

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Foreseeing is believing: How roleplaying mechanism mobilizes present course of actions for future goals?

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Current research on organizing for the future has explored how practitioners make sense of uncertain future but provides limited explanations of how they actually make a present course of action for the future. The study contributes to the literature by focusing on making rather than sensemaking, concretizing future goals to generate “as-if” realities in order to mobilize actions. Building on a case of Yuan village’s pursuit of food safety goals in China, the study reveals a roleplaying mechanism that practitioners adopt to act out the role of the future (fake it) and make it by working backward to fill the gap with discursive practices, capacity building, and present actions.

**Keywords:** Future organization, Roleplaying, Concretization, Discursive practices, Capacity building, Present actions

## Introduction

Organizational research has increasingly recognized the importance to explore how practitioners construct a continuity between the present and the future (Garud et al., 2014; Flammer and Bansal, 2017; Augustine et al., 2019). This stream of literature illustrates diverse perspectives such as wayfinding, foreseeing, and perfect future making with regard to how practitioners perceive the future (Tsoukas and Shepherd, 2004a, 2004b; Chia and Holt, 2006, 2009; Comi and Whyte, 2018). Given the uncertain and ambiguous nature of future goals, it is not clear how to orient people’s present actions toward these goals.

For instance, village revitalization is an ongoing social change movement in China with an aim to reduce the income disparity and social inequality between the urban and rural area, bringing prosperity to the millions of vacant villages with marginalized groups of women, children, and the elderly. This is a typical future goal, as the involved grand challenges are abstract; hard to define, delineate, and operate; and seek long-term, systemic solutions. “It might remain as a dream as all the talented people in the villages have been relocated to the cities” (quotation from Zhanwu Guo, Yuan village). Given the general public are mostly short-termism, how can they be motivated to take present actions to pursue abstract sustainable development goals if they are not yet aware of what these goals look like? To bring a dream to reality, practitioners may use analogies and metaphors to

legitimate their ideas and frame opportunities about the future (Cornelissen and Clarke, 2010; Augustine et al., 2019) and leverage certain mechanisms to foster present actions toward the future goals.

This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the underpinning concretization mechanism that helps to generate concreteness and credibility of the abstract future goals to generate “as-if” realities, which mobilizes present course of actions. According to the construal-level theory (Liberman and Trope, 1998; Augustine et al., 2019, p. 1935), “when abstract futures become represented through increasingly concrete and detailed concepts, they will be seen as nearer and hence more actionable.” The concreteness of a future goal enhances with a closer association with experiential reality. Such a cognitively transformation of an abstract future goal may generate “as-if” realities to a great extent that eventually triggers course-making. Course-making is distinctive from sensemaking or cognition, as it is about being and doing, seeks behavioral changes of the practitioners, making them walking the talks, and taking a more active present stance that goes beyond discourse, learning, or capacity building to take present actions. I ask, how does concretization mechanism influence the transition pathways for practitioners to take present course of actions for the future?

To address this question, I used an inductive approach and followed a process research exemplified by Langley (1999) to trace the revitalization effort of a pioneering village named Yuan in Shaanxi Province of China. The practitioners successfully mobilized the villagers’ present course of actions to pursue food safety goal, leveraging rural eco-tourism to bring prosperity to community members. Food safety is an abstract future goal, as related

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problems, characterized by ambiguity and uncertainty, are deeply rooted in social, policy, and market systems, extending beyond a single party's existing knowledge and experience. To bring such a future goal to reality needs certain concretization mechanism that gives concrete meaning to the abstract future, turning imaginings into a realizable course of action.

Building on Yuan village's pursuit of food safety future goals, I inductively reveal roleplaying as a concretization mechanism that mobilizes present course of actions. Roleplaying refers to the practitioners' acting out as safe food producers and position themselves in the ideal future state to generate "as-if" realities; then working backward to fill the gap with discursive practices, capacity building, and present actions. These findings advance the organizing for the future literature by shifting attention from the cognitive work, by which practitioners make sense of the future to the practical work related to the practitioners' course-making. Given that most future goals are complex and grand-scale challenges, to effectively engage practitioners to pursue these future goals have significant policy and practical implications.

