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**TELLING THE STORY: TEACHING LEADERS THE ART OF
STORYTELLING AND ITS IMPACT ON INDIVIDUALS
AND THE ORGANIZATION**

**A Research Project
Presented to the Faculty of
The George L. Graziadio
School of Business and Management
Pepperdine University**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science
in
Organization Development**

**by
Julie Jones O'Leary**

August 2012

This research project, completed by

JULIE JONES O'LEARY

under the guidance of the Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the faculty of The George L. Graziadio School of Business and Management in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE
IN ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT

Date: August 2012

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Abstract

There are many different approaches to communicating a story which engages and inspires the audience. The opportunity comes in teaching employees a framework to tell a story that influences outcomes. This study analyzed the effects of a storytelling class delivered to employees of a Fortune 500 organization. Data for the study was sourced from a mixed-method approach: archival interviews, class evaluations, and face-to-face interviews. These methods measured the participants' reaction to the training, evaluated the relevance to the job, and determined the impact of learning the art of telling a story. The findings showed participants reported improved confidence, strengthened relationships, and greater competence in telling an effective story. Organizational benefits reported more efficient meetings, enhanced communication, and accomplishment of desired results. Supporting a coordinated approach to teach storytelling across the organization will help organization development practitioners find an effective way to share knowledge, influence outcomes, and deliver measurable results.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Studies have shown that in the United States alone, billions of dollars are wasted each year in mismanaged meetings. According to a study conducted at Hofstra University, unproductive time spent in poorly run meetings translates to a loss of approximately \$40 billion annually in the United States alone (Hoff, 1996). Hoff recognized that managers are spending more time in business meetings than in the past and will continue to spend more time in meetings in the future. As determined by the leadership team of a large retail organization, “We talk too much, often about the wrong things, and fail to make anything happen.” In fact, in 2005, Microsoft conducted an online survey of 38,000 people worldwide and discovered that, on average, people spent 5.6 hours each week in meetings and that 69% of the people surveyed felt the time spent in meetings is not productive (71% in the United States) (Microsoft, 2005).

While meetings can be unproductive, they are essential to organizational life. Effective meetings serve many useful purposes. In meetings, people gather information, generate ideas, plan, and achieve desired outcomes. They provide a mechanism to communicate, debate, influence others, and make decisions (Rogelberg, Scott, & Kello, 2007). Because managers are spending such a large portion of their time in meetings, it is critical that meetings be productive and accomplish predetermined goals.

Communication lies at the heart of this issue, and one aspect of effective communication is the ability to tell a good story. Stories help people connect with others. Through stories people explain how things are, why they are, and their role and purpose.

Stories help individuals make sense of the world and help leaders provide context. Stories enable a person to see issues in a new light and help inspire people to action.

Teaching leaders the art of creating, constructing, and telling a story, or the art of storytelling, can mean the difference between an ineffective meeting and an effective one. More than communication, storytelling is the art of combining verbal and nonverbal information to communicate a specific message that creates credibility, adds value, is easy to understand, and engages the audience. Storytelling emerges from the interaction and cooperative, coordinated efforts of teller and audience. “A central, unique aspect of storytelling is its reliance on the audience to develop specific visual imagery and detail to complete and co-create the story” (National Storytelling Network, 2009).

Statement of the Problem

There are many studies which address the impact of ineffective meetings in organizations (Elsayed-Elkhouly & Lazarus, 1997; Gillette, 2007; Ioffreda & Gargiulo, 2008; Jorgensen, 2010; Rogelberg et al., 2007) and the importance of communication in the workplace (Barker & Gower, 2010; Blair, 2006). Barker and Camarata (1998) contend that communication is an essential ingredient in creating learning organizations; and effective communication requires cooperation, connection, and engagement with others so they understand what has been said and they own the insights or recommendations. The storytelling community teaches many different approaches to the art of communicating a story that engages and inspires the audience (Denning, 2011; McLellan, 2006; Silverman, 2006), but there are insufficient examples of organizations that teach their employees a framework for helping managers devise a clear, concise, and compelling story in order to influence outcomes. Additionally, there is little research that

shows how storytelling training at multiple levels of an organization affects its managers and leaders as well as the organization itself.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study is to measure the impact of effective storytelling in the workplace by analyzing the effects of an internally designed and delivered class, Telling the Story, which is offered to corporate employees of a large retail organization. This study will answer the following questions:

1. What impact does a class, Telling the Story, have on leaders who are taught the art of creating and telling a story in order to influence others and achieve business objectives?
2. What is the impact on the organization?

Research Methods

This study assesses a class on the use of storytelling at a large specialty retail organization. Face-to-face individual interviews were conducted with 14 randomly selected class participants, and existing archival data was analyzed for this study. The archival data included 180 class evaluations completed by participants four weeks after attending the training session and interview results from four senior leaders who sponsored the class, asking about their employees' ability to tell a story to influence others before and after taking the class.

This organization is one of the nation's leading fashion specialty retailers, with more than 230 stores located throughout the United States. It also serves customers through an online presence and through its catalogs. Additionally, the company operates in the online private-sale marketplace through a subsidiary business. This organization

achieved record net sales of over \$10 billion in 2011. It maintained high levels for inventory turn and regular-price sell-through, important measures of retail success. It has strong cash flow, which allows investment in the customer experience. The organization continues to invest in building retail and discount retail stores as well as in its online business. It is investing heavily in e-commerce, technology, and personalization to enhance the customer experience.

The organization employs approximately 56,000 people on a full- or part-time basis. It is publicly traded on the NYSE and is listed in the Fortune 500 ranking of America's largest corporations. It is also listed in the Fortune 100 Best List Hall of Fame for having appeared on the list every year since the inception of the list in 1998.

Significance of the Study

Due to continuing economic challenges, businesses are being asked to do more with less. Helping leaders to become more effective when they are presenting information or ideas can build confidence, enhance results, and increase the bottom line. Whether they are trying to influence, inspire action, build buy-in, ask for support, or request budget dollars for a project, leaders must be able to sort through a multitude of data and information and turn that into insights that appeal to their audience. Companies can no longer afford to have people sit through ineffective presentations or spend time and energy having only senior leaders deliver presentations.

In today's complex and diverse global business environment, timely and effective communication is essential. When looking at the research on applying storytelling in organizations as a communication method, Barker and Gower (2010) suggested there may never be a better time to strategically use storytelling or Narrative Paradigm Theory

at all levels of an organization to manage the complexities of communicating in diverse environments.

Research has shown there are many benefits of storytelling in an organization. However, “the challenge to any learning approach lies in the process of bringing abstract, theoretical ideas to a practical level and make [sic] them understandable in everyday practices” (Lamsa & Sintonen, 2006, p. 109).

This study will add to the literature and help determine the power of storytelling. It will be useful to organizations interested in the effects of teaching a framework for effective storytelling not only to its leaders, but to managers and individuals who need to influence others and motivate groups. It also will be useful to those who want to look at the impact of effective storytelling on the storytellers themselves and the organizations they work in.

Summary

In today’s demanding workplace, companies can no longer afford to have their employees waste up to 30% of their time in ineffective meetings. By measuring the impact of teaching people who need to get things done how to create a story that is clear, concise, and compelling, it may be possible to show that effective storytelling does have a place in corporate communications and to positively impact organizations and the bottom line.

This chapter provides an introduction to measuring the impact of effective storytelling in the workplace and why this is important to organizations.

Chapter 2 presents a critical review of the literature regarding the impact of teaching people how to create and deliver effective storytelling. First is a definition of

storytelling followed by a discussion of the benefits of storytelling. Literature on the relationship between stories and leadership and storytelling and training follows, ending with a discussion of the challenges of implementing a storytelling program in organizations.

Chapter 3 describes the methods used in this study, including the research design, sampling methodology, and data analysis procedures. The process to protect human subjects is addressed. The chapter provides a history of the Telling the Story training and a brief description of the class. Measurement processes are described in detail in this chapter, ending with a brief chapter summary.

Chapter 4 analyzes the data and reports the results from archival class evaluations, archival senior information technology (IT) leader interviews, and face-to-face interviews. It looks at the potential impact of this class on the individual participants as well as the organization.

Chapter 5 addresses the implications of this study, draws conclusions, and speaks to the limitations of this work. It also makes recommendations to managers and organization development practitioners about how to implement and sustain storytelling as a foundational skill in organizational communication. In addition, it provides recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This study examines the impact of a corporate storytelling training program in a Fortune 500 organization in the United States. While the topic of storytelling is widely published, the main objective of this chapter is to investigate how storytelling is used in organizations. This chapter is structured as follows. The first part defines storytelling and explains why it is important. The second section describes the benefits of storytelling, including how storytelling builds engagement and relationships and how stories drive results and enable change efforts. The third section considers the relationship between storytelling and leadership, followed by a section that looks at organizations, storytelling, and training. The next section examines some of the challenges of storytelling, and the chapter concludes with a summary.

Much has been written to illustrate the importance of communication in organizations. Traditional methods of communication include written forms such as newsletters, emails, memos, and PowerPoint presentations, which present information in a linear, structured fashion. According to Ioffreda and Gargiulo (2008), communicators look for the most effective ways of reaching their audience. Communication creates a sense of connectedness between customers, employees, and the organization; it is important for all organizational communication to be aligned. Effective internal organizational communication can build trust, enhance understanding, build commitment and support, and help increase employee ownership (Barker & Camarata, 1998). According to Dolphin (2005), a strong internal communication practice can increase the strategic advantage of an organization and is more effective when it resides with the

employees, not solely within a formal communications department. One form of communication in organizations today is storytelling.

What is Storytelling?

A *story* is a narrative account of an event or events, either true or fictitious (Simmons, 2006). Stories are fashioned to interest or entertain the listener. Story, as defined by Denning (2011), means an “account of events that are causally connected in some way” (p. 13). Storytelling is the art of telling a story in a way that engages the listener by using language, voice, and movement to evoke images in the mind of the listener (Simmons, 2006).

Stories have existed for thousands of years in a variety of forms: pictures, images, songs, poems, plays, verbal and written stories, and movies. Storytelling has been around as long as stories have existed and was used long before man could print, from hieroglyphics on cave walls to using prose or verse so the storyteller could easily construct and memorize his tale (Denning, 2001b, 2011; Kahan, 2001; Ready, 2002). Stories provide the ability to pass along values, morals, and principles from one generation to another (Ohara & Cherniss, 2010). In modern society stories are told through these traditional vehicles and by using different mediums such as art, videos, movies, and even the Internet. Storytelling has been used in a variety of cultures in countless ways, from simple entertainment, such as stories for children, to communicating change and stimulating innovation in organizations. Today the art of storytelling goes beyond narrative entertainment and into the world of business to effect change (Denning, 2001b).

Storytelling's power comes from the speaker's ability to *tell* the story.

Researchers have found that it is in the interaction between the teller and the listener where the meaning of the story, the understanding, occurs (Damon, 2008; McLellan, 2006; Silverman, 2006). Great storytellers build a mental picture in the mind of the audience, based on their needs, history, and experience (Denning, 2001b). They connect with their audience by stirring up images, sounds, and smells “in the context in which the story took place” (Denning, 2011, p. 7).

The literature suggests storytellers often rely on personal experience (Denning 2001b, 2011) to connect with their audience. Silverman (2006) recommends sharing personal stories or stories about situations a person has personally observed. She asserts this is especially important when responding to others' questions, such as in a mentoring situation, or in relaying problems with stories of obstacles overcome.

Benefits of Storytelling

There are many benefits of storytelling in organizations. Stories help build connections between people. Ohara and Cherniss observed that storytelling helps to “captivate, connect, inspire, and spur people into action” (2010, p. 31). Silverman (2006) found that stories build engagement between the teller and the listener. Good stories inspire, build relationships and commonalities, and provide context (Adamson, Pine, Van Steenhoven, & Kroupa, 2006). Kahan (2006) contends that stories, when linked to business objectives, quickly accelerate the work and increase collaboration amongst team members. The ability to quickly and effectively share business information enhances communication, performance, and speed (Barker & Gower, 2010).

Organizations also struggle with the challenge of effectively communicating between different work groups with competing interests and differing backgrounds and objectives (Jorgensen, 2010). Stories often provide insight to the listener that may not have translated in another manner of communication, such as a memo, email, or other written correspondence. Researchers also suggest that storytelling helps build commitment, aid organizations through change, and drive results (Ioffreda & Gargiulo, 2008).

Builds engagement and relationships. Silverman (2006), Kahan (2006), and Blair (2006) found that organizations that intentionally practice storytelling build a community experience and increase understanding. This results in higher levels of employee engagement by strengthening relationships through the sharing of personal stories as told through the teller's experience. Kahan (2006) used a technique he calls JumpStart Storytelling in more than 100 gatherings in his work at the World Bank over 13 years. He found using examples of personal narrative helped promote collaboration and teamwork, accelerate the work, and create excitement amongst the employees. Silverman (2006) shared examples of executives who use different storytelling techniques to engage their employees. One uses a "tell me about" inquiry approach to help his executives share success stories, communicate personal values, and identify ways they build teams. Others use stories to mentor and coach others, sharing personal stories about lessons learned, and to ask their mentees to share stories about their personal experience and what is happening in their organizations.

When many people participate in the storytelling process, it builds greater engagement because people can be involved at all levels of the process rather than

listening to just one person present information to the many (Barker & Gower, 2010; Damon, 2008; Silverman, 2006). Silverman (2006) shared an example of creating employee engagement through a case from Development Dimensions International, Inc. In this case it became apparent to the company leaders that its three strategic priorities were not clear to all of the employees. The president of the company worked with the marketing department to gather stories from employees that were representative of the company's strategic goals. Every two weeks, he shared these stories through the company voice mail system with all employees and then posted them on the company's internal website, illustrating the priorities through the employees' own experiences. By involving employees at all levels of the organization and having them tell their own personal stories, the president has been able to make the company's top three strategic priorities clear and known to all (Silverman, 2006).

