

Leading by Metaphors

– A Case Study of a Mega IT Project in a Danish Bank

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Contrary to existing literature and studies of large-scale IT projects empirical data from a mega IT project in the mid-sized Danish Bank, Jyske Bank, demonstrates a successful implementation of a highly complex IT platform transition. Linguistic representations and especially extensive use of metaphors by executive management to form and shape the megaproject appeared to have significant impact on guidance of individual and collective action, and thereby presumably one of the important factors for the successful implementation. To learn from this case study, we investigate the use of metaphors in the megaproject and discuss how leading by metaphors is enacted. Our findings are that (1) storytelling with metaphors can act as backbone for communication, (2) metaphors can set direction for technical capabilities, and finally (3) metaphors can be used to emphasize emotional intelligence.

Key words: Megaproject, metaphors, successful implementation

1. INTRODUCTION

Management of mega IT projects is extremely challenging and the failure rate is high. IT systems become more and more important as a competitive element in many industries, and these technology projects are spreading over most part of organizations and posing high risk to these organizations if the mega project fails (Flyvbjerg and Budzier, 2011). McKinsey render the following number based on a database of more than 5.400 IT projects (Bloch, Blumberg, and Laartz, 2012, p. 1): *“On average, large IT projects run 45 percent over budget and 7 percent over time, while delivering 56 percent less value than predicted. Software projects run the highest risk of cost and schedule overruns”*. Mega IT projects and large-scale IT projects are even that risky that it can result in bankruptcy, which happened to American LaFrance, a leading brand of custom-made firefighting and fire rescue vehicles, with a failed ERP implementation (Krigsman, 2008). The numerous large scale public IT projects that are suffering are also a clear sign of how challenging these projects are (Budzier and Flyvbjerg, 2012; Gauld, 2007; Krigsman, 2010).

Bloch et al. (2012, p. 4) present four areas that presumably cause the most IT project failures: (1) Missing focus such as unclear objectives and lack of business focus, (2) Content issues with shifting requirements and technical complexity, (3) Skill issues such as unaligned teams and lack of skills, and finally (4) Execution issues with unrealistic schedules and reactive planning. These issues are well aligned with other studies of critical success factors for projects (Cooke-Davies, 2002; Morris, 2013; Turner, Huemann, Anbari, and Bredillet, 2010) and large scale IT projects such as ERP implementations (Finney and Corbett, 2007). The study by Bloch et al (2012) furthermore indicates that the challenges are increasing for large IT projects (defined as >\$15 million dollar) and they state *“large-scale IT projects are prone to take too long, are usually more expensive than expected, and, crucially, fail to deliver the expected benefits”* (Bloch, et al., 2012, p. 6).

There is no single solution or standard recipe for overcoming the challenges that mega IT projects and large scale IT projects present (and for that matter projects in general). There are many factors and several are context specific, which is the reason that universal theories hardly is the answer to the challenges – we will in the following point to two important factors. The first is people: *“the most important part of project management is the people. [and] the most important factor in selecting the top man is his qualities of leadership”* (Frame, 1988, p. 10). This might be extended to leadership competencies for the management team in and around a project. Next, the foundation for well-driven projects starts by the organization’s institutional context where the organization has established appropriate governance and strategy processes, that ensures suitable front-end work with project definition and project start (Morris, 2013; Morris and Geraldi, 2011). The institutional context is built and changed over time and is as such project independent although it has a high impact on the management of projects. Many competencies and disciplines play a role in successful implementation of projects, but people and the institutional context are surely important factors.

