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GATHERING AROUND THE ORGANIZATION'S COMMUNAL FIRE: HOW LEADERS USE STORIES TO MAINTAIN AND CHANGE CULTURE

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Stories abound in the business world. Specifically, leaders use stories to maintain and even change the culture of their organizations. Whether positive in nature or not, stories are perpetuating avenues for leaders in crafting a new working climate or holding steady an existing one. Beginning with an examination of organizational culture itself and the leader's role, the piece moves on to defining what a story is and how the leader is or becomes a storyteller. Finally, the article ties everything together by postulating when stories should be told and how they should be related.

Introduction

Anthropologically speaking, the fireside story is as ubiquitous a part of human history as the fire itself. As we have moved from the plains and caves of prehistory to the boardrooms and conference spaces of today, the fire has been replaced by watercoolers, long tables, and closed doors. Yet, the enigmatic story has remained. Interestingly, we are probably just as animated in telling about our exploits of landing the big client as we were about slaying a particularly dangerous mastodon. Stories, in organizational settings, incite emotions, convey information, explain rites and rituals, and provide sometimes subtle clues to the norms of an organization.

Organizational culture and stories go hand in hand. Whether a leader is maintaining a strong existing culture or attempting a culture shift from a lackadaisical, mediocre one to a dynamic, initiative-taking climate, stories express the essence of the desired culture. In fact, one can hear a well-crafted story and get a fairly firm idea of what the culture of a particular organization might be. For example, after reading the following story, one can readily develop a mental picture of the working environment in this company, as well as the foreboding nature of the emerging culture shift:

The new president had called a meeting of his vice presidents at noon sharp. Only a couple of them had actually had any real conversation with him and it was going to be a chance for them to officially meet this unknown gentleman from South Carolina. They knew him by reputation only – infamous for his labor and budget slashing. Yet, how he would manage the three men and two women reporting to him remained to be seen. As they filed into the executive conference room, they sat at their usual seats, leaving the head of the table vacant for Bill. By 12:15pm, he had not

shown and the VPs grew restless. At 12:30pm, one of them went to Bill's administrative assistant and asked her if she knew where he was. She did not. Finally, at almost a quarter until one o'clock, Bill hurried into the room with a stack of books in his arms. He did not sit down – instead, he slid one book across the table to each VP. Actually, he threw the books. One sailed right past the VP of Marketing and hit the floor. "Ok," he said in his gravelly harsh voice, "you came here to find out how I manage and for me to get to know you. Well, first of all, I don't care to get to know you." The VPs were wide-eyed and gave each other foreboding glances. "Second," Bill continued, "if you want to know how I manage, read the book I gave you." It was a copy of Al Dunlap's (aka, Chainsaw Al) Mean Business. "Read it, and decide if you still want to work here, because I manage a business just like he does." And that was the end of the meeting. He left as abruptly as he arrived into the room. The VPs looked at one another, raising their eyebrows in disbelief. Finally, one of them spoke. It was the VP of Human Resources. "Well," he said, "this should be interesting."

This story comes from an actual incident at a fortune 500 company the author worked with as a consultant. It was told to him by one of the vice presidents mentioned above who lasted about seven months before moving on to a different organization. The former VP said that he probably told the story fifty times during the seven months. It was only after he left this firm that he realized "Bill" intended it that way. Bill was attempting a culture change. The company's sales, profits, and stock were all slipping and the new president was brought in to turn around the organization. Not all would agree that he took the most appropriate approach, but the incident became a story – told again and again.

And it was emblematic of the new tougher, no-holds-barred culture that would emerge during the turn around phase.

This article focuses on the use of stories in both maintaining and changing organizational culture. Whether positive in nature or not, stories are perpetuating avenues for leaders in crafting a new working climate or holding steady an existing one. Beginning with an examination of organizational culture itself and the leader's role, the piece moves on to defining what a story is and how the leader is or becomes a storyteller. Finally, the article ties everything together by postulating when stories should be told and how they should be related.

What is Organizational Culture?

The idea of examining organizational culture has increased dramatically in the last twenty-five years, especially after the publication of Peters and Waterman's *In Search of Excellence* in 1982. Sometimes called corporate culture, organizational climate, corporate environment, and so forth, these words are for the most part, interchangeable. For this article, organizational culture is the term used most as it conveys a broad meaning and is less limiting than, say, corporate culture, which seems best-suited exclusively in for-profit situations.

