2017

Resistance, Resonance and Restoration: How Generative Stories Shape Organisational Futures

Michelle Lebaron
Allard School of Law at the University of British Columbia, lebaron@allard.ubc.ca

Nadja Marie Alexander

Citation Details

Michelle LeBaron & Nadja Marie Alexander, "Resistance, Resonance and Restoration: How Generative Stories Shape Organisational Futures" (2017) 12:3 Int'l Prof Mgmt & Applied Mgmt Rev 22.

The International Professional and Applied Management Review
incorporating
The International Journal of Professional Management
ISSN 20422341
The Journal of the International Professional Managers Association
And
IPE Management School, Paris

Special Edition

May 2017

Arts and Management

Introduction and Paper 3

Resonance and Restoration:

How Generative Stories Shape Organisational Futures

Authors: Michelle LeBaron & Nadja Alexander

Pages 22-31

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International Journal of Professional Management
Volume 12, Issue 3, 2017

Introduction

Why a special edition?

The International Journal of Professional Management (IJPM) has a broad scope. Professional management is defined as "activities which have an impact on personal and/or organisational development." This invites papers ranging from one-to-one coaching to globalisation, and everything in between.

It is good to reach out like this, but it is also good to reach in, to explore one topic in more depth. Special editions give the opportunity to bring together writers with similar interests, and have each one explore a different aspect of the same subject. This could be, for example, green issues, training programmes, e-commerce, or any activity that "has an impact on personal and/or organisational development."

On this occasion we are having a special edition on the role of the arts in management?

Why the role of the arts?

The scientific approach is good. Measurement, prediction, testing and reassessing gives you solid information. Sometimes too solid. It is rare, in human interaction, to have invariable truth with absolute proof. But we like to know, rather than just believe, and then assume we know, and unconsciously get in a rut that blocks alternative thinking. Scientific logic needs to be intermeshed with free flow human multi-directional thought, and the arts excel in that.

Often the arts are seen as the lesser discipline, less rigorous and therefore less reliable, but strict linear thought, especially in the social sciences, can lead to errors of omission. Linear thinking needs the addition of lateral thinking, as De Bono has eloquently pointed out in his six-hat model, for six types of thinking. We need regularly to don the green hat, for creativity, as part of balanced progress.

This is especially so in periods of change, and humanity is always in a period of change, with times of sudden and dramatic improvement – the wheel, writing, domestication of the horse, steam power, telephones, cars, and recently the computer and its many ramifications. Each of these changes has come about by somebody thinking of a new idea, something that didn't exist, and not being discouraged by it seeming impossible at the time. The first spark has been imagination. Nothing new can come without initial imagination, and the arts nurture imagination.

New knowledge comes from people thinking, experimenting, discussing, and then thinking, experimenting and discussing again. It needs an all round approach encompassing freedom to depart from the norm for creativity and innovation, and rigorous checking through replication and measurement. Arts and sciences have vital roles to play. This special edition focuses on the arts, but also has research, experimentation, discussion and rethinking at its core. The arts and sciences are two sides of the same coin.

This special edition emerged from papers at the 2016 conference of the Art of Management and Organisation (AoMO) – Empowering the Intangible.

Many thanks to Cathryn Lloyd and Geof Hill for co-editing this issue.

Art of Management & Organisation (AoMO)

Jenna Ward, Stephen Linstead, Steven Taylor & Emmanuel Guy

Dr Jenna Ward
jeward@dmu.ac.uk

Dr Jenna Ward is Senior Lecturer in Organisational Behaviour at De Montfort University and Co-Director of the Art of Management & Organisation. Her research interests focus on emotions in organisations, in particular difficult or challenging emotions. Throughout her career Jenna has developed and utilised arts-based methods of research and engagement.

Steven Linstead
Stephen.linstead@york.ac.uk

Stephen Linstead is Professor of Critical Management Studies at the University of York and one of the founders of the Art of Management and Organisation Conference. He and co-author, Heather Hopfl published the seminal text The Aesthetics of Organisation. More recently Stephen has moved into the area of film as a method of research and engagement. His first documentary film 'Black Snow', depicting the tragic events of the Oaks Colliery disaster, has won a number of international film awards.

Steve Taylor
sst@wpi.edu

Steve Taylor is a professor of leadership and creativity at the WPI Foisie Business School. He is the author of the books: Leadership Craft, Leadership Art; You're a Genius: Using Reflective Practice to Master the Craft of Leadership; and Staging Organisation: plays as critical commentaries on workplace life.

Emmanuel Guy
Emmanuel_Guy@uqar.ca

Emanuel Guy is Professor of maritime transportation and public policy at Université du Québec à Rimouski. Guy is a contemporary artist working from traditional woodworking techniques.

