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ORGANIZATIONAL LEGENDS

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Abstract

Four areas of research on the role of narratives in organizational settings are summarized: anthropological myths, sagas, organizational stories, and scripts. The commonalities and distinctions among the five theories are outlined. The components most central to narratives in organizations are integrated into a theoretical model of an "organizational legend." Research is reviewed which demonstrated that such legends serve both cognitive and attitudinal functions, causing distortions in memory, changes in beliefs, and influencing commitment to organizational policies and values. A series of testable theoretical propositions are presented. These are supplemented, in some cases, with research findings or designs. In conclusion, the methodological issues raised by the empirical study of the symbolic functions of organizational legends are discussed.
Personal stories, legends from company history and other narrative forms are pervasive phenomena in organizational settings. Top executives sprinkle their public speeches and private conversations with them. Old hands may use a story to indoctrinate new employees with a sense of "how we do things around here." Public relations officers use a company legend to legitimate the company or extol its virtues to the public. Advertisements frequently contain a mention of legendary exploits of company founders. The frequency with which such narratives are told in advertisements and by organizational members suggests that such tales may be a particularly powerful means of communication.

Scholars from very diverse disciplines have studied narratives like tribal myths, (Malinowski, 1922; Durkheim, 1962; Levi-Strauss, 1972) legendary stories or organizational sagas (Clark, 1970), and scripts that people develop about routine events. (Schank and Abelson, 1977). These scholars though often unaware of work by those outside their discipline, observe that these narratives are often associated with strong shared beliefs, they may provide an identity for a social group, they seem to be a way to communicate socially shared values, and they help people make sense of what causes what and what behaviors are appropriate in particular kinds of situations. If narratives do serve such functions, they are clearly of interest to students of organizations who want to understand shared beliefs, organizational attachment or institutionalization processes, and the processing of information in organizations.

Our interest in the structure, content and functions of narratives which are present in organizational settings reflects a recently renewed interest in a cognitive process in organizations, (Weick, 1979; Brown, 1978). Several theorists have begun to investigate the
roles played in organizational life by such symbols as rituals, metaphors and paradigms. (Pondy, 1977; Pfeffer, in press; Kuhn, 1970). The focus of this article on one type of narrative, which we call an organizational legend, is congruent with these recent efforts in organization theory.

We define an organizational legend as a narrative which:

- takes place in an organizational setting;
- concerns a single episode, or a short series of related episodes;
- includes events which are presented as if they were causally connected;
- is partially, but not necessarily exclusively, based on historical fact or personal experience;
- is shared by some group of organizational participants, who know and tell it.

Perhaps the best introduction to the concept of an organizational legend is an example. The following paraphrased version of a popular legend is told by a diverse cross-section of employees of a large electronics firm. They refer to this legend as the "Nine-Day Fortnight":

In the early 1970's, the entire electronics industry suffered a drop in orders and most companies had begun to lay people off in significant numbers. To match the decline in orders, our calculations suggested the need to cut back 10% in our output and in our salary level. However, an essential part of our company tradition is to avoid layoffs. After considerable discussion, we decided to require everyone from the president to the lowest-paid janitor to take a 10% cut in pay and to stay home every other Friday. At first we worried about whether people in the company would go along with us. There were a few critics, but most people thought it was a great idea. In fact, a good number of our employees got so used to having Friday off every other week that they were reluctant to go back to a full schedule. It took about six months to build up our orders again, but we didn't ever have to lay off our people.

This legend is told frequently during economic downturns, is told somewhat differently by people of different rank in the company, is
frequently told to newcomers and outsiders to describe what the company is like, and for most employees is one of the best illustrations of management philosophy and behavior.

We return to this example of a legend several times in this article. We explain why it has this particular content and we elaborate the cognitive and attitudinal functions it serves for the organizational members. By the end of this article, this particular legend should take on new levels of meaning.

A variety of academic disciplines have contributed research relevant to organizational legends, ranging from artificial intelligence (Schank and Abelson, 1977) to anthropology (Malinowski, 1922). Although this range of literature is relevant, reviews have been limited to one or two disciplines. One of the objectives of this article is to integrate systematically the full scope of the relevant work. This is important because considerable conceptual confusion is already evident in the literature. For example, different researchers often use the same word, such as "myth", to refer to dramatically different concepts. To further this confusion, words like "myth" and "story" have generally accepted meanings to the layperson which often bear little or no relationship to the academic use of the terms.

To eliminate some of this confusion, we present a conceptual framework. We then use that framework to discuss theory and research on four types of narratives: anthropological myths, sagas, organizational stories, and scripts. Relevant portions of the theories are then integrated into a theoretical model of the content and functions of organizational legends.
AN INTERDISCIPLINARY REVIEW OF THE CONTENT
AND FUNCTIONS OF NARRATIVES

The four areas of theory and research presented in this section were selected because each is: (a) of relevance to the types of narratives found in organizational settings; and (b) representative of a perspective shared by a number of theoreticians working in the particular area.

Since the four areas to be reviewed are quite diverse, we have found it helpful to use some conceptual dimensions on which we can compare and contrast each narrative type. The first six of these dimensions describe limitations in the content of the narratives. Such differences in content affect the functions served, our seventh dimension, by each type of narrative. The dimensions themselves provide the skeleton of an integrative theoretical model. For this reason, the dimensions are described before the separate theories are presented in detail.

1. Source of data:
The narrative types differ considerably in the type of social group studied. For example, some researchers study non-industrial tribes while others collect data in large corporations. These differences in type of social group are largely a reflection of differences in academic discipline.

2. Number of episodes per narrative:
The narratives also differ in length. Some concern a single episode, defined here as a sequence of events. Others consist of a long series of episodes, constituting all or a substantial portion of an organization's history.

3. Level of abstraction:
Most of the narratives were restricted by definition to a single level of abstraction -- the concrete description of an episode or
episodes. The one exception, script theory, elaborates several levels of abstraction of narratives, allowing the narrative to be a typical or even a hypothetical event or series of events.

4. **Presence of Symbolism:**
Most of the narratives are explicitly defined as having symbolic content. Those which are the most symbolic have a sacred, almost religious character. At the other extreme are narratives which lack symbolic content, restricted almost entirely to purely mundane subject matter.

5. **Content:**
The definitions of some types of narratives specify the content. For example, sagas focus on the unique accomplishment of an organization, while myths deal with origins or transformations of a society. This dimension often contains the elements which make a particular type of narrative easy to recognize.

