

Storytelling and its contribution to organizational theory

[Business](#), [Organization](#)



The storytelling approach towards the knowledge sharing is explored in detail. The story telling can be used to elicit tacit knowledge and can be used to flow the knowledge about previous events in the organization and any other work related knowledge in an interesting and effective manner. Since emotions are attached to the stories, they narrate the much value to the listeners and the listeners tend to keep what they have heard. In this sense, organization memory is created by the anecdotes of the stories being told.

The lessons learnt from the past experiences are label to the employees working now. It is also studied the negative stories have much impact on the listeners. The story telling has the potential to capture tacit knowledge and how it is done in the context of IBM is explained. Moreover, the story telling in the organizations can be enhanced by the use of IT tools like intranet, emails and other knowledge management systems which helps employees to create platform to share their stories and communicate the values of the organization.

This values and the knowledge base of the organization helps to form the organization memory. Table of Contents Introduction Storytelling is one of the approaches towards knowledge capture and codification, the first phase of KM cycle. This is used to elicit tacit knowledge, towards creation of new knowledge and to organize the content in systematic manner. In knowledge capture phase, the distinction between the capture of existing knowledge and the creation of new knowledge has to be made. Mostly, only existing knowledge is set into the pattern, which only forms the explicit knowledge.

There is huge pool of knowledge, which needs to be captured towards generating the new knowledge and that knowledge is mostly tacit in nature, which resides within the heads of knower. Every organization also has a memory. The embodiment of the organizational memory is the experience of its employees, tangible data and knowledge stores in the organization (Walsh and Unison, 1991). The value of knowledge is increased when it is transferred otherwise the uncultured knowledge is devalued and ignored with time. In today's fast-paced economy, an organization's knowledge base is quickly becoming its only sustainable competitive advantage.

This competitive advantage is owned by utilizing the organizational knowledge, the individual skills, thoughts and ideas. So Tacit knowledge management is must to capture the experience and expertise of the individual in an organization and making it available to anyone who needs it. Once the tacit knowledge becomes explicit, it needs to be organized in a structured document that will enable multipurpose use. The KM tools help to create knowledge and then leverage it across multiple channels, including phone, email, discussion forums, Internet and any new channel that come online.

Story telling is one of the best KM tools to capture tacit knowledge. Organizational story can be defined as past management actions, employee interactions or other key events that have occurred and that have been communicated informally (Swap et al, 2001). The stories provide a rich context making it interesting for the listeners and also remains in the conscious memory longer. Stories reinforce organizational learning and

communicate common values. The core capabilities of an organization are built by critical skills of employees, management systems and organizational values.

This capability can be transferred in formal and explicit way. However much knowledge articulatory knowledge with rich tacit dimensions is transferred internally through processes of socialization and internalization. Story telling is one such transfer mechanisms that can leverage the tacit knowledge of the organization. Literature Review The use of the stories and storytelling may provide a powerful practice as a part of efforts by individuals, groups or organizations to share what they know. It breaks away from the traditional means of communication and adds new dimension to the knowledge management tools.

Deeding, in his article " Telling Tales" tries to convey that the age-old practice of storytelling is an effective method to be used as knowledge management tools but the stories told should match the situation and conditions in the organization. Storyteller as a leader should influence the listeners and the story should have enough detail to be intelligible and credible. Different narrative patterns like Sparking Action, Communicating who you are, Transmitting value, Fostering collaboration and Taming the grapevine can be used.

Snowman's article titled " The new simplicity-context, Narrative and Content" focuses on the need for knowledge management to go beyond the boundaries of using best practices into the realms of uncertainty. Since both the human

behavior and system are complex, the cause and effect of the system and the interacting agents can't be separated; the contextual stimulation is needed to capture the knowledge. The decision making pattern is important. Narrative is emerging as one of the most exciting approaches to knowledge management.

It involves going and finding a person to ask questions whenever faced with the new task or encounter a problem and get context-sensitive answers. In short, stories allow the communication of complex ideas in a simple, memorable form. Karakul Shaffer B Kali in his research on " Transfer knowledge Using Stories: A Malaysian University Case Study" attempts to explore the usage of knowledge-embedded stories in a Malaysian institute of higher learning and will consider the understanding of organization members concerning storytelling in the organization.

