


# The Art and Science of Story or “Are you sitting uncomfortably?”

## Part 1: Gathering and Harvesting the Raw Material






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
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# The Art and Science of Story or “Are you sitting uncomfortably?”

# Part 1: Gathering and Harvesting the Raw Material

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*In an earlier article "Story telling: an old skill in a new context (Business Information Review 16(1) March 1999, 30-37) Dave Snowden outlined some of the uses of story telling for communication and knowledge disclosure. In this new two-part article he describes for the first time the full method for Story based on over five years of research, experimentation and practice. Story telling has become something of a management fad in the last year or so, but most if not all of such activity is characterised in this article as 'anecdote enhancement': a useful technique in its own right but which taken in isolation, fails to exploit the full richness and potential of Story. In part one he covers basic language, some uses of Story in organisation and the techniques required to elicit anecdotes from communities. Part I also describes the extraction of Archetype from anecdotes and hints at the extraction and use of Organising Principles the nature and function of which will be covered in Part II (published in Business Information Review 17 (4)). Part II will focus at the various types of purposeful story that can be constructed from this raw material and will elaborate on the various use of Story in organisations together with the ethics of Story use.*

"Art is a human activity, consisting in this, that one man consciously by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, and that other people are infected by these feelings, and also experience them"

Tolstoy *What is Art*

At its most fundamental, the value of a story lies in its ability to convey complex and multi layered ideas in a simple and memorable form to culturally diverse audiences. In contrast most communication, internal and external along with much management consultancy practice, tends to overcomplicate simple ideas. When it comes to learning children are more receptive, eager and willing than most adults. However as parents we do not send them on a training course or issue them with manuals and handbooks; instead we tell them stories (often idealised) from our own past, the past of the relatives and the hero and anti-hero figures of our particular culture. Many great religions have started with a person of high moral worth who tells stories that convey those values in a memorable and moving way and which also are capable of being understood at many levels. A few hundred years later the theologians arrive and life becomes more complicated. One of our problems in management theory and in the modern organisation is that the theologians arrive first.

This paper seeks to indicate some of the science as well as the art of story telling. One of its aims is to indicate the ability of story to transmit meaning with the same intensity as Tolstoy's definition of Art. The balance of art and science in Story is a difficult one. We do not wish to destroy the spontaneity and emotion of story telling for its own sake; but we do want to tap into its power for a variety of purposes including communication, knowledge elicitation, cultural change and cross culture understanding to name just some of the uses. This paper is analytical in nature, but we must always remember that the use of Story requires passion; we need to balance analysis with emotional intensity. The very power of Story can also verge on negative aspects of propaganda and we need

to create an ethic for story intervention that borrows from ethno-cultural experiments and investigation.

## Use of Story

There are many uses of Story, and more emerge every day as organisations realise the richness of the technique compared with more conventional communication practices. The second part of this article will describe a variety of applications in more detail. Aside from internal communication programmes these include merger and acquisition work, effective creation of partnerships in B2B projects, culture measurement and target setting for managers, brand impact and creation, empowerment in uncertain times, cultural change, know-how storage and knowledge dissemination. One example is offered in advance of this by way of illustration and to prepare the ground for one of the anecdote capture techniques described later: the use of metaphor as a workshop technique to create effect as a way of getting people to see things differently, to accept previous lost opportunities and adopt a different perspective.

In conducting innovation workshops with senior managers the author will often send participants two books to read in advance of the session: *A Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy* by Douglas Adams (1992) and *Longitude* by Dava Sobel (1998). The former book is a rich source of material to disrupt management jargon where '42' solutions are too frequent: if you don't understand read the book!

