

LOSER, HERO OR HUMAN BEING

ARE YOU READY FOR EMERGENT TRUTH?

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PREFACE

This paper offers an alternative to the 'default' analytical approach to problems in market research. The method we offer is radically different from all qualitative and quantitative approaches currently used in research.

The method we propose helps researchers and clients look at consumers without formulating a model or hypothesis beforehand. The methodology offers a systematic way to introduce intuition, flexibility, creativity and imagination into the process without falling into the trap of the post-modern attitude that 'there are no truths at all'.

We will explain this approach in the context of a narrative project we conducted at the beginning of 2008, about 'drinking and driving'. The aim of the project was to understand the norms of youngsters concerning drinking and driving in order to gather input for an effective campaign.

We think the method is a very valuable extra, especially for specific kinds of problems: the more complex ones. We do not wish to propose the method as 'the new answer to all our problems'. If we sometimes stress the problems of the current methods and the possibilities of the new ones, we do that because we want to make the differences very clear.

THE NARRATIVE APPROACH: FROM RIGID TO FLEXIBLE

"As to luck there is the old miners' proverb: gold is where you find it." (p. 920)

"Intuition, like a flash of lightning, lasts only for a second. It generally comes when one is tormented by a difficult decipherment and when one reviews in mind the fruitless experiments already tried. Suddenly the light breaks through and one finds after a few minutes what previous days of labour were unable to reveal." (p 920)

"(...) if everyone has a vested interest in believing that they understand everything, or even that people are capable in principle understanding it (...) then you have an environment in which dopey, reductionist, simple-minded, pat, glib thinking can circulate (...). But things (...) seem to argue in favor of a more cautious view of the world, an openness to the full and true weirdness of the Universe, an admission of our limited human faculties." (p782). All quotes from Cryptonomicon by Neal Stephenson.

Neal Stephenson wrote an electrifying book called 'Cryptonomicon'. The core of the book is about breaking codes, both enigma codes during the war and the quest for making and breaking computer encryption nowadays. In the book the main character, Randy Waterhouse, is involved in a very 'next generation' software start-up based on genius encryption insights. His quest gets entangled with several other stories, one of them the story of Alan Turing, who is one of the great thinkers in math, and in the book is working on the Enigma code. The book is not only exciting and funny; it also presents an interesting view on what is seen as 'exact science'. Basically the book opposes the 'old' 'Newtonian' reductionist view that regarded the world as a machine, a rational device. This mechanistic model is replaced by a 'new', more complex view of the world: the world as a

complex phenomena, with so many variables interacting that it cannot be fully described by reductionist laws. This world is not so much 'dictated by laws'; the laws sort of 'emerge' from the complex reality. The view is not at all 'new age'; it is rooted in exact science views of complexity. The main characters are either mathematicians (be it of the creative and genial kind) or computer experts and the book swarms with formulas. It is precisely this interesting mixture of 'exact' and 'complex' that could be the clue to a next step in research.

The current research solutions are rooted in the 'old scientific school' methods, largely influenced by the Newtonian approach, focused on 'analyzing': finding truths by reducing the reality to an insight.

In order to find this insight, you need to ask questions. The questions you ask are dictated by the initial analysis. If you ask consumers 'Do you like the Bob campaign' you presuppose that likeability is a relevant factor. If you ask the consumer 'were you at anytime influenced by the Bob campaign' you ask him to formulate or construct a view of his reality, based on his conscious knowledge. You make him abstract from his experience. You ask him to forget that the norm is highly contextual and you force him to describe the norm as a 'given fact' rather than a continuous work in progress. The outcome is likely to be false, not 'a lie', nor a 'socially accepted truth' but simple: an answer that is bereft of the rich reality of the real life experience. In the reality his 'norms' are flexible and depend on internal and external ever-changing circumstances. However, his answers involve the rigid, rational conscious result of a complex decision, because that is what he is asked for. In our current practice we resolve this problem with the magic of experience. Experienced qualitative researchers intuitively understand the working of the context and are able to 'help' consumers reach below the level of the conscious mind. And if respondents are not able to do this, the researchers' interpretation skills might be able to lift the outcomes to a more meaningful level. This is why research experience is considered as so important: only experienced researchers understand that they should listen very carefully behind the words.

And after collecting the answers, we need interpretation. The answers themselves give no answer to our research questions. Without interpretation the research leads to a meaningless repetition of the consumers' answers. Interpretation is the process that lifts the results to the field of actions, by putting the results into a meaningful context. Here we have two options: either we 'deduct (we can 'deduct' if we have a valid theory about reality), or theory tells us how to interpret the results – this implies that we have and completely trust our theory. The other option is we 'induct'. We use the data in order to 'build' a theory or framework about reality. This is a creative action. Induction is a way of making sense of reality. This is often done in qualitative research. It is a process of combined intuition, analysis and creative thinking that distils 'insight' from research. In a way this is a method for adding the researcher's view of the world to the research. This needs to be done by an experienced researcher. Once having reached this insight, the work is done, the action can start: we know what to do. The insight is a 'truth' and therefore static: it can be used over and over. Furthermore: these insights will act as a 'lens'. Once we have reached this insight we will look at the world through the lens of this insight. The very danger of this approach that we will forget to look at the world afterwards, since we think we already know what's out there.

In short: the 'normal' research methods we are accustomed to do not always account for the level of complexity we need to dive into. The use of an interview guideline with a prescribed number of items to address is too rigid a format. If we want to look at the world in a more open way, we need methods that do not need a model that describes the world. These methods should not ask the researcher to formulate new hypotheses too soon; they should not invite consumers to formulate any hypothesis about their own behavior at all and they should include 'intuition' in a systematic way. The method should be able to help the consumer exploit the richness of real life experience as opposed to converting it to a mini-theory of their own mind and behavior.

