



SPRINGBOARD STORIES HAVE « POWER »



How story-telling helps leaders...

A FINDING from the out of the box thinkers at

GESTION CONSULT-IIDC.MANAGEMENT INC

7400 Sherbrooke Street West, ph5.

Montreal QC Canada H4B 1R8

Tel: (514) 481-2835 – Fax: (514) 481-0837

info@consult-iidc.com

www.consult-iidc.com

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Introduction

Leadership is more tribal than scientific. Gurus like Max Dupree and Peter Drucker say that Leadership has more to do with building relationships, with cooperating and exploring creative ideas, than with managing.

It is not often seen that way though, as competitive drive, egos and limits to perceptions get in the way of developing true leadership qualities. A mind that is built on the “compete to survive” paradigm for example, might not embrace the requirements for a model based on *cooperation*.

This is about how PEOPLE make up their minds. As our paradigms are *neurological*, they explain our thinking limits. Like a road map, this monograph will allow you to understand the thinking of a relatively reactive mindset, and then how that mind-set can be made to change - into the creative and self-empowered “flow state”.

LEADERS do this by supplying a *springboard story* and signposts to guide the paradigm-shift. People can be made to move past their limits and resistances by « acting out » the behaviors that are required by the new paradigm. Changing the behavioral context with a *storyboard* a new experience can be presented in a more compelling way.

Once desired neural connections are made however, the AHA of recognition is made. As Aldous Huxley recognized, once the doors of perception are opened, they can never again be closed.

Springboard stories allow actors to make a leap in understanding and grasp how an organization can change. The springboard story has its impact not only through transferring large amounts of information - but rather by catalyzing a specific realization. It enables listeners to visualize from the story told in one context, what is involved in a transformation of their own context.

What is a neural paradigm

Our brains are filled with stories... with neurons linked into *paradigms* of awareness. Taken from the Greek *paradeigma* – which means a model or an example - the idea behind the word describes the lens through which minds see the world.

There are a lot of synonyms to express this idea: we'll speak of culture but we also say worldview, belief, inner values, morals or ethics, and such. We tend to forget that our neural paradigms define what we accept as truth. The structure of our beliefs is held together by neural patterns; synapses feed our desires and compel our momentum or passivity.

Paradigms are created by several factors: Our unraveling DNA - for gender, family, race, etc. – and then language, religion, environment, nationality, culture, education, philosophy and vocational experiences all contribute to the process.

Our neural anatomy shapes how we see existence itself, and how arrive at, and understand, life's rules.

Aware of it or not, *consciousness* is etching neural paradigms in your brain as you read, which will later define how you think.

The same thing is true of everyone - there are no exceptions. We think within the limits provided by our own brain's neural paradigms. We are subjected to perceptual limits that not only filter the data we receive from the outside world, but largely define the way we should react to that data.

Neural paradigms have both an objective context and subjective content. The context is the process by which humans perceive, remember and think, and the content describes the result of that process by an individual – what we think about. Neuroscience suggests that *how* we experience an event is largely determined by our brain's reactive limbic system whose glands regulate hormones and thereby emotion.

When faced with an unknown situation or a threat, we either trigger a *flight or fight* reaction, or *tend and befriend* one, depending on what hormone is released into the bloodstream. Even if the response is mild, the hormonal reaction instantly affects the brain and shapes the manner in which the event is viewed, and will later be remembered.

In that moment's experience, when the limbic system is influencing body/mind's reality, two other interesting ideas get involved to make up our mind. The first is called a *morpheme*— which is defined in physics as a primary sensation event.

A *morpheme* is the first emotional impression made on the mind when we experience of an event. It's the imprint that labels and classifies the encounter for future reference.

The second idea is called an *engram* —which can more or less be defined as a unit of memory.

Research into the subject of memory reveals that the information we recall is virtual, not real. It isn't real in the sense that we do not remember solid and specific whole events that come from a specific location – as if kept in storage.

