10. Changing the story: management panaceas as narrative interventions
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First they laugh, then they copy. (Anon.)

INTRODUCTION

When we published 'Management by panacea' in 1993, John Gill and I concluded that 'the search for cure-alls and their cyclic patterns is likely to continue, largely for cultural and psychodynamic reasons, despite evidence of their ineffectuality' (Gill and Whittle 1993, p. 282).

The paper was informed by three years of funded research (SERC 1993) into the implementation of Total Quality Management (TQM) in UK manufacturing and my PhD (Whittle 1994). This told a story from several perspectives about the adoption of quality management practices in a UK manufacturing plant of Union Carbide and efforts to implement TQM in the context of the Bhopal disaster. In 1993, we described managers 'beginning major Organization Development activities . . . as an act of faith. After a year or two of intensive activity they became disillusioned and began to reappraise their investment' (Gill and Whittle 1993, p. 286). We suggested that

> The uncertainty, constant frenetic activity and unrelenting pace, fear of losing ground to competitors, the inability to reflect for more than a few minutes . . . are the costs of a role interpretation which is . . . increasingly valued in western, middle-class, managerial cultures. Such behavior may help to explain partly the quick fix and the ephemeral nature of some consultant interventions. (Gill and Whittle 1993, p. 291)

From our psychodynamic perspective, we proposed that the use of process consulting (Schein 1988) and truth saying (Kets de Vries 1990), designed to challenge and help managers become aware of the drift from reality that could accompany the adoption of management panaceas, might offer a more analytic and effective way forward. We also suggested that business ethics might be the next big thing. Perhaps we weren't too wrong, given recurring concerns with Corporate Social Responsibility?

'Management by panacea' has been cited quite often and by two academic communities of practice, one interested in the group and institutional dynamics of innovation and the other interested in consulting from a critical perspective. Over the last 20 years, in my roles as consultant, educator and coach, I have encountered very few managers who have heard of this article or who think about adopting 'panaceas'.

A dozen or so papers from the funded research were presented at conferences and published in *practice-oriented* journals (such as *Journal of Operations Management*) in keeping with the remit of the research grant, to disseminate our findings to support the take-up of practices to improve UK manufacturing (Smith et al. 1994a). Very well received at the time, these papers tend to be (1) cited less often and (2) cited by managers and consultants and those consulting academics embroiled in working with quality, supply chain, culture change, training, technology change, and customer satisfaction issues. These papers are not well known amongst organization and management academics.

Our research into TQM implementation was followed by a broader inquiry into how organizations successfully regenerate their manufacturing performance by using company-wide change programs. These might incorporate a number of themes, including lean, learning organization, matrix management, quality management, pay harmonization, team building, business process redesign, customer focus, and flexibility (Smith et al. 1994b).

Throughout our work, it was clear that we were *documenting* what managers were already doing to make lean, TQM and other panaceas work, as were their consultants. Our rationale for the research was to work from a hermeneutic perspective, to understand how managers make sense of what they are doing and how sense-making informs actions and organizational change. We produced quasi-causal accounts (Fay 1975) to validated methodologies-in-use through practitioner collaboration (Schön 1983).

We found managers learning-by-doing and running practice experiments in their organizations. We also found the idea of a 'management panacea' had little currency. They were interested in pragmatic concerns about what works and how to spot and transfer ideas and practices that had worked elsewhere into their own working situation. Whether it was a panacea or not was largely irrelevant.

Our task was to make sense of and codify the knowledge embedded in these management practices, to make it accessible to others, and enable managers to interrogate a range of approaches to significant change in their manufacturing organizations, without having to rely on risky, individual experiments. Once tacit knowledge is made explicit, it can be imitated (Schultze and Stabell 2004) and codification can reduce the costs

of learning about managerial innovations (Cohendet and Steinmueller 2000). We were aware that we did not have a monopoly on this process. Codification happens anyway, as users and adopters of management innovations tell stories to each other about *what* they are doing and *how well* they are doing, or not. This chapter looks at story-telling and its relationship to those management innovations referred to in this book as management panaceas.

