

Chapter 6

Management as storytelling,

Peter Christie and Gcina Mhlophe, From Sawubona Africa, Embracing Four Worlds in South African Management: Lessem Ronnie and Nussbaum Barbara, (Zebra Press, Struik Publishers, South Africa 1996)

As Karen Blixen said in *Out of Africa*: 'Tell a story to a European and his eyes glaze over, but tell a story to an African and you have his rapt attention. While storytelling is, of course, a cultural universal, it does seem to occupy a special place in the hearts of Africans.

Recalling her childhood, Gcina Mhlophe relates the significance of storytelling: 'Storytelling for me means something that is very exciting, something that comes from my childhood, from my culture. It is something that is very much part of who I am. I grew up in a world of stories, with a grandmother who enjoyed telling me stories. She was so good that she took me to worlds beyond those I knew. I wasn't just stuck in one room in Hammarsdale in KwaZulu-Natal. My world was much bigger: I could travel to where the clouds are, to the bottom of the ocean, to other countries, to the bellies of the fishes in the sea. I could see many things and fly with the birds. The ability to let my imagination run free has remained with me. I also learned to close my eyes and to see colors and shapes and hear voices; see life being enacted by animals and birds and by people who didn't look or behave like me. They were people who were very creative in different ways. That was a very good way to be brought up and nurtured.'

As a white person growing up in a Eurocentric subculture in South Africa, Peter Christie's love of stories developed around the fireside. As he recalls: 'My dad loved the Kruger National Park. As far as he was concerned, the Kruger Park was Africa, and we would spend as much free time there as possible. Usually after the evening *braai*⁴ we would all tell stories before retiring to our bungalows. On one occasion, in my early teens, I remember Dad hiring a kombi so that my sister and I could take some friends along. One night at Letaba, Shaun and I decided to give Marianne and Lynette a fright. We waited until fairly late in the evening and then crept silently across the sand between the two huts. The door was covered in mosquito gauze, and we crouched down on our haunches. Then, mustering the most primal of sounds, we scratched with our fingers on the gauze. "Hooouuggghh, hooouuggghh," we grunted, and then listened as frightened, tittering sounds emanated from the room. We heard the two single beds being pushed together. Suddenly, out of nowhere, came a terrifying grunt--and it wasn't us! We froze, and then looked around to see a harmless honey-badger making its way to a dustbin. Making a hasty retreat to our room, we never tried to frighten others at the Kruger Park again.'

Traditional African storytelling

Traditionally in African culture, storytelling was something that happened at the end of the day. People would come home when they had done their chores and children would wait for the sun to go down. Then, at that special time when everything is beautiful, during the twilight as the first star appears in the northern sky, the children would look at their grandmothers expectantly for a story.

Grandmothers would settle down and say: '*Kwesa gela.*' And the children would respond excitedly: '*Xhosi*, we are ready to listen.' Stories would be told about anything and everything; they could be about a tree that could talk, or about an ant that was having a conversation with a spider. Or it might have been about people, a chameleon who had made the most beautiful singing jacket.

Grandmothers told children about many things: to let their minds travel; to teach them about language; the difference between right and wrong; about who they were; and that when you don't like something, you shouldn't do it to someone else. Stories taught the children about the importance of the culture around them and the way old people did things.

These stories were told night after night, and every day each one was interpreted in many different ways. There was not just one way of interpreting a story. For instance, if something troubled a child, such as feeling guilty, he or she wouldn't like anyone to point a finger at him or her. The child could sit and listen to a story

⁴ *Braai* is a South African word for barbecue

about exactly what was troubling her. However, in the story, the characters were animals, so the child did not think he or she was being personally identified and so would learn a lesson in an unthreatening way.

Children could ask questions at any time and the grandmother would answer. The way the stories were told and the manner in which lessons were taught were never directed at a particular individual. The style of teaching was very indirect. Though the grandmother may have known that a child was asking about herself, she would not let on, and issues were never confronted explicitly.

The parents and other adults were also present at storytelling times. Songs often formed part of the stories and everyone sang along. Because stories were told over and over again, people would get to know the songs very well. They would clap hands and chant at certain times, and when the story came to an end, the storyteller would wrap up with the words: '*Xhosi si yapela.*' Then everyone would know that the story had come to an end.