The Art of Management & Organisation (AoMO)

The Art of Management & Organisation represents a vibrant international community of scholars, artists and creative practitioners passionate in their exploration of the intersections between management, organisations and the arts. They organise a biannual international conference, publish their own peer-reviewed open access journal, Organisational Aesthetics, have a prominent social media presence and support various other events and training opportunities. The Art of Management & Organisation conferences are something of a unique experience and continually strive for experiential difference and excellence in pushing the boundaries between management and the arts. But where did it all begin?

The aim was, and continues to be, the exploration and promotion of the arts (in the most inclusive sense) as a means of understanding management and organisational life and its contexts; as well as the utilisation of artistic processes in the activity of managing. The conference grew out of the Standing Conference on Organisational Symbolism (SCOS), especially its 1992 conference on Organisation and Theatre at Lancaster, and was informed by the dramatic growth of field of organisational aesthetics in the following decade, specifically a series of workshops organised by Heather Höpfl and Stephen Linstead in Bolton and

Northumbria, culminating in an influential book 'The Aesthetics of Organisation' (Linstead and Höpfl 2000) published by Sage.

September 2002 saw the launch of the first Art of Management and Organisation Conference on London's legendary South Bank in collaboration with Tate Modern, followed up by the second in Paris in 2004 in collaboration with the Pompidou Centre. Since then the conference has continued its collaborative and open ethos in Paris (2004), Krakow (2006), Banff (2008), Istanbul (2010), York (2012), Copenhagen (2014) and most recently in Bled (2016) and has given rise to a vibrant global community of praxis – including both scholars and practitioners - and will continue to do so in Brighton on the 30th August – 2nd September 2018.

These experimental events focused on those dimensions of management and organisation that render them an art, not purely a science. However, the conferences rapidly evolved to encompass far more than simply a concern with organisational aesthetics. They came to embrace a cornucopia of ground breaking, exciting and informative encounters, extending from traditional academic papers, to displays, exhibitions, performances, screenings, demonstrations, community building processes, and skills sessions, all of which served to address the field of art and organisation in all its richness. However, throughout this blossoming they have most importantly continued to be informed by the themes of inclusivity, diversity creativity and innovation, pursued with a spirit of both inspiration and critical inquiry, which were central to the founding ethos of the conference series.

When in 2005 the Academy of Management decided not to continue to support its Arts initiatives, AoMO became the major available global channel for arts based inquiry in business and management. The conferences have thus unfolded as an endeavour to draw in and provide a space for new, promising, burgeoning or potential avenues of exploration that are evolving in or around the field of study of management and organisation. They have encouraged material from other critical traditions in the humanities and arts, which may be unfamiliar to those working in the organisation and management field – and have eventually included spheres as diverse as sport, philosophy, painting, technology, theatre, poetry, film, dance and art history. Indeed, 2016 saw the inaugural Heather Hopfl AoMO Artist in Residence, Scholarship awarded to a woodcraftsman, Emmanuel Guy.

Emmanuel is also an academic holding a professorship in maritime transportation and public policy at Université du Québec à Rimouski. The Heather Hopfl Artist in Residence Scholarship will also be the occasion to embark on a deeper reflection about the entanglements of his academic and artistic practices and how they can or cannot feed one another. Between now and the conference in 2018 it is planned that as artist in residence, Emmanuel will share on social media his experiences and reflections in this journey with the AoMO community. In addition, Emmanuel will be compiling a photo essay detailing artistic process, inspirations and developments to the chair to be published in AoMO's Organisational Aesthetics.

Organisational Aesthetics, as a journal, is attempting to create both a dialogue and a place for artistic forms and art-as-research within the domain of academic journals. In this way, it is a pioneer in the publication of management and organisation studies. Indeed, this special issue of the International Journal of Professional Management has emerged out of a successful stream of the 2016 AoMO conference, hosted by the IEDC in Bled, Slovenia.

Empowering the Intangible: Bled, Slovenia 2016

The 8th AoMO conference was hosted by the IEDC Bled School of Management in Bled, Slovenia. The IEDC boasts of being a 'School with a View' with every right. Danica Purg, founder of the IEDC had a vision to create a learning environment in which business leaders were taught and explored the value of the arts to leadership and management. More than 30 years on she is president of a thriving private business school set on the shores of the idyllic

Lake Bled. It was in this resplendent environment that the AoMO community came together to explore the theme 'Empowering the Intangible'.

The theme of 'Empowering the Intangible' was developed by Professor Ian Sutherland, formerly of the IEDC. Ian is both an accomplished scholar and musician and was keen to explore how these interests and skill sets, so often thought to be mutually exclusive, converged to inform and ignite one another. In the spirit of exploration, play, creativity and critique, the 2016 Art of Management and Organisation conference explored the intangible aspects of organisational life.

Proliferating our academic and professional discourses are calls to recognise, engage and empower the intangible aspects of organisational life – the felt, sensory and emotional aspects that so often go under the radar. Like the medieval court jester that could speak of things courtiers could not, the conference theme "Empowering the Intangible" sought out novel ways of exploring, feeling and expressing management and organisation through the arts. AoMO 2016 encouraged the community to explore, feel and express the felt, sensory and emotional aspects of management, leadership and daily organisational life.

