

The Story of Knowledge: Writing Stories that Guide Organisations into the Future

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Abstract: Many organisational gurus highlight the value of *oral* narrative or storytelling as a catalyst for organisational change or a way to share knowledge. Tones of articles describe seasoned raconteurs single handedly inciting enormous transformation in organisations. Oxymoronically many written works are describing the power of oral narrative. Surely these printed exposés are themselves motivators for change; so why the continued emphasis on the face-to-face storytelling? There is no disputing the fact that oral narrative is a powerful form of communicating; however, it is not always feasible. In fact, there are times when the written word packs a more powerful punch. Often it is simply not possible to catch the ear of a wide audience simultaneously, or even at all. Many people simply will not take time from their busy schedules to listen to stories. Busy executives seem to prefer the written word to the spoken. In these cases, the power of the pen offers a persuasive substitute. This is a tale about such stories in action, each of which seemed to sow the seed of change. Of course, time will be the real test; however, anecdotal evidence seems to support the proposition that well-written futuristic stories provide an excellent alternative to face-to-face oral narrative. At least in these examples, the written story proved to be a motivator for organisational change and an effective way to share knowledge. This paper is about the use of narrative to share knowledge; it is part tutorial and part theory. Building on the foundational knowledge developed by Denning, Snowden, Prusak, and others this paper describes the “how to” of effective storytelling to create and share knowledge within organisations.

Keywords: storytelling, organisational change, knowledge management

1. Introduction

On a foggy autumn day nearly 800 years ago a traveller happened upon a large group of workers adjacent to the River Avon. Despite being tardy for an important rendezvous curiosity convinced the traveller that he should inquire about their work. With a slight detour he moved toward the first of the three tradesmen and said “my dear fellow what is it that you are doing?” The man continued his work and grumbled, “I am cutting stones.” Realising that the mason did not wish to engage in a conversation the traveller moved toward the second of the three and repeated the question. To the traveller’s delight this time the man stopped his work, ever so briefly, and stated that he was a stonecutter. He then added “I came to Salisbury from the north to work but as soon as I earn ten quid I will return home.” The traveller thanked the second mason, wished him a safe journey home and began to head to the third of the trio.

When he reached the third worker he once again asked the original question. This time the worker paused, glanced at the traveller until they made eye contact and then looked skyward drawing the traveller’s eyes upward. The third mason replied, “I am a mason and I am building a cathedral.” He continued, “I have journeyed many miles to be part of the team that is constructing this magnificent cathedral. I have spent many months away from my family and I miss them dearly. However, I know how important Salisbury Cathedral will be one day and I know how many

people will find sanctuary and solace here. I know this because the Bishop once told me his vision for this great place. He described how people would come from all parts to worship here. He also told that the Cathedral would not be completed in our days but that the future depends on our hard work.” He paused and then said, “So I am prepared to be away from my family because I know it is the right thing to do. I hope that one day my son will continue in my footsteps and perhaps even his son if need be.”

In the past five years or so there has been tremendous interest in the value of oral narrative or storytelling as a catalyst for organisational change. Many of these accounts chronicle seasoned executives telling *stories* that spark massive transformation in their organisations. It seems, so the story goes, that these organisations were apparently reluctant or incapable of considering even the most modest change initiative. That is until the story was told. The opening story is an adaptation of a legendary example of how a well-told story can motivate men and women to make great sacrifices if they believe their work is important. One can imagine that most leaders would wish to have a team of cathedral builders rather than stonecutters. The question is, can a story really transform stonecutters into cathedral builders? To date most of the work in the domain has focused on the value of telling stories, in other words oral narrative. Take, for example, Steve Denning’s book *The Springboard*, the subtitle of which is

How Storytelling Ignites Action in Knowledge-Era Organisations (2001). In this seminal work, Denning describes his successes in telling face-to-face stories. Denning's work has spawned a host of other papers and books, most of which focus on telling oral stories.

Surely these printed exposés are themselves motivators for change; so why the continued emphasis on the face-to-face storytelling? Perhaps there is value in examining writing stories rather than telling stories that spark change. This paper is a story of exactly that, writing stories that help guide organisations.

2. Literature review

'Stories are a primary mode of human communication and thinking — and one that has been used since the dawn of time. Why? Stories have depth and multiple dimensions; they help us create human connections in a world that seems complex, sometimes (or often) threatening, and increasingly dehumanising. Stories give us context' (Ivy Sea Online, 2005).

2.1 Envisage narratives

Before describing the stories, it is worth reviewing the literature with a view to determining the theoretical foundations of these stories. Much like the cathedral builder's Bishop, many leaders use stories to electrify their subordinates and lead them into the future. The ability to relate to an audience using a story is a concept that has passed the test of time. Through a variety of approaches, present-day executives use stories to excite and invigorate their teams much as their predecessors did. Kaye and Jacobson (1999:50) remind us that "stories tap into our emotions and intellect in ways that get us to remember and use the information and wisdom of the past to help us make informed decisions in the future." There is an enormous difference between relating a message to an audience and sharing a vision to alter the future of an organisation. The use of narration or storytelling envisage within a corporation can grant insight into an alternate course of action. Chartier, LaPointe, and Bonner (2005: v) state in *Get Real – The Art and Power of Storytelling in Workplace Communities* 'Stories are a way to honour our past, describe our present and shape our future.' The impact of conveying an envisioned story, which can change the future of an organisation, can be magnificent, in the sense that it can also change lives. Yet, how does one know that the envisaged narrative will be received and have the ability to alter the future of an organisation? How does the manager know if the message of their narrative has been

received and that their team members can relate? In oral stories the receivers demonstrate an attentive and responsive reaction, sometimes signs of enthusiasm. However, with the written word the immediate reaction is often lacking.

