MEETING ROOMS AND CORRIDORS: HOW DIFFERENT NARRATIVES CONSTITUTE ORGANIZATIONS

A Thesis
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts
in Communication, Culture, and Technology

By

Sofia Yuri Sunaga, B.A.

Washington, DC
April 24, 2012
MEETING ROOMS AND CORRIDORS: HOW DIFFERENT NARRATIVES CONSTITUTE ORGANIZATIONS

Sofia Yuri Sunaga, B.A.

Thesis Advisor: Jeanine Turner, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

In this work I propose the use of two different theoretical lenses to analyze the discussions around the communicative constitution of organizations (CCO): Fisher's narrative paradigm (1987) and a systems view of communication. With the support of these two perspectives, I investigate the location and relevance of different micro exchanges taking place within an organization, the Inter-American Development Bank. More specifically, I examine how the differences and similarities between official and informal conversations influence the constitution of organizations themselves. I conclude that under specific conditions informal communication is more accurately perceived when considered as a strategic space and a channel required for the survival of organizations. In this regard, informal conversations within the CCO perspective become much more than an unidentified and perhaps irrelevant aspect of organizations, but rather a necessary condition for the communicative constitution of organizations.
The research and writing of this thesis is dedicated to everyone who helped along the way.

I would specially like to thank my colleagues at the Inter-American Development Bank for all their support and encouragement during the research process.

Also, I am forever grateful for the excitement, motivation, and support provided by my thesis advisor, Professor Jeanine Turner, and my reader, Professor Linda Garcia.

Many thanks,

Sofia Yuri Sunaga
# Table of Contents

Introduction ..............................................................................................................1

Chapter 1: Literature Review ...................................................................................4  
  The communicative constitution of organizations .............................................. 5  
  The relevance of informal conversations in the literature ................................. 8  
  Informal conversations within the four flows................................................... 10 
  A Narrative view of the world........................................................................... 13 
  A systemic view of the world............................................................................ 17 

Chapter 2: Concepts and Framework ...................................................................22 
  Working definitions........................................................................................... 23 
  Framework Element 1: A Narrative Model....................................................... 29 
    Narrative Structure ........................................................................................ 29 
    Narrative logic ............................................................................................... 33 
    Narrative Perception ...................................................................................... 34 
  Framework Element 2: A Systemic Narrative Model ....................................... 37 
  The Complete Framework: Nested Narrative Systems ..................................... 42 
    Narrative context ........................................................................................... 46 

Chapter 3: The Inter-American Development Bank ..............................................50 
  The Human Capital Strategy ............................................................................. 53 
  Internal communication..................................................................................... 57 
  My role as a consultant in the Bank .................................................................. 58 

Chapter 4: Method .................................................................................................60
Finding exploration themes ................................................................. 62
Interviews: a semi-structure ................................................................. 69
Interview Process .............................................................................. 72
Contextualizing corridor perspectives ................................................. 75
Chapter 5: Analysis ............................................................................ 78
Extracting formal and informal narratives from data ......................... 78
  Official narrative structure ............................................................... 79
  Corridor narrative structure ............................................................ 82
Comparing official and informal narrative structures ....................... 91
Incoherent narrative structures: opportunity for variance ................. 95
Chapter 6: Conclusion .................................................................... 100
  Limitations, improvements and new directions ............................... 103
References .................................................................................... 106
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Perspectives adopted in the research ........................................................ 4
Figure 2 The four communication flows ................................................................ 6
Figure 3 Micro to macro perspectives .................................................................. 22
Figure 4 The signifying ensemble................................................................. 24
Figure 5 Robichaud's view of Greimas' narrative structure ......................... 31
Figure 6 Narrative structure adopted for this research......................... 32
Figure 7 Narrative perception ............................................................................. 36
Figure 8 Individuals within the four flows .................................................. 39
Figure 9 An Organization's systemic boundaries ........................................ 41
Figure 10 Narrative perception (figure 7 repeated) ..................................... 42
Figure 11 Two individuals and their narrative structures .......................... 43
Figure 12 Section of membership negotiation flow........................................ 43
Figure 13 Membership negotiation sub-systems ........................................... 44
Figure 14 View of complete framework (figure 9 repeated) .................... 45
Figure 15 Research method overview.............................................................. 61
Figure 16 From the line-by-line coding to the interview questions........... 72
Figure 17 Social network map of interviewees and referrals ..................... 75
Figure 18 Network view considering gender and contract type ............... 77
Figure 19 Official narrative structure found ..................................................... 79
Figure 20 “Observer” narrative structure ...................................................... 86
Figure 21 “Participant” narrative structure ..................................................... 88
Figure 22 "Variant" narrative structure................................................................. 95
Figure 23 SNA view of interviewees: contract, gender and narrative structure... 96

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Example of themes extracted from line-by-line coding....................... 63
Table 2 Comparison between formal strategy structure and themes found........ 67
Table 3 Placing strategy themes under “actants”................................................. 80
Table 4 Grouping of subjects by perception of organizational changes............ 82
Table 5 Position of subjects within perceived change groups......................... 84
Table 6 “Observers” actant table ................................................................. 86
Table 7 “Participants” actant table................................................................. 88
INTRODUCTION

For all other creatures, communicatively,

Whatever is, works.

For man, communicatively

Whatever works, is. (Thayer, 1972, p.107)

Thayer employed the above aphorism in his explication of the peculiarities of human communication within the context of human communication systems. Referring to the difficulties of connecting the field of communication to that of systems science, this author reminds us of the difficulties we often find in conceptually defining terms that are frequently used and, thus, have their meaning taken for granted. In the case of communication, Thayer states that “this has long impeded substantial development of theory in human communication. Everyone 'knows' what communication is. We all do it, and more and more of us can talk casually about it” (Thayer, 1972, p.96).

In order to contribute both to the academic discussions around the topic of communication and also to the everyday understanding each of us has of the act of communicating, I will analyze in this work a particular kind of communication with which most of us are very familiar: “corridor” conversations that happen within organizations. More specifically, in this thesis I will investigate the extent to which the relationship between corridor and official communication may help us understand how communication constitutes organizations.
In order to answer this research question, I will adopt different perspectives to inform my exploration, one of which is systems science. According to the view of system scientists “to understand the specific systemic qualities and behaviour on a certain level, it is necessary to study the levels above and below the chosen level” (Skyttner, 2005, p.55). Thus, accepting this systemic requirement, I will analyze three different levels related to my research question: the micro-level of official and informal conversations, the meso-level of the merging of these conversations into communicative flows, and the macro-level of the configuration of the organization itself.

Adopting different perspectives to inform each of these levels of analysis, I will propose a framework connecting the micro corridor talks to the macro organizational view, the informal narratives to the systemic and evolving nature of human communication systems, of which the organization is but one example. The reader will find that, underlying the entire proposal of this work there are some overarching statements regarding the intrinsic connections among communication, change and organizations; the nature of human perception; and the idea of the systemic view we as a species are in urgent need to practice.

Hence, while advancing my research, I also propose ideas that are not limited to organizational contexts but speak to the daily communication and interactions we engage in at different settings and moments. This choice was made based on the understanding that barriers around organizations, cultures and even social contexts have been falling (as so accurately perceived and forecasted by
Meyrowitz back in 1985), and we as individuals increasingly transverse multiple environments, bringing new ideas into certain places and learning in other spaces. Considering this ever increasing human communication system where experiences are constantly being shared, created and transformed I wished to contribute to expanding the perception and understanding of human communication and interaction. In this manner, although most of the literature used in this research has a direct connection with organizations and the act of organizing, I hope to expand and promote the concepts of narrative and systems science/thinking to settings outside the organizational and academic field.

I begin the journey to answer my research question in chapter 1 by providing a literature review of the three perspectives that inform this work: the communicative constitution of organizations (CCO), the narrative paradigm, and systems science. After this review I move on to link and orchestrate these perspectives with one another by providing an exploratory framework (chapter 2) that guides the empirical part of this work. In the subsequent chapter (chapter 3), I provide a description of the organization where the research took place: the Inter-American Development Bank. Next, in the method (chapter 4) and analysis sections (chapter 5) I illustrate the use of the framework proposed and then in the conclusion (chapter 6) I present not only reflections on the empirical findings but also reflections about the research process itself.
CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

The figure above provides a visual representation of the theoretical realms that inform this research. Although seemingly a single (albeit compound) element, each circle is actually located at different levels: the narrative paradigm is the circle located at the base or foundation level; the communicative constitution of organizations (CCO) circle is located immediately above the base level; and the system science circle is the highest circle in this tiered illustrative model. The logic of this ordering was based on the intention of moving the analysis from the micro-level (official and informal narratives), to a meso-level (CCO), to the actual constitution of organizations in a systemic or macro level.
Thus, the central area of the Venn diagram where these perspectives visually (but not physically) overlap represents the conceptual realm within which this work will be built. By moving through different layers (or levels) via the crafting of a specific path, I will propose an interdisciplinary approach to the research question presented in the introduction: to what extent can the relationship between “corridor” and official communication help us understand the communicative constitution of organizations? More specifically, (1) how does the official documentation surrounding a specific strategy compare with the informal discussions around that same strategy? (2) Do the differences and similarities of these narratives help us understand the constitutive role of communication as it relates to this topic?

Although in the illustration the base circle or theoretical foundation is represented by the narrative paradigm, I will begin the literature review by the actual focus area of this research: the communicative constitution of organizations (CCO).

THE COMMUNICATIVE CONSTITUTION OF ORGANIZATIONS

An intrinsic part of organizations everywhere, communication has recently moved from a support role in the act of organizing to take the central stage in the debate about the constitution of organizations themselves (Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009; Bisel, 2009, 2010; Haslett, 2012; Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, 2011; McPhee & Zaug, 2009; Putnam & Nicotera, 2009; Sillince, 2010; Taylor, 2011).
In the theoretic realm where such discussions are taking place, McPhee and Zaug (2009) propose that the constitution of complex organizations is tied to four distinct communication flows targeted towards four specific audiences. These “flows are different in their main direction and in their contribution to organizational constitution, with each making a different and important contribution” (McPhee & Zaug, 2009, p. 44). Specifically, they address the needs (and audiences) related to organizational self-structuring, membership negotiation, activity coordination and institutional positioning.

Although analytically distinct, in an empirical sense these four flows are not defined by any specific kind of message or conversation but are composed of multiple exchanges about different topics. In other words, one single topic within
an organizational conversation or task (e.g.: an annual report) often finds expression in more than one flow. Translating these miscellaneous micro exchanges into a defined analytical set of communication flows, McPhee and Zaug propose that there are four basic communication needs organizations must fulfill in order to constitute themselves: (1) define who their members are and what makes them part of the group (membership negotiation), (2) establish what the organization is (organizational self-structuring), (3) organize who should do what, when and how (activity coordination), and (4) negotiate within the larger social context which position the organization occupies (institutional positioning). Figure 2 presents an illustration of how these conceptual flows can be understood to constitute organizations.

As the discussions around the ontological role of communication in the processes and outcomes of organizing take place, different authors approach the issue from different angles. For instance, Cooren and Fairhurst (2009) have analyzed the role of nonhuman actors in the stabilization of organizations and have questioned whether these actors are considered within the flows. Bisel (2009), on the other hand, has joined the discussion by examining the necessary and sufficient conditions regarding the four flows and the related constitution (or not) of organizations in relation to these conditions. Within this exploratory landscape, however, the topic of informal (or corridor) conversations has not yet been addressed and that is where I intend to contribute to the ongoing discussion. Are “water cooler conversations” a constitutive part of organizations and the act
of organizing? Where are informal channels and discussions specifically located in relation to the four flows?

THE RELEVANCE OF INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS IN THE LITERATURE

An active participant of CCO forums, Taylor (2009) expands McPhee and Zaug's proposal of the four flows to a language-based sequential explanation of how they may constitute organizations. Beginning with activity coordination and membership negotiation, this author explores how language allows actors to work together and define roles, responsibilities and activities, a fundamental aspect in the act of organizing. After such coordination and alignment are achieved, organizational self-structuring and institutional positioning can emerge from the collective identity created through the first two flows. In the words of Taylor, a complex organization "emerges in a superordinate meta-conversation where all the conversations of the organization's members, including its own, have become its object of focus" (Taylor, 2009, p. 179). Making an important note that within this meta-conversation total unanimity or a single rationality is not necessarily reached, the author reminds us that managers are in a privileged position to influence the direction, scope and construction of this superordinate exchange. In addition, he reminds us that "the texts that the management conversation generates reflect its preoccupations and orientations, not necessarily those of the communities to which such texts are addressed" (Taylor, 2009, p.180).
Thus, tangentially touching upon the idea of the differences in power between managerial conversations and the exchanges of other communities that make up organizations, Taylor both states his awareness of the existence of these different groups and provides a justification for my inquiry on the location of informal conversations within the CCO perspective of the four flows. How do managerial (or official) conversations compare with informal discussions going on within the four communication flows? Can the differences and/or similarities between these exchanges help us further understand the communicative constitution of organizations?

Another work that merits mentioning in this review is the exploration of the constitutive complexity that emerges at the intersection of the four flows (Browning et al., 2009). Drawing their conclusions from the analysis of interviews, observations, and official documents gathered at a U.S. Air Force Base, the authors of this study explore the intersections between the activity coordination flow and the three other communication flows. In so doing they conclude, among other things, that “self-organizing can occur at any level with any amount of force, which is in keeping with the Foucauldian notion of power – it can come from anywhere (…) power relationships can form that re-define how different individuals and elements interact with one another” (Browning et al., 2009, p. 111). Considering these power contentions and the merging of different flows to form a complex “syncretic encounter between communication flows” (Browning et al., 2009, p. 108), the authors describe the emergence of a new
membership identity that blends military, entrepreneurial, and technical characteristics.

