WILEY STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT JOURNAL

SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

A universe of stories: Mobilizing narrative practices during transformative change

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Research Summary: Constructing narratives of transformative change is an important but challenging practice through which strategy-makers attempt to influence acceptance of an ongoing transformation. To understand whether and how strategy-makers can construct a steady influx of captivating narratives of transformative change, we analyzed how one noted strategy-maker assisted the successful transformation of his organization over three decades by orchestrating the production of change narratives. Our analysis reveals that the strategy-maker constructed and reconstructed meanings of change over time using three sets of distinct but interconnected narrative practices. We develop a dynamic model linking the simultaneous mobilization of these practices to strategy-makers' ability to harness the persistent tension between novelty and familiarity in a transformative change, and thereby, win endorsement from key audiences.

Managerial Summary: How can storytelling be used to influence acceptance of an ongoing organizational transformation? In this article, we try to answer this question by examining how, over three decades, Italian company Alessi documented its transformation from a manufacturer of kitchen steel utensils to a producer of a variety of household objects purchased also for their symbolic value. The leader behind Alessi's transformation, Alberto Alessi, orchestrated such storytelling effort, targeting employees, customers, retailers, and visitors to Alessi exhibitions. Our findings uncover how stories can be used to win audiences' endorsement of change through narrative practices aimed at: (a) constructing a collective memory of change, (b) depicting change as a novel but coherent departure from the past, and (c) portraying change as a transcendent endeavor.

664 | | wileyonlinelibrary.com/journal/smj | *Strat Mgmt J.* 2018;39:664–696.

"The universe is made of stories, not of atoms."—Muriel Rukeyser

1 | INTRODUCTION

Recent years have witnessed an increasing interest in understanding the practice of strategy, meaning "what actually takes place in strategy formulation, planning, and implementation and other activities that deal with the thinking and doing of strategy" (Golsorkhi, Rouleau, Seidl, & Vaara, 2015, p. 1). Within this domain (Jarzabkowski, Balogun, & Seidl, 2007; Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Whittington, 1996, 2006), a vibrant debate has focused on the construction of narratives as a crucial practice through which strategy-makers influence audiences' acceptance of strategic change (e.g., Brown & Thompson, 2013; Fenton & Langley, 2011; Küpers, Mantere, & Statler, 2013; Vaara, Sonenshein, & Boje, 2016).

Organizational narratives are stories composed to arrange organizational events and actions temporally (Boje, 2008) and meaningfully (Polkinghorne, 1988) around specific themes (Barry & Elmes, 1997).[1] In particular, narratives are temporal representations of events that construe the past and present, and envision the future (Czarniawska, 2004). As a result, the construction of narratives is well suited for influencing the interpretation of a process like strategic change, which is inherently temporal (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995) and characterized by an intense negotiation of meanings (Sonenshein, 2010), with the aim of establishing a new reality in the minds of relevant audiences (Dunford & Jones, 2000). This is particularly true when strategic change is transformative—that is, when it is characterized by "constant, evolving, and cumulative" changes (Weick & Quinn, 1999, p. 366) that lead to a radical organizational transformation over years (e.g., Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997; Girod & Whittington, 2015).

To effectively influence how audiences perceive transformative change, narratives must captivate attention by balancing the presentation of novel and familiar events (Barry & Elmes, 1997). This is a formidable task for a number of reasons. First, asserting novelty and familiarity simultaneously poses a dilemma since these are contradictory but interdependent elements of change (Farjoun, 2010; Sonenshein, 2010), and emphasizing one element over the other has clear advantages and disadvantages (Smith & Lewis, 2011). On the one hand, presenting events as overly novel may increase audiences' interest, but decrease the story's perceived credibility (Barry & Elmes, 1997), thus increasing audiences' resistance to change (Lewin, 1951). On the other hand, presenting events as overly familiar may increase a story's perceived credibility while diminishing its ability to generate the "concern, curiosity, and excitement" (Bartel & Garud, 2009, p. 114) that is necessary to garner audiences' support for change (Barry & Elmes, 1997; Czarniawska, 1997). Second, the challenge of managing the novelty-familiarity tension is exacerbated by the nature of transformative change. A transformation that audiences ultimately perceive as highly novel can trigger resistance; while a steady and cumulative flow of changes can be perceived as overly familiar and lacking in significance. Since transformative change may unfold over a long temporal span, the tension

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[1]Following prior work (Barry & Elmes, 1997; Hardy & Maguire, 2010; Shipp & Jansen, 2011; Sonenshein, 2010), in this article, we use the terms *narrative* and *story* interchangeably.

between novelty and familiarity must also be managed over time. As narratives have "shelf lives" (Barry & Elmes, 1997, p. 439) and "become familiar, mundane, and tiresome with time" (1997, p. 438), strategy-makers must come up with captivating narratives over and over, creating "a steady influx of new perspectives" (1997, p. 439).

The narrative approach to understanding strategic change has begun to illuminate methods for addressing the tension between novelty and familiarity, and how these methods may influence the interpretation of change by key audiences. For example, this work has suggested that putting a positive spin on events (Sonenshein & Dholakia, 2012), creating ambiguity about the valence of change (Abdallah & Langley, 2014; Sonenshein, 2010), and leveraging shared cultural values (Dunford & Jones, 2000; Vaara & Tienari, 2011) can induce favorable interpretations of change. Past work has also shown that narratives emphasizing novelty at the expense of familiarity may trigger tragic interpretations of the consequences of change among relevant audiences (Brown & Humphreys, 2003). This research does not, however, make clear how strategy-makers can construct a steady influx of captivating narratives in the specific context of transformative change. In this case, as we have argued, the challenge of managing the presentation of novelty and familiarity is exacerbated by the nature and duration of change. Thus, in this article, we ask *whether and how strategy-makers can construct a steady influx of captivating narratives about a transformative change.*

To this end, we conducted a thematic (Bruner, 1991) and narrative (Czarniawska, 1998) analysis of the content and authorial elements of the narratives produced over three decades at Alessi, an Italian manufacturing company. These narratives documented Alessi's transformative change from a manufacturer of kitchen steel utensils to a producer of a variety of household objects purchased also for their symbolic value. Alberto Alessi, the strategy-maker and leader of Alessi's transformation, orchestrated this narrative production, which covered various topics related to Alessi's history, change, and product-related projects. Narratives were distributed to employees, customers, retailers, and visitors to Alessi exhibitions, and helped employees overcome resistance and support change (Rindova, Dalpiaz, & Ravasi, 2011).

Our findings show that the strategy-maker attempted to construct and reconstruct meanings of change over time using three distinct sets of *narrative practices*. First, the strategy-maker worked to construct a collective memory of change using three narrative practices for *memorializing*: (a) creating a sustained narrative world (*serializing*), (b) compiling a body of texts essential for the transformation (*anthologizing*), and (c) identifying the memory-makers (*curating*). Second, the strategy-maker sought to re-interpret Alessi's past to portray change as a novel but coherent departure from the past using two narrative practices for *revisioning*: (a) expanding the significance of change-related events (*refocusing*) and (b) retroactively enriching the meanings attributed to past events (*augmenting*). Finally, the strategy-maker strived to portray change as a transcendent endeavor using four narrative practices for *sacralizing*: (a) elevating the worth of change (*ennobling*), (b) presenting the change leader as a secular prophet (*prophet-making*), (c) characterizing a set of organizational artifacts as revered icons of change (*iconizing*), and (d) denoting the old strategy as unorthodox relative to the new strategy (*anathematizing*). We theorize how these distinct but interrelated practices can be used to harness the tension between novelty and familiarity, and how mobilizing them simultaneously may help win audiences' endorsement of change.

2 | THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Organizational narratives are the stories (Barry & Elmes, 1997; Hardy & Maguire, 2010; Shipp & Jansen, 2011) that organizational actors compose to configure "an initial state of affair, an event or

action, and a consequent state of affair" (Czarniawska, 1998, p. 2) "into a temporal unity by means of a plot" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 5) arranged around meaningful themes. Narratives are fully-fledged, self-contained stories characterized by a beginning, middle, and end (e.g., Dunford & Jones, 2000). Yet, narratives may also consist of fragments in which only some of these structural elements are explicit (Boje, 2008), micro-stories narrated by organizational members (e.g., Fenton & Langley, 2011), or composite stories that aggregates multiple fragments (e.g., Chreim, 2005). Organizational narratives have both an ontological and an epistemological function as strategy-makers can use narratives to construe organizational reality (Czarniawska, 1997; Weick, 1995) and influence audiences' interpretations of that reality (Fenton & Langley, 2011). During the process of strategic change, this latter function is particularly important for overcoming audiences' inertia—that is, the "tendency to remain within the *status quo* and the resistance to strategic renewal" (Huff, Huff, & Thomas, 1992, p. 56)—and for mobilizing support for change (e.g., Sonenshein, 2010).

2.1 | Organizational narratives of strategic change

The "forging of links between the exceptional and the ordinary" is a crucial feature of narratives for "explicating deviations from the ordinary in a comprehensible form" (Bruner, 1991, p. 47). Thus, an important way in which narratives can positively influence audiences' interpretations of change is constructing it in terms of novelty and familiarity relative to the status quo (Barry & Elmes, 1997).[2] Prior research has begun to shed light on how, and with what effects, strategy-makers connote the novelty and familiarity of strategic change. One stream of work suggests strategy-makers can *manipulate the valence* of such construction to put a negative (Brown & Humphreys, 2003), positive (Sonenshein & Dholakia, 2012; Vaara, 2002), or ambivalent (Sonenshein, 2010) spin on their narratives of change. For example, in a study of post-merger integration among British colleagues, Brown and Humphreys (2003) found that senior managers told a story of "epic" change in which hero-like managers came to the rescue of two failing colleagues and overcame obstacles and resistance. Yet, staff members interpreted this epic narrative, which emphasized the breach with a disapproved past, in "tragic" terms to articulate their feelings of betrayal and hopelessness. On the contrary, Sonenshein and Dholakia (2012) found that when strategy-makers of a large U.S. retailer emphasized the benefits of change rather than the hindrance of the status quo, employees were energized and became optimistic about the outcomes and confident in their ability to overcome the associated challenges. Sonenshein (2010) found evidence of an additional discursive mean through which managers influence interpretations of change, namely, the purposeful creation of ambiguous stories about whether or not a change is consistent with the past, so that employees can enact their own interpretation.

Another stream of work suggests that strategy-makers' narrative constructions of strategic change may *tap into shared values* to foster a sense of familiarity and encourage employees to embrace change. For example, Dunford and Jones (2000) found that the managers of a company facing extensive economic reforms in New Zealand mobilized shared meanings of national excellence (e.g., the yacht race) and symbols of national identity (e.g., the indigenous Kiwi bird) by presenting change as a "round-the-world yacht race" and encouraging employees to tackle it "the Kiwi way" (Dunford & Jones, 2000, p. 1212). Similarly, Vaara and Tienari (2011) found that decision-makers in the merger of firms from four Nordic countries crafted a "Nordic storytelling" in which

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[2]Prior literature has used various synonyms to denote continuity with or deviation from the status quo, including *stability* and *change* (Vaara et al., 2016), *continuity* and *change* (Chreim, 2005), and *familiarity* and *novelty* (Barry & Elmes, 1997). Here, we adopt the terminology of Barry and Elmes (1997).

the post-merger identity turned on shared values (e.g., Nordic simplicity, security, freedom) to focus employees' attention on familiar values consistent with the status quo.

