Conceptual Paper

Change Management and Umberto Eco's Little Red Riding Hood Model

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Abstract - *This project adopts a semiotic, text-centred approach to analyze an environment of turbulence in response to the need for new knowledge to emerge in the field of change management. To achieve a clearer and more straightforward interpretation of organizational change, symbols and references from Umberto Eco (1932-2016) semiotics are employed, particularly the Little Red Riding Hood model. This model has been modified to focus on change management, aiming to symbolize the main issues in a multidisciplinary way, using images and narratives. A core objective of change management is to enhance organizational competitiveness, safety, and sustainable development. These are approached in an original way through the modified Little Red Riding Hood model. Umberto Eco provides a clear path to understanding organizational needs, market challenges, and stakeholders, as well as offering guidance on how management can firmly ground itself in concepts and symbolic figures through a robust system of analogies and metaphors. The narrative plot, i.e. how the model analyzes various situations and the impact of theoretical and practical processes, aims to upgrade organizations and foster holistic flexibility.*

Keywords - *Change management, Change model, Multidisciplinarity, Organizational upgrade, Umberto Eco, Semiotics.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Little Red Riding Hood model was created by Umberto Eco through the collaboration between comparative literature and political science (Eco, 1985). Adopted and modified, it is linked to change management, becoming both an intellectual model of thought and a practical tool. Drawing on elements from tales, literature, and motion pictures, the original version of Umberto Eco's model was created (Eco, 1985). In this paper, symbolism functions in such a way that the more symbolic Umberto Eco is, the more the symbols reveal themselves and explain their symbolism. For example, the hero represents the organisation and Little Red Riding Hood represents change.

The model reflects Umberto Eco's narrative skills. Nevertheless, novel approaches and interpretations have been incorporated, thereby establishing a linkage between the concept of change, its comprehension, and practical implementation. The aim is to utilize linguistic syncretism and the semiotics of the signifier and the signified, tailored to the needs of change management by grounding the analysis in its theoretical background. The proposed narrative change model includes eleven parameters, each analyzed into four ingredients that favor the effective implementation of change projects.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This project employs a specialized version of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). In the field of management research, IPA has been a prominent tool, particularly in the context of change (DeSimone, 2020; Mendy, 2020; Rana et al., 2020; Agarwal and Sandiford, 2021; Dörfler and Stierand, 2021; Raelin, 2021; Arslan et al., 2022; Mhatre and Mehta, 2022; Sadangharn, 2022; Van Niekerk and Jansen van Rensburg, 2022). The objective of this study is to explore the potential for a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between theoretical frameworks, semiotic narratives, and practical approaches to change management.

This exploration has the potential to inform the development of novel theoretical frameworks (Breuer et al., 2022; Van Niekerk and Jansen van Rensburg, 2022), and to re-evaluate older theories (Sadangharn, 2022;

Vuhuong and Edwards, 2022). The methods utilized in this particular research are characterized by the absence of empirical data, as otherwise creative thinking and theoretical reflection would be limited, due to being "trapped" by experience. Instead, this research adopts an interdisciplinary and innovative approach, encompassing theoretical advances and practical insights in the field of change management.

The methodology aims to help participants gain a broader comprehension of the theory and processes of organizational and operational change. While the goal is to generalize the results to the wider community, the focus remains on the study of phenomena, in this case, change management. The focal point steers on the concept or phenomenon analyzed and attempts to explain the issue under study.

Umberto Eco's Little Red Riding Hood model incorporates semiotics and semantics, which have been modified to fit with change management. This results in a model-framework that acknowledges the meaning of change and the narrative flow, analyzing the signified concepts and the signifying signs. The project considers all the symbols of the original text, adding managerial features of change and its meaning. Findings and insights are analyzed conceptually and coded using a text-centred methodology based on semiotic literature (Celhay et al., 2020) to draw conclusions and generate new knowledge (Tables 1–2).

III. CHANGE MANAGEMENT AND UMBERTO ECO

The scientific theoretical background of change management enriches and broadens comprehension of its semiotics and alternative perspectives. It incorporates a set of organizational, collective, as well as emotional and individual functions, summarized in the proposed semantic and semiotic change model full of analogies and metonymies.

It is based on the integration of simple or complex mental and emotional operations, summed up in the Epicurean philosophical incitement: "... to rely on our senses ... on the direct perception of the mind ... as well as in our existing feelings, a basis to draw conclusions for those who still await confirmation, even for the unobvious..." (Epicurus, 1925 p. 22). The Little Red Riding Hood model is a "loan" from Umberto Eco in the form of a syncretism of literary and social sciences.

