Working with Stories in Workplace Communication

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introduction to research project ViADUKT

intranet efficiency

organizational narrations

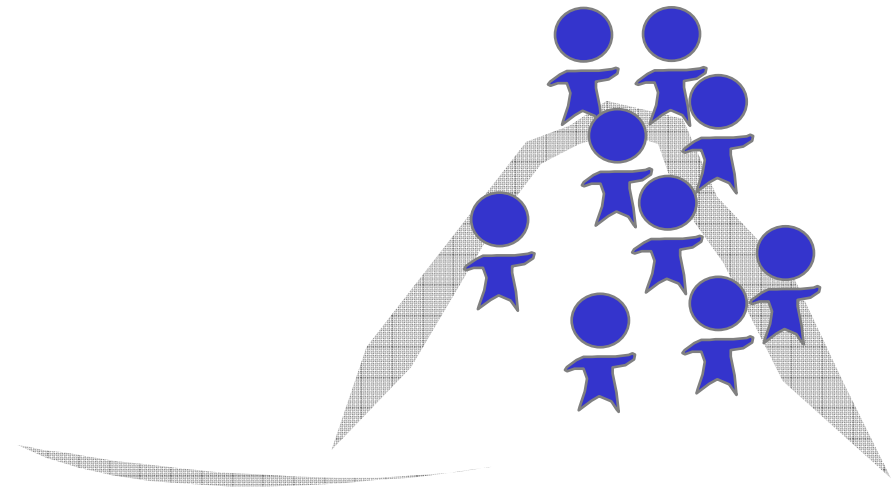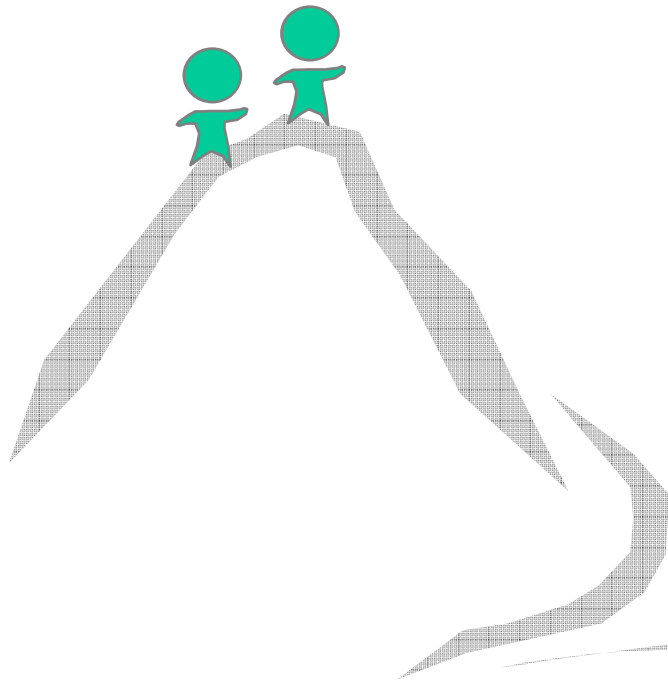narrative information design

