

# DESIGN OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROJECTS AS ANTENARRATIVE STORYTELLING CASE OF A POST-DOWNSIZING PROCESS IN A METAL COMPANY

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## **ABSTRACT:**

The objective of this paper is to analyze the connections between SEAM and antenarrative story-telling through the case of a socio-economic intervention carried out in a metal company following the trauma a downsizing process. This intervention-research draws on the socio-economic theory (Savall & Zardet, 1987) and its epistemological pillars elicited in the qualimetrics approach to the complex object of management dynamics (Savall & Zardet, 2003) and on the book on "Mastering hidden costs and performance. Connections are proposed with Boje's storytelling theory on antenarratives of organizational change (Boje, Haley & Saylor, 2016), in particular with its five components: Before, Beneath, Between, Bets, and Becoming.

**Keywords:** Storytelling ; Socio-Economic Approach to Management; Antenarrative; Agile Organizations

## **INTRODUCTION**

This paper is aimed at highlighting some connections between SEAM and antenarrative story-telling through the case of a socio-economic intervention carried out in a metal company following the trauma a downsizing process. This intervention-research draws on the socio-economic theory (Savall & Zardet, 1987) and its epistemological pillars elicited in the qualimetrics approach to the complex object of management dynamics (Savall & Zardet, 2003) and on the book on "Mastering hidden costs and performance. Connections are proposed with Boje's storytelling theory on antenarratives of organizational change (Boje, Haley & Saylor, 2016), in particular with its five components: Before, Beneath, Between, Bets, and Becoming.

It should be noted that the socio-economic theory has been designed by Henri Savall as soon as 1973 and was not inspired by storytelling. However, it is interesting to notice some similarities between both approaches, even if the

socio-economic theory has been experimented in a larger scale than any other approach to organizational development.

The objective of the case study is to illustrate the socio-economic approach to organizational transformation as an alternative to downsizing and restructuring. Indeed, the Iseor database shows that traditional approaches to cutting visible costs are toxic, as they result in a sharp increase in hidden costs.

On the contrary, the socio-economic investment in human potential development aimed at implementing organizational metamorphosis is highly performing both in social and economic terms. As compared with the storytelling research method, Socio-Economic Approach to Management can be compared to a critical approach to the *Grand Story* of downsizing, where « cutting jobs by cutting people » and « the planned elimination of positions and jobs » (Cascio, 1993: 97; 95) had appeared as a « natural » strategy: decision-makers assume that it results in economic benefits and in an increase in value for shareholders. In terms of organizational benefits financial managers advocate that it lowers overheads, reduce bureaucracy, and help make decisions faster by fostering smoother communications and a new spirit of entrepreneurship. Yet those tantalizing cost savings gains have often fallen short of ascribed objectives (Cascio & Morris, 1994). Socio-economic theory shows the reasons of such downsides and failures of the lack of prevention of downsizing through the analysis and financial evaluation of the dysfunctions and hidden costs stemming from traditional financial and management methods. It may be compared with the analysis of *micro-stories* and *living story webs* and the differentiation between *dominant narrative* and *antenarrative*.

## 1) PRESENTATION OF THE CASE STUDY

The case study is based on a socio-economic intervention in a metal company that had experienced an economic downturn due to shifts in the aerospace market. Following a dip in revenue, decision was made at corporate level to reduce manpower by 25 % of the 400 employees, followed by the recruitment of 60 young employees (see table 1).

Such a case study of a past experiment has been selected so as to get a post-downsizing performance appraisal which would cover a sizable span of time. Objective is to guarantee the durability and the interest of the analyzed process and provide sufficient distancing from the events so as to contribute to single out some of the invariants.

