

## Narrative and Leadership

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My use of the expression, “narrative leadership,” is not to explore the vast knowledge base regarding leadership but to reference an underlying notion that leaders use narrative in their practice of leadership. Though “narrative leadership” is used in current leadership and organizational vernacular, an extensive review of the critical literature found limited instance of the expression. This sparseness of use is also reflected in its definition. Fleming (2001) who may have been earliest in its use provided no succinct definition except to say that narrative equips leaders in their sensemaking role. He held sensemaking as the ability to question an outdated interpretive scheme while providing a new alternative. Key to this is the leader’s ability to tell stories. Taking an altogether different tack from Fleming yet still grounded in the emotive nature of the leader’s speech, Gahmberg (2002) interpreted narrative leadership differently. He viewed narrative leadership as an analysis of the leader’s emotions, “particularly the dimension of enunciation” (p. 1).

To determine the non-critical use and possible definition of the term in current vernacular, the course offerings of various educational institutions and consulting firms in the USA and UK were surveyed. These produced a somewhat unified description. Among them is that of Wales (2008) where narrative leadership is “storytelling as a change management technology and a tool for engaging others.” Cass (2008) described narrative leadership as using the “power of story for organizational and personal change.” Similarly, Hartford (2008) as well as Alban (2008) held it to be the use of “narrative for personal and organizational change” while Denning (2008), a popular business consultant and author in narrative, seems to take pains to not use the two words, narrative and leadership, as a conjoined expression. In an instance of his doing so, it refers to techniques that “use well-targeted and well-deployed emotion to stimulate self-motivated, coordinated action” (p. 1).

It is possible if not likely that the term emerged from other appreciative forms of leadership, particularly transformational leadership (Burns, 1978) and strategic leadership (Hunt, 1991). While this is not clear it is nonetheless telling that common to each is the idea of talking with people about the organization’s future (Boal & Schultz, 2007) and what their individual futures may look like (Driscoll & McKee, 2006). In this vein Boje (2005) appears to have provided the critical definition to which Fleming alluded and the various course offerings appealed. He stated,

The role of a narrative leader is to facilitate the transformation of one way of narrating the corporation to another, in this case from epic to novelistic. In terms of narrative strategy this is a transformation to more novelistic or polyphonic narration. It is also a means of reformulating meanings and changing organizational cultures and transmitting tacit norms. (p. 101)

In this understanding, narrative leadership assumes that to make sense of their worlds people and their organizations rely upon story (Allan, Fairtlough & Heinzen, 2002; Boje, 1991; Brockmeier &

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Narrative and Leadership 2

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Harre, 2001; Owen, 1999). Thereby a another form of leadership emerges, one where a person's storied connections are prized and developed (Boje, 2005).

## Narrative Concordance

To lead narratively, then, is to relate to people not merely with intention but with presence. This presence listens as well as leads, is sensitive as well as strategic, and manifests a commitment to the welfare of persons equal to that shown the organization (Cuno, 2005; Denning, 2007; Gardner, 1995). Denning refers to this as having "narrative intelligence" (p. 111) and defined it as the ability to appreciate narrative's presence in all aspects of life as well as understanding that by it people express themselves and their worlds. Leading in this way demands concordance between the story leaders tell members and that they live (Sparrowe, 2005), a story written first in our own narrative self.

The narrative self is defined by Schectman (1996) as the perception of ourselves as subject who having "had experience in the past... will continue to have experience in the future" (p. 94). By taking certain of those experiences as ours we organize them according to an understood or "implicit narrative" (p. 114) that in turn becomes the story whereby our life is codified and its legitimacy affirmed. In expanding the thought, Sparrowe (2005) posited the narrative self as neither consistent nor continuous, but achieving concordance as experience is emplotted "in the form of a story-like account" (p. 426). In this way the self is a product not of contingency but of explanation where segments are then "bound into larger story lines that are configured in relation to beginning, middle, and end" (p. 427). What results is an integrated self wherein the disunity of life is given a unified whole and a constant self where the subject is vouchsafed as the same throughout the range of experience.