2.2 The use of story

Throughout time, leaders have used stories to share knowledge, spark change and generally enlighten an audience. Some leaders use formal presentations to achieve these tasks. Although there are similarities in the techniques, there are also significant differences. More and more the evidence is suggesting the PowerPoint style of knowledge transfer is less effective than many believe. Janis Forman (1999: 1) argues that 'Clear communications between executives and their audiences has been declining ever since the advent of souped-up computer graphics and Internet access to vast quantities of data.' Neilson and Stouffer (2005) claim that PowerPoint presentations lack contextual meaning. According to McKee (2003: 51) we should 'Forget about PowerPoint and statistics. To involve people at the deepest level, you need stories.'

Steve Denning (2004: 122), the celebrated guru of storytelling, claims to have moved from PowerPoint style presentations to storytelling after watching 'my audience merely looked dazed.' Larry Prusak (in Bell, 2004), respected knowledge management expert, goes one-step further by suggesting 'I've taken PowerPoint off all my computers; it's the enemy of thought.' Though Prusak's action may seem extreme, his point is very valid; knowledge sharing is sometimes impeded by an endless stream of charts and graphs. In their article *Narrating the Vision*, Neilson and Stouffer (2005) illustrate the effectiveness of using futuristic scenarios as a storytelling technique. They suggest that 'futuristic scenarios – stories that paint a vivid picture of a future state – can help provide a vision and leadership in a narrative format as well as communicate the organisation vision' (Neilson and Stouffer, 2005: 26). The ability to convey a message, as in the story *Narrating the Vision*, is a great example of a futuristic scenario. Nevertheless it is important to examine the effectiveness of the approach of futuristic scenarios within an organisation. Steve Denning (2005) stated recently that future scenarios aid in the exploration of other points of view yet concluded that a descriptive narrative to support the scenario is necessary.

2.3 Conveying futuristic views

'As humans, we are wired to respond to stories in deep, sometimes unconscious

ways. We actually answer with our attention and focus, when all other efforts may fail. Watch sometime how body language changes when someone starts a joke or story. Notice the slight rise in alertness and increased presence of the listeners. People will almost always put down what they are doing and give full attention. If the teller is particularly good at storytelling, then the response is almost always deep focus' (Baum, 2000, p. 159).

Visualising a future organisational course of action entails strategies and tactics to build loyalty, focus effort, and spark creativity according to Robert Mai and Alan Akerson (2003). The Leader as Communicator exemplifies the restructuring of several organisations, each of which uses stories to communicate a holistic viewpoint with one or more different angles. The basis of the story is a problematic statement posing a challenge for the organisations. The story is used to convey a guided future course of action for the organisation; a methodical approach occurs prior to this phase. Before the plot line can be portrayed, a data gathering process is needed. The data-gathering phase will answer questions on the past, current, and future course of action of the organisation. One should also consider the buy-in factor of stakeholders. According to Forman (1999) one method that can be used to evaluate or test their envisage narrative is an Analysis Tree. Determining coherence through a visual analysis illustrates phases within a story. The corporation's past history, current course of action to take, and the envisaged future will be shown along with the structural ideas that show a link to strategic reality. The analysis tree is similar to a storyboard, which allows visualisation of how the process relates to another phase. Executives in the healthcare industry used this particular method. The advantage of the analysis tree is flexibility to adapt to the storytellers needs. The storyteller can adapt the analysis tree to the audience or stakeholders. Evaluating narratives through the analysis tree is valuable to an organisation based on the effectiveness of the story.

Contrary to Forman's analysis tree, Allen (2005) suggests that storytelling will not substitute for analytical thinking, but only enhances organisational knowledge. However sharing of knowledge ignites change, which increases the possibility of success within an organisation. Altering duty into passion is a requirement to increase the level of accomplishments. Linking responsibilities with passions prevents burnout and remoteness among employees, therefore benefits the organisation. Storytelling provides the means to convey messages to an audience or a method for sharing knowledge. 'Storytelling can

be the catalyst for change . . . Telling your story complements analytical thinking and allows customers to engage feelings, leading to loyalty' (Allen, 2005:64).