**Table 1: Descriptive data concerning the case study**

COMPANY	SURVIVING WORKFORCE	SEVERANCE RESTRUCTURING FIGURES	TOP MANAGEMENT RESTRUCTURING	RESTRUCTURING CAUSES	CORPORATE SUCCESS PREDICTORS AFTER DOWNSIZING PROCESS
METAL INDUSTRY	360 employees	Downsizing from 400 to 300 hundred employees (partly early retirement scheme) followed by the recruitment of 60 young people	New Management Team after reshuffling	Downtrend of a depleted market	Socio-economic company strategy redeployment and improved implementation

In the case of intervention-research on post-downsizing, the general manager of the company wanted to restore hope after the downsizing process. He acknowledged that all the categories of actors in the company didn't agree on the reasons for the necessity of restructuring. He brought in the Iseor research center to accompany the implementation process of socio-economic management both in order to help the company heal from the downsizing trauma and to re-energize the company actors thanks to a shared sustainable strategic project, which can be compared with the **“bet”** and **“becoming”** aspects of the *storytelling* approach.

The downsizing case studied presented here leads to the formulation of a series of descriptive, explicative and prescriptive hypotheses on restructuring management. The high cost of dysfunction regulations as exemplified in reactive downsizings heeds us towards a more preventive approach of restructuring processes, which are, in many respects, less costly, less dramatic and more oriented towards the future socio-economic creation of potential, a storytelling **“becoming”** process.

The Iseor intervention-research process took more than four hundred hours of field study, interviews, feed-back, facilitation of focus groups, coaching of the persons in charge of action plans and technical assistance were spent on each project for two year. An additional survey was conducted a few years after the intervention.

## 2) UNFOLDING THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC INTERVENTION-RESEARCH PROCESS AND EXPLORING POSSIBLE CONNECTIONS WITH ANTENARRATIVE STORYTELLING

The intervention-research process, consisted in several steps, which can be partly interpreted as matching with antenarrative storytelling concepts:

**-Horizontal and vertical diagnoses**, where all categories of actors have been interviewed, followed by a feed-back in the shape of a mirror effect consisting in fieldnote quotes and participative calculation of hidden costs. It is a kind of presentation of fragment of micro-stories and the *“Before”* of antenarrative as it refers to the position before the fuller narrative. However, the socio-economic diagnoses are structured in themes and sub-themes and articulated with a financial evaluation that don't exist yet in approaches to storytelling. The **mirror-effect** may be compared with the *“Between”* dimension of a storytelling process, as it contributes to the interplay between the fragments of incomplete stories and narratives.

**-Expert advice** aimed at unveiling the unvoiced ideas that are the roots of the dysfunctions. It can be compared with the *“Beneath”* dimension of the storytelling approach, as it unveiled the beliefs, norms and prior conditions that produce the story.

**-Socio-Economic project**: focus groups both at top management level and at departmental and cross-departmental levels have designed an innovative internal and external strategic action plan and priority action plans at all organizational levels in order to convert dysfunctions and hidden costs into social and economic value creation. It was aimed at rebuilding the “bedrock” of the management system of the company. It might be compared with the *“Bet”* in the antenarrative approach because those projects sketch out potential outcomes of the story that is not yet.

**-Implementation of the project and assessment of the results**: Company actors take a course of action following the agreement they came up with in the project. Through the enacting process, they could innovate to improve the functioning of the top management teams, groups at departmental level as well at the level of cross-departmental processes. It can be compared with the *“becoming”* dimension of the antenarrative approach, as it is a prospective process of the story-in-the-making thanks to the contribution of Before, Between, Beneath and Bets.

## 3) IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION PROCESS

### a) Socio-economic diagnosis

Hidden costs revealed by the socio-economic diagnosis as *“micro-stories”* of the downsizing process. Indeed, the negative effects of hasty downsizing had been largely underestimated, as evidenced by the socio-economic diagnosis: by

comparison with a medical surgery in a case of cancer, downsizing can partly restore the health of ailing companies, provided that they survive the traumatic post-operative shock. In the case of the metal company that had undergone employment retrenchment as a strategic redirection, four main shocks or unanticipated adverse effects damaged organizational running of the company operations:

*-Knowledge Loss:*

Severance criteria downplayed competencies worth preserving. It is common practice to review posts and incumbents' or late comers' positions to be axed irrespective of the strategic core competencies and related skills that go along with them. The effect was increased organizational knowledge vulnerability.