A final stream of research draws attention to the *effect of time* on narratives, and suggests that the passing of time can influence the effect of strategy-makers' discursive means. For example, Abdallah and Langley's (2014) study of strategic change in a cultural organization indicated that, though ambiguity initially pushed employees to enact their own interpretation of change, it ultimately led to internal contradictions. Similarly, studying a cancelled merger, Mantere, Schildt, and Sillince (2012) found that strategy-makers' initial efforts to legitimize the planned merger lingered among employees when the merger was called off, preventing them from accepting the reversal. Considered together, these studies provide important insights into the discursive means that strategy-makers may mobilize to influence interpretations of change. Yet, these studies provide only a preliminary understanding of how strategy-makers can effectively construct narratives of *transformative* change *over time,* for the reasons described next.

2.2 | The narrative construction of transformative change

Transformative change occurs through ongoing instances of change (Weick & Quinn, 1999), such as a series of product innovations (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997) or a string of organizational reconfigurations aimed at "adding, splitting, transferring, merging, or deleting organizational units" (Girod & Whittington, 2015, p. 1521). Over years or decades, continuous change can lead to radical change (Huy, 2001; Plowman et al., 2007). For instance, this was the case at Hewlett-Packard, which over many years "changed from an instrument company to a computer firm through rapid, continuous product innovation" (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997, p. 2). Transformative changes have been documented in different contexts, including high-velocity environments (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997), traditional industries (Girod & Whittington, 2015), and the nonprofit sector (e.g., Plowman et al., 2007).

The overview above highlights three features that make it challenging to construct an effective narrative of transformative change, namely: the interconnectedness between continuous change and the resulting radical transformation, the cumulative nature of continuous change, and the unfolding of transformative change over a long time period. Prior research on the narrative construction of strategic change illuminates only part of these challenges. First, while previous work points to some discursive means to makes strategic change seem familiar (Dunford & Jones, 2000; Vaara & Tienari, 2011), it does not indicate how strategy-makers can enhance the familiarity of a radical transformation achieved continuously over time. Second, while previous work shows how strategy-makers can put a positive spin on novelty to encourage support for strategic change (Sonenshein & Dholakia, 2012; Vaara, 2002), it does not illuminate how they can ensure the perception of novelty persists through a series of continuous changes. Finally, while previous work underscores that time influences how audiences react to strategy-makers' narratives (Abdallah & Langley, 2014; Mantere et al., 2012), it does not address how strategy-makers can sustain narratives over time—a crucial issue when change may take years to unfold.

3 | CONTEXT

Alessi's transformation provides an extreme (Pettigrew, 1990) and revelatory (Yin, 1994) case for investigating our research question for multiple reasons. First, as is common with transformative change, Alessi's change unfolded over many years, alongside a series of experimental product

innovations (Dalpiaz, Rindova, & Ravasi, 2016). Second, as change unfolded, the strategy-maker of Alessi's transformation, Alberto Alessi, orchestrated the publication of stories about significant events in the change process, thus allowing us to observe how the content of these stories evolved over time. Third, Alberto Alessi and his collaborators authored Alessi's narratives directly, creating a unique opportunity for investigating how members of the "dominant coalition" (Boje, 2008, p. 99) constructed the desired interpretations of change. Finally, these books were made available to multiple audiences of Alessi, that is, employees, customers, retailers, and visitors of exhibitions. Although they were certainly not the only means through which Alessi successfully navigated transformative change (see, e.g., Dalpiaz et al., 2016; Salvato, 2003), these narratives helped employees to understand and support change (Rindova et al., 2011), allowing us to observe how narratives were constructed effectively. Our case begins with the publication of Alessi's first corporate biography in 1979 and ends with its last in 2010.

3.1 | Transformative change at Alessi

Alessi was founded in Northern Italy in 1921 as a metal workshop for the working of brass and nickel silver plates. By the late 1960s, the company had become the technological and market leader for the production of steel tableware. In 1970, Alberto Alessi, grandson of the founder and son of the current CEO, championed a process of transformative change that unfolded gradually over the next decades. By means of ongoing product innovations, he succeeded in shifting Alessi's core business from manufacturing serving tools for restaurants and bars to producing a variety of household products designed by architects and other artists, appreciated by the higher end of the consumer market, and exhibited in modern art museums (Dalpiaz et al., 2016; Verganti, 2006). This process ultimately redefined the overall content of Alessi's strategy (Rindova et al., 2011). Table 1 provides a stylized overview of Alessi's history, with particular emphasis on the years following Alberto Alessi's entry.

3.2 | Documenting transformative change at Alessi

As Alessi's transformative change unfolded between 1979 and 2010, Alberto Alessi commissioned, wrote, and published more than 30 books.[3] These books offered the account of Alberto Alessi and his collaborators on various topics related to Alessi's history, change, and product-related projects. Collaborators included organizational members (e.g., the head of the Alessi Research Center in humanities) as well as individuals outside the organization (e.g., designers and museum curators), whom Alberto Alessi involved as consultants or contributors on specific projects. The firm's narrative also featured third-party publications, such as monographs on Alessi written by design critics and featuring Alberto Alessi's descriptions of the firm's new strategy, and essays on design topics, featuring Alberto Alessi's opinions.

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[3]The idea was triggered by the collaboration, initiated in the mid-1970s, with Alessandro Mendini, a famous Italian architect and design critic, who would become Alessi's consultant for the next three decades. Mendini suggested a method of "self-historicization" in which the company would reflect on its past strategy in order to devise its new trajectory, and document these reflection efforts in texts available to organizational members and outsiders. This practice proved effective in helping Alessi make sense of the organizational transformation (Dalpiaz et al., 2016), in line with recent studies on the performance effects of reflection (Di Stefano, Gino, Pisano, & Staats, 2014).

TABLE 1 Timeline of key events in Alessi's history[a]

Year	Key events
1921	Giovanni Alessi founds the firm, producing objects for the table and the home in copper, brass, and nickel-silver.
1933	Carlo Alessi (Giovanni' son) enters the firm as a designer.
1945	Carlo Alessi designs the Bombè coffee set.
1970	Alberto Alessi (Carlo's son) enters the firm, whose production is now focused on high-quality serving tools in steel mainly for the catering trade.
1972	Alberto Alessi champions the project Alessi d'Aprés, a collection of small sculptures for the table designed by famous European sculptors.
1975	Collaboration with Italian architect and design critic Alessandro Mendini begins.
1978	Ettore Sottsass designs the 5070 oil cruets. Richard Sapper designs the 9090 coffee-maker, which is the first cooking utensil to extend the range of serving tools.
Metanarrative 1	
1979	Collaboration with urbanist architects begins. Alessandro Mendini authors the first corporate biography (DL1979), which is the object of the first retrospective exhibition on Alessi hosted at the Milan Triennale. Metanarrative 1 begins.
1982	Collaboration with museum curators begins with a seminar exploring innovation possibilities in serving tools. The project is narrated in the book FR1982.
1983	Tea and Coffee Piazza, a collection of tea and coffee sets in silver designed by renown, international urbanist architects is heralded as a landmark operation for Alessi. The collection, whose project is narrated in the book TCP1983, become the object of travel exhibition.
1984	Also Rossi designs La Conica coffee-maker, which is the first architect-signed item to be mass-producible in steel. The project is narrated in the book LC1984.
1985	Architect Patrizia Scarzella authors the second corporate biography (SS1985). American archistar Michael Graves designs the Kettle with Bird Whistle.
1987	After a seven-year long research effort, Riccardo Dalisi designs the Neapolitan coffee-maker. The project is narrated in the book CP1987.
Metanarrative 2	
1989	Third corporate biography accompanies a retrospective exhibition on Alessi in Paris (AW1989). Metanarrative 2 begins.
1990	The book CV1990 documents Alessi's foray into production of porcelain products.
1991	The theoretical investigation on the meaning of serving tools in different cultures is documented in the book RS1991.
1992	The project 100% Make Up for the production of a limited edition of porcelain vases is documented in the book AF1992.
1993	Collaboration with young designers and experimentation with expressive keys related to emotions begins through the project narrated in the book FFF1993.
1993	Philippe Starck designs the Juicy Salif citrus squeezer.
1994	The project for the production of small electrical appliances in collaboration with Philips is narrated in the book EK1994. A monograph on Alessi is published in the United Kingdom (DF1998). An exhibition on Alessi's products is hosted at the Italian Cultural Centre in Paris and narrated in the book OD1994.
1995	Alberto Alessi explains his current view of design in the book PP1995.
1996	Alberto Alessi elaborates again his view of design in the book PSD1996.
Metanarrative 3	
1998	A monograph on Alessi is published in the United Kingdom (AP1998). Alberto Alessi authors the fourth corporate biography (DRF1998). Metanarrative 3 begins.
2000	Alberto Alessi recounts the story of how the project Alessi d'Aprés unfolded 30 years earlier.
2002	Exhibition on the meanings of product pictures used in Alessi communication campaigns over the years is narrated in the book PD2002. First production of bathroom furniture (SUB2002).
2003	Re-edition of the Tea and Coffee Piazza project, named Tea and Coffee Towers. The project is narrated in the book TCT2003 and exhibited at the Venice Biennale.
2008	A set of Alessi's iconic products is re-interpreted by students of industrial design in Milan. The project is narrated in the book IBP2008.
2010	Fifth corporate biography is published to accompany a retrospective exhibition on Alessi in Germany (OP2010).

[a] The table highlights also the time span covered by metanarratives, that is, the higher level stories resulting from the intertextual totality of books published in a given time period. The content of such metanarratives is summarized in Table 3.

4 | METHODS

4.1 | Data sources

We assembled a collection of books about Alessi that: (a) were written by Alberto Alessi; (b) were written by third parties, with explicit contributions from Alberto Alessi or other organizational members; and/or (c) were published by Alessi. We chose these publications because they constitute the narrative that was directly produced and promulgated by the strategy-maker and his collaborators. We did not use publications that did not meet these criteria, such as product catalogues or monographs that did not explicitly contain the views of Alessi's members. We compiled a list of 35 books relevant for our analysis and obtained 25 of them.[4] We complemented these sources with other publications such as scholarly articles and books about Alessi and its context. We summarize our data sources and their use in the analysis in Table 2.

4.2 | Analyses

We analyzed the data in six iterative steps presented in sequence for clarity (Suddaby, 2006).

Step 1. Analyzing narratives requires a rich understanding of the context in which those are produced (Hardy, Palmer, & Phillips, 2000). To develop a thorough understanding of the change process at Alessi, we first read through all available data sources and created a detailed chronological description of Alessi's history with key actors and events. This step allowed us to identify how change affected Alessi's structures and practices (Mantere et al., 2012).

