

Satirical and Romantic Stories about Organisational Change. Actor Network Theory and Action Research¹

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In this article different perspectives on organisational change are analysed using Hayden White's genre categories: romance, comedy, tragedy and satire. White maintains that a "story" is not determined by data, events or the particular case, nor by the way events are remembered, collected or told. Narrative structures preconfigure; they determine in advance what is accepted as a story, and the meaning that will be created.

The empirical material for this article is mainly the literature on different perspectives on organisational change e.g. Actor Network Theory (ANT), Action Research (AR) and Business Process Re-engineering (BPR). In addition, and to contrast in the discussion of genre classification, literature from two different and well known perspectives from work and organisation are used e.g. critical sociology and Swedish pragmatic professional knowledge production.

The literature describing ANT is mostly of a satirical character, while the literature describing this type of participative action research is more romantic. BPR literature combines the satirical and the romantic genres. In addition, possible ramifications of this point of view, i.e., which strategies for change are seen or predominant within the different genres, and the implications for action are considered. To succeed in organisational change programmes I conclude that a switch between satiric and romantic narratives is needed.

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