The grandmother would tell stories because she was close to the children, and often took care of the little ones when their parents were working. When the men went hunting, grandparents always took care of their grandchildren. Grandparents also had the patience to listen and answer the millions of questions arising from curious young minds.

The grandparents were also the guardians of language and the keepers of culture. They would counsel during bad times, and would help when, for example, marriages were on the verge of breaking apart. When children did not listen to their parents, grandparents knew how to teach them lessons and how to share their wisdom through stories.

Naturally, some grandmothers were more gifted storytellers than others. The word would spread when there was a grandmother who could really tell a good story. The children would say: 'Can I sleep at Nomsa's house?' Then all the children would want to go to Nomsa's house. Suddenly, children from five or six houses didn't want to sleep at home. This particular grandmother would become more and more respected, and special events would be scheduled to allow more people to hear her storytelling. Other grandmothers would attend so they could observe and learn her style.

One of Gcina's favorite tales, told by her grandmother, concerned Nanabulele, an animal that lived in water:

Nanabulele was a mysterious animal that doesn't live any more. It was an animal that didn't bother anyone, but people wanted the skin of the Nanabulele because of all its colors. Nanabulele had all the different colors of the rainbow patched on its back. It lived in the deepest pools and rivers, and when it came out of the water, the surface of the pool would reflect these colors and shimmer brilliantly in the sunlight.

Imagine a creature like that. Who would want to remove it from the water and wear it as a skin? Yet kings wanted to wear the skins of the Nanabulele. Of course, it was a very strong animal, which could fight like mad. Many people died in search of the skin of the Nanabulele. However, one day a prince who could not speak, who was born dumb, wanted to get the skin of a Nanabulele.

The prince was a very good runner, a good all-around athlete and a good hunter. But he couldn't speak. And the people were worried, because there was no other boy in the family. When the prince went to mountain school for circumcision, he came back with the other boys who had gone with him, all 40 of them, and graduated at the same time. There was a big celebration and people danced and they sang and it was all so happy. The prince was particularly good looking on that day. He had done so well and his mother beamed. 'Look at what God has given us. What a beautiful son we have!' she exclaimed.

Then the prince stopped everything at the celebration and ran to his parents who were sitting on their chairs on a raised platform. He knelt in front of them and said: 'Baba, Mama, I want the skin of the Nanabulele.' For the first time he knew how to speak, and he said that he wanted the skin of the Nanabulele! People were shocked that he was talking. Moreover, they were horrified that he still wanted to hunt an animal that people had stopped hunting for years. Hardly anyone wore the skin of the Nanabulele, and certainly not his father. Even the bravest of hunters hadn't hunted this animal for years.

But the prince was adamant that he wanted the skin of Nanabulele. So off he went to look for it. All the other boys who had come back from circumcision joined him, so that they could protect their future king. Following his lead, they went to every pool, with him singing: 'Nanabulele, come out and get me.'

But nothing happened. They went to different streams until, far away, they reached a river with the deepest pool. The water was almost green and it was very silent. The boys sang and, armed with their spears, taunted the animal to come out.

Finally, Nanabulele appeared. The colors reflected on the water and there was color and movement everywhere. There were purples and greens and yellow and oranges. Yet the boys were not mesmerized. The prince jumped into the pool and the other boys followed to help him. They fought vigorously with the Nanabulele, killed it and pulled it out of the water. Then they skinned the beautiful creature and dried the skin in the sun while they ate the meat.

Then they took the skin home. The prince wore it around him, and the group returned to the village singing: 'Nanabulele, you will never catch me.' The women were proud that their boys had conquered the animal, and the prince's father was proud of the courage of the future king.

Everyone was proud, but the people learned something from this incident. They learned that peaceful animals such as Nanabulele should never be attacked or hurt. This was talked about for many years in the village.

What does Nanabulele symbolize? Like all stories, it can be interpreted in a number of ways. First of all, we could interpret the story superficially and say the prince was a brave man and that when he wanted something, he went out and got it. But what did he get? He didn't set out to find a large rock to shape into a fine chair. The animal was peaceful, never attacked anyone and had all the colors of the rainbow? Surely it also represents the diversity of cultures that exist on earth.