6. **Basis in objective reality:**
Although all of the narratives may have some basis in fact, they vary considerably on this dimension. Some specify that a part of the narrative must depart from facts which may be objectively confirmed (e.g., myths). Others must be an accurate representation of reality to be useful (e.g., scripts).

The final dimension used to classify the narrative types concerns their function. These range from attitudinal functions, such as encouraging organizational commitment, to cognitive functions, such as facilitation of accurate recall.

We may now apply these dimensions to the four areas of investigation relevant to organizational narratives. The presentation of each area is summarized in Figure 1 using the dimensions just presented.
"Anthropological" Myth

The oldest tradition of research on narratives consists of anthropological studies of the myths and folklore of non-industrial tribes and clans (Malinowski, 1922; Levi-Strauss, 1963). Cohen (1969) defines an anthropological myth as:

... a narrative of events, the narrative has a sacred quality; the sacred communication is made in symbolic form; at least some of the events and objects which occur in the myth neither occur nor exist in the world other than that of the myth itself; and the narrative refers in dramatic form to origins or transformations. (p. 337).

The popularity of Greek and Roman mythology gives most of us some familiarity with this type of anthropological myths. Their relevance to organizational life, however, is not obvious unless the functions served by such myths are considered. Myths as studied by anthropologists seem to function to validate the rituals of a community, promote solidarity among its members, and legitimate its values both internally to its members and externally to the outside world.

This definition of the content and functions of anthropological myth is extended in the first row of Figure 1. The crucial distinguishing feature of an anthropological myth, as opposed to the other types of narratives, is its sacred and supernatural character. A second distinguishing feature is that the definition of an anthropological myth requires that some portion of the content be historically untrue. In other words, although it may be based on historical fact, some part of the anthropological myth must be pure fabrication. Also, unlike the other types of narratives, the content of anthropological myth focuses on origins and transformations. Most of the ways in which this theory

1. Meyer and Rowan (1977) have referred to "myths" in organizations. However, their reference is not to a narrative but to the discrepancy between an official image and the actual task performance of the organization. For this reason, we do not include their description of "myths" in Figure 1.
differs from the others can be attributed to the fact that the focus of study is the religious stories of non-industrial tribal societies.

In spite of these important distinctive elements, the anthropological myth has some elements in common with many of the other theories. It consists of one episode, or a relatively short sequence of related episodes, and contains few if any abstractions.

**Organizational Saga**

An organizational saga is a reconstruction of a part of the history of a contemporary institution. In particular, three small colleges have been studied, (Clark, 1970). To distinguish a saga from an ordinary history of an organization's activities, a saga is defined as a:

... unified set of publicly expressed beliefs about the formal group that (a) is rooted in history, (b) claims unique accomplishment, and (c) is held with sentiment by the group (p. 99).

Organizational sagas serve functions similar to those of anthropological myths. Sagas legitimate the organization to its members and to the public.

A summary of the saga of Swarthmore College illustrates the definition and will help us to distinguish sagas from other types of narratives:

Swarthmore was already a fairly successful small college before Frank Aydelot came. However, for Aydelotte, the "Joe College" atmosphere permeating the campus was antithetical to his vision of a quality education. The saga of Swarthmore spans a 20-year period. It presents the details of Aydelotte's patient efforts to transform the collegiate atmosphere to an academic one. He gradually removed big games with Princeton and Haverford, for example, to de-emphasize the rivalry and professionalism associated with football. After ten years, he was able to abolish,
with the students' agreement, fraternities and sororities. He instituted an Honors Program and began an "open scholars" scholarship fund to attract the academically gifted student. Eventually, forty percent of the juniors and seniors in the college participated in the Honors Program. It became a model for Honors Programs throughout the country. In a period of general movement toward the comprehensive, state-funded university, Swarthmore had become an example of the significant academic advantages possible in small colleges.

The distinguishing feature of a saga is its length. It is a long series of related episodes, covering a significant portion of the entire history of the organization. Unlike the anthropological myth, a saga is not sacred in the religious sense of the word. It is solidly grounded in historical fact, although that fact certainly may be embellished to improve the image of the organization. Like the anthropological myth, its content is both concrete and symbolic. Its content, according to Clark, is restricted to emphasis on the unique accomplishments of the organization. At first glance this content restriction appears to be quite different from the anthropological emphasis on origins and transformations. Examination of the content of each of the sagas reconstructed by Clark, however, indicates that the unique was accomplished either by the founder of the college or by a transformation of traditional college policies. In this sense, then, the content of anthropological myths and sagas is quite similar.

Organizational Story

As many organizational theoreticians have noted, one of a manager's central tasks is to communicate policy and management philosophy (Selznick, 1957). Mitroff and Kilmann (1976) also have written about what they call organizational stories. However, we have not devoted a separate row in Figure 1 to them because their focus is on Jungian personality constructs rather than on stories. The "story" is a projective exercise and we have little information about the content or functions of such projections.
One tool a manager can use for this purpose is the organizational story, which Wilkins defines as:

A coherent event or short sequence of events (1) based on organizational history; (2) associated with a claim of organizational uniqueness; and (3) believed or "shared" by a group within the organization.

Such stories show, in specific terms, how a management philosophy gets translated from rhetoric to reality.

Like anthropological myths and sagas, the primary function of organizational stories is to legitimate and generate commitment to values, in this case the policies or philosophy of an organization (Wilkins, 1978). The "Nine-day Fortnight", presented earlier, is an example of an organizational story. All the employees selected for the study by Wilkins (1978) had heard this story and could tell some version of it. When participants were asked if the story had a moral or meaning for them, the two most frequently cited morals were:

1) In this company we share together in the hard times and in the good times (the company's profit sharing program was frequently mentioned in this context).

2) This company really has a heart. The people here really care about what happens to each other.

The conclusions or morals drawn from this and other organizational stories suggest two levels of morals. Stories may operationalize organizational policies (in this case, that the company avoids layoffs). At a more abstract level, stories may also communicate values like the value of showing human concern for organizational participants.

In many ways, an organizational story is markedly similar to an organizational saga. Both are narratives found in American organizational settings. Both are concrete and symbolic, but not sacred. Both
are based on facts from organizational history and both allow for embellishment of those facts. The critical difference is in the number of episodes per case description. An organizational saga cites a long series of related episodes, consisting of a substantial portion of the organization's history. The organizational story is typically one episode, or at most a short series of related episodes.