## Theoretical background

### *Organizing for the future*

Organizing for the future literature cognitively articulates an imagined future that have implications toward present action or choices (Pitsis et al., 2003). These studies discuss wayfinding, foreseeing, and future perfect thinking perspectives through which practitioners perceive the future (Comi and Whyte, 2018). They differ as to their mode in navigation through the uncertainties of the future, their emphasis on the present and past, whether having a passive or active attitude, taking indirect or direct action, or adopting a building or a dwelling mode (Tsoukas and Shepherd, 2004a, 2004b; Chia and Holt, 2006, 2009; Comi and Whyte, 2018). Specifically, *wayfinding* focuses on spontaneous actions and allows for a more experiential awareness of practitioners' struggles with the uncertainties posed by the future (Chia and Holt, 2006, 2009; Nayak and Chia, 2011; Sarpong et al., 2013). In contrast, *foreseeing* "emphasize cognition, deliberation and purposeful action as the primary (if not the only) ways of dealing with the future" (Comi and Whyte, 2018, p. 1058). It highlights a pragmatist perspective, an active present focus which is realized by engaging in discursive practices and organizational learning (Berends and Antonacopoulou, 2014) with prospective and retrospective sensemaking (Weick et al., 2005).

Related to foreseeing, a few active foresight research emerged in the 1960s to guide business planning, forecasting (Godet and Roubelat, 1996), and strategic decision-making (Miller and Waller, 2003), which include scenarios (Wright, 2005), simulation, and roleplaying games (Linstone and Turoff, 1975). Scenarios can be viewed as prospective sensemaking devices to see "multiple plausible alternatives constructed as narratives with the aim of providing frameworks within which assumptions and key decisions can be wind funneled" (Wright, 2005, p. 87). Roleplaying games are constrained

to the realm of imagination and use perspective-taking to foresee the outcome of conflicting interactions (Armstrong, 2001; Green, 2002), thus enabling a more nuanced understanding of the complex processes unfolded in the future that empowers social interaction (Orazi and Cruz, 2018).

Contrary to foresight research, future perfect thinking scholars take similar active stance toward the future, but instead of navigating forward as foreseeing, it navigates backward from the ideal future state and brings the imaginings of the future into the present (Comi and Whyte, 2018). Drawing on the early work of Schütz (1967) and Weick (1979), this perspective "projects an ideal state of things and works out retrospectively the paths that may lead to such future" (Comi and Whyte, 2018, p. 1057). In line with this perspective, backcasting is a future planning approach proposed by Robinson (1990) to set a desirable future using normative visioning) and then work backward to identify what measures or actions are required to achieve the end goal (Timilsina et al., 2020). These perspectives and approaches recognize the importance of creating a desired state in the future that gives meaning to the present action. Yet, they did not explain how these aspects can inspire a realizable present course of action to make the future into being.

### *Concretization of the future and as-if realities*

Temporal construal-level theory (Lieberman and Trope, 1998; Trope and Liberman, 2003; Berntsen and Bohn, 2010) suggests that futures that are represented as more psychologically near are construed in more concrete terms, using more detailed situational features, while distant futures are construed in more abstract terms, using more stylized essential features of a situation (Lieberman and Trope, 1998; Trope and Liberman, 2003; Berntsen and Bohn, 2010). Augustine et al. (2019, p. 1934) adopted this theory to distinguish the distant future and near future, which has implications toward the present actions. This perspective posits that the more distant a future event, the more likely it is construed on a higher level by using more abstract features, that it is linked to the belief systems, and evaluated on their desirability; in contrast, futures that are represented as more psychologically near are construed in more concrete terms, used more detailed situational features, and are evaluated on their feasibility (Lieberman and Trope, 1998; Trope and Liberman, 2003; Berntsen and Bohn, 2010; Augustine et al., 2019). Distant futures in general do not guide behavior very well, as it generates less urgency toward action (and instead engender more procrastination; Augustine et al., 2019).

To guide present course of actions, the practitioners need to move the distant future nearer to incentivize present actions. The enabling of this transitional process requires a certain concretization mechanism that helps to make the abstract future goals more actionable and credible, creating a closer association with the experiential reality. Such concretization mechanism helps to generate "as-if" realities, so that the practitioners can take the future seriously enough to consider its possible consequences including perceived benefits and the human