Dave Snowden, a professor in Physics who applies insights from the complexity theory to social sciences as well as a Knowledge Management guru, developed a method with precisely this purpose. The basis of the method is the narrative. Asking questions is inviting a person to rationalize, judge, and explain one's behavior; it is essentially a way of 'narrowing down'. Probing narratives is asking for context. A narrative is not an essay; in stories we need not explain why, we just tell the relevant details. So the method is about 'inviting consumers to tell stories without trying to find an explanation. Furthermore, the method is about assigning meaning to the stories, not by the expert interviewer, but by the consumer himself. The method prevents any interpretation by 'experts' to the extent possible. Instead of trying to find simple explanations through expert interpretation, we are looking for relevant patterns and subtle changes within these patterns as an early warning of change. As much as possible, these patterns should emerge from the process, rather than being forced on the material by the interpreters. The method (or rather: a family of methods) is open source and can be used by anyone who is accredited (accreditation courses are held on a regular basis all over the world). There is an international network of accredited narrative consultants empowered by cognitive edge (www.cognitive-edge.com). Ferro has three accredited researchers and has already amassed experience with the method for several clients. Ferro has conducted several narrative projects based on Snowden's method.

The difference between a qualitative research and a narrative project is quite significant. The differences involve all the stages. The fieldwork is completely different. The interpretation follows a different scheme. Even the results are different from a normal project. Since simple directions regarding 'what should be done' cannot be given, greater involvement is needed from the client. Simply waiting for the 'correct' formula for action does not work. In the next chapters we would like to explain how the project was conducted, why it was conducted this way, exactly what the difference is between this and the 'normal approach' and how this

turned out. What did it produce? Is it worth retrying? If so what are the conditions you need to fill in? We would like to explain all that based on the project we conducted.

Given the complexity of the research subject, Ferro feels the narrative approach is very appropriate for 'pre-communication' exploration in fields where complex behavior is to be expected. For this reason Ferro proposed a narrative project to the Ministry of General Affairs and the Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management, to do a narrative project on the subject of 'drinking and driving'. In the next chapter we would like to explain why we felt the approach was worthwhile for this subject.

SEARCHING FOR THE IMPOSSIBLE

The monk Buttho spent his life travelling from cloister to cloister. One dark, clouded night he encountered an elderly man, who was obviously in despair, looking for something under the street lantern. 'What are you looking for?' Buttho asked. 'I am looking for my key, and I desperately need it now', the man answered, 'or my wife will be mad as hell. She is a devil'. Buttho was a gentle person and helped him searching. After a while Buttho asked: 'are you sure you lost the keys here?' 'No', the man answered 'I know for sure I didn't lose them here. But it was the only place where there is any light, so I thought it best to look here because it made no sense to look in the dark'.

A Zen story about a traveling monk: The case

The Dutch government is conducting a campaign on drinking and driving called 'Bob'. Bob is the person who is designated not to drink. Initially, Bob is introduced as a person in Belgium. The leading question of the campaign was 'Who will be the Bob', introducing a first name as a sort of function. The Dutch government adopted the campaign years ago. It provides the consumer a 'name' and a procedure for designating the person who will drive them home safely. Bob has become quite a character in Holland, and if young people party and drive together, 'Bob' is a subject that is likely to be talked about. To promote consumers to adopt the role of Bob (=a designated driver), many features are provided to 'award'

this driver, such as key chains with the name 'Bob' or even beer trays with room for non-alcoholic drinks. The latest campaign challenges the youngster to thank their Bob (the slogan is: 'Je bent top Bob', which could be translated as 'You are wonderful Bob'). The most creative ways to thank your Bob are rewarded. There is a website where youngsters can upload videos with a 'thank you Bob' message.

However, a successful campaign is never an excuse to stop thinking: reality is constantly changing, and today's success could be tomorrow's failure. Although the campaign is considered very successful, the government did receive indications of a slightly changing moral regarding drinking and driving. Where the campaign absolutely favours 'not-drinking at all' if one is going to drive the standard seems to be shifting towards 'not drinking too *much* if one is going to drive'. This causes concern especially since the norms for 'too much' could be flexible. The Ministry responsible for the campaign (The Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management) wanted to find out what the social norm regarding drinking and driving amongst the target group (aged 18 – 35 years) is and how this norm is changing. The Ministry wanted to use this research to provide fuel for new effective campaigns targeting on changing the norm to 'Bob means: not drinking at all' in a way that is not patronising and that the target group can relate to. What approaches could or should the campaign use, in order to be successful? These were questions the Ministry was confronted with, and struggled to answer. In Holland the Ministry of General Affairs has a knowledge and research centre for all questions regarding campaigns. The experts asked Ferro Research to submit a quote for a qualitative approach to tackle these problems.

At first sight, the assignment appears to be finding answers to a set of pretty 'straightforward', or 'simple' questions. The only thing you need to find out is: what is the norm; why is this the norm and how can we best advocate the norm the government wants to promote. This could be easily done: conduct a few focus groups, find out how the consumers think and talk about the

subject, maybe quantify the results and there you are. In this section, however, we will argue that the questions are not that straightforward. Thorough analysis of the problem leads us to the conclusion that there were quite a number of problems associated with the research goals that required a new, experimental approach.

The first problem: The difficulty in finding norms

Why, for instance, is finding out about social norms not a simple endeavour? If you think about exactly what a social norm is, you will find this to be a difficult task. What exactly is that? Is it the norm that respondents adhere to if asked? Is it their actual behaviour in the real world? In order to explain the precise difficulty, we would like to share a research experience. In 2006, Ferro interviewed consumers who watched a lot of non-commercial TV (in Holland we have three non-commercial channels, paid for by public funds and of course many commercial channels). The researchers asked the consumers about their feelings concerning TV, using elicitation techniques such as association mapping and collage. From the answers a clear 'social norm' emerged: the respondents had a disdain for the 'commercial bullshit' they felt they were terrorised by on TV. They hated the programs that seem to go over the top in trying to gain our attention. The worst example of this was mentioned in all groups; it was a program with the name 'Find the gay'. In this program a women had to select her date from a group of men. The group of men consisted of a mixture of gay man and a heterosexual man. If the date she selected as her 'one and only date' turned out to be a gay person, she would lose the game and the gay man would win a significant amount of money. If her date turned out to be heterosexual, the couple would win the same amount of money together. Needless to say, the gay candidates acted 'straight' in order to win the prize. This program was felt to be a symbol of everything that is wrong on TV nowadays, the symbol of TV that is based upon exploiting human emotions. What the consumers (chosen as people who primarily watch public TV) really liked was a good, old-fashioned type of program, preferably best a program you could learn from.