NARRATING MANAGEMENT PANACEAS

Managing is an oral tradition where story telling is an ordinary, everyday occurrence. Good versus evil, east versus west, man versus nature, and man versus woman provide the basis for many stories. These binary opposites not only organize narratives but embody hidden rules that inform and guide our behavior (Levi-Strauss 1972). Stories help us understand changes in our worlds by using familiar characters and plots to offer new rules and guides that 'make intelligible what is strange and potentially disturbing' (Pollette 1998, p. 422).

Stories are texts, spoken and written, in which plots link characters and events over time and in a structured way, through a literary sequence of beginning, middle and end (Polkinghorne 1988). Narrative choices are about how language, symbols, structures and themes (such as the quest – for the Holy Grail; the fall from grace – of Darth Vader; and death and rebirth – of *Alien*) are used to construct a story. Stories proliferate, competing for space in organizational life. Whilst some clash and fall into obscurity, others become established and reified as grand narratives (Boje 2001) and relatively impervious to critique. Some of the most widely used narrative structures are the heroic tale, the tragedy, the comedy and the fairy tale (Gergen 1988; Whittle 2014). These are shown schematically in Figure 10.1. How a story is narrated also depends on *when* the story is narrated, from example, at point X or point Y in Figure 10.1.

Stories begin, develop and end in different ways. Hollywood tends to produce stories with clear (and usually happy) endings that signal a return to stability. Messy or incomplete endings indicate that irrevocable changes have taken place. Stories offer the possibility of learning something about ourselves, about organizations, about how to change. By hearing a tale or reading a text we might identify with characters, plots and situations, and assimilate these into our stories about ourselves and our organizations (Perls 1973). A story's potency, the extent to which it makes sense for me, depends on whether I identify with it. A potent story can change the ways I think of and describe myself, my work and my organization.
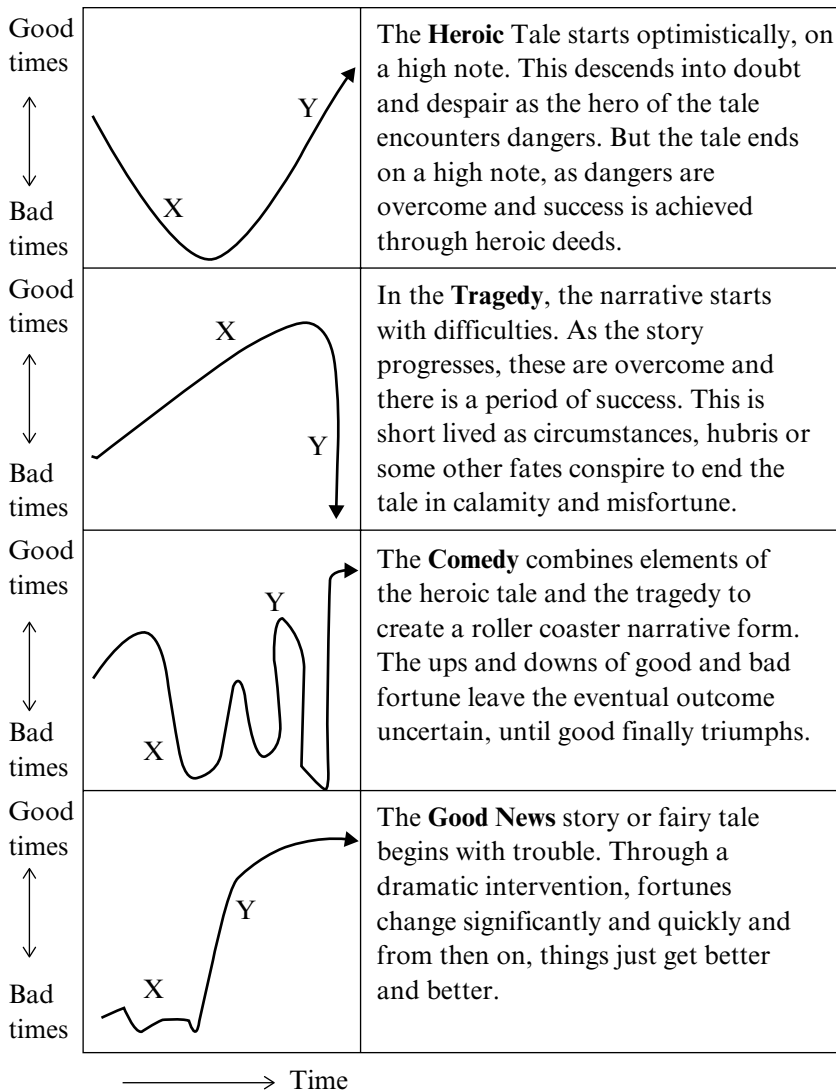
Good times ↕ Bad times	The **Heroic** Tale starts optimistically, on a high note. This descends into doubt and despair as the hero of the tale encounters dangers. But the tale ends on a high note, as dangers are overcome and success is achieved through heroic deeds.
Good times ↕ Bad times	In the **Tragedy**, the narrative starts with difficulties. As the story progresses, these are overcome and there is a period of success. This is short lived as circumstances, hubris or some other fates conspire to end the tale in calamity and misfortune.
Good times ↕ Bad times	The **Comedy** combines elements of the heroic tale and the tragedy to create a roller coaster narrative form. The ups and downs of good and bad fortune leave the eventual outcome uncertain, until good finally triumphs.
Good times ↕ Bad times	The **Good News** story or fairy tale begins with trouble. Through a dramatic intervention, fortunes change significantly and quickly and from then on, things just get better and better.