As Gcina says: 'Whenever my grandmother told me the story, she emphasized the shimmering water, the sun shining on the water and the colors dancing. It brought every type of person in the world to one place; someone from every country in the world. And every one of them was beautiful.' In this sense, Nanabulele is an inspirer of peace through the harmony of colors, which can be destroyed for superficial and irrelevant affectations.

Within traditional African stories, such as the one outlined above, the animals symbolized different qualities. This was especially so when it came to things that are not easy for children to learn, such as listening, patience, and knowing when it is time to do something. These qualities would be embodied in animals: birds, snakes and other creatures. There were animals known to be greedy, such as the wolf, and there were animals known to be tricksters, such as *inkentshane*, a certain kind of jackal. The hare was known as a trickster throughout the continent, while the tortoise represented ancient wisdom. When animals ran out of ideas about how to do something, they would go to the tortoise. When the hare had tricked everyone and there was only one thing left to trick, he would go to the tortoise and be tricked himself. The jackal was another trickster who tricked bigger, crueller animals to save those who really needed saving. In several stories the jackal saved human beings. The eagle represented sharp vision and the ability to reach the highest levels of creativity.

Sometimes the grandmother would explain these characteristics, and at other times leave the audience to interpret. After listening to a story several times, the children usually worked out these characteristics. When a story puzzled a child, for instance when there was no clear answer or ending, the question would remain in the child's mind: 'What did it mean?' And then the child would talk about the story to her friends, brothers and sisters, who might be equally puzzled. Then the children would ask their parents. Eventually, the child would go back to the grandmother who told the story, who had purposefully given them the chance to puzzle it over. 'Why don't you understand it?' she would ask, and then illustrate the story with an example of something that had happened in the village. 'What do you think of that?' she would conclude, and the children would understand.

Often the stories concerned human nature, such as the story of the ant and the spider. There once was a spider who met a red ant. They really got to know each other very well. The spider was very skilled at making her house beautiful, and when the sun rose in the morning and the dew caught in the spider's web like small diamonds, it really looked lovely. This is what the ant noticed and that is how they met. The ant was impressed at the skill of someone who could make a house like that. And the ant admired how the spider found its food without having to go to the great lengths of traveling across rivers and up mountains.

Yet the spider was equally impressed by the ant and how it made its double-storey anthills with different rooms. The spider also admired the way the ant worked with other ants, and all the skills and team spirit among them.

As these two creatures admired each other, they would look at human beings. 'Do you know how stupid human beings are?' the ant asked. 'They walk right through my beautiful house. Everyone can see how beautiful it is, but human beings are blind. You know that ants can dance. When we have collected enough food and built our house, we dance. And when we are really stomping our feet, the human beings can't even hear us--they just walk right over us. They don't stop and admire the dance; they don't admire the way we do things. They can't, because they are deaf.'

And so the spider and the ant would talk about human beings...

'You know, they forget about the gift of the way God made them. They always cover their bodies,' commented the ant.

'Yes,' replied the spider, 'and when it rains they can't just enjoy the feeling of water on their naked bodies, they must cover themselves again. And when they eat, they are wasteful, throwing food on the ground. I don't know what is wrong with human beings.'

During such storytelling, the grandmother would ask questions like, 'Are we wasteful? Are we blind and insensitive to many things?' The reactions to such questions could be explosive, because children would defend themselves and reply: 'I'm not blind!' or 'I'm not deaf!'

An alternative form of storytelling in traditional Africa involved the men telling historical stories during the day. The storytellers had to have good memories, to be sure that they kept to the facts. The truth would be told because the storyteller risked being corrected by the audience. If the storyteller was corrected, the children would know that it was a very important point to remember.