Storytelling can be advantageous to an organisation in a variety of ways. Matsui (7) stated 'Stories can be told in a variety of modes that include: visual accounts, ballads, metaphors, text, and voice. Telling good stories serves the organisation with an effective means of collecting wisdom through experience.' The use of storytelling, along with five other components becomes useful for an organisation to plan a future course of action. This form of planning is called Action Mapping and consists of assemblage, accumulation and production of wisdom, actions as hypothesis, conservation of energy, reflection on action, as well as storytelling (Matsui). The planning phase will consist of essential components from the data-gathering phase. Creating the story requires past, present, and future knowledge of the organisation, which will in turn be used to develop the future course of action. Involving the stakeholders in the process creates an increased success factor of the envisage narrative. Matsui (7) suggests that 'The knowledge and experiences gained from a journey clarify future actions by identifying emerging patterns.' Steve Denning (2001) uses the catalyst approach and takes storytelling a step further, through Springboard stories, which provide the audience or stakeholders with a deeper level of understanding. Visualising through the use of realistic events sustains the attention and consciousness of the audience. The significant aspect of a springboard story is the use of a simplistic approach, using fewer details to allow the audience to imagine the future possibilities that can occur within the organisation. This catalyst approach leads the audience without controlling their views based on an individual's field or past experiences. Audience participation in the creation of the organisation's future is met with less resistance and more enthusiasm, therefore obtaining buy-in from the participants.

2.4 Writing the future

Snowden's (2002: 3) second heuristic of the new knowledge management generation is 'we can always know more than we can tell, and we will always tell more than we can write down.' These wise words seem to suggest that telling an oral story may be more effective than a written story. However, before dismissing the written word it is worth considering the context of his message. Snowden (2002:3) suggests 'I can speak in five minutes what it will otherwise take me two weeks to get round to spend a couple of hours writing it down. The process of writing something down is

reflective knowledge; it involves both adding and taking away from the actual experience or original thought. Reflective knowledge has high value, but is time consuming and involves loss of control over its subsequent use'. This deeper examination of Snowden's second heuristic seems to imply that once one takes the time to create a written story the value may be higher than a less-reflective oral story. Snowden's premise is corroborated by Denning (2004: 127) who wrote 'A story can help take listeners, from where they are to where they need to be, by making them comfortable with an image of the future. The problem, of course, lies in crafting a credible narrative about the future when the future is unknowable.' Together Denning and Snowden highlight the challenge of writing future stories – one must take the time to learn about the future and then articulate the ideas using the reflective knowledge Snowden described.

3. Methodology

The literature review concludes that, in theory, narratives help guide people into the future and share knowledge. The question remains, can one use this technique in practice? Perhaps more specifically, the question is can one use written narratives to share knowledge and guide people into the future? One way to answer this question is by chronicling the success of three recently written stories. Each was written with the express aim of guiding people into the future. Before describing the stories, it is important to understand that this paper is based on exploratory research that was designed to field test some concepts. This paper is not based on empirical research nor does it report the results of a true experiment but rather it describes the use of narratives in real organisations with real people dealing with real challenges. Most of the results are anecdotal in nature; nevertheless, it is believed that the outcome indicates that stories are a useful tool in some organisations.

One must use caution in determining how the results should be generalised. Clearly, the stories achieved the desired end state in the very unique organisation for which they were designed; however, it remains entirely possible the success of the narratives may not be replicated in other organisations. The results are presented in the spirit of sharing so that others may decide if the techniques are appropriate for their organisations. In addition, it is hoped this exploratory research will lead to a formal empirical study.

4. Practical Implementation

There is no disputing the fact that oral narrative is a powerful form of communicating; however, it is

not always feasible. In fact, there are times when the written word packs a more powerful punch. Often it is simply not possible to catch the ear of a wide audience simultaneously, or even at all. Many people simply will not take time from their busy schedules to listen to stories, others may be geographically separated, and still others may simply be out to lunch or otherwise predisposed. In these cases the power of the pen offers a persuasive substitute. This is a tale about a trio of such stories, which seemed to sow the seed of change, help guide people into the future, and share organisational knowledge. Of course, time will be the real test; however, anecdotal evidence seems to support the proposition that well written futuristic stories provide an excellent alternative to face-to-face oral narrative. At least in these examples, the written story proved to be a motivator for organisational change and an effective way to share knowledge.

4.1 Story one – Guiding government leaders into the future

The first story was developed to excite change in a very large bureaucratic organisation – Canada's Department of National Defence. The leader of the Strategic Knowledge Management cell was keen to explain how and why knowledge management could help Defence leaders. Clearly it would not be possible to meet face-to-face with all of the target audience, so what to do? Against the advice of many colleagues, pen was put to paper to create a story entitled Twelve Hours of Knowledge (see Appendix 1). The story was an overwhelming success and it was eventually included in the Canadian Military Journal – the journal read by the target audience (Girard, 2004: 24). The story, which was set five years in the future, intentionally blurred the real with the imaginary. Many facets of the story were commonplace in Defence, such as the type of equipment, ranks, organisations and jargon. Care was taken not to use any real people's names; instead, position titles were used. The tale was about a Canadian Forces operation on a small Caribbean island nation, which was dealing with the aftermath of a natural disaster.

So what made the story a success? Clearly, there were a number of critical success factors; however, one of the most important was the *look* of the story. The story was designed to resemble the weekly newspaper of the Canadian Forces entitled The Maple Leaf. With the editor's permission, a story was crafted that appeared to be The Maple Leaf's cover story. This allowed the story to be distributed as a reprint from the paper. The look was especially useful in capturing people's attention, countering to some degree the old cliché 'Don't judge a book by its cover.' At

least in this case it seems the cover was important to many people. Attracting the target audience is just the first step; clearly, the content is the vital ingredient. The story must be believable, realistic, and most importantly perceived as achievable.