Sobel's brilliant book provides a rich metaphor and is the subject of this example. For those who have not have not read it; *Longitude* tells the story of the discovery of the means to measure Longitude in the eighteenth century, a discovery stimulated by a rich reward offered by the British Government. The means of measuring Latitude had long been known; through observation of the Sun and reference to the date, easily maintained through a ships log. However knowing where you are on the 'y' axis while better than nothing is little practical use without the 'x' axis. The lack of any means of measuring Longitude resulted in many accidents and much loss of life through shipwreck, unexpected encounters with the enemy and such like. When the competition was announced the scientific community of day *knew* where the solution would be found: Latitude was measured by heavenly observation and this was the obvious solution to Longitude. None of them were prepared for the real solution; a furniture maker from the Midlands in England, not a scientist from London, created a clock that kept accurate time on shipboard. Time is the solution; Longitude is measured by the time difference from Greenwich Mean Time at midday. However this was not the solution the experts expected. For decades experts attempted to ignore, denigrate and wear down the furniture maker and his son, until in the end, kicking and screaming they accepted the solution, but even then the prize was not paid in full.

This metaphor can be used with great effect by asking a simple question: "Give me three incidences of where your staff have been treated in the same way as the Astronomer Royal and his cohorts treated that furniture maker". It always produces a useful answer. The alternative, "Give me three incidents where through pig headed ignorance and blind stupidity you have ignored the creative skills and talents of your staff" is both less predictable in outcome and far more dangerous! The metaphor allows people to understand at a deeper and less personally threatening, but still disruptive level.

## The difference between Story and storytelling

Using scriptwriters and the like for more effective storytelling is not the same thing as Story (the capitalisation is deliberate), although it is a useful technique in Story. In the language of this paper the use of storytelling skills isolated from the wider schema of Story will be termed anecdote enhancement. Storytelling, or anecdote enhancement is in danger of becoming a fad. Many consultancies both large and small are setting themselves up to act as storytellers. Scriptwriters, journalists, actors, film producers and many others are offering services to help people tell a better story, or to become

storytellers. Some of this work is valuable, some is just useful and some is plain dangerous as it is being done without the theoretical and ethical framework necessary to support its use.

This is not to say that there is no value in capturing and distributing anecdotes within a company; such activity at 3M is seen as moving beyond the "laziness of bullet points" to the greater complexity and context setting of narrative form (Shaw *et al* 1998). In many knowledge management exercises getting individuals to tell their stories rather than just engaging in structured analysis of past experience has transformed the effectiveness of programmes at organisations such as the World Bank<sup>1</sup> to name just one example.

In order to understand Story we need to introduce some definition of terms.

1. **Anecdote & Story:** in the context of this paper an anecdote is a naturally occurring story. It may be captured in conversation, virtually or in a workshop or wherever. It may be fact, faction or fiction. In contrast a Story has been purposefully constructed. Some anecdotes, particularly those told by a powerful story teller, or those which have been told and retold many times in the context of a training course, or by a public speaker can take on the form of a Story, but the key differentiator is the element of deliberate construction and intent, it is to use an old philosophy problem the all important difference between a *wink* and a *blink*. How to do this and the elements used will be described later.
2. **Script & Anti-Story:** a script is the official story of an organisation. It is the norm of a particular organisation, departure from which can label an individual as 'not one of us' or some similar form of exclusion. Attempts at cultural change often seek to impose a new script on the natural discourse of a community. An anti-story is generally a cynical and spontaneous reaction to a script that is too far away from the reality of life within the organisation concerned, or where the powerful originators of perpetrators of the script act in a hypocritical manner in respect of its underlying values. All organisations have anti stories, ranging from initiative weary cynicism to self-righteous indignation. From "Its just the same as five years ago, another set of managers on yet more courses trying to get us to do something that we all knew how to do before they came out of management school" to "it's all very well for them to call for sacrifice, but I was talking to my friend in travel the other day and you won't credit this, but the whole board flew out to New York First Class for that last meeting". It is better to attempt no change and/or communication if it is likely to generate anti-stories.
3. **Fact, Faction & Fiction:** most people will purport to be telling factual stories, but will actually be using 'faction'. This is the age-old facility of humans to change history to conform to current requirements. This may be the sort of emphasis and de-emphasis that goes on every time an individual constructs a resume, the excuse making by a failed or failing team in a project review or the retrospective association of success with an individual or groups foresight and planning; it may be down right lies that have been told so often that they are now believed. While fiction is often more valuable than fact in story telling, as we shall discover later, for the moment we need to understand that a factual anecdote is very rare and fairly easy to recognise as the pain and the passion will be visible in the storytellers face. The vast majority of anecdotes are a mixture of fact and fiction in varying degrees: faction.