For Sparrowe (2005), the integrated self bespeaks of personal character while sameness the quality of self-constancy. As character represents what is enduring (p. 427) and thus tends to be prized, Sparrowe urged equal weight be given to self-constancy. In support of this point he cited Ricoeur (1992) who stated,

Self-constancy is for each person that manner of conducting himself or herself so that others can count on that person. Because someone is counting on me, I am accountable for my actions before another. The term "responsibility" unites both meanings: "counting on" and being "accountable for." It unites them, adding to them the idea of a response to the question "Where are you?" asked by another who needs me. This response is the following: "Here I am!" a response that is a statement of self-constancy. (p. 430)

In this light character is the content of the narrative self while constancy that of its location or as Sparrowe (2005) had it, character answers the question we ask ourselves of "what am I?" but self-constancy answers that asked by others of "where are you?" (p. 430). Concordance, then, is achieved as character and constancy are held in the story of our life. In this way the enduring element of character by which we identify a person as well as the values that reveal constancy "are disclosed in relation to the changing events of a narrative life" (p. 431). What Sparrowe

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Narrative and  
Leadership 3

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(2005) called concordance Gardner (2006) called resonance and moved the discussion from the leader's inner story to that which is told.

"To change minds effectively," said Gardner (2006), "leaders use the stories that they tell and the lives they lead" (p. 69). In a review of world leaders, he presented Margaret Thatcher as example of this point. Noting that Thatcher's story was simple: "Britain had once been a great nation; it had lost its way in recent decades; but it was possible for Britain to recover its genius" (p. 72), he found that her appeal among the citizens of Britain was enhanced and her story made credible by the facts of her life. These include "her modest origins, her self-reliance, and her bravery" and subsequent rise to hold the highest elected office in Britain. Though the same elements are in the stories of millions, the point of distinction for Gardner is that Thatcher's interior resonance from living the story she told was heard by those she sought to influence and interpreted as the proposed change is both possible and desirable. Though writing from a strategic leader process, Boal and Schultz (2007) appear to underscore Gardner's point when they stated,

A strategic leader's own life story enters the vision formation process along with the life story of the organization itself and its members. The requirement for coherence in both organizational and leader life stories means that a strategic leader imparts much of their own meaning and sense making on the organization: actions and events are interpreted through the lenses of thematic and causal coherence in the context of the histories of both the organization and the strategic leader. (p. 423)

This likewise comports with the findings of Fairhurst (2007) who held that "the most legitimate and convincing means by which leaders convey their authenticity is through their life stories" (p. 127). The call is for concordance in the narrative leader, to align the story we tell with the story of our life. It holds then that if one would lead by becoming involved in the stories that constitute persons, an appreciation of narrative's constructive and defining ability (Latour, 1996; Winslade & Monk, 2001) must be apprehended. It likewise holds that the narrative leader will be required to discern more than his or her story but that of those they attempt to serve.

## Narrative, Story, and Stories

The terms, "story," "narrative," "discourse," and "culture," while not synonymous in the discussion of story and people, appear to be similarly referent. However, this reference is generally kept to the domains explicated by Fairhurst (2007), that is, the everyday walk-about variety of interaction between people and the larger, human-wide domain. In this larger domain are the stories of "lore" (Ammerman, 2001, p. 61) that, depending upon perspective and use, will become narrative, discourse, or cultures while those within everyday interaction are the stories of conversation. These are the stories of moments but with less breadth and lacking the consensus that what is being told is defining for all. Neither retained by memory nor viewed as enduring they pass into what was just another day.

Discerning the story of a people is to recognize the difference between the structuring stories of lore (Winslade & Monk, 2001; Young & Saver, 2001) and the reporting stories of conversation.