effect mechanisms

communication strategies

Introduction

Narrations and stories play a significant role in organisations. Previous research has shown the positive effect of narrations in building corporate identity and the distribution of tacit knowledge. This paper presents the research project ViADUKT (2010-2013) which examines the roles and effects of narratives in top-down workplace communication. Building on narrative foundations from communication sciences, linguistics, cognitive science, psychology, and neuro science we build up a framework providing guidelines for narrative information design enabling efficient narrative workplace communication.
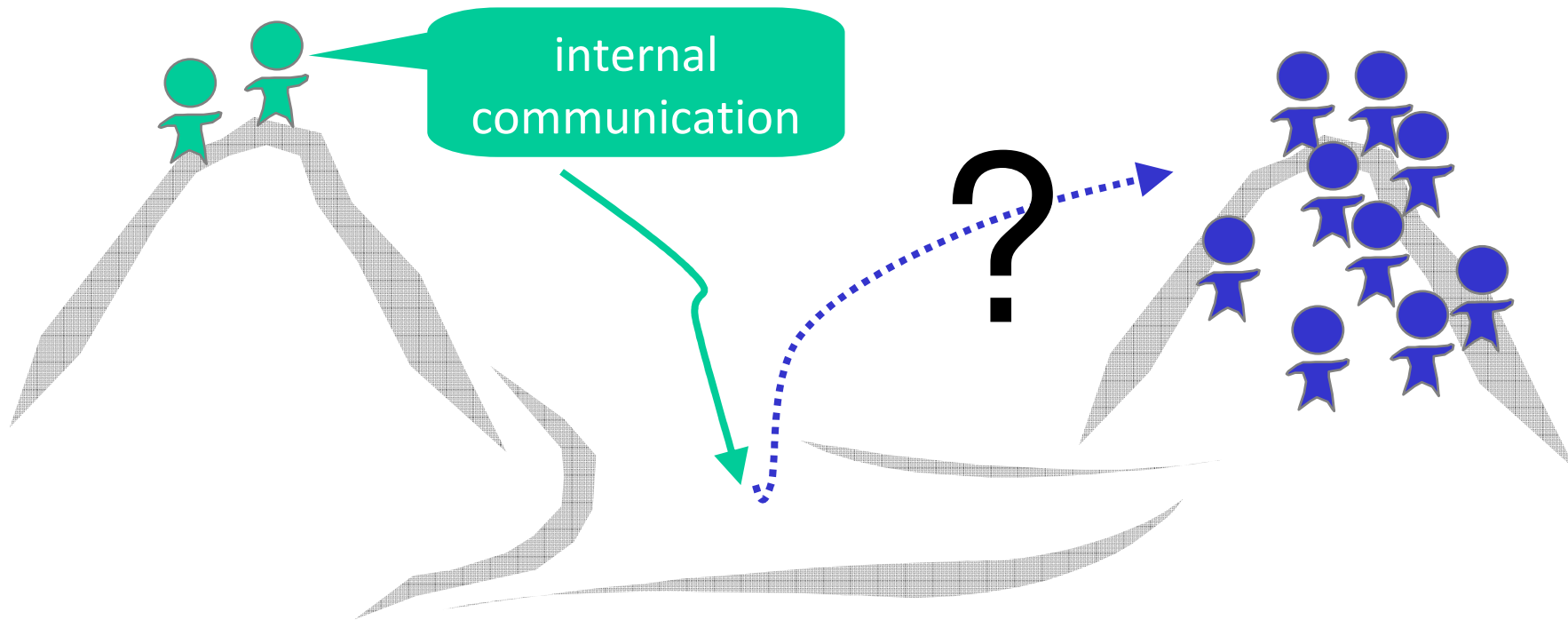
ViADUKT

comprehensible information design for organizational communication technologies

3 year nationally funded research project
to enhance the understanding of narrative information design
conducted with a business partner (mc media consult, Vienna)

Goals of ViADUKT

develop a framework for narrative information design
iteratively tested
develop set of methods