This conference attracted 145 delegates from around the world, highlighting the growing movement in this area of scholarly and creative interest. There were 11 streams, each showcasing academic work, practitioner methodologies and techniques and performances. Each stream is convened and facilitated by a small team of academics and/or practitioners with the support and oversight of the AoMO host to ensure each conference captures the diversity of the field. 2016 certainly did just that with the following streams:

The Power of Poetics – This stream focused on the creative interplay between poetry, poetics and creativity in order to advance understanding of the concepts and their context. The stream encouraged participants to play with poetry of all varieties, to interpret poetics broadly and to be creative in exploring the power of poetry and poetics.

Making the Intangible Tangible – This stream encouraged participants to explore 'stories' and 'storytelling' as a post-positivistic method of organisational enquiry in which stories are data.

Leadership as a Performance Art – Arguing that the 'art of leadership' has much in common with 'performance art' this stream invited diverse ways of understanding, imagining, framing, and expressing leadership as a performance art by welcoming submissions that advance, celebrate, challenge, explore and illuminate theory and practice

Fashion Futures – Fashion is undeniably an aesthetic power with a strong influence on consumption, community building and style, including of management, leadership and organising. This stream explored the intangible power of fashion (able) organising.

Art, Space and the Body - This stream brought together theories and practices of art, creativity theory, phenomenology, performance and installation. The focus of the stream is the human body where the body in space can improvise, model and simulate forms of process-based creation, which in turn informs our understanding of the processes of organising systems and structures and people.

Organising Movement: On Dance, Sound, Embodied Cognition and Organisations – Dance is more than an art form, it is a culturally shaped bodily practice and experience-based activity that allows the exploration of human movement, expression and sensemaking. This stream hosted papers, performances and demonstrations to explore dance as an art form, a social practice and its applications to organisational development and our understanding of organisation studies.

A Home for Happy People: ***Creativity, Critical Reflections and Belonging in Organisations*** – In this ambitious stream in which the convenors asked, can we be at home in organisations in the contemporary world of work or are we condemned to an endless unfulfilled, restless searching. If we can 'be at home' what does this feel and look like, if this is still a challenge what might it feel and look like and how can we express our hopes, fears and dreams for it?

The Virtual Studio – This was another ambitious stream which sought to explore diverse academic perspectives on the role and nature of the 'studio' in arts-based methods and approaches to teaching and learning. This stream attracted a number of 'virtual' contributions in which contributors were streamed in live from international destinations to present and perform.

Improvisation and the Art of Innovating Uncertainty - This stream explored how improvisation can contribute to a new understanding and practice of professional work, innovation and management in organisations. Times of uncertainty, disruption and overwhelming complexity call for an extension of the idea of professional work, innovation and management, which is often understood as a rational action of setting goals, planning, and controlling. While improvisation is often belittled as an unspecific and rather unprofessional dealing with messiness, we seek to look at improvisation differently. This stream brought together interdisciplinary scholars and practitioners with the goal of understanding and developing improvisation in organisation and management contexts.

Arts-based Community Development – Art is increasingly used as a catalyst in global communities to explore and tackle community development issues. This stream brought together a range of accounts and projects that explored the skill sets required to undertake such work.

The Open Stream – This stream captured innovative and unique submissions that did not fall neatly within the remit of the other streams. This year saw it play host to papers on artistic freedom, artful inquiry as a leadership skill, and silence as the essence of organisation.

Outside the streams were ongoing exhibitions, pop-up streams, events and gatherings and the freedom to express and explore ideas as they emerged. This special issue of the International Journal or Professional Management is a showcase of just some of the contributions made to the stream titled, 'Making the Intangible Tangible: Stories as a Process for Organisational and Management Inquiry'. This popular stream ran for two days and included 13 experiential presentations. The stream took place in an amphitheatre style room, ideal for storytelling and wisdom sharing, yet, in a creative AoMO twist the space had access to an outdoor, enclosed private grassed area. Presenters took advantage of this surprise alternative sensory setting and thus, presentations or parts thereof alternated between the indoor and outdoor environs.

This is perhaps the essence of what makes AoMO conferences and events special – there are very few rules. Yes, there is a conference programme and yes, there is a book of abstracts but few days or hours at an AoMO conference will feel structured or predetermined. Organisers embrace and encourage changes to be made and creativity to emerge. Resources are provided to encourage such artistry from plasticine, to pastels, to paints and postcards. This culture of creative embrace, flexibility and democracy are among features that make AoMO conferences unique shared and safe spaces for innovation and liberal creation.

The University of Brighton, UK will host the 9th Art of Management & Organisation conference with the theme of Performance. Already, the organisers are encouraging events, workshops and performances in alternative spaces including the beach. To find out more visit www.artofmanagement.org

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What do the articles published in this issue contribute to the knowledge associated with creativity and professional artistry in management?

