

The knowledge inspires action education essay

[Education](#)



The previous chapter introduced the background to the client organisation and their product, and went on to explain the rationale for this project. This chapter presents what was found as a result of the literature review which was conducted to develop a broad understanding of the relevance and importance of storytelling in today's economy, as well as the ways in which stories, and particularly knowledge sharing stories are structured. As the client requested that the narratives produced relate knowledge about how Doctus software is used in practice, the review starts with findings from the literature surrounding personal knowledge and knowledge sharing. It then discusses aspects of storytelling in general and closes with research into how storytelling is carried out in the digital age, so that recommendations can be made that enable the client to leverage any stories produced.

2. 1 Personal Knowledge

Snowden (2001: p11) asserts that " human knowledge is deeply contextualised and requires stimulation if it is to be revealed", and that storytelling is an effective way of providing this stimulation. Narrative is also believed to be a useful vehicle for communicating knowledge within organisations, where stories tacitly embody individual and organisational ways of thinking, acting and practicing within a culture (Seely Brown, et al., 2005). Seeley Brown (2005) believes that stories create mental models that our minds can more easily understand which enable us to better challenge and change our existing views of the world as we interpret, integrate and internalise this understanding within our own unique conceptual framework. It was therefore felt pertinent that this research address the creation of

personal knowledge as well as the human capacity to generate unique perspectives of the world which are conveyed through stories.

2. 1. 1 Knowledge Inspires Action

Davenport and Prusak (2000) assert that knowledge within the context of an organisation is neither data nor information yet it is related to both of these concepts. Data operates as a set of objective facts about events that can be easily stored and do not require interpretation or judgement as a basis for action. Information is described as a message often conveyed in a form of verbal or visual communication which is intended to inspire action, therefore it is data enriched with meaning (Davenport & Prusak, 2000). Davenport and Prusak (2000) believe that knowledge evolves from information when it inspires comparison, consequences, connections and conversation implying that it requires both social and personal interpretation. According to this process view of knowledge, knowledge is information that is contextualised and relevant for application in a problem solving situation (Turban, et al., 2007), therefore knowledge enables action. This belief supports that of Ackoff (1989) who proposed that knowledge is a process by which data could ultimately be transformed into knowledge and subsequently wisdom, as its inherent meaning and value increase(see figure). The cognitive hierarchy as proposed by R. L. Ackoff taken from: Girard, 2006The process view of knowledge held by Ackoff (1989) although useful in that it illustrates how knowledge may ultimately evolve from data, describes the formation of knowledge from an information systems perspective therefore doesn't fully account for how we as individuals use tacit knowledge to make sense of the world (Rowley, 2007). Dörfler et al (2011) propose a model of knowledge

which accounts for both tacit and explicit knowledge by outlining how it is applied by people in different circumstances, and links these to the actions that knowledge inspires. This model defines Facts, Skills and Intuition as types of knowledge (see figure) and asserts that with experience, explicit rules and practices can be internalised and applied tacitly over time.

Knowledge Types as outlined by Dörfler et al 2011 Facts relate to our evaluation of events that we have observed, where experiencing events and our measurement of what we have witnessed enables us to know in future that ' it' will do ' that'. We increase factual knowledge by experiencing and observing events and articulating explicitly what we have learned. Skills are the knowledge that we generate through action in practice, where we build our ' know how' through the application of the rules or ' second hand facts' (our ' know that'), and by reflecting on the results of our chosen behaviour. Skills are increased through actively engaging with, and tacitly internalising experiences in learning by doing rather than observing. Intuition is where one can sense the direction (' know-what') of a situation and the required solution (' know-why'), which is known as a hunch. In explaining or justifying a hunch one unknowingly applies the explicit rules of a situation (' know-that') tacitly, where over time we develop through practice the ability to use inductive and deductive logic to solve problems creatively. Although Dörfler et al (2011) believe that little is known about how one increases their intuitive knowledge, they do suggest that by deepening one's ' inner' experience in a domain one may develop a sense of the ' essence' of a discipline. This view of personal knowledge is useful as it acknowledges that both explicit and tacit knowledge operate within the facts, skills and intuition we apply day to day; and highlights how knowledge is profoundly embedded