Although the story was set in the future, it did not rely on futuristic technology, but rather, it described technology that is commonplace today. This was a surprise to many readers as they expected some far-fetched, ridiculously expensive Star Trek type technology. Instead the narrative described leadership and culture as the keys to success – another surprise to many readers. A crucial component of the story's success was executive support. An early draft of the story caught the attention of one very senior executive who was delighted with the format and the message. His endorsement provided the necessary influence to sway a few less enthusiastic managers, who may have otherwise been able to thwart the distribution of the piece. As is the case with other change initiatives the support of senior executives is critical to the success of motivational stories.

4.2 Story two – Guiding faculty into the future

The second story was developed to excite change in a small mid-west university (see Appendix 2). A new faculty member was charged with the responsibility of integrating knowledge management into the core curriculum of the College of Business. This was no easy task, especially given the number of naysayers who were perfectly content with the status quo. One group believed knowledge management was just a passing fad and they had been involved with enough fads, thank you very much. A second group thought this KM stuff was a good idea, just as long as it did not affect them or their courses. The final group, which was the majority, had bought into the idea but did not really know what to do next. The story was a mock interview with the Dean five years hence. The story was published in a trade journal, entitled KM Today, shortly after the College was the recipient of the Most Innovative Knowledge Educator (MIKE) award. In the interview, the Dean described the implementation of the program and how it had improved the quality of education for the students. The final question asked by the interviewer was 'What would you do differently?' to which the Dean replies 'I wish we would have started sooner.' Grinning, he continued: 'the success of the program makes me wish more folks could have benefited, had we started in 2003, we would have helped another cohort. That said I am absolutely delighted with our results.'

Both the trade journal and the award in this story were fictitious, as were the other organisations mentioned in the accompanying stories. That said, they resembled their real alter egos. For example the genuine trade magazine is entitled KM World (see www.kmworld.com) while the authentic award is the Most Admired Knowledge Enterprise (MAKE) (see www.knowledgebusiness.com). This allowed the story to be distributed as a reprint from the paper.

Unlike the first story, this time the story focused on an individual, the Dean, who was very well known in the organisation. For this reason, the Dean's real name was used and with his permission, his style was carefully modelled in the mock interview. This blending of the real and simulated worlds went some way in helping to convince the readers that the story was believable and achievable. Once again, a vital component of the story's success was executive support. The Dean reviewed an early draft of the story and he was delighted with the format and the message.

4.3 Story three – Guiding students into the future

Based on the success of the previous stories, another future based story was penned (see Appendix 3). This time the target audience was a group of executive graduate students completing an accelerated Master of Science in Management program. A key element to this program is a major research paper that must be completed before graduation. Historically all students have completed the course work based on the published schedule; however, there tended to be a handful of students who procrastinated on the projects. This procrastination caught the attention of the University administrators who seemed worried that this tardiness may jeopardise the program. In the past a variety of techniques were used to instil a sense of urgency in the students but needless to say the desired results were still not being achieved. Once again, the use of narrative was selected as the way ahead. This time the story was set just months in the future, unlike the previous stories that were several years in the future. Specifically the date of the story was the graduation date of the group with the following headline 'Class of 2005 – The First Cohort to Graduate as a Group.' The story was published in a newspaper that featured a striking resemblance to the University's student newspaper.

The target audience for this tale was a group of geographically separated students who needed a moral boost. The story was printed and mailed to the students' homes. At the end of the day, the story achieved its aim by helping focus the students on the few remaining months of the

program. Several students commented that the story allowed them to see the end of tunnel.

5. Moral of the story

All good stories should end with a moral and this story is no different. This saga began by reviewing the timeless story of a stonecutter and a cathedral builder. Having agreed that most executives would wish for an army of cathedral builders rather than stonecutters the literature was reviewed to see what the gurus were suggesting. The literature is rich with examples of raconteurs guiding the way ahead with oral stories; however, the domain of written stories was far less mature. After reviewing a trio of future-based written stories, it is clear that, at least in some cases, the power of the pen may be as effective as a well-told oral story. In each case, the written word proved to be a powerful motivator by capturing the imagination and attention of the target audience. Perhaps these types of stories are not well suited to all audiences; however, for some groups the written word is more powerful than even the best oral story. To quote a faculty member who was initially against the change initiate and now a supporter of the idea, 'Now I get it.' Just four words, but four words that mean one more team

member is a supporter . . . those are four important words! The target audience seems to be a key to the success of these stories – it is not known or presumed that the success of these stories may be replicated in other groups.

For some groups it is simply not possible to capture the attention of all group members with an oral rendition. This is certainly the case with the three groups described in this paper. Two of the groups, the military and student groups, were separated geographically and it would have been extremely difficult to have them meet to hear the story. The majority of the third group, the faculty, were geographically collocated but as a group were not very receptive to a gathering to discuss the subject. Anecdotal evidence seems to support the premise that the target audiences for these stories prefer the written word to the spoken word. The moral of this story is that both written and oral stories are effective tools in sharing organisational knowledge, sparking change, and guiding people into the future. The wise executive should consider both forms of stories to help guide their organisations.