**Cognitive Scripts**

To discuss the last theory we must move from narratives which contain the symbolic and the unique and which are public knowledge to narratives which are largely unspoken and which focus on the mundane things that happen frequently in our individual lives. A script is defined by Abelson (1976, p. 34) as "... a coherent sequence of events expected by the individual." The events are sequenced in this order because the occurrence of one event "results in conditions that enable the next to occur" (Schank and Abelson, 1977). A script is a way of conceptualizing what is known about situations "like this one."

Interest in scripts is strongest in the fields of psychology and artificial intelligence. In these fields, the types of scripts studied concern routine and mundane episodes, such as going to a dentist or a restaurant. In a restaurant script, for example, roles include cooks, waiters, and customers. Props are food, plates, and menus. Sitting, ordering, eating, and paying are events which are expected to occur in a certain sequence.

The functions of scripts are primarily cognitive. We are bombarded with a potentially overwhelming amount of information. Scripts reduce the information processing requirements made of our limited-capacity minds:

Activating a script is somewhat like a pilot putting a plane on automatic control. There is no need to monitor every incoming piece of information and no need to employ our full intellectual powers in trying to understand what is happening. We know what to expect and, unless something unexpected occurs, it is safe to place much of our intellectual attention elsewhere, to use our limited resources to understand what is novel rather than what we already know. (Martin, et. al., 1979).
Scripts permit us to make cognitive shortcuts. They permit us to fill in the gaps in our knowledge, guessing what we can't recall (Bower, et al, in press). In addition to these information-processing functions, scripts may affect our willingness to make predictions about what events will happen if a given type of episode is about to occur. The willingness to make predictions is an attitudinal more than a cognitive function because it indicates belief in the content of the script.

There are two patterns of reaction to a script, both relevant to belief. A person may participate in the script, behaving in accordance with script-consistent expectations. Or, a person may simply observe it, perhaps mentally noting that if a similar episode were to occur, he or she would know what to expect.

The usefulness of script concepts for understanding organizations can be made more clear with an example from our research which extends Schank and Abelson's ideas to the organizational setting. Martin et. al. (1979) have studied the Coast Guard's transgression and punishment script. This script has two roles, one for the new recruit, called a new SA or Seaman Apprentice, and one for the executive officer, the XO. No formal props are necessary. The script has five events which occur in sequence: (1) the new SA offers an excuse for breaking the regulation—as serious an excuse as he can find; (2) the XO refuses to accept that excuse; (3) the new SA is referred to "Mast," a court martial procedure; (4) where he is found guilty; and (5) severely punished. One purpose for the harsh treatment of recruits at boot camp seems to be to teach them this script, so that they will follow Coast Guard regulations to the letter.

Using the example above, the functions that scripts can serve in organizational contexts become obvious. If a description of an episode is conceptualized or perceived as a script, it may affect what is remembered, facilitate informa-
tion processing and problem solving, and may be used to predict how the organization and its employees will behave in the future.

Script theory also gives a model of how organizational participants generalize or learn when a series of similar episodes occurs. This model is present in the conceptualization of the level of abstraction of scripts. The narratives in the three theories discussed above all occur at a low level of abstraction. In each case, the narratives are presented in concrete episodic terms.

The lowest level of script abstraction, labelled episodic, is a concrete description of a single episode. Should several similar episodes occur, the individual may form a script at an intermediate level of abstraction, labeled categorical. At this level, several episodes would be combined into a single script which describes a typical event. This categorical script would consist of abstract statements, followed by concrete instances. For example, the last event of a categorical version of the transgression-and-punishment script might be: "The new SA gets severely punished, either with a large fine or several weeks of extra duty."

The third and highest level of script abstraction is the hypothetical. No concrete instances are included. The hypothetical script is a complex conditional causal map, consisting of general statements connected with conjunctions such as "if," "then," and "excepting."

These levels of abstraction of scripts give us a model of how people learn personally or vicariously from descriptions of past episodes from organizational history. We use narratives to generalize from how the organization has behaved in the past to predict how it will behave in the future. Thus, we move from concrete descriptions
of single episodes to hypothetical, abstract statements about sequences of expected events.

To conclude this discussion of scripts, we will briefly compare scripts to the other types of narratives. Like the anthropological myth and the organizational story, the script focuses on one episode or type of episode, or a short sequence of related episodes. Distinct from all the other theories, scripts exist in the mind of the individual, rather than the lore of a tribe or organization. The focus, therefore, is on personal or vicarious experience. To the extent they depart from objective reality, scripts are probably not useful. Although they may include concrete instances, they also allow for abstraction. The content is the mundane and the frequently-occurring, without symbolic overtones.

**The Integration of Narrative Types**

We have thus far attempted to show the similarities and differences of four theories of narratives which seem relevant to organizations. It seems particularly apparent that script theory deals with a significantly different kind of narrative and type of function than the other three. Since our desire is to develop an integration of these four theories that are relevant to organizations, we now devote some effort to examining this dichotomy.

A brief review of Figure 1 indicates the dichotomy we mention. The content of anthropological myths, sagas, and organizational stories is publicly shared by members of a society or organization. These shared narratives develop within the context of an organization community or tribe. Their development is a social process—that is, they are orally transmitted and their interpretation is negotiated. In contrast, scripts develop within the mind of an individual. The type of basis in objective reality also differs. The three shared narratives are drawn from historical
fact. In contrast, scripts are based on the personal or vicarious experience of the individual. The historical facts in a shared narrative are often embellished. The objective of a script is an accurate representation of reality. Sagas and organizational stories focus on special, unique occurrences. Scripts focus on standard operating procedures for dealing with frequently-encountered situations. The shared narratives are symbolic, while scripts deal with the mundane. Finally, the shared narratives are concrete. Scripts can be either concrete or abstract, thus allowing explicitly for the process of learning from multiple similar episodes.

The functions of anthropological myths, sagas, and organizational stories are also similar to each other and distinct from scripts. The shared narratives have the primary function of legitimating the values and/or policies of a community—both internally to its members and externally to the outside world. This legitimization is accomplished through changes in attitudes such as beliefs and commitments. No cognitive functions are discussed.

In contrast, the functions of scripts are primarily cognitive, having to do with recall and speed of information processing. The willingness to make script-consistent predictions reflects belief in the content of the script. In this sense alone, scripts have attitudinal as well as cognitive functions.

