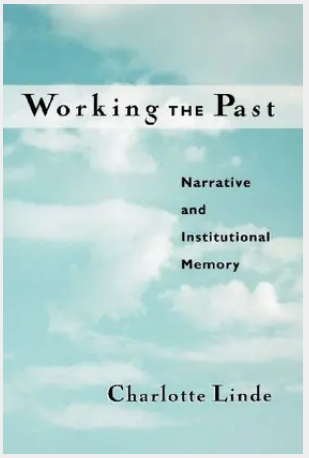
Linde

Working the Past

Narrative and Institutional Memory



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Stories told within institutions play a powerful role, helping to define not only the institution itself, but also its individual members. How do institutions use stories? How do those stories both preserve the past and shape the future? To what extent does narrative construct both collective and individual identity? Charlotte Linde's unique and far-reaching study addresses these questions by looking at the interplay of narratives, memory, and identity in a large insurance company. Her detailed ethnography looks at the role of stories within the institution and how they are employed by its members in both private and group settings. Analyzing the re-telling of certain key stories, she shows how the formation of "core" stories and their multiple re-tellings and modifications provide a means of formulating and promoting a cohesive group identity - which in turn shapes the stories and identities of the individuals within the collective. Linde also looks at silences, and how stories not told also convey their version of the past. Working the Past shows how stories that might otherwise be seen as part of mundane daily life are in fact utterly essential to the formation and maintenance of individual and group identity. Her original research will appeal to those interested in narrative studies, linguistics, anthropology, sociology, and institutional memory.

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