**Table 1. The information of interviewee**

No.	Basic Information	No.	Basic Information	No.	Basic Information
1	Village committee, Male, Zhanwu Guo, Village Chief	22	Neighboring merchant, Male, Sheep Blood Soup, Shop-owner, Mr. Lv	43	Tofu Workshop Cooperative, President, Male, Mr. Lu
2	Village committee, Male, Wang, Village Chief	23	Neighboring merchant, Female, Transfer store, Shop-owner, Ms. Zhang	44	Noodles Workshop Cooperative, President, Female, Ms. Ma
3	Village committee, Male, Guo, Deputy Village Chief	24	Neighboring merchant, Male, Youtuotuo store, Shop-owner, Mr. Yuan	45	Oil Workshop Cooperative, President, Female, Ms. Ma
4	Village committee, Male, Yuan, Deputy Village Chief	25	Neighboring merchant, Male, Wonton shop, Shop-owner, Mr. Wang	46	Investor, the investor of the Hui street, Lei
5	Village committee, Male, Director Zhang	26	Neighboring merchant, Male, Jellied beancurd shop, Shop-owner, Mr. Cao	47	Investor, the President of the Bar Street, Zhang
6	Farmer school lecturer, Male, Zai	27	Neighboring merchant, Male, Baked Noodle Shop, Shop-owner, Mr. Zhao	48	Investor, the President of the Book Street, Hu
7	Village committee, Female, Ms. Alan	28	Neighboring merchant, Female, Steamed bread shop, Ms. Dong	49	Media, Shaanxi Television Station, Reporter Wang
8	Village committee, Female, Accountant Zheng	29	Neighboring merchant, Male, Fermented glutinous rice wine shop, Technician, Mr. Zhang	50	Media, Beijing Youth Daily, Reporter Liu
9	Village committee, Male, Song, Village Chief	30	Neighboring merchant, Female, Steamed bread with bean curd shop, Shop-owner, Ms. Zhu	51	Media, Xi'an food Blogger, Wenwen
10	Villager, Male, Agritainment 11, Uncle Wang	31	Neighboring merchant, Female, Manual rubbing food store, Shop-owner, Ms. Yuan	52	Media, the WeChat Subscription of Yuan Village, Che
11	Villager, Female, Agritainment, Aunt Zhang	32	Neighboring merchant, Male, Fuzi Store, Shop-owner, Mr. Yuan	53	Media, Xianyang Daily, Reporter Li
12	Villager, Male, Agritainment 45, Uncle Luo	33	Neighboring merchant, Male, Laodingjia cured beef, Mr. Ding	54	Government, Liquan County Government, County Magistrate, Yu
13	Villager, Male, Agritainment 88, Mr. Wang	34	Neighboring merchant, Female, Stew shop, Shop-owner, Ms. Li	55	Government, Liquan food and Drug Administration, Director Zhang
14	Villager, Male, Agritainment Liju, Mr. Zhang	35	Neighboring merchant, Male, Minced pork noodles, Shop-owner, Uncle Wei	56	Government, Liquan County Transportation Bureau, Director Liu
15	Villager, Male, Agritainment Qiutian, Mr. Zhang	36	Neighboring merchant, Male, Cold Rice Noodles Shop, Shop-owner, Mr. Zhang	57	Government, Yanxia Town, Township Head, Yuan
16	Surrounding Villagers, Female, Spice workshop cooperative, Worker, Ms. Sun	37	Cooperative Association, President, Male, Mr. Yang	58	Government, Yanxia Town, Director Guo
17	Surrounding Villagers, Female, Silky noodles, Worker, Ms. Miao	38	Vinegar Workshop Cooperative, President, Male, Mr. Guo	59	Plumber, Mr. Du
18	Surrounding Villagers, Female, Stew shop, Worker, Ms. Zhang	39	Spice workshop cooperative, President, Female, Ms. Wang	60	Consumer, Liquan, Mr. Sun
19	Surrounding Villagers, Male, Potato rubbing shop, Worker, Mr. Wang	40	Noodle workshop cooperative, President, Male, Mr. Wang	61	Consumer, Xianyang, Ms. Wang
20	Surrounding Villagers, Male, Dried persimmon shop, Worker, Mr. Yang	41	Yogurt workshop cooperative, President, Male, Mr. He	62	Consumer, Taiyuan, Ms. Li
21	Surrounding Villagers, Female, Yogurt workshop, Worker, Ms. Liu	42	Fermented Glutinous Rice Wine Workshop Cooperative, President, Male, Mr. Yuan	63	Xian Jiaotong University, Professor, Ms. Li