The classic work on the subject is Terrence Deal and Allan Kennedy's *Corporate Cultures*, originally published in 1982. Taking research both had conducted (Deal in education and Kennedy in business), the authors set out to identify what "made organizations tick" (1982, iv). They suspected that a value-driven organization, united around a set of shared values, would outperform competitors. They just needed to find evidence of this. They did and their work details their findings. In doing so, they also identified the meaning of organizational culture, which is still used more than twenty years later. They state that organizational culture is a widely shared philosophy of management beliefs and practices important to those in the organization, where heroes, stories, rituals, and ceremonies become integral to the organizational climate (2000, 9-14). Specifically, they postulate that...shared values are important. Corporate heroes and heroines provide tangible role models for others to emulate. Rituals connect people in deeper ways than do functional meetings or rationally based encounters. Periodic ceremonies instill a sense of communal spirit, reminding people of their shared values and purposes. Stories carry values and their telling and retelling create a social glue that connects people to what's really important. And a cultural network of

priests and priestesses, gossips, storytellers, spies, and whisperers carries on their indomitable informal efforts to keep the enterprise intact and on track (2000, iv).

Of course, Deal and Kennedy are not the only ones to grapple with the concept of organizational culture. In *Leader of the Future*, an essay by Edgar H. Schein appears, where he states that when it comes to culture, the leader animates (or brings to life) the culture in an organization's incipency, and in entrepreneurial settings, he or she creates the culture, then maintains the culture as the organization grows, and finally the leader serves as a change agent (Hesselbein, 1996, 60-63). It is this notion of framing the culture around the leader where stories become such a necessary component of change and maintenance of that culture. Without stories told by the leader and the immediate followers of that leader, it would be difficult for the leader's vision to readily pass through the organization.

And how important is culture to companies and the implications for leaders? Senn and Childress, in their "Forward" to *The Secret of Winning Cultures* state, "Never before in the history of business has the impact of organizational culture been more critical to the success of organizations and the effectiveness of individuals leading them" (1999, vii). Truly, a broad and very telling statement. In addition, Sanchez says "the word 'culture' is championed and applied as the all-purpose explanation for a variety of organizational results. The term is used to explain everything from success to failure, from integration to dissolution, from change resistance to winning adaptability" (2004, 18). Again, the success and failure alluded to by Sanchez can be related through applicable stories. As with the opening scenario, the story could very well have negative connotations to the listener. But, the story still embodies the culture being created.

One pair of researchers who delved into the concept of organizational culture is John P. Kotter and James L. Heskett. In their work, *Corporate Culture, and Performance*, they identified two levels to culture in organizations worthy of consideration. First, on a deep, "less visible level, culture refers to values that are shared by the people in a group and that tend to persist over time even when group membership changes." According to Kotter and Heskett, at this level, culture is almost impossible to change because the members of the organization may be unaware of the values that hold the members together. And second, "on a more visible level, culture represents the behavior patterns or style of an organization that new employees are automatically encouraged to follow by their fellow employees." At this level of culture, change is much easier to affect due to

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the very nature of individual and group behaviors (1992, 4).

Some researchers take very simple approaches to their definition of organizational culture. Gallagher, for example, in *The Soul of an Organization*, defines it simply as the "core beliefs, behaviors, and actions behind its daily business life" (2003, 3). Haasen and Shea, though, show that members of the organization determine culture as they "attempt to identify, define, explain, and communicate to others in their family or group guiding principles, assumptions, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and practices that they presume to be of value to their own and future generations." In addition, culture "embodies the experience, skills, and creative talents that make life more satisfying, rewarding, and successful for at least those members who can exert some influence on their situation" (2003, 5).

Even Warren Bennis, ubiquitous in his appearance among works on leadership, has this to say within the practitioner literature about what organizational culture means:

Organizational cultures...don't happen suddenly. They evolve slowly, imperceptibly, over years, if not decades. Unlike mission statements, they are never written down. But they are the soul of an organization and determine much of what happens within it. "It's the way things are done around here," one CEO told me, in defining his corporation's culture. Such cultures are collections of unspoken rules and traditions. They determine which offices are sacrosanct, whether the men wear ties, and who speaks to whom and in what tone of voice – the red, amber, and green lights that aren't visible but that operates 24 hours a day and determine the quality of organizational life (2003, 34).