The dichotomy we have just highlighted has occurred because of disciplinary differences in focus in anthropology and sociology on the one hand and cognitive psychology and artificial intelligence on the other. This dichotomy is both unnecessary and dysfunctional if one is interested in the types of narratives which occur in organi-
zational settings. This point can be demonstrated by our example of the "Nine-day Fortnight." This narrative describes a unique event, drawing on historical fact and perhaps embellishing it. It is associated with belief in the company's policy of avoiding mass layoffs and commitment to the organization as a whole (Wilkins, 1979). Since it is told widely, it clearly serves the functions of a shared narrative.

A bit of history, however, makes the scriptal functions of the "Nine-day Fortnight" become evident. The story focuses on the first time the company employees took a cut in pay in order to avoid mass layoffs in the early 1970's. When the company was faced with a similar drop in orders in 1974, the company returned to a nine-day fortnight arrangement. More recently, in the Far East, a company plan experienced an unexpected and sharp drop in orders. The response of the plant was to follow the sequence of events described in the "Nine-day Fortnight."

The "Nine-day Fortnight" is a script as well as a story. As a script, it gives employees a causally-connected sequence of events to expect in a particular kind of situation. It presents the company's "no mass layoffs" policy in a memorable way. It is remembered because it has implications for the future. It helps employees predict how the organization will behave should a similar situation occur in the future. It also provides a ready solution for the decision maker.

The discussion of this example demonstrates that we need a definition of an organizational narrative that avoids the dichotomy discussed above. It should include both attitudinal and cognitive functions and should integrate characteristics of shared narratives with those of scripts.
We have entitled our integrative concept for organizational narratives "organizational legend." After a brief definition of this concept, we will specify the dimensions along which organizational legends may vary.

**Definition of Organizational Legends**

We have shown that myths differ from the other types of narratives in their basis in objective reality. We have seen that scripts are likely to be less embellished than the other types. For a concept that would utilize insights from all four narrative types, we wanted a label that would leave open the possibility that the description could be false or exaggerated propaganda. The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (1973, p. 1196) defines a legend as both "a history, story, or account" and as "an unauthentic story handed down by tradition and popularly regarded as historical." This leaves the issue of veracity unresolved, as in "a gloryous legende of goode women," (Chaucer, The Golden Legend). For this reason we chose the label "organizational legend."

The five elements we use to define the content of an organizational legend are listed at the beginning of this article. First, the narrative occurs in an organizational setting. Second, like scripts, anthropological myths and organizational stories, an organizational legend concerns a single episode or a short series of related episodes. Unlike a saga, an organizational legend does not include a long series of episodes constituting a substantial portion of an organization's history. Third, the sequence of events in an organizational legend is presented as if the events were causally related, that is, as if the narrative were
a script. Fourth, like all the types of narratives discussed, an organizational legend is partially, but not necessarily exclusively, based on historical fact or personal experiences. Finally, an organizational legend, like the three types of shared case descriptions and unlike a script, is shared by some group of organizational participants who know it and tell it. The basic elements of this definition are included in the last row of Figure 1.

**Dimensions on which Organizational Legends Vary**

Organizational legends, as defined, may vary along four dimensions of theoretical interest to researchers:

1. **Truthfulness.** An organizational legend may be wholly true or partially false. Although it must be based in part on historical fact, its objective, unlike that of a script, is not an accurate representation of objective reality. In addition, the nature of departures from reality are not specified.

2. **Favorability.** The legend may either be favorable or unfavorable to the organization. Theories about shared narratives focus on the way these narratives tend to present the social group in a favorable light, while our concept of legend leaves open the possibility of negative legends, unfavorable to the organization.

3. **Restrictions in Content.** Whereas the content of shared narratives is restricted to the unique, origins, or transformations, etc., an organizational legend may, but does not have to, focus on such content.

4. **Level of Abstraction.** Like a script, an organizational legend can be stated at varying levels of abstraction, ranging from a concrete
description of a single episode to an abstract statement fitting the form of a hypothetical script, that is, consisting of a causally connected set of conditional statements.

5. **Extent of Sharing.** The legend may be shared by many or few people in the organization. It may be shared by a homogeneous group in one part of the organization or by a diverse group consisting, for example, of participants of high and low rank, long and short tenure, and of different divisions.

**The Functions of Organizational Legends**

We now consider in some detail the functions which can be attributed to our concept of organizational legends as a prelude to presenting testable propositions linking functions and the dimensions along which organizational legends vary.

Little, if any, research focuses on organizational legends as defined above. There is, however, some research that is relevant enough to be used to generate propositions concerning the functions of organizational legends. We have organized our review of these results according to the types of dependent measures used: research relevant to attitudinal functions only, research on cognitive functions, and research which studies both types of functions simultaneously.

**Attitudinal functions.** The research which is relevant only to attitudinal functions of organizational legends has been conducted by anthropologists and organizational researchers. The results have been discussed above in the context of Figure 1. To summarize briefly, anthropological myths have been shown to be associated with belief in and commitment to the religious values of a tribal society (Cohen, 1969; Malinowski, 1922; Durkheim, 1961). Similar functions are served by sagas in organizational contexts (Clark, 1970).
Unfortunately, this research is correlational and does not include any comparison data. Therefore, we cannot conclude that the sagas and myths caused the commitment. In addition, we do not know if sagas and myths are more effective than other methods of generating commitment or communicating values.

Research on organizational stories yields similar findings while avoiding some of the problems associated with the research on anthropological myths and sagas. Wilkins (1978) collected stories in two organizations: one where employees were highly committed and one where they were not. In the organization with the more highly committed participants, stories were told more frequently and were more favorable to the organization. Commitment was associated with the telling of stories which attempted to legitimate the organization's management philosophy or to claim something unique about the organization. Although this research does provide data from a comparison group, the evidence is correlational. We cannot conclude on the basis of these data that stories are more effective than other means of engendering commitment. We also cannot conclude that stories cause commitment. It may be that the relationship is spurious or that commitment causes story-telling.

Cognitive functions. That research which is relevant to only the cognitive functions of organizational legends is experimental. Therefore, it avoids the problems noted above concerning the lack of comparison data and the limits of correlational data. This cognitive research, however, has the limitations associated with artificial laboratory settings. In spite of this problem, however, the findings are suggestive.