tested in experiments and case studies

bridging theory and practice

ViADUKT deals with communication in organizations

top down communication
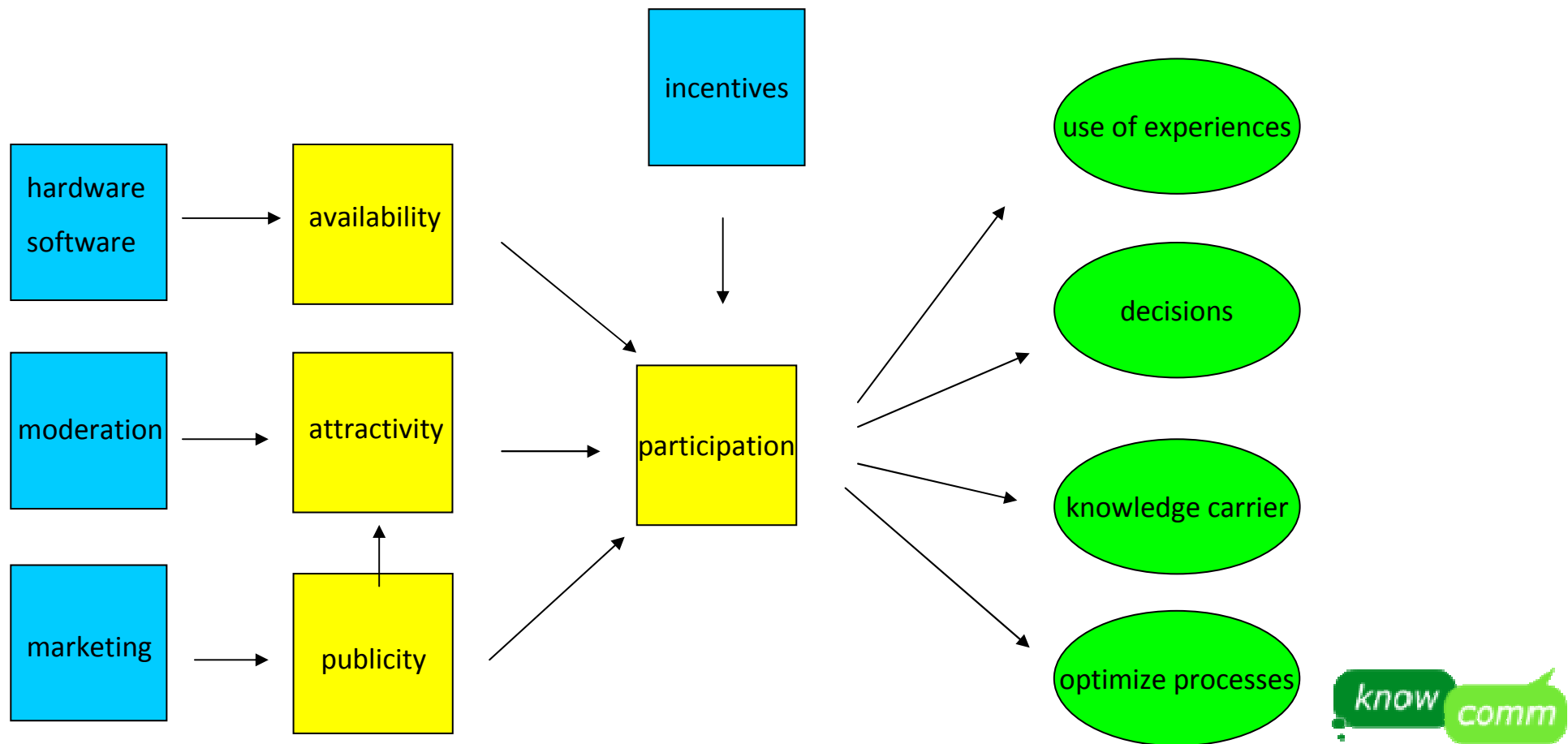electronic communication
intranet – internal communication

intranet efficiancy : Mathias Fank (2003)

decision variable	effect variable	target variable

Diagram:

- hardware / software → availability
- moderation → attractivity
- marketing → publicity
- publicity → attractivity
- availability → participation
- attractivity → participation
- publicity → participation
- incentives → participation
- participation → use of experiences
- participation → decisions
- participation → knowledge carrier
- participation → optimize processes

organizational narrations

narrations in, about, and from organizations

narrations entail each other

monophonic (one voice)
to polyphonic (many voices)
interact and inter-penetrate

narration in organizations

effective and operative on a

micro level (product)
meso level (organizational level)
macro level (society)

narration on a product level is not enough

"at best we may find it entertaining and it may have a temporary affect on our motivation and understanding at worst it may provoke cynical and mostly covert anti-story as a reaction to perceived Maciavellian Propaganda" (Snowden, 2001)

narration is a question of (organizational) culture ⟷ **culture is a question of narration**