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Narrative and Leadership 4

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Thinking of the story of Jack and the Bean Stock compared to the story of a vacation can give some perspective. While the former speaks to a cultural value (structuring) the latter simply relates personal activity (moments). The stories of lore are, in the words of Boje (2001), the “antenarrative” that precedes formal codification as operable narrative, the “collective memory before it becomes reified into the consensual narrative” (p. 4). This seems in line with the “folklore” of Gabriel (2000) and his definition of the term as cultural practices that are symbolic, emergent rather than imposed or coerced, and emulated becoming a tradition (p. 24). So although the tales of lore and those of conversation are stories, in organizational terms, only those freely taken up and repeated by others in a repetition of collective remembering becoming consensual and emulative rise to form organizational culture and its traditions. This is the “polyphony” and “sequentially occurring vocalities” of the storytelling organization (Currie & Brown, 2003, p. 564) and agrees with Boje’s (2001) story as the “account of incidents or events” and narrative as the formalizing plots imposed upon it (p.1). In this way stories of folklore are codified into traditions and become narratives of organizational or societal culture (Mishler, 2006; Schein, 2004).

Just as narrative informs culture it likewise becomes discourse (Brockmeier & Harre, 2001; Mankowski & Rappaport, 2000). In a narrative sense, discourse refers to the “underlying conventions that embody particular ideologies” (Ford, 1999, p. 491). These tacit and implied understandings serve as guides to behavior and conversation within the organization by positioning “members to speak, think, and act in particular ways” (Johnson, 2006, p. 213). Expanding the thought, Fairhurst (2007) saw discourse in two forms: local and general. Local discourse embodies the meanings of a culture and acts as a “medium for social interaction” while general discourse refers to “enduring systems for the formation and articulation of ideas in a historically situated time” (p. 6-7). Both local and general discourse bear marks of “this is the way things are” with a distinction being that local discourse is formative of individual identity within a local setting such as organizations (Ford, 1991, p. 490) and general discourse is formative of identity within a time (Fairhurst, 2007; Johnson, 2006).

As discourse can refer to two distinct movements bearing common genesis, so too can culture (Schein, 2004). Mankowski and Rappaport (2000) referred to this as the “dominant cultural narrative” and the “community narrative” (p. 482-3). Therefore the culture of organizations while not the same as societal culture can, like it, be formative of the individual within context (DeFina, 2006). That context for organizations is the “discursive space” of story, meaning, interaction, and social articulation that appears to be locus for the narrative, discourse, and culture of an organization, in short, “a complex communicative storytelling milieu” (Brown, Humphries, & Gurney, 2005, p. 314). While stories of lore do become narrative, represent as discourse, and eventually become culture, not all structuring stories derive from folklore. Some are imposed.

In contrast to the polyphonous and emergent nature of folklore narrative, a hegemonic narrative also exists that rather than be accepted consensually can be imposed unilaterally (Gabriel, 2004). This is accomplished as those “who are hierarchically privileged seek to impose their own monological and unitary perceptions of truth” (Brown, et al., 2005, p. 314). However, in that organizations are “pluralistic and polyphonic” the control over discursive space is never unendingly unilateral

(Humphreys & Brown, 2002, p. 422). Another perspective on hegemony is that of Kiesling (2006) who held that “hegemony does not function through ideologies controlled by elites, but is created and perpetuated by Discourses” (p. 262). Currie and Brown (2003) referred to hegemony as a loss of power while Ford (1999) saw it as a loss of voice. In this understanding “what one says brings things, ideas, and relations into existence.” In Ford’s thought the inability to speak in this fashion relegates members to reporters of reality rather than its creators (p. 493). Hegemonic narrative then is primarily monological or from the one voice as opposed to the polyphony of folklore narrative where from many voices arise one (Brown, et al., 2005). Whether of folklore or hegemony, it seems certain that within organizations exists a structuring story that regulates both organization and members (Nelson, 2001).

## Stories and Organizations

Gabriel (2004) confirmed the presence of organizational story and held that folkloric or “mythological qualities” are inherent in the organization (p. 6) thus rendering it a non “story-free” space (p. 3). He said,

There are official organizational stories, stories reproduced in organizational rituals, advertisements, websites, and official publications, which express some of the desirable qualities that at least those managing and leading the organization would wish to see associated with them. (p. 3)

In line with this are Allan, Fairtlough, and Heinzen (2002) who posited that organizational stories are “linked to the socio-political structures of the organization in which they are told” (p. 215). These form the organization’s heritage (Gabriel, 2000) and serve its continuity (Abma, 2000).