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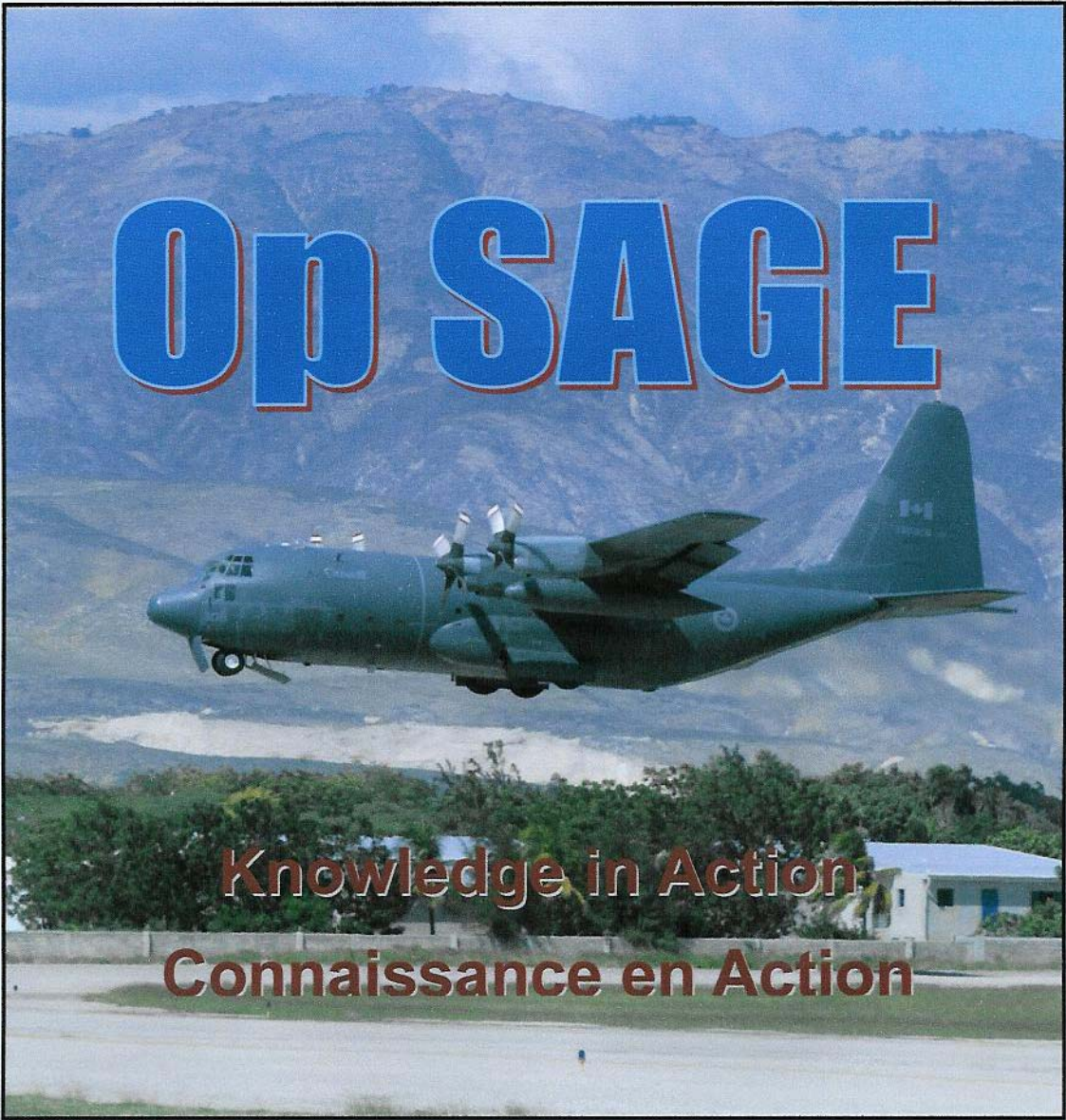
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Appendices

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The MAPLE LEAF  **La FEUILLE D'ÉRABLE**

31 October 2007, Vol. 12, No. 17 Le 31 octobre 2007, vol. 12, n°. 17



Op SAGE

Knowledge in Action
Connaissance en Action

In this issue / Dans ce numéro

Knowledge in action / Connaissance en action2-3	Knowledge News / Nouvelles de la connaissance4
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This **fictitious** story describes the power of knowledge management in action.
It was created with the kind permission of the **Maple Leaf**.

Twelve hours of Knowledge:

How knowledge sharing helped Op SAGE:

(Ottawa) On Monday 29 October 2007, the Canadian Forces' Humanitarian Emergency Relief Team (HERT) arrived in Haiti to help the island nation deal with the aftermath of a natural disaster. HERT was the first international force to answer Haiti's call for assistance. This speedy response, called Operation SAGE, was made possible by connecting people with people to share knowledge. Their story is below.