narration is a mirror of organizational culture
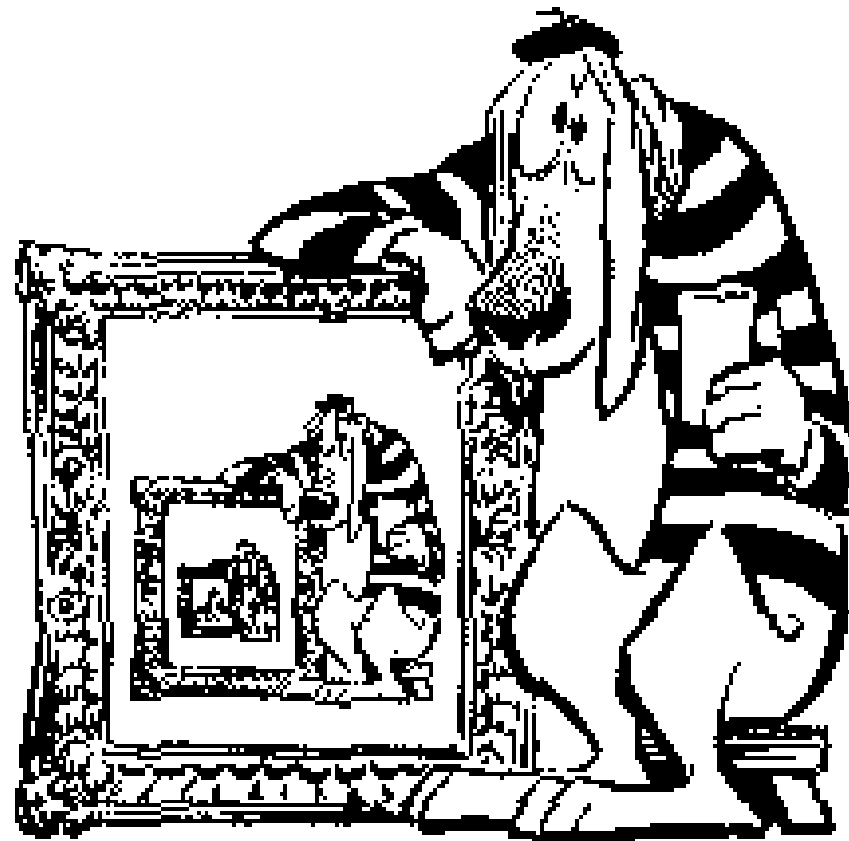
Walt Kelly, *Ten Ever-Lovin' Blue-Eyed Years*
With Pogo (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959), p.71.

how can culture be reflected on the product level?

via shared situation models

open organizational culture as a precondition for effective narrations

integrated procedural model:

gathering	**integrating & using**	**testing**

how could narrative design work?

8 effect mechanisms

(1) narrative dominance

narrative content is processed cognitively with priority
  -> it gets more cognitive resources

the more central the intended content is anchored in narration the better it is processed

(Fisch, 2000)

(2) reduction of critical thoughts

narrative mode of processing is in competition with the analytical mode (of processing)

 --> the stronger the narrative engagement the weaker is the analytical mode of processing

narrations can
- compensate argumentatively weak content and
- take negative-skeptical arguments out of focus

(Adaval & Wyer, 1998; Escalas, 2004)

(3) creation of positive emotions

"narrative transportation" (= being "pulled" into a story) promotes the formation of positive emotions

--> flow-experience (increasing the excitement levels)

narrations are able to activate a holistic mode of processing which gives more space to emotions.

(Glaser et al, 2009; Green & Brock 2000)

(4) enhancement of identification

narrations consist of actors with certain intentions, a certain frame of mind and emotional state in concrete situations.

--> personification enhances processes of alignment between the recipient and the actor and enhances identification

(Strange 2002; Slater & Rouner, 2002)

(5) enhancement of imagination

narrations induce mental images or stimulations

--> these dominate working memory and inhibit processing of alternative scenarios

--> mental images also enhance the belief that certain events will occur (narrative persuasion)

(Gregory et al., 1982)

(6) narrative blindness for sources

credibility of sources is less relevant with narrative texts than for example with argumentative texts

--> effects of narrations on attitudes are able to deploy themselves in the context of sources with low credibility (potential 'sleeper-effect')

(Green & Brock, 2000; Richter, o.J.)

(7) long-term memory

in comparison to argumentative texts or expository texts narrations stay longer in the human memory

--> deeper textual processing through construction of coherent situation models (mental representations)

(Ditman et al., 2010;Negrete & Lartigue, 2010; Richter, o.J.)

(8) synthesis: narrative persuasion

works on the basis of the following mechanisms

- reducing critical evaluation ('suspension of disbelief')
- devaluating 'weak' arguments
- creating positive emotions (high arousal levels)
- increasing mental und emotional participation (identification, imagination)
- sustained in long-term memory

(Escalas, 2004; Escalas, 2007; Slater & Rouner, 2006)