**Table 2. Timeline of Yuan village's pursuit of food safety**

Year	Event	Food Safety as a Future Goal	Gap Filling via Action	Recognition	Tourists Received
<b>Stage 1: Farmhouse Hostel Run by the Villagers (2007–2008)—Food Safety as an Opportunity and a Direction</b>					
2007	Establishes Local Folklore Life Experience Base	The village was aware of the importance of food safety, setting it as their goal and direction. The village used food safety as its brand and explained to the public that Yuan village was not pursuing organic, green food, but rather original food.	Built food workshops to produce original tofu, spice, oil, and other food ingredients. Arranged a demonstration of the traditional way of making pepper, vinegar, and handmade noodles. Sold safe ingredients to the tourists and village farmhouse hostels. Sent villagers to study in five provinces.		30,000
2008					100,000
<b>Stage 2: Incubate External Merchants at Snack Street (2009–2011)—Food Safety as a Business Brand</b>					
2009	"Snack Food Street" opened for business.	Proposed a slogan "Farmers Defend Food Safety" requesting merchants to use original food ingredients and demonstrate transparent food processing to the tourists.	Built a debugging team to check food quality and ingredients. Every food item needs to extract the most original taste from the original food ingredients. Merchants were not allowed to use additives in food processing and were asked to throw away leftover food items.	Provincial Cultural Industry Demonstration Site Eco-village	500,000
2010	First food workshop transformed into a cooperative.			National 3A Level Scenic Spot	800,000
2011				Charming Leisure Village	1.2 million
<b>Stage 3: Food Safety as a Business Brand, Transparent Food Processing and Monitoring (2012–2014)</b>					
2012	Experimented a shareholding system. Bar street opened.	The village confronted doubts and questions from the public about their food safety.	Merchants pasted self-cursing notes in storefront to demonstrate the authenticity of food ingredients. Arranged a shop in front and processing in back to earn trust of food safety from the tourists.	National Ecological Demonstration Village; hosted the first rock festival.	1.8 million
2013			Established a Farmers' school	Village with Characteristic Landscape	2.6 million
2014	Art corridor and art gallery opened.			National 4A Level Scenic Spot; Top Ten Prosperous Villages	3.5 million

#### Stage 4: Food Safety as a Lifeline—Fostering Collective Interest and Action (2015–2017)

2015 Shareholding system expanded to the “Snack Food Street.”  
 Opened two more streets, a resort hotel, and the first city store.

Confronted competition from the other villages that replicated their “food safety” models.  
 With time, the copied villages failed as they merely used food safety as sales gimmick.  
 Sold safe ingredients and snacks produced in Yuan village.

National Rural Tourism Innovation Demonstration Base

4.5 million

The village was capable of handling food safety within the village boundary. The most critical stage of food safety was processing. The village made sure to use the most original food ingredients and not to add any additives in food processing.

The village established night school for the external merchants to reflect the incubational support from the village and made them allow the original villagers to obtain shares from the most lucrative Snack Food street. This helped to build a community of interest in taking food safety as the lifeblood of the village.

2016 Expanded impacts to other regions

Villagers studied tourism in Japan.

National Ecological Cultural Village

5 million

Hosted the National Rural Tourism Summit Forum.

2017 Collaborated with six provinces.

Set up Village Revitalization training programs and rural reform pilot schemes

Two TV programs featured the village

5.5 million

#### Stage 5: Closing the Loop—Formalizing Food Safety Standard and Governance (2018 till now)

2018–2022 The original two business streets expanded to nine streets. Built 17 experience city stores in total.

Food safety had always been the direction. This direction got clearer along the road. The village hoped to scale up and leverage its food safety brand and competency to become a national hub that offered safe agricultural and sideline food items. It aimed to close loop and closely monitor food safety and quality.

Scaled up business scope to transform traditional food workshops into processing plants. Assigned managers to be in charge of food safety and quality. Recruited national procurement bases and developed long-term collaboration;

National Rural Governance Demonstration Village; National Civilized Villages; Top Ten Influential Tourist Areas; Innovation Models; 4 National TV stations featured the village.