The following papers reveal how the use of stories provides a meaningful and creative way for professional practitioners to gain deeper insight into their practices and the organisations in which they work, and in turn develop the professional artistry they need to navigate organisational life. In keeping with the spirit of the journal we provide a brief snapshot of the papers as we intend to let the stories speak for themselves.

1. **Stories as a Process for Organisational and Management Inquiry**
   Cathryn Lloyd and Geof Hill

   Practitioners are at the centre of organisations, and their personal stories are entwined with the company stories. Different professionals sharing their stories, in both artistic (hands on) and artful (using all the senses) can expand what we gain from experience.

2. **Structuring Storytelling in Management Practice**
   Martin Eley & Geoff Hill

   The authors discuss stories they have solicited from business professionals that speak to issues of leadership. They posit a model for drawing emotional distinctions within stories about leadership.

3. **Resistance, Resonance and Restoration:**
   How Generative Stories Shape Organisational Futures
   Michelle LeBaron & Nadja Alexander

   The authors discuss specifically at generative stories at work in organisations and how these types of stories can be crafted and how they contribute to organisational awareness

4. **Telling Stories in Organisations:**
   Reflective Practice/Curated Practice
   Jo Trelfa

   The author articulates a process for generating organisational stories. Her model adds to the discussion of the literature about storytelling and reflective practice in organisational contexts.

5. **Body Mapping: A Personal and Professional Artful Inquiry Process**
   Cathryn Lloyd

   The author describes her use of body mapping as an artful inquiry and a way to facilitate professionals' creative thinking and reflection about their professional practice

6. **Towards a Methodology: Organisational Cartographies**
   Kate Carruthers Thomas

   The author uses a mapping metaphor, describing a very different approach to mapping.

7. **Beating the Blues: An Exploration of the Value of Blues Music to Improve Performance**
   Jack Pinter

   The author describes his use of blues to elicit and perform organisational stories of discontent in ways that are seen as celebratory rather than complaining.

8. **Bringing the Body into Change Practice through Storied Performance**
   Hedy Bryant

   The author illuminates a particular form of storytelling in performative poetry and explores how her own poem 'The Shapeshifter' helped her to articulate her organisational practice related to organisational change.

3. Resistance, Resonance and Restoration: How Generative Stories Shape Organisational Futures

Professor Michelle LeBaron & Dr Nadja Alexander

Professor Michelle LeBaron
lebaron@allard.ubc.ca

Professor Michelle LeBaron is a conflict transformation scholar/practitioner at UBC in Canada. She has done seminal work exploring how arts help shift intractable conflicts. Michelle has served as visiting professor and research fellow at the Trinity College Arts and Humanities Research Institute in Dublin and the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Studies, South Africa.

Dr Nadja Alexander
nadjaa@smu.edu.sg

Nadja Alexander is Professor and Director of the Singapore International Dispute Resolution Academy at the Singapore Management University. An award-winning author and educator, Nadja's work embraces interdisciplinary approaches to deepen conflict engagement. Her books include Negotiation: Strategy Style Skills, The Mediation Manual, Global Trends in Mediation and The EU Law Mediation Handbook.

Introduction

Stories are powerful. They reflect our past and shape our futures, but are never complete. Stories connect us to people in organisations – present and past – with whom we feel belonging, and disconnect us from others. Always abstractive, they give incomplete pictures of what was, weaving past accounts into what is and what will be. Because choice-points in storytelling are mostly unconscious, biases and perceptions are always part of narration, tending to reinforce preferred images, identities and trajectories. Storytelling habits, in turn, often accent negative histories and escalate conflict.

Because stories are so powerful, it is essential to critically examine how they function in organisations, and to develop ways of supporting generative, inclusive stories.

Generative stories

Generative stories foster compassion, hope, strength and resilience. These may be stories we tell about ourselves and our lives; they may be stories about relationships, events and problems.

Research by Dan McAdams and others (Cox, Wilt, Olson & McAdams 2010; McAdams & Albaugh 2008; McAdams, Ruetzel & Foley 1986) have found that people who tell generative or – in his words – redemptive stories, are more likely to consider their lives meaningful and more inclined to contribute to groups, organisations and communities (McAdams 2005; Smith 2017). We may recognise people like this in our local and global communities as mentors, humanitarians, idealists, wise "elders", writers, neighbourhood organisers, artists, parents active in their children's school events and associations, and graduates active in alumni associations, just to name a few. Generative stories appear to have a positive influence not only on the storytellers themselves (the self), but also on those to whom the tale is told (the other) and on the community in which the storytelling takes place (the context).

We begin by describing characteristics of generative stories, exploring ways to foster them to prevent conflict escalation and to engage with conflict constructively. In particular we examine the following features of generative stories, namely that they tend to be:

- continuous rather than discontinuous
- more hopeful than confined
- creative as opposed to unfruitful
- more risk-taking than safe

Throughout this paper we illustrate the characteristics of generative stories with a synthetic narrative from a manufacturing organisation that we'll call *Crystal Dreams* (CD). We also draw on examples from our consultancies and well-known iconic stories to elaborate the nature of generative stories.