6 communication strategies

to bring narrative information design to work

in organizational communication

6 communication strategies

culture management: identity and sense making

synconisation of sub cultures

crisis communication

change communication

continuity management

strategy development

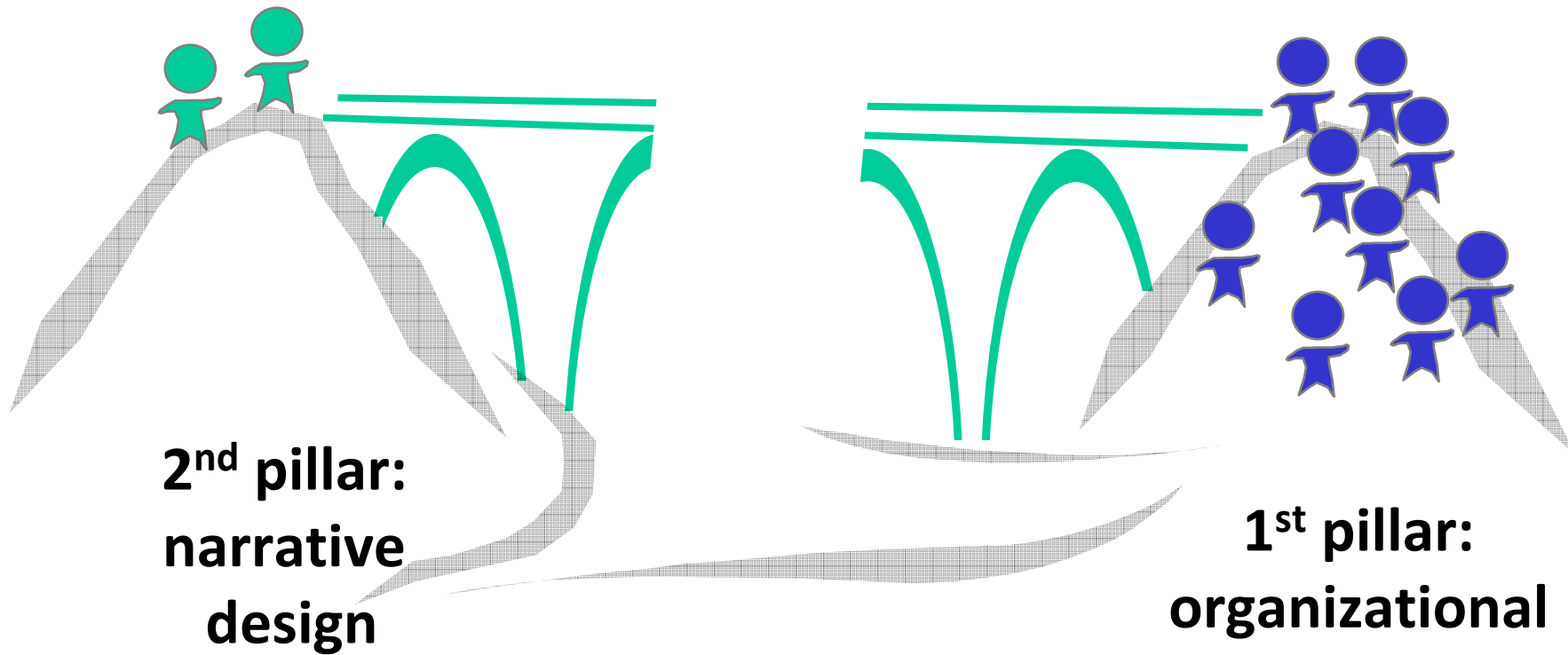tacit knowledge management

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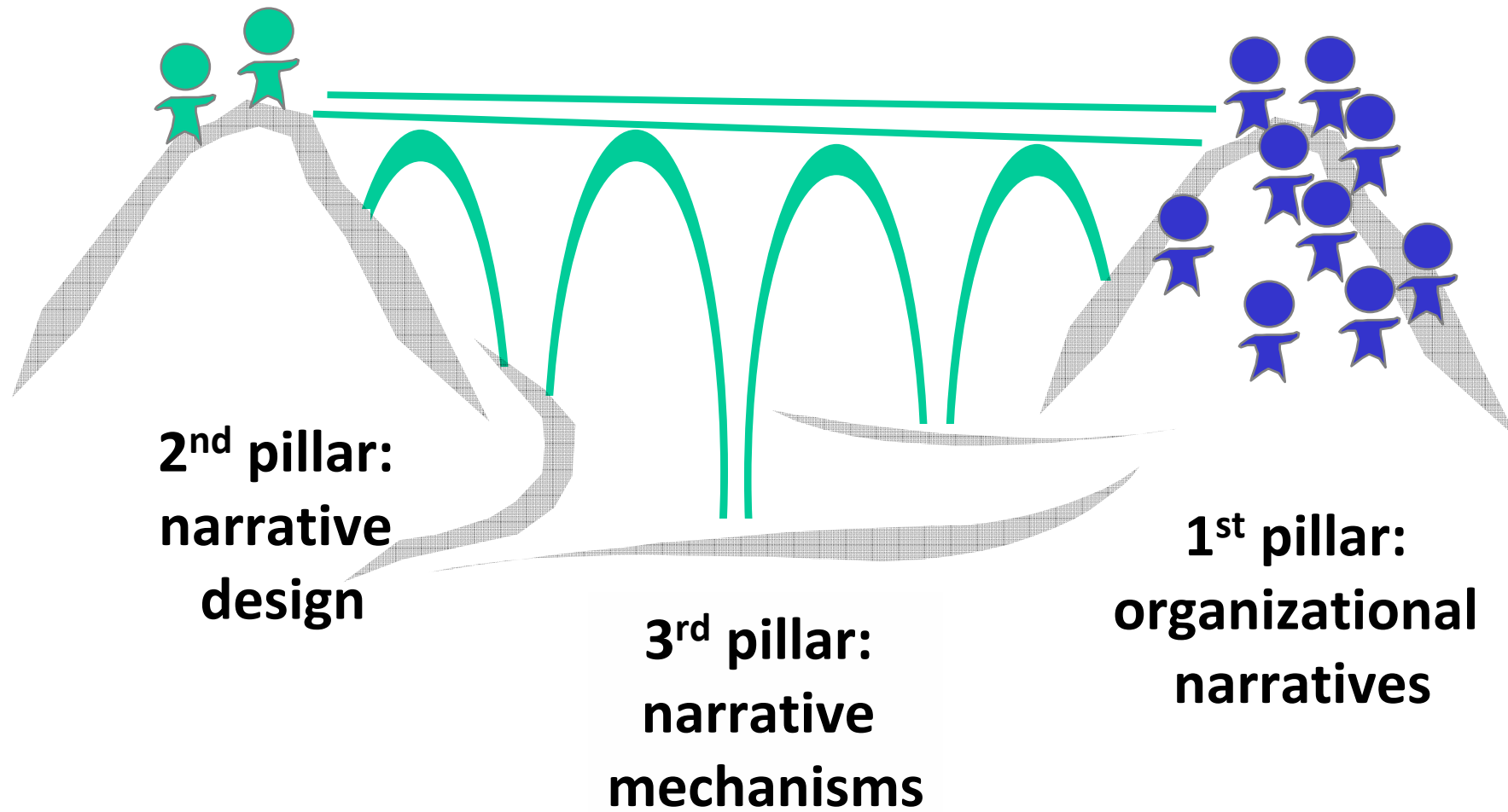