On Sunday, the Commanding Officer (CO) HERT awoke to the ringing of his personal data assistant. It was 0615 and his Operations Officer had just sent him a priority email. The note contained a news feed describing a hurricane, which suddenly changed course and was heading toward the small Caribbean island nation of Haiti. The CO was surprised by the news as he and his team had been watching the storm for a number of days and most experts believed the storm would not reach land.

After reading the note, CO HERT opened his tablet PC, inserted his Public Key Infrastructure (PKI) card and turned on his computer. Within minutes, through a wireless connection, the CO's personal knowledgespace appeared, which included a dashboard showing the status of his unit. The dashboard was a collection of critical data and information maintained by his staff. The presentation of knowledge in an intuitive manner allowed the CO to quickly decide if he needed to take action or make any decisions. He was delighted to determine that his command group was available, less one officer who was leading a reconnaissance team on another Caribbean island.

Next, he read news from several sites reporting on the conditions in Haiti and the weather forecast for the next 72 hours. Sensing that this may be a mission for the HERT, he created a collaborative workspace for the contingency operation. The content of the workspace was based on the lessons learned from previous missions. After each mission, an After-action Review (AAR) identified the deficiencies and helped redefine the requirements of the workspace.

Returning to his knowledge-space, the CO typed the words CF operations Haiti and quickly rediscovered that the CF deployed to Haiti in 1997 and 2004. A synopsis of each operation was available as well as a series of links. To ensure this information was readily available to the other members of his team, he dragged the links into the contingency collaborative workspace. He also saw a list of experts on Haiti, including a policy

officer from Western Hemisphere Policy, a member of the intelligence staff, a lawyer from Director of International Law and others. He added the list of names to the collaborative workspace.

Next, he opened the staff list for the 1997 operation, but he did not recognise any of the names; in any case, he dragged the link to the staff list into the collaborative workspace. He decided to connect to the CF People Finder application to see where the 1997 battlegroup commander was now. Before being given access to the application, his profile was reviewed to see if he should be given access to the sensitive data. This is a relatively new improvement to the People Finder. In the past he would have had to contact ADM(HR-Mil) to gain access to the information. However, in 2005 decided that a more trusted environment was necessary to support operations. To guard against potential abuses, a sophisticated algorithm monitors all accesses to the People Finder and will lock out and report abusers.

The CO determined that the battlegroup commander retired in 2006 as brigadier-general; however, he remained a member of the Supplementary Reserve and had agreed to be contacted for operational reasons. CO HERT added these details to the collaborative workspace. When he clicked on the 2004 staff list, he was surprised to find that a Staff College friend of his was the deputy commanding officer of the operation. Using People Finder, he determined that his friend is in Ottawa – this fact was added to the workspace.

The CO saw a small flashing icon beside his friend's name, indicating that he was online. Clicking on this icon an Instant Messaging (IM) box appeared and he typed a quick note to his friend. He asked if his friend had heard about the storm and received a quick response saying "AFK – WIMU 10" – which of course is shorthand for "I am away from my keyboard, I will instant message you in 10 minutes" – such shorthand is used when one is using a cellular telephone or other hand-held device.

While waiting for his friend to return the IM, he clicked on a link to the lessons learned library. The genesis of the library was an idea from a Community of Practice in 2005. With members from a variety of organisations that collect and analyse lessons, for example the Army Lesson Learned Centre, Director General Safety, Flight Safety, the community thought it would be a great idea to share information amongst each other. The Director Knowledge Management built on this great idea by sponsoring a project to consolidate the various sources. Today with a click of a button, the CO is able to search a variety of knowledge stores.

The lessons learned library produced some very important lessons. First, he noted that during the 2004 operation, the battlegroup had problems using floppy disks to store data. It turns out that the sand from the island was corrupting the magnetic medium. Their solution was to use Universal Serial Bus (USB) thumb drives in lieu of floppy disks. Next, he discovered that in 1997 there had been a problem with the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) for the neighbouring country of Cuba. Other issues were also highlighted, all of which were moved to the collaborative workspace and flagged for the Operations Officer's attention. The SOFA issue was a priority so it triggered an automatic message to the Operations Officer, who reviewed the message and prepared a note to the lawyer identified by the CO as an authority in the area.

It was now 1000 and the CO's staff college friend sent him an IM. He asked his friend a number of questions about the previous operation. After a few minutes, the CO received an IM from the COS J3 in Ottawa suggesting a Warning Order was being developed and would likely be signed off before noon. The CO parted company with his friend and they agree that if anything else developed they would talk again.

The CO sent an IM inviting COS J3 into the collaborative workspace and he provided an overview of his morning. COS J3 remarked that he did not know how they did it in the old days. He suggested that the CO drive from Kingston to Ottawa for an afternoon classified briefing – they agreed to meet at 1600. The CO signed out of his knowledgespace to tend to some personal issues before departing for Ottawa.

At 1120, the CO received a priority message on his cellular phone. The message was from the collaborative workspace and it stated that COS J3 had just uploaded the warning order. The CO signed into his knowledgespace, received the order, added some additional information and forwarded a message to his operations officer who knew exactly what to do based on standing operating procedures.