It provides insights on the culture of storytelling as a method of knowledge transfer medium and explores the practicality of using stories in the organization and the employee's perception of the usage of stories to transfer knowledge. This case reveals that story telling is regarded as an acceptable approach in knowledge transfer. Mostly gathering sessions in the university stimulated storytelling. The case also presented the factors that influence the KM storytelling.

The factors are an extension of the existing knowledge transfer factors mentioned in literatures, which do influence KM storytelling. Walter Swap, Dorothy Leonard, Mimi Shields and Lisa Abram in their research " Using

"Mentoring and Storytelling to transfer knowledge in the Workplace" explains that the knowledge with rich tacit dimensions is transferred informally through processes of socialization and naturalization. They have focuses on two transfer mechanisms mentoring and storytelling.

Most stories told informally in organizations are negative. Therefore managers interested in how knowledge accrues in the organization cannot ignore these important transmitters. Stories that dramatize or illustrate managerial systems, values, norms are more likely to be believed and acted upon than mere statements of policies and norms. Finally, the use of information technologies can enhance the story telling. The effect of verbal storytelling can be enhanced through the use of multimedia.

Consistent with the elaboration effect, seeing and hearing the storyteller can add weight and detail to the story as can visual about the environment in which the story occurred. Story-telling-a technique to capture tacit knowledge In KM, the knowledge capture and creation may be done by the individuals who work for the organization or a group within that organization, by all members of a community of practice (COP), or by a dedicated COP individual.

So the creation, capture and the codification of the information is done at the personal level while performing activities at Job. Within the firm, individuals share perceptions and jointly interpret information events and experiences (Cohen and Leviathan, 1990) and at some point, knowledge acquisition extends beyond the individuals and is coded into corporate memory (Napkin,

1995; Spencer, 1996; Monika and Takeouts, 1995). Unless knowledge is embedded into corporate memory, the firm cannot leverage the knowledge held by individual members of the organization.

Knowledge acquisition from individuals or groups can be characterized as the transfer and transformation of valuable expertise from a knowledge source (human expert, documents) to a knowledge repository (organizational memory, facts and rules). Explicit knowledge is already well described but we need to abstract and summarize this content. Tacit knowledge capturing needs various techniques of which story telling is the one. Stories involve the detailed narrative of management actions and decision-making styles, employee activities and interaction and other events within the division that are communicated informally within the organization.

A story can be defined as telling of a happening or a connected series of happenings whether true or fictitious (Deeding, 2001). This involved the group interaction and collaboration for story telling. The SEC' model developed by Knock and Takeouts also supports that story telling or narratives can be used to bring out tacit knowledge. Fig 1 : SEC Model by Monika and Takeouts Here, colonization process is involve which emphasizes the tacit knowledge exchange through Joint activities such as gathering, spending time together, informal talks and living and working in the same environment rather than through written or verbal instructions.

The process of transferring one's ideas or images directly to colleagues or subordinates means to share personal knowledge and create commonplace

or Baa. During extrapolation process, an individual commits to the group and thus becomes one with the group. The individuals' intentions and ideas merge and become integrated with the group's mental world. This involves the expressing of ideas or images as communicable manner such as metaphors, analogies, event description or narratives. A number of conditions must be in place, however, in order to ensure that storytelling in its various enacted forms creates value in a particular organization.

Sole and Wilson (2002) argue that although all stories are narratives, not all narratives are good knowledge-sharing stories. As an example, they cite movies, which tell stories designed primarily to entertain and therefore need not necessarily be authentic-? or even believable. In contrast, in organizational storytelling, stories are often used to promote knowledge sharing, inform, and/or prompt a change in behavior, as well as communicate the organizational culture and create a sense of belonging.

In order to achieve these organizational objectives, knowledge-sharing stories need to be authentic, believable, and compelling. Stories need to evoke some type of response, and, above all, they need to be concise (Deeding, 2001), so that the moral of the story or the organizational lesson to be learned can be easily understood, remembered, and acted upon. In other words, organizational stories should have an impact: they should prevent similar mistakes from being repeated, or they should promote organizational learning and adoption of best practices stemming from the collective organizational memory.