If we consider the power contentions described by Browning et al. (2009) in the context of the research question proposed in this study it is easy to perceive how informal conversations are relevant to the exploration of the CCO: corridor chats can easily be seen as potential spaces for resistance and the creation of new power relationships. Furthermore, if these power relationships and the complex merging of flows together have the potential to create new elements in one (or more) of the flows, informal exchanges among employees seem to possess an extremely powerful effect in the constitution of organization themselves. Unfortunately, in Browning et al.’s (2009) study such a possibility is never addressed and the data and method of the study indicate that researchers never considered informal and official exchanges as analytically distinct.

INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS WITHIN THE FOUR FLOWS

Returning to the original proponents of the four flows, McPhee and Zaug tackle the CCO challenge from a level of analysis somewhere between macro and micro perspectives and, thus, believe that “organizations and communication are varied enough so that we cannot go much further in explaining constitution at this level of generality than by discussing types of flow” (McPhee & Zaug, 2009, p. 32). However, at the same time, these authors state that the “four flow of messages are actually more of less hidden implications of conversations and
reports within and outside organizations, operating on a level that may not be obvious or seem important to members” (McPhee & Zaug, 2009, p. 32). Thus, if the communication flows are somehow categories created to bring into focus certain key exchanges taking place at the micro-level, exploring a way to analytically examine each flow and link it (or them) to the micro-level in a manner that does not affect the overall idea of the constitution of organizations would strengthen and make McPhee and Zaug's proposal all the more appealing.

From yet another angle, Putnam and Nicotera, editors of the book where McPhee and Zaug feature, state that "the four flows interface and are interwoven in complex ways to constitute an organization (...) [they] are interwoven, like hues of yarn that become inextricably intertwined and in combination constitute a new form" (Putnam & Maydan Nicotera, 2009, p. 161). Inasmuch as this description adds to the idea that the four flows are always interrelated and that they constitute general categories from which one begins to understand the constitution of an organization, the addition of the idea of complexity to this understanding of CCO may lead to a further “packing” of the flows in such a way that the exploration of what lies within or beneath them becomes epistemologically difficult. After all, yarn itself is made of spun threads and in understanding the nature of the threads one can better perceive the quality of the fabric.

Thus, adopting the metaphor suggested by Putnam and Nicotera, in this work, I will explore how different spun threads (official and informal exchanges) may
affect the making of the yarn (four flows), and how the yarn itself is woven into a specific fabric (organization) which, if analyzed closely, will still have its threads visible to the analytic observer. As I address each level of this exploration I will rely on an interdisciplinary approach and will draw from disciplines as varied as semantics (as defined by Greimas, 1983), sociology, and system science. More specifically, to address the micro-to-macro (simply ”macro” henceforth) process of how communication may constitute organizations I will utilize: (1) Fisher's narrative paradigm (Fisher, 1987) to inform my analysis of exchanges happening at the micro-level, (2) the communicative constitution of organizations as discussed in this section as a middle ground between micro and macro, and (3) diverse authors from the field (or philosophical proposal) of systems science, mainly represented by the work of Thayer (1972).

As the previously described works of Taylor (2009) and Browning et al. (2009) make clear, CCO has been approached from different interdisciplinary perspectives. Hence, my proposal of exploring the communicative constitution of organizations at the intersection of different disciplines is not completely foreign, although I recognize the added challenge of simultaneously dealing with not only two, but three, different perspectives: the narrative paradigm, systems science and CCO. In order to clarify my position regarding the two other selected fields of knowledge that will support this research, I will now address the use of narratives as both an analytic tool in different disciplines and as a general philosophical proposal. This review aims to make clear how the CCO discussion can benefit
from academic conversations adopting narrative perspectives. After the review on narrative a subsequent section will analyze systems science following the same logic of mutual beneficial connection with the CCO arena.

**A NARRATIVE VIEW OF THE WORLD**

Different disciplines and authors have recognized the value of narrative perspectives and analysis in bringing out points of view otherwise missed in the logico-scientific mode of thought and inquiry (Bruner, 1986; Ezzy, 1998; Fenton & Langley, 2011; Fisher, 1987; Ospina & Dodge, 2005; Rhodes & Brown, 2005; Weick, 1995; Jay White, 1999). For instance, Ospina and Dodge (2005) defend the usefulness of narrative inquiry as a research method in the scholarship of public administration and public management. They describe the narrative turn different fields have embraced in recent years and state that narrative research possesses “its own theoretical perspective and its own methods of analysis that are distinct from other forms, such as discourse analysis and content analysis” (Ospina & Dodge, 2005, p.145). While pointing out the specificities of narrative inquiry and its benefits, these authors propose different ways in which this type of inquiry can enrich and improve research in their particular field. In this regard, they especially emphasize the contribution narrative inquiry brings to complementing “more traditional explanatory approaches that answer different questions better and elevate other, more logicorational [sic] ways of knowing” (Ospina & Dodge, 2005, p.154).
In another example, now in the area of sociology, Ezzy (1998) provides an insightful argument on the narrative nature of individuals' self-identity. Weaving together psychological, sociological and narrative perspectives through the element of temporality this author proposes that “the plots of narrative identities are formed in a complex interaction between events, imagination, significant others, routines and habits, and the structure of the soliloquy [internal dialogue] that forms a person's self-narrative”. In simpler words, he defends that “self-identity is formed in a narrative” (Ezzy, 1998, p.251).

In the communication field, Fisher (1987) proposes an all encompassing “narrative paradigm” that contains within itself all other forms of discourse and thought, including the “scientific narratives” being discussed by scholars such as Ezzy (1998) and Ospina and Dodge (2005). Arguing that humans are innate storytellers, Fisher (1987) proposes that our decision-making and enactment of the world is accomplished through an individual and collective understanding of the coherence and fidelity of the different narratives we experience in our daily lives. And Fisher is not alone in his philosophical view of narratives; other scholars have also proposed a narrative understanding of the world in different disciplines. The work I would like to highlight here is the one developed by Midgley (2003) exploring the (often overlooked) myths present in science itself. In the words of this author,

*Myths are not lies. Nor they are detached stories. They are imaginative patterns, networks of powerful symbols that suggest particular ways of"*
interpreting the world. They shape its meaning. For instance, machine imagery, which began to pervade our thought in the seventeenth century, is still potent today. We still often tend to see ourselves, and the living things around us, as pieces of clockwork: items of a kind that we ourselves could make, and might decide to remake if it suits us better. Hence the confident language of 'genetic engineering' and the 'building-blocks of life' (Midgley, 2003, p. 1).

Considering that myths are narratives themselves (perhaps with the difference of possessing an archetypal quality that distinguishes them from everyday narratives) we can perceive that in her own perspective Midgley corroborates Fisher's paradigm, proposing that science too is a specific type of narrative about creation and exchange.

Due to the proportions and boldness of his claims, however, Fisher's ideas have been targeted by critics who question “whether an approach treating all forms of rhetoric as narrative in one sense or another is useful” (Rowland, 1989, p. 40). Partly answering such criticisms and partly calling forth new research on his ideas, Fisher closes his book with the following paragraph:

>This is the logic that I believe comes into play when anyone experiences an account that implies claims about knowledge, truth, or reality. Beyond it, other logics, such as the rhetorical logics we have inherited from tradition, come into play if they are appropriate to the special forms we
sometimes give to ideas. The logic I have outlined and critically applied in interpreting and assessing political, aesthetic, and philosophical discourse is, I believe, a universal logic. As such, it is paradigmatic of human discourse. The narrative paradigm is the foundation on which a complete theory of rhetoric needs to be built. To do so would not displace subordinate logics. It would incorporate them within a comprehensive explanation of the creation, composition, adaptation, presentation, and reception of symbolic messages. (Fisher, 1987, p. 194)

Although many authors have examined narratives as particular lenses through which individuals perceive specific and limited settings and situations (in the particular intersection of communication and organization studies, see Rhodes & Brown, 2005 and Ospina & Dodge, 2005 for good research overviews), in this study I will adopt Fisher’s encompassing narrative paradigm as the micro-level lenses from which to analyze the formal and informal exchanges inside organizations. This choice was motivated by the understanding that the same broadness that was criticized in Fisher's ideas is exactly what will allow my interdisciplinary proposal to function properly. In other words, by keeping the specificities of the CCO approach and adopting more encompassing theories in other fields to support it, I intend to avoid the incommensurability issues that often keep different disciplines and even research approaches apart (Corman & Poole, 2000; Jay White, 1999). Thus, answering the call made by Fisher (1987) and the questioning of critics (Rowland, 1989), I intend to make a small
contribution to the construction of this Narrative (as in narrative paradigm henceforth) rhetoric while maintaining the focus on strengthening the CCO discussions.

For additional resources and interesting discussions on the validity and scope of Fisher's proposal, the reader can refer to the works of Baeslhr (1995); Fenton and Langley (2011); Fisher (1989); Rowland (1987, 1989); Stutts and Barker (1999); and West and Turner (2010).

A SYSTEMIC VIEW OF THE WORLD

The other perspective (or paradigm) that will support the exploration of my research question is systems science, which proposes “to understand man and his environment as part of interacting systems [and] to study this interaction from multiple perspectives, holistically” (Skyttner, 2005, p.3). Within this perspective, a system can be generally defined as composed of elements, the connections (or processes) between these elements, and a boundary or limit that specifies what is inside and what is outside the system. The researcher, however, often defines this boundary according to her research interests as well as her epistemological and axiological choices (Williams & Hummelbrunner, 2011). In the words of Laszlo, “systems science can look at a cell or an atom as a system, or it can look at the organ, the organism, and the ecology as systems (...). A system in one perspective is a subsystem in another” (Laszlo, 1996, p.10).
In addition to providing systemic lenses from which to understand the world, systems science is also a philosophical proposal, one that attempts to bring together different areas or disciplines by applying a common language to all knowledge. Underlying such an ambitious proposal is the understanding that “an attempt to reduce complexities to their constituents and build an understanding of the wholeness through knowledge of its parts is no longer valid” (Skyttner, 2005, p.37). Thus, criticizing disciplinary barriers and the atomistic-specialized view of the world, system scientists seek to “concentrate on structure on all levels of magnitude and complexity, and fit detail into its [the system's] general framework (...) [discerning] relationships and situations, not atomistic facts and events” (Laszlo, 1996, p.9). In search for this common language and systemic understanding of the world, system scientists have advanced knowledge in the areas of biology (Bertalanffy, 1975), philosophy (Laszlo, 1973), artificial intelligence, organizational theory, and informatics, among others (see good overview of systems science by Skyttner, 2005).

In terms of the application of systems science to communication, Thayer (1972) provides us with an insightful analysis of the many conceptual challenges found by those attempting to position human communication theory within a systemic view. Addressing one of these challenges, he humorously mentions the frequent confusion (or disagreement) among scholars around the definition of the basic unit and level of analysis of human communication: “Is the basic phenomenal unit (…) that of the message, of the message plus the sender,... plus
the receiver,... plus the response,... plus the consequences,... plus the context,... or what?” (Thayer, 1972, p.103) In order to answer his own question, Thayer then proposes his definition of a communication system “(...) comprised of the organism or the individual, together with that which is presently being taken-into-account, whether some aspect of its environment or another individual or organism” (Thayer, 1972, p.110). In addition to defining the basic units of a communication system, the author also details the intricate interdependent nature, the historical dependency, the nested hierarchy, the level of openness, and the level of organization that these systems present. In spite of the robustness of the framework proposed, however, the author himself closes his work acknowledging that “there are a great many other issues to be considered” (Thayer, 1972, p.121) in the endeavor of understanding communication from a systems perspective.

In terms of the application of systems science to organizations and the act of organizing, Senge (2006) proposes a systems thinking approach to the task. According to this author, systems thinking is “a framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things, for seeing patterns of change rather than static “snapshots” (...) a sensibility – for the subtle interconnectedness that gives living systems their unique character” (Senge, 2006, p. 68). Considering the complex and organic nature of organizations, Senge explains his view of the “learning organization” and how the lack of a systemic view of the world can lead to learning disabilities that affect organizations in particular and society in general. In the words of the author,
Today, systems thinking is needed more than ever because we are becoming overwhelmed by complexity (...). All around us are examples of “systemic breakdowns” – problems such as global warming, climate change, the international drug trade, and the U.S. trade and budget deficits – problems that have no simple local cause. Similarly, organizations break down, despite individual brilliance and innovative products, because they are unable to pull their diverse functions and talents into a productive whole (Senge, 2006, p. 69).

Thus, providing tools, arguments and perceptive explanations to promote the transformation of traditional organizations into learning organizations, Senge aptly brings up systems science and thought to the area of management and administration. On this particular work, however, his thoughts seemed directly targeted towards business practitioners and leaders, leaving aside scholars and the proposal of system science to bridge different disciplines through a common perspective and language.

With the intention to build on Thayer's communication system proposal and in order to contribute to the bridging of different disciplines through a common systemic language, I provide in the next chapters a framework to understand how the systemic approach can assist us in comprehending the very constitution of organizations themselves. In addition, I also intend to bridge the realms of practitioners and academia as I apply the framework to an existing complex organization: the Inter-American Development Bank.
As we can thus far see, both Fisher's paradigm and systems science propose overarching ideas that, although not directly related to CCO discussions, can inform developments in this area by providing a new foundation (or outlook) for both researchers and the topic of inquiry. In other words, due to the paradigmatic nature of these two proposals, in adopting them to support the exploration of the communicative constitution of organizations it is possible to keep intact the specific concerns and topics of inquiry of CCO scholars. At the same time, the new perspectives on Narrative and nested systems (systems within systems or subsystems within a greater system) can assist CCO researchers to move their exploration into directions otherwise inaccessible without the support of new ways to perceive the world.

We will now propose the interdisciplinary framework that will guide our empirical analysis of the multilateral agency selected as the source of data for this research.
The illustration above represents a different point of view of the central region formed in the Venn diagram presented in Figure 1. The sphere represents the researcher, the blue lines represent a vertical section of each level of analysis and their related theories (as previously explained), and the arrow stands for the path that will be followed in this research together with the framework and common elements that will be employed. In order to follow the proposed research path (the use of different disciplines to inform distinct levels of analysis), an understanding of the arrow is the first step on the journey. Thus, in the next sections the different perspectives presented thus far will be put side by side (or one over the other) in an explanatory framework that will guide the forthcoming empirical analysis of the communicative constitution of a multilateral development agency. But first I
will clarify some basic tools (concepts) that will be employed in the framework design.