There are two types of relevant cognitive research, depending on the type of independent variable used. In the first type, a script or schema
is activated in the subjects' minds. The effects on different kinds of
cognitive functioning are studied, such as accuracy of recall or recog-
nition, speed of information processing and problem solving, etc. In general,
this type of research has found that the presence of a script or schema facil-
itates cognitive functioning (e.g., Bower, et al.,
in press; Hamilton, in press), although a few contradictory findings have
also been reported (c.f., Taylor and Crocker, in press).

The second type of relevant cognitive research uses a different
independent variable that is not typically a narrative. The findings
are suggestive, however, because a case example (N=1) is compared with
baseline information, usually in the form of statistics concerning
how a majority of people react to a given situation. The statistical
information should have greater utility, because it is based on multiple
observations rather than a single instance. When subjects make proba-
bility judgments, however, they over-utilize the case example information
(Kahneman and Tversky, 1978; Tversky and Kahneman, 1977). Recent
research has begun to investigate the boundary conditions of this ten-
dency to over-utilize case example information, (Ajzen, 1977; Feldman et

Findings in two areas of cognitive research have been summarized.
The results in both areas are consistent. Case example information is
over-utilized, when subjects perform cognitive tasks. These findings
suggest the proposition that organizational legends have cognitive functions,
facilitating recall, recognition, and the prediction of events consistent
with the content of the legend.

Attitudinal and cognitive functions. A few researchers have investigated
both attitudinal and cognitive functions of narratives. As in the purely
cognitive research, these studies are experimental, so control groups are
present and causal conclusions can be drawn. Some of these experiments minimize the problems of artificiality associated with the purely cognitive research.

These studies use independent variables similar to those in the baseline studies cited above. In one type of study, the effects of consensus information, based on a large number of observations, was contrasted with the effects of observations by a single individual. The single observation had strong effects on recall, on predictions about one’s own behavior and that of other people, and on more direct measures of attitudinal commitment (Borgida and Nisbett, 1975; McArthur, 1974; McArthur, 1976; Nisbett and Borgida, 1975; Nisbett et al., 1976).

In each of these studies the consensus information was under-utilized. This research suggests implications concerning the impact of organizational legends because a legend is similar to information about a single individual in that it concerns a single episode or type of episode. If a manager wanted to gain acceptance of (or belief in) a policy among his or her employees, this could be done by simply stating the policy, perhaps in terms of a corporate objective. Alternatively, the policy statement could be supported with an organizational legend. Another alternative is to support the policy statement with statistical information about the frequency with which the organization has adhered to the policy. This is comparable to the consensus information in the studies described above. A fourth alternative would be to use both statistical information and a legend to support the policy.

We predicted that the policy statement would have the strongest impact on both attitudes (e.g. commitment and belief) and cognitions (e.g. recall and prediction) when it was supported by only the organizational legend.
The second strongest effect, we predicted, would be found when both the statistical information and the legend were used as supporting information. Statistics alone were predicted to have a weaker effect, stronger only than the effects of a policy statement without additional supporting information. The results confirmed our expectations. This pattern of results is consistent with the research on consensus information, although the predicted reliance on the organizational legend, as opposed to statistical information, was stronger than that found in previous research.

Our prediction was tested in two experiments. In the first experiment, (Martin and Powers, 1979), subjects were asked to read and answer a number of questions about an advertisement for a California winery's dry white wine. All subjects read the same policy statement in the text of the advertisement: that the winery, unlike most other California wineries, attempted to duplicate the expensive and quality-enhancing wine-making procedures used in the Chablis region of France and, therefore, their California wine had the excellent taste of French Chablis wine.

Subjects were randomly assigned to one of four conditions. Subjects in the control condition received only the policy statement described above. Subjects in the remaining three conditions received, in addition to the conclusions, supporting information concerning the frequency with which certain wine-making procedures were used by the California winery sponsoring the advertisement, by wineries in Chablis, and by other California wineries. In the organizational legend condition, this information was presented in a story about the wine-making procedures used by the founder of the winery. In the statistics condition, this same information was presented using numbers presented in tabular form. Subjects in the third statistics-plus legend condition received the information in both formats.
There were measures of both attitudinal and cognitive effects in the study. The attitudinal measures concerned subjects' beliefs about the policy statement. The predicted pattern of results was found. When the policy statement was supported only by the organizational legend, the subjects were least likely to doubt the truthfulness of the policy statement, most likely to believe its assertions about the particular wine-making procedures used, and most likely to believe that an expert wine taster would judge the California wine to taste like a French chablis.

The cognitive dependent measures also showed the predicted pattern of results. Subjects were given a multiple choice recognition test concerning phrases from the policy statement they had all read. There were three options on each item of the test: one accurate version of the phrase, a distorted version favorable to the winery, and a distorted version unfavorable to the winery. Subjects exposed only to the organizational legend as supporting evidence for the policy were most likely to recognize the favorably distorted phrases as coming from the policy statement. In contrast, subjects receiving only the statistical information were most likely to recognize the accurate phrases. Thus, the legend had both attitudinal effects, making the policy statement more believable, and cognitive effects, causing distortion in memory, so that the policy statement seemed even more favorable to the organization.

The results of this first experiment were encouraging. A second experiment was conducted to test the same relationships using a different type of organizational policy (Martin and Powers, 1979). MBA subjects were given a policy statement from a corporate officer. The policy statement was an assertion that the company would order all employees to take a 10% cut in pay, rather than permit mass layoffs to occur. This policy statement was then supported by, in one experimental condition, a version
of the "Nine-day Fortnight" organizational legend. In a second condition, statistical information supported the policy statement. That statistical information concerned the frequency with which pay cuts and layoffs had occurred in the past. The third condition included both the legend and the statistics as supporting evidence. The control condition, as in study one, received only the policy statement.

The predictions and method of analysis were the same in experiment two as in experiment one. The findings were also similar. The organizational legend generated the most belief in and endorsement of the policy.

These two experiments provide strong evidence that organizational legends may serve both attitudinal and cognitive functions, generating belief in organizational policies and causing memory distortions favorable to the organization.