The first characteristic of generative stories is that they are continuous, connecting the past to the present and future in spacious ways.

Continuous or discontinuous stories

> *Sunita began working at CD as a supervisor in the technical division after finishing school several years ago, having worked her way up from an entry-level position. Carmen joined the business development section as a business analyst more recently, fresh from an honours business programme. They are about the same age. Tensions began to simmer between the two when they were appointed to represent their divisions on the workplace wellness committee along with five other employees. At first, Carmen was excited to meet Sunita, the only other woman on the committee. But relations quickly soured after Sunita opposed Carmen's suggestions of launching a healthy recipe exchange and a weight-loss competition. By the end of the first meeting, Carmen's jaw was tight and Sunita looked guarded and uncomfortable. Back in their divisions, Carmen and Sunita present two different accounts of what happened.*
>
> *Carmen vented with her colleague Nikki about Sunita. "I don't see what her problem is; everything I suggested, she blocked. And she is pretty overweight, so if anyone needs a healthy recipe exchange, it's her!" she pauses. "Ah, I guess the weight thing must be tough for her… but still, it's going to be hard to get anywhere with wellness at CD with her involved," she sighed. "Well, as my dear Aunt Libbie always reminds me, 'Persistence beats resistance'. I'm going to need a lot of patience and determination for this Sisyphean task. Oh well, I've pushed stones up hills before."*
>
> *Sunita spoke with her co-worker Genevieve. "What a terrible meeting I had to endure today. Wellness, schmellness! These business school "experts" think they know everything. They march in here and tell everyone what to do. My daughter has a teacher like that, thinks she knows everything. Makes you feel bad. Wastes time. Do you have any chips? I'm starving!"*

Notice your reaction to the two accounts above. With which person did you feel more sympathy, Carmen or Sunita? Typically, people in conflict tell stories that situate themselves positively. A very common narrative pattern involves placing the self as a victim, and the other as villain. The listener may easily fall into the role of rescuer, empathising with the teller and thus supporting and even amplifying her feelings of victimhood. Victims are

typically vulnerable and innocent, and don't see themselves as agents of change, so narratives like this may maintain or worsen the conflict (Hardy 2008).

Yet, some victim stories draw us in more than others. For example, when we read Carmen's words, we might feel some sympathy for her and her situation. Many people experience less sympathy for Sunita's story. Why is that? A clue lies in how the stories are told.

Mary Catherine Bateson (2004) distinguishes continuous from discontinuous stories. Continuous stories are coherent; they reinforce confidence and competence by connecting current conflicts to past experiences of successfully navigating challenges. Discontinuous stories, on the other hand, emphasise vulnerability. They start as if from zero, without referencing constructive past experiences (Bateson 2004). Sunita's exchange may have ended with sharing chips with Genevieve, but it didn't lay the groundwork for constructive problem-solving. Carmen's account, at least, acknowledged that progress could be made, even if there were dangers of regressing along the way.

Generative stories, then, are often continuous, though sometimes discontinuous stories can be useful as a contrast. We will discuss how these two story types can optimally co-exist later in this article. For now, our focus remains on continuous stories. They are not necessarily more logical than discontinuous ones, but are always more compelling. Steve Jobs, hailed as the greatest corporate storyteller of all time, didn't talk about the technology or size of the iPod when he first introduced it. Rather he displayed infectious enthusiasm about the idea of having '1,000 songs in your pocket'. So 1,000 songs in your pocket became a story that fired up people's imaginations. People listening to Jobs felt what he felt – excitement and anticipation. They felt a part of the story. How did this happen?

Studies in neuroscience have shown that emotions are contagious; they move amongst us without conscious awareness (Homann 2010: 87; Bloom 2006; Hagendoorn 2003; Gazzaniga 2005; Winters 2008). Our innate capacity to feel and interpret the states and emotions of others has been explained by the presence of so-called 'mirror neurons'. When we observe, imagine or plan actions, the same motor neurons and muscle groups become activated as when the action is being actually performed. In fact, it is only the suppression of a motor command that distinguishes these processes. The connection between imagination, observation and action is so strong that it can take as long to imagine walking somewhere as actually walking – and even longer if you imagine yourself carrying a heavy object. People also breathe more rapidly while imagining running even if they are still (Rizzolatti & Arbib 1998; Iacoboni 2009).

When emotions are expressed, there is a kinetic take-up in listeners' brains. This helps to explain how Steve Job's enthusiastic, emotive storytelling infused his audience with excitement and curiosity and contributed to the astonishing success of the iPod and the Apple narrative. It also helps to illuminate the nature of generative stories, which invite positive emotional resonance, or empathy. Of course, negative emotional expression also activates mirror neurons. Thus, we feel along with a character in a play portraying a painful dilemma. We leave a tragic film feeling downcast. How do you think Genevieve and Nikki felt after listening to their friends' stories? The continuous nature of Carmen's story likely meant that Nikki felt more hopeful than did Genevieve. This leads to another aspect of generative stories: they invite others to share in hopeful future visions in which constructive change is possible.