WORKING DEFINITIONS

In preparing the ground for any analytical examination regarding communication (in our case the communicative constitution of organizations) one inevitably faces the limitations related to the act of communicating about communication. In other words, since communication is part of the process (the writing of this thesis), the medium (the finished thesis text) and the subject (or topic) of research, there are many possible pitfalls and obstacles related to the ontological and epistemological foundation where one stands. Therefore, I begin this section by defining communication as it is broadly understood in this work: a “symbolic sense making through interaction” (Taylor, 1993, p.ix).

Concise and apparently simple on the surface, this definition requires further unpacking in order to be fully understood within the context of this work. In this regard, two basic concepts found in Greimas’ (1983) work on semantics will be useful:

(...) we will call the signifier the elements or groups of elements which make possible the appearance of signification at the level of perception and which are recognized, at the same moment, as exterior to man. With the term signified we will name the signification or the significations.
which are covered by the signifier and manifested because of its existence.

(Greimas, 1983, p. 8)

In other words and in simplified terms, through the process of signification the signifier “cat” (the printed word, letters, sound) triggers the formation of images or ideas (the signified) in the reader’s mind, evoking in each individual the idea of an animal that is at the same time common to the collective and particular to the individual experience. Below is an illustration that visually represents this process.

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 4 The signifying ensemble*

By substituting the term “symbolic” in the definition of communication suggested above for the concept of “signifying ensemble (…) the union of signifier and signified” (Greimas, 1983, p. 8) I intend to provide a more detailed
and specific understanding of signification and meaning in the process of communication, going beyond the materialized expression (voice, gesture, print, etc.) that is usually the object of analysis of communication scholars. The importance of such specificity will become clear as we advance on the details of the framework adopted for this work.

In addition to refining the term “symbolic” in Taylor’s definition of communication I will also connect the idea of “sense making” proposed by him with Fisher’s narrative paradigm. Since in this work we have defined that human beings perceive and enact the world through a narrative understanding of themselves and their external reality, we now understand communication as the narrative sense making of individuals that happens via the signifying ensemble during interactions. However apparently specific, this definition is in reality broad enough to accommodate both communication related to “corporate actors” (e.g.: IDB as actor) and nonhuman agents (e.g.: strategy, office space), in that the presence of the signifying ensemble allows for varying significations for specific signifiers, and “interactions” remain open for exchanges between humans and nonhumans. In this manner a couple of challenges and limitations identified by leading CCO scholars (Putnam & Maydan Nicotera, 2009) in the current research discussion can be addressed in this work.

Moving forward on the definition of key concepts, the next natural candidates for clarification are the terms “constitution” and “organization”. In this work, organization will be understood from a grounded in action perspective, where
“organizations never emerge as entities per se, but as systems, objects anchored in social practices, texts, or memory traces derived from the properties of language and action” (Putnam, Nicotera, & McPhee, 2009, p.9). In this manner, organization as a process (or verb) will be understood as the ontological and unfolding nature of the IDB and will be henceforth referred to as Organization (with an initial capital letter henceforth), while organization as a noun (or entity) will be understood as a snapshot of the organization-as-process in a specific period (or moment) in space and time. This definition is aligned with Putnam and Maydan Nicotera's (2009) suggestions on the critical issues that should be addressed by scholars when venturing into the CCO realm and, also, with the view of organization as a form of life proposed by Taylor and Van Every (2000), and the perspective of organizations as ever adapting and changing systems proposed by system scientists (Kramer & de Smit, 1977; Senge, 2006; Skyttner, 2005).

Furthermore, the adopted fluid view of organization-as-process is in line with the ideas proposed by Tsoukas and Chia (2002) regarding the constant presence of change in organizations (entities) and thus their proposal of an “organizational becoming” (process) to define the ontological nature of organizations. These authors propose, then, that change “is not an exceptional or special activity individuals undertake, as one might be tempted to think from the perspective of stability” (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002, p. 577); on the contrary, change is an intrinsic (if not ontological) part of organizations. This connection between the concepts of
organization and change will be further explored in the analytical section of this work. For the time being, it suffices to clarify how they are aligned and understood in this work.

As for the definition of the term “constitution”, I will understand it not as a static idea (or signified) represented by the concept of “made of”; instead, I will use the term taking its significations that “focus on forming, making, and composing (...) [which] highlight the process or dynamic elements of a phenomenon” (Putnam, Nicotera, & McPhee, 2009, p.4).

The remaining two terms directly connected to my research question that have not yet been clarified are “corridor” (or informal) and official communications. In a work exploring the role of informal communication ties in the diffusion of innovation within an organization, Weenig (1999) defines official and informal communications as follows:

The organizational chart outlines the formal reporting relationships among the various levels of management and employees and describe the planned communication within the organization. Informal communication can be defined as all communication between employees that does not follow the formal organization chart and was never explicitly planned by the management (Weenig, 1999, p. 1073)

Further refining this definition through Taylor and Van Every's work (2000), in this exploration I will explicitly connect informal communication to
conversations (utterances) while considering official communication as text (writing). In these authors words, “text because, in its own way, it fixes a state of the world (...) and lends itself to faithful reproduction; conversation because its outcomes are never quite predictable and, unless rendered by recording into a texted equivalent, are as evanescent as smoke” (J. Taylor & Van Every, 2000, p. 325).

At this point it is important to note that, as the previous quote makes clear, the conversations collected to represent a sample of the informal communication within the IDB do not portray what people are actually discussing in the corridors, but what they could potentially share with their peers. In this manner, the transcribed conversations that will be used as data in this research are like small delimited areas of an uneven sidewalk. The purpose of studying these samples is to find out possible routes streams of rain water (informal conversations) may take and how particular declivities and slopes in these conversations (individuals' perspectives) may generate a specific pattern of water flow (informal conversations flow). Would this sidewalk stream merge with the official waters flowing through an official channel towards a planned direction? Or would they take a completely different route and perhaps flood an unplanned area?

Having defined all key terms related to the research question, it is now time to move on to the explanation of the framework that will guide this research. I will begin the description with the individual elements of the framework and will then provide a complete conceptual picture of it.
FRAMEWORK ELEMENT 1: A NARRATIVE MODEL

In order to build a framework utilizing Fisher’s paradigm as foundation one must first define what are the basic elements of a narrative. In other words, one must be able to specify how narratives are to be distinguished from one another, since the paradigm proposes that all meaning is perceived through narratives and, hence, their ubiquitous nature can be interpreted as a hindrance. As a second required step for the building of such a framework, one must specify how different narratives are to be classified amongst each other: is narrative A better than narrative B? Why is that so? In addition to these two steps, due to the interdisciplinary nature of this research, it is also important to incorporate key concepts (defined in the previous section) into the framework in order to guarantee its coherence throughout the work. Below I begin addressing the first step: the basic elements of a narrative.

NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

While looking for definitions of the concept of narrative to inform this research I found many different possibilities such as those presented by Foss (1989), Ospina and Dodge (2005), and Soderberg (2003), among other authors. I decided, however, to adopt a definition by an author who is currently engaged in the discussions around the CCO topic: James Taylor. According to this author,

*The first function of the narrative is thus to establish a common basis of understanding of the situation and what is wrong about it (…). The second*
phase of narrative is establishing what is to be done and who is to do it

(...) The third phase of narrative is simply what happened, when, where, and who was involved in doing what. The fourth and final phase deals with how the situation ended up, and who was rewarded or punished – sanctioned – because of their roles in the episode. (Taylor, 2009, p.170)

Although Taylor’s description is very clear and straightforward, his temporal (or “phase”) description of the different transformations present in narratives made me reflect on the challenge of analyzing time in my research. How might I account for all these transformations in time in different narratives and still be able to compare them amongst each other? Would the narrative present in the official document selected contain temporal marks as clear as those proposed by Taylor?

Seeking a solution to this temporal challenge, I came across the work of Robichaud (2003) and Soderberg (2003) who employ Greimas’ (1983) semantic narrative structure to provide a narrative perspective of multiple actors involved in a public consultation process of a municipal agency, and an international acquisition process of a telecommunications company, respectively. Although in these studies the concept of narrative was interpreted as the traditional form of discourse and/or analysis category and not as a philosophical proposal, these authors schematization of Greimas’ model (particularly Robichaud’s visual interpretation below) appealed to me as an interesting analytical tool to apply to this research.
In Robichaud's (2003) reading of Greimas' work, there are two key notions to understand this narrative model. “First, all narratives cast the subjects and objects of actions that he [Greimas] calls “actants” in a set of relationally and mutually defined positions or roles. Second, a narrative always amounts to a transformation of some sort, and typically many transformations, all informing each other” (Robichaud 2003, p.39). Further explaining these two ideas, Robichaud describes the relationships and transformations behind different pairs of actants: the relation of desire or value linking subject and object; the authority or manipulation connection between sender and subject; the antagonistic relation between subject and opponent; the support or competence transfer between the helper and the subject; the performance connection between the subject and object (in order to fulfill the desire link between these two actants); and finally the sanction relation between the subject and the receiver, where the former is acknowledged by the latter.
By comparing Robichaud’s ideas with those of Taylor, I realized that a good solution for the temporal challenge of my research was to merge the two narrative definitions into a single model. In that manner, both the structure of the different narratives (actants) and the time aspect of each one (transformations between pairs of actants) would be captured in a single “snapshot” view. Thus, in this work narrative will be defined as any account that addresses: (1) what is wrong about a situation (unfulfilled desire between subject and object); (2) what is to be done and who is to do it (manipulation between sender and subject); (3) what happened, when, where, and who was involved in doing what (opposition, support and performance relation between opponent, helper, object and the subject); (4) how the situation ended up, and who was rewarded or punished because of their roles in the episode (sanction of the subject by the receiver).

Figure 6 Narrative structure adopted for this research
NARRATIVE LOGIC

In addition to distinguishing narratives from one another, a Narrative view of the world also requires some criteria or logic through which we select those narratives that resonate with us from those that do not. Fisher had exactly this task in mind when he supported his paradigm with a detailed explanation of the logic of “good reasons” where he proposes the concepts of coherence and fidelity as the basic foundation of Narrative reason. In Fisher's words, “the principle of coherence brings into focus the integrity of a story as a whole, but the principle of fidelity pertains to the individuated components of stories – whether they represent accurate assertions about social reality and thereby constitute good reasons for belief or action” (Fisher, 1987, p. 105). Hence, in the logic of good reasons, although a narrative may hold well all of its parts and arguments together (e.g.: a grammatically well-written research paper), if it does not resonate with an individual's personal experiences it will lack in fidelity (e.g.: reader's knowledge of other academic claims refuting a paper's main idea), making it more difficult for the individual to either believe in the narrative or act on it. Since the narrative paradigm has already been defined as one of the perspectives informing this work, it is only natural that I adopt Fisher's narrative logic in the crafting of this framework.

Hence, thus far in the description of the framework I have proposed an analytical tool in the form of a narrative model or structure and a logic to classify narratives in relation to each other. With the description of these two elements, it
is already possible to conceive of the identification of basic trends and ideas underlying different narratives, for instance specific relationships between actants that are found in different individual narratives. Considering this analytic aspect, it is useful to compare the narrative tools provided so far with the four flows proposed by CCO scholars: although each flow is not defined by any specific topic, channel or communication format, they still serve as analytical concepts from which to explore the constitution of organizations. In the same manner, although individual narratives may present a multitude of different plots, styles and elements, I propose that the comparison among them through the tools explained above has the potential to help us understand how micro exchanges contribute to the constitution of the CCO flows themselves, an insight so far thought to be unapproachable (or perhaps irrelevant) by the CCO scholars researched.

I will now address how to connect an important concept defined at the beginning of this chapter, communication, to the narrative model proposed, finalizing the description of the basic element of this framework: individuals and their narrative enactment of the world.

NARRATIVE PERCEPTION

While studying some of Greimas’ original works (1977, 1983) to better understand Robichaud’s (2003) employment of the narrative model, I came in contact with the former author’s idea of different levels of representation
(meaning making and expression) and analysis: the level of the manifestation of speech and the level of configuration or organization of such speech prior to its utterance or expression. Such idea is already present in Greimas' understanding of the signifying ensemble (proposed in the definition of communication for this work) and we will now further explore its implications and possibilities for the crafting of the framework of this research.

In an article published prior to his *Structural Semantics* (1983) book (the work mainly referred to by Robichaud, 2003) Greimas discusses the possibility of using narrative analysis to understand different areas of human expression and knowledge:

*It was first necessary to acknowledge that narrative structures can be identified outside of the manifestations of meaning that occur in the natural languages: in the languages of cinema and of dream, in figurative painting, etc. (...) But this amounted to recognizing and accepting the necessity of a fundamental distinction between two levels of representation and analysis: an apparent level of narration, at which the manifestations of narration are subject to the specific exigencies of the linguistic substances through which they are expressed, and an immanent level, constituting a sort of common structural trunk, at which narrativity is situated and organized prior to its manifestation. A common semiotic [symbolic] level is thus distinct from the linguistic level and is logically*
prior to it, whatever the language chosen for the manifestation. (A. J. Greimas & Porter, 1977, p.23)

In figure 7 I represent my reading of Greimas' two-level proposal where the immanent level is located on the left side of the blue line and the manifestation level is represented on the right side. Positioning the narrative structure previously defined on the left side, I represented some examples of the manifestation of narratives on the right side: movies, painting, music, speech, etc. The arrows represent what we have defined as communication, and the signifying ensemble is once more reproduced in order to represent the basic unit in the process of signification and meaning apprehension. The brackets represent the generic nature of the concepts represented within them; in other words, they are the fixed structure within which different ideas can be positioned and arranged in relation to each other.