⟶ Time

Figure 10.1   Some popular narrative structures

In 1993 we noticed that 'Emotionally appealing symbols and language are used by consultants promoting panaceas, along with parables and stories detailing the magic that TQM, OD, and other panaceas deliver' (Gill and Whittle 1993, p. 290). In contrast, 'The [TQM] literature was found to comprise a mass of best practice statements and lists of requirements

"essential" to the successful implementation of TQM' (Gill and Whittle 1993, p. 286). In my more recent work with other widely adopted management innovations such as capacity building, health impact assessment, and evidence-based policy making, I have found that the contrast between stories constructed by those selling, those using, and those who are observing and researching panaceas, continues (Dunford et al. 2013). Gabriel (2000) differentiates between:

- poetic stories, which have a beginning, middle and end in which events and characters reveal a predicament of some sort, which the teller embellishes in order to convey enduring truths rather than specific facts;
- opinions, which may include symbolic elements but lack characters and plots;
- reports, which are causative, factual accounts.

In my experience, the heroic and the fairy tale narratives shown in Figure 10.1 are deployed in poetic stories constructed by users and sellers of management panaceas, particularly in the early days of an innovation's life cycle. Over time, more nuanced stories emerge which use comedy or a combination of narrative structures to tell it how it is. Being able to change your organization's story in relation to a panacea may differentiate those reporting success from those reporting disappointment and abandonment (Whittle et al. 1992b; Benders and Van Veen 2001). Still later, as panaceas fail to meet hopes and hype, tragedy emerges as a more pronounced narrative. During this time, reports (Gabriel 2000) are produced by consultants, researchers, governments, industry and professional bodies offering causal accounts and statistics about why this panacea is/isn't working and what to do about it.

MALADAPTIVE RESPONSES AND SIMPLE STORIES

As forms of codification and in contrast to reports, stories have relatively simple characters and sacrifice accuracy for effect (Gabriel 2000). At both ends of the panacea lifecycle, we find heightened narrative simplification. We can understand simplification of the stories told (about the adoption, adaptation or abandonment of panaceas) as maladaptive responses (Emery 1976) to the anxiety evoked by the possibility of making the wrong choice, of panacea and/or of the way it is adopted. Not infrequently, these can be expensive and emotionally demanding decisions.