Apart from these interviews, Ferro had 'TV nights' with the respondents. The researchers asked them to fill in a diary with their viewing behaviour during the last week and spend one night watching with them and asking them about the things they were watching. And what programs did the consumers watch? Rarely was this the kind of programs they had asked for. Often they watched the very programs they said they despised in the focus groups: 'emotion TV'. What is interesting is the way they accounted for the difference between the groups and reality: after a day of hard work you need a moment of relaxation. You could argue that the respondents had been 'lying' in the groups, or behaving in a 'socially acceptable' manner, and that their 'real social norm' is the way they behave. But that is not completely correct, because they did watch the 'higher quality programs' as well. And they felt good if they did so. Apparently the norm was not static, not a single-minded, single issue affair. It adapted to the situation. It adapted to their needs and feelings at the moment, the amount of energy they had, the company they were in, the offer of programs at a specific moment. Rather than saying 'they give socially accepted answers' it would be better to say that their norm is ambivalent. There is no one norm that is always and invariable there. The norm is not a straightforward fact you can easily detect. It is 'flexible', it adapts to sudden needs. The behaviour is the result of equilibrium. It represents balancing between internal needs on the one hand and external pressure or external circumstances on the other. Both the internal needs and the external pressure are 'moving targets' that continually change. This equilibrium is in a constant flux. We cannot just 'count' individual norms of the separate individuals, divide them by number and say 'this is the mean or modal social norm'. And even if we refine this, by looking for several groups, each segment with their own social norm, we disregard the fact that the norm is not a static phenomenon, or a given fact. The norm is more like an ecosystem or a weather system that continuously adapts, both on an individual level and at a societal level. Just as in ecosystems or weather systems it is not possible to make long term predictions about their future states. The only certainty

is that the systems are changing constantly. Even if they linger for a longer period in a stable state, they could suddenly, rapidly change. This is why finding the norm is not a simple endeavour.

The second problem: Effectiveness of the communication

Now that we have concluded that a social norm is not a simple construct, we can go to the second target: input for effective communication. This research goal seems to enter even more complex territory. It is impossible to pinpoint 'effective strategies' without entering the realms of 'belief'. In the first place, it is impossible to find a direct relation between communication and effect. There are simply too many variables at stake. 'End effect' can be measured (the number of accidents involving drinking and driving, the attitude towards the Bob, the number of youngsters drinking and driving). Simple campaign effects can be measured (the number of people who see the campaign, the number of people who remember it, the number of people who understood the message as intended, the number of people who like and dislike it). But then our knowledge stops, the only thing we have available is assumption. We *assume* a campaign is successful if the figures are right (say: 90% coverage, well liked campaign, 80% understood the message as intended), and even more successful if there is an intended 'end effect' (less drinking and driving, better attitude). It could be safe to *assume* an effect, but it is impossible to give the precise relationships between the campaign and the changed behaviour. The best we can get are assumptions on hindsight. So we could claim for instance that Bob is a very successful campaign since it is well known and understood. But can we not claim that thanks to the Bob campaign the social norm changed in the right direction; we can only assume that, and even assuming based on 'common sense' is dangerous. Take this simple assumption: 'the better the Bob campaign is known, the better it can work'. This assumption seems indisputable, but in effect the assumption is wrong. There are many well documented cases of messages that reached a very small number of people but had a huge impact because it reached the

right kind of people ('the tipping point'). In *The Tipping Point*, Gladwell (2000) gives interesting examples and also explains mechanisms behind this kind of impact. In 'the law of the few' he explains how a very small group of trendy consumers in New York started a world wide trend for shoe fashion. Communication targeted at this small group reached an extremely small group. If the communication had been 'middle of the road' and acceptable to a large group of consumers, it could not have been as effective as it turned out to be. Therefore, a campaign aimed at a small but very specific target group can be more effective than a campaign that reaches the masses. The same argument holds for 'counting the frequency with which your message got across. A message that is well disseminated could be not so productive. The message can be transformed in real life. A teenager could easily influence his peers in a subtle way. It could be the way he pronounces the word 'Bob' in a conversation about 'who will be the designated driver'. With an undertone of mockery he could counter the rational message 'Bob=the safe way home'. The complexity of daily interpersonal communication is so high that in real life, a consumer could send out two messages at the same time: mockery (being Bob is ridiculous) and real responsibility (we need to get home safely). Both messages would be a translation of the campaign. The point we want to make is that we simply have no proven knowledge of how communications works. This implies that we are dependent on beliefs.

Therefore, we are not able to find hard evidence about the effectiveness of campaigns from the past, let alone can we claim that a specific new approach within the Bob campaign could have a better effect than the current one.