To better characterize this phenomena I have abstracted reviews of 7 organizations in which a structuring story(s) appears. Four are established as non-profit and likely use a combination of employee and volunteer for staff. They are: Trinity Church, A Roman Catholic Religious Community, Harvard University Art Museums, and Central Health. Three are for-profit entities and use employees. They are: Laskarina Holidays, Telco, and Infotech.

### *Story in a Religious Congregation*

After missionary service in Africa, Hopewell (1987) led the establishment of a congregation in the US. He was surprised to discover similar bonding features between his nascent US congregation and that he had witnessed in African villages. Among these were, “the critical importance of narrative, a coalescence of world view, [and] the link of myth and ethos.” To determine if these features were universal in religion he spent one year attending the meetings of two other US congregations while involving himself in their bodylife (p. 5). His discovery was an idiom unique to each.

Idiom for Hopewell (1987) pointed to a language. This was comprised of both religious and secular understandings particular to the congregation. It bounded their views and became for them a “deep current of narrative interpretation and representation by which people give sense and order

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Narrative and Leadership 6

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to their lives” (p. 5). In Hopewell’s, “story expresses the intricacy of congregational life,” he pointed up the dialogicism (Hopkinson, 2003) inherent to the conveyance of narrative through idiom. In this way he concluded that “the congregation’s self-perception is primarily narrative in form,” “the congregation’s communication among its members is primarily by story,” and that “by its own congregating, the congregation participates in narrative structures of the world’s societies” (p. 46). One such story is that of Trinity Church.

Trinity Church, Atlanta, Georgia was the site of a congregation-based course for which Hopewell (1987) would share teaching responsibilities. Its objective was to explore the absence of racial diversity in several of the age groupings at Trinity. The course failed from lack of participation by its twelve Trinity lay-people, the majority who were no-shows or dropouts. Hopewell stated,

We began to discern in the words and actions of truants a subtle and intricate pattern of values that seemed to transcend the motives of any single person. It began to appear that this course had violated a hidden code of worth and meaning that underlay the corporate life of this particular congregation. (p. 41)

The Trinity Story it was discovered was a narrative used by members to describe the ascent of Trinity during the antebellum era, its descent after the Second World War, and latter efforts toward racial integration. This took the form in the 1960’s of Trinity intentionally realigning its ministry priorities and assets to incorporate black and poor persons. The change in ministry priority disrupted the membership as well as the community in which Trinity was located. Eventually, after loss and tension the congregation re-formed as a racially diverse group. Speaking of the now defunct course in light of Trinity’s narrative Hopewell said,

While each truant was a liberal Christian who gave private assent to the course plan, each was also a member of a body guided by a contravening set of norms and outlooks. As members, these persons guarded this corporate code by their absence, silence, and argument. (p. 41)

## *A Roman Catholic Religious Community*

In a study of narrative in a Catholic religious community, Stuber (2000) anticipated that a story or stories undergirds a community’s identity. Her investigation showed that in this religious community a founding narrative was in place and its “central themes and principle values... transmitted to the sisters to be lived out in their lives” (p. 510). That the narratives were adopted by members and incorporated into their lives is attested to in members modifying behavior to conform to the narrative(s) and their commitment to transmit them to subsequent members. Admittedly, this study was conducted in a religious community and the possibility of exigency, as statement of faith exists. However, in a non-religious, non-closed community Brown, et al. (2005) found much the same.

## *Laskarina Holidays*

Brown, et al. (2005) reasoned that organizations are constituted through stories. To test this they

studied a tour operator located in the UK. Noting that multiple narratives were in circulation in this company, one stood out as baseline identity for both company and employees. It was a narrative of the founders as moral people and was exemplified in multiple instances of “exceptional efforts... to rectify problems” (p. 318). The presence of this underlying yet defining narrative expressed itself in employee’s willingness to accept responsibility to and for the public with whom they dealt as well as a commitment to ethical behavior. Cuno (2005) related a similar experience in his experience as director of Harvard University Art Museums.