Maladaptive responses arise when we face complexity, where choice is too

difficult and full of anxiety, and yet a choice is necessary and unavoidable (Emery 1976). Maladaptive responses are those efforts made by individuals and groups to reduce anxiety and simplify choices but which actually lessen the prospects of reducing uncertainties and sustaining choices (Emery 1976). Paradoxically, they tend to result in disconnection or dogmatism.

Maladaptive responses can be passive (where there is a withdrawal from the context that evokes anxiety, or a lessening of attachment) or active (where exaggerations of responses that were useful in the past are deployed). Anxiety about choosing the wrong thing to commit to and work on is known as the primary risk (Hirschhorn 1999). Risk and the anxiety arising from it can be managed through the following maladaptive responses:

- *Dissociation*: a denial or cynicism that what others are doing could be helpful to one's own agenda for change. There is a loss of common purpose and a 'go it alone' mentality.
- *Segmentation*: the loss of relationships with others, through the rise of prejudice and segmentation into trusted and not trusted others. Opportunism replaces means–ends thinking.
- *Superficiality*: lowering of emotional investment in work and ends sought. Suppression or denial of emotional bonds that tie people together so that action is shaped by random or idiosyncratic ('me') concerns.
- *Evangelicism*: where individuals join and unite around movements and fads. The creed is less important than the joining. Recruitment is from the ranks of the dissociated.
- *Authoritarianism*: enables certainty to be regained and ends achieved through the use of (omniscient means of) control and coercion.
- *Fundamentalism*: the assertion of an ideology or orthodoxy (religion, science, family, money) that enables adherents to handle complex situations simply (Emery 1976).

The last two maladaptive responses are of particular relevance to this chapter. Many have commented on the authoritarian, controlling and coercive aspects of BPR, TQM, lean organization, customer excellence and so on (Knights and Willmott 2000). The banishing of uncertainty through all-seeing and all-knowing systems and procedures typifies the image of many panaceas, demonstrated in the rise in surveillance of customers and employees, the use of statistical controls, and the analysis of BIG DATA to reveal trends and anticipate the future. Critics have pointed to the costs of this methodological march of authoritarianism in terms of worker alienation and a loss of organizational purpose (Keep and Mayhew 2010). In contrast, fundamentalism, as a maladaptive response

to uncertainty, looks to simplification through assertion of ideology to manage anxiety. So we see a proliferation of pithy phrases and key terms, four basic questions, five core processes and seven essential practices, that are typical fundamentals of many management panaceas. Some might agree that 'Panacea proneness is a moderate form of fundamentalism' (Ackoff 2001, p. 3).

MANAGEMENT PANACEAS AS IDEOLOGIES AND METHODOLOGIES

Management panaceas are characterized by a multitude of competing approaches, essentials and fundamentals that potential adopters can find confusing (Bryce 1991; Whittle et al. 1992a; Dunford et al. 2013). Panaceas tend to have the characteristics of ideologies in that they are:

- a program or plan of action;
- based on an explicit model or theory of how society works;
- aimed at radical transformation or reconstruction;
- held with more confidence or passion than the evidence for the theory or model warrants (Geuss 1981).

Giddens (1979) provides a more psychoanalytic perspective arguing that an ideology:

- can represent sectional interests as universal;
- affords denial or transmutation of contradictions through splitting;
- reifies the present, such that the reality of the world as 'given' enables other views to be ridiculed as naive or false.