Moving to the purposeful construction of Story allows us to better understand and use the various forms of story that exist within an organisation. Anecdotal enhancement on

<sup>1</sup> Steve Denning's book on his experiences at the World Bank are outlined in 'The Springboard: How Storytelling Ignites Action in Knowledge-Era Organizations' (Butterworth Heinemann, 2000). See also [www.stevedenning.com](http://www.stevedenning.com)

its own always carries the danger becoming a script and generating anti-story, especially where it is taken up too enthusiastically by the organisation.

## **The Anecdotal base of Story**

The anecdotes of a community provide the raw material for Story. By using characters, incidents and context from the anecdotal material captured from a community we can root a purposeful story in the community that it is intended to influence. Constructing stories in isolation from this material can generate anti-stories as the construct is too far removed from reality. It can also generate derision. Children have a habit of ignoring 'Janet and John' books in which idealised children help Mummy and Daddy in the home; the same is true of organisations. No one of any value will respect idealised stories based on an assumption of universal trust, common purpose, the value of an anodyne mission statement or motherhood and apple-pie value propositions. In order to produce purposeful stories we have to root those stories in the reality of that community as well as its (rather than a third party's) aspirational goals. This requires the capture and recording of a critical mass of anecdotes from a community. Experience indicates that critical mass of material is achieved for a socially cohesive community with some twenty or thirty anecdotes.

### **Anecdote Elicitation**

The most fundamental requirement of anecdote capture is not to influence the anecdotes that one is told by a community. Structured interviews, questionnaires and conventional workshops will tend to produce anecdotes that conform to the script of a community: individuals in large organisations soon learn how to adopt camouflage behaviour as a survival technique. The smaller the footprint of the investigator the more valuable the material captured.

There are a variety of proven techniques for this work that will now be described.

### **Anthropological observation**

When an anthropologist studies a community they first become, as far as is possible, a part of that community. By acting as the unobserved observer they reduce the chance of bias and influence and are more likely to gather the real day to day anecdotes of a community. A brief experiment will prove this to the sceptical reader: ask a group of children about their teachers while sat around the formal context of a meal, and then leave a tape recorder in a play area and contrast the results. With adults the effect is more pronounced as we learn the importance of unguarded and guarded conversation at an early age. Any consultant or manager who claims that their style, discipline or research prevents this is either a saint or self-deluding fool and a charlatan. The saint's capacity for martyrdom, self sacrifice and sanctity occurs too infrequently in the managerial class to form a basis for planning.

Anthropological techniques are gaining increasing credibility in business and do not require long periods of cultural emersion to be effective. The secret to this sort of work is not to enter in as a consultant wearing a suit with or without clipboard, and certainly not with a pre-prepared set of questions and hypotheses to test. Instead the consultant enters as a servant of the servants: stack vegetables, carry bags, make tea, sweep metal scarf off the factory floor with the apprentices, dig holes in the road, shadow office workers. You may not even use consultants; in one successful project school children were used to understand the knowledge flows of a head office. The stated reason for their presence was a half term work experience, but the day before they started an anthropologist trained them. The school children exhibited three characteristics of successful operators in the field. They were **naïve** so they asked unexpected questions, they were **innocent** and as a result the subjects of their study naturally volunteered their anecdotes. Finally they had all the curiosity of youth, and genuine **curiosity** naturally leads to higher levels of elicitation. How many managers or consultants would one naturally associate the words trust, curiosity and naivety?