The semeotician created this model in collaboration with comparative literature and political science students at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Different types of stories were used in the model, such as Little Red Riding Hood, war stories, and motion pictures. The result was a simplified narrative-storytelling model characterized by the following principles: There is a hero who strives to achieve a 'value'. To succeed and preserve the value, the hero must respect an 'interdiction'.

However, the interdiction has been violated either by the hero, under the influence of a villain or the villain himself at the hero's expense, resulting in "misfortune". At this point, a "rescuer" intervenes and fights villain until the triumph. Defeating villain re-establishes the temporarily lost value (Eco, 1985, pp. 4-5).

In this project, the proposed narrative model has been modified to reflect a morphology of change management, using comparative literature and semiotics taken from Umberto Eco and his team's reasoning. This resulted in a symbolic map, inside which storytelling could function supplementarily to change models, symbolizing and coloring semantic narrative archetypes, utilizing appropriate analogies to indicate the response to the challenges faced by any organisation or business.

Proper operations, for example, "information regarding change through effectively knowledge sharing mechanisms" (Usman et al., 2018, p. 14), i.e. effective communication (Rohmah and Subriadi, 2020) favor the application of change, "balancing forces" (Kettinger and Grover. 1995) toward its dominance over stability, through constantly purveying the belief of organizational success (Pagel and Westerfelhaus, 2019, p. 24).

Moreover, they create the potential for perspective complementary and beneficial factors, stimulating "a well-designed, wisely adapted and well-implemented change program" (Mosadeghrad et al., 2014, p. 189). Such factors include the "reconfiguration" of organizational structure and a demanding approach at various intersections of truth-seeking and lost "value" re-establishment, as pointed out in Umberto Eco's original model.

Table 1. Change Management Morphology Intersects with Both Comparative Literature and Semiotics

Principles (metonymies)	Little Red Riding Hood	Operational Change	Change Implementation	Change's Sensemaking
Hero (change)	Little Red Riding Hood (organization)	Managerial necessity (market challenges)	Stakeholders (involved in change process)	Leadership-leading team (support network)
Value	Sustainability safety (the value lost: competitiveness)	Regaining competitiveness (goal)	Entrepreneurial survival (purpose)	Acceptance of the need for a new organizational culture (awakening)
Interdiction	Stagnation (interdiction, which is violated because competitiveness is lost when there is no movement or activity)	Loosening of alertness to the inevitable challenges of the market (result of violating the interdiction)	Behavioral indifference (lack of commitment to change)	Resistance to change (movement violation causes stagnation)
Villain (organizational gaps and behavioral reluctance of participants to change)	Wolf (fallacies, stereotypes, and habits are the reasons why value has been lost)	Lack of communication: (requires the restoration of trust and honesty, regarding the purpose, goals, and processes of change)	Addressing the barriers to change (insufficient resources, internal competition, etc.)	Unwilling participants (having ineffective attitude towards change)
Violation of Interdiction	Inertia-detachment (the value of competitiveness, which provides security, requires alertness and participation)	Reduced sense of urgency (to be reversed through understanding, feedback, and accurate reframing)	Intentional passive and/or active resistance (expected behavioral response-activation of response strategies)	Disorientation (due to violation of the principle and loss of value, attempt to reverse disorientation)
Misfortune (chain of inexpediences)	Organizational disintegration (complete resignation - inability to integrate members into change)	Misguided design (forced movement due to circumstances; choosing the appropriate model would have avoided this problem)	Collapse of change: (change cannot be implemented; what was planned is not being applied)	Consequence: loss of credibility for the change leader(s) and/or team(s)

The classification and new actions resulting from the previous findings lead to the successful implementation of change, which follows the subsequent course:

Table 2. Next Stage: Results and Impact

Functions	Little Red Riding Hood	Entrepreneurial Change	Change Implementation	Sense-Giving of Change
Rescuer (effective change leadership)	Awakening (gaining organizational self-awareness)	Appropriate redesign (selection of the appropriate change model and its implementation)	Consistency (stakeholder involvement)	Coordination (organizational alignment and harmonious processes)
Struggle (to regain lost value)	Reinforcement of self-confidence and counterattack (entrepreneurial insight)	Acceleration (changes flow under conditions of decisiveness)	Achieving milestones (awareness of progress towards completing the change project)	An emerging, yet incomplete, desirable state
Victory (prerequisites)	Powerful will (effective action)	Eliminating inhibitions (commitment to change)	Success of change (achieving the desired situation)	Outcome: reconfiguration of parameters and changes in business/organization, resulting in strengthened competitiveness
Value Re-established (organizational upgrade)	Safety (restored value: competitiveness)	Completion of the change process (desired organizational and operational state)	Sustainability (restoring safety and competitiveness)	Stabilization of the new corporate change-oriented culture
Evaluation of Facts (monitoring-retrospective-reviewing)	Identifying and avoiding future misjudgments (value shielding)	Proactive planning of tactical changes (countermeasure projections for potential loss of value)	New changes pending (change-oriented mindset)	Integrating a culture in favor of change (gaining organizational and individual flexibility)