The ideological development of panaceas is aided by incorporating and promulgating rational myths (Meyer and Rowan 1977), which function as rules, conferring legitimacy and enabling those organizations conforming to accepted modes of practice, structure and rhetoric to attract resources, both relational and material. Ideologies, as maladaptive responses, are regressive responses to anxiety. Their potency does not depend on evidence or evaluation but on their capacity to reduce anxiety. This is achieved by replacing the need to think by copying from others. What follows the hype and the limitations of copying, or emulating of practices invented elsewhere, is disappointment and abandonment (Whittle et al. 1992b). 'Formulation of a programme is best considered as a creative act, rather than a process of copying . . . copying assumes that a great

many institutional and contextual variables remain constant' (Rose 1991, p. 21).

Methodology is a framework of methods, tools and techniques, organized as a series of steps, designed to accomplish named changes in an entity (Smith and Whittle 1994). To be useful, methodologies need to overcome the maladaptive practices of simplification and fundamentalism that can be so helpful to the diffusion of innovations in their ideological phase. In my experience, methodologies for the adoption and adaptation of panaceas are usually fuzzy in terms of palpable objectives. Benders and Van Veen (2001) refer to the 'interpretative viability' of any popular management idea, which enables users to select relevant and/or appealing elements to suit their own purposes. This can be both functional and dysfunctional, prompting users to project their individual needs, desires and circumstances into the innovation and yet offering enough potential space to fantasize and fail. Calls to address methodological vagueness by attending more to adoption and adaptation contexts continue (see Andersen et al. 2014).

Panacea methodologies also reflect locally prevailing ontological assumptions about the nature of management, organization and change, sometimes overlaid with consultant promise and guru prescription. These ontological assumptions configure the paratactic aggregate of tools, techniques and pithy aphorisms that comprise management panaceas into design archetypes (Greenwood and Hinings 1988). Over time, these become recognized and traded as distinct and sometimes incommensurate methodologies for change (Smith and Whittle 1994).

Typically, there is a strong assertion of, and attachment to, panacea fundamentalism (as if an ideology) in the earlier phases of the panacea life cycle. This contrasts with and is a stronger assertion of, and attachment to, panacea authoritarianism (as if methodology) in the later phases of the life cycle. This might sound like stating the obvious except that the development and popularity of a panacea as ideology and as methodology can occur independently. The interplay between panacea as ideology and methodology impacts the types of stories told by sellers and users of panaceas and shapes their adoption, adaptation and abandonment (Smith and Whittle 1994).

Figure 10.2 shows speculative relationships between the ideological and methodological aspects of management panacea lifecycles. Whilst only a single trajectory is shown here, in practice several ideological and methodological variants of the same management panacea may be competing to be taken up by adopters.

- Figure 10.2a illustrates a well-known lifecycle pattern in which ideological models and rationales precede methodological develop-
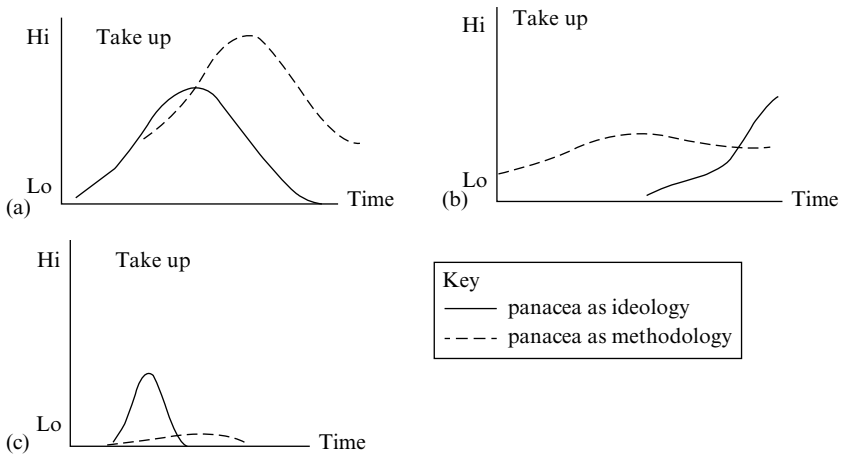
Figure 10.2   Speculative relationships between the ideological and methodological aspects of management panacea lifecycles

ments. The schematic suggests that methodological developments fuel further take-up of management panaceas for a while until take-up peaks and falls away. The figure implies that panacea methodology can continue to attract adoption despite the falling attraction of panacea ideology.