Memory is summoned from all over the central nervous system by an emotional *attraction*. It is assembled like a hologram but the shapes that contain it are more properly called *anagrams* – this because emotion causes a structural change to occur in the brain's neuropath ways that trigger specific memory. *Anagrams* only exist as something is remembered. They are e-motional image containers.

We label events good (to be repeated) or bad (to be avoided) as morphemes, experienced and stored for recall. Interestingly, when we re-assemble an anagram, we'll extract bits and pieces from the whole experience and may even reclassify them, according to the context of the recollection.

Positive morphemes are shaped when an event (any event) is experienced with a positive emotion; the primary sensation sets the tone for the whole experience.

Negative emotions (not positive will be perceived as negative rather than neutral) imprint negative morphemes and those memories are stored as negative anagrams.

Anagrams link into the neural paradigms that shape our life experience. Your old ones will bring their content into play the next time you want to create a new memory.

Reactive –vs.- Creative thinking

Our paradigms are therefore the stories we tell ourselves. We listen to ourselves think as if we are hearing oracles instead of a regurgitation of our mood. Every mind reacts to stimuli in its own unique ways.

The reactive mind has a basic functioning called ***the stimulus/reaction mode*** defined by personal habits. That means we react to specific stimulus in habitual ways. An image, a comment, an opinion, a scene, a scenario or a person will all trigger a usual reaction wherein «I» instantly verifies its perceptual input against a personal inventory of reactions and determines an adequate response.

In that same instant I discards all of them except that reaction which is most deeply etched into the brain as the appropriate response. Habits are assembled from neural pathways of least resistance.

Any new response requires conscious effort. We react with such astonishing speed that neuroscientists have found that we in fact prejudge most of our input, and habitually react before we are fully aware of what we

are reacting to. We recoil or are receptive to stimulus based on expectations built from previous perceptions.

"I" verifies input against its existing neural pathways – its old stories – for emotional clues. Appropriate feelings are triggered, instantly opening and closing ion gates linking neurons in the brain. The gates are opened and closed by near-chemicals selected by our hormones, our moods. Some of our reactions are so emotional – so predictable – that we can even classify them as Pavlovian.

Recent research has determined that many people are largely hardwired with all kinds of emotional responses that, in fact, *are self-sabotaging*. We are creatures of habit, and when a challenging situation arises, you can count on angry people to react with anger, on courageous individuals to reach courage, and on kind folks to be kind.

You might feel that you are free to respond any way you want. Why would you consciously self-sabotage? The most recent research confirms that reacting with fear harms the physical body by releasing toxic chemicals (aggressors like steroids and corticoids, etc.) into the bloodstream.

Some scientists have labeled corticoids "the death hormones" so you can imagine the harm we do ourselves whenever we feel anger and release it into our system. Unless these stress chemicals are quickly spent, they harm the body, and have serious effects on the body-mind connection.

Science has also found that when a mind reacts with love and joy, the body is inundated with all kinds of beneficial chemicals that actually soothe it while expanding the mind. This is where the story-telling leader comes in.

Springboard stories are designed to guide people through the quagmire of their limiting reactions, in order to have them embrace new ideas.

What gives a narrative - or a story - sense?

A story in its broadest terms is anything told or recounted; more narrowly, something told or recounted in the form of a narrative; or an account; a tale: the telling of a happening or connected series of happenings, whether true or fictitious; a narration.

A narrative is created by telling how something causes something else, and how an event is a part of a whole. It is usually combined with human actions or events that affect human beings. The meaning of each event is produced by the part it plays in the whole episode.

To say *what something means* is to say how it is related or connected to something else. To ask the meaning of an event is to ask how it contributed to the story in which it occurs. It is the connections or relations between events.

Meaning is a social phenomenon. Meaning is produced by individuals and by groups, communities, societies and cultures who maintain language and agree to understandings – knowledge of the connections between signifying words and signifying events, or what Bloom calls *memes*.