The third problem: We see our own beliefs reflected in research

Since we are dependent on 'beliefs', we form schools. The third problem is that schools look at reality (and at research) through the lenses of their beliefs. Different organisations and different advertising agencies cherish different beliefs about what will work and what won't. Take for instance 'influencing life style' (such as:

drive less, drink less, stop smoking, don't drink and drive). In this field, there are at least two different schools. One school promotes the 'confrontation' strategy: show the negative effects of behaviour as extremely as possible: show cancerous lungs in an anti-smoking campaign, show the remorseful victims of smoking-related diseases. That will teach them. Another school feels that such an approach does not really work, because the consumer will actively shut his system off from this kind of information, countering it with arguments such as 'I have to die anyway' or 'I never have a problem drinking and driving'. They claim that you can better focus on a more positive approach or an approach that avoids showing negative consequences. Both will be able to find proof for their ideas, and both schools will tend to open up to reality supporting their ideas, avoiding evidence that goes against their case. Doing research both schools will find their view supported by consumers, one asking for 'extreme examples', the other claiming to be immune to such an approach and asking for a more positive approach. In our long experience we have numerous experiences of this in the viewing room: the respondent that gives 'the right answer' is embraced 'You see, I knew it, scaring them of doesn't work'. Two respondents later another communication manager or researcher will hear proof of the opposite opinion 'This is exactly what I mean. They are asking for extreme emotions, otherwise they won't listen'). There is no direct way out. Even counting is useless: suppose that 30% of the consumers were open to an extreme approach and 70% to a milder one. But the effects of the extreme approach could be greater. Or the creative team could have found a new level that is appealing to 50% of the viewers although it is extreme. That is why research, trying to find the right communication approach involves a danger: you might end up finding what you already thought was right, or – even worse – you might find an internal quarrel aggravated since both views will find their standpoint proved. This means that research as we know it cannot help us out, cannot transfer the problem from the realms of belief to the realms of 'proof'. We do not have an adequate theory at hand; therefore we are not able to interpret the research in a consistent way: the discourse

about the axioms will shift towards a discourse about the interpretation of the result.

Managing uncertainty

It makes no sense to look for our keys under the light of the lantern if we know the keys were lost elsewhere. That means we have to learn to go into the dark. Where the uncertainty is fundamental (at least for the time being) it is no good to stick to pseudo-certainty. We'd be better off to try to manage uncertainty. The question is: are our 'proven' methods, the ones we are used to, helping us enough in 'searching in the dark'? Are there conceivable improvements that enable us to manage the uncertainty in a better way? Is there an approach that does more credit to the complexity of the problems as we have analysed them? Is there, in other words, a methodology that helps us to look at reality without preconceived ideas, such as 'effective communication should do this or that'? That escapes the interpretation trap? And is it possible to delve deeper into the world of our target group in an open, receptive way? How can we find the subtle effects and influences that we are looking for? We felt that the narrative approach could be an interesting method for doing precisely this. In the following chapters, we would like to tell exactly how this approach was used, what the benefits were, what problems we encountered and how we feel this is a meaningful approach for the future.

FIELDWORK: STORIES ABOUT DRINKING AND DRIVING

"And the Khalif said 'By God, Dja'far, this is an extraordinary and amazing story. And he ordered that it be written down.'" From Stories of a thousand and one nights

"(...) everything, when inwardly represented, loses its precise outline, since the imagination possesses the magic virtue of making things infinite. (...) Such ideas have this in common, that they furnish only a vague indication, leaving it to the imagination to make the final evocation.'From *The Romantic Agony* by Mario Praz

Story groups

The fieldwork was conducted in the form of five story groups of five respondents each. The five groups were clustered by age: the youngest 18- 20 years of age, the eldest 30 - 35 years of age. All of the respondents were selected based on the following criteria: they drink alcohol, attend parties and regularly drive back (or drive back with others), Half of the attendants were from the city, the other half from more rural places. The groups were conducted simultaneously in one room, each table had a scribe. We chose students instead of researchers, as we didn't want experienced moderators who might be tempted to interfere in the process. So the tables were not moderated. Instead of moderation, we offered 'rules'. There was no 'discussion' but there was storytelling. The scribes took care that the rules were followed. The rules were simple and had the effect of ritualizing the storytelling process. If a person had a story, he used the talking stick: a voice recorder. It was explicitly stated that you had to speak into the device because the recording was set on 'low sensitivity'. If you didn't speak right into the recorder your story would be lost. If a respondent had the talking stick, he was not to be interrupted by the others. The only 'interruption' allowed was to ask for clarification or to get more details. After a story was finished, it was numbered and named (name provided by the storyteller) on a post-it that was attached to the table in front of the storyteller.

Story elicitation questions

In order to elicit stories, the research team created five 'story elicitation questions'. These questions were designed in a way that the respondents were invited to look for real life experiences and to dive into the context and not for opinions, feelings, emotions or explanations. The first one was 'imagine you are at a party. You have a nice conversation with friends and for some reason you exchange anecdotes about drinking and driving. What stories could you tell about experiences that would make you say 'that was a close call, things could have gone wrong'. And what are the stories you could tell if you wanted to say 'that was wonderful, just as it should be'. Another elicitation question was: take a magazine and look for one picture that for you somehow represents

the designated driver. Tell us a story or anecdote about this picture in relation to the Bob'. The scribes would ask the elicitation questions. They were instructed not to ask the next question too quickly: only if the question was clearly exhausted and no stories were popping up. They were not allowed to ask questions to probe deeper, other than the five elicitation questions. Note that these questions are fundamentally different from the normal questions we ask: we do not ask respondents to formulate their own feelings, emotions or ideas directly.

The role of the researchers

The role of the researchers was completely different from their role in a normal project. The researchers could not influence the conversation and could not ask questions; thus, it was impossible to probe deeper. The researchers couldn't even follow five tables simultaneously. Using the post-its, they could follow whether the production of stories was going OK and they could help the scribes if they had any questions. Their role was to 'start the event' by explaining the rules. One of the researchers explained that the aim of the research was not to immediately understand them or get explanations of their behavior but to get as many anecdotes as possible in the most vivid form as possible. As a form of 'self-fulfilling prophecy' in the opening speech he reassured the respondents that experience teaches that storytelling is an easygoing process, fun to do and that normally at the end of the session each table has produced between 30 and 45 stories. And that was exactly what happened: the storytelling was very lively and created a 'buzz': a natural flow of storytelling. Within one hour and fifteen minutes we gathered as many as 188 stories and anecdotes: an average of 37 stories from each table (varying from 28 to 46). Through the 'post it' procedure we could observe that most respondents contributed equally to the productions of stories, only one respondent was meager (only two stories where the average was eight). The whole experience took two hours, including the kick off (took 20 minutes) and the 'indexation' (to be described later), and was perceived by the respondents as 'great fun'. The whole procedure was experienced as a sort of a game rather than as serious marketing research.