Table 2 details a comparative « scale of skills » before, and after, the planned redundancy scheme in a department of the metal company. One can observe that a number of operations such as laser welding and numerical control machine programming cannot be performed by competent people since employees E and H are no longer members of the department. In that case, it should be noted that employee B was given early retirement leave, whereas E and H were laid off because they were the last to be recruited. B had an invaluable know-how which the firm has lost. Employee B had a thorough knowledge of the customers' specific needs for the various products. Indeed, B had been with the firm longer than anybody else. On many occasions, he visited the customers together with the sales manager. In fact, some of the most skilled people defected of their own initiative when hearing about rumors about future layoffs and before the planned redundancy scheme was announced.

Such negative effects were even more visible when voluntary leave incentives were offered while competitors made attractive offers to the most competent people of the firm. In this case, several departments were left with the least employable and the less skill-useful people after downsizing was completed.

*-Post-downsizing Organizational Dysfunctions:*

Staff retrenchment had been justified by the existence of too many low added value or even useless activities in the firm. In the company, activity screening allowed to draw up a list of loss-making activities.

An inventory was also made of useless and redundant administrative tasks. It was estimated that they were swallowing up about 20% of management and staff time. For example, quotes sent out beyond deadline to customers due to poorly planned activities barely scheduled. The work formerly done by downsized staff was either left pending or was disorganized in part.

The downsizing process could be compared with cancer treatment that would cut blindly into healthy and unhealthy tissues. Metaphorically, the firm was badly in need of an immune therapy to enable the company weed out parasitic activities without harming strong value-added ones.

**Table 2: Comparing the table of skills of a department before and after downsizing (©ISEOR)**

OPERATIONS AND KNOW-HOW	Table 2 A : SCALE OF SKILLS BEFORE DOWNSIZING SCHEME												
	SENIORITY	WELDING	LASER WELDING	BOILERS	METAL-TURNING	MILLING	ASSEMBLING AND FINISHING	NUMERICAL CONTROL PROGRAMMING	PLAN READING SKILLS	SITE MAINTENANCE	QUALITY CONTROL	CUSTOMER AND PRODUCT AWARENESS	ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGEMENT SKILLS
EMPLOYEES													
A	5 YEARS	■	▣	▣	■	■	▣	▣	■	■	■	□	□
B	21 YEARS	■	■	□	■	■	▣	■	■	▣	▣	■	■
C	7 YEARS	■	□	□	■	▣	■	□	▣	▣	□	□	□
D	10 YEARS	■	□	▣	■	▣	▣	▣	□	□	□	—	□
E	1 YEARS	▣	■	■	▣	▣	■	▣	■	□	—	□	□
F	3 YEARS	■	—	▣	■	▣	□	□	▣	□	□	—	□
G	8 YEARS	□	—	▣	□	■	□	□	▣	□	—	□	▣
H	1 YEARS	□	▣	■	■	■	▣	▣	▣	□	□	—	□

OPERATIONS AND KNOW-HOW	Table 2 B : SCALE OF SKILLS AFTER DOWNSIZING INCLUDING B, E, H LAYOFFS												
	SENIORITY	WELDING	LASER WELDING	BOILERS	METAL-TURNING	MILLING	ASSEMBLING AND FINISHING	NUMERICAL CONTROL PROGRAMMING	PLAN READING SKILLS	SITE MAINTENANCE	QUALITY CONTROL	CUSTOMER AND PRODUCT AWARENESS	ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGEMENT SKILLS
EMPLOYEES													
A	5 YEARS	■	▣	▣	■	■	▣	▣	■	■	■	□	□
C	7 YEARS	■	□	□	■	▣	■	□	▣	▣	□	□	□
D	10 YEARS	■	□	▣	■	▣	▣	□	□	□	—	□	□
F	3 YEARS	■	—	▣	■	▣	□	▣	□	□	—	□	□
G	8 YEARS	□	—	▣	□	■	□	▣	□	—	□	▣	▣
POST-DOWNSIZING VULNERABILITY			Strong						Strong	Strong	Very strong	Strong	

