

NARRATIVE ANALYSIS FOR HUMAN RESOURCES RESEARCH

The case of career change and development

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Qualitative research methodologies emphasize the exploration, description, and comprehension of complex phenomena. In the field of Human Resources (HR), these methodologies provide insights into the social and organizational realities that are often difficult to capture through quantitative methods. This study proposes narrative analysis as a qualitative approach in HR research, highlighting its potential to uncover deeper meanings and offer a holistic understanding of employee experiences. The aim of this work is to present the narrative analysis methodology as a valuable tool for technical-scientific research in HR management and development, offering researchers a framework for its application.

The narrative methodology is rooted in the understanding that stories are essential to human cognition, structuring experiences in a way that makes sense of reality (Bruner, 1991). Narratives are seen as a way to organize thoughts, events, and emotions over time, creating coherence and meaning from life experiences. In research, narratives are a powerful tool for interpreting how individuals and groups understand their roles within organizations, revealing their perspectives on challenges, successes, and the broader work environment (Polkinghorne, 2007).

Within HR, the use of narrative analysis can offer deeper insights into organizational culture, leadership styles, employee motivation, and interpersonal relationships. By focusing on stories told by employees, narrative analysis reveals underlying patterns and themes that may be missed by more structured methods of data collection. These insights can support the development of HR strategies that align with the emotional and psychological needs of the workforce, contributing to stronger organizational outcomes (Czarniawska, 2011).

This communication illustrates this research option with a study based on a qualitative, narrative approach, employing unstructured, in-depth narrative interviews to collect data. The focus was on exploring the lived experiences of HR professionals who have undergone career changes. The selection of participants aimed at capturing a broad spectrum of experiences, allowing for a diverse range of narratives to be analysed. By examining how participants structure their stories, the study aimed to understand the subjective factors that influence their career trajectories and experiences in HR management. This approach allowed for the identification of key emotional, social, and contextual elements that may not be evident through other research methods.

The narrative analysis revealed several significant patterns. First, participants often emphasized the role of organizational culture in shaping their professional experiences. Narratives about career changes frequently included reflections on the adaptability and resilience required to navigate organizational transformations, such as mergers, restructures, or the adoption of new technologies. These stories also highlighted the importance of supportive leadership and the presence of strong mentorship programs in facilitating positive career transitions.

Many participants expressed a strong sense of personal agency in their stories, demonstrating how they actively sought out opportunities for development and positioned themselves strategically within their organizations. This proactive stance was particularly evident in stories related to the adoption of AI and other digital tools, where professionals highlighted the need for continuous learning and adaptation to remain relevant.

The analysis also showed that participants often framed their experiences around key moments of decision-making and transformation, suggesting that narrative analysis is particularly well-suited for capturing turning points in career trajectories. These moments provided a rich source of data on how professionals perceive their growth and the organizational factors that either supported or hindered their development.

The results of this study confirm the potential of narrative analysis to offer rich, detailed insights into the personal and professional experiences. By focusing on the subjective aspects of career development, narrative analysis reveals the complex interplay of individual agency, organizational, and social context in shaping professional development. This methodology highlights the importance of storytelling in making sense of work and learning dynamics and offers a valuable tool for researchers and educators aiming to explore the nuances of HR management and development in contemporary context.

In HR research, the use of narrative analysis can provide a more empathetic and human-centered approach, complementing more traditional quantitative methods. This qualitative perspective allows for a deeper understanding of the motivations, challenges, and aspirations of employees, contributing to the development of more effective and humane organizational strategies. Moreover, narrative analysis offers a flexible and adaptable research tool that can be used to explore a wide range of topics within HR, from leadership styles and team dynamics to organizational culture and employee engagement (Bastos & Biar, 2015).

This study demonstrates the applicability of narrative analysis as a qualitative research methodology in HR management. By offering a deeper understanding of the subjective experiences of HR professionals, narrative analysis provides valuable insights that can inform organizational strategies and practices. The use of narratives allows researchers to capture the richness and complexity of individual experiences, revealing underlying patterns and themes that may not be evident through more structured methods.

The integration of narrative analysis into HR research offers significant benefits for both researchers and practitioners. For educators and researchers, this approach provides a framework for exploring the human aspects of HR management and development, facilitating a more nuanced understanding of how employees interact with their work environments. For HR practitioners, the insights gained through narrative analysis can inform the development of more empathetic and effective strategies for managing and development human capital, particularly in the context of change and transformation.

Future research should continue to explore the potential of narrative analysis in HR, particularly in areas such as leadership, organizational change, and employee development. By incorporating narrative analysis into a broader range of HR studies, researchers can contribute to the development of more inclusive, human-centered work settings, where employee experiences are valued and understood in their full complexity.

This proposal not only enriches the existing body of knowledge on qualitative research methods in HR but also provides practical tools for integrating narrative analysis into both academic and applied HR contexts.

Palavras-chave

Narratives, HR Research, Storytelling, Career Development, Career Change