Through the JumpStart Storytelling process, Kahan (2006) helped to create an event which engaged employees in business objectives, increased collaboration, built relationships with others in the room, and improved learning through the sharing of ideas and experiences. The JumpStart process started with organizing participants in small groups, inviting them to share personal stories related to the overall objectives of the session. Several rounds of storytelling were held, with people moving to new groups to share their stories and listen to others' stories they had not yet heard. In the final exercise, people were asked to connect with those whose stories had the greatest impact on them. Kahan asserts that when people listen to each other's stories, engaging both mind and heart, it accelerates collaboration, builds relationships, and "improves learning through high quality idea exchange" (p. 24) Ideas are shared, and the audience stays engaged, not

only in the process, but in the overall objectives of the meeting. These are just two examples of many, whereby creating an experience through the use of storytelling engages employees, furthers the depth of the dialogue, and builds relationships.

Stories drive results and enable change efforts. Storytelling can be an effective tool when helping organizations through any change effort, be it organizational or strategic. While at the World Bank, Denning (2001b) created the Springboard story, one which catalyzes understanding quickly and enables people to see an idea as a whole in a non-threatening way, a narrative that “enables a leap in understanding by the audience so as to grasp how an organization or community or complex system may change” (p. 51). As part of the same team of executives leading the change effort at the World Bank, Kahan (2006) created what he later called the JumpStart story. The JumpStart story is a process that can be used on groups, from 10 people to hundreds. The purpose of JumpStart Storytelling is to engage participants in business objectives, accelerate collaboration, introduce people to each other, and improve learning through the sharing of ideas via stories. Both Denning and Kahan used storytelling to help the World Bank implement a multi-year worldwide change initiative refocusing the core business, taking what was an “unfunded idea to a worldwide program with \$60 million in annual allocation” (Kahan, 2006, pp. 23-24).

Having a clear vision and building buy-in is an essential step in any change effort, without which many change efforts fail (McKinnon, 2008). According to McKinnon, failure to build buy-in can result in loss of productivity, cynicism, and even turnover as employees may move to an organization where they believe they better understand the focus and direction.

Through examples from five different organizations, McKinnon (2008) also illustrated how storytelling can be a powerful tool for enabling change and addressing the emotional issues that come with change efforts that often disrupt or sabotage change initiatives. Similarly, research has indicated that effective change efforts address and/or recognize employees' cares and concerns, acknowledging the past while building positive anticipation about the future. Once people can see an exciting yet realistic future, they can start to move toward it (Adamson et al., 2006; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; McKinnon, 2008; Schein, 2010; Watkins & Mohr, 2001). By intentionally using stories, people can move from feeling complacent to actively seeking out the new desired state. In order to do this, they need to understand the bigger picture; the greater change must become larger than individual concerns. Companies can leverage their change efforts through the use of effective storytelling (Denning, 2011).

In one example from McKinnon (2008), Hewlett-Packard's Imaging and Printing Group business unit was battling high operating costs, inconsistent customer experiences, and technical challenges. The unit was in the need of technical and organizational change; as a result, the Oz initiative was created. Complicating this situation was a failed attempt at a similar initiative years prior, which many people remembered. McKinnon highlighted that Hewlett-Packard leadership recognized the need to define a future vision and conducted a one-day visioning meeting. In this meeting stories of the future were defined and the group acknowledged past failures. Out of this meeting came a metaphor based on The Wizard of Oz. Individual viewpoints were recognized, while the group moved toward a common vision. The story and metaphor of the Wizard of Oz enabled

this group to address uncertainty and resistance, while providing the common focus and understanding to move through the change process.

Similarly, effective stories answer the *why* or *so what* questions that often accompany envisioning a future state. Research by Adamson et al. (2006) described how San Juan Regional Medical Center in Farmington, New Mexico, faced one of the most challenging periods in its history; it was in need of creating a new, comprehensive strategy that would change the company's business model. Rather than looking at things the way they always had, the leadership group, known as the Galileo group, wanted to take a different approach. Believing they had to engage the employees in their professional experience before engaging them in a personal patient experience, they moved their focus from the patient experience to the employee experience. The authors noted that they quickly defined a new mission, vision, and philosophy, the *what*. After initial resistance, the president of the medical center recognized they were missing the *why are we doing this* perspective. The researchers described the process where the Galileo group developed a story using a metaphor of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* to create the future vision and engage employees in new ways of doing things at the medical center. They not only shared the story, but engaged the employees in the process, asking them to share their stories and successes, building excitement and engagement quickly. Adamson et al. reported that because of the success of this change effort, San Juan Regional Medical Center continues to use stories to engage employees and drive the business.

Based on their research, Adamson et al. (2006) encourage organizations to weave messages about new strategies into compelling and memorable stories that involve employees in the process. These authors assert that during times of change, companies

must start with the vision of where people and the organization need to go. With the employees, they must realistically address where the company is today and share where it needs to go in the future, creating the gap that inspires people. And in the process, they must tell *real stories* to create a sense of humanness, which can build cooperation and respect and connect employees in an emotional way.

Other benefits. Gargiulo (2006) agrees that storytelling can help build relationships and engagement and suggests additional benefits to an organization. Other advantages include creating stories that empower the speaker, help people engage in active listening, create a common understanding, help individuals negotiate differences, and help people to see things differently and think outside of their normal patterns.

The ways organizations use stories are outlined in Table 1, where Gargiulo offers a comprehensive yet succinct model. This model represents different applications of stories in the workplace, the purpose of using different types of stories, and who should be involved in telling these stories. There are many additional applications of storytelling. Stories are used to enlist support, relay information, build buy-in, request resources, foster collaboration, ask for sponsorship, transmit data, request information, brainstorm ideas, suggest a specific course of action, and even present solutions to dilemmas (Denning, 2011; McLellan, 2006; Silverman, 2006).

Stories and Leadership

Storytelling has also been researched with respect to leadership, with the focus primarily being on the importance of leaders being able to tell stories to influence others (Forman, 2007; Morgan & Dennehy, 1997). Denning (2011) reported that “it is now

Table 1***How Organizations Can Use Stories***

When Are Stories Applicable in Business?	How Are Stories Used in Business?	Who Uses Stories in Business?
Presenting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Animating talks and presentations • Anchoring a message • Potentiating a message 	Leaders Public relations Sales Marketing
Imaging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Product positioning • Appealing to an audience • Dialoguing with customers • Innovating 	Marketing Advertising Sales Customer service Research and Development
Connecting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pacing/getting in sync with others • Recruiting • Discovering talents of employees • Problem solving • Finding the critical point in a system 	Sales Market research Human resources Managers/leaders
Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training • Developing staff • Knowledge management • Change management 	Trainers Human resources Organizational developers Managers/leaders
Leading/Staff Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building and managing corporate culture • Mentoring and coaching • Engendering loyalty • Cultivating diversity 	Trainers Human resources Managers/leaders
Team Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energizing employees • Creating synergy • Collaborating • Partnering 	Team leaders Managers

Note. Material presented in “Power of Stories,” by T. L. Gargiulo, 2006, *Journal for Quality & Participation*, 29(1), 6. Reprinted with permission from *Journal for Quality & Participation* ©2006, American Society for Quality. No further distribution allowed without permission.

standard practice for authors to include a section on storytelling in books on leadership and change management” (p. ix), citing the works of Heath and Heath (2007), Kahan (2010), Kouzes and Pozner (2007), and Pink (2006). Many authors agree that a critical component in any change effort is the need for leaders to be able to tell a compelling story that engages their audience (Denning, 2011; Forman, 2007; Jorgensen, 2010; Silverman, 2006). Ready (2002) contends that stories told by a company’s senior executive group provide potential leaders with the necessary context from respected role

models. He recounted the story of how a chief executive officer of a large European tire company used stories to motivate employees in the company's high-potential leadership program. After hearing a compelling story of the future of the organization and the need to build capabilities beyond the domestic market, these high-potential leaders were motivated to form project teams, building relationships with suppliers, technology providers, and other manufacturers to help make the company into a highly successful global competitor. Many leaders build on personal experiences because they are more memorable and can make the leader seem more human. Leaders often rely on tried-and-true stories to illustrate specific points, though skilled storytellers will know how to flex their story to meet the needs of their immediate audience (Denning, 2011; Gargiulo, 2006; Kahan, 2001; McKinnon, 2008).

For more than 10 years, Forman (2007) has been using a storytelling framework to teach communication to MBA students. The goal of this course on strategy, communication, and leadership is to help students acquire leadership positions by articulating ideas of organizational growth to senior management through the telling of compelling stories. Forman shares several considerations with her students, including having a specific point of view, knowing how to formulate their story beyond data, and understanding why a company may want to act *now*. She also discusses the importance of knowing one's audience, including anticipating resistance, formulating a story to a specific audience, and having an "elevator pitch" or executive summary to be able to tell on the fly.

Like Forman, Morgan and Dennehy (1997) recommend teaching managers a framework for creating stories and suggest ways to help managers become better

storytellers. Their framework has many similarities to the one used by the organization in this thesis study, including setting up the situation or context, addressing the complication, identifying the crisis or burning platform, identifying the key learnings, and suggesting an answer or solution. In addition to Forman's suggestions, Morgan and Dennehy (1997) recommend that leaders listen closely to stories that others tell; practice by telling their own stories; journal stories to integrate theory and practice; look at stories from the perspective of another; and continue to practice, practice, practice.

Ready (2002) conducted interviews with 45 companies over a 10-year period, looking for innovative and effective practices to develop leaders. Executive-led storytelling initiatives surfaced as a key way to develop leaders in high-performing organizations. "Leadership is best learned within the context in which it will be practiced" (Ready, 2002, p. 64). Ready agreed with other research that leaders learn best from their peers, namely those who are trusted and well respected.

Business is moving faster than ever today and the need to develop leaders and invest in high-potential employees is becoming increasingly important. Teaching the art of storytelling can be an effective means of leadership development (Ready, 2002). Leaders become role models when they share stories and engage people in the organization. High-potential managers can be developed through mentoring from current leaders (Silverman, 2006). Sharing stories of past experience, both successes and lessons learned, can be effective for both the storyteller leader and the high-potential listener.

Storytelling and Training

As important as it is for individuals to be able to deliver a narrative, or story, to persuade and inspire others, few companies teach the art of storytelling in their

organizations, especially to leaders, even though results from using a storytelling approach are evident in many organizations. There are few examples of storytelling campaigns where the company created the story and leaders were asked to participate in implementing a storytelling process (Damon, 2008; Jackson & Esse, 2006; Ohara & Cherniss, 2010). Parcellforce Worldwide neared the end of a five-year turnaround strategy that was losing momentum (Jackson & Esse, 2006). Working with The Storytellers, an external training company “dedicated to creating engagement in organizations through storytelling” (p. 27), Parcellforce successfully re-engaged its workforce. Using a “StoryMap” (p. 28) approach with the Parcellforce employees, The Storytellers led them through the journey of where the company had been, the current state, and where they needed to go in the future. In this case study, the approach focused on “natural storytellers” to be the evangelists. While direction was provided in how to lead the StoryMap sessions, the process was already created and less emphasis was given to teaching leaders the art of storytelling. According to Jackson and Esse, toward the end of their campaign, some groups appeared to run out of steam when leading their sessions.

The electrical retailer Currys, located in the United Kingdom, also used The Storyteller’s StoryMaps to help with a major change program (Damon, 2008). This program enlisted the help of the senior Currys’ management team to articulate the supply chain strategy and vision. Combining a one-day management training session with an online tool, StoryWeb, managers delivered training back to their teams with significant results, reducing absenteeism and staff turnover while increasing productivity. They even won the CiB Communications Strategy Award for 2007.

Juniper Networks took its storytelling process further. Its case study revealed a storytelling initiative to integrate company values and desired behaviors in a small company that was becoming a global organization (Ohara & Cherniss, 2010). Juniper Networks was able to identify core company values and launch a storytelling initiative which supported these values. Once the company identified the “Juniper Way,” it was brought it to life through storytelling sessions. A brainstorming guide was created, a step-by-step tool to help leaders and employee brainstorm potential stories and then tell them. Next came ten 90-minute storytelling sessions highlighting the power of storytelling in shaping company culture, with a specific focus on encouraging leaders to tell stories that helped them work through specific business issues to achieve measurable results. Ohara and Cherniss (2010) reported that this led to additional ways to convey company stories (through videos, a story repository and resource center, and manager training). By initially focusing on where the energy was, the company leveraged natural leadership and sponsorship, eventually leading to a company-wide, sustainable approach.

Challenges

Few companies have embraced the importance of storytelling to leverage organizational communications, and few teach the art of storytelling in their organizations, especially to leaders, even though results from using a storytelling approach are evident in many organizations (Denning, 2001b; Kahan, 2006; Silverman, 2006). There seems to be an inclination to take a natural approach when it comes to storytelling in organizations. This is contrary to the evidence, which shows naturally occurring storytelling schemes to be less effective than an intentional approach (Tyler, 2007).

Ready (2002) contends that implementing a leadership storytelling program has its challenges. Storytelling works well with other development approaches, such as coaching, peer coaching, and university-style processes, but it must be a visible process in order to work; organic approaches are not effective.

Additional obstacles include the difficulty of finding executive sponsorship for storytelling programs, which could be linked to the data suggesting a lack of effectiveness or an inability to create a narrative about telling a story (Ready, 2002). There is also evidence to suggest it is necessary to have people from different levels engaged in the process to build buy-in (Jackson & Esse, 2006). Some resistance, especially in human resource functions, may stem from the time and expense needed to create a storytelling program.

Tyler (2007) created a compelling case for human resource development practitioners to systematically market storytelling as a viable business process, though few are doing so according to her study. In fact, Tyler found that though the skills are valued and recognized as an important strategic advantage, most human resource practitioners were hesitant even to create a business case to support teaching the art of storytelling. Ironically, Tyler concluded that human resource practitioners need to learn how to advocate for their beliefs, perhaps through effective storytelling.