Step 2. To investigate how Alessi's narratives constructed familiarity and novelty of transformative change, we engaged in a thematic analysis of each book (sources I and II in Table 2) and identified the main themes related to transformative change. We used a functional approach to thematic analysis (Bruner, 1990) with the goal of uncovering the *meanings of particular stories* as opposed to analyzing their grammar, lexicon, or relation to the broader socio-cultural context. As is customary in qualitative research, we used paragraphs as coding units (Weber, 2005). We coded every paragraph in each book, with contiguous paragraphs covering the same subject matter sharing a single code. Because of our interest in capturing the presentation of transformative change, we analyzed the coding units in search of references to: (a) dimensions of change (Hofer & Schendel, 1978; Rajagopalan & Spreitzer, 1997), (b) processes and structures of change (Mantere et al., 2012), and (c) values of change forming the basis of the new organization's understanding (Amis, Slack, & Hinings, 2002). In the process, we kept a large degree of flexibility so as to remain open to the identification of other topics. The thematic analysis (described in File S1) led to the identification of 32 narrative themes mapping onto 11 discursive categories. We used the label "narrative theme" to describe the subject matter of a portion of text and to distinguish our focus from the use of "theme" in prior work in the area of organizational narratives (e.g., Chreim, 2005; Sonenshein, 2010).[5] In line with prior work (Laamanen, Lamberg, & Vaara, 2016), we used the label

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[4]We created a unique identifier for each publication formed by the initial letters of the title followed by the year of publication. The 10 books not available for our data collection were about specific designers or product-related initiatives developed by Alessi. To assess the likelihood that their absence could affect the results of our analysis, we isolated similar books in our sample. We examined them in comparison with all the others and found no substantial difference in the set of narrative themes used, which increased our confidence in the robustness of our analysis.

[5]A "narrative theme" describes the *subject matter* of a portion of text and requires the coding of *each* portion of text produced by an organization in order to uncover the totality of the narrative content. Instead, a "theme," as used in prior work, describes a *concept of interest* (e.g., organizational identity) and requires the coding of *only* the portion of text that reveals the concept of interest.

TABLE 2 Data sources and their use in the analysis

Data source	Data type	Details	Use in the analysis
I. Alessi's publications	Ia. Corporate biographies	Official biographies commissioned or published by Alessi. Contain analysis and description of Alessi's history, present actions, and plans for the future	1. Understand timeline and main events of Alessi's change. In particular: (a) when and how the mission, scope, referent environment, and sources of competitive advantage changed; (b) the role of Alberto Alessi and external collaborators. 2. Understand content and evolution of organizational narrative about Alessi's change. In particular, analyze and trace the interpretation of events that the change leader endorsed and wanted to communicate over time. 3. Identify the authors of books and chapters, and their narrative point of view.
		-Domestic Landscape 1979 (DL1979) -Steel and Style 1985 (SS1985) -Alessi Workshop 1989 (AW1989) -The Dream Factory 1998 (DRF1998) -Objects and Projects 2010 (OP2010)	
	Ib. Project-specific books	Three types:	
		-Tea and Coffee Piazza 1983 (TCP1983) -La Conica 1984 (LC1984) -Coffee-maker and Pulcinella 1987 (CP1987) -Communicating Vases 1990 (CV1990) -Aesthetic Factory 1992 (AF1992) -FFF Family Follows Fiction 1993 (FFF1993) -Electric Kitchen 1994 (EK1994) -See under: Bath 2002 (SUB2002) -Tea and Coffee Towers 2003 (TCT2003)	
		(a) Product-related initiatives Describe the goals of producing a given object or line of objects and its actual outcomes. May contain critical contributions on the meanings of objects (e.g., the role of emotions in the perception of the value of objects)	

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Data source	Data type	Details		Use in the analysis
		(b) Theoretical investigations Collections of reflections on the meanings of tableware and its importance for Alessi	-Foods and Rituals 1982 (FR1982) -Rebus sic 1990 (RS1990) -Image Beyond Projects 2008 (IBP2008)	See points 2 and 3 above
		(c) Themed exhibitions Explanation of specific themes of Alessi's exhibitions (e.g., role of design experimentation)	-Not in production/Next in Production 1988 (NPNP1988) -Object Dynasty: Alessi 1994 (OD1994) -Picture and Design 2002 (PD2002)	
II. Third-party books on Alessi	*IIa. Corporate Monographs*	Evaluation of Alessi's current strategy and identification of emblematic products	-Design Factory 1994 (DF1994) -Art and Poetry 1998 (AP1998)	
	IIb. Other third-party publications	Alberto Alessi's perspective on given topics of design or personal experience during project development (e.g., trip to meet Salvador Dali)	-Post-humus Project 1995 (PP1995) -Phillippe Starck Distordre: Dialogue 1996 (PSD1996) -Due 2000 (DU2000)	
III. Other publications on Alessi and its context	*IIIa. Management publications*	Scholarly articles and business cases on Alessi	-Verganti, 2006 -Moon, Dessain, & Sjoman, 2003 -Salvato, 2003 -Rindova et al., 2011 -Dalpiaz et al., 2016	4. Understand: (a) processes involved in Alessi's change; (b) practices for new product development, manufacturing, and commercialization; and (c) outcomes of Alessi's change.
	IIIb. Design publications	Books written by design historians to describe changes in the field of design	-Branzi, 2004 -De Fusco, 2002	5. Contextualize strategic change within the broader industrial and cultural context.

TABLE 3 Narrative constituents and authorial elements of Alessi's metanarratives

	Metanarrative 1 (1979–1988)	Metanarrative 2 (1989–1998)	Metanarrative 3 (1998–2010)
Actors			
Leader	Alberto Alessi is a supporting actor (the firm Alessi is the protagonist). He is the champion of new projects and the firm's spokesperson. The role is constructed through both third parties and self-attributions. On the one hand, critics and designers identify him as the person championing given projects. On the other hand, Alberto himself explains new projects on behalf of Alessi.	Alberto Alessi becomes the protagonist. The role is constructed through both third parties' and self-attributions. On the one hand, critics and designers explicitly identify him as the leader of Alessi's transformation. On the other hand, Alberto himself offers his interpretations of the new meanings of design.	As in Metanarrative 2.
Designers	Designers and design critics are supporting actors. They design new products commissioned by Alessi and provide insights into topics that Alessi is investigating. Architect and design critic Alessandro Mendini inspires Alessi's change through his consulting activity.	As in Metanarrative 1. Further, Alberto Alessi's encounters with given designers and critics are said to have shaped Alessi's transformation.	As in Metanarrative 2.
Antagonists	Not available.	"Industrialists in the classic sense," "mass production factories," and the "Supreme General Director of Moneyland" are generic incarnations of firms entrenched in a contrasting world view that hinders society's happiness as well as Alessi's ability to offer happiness to society.	Some of Alessi's past managers are constructed as antagonists in retrospect as they manifested skepticism toward some experimental projects championed by Alberto Alessi in the 1980s.
Acts			
Project development	The metanarrative describes projects that took place between 1921 and 1988. Little information is provided about how projects developed before 1979. For some projects developed after 1979, the narrative describes how they were initiated and evolved from the original ideas to the final product, as well as how organizational members reacted.	The metanarrative describes projects developed from the late 1970s, that is, since Alberto Alessi started collaborating with given designers. The description of how project progressed includes anecdotes about ambiance and persons involved.	The metanarrative describes projects that took place since Alberto Alessi joined the firm in the early 1970s.

TABLE 3 (Continued)

	Metanarrative 1 (1979–1988)	Metanarrative 2 (1989–1998)	Metanarrative 3 (1998–2010)
Project function	Projects developed before 1979 had commercial goals only; projects developed after 1979 were means for experimenting with the language of architects in product design.	Current projects are means for experimenting with a broader range of expressive keys than architects' language.	Current projects leverage expressive keys used in the past and offer new interpretations of past projects.
Quest			
Innovation drivers	Alessi explores a new innovation driver: the interpretation of design as products' "high formal content" delivered through the expressive language of architects. The quest is experimenting with the expressive language of architects and other creative actors so to use product design as a new source of value.	The innovation driver becomes a new interpretation of design "intended as art and poetry." The quest is expanding the interpretation of design from just an element of differentiation to Alessi's *Weltanschauung*, that is, the world view around which every activity revolves.	Re-editing past projects becomes an additional innovation driver, which exalts Alessi's past as a resource for present-day innovation. The quest becomes extolling past acts, undertaken mainly under Alberto Alessi's leadership.
History reconstruction	Sets of products from the past are presented as antecedents of the current interpretation of design: Bombè coffee set (1945), Alessi d'Aprés (1972), and 57 prototypes and products developed between 1921 and 1987. Historical synopses are list of actions and managers from founding in 1921 to 1979.	Bombè coffee set and Alessi d'Aprés are indicated as historical antecedents of the new interpretations of "design as art and poetry." Historical synopses are now organized by "phases" (e.g., functionalism, modernism, and infantilism) or by collaborations with given designers.	Bombè coffee set is presented again as antecedent of current way of intending design. Historical synopses are organized by numerous phases, now constructed predominantly around events and projects developed under Alberto's leadership.
Instruments			
Project meanings	Pre-1979, projects are described along technical-production features, such as functional solutions and finishing quality. Post-1979, experimental projects are described in terms of the designer' language (e.g., La Conica coffee-maker designed by Also Rossi between 1980 and 1983 as a "monument object;" the Neapolitan coffee-maker designed by Riccardo Dalisi in 1987 as "animated object").	Project descriptions highlight how the products' formal properties evoke religious symbols (e.g., Hot Bertaa tea kettle designed by Philippe Starck in 1989), reflect specific cultures (e.g., products designed by Graves since 1985), and trigger emotions (products in plastic developed since 1993). Multiple products are identified as symbols of Alessi's new strategy (e.g., cutlery sets designed by Achille Castiglioni 1982), "design symbols" (e.g., the designers kettles), and turning points for Alessi (e.g., Tea and Coffee Piazza).	Many experimental products are identified as design symbols (e.g., Juicy Salif lemon squeezer designed by Philippe Starck in 1993). Some current projects are not about producing new objects, but about reflecting on past experimental projects developed under Alberto Alessi's leadership (e.g., PD2002).