Contrary to the existing literature and studies of large-scale IT projects empirical data from a mega IT project in the mid-sized Danish Bank, Jyske Bank, demonstrates a successful implementation

of a highly complex IT platform transition over a two-year period (2010–2012) and a well-executed launch in October 2012 with a six to 12 months stabilization period. The mega IT project is called NOVA. We designate it as megaproject and not “just” a large-scale IT project because it consists of 147 projects and 900 employees working on a tight two-year schedule, which is extremely challenging, and is mega in nature, but we acknowledge that it also could be labelled a large IT project (Flyvbjerg, 2014; Kipp, Riemer, and Wiemann, 2008). One of the authors have been heavily involved in the management of NOVA while the other has followed NOVA as collaborative practice researcher (Mathiassen, 2002). Gradually we became aware of the importance of linguistic representations in NOVA during the project course, and this is especially expressed by extensive use of metaphors by executive management to form and shape the project (leadership competencies) (Müller and Turner, 2010). This appeared to have significant impact on guidance of individual and collective action, and thereby presumably one of the important factors for the successful implementation. This leads to our research question: *What can we learn from this particular case study concerning the use of metaphors to lead a project?*

We contribute to a communicative perspective by showing how organizational knowledge is manifested, managed, and utilized through communication (Canary and McPhee, 2010) with particular focus on metaphors.

The remaining part of this paper is structured as follows: The next section introduces metaphors in projects and project management to establish a conceptual foundation for this study. The research methodology is then presented with focus on project setting, data collection and data analysis. We continue with the NOVA story with emphasis on the use of metaphors. We then discuss the use of metaphors related to leadership in projects, and finally we present the concluding remarks.

2. METAPHORS IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT

“Linguistic representations are verbal or written means used to communicate a concept to guide individual and collective action” (Seidel and O’Mahony, 2014, p. 693), and there are many types of linguistic representations such as metaphor, poetry and storytelling (Grisham, 2006). Metaphors are pervasive in human thought (Ortony, 1993) and probably make up *“the very stuff with which human beings make sense..”* (Turbayne, 1962 cited in Grisham 2006: 488). We live by metaphors in our everyday life (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980), working life and certainly also in academia. Metaphors are used as linguistic representations to understand organization and management (Morgan, 1997), to selectively frame and guide individual interpretations of events (Goffman, 1974), for construction of theory as imaginary concepts (Weick, 1989) and much beyond. Morgan proposed eight metaphors for an organization (e.g. machine, organism and brain) and stated that metaphors imply *“a way of thinking and a way of seeing ..but also a way of not seeing”* (Morgan, 1997, pp. 4–5). We have to use several metaphors in order to study organizations as each way of seeing will provide unique insights with strengths and limitations (Morgan, 1997, p. 352). The understanding of the organization as a machine implies that employees are expected to operate as cogwheels in a machine with the managers controlling the clockwork, which make up a machine

with “*precision, clarity, regularity, reliability, and efficiency.*” (Morgan, 1997, p. 17). This basic example illustrates the supremacy of metaphors, and labelling the organization as a machine is more powerful than talking about Taylor’s scientific management, Fayol’s administrative theory and Weber’s theory of Bureaucracy (Scott and Davis, 2007, pp. 40–53) although it covers the same thinking to some extent.

Metaphors have also been used within project studies and project management. An early use of metaphors is Angling’s (1988) study of multi-project management which he characterizes as building the Great Wall of China, while Eskerod (1996) also studied multi-project management but used the Chinese dragon as metaphor. Eskerod’s (1996) use of metaphor is in stark contrast to Angling’s (1988) as elaborated by Skorczynska (2014) where the Chinese Wall implies order and predictability while the Chinese dragon suggest constant change and dynamism – this underlines Morgan’s (1997) statement about seeing and not seeing with metaphors. A very well cited metaphor within project management is that “projects are temporary organizations” (Lundin and Söderholm, 1995; Packendorff, 1995) which originates from the Scandinavian school of project studies, which looks at how projects enfold as temporary organizations and how they are embedded in permanent organizations and wider environments (the contexts) (Sahlin-Andersson and Söderholm, 2002). Other examples include modern software projects characterized as zeppelins and jet planes (Armour, 2001), applying metaphors in product innovation (Seidel and O’Mahony, 2014), where one of the examples is a car specification using “pocket rocket” as metaphor (Seidel and O’Mahony, 2014, p. 693), and lastly a study of using building and animal metaphors in project management discourse (Skorczynska, 2014).