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in practice. It also provides us with much more personal terms with which to describe knowledge, where data, information and knowledge as defined by Ackoff, are not concepts that lend themselves well to being conveyed or articulated within a story. For instance we are more likely to disclose the facts and skills used in a situation and tacitly convey the results of our intuition, rather than talk about the 'information' or 'knowledge' that was applied.

2. 1. 2 Knowledge is Explicit and Tacit

Explicit knowledge is that which can be easily captured and formally 'codified' in the form of 'artefacts' such as documents, images, reports, models, procedures, rules or patents (Snowden, 1999), and can be conveyed between people in deliberate 'systematic' ways (Allee, 1997). Explicit knowledge is presented in a tangible form which can easily disseminated and re-applied throughout an organisation, and can be easily transferred from person to person to teach and train (Dalkir, 2011). As explicit knowledge can be easily documented and shared, it can be described as being 'leaky' as it is easier to forget as it is less embedded, and is more susceptible to being shared out with an organisation (Turban, et al., 2007). Allee (1997) defines tacit knowledge as that which is profoundly personal, context-specific and resides in the individual or the 'knower'. Tacit knowledge revolves around the 'mental models' we create that help us to make sense of our world by incorporating a blend of beliefs, values, images, concepts and perspectives. For instance we use tacit knowledge to interpret and adapt to new situations (Dalkir, 2011) where it operates within our subconscious as a tool to handle or improve the task that is the subject of our attention or focus (Sveiby,

1994). Stories have been shown to effectively communicate our knowledge of tacit practices that have worked well in the past. Snowden (1999) points out that as tacit knowledge is often difficult to articulate and that it cannot be 'conscripted', it has to be volunteered. This makes tacit knowledge often invisible and as such codifying it for its value to be elicited may be challenging (Allee, 1997) as it is 'sticky' in nature and the individuals in possession of the knowledge often do not realise its potential importance to others, so are often not motivated to sharing it (Turban, et al., 2007). Stories however, are considered an excellent medium for capturing and codifying tacit knowledge as they provide the rich context which ensures that knowledge remains in the memory for longer (Dalkir, 2011 & Swap, et al., 2001), and they enable an individual to convey more than what they can explicitly (Davenport & Prusak, 2000).

2. 1. 3 Knowledge is Communal

Davenport and Prusak (2000: p5) propose a working definition of knowledge which is intended to reflect the characteristics which make knowledge valuable yet also difficult to manage within organisations:" Knowledge is a fluid mix of framed experience, values, contextual information, and expert insight that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information. It originates and is applied in the minds of knowers. In organisations, it often becomes embedded not only in documents or repositories but also in organisational routines, processes, practices and norms" This definition is useful as it highlights the dynamic nature of knowledge and how it can be entrenched in organisational practices and norms, which would include the stories that circulate as an

inherent part of an organisation's culture. Allee (1997) also believes that there is a communal aspect of knowledge, citing physicist David Bohm in describing the nature of knowledge as a cycle of communication between people, where thoughts flow through and between individuals resulting in experience and information being communicated and shared over time. Although the experience of 'knowing' is individual, 'knowledge' itself is not (Wegner, et al., 2002). Seeley Brown (2005) asserts that in sharing and exchanging stories we are taking part in a form of 'socially constructed' understanding, through which we elicit our own interpretation and subsequent learning from the experiences being shared. It is through this process of social construction that an individual, and subsequently an organisation can begin to make sense of itself and its environment, thus reducing ambiguity in a world of multiple meanings (Easterby-Smith & Lyles, 2005). The communal nature of knowledge is also alluded to by Polanyi (1962: as cited by Sveiby 2004) who proposed three main theses within his concept of knowledge; that true discovery cannot be accounted for by a set of formalised rules, that knowledge is public and to a great extent personal in that it contains emotion, and that all knowledge is tacit or rooted in tacit knowledge. It is considered that knowledge is more social than private as we both convey and absorb knowledge throughout our experience as an individual, where it becomes part of our own unique version of reality (Polanyi 1962, as cited by: Sveiby 1994).