TABLE 3 (Continued)

	Metanarrative 1 (1979–1988)	Metanarrative 2 (1989–1998)	Metanarrative 3 (1998–2010)
Storytelling	Storytelling is instrumental to achieve Alessi's quest. The first book, DL1979, is written to analyze Alessi's past production policies in order to achieve "critical awareness" for changes to be implemented in the future.	DL1979 is still indicated as fundamental for understanding the direction of change and current projects. Large excerpts are used from this and other books published in Metanarrative 1 (e.g., LC1984) to explain past projects.	As in Metanarrative 2. A series of books published since DL1979 (included) is indicated as having being instrumental for directing and adjusting Alessi's transformative change.
Context			
Traditional sector	Alessi's activity is described as embedded in the business context, as evidenced by detailed analysis of competitors, product segments, materials, market segments, stylistic and functional features of the metal household manufacturing industry.	Disappearance of industry considerations.	As in Metanarrative 2.
External context	Few socio-cultural considerations are present (e.g., rituals of consumption about Neapolitan coffee-maker).	Alessi's production is contextualized in the wider society as evidenced by the many and articulated socio-cultural analyses of consumption (e.g., RS1990, FFF1993, EK1994).	As in Metanarrative 2, but fewer and less elaborate analyses of the meanings of products in society.
Authorial elements			
Narrative voice	Introductory notes and forewords are authored by design critics and designers, and sometimes, by Alberto Alessi as the firm's spokesperson. Other chapters are written by design critics and designers. The only exception is NPNP1988, in which Alberto Alessi authored not only the foreword but also the remaining text (brief notes under product pictures).	Introductory notes and forewords are authored by design critics, designers, and Alberto Alessi. Other chapters are written by design critics, designers, and external collaborators as well as Alberto Alessi offering his own ideas. An exception where Alberto does not author any chapter is RS1990.	As in Metanarrative 2. Moreover, books narrated only by design critics, designers, and so on, disappear and for the first time Alberto is the solo author of the lengthy biography of Alessi (DRF1998).
Narrative point of view	The point of view is mainly the third-person. Exceptions include the foreword by Paolo Portoghesi in SS1985, the introductory note by Alberto Alessi to FR1982 and NPNP1988, and a chapter authored by Ettore Sottsass in SS1985.	The point of view is mainly the first-person, subjective point of view.	As in Metanarrative 2.

"discursive category" to describe the subject matter of a given discourse. To illustrate, we grouped narrative themes such as "leader's learning about design topic" and "leader's extolment" into the discursive category "leader."

Step 3. In order to understand how Alessi's narrative of change evolved, we next examined how Alessi mobilized the 32 narrative themes over time—that is, whether the narrative covered the same themes or emphasized different themes at different points in time. To this end, we computed the frequency with which each narrative theme appeared in each book. Four books (SS1985, AW1989, DF1994, and DRF1998) exhibited a particularly high frequency across different themes. We hence used their publication years to delimit five provisional time brackets (Langley, 1999). Books in the first and second brackets, as well as those in the third and fourth, mobilized similar narrative themes more frequently. We therefore re-arranged the time brackets to reflect more homogeneous narrative content: 1979–1988, 1989–1998, and 1998–2010.[6]

Step 4. Prompted by the observation that stories within each time bracket emphasized distinct sets of narrative themes, we set out to understand whether there was a story enfolding and transcending the individual stories told within each time bracket. To extract such a story, we used Bruner's (1991) approach of interpretative abstraction both within and across individual narratives. First, we analyzed the particulars of each book to abstract its Actors (i.e., the agents behind action), Acts (i.e., actions of the story), Quest (i.e., the ultimate purpose moving the Actor), Instruments (i.e., the means for achieving the Quest) and Context (i.e., the setting of the story). Such *narrative constituents*, also known as the Burkean pentad from Burke's theory of dramatism (Burke, 1945), characterize stories that focus on deviations that have legitimacy consequences (Bruner, 1991). They hence seem particularly well suited for the interpretation of stories of transformative change, among the many different tools one could use (Boje, 2001). By analyzing the narrative constituents of the books in each time bracket, we observed that the "essence" of each constituent was homogeneous within the time bracket. For instance, books in the first time bracket depicted the firm Alessi as the main actor of the story, whereas in the second bracket the leader Alberto Alessi takes center stage. Following Bruner, we transcended the particulars of the individual stories and abstracted the narrative constituents of each time bracket, together with the plot connecting them.[7] Following Laamanen et al. (2016), we define this story as a *metanarrative*, that is, a higher-level story resulting from the intertextual totality of individual narratives.

Step 5. Next, we analyzed how the meanings associated with each narrative constituent of the Burkean pentad changed across the identified metanarratives. To do so, we first categorized the discursive categories (and the associated narrative themes) into each of the different constituents. To illustrate, the discursive categories "leader," "designers," and "antagonists" were attributed to the narrative constituent "Actors," whereas, for instance, "project development" and "project function" were attributed to "Acts." Second, using metanarratives as an embedded unit of analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989), we compared the meanings associated with the discursive categories (and the associated narrative themes) of each narrative constituent across metanarratives. In doing so, we

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[6]Additional details on this analytical step are available from the authors. Note that the second and third time brackets share a common year, 1998, which saw the publication of a third-party monograph (AP1998) and an official biography (DRF1998). We categorized them in the second and third time bracket, respectively, based on their content, that is, the themes that were more frequently mobilized in each of the two publications.

[7]As Bruner noted (1991, p. 60), the meanings attributed to narrative constituents are not logical propositions and "there is no way of arriving logically at their 'truth conditions'…nor can their 'gists' be extracted unambiguously." Consider the case of Ulysses and the Odyssey. Is Ulysses best described as a devout husband, a canny warrior, or a dutiful king? Is *The Odyssey* best described as a story about a journey by sea from Troy to Ithaca or about the deployment of acumen to overcome difficulties? Confronted with these alternative interpretations, the choice of one interpretation over another is guided by the interpreter's purpose. In this article, our interpretation was guided by our interest in understanding the meanings attributed to transformative change.

also noticed that the same narrative themes were sometimes narrated by different voices and with a different narrative point of view, either within the same book or across different books. As the evolution of authorial elements is an important dimension through which narratives evolve (Chreim, 2005), we decided to analyze also whether and how authorial elements, in addition to narrative constituents, evolved. To this end, we engaged in a narrative analysis (Czarniawska, 1998). While content analytic approaches (like the thematic analysis in Step 2) focus on small textual units, narrative analysis casts the entire text (e.g., a book) as the main unit of analysis. We hence analyzed all chapters and forewords of our source books and categorized each book for whether it was solo- or multi-authored, and whether the narrative voice belonged to organizational members or external collaborators. We further examined the narrative point of view by looking at whether texts were mostly written using the first-person (I/we) or third-person (she/he/they) pronouns.

By exploring how narrative constituents and authorial elements evolved over time, we were able to uncover a number of narrative practices used by the strategy-maker to construct and reconstruct meanings over time. Building on prior studies in sociology (e.g., Kansteiner, 2002), historiography (e.g., Elton, 1967), and management (e.g., Harrison, Ashforth, & Corley, 2009), we theorized the existence of three sets of distinct *narrative practices*, which we call *memorializing*, *revisioning*, and *sacralizing*. To illustrate, by examining the evolution of the narrative constituent "Actors," we remarked a shift toward reverential praises of Alberto Alessi's qualities and intuitions by designers and museum curators discussing Alberto's role in Alessi's transformation (narrative theme "leader's extolment" in the discursive category "leader"). Further, the evolution of the authorial elements revealed that, starting from Metanarrative 2, Alberto Alessi addressed his audience directly in first-person to put forth his interpretation of "true" design. As a result of these and similar observations, examined in the light of prior work on secular religions (e.g., Harrison et al., 2009), we hence theorized the narrative practice of *prophet-making*, which, we will argue, aims at sacralizing transformative change by presenting its leader as a secular prophet.

Step 6. Finally, we developed theoretical insights about how the previously identified sets of narrative practices enable strategy-makers to harness the persistent tension between novelty and familiarity of transformative change. To do so, we drew multiple representations of the emerging relationships among practices within and across metanarratives, and recursively checked the data to ensure consistency (Locke, 2001). We present our findings next.

5 | NARRATIVE PRACTICES OF MEANING CONSTRUCTION

Our analysis revealed three metanarratives that capture distinct moments of Alessi's transformative change. The first metanarrative (1979–1988) is the story of product experimentation efforts undertaken by the firm Alessi from the early 1980s, with the aim of incorporating the expressive languages of architects and other creative actors as new sources of product value. The second metanarrative (1989–1998) is the story of how Alberto Alessi expanded the meanings of design from the formal aspect of a project to Alessi's so-called *Weltanschauung*, that is, the firm's view of the world and philosophy. The third metanarrative (1998–2010) is the story of how Alberto Alessi exalted Alessi's past as heritage for the future. Table 3 summarizes how narrative constituents and authorial elements evolved across metanarratives (see File S1 for illustrative quotes). Building on these observations, we theorize how meanings of change were constructed across metanarratives using three sets of narrative practices aimed at memorializing, revisioning, and sacralizing change.

TABLE 4 Memorializing at Alessi: Overview of theoretical and empirical observations

Narrative practice	Observations
Serializing	**Creating a sustained narrative world, populated by a consistent set of characters, who experience a chain of events over time**
	At Alessi, serializing unfolded as subsequent metanarratives gave rise to a sustained narrative world, which encompassed:
	• *A consistent set of Actors*: the firm Alessi as protagonist, Alberto Alessi, Alessandro Mendini, and external designers as supporting actors in Metanarrative 1; Alberto Alessi as protagonist, the firm Alessi, Alessandro Mendini, and external designers as supporting actors in Metanarratives 2 and 3;
	• *A consistent set of Acts*: projects undertaken in 1921–1988 in Metanarrative 1; projects championed by Alberto Alessi since the 1970s in Metanarratives 2 and 3;
	• *One core quest for new sources of innovation*: using product form as a new source of product value in Metanarrative 1; bringing product design intended as art and poetry to the center of Alessi's activities in Metanarrative 2; using past projects as resources for current innovation in Metanarrative 3;
	• *A consistent set of Instruments*. First, experimentation with (a) expressive languages of architects in Metanarrative 1, (b) meanings transcending product function in Metanarrative 2, and (c) re-editing and reflecting on past projects in Metanarrative 3. Second, storytelling for analyzing the past and the present, and for rationalizing future direction in all metanarratives.
Anthologizing	**Compiling a body of texts essential to provide meaning, purpose, and direction to change**
	At Alessi, anthologizing entailed constructing a set of texts as essential for understanding how and why Alessi was transforming into a different organization. In Metanarrative 1, Domestic Landscape (DL1979) is indicated as the book containing the analysis that triggered Alessi's change, because it "enabled to read the past as such" (SS1985) and enabled Alessi to identify a trajectory for change. In Metanarrative 2, the same book is referred frequently as the text that "laid the foundation for a radical transformation" of the firm (AW1989). Other books such as TCP1983 and CP1987 are also indicated as crucial for the development of Alessi's understanding of its activity, and numerous excerpts are used to illustrate given aspects of it. In Metanarrative 3, DL1979 is again referred to multiple times as the text that triggered Alessi's change through offering "Alessi's first critical awareness" (OP2010) and as the fundamental text for interpreting Alessi's pre-change production as "standard objects" (DRF1998). A set of other books from all metanarratives (including DL1979, TCP1983, AW1989, FFF1993, and TCT2003) are said to have shaped Alessi's transformation over the years and to constitute Alessi's *Thought* (OP2010).
Curating	**Identifying the memory-makers who oversee the production of change-related narratives**
	At Alessi, curating entailed structuring most books with forewords or introductory chapters written by Alessandro Mendini and Alberto Alessi, alone or together. In Metanarrative 1, they provided introductions for 5 out of 7 books: Mendini for DL1979, Alessi for CP1987 and NPNP1988, and both for FR1982 and TCP1983. In Metanarrative 2, they provided introductions for 6 out of 11 books: Mendini for AW1989, AF1992, and EK1994; Alessi for FFF1993, DF1994, and AP1998. In Metanarrative 3, they provided introductions for 5 out of 7 books: Alessi for DRF1998, SUB2002, and IBP2008; both for TCT2003 and OP2010.

