



Do we need a comic to talk about innovation?

In 2015 Harvard University published the first dissertation entirely written as a comic. Unflattening challenged how we create and communicate knowledge. Is there any benefit in science comics? I made an experiment. I transformed my own PhD thesis on Innovation into a comic.

Storytelling in research

In her book *Writing management: organization theory as a literary genre* Czarniawska (1999) argues that narratives might have a potential that traditional ways of presenting knowledge cannot provide. Narratives use stories to connect isolated and confusing events, into one meaningful whole. In that way, narratives contribute with what Weick (1995) called “plausible explanations” that allow to make sense of what is going on in an organization. According to Czarniawska, narratives have the power to establish connections between the exceptional and the ordinary, and transfer tacit knowledge, for example by exhibiting an explanation instead of demonstrating it.

Comics: a visual narrative

Jee and Anggoro (2012) assert that comics make concepts more concrete and easier to comprehend. Readers form mental representations of the characters, settings and events and that help them to relate to everyday experiences. One of the main contributions of comics is to generate a sense of empathy. According to Williams (2008), comics might allow readers to step into the eyes of another and consider a different point of view.

Although the increasing production of science comics, “narrative knowing” has still a lower acceptance as a scientific approach than the traditional one (Czarniawska, 1999). An explanation might be that there have been few systematic studies demonstrating science comics’ effectiveness (Jee and Anggoro, 2012, Tatalovic, 2009).

Unflattening: legitimizing comics

Nick Sousanis' *Unflattening* (2015), the first doctoral dissertation entirely written as a comic, became shocking. Finch (2015) argues that *Unflattening* means a breaking point for at least two reasons. First, it shows that images are not subordinate to words, but equal partners in the articulation of thought. Second, because it is a dissertation in a comic-form it gives legitimacy to comics as a way to communicating and creating scientific knowledge.

A comic to talk about Innovation

Czarniawska says: *"The ambition to produce narrative knowledge changes the task of the researcher, instead of reproaching the practice and telling the practitioners which way to go, our task would be to tell them a good story"*. I wanted to explore the production and contribution of science comics. I decided to make an experiment. To transform my own PhD dissertation on Innovation Management into a comic.

Take a look at www.innovationstories.se.



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In 2012 I received my PhD from KTH, Royal Institute of Technology of Sweden. In my research, I studied innovation with a focus on decision making, strategy and project portfolio. With *Innovation stories* I have tried to create the work on innovation that I had needed and never found.

References

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