### *Harvard University Art Museums*

When Cuno (2005) assumed the directorship of the Harvard University Art Museums it was a troubled organization. Disagreements between the Museum and its organizational parent, Harvard University, declining finances, and revolving personnel had persisted for the 10 years prior to his arrival. Key to his success in leading change in the organization was his belief “that what the Art Museums needed most was someone who would relate their story – to themselves as well as to others – as an unfolding narrative of origins” (p. 209). This would come about as he reminded those with whom he worked of the founder’s vision thereby helping them to “think through who they are” and their place in the “larger narrative that tells the institution’s story” (p. 210). His conclusion was that the story of the institution gave “life and form to our institutional identity and provided the proper context for the changes we had to make” (p. 212). Another view of structuring story is in the study of Telco where change was accomplished primarily through themes unified with a new story of lore.

### *Telco*

Telco was a “government-owned telecommunication organization” in New Zealand where its market share was near total. In the deregulation of New Zealand’s economy Telco was to be privatized. Management feared that being a near monopoly would make the company complacent. To counter this and prepare for competition with international telecommunication companies, Telco cast the upcoming preparations along three new themes: change was necessary in that they were “under threat.” Therefore individuals must align their “perspectives with corporate objectives” as well as take “personal responsibility” (Dunbar & Jones, 2000, p. 1215).

The structuring story present in Telco was one of a “dependency relationship” (p. 1217) underwritten by near guaranteed employment. To accomplish its change of story Telco brought in new managers and unsettled the structuring story with a consistent appeal to the new themes. “Under threat” meant that Telco would have to compete for market share and nothing could be taken for granted. The theme of individuals aligning their “perspectives with corporate objectives” indicated that the former structuring story and its tales of reciprocal loyalty no longer defined the company. Instead,

Today the deal is ‘hey, look, come and work; we’ll give you the opportunity to perform; you’re going to have to develop real fast because we’re probably going to thrust you into a bigger job and this organization is in a state of flux and, you know, at some point it may be that things will change and we won’t need you anymore’.... It’s got nothing to do

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Narrative and Leadership 8

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with whether or not you're good, it's just got to do with how this organization is changing . . . the deal is you could leave here having advanced in terms of your capability and therefore your employability in the labour market. (p. 1217)

The benefit of employment in the new Telco would no longer be a job for life but becoming better employable. In that expectations as an employee in a government controlled monopoly could not align with those of an employee in a private company competing for market share, the third theme of "personal responsibility" echoed the first. As employees had depended upon their government-controlled monopoly to remove threat of competition and could do so no longer, neither could they depend upon another to make a decision or be responsible for outcomes. Now individuals would have to accept these responsibilities.

The story of lore that served to unite the new themes was that of General George Patton as played by George C. Scott in the movie "Patton." In one scene the column comes to a stop while troops attempt to negotiate with a farmer whose cart and mules are blocking the only route of passage, a bridge. While stopped, German warplanes begin strafing the stalled column. Patton charges to the front, demands to know the cause of the delay and then sees the reason. He promptly pulls his revolver, shoots the mules, and orders they and the farmers cart be thrown over the side. He then orders the column to move on. This story of lore communicated that the new Telco would do anything to keep moving. Dunbar and Jones (2000) reported that one manager said, "This theme has just swept like wildfire and we've got this email sort of thing and hardly a week goes by without somebody saying, 'I shot the donkey!'" (p. 1219).

The preceding research suggests the presence of a structuring story. Dunford and Jones (2000) indicated that a structuring story can be replaced with another and in so doing change the identity of the organization. Czarniawska (1997) warned that change led by those responsible for the conditions that are to be changed might not be possible. This may be due to the identity of those in charge being linked with current practice. So although organizational change can be occasioned by many factors it may not be felt intently enough to force the organization or its members to recast how they view themselves. For while identity is constituted at one of level of our sociality by the organization that comprises the expression of our worklife (Humphreys & Brown, 2002) at another it is deeper and broader and connected to the society in which our organizations function and purport to serve (Ezzy, 1998; Johnson, 2006; Mishler, 2006). Therefore when the approval of that which our organization provides is withheld by society, we may be moved to change that is ultimate: fashioning for ourselves another identity to remain in favor of our society, itself the legitimating source of our personhood (Schechtman, 1996). Change of this sort could be beyond a change in practices but a restatement of who we are, that is, a restating of the structuring tales of lore from which our narratives, discourses, and culture derive. Of such are Infotech and Central Health.