Hopeful or confined stories

Generative stories connect fragments of past experiences to each other, offering glimpses of hope or accenting strength of character or portraying a glass as half full or steering toward the silver lining of a threatening cloud.

One of the most iconic stories of maintaining hope in the face of desperate odds comes from the life of Nelson Mandela. During his 27 years in prison, Mandela not only learned the language

of his oppressors; he also familiarised himself with their poetry, literature, music and rugby. He got to know his jailers and – in some cases – their families. He learned their stories. Eventually, he negotiated a new inclusive political climate for his country, and avoided the bloody civil war that so many had assumed would be inevitable.

Mandela's political giftedness lay partly in his ability to understand the stories of Afrikaners – and hence their culture and way of thinking. But his genius lay also in his own storytelling. Rather than reacting with angry accounts amplifying victimisation, injustice and persecution, as many black South Africans expected and even desired, Mandela offered the possibility of a future South Africa where no one would suffer because of the colour of their skin. Rather than stories of despair, he shared stories of hope. Rather than stories of revenge, he offered stories of reconciliation.

Mandela's narratives were not always well received. Many did not understand their leader's conciliatory approach and willingness to collaborate with 'the enemy'. They were confused and disillusioned; some felt betrayed. Amidst tensions that brought South Africa dangerously close to civil war, Mandela's hopeful story remained constant. He ultimately emerged as a hero who saved a nation through his narrative of reconciliation. Upon his death in 2013, he was celebrated as a giant of history. Mandela defied the instinct that many have – especially in the face of unfairness – to tell stories that polarise, demonise and incite revenge.

From Mandela's life story, his 27 years in prison and subsequent political life, we can see the power of stories that offer hope. They build not walls but pathways to positive change. In organisations which accent bureaucratic culture and procedural uniformity, hopeful narratives can be difficult to create and sustain because they almost always entail change and sometimes even audacious transformation. Because our cognitive habits tend toward aggregating like information (Krepper 1996) hope begets hope just as despair spawns more despair. Thus, Carmen's more hopeful story invites her listener to imagine ways that the outcome might be other than Sisyphean.

Sunita's story did not offer a hopeful way forward. Her emotional tone of resignation and resentment leaned more toward wallowing in misery than problem-solving new options. Thus, it confined her and her listener to a story in which others with elevated positions fail to see how things really work, and waste valuable time. Without a hint of hope, her story leaves her listener feeling emotionally flat and without agency.

The extent to which a story is hopeful or confined is also related to resilience. Resilience is the capacity of a group or individual to re-find coherence and meaning after trauma or conflict (Zolli & Healy 2012; Wilson 2012). Studies have shown that people with high resilience recover more quickly from adversity, and find ways to create and live new, positive stories. Fascinating research draws a relevant distinction between so-called delicate orchid children and hardy dandelion children. Researchers have found that genetic predispositions in some children mean that they are less hardy, more sensitive and more likely to struggle unless they receive particular care (Wlassoff 2015; Bergland 2015; Ellis & Boyce 2008). When these delicate orchid people grow up and join organisations, they may struggle if they did not receive the careful attention they needed as children, and thus they may present with a 'chip' on their shoulders. While it is not clear whether Sunita or Carmen were hardy dandelion children or the more delicate orchids, it is important to recognise that social context plays a role in resilience alongside genes. Organisations whose cultures emphasise belonging, respect for diversity and dialogue are more likely to encourage resilience in ongoing interactions. Another helpful factor is creativity, especially when linked with movement.

Creative or unfruitful stories

Creativity is the capacity to make something new out of what already exists. It is the ability to connect disparate dots of the past in different ways to generate new narrative realities that help make sense of our experiences, encounters and our ever-evolving identities. Members of CD's wellness committee would be well-advised to consider how to create innovative stories together. Experiential activities might also assist Carmen and Sunita to shift their negative dynamics before the situation polarises further, making progress even less likely.

One of the most productive avenues comes from the arts. In expressive arts activities, participants are encouraged to move amongst modalities, shifting from dance to drumming to storytelling, for example (Levine & Levine 2011). Emphasising low skill and high sensitivity, expressive arts experiences give participants opportunities to spark new brain cells, and new linkages in the brain. Judith Hanna (2016) tells us that dance and rhythmic movement, for example, actually makes brain cells more nimble, so that they readily wire into the neural network.

One of the escalating factors in the emergent conflict between Sunita and Carmen may have been the process of their wellness committee meeting. We don't know whether the members had an opportunity to explore the possible terrains for realising their mission, or to imagine their work in creative ways. If not, it's not too late. Whether the committee engages in adventure learning or some facilitated expressive arts activities, the stories they tell about each other and the most promising ways to support wellness at CD will be different after kinaesthetic engagement (Alexander & LeBaron 2013). More creative possibilities will almost certainly follow.