This "loan" from semiotics and semantics, when applied to change management, demonstrates how Umberto Eco's narrative model can detect problems and facilitate change. The semantic analysis of the reference points indicated by the Little Red Riding Hood model identifies them as metonymies of change within organizational and operational frames, findings and actions, along with the beneficial impact of providing meaning to change through sensegiving, i.e., change agents' activities to transit it as a shared value to its recipients (Lines, 2007).

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The proposed narrative model, deploying symbolism and descriptive development, raises fundamental questions and sheds light on the role of symbols such as metonymies, similes, and metaphors in understanding the challenges of organizational change. These signs serve as symbolic representations of change, organization and value. For example, they depict Little Red Riding Hood and the wolf, as well as the rescuer, the struggle and victory. They also portray the processes involved in communicating the meaning of change to stakeholders and the goal of this communication. Let's examine what is illustrated in more detail. Through semiotics, a storytelling unfolds about how change, organization and people are affected in relation to points of reference and the meanings that arise from them.

1) Thus, change is presented as a hero who saves Little Red Riding Hood, symbolizing the organization, which identifies operational change as a necessity for corporate success and growth (Naeem et al., 2013), and actively involves stakeholders in planning and monitoring procedures of its implementation (Base and Abad, 2025). The leader or leadership teams communicate the reasons for change (Mwamba, 2023) and create a "convergent sense-giving-sensemaking process through the use of purposive narrative" (Wasieleski et al. 2024, p. 2) in favor of its successful application with all available means and resources.

2) The value is the competitiveness that was lost along with the market share and affected the safety and sustainability of the business, diminishing economic influence and reducing employment opportunities (Schwaeke et al. 2025, p. 1298). Entrepreneurial change is emerging as a prerequisite to regain competitiveness, in order for the organization or the business to survive in the long-term, through continuous improvement (Graen 2015). With proper communication, the need for a new organizational culture is accepted (Mardikaningsih and Darmawan 2022) during for instance the introduction of new technology, digital transformation, etc.

3) According to the proposed narrative model, interdiction is violated, "as the persistence of outdated cognitive frameworks leads to organisational stagnation" (Krukowski and Oliński, 2025, p. 112). This results in a loosening of alertness, turning the organization vulnerable to market challenges due to institutional contradictions (Savelev and Saveleva, 2024). At the same time, indifference (Karimi-Ghartemani et al., 2022) and a lack of commitment to change emerge, "with negative consequences including change implementation failures" (Kromah et al., 2022, p. 1), This resistance to change further reinforces the organization's immobility manifested as institutional inertia (Aksom 2022) and, once violated, interdiction causes disorganization.

4) Villain manifests himself in the form of organizational gaps that reproduce themselves, when spread (Öberg and Leminen, 2017) and behavioral reluctance among those involved in change, like a wolf, meaning delusions, stereotypes and ineffective habits. These are the reasons why value has been lost, namely competitiveness, being a core factor for organizational success (Sousa et al., 2018) in terms of safety and sustainability. Change emerges as a way to restore confidence (Ford and Ford, 2010) and be honest about the organization's purpose and goals by telling the truth (Grover, 2013). During the process, all possible obstacles are discussed, such as insufficient resources, internal and external competition, and so on. However, evil, as described in various forms, manifesting as unwillingness to engage in change, is a key challenge.

5) The interdiction is violated by the hero, who in this case is Little Red Riding Hood herself, representing the organization. After the interdiction is violated, an allegorical path through the forest is revealed. This therefore falls under the category of misconduct concerning indolence and detachment rather than alertness and participation. In other words, the organization appears to abandon the effort. Operational change attempts to reframe the situation through collecting feedback "for timely adjustments and continuous improvement" (Picado and González-Prida, 2024, p. 6) and acting with precision, reversing the diminished sense of urgency and need for change within the organization. During implementation, it faces various challenges, such as resistance to change, and activates the development of targeted strategies to address these issues (Xue et al. 2024). However, violating the interdiction is disorienting and requires considerable effort to reverse and restore value.