A rather distinct area is using multiple metaphors to classify different schools of thought within projects much in line with Morgan’s (1997) use of metaphor (e.g. Svejvig and Andersen, 2014; Söderlund, 2011; Turner, et al., 2010; Winter and Szczepanek, 2009). Turner and colleagues (2010) took up this metaphorical approach and presented nine metaphors for perspectives on project. For example, they characterized the project as a machine, which embeds the view that “*the project is treated as a machine that, once defined, will be very predictable in its performance*” (Turner, et al., 2010, p. 34). This has also been referred to as the optimization school within project management (Cleland and King, 1968; Kerzner, 1998).

A common trait in the use of metaphors in project management literature is that they deal with projects in general and not a particular project. Contrary to this our study is focusing on a specific project and the specific use of metaphors within this project – that is an idiographic perspective (Neuman, 2006). However, there are other examples of specific use of metaphors in projects where animal metaphors are used to develop team relationships with desired behaviors (e.g. eagle) and undesired behaviors (e.g. rattlesnake) (Shelley, 2012). The same is the case with product innovation mentioned earlier (Seidel and O’Mahony, 2014).

This brief presentation of metaphors in organizations and projects particularly serves as the conceptual foundation for the study of metaphors in NOVA.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

These findings and discussions about metaphors reported here are part of a broader study based on a long term collaborative practice research (Mathiassen, 2002), where the focus has been twofold (Van de Ven, 2007, p. 27): (1) To co-produce knowledge with collaborators and (2) To do action / intervention research. The research was initiated during autumn 2010 where we, the two authors (practitioner and researcher), started to work together on NOVA. We have met regularly during the NOVA project execution period (2010–2012) and the following stabilization period (2012–2013). The practitioner was a part of the program management team for NOVA and has thus been heavily involved in most of the management aspects of NOVA. Our collaborative research is still ongoing and now we are focusing on writing up results from NOVA, and we continue discussing and reflecting upon the case involving management and former project participants. Gradually we became aware of the importance of linguistic representations, especially metaphors, during the NOVA course, and their implications for successful implementation.

We designate it as case study research where NOVA (megaproject) is the case, as it makes empirical evidence from real people in real organizations in order to contribute with original knowledge (Myers, 2009). Case study research is effective to explore research questions about organizational contexts where the factors relevant to outcomes are not yet known (Eisenhardt, 1989), which is exactly our situation. Beforehand none of us were aware of the high importance of metaphors in project management, this emerged out of the collaborative research. We adopted a contextualized, interpretive research approach (Pettigrew, 1990; Walsham, 2006) that attempts to understand phenomena through the meanings that people assign to them (Myers and Avison, 2002). We acknowledge that access to reality is through social constructs such as language, consciousness and shared meanings (Berger and Luckmann, 1966), and such access is indeed relevant when the aim is to study linguistic representations.

3.1. Case setting

The NOVA programme is the largest change process ever undertaken by Jyske Bank and has been called one of the largest IT enabled megaprojects in Denmark. Jyske Bank is a financial institution that provides all types of financial services such as banking and financial deals primarily in Denmark. Jyske Bank employs 3,800 employees and has more than 450,000 private and business customers in Denmark. NOVA is about moving Jyske Bank's custom developed IT platform, consisting of more than 500 applications, to Bankdata's standard IT-platform. Bankdata is an IT service provider owned by 12 Danish banks who are also their customers. To undertake this large change process they involved 900 employees organized in 147 projects during a two-year period. The launch of the new IT platform was done in 33 hours (switching from old to new platform), followed by a 48 hours production test of 398 customer requirements and 1200 business processes. On Monday the 15th October 2012 the system went live for 3.800 employees and 450.000 customers. It is fairly easy to imagine the extremely high complexity of NOVA.