- In Figure 10.2b, methodology emerges (perhaps as a loose collection of techniques and methods) before a programmed plan of action crystallizes into an ideological rationale about how organizations work and how managers manage. Take-up grows relatively slowly (perhaps by word of mouth) and at some tipping-point takes on the characteristics of a rational myth and take-up of the ideology takes off.
- Figure 10.2c depicts a scenario of relatively low take-up of a panacea as ideology. This peaks and falls away quite quickly before a nascent methodology can become established.

A competitive and diverse ideological phase can spawn multiple implementation methodologies, authored by different consultancies, academics and organizational stakeholders. So, in a form of methodological provincialism (Gioia and Pitre 1990), leaders might support adoption and implementation methodologies that are different from those espoused by manufacturing and operations managers, and different again from methodologies preferred by HR managers (Smith et al. 1994a). It is all too easy for the implementation of management innovations to become stuck

within one of the methodologies preferred by particular stakeholders, plateau and decline, without achieving the organizational transformations desired (Whittle et al. 1992b).

In the early days of TQM in the UK, the predominant consultant and user narrative was that *any* form of TQM was good. Some organizations started by reducing process variances and controlling product quality. Others aligned strategic objectives with 'delighting the customer' and yet others focused on employee empowerment and adopted a 'learning organization' model to inform their change agenda. As the market became more competitive and early adopters were experiencing problems, consultants differentiated their approach in terms of 'making it stick' (Smith and Whittle 1994). Debates then centered around whether TQM meant winning hearts and/or minds (and whose hearts and minds) versus controlling organizational processes, variances and costs. TQM as ideology still had a strong presence and there was little available methodologically to help managers appreciate the limited returns of any one narrative. Many floundered at what to do next. Some revisited and reinvented their panacea adoption strategies, effectively adapting them to support more radical organizational change, by changing their stories about their organization's identity. Red Box was such an organization.

A manufacturer and supplier of a range of electrical products to the construction industry, Red Box had been losing market share to competitors who were able to offer more reliable and lower priced fire and alarm equipment. Over a five-year period, and following a management buy-in, they adopted and then adapted a range of well-known management and manufacturing innovations in their own poetic way. (Panacea was not in their vocabulary.) Their challenge was to construct and maintain a collective sense of organization (who we are, what business we are in, how well we are performing, and so on) in the midst of multi-strand change programs, imported from outside the company. Box 10.1 shows the strapline and lists the main innovations Red Box adopted and adapted in a two-phase tale of regeneration (Whittle et al. 1994).

MODIFYING AND ADAPTING PANACEAS

Over 20 years I have seen this pattern quite often, whereby learning how to think about and how to change organizations is accomplished by the experience of doing. This is still underappreciated in much of the organization and management literature where rational planning techniques and hermetic models prevail. In practice, managers tend to put together idiosyncratic programs of activities, based on a number of panaceas, to

address their organizational problems rather than implementing a single remedy by the book. Unfortunately, the perceived modification of panaceas can attract criticism as inappropriate or even a subversion of how things should be done (Mamman and Kamoche 2007).