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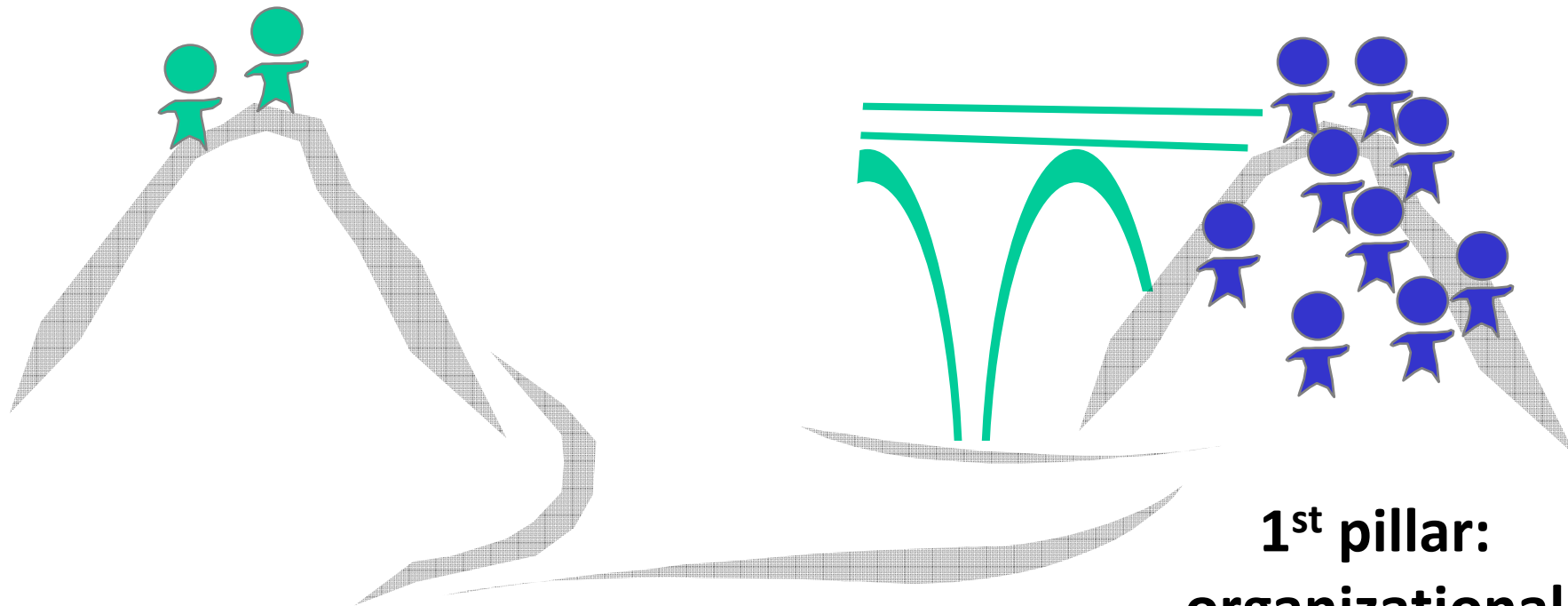
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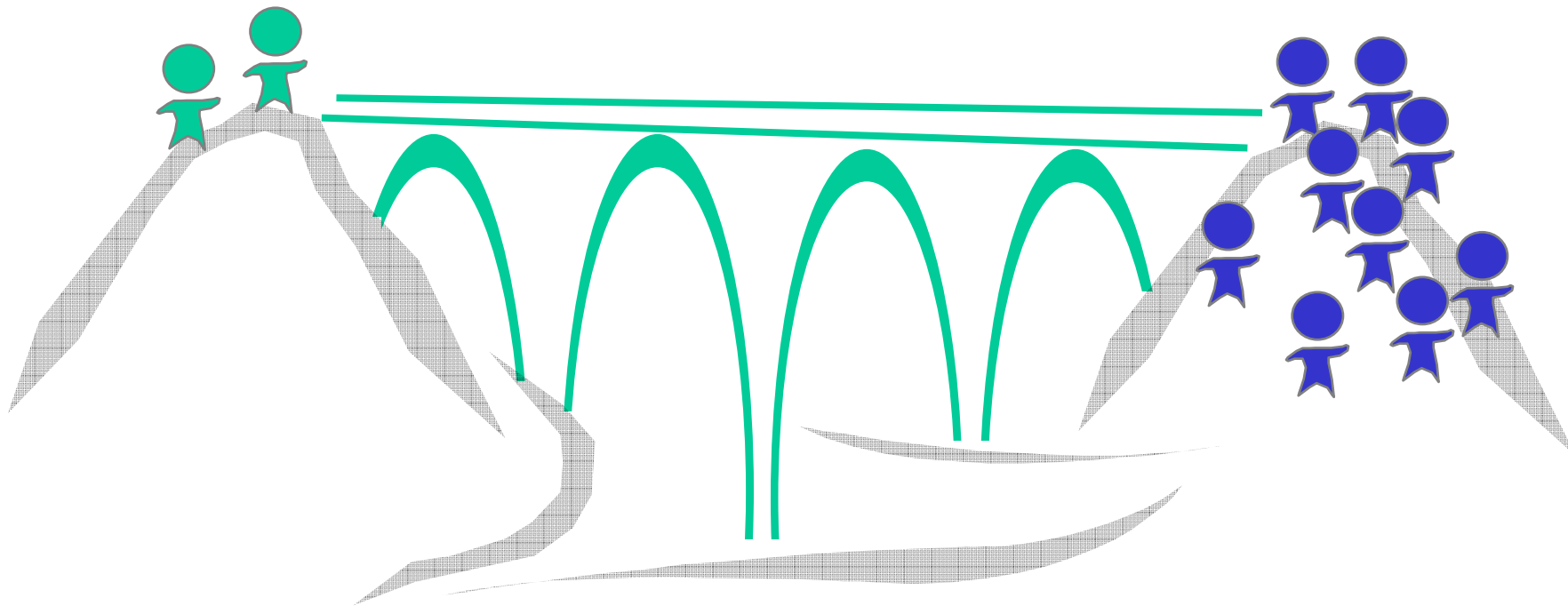
thanks for your attention!

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