5.8–6 million

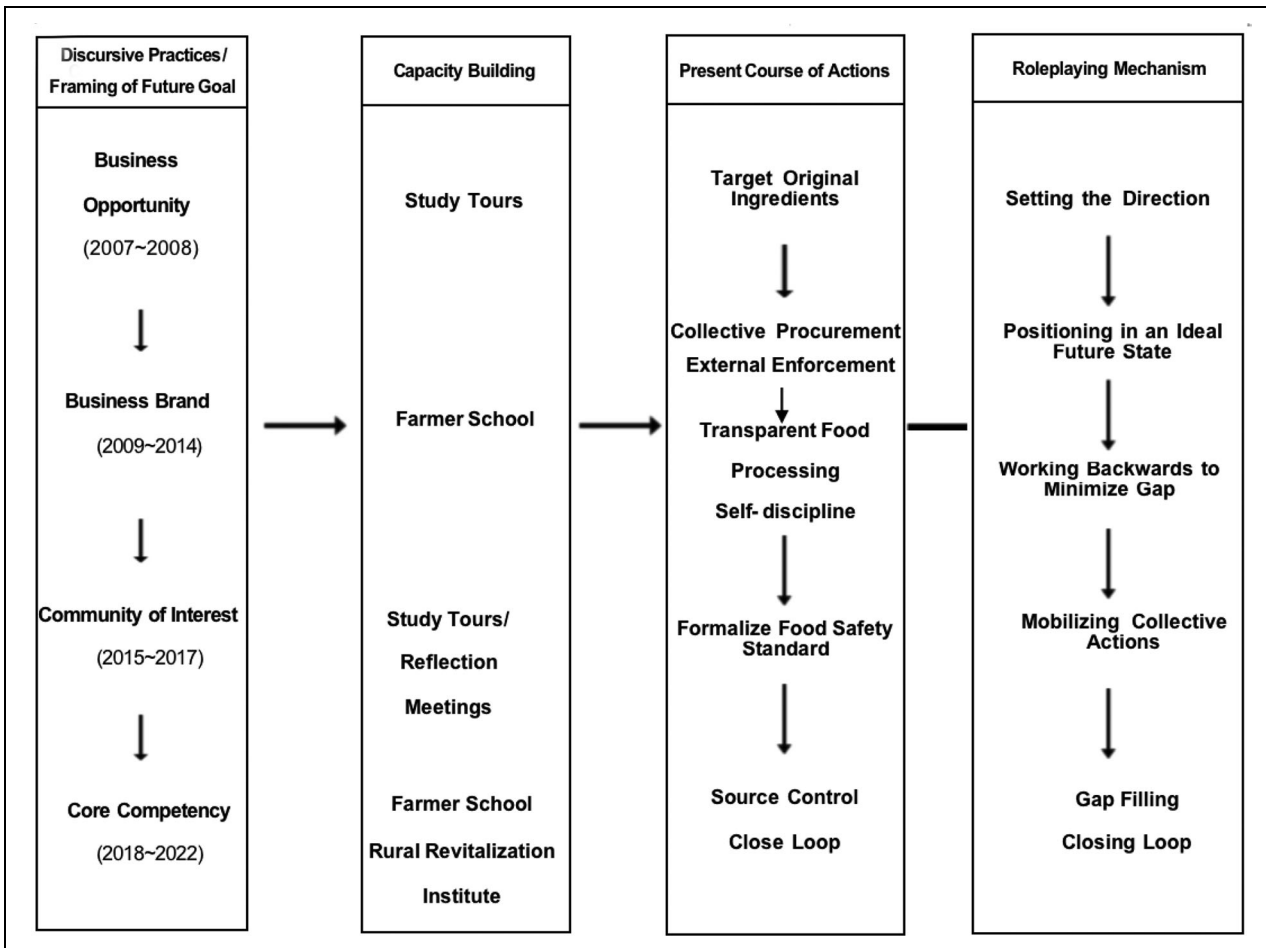
Village Starbucks opened; Hosted Street Art Festival.

Developed food standards at the provincial level.

Opened a night school to train villagers and merchants;

Opened a Rural Revitalization Institute to train visitors that came to study the village’s experiences;

Hosted the First China Rural Revitalization Congress.



**Figure 1. A process model for roleplaying as a concretization mechanism.**

for their own consumption while selling unsafe or lesser quality goods to strangers in the market (Xu et al., 2013). How to cultivate and prepare safe food to tourists became a big challenge. *Zhanwu* took the villagers on field study trips to neighboring provinces and acquired experts' opinions. During these trips, he became aware of his village's unique farmer-centered folk culture, which was appealing to urban residents who had nostalgic memories of traditional village life. It was under this context that "food safety" became the village's important future goal and development direction. Together, these presented a great entrepreneurial opportunity in rural tourism for the village to offer healthy and safe produce, authentic traditional snacks, and original cultural experiences to tourists.