Figure 7 Narrative perception
Consider the following examples of the application of the narrative structure as presented in figure 7. In a fairy tale, a little girl (subject) is asked by her mother (sender) to deliver some food to grandmother (receiver), who is sick in bed. In order to achieve her goal of getting to grandmother’s house (object), the little girl has to go through a dense forest and face a scary wolf (opponents). With the support of a lumberjack (helper), the little girl is able to save her grandmother from the wolf and comes out of the process more knowledgeable and grown up. Following the same narrative structure, we can easily make sense of a common organizational situation where an employee (subject) asks a colleague (helper) for support to meet a certain project deadline (object) that was strictly enforced by a supervisor (sender). After dealing with the pressure and stress of getting the job done on time (opponents), the employee is acknowledged by the company (receiver) during a departmental retreat where he/she is mentioned as a role-model in the company.

This element of the framework represents the perception process of a single individual. In the next section I will expand this idea to include several individuals within a systemic view of an Organization through the employment of Thayer's communication systems ideas (1972).

**Framework Element 2: A Systemic Narrative Model**

As we have seen in the literature review, Thayer (1972) defines the individual (human or not) and whatever other element being taken into account by the
communication researcher as the basic composition of a communication system.

Further refining the particularities of the human communication system, however, Thayer addresses their nested and hierarchical nature, stating that

In complex societies, there are multiple communication systems and sets of communication systems (...) which overlap and interpenetrate each other through common or linking members or participants. In addition, every conversation involves individuals who are members of the same and of different higher-order communication systems, which are themselves nested in spatially or temporally larger, more comprehending communication systems, and so on, from the most casual conversation to the most embracing and long-lasting human “culture” (which is itself a kind of extended communication system within which certain communicational realities are confirmed and perpetuated). (Thayer, 1972, p. 114)

From this systemic description, it is possible to interpret the four communicative flows proposed by McPhee and Zaug (2009) as a specific set of human communication systems, a set located (1) within an Organization's boundaries of time (working hours) and/or space (office space, physical building), (2) comprised by individuals hired by the Organization, and (3) defined by four specific topics or themes being considered by the researchers, namely: organizational self-structuring, membership negotiation, institutional positioning,
and activity coordination. In visual terms, then, we can have the following representation where the circles illustrate the four communication systems and the squares represent different individuals (figure 8).

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 8 Individuals within the four flows*

In addition to the hierarchical and nested nature of human communication systems, Thayer also qualifies these systems according to their relative closeness/openness to outside influences and their possibility of suffering from over-organization, especially in the case of relatively closed human communication systems. In that regard, he proposes that when closed communication systems overorganize through routines and bureaucracy, the risk becomes that individual members will be too homogeneous and alike within their communication system and can thus contribute to its collapse. This happens
because “there seems to be an optimum level of organization for every
communication system, which depends upon some level of internal (and, where
appropriate, external) perturbation” (Thayer, 1972, p. 117).

Further explicating the nature of this perturbation, Thayer returns to the
interdisciplinary nature of systems science to refer to an important process by
which communication systems (human or not) change or mutate:
excommunication. According to this author, by the creation of a barrier that
secludes individuals from groups, excommunication allows certain variations to
take place often forcing the system to change in order to adapt to these variations.
More specifically, there would be “(…) some optimum degree of
excommunication or discontinuity between and among the communication
subsystems of the whole (e.g., society) that enables the variability and evolution-
producing diversity which is necessary to the health and the viability of the larger
whole” (Thayer, 1972, p. 118). An example of the employment of this systemic
property in Organizations is Google’s policy of offering its engineers a certain
amount of time when they are free to work on whatever projects they are
interested in (Google, n.d.). By creating a space where employees can engage in
different groups/topics other than their assigned functions/teams, Google fosters
variation within and among its different human communication systems (i.e.:
company-wide official communication, team coordination, informal
communication), harnessing the process of excommunication to bring innovation
to its products and services.
Applying these additional ideas to my framework, I decided it was important to locate the boundaries of the whole communication system in order to identify the inside and the outside of the system. Furthermore, it became important to qualify this overall system in terms of its relative openness to external influence. Finally, it also seemed necessary to analyze individuals and groups more closely, since the differentiation within and among groups can potentially lead to variations that force the system to change. In the image below I include the first two aspects mentioned in this paragraph. The systemic aspect related to the individuals and groups will be explored in the final section of this chapter, where we will see the entire framework constructed from the individual to the Organization.

Figure 9 An Organization's systemic boundaries
**THE COMPLETE FRAMEWORK: NESTED NARRATIVE SYSTEMS**

In order to assemble the final framework a series of images will be used. Since by now the reader is already used to the representations provided, brief explanations will follow each image and the assembly of the framework will follow the logic of a series of nested communication systems (in the case of this work, a series of nested narrative communication systems).

Below is the first element of the system which has already been presented but that will be now repeated for the sake of facilitating the visualization and comprehension of the framework.

![Diagram of narrative perception schema](image)

*Figure 10 Narrative perception (figure 7 repeated)*

The next image locates this narrative perception schema in two individuals of the organizational communication system who are interacting with each other.
Figure 11 Two individuals and their narrative structures

On the following representation, we can see many individuals under the same sub-communication system, in this example, the membership negotiation system.

Membership Negotiation

Figure 12 Section of membership negotiation flow
We can now visualize potential sub-groups (or sub-sub-communication systems) within the membership negotiation communication sub-system.

**Membership Negotiation**

*Figure 13 Membership negotiation sub-systems*

Finally, below is the complete human communication system under consideration (located within Organizations), with the four flows as its sub-systems and the individuals and groups located within them.
This is the framework that will guide the inquiry on the influence informal and official exchanges may have over the communicative constitution of organizations. Considering that an individual narrative perception is the basic element of the framework, I will analyze how varying individual narrative structures can be aggregated (or not) and what are the narrative elements that allow them to be so. After this grouping/differentiation of informal narrative structures I will compare official and informal narrative structures. What are their differences and similarities? From the start one can already imagine differences between the managerial narrative and the workforce perspective, but can these differences be accounted for and be considered representative of specific sub-groups located within the four flows? If so, how many sub-groups are there and
how do their narratives differ? How can the differences between the different narrative groups be connected to the constitution of the Organization itself? These are only a few of the questions I will be addressing in the empirical section of this work, which will begin with a detailed description of the methods applied.

Before moving on to the methods chapter, however, there is one last element connected to narratives that I considered in this research and that is important mentioning in this section: the context of narratives. I left this component out of the first section of this chapter (narrative model) in order to use the complete view of the framework as an illustration for the contextualized nature of narratives. I will briefly address this idea below and then extend the concept of narrative context in the next chapter by providing a description of (1) the Organization where the research took place, (2) the official document selected to represent an example of official narrative, and (3) my simultaneous role as a participant-observer for the research and a consultant for the Organization.

**NARRATIVE CONTEXT**

In a Narrative view of the world, narratives do not exist in isolation, in the same manner human communication and socialization cannot take place if an individual is not located within some type of group or community. Exploring the unique features of human communication systems, Thayer proposes a couple of elements of high importance when considering the self-reflective capabilities of human beings and their communicative behavior. First, he proposes that,
differently from all non-human communication systems, “men are, through their uniquely long and dependent periods of socialization, in-formed by other men to take-into-account their environments and each other in ways that, we assume, somehow serve the ends of man” (Thayer, 1972, p. 108). In other words, and considering the Narrative stance adopted, human beings are socialized and introduced to their environment (or context) through the sharing of their communities' narratives and they interact with each other and their context by constantly creating and transforming their narrative understanding of the world in a manner that serves their individual purposes.

The sharing, creation and transformation of these narratives are, therefore, as ubiquitous as the different narratives that exist in a Narrative view of the world and, thus, one has to establish some sort of criteria to decide when to engage or not in a new narrative construction or transformation process. After all, if I have a specific narrative perception of topic X that has been working perfectly for me and my purposes, why would I bother questioning such narrative in order to review or even change it in my mind? This is where the second element raised by Thayer (1972) regarding the communicative behavior of human beings acquires a high importance. According to this author, “human intercommunication is (..) dependent upon a special kind of metacommunicative 'trust' (for want of a better term), which is not at issue for those creatures which are pre-formed for intercommunication” (Thayer, 1972, p. 108). Further explaining his point, Thayer reminds us of the fact that in human communication individuals don’t always (or
perhaps rarely) state things in a linear or strictly objective manner like non-human organisms do. On the contrary, humans often use metaphors, irony, and many other communicative resources (including lying and deceiving) to convey their ideas and fulfill their individual and collective objectives.

Within our Narrative context, that means that in the same way the logic of good reasons provides individuals with tools to measure the quality of different narratives, in a social context, where narratives get constantly created and transformed, trust must act as an important decision element that influences one’s willingness to engage in a new narrative transformation act. In other words, while I individually classify and order narratives according to my understanding of fidelity and coherence, when in a group setting I will also consider my trust connections to other people in order to evaluate and interpret the narrative being shared. After all, however coherent and socially accurate a narrative may sound, it can still represent an attempt by other individuals to deceive me and it is trust that will allow an individual to decide whether to consider such narrative or not.

In relation to the framework provided, these two elements – the social transformation of narratives and the trust criteria – are then the social fabric underlying the individual squares represented in the illustrations. For the sake of maintaining the visual simplicity of the illustrations I will leave these two elements aside for the time being, but they will be considered in the analysis of both the official and the informal narratives. In the case of the official narrative, its social context will be provided in the next chapter through the description of
the setting where the research took place. As for the informal narratives, a social network map of the interviewees’ connection to one another will be presented in the analysis chapter to contextualize their accounts and allow the reader to visualize the social fabric through which these narratives were transformed and spread.
CHAPTER 3: THE INTER-AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK

The IDB was created in 1959 by an agreement signed within the Organization of the American States. Initially composed of 20 signatory countries and a 1 billion dollar operational fund, the Inter-American Development Bank is now composed of 48 member countries, 26 of them corresponding to the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries (borrowing members) and 22 of them representing non-regional (and non-borrowing) member countries such as Japan, Sweden, Germany, Croatia, China, and the United States. In contrast with its initial capital, since 2009 the IDB has been working on the processes and adjustments necessary to receive its ninth capital increase (IDB-9), a new 70 billion dollar transfer from its member countries that will allow the continuation of IDB operations in the post-crisis period. According to the Organization's report on its ninth capital increase, as a result of the 2008 international financial crisis the IDB saw an increase in its importance in the LAC region and a consequent spike in lending exhausted its financial capacity (IDB, 2010), a challenge that will be addressed by this new injection of funds.

According to the IDB’s official website, the Bank “support[s] efforts by Latin America and the Caribbean countries to reduce poverty and inequality (…) [and] aim[s] to bring about development in a sustainable, climate-friendly way” (IDB, n.d.). A very complex Organization, the Bank is composed of over 3,000 employees distributed among offices in all 26 LAC member countries and its
headquarters in Washington D.C. The main office in D.C., which is the largest, is where high managers work and coordinate the Bank’s operations. There are currently 35 departments, offices, and sectors within the Organization. In this work I will examine one of them, the sector where I currently hold a position as a consultant.

As a multilateral Organization, the IDB hires individuals from all borrowing and non-borrowing member countries and so the work force is quite diverse in terms of nationality. As regards its human resources, the Bank is currently working to improve several of its policies and mechanisms, from increasing the number of women in high positions to creating incentives to foster collaboration within the Organization (IDB, 2011). On this last topic, my experience in the Organization indicates that, although collaboration does happen among employees (especially collaboration based on trust connections), there is a deep-rooted culture of competition among departments and teams due to, among other factors: (1) allocation mechanisms that privilege single organizational actors as opposed to groups of actors (e.g.: teams, departments and sectors receive funding according to the projects they are leading, although projects often contain input from other “non-leading” organizational actors), and (2) the perception that in order to go up the organizational ladder one must show superior individual (and not necessarily team) performance. Although the IDB has recently moved towards the modification of existing mechanisms to solve these issues, the pace of the
design, approval and implementation of these modifications is usually very slow
due to the governmental and bureaucratic nature of the Organization.

Accounting for this slow pace of functioning of the IDB is the presence of
national governments inside the Organization. The Bank is owned by its member
countries, and each member possesses a voting power proportional to the number
of shares it holds. A unique characteristic of the IDB is that 50.02% of its shares
are held by its LAC member countries. Thus, borrowing member countries hold
the majority of shares while non-borrowing member countries divide the
remaining ones, with the United States as the single largest shareholder (30.01%).
Hence, as much as the final objective of the IDB is to foster development within
all LAC region, we can easily perceive that financial power coupled with national
interests have a strong say in how, where and when such development takes place.

In addition to the political factors described above, the pace of work at the IDB
is also determined by its administrative structure. Headed by a Board of
Governors (usually the appointed Finance Ministers of member countries), the
IDB also possesses a Board of Executive Directors (individuals appointed by the
national Ministries) to run the daily business of the Bank, since the Governors are
all busy dealing with their respective countries’ issues. If such assignment of
agency seems reasonable and relatively simple at the ownership level, at the
subsequent levels authority and responsibility down the hierarchical structure
become more and more complex. As an illustration, aside from a president
serving as its CEO, the Bank currently has five vice-presidents, four offices
related to oversight of the Bank’s business, and 5 departments that run the administrative matters of the Bank – not to mention the different divisions and units under each of them. Within this formal structure, the Human Resources department, whose strategy will be analyzed in this work, can be found underneath one of the 5 vice-presidencies, which answers to the president, which answers to the Board of Directors, which answers to the Board of Governors, which, ideally and ultimately, answers to the peoples in the member countries. Strongly influencing the pace of work, this tiered division and delegation of responsibility represent an inherent part of the Organization and so I will touch upon the perceptions employees carry about it.

**THE HUMAN CAPITAL STRATEGY**

In June 2011 the Board of Executive Directors of the IDB approved a human resources document called the Human Capital Strategy (HCS), whose objective is “to provide the Bank with a framework to ensure it has the right person, in the right place, at the right time, and with the right incentives that lead to high-performance” (IDB, 2011, p.1).