2. 1. 4 Knowledge is Personal

Our 'own unique version of reality' is a mental construct of knowledge through which we view and interpret the world to actively support our

thinking and perception. These mental models are made up of units of information each with their own independent meaning, which we have absorbed as a result of our personal experience and understanding of tasks, problems and decisions that we have experienced over time (Dorfler, 2010). These models influence how we each perceive or 'frame' a scenario differently, and can be modified and transformed as we are exposed to new knowledge (Mérö 1990, as cited by Dörfler 2010: p 370) meaning that they are deeply personal and unique to each individual, reinforcing the idea of knowledge residing within the ' knower'. ' Framing' is a term used by Goffman (1974, as cited by Pidd 2011: p51) to describe how we use these mental models to make sense of events. We interpret new experiences in light of the patterns and meanings that exist within our existing frame of reference, allowing us to both see some things and ignore others. When people do not share a common frame of reference, for instance within a field of expertise, they will literally see things differently as they each refer to their own mental model to make sense of the same situation (Pidd, 2011) . As we share stories which embody our past experiences, learning and behaviour; and recreate the circumstances of how we have applied our own personal knowledge in practice, we are effectively representing our personal perspective (or mental model) of a situation so that it can be used by the listener for them to identify meaning and patterns which fit with their own frame of reference (Schank, 1990). It is this on-going representation of mental models and absorption of meaning between parties that makes knowledge profoundly personal in its content yet, paradoxically communal in its ability to build social and organisational constructs. This process enables the listener to construct their own interpretation of the situation, where the

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knowledge shared has allowed them to challenge and reframe their own mental model and influence their behaviour in the future having had insight into what has worked for others in their past (Seely Brown, et al., 2005). This view considers knowledge as a subjective contextual construct (based on Polanyi 1958, as cited by Paulin & Suneson, 2012). As this perspective suggests the knowledge cannot be separated from the context or the individual, it is contrary to the view of knowledge as an object, where a company can have a 'stock' of knowledge which can be physically moved and transferred between people. The way in which we tell or are told a story is also heavily personal. For instance we adapt the amount of context or detail we convey to an audience dependent on our understanding of their knowledge, this allows them to read between the lines and fill in the blanks to form their own meaning from what is being shared (Boje, 1991). This highlights the personal nature of the knowledge being presented and the way in which it is being delivered, as well as the role that both teller and listener have in co-creating narrative and making sense of the experience. The potential to reveal, challenge and change frameworks of personal knowledge is what makes storytelling so powerful (Seely Brown, et al., 2005).

2. 2 Knowledge Sharing

The transfer of knowledge between people is seen as a fundamental part of the development of civilisation, as it is central to our ability to learn as a society (Paulin & Suneson, 2012). According to Allee (1997) knowledge and learning are critical components of conversations within cultures. In most

environments knowledge is revealed in periods of years not days, but storytelling is a powerful way to speed up this process (Snowden, 1999).

2. 2. 1 What is Knowledge ‘ Sharing’?