6) Disaster represents organizational collapse following a series of setbacks, "where there is no sufficient reason to change as it may lead to an oblivion that change is indispensable for the organization's competitiveness" (Hanekom et al. 2024, p. 104), indicating an inability to engage stakeholders in the change process (Zmitrowicz 2024). This may be the result of poor planning in emergency conditions, "considered a main reason for organizational change failure" (Errida and Lotfi 2021). If the change is not implemented as planned, the leader and the change management team will lose credibility.

7) Rescuer demonstrates effective leadership in enacting change, embracing "change as an essential part of their strategic agenda" (Mwamba 2023, p. 28), leading to organizational self-awareness an accurate perception of internal and external reality and ultimately, awakening (Potter and Starke, 2022). This kind of awakening focus on the radical redesign (Krajcsák and Bakacsi, 2025) or the identification of a

suitable change model and its realization (Junnaid et al., 2020). Thus, during the implementation of change, those involved participate consistently, achieving coordinated processes and organizational alignment with strategic goals (Gulati et al. 2025).

8) Little Red Riding Hood (the organization) must strengthen through struggle its self-confidence to navigate the forest and avoid the 'wolf', demonstrating the insight needed to regain lost value. This struggle accelerates change and, as it unfolds, milestones arise to show its direction. Once businesses and organizations are struggling, change becomes meaningful (Alammar, 2025); it emerges, but is not yet completed.

9) In order to achieve victory, it is first of all necessary for the organization to demonstrate that it possesses two key prerequisites: namely, strong will and effective action (Bargavi and Vasumathi. 2025). Change then eliminates suspensions and fosters employee loyalty through transparent and symmetrical communication (Kim and Uysal, 2025), thus completing the change project and bringing the organization to the desired state. Consequently, a reconfiguration of parameters often ensues, which in turn results in changing the organizational hierarchy "achieving shared goals through building power-with followers and stakeholders" (Biygautane and Clegg, p. 13), thereby enhancing organizational competitiveness.

10) The value that has been restored is entrepreneurial 'safety', which, upon the completion of the change initiative, has undergone an organizational upgrade through acquiring new knowledge, inspiring innovation (Valeri and Baggio, 2021, p. 2129) and found itself in the desired operational state. The implementation of change at this point serves to restore safety and determination, thereby engendering sustainability, which in turn stabilizes a change-oriented culture due to leadership support and incentives (Kushnir et al. 2025).

11) The evaluation of facts is an essential component of the analysis. In the final stage, facts are evaluated and value is secured and restored by implementing proactive strategies and by avoiding potential future mistakes in turbulent times (Gulati et al., 2025). Protecting value, so that it is not lost again, establishes a change-oriented mindset, fostering positive adaptation and active participation of all stakeholders (Hu et al., 2025), which is incorporated as a skill of organizational and individual flexibility towards change.

In summary, the proposed model is above all a text (narrative) that has been formed by self-determination that cannot be ignored, regardless of whether taken into account or not (Eco, 2025). In other words "some maintain that there is a form of language so strong, that it 'shows' us being (that is, indissoluble plexus of being-language) so that the self-revelation of being is actuated within the language" (Eco, 2000, p. 31). This gives us a broader overview, both in terms of the organization, people, and market challenges, as well as the necessary changes to which it directs.

V. CONCLUSION

The proposed narrative model of Little Red Riding Hood functions as a framework within which linguistic, philosophical, organizational and managerial syncretism produce a reliable tool for comprehending change. In addition, the project as a whole consists a narrative and a text-centric course to semiotics and symbolism, a standpoint which serves to shape and illustrate the narrative's flow. In this way, attribution of meaning to change is achieved, thereby providing a rationale for the utilization of all allegories and metaphors that are deployed, such as hero, value, misfortune, and so forth. This classification necessitates the decoding of symbols, signs and signifiers through philosophical projections and operational practices, as illustrated in Tables 1 and 2. The outcome is the capacity of an organization to regain stability whenever logic and moderation in the sense of measure are violated.

At the same time, guidelines are provided for addressing specific issues as problems arising during the implementation of change as well as the pursue of organizational harmony. In conclusion, the suggested narrative model aspires to enhance a deeper understanding of change, but also of the current situation, and attempts to illustrate strong will and organisational upgrade as means to regain lost competitiveness and safety. At the same time, it is a practical documenting system, which outlines a road map, where the narrative and symbolism reveal critical factors and invisible parameters that drastically influence the design and introduction

of change. The contribution of this project lies in the use of a dialectical syncretism, inspired by Umberto Eco and modified for the needs of change management that enriches the field with its originality and narrative dynamics.

Conflicts of Interest

The author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest concerning the publishing of this paper.

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