To start with this big goal, the village mobilized five of the 62 households to renovate their homes for use as farmhouse hostels and to organize a farming culture exhibition in the old street. They also built a food workshop street, providing a demonstration of traditional way of making spice, vinegar, handmade noodles, tofu, and other food ingredients. They aimed to create a live agricultural museum with a demonstration of their traditional livelihood. They used "food safety" to promote their rural tourism. In responding to doubts and critiques from the tourists, the practitioners explained that the village was not pursuing organic, or green,

but rather original food. The village received 30,000 tourists during the first year in operation. The success encouraged more village households to join forces.

**Stage 2: Opening a snack street to invite and incubate external merchants (2009–2011)**

In China, many local-villager-led, small-scale rural farmhouse tourism was short-lived and unsustainable due to hostile competition and low-end homogenization. The village made a smart move in 2009 to open a Snack Food Street, providing free store spaces to invite skillful external merchants to incubate varieties of original food and snacks at the village. Free rent and initial salaries motivated the merchants to relocate to the village when it had no name. They run their food businesses without pressure, focusing on enhancing food quality and taste. Realizing that "food safety" made their village unique and attractive, the village hanged a ceremonial plaque proclaiming "Yuan Village Resolutely Defends Food Safety" at the entrance to the village to demonstrate their commitment. While this sign could be symbolic, the village backed it up with a relatively strict enforcement of food safety, which included a collective procurement scheme, requiring all the merchants to buy ingredients from village food workshops and had scrutiny over food ingredients purchased outside the village. They formed a debugging team to taste all





students who came to study the experience of Yuan village.

In summary, the village's rural tourism business expanded steadily across five stages: inviting external merchants to open a snack street, turning successful incubated businesses into food cooperatives, using shareholding system to expand successful businesses and reconcile divergent interests, and adopting a "Reaching Out" strategy to expand business to the city and other provinces. With these expansions, the village continually scaled up by building on food safety brand and core competency.

**Finding 2: Roleplaying as a concretization mechanism —Transitioning food safety future goals into present actions**

The study reveals roleplaying as a concretization mechanism that enables the transition of abstract future goals into present course of actions. **Figure 1** illustrates this transition process, explaining how an abstract future is framed as a direction and a business opportunity to start, then gradually converted into a business brand and core competency. In the process, practitioners may position themselves in the ideal future state, acting as if the goal of food safety were a reality ("as-if" reality), then working backward to fill the gap between the present and the future via discursive practices (to reconcile critiques), capacity building, and present actions. **Table 3** illustrates the detailed three-step coding approach that arrives at the theoretical elements in the process model.

**1. Future positioning —A concretization process: From vagueness to concreteness**

*Frame future as an opportunity.* The data reveal that the starting point to turn a future goal into a present course of action relates to how the practitioners "frame" or "position" the future. A future goal will no longer be abstract and vague when it can be framed as an "opportunity." The interviewees were aware of the unique branding value of the village being set up as a model of food safety. "When everyone feels that food is not safe, the pursuit of food safety becomes promising" (*Zhanwu*). The study reveals the shifts of future framing across five stages, from vagueness to concreteness. "At the beginning, we took food safety as our goal and direction, but we did not have a clear idea how to go for it. Given more time, we started to have a better understanding how to actually achieve the goal." Roleplaying enables the practitioners to obtain the value of the future goals upfront. Along the process, their framing of the future goal shifts from a vague direction to a concrete opportunity, continually converting the future goal into a business brand and core competency.

*Generating "as-if" reality.* The village had achieved a basic level of food safety at the beginning, which was a procurement control of food ingredients and transparent food processing. Yet, hanging a ceremonial "food safety" plaque at the entrance had positioned the village in the ideal future state before it had achieved this advanced level goal. Doing so enabled the practitioners to create an

"as-if" reality of food safety, making themselves believe the goal was achievable, and making customers trust the safety of village's food, which greatly boosted sales. "As-if" reality means the practitioners look as if they have reached the ideal state, yet there is a gap between the future and the present status.