Output examples

It would not be possible to give a representative impression of the material; that would take too much time. In order to give you an idea, we have selected three stories:

Group 2 (22- 25 years of age), story #10. "Noordwijk" (name of a village)

"This is something bad. It was my own experience. We went to Noordwijk by car and had a lot of drinks. We were in two cars. The drivers drank the most alcohol of anyone in our group and they almost hit someone: a cyclist on the cycling path beneath the road. We lost control of the cars. But things turned out OK. It is very stupid that I even stepped into the car. I advise all of you not to do that. I remember that I thought 'you shouldn't drink when you are driving'. You just shouldn't. The consequences could have been worse."

Group 1 (18 – 21 years of age), story # 14. Sissy?

"In my village if you go out by car, you have to come back by car, otherwise you are a sissy. That's our mentality. And if you don't dare to step in Bob's car you are a sissy as well. And that is nonsense. My boyfriend and I decide beforehand who will be driving back. I don't drink a lot because otherwise I am in a bad mood the next day. So I am often the one driving back. It is not like a rule we have. If four of us go out, there are usually three who don't drink; then it is clear who will be driving back."

Group 1 (18 – 21 years of age). Against the stream

"We don't encourage our friends not to drink if we are the Bob. If someone is the Bob, we won't say: hey stop drinking. Nobody does that. Okay, you have a few beers, but it has never gone badly."

Some pros we encountered

In our opinion the main advantage of this method is the lack of the 'observation inhibition'. In a normal research setting every sign communicates: 'you are being observed. We are interested in understanding you, we want to 'analyze you'. This is communicated

by the mirror, the camera, the format of the interview (with the researcher asking questions and either subconsciously or consciously encouraging some stories and discouraging others) and the introduction ('we are interested in your opinions and feelings) and even in the relationship between the number of respondents (say: eight) on the one hand and the number of research pros on the other (moderators, scribes and clients together often between six to ten). This tells you as a respondent: 'they are eager to understand me'. As every teenager knows when his parents ask him, 'how was your school party', explicit interest in your experiences can be paralyzing, especially if the one interested lives in another world. In the storytelling group this is suddenly reversed. It is not the researcher who is interested and to whom they have to tell their story; it is their peers. It is as if the respondents are more leading: they decide on the subjects they bring in, they are literally in the majority (25 to 7) and since there are five groups sharing stories simultaneously they cannot even be heard by the experts. The only person who can, the scribe, is only the guardian of the rules.

If we compare the content of the stories with the output of five normal two-hour groups (disregarding the fact that the real storytelling part was only 90 minutes!) we feel the content was huge, both in terms of quantity (the number of meaningful observations/experiences) and quality (the stories were so rich and varied, so many interesting observations). We have the feeling this is mainly the effect of the format chosen.

Another positive effect was our observation that the process was more democratic in the sense that the content was better distributed among respondents. If we count the number of sentences produced in a focus group, we always find huge differences between respondents. This was less the case in the number, length and quality of the stories. We found those very well distributed (apart from one respondent who did not 'fit in'). Apparently the storytelling ability is more equally distributed than the 'opinion telling ability'. This was reflected in the quality of the distribution of the stories: there were all kinds of stories and in one group. And it

was clear that a 'boasting story' about drinking a bottle of vodka and countering the effect of the vodka by taking speed and thus driving 'safely' did not discourage a story about very responsible behavior or the other way round. (We could monitor this because all the stories were numbered).

Disadvantage

Of course there is a flip side to this coin. Within the 'normal' qualitative approach, viewing plays a vital role. Viewing gives the client the opportunity to 'see and feel' his customer, to feel very involved in the research and is important in the acceptance of the results. As the clients see for themselves that the respondents have an aversion to his new campaign it will be easier for him to accept that changes are needed. Thus, the viewing experience is one of the most important aspects of qualitative research. In the narrative approach, viewing is simply impossible. This was felt to be an important disadvantage.

Another apparent disadvantage is that you lose control. There is no way to influence the process. Only the subjects that the respondents bring up will be dealt with. If you are interested in a certain subject (for instance: do people find it easier to drink and drive after a party with people they don't know than after a party where all their peers can see what's happening) you cannot probe for it. It has to come naturally. The process is an emergent process: you stipulate the rules, you set a date, select the respondents and then: it has to happen. So you not only miss the engagement of following the groups, you miss the opportunity to help 'form' the research. This is intended and even required, but of course it can feel frustrating.

SELF-INTERPRETATION: EMERGENT ARCHETYPES

"As in looking at a carpet, by following one colour a certain pattern is suggested, by following another colour, another; so in life the seer should watch the pattern among general things which his idiosyncrasy moves him to observe, and describe that alone."

Thomas Hardy

So after the fieldwork we had a corpus of 188 stories and 58 pictures. An important reason for pursuing the narrative approach was to find the 'weak signals': the subtle processes that can steer our behavior that we are not necessarily aware of. These signals cannot be found in rational deductions or in finding 'insights', because we suppose that reality in the case of communication in the field of drinking and driving is too complex for that, the instrument of deriving insight from moderated focus groups is too blunt and lacks context. But it can be found in looking for patterns within the narrative material. This is the way the human brain works naturally: looking for patterns (often replacing reality by the pattern found, we see what we think we see). Specifically, we are looking for the weak signals, the patterns we normally ignore because our view is limited by our beliefs. What do the narratives teach us about how the behavior and moral of the youngsters is steered concerning drinking and driving? What do they teach us about the way the 'Bob campaign' is interacting with their beliefs, norms and behavior? Where does it help to set the norm as intended? Where does it hinder this? Can we detect patterns we weren't aware of?