At 1200, he grabbed his tablet PC along with a few other necessities and commenced the drive to Ottawa. At 1315, he was hit head-on by another vehicle and died instantly. At 1400, the COS J3 was notified of the tragic accident. After ensuring that all necessary arrangements were in place to help the CO's family, the COS J3 returned his attention to the operational mission at hand. Clearly, a new CO had to be appointed as the Prime Minister had just announced that the CF would be dispatching the HERT within 24 hours.

The selection of the new CO was simple. Since 2006, the CF policy had been that all command positions must have identified successors. The nominated successor is informed of their selection and therefore is able to mentally prepare for transition. In this case, the successor was aware of her assumption of command in ten months and she had begun preparing to be a CO. Knowing that she would be the next CO, she had been thinking about the storm and wondering if HERT would be involved. She had also been thinking what she would do if she were CO. She remembered visiting the HERT in Kingston and being briefed on contingency plans.

The new CO HERT was informed of her new position at 1500. As she lived in Ottawa, she was able to meet with the COS J3 later that day. In the meantime, she was given access to the collaboration space and was able to review her predecessor's work. She too, knew the battlegroup commander from 2004 and decided to make contact. The two agreed to discuss the impending mission. As soon as they met face-to-face, the CO realised that her friend was uncomfortable about something. Soon he began to describe the details of a tragic incident on the island. The sharing of this experience would turn out to be very important in the days ahead. In fact, the story was so powerful that the CO never forgot the words of wisdom from her friend. After the operation, during the after-action review, she noted that the war story had saved the lives of several soldiers – that is the power of sharing knowledge.

At 1815, CO HERT met with the COS J3, just 12 hours after her processor first heard about the disaster. She told COS J3 that she was up to speed and ready to go. HERT deployed the next morning. The speed of response for Op SAGE was the result of the COs' ability to rapidly connect to the data, information and knowledge they needed to make decisions and take actions – this is the essence of knowledge management. This is a story of the synergy of technology, leadership and culture; this is a story of the power of sharing.

About this Story

This is a fictitious story that describes the power of knowledge management in action. It was created with the permission of the managing editor of the Maple Leaf.

For More Information

For more information about using stories to spark organisational change please contact Dr. John Girard (john@johngirard.net).

Please contact Dr. Girard if you wish to distribute this story.

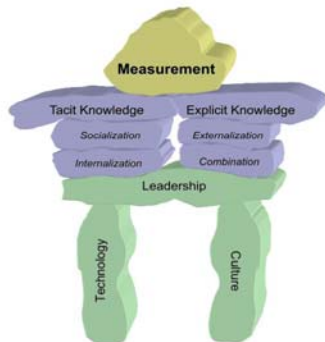
Version Française

Il y a une version française de cette histoire, demandez au Dr. Girard (john@johngirard.net)

KM KNOWLEDGE Management TODAY

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JULY/AUGUST 2008



**The Inukshuk: A view
from the North - page 12**

RRU Renews Online KM MA

The Director of Knowledge Management programs at Royal Rivers University, Victoria, BC, has confirmed that RRU will continue its knowledge management (KM) Masters of Arts program. The revised online program will build on the highly acclaimed package offered by RRU for more than a decade. New to the program will be an emphasis on the post-Nokana period espoused by

RRU continues on page 7

Minot State University: Leader in Applied Knowledge Management

Dr. Roderic Hewlett, Dean of Minot State University's College of Business (www.minotstateu.edu), described "applied Knowledge Management as core *business* for faculty and students alike." Dean Hewlett recalled that "in the early days [2004] some people questioned the value of the program; however, four years later, virtually everyone is united in the view that the program has added incredible value."

Today, most students and faculty are members of at least one community of practice or interest, and students participate in after action reviews, collaborate virtually, and spark change through storytelling. According to Dean Hewlett "the applied aspect of

the [KM] program is built on a solid academic foundation. Rather than simply exposing students to the theories of knowledge management, we create an environment in which we all may practice what we preach."

In addition to offering graduate and undergraduate knowledge management courses, Hewlett stated that "KM learner outcomes are integrated into many courses in the College." He proudly stated "that our combination of theory and practice provides a world class learning environment, one which is second to none." Dean Hewlett is confident that

MSU continues on page 2

Knowledge Management Modeling Research Continues at GWU

Great Western University's (GWU) Lead Professor for Knowledge Management (KM) announced that GWU will continue its ground breaking research in knowledge management. A team of researchers will investigate the

relationships between leadership, organization, technology, and learning. Early results are expected in the summer or fall of 2009

GWU continues on page 3

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In This Issue:

KM World
Supplement

Knowledge in Education

Industry watch 6
Corporate taxonomy 8
University review 14
Personal toolkit 26

*This is a fictitious story - to learn about using stories to spark organizational change,
please contact Dr. John Girard (john@johngirard.net).*

MSU (continued from page 1)

students are benefitting from the College's profound commitment to knowledge management

"... our combination of theory and practice provides a world class learning environment"

Minot State's journey toward a knowledge environment commenced in 2003 when Hewlett rallied the Faculty to endorse three themes for the College. Two of the themes were well known at MSU: International Business and Entrepreneurship - in each of these domains MSU was an acknowledged leader, much as is the case today. Hewlett recalls that "The third, knowledge management, was less well understood; nevertheless, the Faculty collectively agreed that the foundations of KM were sound and we agreed that KM should become a College theme."