Loyalty and attachment to an ideal-type panacea is evidence of the ongoing influence of ideological dynamics on the adoption of management innovations. Managers are challenged to defend whether their approach is *really* TQM, or *really* activity based costing. Some managers can be anxious about attracting these accusations and licensing themselves to adopt panaceas as they think fit and in ways that benefit their organizations rather than complying with some rubric. Loyalty can be an easier choice than exit or voice (Hirschman 1970). And yet, with the adoption of innovations being such an emergent process, it is not surprising that 'modification of innovations by organizations is very common' (Mamman and Kamoche 2007, p. 4). In Phase 1, Red Box made incremental and modular changes to adapt panaceas to fit their existing management and organizational practices. In Phase 2, changes were more systemic and radical. How managers can go from copying sometimes ill-fitting panaceas to hybridizing and inventing their own heuristics for change is what we don't understand (Whittle et al. 1992a; Ansari et al. 2014). Is copying developmental, a necessary preliminary to creating one's own remedies? Or is copying a dead end? For Red Box, crafting new narratives and stories aided this process which we might think of as a shift from reading a script to writing your own play.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCHERS AND MANAGERS

Management panaceas can defend against anxiety by providing some order and containment during periods of uncertainty and change. They simplify choices about *what* should be done and reduce risks associated with *how* things should be done to a few manageable fundamentals. So it may not be surprising that a view of managers as panacea dopes, blindly following fashions, consuming the latest guru fad and regurgitating in their organizations, is still strong in the literature. But perhaps this view is evidence of simplification as a response to anxiety in the research community, rather than anything to do with what happens in practice (Clark 2004)? There is evidence of different companies using the same methods and techniques in different ways (Smith and Tranfield 1996) and others have noticed that some 'followers' of managerial fashions 'will critically consider how they want to use a concept . . . and which of its notions

BOX 10.1   ADOPTION AND ADAPTATION OF MANAGEMENT PANACEAS IN RED BOX COMPANY

PHASE 1 (3 years)

'We aim to turn underperforming and unimaginative manufacturing operations into a strategic asset that is understandable, focused and flexible.'

- Strategic planning: Focus on fire protection and withdraw from all other markets. Product rationalization managed through Project New Leaf.
- Marketing via differentiation strategy; new company logo; new customer promise. Benchmarking of customer satisfaction.
- Investment in cellular manufacturing layout; semi-autonomous work teams; JIT work flow; supplier partnerships; activity based costing. (Project 'Chrysalis'.)
- Structural change to matrix organization.
- Harmonization of pay and conditions and introduction of group performance related pay.
- Team building, training and briefings in line with learning organization model.

The story told

Adoption of panaceas narrated as a no-choice, heroic tale of survival to avoid tragedy.
Multiple models provide ideological rationales but little if any methodological integration.
Red Box is looking for transformation and second order change but experiences incremental and first order improvements.

Analysis

After 3 years, performance improvements slowed down and energies dropped. Following a rethink (Weick 1995), discrete but multiple problem solving was replaced by 'a consistent and legitimate narrative to construct a collective sense of self' (Ravasi and Schultz 2006, p.434) around a reinvented organizational identity. By narrating a time and psychological boundary around the innovations they had employed to date, managers were able to launch Chapter 2, a more ambitious and home grown phase of changes, based on different ways of thinking about their organization, their business and their future.

PHASE 2 (2 years)

'We aim to be the market leader in the supply of fire detection and alarm equipment.'

- Strategic planning: 'to be professional and be the best' by shifting from an engineering led to a market led organization.
- Flatten responsibility structure and become a 'local initiative' company.
- Simplify organization structure.
- Introduce proactive product design to lead customer demands.
- Further develop flexible and agile manufacturing capabilities to be customer responsive.
- Introduce more business focused management controls in addition to internally focused manufacturing controls.
- Automate manufacturing.
- Rationalize supply chain.
- Clarify process ownership in manufacturing and other functions.

The story told

Adaptation of locally well understood, tried and tested panaceas, narrated as a comedy, an epic saga of ups and downs structured by insights, turning points, critical events, risk and choice.

Analysis

The company attributed significant changes in performance (turnover doubled; value of inventory halved; lead time down fivefold; and profit tripled) to how they used these innovations.
(a) initially as off-the-shelf remedies to address problems and then (b) as more bespoke approaches to changing organizational identity and building generic capabilities.