Available through the Organization’s website, the document represented an ideal data source for the research proposed in this work. First, due to its public nature, the strategy allows the possibility of future research on and around its content. Second, the document represents a potential hot topic for corridor conversations because of its direct relationship to all the Organization’s
employees. And finally, the strategy represents an empirical example of the overlapping of CCO communication flows in one artifact: organizational self-structuring (strategy defining what the IDB is to do), membership negotiation (who are IDB members and what is their relationship with the IDB), and activity coordination (details on how the IDB will implement the strategy). The single communication flow that seems to be left aside is the institutional positioning flow, although it can be argued that the publication of the strategy on the Organization’s website is itself an attempt to position the IDB as a transparent and accountable Organization. In spite of the capacity of this particular narrative to illustrate the four CCO flows, however, for the purposes of this work I will consider the strategy selected as a narrative within the membership negotiation flow. In this manner the visual representation of the framework will be simplified and so will the analysis of this narrative's impact on the research question presented.

Among the topics covered by the HCS the issue of revisiting the Bank's employment policy framework is the one most widely discussed in the corridors of the Organization. This policy framework addresses how each contract modality (staff, consultant and contractual) is defined in terms of conditions, benefits, contract length, etc. In the employment model under revision (established by the first Human Resources Strategy in 2001) there are a series of limitations regarding non-staff terms including a limit on the duration of contracts that, in my experience, always become a topic of conversation around the Bank, as in many
cases people are forced to leave for a while only to come back to the same job after their mandatory “break”. In addition, the complexity and amount of work at the Bank has been increasing – an argument that is also used to justify the ninth capital increase (IDB, 2010) – and the fixed headcount and payroll limitations that were established for the Organization require a high number of non-staff individuals to assist in the daily business of the Bank.

Addressing the contract modality issue, the HCS acknowledges that

*Today, this model has become restrictive in addressing existing and future business needs. As a result, there has been an increase in the use of complementary workforce arrangements [non-staff contracts] to help balance workload within a rigid employment model framework and headcount restriction. The role and employment conditions of the complementary workforce group needs to be reviewed. (IDB, 2011, p. 13)*

Another HCS topic that is relevant for this research is the proposal to increase IDB’s presence in its borrowing member countries. In the words of the strategists, the IDB needs to achieve “increased capacity in the country offices to better respond with technical knowledge to member country needs, particularly the small and vulnerable” (IDB, 2011, p.4). Interestingly, this particular initiative of the HCS (and the IDB-9) is in line with a differential feature identified by John White back in 1972 in his comparative study of the regional development banks
Another feature of the bank's structure, which distinguishes it, most notably, from the World Bank, is the strength of its field representation. It has a mission in each member country. The quality of these missions is somewhat uneven, and in some cases little more than project supervision is undertaken, but the trend is clearly in favour of enhancing the field mission's responsibilities. (John White, 1972, p.165)

In addition to providing an historical example of scholarship on the relevance of the study of regional development banks, in this particular excerpt White also touches upon two small (albeit relevant) aspects that emerged during this research: (1) the influence of the World Bank and (2) of the academic literature in IDB's decision-making and direction. Regarding the first aspect, there was a somewhat strong perception among interviewees that the IDB often “copies” or follows what is done by the World Bank. These opinions were expressed in a manner that sounded more depreciating than appreciative of the Organization’s behavior. As for the second aspect, one subject specifically pointed out the influence of the academic debate in the decisions made by some managers on the strategic directions the Organization should take. In this regard, White's (1972) work provides an actual example of the accuracy academic works can achieve in
providing strategic support for the IDB. I will return to these two points in the analysis and conclusion sections of this work.

**INTERNAL COMMUNICATION**

As regards to communication exchanges within the Bank, my work at the Organization indicates that e-mail (enabled by Microsoft Outlook) is one of the most utilized channels, in addition to phone and face-to-face interactions. Aside from that, there are many other communication channels available and the ones of which I am aware (excluding the ones previously mentioned) are: intranet hosting department and topic/area websites (e.g.: 9th General Capital Increase [GCI] website, Human Resources Department website, Help Desk website, Operations website, Manuals website, New Employee Portal website, to name a few), video conference system, Webex, instant messaging, Yammer, Skype, Infolinks (internal newsletter sent via e-mail and hosted on the intranet), and an online space for communities of practice hosted on the IDB Internet website. In addition, there are many different systems and tools used for technical operations that also provide important information for everyday tasks. Some examples of these systems are: WLMS (loan management system accessed via intranet), IDB Docs (shared repository for documents) and Zahorí (internal search engine). This last tool has only recently been deployed and it is very useful in navigating the vast ocean of information that composes IDB’s communication landscape.
Furthermore, lying beneath the sea of channels and tools described, a complex network of documents supports the work of the Organization. This network is formed in the same way scientific papers and studies create a network of references: for every document that is designed, there are a number of other documents already approved that serve as a justification for the new document being crafted. In this manner, the IDB possesses its own complex network of documents that, depending on the task an individual is assigned to perform, often goes undetected or unchecked. In other words, employees responsible for one specific topic or area that is related to, say, organizational self-structuring documents, would not necessarily be informed about documents related to activity coordination or institutional positioning.

**MY ROLE AS A CONSULTANT IN THE BANK**

I will now briefly describe (and clarify) my position at the Bank as a researcher and consultant. Working for the IDB since 2008, I have been engaged in activities in my sector since the beginning of this period and this is also the time I will consider as the beginning of my participant-observer position in this research. New to the development field and constantly observing the Organization, I was stunned to find out in my first year that the IDB did not have then any type of manual or coherent instructions for the use of its visual identity. As an undergraduate major in advertising, I could not conceive how an Organization completing almost 50 years at the time could not have had instructions as to how
its logo was to be employed in different settings. Also, the lack of connections among the different communication and operational systems of the Bank, which diminished its ability to function, was a real mystery to me. From my observations, it seemed that the IDB was only able to carry out its daily business in spite of its many bureaucratic, political and technical challenges due to the social connections and the resourcefulness of its employees.

On a more positive side, individuals working for the IDB have always been very supportive of my work and research and it was only due to their willingness that I was able to carry out this work. Regarding this final aspect, it is important to note that the present work is completely divorced from my role as a consultant for the Bank, and I received no compensation whatsoever for this study. The ultimate purpose of this work was to complete my M.A. requirements at Georgetown University and as a participant of the IDB community I hoped to make a small academic contribution specifically to the work of my colleagues and, in general, to the Organization itself.
CHAPTER 4: METHOD

While considering methods to apply to this research I decided to follow Charmaz, (2009), Czarniawska-Joerges, (1998), Fraser (2004), and Williams and Hummelbrunner (2011) advice that in qualitative and systemic research, there are no specific recipes to be followed. More important is an ability to craft analytical tools according to one’s research question. In this manner, I decided to design my own methods taking inspiration from Charmaz's grounded theory description (2009), Boje's story network analysis (2001), Cross and Parker’s social network analysis (2004), Flanagan's critical incident technique (1954), and, as we have already seen, from Robichaud's (2003) use of Greimas' narrative structure.

Charmaz's (2009) work was an important source in the process of extracting an official narrative from the selected document through a line-by-line coding of the text. Flanagan's technique (1954) served as a foundation for the crafting of the interview questions used to obtain informal narrative data. And, finally, Boje (2001) and Cross and Parker’s (2004) story and social network analysis were the inspiration for the idea of contextualizing informal narratives through a social network view of interviewees’ connections to each other.

Based on these authors’ works I developed a specific research method utilizing techniques and tools that allowed the translation of my research question into a specific set of procedures. The following illustration depicts the outline and logic behind the whole process.
Figure 15 Research method overview
The first step in my research was to select an IDB document to serve as an official narrative. Having selected the document, I aimed to base all research around a specific topic extracted from the official text. In so doing I could maintain an alignment between official and informal perspectives throughout the process of data collection, making the comparison between both narratives easier. In order to obtain this specific topic, however, awareness of my participant-observer condition motivated a series of steps to reach a relatively impartial view of the HCS document and its subsequent analysis. These steps are described in the following section.

**Finding Exploration Themes**

In order to begin my exploration of the narrative behind the official strategy selected, I performed a line-by-line coding of the HCS document. Such choice was based on the understanding that as a participant-observer immersed in the object of my study I needed to look at the document with fresh eyes in order not to miss aspects of it that perhaps would be relevant for my future analysis. In the words of Charmaz,

> *Coding every line may seem like an arbitrary exercise because not every line contains a complete sentence and not every sentence may appear to be important. nevertheless, it can be an enormously useful tool. Ideas will occur to you that had escaped your attention when reading data for a general thematic analysis (Charmaz, 2009, p. 50).*
Thus, inspired by the first steps of a grounded theory analysis as described by this author, I focused on a line-by-line coding of the strategy and came up with several themes. Below is a table illustrating some examples. The paragraph numbers show the distribution of each theme throughout the document. It is important to note that tables, graphs, and figures were not included in the coding process. However, considering that those elements are usually a visual representation (or repetition) of what is already contained in the textual body of documents, such exclusion did not interfere with the analysis described here.

Table 1

*Example of themes extracted from line-by-line coding*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Paragraph</th>
<th>Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employment model and staffing</strong></td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>&quot;... optimization efforts and is currently underway. If the Bank is to attract and retain the...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>&quot;... changes in its pension plans, updating them to evolving demographics and other factors&quot;.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>&quot;... will continue to be applicable until a new Employment Policy Framework is approved...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Managing career and performance</strong></td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>&quot;... launched, providing for an integrated approach to talent management by putting in place...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>&quot;strengthening the performance management system with a focus on results planning...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>&quot;... that define career aspirations, point out strengths to be leveraged, weaknesses to be...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>&quot;... foreseen as a high-impact initiative within the Talent Optimization pillar of the HCS&quot;.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Managing conflict</strong></td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>&quot;... conduct, and grievance systems is taking place in parallel, as well as the development of...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>&quot;... employees and Management can resolve any differences, while providing assurance that...&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Achieving mobility and flexibility | 2.4 | "... making expertise in country offices more mobile, and improving internal..."
|-----------------------------------|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------
|                                   | 3.13| "... flexibility and mobility is needed to optimize the CMF, and this requires an integrated..."
|                                   | 4.16| "... rotations, lateral transfers, and/or career development opportunities either for short-term..."
| Monitoring and evaluating progress | 2.7 | "... development impact. The Bank needs to take stock of its progress in building-up the HC..."
|                                   | 5.2 | "A set of performance indicators that monitors the design, implementation, and impact of..."
| Defining "talent"                 | 1.1 | "The key asset of the IDB is its employees who work with commitment and passion to..."
|                                   | 4.32| "... be proactive in planning and managing their careers and seeking opportunities to..."
|                                   | 6.5 | "... staff motivated and engaged within a work environment that is diverse, inclusive, and..."
| Developing Leadership             | 3.17| "...highlighted through the development of a leadership profile. Further, a development..."
|                                   | 4.3 | "$... the IDB is incorporating mechanisms that hold leaders accountable for embracing..."
|                                   | 4.56| "$... the competencies needed to develop as a leader and a development plan that provides..."
| Explaining the strategy (self-reference) | 1.4 | "$... the Institution is recognized for: its knowledge of the countries it serves and its..."
|                                   | 3.1 | "An effective Human Capital Strategy needs to be consistent with the requirements of the..."
|                                   | 4.23| "The High-Performance Organization pillar of the HCS helps the organization to identify..."
|                                   | 5.1 | "The activities described in the previous section related to the three pillars of the HCS..."
| Accomplishing mission and goals   | 1.4 | "... the Institution is recognized for: its knowledge of the countries it serves and its..."
|                                   | 2.2 | "... closer to its member countries in the Region, deepen its sector expertise, increase..."
|                                   | 4.2 | "... essential to reach both development and human resources goals."
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building capacity, learning</th>
<th>2.3</th>
<th>&quot;... facilitation of organizational learning and knowledge management. The focus of the...&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>&quot;... strengthen the learning culture so as to continually enhance and expand the Bank's...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>&quot;... be equipped with adequate training and resources to fulfill this responsibility. To this...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>&quot;Capacity Building - provide the leverage to bring the IDB's human capital management in...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>&quot;... assessment of additional financial and human resources, to include training and skills re-&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextualizing strategy</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>&quot;As the region emerges from the global financial crisis, its needs from the Bank are...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>&quot;... the last five years, the Bank's workforce has changed - the ratio of professional to...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>&quot;... model. A strategic shift in the organization emerges from IDB-9, in that having technical...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>&quot;... and smooth transition between the 2001 framework and this HCS, it is understood that...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewing, reshaping, rethinking</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>&quot;The development of this HCS is based on a review of human resources best practices, an...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>&quot;... of the new business model. Two major HR systems were revamped in order to...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>&quot;... HRD must refocus its role as a strategic partner to management and work to...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>&quot;... responsibilities to achieve institutional goals, results in a need to re-think both the...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>&quot;The implementation of this HCS will reshape the Bank's human capital practices for...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consulting, dialoguing and communicating</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>&quot;... extensive consultation process carried out with bank staff&quot;.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>&quot;Administration, individual interviews conducted with senior executives, periodic...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>&quot;... opportunities for staff and supervisors to give feedback, promote ownership of the...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>&quot;... communication of clear rules will aid to build a better work environment, improving...&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Referring to other documents

| 1.6 | "... Strategy approved by the BOD on January 22, 2001 (GN-2113-3 Rev.), which will be..." |
| 2.5 | "... IDB-9 provides the Bank with an institutional strategy and a results framework that is..." |
| 3.16 | "... 2008-2010. The development of a new Strategy for Knowledge and Learning (K&LS)..." |
| 4.16 | "... Region and to meet its business objectives. The IDB-9 report (AB-2764) indicates that..." |
| 6.8 | "This HCS supersedes the 2001 Human Resources Strategy. In order to assure a seamless..." |

Identifying challenges and limitations

| 1.5 | "... external diagnostic assessment on human capital management at the IDB, and an..." |
| 3.7 | "... that systemic rigidity do not provide for the flexibility needed to adapt to strategic..." |
| 4.12 | "... the budget and the business plans do not integrate the planning of the workforce in a..." |
| 6.5 | "... efficient and effective talent management cannot be delegated principally to HRD. In..." |

After this process I compared the themes obtained with the table of contents of the document. By utilizing the explicit structure of the document as a baseline I intended to identify topics that would not “fit” specifically within any one section. In that way, I hoped to surface ideas that appeared relevant due to their constant presence within the text in spite of their lack of a formal section to address them. Below is a table illustrating this process (table 2).