**Typology of Functions of Organizational Legends**

This research suggests a series of propositions concerning the functions served by organizational legends. Those propositions are presented below, beginning with behavioral measures of commitment, followed by attitudinal measures of belief and commitment, and concluding with cognitive effects. Organizational legends which are favorable to an organization:

1. Generate behavioral commitment to the policies and management philosophy as stated in the legend. For example, behavioral commitment could be indicated by frequency of employees making decisions consistent with the policy, willingness to defend the policy publicly, or time elapsed until new employees informally are told about the policy.
2. Increase behavioral commitment to the organization as a whole. These effects should be weaker than the policy-specific behavioral commitments, because many factors impact this type of commitment. However, in organizations where legends are frequently told, we would expect lower turnover, absenteeism, sabotage, and vandalism, as well as higher productivity.

3. Facilitate attitudinal commitment to the policy itself. Participants in organizations where legends are frequently told will endorse organizational policies as beneficial for organizational employees in general, as well as for themselves personally.

4. Increase attitudinal commitment to the organization as a whole, as indicated by subjective measures of morale, either administered in questionnaire format or observed in the interactions among employees. Again these effects should be weaker than policy-specific indications of attitudinal commitment, as overall commitment is affected by many factors other than a specific policy or aspect of management philosophy.

5. Encourage belief in the truthfulness of the policy. This is different from attitudinal commitment, because one may feel committed personally to a policy and yet not believe the organization adheres to it. Or, one may believe the policy is true, but not feel committed to it. In addition, there are many relevant aspects of belief:

in the content of the policy, in the reasons given for the adoption of the policy, in the accuracy of the policy as a description of past organizational behavior, or in the promise implied above, that the policy is a description of likely future organizational behavior. (The "Nine-day Fortnight" legend illustrates the importance of these latter distinctions. One may believe that the legend is true, in that its content accurately represents historical fact. At the same time, however, one could believe that the promise is false, in that the company will not avoid mass layoffs in the future. On the other hand, one could believe the promise that layoffs would be avoided, but attribute this to good financial reasoning rather than the humanitarian explanation usually given.)

6. Increase willingness to predict that the organization will behave in the future as, according to the legend, it did in the past. The organization's behavior could be directed at employees in general, a specific employee, or the subject, if she or he were employed at the relevant organization.

7. Cause distortions in recall and recognition which are favorable to the organization.
An organizational legend, as defined, can be unfavorable to the organization, perhaps providing evidence that a humanistic policy statement is false propaganda. In this case, we hypothesize that the opposite pattern of effects could occur, with the organizational legend causing sharp decreases in behavioral and attitudinal commitment, an unwillingness to predict that the organization would adhere to the policy in the future, and distortions in memory unfavorable to the organization.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

The propositions outlined above concern the functions of organizational legends. If these propositions are supported by empirical research, organizational legends will be shown to have a strong impact on what people remember and become committed to. Organizational legends, however, will have differing levels of impact on these attitudes and cognitions. It is easy to imagine an organizational legend that would be forgotten because it was boring or dismissed as false propaganda. This raises an interesting question: What types of organization legends will be most memorable, most believable, and/or most likely to generate commitment to organizational policies and values? What types of legends will be dismissed as false propaganda? The answer to these questions would be useful to managers who want to maximize the impact of an organizational legend. It would also be helpful to an employee or a consumer who wants to distinguish between true and false organizational propaganda.

Our answers to these questions follow in the form of propositions.

We will also attempt to answer a second question: What are the limits of the proposed functions of organizational legends? What are the boundary conditions of the ideas discussed above? Again, we will suggest several propositions.
How Can the Impact of Organizational Legends be Increased?

There are at least four ways the impact of an organizational legend can be changed. First, we may vary the properties of the legend itself. Second, we may vary who initiated the legends. Third, we may vary the way the legend is transmitted. Finally, we may vary the characteristics of the person who hears or reads the legend. We present below, several propositions concerning each of these four methods of increasing the impact of an organizational legend. Each proposition will refer to the cognitive and attitudinal functions of organizational legends described above.

Varying the Properties of the Organizational Legend

Level of abstraction. We have noted that the definition of an organizational legend does not specify the level of abstraction of a legend, its thoughtfulness, or its content. This suggests propositions concerning ways variations in the properties of an organizational legend might increase its impact.

Proposition 1: A more concrete organizational legend will have a stronger impact on attitudes and cognition than a more abstract legend.

This is the only proposition to be presented which has already been supported by previous research focused on organizational legends per se. Martin, Patterson, and Price (1979) varied the level of abstraction of an organizational legend. The least abstract legend was a concrete description of a single episode. The more abstract legends concerned more episodes, contained fewer concrete details, and contained more abstract words. The least abstract legend was recalled the most accurately and showed a marginally significant tendency to be more believable.

Research on organizational stories has found similar results. In his two-organization design, Wilkins (1978) found that in the organization
where participants were more committed, participants told more concrete stories about the company. Cognition seemed to be affected as well. Wilkins reports a significant correlation (.41) between the perceived clarity of management policy and the number of concrete stories a person told which were associated with management policy. A greater proportion of the interviews with participants in the organization with low commitment and low perceived clarity of management policy was at the abstract rather than the concrete, episodic level.

These results are congruent with cognitive research. Concrete words, sentences, and paragraphs of "connected discourse" were recalled more accurately than more abstract words, sentences, and paragraphs (Paivio, 1969; Beggs and Paivio, 1969; Homes and Langford, 1976, Yuille and Paivio, 1969). Bower, Thompson, and Reyes (1979) supported eyewitness testimony in a trial simulation with either concrete or abstract irrelevant details. When the details were concrete, the eyewitness testimony was recalled somewhat more accurately and it had a stronger influence on judgements of guilt. The results have been attributed to the ease with which concrete words can be associated with visual images.

Claim of uniqueness - contrast. An important way that legends (or other forms of concrete episodes) communicate is through the use of contrast or oppositions. Levi-Strauss (1963) claims that the principle function of myths is that they present strong oppositions and then mediate them in some way. Opposition or contrast is portrayed in the 9-day fortnight story, for example, by comparing the focal company with the rest of the electronics companies to show how unique it was for the company to try to avoid layoffs. Indeed, as shown by their example, the claim of uniqueness in storytelling which Clark (1970) and Wilkins (1978) have shown to be
correlated with professed organizational commitment is founded on just such a contrast. The contrast builds tension and thus captures attention. It also provides a way to claim uniqueness. This line of reasoning suggests the following propositions:

**Proposition 2:** The stronger the contrast or claim of uniqueness in a legend, the more memorable the legend.

**Proposition 2a:** The stronger the contrast or claim of uniqueness in the legend, the less believable the legend (because the claim appears exaggerated).