It has been highlighted (by Paulin & Suneson, 2012) that there is confusion in the current Knowledge Management literature regarding the difference between knowledge sharing and knowledge transfer, and that these terms are often used as synonymns. For that reason further detail of the use of these terms will be examined. Knowledge sharing as a term is generally used when an author’s view is consitent with the Knowledge as a Social Contextual Construct (KSCC) perspective, where knowledge is presented by a ‘ knower’ in a socialised setting and redeveloped by the mental models of others who seek to generate their own meaning from the account (Paulin & Suneson, 2012). When considering knowledge in this light the emphasis is that sharing can only take place between individuals where, as Tuban et al. (2007: p489) explain there occurs: " the wilful explication of one person's ideas, insights, solutions, experiences to another individual". For instance where two colleagues collaborate on a project where they discuss experiences, approaches, ideas, and share expertise in a context they are both familiar with. However debate does ensue when we consider that personal knowledge is deeply contextualised and therefore we can never fully ‘ share’ it, as each unique context in which it has been generated can never be recreated or witnessed in the same way as another (Henriks, 1999 and Paulin & Suneson, 2012). Those who adopt the term Knowledge transfer therefore generally view knowledge as being an object (KO perspective) which can be moved around rather than something that is tied to a particular

individual (Paulin & Suneson, 2012). The general consensus is that transfer takes place between multiple parties, such as disparate teams or organisational functions and is multi-directional rather than emanating in a one-way fashion from a ' knower'. For instance a simple mode of transfer would take place when a UK engineer travels to China to replicate a manufacturing facility to inform local operators as to how best to assemble new equipment (Paulin & Suneson, 2012). Davenport and Prusak (2000) propose a formula for knowledge transfer: $\text{Transfer} = \text{Transmission} + \text{Absorption (and Use)}$. Interestingly this has been referred to by another author (Hendriks 1999) who has cited this as a formula for knowledge sharing, highlighting the fuzziness of boundaries between the terms 'transfer' and 'sharing'. In the case of this project the KSCC perspective is considered to be the most suited to storytelling, as it is believed that although stories can exist both in the oral and written tradition making them potentially an ' object', they are both social in their construction and in their mode of circulation, and are generally not static artefacts that can be easily transported free of the ' knower' who is essential to orally conveying their context and intended meaning. Therefore the term sharing will be used within this work to describe the movement of stories between people.

2. 2. 2 How is Knowledge Shared?

Hendriks (1999) discusses how effective knowledge sharing takes place between two or more cooperating parties. Firstly a willing source needs to have the motivation and communication skills to articulate and share what they know in some form (either by acts, speech or writing etc). Secondly there must be recipients who have the have ability to effectively absorb and

interpret the expressions presented, and then make sense of these for application in their own context (see figure). This involves an act of 'externalisation' by those that embody the knowledge, and an act of 'internalisation' by those seeking to acquire new knowledge. A simplified model of knowledge sharing from: Hendriks 1999

2. 2. 3 Why do People Share Knowledge?

There are several motivations for sharing knowledge among humans. These would include: the need to earn a living, the need to expend mental or physical energy, the desire for social interaction or to achieve social status, the need for recognition or respect, the desire for achievement or power, or simply the need to survive, belong or just for sheer pleasure (Hendriks, 1999). Hendriks (1999) and Riege (2005) highlight that there are many barriers to knowledge sharing being effectively carried out. These barriers may be take the form of simply space and time, or may be more complex such as: social distance, culture, language or significant differences in mental frameworks due to differences in expertise, a lack of confidence in using ICT that supports sharing, or simply a lack of awareness of the value of knowledge. It has been suggested that people most willingly and voluntarily share and capture knowledge within informal networks with those they are comfortable collaborating with, and where there exists an appreciation for the value of the knowledge within others (Riege, 2005). Without this people will be unlikely to understand, trust or build rapport with each other (Davenport & Prusak, 2000).

2. 2. 4 How Can Stories Be Used to Share Knowledge?