From the 19 themes obtained in the line-by-line coding, I selected 15 to illustrate the process and the tables presented. I have limited the number of themes for the sake of simplicity and the argument that follows was not influenced by such choice.
Table 2  
*Comparison between formal strategy structure and themes found*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table of contents of strategy</th>
<th>Extracted Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Explaining the strategy (self-reference)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Defining &quot;talent&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Human Capital Strategy and the Bank's Business Model</td>
<td>Accomplishing mission and goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contextualizing strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Referring to other documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying the gaps in the Bank's Human Capital Management System</td>
<td>identifying challenges and limitations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>consulting, dialoguing and communicating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talent Optimization</td>
<td>Employment model and staffing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-performance Organization</td>
<td>Achieving mobility and flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managements and Leadership Capacity-Building</td>
<td>Managing career and performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Managing conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Building capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation Framework for the HCS</td>
<td>Monitoring and evaluating progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building change at the IDB</td>
<td>Reviewing, reshaping, rethinking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the table demonstrates, the themes chosen to name each group of ideas obtained in the line-by-line coding show coherence when compared to the formal structure of the document. That is not surprising considering that a strategy “is always something that is constructed to persuade others toward certain understanding and actions” (Barry & Elmes, 1997, p. 433). In other words, every
line in a strategy is designed to convey an argument and the sections, order, and visual presentation (e.g.: format, numbering of paragraphs, etc.) of the document are also aligned with the ideas presented in it.

To further test this coherence I went back to the full document and compared the content of each section to the themes obtained. In doing so, I noticed that most topics were indeed developed and explained in the document in their respective sections, although they were also present across different sections of the document, as already illustrated in table 1. There was, however, one exception to this rule: the theme “reviewing, reshaping, rethinking”. Although the document did possess a section entitled “Building change at the IDB”, the content of this area was comparatively vague when considered side-by-side with other sections and it did not possess a lot of additional information relevant to the document. More specifically, the section did not address how organizational change would be built, managed or fostered within the IDB, the basic idea present in the heading of the section. Hence, the constant presence of the idea of change behind the theme “reviewing, reshaping, rethinking” was not further developed within the text.

Based on these findings I decided to use this exception as the springboard for my analysis of official and corridor narratives. Considering the perspective of Barry and Elms (1997) of strategy as fiction, I employed this exception to navigate the text in a different manner than that originally intended by the strategists. In so doing, I explored the idea that “any story the strategist tells is but
one of many competing alternatives woven from a vast array of possible
characterizations, plot lines, and themes” (Barry & Elms, 1997, p.433). Thus, by
bringing to the surface background elements present in the strategy I extracted a
plausible official narrative from the text, perhaps not one external readers would
recognize from a superficial (or face value) examination, but one that insiders
(i.e.: employees) could perceive.

INTERVIEWS: A SEMI-STRUCTURE

In order to create my interview questions I decided to consolidate the theme
“reviewing, reshaping, rethinking” under the theme “organizational change”. I
based this consolidation on the general meaning of the prefix “re-”: “With the
general sense of ‘back’ or ‘again’”, “to reverse a previous action or process, or to
restore a previous state of things”, “frequently rendered by ‘second’ or

Considering the underlying ideas of “modification”, “improvement”, and
“see/do it once more in order to correct” present in the prefix in question, I
considered the ubiquitous employment of this prefix by the strategists as an
indicator of the organizational changes needed at the IDB. In this regard,
inasmuch the creation of the strategy itself can be considered as a proposal for
organizational change and all the document’s specific sections and instruments
considered change mechanisms or initiatives in and on themselves, the
pervasiveness of the prefix “-re” within the text indicates the necessity (or desire)
for organizational change in a more tangible (linguistic) level, so that is can be measured and not merely interpreted.

Still addressing such consolidation, I would like to remind the reader of the two views proposed by Tsoukas and Chia (2002) of the synoptic (or snapshot) perspective of change in contrast with the constant “becoming” of Organizations and their micro universe of changes discussed at the beginning of this work. While I intellectually adhere to the idea of organizational change as a constant “becoming” (hence the initial definition of organization-as-process, or Organization), my participant observation experience at the IDB strongly indicates change is still mostly perceived in an episodic manner within the Organization. It is possible to assume, therefore, that such is the view held by the individuals who designed the strategy under analysis, and who, accordingly, created a specific section in the text that hinted at “building” change in the organization, not simply bringing constant and ongoing change into focus. In this sense, and considering the bureaucratic nature of the IDB which makes radical modifications very difficult (if not impossible) to achieve, it is easy to perceive how episodic organizational change might be pursued by revisiting, reviewing and revamping existing structures. Hence this is another strong reason for connecting the frequent use of the prefix “-re” and the idea of organizational change, validating my choice of consolidation of themes.

After the process of consolidation and (re)naming of the selected theme, the next step in the process was to design the questionnaire that guided the semi-
structured interviews from which I extracted the corridor perspectives. The questionnaire was composed of four questions:

1) Do you perceive changes currently going on within the organization motivated by the IDB-9?

2) What is IDB’s approach to organizational change? How does change happen in the organization?

3) Can you share a significant change experience you’ve gone through here at the IDB?

4) How would you relate the HCS with the new institutional strategy (IDB-9)?

In addition to referring to organizational change, the questions also established a connection between the strategy under analysis and employees’ perceptions of salient topics addressed by the HCS. For instance, the official document makes constant reference to IDB’s ninth capital increase (IDB-9) in order to justify its human resources initiatives. Hence, question number one prompts employees to share their general understanding of the changes (amongst which are the HCS initiatives) that are currently happening in the organization, while question four explicitly asks about the relationship between the HCS and the IDB-9. In addition, one question was designed to allow personal accounts of episodes related to organizational change.

Once more, these questions served as a springboard for the conversation and clarification, follow-up, and further questions were asked as each interview
developed. The image below illustrates the process of obtaining the interview questions from the line-by-line coding of the HCS, steps described so far in this method chapter.

![Diagram of the interview process]

**Figure 16 From the line-by-line coding to the interview questions**

**Interview Process**

I carried out a total of 15 interviews within a single sector of the Inter-American Development Bank. This choice was based on the observation that communication and work dynamics vary greatly inside each department of the IDB and, thus, in order to acquire a valid qualitative picture of potential conversations going on within the Organization I needed to limit the scope of this study to the micro-universe of a single sector. This limitation will be revisited at the analysis and conclusion sections of this work, as one of the purposes of this study was to explore the general links between the micro-level of communication, the middle level of communication flows and the macro-level of Organizations.
Inspired by the works of Boje (2001) and Cross and Parker (2004) on story and social network analysis (respectively), I recruited the 15 subjects in 3 groups of 5 individuals each. By dividing the interviewees in three different groups, I carried out the interviews in three different “waves” of phases. The first group of subjects was recruited through trust connections that I cultivated during the time I have worked for the Organization. Selection of these individuals was based on diversity of backgrounds, the number of years subjects were working for the Organization, gender, etc. As for the second and third groups, I selected subjects based on a snowball sample (referrals from interviewees) which gave preference to (in order of priority): (1) those subjects referred to by more than three interviewees, (2) individuals who the investigator did not know/did not possess close ties with, and (3) those who possessed a diversified background in relation to the recruited group. The logic behind such subject selection criteria was the following: (1) to gather points of view of potential opinion leaders, (2) expand the sample beyond the community known by the researcher in order to be more representative of the department employees, (3) gather perspectives from a diverse group of subjects.

The referral method was carried out as follows: at the end of each interview subjects were asked to provide 5 names of people they (1) trusted in a professional setting and that they (the interviewees) believed would either (2) like to contribute to the research or (3) have an interesting perspective to share. These last two criteria were purposefully less specific and open to the interpretation of each interviewee while the trust connection was emphasized more strongly.
The employment of a social network analysis (SNA) sample such as the one described allowed me to create a picture of the context and background for the narratives obtained. In SNA, individuals or ideas are represented as nodes and the relationship among these nodes are illustrated by connecting lines. For example, in the case of this research, interviewees will each present 5 lines connecting them to their referrals. If one interviewee presents more than 5 connecting lines, he or she was referred to by other subjects. The next section in this chapter illustrates these ideas and clarifies the SNA concepts presented. The limitations of this sampling and referral criteria will be discussed in an upcoming section.

The final group of interviewees consisted of 7 women and 8 men, 8 staff and 7 consultants. Due to the referral method and the nature of the questions (especially question number 3), participants in general referred to subjects who had been working in the Organization for more than 4 years and, thus, that is the minimum amount of time most subjects had accumulated inside the IDB. This minimum-4-year-experience factor emerged during the interview phase because the most commonly recalled personal organizational change experience was the institutional realignment the IDB went through from 2005 to 2008. Nevertheless, since not all interviewees were able to share a past organizational change experience, interview data was limited to those accounts on the current organizational changes perceived by subjects.
CONTEXTUALIZING CORRIDOR PERSPECTIVES

In this section I briefly describe the network context surrounding the interviews, as the context of the HCS has already been explored in the chapter dedicated to the IDB. This information is useful to better understand the corridor narratives extracted through the interviews.

Figure 17 Social network map of interviewees and referrals

The image above represents a social network map of both the interviewees and the individuals to whom they referred. It includes a number of 39 individuals or nodes. The black nodes represent individuals mentioned but not interviewed and the colored nodes represent the individuals who contributed to this research with their perspectives. The smallest pink node (labeled “S”) represents the researcher,
the blue nodes represent the first five interviewees, the green nodes are the second
group of interviewees and the larger pink nodes are the final group. Node size was
adjusted to represent the number of incoming connections (references): the larger
the node, the more individuals referred to the subject represented by the large
node. Thus, larger nodes can be interpreted as opinion leaders or individuals who
are perceived as trustworthy and somehow a good source of information. Aside
from the number of references, however, it is important to note trust connections
among nodes. The links highlighted in red represent a mutual referral; in other
words, people sharing a connection in red referred to each other when asked about
people whom they trust and that would like to participate in the research.

From this snapshot view of the network within which the extracted narratives
are embedded, it is possible to see that the narratives of the 15 interviewees have
the joint potential of reaching at least other 24 individuals (black nodes). If,
however, there is a single or a few narrative structures that are found within the 15
narratives analyzed, the possibility of individuals not interviewed sharing the
same narrative structures than that of the interviewees’ increases even more.

The network below represents the same network map of both the interviewees
and the individuals referred by them but now the shapes and colors of each node
are modified to represent: employees who hold the status of staff or official
employee (blue nodes), consultants (pink nodes), men (square nodes) and women
(circles). Also, in this view the network of the interviewees is highlighted through
the fading of the individuals referred to but not interviewed. At this point, the
A single observation I would like to make is the tendency of the two different contract modalities represented to cluster around individuals holding the same contract status.

*Figure 18 Network view considering gender and contract type*
CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS

In this chapter I will describe how data was extracted from the official document and the interviews performed. In addition, I will compare the narrative structures found, analyze the implications of their similarities and differences from the perspective of the framework presented, and propose a new understanding of informal communication within the CCO view: that corridor exchanges are part of the necessary conditions for the constitution of organizations.

EXTRACTING FORMAL AND INFORMAL NARRATIVES FROM DATA

In order to extract a comparable narrative structure from both the official document selected and the interviews performed I used the narrative structure defined in the framework chapter of this work to guide my coding of the data. As regards the strategy I worked from the themes already obtained in the previous line-by-line coding (table 1) while for the interviews I worked directly from the interview transcripts. However, in all structures I kept constant the actant “object” substituting it by the concept of “organizational change”. In so doing I intended to specify the kind of narratives I was looking for in my data: organizational change narratives. In other words, by establishing a specific object of desire I delimited the topic of the narratives and somehow determined the relationship among
actants, since these elements are defined “by their relation to each other in the network they constitute” (Robichaud, 2003).

**OFFICIAL NARRATIVE STRUCTURE**

Figure 19 Official narrative structure found

Above is the narrative structure obtained for the HCS. In order to arrive at this structure I first worked with the themes obtained in the line-by-line coding (table X), placing different themes under the different actant categories in order to create a coherent narrative structure. For instance, I placed all themes I perceived as HR tools, mechanisms or initiatives under the actant “helper”, as these initiatives can be interpreted as tools to achieve the “object” organizational change. Thus, most of the document content, which described the different initiatives that would be pursued in order to fulfill the HCS objective, was put under this actant. As for the “sender” category, the coded themes “referring to other documents” and “contextualizing strategy: external and internal changes” provided the authority
necessary for this actant to delegate the “subject” with the task of achieving change at the level of the organization. The table below illustrates how strategy themes were placed under specific actants.