Summary

The literature recognizes the importance of storytelling in organizations. Stories help to “captivate, connect, inspire and spur people into action” (Ohara & Cherniss, 2010, p. 31). Much like the stories they represent, books on the topic seem to be multiplying (Denning, 2011; Greene & Del Negro, 2010; Silverman, 2006; Simmons, 2006). These

books represent the need to influence others through stories as well as answer the “how-to” process to learn to tell the right story, to the right people, at the right time.

Contrary to the need, research suggests that not enough is being done to teach people the art of storytelling. Organizations tend to rely on innate talents of the individuals who work for them and grass-roots processes that have proven to be less effective than an intentional approach. This study examines how teaching leaders at all levels of an organization the different components of telling a story, sharing a framework to build a story, and giving them an opportunity to practice their skills can make a significant impact on the individual and the organization.

Having the ability to share information with the right people, in the right place, at the right time is an essential leadership skill. It can mean the difference between admiring a problem and doing something about it. Effective storytelling provides a way to get business results, accomplish objectives, and influence others to take action. While many people are natural storytellers, they do not always know how to employ this innate talent to achieve business results. This study focuses on the effects of a storytelling class at a large retail company and assesses changes in trainees’ ability to influence others and achieve business objectives. The next chapter describes the methods used in this study.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

The purpose of this study is to measure the impact of effective storytelling in the workplace by analyzing the effects of an internally designed and delivered class, Telling the Story, which is offered to corporate employees of a large retail organization. This chapter describes the research methodology used in this thesis. The overarching research questions are as follow:

1. What impact does a class, Telling the Story, have on leaders who are taught the art of creating and telling a story in order to influence others and achieve business objectives?
2. What is the impact on the organization?

This chapter supports the purpose of this study by summarizing the research methodology including the research design, sampling methodology, measurement, and data analysis. It also provides a history of the training and discusses the protection of human subjects.

Research Design

Quantitative and qualitative analysis methods were used. Data collection methods included the use of archival data which involved employees' attendance at classroom training sessions and voluntary completion of class evaluations/surveys, which they knew would be used for evaluating the effectiveness of the training. Qualitative data analysis methods were used on two sets of data: archival data from managers' assessments of their employees who had taken a Telling the Story class as well as results from individual face-to-face interviews with 14 randomly selected participants.

Telling the Story Training

The Telling the Story training was an internally designed class that was originally intended for the IT organization within a Fortune 500 retail company. The IT group had invested heavily in leadership development, primarily in three areas: self-development, building relationships with others, and building teams. These efforts were generally thought to be quite successful, but there was a growing realization that even with training, the IT leaders were not effective in influencing others, especially when it came to building support or asking for large sums of money for technology initiatives. Additionally, there was evidence that the inability to tell a clear, concise, and compelling story to support the IT business needs was costing the organization significant sums of money because the storytellers were not as effective as they should have been, it took too long to influence outcomes, and they often had to present evolving business cases multiple times until they got it right. Given this awareness, the chief information officer asked that a class be designed to complement the IT leadership development program and be delivered to his senior leadership team, with the possibility of extending it to approximately 100 managers. This class became known as Telling the Story.

Telling the Story is an eight-hour, in-person class delivered in two four-hour sessions over two consecutive days. The class is highly interactive and is limited to no more than 14 people per session, with 12 being the ideal class size. Each participant is instructed to bring a topic to work on in class, an actual presentation, preferably one that is about to take place. Participants are also given the option to work on a presentation that has already been given but was not as successful as it could have been, basically an opportunity to improve on a less-than-successful presentation. Each class was delivered

by internal facilitators from either learning and development or the technology leadership development group.

There are several areas of focus taught in this class: how to formulate a story, distinguishing different elements that contribute to the burning platform; how to state a burning platform in two sentences or less; how to assess an audience; and how to structure and deliver the story, using an approach that is curious, uses skillful judgment, and is flexible. The burning platform is the often unstated issue that “hovers just below the surface and becomes steadily worse until somebody does something about it” (Hoff, 1996, p. 16). An important element, the burning platform is the hook or issue that when brought to the surface, inspires people to listen to the rest of the story.

This program was originally designed for the IT core and senior leadership groups. Based on the success of the initial rollout, it was decided to invite all IT leaders to take the class, and it was also made available to all IT employees. The class was not mandatory, but it was highly recommended to anyone in the IT organization, especially those who were expected to influence others in the business. In addition, requests came in for intact team development as well as from other areas of the business: the retail division, the discount retail division, operations, the design and manufacturing division, the banking division, corporate, and the call center. Eventually, the class was offered to all headquarters group employees.

Sampling Methodology

Archival data was analyzed from 180 classroom evaluations collected from 70 Telling the Story classes. Classes were held between December 15, 2009, and March 15,

2012, with 869 people completing the class. Five instructors taught 78 classes, using a detailed facilitator's manual.

Class evaluations were not used initially and were introduced in December 2010. This means that 16 classes, with a total of 164 participants, did not have an opportunity to complete timely evaluations, though they did receive an invitation to fill out a post-class survey in December 2010 when the evaluation was created and introduced. Of the remaining 62 classes, 705 participants had the opportunity to complete a class evaluation, which was sent four weeks after the completion of the class. Of these, 180 students completed the voluntary classroom evaluation, which resulted in a 25.5% response rate.

Respondents were from all headquarters business units, as well as the corporate offices, and were from various roles and levels of the organization. Figure 1 on the next page shows the distribution within the organization.

The learning management system provided years of service data as represented in Table 2.

Table 2

Years of Service

Years of Service	Total Participants
< 1 Year	82
2-3 years	120
4-10 years	286
11-20 years	251
> 20 Years	130
Total	869

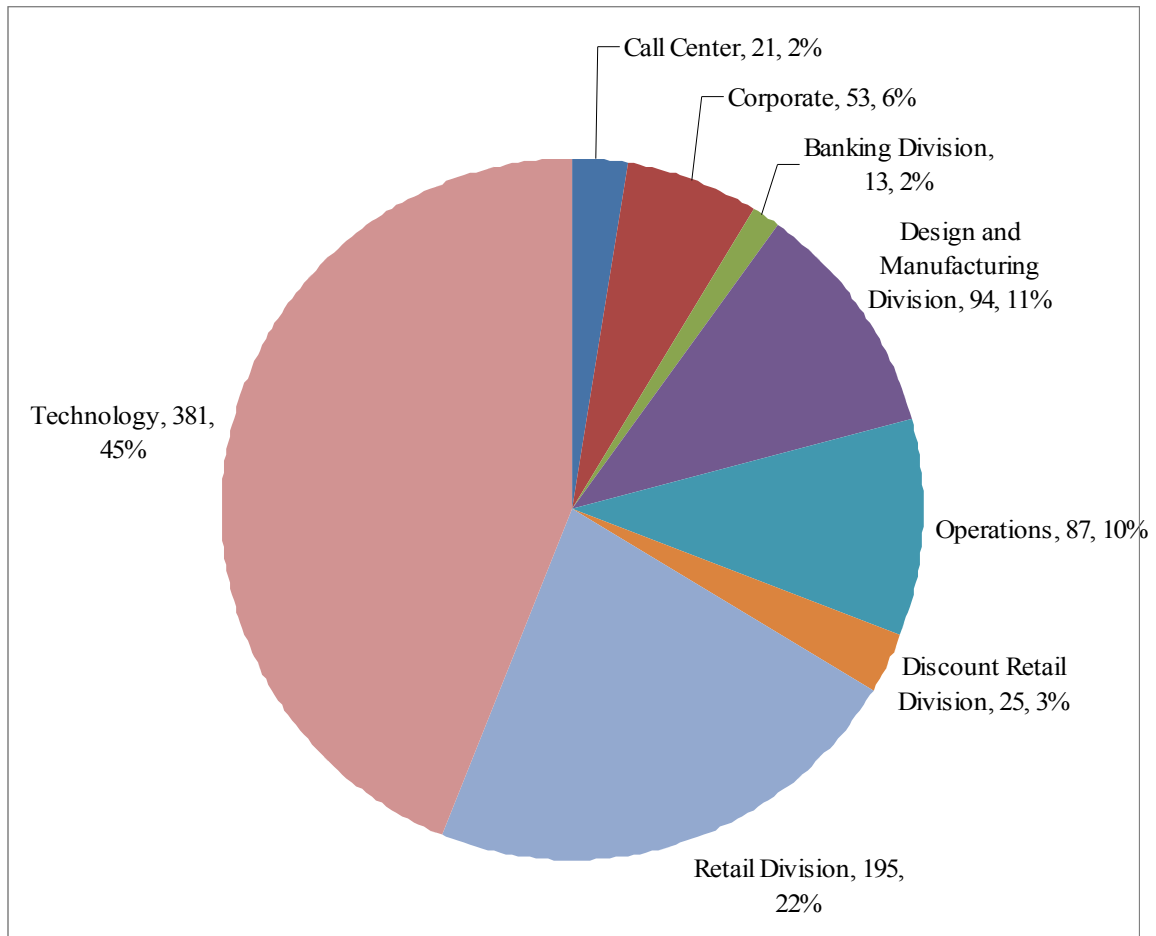


Figure 1

Organizational Distribution of Respondents

A random sample of participants representing each organization (40 people total) was invited to participate in the interview process. Fourteen people, from three divisions, accepted and participated in 45-minute face-to-face interviews. Table 3 details their divisions and roles within the organization, at both the time of the class and the interview.

Table 3
Interview Participants' Divisions and Roles in Organization

Area	<i>N</i>	Role at Time of Class	Role at Time of Interview
Corporate Center	5	Senior Process Engineer— Technology Group	Manager, Business Process Excellence—Procurement
		Human Resource Benefits Analyst	Human Resource Benefits Analyst
		Senior Benefits Analyst	Senior Benefits Analyst
		Internal Audit Analyst	Internal Audit Analyst
		Manager—Audit and Controls	Manager—Audit and Controls
Technology	7	Program Manager— Business Information Organization Education and Change Readiness	Program Manager—Business Information Organization Education and Change Readiness
		Director—Merchandising and Supply Chain	Senior Director, Merchandising and Supply Chain
		Director—Information Technology Services	Senior Director—Information Technology Services
		Merchandising Planning Project Manager	Merchandising Planning Project Manager
		Quality Assurance Group Project Manager	Information Technology Services Program Manager
		Help Desk Escalation Analyst	Process Collaboration Systems Application Analyst
		Senior Process Engineer	Senior Process Engineer—Agile Coach
Retail Division	2	Financial Manager— Merchandising Group	Business Planning and Analysis Director
		Regional Manager— Restaurant Division	Regional Manager—Restaurant Division

Finally, 60-minute interviews were conducted with senior leaders of the IT group, for which the class was originally designed. These leaders consisted of four people: the chief information officer, the vice president of IT, the vice president of the business information organization, and a senior director.

Protection of Human Subjects

Approval to conduct the study was obtained through the vice president of learning and development, with additional approval from the director of learning and development and Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board on January 12, 2012. The researcher completed the Human Subjects Research Participants web-based training course sponsored by the National Institutes of Health Office of Extramural Research on October 10, 2010.

All evaluation activities were completed within the normal bounds of the participants' current jobs and with an understanding they would be used to assess the effectiveness of the class. All class participants were informed and understood that the information would be gathered and analyzed by the organization. Interviews with IT leadership were conducted with the express understanding of evaluation of effectiveness of the class and with the possibility this data might be used for additional research study. Face-to-face interview participants signed consent forms prior to being interviewed. The only inconvenience to participants was the time involved in completing the evaluations and participation in interviews.

All participant responses were kept confidential, and participants were not obligated to complete evaluations, participate in interviews, or include their names on the

evaluations. Only aggregate data was reported in this study. Participation was completely voluntary.

Measurement

Three primary levels of data analysis were used for this study: archival class evaluation information collected through the organization's learning management system, archival interview data with senior leaders in the IT organization, and face-to-face interviews with class participants after they had taken the class. The following sections describe these instruments.

Archival employee class evaluations. Class evaluations measured three areas of the class: objectives, content, and how participants applied what they learned. Objectives were defined as follows:

After attending the Telling the Story class, participants will be able to

1. Develop an approach that is curious, uses skillful judgment, and is flexible
2. Find the burning platform by using data, information, knowledge, and insight
3. Formulate the story by identifying desired outcomes and understanding the audience
4. Structure the story
5. Deliver the story
6. Be clear, concise, and compelling

The class objectives questions measured the extent to which the participants' understanding increased, rated by participants on a four-point scale from 1 = not at all to 4 = to a significant extent. After providing a rating, respondents were asked to provide

narrative comments to explain their ratings. They also were asked to provide examples of how they have applied what they learned.

The class content was rated on a four-point Likert scale with respondents measuring their level of agreement for the following series of statements using a scale of 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree:

1. The class content is relevant to my role.
2. The class content was clear and easy to follow.
3. The class has helped me do my job better.
4. There were enough opportunities for participant involvement.
5. The participant materials can be used as a reference.

After rating the content, respondents were asked to provide narrative comments to explain their ratings specific to class content. Respondents were invited to share examples of how the content could be improved. They also were invited to provide general comments and specific feedback regarding the instructor.

Archival senior IT leader interviews. From December 2010 through January 2011, interviews were conducted with the core IT leadership team who had attended the Telling the Story class and whose managers also attended. The purpose of these interviews was to pilot a process to better measure the return on investment of classes and determine if the classes were meeting the learning objectives. Since the class was a new offering and over 90% of the IT leaders attended the class in the first quarter of 2010, it was selected as a pilot to create a Level 3 evaluation process to apply to selected classes offered in the learning and development curriculum. The levels of training evaluation were based on Kirkpatrick's model of training evaluation shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Kirkpatrick's Levels of Training Evaluation

Level 1—Reaction—What was the participants' reaction to the training?
Level 2—Learning—What did the participant learn compared to the learning objectives?
Level 3—Behavior—How has what was learned been applied?
Level 4—Results—Did the training program lead to final results?

