Story Telling – An Effective Tool for Class room Teaching

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"The ability to tell the right story at the right time is emerging as an essential leadership skill for coping with and getting business results, in the turbulent world of the 21st Century"[1]

Today's world is highly competitive in which gaining attention from people is becoming a stupendous task for all marketers. Even out of all the people tracing and holding the minds of youth is highly hectic.

Marketers are struggling to catch the attention of youth with lots of ideas, investment, & gimmick, think the position of faculties who teach & extract the potential of student's Community. The minds of the students community is volatile & expects always things interesting. Since times immemorial story telling has been viewed as an interesting exercise irrespective of ages.

Boyce (1996) argued that little has been done to date in the story and storytelling research and called for further elaboration on the study of story telling.
Stories help to shape our perception of what is moral (Gabriel et al., 2000, p.50), have strong power over the listener (Boje, Luhman, & Baack, 1999), and are fundamental in realization.

This article tries to make an understanding of story telling and their relevance for management studies.

The Story Telling - Conundrum

The definition of a story in Webster's Dictionary: "A narrative. In prose or verse, designed to interest, amuse, or instruct the listener." Ricoeur (1984, cited in Boje et al., 1999) suggests that "a story describes a sequence of actions and experiences done or undergone by a certain number of people, whether real or imaginary" (p.341). Adding, modifying, and upgrading the story are common in stories that are told (Cassady, 1994; Gabriel, 2000).

Stories have a beginning, body and end (Czarniawska, 1997; Gabriel, 2000; but see Boje, 2001 for a different perspective). This is true for all the types of stories like short stories, organizational stories, fairy tales, etc.

The fairy tale is a unique type of story, mainly directed at young people, preparing them for life. They are symbolic, can be understood metaphorically, and are detached from an organizational context rather being associated with family, adventure, or a journey tale (Bettelheim, 1976). Fairy tales serve the whole community by providing a framework for understanding life and learning to realize and cope with difficulties and realities (Zipes, 2000). Similarly organizational stories help individuals in gaining knowledge and understanding of organizational events and perspectives (Abma, 2003), in knowledge transfer (Swap, Leonard, Shields, & Abrams, 2001) and in developing future leaders according to the aspirations of present leaders (Ready, 2002). Organizational stories are supposed to be rational and logical, although a fair amount of irrational forces operate within organizations (Moxnes, 1998).

Organizational stories are part of the in-depth sense of making of the organization (Gabriel, 1999; Weick, 2001). When dealing with organizational story telling, one should have realistic expectations: "Story tellers … should not pretend that stories have a magic power of healing … the community, that stories can work wonders for each troublesome situation" (Zipes, 1995, p.223)

Story Telling improves listening

Many studies confirm that most of the people are poor and insufficient listeners. Effective delivery is not only the responsibility of speaker also he has to make the audience to listen. General speaking rate is 125 words per minute but however the mental capacity to understand extends to 400 words per minute.

It means that only 1/3rd of our mental capacity is spent on listening & remaining capacity starts wandering. Story telling makes the audience to listen up to a maximum extent. Selective perception concept is also applicable since majority of people like stories. Story telling decreases the one of the common bad listening habit which is fake attention, sitting with chin in hand staring at the speaker. (Eyes are on, but minds are miles away). Stories come to give us a message, to entertain, to educate. Teacher's pedagogical stories inscribe worlds, beliefs, and identities that position their student's participation and performance (Rex, Murnen, Hobbs, & McEachen, 2002).

Organizational stories should be taken seriously in management studies (Boje, 1991, 2001; Gabriel, 1991b, 2000; Gabriel, Fineman, & sims, 2000; Van Maanen, 1988; Watson, 1994). Story telling workshops have been proven to improve competence by helping members' understanding and making sense of organizational issues (Abma, 2003).

Story telling makes easy

Concepts & ideas which are difficult to deal and explain can be easily articulated through the help of stories. Productivity implies a concern for both effectiveness and efficiency. Effectiveness is the successful achievement of a goal whereas efficiency is the ratio of effective output to the input required to achieve it.

A Scene in Mahabharatha, where a competition is announced between Gauravas and Pandavas. The competition is to accomplish a simple task. They will be given a sum of money with which they have fill up the space of the house with something what they want to. Time limit was given to them and they have been told the results will be announced after the time limit. The Judgement day came, judges like Vidura, Dhrona, arrived for giving the judgement.

First they went to Gaurava's house. The house is filled with full of charcoal and not even in a position to enter. But the assigned task as per the competition was fulfilled. Then they went to the house of Pandava's . Warm welcome was given by pandavas , they greeted them inside the home and gave sweets. They had decorated the home with full of lights. When they enquired they told the house was filled with lights. They gave some amount back to the judges as their balance after the spending.

Judges announced that pandavas won the competition. Here the act of Gauravas is described as effectiveness (Successful achievement of a goal) and the act of Pandavas is described as efficiency (The ratio of effective output to the input required to achieve it).