In order to learn interesting new patterns it is wise to look not only at the 'world of your target group', but to dive into the way that you look at the world, as well. It might be that looking at your own view of the world teaches you even more. So apart from looking at the way the target group interprets their own story-world, it is interesting to see how the client looks at it as well. Where do their views of the world differ? This can be an important factor. There could be a gap and this gap could prevent you from communicating properly. It could be precisely this gap that hinders the communication.

Emergent archetypes

An important barrier to finding subtle signals is that we tend to look at the world as we think it is. We tend to see our own opinions reflected in reality. This means that 'interpreting stories' from our target group could have the same effect as 'interpreting focus groups'. So it is important to postpone interpretation, and to start exploration instead. In order to make this happen,

we used the technique of 'archetype subtraction'. An archetype is a 'typical person' who plays a role in our stories. The characters of stories tend to cluster towards specific characteristics, thus creating a pattern within the story material. We are not speaking about the Jungian, universal archetypes, but about contextual archetypes. To offer an example in the realms of politics: within our stories of politicians there is always the 'dishonest, truth concealing, helper' and the 'powerful leader, who is equal to the task'. Each character has specific characteristics, both 'external' (looks and behavior) and 'internal' (character). If we tell stories, these characters resonate. The course of the event is partly dictated by the characteristics of its main character. Politicians know this. Nixon lost an important TV debate with Kennedy in 1960 because he was 20 kilos underweight (after spending two weeks in a hospital), refused to use make up, and had ill-fitting clothes, while Kennedy looked young, fit and tanned (after two weeks of vacation). Nixon had the looks of the 'cheating character': pale and exhausted, not equal to the task, where his opponent looked fit and tanned and had the looks of a leader. This is where our narrative world meets reality. The external cues are transferred to an assessment of character. Nixon could never win this election because he represented the wrong kind of character. The stories were against him. It is the politician who understands best how to form and exploit his character who wins the game.

In order to find the archetypes that play a role in the narrative universe around 'drinking and driving' we used the 'emerging archetype' technique. This is a process specifically designed to remove our ability to impose our filters of interpretation on the narrative material and to socially construct the archetypes. The process is disruptive but very fruitful. We selected a representative sample of 60 stories from the material, carefully chosen to give as much variety as possible. The target group (15 of the 25 respondents who attended the story groups, three from each age group) and the client (from the Ministry of General Affairs, the Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management and the advertising company) were confronted with the same narrative material. We held two five-hour workshops,

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one for the client and one for the consumers. The two groups decomposed the narrative material in a process that enabled archetypes to emerge, without giving the individual participants too much influence on the process. The process was designed in the following manner:

- The 60 anecdotes we selected hung on the walls.
- All of the participants labeled the stories using three types of labels: actions, subjects and persons (using three different colored post-its).
- In three subgroups the actions, subject and persons were clustered, the three groups ‘revolved’; whenever the next group came to cluster a new wall, they were able to change the clustering of the previous group.
- In the third round the clusters were named. The names represent the stereotypes.
- Then – again in three subgroups and in three rounds – the clusters were attributed characteristics, the groups were invited to allocate an equal number of positive as negative characteristics. These were elicited by asking questions (for persons: what would the best friend of this person say about him to praise him, and what would his worst enemy say about him to show how bad he is).
- The clustered post-its were removed, the characteristics randomized and – in three subgroups that were able to change the previous clustering – they clustered again. In the third iteration, the clusters were assigned names. These are the archetypes, archetypical subjects and archetypical actions (values).
- In the last round an illustrator came on the stage. The workshop group instructed the illustrator how the archetypes should be illustrated. The illustrator was

not allowed to give her own interpretation: the cartoons were ‘owned’ by the groups. (See figure 1.)

Some of the results

After this we not only had a set of numerous stories, we also had two sets of archetypes, representing the view of the narrative world by target group and sender. From each archetype we could track the stereotypes from which they received their characteristics. The archetypes showed subtle differences in the way the two groups assessed the stories. In both groups positive Bob-archetypes emerged from the stories. The consumers’ Bob was ‘Superman’: an almighty person, who never fails and never does anything wrong. The archetype is hardly human and so positive that it does not reflect an attainable person that most of the consumers we have asked could relate to (considering their stories). An interesting exercise is to track down the stereotype from which an archetype ‘inherited’ its characteristics (remember: the stereotype characteristics were clustered again, thus forming the archetypes). Superman actually got quite a few characters from the stereotype ‘Herman Brood’: a completely irresponsible party-going type who follows no rules and knows no fear (who is a leader in his way). From the client group two Bob archetypes emerged. Interestingly enough both are much more human and attainable. The ‘hero’ is a bit like Superman, but more of a person. The other archetype is ‘the buddy’: a real life character, very positive but definitively human. All of his characters stem from positive Bob stereotypes. (See figure 2.)

**FIGURE 1
THE WORKSHOP**



FIGURE 2
POSITIVE BOB ARCHETYPES

Bob archetype
'Superman' (consumer)



- Responsible
- Steering
- Leader
- Supporting
- Problemsolver
- Sober
- Man of principles
- Strong
- Clear
- Fresh
- Safe
- pragmatic

Bob archetype
'Buddy' (client)



- Friend
- Honest
- Responsible
- Experienced driver
- Wise
- Realistic
- Cautious
- Reliable

For both groups negative Bob-archetypes emerged as well: two for the consumers ('the prick' and 'the nerd'). From the client group only one negative archetype emerged: the loser. It is interesting to view subtle differences between two very similar archetypes: the nerd and the loser. Whereas the nerd is a pathetic character, desperately trying to belong to the club, the loser is a lonely, self-contained person. (See figure 3.)