Over the next year the College recruited a KM faculty member to take the lead in the development of the core KM program. One the first tasks was to ensure that the team understood the tenets of knowledge management. Hewlett recalled "KM was new to many Faculty. We decided to offer some awareness seminars - these turned out to be very successful and really helped our team understand why it was important to integrate knowledge management into the College's core curriculum."

During the awareness seminars the Minot State team agreed on a clear, concise definition for KM. Simply stated, they believe *KM is creating and sharing organizational knowledge*. Although more than fifty definitions could be found in the literature, the MSU team desired a simple definition to help guide the

development of their program.

Unlike many KM programs of the early 2000s, MSU decided not to design a bespoke KM degree, but rather, opted to incorporate the knowledge theories, tools and techniques into all College of Business programs. Although commonplace today, such a novel concept was unheard of only four years ago. MSU's pioneering efforts are likely the reason this best-practice has been successfully replicated across America.

Time has proven Hewlett correct, as an after-action-review, or AAR in the KM parlance, clearly demonstrated earlier this year. AARs are now routine events at MSU; instructors use the tool to validate learner outcomes, students are encouraged to participate in AARs to improve the quality of programs, and the administration use AARs to ensure programs are meeting the stated goals. For example, the AAR of the KM theme demonstrated conclusively that students, faculty, and the administration were benefitting from the creative project.

KM is creating and sharing organizational knowledge.

Hewlett uses Storytelling as an example of how the applied nature of KM has been incorporated. The College's core Business Communication Course includes a module on the theory of Storytelling, which is team-taught by two faculty members - one an expert in communications and the other in KM - together they provide a unique combination of experience. But it does not stop there, as students are expected to apply the concept of storytelling in Senior courses, such as the College's International Management course. Hewlett is convinced that "the blended teaching

approach combining the incremental application of tools and techniques is a recipe for success."

"KM learner outcomes are integrated into many courses in the College."

When asked what he would do differently, Hewlett paused reflectively, and then stated "I wish we would have started sooner." Grinning, he continued: "the success of the program makes me wish more folks could have benefitted, had we started in 2003, we would have helped another cohort. That said, I am absolutely delighted with our results."

The College of Business' innovative program earned MSU the distinction of being the 2008 MIKE (Most Innovative Knowledge Educator) Award recipient for their outstanding application of knowledge management in an educational environment. When accepting the award, Dean Hewlett offered to share the secrets of their success with others.

About this Story

This is a *fictitious* story that describes the power of knowledge management in action.

For More Information

For more information about storytelling to spark change in your organization, contact Dr. John Girard:

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Use of this Story

The author is a believer in sharing ideas; however, he would like to know who is using his stories. Please contact Dr. Girard if you wish to distribute this story.

SEEN & HEARD

MSU College of Business' Student Newspaper

CONGRATULATIONS
JOB CORPS
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12 MAY 2006

MINOT STATE UNIVERSITY

SPECIAL EDITION

Conference a Huge Success

"An overwhelming success" is how Dr. John Girard, the Director of Job Corps Executive Management Program (JCEMP), described the recent JCEMP research conference. "I am absolutely delighted with the quality of research completed by the JCEMP Fellows," stated Girard. Asked if he was surprised by the quality, Girard grinned and replied "Not at all - I would have been disappointed if the Fellows had not exceeded the standard normally expected of graduate students." He continued "this was a very motivated group; early in the year they decided to work as a team to ensure all Fellows completed high quality academic research projects."

Dr. Linda Cresap, Dean of the Graduate School, described the conference "as a huge success," and said "I hope this [conference] will become an annual event and perhaps even a model for other graduate programs."

In total twelve JCEMP Fellows presented the results of their research to a panel of College of Business faculty members and Minot business leaders. After each oral presentation the Fellows were subjected to a battery of questions by the panel.



Class of 2006 - The First JCEMP Cohort to Graduate as a Group

For the first time in the history of the Job Corps Executive Management Program (JCEMP) all Fellows graduated as a cohort. The twelve members of the Class of 2005 commenced their journey in June of last year by attending a five-week session here in Minot. All twelve returned to Minot this week for the today's Commencement ceremony, also a first for the program.

Dr. Gary Ross, Dean of the College of Business, described the milestone "as a tremendous achievement and a testament to the group's hard work, dedication and commitment." Ross described the Class as "an exceptional

group of individuals that transformed into a high performance team."

After the Graduation ceremony the Program Director, Dr. John Girard, was seen *Job Corps* hugging each of the graduates, fulfilling a promise he made if the group graduated together. He commented that "he was very proud of each and every graduate."

Speaking under the condition of anonymity, a group of graduates reported that the program was "easy peasy lemon squeezey" and that the "**prawject prezentations** were the best part of the course **eh!**" Dr. Girard suggested "they were speaking gibberish - obviously a result of stress."

This is a fictitious story. To learn about using stories to lead people into the future, please contact Dr. John Girard (john@johngirard.net).