3.2. Data collection

The data collection has been ongoing since September 2010 and is still taking place in the form of additional interviews, reflections with stakeholders and informal talks. Below is Table 1 sketching the major data collection activities:

Phase	Time period	Data collection activities
Project execution	September 2010 – October 2012	Regular meetings, typically monthly, between practitioner and researcher, where specific interventions such as project charter structure, planning issues and basis for decision-making were discussed. Parts of the meetings were also used for more reflective discussions about how NOVA was unfolding and the reasoning behind it Collecting published and unpublished documents: plans, reports, minutes and presentations; press releases; Jyske Bank and Bankdata home page information (www.jyskebank.dk ; www.bankdata.dk); news articles; magazine reports, videos etc.
Stabilization after launch	October 2012 – March 2013	Interviews with executive management, bank staff and project manager for change process (three interviews) Continued collection of documents
Writing up and continued discussion and reflection	March 2013 – September 2014	Interviews with executive management, bank staff and project manager for change process (three interviews) We started to write up and analyze the case from March 2013, which then have led to additional informal talks, emails and meetings, which make up the collected data Continued collection of documents

Table 1: Overview of data collection methods

As shown in Table 1 above, the data collection started from the very beginning of NOVA that was during September 2010. We decided to work together on this megaproject, and we were quite sure beforehand, that this would be an interesting case to study – as this was really a high risk megaproject (Flyvbjerg and Budzier, 2011). We held regular meetings, typically monthly, and at specific events even more often e.g. when preparing a basis for the decision-making early in the megaproject (October – November 2010). Although the focus of the meetings was to discuss specific project management issues such as planning many other topics emerged out of the discussion, for instance the importance of linguistic representations and communication style. The meetings are documented in hand-written field notes. However, we did also collect documents, which we found relevant, but this has been a less conscious process as we have a good working relationship with Jyske Bank and Bankdata, where we can get relevant information upon request. In fact both organizations have been very cooperative and open to our research, which has been a driving force for this study. We focused on doing interviews during the next phases, the stabilization period and writing period, where we have had six interviews with stakeholders (executive management, bank staff and project manager for change process). The interviews have had multiple purposes ranging from the strategic intent and results discussed with executive management to understanding the daily work situation for the bank staff after the launch of the

new IT platform. Internal newsletters, presentations and videos have very often complemented the findings from interviews – Jyske Bank has its own TV channel, where they broadcast and record various topics, which emphasize the focus on communication styles. The interviews lasted from one to two hours each and we have written-up the major issues, but not prepared detailed transcriptions.

Data collection and data analysis are not distinct processes in qualitative research, but overlapping and carried out iteratively, and this is specifically the situation in this study where it has been natural to start analyzing the situation and then afterwards to collect more data. Nevertheless, they are discussed separately and presented in a linear fashion starting with first data collection and then data analysis, as this is a useful and logical way of understanding the two activities (Myers, 2009, p. 165).

3.3. Data analysis

We have lived by the metaphors and linguistic representations in NOVA, and this has been a part of our ongoing interpretation and understanding of the megaproject for a long time. We made use of the data sources presented in Table 1 above to obtain an overall understanding of NOVA and to present the story line in this paper. However, the richest source of empirical data for this metaphorical analysis stems from selected PowerPoint presentations as these were used by executive management to explain and convince NOVA project members about vision, objectives and project approach.

The metaphorical analysis follows the subsequent steps (inspired by Schmitt, 2005): (1) Select documents, (2) Map out the metaphorical use in documents, and finally (3) Analyze the metaphorical use. *The first step* was to identify potential documents, primarily PowerPoint presentations and written up story lines from interviews. In the *second step* we then mapped the metaphors used in the document, and this resulted in 45 distinct metaphors. The metaphors are taken from many sources where several are inspired by the Apollo moon mission back in 1960's such as "*Failure is not an option*" ((Kranz, 2001) and "*NOVA let's make history*" (shown on a slide with a background where Neil Armstrong steps down as the first man on the moon). Others are metaphors used in daily life like "*to stretch shoes from size 42 to size 44*" (about the changes to the standard IT platform from Bankdata). The *third step* was to analyze how the particular metaphor was used to enable and support NOVA leadership as enacted by management.