Groups, communities, societies and cultures also preserve collections of typical narrative meanings in their myths, fairy tales, legends, histories and

stories. To participate in a group, community, society or culture requires a general knowledge of these accumulated narrative meanings. The cultural stock of meanings are dynamic and are added to by new contributions from members and deleted by lack of use.

Narrative meaning is about connections. It links individual human actions and events into inter-related aspects of an understandable composite. Narrative displays the significance that events have for one another. (The anti-story makes explicit that events do not have causal connections between each other.)

Stories fill our lives in the way that water fills the lives of fish. Stories are so all-pervasive that we practically cease to be aware of them.

What is a springboard story?

A springboard story is a narrative that enables the listener to make a leap in understanding so as to grasp how a complex system - an individual, organization or community - can change. A springboard story has an impact not only by transferring large amounts of information, but also by catalyzing that information into a common understanding. It enables people to visualize - from a story experienced in one context - what is involved in a transformation in another context.

Narrative -vs- Abstract thinking: The power of stories

Analytic or abstract thinking is ideal for reporting the regular, the expected, the normal, the ordinary, the mundane, the things we often take so much for granted that we are hardly conscious that we know them at all.

By contrast, narrative thinking, encapsulated in springboard stories and storytelling, is ideally suited to discussing the exceptional. Narrative thrives on the disruptions from the ordinary, the unexpected, the conflicts, the deviations, the surprises and the unusual.

Stories flourish in the overthrow of the existing order by some event or thought that changes our perspective. Stories derive their power from a violation of the normal and the legitimate and the ordinary, which in turn generates the fear and curiosity and excitement that we all feel when listening to a good new story.

In this way, stories appeal not only to the mental processes of the brain, but are grounded in the feelings of the actor.

They thus can appeal to both the mind and the heart in several ways:

1. Stories make the breaches of expectation comprehensible by relating the events to other times and places, and usually the intentions of the actors. By pointing to the extraordinary, stories - explicitly or implicitly - link the new or odd with the ordinary, the economical with the exuberant, the prescriptive and the descriptive, the internal subjective

- and the external objective. Stories provide guidance about which things should be taken for granted and which need explaining.
2. Stories revolve around what matters to people. They are human-centered in their essence and we are in consequence naturally drawn to them.
 3. Stories have the power of ascending to the particular from the universal, in contrast to science's power to ascend to the general from the particular.
 4. Stories, unlike logic, are not stopped dead by difficulty or contradiction.
 5. Stories thrive on conflict, on clashes of differing wills, on difficulties, on inconsistencies, on the very fault lines of society.

We know instinctively that in these very fault lines is the key to living in the future. We intuitively grasp that this is where innovation comes from and where breakthroughs occur. Science and logic thrive on the banal, the regular, the routinely observable, the inert, but the better world has always come from myth, magic and mystery. After all, empowerment needs POWER.

Storytelling complements abstract thinking

Storytelling doesn't replace thinking. It supplements it by enabling us to imagine new perspectives and new worlds, and it is ideally suited to communicating change and stimulating innovation. It is a must for leaders who must navigate uncharted waters.

To have the whole crew onboard requires them to share common – but new and empowering – memes. *After all, if you keep on doing the same old, same old, you'll keep on getting the same old, same old* – and to expect a different result is the beginning of delusion.

Abstract analysis is easier to understand when it is seen through the lens of a well-chosen story and it can, of course, be used to make explicit the implications of a story.

The Springboard story does not recommend abandoning abstract thinking, nor does it suggest that we should give up the advances that have emerged through experimentation and well-worn practices. It discusses the discovery of the power of storytelling and the mechanisms by which it operates, thus remedying the neglect of storytelling, but not so as to jettison analytic thinking. It proposes marrying the communicative and imaginative strengths of storytelling with the advantages of abstract and scientific analysis.

The springboard story examines the various options that are available to achieve a good marriage. It explores the difficulties that a cognitive scientist encounters in understanding the marriage.