**Varying the Source of Organizational Legend**

There is considerable evidence that varying the source of a communication, for example, the prestige of the communicator, can increase the impact of that communication on attitudes (e.g., Greenwald; Zimbardo et. al., 1979). This suggests the following propositions:

**Proposition 3:** An organizational legend that is based on personal experience will have a stronger impact on attitudes and cognitions than legends that are told by people who observed the episode(s) that are the focus of the legend. Organizational legends that are heresy fabrication will have the least impact.

**Proposition 4:** When the source of the organizational legend is more credible, the legend will have a greater impact on attitudes and cognitions.

**Varying The Process of Transmitting the Organizational Legend**

An important consideration for research and application of theories about organizational legends is the extent to which the accuracy or content of legends is affected by the way it is transmitted. From Bartlett's (1932) classic memory research we might draw a proposition and a corollary:
Proposition 5: When a favorable organizational legend is serially repeated (that is, transmitted from one person to another), it will become simplified, in terms of accuracy of recall, and distorted in a direction favorable to the organization, thus indicating belief and commitment. A negative legend will also become simplified, but the distortion will be negative.

A corollary of proposition 5 is that the larger the number of people transmitting an organizational legend, then more simplification and distortion should occur.

Public Commitment. Both Clark (1970) and Wilkins (1978) have observed that the effective transmission of an organizational saga or story is not likely to be accomplished by a PR department and tabloid. There is enough apparent external justification for a PR department to say favorable things about the organization that it is much more likely that the transmission of the legends will have greater impact if it is transmitted through more informal means.

Not only do those who tell the legend under such conditions perceive that they are acting from their own volition, but the legend hearers are also more likely to perceive this lack of external justification. The result is that both the teller and hearer should develop greater belief and commitment. Wilkins (1978) found, for example, that in the organization with higher commitment more of the legends were communicated informally than in the other company.

Proposition 6: Memory of, belief in, and favorable attitudes about an organizational legend should be greater if a person has made the public commitment of telling the legend to someone else.

This proposition is congruent with the research on the effect of public commitment on attitude change, (c.f., Salancik, 1977; Zimbardo, et.al., 1977). Indeed, most of the attitude change literature can be used to generate propositions about ways to increase the impact of organizational legends.
Varying the Characteristics of the Audience of the Legend

Bower, et.al., (in press) have shown that what people remember from the same simple narrative about a parade depends on whether they are asked to assume the position of one who is: 1) standing on a balcony; 2) standing near the parade on the road; or 3) marching in the parade. People who assumed they were standing on the balcony, for example, remembered more about the overall structure of the parade, while those who assumed they were marching in the parade tended to remember more details about the hair color of marchers, the smells, etc. In this regard, organizational legends are subject to the projections and selective perceptions of legend hearers.

For example, Wilkins (1978) found not only that certain groups of people tended to remember and feel "ownership" of some stories more than of others but the same stories were interpreted somewhat differently by different groups. Almost everyone who told the "Nine-day Fortnight" story thought that it illustrated the company policy to avoid layoffs. However, those of low rank typically believed that the legend means they won't ever have to worry about being laid off. The higher rank people, on the other hand, will often emphasize that the company has had some layoffs, but this is a last alternative. Further, they say the company does fire people and the story is not to be taken as license for laziness. This protest may come in partial response to the interpretation drawn by a smaller group of people, typically of short tenure, who say, in the words of one, that "you have to be a nerd to get fired from this company, I mean you really have to be out to lunch."

This line of argument suggests that one could predict that different legends would be remembered and that the same legends might be differently interpreted by different groups in the organization depending
on their value orientations and the requirements of their tasks (Mitroff and Kilmann, 1976; Wilkins, 1978). It is important to recognize, then, that perhaps one of the reasons a broadly shared legend can serve as a sort of soft social glue to promote organizational solidarity is that it at once promotes a particular interpretation of history and scriptal models for behavior, on the one hand, and provides the opportunity for individually meaningful projections of meaning on the other.

Proposition 7: Organizational legends which are congruent with the values of the audience should be more memorable and believable.

Aspiration ideals. Wilkins (1978) found in the high commitment organization a negative correlation between how well the story teller knew the actors of the stories he/she told and the perceived favorability to the organization of the story (the less well known the actors the more favorable reflection on the company). There was no such relationship in the low commitment company. There are many possible conclusions which might be drawn from this result. However, one might speculate that in the high commitment company, the actors were seen as similar to the teller's "aspiration ideal." It seems realistic that it would be easier for participants to idealize people they don't know well. As Christ said it "a prophet is not without honor save in his own country." We might assert, then, that as a corollary to proposition 7:

Proposition 8: The more the actors in a legend are 1) similar to the aspiration ideal of the audience and yet 2) personally distant from them, the greater the impact the organizational legend should have on attitudes and cognitions of the audience.

What are the limits of the proposed functions?

We have thus far treated the proposed relationships between the structure or content of organizational legends and certain functions as
though they were intrinsic. However, it is possible that narratives are just one of a number of possible phenomena to which may be attributed certain meanings. The relationships which we propose between the structure and functions of narratives may derive from prior social conditions, rather than from some intrinsic properties of concrete episodes. For example, one might argue that narratives have a strong impact on attitudes and cognitions primarily in societies which focus attention on action or control over events. In other cultures (e.g., India), a more passive view of one's role in nature might lead to the functions of belief, commitment, and recall being associated with other more abstract, hypothetical phenomena or with more abstract narratives.

There are at least three different assumptions one could make about the reasons for the relationships between the properties and functions of narratives. First, there may be something intrinsic in the way human beings think and perceive that makes narratives with certain properties have particular effects on cognitions and attitudes. Second, it may be that this intrinsic functionality is mediated by varying social conditions. Finally, it is possible that there is no intrinsic functionality. Instead, shared assumptions learned in particular social conditions may make concrete narratives appealing as a mechanism for accomplishing these particular functions.

There is little question in our minds that some kind of relationship exists between types of narratives and certain functions. The functions of types of narratives have been postulated by researchers from a variety of academic disciplines, using differing theoretical models, empirical methods, and working in a wide range of cultures and time periods. Our approach is to assume that these functional relationships in many cases
have the status of testable propositions. Our approach is based on the assumption that the first task is to refine and integrate these observations. The task of bounding these relationships is worthwhile, though not necessarily a prior task to the testing of these functional relationships.