Another interesting phenomena is the fact that no fewer than three positive archetypes emerged from the consumer groups, that represented party-going people whom we can expect not to always be strict in terms of drinking and driving (the artist, the thrill seeker and the humorist), whereas the client had one negative party-archetype (the anti-social) and one positive (the life recipient).

Thus, one important asset of the method is the fact that it gives us a wonderful, subtle insight into the differences in how the consumer and the 'sender' – the party communicating the message – look at the world. Because the archetypes are based upon the same story material, the differences between the two archetype sets represent differences in points of view. Insight into these differences can help the 'sender' better understand his target group. These were the 'self-interpreted' outcomes, the results that did not come from an expert view, but self-emergent truth. This makes it easier for the sender to accept the results: it is not a researcher who is telling him that his view is different from his target group; it is the process itself that reveals the difference. Only after this stage did the research team start its interpretation of the results. In our view, postponing enriched the analysis and enabled more room for the dynamic aspect of the reality. We would like to share some of the results.

FIGURE 3
NEGATIVE BOB ARCHETYPES

Bob archetype
'Nerd' (consumer)



Bob archetype
'Loser (client)'



One of the leading mechanisms described was the fact that for the target groups two independent forces exist, each of which 'pushes' the party-going consumer in a different direction. The one force is the need to act responsibly; the other force is the need to behave irresponsibly in order to party properly. Parties are about 'letting go'; being the designated driver is about being 'in control'. In the stories, the characters get credit for acting both ways: if they are responsible they are acting well, if they are irresponsible they are being 'cool'. At the same time, characters are punished for acting both ways: the Bob is having a dull night and the irresponsible character has created danger for himself and his friends. The right behavior is just, it is admirable, it is the right thing to do, it is how one should behave, but it is definitely not cool and it is definitely not attractive. The very young groups sometimes refuse to go there voluntarily: they need to be forced to do this by being faced with the punishment of being seen as a nerd. If they are the designated driver they act cool if they drink a beer. Their peers go along; they won't discourage him from drinking. You can't deny a friend his right to be cool. The difficult aspect is the

ambiguity in this: the bad thing is good and the good thing is bad. It is not that the youngsters are 'bad', but it is a fact that they are under constant pressure to do the 'wrong-right' thing.

In this atmosphere the campaign basically did the right thing. The designated driver, personalized as 'the Bob', is a figure that plays an important role in the stories about drinking and driving. Bob is a prominently feature. You can't deny him. This means the first battle is won. The subject is on the agenda and Bob plays an important role in this. Hats off to the campaign.

However we did receive 'weak signals' about underlying future dangers. The Bob is becoming either a hero you can't live up to, or a loser you don't want to be. The campaign plays up the first character. In stressing how wonderful Bob is, the campaign stayed away from the danger of associating the Bob with a nerd. However, an escape route is offered for young people. You can't be asked to become superman: you are a human being, subject to temptation. Confronted with temptation you will give in. Not always, but every now and then. In this

respect, the campaign does not 'help' with the goal by setting the standard: being Bob = no drinking at all. This danger is enforced because of the different views of the world held by the party communicating the message and the target groups. The target groups are inclined to 'sanctify' the Bob: make him so good it is impossible to live up to him. The client views a much more attainable Bob, someone more like you and me. The client is inclined to see irresponsible behavior as purely negative, whereas in the eye of the target group this kind of behavior has a strong attraction: better the romance of a 'thrill seeker' than the responsible behavior of a 'loser', especially in the atmosphere of a party. Therefore the campaign managers should be cautious about avoiding a trap that can be easily stepped in to: creating a Bob that is well known, but who is too remote from the human form: not a nerd but a hero. In order to become even more successful, the campaign should bring back Bob to humanity.

Some pros we encountered

In our view the process was extremely interesting. The researchers were hardly in play during the first phase. That is to say: the researchers served primarily as process-orientated mediators. Their work was to select the stories for the workshop and to prepare and mediate the workshops. The archetypes emerged from this process, and indeed they revealed extremely interesting subtle aspects about how the consumers view their 'narrative world' as well as how the client views it. The information given was especially interesting in understanding how the 'norm' is behaving under pressure; rather than providing insight, it offered a feeling for what factors control our behavior and what role the Bob campaign plays in this. Without any preconceived idea or hypothesis about the 'theory' of norms and of communication, a pattern emerged from the stories. Only after this phase did the research team come on stage; the team felt that their interpretations were richer than they could have been using a normal approach.

One interesting pro was also the fact that the process helped the client get in touch with the narrative material without the need to draw 'conclusions': he could sort of

'dive into' the narrative world. This sometimes opened doors. One of the participants mentioned that it was particularly interesting for her to be forced to assign positive attributes to stereotypes that she perceived as negative and vice versa. This sort of broadened her world. In our view, it was an advantage that even offset the viewing experience, where often the 'listening' is not of high quality (viewers tend to talk with each other a lot, or close their ears because of the knowledge they think they already have or because of a vested interest in the results). Here the client was 'forced' to read 60 true to life anecdotes, without an opportunity to rationalize them. In the client's view, this was not only a pro, but a con, as well. (See the next chapter).

Here we are confronted with an important, essential difference between this project and our normal projects. The entire process has not been directed towards a 'tunneling' process, narrowing the material down to explaining principles. This is what we do in normal projects. We try to get the answers from the consumers, we narrow the general subject down from a broad view to smaller pieces (for instance: first general experience with drinking and driving, then narrowing down to what we as researchers feel are important aspects, such as 'how do you feel when you 'sin', in what circumstances do you tend to do the wrong thing, and so on). In this sense, the discussion guide is already a format for analyzing. The problem has been broken down into predefined pieces. Whereas in these narrative projects, we do the opposite because we don't want to use our 'common sense' about how reality should be broken down. On the contrary, the process went the other way round: giving as much context as possible, without restrictions through analysis or preconstructed notions, allowing patterns to emerge without the interference of an expert.