4. THE NOVA JOURNEY

The timeline below in Figure 1 shows major phases in the project, which are used to explain the NOVA journey:

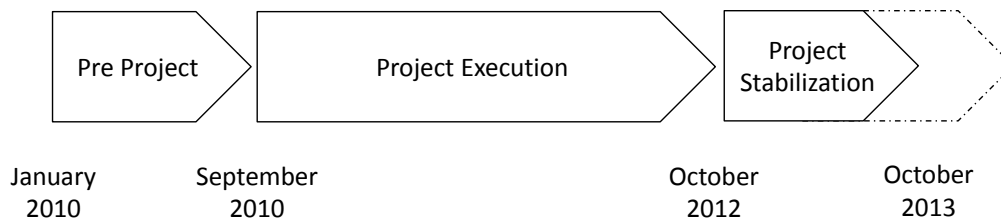


Figure 1: Timeline of NOVA megaproject

Pre-project: The situation for Jyske Bank back in 2009 was that the three largest banks in Denmark had their own IT development while all other banks were organized around three local IT service providers where Bankdata was one of them. Jyske Bank has a yearly strategy process where outsourcing of IT development is always being discussed, and in 2009 it was reaffirmed that IT development should be done internally as a sourcing principle because it was seen as a necessary strategic resource for Jyske Bank.

However, the financial sector in Denmark was forced into considering new business models with strategic alliances, and to potentially engage in mergers and acquisitions because of the global financial crisis (see also Andersen and Overgaard, 2011). This has certainly impacted Jyske Bank's strategy discussion in the beginning of 2010 where a decision was taken to look for a new sourcing strategy concerning IT development. Several arguments were brought up that "*Jyske Bank needs a bigger IT muscle*" and "*increased internal IT resources were seen as a vicious spiral*" of adding more and more IT resources. Nevertheless, there was a need for more IT resources if Jyske Bank was going to sustain their competitive advantage, and Jyske Bank conceded that they did not want to invest more in IT capabilities, making the obvious choice to look for a strategic IT partner, because IT is a strategic resource to a bank.

Executive management searched for sourcing solutions and a meeting between the managing director for Jyske Bank and the chairman of the board for Bankdata in April 2010 was the starting point for the strategic alliance between the two organizations as it was seen as being beneficial to both parties. It was expressed as follows: "*this is about finding playmates who want the same as you*". Jyske Bank decided to rely on the standard IT platform supplied by Bankdata with a very brief initial technical discussion, and much lesser than typically anticipated in the literature (Henderson and Venkatraman, 1999 (1993); Ross, Weill, and Robertson, 2006). The focus was on the strategic partnership and not on the technical capabilities of Bankdata's IT platform – it was verbalized as follows: "*it was not about who has the smartest and most beautiful IT platform*", and "*Jyske Bank have to live with duct tape*" indicating that some functionality will be missing in the standard platform from Bankdata (referring to using duct tape in Apollo 13 to repair lithium hydroxide canisters to remove the CO₂ (Atkinson, 2010)).

The many meetings and workshops between Jyske Bank and Bankdata resulted in a strategic partnership, which was proclaimed in a stock exchange announcement on the 1st September 2010. Jyske Bank became member (owner) of Bankdata together with 11 other banks, and moved its IT development to Bankdata, which implied that about 370 employees were changing their employer from Jyske Bank to Bankdata.

Project execution: The real project work starts immediately after the stock exchange announcement where the two organizations, Jyske Bank and Bankdata, should get together. NOVA has an immediate effect on more than 500 employees in the two organizations, which are affected by the strategic outsourcing decision. NOVA presents unimaginable many open areas and issues such as: (1) The scope of NOVA, (2) people management of employees in this outsourcing situation, (3) the structure for cooperation including organization, roles, responsibilities and governance, and (4) major technical decisions- to mention few important areas.