5.1 | Memorializing

Our comparative analysis of Alessi's metanarratives reveals an attempt to gradually construct a collective memory of transformative change by creating a sustained narrative world (*serializing*), compiling a body of texts essential for the transformation (*anthologizing*), and identifying the memory-makers (*curating*) (see Table 4). Building on prior sociological work (e.g., Hutton, 1993), we refer to this set of narrative practices as *memorializing*, since official collective memories are "collectively shared representations of the past" (Kansteiner, 2002, p. 181), purposefully shaped through "acts of memorialization" (186) and writings about meanings of the past (Spivey, 1997).

5.1.1 | Serializing

Our observations about the evolution of all constituents of the Burkean pentad of Alessi's metanarratives revealed the progressive creation of "a sustained narrative world, populated by a consistent set of characters who experience a chain of events over time" (Mittell, 2015, p. 277). We refer to this narrative practice as serializing to draw an analogy with television serial storytelling, to which the definition above refers. Serialization has been argued to be at the core of television narrative

production, where the "overarching storylines are restricted to just a few episodes, to one season, or…transcend the season" (Allrath, Gymnich, & Surkamp, 2005, p. 6), and "the tendency toward increasing continuity has led to an extensive use of summaries of past story developments" (2005, p. 10). Serializing is important for shaping the collective memory of transformative change as "these repetitive representations form the backbone of collective memories" and "are widely and frequently-enough disseminated to create and maintain group identities" (Kansteiner, 2002, p. 190).

At Alessi, serializing resulted in the production of texts connected to one another in a sustained narrative world that shaped the collective memory of Alessi's transformative change.[8] Changes in the connotation of all narrative constituents contribute to define a storyline that is different for each of the three metanarratives, and yet characterized by a consistent set of actors experiencing a chain of events around a core quest (see Table 4). In line with the continuity in serial storytelling, each metanarrative also reinforced the links between past and present by, for example, retrospectively interpreting the past and frequently summarizing the transformation.

5.1.2 | Anthologizing

Our observations about the evolution of Instruments in Alessi's metanarratives revealed that, over time, a body of texts came to be construed as essential in providing meaning, purpose, and direction to the organizational transformation. The construal happened progressively through the continuous reference to such texts as dictating the founding principles of the transformation. We refer to this narrative practice as anthologizing since anthologies are a selection of texts purported to be essential for comprehending a focal phenomenon (Harris, 1991). Anthologizing is important for shaping the collective memory of change, as it objectifies memory into artifacts "designed to recall fateful events in the history of the collective," thus constituting its "officially sanctioned heritage" (Kansteiner, 2002, p. 190).

The first text included in the anthology is Domestic Landscape (1979), which was repeatedly indicated across metanarratives as the foundational text for understanding the reasons for, and directions of, Alessi's transformation (see Table 4). For example, in Metanarrative 2 it was observed that "more than 10 years later, that research…is still more than ever the fundamental point of reference for the development of Alessi's metaproject" (AW1989). Our analysis showed that over time other texts were also indicated as being essential for understanding Alessi's transformation, which then led to the identification, in Metanarrative 3, of the Alessi *Thought*—a corpus of texts including DL1979, TCP1983, AW1989, FFF1993, and TCT2003, which explained and directed Alessi's transformation over time (OP2010):

> Since the Eighties the firm Alessi has been elaborating…theoretical references for its strategies, [that became] more and more precise and deliberate over time. A series of books…gave rise to experimentations and new themes that led later on to new approaches and new typologies.

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[8]Expanding on the television series analogy (Allrath et al., 2005), we can think of individual narratives as episodes and of metanarratives as seasons. The storyline of the metanarrative is abstracted from the story of the individual narratives, the same way that the story of a season is abstracted from the story of episodes. Seasons are further linked by the overarching storyline of the series, which in the case of Alessi can be thought of as the story of the overall transformation. We can think of this story as a grand narrative, that is, the overarching story of the organizational transformation as it takes shape through the accumulation of changes described in the metanarratives and revealed by their intertextual totality.

TABLE 5 Revisioning at Alessi: Overview of theoretical and empirical observations

Narrative practice	Observations
Refocusing	**Expanding the significance of change-related events**
	At Alessi, refocusing entailed:
	• *Presenting the projects led by Alberto Alessi over few decades as the almost totality of Alessi's history.* Starting from Metanarrative 2, summaries of Alessi's transformation connect past and present by interpreting events that happened before 1979 as propaedeutic to the transformation. Activities undertaken by Alessi in the 60 years that preceded TCP1983 are dismissed under the label "the original [family] of the first industrial design until the 1970s." (OD1994) In Metanarrative 3, Alessi's 80-year history is summarized in terms of a long list of projects orchestrated by Alberto over 30 years, except for the Bombè set, the catering trade lines, and a generic reference to 1970s production (OP2010);
	• *Shifting the locus of action of Alessi's narrative from the conventional industry of household manufacturing to the broader societal context.* Industry-related considerations, predominant in Metanarrative 1, disappear from Metanarratives 2 and 3. Prominence is given to socio-cultural aspects of consumption relevant for new product development.
Augmenting	**Retroactively expanding the meanings attributed to past events**
	At Alessi, augmenting entailed:
	• *Expanding the meanings of past projects in light of current meanings.* In Metanarrative 1, the current meanings of experimentation are applied retroactively, as a plethora of products and prototypes developed between 1921 and 1987 are presented as research and experimentation. Yet, the idea of "experimentation" (SS1985) and "sophisticated architectural and design experimentation" (DL1979) had been enacted only from 1983. Similarly, in Metanarrative 2, some past projects are presented as ante litteram examples of current experimentation, with past projects being reinterpreted in light of expressive keys that Alessi experimented with only afterward (FF1993; DF1994). In Metanarrative 3, the meanings of experimentation are further augmented by using past projects as inspirations for current innovation efforts (e.g., re-editing Tea and Coffee Piazza from 1983 as Tea and Coffee Towers in 2003) or reflection (e.g., PD2002 and IBP2008 re-examining the meanings of, respectively, *pictures* of iconic products and iconic products *themselves*);
	• *Adding new meanings to what was previously meant as experimental research.* Starting from Metanarrative 2, past experimentation with architect language is constructed as "intellectual" and a "corollary" to current experimentation with "expressive keys" centered on emotions (FFF1993);
	• *Dramatizing the description of past projects.* Starting from Metanarrative 2, accounts of how past projects developed articulate the feelings of actors involved (e.g., Alberto describing his feelings of happiness, nervousness, and desperation during the development of Tea and Coffee Piazza in 1983), and provide descriptive details of the atmosphere (e.g., "on a sunny day," "he was dressed in all black and wearing a bizarre piper's hat").

5.1.3 | Curating

Our observations about the evolution of the Authorial Elements in Alessi's metanarratives revealed the use of the same narrative voices to introduce new texts to the narrative corpus. In particular, our analysis showed that it was up to either Alessandro Mendini, Alberto Alessi, or both to author most forewords and chapters that elaborated on the specific contribution of a given book to the understanding of Alessi's activity at a given point in time (see Table 4). We refer to this narrative practice as curating, from the Latin *curare*, "to take care," as it uncovers the identity of those who oversaw Alessi's narrative production. Curators, in this sense, are "the memory-makers who selectively adopt and manipulate" the object of memorialization (Kansteiner, 2002, p. 180)—a central activity in the practice of memorializing.

5.2 | Revisioning

Our comparative analysis of Alessi's metanarratives revealed a gradual re-interpretation of the firm's past to portray transformative change as a novel and yet coherent departure from the past. This re-interpretation was carried out by expanding the significance of change-related events (*refocusing*) and retroactively enriching the meanings attributed to past events (*augmenting*) (see Table 5). Building on prior historiographical work (Carr, 1961; Elton, 1967), we refer to this set of narrative

TABLE 6 Sacralizing at Alessi: Overview of theoretical and empirical observations

Narrative practice	Observations
Ennobling	**Elevating the worth of and lending greater dignity to change**
	At Alessi, ennobling entailed mobilizing metaphysical references to define Alessi's new activity. Transcendent references appear for the first time in Metanarrative 1, but their use escalates in Metanarrative 2. The word *Weltanschauung* is used frequently to articulate Alessi's approach to design and it is associated to metaphysical ideas such as satisfying "people's dreams" and "more profound needs for art and poetry," enabling "people's happiness," solving "Faustian tensions," "preserving the spiritual dimension." Projects are also discussed through transcendent terms, such as "meta-function of design," and philosophical thoughts, such as, for example, Martin Heidegger's essence of things and Oswald Spengler's pseudomorphosis. In Metanarrative 3, change is remarked as a noble endeavor by repeating the same transcendent ideas, referencing to concepts developed by philosophers (e.g., Gianni Vattimo) and sociologists (e.g., Michael Maffesoli), and presenting projects through "quotations from the universe of literature, art and architecture" (SUB, 2002).
Prophet-making	**Presenting the change leader as a secular prophet who articulates transcendent meanings for the organization**
	At Alessi, prophet-making entailed constructing Alberto Alessi as the unquestionable interpreter of the true meanings of design. While in Metanarrative 1, Alberto emerges as Alessi's spokesperson and champion of new experimental projects, in Metanarratives 2 and 3, he is presented as the rightful proponent of Alessi's new activities. Such a construal happens through third parties continuously referring to his opinions (e.g., "Alberto Alessi claims that…") and praising his qualities (e.g., "he is fun, witty, dynamic, and charming"—DF1994—and "he has written the history of design"—OP2010). It also involved Alberto offering philosophical thoughts on the meanings of projects, and forecasting the future success of given designers and society evolution (e.g., "I really felt these were projects destined to change the history of design"—DF1994). Prophet-making is further reinforced by the change in narrative point of view, with Alberto switching to the more subjective first-person in Metanarrative 2.
Iconizing	**Characterizing a set of organizational artifacts as revered icons of change**
	At Alessi, iconizing entailed the construction of a set of products and projects as icons of change, symbols of the new meanings of design that Alessi came to champion. In Metanarratives 1 and 2, the Bombè coffee set (1945), Alessi d'Aprés (1972), and TCP (1983) are identified as icons of change: For example, Alessi d'Aprés is as the project that Mendini suggested to "broaden and radically transform …to make it a sophisticated experimentation in design and architecture" (AW1989) and TCP is "quintessentially Alessi in spirit" (AP1994). Further, a set of products are described as "express[ing] six different typologies and practices" of Alessi's experimentation in the 1980s, and the Alessi kettles as "the most constant icons for two decades in the design conscious kitchen" (DF1994). In Metanarrative 3, Bombè and TCP are still constructed as icons of change (e.g., as "Alberto Alessi's symbolic birth" [PD2002] and as having "start [ed] off the trend of highly expressive, postmodern 'objects of emotion' style symbol" [DRF1998], respectively). The range of products constructed as icons is enlarged to include: "the citrus squeezer 'Juicy Salif', 'La cubica' pot, '100% Make-up", 'La Conica',…, the 'Anna G.' corkscrew, Sottsass' oil cruets, Sapper's 9090 coffee-maker, the 'Firebird' gas lighter, the 'Pasta Set'" (OP2010).
Anathematizing	**Denoting the old strategy as unorthodox relative to the new strategy**
	At Alessi, anathematizing entailed purging the old strategy from the firm, attributing it to the generic firm category of "mass production factories" (DF1994) or "industrialists in the classic sense" (AP1998), and then connoting it as almost heretical. Anathematizing also involved benevolently deriding the champions of such strategy for their entrenchment in the conventional view of industrial design. This was also the case for Alessi before the transformation took over, as testified by the accounts of episodes from earlier decades when some managers mocked or opposed projects that Alberto championed, and got irritated at working with the architects he wanted to collaborate with (e.g., Ettore Alessi being disappointed at Aldo Rossi's watercolor sketches).

practices as *revisioning*, from revisionism—that is, the process taking place when history gets re-interpreted over time based on the discovery of new evidence, changes in what is considered significant, or a re-evaluation of events and processes (Tucker, 2008).