Clearly, organizational culture can be described in many ways, but Deal and Kennedy's definition seems to work best for framing this examination because the components are common throughout the canon of literature as well as those that specifically address culture in organizational environments: heroes, rites/rituals, and storytelling. The storytelling piece, though, assists leaders in relaying tales of the heroes in the company as well as the rites and rituals. Telling a story of the director of engineering, who five years ago was an entry-level packaging engineer, would be an example of a hero story. Or another would be the truck driver who assisted a stranded motorist, refusing to accept money or anything more than a simple "thanks."

Stories, as we will discuss later, also can be used effectively in giving a new employee an idea of the organizational rites that exist. For example, a more senior employee may relate a story to a new recruit about someone who showed up to a meeting late and was ridiculed in front of her peers. The new employee obviously derives from the story that punctual attendance at meetings is expected.

Leader's Role in Maintaining/Changing Culture

In *reframing organizations*, Bolman and Kennedy ask a couple of questions to ascertain what role the leader plays in maintaining or changing culture: "Do leaders shape culture, or are they shaped by it? Is symbolic leadership more often empowering or manipulative?" (Bolman & Deal, 1997, 231). For Bolman and Deal, these questions are not easily answered, and are worthy of further research. Other researchers see the leadership role much more clearly:

The effective leader teaches employees what the corporation values, why it is valued, and how to transform values into actions. Education of this sort requires special skills. Employees do not always see the value of what they are doing until after they have done it. They may tire, get discouraged, or even resist. Yet, the thoughtful manager overcomes these hindrances while engendering commitment to corporate values and inspiring employees to enact them. (Clampitt, 2005, 55)

Literature for practitioners is replete with "seven steps," "four phases," "ten ways," and "six unwavering rules" for leaders to maintain or change culture. However, some of this literature is not so linear in its approach. For example, Schein tells readers that one should "never start with the idea of changing culture. Always start with the issues the organization faces; only when those business issues are clear should you ask yourself whether the culture aids or hinders resolving the issues. If changes need to be made in how the organization is run, try to build on existing cultural strengths rather than attempting to change those elements that may be weaknesses" (Schein, 1999, 189).

Simply understanding the foundations of cultural meaning in an organization is also critical for leaders. It helps them know whether everyone is pulling together in the same direction and can have an impact on morale (Stovall, 20). Additionally, understanding their impacts and roles assists leaders in cultural transformations. For example, Morgan asserts that "under the influence of the cultural metaphor, leaders and managers come to see

themselves as people who ultimately help to create and shape the meanings that are to guide organized action. This involves a major reframing of their roles" (1998, 141). He also states that the leadership challenge is really a paradox in its relation to culture. Leaders, he says, recognize that even though they cannot exert "unilateral power or control over any complex system," they can act through the power and control that are inherent among themselves (Morgan, 1998, 257).

But, it is important to note that little of the literature makes the distinction between leadership in the right direction and those leaders that take employees down the wrong path. Kotter and Heskett raise questions about the "cultural drummer" in directing people. "If the direction is good," they point out, "then a strong culture might logically help a firm do well. But what if it is bad? What if people all run, hand in hand, in the wrong direction?" (Kotter & Heskett, 1992, 18). Interestingly, one researcher has examined this phenomenon in a work entitled *Corporate Cults*. The author, Dave Arnott, identifies the insidious nature of leaders in cult-like corporate environments. He states that "corporate cult leaders often appeal to positive emotions, but not always: they may appeal to fear, uncertainty, and insecurity, to name just a few that are not positive" (Arnott, 2000, 124). These leaders, according to Arnott, carry charismatic leadership to its worst possible level. Similarly, in *Corporate Religion*, Kunde sees the leader as the propagator of the organization's philosophies that may actually become the *religion* of the company. For example, Kunde sees the role of the leader as one that is concerned with the "active participation in the development, maintenance and dissemination of the company's corporate religion, the central management tool" (2000, 225).

Certainly, most of the research is not so bleak. Deal and Kennedy tie together all the aspects of our definition of culture and show how the leader influences and enhances each of those aspects. The authors call these effective leaders *symbolic managers*. The reason? Because these leaders "spend a lot of time thinking about the values, heroes, and rituals of the culture" (Deal & Kennedy, 2000, 141).

Storytelling and Culture

So what is a "story"? We have heard them from friends and family members, seen them on TV and in movies, listened to them on the radio, and we even write and tell our own. But what specifically defines a story as such?