Note. Constructed based on information in *Evaluating Corporate Training: Models and Issues*, by S. M. Brown and C. J. Seidner, 1998, Norwell, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

For this process, interviews were conducted with a total of four individuals, looking at the senior leaders' observations of their leadership teams before and after taking the Telling the Story class. They were asked to describe the leaders' ability to tell a story to influence others prior to taking the class and to describe any noticeable changes in behavior. They also were asked to describe the impact on individuals and their teams. Appendix A includes a copy of the interview protocol.

Face-to-face interviews. Requests for interviews were sent to 40 randomly selected Telling the Story participants to gather insights about how participants used the skills taught during the Telling the Story training and to determine the impact of the class in which they participated. Emails were sent to the 40 individuals explaining the purpose of the study and requesting a 45-minute interview. Fourteen individuals responded to the request, and these 14 face-to-face interviews were conducted from February through April 2012. With permission from the participants, all interviews were recorded by the principal researcher via a digital recorder and later transcribed by a professional transcription service. Appendix B contains a copy of the email request and Appendix C a copy of the consent form.

A list of 14 interview questions was developed based on interview best practices and class content. Interviews began with describing the purpose of the study, the nature of participation, and confidentiality and consent procedures, including consent to have the interview recorded. Following the introduction, participants were asked to describe their ability to tell a story to influence others before taking the Telling the Story class. The purpose of this question was to explore the participants' previous ability to tell a story. The next section of the questions focused on what they were hoping to get out of the class when they signed up for it, whether they signed up on their own or were sent to the class, and if the class they attended was open enrollment or taken with an intact team. The last series of questions was designed to explore the impact of the class on the individual. Participants were asked to share specific examples of how they have used stories in their work and elsewhere since taking the Telling the Story class. They were asked about the primary benefits of using stories, any challenges experienced in trying to develop stories, and the extent to which this class has helped them in their jobs or in any other way. The remaining questions asked the participants to comment on the objectives of the course, specifically about which topics or content had the greatest impact on their learning and whether they would recommend this class to others.

All interviews were conducted using the interview protocol, although certain questions were expanded upon based on individual responses. All interviews were 35 to 55 minutes in duration. A copy of the qualitative interview guide is shown in Appendix D.

Data Analysis Procedures

Working with three separate sources of data as identified in Table 5, descriptive statistics were calculated for the quantitative items on the archival employee class evaluations using pivot tables. The qualitative data was organized in tables that could be sorted by question and characteristic. Respondents were not required to give a name, so the data was sorted by a respondent identification number. A set of codes was developed based on examination of the data, both predefined codes, based on the researcher's knowledge of the subject, and codes that emerged from the data. A second researcher reviewed the codes and data to allow for a different perspective on the data. Subcategories were created as needed. Next, themes, patterns, and relationships that emerged across the data were identified. After the data was coded, it was examined question by question to illustrate key themes in each question. The data was then organized into key themes.

The report and detailed notes gathered in the archival data from the managers' assessments were reviewed three times for meaning and understanding, highlighting key themes on the master notes and report. Themes were a word, a phrase, a sentence, or multiple sentences that offered insight or knowledge into the data. The master notes and report were read again, this time focusing on using the codes created in the employee class evaluations as well as additional themes which emerged in the data. Coding units were listed in a spreadsheet and categorized by themes. The spreadsheet was read and reviewed three times to allow for the emergence of previously uncovered issues and connections.

Table 5***Summary of Data Collection Procedures***

Instrument	Method	Response Rate
Archival employee class evaluations	Participants were asked to complete a voluntary evaluation four weeks after attending class.	180 respondents (25.5% response rate)
Archival senior information technology leader interviews	Leaders were asked to share their observations of their leaders' ability to tell a story prior to and after taking the Telling the Story class as well as describe the impact on individuals and teams.	4 interviews (100% response rate)
Face-to-face interviews	Face-to-face interviews were conducted to gather insights about how participants used the skills taught during the Telling the Story training and to determine the impact of the class.	14 interviews (35% response rate)

Interviews were transcribed by a professional transcription service. Once the transcripts were complete, each recorded interview was reviewed two additional times, comparing the recordings to the transcribed notes. Notes were added and adjustments made as needed. The transcribed master notes were then reviewed, using a color-coding process to identify and code the data, based on the data from the previous two sources, while adding emergent codes and themes. From the master data, themes were then identified and were placed into separate spreadsheets. The master data and themes were reviewed multiple times to ensure accuracy and guard against bias by the researcher. A second researcher reviewed the spreadsheets, coding, and themes looking for discrepancies in the analysis in order to increase the reliability of the analysis. The

second researcher showed close agreement, confirming the original analysis and suggested two additional sub-themes which were included in this study. Throughout the data analysis process, the recorded interviews were reviewed to assure coding reflected sentiments of the interviewees.

After the three sources of data were analyzed individually, they were compared each to the other. Common themes and distinctions across the participants' responses were identified. Several consistent themes were identified between the three measurement tools.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the research methodology for this research project, covering the research design, sampling methodology including use of archival data and the interview protocol, and data analysis procedures. Further, it provided a history of the Telling the Story training and discussed the protection of human subjects. This study used a mixed-method design and gathered data from the organization's learning management system, previous interviews, and face-to-face interviews. The methods were used to capture the participants' reactions to the training, what they learned, how what they learned has been applied, and the perceived impact of taking the Telling the Story class. The next chapter reports on the results and analyzes the findings.

Chapter 4

Results

This study measured the impact of effective storytelling in the workplace by analyzing the effects of an internally designed and delivered class, Telling the Story, which is offered to corporate employees of a large retail organization. This study will answer the following questions:

1. What impact does a class, Telling the Story, have on leaders who are taught the art of creating and telling a story in order to influence others and achieve business objectives?
2. What is the impact on the organization?

This chapter reports the results of the study in the following order: archival employee class evaluations; archival senior IT leader interviews; followed by individual face-to-face interviews, findings, and themes.

Archival Class Evaluations

The participants' overall reactions to the Telling the Story training were very positive in the evaluations sent four weeks after class (see Tables 6 and 7). Table 6 presents the results rating class content, where 1 = strongly disagree and 4 = strongly agree. The highest mean score was reported for "there were enough opportunities for participant involvement" (mean = 3.87, *SD* = 0.35). The lowest mean score was reported for their perceptions of the training's helpfulness to do their job better (mean = 3.57, *SD* = 0.52). High mean scores were reported for all items, indicating the content was relevant and helpful.

Table 6***Participants' Reactions to Class Content***

CLASS CONTENT: Rate the following using a scale of 1 to 4.	Range	Mean	<i>SD</i>
There were enough opportunities for participant involvement.	2-4	3.87	0.35
The class content is relevant to my role.	2-4	3.77	0.45
The class content was clear and easy to follow.	2-4	3.67	0.50
The participant materials can be used as a reference.	2-4	3.64	0.50
The class has helped me do my job better.	2-4	3.57	0.52

N = 180; Scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree

Participants were also asked to rate the extent to which their understanding increased as related to the class objectives, as indicated in Table 7, where 1 = not at all and 4 = to a significant extent. The highest mean score was reported for the extent to which their understanding to “find the burning platform by using data, information, knowledge, and insight” increased (mean = 3.64, *SD* = 0.56). The lowest mean score was reported for the extent to which their understanding to deliver the story increased (mean = 3.40, *SD* = 0.65). High mean scores were reported for all items.

Table 7***Participants' Reactions to Class Objectives***

CLASS OBJECTIVES: To what extent has your understanding of the following increased:	Range	Mean	<i>SD</i>
Find the burning platform by using data, information, knowledge, and insight	2-4	3.64	0.56
Formulate the story by identifying desired outcome and audience	2-4	3.62	0.54
Be clear, concise, and compelling	2-4	3.59	0.58
Develop an approach that is curious, uses skillful judgment, and is flexible	2-4	3.51	0.55
Structure the story	2-4	3.48	0.58
Deliver the story	2-4	3.40	0.65

N = 180; Scale: 1 = not at all, 2 = to a slight extent, 3 = to a moderate extent, 4 = to a significant extent

Given the relatively high mean scores for the quantitative survey, the qualitative components of the mixed-method approach give additional insight. Participants had the option to provide comments related to their experience in the Telling the Story class (Table 8). They were asked to explain their ratings regarding class content by providing comments. The comments reported by the greatest number of participants ($N = 140$) reinforced that the class was relevant to the job. One participant offered, “Everything was usable and the fact that we worked on something current in our roles made it a really good use of our time. It is probably the best class I have ever taken.” Another stated, “The class was fantastic overall. The exercises and examples were engaging, applicable, and really helped bring the concepts to life.”

Many participants ($N = 129$) shared examples of how they had applied what was learned in class to the job. One participant offered, “I have used the structuring the story template for at least two presentations. One was for a presentation that a team was working on. Using what I learned in class, I was able to get the presentation from 21 pages to 8!” Another shared, “In two meetings this week, I have incorporated the learnings, particularly with development of my burning platform. From there, the structure of the story just fell in place.” A third respondent “used the story formulation/audience filter with the desired outcome right away—helped us make a clear, concise, compelling case (in my opinion) on an anniversary approach we wanted to take, and it was approved.”

A portion of participants ($N = 29$) mentioned they had not had time to practice or hone the skills learned in class, though they expected to do so, as related by one

participant, “I really enjoyed the class and hope to see myself as a ‘4’ within the next couple of months when I’ve had time to apply the concepts consistently.”

Numerous participants also commented on the class objectives, and the comments followed a similar pattern to the data in Table 7, with specific comments ($N = 82$) about an increased understanding of the importance of finding the burning platform and how they were challenged with this new concept, as evidenced by one participant: “The burning platform concept was the newest thing that I learned about, so my understanding of this was a bit tougher to grasp than the rest of it.” There were several examples ($N = 60$) of how people used the framework and burning platform to improve presentations, as illustrated by one participant:

I gave a presentation to Core on my business to inform them and it went really well. I received “wows” and claps on my burning platform, and there was quite a bit of conversation. It was successful due to the things I learned in this class. I will be presenting to our stores in the coming months, and I’m preparing the presentation and burning platform now! Can’t wait!

Many people ($N = 136$) raved about the class facilitators. The instructor “is great. Very engaging, completely approachable, and has a knack for providing constructive feedback. I’ve learned a lot from just watching her present and interact with the team. I hope someday to emulate her style!” Another expressed,

. . . an amazing instructor. She was open, honest, welcoming, warm, and knowledgeable. She pulled from her own experiences to explain concepts and encouraged others to do the same. This created a great learning environment which fostered creativity and group knowledge. It was also nice that she made connections within the groups to explain our corporate hierarchy for understanding the roles of other students. As a recent hire, it is helpful to see this big picture view and it provides context for learning.

There is a connection to the themes referenced by Kahan (2006) to the purposes of JumpStart Storytelling, and these purposes, along with an additional theme of time, are

used as overall synthesizing theme headings in Table 8, which categorizes participants' open-ended comments.

Table 8

Participants' Open-Ended Comment Themes in Class Evaluations

Theme	<i>N</i>
1. Effectively engage participants in business objectives	
This class is relevant to my job	140
How I have and/or will use it specifically in my job	129
Burning platform—it is very hard to get to, yet useful	82
I can see many different ways to use Telling the Story structure (email, phone, impromptu, elevator speech, etc.)	15
2. Accelerate collaboration without compromising diverse perspectives	
Framework/structure	60
Clear, concise, compelling delivery	51
The importance of understanding my audience and tailoring the story to each audience	39
Identify outcomes and objectives	20
Developing my critical thinking skills	3
3. Effectively introduce participants (collective learning)	
Great learning environment/interactive class	37
Liked being with people outside my area/the diverse group interaction was the greatest value	26
Think it would be more effective if taken with my own team/peers	5
4. Improve learning through high-quality idea exchange	
Facilitator—excellent instructor	136
Suggestions, none, it is great as is	40
Will recommend it to others	8
The feedback from the class and instructor is helpful	7
Boosts my personal confidence/I am motivated to get better	4
Want more examples of content (burning platform, case studies, etc.)	4
Want more personal feedback	1
5. Time to assimilate/duration of class	
Want class to be longer/more time to practice in class	44
Telling an effective story is hard; it takes time to learn; it is a learning process	35
Have not had time to apply; see opportunities to apply in the future	29
Class could be shorter or done in one day	5

N = 180

A portion of participants (*N* = 44) shared a desire for the class to be longer, suggested the class be extended an additional two to eight hours, and offered many

reasons for lengthening the class. Several wanted to spend more time delving deeper into their selected topic, some wanted to extend the time with presentations and feedback, while others wanted to work with more than one topic, and a few suggested the need to apply a wider variety of types of storytelling such as impromptu situations or an elevator speech. One participant offered, “the class was fabulous . . . it could have been longer as the content is pretty dense, and I felt like we just began to scratch the surface. A follow-up class would be extremely helpful!” Others ($N = 5$) thought the class could either be given in one day or shortened by several hours as suggested by one student, “perhaps a shortened timeframe overall. Eight total class hours are a large commitment to fit in a busy schedule. An eight-hour meeting about having more concise meetings/communication seems a bit contradictory.”

Collaboration and collective learning was also highly valued. Shared experiences (as distinct from individual learning) contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of what is taught in this class. Participants commented on the importance of receiving peer feedback in identifying personal strengths and areas of improvement and how different perspectives from people in other parts of the business broadened their point of view, enhancing the process and, ultimately, the presentations. This represents impact to both the business and the individual participants. Participants also appeared to resonate with connecting these skills to business objectives in order to achieve specific outcomes, despite a variety of random circumstances back in the workplace.