## *Infotech*

Infotech was a New Zealand based company in financial straits, a reduction in workforce by two-thirds, and saddled with the culturally disapproved practice of "cradle to the grave" employment,

itself the result of a now abandoned national welfare state (Dunford & Jones, 2000, p. 1213). Changing the culture of Infotech began with existing management restorying the organization to legitimate the elimination of lifetime employment, a change in keeping with the changes in national opinion toward social dependence. Additionally, management instituted three stories of lore, each based in fact to which members could attest. First, was the story of “the rebel days” where due to financial losses in their parent company, Infotech was required to be independent. Second, was the story of “the 1000 day journey” where the change process was posited as taking 1000 days. Imagery of “a round-the-world yacht race – a sport in which New Zealanders have been successful in international competition” was associated with this story. Third, was the story of “we must stand our own two feet” where new societal expectations as well New Zealand’s location on the globe underscored the “world doesn’t owe us a living” and reinforced “personal responsibility (p. 1211-12).

The culture of dependency that had defined Infotech changed as members adopted the new stories of lore. This change could be seen in their resistance to the parent company’s overtures to reinstate the now successful Infotech into a global strategy. It was also visible in Infotech’s desire to retain their newly formed “entrepreneurial” edge and the ability to determine their own strategy (p. 1214). Through the introduction of new stories of lore Infotech changed its structuring story to comply with societal expectations. Another example is Central Health.

### *Central Health*

Contra the idea of a single structuring story under girding the organization and creating its culture, Doolin (2003) maintained that organizations are a “multi-discursive set of strategic narratives” (p. 764). This position accords with that of Buchanan (2003) who held that organizations are sites of “competing narratives” (p. 7). Although not specifically opposed to the idea of a structuring story, Buchanan does speak of “culture” (p. 7) and Doolin of “society” (p. 760), the multiplicity of narrative for Buchanan is within the organization while for Doolin it is usually without but available in the larger society as discourses and used in the organization as themes.

As example of his view, Doolin (2003) cited the case of Central Health. Through passage of the “The Health and Disability Services Act, in 1993 New Zealand changed the status of public health entities and mandated their operation as businesses. “This discourse redefined performance and efficiency in economic terms and framed clinical issues in the language of the market” (p. 759). Brown, et al. (2005) and Ford (1999) held that language is both formative of identity within members and constitutive of organizational space. Changing the language of an organization then is tantamount to “constituting a new reality in the minds of organizational members” (Dunford & Jones, 2000, p. 1208).

Prior to the government initiative, healthcare professionals managed Central Health. Afterwards private sector managers were hired to effect the transition to a cost efficient business. Previous management had seen their story as one where they existed to provide “caring and cooperation,” a story that was challenged by two successive efforts at restorying this organization. The first began shortly after the national mandate in 1993 and led to the perception that the “hospital had

been taken over by the suits; that health was being run by accountants... and that the drive in the organisation is cutting costs, not caring for patients” (p. 759). Within three years a new attempt to bring Central Health into compliance was needed.

With operating deficits, pressure from government oversight to comply, and staff’s dissatisfaction in the previous management scheme, the new CEO was confronted with both the legitimating remnants of a structuring story (if we still did it the old way everything would be fine) and a newer story about Central Health’s woes. To counter these and accomplish the mandate, Doolin (2003) saw that multiple stories (discourses) were given by management. These include that the organization in its present form had outgrown the old organizational structure and that the first attempt at reordering was a “transitional phase” and now basically complete. In conjunction with these interior themes multiple other discourses were identified both within and without the organization. The result was Central Health’s new composition was one that embodied “a mix of entrepreneurialism tempered with common sense and balance[d] medical collegiality with responsiveness” (p. 760). For Doolin the change that occurred in Central Health wasn’t as much a change in the structuring story as a change of discourses or the multiple narratives whose synergy comprised the organization. So while Central Health, and Infotech in some form changed to align with societal expectations, what changed is thought to differ.