" Sharing knowledge means bringing people into the conversation" Allee 1997 Knowledge sharing initiatives involve informal and formal, as well as virtual and face to face interactions. However as Allee (1997) suggests in the above quote, and as Davenport & Prusak (2000) believe that " in a knowledge driven economy, talk is the real work"; simple conversation is vital to sustaining knowledge sharing. In a time where ' virtual offices' are regarded as the modern way to do business from home or a client site, it is essential that organisations provide time and space for people from across departmental lines to meet and talk, thus encouraging ' at the water cooler' type conversations that often result in the genesis of a new problem solving approach. During conversation colleagues and teams share fresh approaches to problems or novel ways to practice their role through stories, and when people approach a group for help members will conjure up old stories to suggest linkages between ' symptom and cause' (Bobrow & Whalen, 2002). Those who author and propagate such stories are considered to be increasing the intellectual capital within a firm and become central members of their communities of practice, where networks of workers become ' expert systems' themselves in supporting each other's decisions (Doubler 1994: as cited by Bobrow & Whalen, 2002). Communities of practice are groups of people who share an interest, concern or set of problems about which they interact on an ongoing basis, in order to improve their knowledge and expertise (Wegner, et al., 2002). Stories are useful at sharing both explicit and tacit knowledge as Swap et al. (2001) highlight in the following narrative (Wilkins 1984: p46, as cited by Swap et al 2001):" Hit by hard times, a company chose not to fire 10% of its people, but instead requires everyone,

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including top management, to take a 10% pay cut in exchange for working nine days out of 10" This story shares explicit knowledge about how things are done within this particular company (the managerial systems), as well as the implicit message that all levels of employees are valued and that team effort is important to this organisation during troubled times (organisational values). Swap et al (2001) consider stories to be powerful at communicating knowledge rich in tacit dimensions, especially when they convey norms and values that within narratives that one can easily relate to. They also propose that stories rich in contextual detail can reveal tacit knowledge of an organisations core capabilities (such as ability to deal with obstacles in the previous example), as well as being able to engender the 'buy-in' of company members more effectively than explicit forms of communication (Swap, et al., 2001). Stories do however, perpetuate old and often outdated values. For instance stories that share knowledge of potentially dangerous behaviour are more memorable due to the fear they evoke. By nature they are the most willfully recalled and thus are pervasive within organisations. These stories however are have a negative impact in that they prevent new approaches to problems being seen as acceptable (Swap, et al., 2001). So although stories are useful at sharing knowledge, in order to behave as a learning organisation it paradoxically has to 'unlearn' or shed the stories which prevent it from breaking free of the organisational norms (Seely Brown, et al., 2005). Although written forms of communication are useful for conveying explicit knowledge, they illustrate literally 'only part of the story', meaning that they often demand an accompanying narrative to support them when being shared (Allee, 1997).

2. 2. 5 Why Is it Important to Share Knowledge?

As the traditional manufacturing economy is steadily losing global market share to those who trade in intangible products, ideas and processes; cultivating a culture of knowledge sharing is now more crucial than ever to ensuring and sustaining the survival an organisation (Gurteen, 1999) as it is these knowledge assets which " build up over time in peoples' heads, hands and relationships" that are now the means through which organisations compete in the global marketplace (Swap, Leonard, Sheilds, & Abrams, 2001: p96). In leveraging their knowledge effectively a company can learn more from their mistakes and reduce the impact of expertise being lost by key people walking out of the door, as jobs become mobile (Turban, et al., 2007) and the ' job for life' faces extinction. The most salient benefit for those who allow knowledge to flow freely within their organisation is that of increased productivity and innovation through the timely and careful application of new and existing knowledge, which in turn engenders competitive advantage (Davenport & Prusak, 2000). Morale amongst workers who believe their knowledge is respected and valued will be higher within companies that recognise the expertise within it, and in fostering a culture of openness and trust companies will engender greater shared understanding of a company's goals and aspirations, therefore greater ' corporate coherence' can be achieved (Davenport & Prusak, 2000). In developing this shared vision, by encouraging reflective conversations that engage mental models, and in treating their organisation as a complex ' ecosystem' that should be nurtured, a company can start to realise its full capability and achieve the status of a ' learning organisation' (Senge, 1990). Senge (1990: p3) characterises learning organisations as those which are " continually

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learning how to learn together" and believes that it is these companies who will be productive, flexible and adaptive enough to perform well in situations of turbulent change (Senge, 1990).