Deeding (2001) describes the power of a springboard story, knowledge that has been captured in the form of a brief story that has the ability to create a strong impact on its audience. He outlines a number of key elements required to use stories to encapsulate valuable knowledge, such as: The explicit story should be relatively brief and detailed just enough that the audience can understand it. The story must be intelligible to the specific audience so that they are "hooked."

The story should be inherently interesting. The story should spring the listener to a new level of understanding. The story should have a happy ending. The story should embody the change message. The change message should be implicit. The listeners should be encouraged to identify with the protagonist. The story should tell with a specific individual or organization. The protagonist should be prototypical of the organization's main business. Other things being equal, true is better than invented.

One should test, test, and test again Story telling and KM processes involved in context of MM. IBM has leverage on the power of story telling at the daily work place to enhance the employees' performance. IBM has a four-stage storytelling approach. 1 . Anecdotal elicitation through interviews, observation and story circles 2. Anecdotal deconstruction to analyse cultural issues, ways of working, values, rules and beliefs to find the story's key messages 3. Intervention / communication design with a story constructed or enhanced 4.

Story deployment Story telling workshops can be run to elicit the knowledge and cultural values of an organization as well as both its best and inhibitors to sharing and identifies business issues. Values, rules and beliefs of organization were identified. Storytelling provides the platform to the employees to share experiences and build social capital and networks and most importantly it achieves agreement among the participants The knowledge management framework developed by Olivia and Lieder (2001 a) is based n the view of organizations as " knowledge systems".

According to this view, organization consists of four knowledge processes Creation Storage / Retrieval Transfer Application Here in case of MM, knowledge creation process takes place by the creation of anecdotes, which are captured as tacit knowledge, and they are stored in a repository and aligned with communities, processes and subject areas. This shows the knowledge storage process.

Then the knowledge transfer takes place through support discussion forums (lunch and learn), databases, intellectual capital, management systems (training), document management systems, bulletin boards, inline chats, portals (community kick-off days) and intranets. Ultimately, the people who make communities do the knowledge application process. The effective communities have valuable stories. Practice of dedicated Story Telling Sessions The practice of dedicated story telling sessions in some organizations have proved the increased level of knowledge exchange among employees.

For example, NASA, Deducted and Malaysian university have Km initiative in form of story telling sessions. The ITEMS (Information Services and Media Services) Department has its own storytelling sessions. There are two storytelling session ITEMS Sharing Session- It involves the staffs from whole ITEMS department and it is conducted once a week to share the stories on the problems encountered and the solutions. Toolbox Session- alt only involves the units in ITEMS department. It gathers the support unit employees to share their stories on the problems raised.

They have one program to stimulate KM storytelling called Buddy program. In Buddy program, two employees from different department are paired together to work as a single department. Junior staff is paired with senioracademicacting as mentor. Conclusion Stories are powerful conveyors of meaning and tacit knowledge and been in use from ancient times. It helps to share knowledge with context and emotion. It triggers the listeners to respond with other stories building new understanding.

Stories can capture and hold the attention increasing the likelihood of hearing and listening. Story telling is very valuable in story telling network. Any organization has a set of itsmemoriesembedded from the time of its inception. These memories are the skills and knowledge of its employees while in an organization over the years of operation. So, the organizational memory has its role on forming the knowledge base of the organization. Employees can use the organization memory to learn and improve the effectiveness of their work.

Employee's knowledge can be stored and then information and knowledge can be shared by KM. Organizational memory is one of intangible assets of one organization; it stores past experiences and knowledge, supports organization strategy and improves organization effectiveness. Accordingly, it is important to establishment and development of organizational memory for KM. Organizational culture can be stored by story, and it is one of retention facilities of organizational memory.

The idea, spirit, and culture of organizations can be passed down by storytelling. Through storytelling, organization members emotionally connect to their organization and then identify their organization. Storytelling can store organizational culture, convey experience and knowledge, and improve acquisition, retention, and maintenance of process of organizational memory management. Organization value and spirit can be conveyed effectively by storytelling.