In summary, based on the survey responses, class participants reported this to be a useful, high-value class that is relevant to their jobs. There were some examples of participants successfully using what they learned in class to achieve specific results, and

this on-the-job applicability was valued as contributing to business objectives and reinforcing learning. A few reported shorter, more efficient presentations and meetings as a result of using what they learned in class. Most reported an intention to use what they learned in class and had specific areas of interest to focus on. The class was engaging; they appreciated the social interaction with others in the business and the collective learning; and they intended to apply what they learned in class to their day-to-day work, expressing a desire to improve their skills in the future.

Archival Senior IT Leader Interviews

Qualitative interview data was gathered from four senior IT leaders in one-on-one interviews in December 2010 and January 2011. All reported they were beginning to see decided differences in the leaders who were applying the Telling the Story concepts in their work. One leader took an overt approach with his teams, setting clear expectations for his people to apply what they learned in class and actively coaching and mentoring individuals on his team. The other leaders took a more organic approach, purposely not setting expectations but judging success by the number of people who were voluntarily using the tools. One believed his people “should be self-motivated to use the tools because it is the right thing to do.” It was too early to tell if there was a discernible difference in the two approaches.

All reported starting to see levels of improvement in presentations, whether formal or informal. One commented, “There is safety in numbers and a ton of folks have run through this. They all know they are not good at this, which makes it okay to practice.” The chief information officer described incremental improvements, offering that “we are making progress, but still have a ways to go.”

The interviews used a before-and-after methodology focused on the people who had taken the Telling the Story class. Four key themes surfaced as follow, with each theme broken down into greater detail in Table 9:

1. Relationships—working with others, developing relationships, and supporting others
2. Skills—competence, audience assessment
3. Communication—presentation personal style
4. Efficiency—time, workflow, and delivery

As illustrated in Table 9, the leaders were seeing greater collaboration and improvements in relationships between management team members who have applied the skills taught in the class. The IT leaders observed more managers challenging and supporting each other from the bench, noting that when someone else was making a presentation that went off track, peers started to ask specific questions to help the presenter get back to the topic at hand; “they could help because the objectives were apparent.” Another stated, “You are starting to see them throw each other a lifeline instead of an anchor.” The described implication is people are moving beyond the ability to simply help each other; they are enhancing communication and building greater trust. Many are taking a “we are all in this together” approach. As noted by Barker and Camarata (1998) in chapter 2, effective internal organizational communication builds trust, commitment, and support and can help increase employee ownership. The IT leaders were beginning to see this in action.

Table 9

Before-and-After Observations of Managers

Before Telling the Story Training	After Telling the Story Training
<p>Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individualistic • Did not always <i>own</i> their presentations, relying on others to present for them • Competitive, fear of being vulnerable • Playing it safe, fear of taking risk • Defensive • Sometimes combative when challenging others • Passive-aggressive 	<p>Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More collaborative • Practice with peers and managers, solicit feedback before presenting • Team motivation to improve, want to see each other succeed • Challenging in a supportive way <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ easier to challenge because content is clear, fewer personal challenges ○ inquiring instead of advocating ○ using the Telling the Story language (burning platform; clear, concise, and compelling; key insights; clear ask or tell) ○ helping each other <i>from the bench</i>
<p>Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of structure or framework • Not flexible with unexpected topics or a change of course • Audience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ did not assess audience prior to presentation ○ presented from a personal point of view, <i>my needs</i>, rather than considering the audience interests ○ messages often delivered at the wrong altitude 	<p>Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obvious structure to story • Clear outcomes help stay on point yet can be flexible • Audience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ improved assessment of audience ○ message tailored to audience interests, WIIFT (what's in it for them) versus WIIFM (what's in it for me) ○ more interactive, better audience engagement ○ appropriate message for the audience
<p>Communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation style <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ insecure, lacking confidence ○ obvious nervousness, frozen ○ not concise, rambling ○ scripted, not dynamic or overly passionate ○ over-reliance on tools—relied on PowerPoint deck to tell the story ○ lack of preparedness 	<p>Communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More dynamic presentations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ greater confidence ○ clear and concise, gets to the point quickly ○ message sticks longer after presentation • Delivering the story <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ less reliance on PowerPoint ○ integrating more tools like white boards, audience interaction, illustrations, metaphors
<p>Efficiency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too detailed, in the weeds • Often out of context • Meetings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ too many ○ too long, often off topic ○ too many people in the room ○ wrong people attending • Over-reliance on a few great storytellers to tell all stories 	<p>Efficiency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear message, appropriate supporting data • Correct context—meet the intended outcome more often • Meetings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ right people in the room ○ delivering the right message ○ more effective • Deeper pool of people who can present effective stories

All interview participants pointed out examples of the progress they were seeing, but some leaders were practicing the skills more than others. One participant offered, “It’s obvious who is using it and who is not.” It was reported that those using the Telling the Story structure seemed better prepared; were more clear, concise, and compelling; and were able to achieve desired outcomes quickly because the audience understood what was being asked of them. This resulted in greater efficiency and more dynamic presentations, with the presenter appearing to have greater confidence in front of the room. A reported consequence of people not using the techniques when they had been through the class is that it “can be more frustrating [to watch] when you know what you’re missing.” One interview participant went on to say that when people are not using the skills, then the objectives are not as clear, it takes longer to get to the point, and the presenter’s message may not be as targeted to the audience, at times requiring more time and even additional meetings—all of which impact the bottom line.

Perhaps the most fascinating data came under the theme of efficiency, describing two significant findings. The first finding relates effective storytelling and meetings. The second describes the relationship between having large numbers of people who are capable of delivering an effective story and timely communication throughout the organization.

The first finding emphasized that effective storytelling requires an ability to assess the audience, anticipate their interests, and deliver an appropriate message at the right level or altitude. Not only are the presentations more effective, but the presenter ensures the right people are in the room. One participant offered the following example. Prior to the rollout of the Telling the Story class, presenters often brought several people

with them in support of their presentations. Many reasons were given for this, with two reported consistently: People did not like to present and relied on those with natural talent to do it for them, or they would bring a panel of experts to support them should they be challenged on any of the data, signaling a lack of confidence that they would be able to provide an answer. This was perceived as some people being insecure about presenting; others having a strong desire to stay in their own comfort zone; others with a strong fear of failure wanting to protect themselves; and some as taking a laissez-faire approach, not wanting to do the work necessary to fully understand the topic. This often resulted in too many people unnecessarily attending meetings. After introducing the Telling the Story class, the number of people needlessly attending meetings started to decline. The leaders' perception was that presenters were doing their homework, were practicing with others, and had greater confidence in delivering a message. This resulted in fewer people attending meetings, having the right people in the room, and more concise presentations.

The second finding reported the IT group historically depended on 6 to 10 great storytellers in the organization to deliver key messages within IT and to the business. Since sending more than 120 leaders through the Telling the Story class, the organization “can now rely on 40 to 80 people to deliver the story with a large degree of success, and they are getting better by the day.” The significance of this was explained. In the past, a story usually depended on a handful of people to deliver the message through multiple levels of the organization, which could easily take weeks and often months to deliver because it depended on the small number of people who had the ability to deliver the message effectively. Today, there are many people who have the ability to deliver that same message in quick succession. What used to take months can now be delivered in a

matter of weeks, if not days, depending on the urgency. There are simply more people who are capable of understanding and delivering a consistent message in a timely manner. Delivering a story to the entire organization is more efficient.

The leaders of the IT organization concluded there is great benefit in teaching the art of storytelling in the workplace, sharing specific examples of the impact. They recognized the importance of practicing the skills; those who apply the skills benefit in a variety of ways while those who do not miss opportunities to be perceived as being more effective in the workplace. They provided additional perspective on the impact to the organization, citing examples of improved interpersonal relationships, a higher degree of teamwork, greater personal confidence and credibility, and improved efficiency for the organization.

Similar to the data reported in the class evaluations, these leaders reported that teaching people the art of storytelling adds significant value to individuals and the organization, including having skilled storytellers at all levels of the organization who are able to quickly deliver a story to the masses. The leaders are also watching to see who is, and is not, using the skills. It will be interesting to observe the long-term impact of this class. Will there be political consequences of not using these skills and in how people are viewed in the organization? And will using the skills regularly have any influence on how people are promoted or receive informal rewards? As of these interviews, not all leaders had stated clear expectations that their people use the skills. However, if people paid close attention, they would realize the significant investment the senior leaders are making in sending all leaders to class and conclude that there are expected outcomes, even if they are not overtly declared.

Face-to-Face Interviews

From February to April 2012, a random selection of 14 class participants completed face-to-face interviews to gather insight into how they used the skills taught during the Telling the Story training and to determine the impact of the class. They were also asked to share specific examples of how they have used stories at work and elsewhere since taking the class. Each participant completed the class at least once, with 5 of the 14, or 36%, taking the class a second time (see Table 10). One participant had signed up to take it again in July 2012, reasoning while she learned a lot and has been applying the techniques, she feels there is more to learn a second time around and wants additional practice with feedback from peers. Since taking the class, interview participants had anywhere from 7 to 30 months to apply the skills, with 15.43 being the average time to practice. Participants described their levels of proficiency in using the skills taught in class on a scale of 1 to 5 with a mean rating of 3.57, where 1 = very little and 5 = unconscious competence, use it all the time.

More time had passed since taking the class for the IT participants (mean = 19.85 months) versus other groups: corporate center (mean = 11.6) and retail (mean = 9.5). While this permitted more time to practice the skills learned, the distance from the class can also signify more time to forget what was taught. One interesting note: Those who worked in the IT group, where all leaders were expected to attend a Telling the Story class, reported significantly higher levels of proficiency (mean = 4.57) than the other participants' groups: corporate center (mean = 2.4) and retail (mean = 3.0). Several participants asserted that a strong storytelling culture in the technology group is starting to emerge and is becoming a norm operating principle. Five of six people who have had

Table 10***Face-to-Face Interview Participant Information***

Who	First Class Second Class	Months to Apply*	Use of Skills	Profi- ciency	Organization
f7DH	7/26/2011 *7/2012	7	Formal presentations, email, want to use it more	3	Corporate Center
m8AS	8/25/2011	7	For formal presentations mostly	2	Corporate Center
m10SD	7/26/2011	7	Very little use, this reminds me to try it again	1	Retail
f6SA	6/23/2011	8	Email, few projects, think about it, don't always use it; want to use it more	2	Corporate Center
f14CL	6/18/2011	8	It's how I think	5	Technology
m9GS	4/28/2011	11	Moderate use, could use it more, plan to use it more	3	Corporate Center
f5AP	3/3/2011 8/24/2011	12	It's how I think, what I listen for from others	5	Retail
m13DW	3/22/2011	12	Frequent use, always use the framework	5	Technology
f1LP	12/13/2011 2/1/2012	16	Frequent, want it to become natural	4	Technology
f11MT	10/20/2010 2/1/2012	17	Conscious competence, use it in a variety of ways	4	Technology
f4MO	1/6/2010	25	Moderate, could use a refresher	2	Corporate Center
m12JM	1/14/2010	26	Conscious competence, use it in a variety of ways	4	Technology
f2CK	10/12/2009 *P 2/23/2010	30	It's how I think and coach my people/teams	5	Technology
m3MP	10/12/2009 *P 3/10/10	30	It's how I think and coach my teams	5	Technology
	Total classes = 19 *P = Pilot class	Mean = 15.43		Mean = 3.57	Mean by Org: Technology = 4.57 Corporate Center = 2.4 Retail = 3.0

N = 14; Scale 1 = very little use; 2 = slight use; 3 = moderate use; 4 = frequent use, multiple applications; 5 = unconscious competence, use it all the time

*Months to apply learning from date of interview

the opportunity to practice for more than one year reported higher levels of proficiency.

The technology group employees had the highest percentage of participation in the

Telling the Story class of all other groups, 45%, as represented in Figure 1, chapter 3.

One retail employee who reported the lowest rating of all interviewees (1 in proficiency)

was hoping the class was about public speaking. He admitted to listening for what he

wanted to hear and thought he missed a lot of the content. It had been seven months since he took the class. Upon reflection, he stated he was inspired to go back to review the class materials to see how he might apply it today. The other retail employee described herself as a power user of the content, rating a 5 in proficiency. She put the materials to constant use, in a wide variety of situations, and described the structure as a way that she now “thinks.”

All of the retail and corporate center employees enrolled in the class voluntarily. They heard it was a good class, and they thought they might benefit from taking it. Two of the corporate center employees were from the finance division, which encouraged their employees to attend the class. Interestingly, only one of the corporate center employees’ managers had taken the class. All corporate center employees said they did not believe their managers were looking for how they were applying it in the workplace, which could explain the lower proficiency scores. Females reported a slightly higher average proficiency score (mean = 3.75) than males (mean = 3.33).

When asked to describe the impact of the Telling the Story class, four key themes emerged in the interviews. These themes were similar to other data sources and offered more detailed descriptions of the impact, with one distinction: the category of drives results. While some results were described in the previous participant groups, there was a larger distinction with the face-to-face interviews. Participants were eager to talk about the results they had and had not experienced since practicing the Telling the Story skills and had many examples, which will be shared later in this chapter. The four themes were as follow:

1. Builds relationships with others

2. Drives results, both company and personal
3. Increases efficiency
4. Develops skill—requires focus and practice

Participants reported that a direct result of applying skills learned in the Telling the Story training was improved relationships, something the company places high value on. One commented, “When you nail your story, people will trust and believe in you more.” Table 11 presents some of these findings for the builds relationships with others theme and shows that 100% of the participants believed their relationships with their bosses had improved. Others cited improved relationships with their teams, vendors, and mentors. Many ($N = 9$) believed the storytelling mindset gives them a framework to ask questions and coach others in a more effective way, from peers to team members, which improves relationships. One explained it this way: When she uses the structure to frame a story for her bosses, she “sounds a lot smarter,” and she feels the result is enhanced trust and a better relationship.