If possible, and permission is given record the stories gathered in this way, writing them down inevitably alters the material and will involve some loss of context or content (Snowden 2000). If it is necessary to record the observations in writing then a notebook with a vertical column down the centre of the page should be used. The left hand column is for opinions, the right for the most accurate possible recording of what is being told. This simple device helps separate fact from opinion and focuses the observer. At all costs observers should be trained to be paranoid about imposing or influencing the subjects with their own emerging opinions or worst still the presumptions and presumption of their industry expertise. Two things are key to this type of work:

1. The need to respect privacy and confidentiality for material gathered and the willingness to refuse *at all costs* to divulge, or by description accidentally identify the source of ones material. The principle here is that of the investigative journalist who cannot reveal his or her sources without losing all future respect and the capacity to work.
2. To be humble and accept that one has to learn, to be non-judgemental even in the face of extreme racism or the like. The purpose of observation is to capture things as they are, not as we would like them to be. Initiation rites are common in this type of work and living through them with good humour is essential, and ultimately rewarding. Three examples from the author's own experience will illustrate this: (i) being sent to the depot to pick up a 'Stand Alone', a non-existent part but a good excuse to stand the consultant on his own in a corner of the depot for fifteen minutes or so; (ii) being given a really filthy job to test ones nerve and motivation, with a water utility this can be particularly unpleasant ending up to ones neck in the semi-liquid contents of a Sewer is very instructive and a great leveller; (iii) keeping a secret when drunk with a group of merchant bankers appeared purposeless, but on reflection the nature of their job is all about keeping secrets under conditions of stress.

### **Story Telling Circles**

Anthropological observation is a very effective way of gathering anecdotes, but it suffers two restrictions. Firstly, the anecdotes are only stimulated by events that take place or are recalled during the period of the observation: in a long life cycle project environment this is too restrictive. Secondly, the capture of anecdotes is confined to fact or more often faction, but does not permit the use of fiction which can be a valuable disclosure device, particularly for those valuable and painful anecdotes of failure that are so important to the creation of a learning environment in organisations.

Story telling circles are sensibly formed around groups with some degree of coherence and identity in the organisation: it may be common past experiences in a project environment or a common job function or aspiration(s). Key is that the community has some common history or reference from which they can draw anecdotes. Practice indicates that the ideal time span for such an event is a short day or ideally an afternoon coupled with an evening. It is also essential that the facilitator does not prepare possible or anticipated solutions in advance of the session itself; it is legitimate to prepare techniques and supporting tools, but not to possible outcomes. Far too much modern facilitator training focuses on ensuring participant satisfaction at the cost of discovery. Facilitators need to be highly tolerant of ambiguity and prepared not be liked in order to succeed. Story circles should be recorded on video and analysed later, it is a mistake to allow participants to analyse their material as they go along: it over directs their thinking and subsequent anecdotes reflect and may falsely reinforce their original analysis. The participants should always be prepared for an event in which material will be gathered without conclusions being reached, as the habitual expectation of a workshop is that it will reach a conclusion. Within a circle there are five useful techniques for anecdote elicitation:

1. *Dit spinning* is a British Navy saying, variations include to *spin a dit* or *swing the lantern*. A more international phrase might be *fish tales*. It's human nature in a social setting to swap experiences – and there is a natural tendency to escalation. I tell a story of a harrowing or amusing experience, my partner tells a better one and so on. The desire to tell a better story overcomes the inhibitions of conformity with the official script. The secret of facilitation here is to pull out of each *dit* as it reaches a natural peak and start another.
2. *Alternative histories* provide a powerful means by which a group can explore fictional space and stimulate the creation of a richer anecdotal base. Any anecdote will have a number of turning points, where an alternative future was a possibility based on a small change in a decision or some 'environmental' factor. Exploration of these alternative histories is a powerful source of often truth-full anecdote: for example, once the official history of a project has been told, the participants are asked to identify between three and seven points in that history where a small change would have resulted in a radically different outcome, most frequently failure instead of success or vice versa. They are then asked to construct an alternative and fictional story for each such turning point. The result is four or eight anecdotes rather than one. Professional historians create alternative histories as a way of better understanding what actually happened and to better examine the motivations and values of those involved. The same reasons apply here, with the interesting twist that often, more truth is revealed through the alternative histories than is achieved through the official one!
3. *Shifting Character or Context* in a story can elicit a higher level of diversity in the anecdotal material. All stories have a structure, one of which will be described later in the context of story de-construction. They have antagonists, scenes, conflict, inner feelings and the like. Having identified a substantial anecdote – this does not work with uncomplicated ones – the group is taken through the deconstruction process described later and then asked to retell the story with an appropriate change. Change the Protagonist to be Antagonist for example. The change provides a new perspective on the anecdote. A good example of this can be seen at the English Heritage Centre at the site of the Battle of Hastings. Entry to the battle site allows the visitor to select one of several tape machines each of which tells the story from a different perspective: one of the Norman Knights, a Saxon Warrior, a local priest, a camp follower. In practice many visitors will walk around the site several times, on each occasion gaining a different perspective and enhancing their overall understanding.
4. *Indirect story telling through the use of Archetypes* allows disclosure without attribution. This is a variation of a technique long known to parents. When my son Huw was six, honesty in respect of some act of mischief was achieved by accepting the convention that 'It was Teddy that did it'. The use of archetypal characters as a means of learning within a community has a long history that will be more fully referenced when story forms are discussed later in this paper. Within a story circle the participants can be asked to identify archetypal characters revealed by the anecdotes they have collected; this is viable when the number of anecdotes reaches a critical mass: normally in excess of twenty. The process can be facilitated by the use of cartoonists, who draw and redraw the characters until the group are happy. It is key in this type of work to ensure that the archetypes are not specific to an individual or individuals known to the group. Once the archetypes are established then possible future situations can be used to stimulate anecdotes from the group using the archetypal characters. Equally past events can be described again using the fictional device of "How would our archetypal characters have handled this?" Again the purpose is to use fictional forms to explore a wider range of possibilities and create a richer repository of anecdotes. However in archetype use, and also the use of metaphor described next, there is another equally important purpose. We are moving from an 'I' story to a 'They'

story. Many psychotherapists will deplore this de-personalisation, but we are not here concerned with the redemption of the individual, but with the elicitation of learning material. The indirect use of archetypes permits a degree of honesty that would not be possible using the 'I' mode.

5. *Metaphor* can also provide a powerful elicitation technique for anecdotes. Its use can provide a common reference for the group you are working with that moves them away from current concerns and prejudices, into a safer space, but a space that is disruptive in the association of ideas that it stimulates. It can also provide a language to sustain thinking within the group after the event itself. Reference was made earlier to the use of Longitude to elicit examples of cases where innovative or creative behaviour had been stifled by an assumption of the status quo. That example not only allows people to 'own up' to bad practice that they might otherwise attempt to excuse, but also provides an ongoing stimulus to prevent re-emergence of the behaviour: "Hold it Guys, we're acting like the those Eighteenth Century scientists again" acts as a trigger or stimulus to previous group learning. Common childhood stories, examples from other industries, use of a different discipline, science fantasy, historical references are all examples. The book, article, cartoon or film provided to the group becomes an artefact whose use is uniquely associated with the learning and acts as a means vehicle for passing that learning on to others: "You must read this book"; "Pin this cartoon on your wall".

### **Virtual story telling**

The examples to date assume the physical presence of the individuals involved in producing the anecdotes. This is the easiest way to manage anecdote elicitation, but it is not always possible. Running a virtual story circle is more difficult as the physical triggers and indicators are not present. It is a mistake to attempt to just carry forward the same techniques into a virtual environment. Some techniques will transfer where the virtual story circle is synchronous, with all the actors present and interacting. However it is frequently necessary, and often advantageous for the story circle to be run asynchronously with participants joining and leaving at different times and places. In this case the time horizon is weeks rather than a single day.