A story is simply the communicated description (verbal or written) of an event that often has associated with it a moral. That moral may of course be explicit or

very subtle in nature, permitting the audience to decipher the "gist" of the tale. In organizations, especially relating to culture, stories may be used to highlight the achievements of a star employee or give an indication of the cultural norms of the entity. The idea is that the story is a convenient and effective avenue for relating rites and rituals in the organization. In other words, a well-crafted story will be remembered and understood far longer and with greater impact than a power point presentation consisting of bullet-point lists or a memo sent to all employees. Stories can be truly powerful vehicles for instilling cultural information "because a story evokes both visual image and emotion" (Morgan & Denney, 1997, 494). Appealing to the images in the mind's eye lasts far longer than a written policy statement placed in a file folder. McKee (2003, 52) echoes this by saying, "in a story, you not only weave a lot of information into the telling but you also arouse your listener's emotions and energy."

Cultures of all kinds whether that of a for-profit organization, or anthropologically speaking, have an innate need and desire to tell stories. They become the cultural icons of past exploits as well as a venue for passing along the values and norms of that culture to new members or successive generations. As Morgan states, "every organization has its own stories to tell. These communicate its origin, style, and core values, as well as juicy tidbits that can lend color and life to daily routine" (Morgan, 1989, 159).

Stories are so vital to the discussion of organizational culture, that Deal and Kennedy make it a critical piece to the very definition of organizational culture. Those who actually perpetuate the stories - storytellers - possess an almost omnipotent status. These "storytellers are in a powerful position because they can change reality. Storytellers simply interpret what goes on in the company - but to suit their own perceptions" (Deal & Kennedy, 1982, 87).

David Armstrong, in his insightfully titled work, *Managing by storying around*, points out that effective stories are those that have a moral and give employees direction as to how to act or not act. In his own company, he relates:

We have found stories to be so effective; they've replaced our policy manual...Storytelling is a much simpler and more effective way to manage. I don't have to make thousands of individual decisions - Is it okay to have a drink during a company dinner? How about charging an in-room movie to the hotel room during a company trip?...The story gives people our guidelines, and then it is up to

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them. Storytelling promotes self-management (Armstrong, 1992, 11).

But stories are more than mere informal policy statements. "They comfort, reassure, and offer direction and hope...They perpetuate values and keep the historical exploits of heroes and heroines alive" (Bolman & Deal, 1997, 221). In addition:

Stories are a key medium for communicating corporate myths. They establish and perpetuate tradition. They are recalled and embellished in formal meetings and informal coffee breaks. They convey the value and identity of the organization to insiders and outsiders, thereby building confidence and support...Stories can communicate the success of a good program - or obscure the failure of a bad one (Bolman & Deal, 1997, 222).

Along this line, for the practitioner, stories bring into scope the broad nature of culture. As members of a group learn about the organization that they are a part of, they discover it through stories. In other words,

Beliefs and assumptions form about daily life, how to get along with the boss, what kind of attitude one should have toward customers, the nature of the career in the organization, what it takes to get ahead, what the sacred cows are, and so on. Deciphering culture can therefore be an endless task. If you do not have a specific focus or reason for wanting to understand your organizational culture, you will find it boundless and frustrating (Schein, 1999, 26).

The stories that are told can clearly influence culture. For example, while examining organizations such as TDIndustries, The U.S. coast guard, and AES corporation, Haasen and Shea noted a commonality among these three entities and the stories that were told. The stories spread among the organizations were "that people's personal growth and professional development is a definite priority, above and beyond the missions, goals, and successes of these organizations. This sense of human worth, providing opportunities and meaning for people's work lives, will be reciprocated by the enormous commitment of the employees, establishing strong cultural bonds to the organization for which they work" (Haasen and Shea, 2003, 77). Morgan discusses the metaphorical image in his work, *Imagization*. In it, he states that:

...metaphorical images can provide powerful tools for helping people look at themselves and their situations in new ways and, as a result, see and act in the world somewhat differently. The process operates by creating a tension between existing and potential understandings, creating space for the new to emerge...however, new images do not result in new actions, unless there is an appropriate degree of shared understanding and a will to act on the insights thus generated (Morgan, 1997, 291).

Storytelling is critical to maintain and even change a culture. For businesses, it is important to not only understand the role of storytelling, but also how to tell a good story. Even *Harvard Business Review* includes articles suggesting how executives can learn to tell stories:

Businesspeople not only have to understand their companies' past, but then they must project the future. And how do you imagine the future? As a story, you create scenarios in your head of possible future events to try to anticipate the life of your company or your own personal life. So, if a businessperson understands that his or her own mind naturally wants to frame experience in a story, the key to moving an audience is not to resist this impulse but to embrace it by telling a good story (McKee, 2003, 52).