**Legend :**

- Full operational skill mastery
- ▣ Partial skill mastery
- Knowledge of principles without operational skills
- No competence at all

*-Work overload of surviving managers and employees:*

Oganizational dysfunctions were at the origin of heavy work load incumbent upon surviving employees. Going through a crisis, the company had to face up to an extra workload brought about by the current restructuring. A new strategy was developed, a strong commercial effort was also implemented in order to increase sales and compensate financial losses. Money-making production and accounting activities were spurred so as to collect funds and meet financial commitments. In the company, it was reckoned that the top managers' work load had moved from an averaged 45 hour- work week to over 60 hour-work week after the restructuring process.

Overwork increased in similar proportions within the management team. Following such a pace for months made individuals overtired and nervous, and impacted employees' job satisfaction and organizational climate. Besides, overwork had increased sick leave and management team members' defection or senior executives' turnover. If such risks had further materialized, it could have proved disastrous for the company's survival chances considering the difficult phase the company was going through.

*-Low Commitment of surviving employees:*

The socio-economic diagnosis highlighted that survivors didn't not feel like stretching themselves to the limit so as to contribute to the company's turnaround. Here were the most frequently given reasons:

- The antagonized work force claimed that the same management team had not proposed any new project but a continuation of the previous cost-cutting strategy. In the meantime, employee survivors strongly believed that major strategic errors had been made by central management.
- Some employees were given in to their fate and pointed out that other companies in the same industry were closing down for having lost their competitive edge. Employees waiting for an upcoming round of redundancies hoping for a respite so as to be entitled to less drastic severance pays or early retirement packages in due time.
- There was a serious litigation with the parent company. Management and employees had perceived as unfair the one-sided decision made at corporate level to target and downsize their unit instead of other subsidiaries they thought less efficient. Revenge and resentment against the parent company were pervasive feelings subsequently to the retrenchment process. As a result, the organizational climate that prevailed did not make the idea of additional work timely nor was particularly efficient.

*Evaluation of the hidden costs*

Acknowledging the "before" through evaluating the Financial impacts of organizational dysfunctions resulting from downsizing contributed to enhanced awareness of all actors regarding the need to a dialogical process.

The four types of dysfunctions all had economic consequences that were gauged while the socio-economic interventions took place in the company. The impacts could be assessed by a comparison between dysfunction costs ex-ante and ex-post downsizing. In practice, the assessment was conducted ex-post and focused on the effects of the downsizing process on increased dysfunction costs.

The traceable findings were as follows:

- The unit cost of employee absenteeism rose for lack of competent insider staff to replace former downsized employee. In a case, it was even necessary to outsource and call in another firm to adjust machines when the local technician was on leave. It caused maintenance extra costs and a lower machine operating ratio.
- Productivity losses were due to disrupted work flows.
- Increased non-quality and rejects costs were located in the metal company following the layoffs of competent staff affected to key processes.
- Heavy customer defections were linked to the voluntary leaves of sales people and the tarnished institutional image due to the customer habit to deal with previous sales reps.



Table 3 provides examples of dysfunction costs and relevant evaluations. It shows that the dysfunctions costs presented below are equivalent to the total wages including labor charges that would have been paid to over 25% of the downsized staff. In other words, the visible costs saved thanks to layoffs was partly written off, if not completely, by an increase in hidden costs. As a side-effect, soaring dysfunction costs have dragged performance into a downward spiral: downsizing produced rising hidden costs which, in turn, beget possible need for new cost cutting. Such vicious cycle might have eventually ended with the company going out of business.