**2. Backup gap-filling practices**

Backup gap-filling practices involve a full set of linguistic discursive practices, directional discursive practices, capacity building, and present actions. First of all, the village adopted roleplaying—faked it before they made it, using linguistic discursive practices to reconcile skepticism, critiques, and raise awareness. The detailed schemes include the following:

- (1) *Framing future as a direction, opportunity, and achievable target to link an abstract future to reality.* The village recognized that the accomplishment of food safety was a long-term plan. It was a public good, which was beyond the capacity of the village. "While we have not realized food safety, our dream is to engage in it. We ultimately want to control our production and processing in a way to achieve food safety. This is our ultimate purpose."
- (2) *Gap recognition.* Our research team questioned the village's acting out on an ideal state of food safety before it had actually achieved the target. In response, the interviewees were quite authentic about their status, admitted that food safety might remain as a dream as the village did not have the professional knowledge and capacity at this stage. "Food safety is a complex problem, and not a single village can handle it yet." "Farmers, as the main body of this business, do not have this kind of professionalism." "At this stage, we cannot control whether the wheat or vegetable is organic. It is important for my generation to resolve the source control of food safety. Yet . . . We may not be able to break through the food safety problem eventually."
- (3) *Authentic and realistic about status.* When questioned by the researchers about the village's food safety status, the food cooperative merchants were quite authentic about their status in food safety. "We did not strictly control food safety. We only controlled ingredients by requesting the merchants to buy them from the village food workshops. For other food items we did not specify which store the merchants need to go to. We asked the merchants to keep the invoices so that we could source the problem in case some issues occurred." "Merchants were not allowed to add food additives. They don't have the intention to harm tourists." "What we can promise now and what we can achieve at this point is: There will be no toxic or unhealthy ingredients in oil, peppers, and flour, etc. Anyway, do not have too high an expectation on us. At this stage we have to be realistic."
- (4) *Redefine the future goal to minimize the gap between reality and the future target.* I noted that

**Table 3. Representative coding**

Aggregate Dimension	Second Order Themes	First Order Categories	Quotation
Future framing	Future goal Food safety	Dream	“The accomplishment of food safety may take ten or twenty more years. It is a question of ability. That is why I said that food safety is a dream for us now, or a long-term plan for us. Yet, we ultimately want to control our production and processing in a way to achieve food safety. Therefore, we set food safety as our goal.” ( <i>Zhanwu</i> )
		Goal	
		Direction	
	Positioning in the Ideal Future State	Opportunity Core competency Branding	“We put up a slogan ‘Farmers Resolutely Defend Food Safety’ in 2009. This is a direction and goal of our village.” ( <i>Chuangzhan-Village Chief</i> )
			“When everyone feels that food is not safe, the pursuit of food safety becomes promising.” ( <i>Zhanwu</i> )
			“The biggest problem that Yuan village resolves is food safety, Our core competitiveness is that we did not use food additives. I am mobilizing the farmers to get rich together through this food safety brand, through this slogan. This is the core of Yuan village. We want everyone and the market to know about it.” ( <i>Song</i> )
Discursive practices	Discursive practices: Linguistic	“With the accumulated success led by Zhanwu, I start to realize the unique value of Yuan village. Our business model is unique and hard to be replicated. I start to realize that what we have achieved is beyond a successful business model. We resolve rural poverty problems with an aim to realize common prosperity.” ( <i>Zai-Lecturer</i> )	
		Recognize gap	“Yes, food safety is what we claim and what we do. Absolutely source control for food safety is impossible in China now, no one in China can do it yet. We are closer, and our goal is to make it happen.” ( <i>Zhanwu</i> )
		“Food safety is a complex issue. Farmers, as the main body of this business, do not have this kind of professionalism. They basically don’t have much knowledge, or only have very primitive common sense, such as how to wash hands, wear a mask.” ( <i>Yuan-Deputy Village Chief</i> )	
		Open for critique	Zhanwu Guo and the merchants were open for critiques. “You are not provoking by saying ‘food safety as a marketing scheme in the village sounds like green washing’. It is good that you point out the areas that the village can improve in the future.” ( <i>Zai-Lecturer</i> )
	Discursive practices: Directional	Realistic on gap	“What we can promise now and what we can achieve at this point is: there will be no toxic or unhealthy ingredients in oil, peppers, and flour, etc. Anyway, do not have too high an expectation for us.” ( <i>Hongjiang Guo</i> )
		Goal to action	Yuan Village’s slogan “Farmers to Defend Food Safety” is a kind of marketing. “We are telling the tourists that it is safe to eat our food. We also want to use the slogan to mobilize the merchants to act on it, to realize the importance of food safety, which is the foundation of our business.” ( <i>Hongjiang Guo</i> )
		Authenticity	“There are 100% no fake products in Yuan village. There is no market for counterfeits. We use real material; the price is higher and customers can accept it.” ( <i>Merchant A</i> )
		Awareness/ consensus building	“We are relatively better at building a consensus of food safety. More people feel that it is a marketing method, and a slogan. We need time to mobilize actions. When I first started to call for food safety, persuading farmers to defend food safety, it seemed that everyone thought this was a slogan, tourists also thought this was a slogan. But our efforts over the past six years make everyone believes that (the food in) Yuan village is safe. Our merchants are honest and did not add any harmful food additives. The market gradually recognizes it.” ( <i>Zhanwu</i> )
Road map to source control	“We will have a primary production base in a year or two, and we plan to cooperate with an agricultural corporation to test the soil, to provide varieties of seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, etc. and to cooperate with farmers in other counties. This is our thought.” ( <i>Zhanwu</i> )		
“Today, we communicated with our city leaders, and asked if Yuan Village could have a production base. This is our next step and ultimate purpose. We are not there yet.” ( <i>Zhanwu</i> )			