A very important decision had already been taken in the pre-project phase regarding which IT platform that should survive after NOVA and this is expressed in the following: *“It is Bankdata’s IT platform that remains! This means that Jyske Bank has to ‘move in’ with Bankdata and that Jyske Bank’s IT platform has to die”*. This was a very tough decision for Jyske Bank’s employees as they felt strongly about their “own” IT platform. This was verbalized as *“when we sum it up, the decision is not that difficult in our mind, but it is in our heart”*.

The pre-project has only scratched the technical surface of the new IT platform from Bankdata and a comprehensive business analysis was initiated during September 2010 to compare the old and new IT platform and identify major and minor gaps. The business analysis was divided into eight tracks staffed by 140 employees from Jyske Bank and 60 employees from Sydbank and Bankdata. Sydbank is also a member of Bankdata and is already using Bankdata’s IT platform; Sydbank is the fifth largest bank while Jyske Bank is the third largest bank (Wikipedia, 2014). Bankdata contributes with technical knowledge while Sydbank has extensive knowledge about setting up the IT platform and using it in their daily work with private and business customers. There is a strong culture in Jyske Bank, and you are part of *“the green family”* (green is the logo color), and several among Jyske Bank’s management and employees felt that they were delivering Jyske Bank’s *“DNA”* to Sydbank. Others realized that it was necessary knowledge sharing between the two competitors, and that Jyske Bank and Sydbank have to share their DNA. The business analysis resulted in a list of major and minor gaps, which were used in NOVA onwards. Another outcome of this analysis was to soften up the decision about the IT platform, which meant that some Jyske Bank IT applications would survive after NOVA.

The challenge regarding the new IT platform to solve Jyske Bank’s business requirements was expressed as *“to stretch shoes from size 42 to size 44”*, which means adding a new functionality, and to use *“duct tape”* to repair issues where the new functionality was not feasible due to schedule and/or cost reason.

A very tough schedule was defined where the launch of the new IT platform would have to take place on the 15th October 2012 (two years ahead from decision about launch milestone) and the stabilization period should finish no later than 1st March 2013. This meant ramping up resources with a peak of 900 employees working on NOVA and establishing 147 projects in the NOVA programme (or megaproject).

The project execution phase consists of six areas where the 147 projects are assigned and these areas are as follows: (1) Data migration, (2) Technical infrastructure, (3) Bankdata IT development, (4) Jyske Bank IT development, (5) Product and processes, and (6) Organizational implementation. It is a highly demanding process to coordinate, control and ensure communication among 147 individual projects spread across the six areas.

An important way for management to cultivate and motivate the 900 employees was to use the Apollo programme as an overall metaphor for the NOVA journey. An extract from a PowerPoint presentation with 25 slides is reproduced here (Spring 2011):

The front page has only the word “NOVA”, but the background photo is stars in the sky showing the boundless space (Slide #1)

“Strongly manned” and “Joint analysis and check procedures” with NASA's Mission Control Center in Houston as background (Slide #3 and #5)

“Countdown to launch – 72 weeks out of 111 weeks left to launch” with a photo showing the launch of a rocket with fire spreading from engines (Slide #16)

“Safe landing of projects” with a photo of a Lunar landing module landed on the moon (Slide #16)

“Launch day is 15th October 2014 – Failure is not an option” with a photo of three parachutes moving to the earth (Slide #23)

This communication was done by executive management to tell the story that the people on the project was doing a very difficult task comparable to the Apollo programme. “Failure is not an option” (Kranz, 2001) is a strong message and everyone understands that space missions are life critical and that failure is not an option, and this analogy is drawn to NOVA. The communication style, e.g. by PowerPoint presentations, always included extensive use of metaphors and photos to back up the message put forward.