Dimensions in communication: Traditional –vs- Interactive communication

The traditional view – or common sense view - of communications is to see it as a process not far from removed from a Western Union message system, in which: ... the addresser sends a message to the addressee.

To be operative, the message requires a context referred to, graspable by the addressee, and either verbal or capable of being verbalized; a code fully, or at least partially, common to the addresser and the addressee; and finally, a contact, a physical channel and psychological connection between the addresser and the addressee, enabling both of them to enter and stay in communication.

According to this conventional view, all communications proceed on the same basis whether it is an ordinary conversation, a speech, a letter, a poem or a narrative. There is always a message that proceeds from an addresser or sender to an addressee or receiver.

The message communicated is dependent on three factors: a contact, a code and a context. There can be no communication unless the listener makes contact with the sender's message, through hearing words or seeing them printed page. Messages are communicated through a code that involves connections of meanings along with an organization pattern of the discourse as a whole. The context of the message is the general subject that the message is about and what the speaker is referring to.

This view of communication is implicit in the unreflective discussion about the media that implies it's a pipeline transfer of units of material called "bits" or "information" from one place to another.

Here the mind is a box. One takes a unit of "information" out of it, encodes the unit (i.e. fit it to the size and shape of the pipe that it will have to go through) and put it into one end of the pipe (the medium, something in the middle between the two other things). From the one end of the pipe the "information" proceeds to the other end, where someone decodes it (restores it to its proper size and shape) and puts it in his or her own box-like container called a mind.

This view of communication is very widely held but it has one serious problem: This model obviously has something to do with communication, but on close inspection, very little, and it distorts the act of human communication beyond recognition.

The interactive view – Human communication

Human communication, verbal or other, differs from the conventional or "medium" model most basically in that it is interactive. It involves anticipated feedback in order to take place at all. In the medium model, the message is moved from the sender-position to receiver-position. In real human communication, however the sender has to be not only in the sender position but also in the receiver position before he or she can send anything.

To speak, one has to address another or others. People in their right minds do not stray through the wood just talking at random at nobody. Even to talk to yourself you have to pretend that you are two people. The reason is that what I say depends on what reality or fancy I feel I am talking into, that is, on what possible responses I might anticipate. To speak, I have to be somehow already in communication with the mind I am to address before I start speaking. I might arrive at this through past relationships, by an exchange of glances, by an understanding with a third person, or in countless other ways. I have to sense something in the other's mind to which my own utterance can relate.

Human communication is never one-way. It not only calls for a response, it is shaped in its very form and content by the anticipated response. This is not to say that I know how the other will respond to what I say. But I have to be able to conjecture a possible range of responses at least in some vague way. I have to be somehow inside the mind of the other in advance in order to enter with my message, and he or she must be inside my mind. To formulate anything, I must have another person already "in mind".

This is the paradox of communication. Human communication is inter-subjective. The media model of communication is not. There is no adequate model in the physical universe for this operation of consciousness, which is distinctively human and which signals the capacity of human beings to form true communities wherein a person shares with another person inter-subjectively.

The practical implications for effective communications are significant. When speakers forget or ignore the interactive nature of communication, as frequently occurs in organizations where speakers mistake their hierarchical power over their employees for an actual capacity to force listeners to listen, the outcome is predictably disastrous.

Creative self-empowerment

Empowerment by emergence begins with both faith and humility. It sees humanity as a limitless source of novelty and invention that suffers when constrained by too many limits. It invokes higher processes--complexities beyond the scope of human minds. It champions freedom, interaction, organic growth in a multitude of directions. It's as interested in the unknown as it is in the known--maybe more.

Analogies: knowledge is a wave, a flow, a process. It's ecology - a whole system of interacting patterns. The patterns are inseparable from the whole. It's impossible to extract knowledge from anything. Instead, one gardens.

Creativity can grow. It emerges out of a fertile field, tended by people interacting with people, with their environment, with ideas. Even when technology enters the picture, this point of view is human-centered. It wants the techno-logy to adapt to people and not the other way around.