5.2.1 | Refocusing

Our observations about the evolution of Quest and Context in Alessi's metanarratives revealed that, over time, the narrative came to be dominated by the accounts of experimental projects developed

by Alessi once the transformative change was initiated, at the expense of past projects. We refer to this narrative practice as refocusing, with the analogy to the depth of field in a camera lens, as it involves increasing the prominence of recent events, while letting past events fade into oblivion. In doing so, this practice operates what historians call a significance-driven revision (Tucker, 2008)—a re-evaluation of events' significance. By referencing past events, while shrinking their significance, refocusing contributes to the portrayal of change as coherent with the past.

At Alessi, refocusing emerged as Alessi's history was construed in subsequent metanarratives. In Metanarrative 1, historical synopses reported detailed lists of facts and managers from the founding of the firm in 1921 until present times. Starting from Metanarrative 2, we observe a progressive oblivion of projects developed before Alberto took responsibility for new product development, to the extreme of Metanarrative 3, where events orchestrated by Alberto Alessi over a few decades are presented as the near totality of Alessi's 80-year history (see Table 5). As the history of Alessi was rewritten in light of significant events that had occurred in its last 30 years, we observed a clear shift in the Context. Considerations related to the industry of household manufacturing progressively disappear, replaced by reflections on the broader societal context, its different needs, and the different role it demanded for organizations.

5.2.2 | Augmenting

Our observations about the evolution of Acts and Instruments in Alessi's metanarratives revealed that, once the transformation was initiated, the meanings attributed to the experimental projects developed by Alessi was gradually but persistently expanded in a retroactive fashion—a narrative practice we refer to as *augmenting*. This contributed to the portrayal of change as a novel and yet coherent departure from the past. As such, this work represents what historians call value-driven revision (Tucker, 2008)—a revision resulting from a re-evaluation of events' meanings.

Augmenting emerges clearly from our observations about how new meanings were added to what was previously meant as experimental research and past projects were re-interpreted in light of current meanings (see Table 5). In the excerpt below (FFF1993), oil cruets designed by Castiglioni in 1984 came to be reinterpreted in light of the psychoanalytical keys (the "child code") explored only in the 1990s:

> The "playfulness"…clearly evident in many of his creations, seems to me to relate to the child code. Thus the gimmickry to be observed in his cruets of 1984 (with the balancing lid that opens and closes by itself when the container is tilted)…suggest to me the appearing and disappearing referred to by Baudrillard when he cites Freud's observations on the "reel game." In the case of the child who played with a wooden reel, throwing it over the sides of his cot…and collecting it inside…, there is a tendency to repetition that is also found in traumatic neurosis.

The description of past projects was also progressively enriched so as to include apparently irrelevant details about their genesis and development, such as the feelings and attire of persons involved, or the locations where events took place (see Table 5). For instance (AW1989):

> The relationship [of architect Andrea Branzi] with Alberto started in 1987. Alberto Alessi met him at a conference in Dusseldorf and during the dinner, in a smoky alehouse in front of a plate of pork hocks and sauerkrauts, he asked him what they could work on together.

5.3 | Sacralizing

Our comparative analysis of Alessi's metanarratives revealed a gradual connotation of change as a transcendent endeavor. This was carried out by elevating the worth of change (*ennobling*), presenting the change leader as a secular prophet (*prophet-making*), characterizing a set of organizational artifacts as revered icons of change (*iconizing*), and denoting the old strategy as unorthodox relative to the new strategy (*anathematizing*) (see Table 6). Building on prior work suggesting that nonreligious organizations may appeal to the sacred and embody transcendent ideals in their missions (Ashforth & Vaidyanath, 2002; Harrison et al., 2009), we refer to this set of narrative practices as *sacralizing*, as it espouses "beliefs…that provide the raw materials for individuals to seek more transcendental experiences within the purview of the organization" (Harrison et al., 2009, pp. 229–230).

5.3.1 | Ennobling

Our observations about the evolution of Acts and Quest in Alessi's metanarratives documented an increasing reliance on metaphysical references related to philosophical speculation and intellectual abstraction. We refer to this narrative practice as ennobling to underscore the attempt to elevate the worth of change and lend it a greater dignity. By construing the firm's mundane pursuit as worthy of dedication, ennobling construes change as a transcendent endeavor.

At Alessi, metaphysical references made their appearance in Metanarrative 1, when Alessi's industrial, mundane *Weltanschauung* is said to be "scratched away" "as a sort of miracle" thanks to the Neapolitan coffee-maker project (CP1987). The word *Weltanschauung* was used in both English and Italian texts. It means "a particular philosophy of life" (*Oxford English Dictionary*) and has an eminently philosophical use. The choice of this word underlines the attempt to underscore the superiority of Alessi's quest. Also, reference to the "miracle" of opening up to sociological investigation can be seen as underlining the beginning of Alessi's path toward a superior way of being a company. Ennobling was employed again in Metanarratives 2 and 3 (see Table 6). For instance, the word *Weltanschauung* became frequently used in association with Alessi's quest, which came to be expressed through transcendent concepts such as "dreams," "utopia," and "happiness." Alessi's new quest is hence presented as: "a *Weltanschauung* that informs all our activities and is geared…to the realization of people's dreams, to the utopia of making things that really do people good and help them being a little bit happier" (EK1994). Acts of change were also ennobled, for instance, by discussing new product development through philosophical ideas, such as Heidegger's "Thingness" (PP1995):

> Reflecting on Heidegger's text, it becomes apparent that a pitcher that wants to give itself the quality of a true pitcher…must first of all collect, contain, and pour…. But it is also clear that it would have to meet a higher requirement, of the metafunctional type: that of bringing together in the very exercise of its function as a pitcher…the four extremes, heaven and earth, human and divine, 'while maintaining the distance between them'. A ritual quality? A mystical quality? Certainly transcendent and symbolic.

5.3.2 | Prophet-making

Our observations about the evolution of the authorial elements and the narrative constituent Actors of Alessi's metanarratives revealed that, over time, Alberto Alessi came to be construed as almost a secular prophet, the omniscient and unquestionable interpreter of the "true" meanings of design (NPNP1988). We refer to this narrative practice as prophet-making to refer to larger-than-life

business figures (Ashforth & Vaidyanath, 2002) who articulate transcendental meanings and secular gospels for their respective organization (Crouch, 2011). By manipulating the presentation of the leaders' qualities and making them the rightful interpreters of the new systems of values, prophet-making contributes to the connotation of change as a transcendent endeavor.

At Alessi, prophet-making clearly emerged starting from Metanarrative 2, when Alberto began to solemnly put forth his interpretation of design (EK1994):

> After two years, as I ponder once again the deeper sense of this operation [Electric Kitchen for the manufacturing of small electric appliances], I can't help thinking of the advice which one of my best-loved masters…offered me many years ago: "My boy, never forget that your work as an industrialist gives you a great responsibility...because you contribute decisively to 'giving form' to our society, to determining the quality of our lives."… This is the sense of the model I propose, the only one I know which can preserve the dignity of our work as manufacturers and perhaps also be in tune with the Faustian tension of our destiny as men.

Prophet-making was further reinforced by designers and museum curators continuously referring to Alberto's opinions and emphatically praising his abilities, ideas, and intuition (see examples in Table 6). This contributed to denoting Alberto as the rightful proponent and interpreter of the true meanings of design. The evolution of authorial elements supported this interpretation as well. In Metanarrative 1, Alberto Alessi appeared as Alessi's spokesperson and rarely offered his personal opinions on design. But in Metanarratives 2 and 3, Alberto spoke in first-person to elaborate his interpretation of design "intended as Art and Poetry" rather than just formal properties of an object. These interpretations were presented as directing new product development, with each project being "a new journey and a reflection of Alberto Alessi's concept of design as an artistic and poetic discipline" (AP1998).

5.3.3 | Iconizing

Our observations about the evolution of Quest and Instruments in Alessi's metanarratives revealed that, over time, a set of organizational artifacts came to be characterized as revered representations of change—thus, our reference to this narrative practice as iconizing. By providing audiences with totems to revere and around which a cult can coalesce (Ashforth & Vaidyanath, 2002), iconizing contributes to connoting change as a transcendent endeavor.

At Alessi, iconizing started by identifying three products as the origins of change, namely: the Bombè coffee set (1945), symbolizing Alessi's capacity to design objects that are in tune with societal changes; the art-multiples lines (1972), symbolizing Alessi's attention to the role of arts in manufacturing; and Tea and Coffee Piazza (1983), which imprinted the transformation as "it updated [Alessi] culturally, in the postmodern sense" (SS1985). Over time, iconizing constructed additional products and projects as symbols of Alessi's new design practices (see Table 6). In Metanarrative 3, some products became constructed as design icons: "How many people, even though not physically owning an object such as the now legendary citrus squeezer Juicy Salif by Philippe Starck, are at any rate in possession of the indelible revolutionary idea of its form, and therefore of its image?" (PD2002).

5.3.4 | Anathematizing

Our observations about the evolution of Actors in Alessi's metanarratives revealed that, over time, the old strategy was construed as unorthodox because of its being in disaccord with the new one.