Success was the option and opposite to failure, as the new IT platform was launched on the scheduled day October 15th 2014, and all the effort of the project execution phase seemed to have borne fruit. A video was produced for the NOVA celebration party emphasizing that “NOVA is a success”, and as a tribute to all the people involved in NOVA, and once again it shows the superior way that Jyske Bank communicates.

Stabilization period: Launching a new IT platform is to some extent finalizing the technical work although error correction and support are ongoing, but it is also a starting point for the business line staff serving private and business customers as well as the many back office functions in a bank. This is a critical period for any organization because it is here that the system should show

that it is viable, and there were many struggles such as performance drop by employees due to learning curves and other issues (Elrod and Tippet Donald, 2002; Markus, Axline, Petrie, and Tanis, 2000; Robey, Ross Jeanne, and Boudreau, 2002). The “performance drop”, “the dive” and “death valley of change” is some of the labels by which the time after launching a new system is characterized. This is very frustrating to the bank staff at all levels, and creates many discussions. However, this is also tackled by the Jyske Bank management and the CEO of the bank says (December 2012):

“We know there are many problems out there right now, things take extra time and productivity is lower. It will take a while yet [before we are back to normal]. But we had counted on [the situation]. It must be weighed against that we would otherwise have spent 3-4 years (instead of two) on conversion.”

Again, the right communication at the right time, and the CEO message was clear, that executive management was expecting problems and lower productivity (the drop) and that it would take some time before normal operation was achieved. This was a reassuring message to all the hard working bank staff trying to survive in a tough situation and a pat on the shoulder to all staff involved in supporting daily business by organizational implementation activities. Slowly but surely Jyske Bank went back to normal operation during 2013.

We are going to round of this section by expressing some of the reasons why NOVA can be regarded as successful: (1) NOVA was delivered according to schedule and with the agreed functionality overall, but the cost has increased considerably (which to some extent was expected by top management); (2) The stabilization period was very frustrating and problematic, but Jyske Bank became more and more acquainted with the new system over a period of 6 to 12 months; and finally (3) Jyske Bank survived the stabilization period and the new IT platform is still used by all the employees in 2014. It is time for Jyske Bank to harvest the benefits from this mega change process.

5. LEADING BY METAPHORS

The story line presented in previous section shows some of the metaphorical representations used in NOVA and it is immediately clear that such expressions are efficient tools for forming and shaping a project as well as motivating and influencing others, which are important leadership competencies (Morris, 2013). With this in mind, we will return to our research question: *What can we learn from this particular case study concerning use of metaphors to lead a project?* Below, we discuss and reflect upon the key insights from use of metaphors in NOVA.

Create a storytelling with metaphors as backbone for communication: The overall story line with the Apollo program was a very appropriate way to communicate the vision and strategy for NOVA. The statement that NOVA is a (close to life) critical mission for Jyske Bank and failure is not an option really are strong messages to the project personnel and other stakeholders. Developing an effective vision implies that the vision is imaginable, desirable, feasible, focused, flexible and communicable according to Kotter (1996, p. 72), and most of these characteristics are followed by

the NOVA vision. Kotter talks about “an imaginable picture of the future” (Kotter, 1996, pp.: 72-75), and this was met by NOVA in an exemplary manner by using the Apollo program and associated metaphors. The choice of the Apollo program appeared to be very viable for NOVA and was used repeatedly. There were so many ramifications from this overall metaphor such as (1) “*strongly manned*” and “*joint analysis and check procedures*” with NASA’s mission control center in Houston as background (slide #3 and slide #16), (2) “*safe landing of projects*” (slide #16), and (3) “*Countdown to launch..*” (slide 13). There was an overall purpose of the Apollo journey and then many possibilities for more detailed and specific messages.