Virtual story circles require a greater amount of energy to sustain participation. In a room with others we will apply ourselves, and if we do not the lack of participation is clearly visible to the group, as a whole and social pressure will involve us, even if interest did not. In a virtual community this is far more difficult. There are usable models; spending time in one of the multi-used games available to the public may help in understanding the type of work that has to be done to set up a virtual story circle. The issue of individuals failing to participate can also be handled using what is becoming known as translucent technologies. A good example of this is Babble (Erickson et. al., 1999). Originally developed within IBM's Labs, Babble uses social proxies to make an individual's level of participation visible to the individual and to other community members. All members of a virtual collaborative community are represented by different colored dots within a circle or *Babble*. The dots of active members cluster in the center, while those of members who fail to participate gradually drift to the edge of the circle. The visibility to the individual, and to the virtual community of which the individual is a member, induces responsibility by providing a virtual equivalent of the social clues that we get in day-to-day interaction in conventional space. Tools such as Babble permit virtual story telling over longer periods of time, by making participants aware of their own participation and that of others, without the representation taking over. The Social Proxy in a Babble is a small area of the screen, which fades into the subconscious of the participant. Virtual Story Telling provides different facilities to that physical story telling; note, different not better or worse.

There is one other feature of virtual communities that can be used for anecdotal elicitation, although this is experimental and fraught with ethical and other issues: it is offered with that qualification. We already know that virtual communities allow people



to adopt alternative persona, or be perceived in radically different ways (Stone 1996). We are also seeing evidence that virtual environments can encourage confessional behaviour with some public web sites already established and active in this area. Use of anonymity and multi-persona is best confined to short-term interventions. It permits two types of activity that are useful in the process of knowledge elicitation:

1. Individuals can experiment with ideas and experience, confident in the knowledge that there is no direct attribution. For example a normally cautious individual may develop a 'risk taking' personality who reveals anecdotes and ideas that would normally damage their desired profile within the organisation.
2. Individuals are able to reveal evidence of cover ups, lucky escapes etc. These may be malicious and it is important to remember that material arising from such exercises has to be used with care. For this reason it is usually best to have the environment managed and interpreted by a third party.

All of these techniques, but in particular virtual story telling, are non-trivial tasks and need to be undertaken with considerable care, attention to ethics and continuous injections of energy. Training and mentoring are a necessary precursor to their use.

### **Extracting value from Anecdotes**

The process of anecdote capture is useful in its own right. It creates material that is inherently more attractive than 'dry facts', and often reveals unexpected material, attitudes and incidents that are not revealed by more traditional means of enquiry. The process of anecdote elicitation is also a valuable learning experience for the participants. All of the workshop techniques listed above can be used on a stand-alone basis to considerable effect.

However there is far more value that we can obtain from the anecdotal base over and above the raw material it provides for story construction. All people in an organisation constantly tell anecdotes, both about their organisation and about their own personal lives and aspirations. These anecdotes are told around water coolers, across desks in an open plan office during a quiet period, over the lunch table, in Internet chat rooms and in the countless opportunities both physical and virtual that are available in any organisation. Unlike a formal interview we are off guard when we tell an anecdote. It will reveal more than we intended and taken collectively with the anecdotes of other individuals with whom we work it can reveal much of the culture of an organisation. This culture can be revealed and more importantly represented by the archetypes present in common across a range of anecdotes and in the underlying value, rule and belief systems surfaced by the messages, both explicit and implicit. The extraction of these is surprisingly easy in practice, although difficult to describe. It is important that it is done collectively and that anecdotes are batched into samples. Each extracted archetype and value is a de facto hypothesis that ideally requires some, but not exhaustive testing from sample to sample. Before looking at archetypes and organising principles, we have a more fundamental task, to break each anecdote down into its component parts.