A dynamic model for the construction of captivating narratives of transformative change
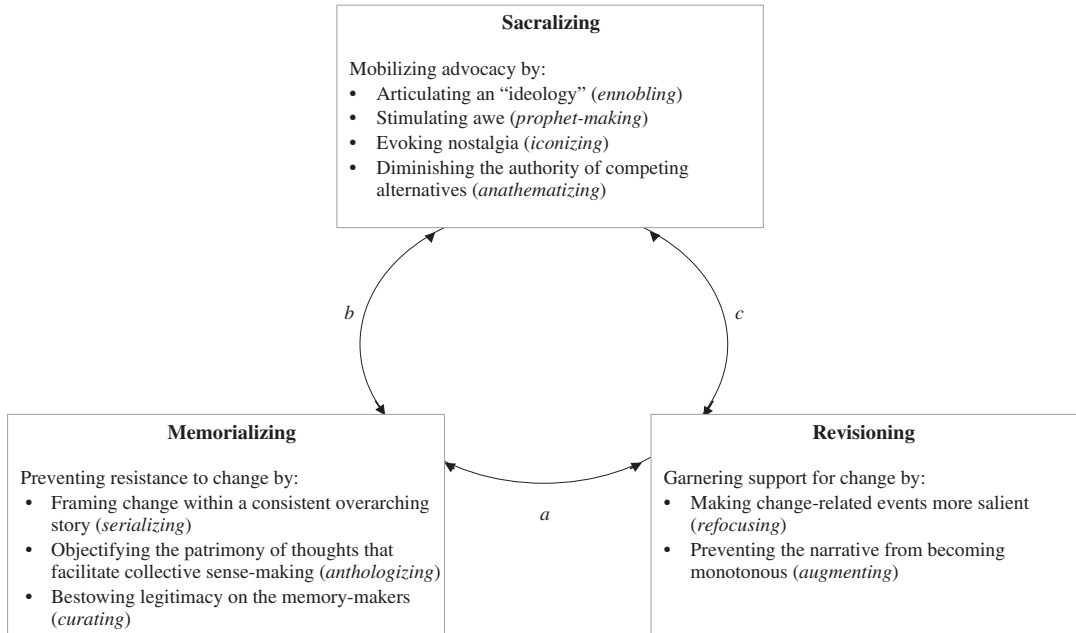

FIGURE 1   A dynamic model for the construction of captivating narratives of transformative change

We refer to this narrative practice as anathematizing to emphasize the contrast between the sacralization of the change undergone by the firm and the negative connotation of the strategy the very same firm was pursuing before. By anathematizing the old strategy, the strategy-maker drew a clear line between new and old, right and wrong, true and false—thus, contributing to the construal of change as a transcendent endeavor.

In the case of Alessi, anathematizing entailed purging the old strategy from Alessi and attributing it to the generic firm category of "mass production factories" (DF1994) or "industrialists in the classic sense" (AP1998). Once purged from the firm, this strategy was heavily criticized for: "not giving enough chance to the marvelous mystery of the Creative Possibility, having a somewhat uncritical faith in marketing as a prescriptive discipline and reading of society, and tending to let their achievements be withered by the difficulty of accepting risk as a natural component of their work, and consequently flattening out industry so much that the markets, too, are saturated" (EK1994). Anathematizing also entailed the benevolent derision of characters entrenched in old industrial principles. A colorful example (reported in File S1) is provided by a conversation that supposedly took place between Alberto and the manager of another firm, whom Alberto mocks for his conventional view of industrial design and refers to as "The Supreme General Director of the Republic of Moneyland" (AF1992).

6 | A DYNAMIC MODEL OF MEANING CONSTRUCTION

We began this article by asking whether and how strategy-makers can manage the tension between the novelty and familiarity of transformative change by constructing a steady influx of captivating narratives. The previous section articulated our theoretical insights about the sets of narrative

practices that Alessi's strategy-maker mobilized for constructing and reconstructing meanings of change over time. This section abstracts from the case of Alessi to propose a dynamic model (see Figure 1) of how strategy-makers can simultaneously mobilize memorializing, revisioning, and sacralizing to skillfully manage the novelty-familiarity tension.

6.1 | Memorializing to familiarize change novelty

By constructing a collective memory of transformative change (Hutton, 1993; Kansteiner, 2002; Spivey, 1997), memorializing provides a shared understanding of how change is unfolding. This narrative practice helps the strategy-maker construct the familiarity of change, which, in turn, prevents resistance to change (Lewin, 1951; Sonenshein, 2010) by acting on the complementary levers provided by the three narrative practices we identified previously. In particular, *serializing* helps prevent resistance to change by framing it within a consistent overarching story. By creating a communication routine (Kansteiner, 2002) and threading multiple stories to create a sustained narrative world (Allrath et al., 2005), this narrative practice provides the transforming organization with shared history and values. Next, *anthologizing* helps prevent resistance to change by objectifying the patrimony of thoughts that facilitate collective sense-making (Stigliani & Ravasi, 2012) and by creating an "officially sanctioned heritage" (Kansteiner, 2002, p. 190) that explains the changes now unfolding (Harris, 1991). Finally, *curating* helps prevent resistance to change by bestowing legitimacy on the actors shaping the collective memory of change. As it appoints the memory-makers, this narrative practice provides the transforming organization with "opinion leaders" (Rogers, 1995, p. 7) who legitimately set the agenda of change (Lukes, 1974) and influence the issues to be considered important in its evaluation (Fleming & Spicer, 2007).

6.2 | Revisioning to refresh change familiarity

By re-interpreting the firm's past to portray transformative change as a novel and yet coherent departure, revisioning stimulates attention and generates interest from the firm's audiences without alienating them. This narrative practice helps the strategy-maker construct the novelty of change so to garner support for a change that may have become familiar (Barry & Elmes, 1997) by acting on the complementary levers provided by the two narrative practices we identified previously. In particular, *refocusing* helps garner support for change by making change-related events more salient. This narrative practice depicts these events as overly important in the history of the organization, thus stimulating attention and interest (Fiske & Taylor, 2013). At the same time, *augmenting* helps garner support for change by preventing the narrative from becoming monotonous. As it retroactively enriches the meanings of past events, and "constantly look[s] for new images and new ways to capitalize on" them (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988, p. 62), this narrative practice constantly refreshes the narrative, thus stimulating attention (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988) and interest (Zillmann, 1994).

6.3 | Sacralizing to go beyond the novelty-familiarity tension

By connoting change as a transcendent endeavor (Bromley, 1998; Harrison et al., 2009; Pratt, 2000; Tracey, 2012), sacralizing sets change apart from common evaluation criteria related to the perception of its familiarity and novelty. This narrative practice helps the strategy-maker mobilize advocacy for change by acting on the complementary levers provided by the four narrative practices identified previously. In particular, *ennobling* helps mobilize advocacy by articulating an "ideology," that is a visionary explanation of "how and why things…constitute…'truth'" (Ashforth & Vaidyanath, 2002, p. 361) and offers a "means of restoring wholeness of life"

(Bromley, 1998, p. 360). By invoking virtues that transcend simply being a profitable company (Harrison et al., 2009), this practice elevates the worth of change and offers audiences an opportunity for self-fulfillment. Consider the case of Amway, an organization that articulated an ideology according to which working for them was the only route to fulfill the lost American dream of freedom and opportunity (Bromley, 1998; Pratt, 2000). Next, *prophet-making* helps mobilize advocacy by stimulating an "awe-approaching reverence" for the change leader (Bromley, 1998, p. 356). Such a practice goes beyond the attribution of "strong and potentially excessive potency to obtain organizational outcomes" (Sinha, Inkson, & Barker, 2012, p. 224), which constructs leaders as celebrities (Hayward, Rindova, & Pollock, 2004) and corporate heroes (Amernic & Craig, 2006). Instead, it attributes leaders the potency of mobilizing cult-like devotion to the firm and its products (Ashforth & Vaidyanath, 2002). Whereas many business leaders have been construed as celebrities and corporate heroes (e.g., Bill Gates, Jack Welch), very few have been construed as secular prophets. Prominent examples are Amway founders Rich De Vos and Van Andel (Bromley, 1998) and Apple founder Steve Jobs (Crouch, 2011).[9] Third, *iconizing* helps mobilize advocacy by evoking a powerful sense of nostalgia that may increase audiences' emotional response to a firm's stories (Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry, 2003). By selecting a few important icons from the history of the firm, this practice provides audiences with the totems necessary to any new cult (Ashforth & Vaidyanath, 2002). Interestingly, while the first three practices leverage audiences' emotions, *anathematizing* helps mobilize advocacy by acting on rational means. In particular, it purposefully diminishes the authority of any competing strategy (Bromley, 1998), thus removing potential obstacles to the inviolability of transformative change.

6.4 | Relationships among narrative practices

The narrative practices discussed above are mutually reinforcing (see Figure 1). Let's start from the relationship between memorializing and revisioning (see arrow *a*). A first obstacle to the successful development and implementation of transformative change is constituted by potential acts of resistance, such as employee strikes and resignations, customer boycotts, and investors withdrawing financial resources as these acts may decrease resources and jeopardize change. As a result, strategy-makers need to prevent resistance to change. They can do so by mobilizing the narrative practice of memorializing. Yet, the absence of active resistance to change is not in itself sufficient for a successful change; strategy-makers also need to convince audiences to *support* change. As argued earlier, they can do this by mobilizing the narrative practice of revisioning. In turn, revisioning enhances memorializing by reconstruing the ties of change-related events with the past and smoothing out possible inconsistencies.

Preventing resistance (through memorializing) and garnering support (through revisioning) are necessary but not sufficient conditions for the successful development and implementation of transformative change. This is because the disruptive nature of transformative change requires that audiences are also its dedicated advocates. Indeed, unless strategy-makers capture both "the minds and the hearts" of their audiences, transformative change is doomed to fail (Kotter, 2007, p. 100). And where memorializing and revisioning can capture the "minds" by making change acceptable and supported, it is sacralizing that may capture "hearts" and make change something to actively

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[9]Amway's founders were emotionally venerated by distributors as prophets, and credited with giving them a way to fulfill their lives and bring peace to the world (Bromley, 1998). Crouch (2011) suggested that Steve Jobs's "most singular quality was his ability to articulate a perfectly secular form of hope," "a gospel of a secular age" according to which "ordinary and mortal life can be elegant and meaningful," and products are akin to miracles. His speeches for the launch of new products and the famous Stanford commencement address are credited with creating the "Apple faithful" and the "cult of the Mac."

embrace. We argue that it would not be possible to turn audiences into advocates of change without first convincing them that change is acceptable in the scope of the firm's activity (through memorializing, see arrow *b* pointing upward) because a change that is inspiring, yet not acceptable within the purview of the organization could still generate resistance. Similarly, it would not be possible to mobilize advocacy without also garnering support (through revisioning, see arrow *c* pointing upward) because a change that is inspiring, but perceived as being outside the purview of a firm could not be supported. Sacralizing, in turn, supports both memorializing and revisioning. It supports memorializing (see arrow *b* pointing downward) because it anchors the construal of change as a transcendent endeavor into artifacts and concepts that are part of the collective memory of change by presenting past products as revered icons of change and construing the old strategy as unorthodox. Sacralizing also supports revisioning (see arrow *c* pointing downward) because it contributes to stimulating attention and generating interest by ennobling the worth of change and construing the change leader as a secular prophet.

In sum, although each of these three narrative practices can be used independently, we argue that, by activating them simultaneously, strategy-makers are most likely to win audiences' endorsement of transformative change. Mobilizing these narrative practices simultaneously produces *captivating narratives*—narratives that are perceived as both sufficiently novel and sufficiently familiar, such that the tension between novelty and familiarity is harnessed to generate acceptance, support, and advocacy from key audiences. The fact that transformative change unfolds over time makes it possible to spark multiple cycles of sense making by producing a *steady influx* of narratives, a feature emphasized by the circularity of Figure 1.