Table 11

Builds Relationships with Others Theme

Builds Relationships	<i>N</i>
With boss	14
With audience	13
Coach others from the bench/help others in effective ways	9
Improves trust	9
With my team (great coaching tool)	5
With vendors (explain what we want and can use it to ask questions)	4
With mentors	3

$N = 14$

All participants reported significant improvement in results when they apply the concepts from the Telling the Story class. One person stated people “are going to be

better at the job—it's a powerful tool.” When looking at the personal impact, 13 of the 14 believed they were now more concise in presentations, formal and informal, with many sharing examples where they received feedback to confirm the point. One participant shared a before-and-after view of her ability to tell stories: “[In the past,] I don't think I would have been able to shape and hit the most salient points nearly as effectively to tell stories.” Over half of the participants ($N = 8$) believed their confidence had improved as a result of applying what they learned in class, as one testified, “When you tell the story correctly, you are more concise, confident, and thoughtful.” Many said the class changed how they listen to others and even how they think; with one participant claiming “it has completely changed the way that I communicate.” Another offered that prior to the class, she did not know what to expect other than thinking it was a way to outline a speech and deliver talking points, but what she got out of it afterwards “was a different way of thinking.”

Participants described many results of taking the Telling the Story class, as shown in the drives results and personal development theme in Table 12, with 11 of the 14 reporting they accomplish more objectives today and get faster results. One offered this point of view, “You know you will see results. The company will see results. You will see success. Your team will see success.” Participants reported improvements in how information flows and better communication ($N = 8$) as well as faster approvals ($N = 5$) and more rapid decision making ($N = 3$). One commented that when he applied the framework and used the structure, it “streamlined the approval process.”

Table 12

Drives Results and Personal Development Theme

Personal	<i>N</i>	Company	<i>N</i>
More concise, less blabber	13	Accomplish objectives, get results	11
You get what you want; it works!	11	Removes ambiguity	10
Better prepared (use structure)	10	Gets to root of issue—right content included through use of process and preparation	8
Changes how one thinks and listens	10	Shortens time to make decisions	8
Improved confidence	8	Unifies communication—all see the data the same way—from self to manager to team—it's an iterative process.	8
More compelling	8	Improves the flow of information	8
Improved credibility	7	Faster approvals	5
More empowered	7	Improves decision-making process, speed, and content	4
Helps me focus	7	Fewer revisions	3
Clear objectives	7		
Better able to respond to questions because you expect them and anticipate what will be asked	7		
Now include the right content	6		
Motivates me to get better	3		

N = 14

Table 13 shows examples of how efficiency can increase as a result of this class. Some people (*N* = 8) reported more focused communication, including shorter presentations with fewer slides, as an outcome of their participation in class. Others (*N* = 7) reported more efficient meetings. One leader encouraged his entire team to take the Telling the Story class. His team deals with emergent technology issues such as website failures that are very visible to customers and quickly come to the attention of the senior executives in the company. In the past, it could take 30 to 40 minutes to identify and communicate the problem and solution up the chain of command. After participating in

class, he reported the following: Using the Telling the Story structure, his team shares a quick download of the relevant information, and he starts to “mentally parse out exactly what and how I want to communicate the message [to his leaders].” This takes about five minutes. He then finds his managers and within minutes he can deliver a “30-second to one-minute speech to them,” resulting in significant time savings. In a separate example, another participant offered this: “If you can get to those key points more quickly with less words, you save them time, and you give them what they really need, and you can get what you really need as a result of that.”

Table 13

Increases Efficiency Theme

Increases Efficiency	<i>N</i>
Focused communication, coherent message; gets to the heart of an issue quickly	8
Fewer slides in formal presentations, results in shorter presentations	8
More efficient and shorter meetings	7
Right people in the room, don't waste time of others who don't need to be there; hard cost savings (right people, presenters, and audience)	6
More time for dialogue, questions and answers	6
Frees up time to do more	4
Fewer revisions	3

N = 14

When asked what content had the greatest impact on the learning, at least half of the participants found value in five of the six class objectives (see Table 14). All participants (*N* = 14) identified two key areas: (a) formulate the story by identifying desired outcome and audience and (b) the importance of finding the burning platform. Nearly 80% of participants (*N* = 11) thought using the structure taught in class helps them be more effective; and 71% (*N* = 10) believed that being clear, concise, and compelling

helped them be more effective in their jobs. This is very consistent with the data analyzed in the 180 class evaluations.

Table 14

Develops Storytelling Skills Theme

Class objectives—What content had the greatest impact on your learning?	<i>N</i>
Find the burning platform by using data, information, knowledge, and insight	14
Formulate the story by identifying desired outcome and audience	14
Structure the story	11
Be clear, concise, and compelling	10
Deliver the story	7
Develop an approach that is curious, uses skillful judgment, and is flexible	5

N = 14

All participants discussed the impact of knowing the audience and building a relationship through storytelling. When talking about the audience, one participant observed,

They become part of the story themselves along with you, so instead of just telling someone something and answering the question, they get involved. I mean it's something. It's hard to explain. It's more something you can see and can feel in that . . . this is . . . I mean this is the most advanced thing . . . it's not boring and you get results.

Flexing the message to the audience is essential; “it is important to know how to flex the message to the appropriate audience, even if the attendees change unexpectedly.”

Another explained, “You know how to flex your story in a way that will be meaningful to the audience that shows up.”

Identifying the burning platform is an important skill expressed by all; as one participant testified, “The audience just wants the conclusion first.” Another offered, “I think simply the awareness and concept that there is one piece of your story that is the critically compelling piece, and if you don't find it, you are just going to flounder.”

Finding the burning platform is not easy, but it is essential. Another interviewee

discussed the importance of doing so while trying to teach members of her team how to do something they had never done before: “I have to figure out what’s the burning platform. Why would they be interested in this?” Participants reported success with the right burning platform, saying the audience pays attention and wants to hear more.

The ability to build the skills taught in class is significant, and many participants cited the importance of continual practice:

It’s important that if you take the class, that you go in, you dive in. You don’t dip a tail in, and you don’t sit in the background. . . . There is a huge effect that comes from this, and that is being able to adopt it and apply it, not just listen and then forget it.

Most agreed that adoption is not easy because it takes a conscious effort to use it and work with it, and it can take multiple times to get it right—“You have to use it or you will lose it”—and a few suggested the more it is used, the greater the impact. One said,

I think inherently those steps are now burned into my mind, my way of thinking about what is it you are ultimately asking for. What’s the right altitude for the burning platform, or why does someone even buy into this type of change?

There are many ways to apply the skills learned in the Telling the Story class.

Table 15 shows many of the ways participants put the skills to use. For example, all participants ($N = 14$) applied concepts taught from the class in both formal and informal presentations. A significant number of participants ($N = 10$) used the format in impromptu situations, and 7 of 14 used it in creating an elevator speech and to coach and motivate others. One participant insisted, “This isn’t just applied to different pitches that we have; this is applied to basic interaction.” Not all uses are verbal, with participants sharing they applied the skills learned in class to write emails ($N = 5$) and when instant messaging within the organization ($N = 2$). As one participant mentioned, “It goes beyond verbal communication—meaning I use it on instant messaging notes, with email and memos.”

Another shared, “I have a group that I’m working with, and about 70% of their communication is email, so it’s like, I have to translate it.” There were a few ($N = 4$) who used the skills when communicating with their families; and 3 participants used the skills outside of their work environment, when volunteering, coaching, or with external professional organizations.

Table 15

Applications of the Trained Skills

Applications	<i>N</i>
Formal presentations	14
Informal presentations	14
Impromptu	10
Status or team meetings	8
Elevator speech	7
To coach others	7
To motivate teams/people	7
Conference calls	5
Email—use the format	5
With family	4
Outside of work, volunteer opportunities, coaching, professional organizations	3
Virtual team meetings	2
Instant messaging	2

$N = 14$

Participants shared many examples of how they applied what was learned in the Telling the Story class by reporting specific success stories. Table 16 presents a sample list of tangible outcomes participants associated with the training. For example, regarding the skill of using the burning platform worksheets and the Telling the Story framework, one participant explained that she had to make a presentation to the budget review committee to ask for \$100,000 for a project. Applying the framework, she received no pushback and gained immediate approval. Another focused on identifying his audiences’ interests as he presented to many different levels of executives while building buy-in and

getting to the right people who could approve his innovative project idea. He used the burning platform worksheet and the Telling the Story framework to “create a compelling story,” flexing the story to the audience at each level. He received a \$250,000 approval to pilot the application. The project eventually “got scrapped,” but he considers his story to be one of great success. He was an hourly worker “help desk guy” who told a compelling story that he eventually presented to the president of the company, and he won the annual technology innovation award as a result.

Table 16

Sample Impacts of the Trained Skills

Skills	Impact of Trained Skills
Using the burning platform worksheet and Telling the Story framework	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Used the framework to ask the budget review committee (mostly vice presidents and senior directors) for \$100,000 for a project. “No pushback; received immediate approval.” 2. Followed the outline, one of the shortest presentations I’ve ever done. Few questions. Very little “red pen.” Got approval to take to the next level, from vice president to executive vice president, for final approval. Once approved, used the same format, adjusting it to a new audience, lower level executives. Information was easily understood. Quick understanding and buy-in. 3. Wanted to sunset an application that cost over \$1 million to build and was still being depreciated but not used. Did homework, gathered data. Used framework to tell the story. Delivered insight (not emotion). Approved. Project is now sunset. 4. Trying for three years to build support for an idea and move it to production. Applied Telling the Story format, adjusting to audience, and achieved quick results. Project was approved and is now installed. 5. Impromptu presentation to ask for additional headcount. Was not prepared. Quickly used framework in my head. Request approved.
Assessing the audience	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Nominating employee for an award. Looked at all data. What was audience interested in? Built comprehensive picture. Used the format. My person won! 2. Asked the capital budgeting committee for \$7 million in unplanned dollars for a new project. Working with our chief information officer, we got the presentation down to three slides for C-level executives. “I clearly and succinctly delivered the message and was asked to come back to present to the president of the company.” Studied audience, prepared, and practiced. Re-scoped the proposal and received a \$3 million approval. “While I didn’t get all of my ‘ask,’ I got what I felt was appropriate. I am telling bigger stories now with more at stake.” 3. Had an innovative proposal. Used burning platform and framework to create compelling story. Worked through various audiences, adjusting to each one. Edited a 17-slide, 30-minute presentation down to executive presentation with 2 slides, 15 minutes. “Approval to move forward with \$250,000 pilot project.

	The project eventually got scrapped, but I consider it a huge success. I was a help desk guy in front of the company president. And, I received the annual innovation award.”
Building relationships	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. “Preparing for an internal audit with a group we’d never worked with before. We are tactical; they are creative and strategic. Anticipated a possible adversarial relationship. Analyzed audience, identified the WIIFT [what’s in it for them] and started with the burning platform.” Adjusted the delivery to be collaborative. Listened. Established the relationship and accomplished the goal. 2. After attending the class, revamped a class that needed executive support. Used less data, more insight. Adjusted the level to the audience. Presented the class to steering committee, though it wasn’t quite finished, but was able to explain it using the framework, in simple terms. “I received immediate buy-in and support.”
Delivering clear, concise, and compelling messages	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. “I had a few minutes to white board a message with my vice president. I’d done my homework and delivered a clear, concise, and confident message that shifted the conversation.” 2. “I was talking with vice president about a larger role for which I was a long shot. I laid out a proposed organization structure in less than 20 minutes, being concise and compelling. Received a job offer on the spot. I swear I got promoted after it worked in these two meetings; I would not be promoted without it.” 3. Used the framework to present to the budget review committee (C-level and senior executives). “In the past, I’d been told I was verbose and I could see my audience losing interest midway through the presentation.” Focused on what the audience cared about, presenting the burning platform and key insights only. The meeting went much faster. Nods of understanding. Few questions. Got immediate approval. “Several weeks later, I received a big promotion. I believe this was a direct result of this class.”

While these success stories are impressive, not everything goes according to plan. Participants spoke of many challenges of telling an impactful story to influence others as noted in Table 17. Most participants ($N = 12$) found it challenging to deliver a clear, concise, and compelling story, stating it was hard to shape the story and shave it down to a meaningful message. When reflecting on their ability to tell a story prior to the class, many ($N = 10$) said they were “too verbose” and were often asked to “get to the point.” Many ($N = 9$) stated they relied on their passion to tell the story, while several ($N = 4$) had an over-reliance on “winging it”—both approaches being counterproductive to being concise.

Participants ($N = 11$) also discussed the difficulty in finding the burning platform as described earlier in this chapter. Ten of 14 shared frustrations over finding time to develop the story and practice a presentation prior to presenting to others, while some felt it was just a matter of time before their skills improved. One shared the following: “Now when you try to have a structured, methodical approach, it’s the best way, and the most appropriate, and the most effective way, but I think it’s still hard for me just because I’m so new doing it.”

Table 17

Challenges of Applying the Skills

Challenges of Applying the Skills	<i>N</i>
Delivery; telling a clear, concise, and compelling story	12
Finding the burning platform	11
Practicing, finding the time	10
Considering the audience, understanding their needs and wants, flexing to their needs, anticipating their questions	7
Structuring the story	6
Having to do the preparation/homework	6
Becoming a way to think	5
Using it as a platform to listen to others	4
Having the confidence to deliver the story	2

$N = 14$

Group Comparisons

There were similarities and differences in the data between the class evaluation group and the two interview groups as shown in Figure 2. All groups agreed that it takes practice and time to perfect storytelling skills. There was also general agreement that the class effectively engages participants—providing job relevance and useful content—and that the facilitators were knowledgeable and engaging. The other area of agreement related to the *skills* taught in the class. These included perceived value in the storytelling

structure and framework; the importance of the burning platform—even though it is difficult to compose; and, finally, the importance of formulating the story, distinguishing between data, information, knowledge, and insight.