Those who see knowledge as ecology also tend to see organizations as living systems. They are interested in questions of evolution, of the deep, enduring patterns that drive change and provide continuity. One of their

primary tenets is that organisms at all levels are self-organizing. Here is the faith - that order emerges spontaneously out of chaos.

Knowledge by emergence honors background--the tacit, the mysterious, the unformed. Its best trick is to sense what isn't so obvious, then to gather insights in the periphery and let these insights feed clear vision. This can be a transformational insight, a leap to a new level of intelligence.

Knowledge by emergence is vulnerable, however, to the chaos it respects. It's difficult to direct, and it may not deliver on a deadline.

This uncertainty doesn't bother the faithful. They have a longer view and are frustrated by those who want to control. (From the Institute for the Future)

Storytelling: The literature of persuasion

The literature of persuasion has an unsavory reputation. So unsavory in fact that one may hesitate to call it a literature at all. We find ourselves here in the land of the salesman and the huckster, the world of the high-pressure sales campaign, of the fast buck and the hustle, with recommendations of subliminal techniques and unscrupulous ploys aimed at separating honest citizens from their hard-earned livelihood by getting them to buy things they neither want nor need.

This is the world of Dale Carnegie, who has sold some fifteen million copies of his book extolling the merits of lavishing the deftly chosen compliment, smiling the kind of smile that will bring a good price in the marketplace, and evincing purported interest in the lives of the potential customers, or his modern successor, Robert Cialdini who explains in horrifying detail how the "foot in the door" or the "bait and switch" techniques can routinely persuade people to do or buy the most stupid of things.

Perhaps the most encouraging aspect of these writings is the evolution shown in the contrast between Carnegie who, writing in 1937, displays no sense of irony or apology for the tackiness of his message, and Cialdini who, writing in 1982, is obliged to purport to be deploring, and defending against, the very techniques which he glorifies at such length.

If the hard sell of homo vendens is unattractive and reprehensible, albeit regrettably effective, what is the alternative? Homo vendens is often contrasted to the great hero of Western literature, rational man.

The paradigm of rational man is enshrined in a literary tradition dating back to Aristotle in ancient Greece which supposes that (1) humans are essentially rational beings; (2) the normal mode of human decision-making and communication is argument -- clear-cut inferences from known facts -- and (3) the world is a set of logical puzzles which can be resolved through appropriate analysis and application of reason.

In some ways, the modern corporation is the organizational embodiment of rational man, with whole armies of staff pursuing economic goals by rational means, thus systematically solving the economic puzzles that the

world represents. Rational debate and cool, usually quantitative, analysis are the honored modes of its discourse.

An early exponent of the paradigm of rational man was the Greek philosopher, Socrates, who among other things went round pestering his fellow Athenian citizens with irritating and pedantic questions with such persistence and single-mindedness that eventually they got fed up with him and put him to death, ostensibly for impiety and corrupting the youth. While one can regret the disproportion between the punishment and the alleged crime, it is also true that Socrates sometimes conducted himself with such intellectual officiousness, that one can at moments feel a twinge of sympathy for the actions of the ancient Athenians.

The fact is that purely rational man is not a pleasant or agreeable companion. He is not someone we can listen to for very long. He is not someone we like – perhaps someone who might be good at doing our taxes, but not someone we want to spend time with. He is even someone we dread meeting, and we would not really want him at our dinner table, any more than we would want *homo vendens*. Purely rational man would be a very tiresome guest and spoil the party.

Socrates' death at the hands of the ancient Athenians demonstrated in a dramatic fashion that having the better argument does not necessarily result in winning the argument. Even when purely rational man is entirely in the right, people may tend to resent him. He makes us feel like we are being used, by overpowering us with the strength of his logic. We don't necessarily buy into his picture of the world as a logical puzzle to be solved, and to which he has the solution.