7 | DISCUSSION

In this article, we endeavored to examine whether and how strategy-makers leading a transformative change may construct a steady influx of captivating narratives—that is, narratives that imbue change-related events with a satisfying balance of novelty and familiarity (Sonenshein, 2010). To this end, we analyzed the narrative constituents and authorial elements of the narratives produced by the Italian manufacturing company Alessi between 1979 and 2010, as the company documented its transformation from a conventional manufacturer to a leader on the role and value of design objects in daily life. Our observations revealed that Alessi's strategy-maker constructed and reconstructed the meanings of transformative change steadily using three sets of narrative practices, each of which enabled a unique management of the novelty-familiarity tension. We argued that these practices are interrelated, and that their simultaneous mobilization may enable strategy-makers to win audiences' "minds and hearts" (Kotter, 2007) through rational and inspirational means. Our observations advance current research by shedding light on the role of narrative practices in strategy-making, balancing continuity and change, and wielding power.

7.1 | Narrative practices and strategy-making

In the strategy-as-practice literature, a practice for strategy-making is a form of routinized behavior (Whittington, 2006) that constitutes the "social, symbolic, and material tool through which strategy work is done" (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009, p. 70). The construction of narratives is a crucial practice for strategy-making because it is "a potentially powerful…device in developing and enacting strategy," in general (Fenton & Langley, 2011, p. 1177), and in particular, for influencing audiences' acceptance of change (Sonenshein, 2010). The importance of this practice is gaining

recognition among practitioners, as exemplified by Microsoft's appointment of a Chief Storyteller "responsible for Microsoft's company storytelling both internally and externally with a mission to change the perception of Microsoft through stories".[10] Yet, the actual ways in which the strategy-maker can enact this practice are under-investigated (Brown & Thompson, 2013). Our study contributes to this stream of literature by (a) showing how narrative practices can construct and reconstruct meanings of change flexibly over time and (b) providing a different understanding of the nature of strategy texts.

First, our findings draw attention to specific narrative practices that strategy-makers can engage to construct the desired narrative representation of change. In so doing, we extend prior research suggesting that strategy-makers may construct narrative representations that offer their general interpretation of change (e.g., Brown & Thompson, 2013; Sonenshein, 2010; Vaara, 2002) by investigating the specific mechanisms that underlie the construal of such representations. For instance, by enhancing the significance of change-related events through *refocusing,* and retroactively enriching the meanings attributed to past events through *augmenting*, the strategy-maker can re-interpret a firm's history to portray change as a novel and yet coherent departure from the past. Such a revisioning effort, we have argued, stimulates attention and generates interest in the firm's audiences without alienating them.

Second, our observations about memorializing, in general, and the *serializing* practice, in particular, expand our understanding of the nature of strategy texts, that is, the material manifestations of strategy-making (Fenton & Langley, 2011). Past work conceived strategy texts as relatively unrelated individual narratives adhering to specific genres, such as business plans and annual reports (De La Ville & Mounoud, 2015; Kaplan, 2011), conveying information as lists or stories (Shaw, Brown, & Bromiley, 1998), and acquiring meanings within the narratives that are widely diffused within a field of organizations (Fenton & Langley, 2011). Instead, we portray strategy texts as a collection of interconnected narratives that advance broader stories (metanarratives), and ultimately, construct an even broader firm-specific "grand-narrative" (see footnote 9). Importantly, and in contrast to the prior understanding of collective memory in social groups (Kansteiner, 2002), serializing supports the creation of a collective memory of strategic change in media res (i.e., as it unfolds), rather than ex post. It does so by attaching new meanings to specific narrative constituents (e.g., attributing new roles to actors or new quests to the firm) so that a single text (an individual narrative) can be used to close one broader story (the metanarrative) while opening a new one, much like an episode in a television series as it transitions from one season to the next. While these insights are consistent with the idea that narratives released contemporaneously with change events can help to reconstruct the past based on a desired future (Shipp & Jansen, 2011), they have also allowed us to articulate, for the first time, how specific narrative practices can be employed to support radical transformative change. While our case is certainly extreme (and thus, revelatory—Pettigrew, 1990), we believe these insights are valuable for any firm engaging in strategic change, regardless of the length of change and the number or type of texts produced.[11] Take the case of Mantere et al. (2012), who show how the meanings provided before a planned merger lingered among employees even after the merger was cancelled, causing resistance to its reversal. In such a context, serializing could be useful to give continuity to the explanation of change—the organization could have initiated a new metanarrative explaining how the merger reversal was credible within the

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[10]http://www.microsofthostingsummit.com/#speakers

[11]An example is provided by the 20-year collaboration between Robert Burgelman, a Stanford professor, and Andrew Grove, Intel's CEO, which led to a rich body of text that constructed the official collective memory of Intel's multiple transformative changes. These texts include several case studies about issues Grove was struggling with as well as books and scholarly articles that the authors wrote together or independently.

firm's grand narrative. Or think about the implementation of a merger as in Vaara and Tienari (2011). The narrative practice of *anthologizing* could be leveraged to identify the fundamental texts for employees to make sense of the reasons and benefits of merging.

7.2 | Narrative practices and balancing continuity and change

One of the crucial questions in studies of strategic change is how strategy-makers can ensure that a change is perceived as both novel *and* not too unfamiliar (e.g., Malhotra & Hinings, 2015). The narrative approach to strategy-making suggests that narratives can achieve this goal by offering stories that are perceived as both credible and interesting (Barry & Elmes, 1997). This enables strategy-makers to balance continuity with the past, while also changing from it (Fenton & Langley, 2011), and shape audiences' understanding (Buchanan & Dawson, 2007). Prior work indicated specific mechanisms that strategy-makers may leverage to balance continuity and change, such as constructing rhetorical histories (Suddaby, Foster, & Trank, 2010, p. 157), referencing products developed in the past (Dalpiaz et al., 2016; Dalpiaz, Tracey, & Phillips, 2014), casting a new organizational identity rooted in familiar values (Vaara & Tienari, 2011), and framing change as enabled by familiar values and capabilities (Dunford & Jones, 2000). Work on identity change has also suggested attributing different meanings to the same identity labels over time (Chreim, 2005).

Our study contributes to this stream of literature by underscoring the importance of specific narrative practices, and their simultaneous mobilization, for balancing the construction of continuity and change. First, prior research suggests that the subjective interpretation of a firm's past facilitates strategic change by creating a sense of continuity (e.g., Suddaby et al., 2010). Our observations unpack *how* that sense of continuity is construed, and reveal that meanings of a firm's past can be manipulated by different narrative practices that emphasize different elements of the novelty-familiarity tension. This is the case for three of the nine narrative practices we uncovered. The strategy-maker leveraged *serializing* to frame change within a consistent overarching story, while constantly revisiting the past to make change-related events more salient (*refocusing*) and retroactively enrich their meaning (*augmenting*).

Second, and in contrast with past research, our observations shift attention from the mobilization of specific linguistic mechanisms (Brown & Thompson, 2013) to the *simultaneous* mobilization of multiple narrative practices that enable strategy-makers to balance the construction of continuity and change. This is the case because, as we explained, the distinct narrative practices act on the tension between novelty and familiarity of change through distinct means. It is only by jointly activating them that strategy-maker can capture "the minds and the hearts" of their audiences and secure a safe space for transformative change to unfold.

It is important to note that we did not observe audiences' actual reactions to Alessi's narratives, but inferred them from the success of change as well as from prior studies documenting the effect of these narratives on employees' acceptance and endorsement of change (Rindova et al., 2011). Yet, our theory is grounded in the idea that "readerships and processes of interpretation are at least as important as structure and authorship" (Brown & Thompson, 2013, p. 1145), as audiences' perceptions of the novelty-familiarity tension ultimately determine whether or not a flow of narratives is captivating.

7.3 | Narrative practices and wielding power

Our findings contribute to research at the intersection of strategy-as-practice, narratives, and power (see Balogun, Jacobs, Jarzabkowski, Mantere, & Vaara, 2014, for a review) by enriching the

understanding of how strategy-makers may manipulate meanings in narratives of strategic change to exercise power. In particular, our study contributes to this stream of literature by suggesting that mobilizing given narrative practices may enable strategy-makers to: (a) co-opt and subtly control their audiences and (b) construct the voices of the dominant coalition.

Prior work has uncovered how strategy-makers can strategically leverage individuals' search for inspirational meanings in the mundane (Bromley, 1998; Harrison et al., 2009; Pratt, 2000), and how they can co-opt and subtly control their audiences by "espousing edifying cosmologies, and encouraging faith in transcendent missions" (Ashforth & Vaidyanath, 2002, p. 359). Our findings build on these by beginning to unpack how this subtle form of power is realized. Through *ennobling*, the strategy-maker may shape the cosmology undergirding the (transformed) organization and gradually construe the firm's mundane pursuit as worthy of dedication. Once the worth of change has been elevated, the other narrative practices can construct a cult around it. *Prophet-making* manipulates the presentation of leaders' behaviors and qualities (Brown, 1994) to make them the rightful interpreters of a cosmology of meanings for their respective firm. *Anathematizing* declares a departure from past strategy (Mantere et al., 2012) and marginalizes dissonant voices (Boje, 2001) by strategically referencing them in the narrative and construing them as obstacles to be overcome. Finally, *iconizing* provides audiences with the totems needed by any new faith (Ashforth & Vaidyanath, 2002). By unpacking these narrative practices, our study also advances the "rudimentary understanding of the role of the sacred and the dynamics of sacralization in secular organizational forms" (Tracey, 2012, p. 124).

Our findings also suggest that narratives may offer other means for exercising power by construing the voices of the dominant coalition during change. Whereas prior work considers the dominant coalition as a fixed trait in organizations (Boje, 2001, 2008), our findings suggest that effective narratives can establish (and hence, change over time) "who is and can be perceived as strategist" (Fenton & Langley, 2011, p. 1180). *Curating* gradually constructs the dominant coalition by acting on the narrative voices and points of view, and changing them over time. This voice can also be imbued with prominence and authority over time, as the narrative point of view shifts from the objective-sounding third person to the subjective-sounding first person.

Using narrative practices to wield power offers a number of causes for concern. Prior work has revealed that strategy-makers may advance their own agenda by excluding dissonant voices from official narratives (Brown & Humphreys, 2003), repeating stories serving their self-interest (Dailey & Browning, 2014), and purposefully creating ambiguity about the impact of a change they lead (Abdallah & Langley, 2014). It could hence be argued that the narrative practices discussed above could be used to advance a strategy-maker's self-interest at the expense of the firm or its audiences. Such a "dark side" of leadership would be enacted by presenting strategy-makers' vision and role as more appealing and important than they actually are. For example, *curating* could be used as a means to exclude dissonant voices from storytelling, *refocusing* for exaggerating the leader's role in the firms' history, and *ennobling* for hiding more mundane quests. Our theoretical observations nevertheless emphasize the benefits of mobilizing these practices truthfully as a method for infusing change with positive meaning.

A second cause for concern could be related to the effect of narrative practices on firms' resistance to change (Ashforth & Vaidyanath, 2002). Take, for instance, the ennobling practice in Alessi's Metanarrative 3. It could be argued that invoking the firm's heritage as inspiration for future innovations could have rendered Alessi myopic and resistant to change. While we cannot rule out that the late ennobling of Alessi's heritage was due to the absence of more radical options for change, our theoretical observations draw attention to how this narrative practice contributed to

sustain the development and implementation of Alessi's change for decades. If the firm were to experience further changes in the future, the circularity of our model suggests that Alessi could use the same narrative practices to harness, once again, the tension between novelty and familiarity.

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