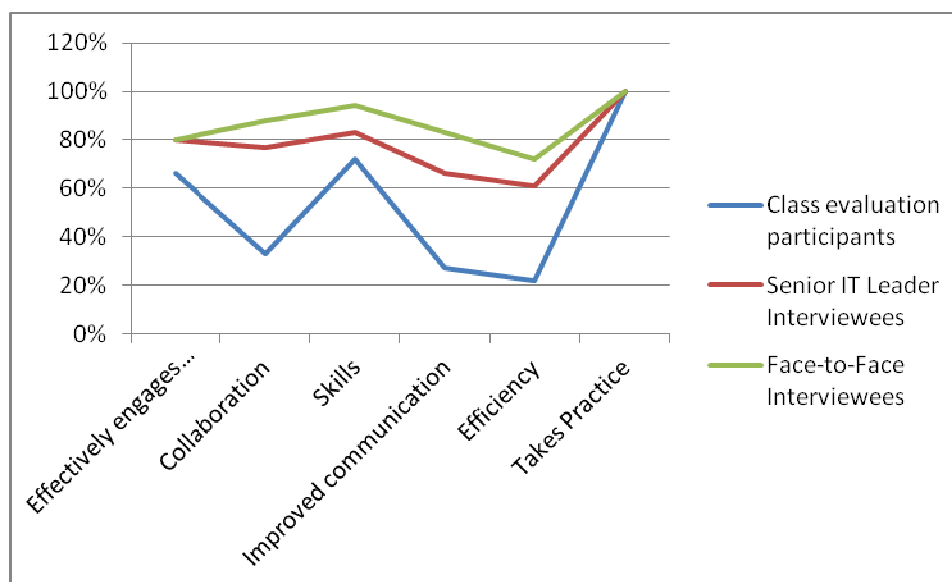


Figure 2

Group Comparison Chart

Three significant differences became apparent in the in-depth interviews: efficiency, improved communication, and collaboration. The interview groups shared many examples of shorter meetings, having the right people in the room, and that a well-told story helps to drive results and desired outcomes. The class evaluation group did not share any examples of faster approvals and quicker decision making, but both interview groups reported moderate success in these areas. Also, both interview groups recognized a deeper pool of people who could present stories, with more people improving their ability to tell a story to influence others. The interview groups reported greater confidence and competence as well as stronger feelings of empowerment and ownership.

The interview groups acknowledged advancements when stating a clear message and being more concise. All groups reported increased collaboration, but the interview groups were able to point out many examples of enhanced relationships, including better listening skills and building trust with others by telling more effective stories.

Summary

This chapter analyzed data and reported the results of the study, which looked at the potential impact of the Telling the Story class on individual participants as well as the organization. There was consistency between the three data sources, with greater detail provided in the archival leader interviews and the face-to-face interviews. Chapter 5 addresses the implications of this study, draws conclusions, speaks to the limitations of this work, and provides recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to measure the impact of effective storytelling in the workplace by analyzing the effects of an internally designed and delivered class, Telling the Story, which is offered to corporate employees of a large retail organization. This study addressed the following questions:

1. What impact does a class, Telling the Story, have on leaders who are taught the art of creating and telling a story in order to influence others and achieve business objectives?
2. What is the impact on the organization?

This chapter provides insights and presents a discussion of the study results, including conclusions, recommendations, study limitations, and suggestions for future study.

Conclusions

Based on the data gathered in this study, results indicate that teaching leaders the art of storytelling has a positive impact on both the individual storyteller and the organization. All three data sources reported this class to be relevant and useful. Participants saw immediate value after four weeks, recognizing the relevance and application to their jobs. When studied over time, the data indicated that people who apply effective storytelling practices improve their ability to tell a story, influence others, and achieve greater results.

Impact on the Individual

Prior to participating in the Telling the Story class, students described their ability to tell an effective story to influence others as low, yet many understood the importance

and relevance to their roles. Reactions to the class content and objectives were high, indicating value in the class.

Improves confidence. When using different elements of the storytelling framework and skills taught in class, students reported increased levels of confidence, because they delivered clear, concise, and effective presentations. They reported being more empowered to deliver a compelling story and having greater motivation to continue to improve their skills because of the quick results they experienced. This corresponds with the IT leaders' observations of the people who have used the skills. The literature (Denning, 2011; Gargiulo, 2006; Kahan, 2006) reported similar impact on storytellers; they have increased confidence and ownership.

Develops skills. Both students and the leaders interviewed in this study found value in being introduced to the structure and framework taught in the class. Not only were participants able to apply the framework soon after taking the class, many reported feeling more competent with repeated and varied use. This is consistent with the data reported by Morgan and Dennehy (1997) as well as Forman (2007), who has been using a storytelling framework to teach communication to MBA students for more than a decade.

All participant groups in this study reported the significance of defining the burning platform when formulating a story to influence others. A compelling burning platform delivered early in the process hooks the audience and grabs their attention, inspiring people to listen to the rest of the story. People who wait until the end of the story to deliver the burning platform have often already lost their audiences' attention. They also reported this to be one of the most difficult components to master, but worth the pursuit. Kahan (2006) and Barker and Gower (2010) agreed that when the story is

directly linked to business objectives, i.e., the burning platform, it quickly accelerates the work and increases collaboration.

Enhances relationships. The literature suggests that effective storytellers build a relationship with their audience (Denning, 2011; Gargiulo, 2006; Kahan, 2001; McKinnon, 2008). This study supports their position, with all participant groups reporting that storytelling can be used to build relationships with others, even beyond the audience. Skilled storytellers know how to meet the needs of the audience, targeting the story and delivery to the listeners. The research from this study implies the storyteller builds better listening skills and increases credibility with the audience. Participants reported value in the collective learning process, including receiving peer and instructor feedback, which aligns with Ready's (2002) assertion that leaders learn best from their peers, especially well-respected, trusted colleagues. Both the IT leaders and the face-to-face interviewees reported improved relationships and a desire to help each other succeed when creating and delivering stories, which supports the evidence found in the literature around collaboration and team effectiveness (Barker & Camarata, 1998; Kahan, 2006). Many participants claimed that an improved ability to tell a story has helped them build stronger, trusting relationships with their managers, peers, mentors, and employees. This echoes Silverman's (2006) and Barker and Camarata's (1998) position that effective communication can build trust, enhance understanding, and build commitment. When attention is paid to focusing on discerning the audience's interests and needs, it becomes a powerful force to accomplish visible business results.

Impact on the Organization

The literature provides many examples of storytelling and change efforts, especially when providing a compelling vision of the future (Adamson et al., 2006; Denning, 2001a; Jackson & Esse, 2006; McKinnon, 2008), but it provides only a few examples of direct results of teaching people the art of storytelling and the impact to the bottom line (Denning, 2001a; Kahan, 2006). The findings of this study shared specific examples, with results ranging from simplifying and shortening presentations, to sunsetting a no-longer-used technology application, to getting approval for multi-million-dollar projects. One participant described a failing effort to build support to sunset a technology application that cost over \$1 million to build and was still being depreciated but not used. She felt strongly that it was a waste to spend money supporting an unused application. In the past, she had tried to gather support to turn off the application using her natural approach which relied on her passion to deliver the message. After taking the Telling the Story class, she “did her homework,” gathering data to support her cause. Using the framework to formulate a new story, she delivered a concise presentation using data and key insights to convince her leadership to approve turning off this application, ultimately saving the company support dollars. Another participant was going to present to the company’s capital budgeting committee for the first time, asking for millions of unplanned dollars for a new project. The audience was made up of several C-level executives. He studied his topic, assessed the audience, and practiced his presentation, getting feedback from his mentor, resulting in a three-slide presentation. “I clearly and succinctly delivered the message and was asked to come back to present to the president of the company,” he stated. Based on feedback, the proposal was re-scoped. He received

a \$3 million approval to proceed with his project, which supports a key company initiative.

Not all impacts were organizational. Additional examples were shared, including personal illustrations of the impact of telling an effective story. One participant told of working with a non-profit group that focuses on eliminating human trafficking. She used skills taught in the Telling the Story class to persuade a group of more than 300 women to support the cause, advocating for a reauthorization of a national act with local district representatives. In short order, they were able to make a presentation to a state senator who agreed to sponsor the senate version of this bill. While this does not represent impact to the organization, the effect this had on the storyteller increased her confidence and desire to make a difference at work.

Delivers results and desired outcomes. All three participant groups reported some results from learning how to frame and tell a story. The lowest results were reported in the class evaluations, which are sent out four weeks after taking the class, with the most significant results reported by the IT leaders and the 14 interviewees who, on average, had 15 months to apply the skills learned. Table 16 in chapter 4 introduced a sampling of significant results; not all examples were reported, though they were equally impressive. People who use this process are confident in its ability to drive results and impact the bottom line. As many participants pointed out, it works and they get what they want. Participants pointed out that if the burning platform is aligned with business objectives and the storyteller is clear with his or her desired outcomes, successful results will be achieved.

Advances communication and increases efficiency. The findings of this study confirmed the literature that reports effective storytelling can improve productivity (Barker & Gower, 2010; Forman, 2007; Kahan, 2006). All three study groups reported shorter presentations and meetings, with many reporting streamlined approvals and faster decision making. Participants reported that the Telling the Story framework helps to shape clear messages with appropriate supporting data, keeping unnecessary details out of the way. Shorter, streamlined communication can result in more dynamic presentations, be they formal or informal. Speakers are more concise and have clearly outlined objectives, thus saving time for all in attendance.

Adding to the literature is the emphasis of having the right people in the room for all meetings, something that is emphasized in the Telling the Story class. IT leaders and interview participants reported improvements in this area. They stated that often the right people were attending the right meetings and no longer needed support from others because they were better prepared to address the audience. Improvements were acknowledged, but both groups admitted there was room for more success. It was also acknowledged it is not always possible to control who shows up at meetings, but the skills taught in the class enabled the presenters to flex their stories to the needs of the audience, thus taking greatest advantage of meeting the needs of the audience. As stated in chapter 4, the IT leaders emphasized the importance of being able to leverage many more people who are able to present a compelling story, which results in more efficient communication and needing less time to share important organization messages. This study did not look at the compounding effect of more people using the skills, and this could be an option for future research—the implication being that the more people in the

organization demonstrate the skills, the more others can see the results and may be motivated to use them. The more people improve in the skills, the more they want to help others to do the same.

Additional Insights

There are several interesting insights worth noting. The first is the awareness or expectation around using the skills taught in the Telling the Story class. A second looks at how teaching the art of storytelling can impact communication beyond simply conveying a message. The third looks at the importance of practicing the skills, and a fourth insight considers the impact of teaching the art of storytelling and making it available to employees at all levels of an organization.

Expectations of use. The senior IT leaders are closely watching their people to see if, when, and how they are applying the skills. What is unknown is the impact of this scrutiny. The literature does not address the political ramifications of not using skills taught in an organization. Can someone's interest in applying the skills or their ability to be an effective storyteller impact how one is viewed in the organization? Could it go so far as to impact how one receives plum assignments or even promotions? Two of the 14 interviewees directly attributed receiving a promotion with taking the Telling the Story class and applying the skills. Another pointed out that he received a prestigious annual award because of his improved ability to tell a story to influence others. Two others thought there was some correlation to receiving promotions, though not as directly related as the first two interviewees. If leaders are looking for the skills but do not state clear expectations for their people to use them, then individuals have to deduce the

importance of using the skills in the workplace. If this is misconstrued, it could have negative consequences.

The findings in the 14 face-to-face interviews indicated another interesting insight when separating the IT participants from others. IT participants reported that a strong storytelling culture has begun to emerge in the technology group. They also reported a higher level of proficiency than the others. They asserted it is because it is implied that all leaders are expected to attend the class and use the skills, though this is not stated outright. The IT leaders confirmed this assertion. This could imply a strong correlation between expectations of use and senior leaders' support as evidenced in the literature (McKinnon, 2008; Ready, 2002).

Other communication impacts. With regard to how teaching people the art of storytelling can impact communication, several trends surfaced. Some mentioned this class had changed how they think and take in data. Several people said they listen differently to others' presentations, formal or informal. They described listening for many things: the burning platform; a clear, concise, and compelling presentation; straightforward objectives; and whether the presenter is focusing on the audience needs. Perhaps an underrated effect is that the organization is creating better listeners. The organization's intention is to change people's ability to deliver an effective story, improving how people influence others. What was not discovered is if the organization has created better listeners as well. Which has the greater impact, enhancing the storyteller's skills or changing the listener's behavioral patterns, or both?

The importance of practice. Participants from all three groups commented on the importance of practicing the skills taught in this class. Many of the skills are reported

to be complicated and take time to learn. Students are encouraged to use the skills beyond formal presentations, using email, voice message, impromptu run-ins, and the elevator speech. The data suggests that the more people use the skills, in a variety of different circumstances, the more proficient they become and the more natural the storytelling appears. This aligns with literature that recommends leaders listen to others tell stories, learn from what they hear, integrate this into their own performance (Forman, 2007; Morgan & Dennehy, 1997), and practice the skills continuously in a variety of different ways (Forman, 2007; Silverman, 2006; Tyler, 2007). Those who do not commit to or practice using the skills achieve minimal results compared to the people who apply them actively in their day-to-day lives.

Teaching the art of storytelling. This study examined a storytelling class that was open to all employees of the corporate headquarters groups, regardless of their role or position. Few companies create a formal process to teach employees the art of storytelling. Jackson and Esse (2006) and Damon (2008) shared two examples where an external consultant was brought in to lead storytelling efforts in two organizations. Ohara and Cherniss (2010) described an in-depth effort that taught leaders how to create a story, including providing a step-by-step tool to help leaders and employees brainstorm and tell stories, and then gave them time (specific sessions) to work through business issues. Their study reports positive impact to the individual and the organization and provides a compelling case to move storytelling from an organic approach that some companies take with their leaders to the mainstream of their organizations.