Disadvantages observed

One important disadvantage is that the workshop is experienced as a bit disruptive, not for the consumers (they loved it) but the client. In the first place there is a disturbing lack of control. What do you get? Being deprived of the opportunity to watch the groups, the

client did have the chance to get in touch with the story material. However, this was done in a way that disrupts their 'normal' thinking process. Instead of being helped to understand the results, they are forced into a deconstruction process. One important fact is that at this stage (of necessity) there was no report, nor was any comforting interpretation leading to 'what to do next' at hand. This feeling is part of the method: the very reason we choose to use it is that we do not want to be blinded by the views we already have. We don't want our 'pseudo knowledge' and conscious and unconsciously held insights to block our view of interesting patterns that might help us to better understand what is really going on. The method is designed to give us the least possible opportunity to interpret; the patterns we are looking for have to 'emerge'. No wonder we get a bit nervous during the process. But this is an important factor to realize.

ACTIONS: WHAT TO DO WITH THE RESULTS

“Wirklicher Fortschritt ist nicht fortgeschritten sein, sondern Fortschreiten. Wirklicher Fortschritt ist, was Fortschreiten ermöglicht oder erzwingt.” Bertolt Brecht

So much for methods and 'analysis'. But now what to do? How to use this as input to a new campaign? Because of the nature of the problem it is not useful to give the client 'directions': there is no single path to victory. The nature of the complexity is that no 'simple rules' will work. Therefore we did not formulate recommendations; instead we conducted two workshops with the client, using the research material to come up with ideas. In a two-hour workshop many ideas were generated. We used the consumer archetypes to direct our thinking: how could you convince this person to embrace the intended norm and behave in accordance with that norm. We also generated overall campaign ideas. All in all, this workshop was 'divergent': creating as many ideas and angles as possible for tackling the problem. A third workshop was needed to give the client more feeling of direction, and provide help in how to proceed. In this convergent workshop the client was given a 'model' to work with the project outcomes. Basically the model provided the client with a map that

can be used when designing a strategy. This map shows different types of strategy, each with its own powers and pitfalls. This map enables the client to navigate through time. The overall idea was that 'the next step' would be a shift. Up to now the main message was 'think about designating the Bob before you party'. Now the message needs to shift towards 'help the Bob with his difficult task'.

One important aspect of the model was a sheet that represents the 'lenses' through which the sender looks at the world. So while thinking about new communication, the client can now take into account the fact that he knows he is inclined to see drinking and driving as 'bad' whereas for his younger target groups this behavior is both 'bad' and 'cool' at the same time.

Because it is different from the usual models that describe reality in a rigid form, this model helped the client see the dynamics of the narrative world. And in contrast to the usual models, the client is challenged to use the narratives and the archetypes to 'test' the dynamics over and over. This model can help the client during the campaign testing phase to at least think consistently about how the proposed approach *could* work: we evolved from being able to make assumptions based on hindsight to being able to make assumptions beforehand. The main goal has been made very clear. In order to take the next step, the client needs to constantly think about the effect of his campaign on the perception of Bob: will he be the hero, the loser or could he be you: a human being, subject to temptation. And although it is too early to offer any results, we are confident that the Ministry will be able to move in the right direction.

Overall assessment

All in all, we feel that the narrative approach offers huge potential. A big win in our view is the natural, almost 'ecological' method of gathering information. In our view, the whole process of eliciting stories was a big success. It is easily be scaled up, and could be used in a quantitative way as well. We feel this part of the method is well balanced and needs no adoption at all. Also the 'miracle' of emergent archetypes worked

brilliantly and gave us important information that, in our opinion, would not have been possible to gather otherwise.

The method helped us prevent 'conceited' thinking. This enabled us to discover subtle signals that we would not have been able to see so easily in another method. On top of that: it delivered very handy 'bearers' of those emerging insights in the form of illustrations.

However, the method also confronted us with some problems. The main problems were related to the lack of familiarity both the researchers and the clients have with 'complexity thinking'. We are more used to finding 'recommendations' than we are with helping our clients navigate a complex problem, and the client is used to receiving very hands on recommendations about future actions. But the very idea with being a narrative project is that 'instant solutions' are not valid. So we need to get used to that. Researchers doing narrative projects should include management of this uncertainty in their process.

In our opinion, the art is to better manage this by incorporating a workshop that not only leaves it to the client to find multiple solutions (the variety of solutions or the 'solution space' you are looking for by the very absence of one and only road that leads to Rome), but also provides the client a compass that enables him to navigate in this space without looking for instant answers. This is what we ultimately delivered (after we found out there still was uncertainty left). We believe that in a subsequent project we will have to offer this in advance. In the first place we could have better explained to the client what to expect when.

The most important aspect for improvement is to find a way to better manage expectations and better engage the client in the process. In our view the client could have been better 'engaged' in the research than we have done up to now. Maybe the workshop as an initial encounter is too disruptive. We feel that a 'kick-off' meeting would have been the right idea; perhaps we should have started with a story-telling workshop with the client. We could even have added the client's stories to the

corpus: we are all human. This would have drawn them into the research even more and would probably have diminished the initial feeling of discomfort.

All in all, we would say that the process is more than worthwhile. We would like to make the following recommendations.

- The method is radically different from current practice. We have discovered that the differences are so great that researchers can be tempted to mistakenly insert aspects of the old methods. We have encountered that problem in previous projects. We feel that in order to start this approach, at a minimum one should have followed an accreditation course.
- The research goal should be in the field of the complex: you would have to be able to assume that simple solutions can not work. This is especially the case in rapidly evolving markets, innovation, influencing behavior in complex fields.
- The client should be ready to be more involved in the project than in normal research; moreover, his involvement is also totally different.
- The research team should be open to understanding the difficulty of that and be able to manage the client's expectations accordingly.

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