Hanna's research also suggests that interweaving different tasks promotes more effective learning. The wellness committee might take its cue from this finding, varying the ways they work together and designing processes that invite sharing different kinds of stories. The other aspect of generative stories that the members of the wellness committee could incorporate into their work has to do with risk-taking.

Risk-taking or safe stories

Stories associated with strong emotions have a strong purchase on us. We may find ourselves retelling them many times, or repressing them and trying to relegate them to an uninfluential past. Others, too, retell or remember stories about us, keeping us frozen in a singular identity. But whether we or others retell them or attempt to bury them, these magnetised stories play potent roles in how we perceive ourselves and others, and the choices we make. Sometimes, particularly traumatic stories become so powerful in our psyche that they threaten to merge with our identity. For example, after the murder by beheading of journalist Daniel Pearl, his sister, a personal friend of the author was frequently introduced as the relative of the slain man. While this fact about her is true, it tends to obscure many other things about her, limiting others' understanding of her complex self.

Repeating stories risks ossifying them, effacing vitality and more complex identities. We find ourselves unconsciously locked into rhetorical patterns that silently shape the meaning of our lives in collectives like corporations and communities. As neuroscientist Uri Hasson writes, "Today, too many of us live [and work] in echo chambers where we're exposed to the same perspective day after day." (Hasson 2016)

For example, in a commercial mediation conducted by one of the authors, two large corporations were at loggerheads. Legal action had been pending for a decade with numerous interim applications complicating and redefining the legal narratives. However – even more significant than the legal narrative – was a fiery public feud that had escalated and spread to envelop entire departments within the two organisations, individuals within other organisations in the sector, and even family members. As the mediator was conducting initial meetings with

key individuals, she was advised that she would learn a lot by reading a novel based on real events forty years earlier that were inextricably connected to the current legal dispute. Forty years ago! This organisational conflict had been handed from one generation of employees to the next. Key individuals originally involved in the dispute had long retired; some had passed away. But their stories were alive, their characters legendary as if etched into the ice of the long-frozen conflict.

New staff members found themselves entering an organisational culture defined by deeply entrenched conflict narratives framing their organisation as the victim and the other as the villain. Even though both organisations – and the people within them – were involved in the same conflict, the way they made meaning of those stories could not have been more different. When representatives of the organisations had previously come together to talk, the assumptions in their stories stayed within the "safe" parameters of the inherited corporate narrative, offering neither space nor flexibility to risk a shift in perspective.

Throughout the mediation, the mediator worked in creative ways to guide the corporate representatives to a space where they were able to engage in a more risk-taking behaviour, making narrative shifts from the past to the future, from discontinuous to continuous, from confined to hopeful.

In a series of lab experiments, Hasson and his team have shown that what we accept as true strongly influences our ability to influence one another (Hasson, Ghazanfar, Galantucci, Garrod & Keysers 2012; Silbert, Honey, Simony, Poeppel, & Hasson 2014). This, then shapes the meaning of the stories we tell, and are told. As with the two warring organisations in the mediation, if Carmen and Sunita start off with the assumption that the other is impervious to their ideas, their ability to influence the other will remain limited. In the absence of a contextually-relevant shared perspective, Carmen and Sunita's brains are less likely to resonate with each other and they will likely retreat to the familiar neural pathways associated with frozen assumptions and conflictual patterns of interaction. Effective communication and negotiation significantly depend on speakers and listeners recognising some common ground between them. So what advice can we give individuals and organisations to encourage them to take the apparent risk to disrupt safe patterns of difference and disharmony?

Generative stories involve taking the risk to step outside well-travelled accounts, and unsettling the thin, self-serving storylines of melodramatic victim-villain narratives that fuel the fires of conflict. In relation to the organisational mediation, it falls to the mediator to use a range of creative interventions, including narrative strategies, to encourage a risk-taking approach and support a shift towards generative storytelling. Given the long-standing, deeply entrenched, well-documented, publicised and legalised nature of this conflict, this is a challenging task. A successful mediation process at its best may catalyze a turn toward seismic cultural shifts in both organisations. But do we need to wait until the conflict is so painfully acute and the organisational dis-ease becomes life-threatening in an existential sense? In most cases, paying attention to dysfunctional narratives as they begin to emerge within an organisational context is a much more effective way to manage conflict.

To illustrate, let's return to the situation at CD Corporation and consider how Sunita and Carmen feel as they approach the next meeting of the wellness committee. By the time they arrive, Sunita and Carmen will have been primed for conflict. Each has repeated their story to at least one co-worker, and probably to others in their lives. Every time these stories are told, they are brought again into conscious awareness, and cognitively reconsolidated as salient. In the retelling, the stories do not stay the same; neuroscience shows us that each time we recall a memory and tell the associated story again, it changes. The roles of victim and villain may be accentuated as negative emotions are again aroused (Weiler 2016). The memory itself becomes labile each time the story is retold, changing in relation to a listener's reaction

and the current cognitive/emotional state of the teller. Thus, Sunita and Carmen may have even more likelihood of getting into conflict by the time the committee meets again than they would have had directly after the first meeting.