(continued)

**Table 3.** (continued)

Aggregate Dimension	Second Order Themes	First Order Categories	Quotation
Capacity building	Capacity building	Learning	<p>“It is our goal for farmers to defend food safety, and we want to do this well within our capabilities. We want to explore some better practices through our classroom to guide us to the next step to achieve the goal of ‘Farmers to Defend Food Safety.’” (<i>Zhanwu</i>)</p> <p>“We use integrity to control our food processing.” (<i>Helin</i>)</p> <p>“These merchants had not been easy. We would not replace them unless they have dishonesty problems. We used educational methods to let them keep up. That is why we have farmer schools and business meetings.” (<i>Helin</i>)</p>
		Collective procurement	<p>“At first, I was selling noodles here, and then the village mentioned food safety, it was a new thing, they had strict requirements, asking us to buy ingredients at the village’s own Food Workshop Street.” (<i>Merchant Deng</i>)</p> <p>“I am responsible for food safety in snack street. First, most raw materials are purchased from the food workshops” at the village. We promise to tourists that our food won’t add any additives, soybeans, and rapeseed.” “For some items we don’t specify which store the merchants should shop at, but we request them to keep the invoice for future investigation, had any food related bad incidents occurred.” (<i>Yuan-Deputy Village Chief</i>)</p>
Present course of actions	Source control	Designated agricultural bases	<p>“We have designated suppliers for external procurement, which can ensure the basic safety of the ingredients. We paid higher price for better quality of goods. For instance, the purchasing price of wheat is 2 to 3 cents higher than the market price. We must buy good wheat, because we don’t add any additives, and you can’t get good flour if you don’t get good wheat. For vegetable and meat, we have three designated stores.” (<i>Hongjiang Guo</i>)</p>
		External enforcement	<p>“After the establishment of the Snack Street, city people came to our village to eat authentic Shaanxi snacks, reflecting on the taste of childhood or the taste of Grandma’s house. To ensure food safety, the village has a debugging team for routine inspection. I also have to do daily checkup for these stores. Every morning, for example, they open at eight o’clock, and I check them at half past ten. The debugging team is jointly managed by the association and the street chief. The debugging team is formed with skillful merchants with is relatively good business operation. The team came to check your food color, taste, operation speed, service, quantity, and temperature, and help the store make further improvement.” (<i>Hongjiang Guo</i>)</p>
	Self-commit	<p>Merchants would voluntarily identify trust-worthy food sources and paste supplier information on storefront.</p>	
	Transparent processing	<p>The village had a demonstration of traditional way of making pepper, vinegar, handmade noodles, using food processing demonstration to build trust with the tourists.</p>	
	Quality control	<p>“The noodle I made has special features, all hand made with good craftsmanship. When the food shops are not doing well, new businesses could be introduced to replace the old ones by a competition. There are a few merchants left the village because of food safety problems, may be raw material problem, or the craftsmanship is not good.” (<i>Merchant Ma</i>)</p>	
	Standard	<p>With the village’s development of nation-wide production and processing bases, it starts to develop some food standards at the provincial level to monitor food quality.</p>	

in public occasions, the village chief redefined the future goals of food safety to minimize the gap between an ideal future state and the reality. “In Yuan village, we do not declare that our food is organic, nor do we say that it is green. We can only promise that our food is original. Our farmers are very honest and down to earth. We want to present the most original taste of the local food and snacks. For that goal, we need to get the most original and

good quality ingredients, and process them without adding new (chemical/toxic) additives.” Through linguistic usage, he frequently used “original” to illustrate food safety, swap concepts, moving the target closer to minimize the future-reality gap.

*Discursive practices—Directional practices.* Discursive practices in this case can also be demonstrated by some







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