### **Raw material for Story Construction**

Decomposing a story into its component parts allows improved storage of, and access to, anecdotal elements as well as providing models for story construction (Orton 1995). In the case of construction it's rather like providing the artist with an articulated model to assist in drawing life models – or more prosaically a 'join the dots' picture drawing guide. There are a variety of suitable techniques, none of which are original, for anecdote deconstruction that can be used in isolation or combination. Three of these are identified below and one, the most useful is described in more detail.

1. *W-fragments* are the distinct acts or elements of an anecdote described earlier under the alternative histories approach to anecdotal elicitation with the addition of multiple tags to allow easy access to the material. The tags are: *Who*, the name of

the individual or the type of character involved; *What*, the activity taking place within the fragment; *When*, the time dimension which may be static or dynamic in nature; *Where*, the location, normally in space appropriate to the fragment; *Why*, some explanation of the rationale for any action, or inaction and the motivation of any individual involved. The *Why* is the most problematic and may be ignored and should always be taken with a pinch of salt. W-fragments are the most useful when a computer database is in use, and offer potential for real time assembly of crude stories with continued development of technology support for story construction.

2. *Story Effect* looks at the impact of the anecdote on either the originator of the anecdote or their audience; empathy, suspense, curiosity and shock are all examples. What is important is to carry out multiple experiments on anecdotal material and determine a limited number of such factors that could be used and interpreted consistently within the context of the Story project. It may also be necessary to separate the effect on the characters in the anecdote from the anticipated impact on the audience. A good rule of thumb is to restrict the number to five, or three as these can be remembered and used by human beings. Mnemonics can help and make the analysis more easy to use in practice, looking up lists is never a good idea in group-based classification.
3. *Story feature* is often most useful as it also prepares the ground for story construction. Here the anecdote is re-described in a standard format, these can be varied to suit the circumstances but we can illustrate the most common using a near universal fairy story:

Context	Medieval Village terrorised by dragon who requires the annual sacrifice of a female virgin.
Initiating Event	Kings daughter nobly (or foolishly depending on ones point of view) insists her name is included in the lottery and is 'naturally selected' for this years ritual
Protagonist (P)	Noble Knight, preferably with a large sword – symbolism is very important in fairy tales.
P's internal response	Falls in love with Princess.
P's external response	Kills Dragon.
Consequence	Marries the Princess and inherits half the kingdom.
P's internal response	Becomes arrogant little prig and oppresses the peasants just like his father in law. Apologies for that, but the author is Welsh and was always on the side of the dragon, not to mention the peasants.

Story feature can be applied to complete anecdotes and is most useful when the large granularity material is available, which in practice is the most common as individuals like to tell substantial stories!

Aside from the greater understanding of the anecdotal material achieved through the use of these analysis techniques we are not better equipped for purposeful story construction. Story either takes and enhances an individual anecdote, or creates a completely new story from anecdotal material. Having the anecdotes deconstructed can also assist the process of extracting the archetypes and organising principles, an

understanding and informed use of which is essential to Story as opposed to anecdote enhancement.

## **Archetypes**

Archetypes have several uses in Story.

1. To assist in anecdote elicitation as described earlier.
2. For use in one of the basic story forms described in Part II.
3. As an indicative and indirect measure of culture, and by extension cultural change if archetypes are extracted over time. This will be further discussed in Part II.

Archetype extraction is intimately connected to the process of anecdotal elicitation and is one of the most useful techniques in a story circle. Reference has already been made to the use of a cartoonist to assist a group in revealing the archetypes contained in their stories. Another useful technique is to use actors once the basic archetypes have been extracted. This will be more fully described when we look at Archetypal story form, as actors are most useful in story construction. However where the archetype extraction is problematic, actors can provide a useful tool in refining and testing the archetype through their ability to provide colour and depth to character. One actor-based technique is to take the character to an extreme to test its sustainability.