**Table 3: Example of financial Impact of Downsizing process on hidden costs**

TYPES OF DYSFUNCTIONS	HIDDEN COSTS	FINANCIAL EVALUATION
NON QUALITY	Increase in non-quality costs resulting from skill loss (corrective actions and delays)	\$ 216,000
CUSTOMER TURNOVER	Customer defection and profit margin loss resulting from downsizing impact on company's image	\$ 357,000
PRODUCTIVITY GAP	Productivity loss resulting from increased standby time, and disrupted production flow.	\$ 690,000

**b) Expert advice**

The socio-economic diagnosis helped to bring dysfunction costs and alleged causes to the fore as inter-group mirroring took place at management team level but also at work unit level and with the firm's representatives so as to make cross-layers of staff aware of the pending core problem that had to be resolved. Meetings were focused on the clarification and labeling of pressing problems facing individuals or groups and were also designed to foster future collaboration and mutual problem solving.

Intervener-researchers voiced the "unstated ideas", i.e., roots of the dysfunctions. Among the pivotal ideas listed in the expert advice, one can point out some of underlying factors laying "beneath" the dysfunctions:

- Poor sensitization of the actors to the financial value destruction stemming from the downsizing process.
- Short termism is at the origin of lack of anticipation of strategic turnarounds.
- Slow process to clean up tasks and activities that are not value added in order to re-use time budget to create potential.
- Lack of synchronization across actions aimed at implementing the strategy, in particular as regards integrated training.

### c) **Socio-economic project**

Participative group technique and team-work was used so as to better identify preferred future strategies and re-energize both management team and staff. A survey feedback of project ideas and themes was presented to the staff by intervener-researchers. During the intervention, all categories of employees were given continuing information about the progress of the ongoing intervention and gave their views.

Examples of the themes of the project were as follows:

#### a) **Re-building a cohesive and re-energized management Team**

Building a real management team by leveraging synergy was the first step towards organizational redevelopment and new organization design when considering the trauma caused by downsizing. Three measures taken after the appointment of a new production manager, who had already taken up his post before the intervention started:

- Scheduling a weekly meeting focused on the assessment of the key business piloting indicators. The idea of a management « hub » providing an integrated, single point of contact was used to foster information sharing and improve time-based and crisis coordination and decision-making. Showing surviving employees that there was no warlord conflicts between seniors executives could also prevent staff loss of morale in times of hardship.

- A recovery implementation project was jointly built using the socio-economic management tools, such as piloting indicators, knowledge and skill management, periodically negotiable activity contracts, and priority action plans.

- The shared strategic competencies of the top management team were strengthened. Restructuring the company went along with the defection of competent senior executives and the recruitment of new managers less cognizant of the company core business. Hiring one or two top proficient executives to fill the competence and experience gap was one strategic option used towards team strengthening. A new managing director was appointed in the metal company. New product engineers were hired in the mechanical engineering firm while a computer-skilled manager was employed in the hosiery concern. Resorting to outsourcing was ruled out because its predominantly short-termed and process-related goal did not contribute enough to team and skill building.

- Career advancement of project-committed top managers was also favored. It allowed to curb costs while capitalizing on the organizational experience and business knowledge of the surviving manager. The competence standards were raised thanks to work in pairs gathering an experienced senior manager and the new management team member. Table 4 is a mapping of the management team skills one year after reshuffling. It is easily understood why the manager: (A), who is

competence laden, has work overload. Weaker management skills (poor meeting running and delegation skills) and reduced multi-purpose skill using also affect individual

OPERATIONS		Copyright ISEOR																	
		Technical knowledge of operation A	Technical knowledge of operation B	New product design	Production Management	Human Resource Management	Management Computing	Auditing	Finance and D accountancy	Purchasing	Sales & Marketing	International Marketing	Marketing	Strategy	In-house recognition	Customer recognition	Bank & financial institutions recognition	Team Management	Delegation skills
A		■	■	■	□	■	—	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	□
B		■	■	□	—	■	□	—	—	■	■	□	□	□	□	■	—	■	□
C		■	■	—	■	■	—	■	—	—	—	—	—	■	—	—	—	□	—
D		■	■	—	■	■	—	■	—	■	□	■	—	—	■	—	—	■	■
E		—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	■	—	□	—	—	—	—	—	□
F		—	—	—	—	■	—	■	■	—	—	—	—	—	—	□	—	—	—