We have, however, tried to take into account in previous research alternative hypotheses based on the argument that the functional relationships we propose might be mediated or entirely produced by prior social conditions. For example, in some experimental research reported earlier contrasting an organizational legend with statistics as alternative means of communicating management philosophy, one of us and another colleague (Martin and Powers, 1979b) tested the idea that statistics would be a more influential means of communication than organizational legends among MBA students with very good quantitative skills. The argument for this alternative proposition is that statistical data is an information source which, if understood, is more powerful in proving a point than an organizational legend. The legend has its impact relative to statistics, according to this argument, because it is a form of communication which is more widely shared. The test of this alternative proposition showed no significant difference between those with and those without strong quantitative skills in terms of the over-utilization of information in the legend. Of course, there are many other possible social conditions which could be investigated in this case. For example, if MBA students are more oriented toward actions than analysis as seems to be true for business executives (Mintzberg, 1974; Harrell and Harrell, 1974), then perhaps the legend is inherently more informative than statistical information.

Another way to bound the relationships we have proposed, given the argument about prior social conditions, would be to conduct cross-cultural
and comparative organizational studies. One effort might be to find non-legend telling societies or organizations that have and don't have the functions we have mentioned (solidarity, commitment, shared beliefs, etc.). One could then seek to isolate the elements associated with these functions to determine whether there are other phenomena besides narratives which perform the functions of interest.

SUMMARY

We have attempted to eliminate some conceptual confusion which has resulted from the fact that theoreticians use the same word ("myth" or "story") to describe very different concepts through a review of several research areas. The concept of organizational legends has provided us with a way to integrate theory and research from these disparate fields of inquiry in a way which is relevant to understanding shared narratives in organizational settings. Perhaps the most important contribution of the concept of organizational legends is the joining of concepts about myths, sagas, and organizational stories with concepts about scripts. This conceptual linking of quite different traditions suggests a variety of research methods and settings. The implication for us is that one can (and should) move back and forth between the richness of field settings using anthropological or survey investigation methods and the rigor and control of experimental settings. The result for us is an invitation to interdisciplinary and highly interesting research.

In the course of this paper we have made an effort to restrict ourselves to testable propositions. We did this because we are interested in addressing a meta-level issue. Currently in the organizational behavior field there seems to be a clash between two opposing points
of view. The first point of view emphasizes the objective nature of reality and prefers supporting theory with empirical data. The second point of view emphasizes the social construction of reality (Berger and Luckman, 1967, see also Burrell and Morgan, 1979, for a discussion of this issue). Although there are some exceptions, this second position is associated with phenomenology, ethnographic methods, and discursive "think pieces," full of interesting ideas and often short of empirical support. We agree with Pfeffer (in press) that these differences represent a false, that is, unnecessary and undesirable, dichotomy. We believe that "think pieces" and ethnographic methods are very useful for theory generation while empirical tests of theory are crucial if we are to progress in our fields of inquiry. In short, we believe that socially constructed reality, such as that which is represented in an organizational legend, can be fruitfully studied using empirical methods.

We are not asserting that it is necessary to couple—even loosely—every concept with a number. We do, however, assert that it is important to have control or comparison data. We believe that the sample selection criteria should be shared, so that the characteristics and biases of the sample are known. We do believe that a researcher's methodology should be described in specific enough terms to be replicable. In addition, it should be clear that research results represent the reactions of study participants rather than the researcher.

The quest to avoid boring or trivial ideas is admirable. We want to examine social constructions of reality, such as organizational legends and the symbolic functions of management. This, however, does not preclude the empirical study of such ideas.
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### Types of Narratives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Narratives</th>
<th>Most Often Studied</th>
<th>Number of Episodes/Narrative</th>
<th>Level of Abstraction</th>
<th>Presence of Symbolism</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Role in Reality</th>
<th>Public or Private Information</th>
<th>Functions of Narratives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Myth</td>
<td>Tribes</td>
<td>One episode or a short series of related episodes.</td>
<td>Concrete</td>
<td>Symbolic and sacred, perhaps metaphorical.</td>
<td>Origins or transformation.</td>
<td>Possibly based on facts from historical and pre-historical times. At least some part has to be fabricated and not based on historical fact.</td>
<td>Public Information</td>
<td>Legitimize the religious beliefs, values and tribal ceremonies to the tribal members and to the external environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sage (Clark)</td>
<td>Small Colleges</td>
<td>A long series of related episodes representing a significant portion of the organization's history.</td>
<td>Concrete</td>
<td>Symbolic but not sacred.</td>
<td>Unique accomplishment of organization.</td>
<td>Facts from organizational history. Often embellished.</td>
<td>Information shared by group to college</td>
<td>Legitimize the values, and articulate the accomplishments of the organization to employees, past and future students, and the public.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story (Wittgenstein)</td>
<td>Organizations</td>
<td>One episode or a short series of related episodes.</td>
<td>Concrete</td>
<td>Symbolic but not sacred. Sometimes mundane.</td>
<td>Unique accomplishment, policies, transformation, policy, individual worth.</td>
<td>Facts from organizational history. Often embellished.</td>
<td>Information shared by at least small group of people</td>
<td>Legitimize the policies, rituals and management philosophy of the organization to its employees and to the external environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Script (Abelson)</td>
<td>Individuals</td>
<td>One or more (similar) episodes.</td>
<td>Varies from most concrete episodes (frequently encountered, routine event sequences) to highly abstract (hypothetical).</td>
<td>Mandane (frequently encountered, routine event sequences) to high abstraction (hypothetical).</td>
<td>Standardized behavioral routines, for causally connected event sequences. Not unique.</td>
<td>Facts from personal or vicarious experience. Must be accurate to be useful.</td>
<td>Often private knowledge</td>
<td>Recalled easily. Used to classify incoming information, guess missing information, speed up processing and problem solving, increase willingness to make script-consistent predictions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legend (Cohen)</td>
<td>Organizations</td>
<td>One episode or a short series of related episodes.</td>
<td>May be episodic, categorical, or hypothetical.</td>
<td>Symbolic but not sacred. Sometimes mundane.</td>
<td>Unique accomplishment, policies, transformation, policy, individual worth.</td>
<td>Based on historical fact or personal experience but may be embellished. Presented as though events were causally connected.</td>
<td>Shared by some group of organizational participants</td>
<td>Legitimize the policies, rituals and management philosophy of the organization to its employees and to the external environment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1: The Content and Functions of Different Types of Narratives**