This is where risk comes in. If one of the women is willing to entertain a story about the other different from the one that now feels familiar and thus 'safe', the emerging conflict may shift. Sometimes even taking a small risk in the form of a small story edit can have a big impact (Grant & Dutton 2012). Risky stories take a chance on interrupting continuities that situate another negatively. For this reason, generative narratives ideally feature both continuous and discontinuous stories in counterpoint. Continuous stories, as we have seen, are helpful in lending coherence and – when connected to positive experiences in the past – also provide hope. Discontinuous stories are useful when a break or shift is needed from the way a process is evolving. Thus, both kinds of stories are needed to foster generative risk-taking in organisations.

Let's tune into the second meeting of the wellness committee.

> *Sunita arrives feeling tense and apprehensive. Carmen, too, has been dreading the meeting. Armed with their reinforced stories, they feel resigned and frustrated respectively. Fortunately, a new chair, Felix, has been appointed due to the unexpected reassignment of his colleague. Having been briefed on the previous meeting, Felix begins by saying that he wants to know about what the committee did previously, but first is interested in knowing more about each member of the committee. By way of introductions, he asks each of them to share an image or metaphor for wellness, and a well-known person (living or past) who epitomises wellness. In doing this, Felix is signalling that he wants a discontinuity with the previous meeting. As each committee member shares their image, there is shared laughter, and also surprise at the creativity and diversity of the metaphors. When Sunita and Carmen name their wellness exemplars, there is a moment of silence accompanied by raised eyebrows and, finally, smiles all around. Each of them has named Nelson Mandela. This moment of shared recognition shifts the tone of the meeting from apprehension to curiosity, and everyone around the table feels relief. Felix took a risk that paid off for CD Corporation.*

In another example, Tim Leberecht suggests risking a mental shift from telling stories about winning, to telling stories about losing (Leberecht 2017). Leberect explains that – with increasing economic uncertainty worldwide, coupled with the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence – the workplace is set to become even more flexible. This may mean that individuals in workplaces will likely enjoy less status and less influence over their work. They may need to get used to losing even more. Daring to develop a generative narrative that reflects shared human experiences of change and loss may bolster sustainable coping strategies

Max Leonard (2015) offers another illustration of how to make such a radical perspective shift in his book about "the last man in the Tour de France". It's not just about the last man in the race, but about the vast majority of people who do not feel they have "won". Leonard asks what would happen if there were another narrative, for example one that shifted attention from winners and losers in the race to finishers and non-finishers or simply on the singular adventure of a cyclist throughout the event? What if there were another way, or even other ways, to tell stories that embraced the richness of what exists between the "wins" in our lives?

Like Leonard, German filmmaker Edgar Reitz, shows in *Heimat*, a film series about German 20th century history, how conventional narratives can be disrupted, inviting viewers to embrace new perspectives of time, people, emotive states and selected events (Wickham 1991). Watching this series, viewers realise how fragments always shape present perceptions – though mostly unconsciously – as we create the many accounts of our individual lives and the multiple stories of our collective lives. Taking the risk to interrogate this process within our own psyche's as well as our organisational and communal ones is an important part of creating generative stories.

Creating organisational spaces for generative story-making

How can leaders and employees in organisations cultivate conditions that make generative story-telling more likely? As we have seen in CD Corporation, leaders have a critical role to play in noticing when "safe", confined and unfruitful stories are being told, and strategically inviting stories discontinuous with that trajectory. They can later invite continuous stories, linking to past successes, once positive momentum has been established. Leaders who value generative stories will also be mindful of the importance of inviting kinaesthetic knowing through shared activities. Felix, the new chair of the wellness committee at CD Corporation, realised this. He suggested that the wellness committee take a vegetarian cooking class together with a local celebrity chef. Through this experience, members of the committee came to know each other in more kaleidoscopic ways, to engage in a different kind of dialogue, and to develop closer bonds.

Felix, also understood the principle from systems theory that complex, adaptive systems are highly sensitive to initial conditions. Having learned from informal conversations that the initial interactions of committee members were unconstructive, he proposed a "restart" under his tenure that created a climate in which risks could be taken, creativity exercised and a blend of continuous and discontinuous stories used as needed. The wellness committee functioned effectively during the following year, and members looked forward to their joint work.

CD Corporation's experience is far from unique. As Felix understood, the importance of encouraging generative story-creation and story-telling is buttressed by neuroscientific insights about narratives and their relationships to memory and conflict transformation. Still, there are many factors that undercut generative stories including overly bureaucratic cultures that limit creativity and proscribe risk-taking; lack of insight and skill in leaders and employees; and the myth that allowing spaciousness for generative stories at all levels of an organisation is 'soft' or less incisive' than more constrained strategies. More work remains to be done to compellingly describe the benefits of generative story-telling in organisations, and uncover more about the conditions that make it possible.

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