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appear useful in their particular circumstances' (Benders and Van Veen 2001, p. 41). Often, managers do not seem to engage in rational comparisons of options before adopting a particular panacea but speak of their choice as being 'the only sensible thing to do'.

Finding ways to differentiate panaceas (in terms of costs and benefits, difficulties of adoption, and needs for adaptation in different contexts) will be helpful and is what this book is about. For researchers, this amounts to working hard:

● to debunk or develop panacea ideologies;
● to describe, design and evaluate accessible panacea methodologies.

This will involve real-time efforts to track the ideological and methodological status of panaceas and to design ways to intervene *appropriately* into the emerging institutional environment, to guide and evaluate adoption and adaptation practices. But we are not starting from scratch. Frameworks such as Rogers' well-known diffusion model from the innovation literature (Rogers 1983) or practice journals associated with any panacea offer rich pickings. Researchers can help loosen the grip of simple and fundamentalist ideologies that can feature early in the panacea lifecycle by offering more and different stories of how managers initially employ these innovations (Mamman 2002). Similarly, research can challenge authoritarian prescriptions that constrain adoption and adaptation methodologies by recounting more detailed stories and at different stages of adoption and adaptation.

Theorizing these accounts could draw more on longitudinal case studies in a range of contexts (such as regulated and non-regulated environments; growing and declining markets), and challenge the survivor bias of much of the current literature by investigating panacea abandonment seriously. Unlike reports and refereed articles, poetic stories can retain complexity and convey nuanced and paradoxical messages efficiently. This offers managers more of the 'interpretative viability' needed to make panaceas their own (Benders and Van Veen 2001, p. 38). By employing more Mode 2 research practices (Nowotny et al. 2003), stories and narratives can be offered via video or other ways that fit with managers' oral traditions, rather than writing reports and continuing turgid discourses in refereed journals. What can be learned from elsewhere? The construction industry uses demonstration projects to test innovations, whilst policy innovators and health economists conduct feasibility studies to analyze and evaluate new thinking and practices. Can the same be done with management innovations *before* they are labeled panaceas? The term 'panacea' has a paradigmatic quality that makes difficult a more contingent and measured

interest in an innovation (Geiger and Antonacopoulou 2009). How can researchers influence managers' expectations about this or that innovation so as to be more realistic and less fanciful?

CONCLUSION

We are now used to thinking of organizing and managing as contested storytelling. How good are the stories about management panaceas? Do they help or hinder adoption and adaptation of management innovations? The dynamics of fundamentalism and authoritarianism that structure panacea stories are described in this chapter as maladaptive responses to anxieties about risk and uncertainty. These dynamics can:

- support the premature diffusion of panaceas, by presenting inappropriately simple remedies to complex problems;
- thwart the adaptation of panaceas to local needs and constraints by undermining methodological diversity and development.

Because 'cure-all recipes for organizational change are bound to fail' (Jacobs et al. 2013, p. 772) we need to make tales about the adoption and adaptation of management innovations more complex and more nuanced (Wood and Caldas 2001). As language is constitutive and not merely descriptive, we know that language use is integral to the appeal of managerial innovations and that 'the role of language in organizational change may be critical in its success' (Dunford et al. 2013, p. 89). Research can help managers to continue experimenting with innovations, in more knowing ways, by co-authoring stories and enriching the language and narratives employed. This can support a less anxious exploration of panaceas by creating a more playful 'potential space' for innovation (Whittle 2014). Moving out of the critic's armchair and onto the stage is research with an emancipatory interest in mind, designed to inform action rather than merely offer description or critique (Habermas 1973). Consulting practice and management fads have themselves become fashionable topics for researchers. So we might have to shake off a few of our own rational myths and maladaptive responses to anxiety about 'the status and value of academic knowledge' (Clark 2004, p. 300) in order to innovate.

> For a moment nothing happened.
> Then, after a second or so, nothing continued to happen.
> (Douglas Adams, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*)

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