Table 3
*Placing strategy themes under “actants”*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actants</th>
<th>Actors</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Helper</strong></td>
<td>HCS instruments and initiatives</td>
<td>Employment model and staffing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Managing career and performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Managing conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Achieving mobility and flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Explaining the strategy (self-reference)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Developing leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>consulting, dialoguing and communicating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Building capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Receiver</strong></td>
<td>Clients (member countries) and employees</td>
<td>Monitoring and evaluating progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Defining “talent”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Accomplishing mission and goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sender</strong></td>
<td>Internal (IDB) and external (region) changes</td>
<td>Contextualizing strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Referring to other documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Object</strong></td>
<td>Organizational change</td>
<td>Reviewing, reshaping, rethinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opponent</strong></td>
<td>Organizational limitations (structures, mechanisms, procedures, etc.)</td>
<td>Identifying challenges and limitations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The only actant I was unable to identify from the themes extracted from my previous line-by-line coding of the strategy was the actant “subject”. However, considering the frequent use of impersonal language by strategists in order to
achieve an effect of neutrality and to convince their audiences of the objectivity and rational nature of the strategy (Barry & Elmes, 1997), the lack of a “subject” in the official narrative analyzed was to be expected. Assuming that the issue could be easily remedied by placing IDB’s human resources department as the main subject responsible for the changes proposed in the strategy, while seeking for a solution to the subject problem I was somehow (but not completely) surprised to find the following paragraph at the very end of the document:

HRD’s role is to partner with the business units and provide the mechanisms to address career management and staff development needs. The responsibility for efficient and effective talent management cannot be delegated principally to HRD. In collaboration with supervisors, HRD can help the Bank meet its work program and keep staff motivated and engaged within a work environment that is diverse, inclusive, and clearly defines expected results and establishes desired behaviors. Employees feel stronger engagement when they understand the mission, vision and goals of the organization and their individual alignment with it. (IDB, 2011, p.23)

As a solution to this disputed “subject” issue, I decided to complete the official narrative structure by placing the actors “IDB and HR” as the actant pursuing the desired object of organizational change. I will return to this subject conundrum in
an upcoming section. Now I will move on to the narrative structures found in the corridor perspectives.

CORRIDOR NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

In order to extract the narrative structure of the interviews I first decided to group interviewees according to the level of change they perceived when asked about current organizational changes. Interestingly, by following this criterion I was able to divide the subjects in two evenly distributed groups: those that perceived few or no changes (8 individuals) and those who perceived many significant changes (7 individuals). Table 4 illustrates this process and each table cell represents the perception of a different individual.

Table 4

\emph{Grouping of subjects by perception of organizational changes}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change perception</th>
<th>Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Few, no changes</td>
<td>“I haven’t really [gone through a significant change experience]. Not profoundly, you know.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I haven’t seen any big changes, at least nothing that has affected my work.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“No [change]. Besides, it’s not approved yet... the increase. It’s more of an idea than... we’re still waiting for the US, who is the main partner to sign.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|                     | “I’m not really involved, as a consultant I am in the “bubble”.
|                     | “So in the end it’s just new names for old things. And I would say that has happened before. Every other time they changed the names but they tried to adapt the names to incorporate all the things we’re doing now and not see what we need or what we’re going to need in the future and then selecting those categories for those new things.” |
|                     | “There may be... 1-2 years ago it was more difficult to approve something. It is now easier because it’s in the mandate.” |
“Well, there have been gradual shifts that I think mirror the changes multilateral banks have gone through over the years which is only natural.”

“So far I have not experienced any change whatsoever. For me it’s business as usual. Nobody has come to me and told me that anything is going to change…”

“Yes, well, we have a clear set of goals to attain for the IDB-9, tasks, practical ones in our realm of work, (...) we have very specific goals for 2012 in terms of lending, targets (...)”

“Of course. They are more focused on results. They are reconsidering the role of the consultants in the Bank... very much so because now I think they are trying to change the approach they have with human resources and how to improve the use of everybody and I think yes, they’re... I feel a change.”

“Yes, of course, there are important changes. (...) We have to be more involved in the loans, we have to be more active in these issues... and we have to be more related to the other areas of the bank (...)”

“Absolutely. Well first of all the IDB-9 states 5 institutional priorities and there have been... each of those has led to some reorganization... some reorganization at some level.”

“Yes. I wouldn’t know what all the changes are, but I’d say that as the region is evolving and the capital increase is an opportunity to look at how this is evolving and it is an opportunity to look at the stakeholders on both sides and take into account these new changes and the needs in place in the region.”

“Essentially, of course we feel change. We have more demanding tasks. We have more demand, and demanding work. The demand is the work load, demanding is more the kind of… a challenge.”

“Yes. Definitely there have been some changes related to that. I would say that if I remember all of them, there have been some changes in the... trying to align the human capital of the organization (...)”

After determining these two groups, I decided to further refine the position of each individual within their groups by looking for data that illustrated their perceived involvement in the change process. This was necessary to determine the “subject” actant in the narrative structures. Would interviewees perceive themselves as active actors within the organizational change narrative or would
they only be observers? Table 5 shows the sub-division of the change perception groups and the evidence supporting the process.

Table 5

*Position of subjects within perceived change groups*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change perception</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Few, no changes    | Outlier  | "I'm sort of an outlier. Generally I am not... I don't pay too much attention to institutional things. I try to concentrate on my work. I don't know if I am a good sample of what's going on or an average of the Bank."
|                    |          | "I am not sure how the organization itself is changing or not since I'm not really involved," |
|                    |          | "... the core of the things I've been working have stayed the same so in that sense I am probably not a high percentage..." |
|                    |          | "I perceive a lot of changes since the realignment but I don't know if... I didn't pay attention if they are connected to June 2011..." |
|                    | Skeptic  | "It's a big, very big organization so that makes things a bit more difficult but I think that efforts should be made (...) And yes, it is a governmental organization, a big organization but I really wonder why. It could be done a bit better I think." |
|                    |          | "It seems like it's going to happen but it's not for sure. I prefer just to... when really things are happening, otherwise it's too optimistic. I'm not pessimistic, but let's wait and see..." |
|                    | Critic   | "Supposedly the new HCS focus on helping you to achieve more results but I'd say in practice it's not, there is not that connection." |
|                    |          | "I don't know anything about it but my impression is that the HCS has nothing to do with consultants. It's all about staff and there is a very clear segregation between consultants and staff." |
| Significant,      | Participant | "I participated in several panels and the human resources department is on those panels..." |
| important         |          |      |
changes

"... I think they were very straightforward (...) I don't know if it's because I'm a little bit involved because of my job description and I don't know how everybody is informed but I think they are because there is the new system..."

Empathic

"All that you can do to improve this is better because it's not easy for one organization to have staff and consultants. It's not easy (...) it's not always easy to do this because you're taking monetary decisions (...) If the organization can do it it's better for the people."

Well-Informed

"... how its internal structure evolves to take into account the new mandate (...) that the Bank... these are complex issues, complex organisms, so the changes are complex in a way as well."

"... the IDB is responsible for multitask operational research and policy guidance, advice and implementation and the IDB now has a bigger responsibility than in the past and the more complicated environment..."

"I always think that an organization is probably never perfect, it is just the way you manage it, more than anything."

"I know the HCS, well it's still in the making now... How is this related to the IDB-9... part is related to the IDB-9 and part is not related."

This refined positioning of individuals within their change perception groups allowed me to label the overall narrative structure of each group as follows:

“observer” (outlier, skeptic, critic) narrative structure and “participant” (participant, empathic, well-informed) narrative structure. Translating this position of interviewees to a group narrative structure, I defined two subject actants according to the level of participation in the narratives transcribed: “IDB (they)” (observer narrative structure) and “IDB (we)” (participant narrative structure). Figures 20 and 21 illustrate the structures.
After the definition of the object (perceived changes) and the subject (IDB) of the narrative structures, I continued the process of identifying the other actants within the transcribed narratives. At the end of this process I had uncovered three basic narrative structures, one of which was an incomplete (and not very coherent) structure that corresponded to the narratives of 4 subjects belonging to the observer group. Deciding to work with the complete structures in order to allow a side-by-side comparison between them, I left the incomplete structure aside and worked only with the two remaining narrative structures: one representing the participant group and other representing the observer group. I will return to the incomplete structure in an upcoming section. Below are the two structures found in employees’ narratives and their respective actant tables.

![Figure 20 “Observer” narrative structure](image)

Table 6

“Observers” actant table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actant</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sender</td>
<td>Market pressure</td>
<td>“... the market is changing (...) so we have more competition”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>IDB (they)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;... the only way to justify the existence of the Bank is that if we can really add knowledge to the money that we lend. Because if it's just lending money you can just go to a commercial bank...&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;... trying to adapt to the market, if we can say that the World Bank is a market.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;... shifts (...) influenced by the region, the academic debate, those so push on...&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;What I did not see afterwards was a clear political commitment from the Bank, you know, training and really enforcing it. I didn't see it implemented&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;So it's crucial for the Bank to invest in human capital and in knowledge. If the strategy is putting emphasis in that I think it is the right thing to do.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;There is no head, there is no main point of decision, that is not happening at this moment at the board, that is not happening at the president's office.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I think that the Bank... (...) reacts rather than acts upon that... so yes, there have been shifts, gradual and influenced by the region...&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Helper</th>
<th>Little HCS support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;In terms of some procedures that have been made a bit more flexible. So here and there you do see changes, but I haven't seen a profound...&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I think it was a good thing that they created a separated career for professionals.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;So there are a couple of examples of good things that are happening because of the HCS but they are too small to really create a connection with the institutional strategy.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I know there are efforts here to help spouses find jobs... I've never heard of anything that this has been particularly effective&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Receiver</th>
<th>Clients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;... position itself differently and really give good client service.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;... that doesn't make much sense for people outside the Bank.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;... exercise from inside the Bank than a pull exercise from the countries, from the demand...&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Before the countries, the region, our clients...&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opponent</th>
<th>Lack of clarity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| "So I don't know how competitive our loans still are. I think we need much more flexibility in our
programs, new instruments. I don't think the institution is very flexible towards that..."

“That complicates the whole communication with people outside the Bank. What was the motivation for the change? I don't know.”

“I think it's more... there is a disconnect between what was written and what is being applied...”

“... I don't know what exactly they have maybe considered and then thought to be impractical or unfeasible or whatever and put it to the side...”

---

Figure 21 “Participant” narrative structure

Table 7
“Participants” actant table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actant</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sender</td>
<td>IDB-9</td>
<td>&quot;Well, we have a clear set of goals to attain for the IDB-9, tasks, practical ones in our realm of work...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Well, first of all the IDB-9 states 5 institutional priorities and there have been... each of those has led to some reorganization at some level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;There have been many capital increases. This is the ninth one, which is still being implemented, hasn't been totally confirmed. The changes are in terms of organizational changes.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Because now we see that the globe is more complex (...) so that's why one of the capital increase priorities is</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
infrastructure, climate change..."

"Yes, definitely. There have been some changes related to the capital increase. I would say that if I remember all of them, there have been some changes in..."

"I believe that it has been a bottom-up approach. They have done a good job in getting the key players involved in all different levels of the organization into understanding what changes were involved and making sure that they feel ownership of the change."

"They are more focused on results. They are reconsidering the role of the consultants in the Bank...very much so because now I think they are trying to change the approach they have with human resources and how to improve the use of everybody..."

"As you know we have now more people in the countries and this is very important because now we're more in contact with the private sector, public sector, so we can identify better what they need. (...) And this is, I believe, one of the most important, better characteristic of the change."

"Well, you see consolidation and amplification of the mandate of the sector. In my role in the sector, of course, because I'm part of the sector and I identify with the sector."

"We know that there is a new policy to recruit consultants so that's part of the strategy (...), looking for results in all the work we produce. In doing that there has been a strengthening of our field offices (...). Many changes. Positive changes."

"I think the HCS supports the new institutional strategy. It calls for professionalizing our staff, looking for the best talent and you can see that really happening."

"They want to hire the best people no matter... they want to have good people no matter if they're consultants or staff. And that’s the baseline for having a great, strong institution... is to have good people."

"... part of the vision of the president with the new administration but the IDB-9 reinforces it... which is to have more people on the ground. In order to do that there is a whole part of the HCS that is related to this..."

"... relating to the strengthening of our field offices, this is something that it’s for us... for this sector, after the realignment it’s very important."
"And the bank can then adapt to all those changes to be more effective, more efficient in its mandate, to serve its clients. That’s an essential part of the human capital."

"We need to support the origination process which means our specialists have to be more involved with the client ..."

"I wouldn’t know what all the changes are, but I’d say that as the region is evolving and the capital increase is an opportunity to look at how this is evolving and it is an opportunity to look at the stakeholders on both sides and take into account these new changes and the needs in place in the region."

"That’s why the bank needed to address, to prepare to help our client countries."

"In doing that there has been a strengthening of our field offices, trying to decentralize even more what we do and to be closer to our clients in the countries."

"I think that there is another important thing, which is connected to philosophy. We are very close to the countries and in general all the changes are in the same line."

"Here all the decisions are slow and you have to remember that in addition this is a political organization where we have the government in our directory, the government of the country, and then it’s not easy to move very fast."

"It’s usually pretty slow, because there are so many stakeholders involved into the process. Usually institutional changes are quite slow."

"Now the bank requires more kind of horizontal coordination for topics for example here we do this work but together with other departments. The internal coordination is a requirement so that’s why it’s much more... it takes more time."

"we’re moving in the right direction but very slowly in terms of resources coming... I mean the strategies they’re there but the resources to support the strategy are not so significant..."

"... we have all these activities which are being implemented and it will probably take some time, also many things are still not defined, some things are still going to be defined."
In the next sections I will examine the structures uncovered and relate these findings to the framework and research question proposed.

**Comparing Official and Informal Narrative Structures**

Observing the narrative structures obtained from both official and informal perspectives, it is easy to perceive their close similarities. First, the HCS features as a significant “helper” in all three structures. Second, the main “opponent” perceived by both employees and strategists are IDB’s own organizational limitations. For instance, the Organization’s structural slowness (described in chapter 3) features as the main opponent in the narrative structure extracted from the *participant* employee group, while limitations like IDB’s “systemic rigidity” (table 1) appear as the main opponent in the narrative structure extracted from the HCS. A third similarity between the structures obtained is the recognition that the clients (or member countries) are the “receivers” of the efforts of the organization to change. And, finally, in all narrative structures the IDB-9 and the market are both seen as important “sender” factors in demanding the organization to change and adapt.