Clearly, stories in all shapes and forms assist in maintaining and changing cultures in organizations. They are a means for transferring cultural norms and expectations as well as providing a connection to the organization's past. Stories are easy to tell and understand because they have been a constant in human society for eons - it is no wonder they are powerful cultural conveyances for organizations.

Pulling it All Together

Stories and organizational culture are highly integrated concepts that supplement one another so well because the organization's "communal fire" is so similar to the actual fire pits of times past where tribes sat around telling tales of exploits, adventures, and simply ways of living in harmony. For the modern organization, stories manifest themselves in one-on-one meetings, in boardrooms, in new hire orientations, in annual stockholder meetings, and just about every other venue

where two or more people gather together. It is interesting to note that if one asks those in the business world what they would rather listen to – a prepared speech replete with slides and handouts or a well-told story – most would respond enthusiastically to the idea of a story. Yet, the custom is to continue preparing the same format of presentation that has been done in the past.

Of course, making a conscious effort to tell a story rather than deliver a PowerPoint presentation is not easy. As Denning (2004, 123) points out, “when you talk about ‘storytelling’ to a group of hardheaded executives, you’d better be prepared for some eye rolling.” So where is the disconnect? If the majority of businesspeople would rather hear a story than traditional means of conveying organizational information, why continue down the same path? It is mostly a matter of approach. The executive who subtly changes his or her delivery to include more stories is less likely to see the eye-rolling than one who says, “ok, folks, I’m going to try a new feely-touchy approach to today’s meeting.” These quiet changes in style produce less resistance to the concept than explicit, abrupt delivery modifications.

When it comes to how a leader maintains and changes organizational culture with stories, there are several key points to keep in mind. Based upon the author’s fifteen years of corporate environment experience, certain ideas and approaches have been discovered to work well. The following sections address when it is most appropriate to tell a story and how to tell a story that is consistent with cultural expectancies.

When to Tell Stories

The timing of a story is almost as important as the story itself. For example, telling a story with a moral of being punctual to meetings probably would not be appropriate when the teller of the story is late to the meeting! Careful strategizing of the time and place a story is delivered will assist the storyteller in crafting an effective tale. Specifically, the timing is based upon the storyteller’s objective. In situations where it is important to reinforce the mission and vision of the organization, a story during weekly or monthly meetings would be well suited. As an example, the storyteller may relate the following story:

In the 1980s, a brand new Navy jet pilot shared with his comrades that he was absolutely terrified of landing his plane on an aircraft carrier. Dry land was no problem. But the choppy waters and the narrow deck provided just too dangerous of a situation to make him

comfortable. It seemed impossible to land a high speed jet on such a small space. As he was opening up about his fears, a much more senior pilot gave him some advice. He said the yellow stripe down the center of the flight deck is where you focus your attention. It doesn’t waiver and doesn’t move. “I always line the nose of my plane with that line,” he offered, “and it has never failed me.” As we move forward this year, I want each of you to keep the vision of our organization in mind. Our vision is the yellow line that doesn’t waiver. Ask yourself every time you take on a new project or task if it is keeping with our vision. If it does not, question why we’re doing it.

This kind of story points out that the storyteller does not have to use stories from the organization’s own past. A parable or anecdote works just as well if it can be tied in to something specific within the company. In the above story, the storyteller is reinforcing the vision while ensuring that the employees remain focused on value-added activities.

Another point about the timing of stories is of course related to organizational culture. Whether attempting to perpetuate the existing culture or change it, a well-timed tale will assist in this endeavor. In a cultural maintenance situation, stories can be told during regularly scheduled meetings or in small groups with solid effectiveness. However, in cultural change situations, larger groups tend to be too cumbersome for a story. Small groups, or even one-on-ones work much more successfully. Often, when a change in culture takes place, there is strong resistance from different ones in the organization – and in some cases, from the majority of employees in the workplace. In either case, it is important to pass along stories to those the storyteller suspects will continue to relay these tales to others in the organization. They may put their own spin on those stories, but they will maintain the overall moral of the tale.

Finally, especially in cultural change scenarios, the timing may simply be based upon the storyteller’s “gut feel.” If morale appears to be down to a level that will not absorb the concepts being promoted in the cultural shift or employees are angry and a cacophonous roar is emerging from their ranks, a story just might be the one thing to ameliorate the situation. Perhaps a tale regarding getting through tough times would be appropriate. Or one about success after navigating through challenging obstacles might be prudent. In any case, the storyteller gauges the overall situation and discovers a need for a story that placates, while maintaining the cultural focus.

