) when a decision had to be made, stories could be a way of supporting their ideas and convincing others; (4) when feeling depressed, stories could be a way of escaping; and finally (5) when everything seemed to go wrong, stories could be a kind of lucky charm or premonition.



We managed to refine the typology of narratives and give them new roles in changing environments. We also proved that stories are linked to the context and how they evolve. We therefore helped to develop the study of stories in management. Following Giroux's works, we assume that organizations usually value more reasoning, numbers and statistics. The study of narratives indicates that they should also pay attention to experiences, stories and anecdotes as they are meaningful, bring knowledge and can consciously or subconsciously affect decision-making and collective action.

From a practical point of view, our study advises managers to pay more attention to stories that are spread. Showing interest in employees' stories can be a good way to understand the true situation they are in. It is all the more important since we live in a fast-changing environment. Ordinary stories are as interesting as big official speeches to understand the situation.

Our study also has its limitations. First, the stories were witnessed by the researchers and were therefore more or less interpreted by them. Second, it was impossible to collect all the stories told because they were spontaneous and sometimes unexpected. We could not be there all the time. Third, we could not take into account all the situational elements such as the general environment. Fresh and hot sensations, the amount of light and tiredness are external factors that can supposedly affect the stories told.

We would like to examine in more detail the role of these external factors in the creation of stories.

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