Another significant aspect of the comparison between official and informal narrative structures is the “subject conundrum” all narratives present. On the official side, the HCS claimed that “the responsibility for efficient and effective talent management cannot be delegated principally to HRD” (IDB, 2011, p.23), which made me adopt the actant “IDB & HR” as the subject of the official
narrative. On the informal side, the observer and the participant narrative structures showed different perceptions regarding who was the subject of the narratives: interviewees sometimes perceived themselves as part of the Bank (IDB/we) and other times they saw the Bank as a separate entity (IDB/they) in charge of the changes. Although in the division of the interviewee groups I made the decision of using these different perceptions as characterizing the participant (IDB/we) and observer (IDB/they) groups, data in the tables of these groups show that even inside the participant group the IDB was sometimes perceived as “they”, while in the observer group the IDB was also referred to as “we”.

At first glance this variation in narrative subjects may look like an organizational inconsistency that perhaps the IDB should examine. However, in my perspective, this “subject conundrum” is a structural part of the Organization and a direct reflection of the several layers of responsibility and delegation that constitutes the IDB, as I described in chapter 3. In this regard, a systematic effort to inform employees about this structural complexity might allow the organization to maintain (or improve) the coherence of different narrative structures by clarifying the responsibilities and limitations of different actors.

Regarding the differences between the official and the informal narratives, the most significant discrepancy I have found was that employees did not perceive themselves as beneficiaries (in the narrative structure, “receivers”) of the strategy. Considering that the official document analyzed is in its entirety related to IDB’s human resources practices, one might have imagined that the main topics and
initiatives described in this official narrative would have been at least minimally interesting for the subjects interviewed. However, from the sample group selected, very few individuals seemed to have a good understanding of what the document was about and how it affected their relationship to the Organization. As I have described in the chapter dedicated to the IDB, the communication landscape of the Organization is a rich and complex one and it probably plays an important role in the narrative perceptions gathered for this research. Thus, although this finding does not necessarily point to a complete disengagement of employees towards the Organization, it is interesting to analyze from a managerial perspective, since it may hint at other official narratives that are not reaching important audiences inside the Bank.

As for the differences among the identified informal structures, it is interesting to note how the position of the different groups as participant and observer influenced their views about how much the organization was actively pursuing changes or not. While the observer group perceived few changes and saw the IDB as passively being pushed by the market and adapting because of this pressure, individuals in the participant group tended to perceive the organization as an active agent in the pursuit of change, considering the strategic document of the IDB-9 as an important source for the many changes they perceived were taking place. In addition, while the participant narrative structure (figure 21) presented as “opponent” the structural and intrinsic slow pace of the organization, the observer narrative structure (figure 20) determined as “opponent” a lack of clarity
in decision-making that, in a first analysis, is not necessarily connected to the nature of the Organization. This lack of clarity, then, could be addressed by the improvement of internal communication practices and systems so as to bring individuals carrying observer narratives into the participant realm.

Considering the differences and similarities between the formal and informal narratives described thus far, I found few discrepancies among the uncovered structures. Furthermore, the discrepancies found were mostly related to slight differences in the definition of specific actants as opposed to a radical shuffling of roles, for instance placing IDB’s clients as “opponents” or employees as “senders”. As I have suggested, then, these slight differences in actants might be solved through improvements in the communication mechanisms of the Organization. Relatively straightforward and simple, this solution follows the practices many managers and administrators would suggest and apply to their own Organizations. After all, Organizations must be aligned and coordinated, and once these minor actant issues are “fixed” there would be no further adjustments the IDB could benefit from, since its basic official narrative is already in great resonance with the informal narratives going on in the corridors. In this work, however, I will argue for a counterintuitive (albeit systemic) manner to address and harness narrative differences.
INCOHERENT NARRATIVE STRUCTURES: OPPORTUNITY FOR VARIANCE

As explained in the previous sections, the only structure that diverged greatly from the official narrative structure (and both the informal structures, for that matter) was the incomplete and often incoherent narrative structure obtained from a sub-group of the observer group. This sub-group will be referred to as “variant” group from now on and below is an illustration of its narrative structure.

![Figure 22 "Variant" narrative structure](image)

Data for this particular structure was not presented in this work due to the specific narrative of each of the four interviewees and the possibility of subjects being pinpointed by other IDB members able to recognize the interviewees' accounts and opinions. In other words, while the narrative data presented thus far possessed a similar underlying structure and interviewees' opinions could be aggregated and presented as a group in tables, the accounts of the individuals presenting the variant structure did not allow the same treatment to their data. However, by simply considering the incoherence of the variant narrative structure
it is possible to make a series of observations that do not require the specific
narrative data to be presented.

As a first observation, it is interesting to note that all members of the *variant*
group were consultants. In addition, three of the individuals sharing the same
incomplete structure also shared trust connections among each other. In the
network view below that becomes clear.

![Figure 23 SNA view of interviewees: contract, gender and narrative structure](image)

In this view, only the interviewee network is represented and the empty shapes
signal the members of the *observer* group. Again, pink shapes represent
consultants, blue shapes represent staff, squares are male interviewees and circles
are female interviewees. Within this group, subjects D, I, and C are connected through trust links and all three of them held a *variant* narrative structure. The fourth subject of the *variant* group, L is notably connected to two female staff members holding *participant* narrative structures, including subject O, with whom L shares a trust connection. Nevertheless, L finds affinity with the *variant* group due to its particular narrative structure.

Before labeling this *variant* group as representing subjects alienated and disengaged from other IDB members and even the organization itself (which is not a favorable position to hold inside any traditional Organization), it is important to remember a particular feature of Thayer's proposal of human communication systems: in relatively closed communication systems (which is the case of the IDB and its governmental structure) overorganization through routines and bureaucracy can lead to lack of variance and, from a systemic point of view, that is a great disadvantage if the system is to evolve and adapt to changes. Thus, we can interpret the group holding the *variant* narrative structure as a potential sub-group (in this case formed by a particular contract modality) that might bring to the IDB some degree of variance and increase the Organization's capacity to change while it adapts to this sub-group's ideas and perspectives.

However, in order for that variance to emerge, I believe a minimum amount of narrative coherence among this sub-group would be necessary. Only then might it promote any changes in IDB's communication system. And as the network graph
demonstrates, this specific group potentially shares many trust connections amongst its members, a factor that can significantly facilitate the creation and diffusion of a common group narrative.

Were the IDB to adopt a systemic managing style, the *variant* group might be identified, recognized for its potential variance, and allowed space to create its own sub-group narrative allowing the Organization to achieve a healthy degree of “narrative mutation” and consequent adaptation. This is the approach adopted by Google in its policy that allows engineers 20% of time to work on whatever projects they are interested in. As the policy highlights, this is a specific condition (time for “choice” projects) being offered to a specific group of employees (engineers), a situation that can also be reproduced among IDB consultants. Obviously, the working dynamics of Google and of the IDB are very different, but the example of the resilience and growth of the technology company can serve as an inspiration (and motivation) for the adoption of a systemic management style by the Bank. Such an innovative approach to managing divergent opinions, if adopted, would in addition potentially contribute to a change in the perception of those employees that see the IDB as a copycat of the World Bank.

Furthermore, by experimenting with and discussing the findings of this work, the IDB could actively engage with the academic community and foster more studies around its organization, structure and dynamics. For, as we have seen through the work of John White (1972) and the opinion of an interviewee, academic works do present possibilities of reasonable and innovative directions
that the Organization might take. As an added benefit, the exploration of this
systemic property of relatively closed communication (and in our case narrative)
systems, could potentially improve IDB's internal processes and, consequently, its
institutional positioning among its stakeholders.

By bringing this perspective to the CCO realm, it is possible to state that
within relatively closed Organizations informal narrative exchanges possess the
(often unrecognized) creative potential of ensuring the survival of the
Organization by forcing it to adapt to changes from within itself. Closed
Organizations, by definition, have low permeability to external disturbances and
the variance effects they trigger. Thus, under closed conditions and considering
the CCO perspective, I believe informal communication should no longer be
considered a common, taken-for-granted practice inside Organizations. On the
contrary, informal exchanges will be more accurately perceived when considered
as a strategic space and a channel required for the survival of relatively closed
Organizations. In this regard, informal conversations within the CCO perspective
become much more than an unidentified and perhaps irrelevant aspect of the four
communication flows, but rather a necessary aspect related to the communicative
constitution of organizations.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

In this work I have proposed the use of two different theoretical lenses to analyze the discussions around the communicative constitution of organizations: Fisher's narrative paradigm (1987) and a systems view of communication. With the support of these two perspectives, I specifically sought to investigate the location and relevance of different micro exchanges within the communication flows, in an attempt to understand how the differences and similarities between specific conversations influenced (or not) the constitution of organizations themselves.

As the investigation developed, I was pleasantly surprised by many of the findings, especially by the (somewhat counterintuitive) potential constitutive role of variant narratives that are often spread and crafted in corridors and cafeterias everywhere. From a systems science perspective, these narratives seem to possess greater importance and power in relatively closed Organizations and in that regard the IDB provided an excellent initial ground to explore them. In this work I have only touched upon the empirical existence of these narratives and how to identify them from other narratives, but further investigation around their origins, reach and role in the mutation and adaptation of Organizations sounds like an exciting intellectual journey to make. For instance, future research could engage in efforts to (1) connect variant narrative structures to micro and macro organizational changes, (2) investigate the existence (or not) of these narrative structures in an
entire Organization, and (3) follow the emergence of variant narratives inside organizations considering variables connected to time and space.

In addition to the positive surprises encountered during the analytical part of this work, I found the theoretical journey to be one of great sights, sounds and memorable findings. To mention but two main examples, I was delighted to encounter in systems science a deep resonance to the kind of thinking I have been practicing for a long time, but one I never knew possessed a specific name, a scientific structure, and a philosophical foundation. Also, Fisher’s view of the world as a great narrative deeply speaks to the way I perceive myself, others and my environment. I truly believe that narratives are the actual foundation of human perception and sense making. After intellectually engaging with and getting to know both these perspectives better, I hope to have contributed in this work to bringing them closer together in the academic world. Not only that, I hope this work fosters more dialogue engaging the three perspectives adopted, so as to generate a constructive effort to bring the scientific and the practitioner community closer to the systemic and narratively coherent community I believe it has the potential to become. Most obviously, based on the findings of this work, divergence and differences not only ought to, but also, must exist for the sake of the development of this ideal community itself. However, by employing some of the same vocabulary and perhaps some similar structures, the different narratives being shared, built and contested within this community will outgrow what White
aptly labeled as disciplinary and research-specific “language game” (Jay White, 1999).

Still speaking on behalf of the interdisciplinary approach adopted in this work, I make Moran's words my own:

*It could be argued that, because they are relatively new and exploratory, interdisciplinary ways of thinking have a tendency to be more disorganized, error-prone and incomplete than established forms of knowledge. But if a certain messiness goes with the territory, this is also what makes the territory worth occupying: interdisciplinarity can disrupt the sometimes deceptive smoothness and fluency of the disciplines, questioning their status as conveyors of disinterested knowledge by pointing to the problematic nature of all claims to scientific objectivity and neutrality.* (Moran, 2002, p. 184)

By leaving a defined disciplinary arena one often risks being called out for not following specific premises such as this one: “CCO scholarship never leaves the realm of communicational events” (F. Cooren, Kuhn, Cornelissen, & Clark, 2011, p.1153). I have chosen, however, to risk the messiness of unexplored territories and, in order to avoid (or at least minimize) the pitfalls indicated by Moran, I utilized a series of ontological and epistemological notes and safeguards to finalize the research to which the reader was introduced. And I will leave it to the reader to be the final judge of the outcome of this process.
LIMITATIONS, IMPROVEMENTS AND NEW DIRECTIONS

In this final section I will bullet point areas of improvement and possible new research directions.

- Use of three different perspectives to inform the research: in order to maintain a coherent argument throughout this work several other clarifications regarding the alignment of the terms, concepts, and logic underlying the different theories had to be left outside this work. This inherent difficulty of interdisciplinary research would be greatly diminished by the expansion of systems science's proposal of a common language and (systemic) perspective. Any research created with this objective in mind is of large relevance.

- Advancement of Thayer's (1972) human communication system concept: in this work I have mostly adopted the systemic elements of Thayer's communication proposal, leaving aside some of this author's definitions and ideas related to the individual level of the system (e.g.: the conceptual difference between communication and intercommunication suggested by this author). Future research undertaken on the intersection of the three perspectives adopted could further refine the alignment between the narrative and the systems perspective, specifically addressing the unique self-reflective nature of human communication systems.

- Use of interviews to collect potential corridor perspectives: as we have seen, the informal narratives were gathered through individual interviews
and did not necessarily portray conversations individuals were actually having in the corridors. In order to gather corridor perspectives *in situ*, new research methods and approaches would need to be designed and great attention would need to be given to the issue of subject's privacy and their eventual requests for confidentiality.

- Employment of a social network analysis/referral sample: the referral method employed in this work asked interviewees for more subject names at the end of each interview as opposed to the beginning. In this manner interviewees tended to give out names of individuals whom they believed would be able to provide interesting perspectives to the interviews questions presented. If the request for referrals were made before the interviews took place, data for the social network sampling could have been different and that is an interesting aspect to examine in future research.

- Official perspective selection and location within the four flows: due to the generic nature of the four flows, different organizational topics will often be located within more than one communication flow. In this manner, the careful selection of an official perspective and the clear connection between the narrative chosen and one of the CCO communication flows would allow a flow-specific understanding of the influence informal conversations have over different flows. In the case of the human resources strategy adopted, its intrinsic relationship to the
theme of membership negotiation made the connection clear, albeit not exclusive to that flow.


doi:10.1177/0893318909351582


doi:10.1177/0170840611410836


doi:10.1177/1473325004043383


Accessed December 10, 2011, from
http://www.iadb.org/document.cfm?id=36290863

Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) n.d., *About the Inter-American Development Bank*. Accessed December 17, 2011, from


doi:10.1177/0170840611411395