How to Tell Stories

The notion that everyone can be a storyteller is not far fetched. As mentioned earlier, all of us have heard stories our entire lives. We tell them to our friends after something exciting happened at work, while shopping, or with our children. We become animated and build in twists and turns, while building the tale up to its precipitous climax. "Let me tell you what happened," is a common way of starting our stories with family and friends. But in the working environment, a well told story may have any number of beginnings. It may not even be readily apparent that a story is being told. The listener may suddenly realize that she is hanging on to every word simply because it is not the ubiquitous power point presentation and that an intriguing story is being delivered instead.

Our innate storytelling skills can be enhanced through practice and thought so that organizational storytelling is more compelling. The first approach should be for the storyteller to make a conscious effort to see what is effective about others' stories. How are the good ones crafted? How did they begin? End? Was the moral easy to ascertain? This approach can be likened to the first time novelist. Before ever writing the manuscript, a smart novice would read many novels and study how they are put together. By studying the works of others, an effective storyteller will have a framework for basing his or her own tales upon.

Second, one must know the objective of the story before the first words are ever uttered. The objective will determine the moral, and the moral will be the basis for the story. The objective may be to improve customer service, cut costs, increase sales, focus on the organization's vision, or any other aspect of doing business. The key is determining direction before setting down the path.

Third, the storyteller must be "into" the story itself. In other words, he or she should use gestures, vary pitch of voice, use facial expressions, and so forth. The listener should be able to feel the storyteller's excitement, dread, elation, fear, or other emotions. Imagine if a story was told in a business meeting that had the same level of animation as one told over drinks on a Friday night. If the storyteller is not excited about the story, why should the audience?

Fourth, the person telling the story should think like a true storyteller. A great story does not necessarily have a chronological beginning, middle, and end. It may start at the end and explain how the ending occurred. Or, it may start right in the middle, with a tangent that explains how the story got to that point. If one were to examine fiction writing, especially short stories, it would become

obvious that the boring ones have no suspense. Or think about a child telling a story, where they say, "this happened, then this, and then this." Effective storytelling should hold the listener so they begin becoming part of the story and try to anticipate what happens next or why something is occurring in the story. Essentially, the good storytellers are the ones who tell a story as if they are with close friends in a social, causal setting. That is why the organization's "communal fire" is such an apt phrase to describe the setting for stories in companies.

Finally, a good story is one that moves people to action. That action may be initiative, taking on new tasks, or simply giving more reflective thought to an idea or concept. One would not want listeners to say, "oh, that was an interesting story," but not change their behaviors or thought patterns. Storytelling for the sake of storytelling is not an efficient use of time and effort in work settings. Thus, the story should have relevance to what is taking place in the organization with relation to culture, it should be emblematic of the values espoused in the desired culture, and it should spur individuals to act in a manner consistent with cultural direction.

Summary and Need for Further Research

Stories are a natural human conveyance of emotions and information. They have been an integral part of the workplace as much as they have society in general. Used in conjunction with maintaining an existing organizational culture or changing the culture altogether, stories become a framework for illustrating norms, rites, rituals, customs, values, and vision of the organization. In its most basic form, the definition of organizational culture according to Deal and Kennedy is the widely shared philosophy of management beliefs and practices important to those in the organization, where heroes, stories, rituals and ceremonies become integral to the organizational climate. The leader is the key individual in any organization who maintains the culture or precipitates change. Often, that is accomplished through stories. A story is simply the communicated description (verbal or written) of an event that often has associated with it a moral. That moral may be explicit or very subtle in nature, allowing the listener to draw his or her own conclusions. In telling a story, timing is essential. The storyteller must base the timing upon his or her objective, how it relates to the organizational culture and the storyteller's own "gut feel." To ensure the story is effective, the storyteller should consider other stories heard in the past, keep the objective in mind, become animated in the telling of the story, think like an accomplished storyteller, and craft a story that moves people to action.

Literature on the nature of storytelling in business settings has become more prevalent in the last ten years, and further research is clearly needed in this area. In depth analysis of effective stories and storytelling should shed additional light on the subject. Whatever direction continued research takes, it is definitely intriguing for both the practitioner and researcher to see the emergence of an organization's communal fire. Storytelling can be contagious and surveys collecting data on organizations that have made stories an integral part of their workplace would be fascinating studies.

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