Use metaphors to set directions for technical capabilities: While it might be rather obvious to use rhetorical instruments as storytelling and metaphors to develop vision and strategy, it is less intuitive to use the same thinking for technical capabilities. However, the NOVA case shows that technical issues can also be articulated by metaphors, and it might be a convincing way to align between business functions (less technical savvy) and technical functions – as well as setting directions in a clear formulated way. One of the challenges for Jyske Bank was to convince its employees that the Bankdata IT platform was the right choice although it was a compromise functionality wise. This is voiced in the following metaphors: (1) “*It was not about who has the smartest and most beautiful IT platform*” – this is not a beauty contest; (2) “*Jyske Bank have to live with duct tape*” – we can repair the solution); (3) “*To stretch shoes from size 42 to size 44*” – we stretch shoes when we buy shoes, which are too small, they seemed to fit when we bought them, but then we realize that they are too small after wearing them for some time; and finally (4) “*It is Bankdata’s IT platform that remains! This means that Jyske Bank has to ‘move in’ with Bankdata and that Jyske Bank’s IT platform has to die*” – die is a strong word, so the project personnel do not have to argue that they want to keep their “Jyske Bank baby”, the decision has been taken! We do not argue that the metaphors replace requirements specifications, gap analysis etc., but it is a convincing rhetoric grip that helps persuade the audience. In their paper about managing the repertoire in product innovation Seidel and O’Mahone (2014, pp. 693, 699) present similar examples such as a flextruck (truck with flexible cargo area) that was labelled a “*Swiss army knife*” and the earlier example of “*pocket rocket*” for a car specification. They also argued that the stories and metaphors cannot stand alone but need to be complemented by specification and prototypes in order to have a repertoire of representations in product innovation.

Use metaphors to emphasize emotional intelligence: Emotional intelligence is a central leadership competence (Müller and Turner, 2010) and in rhetoric there are three modes of persuasion: pathos, logos and ethos, where pathos appeals to the audience’s emotions (Toye, 2013, p. 14). The NOVA change process was highly emotional for the many employees who were transferred from Jyske Bank to Bankdata and it make sense to verbalize the socio-cultural issues arising from this drastic decision. Metaphors like (1) “*When we sum it up, the decision is not that difficult in our mind, but it is in our heart*”, (2) “*The green family*”, and (3) “*[Jyske Bank’s] DNA*” address interpersonal sensitivity where executive management (and other management personnel) takes account of the employees’ needs and perceptions (Müller and Turner, 2010), and shows empathetic understanding (Turner and Müller, 2005).

As a final comment, leadership is that highly linked to communication and communication style that any leader needs to know the repertoire of stories, metaphors, poetry, myths (Grisham, 2006; Turbayne, 1962) and other rhetorical means and how to use them efficiently in projects. This is not a trivial consideration and is certainly an underdeveloped discipline within classical project management – soft skills like communication are the hardest (adapted from Morris, 2013, p. 198).

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The purpose of this study was to investigate what we could learn from this particular case concerning the use of metaphors to lead a project. To address this topic we told and analyzed the story about the NOVA journey and how metaphors were used along the journey, starting in the pre-project phase and continued through the project execution phase and beyond. The linguistic representations and especially the extensive use of metaphors by executive management formed and shaped the megaproject, and appeared to have significant impact on guidance of individual and collective action – and was thereby presumably one of the important factors for the successful implementation. Our findings are that (1) storytelling with metaphors can act as backbone for communication, (2) metaphors can set direction for technical capabilities, and finally (3) metaphors can be used to emphasize emotional intelligence.

We have conducted a single case study from an idiographic perspective and we should thus be cautious about generalizations. The megaproject and following change process at Jyske Bank is an unusual case at least in a Danish context, but might be “translated” to other large scale projects and megaprojects or other-settings in general (Seddon and Scheepers, 2006) We argue that the use of metaphors as communication style used by managers is a more generic competence, which is applicable in many situations in projects and beyond. It is important that managers (leaders) have their own context in mind, since the outcome may differ across contexts. Aspects, which have proved to be important in this study, may have less importance in another context. Other insights could appear if a similar topic were to be investigated in another company; we thus encourage other researchers to study use of metaphors in projects.

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