



Dear Editor: A Reply to Basbøll and Graham

Karl Weick

Dear Editor:

In my judgment it is our ideas, theories, findings, and lines of argument that make or break us as a field, not our examples. The Alps illustration is one of many stories I've found over the years to illustrate complex concepts. As with many illustrations I eventually use, it is only after mulling and incubation that I realize why something is a good story. In the case of the Alps illustration, it was years before I understood that this example was relevant to the concept of enactment that I had been writing about since the mid 60s. By the time I began to see the Alps story as an example of cognition in the path of the action, I had lost the original article containing Holub's poem and I was not even sure where I had read the story. This occurred in the early 1980's which was quite some time before internet search was a common form of inquiry. I reconstructed the story as best I could. I obviously had no idea whether the reconstruction was close to the original or not since I had no original in hand for comparison. Other than to insert a footnote saying 'source unknown', I would not have done anything different were I in the same position today. Later, when I learned the source of this story from a helpful colleague, I used the attribution to Holub from then on in newly developed pieces where I used this illustration. I took no credit for inventing or discovering the story, and instead, used it as one among many examples to illustrate the general idea that minimal structures, when trusted, updated, and acted on attentively, tended to generate data that improved problem solving. While this style of using stories as allegories may displease people who favor other forms of evidence, the stories themselves are available for comparison, refutation, extension, coupling with other illustrations to exemplify a quite different concept, or for being ignored.

the author

Karl E. Weick is Rensis Likert Distinguished University Professor of Organizational Behavior and Psychology at the Stephen M. Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan.
E-mail: karlw@umich.edu