-Re-defining a new vision and shared strategic orientations: the major management team goal was to work out a new strategic plan allowing sub-units to redeploy and develop activities after such a setback. All the members of the top management team had to entirely revise their strategy within months through taking-into account the ideas proposed in the socio-economic projects. They did it in accordance with the restructuring plan of their parent company. They advocated the reinforcement of the current company's core business and the development of a stronger competence edge. Meeting deadlines, eliminating delays or gaining one particular technological lead would, for example, help deliver performance.

**d) Implementation and evaluation of the project**


Our hypothesis is that these factors, which have contributed, to some extent, to the strategic reorientation project, have been more instrumental thanks to the assistance and guidance process set up by consultants to provide help and expertise to the management team. Left to their own devices, managers usually experience « strategic helplessness », if not a state of utter confusion. This phenomenon has often been observed in many firms. It may bring a paralyzed or panic-stricken management team on the brink of strategic suicide or, at least, of serious errors.

Second, the strategic action plan must be communicated to the surviving staff so as to gain legitimacy and increased depth. It is essential that the staff receive detailed information on the objectives so that he may participate more effectively in the search for original and realistic implementation actions that must be launched to achieve constant improvement and hunt costly dysfunctions. This

involvement technique is formalized in the various Priority Action Plans throughout the company. These plans (PAP) lay down the detail of programmed actions and schedules for all the concerned units in the most simple and, preferably, vivid terms. In the four strategic orientations concerning the metal company, one particular objective was to shorten design and production delays since it was a key competitive factor on the aeronautical market. Demultiplying this strategic line throughout the company's departments meant that two hundred precise operations as showed in table 6 would be listed and translated into actions. To implement these objectives, it was necessary to organize half-yearly appraisal interviews where the immediate superior and his subordinate negotiated the right balance between objectives and resources. Besides, incentive boni were tied to implementation results, which were recorded by a wide array of collective, semi-collective, and individual result indicators.

**Table 6: Excerpt of a Priority Action Plans (PAP) in the Metal Company**

**(Strategic Actions Implementation focused on shortening design and production delays)**

<b>PAP AT COMPANY LEVEL</b> <b>6 actions</b>	<b>A SELECTION OF ACTIONS IN PAP AT DIVISION LEVEL</b> <b>Excerpt of 25 actions</b>	<b>ACTIONS IN PAP AT TEAM LEVEL</b> <b>Excerpt of 235 actions</b>
1 - Shortened estimate reply process	- Improved coordination between marketing and research departments - Different department staff members put together in the same room	- Redefined and simpler form that will serve as operating card is written up - Team estimates examination occurs after mail delivery and without files « stacking » - Shared office fitted out
2 - Creation of a Task Completion Schedule Indicator for each department 	Indicator for Research Dpt TCSI for Production Dpt TCSI for Quality Ctrl Dpt	TCSI for Product Lines TCSI for Prototypes TCSI for Estimates
3 - Shorten delays and reduced bottlenecks	- Shared office to enable cross department cooperation	Revamping offices
4 - Tool reliability improvement scheme designed to reduce failures and delays	.....	.....
5 - Install sequential scheduling software	.....	.....
6- Improving coordination	.....	.....

between departments to pilot weekly schedules		
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-Actions facilitating changes in work organization, job-design, time-shift, and responsibility charting

Such restructuring required from the surviving staff making an inventory of performed tasks and reorganizing them afterwards. This detailed review aimed to eliminate low value added tasks and to share the workloads of previously downsized employees more harmoniously. A monthly time estimate for repetitive tasks is made. A value added quotation list was also drawn to measure their contribution to the company's smooth functioning. For instance, it was discovered that too much time was spent on the management of supplies in the joinery firm as compared with other competitors. In fact, time was wasted because of a lack of order anticipation. Consequently, the whole supplying process had to be restructured. Time spent on tasks was screened, carefully allotted and finally reduced by 50%. Restructuring was carried by the socio-economic pilot group with the participation of employees. Such quantitative and participant method could also be more frequently used when flexible working time is introduced and working weeks are temporarily shortened to preserve jobs.