Enables Behavioural Changes

The Story of Harischandra which showed the path of Truth to Gandhiji. Mahatma Gandhi was influenced by the mythological character of Harishchandra and it made him to adhere with honesty.

Learning & Behavioural changes happens by repetitive experience stated by Ivan Pavlov[2] a Russian Physiologist as a result of Classical conditioning exercise

"Through stories we let people know what is important to us; our struggles and our life lessons, our beliefs, our values, our traditions, our hopes and our dreams. Telling stories is a way to honor our past, describe our present and shape our future[3].

The story telling exercises solves the purpose that is why moral classes are still in effect in school level education. Behavioural changes were enacted by story telling exercises to a considerable amount.

In the words of Deborah Tannen, "conversational style often overrides what we say, affecting who gets heard, who gets credit, and what gets done"[4]

Relevance to Management studies

Today's management students were tomorrow's professionals. Story telling can be a powerful managerial tool, especially when there is a need for cultural change within the organization, a highly challenging process (Hendry, 1992). There is ample evidence that storytelling helps in training and development and in reinforcing organizational socialization, identity and change (Hough & white, 2001; parkin, 2004). Moulding the minds and to bring the changes in students level is comparatively easy for which story telling helps a lot. Storytelling enhances decision making skills providing knowledge on situations, analysis, alternatives & different approaches for viewing and solving the problem or a happening. (See exhibit II).

Conclusion

The effectiveness of communication lies in non-verbal forms rather than verbal. Gestures, Eye movements & body language were involved more in story telling exercise than any other form of communication. Every one has their own style in story telling. There is no other specific method or training required for telling stories. The Success lies in narration, presentation style, cogency, conciseness & stimulating the listeners to think actively.

Exhibit I :

Narrative Patterns

If Your Objective is	You will need a story that;	In Telling, You will need to;	Your Story will Inspire Such Responses as:
Sparking action	Was implemented in the past, but allows listeners to imagine how it might work in their situation	Avoid excessive detail that will take the audience's mind off its own challenge.	"Just Imagine..." "What if…"
Communicating who you are	Provides audience-engaging drama and reveals some strength or vulnerability from your past.	Provide meaningful details but also make sure the audience has the time and inclination to hear your story.	"I didn't know that about him!" "Now I see that what she's driving at !"
Transmitting values	Feels familiar to the audience and will prompt discussion about the issues raised by the value being promoted.	Use believable (though hypothetical characters) and situation, and never forget that story must be consistent with your own actions.	"That's so right!" "Why don't we do that all the time?"
Fostering Collaboration	Movingly recounts a situation that listeners have also experienced and that prompts them to share their own stories about the topic.	Ensure that a set agenda doesn't squelch this swapping of stories – and that you have an action plan ready to tap the energy unleashed by this narrative chain reaction.	"That reminds me of the time that I …" "Hey, I've got a story like that"
Taming the grapevine	Highlights, often through the use of gentle humor, some aspect of a rumor that reveals it to be untrue or unreasonable.	Avoid the temptation to be mean-spirited- and be sure that the rumor is indeed false!	"No kidding!" "I'd never thought about it like that before!"
Sharing knowledge Leading people into future	Focuses on mistakes made and shows, in some detail, how they were corrected, with an explanation of why the solution worked.	Solicit alternative – and possibly better – solutions.	"There but for the grace of God…" "wow! We'd better watch that
Describes how a successful change	Evokes the future you want to create without providing excessive detail that will only turnout to be wrong.	Be sure of your storytelling skills. (Otherwise, use a story in which the past can serve as a springboard to the future.)	From now on!" "When do we start?" "Let's do it!"
Source : Denning Stephen, "Telling Tales", Harvard Business Review, May 2004.			

Exhibit II:

Situation, Analysis and Finding/s

Situation: "While walking along a beach, a man saw someone in the distance leaning down, picking something up and throwing it in the ocean. As he came closer, he saw thousands of star fish the tide had thrown onto the beach. Unable to return to the water, the starfish were dying. He observed this man picking up the starfish, one by one and throwing them back in the water.

Analysis : Now, after watching this seemingly futile effort, the observer said, "There are thousands of star fish on this beach. It would be impossible for you to get to all them. There are too many of them. You can't possibly save enough to make a difference."

Finding : The young man smiled as he continued to pick up another star fish and threw it back into the ocean "It made a difference to that starfish," he replied. – Anonymous.

Source: Lingam Ram. Story Telling As A Tool For Trainers, www.askme4.com

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Notes

[1] Denning, Stephen. The Leader's Guide to Storytelling: Mastering the Art and Discipline of Business Narrative, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 2005.

[2] I.P. Pavlov, The work of the Digestive Glands, trans. W.H. Thompson (London: Charles Griffin, 1902).

[3] Chartier Bob , Lapointe Sylvie, and Bonner Karen., Get Real – The Art & Power of Storytelling in Workplace Communities, National Manager's Community, Canada, 2005.

[4] Tannen Deborah. "The Power of Talk: Who Gets Heard and Why", Harvard Business Review, September, 1995.

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