Archetype extraction is a workshop process and can be conducted within a story circle, once a sufficient volume of anecdotes has been elicited. It requires interaction between members of the community and should not be dominated by senior staff. It is also an iterative process; a first pass should be tested and retested against different samples. By this stage the archetypes will have become characters, and their depth will increase with their use. The tests that are applied are as follows:

1. None of the archetypes should be linked to an identifiable individual within the organisation.
2. Everyone hearing of the archetype should recognise the character and be able to associate actual behaviours with the archetype.
3. There should be significant conflict between at least two of the archetypes and an ability to create empathy for each character with the audience
4. Each archetype should be clearly drawn and characterised; the use of cartoonists to facilitate the identification of archetypes is deliberate. Cartoonists strip a personality down to the bare essentials, as an essential feature for the work of story construction.

There are no hard and fast rules on the number of anecdotes required and the anecdotal material will to some extent determine the number. In practice there are likely to be three to five main archetypes with supporting characters. Rather like a good soap opera there are principal characters appearing in nearly every episode and subsidiary characters appearing from time-to-time, as their particular qualities are required. The cartoons, a description of each character, a list of their principle strengths and weaknesses, all form a valuable artefact for knowledge management, internal and external communication and organisational learning.

## **Organising Principles**

The nature and function of Organising Principles will be described in Part II. For the moment we need to understand that Organising Principles express themselves as values, rules or beliefs and provide a means of articulating the informal principles around which a community is self-organising; unfortunately they very rarely conform with the mission statement and formal values of the organisation!

To illustrate this lets look at three real examples of organising principles all extracted from recent engagements:

- *Don't buck the process*, evidenced by multiple anecdotes of futile attempts to do something imbued with common sense and logic, before abandoning the attempt in despair and following the process.
- *Making a decision is the starting point of a new discussion*, a succession of anecdotes indicated the highly consensual nature of the organisation in question.
- *Above all else stay loyal to your networks*, based the experiences of those not in the inner circles of power in a large bureaucratic organisation, who were dependent on their networks to secure their future through multiple re-organisations.

In all these case, once articulated, rather like an archetype its truth is immediately apparent to the organisation concerned, and to other individuals and communities with whom they work. Prior to articulation it forms an implicit organising principle that bounds and constrains anyone within the organisation, unless they are prepared to stand aside from the norm.

Extraction of organising principles is not as easy as archetypes and is best left to the end of the anecdote elicitation stage when a workshop can be set up with some of the more creative and experienced staff from the organisation identified during anecdote capture. One of the workshop techniques earlier involved the use of archetypes and this can be adapted for organising principles. By building the character, already exaggerated by the cartoonist, discussions can take place as the beliefs of the archetype, their likely reaction to different scenarios. The facilitator looks for key phrases or clues, which always come and which always summarise in a pithy form the underlying material. Another technique is to try and describe a set of organising principles that would have produced a radically different results and look at the negation as a target candidate. A simple discussion question: how would you summarise the culture of this group in three minutes – followed by a telling and re-telling session for the results is surprisingly effective.

The point of all these techniques is to use the anecdotes and the awareness that has come from listening and reading this material to stimulate the articulate of existing organising principles. It needs a skilled, experienced and gifted facilitator, but is the make or break point of Story. Once done, the validation test is to see if all the mainstream non-maverick activities described in a group of anecdotes can be described in relation to the organising principles identified. It is also useful to test them on a third party and see if anecdotes can be stimulated that contradict the principles in other than a maverick manner. The extraction of organising principles is powerful in direct proportion to the degree to which the anecdotes are the real feelings and beliefs of the communities from which they are gathered. Hence the paranoia to avoid any influence on the ecology that would allow it to give you anecdotes based on the script of that particular organisation's masters.

## **Status Report**

We have now gathered the raw material for Story. In Part II we will consider the modification or creation of Organising Principles as a component in Story Construction. We will look at four forms of Story: Myth, Fable, Virus and Archetypal. Finally in the context of several examples of the use of Story we will elaborate an ethic for the use of Story in organisations.

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