Mapping, formalizing, and updating in-house individual skills and competencies

The company needed to restore competitiveness as quickly as possible had little time and money to allocate to retraining. A light system had to be designed to map, formalize and transfer existing competencies.

Two courses of action were privileged:

- Interpersonal and cross-team trainings which allowed an exchange flow of competencies between two permanent employees occupying two different work places. Team training in the hosiery firm helped, for example, restore a minimum of job flexibility and versatility required when there were absentees or work overload in some segments of the production system.

-Integrated training of an original kind involved managers in the production of operational and training material. They filled cards indexing the organizational knowledge and individual skills acquired during operation implementation and after evaluation process. Thus, management helped staff raise competence level and was able to delegate time-consuming tasks. Time spared was reallocated to development actions as formalized in the Priority Action Plans. The metal company rebuilt and saved its endangered tacit knowledge capital once it had mapped and written down its procedures, processes, and critical organization core operations.

In both experiments, not only skill training and skill transferring materialized in organizational knowledge easily accessed by learning employees but went hand in hand with the implementation of organizational change. Strategic restructuring and learning organizational capabilities were also mutually reinforced inside the metal firm by a qualification training package and diplomas certifying multi-skill versatility. The system of classification and remuneration served as an evaluation sanction and translated the newly acquired competencies into rewards.

Revitalizing sales and customer-oriented skills to breed customer-intimacy strategies:

Marketing management being at the heart of the new middle- and long-term strategic reorientations of the company, a pick-up in sales was crucial. It was urgent to restore the company's cash position and to increase sales margins so as to finance the restructuring scheme implementation. Two kinds of actions were started:

- Improving the skills and methods of the sales force that had not been revitalized as vigorously as other corporate functions. There was a fairly large and promising reserve of hidden potential that could be tapped without too much energy spending. In the three family businesses, coordination meetings with the sales force were held. New sales presentations were introduced and distribution networks were targeted in order to break more easily into the national and the European market.

- A new mindset within the company from reception desk to logistics was created. Culture-building initiatives were launched. In three firms out of five (hosiery, metal, mechanical companies), production managers were paired up with sales managers. Together, they followed a line of products, set off and called on clients. They analyzed markets, made product improvement suggestions, drawing respectively from their own technical or marketing background. Work team-relationships were built. A new form of group interaction was directed towards greater intimacy with clients. It instilled new sales skills and a learning spirit that revitalized the potential of surviving staff. The sales guiding purpose made the organization more efficient by increasing productivity while enhancing employee satisfaction and morale. Pro-active behaviors and strategic competencies were developed in lieu of passive job flexibility maximisation so as to avoid survivors' exhaustion.

## **CONCLUSION**

The case study shows connections between the socio-economic approach to management and antenarrative storytelling.

In particular, both approaches insist on the need to listen to all the categories of actors in order to bring to light the various points of views and question the "grand narrative" which resorts to a limited rationality and ignores the dysfunctions and hidden costs. The expert advice consists in expressing the unstated ideas in order to enhance actors' awareness on the underlying factors of the situation, which has similarities with the "beneath concept". Socio-economic project might also be compared with a "bet" and restores hope even though company is experiencing a predicament.

Overall, the socio-economic intervention is a "becoming" process, as all actors transform their mindsets and move to a preferred situation. Ten years after the intervention, company was thriving while competitors were facing crises.

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