Perhaps in an ideal, albeit disagreeable, world, everyone might be purely rational, and then communications might proceed on a purely rational basis. But in the real world of today, it is not so, or at least, not yet. The truth is that human beings are not fully and accurately represented by the concept of purely rational man. As a result, dealing with the elements beyond pure reason is key both to understanding and succeeding in the real world.

When the failure to persuade, particularly of major changes, is pervasive, the executive might be entitled to wonder whether any harm would be done by inquiring, at least hypothetically, how we might go about persuading an organization to change.

Storytelling is by its very nature well adapted to the task of genuine persuasion. and creating innovation and genuine buy-in for change .

Storytelling and genuine persuasion

First, true persuasion is not about any old idea, good, bad, or indifferent. Genuine persuasion is about an idea that is true. The use of persuasive techniques to promote ideas that are not true is often known as propaganda. Using persuasive techniques to promote ideas that are shoddy or only half-true are frequent in advertising.

The idea that persuasion is about true ideas is unpopular, perhaps even anathema, in those realms of academia where post-modernist and ironic

philosophy prevails, and truth is a discredited notion, and any viewpoint can be accepted as being as good any other, so long as someone happens to hold it. But in the real world, the world of change, the pursuit of the true is fundamental to persuasion. There is a fundamental practical difference between ideas that are reliable and those that have no intellectual basis for belief. Persuasion is basically about the former kind of ideas.

Second, persuasion is not about selling an idea in a one-way process of communication. Effective persuasion is inherently two-way communication. Unless persuasion is a two-way process, it is unlikely to be effective, it will be temporary, ephemeral exchange of information. If it is forceful one-way communication, it will be browbeating and pillage. If such communication is supported by economic incentives and disincentives, it may become coercion and it may enjoy a sort of short-term effectiveness. If it uses devious means, it becomes trickery.

None of these types of communications constitute genuine persuasion. They may be effective in getting short run actions or even shifts in attitudes, if enough economic or other power is brought to bear on the audience. In a one-way process of communication, information may become temporarily lodged in the listener's mind, like flotsam and jetsam washed up from the sea, but it will wash or blow away with the first wind that comes, the first wave that breaks. Effective persuasion is about permanent change in people's minds, and the only way in which this can happen is by a two-way process of communication.

Persuasion is a two-way interchange like conversation. You give and you take. As an instigator of change, you are likely to find that you get more than you give, because you are listening to every nuance of audience reaction, seizing on every question as a invaluable indication of what is going on the interchange, capturing your answers which you have to invent on the spot and using them in future interchanges.

A bad persuader is like a bad conversationalist who monopolizes the conversation in a monotonic lecture. Good persuasion is basically two-way communication.

Third, in what follows from the second characteristic, persuasion is a process in which the listener is active. The listener must actively participate in the discovery of truth for the idea to become part of their permanent mental framework.

Fourth, genuine persuasion is about achieving permanent change in mental frameworks. Great persuasion is not different from great teaching or fine dialogue. The great persuaders – Plato, Jesus, Descartes and Jefferson for example – communicated their ideas so effectively, the entire human race has been unable to recover from their teaching. There is no way that we can go back to looking at the world the way it was before they spoke. They have permanently altered the way the human race thinks about things and looks and feels about the world around us.

Even people who have never heard of them cannot escape the reach of their ideas. Looked at from the devil's point of view, the "damage" they have done is irreparable. Put more positively, their way of thinking has been incorporated in the way the human race thinks about things, It is now such

a part of the human mindscape we are no longer aware of it as persuasion. Persuasion thus aims at permanent change in mental frameworks. For genuine persuasion, storytelling is the tool of choice.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Lawrence J-E. Poole - *SELF-Empowerment – How and why to invest in your creative capital*; IQ Press, Montreal

Stephen Denning - *The Springboard: How Storytelling Ignites Action in Knowledge-Era Organizations*. KMCi Press, Boston

Edward De Bono - "*I am right and you are wrong!*" Penguin Press, London

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www-consult-iidc.com

info@consult-iidc.com