Recommendations to the Case Organization

The following recommendations are made to the organization in the study:

1. The leading practical recommendation from this study is for the organization to continue to deliver this training, as the data suggests a positive impact on individuals and the organization.
2. It is also recommended that the organization build greater leadership awareness and support in all areas where this class is taught, extending the support beyond IT into all areas of the organization. There is evidence the results could be multiplied by expanding the audience for this class, with great potential to leverage these skills across the entire organization, not just the corporate offices.
3. Leaders stand to benefit from the class if the content is applied, both personally and when supporting their teams. Additionally, training should be encouraged for leaders throughout the headquarters organizations so they understand the process, what to look for, and how to coach individuals on their teams to apply the skills. Where there were clear expectations to use the skills and the support of senior leaders, greater levels of proficiency were reported with strong results. Specific to the IT organization, senior leaders should explicitly state the need for all employees to use the skills.
4. It is recommended that the organization share the results of this study with the five facilitators of the class, so they can emphasize the importance of using the skills beyond formal presentations and in a variety of ways. Facilitators can call attention to the importance of practice and help participants understand how to create opportunities to apply the skills in the work environment. They

can encourage students to seek others' help to craft stories, thereby encouraging collaboration with peers and helping to build relationships.

Suggestions for Organization Development Practitioners

Tyler (2007) contends that human resource practitioners are “adding storytelling to their box of tactical and strategic tools” in for-profit settings “as a means of advancing organizational goals” (p. 559). Like their human resource counterparts, organization development practitioners can benefit by better understanding how to improve their own storytelling ability, including being able to teach others these valuable skills.

Organization development practitioners are advised to consider building this into their own repertoire or toolkit to use when working with groups. Additionally, using the skills on a regular basis may help them communicate more effectively and provide valuable feedback to clients. A potential benefit to organization development practitioners is that by becoming effective storytellers, they “can profit from acquiring the skills that enable them to develop a business case for storytelling and other softer technologies” (Tyler, 2007, p. 584; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Watkins & Mohr, 2001).

Study Limitations

A number of important limitations need to be considered:

1. There were several weaknesses around the data itself. No baseline data was used to assess people's ability to tell a story. The data was anecdotal and self-measured, with the exception of the leaders' assessment of the before-and-after perceptions of how people applied the skills taught in the Telling the Story class. All data was based on people's memories and experience since taking the class. Furthermore, data for the three different data sources was

collected in a different manner and collected over a different span of time, either of which could impact the accuracy and credibility of the data.

2. The study population was another limitation. Only 25.5% of the people who completed the class participated in the evaluation process. A more accurate assessment would be to make the class evaluation mandatory. The evaluation was not only voluntary, but people did not have to share their names or positions, so it was impossible to track demographic information, which could have added value to the findings. The sample size for the archival manager assessments was small, and caution must be applied as the four IT leaders represented one area of the business. While the four were some of the most experienced with the content, the findings might not be transferable to other areas of the business. The sample size for the face-to-face interviews was also small and the distribution was not representative of the entire class population. The initial population was selected through a systematic sampling process from the entire class participant list, which was organized in chronological order. This subgroup was then invited to participate in the interview process. Of the 40 invitees, 14 agreed to participate. This final group did not equally represent the overall population. Due to the constraints of the study population, it would be difficult to generalize these results to the overall organization.
3. There were other limitations in the demographic data available. The data was inconsistent between the three data sources. Even if demographic data were captured, each business unit had non-standard naming conventions for job

roles, including titles and compensation levels. The learning management system which tracks the classroom training did not coordinate with the human resource system, further complicating the collection of demographic data.

Future studies could gather consistent data from all sources, such as age, gender, tenure, role, and level in the organization.

4. Another limitation recognizes that organizational outcomes were not assessed before or after the program, and impacts are inferred. Future studies should implement a process to record desired outcomes, measure immediate results, and make certain that direct measurements of organizational and personal outcomes are taken.
5. Finally, the researcher is employed by the retail organization. Her own knowledge of the class, participants, and organization may be biased and could have influenced the data collection and study.

Suggestions for Further Research

Many people report, and this study suggests, that telling an effective story saves time, but there is no quantitative analysis to support this. The suggestion for further research is to conduct a time study measuring the return on investment associated with teaching people the art of storytelling. This study could include short-term proficiency and long-term adoption rates.

A second possible area of study would be to compare desired and actual results. Currently, results are anecdotal. This would require identifying desired outcomes and appropriate measure of said outcomes. It would also require quantifying actual results. This could be done at an organizational level.

A similar approach could be used to measure the personal impact of teaching the art of storytelling to influence others. A future study would collect pre- and post-training skills evaluation and could include conducting a 360-degree assessment. This would require identifying desired individual storytelling skills and knowledge. This could extend beyond the individual and measure a person's ability to build relationships through storytelling.

Few examples exist of teaching storytelling at all levels of an organization. Future research would identify organizations where this is happening, establish benchmarks, and document best practices. Best practices could then be used to create a unified communication framework allowing for consistent and predictable delivery of stories to impact business results.

Summary

Research shows that billions of dollars of unproductive time is spent each year in poorly run meetings (Hoff, 1996). There are many studies which link ineffective meetings and the importance of communication in the workplace (Barker & Camarata, 1998; Elsayed-Elkhouly & Lazarus, 1997; Jorgensen, 2010; Rogelberg et al., 2007). This research looked at one form of effective communication, storytelling. The purpose of this study was to look at one organization's attempt to educate people in the art of storytelling and determine the individual and organizational impact of teaching leaders how to create and tell a story in order to influence others and achieve business objectives.

The results of this study show a positive relationship between the Telling the Story class and impact to the participants and the organization. Participants in this study reported improved confidence and a greater sense of ownership; strengthened

relationships with managers, peers, direct reports, and others; and the ability to use new skills to create stories that are clear, concise, and compelling. The findings also suggest that, in general, when people put these skills to regular practice, communication improved, meetings were more effective, and participants achieved desired results, thus having a positive impact on the organization. Involving people in the process of creating and communicating stories has many desired effects and may warrant further investigation. These results, while limited, are promising.

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Appendix A: IT Leader Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Level 3 Measurement—Data Gathering

Topic—Telling the Story

Background:

We are creating a pilot to better measure the ROI of the classes to which you send your people.

1. We're charged with a way to better define the ROI on classes and if our classes are meeting the learning objectives.
2. In order to do this, we are looking at creating a process that provides Level 3 evaluations
3. What are Level 3 evaluations? Based on the work of Donald Kirkpatrick's model of training evaluation:
 - Level 1—Reaction—What was the participant's reaction to the training?—smile sheets
 - Level 2—Learning—What did the participant learn compared to learning objectives?
 - Level 3—Behavior—How has what was learned been applied?
 - Level 4—Results—Did the training program lead to final results?

To provide Level 3 evaluations, we need to involve leadership in identifying benchmarks for change in behavior for the TTS class.

Why you?

4. You know the history of TTS—why it came to being
 - a. You understand the content
 - b. IT has the most experience with TTS (applying and observing)
 - c. We believe you can lend the most insight
 - d. TTS been in place almost a year in IT, rolled out to BIO and OE this fall

We want to know what you have observed both before and after someone has taken TTS
Before:

- a. Individuals (leaders)
- b. How would you describe someone's ability to tell a story to influence others?
- c. Can you share a specific example(s)?

After:

- e. Do you see a noticeable change in behavior? What? Can you please share example(s)?
- f. Describe the impact it has on:
 - g. Individuals
 - h. The team
- i. What impact have you seen on other leaders who haven't been through the class (if any)?

What thoughts/comments do you have that we have not yet covered?

Appendix B: Employee Email Invitation

Dear (Name):

I am currently a graduate student at Pepperdine University and working to achieve my master's degree in organizational development (MSOD). Part of our course work includes a thesis project. I have chosen to focus on the impact of effective storytelling in the workplace by analyzing the effects of an internally designed and delivered class, *Telling the Story*, offered to corporate employees of this organization.

All employees who have attended the eight-hour Telling the Story class are eligible to participate in the interview process and will be randomly selected. In addition to using archival data from the Learning Management System (LMS) class evaluations, I will be conducting a number of interviews of class participants discussing how this class has impacted their performance. Participation in the interviews is voluntary and optional. You may decide not to participate or drop out at any time. It is completely up to you.

The information gathered through the study will remain confidential and detailed, specific information including your name and role will be excluded from any report shared with others. I will be the only person who has access to your specific answers and information you choose to share during the interview process.

If you are comfortable in participating in the study, please sign the attached consent form. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns. You may also contact my research supervisor, Julie Chesley, Ph.D. at [contact information] or [contact information] for further information. I appreciate your consideration and look forward to working together soon.

Thank you,

Julie Jones O'Leary
[contact information]

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

Study Title: Teaching Leaders the Art of Storytelling and Its Impact on Individuals and the Organization

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to conduct an action research project to measure the impact of effective storytelling in the workplace by analyzing the effects of an internally designed and delivered class, *Telling the Story*, offered to corporate employees of a large retail organization. This study seeks to analyze the importance of teaching the art of effective storytelling in the workplace and why this is important to organizations. This study is being conducted as part of a requirement for a Master of Science in Organization Development degree through Pepperdine University, under the supervision of Julie Chesley, Ph.D. If you have questions or concerns, please confer with the researcher or you may contact Dr. Chesley directly at [contact information].

Procedures: If you decide to volunteer, you will participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher, Julie Jones O’Leary. The interview will last no more than 45 minutes. It is important that you have completed the entire eight-hour class in order to have an understanding of the content and class objectives and be able to speak to its impact. Volunteers will participate in individual face-to-face or telephone interviews, during which you will be asked to relate any personal impact you have experienced after participating in the class. I will be taking notes and recording the interview. Information collected from interviews will be analyzed to further evaluate the impact of this class. Responses will be summarized in an attempt to see themes, trends, and/or patterns. None of your comments will be specifically attributed to you. Please note that any and all data and recordings gathered for this study will be kept in a locked file cabinet that only the researcher can access.

Participation: Participation in this study is completely voluntary. It is the right of any participant to remove themselves from the study at any time for any reason. Should you choose to volunteer, you may refuse to answer any question or portion of a question for any reason without risk. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts anticipated as a result of this interview. Choosing to not participate will have no consequence to you or to the researcher.

Confidentiality: The results of information the researcher learns from the interview may be published in the form of a research report or articles; however, you will not be identified by name. Your name will remain confidential and other employees of the organization will not have access to specific information. Only the researcher will have direct access to the data. The confidentiality of individual records will be protected during and after the study, and anonymity will be preserved in the publication of results. Your signature below will confirm your acceptance of participation, that you understand the parameters of the study and you agree to voluntarily participate in the study:

Signature of Participation

Date:

Appendix D: Qualitative Interview Guide

Qualitative Interview Guide

One-on-One Interview Questions (Semi-structured approach)

Introduction/Opening comments:

Thank you for your voluntary participation in this study regarding the Telling the Story class. This interview is part of a process to determine the impact of the Telling the Story class in which you participated. At the end of the interview, I will ask you for some demographic information to help me with my study. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Introductory questions:

OBJECTIVE: These questions will explore the participants' previous ability to tell a story.

Prior to taking the TTS class:

1. How often did you use stories? (What did you use them for; can you give me an example?)
2. How would you describe your ability to tell a story to influence others?

Transition questions:

1. What were you hoping to get out of the TTS class when you signed up for it? Was there something in particular you were trying to address?
2. Were you asked to attend or were you sent to this class? By whom (position, i.e., manager, director, peer, etc.)?
3. Did you attend an open enrollment class or with an intact team?

Key questions:

OBJECTIVE: These questions will explore the impact of this class on the individual.

4. Can you tell me a story (give me an example) of how you have used stories in your work since taking TTS?
 - a. How did you prepare for the above story?
 - b. What was your objective? What were you trying to achieve?
 - c. Who was involved?
 - d. From your perspective, what was the impact of the story?
 - i. Do you think your story had this impact?
 - ii. Can you give me an example?
5. Can you share another example of how you have used stories for other purposes?
 - a. How did you prepare for the above story?
 - b. What was your objective? What were you trying to achieve?
 - c. Who was involved?
 - d. From your perspective, what was the impact of the story?
6. From your perspective, what are the primary benefits of using stories?
7. What challenges, if any, have you experienced in trying to develop stories?

8. As you reflect on your day-to-day experiences, do you see stories being used effectively by others in this organization? How often? If so, can you share an example or two? (What is the impact?)
9. To what extent has this class helped you in your job? In other ways?
10. In looking at the objectives of the course, please comment on your learnings in these areas. (Probe for concrete examples)
 - a. Develop an approach that is curious, uses skillful judgment, and is flexible
 - b. Find a burning platform by using data, information, knowledge, and insight
 - c. Formulate the story by identifying desired outcomes and audience
 - d. Structure the story
 - e. Deliver the story
 - f. Be clear, concise, and compelling
11. What topic/content had the greatest impact on your learning?
12. Would you recommend this class to others? Why or why not?

Ending question:

Is there anything about your participation in the Telling the Story class that we haven't talked about that you would like to raise before we leave?

Footnote: These questions will be generally followed during the dialogue. Prompts such as:

- Can you tell me more about . . . ?
- Would you explain what you meant when you said . . . ?
- Can you give me a specific example of . . . ?
- Could you tell me more about your thinking on that?
- Anything else?
- I want to make sure I understand . . . (then paraphrase)

May be generally used in order to qualify explanations and further expand data collection.

Demographic questions:

13. What is your length of employment at our company?
14. When did you take the Telling the Story Class?
15. What was your job title at the time you took Telling the Story?
16. What is your current job title (level in the organization)?
17. In which organization do you work in our company?

The class objectives are as follows:

After attending the Telling the Story class, you will be able to:

- Develop an approach that is curious, uses skillful judgment, and is flexible
- Find a burning platform by using data, information, knowledge, and insight

- Formulate the story by identifying desired outcomes and audience
- Structure the story
- Deliver the story
- Be clear, concise, and compelling