## Leading Narratively

In the above studies, it appears the foundation of leading narratively can be understood as appreciating that people make sense of their worlds and their organizations through story. As such the storied connections of each are to be prized and developed by the leader while conveying authenticity through his or her own life story (Boje, 2005). In that these elements are foundational to leading narratively and both the critical and popular literature do refer to two forms of narrative change, that is, to restory an organization (Boje, 2001, 2005; Churchman, 2006; Currie & Brown, 2003; Dunford & Jones, 2000; Gardner, 1995, 2006) and to lead change through story (Allan, Fairtlough, & Heinzen 2002; Czarniawska, 1997; Denning, 2005, 2007; Gabriel, 2000, 2004), others may yet be forthcoming. The difference is tangible.

In leading change through restorying (Driscoll & McKee, 2006) leader(s) legitimate the organization through introduction of a new structuring story (Dunford & Jones, 2000). In leading change through story leader(s) legitimate desired outcomes through use of stories (Gabriel, 2000). Principally, the distinction resides in what changes: In the former the identity of the organization is at stake (Boje, 2005) while in the latter at stake is its product (Denning, 2005). Leadership is challenged to appreciate the significance of change that each form can have upon people and prepare for the extent that change could be felt by members (Calhoun, 1994; Ford, 1999; McAdams, 1996; Nelson, 2001). Although a restorying approach holds that the organization is structured around the presence of a unifying narrative (Hopewell, 1987), itself possibly formed of multiple stories of lore (Currie & Brown, 2003; Gardner, 2005), still this narrative does not function alone. People are the point of engagement for both action and change (Denning, 2007) as well as have their own structuring and conversational narratives (Denzin, 2000; Polkinghorne, 1988) that work in relation to that of the organization (Brown, et al., 2005). Therefore, organizational change cannot be

considered in a vacuum. What the narrative leader does is never done alone but in the presence of people (Boal & Schultz, 2007).

Churchman (2006) in her report of narrative change noted in relation to the corporate narrative, individual narratives are expressed as a “righteous moral discourse of making a difference, a relational discourse of social interaction, and a pragmatic discourse of corporatism.” When conflicted by change in the dominant paradigm of the “corporatism” narrative, their exercise can prompt a sense of struggle and confusion in members to the extent that positions are taken then defined as “moral and immoral” (p. 9). In this milieu of storytelling lies the grist of the narrative leader’s work (Brown, et al., 2005).

To lead successfully amid these disturbed values Boje (2005) suggested the actions of narrative leaders are to help “the organization adapt to its environment” (p. 3) and in facilitating “the transformation of one way of narrating the corporation to another” (p. 12). Borrowing from the language of transformational leadership he held these objectives are accomplished as “leaders motivate followers by raising awareness of organizational mission and getting followers to transcend self interest” (p. 95). This entails the leader being present in such way that the future is definable as well as “desirable” and the “development needs” of members addressed (p. 95).

Where Boje (2005) relies for accomplishment on the leader’s use of symbol, Dunford and Jones (2000) saw language as primary. In their view, narrative leaders help members form a “new reality” through the active use of words that depict current and new reality. They held that language “does not simply describe the social world, but categorizes it and brings phenomena into sight” (p. 1208). In this view leaders are not merely suggestive but proactive, even forceful, in defining for members what is and what should be (Ford, 1999). In contrast is the work of Currie and Brown (2003) who reported that leadership’s imposition of change narrative was without success. After one year of continued resistance by members, project leadership found it essential to acknowledge that member’s personal narratives, i. e., Churchman (2006), were bound to the corporate narrative. This resulted in an accommodation by leadership whereby a new structuring story was implemented but with member’s assistance.

History seems replete with examples of people changing their identifying, structuring story. Narrative leadership, then, is likely new only in the term given to describe it, the place of its accomplishment, i.e., the organization, and as a topic of research. Therefore the elements above and defined as leading narratively cannot be construed as final and complete but only tentative and partial.

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