Historical stories would go back as far as the memories of the grandfather or the great-grandfather, and they would be passed down from generation to generation. For instance, the story of Pallo is an example of a historical story for Xhosa people. Pallo was the king of the Xhosa, a very respected person. He was described as Ngangalala: someone big in build and who possessed a certain dignity. He was a person who didn't just speak or say any thing, but a person who listened, tried to solve problems, and was a good leader. Pallo was someone that everyone wanted to meet. During the storytelling, specific events would be described which would qualify Pallo to be called Ngangalala. Pallo's story was originally told by people who lived with him, and then passed on to successive generations. Even contemporary Xhosa people know the story of Pallo, and others, which date back two, three or four hundred years.

The Zulu people tell the story of Nomkhubulwana, who represented a mystical figure who came from the Valley of a Thousand Hills. She was very important, representing vegetation, fertility and the nourishment that comes from the earth. Her body was covered with fruit trees, maize, and all other manner of things. Some stories were purely historical, some purely myths, and others were a combination of the two. When people talked about the praise names of a family, tribe or king, they usually incorporated myths and facts, together with statements indicating how the king's contemporaries talked about him.

Take, for instance, the way people understood HF Verwoerd⁵. Few Africans knew him personally, apart from the fact that he was a major difficulty in their lives. So African people named their cattle after him. And when it was time to plow, people would call loudly in their fields: 'Verwoerd, Verwoerd!' In other words, when people did not know someone well, they created meanings for themselves. Verwoerd was seen as a dumb bull instead of a revered leader. In this way history took on the 'shades of the eyes' of the storyteller.

Storytelling events created a sense of community in African society. They brought people together and provided opportunities for them to bond and to get know each other. In this kind of setting, with people listening to each other, they really got to know each other by the way they reacted to the stories. In this way, people would also learn to tolerate one another. The lessons learnt were therefore not restricted to the story itself, but also to the interaction of different people with the story.

To focus on transition, the culture of storytelling in Africa survived colonialism and Christianity because of its intangible and universal character. Unlike other more material aspects of culture, storytelling could not be manipulated, stolen or suppressed. Storytelling survived because the colonialists never bothered to learn African languages, and it was carried from generation to generation whenever people were together. Storytelling was also conveyed in songs, and some of these stories and songs are still told and sung today.

⁵ Verwoerd was one of the Prime Ministers of South Africa, during the period 1958 - 1966 and considered one of the primary architects of *apartheid*

Story business

While storytelling is probably as old as when people first started to communicate using language, it is only recently that it has captured the imagination of management scientists and practitioners. The relevance of storytelling to organizational life is not immediately apparent, particularly where the conventional wisdom of management as a detached, analytic science is prevalent.

Yet increasingly, the notion of storytelling is gaining currency in management circles, to the extent that even Tom Peters, one of the most pragmatic management thinkers, who is also among the world's most respected management consultants, has the following to say: 'Policy manuals are a no-no today. But anarchy's not in either. So how do we let people know "what's important around here" without constraining them? The best answer as I see it--stories!'¹

The increased attention given to storytelling and management arises, in part, from the study of organizational culture more generally² and the study of organizational symbolism more specifically³. Both of these interests relate to the growing awareness of researchers that management is as much an art as a science. This new orientation is keenly expressed by J Pfeffer⁴ who states: 'If management involves the taking of symbolic action, then the skills required are political, dramaturgical, and language skills more than analytical or strictly quantitative skills.'

Similarly, EM Eisenberg⁵, in considering the changing role of management in contemporary organizations, states that: 'If leadership is the ability to make activities meaningful to members, the language required is abstract, evangelical, and even poetic.'

There is increasing recognition that leaders in organizations lead partly through their attention to the symbolic dimension of working life. L Smircich and G Morgan⁹ state that: 'Leadership rests as much in ... symbolic modes of action as in ... instrumental modes of management, direction and control.'

In what ways do stories and storytelling form a key component of a leader's competence in managing cultural phenomena in organizations?

Firstly, research has clearly indicated that so-called 'excellent' companies can be separated from the 'also-rans' on the basis of the former having a clear set of concrete examples, or stories, of past management and organizational behavior⁷. These stories help to infuse life into employees' understanding of the corporate culture. Employees are, on the whole, very far removed from the executive offices from which statements of philosophy, mission, vision, values, and so on, emanate. The organizational stories, in contrast, are a highly accessible resource from which employees' understanding of the guiding principles of the company can be greatly enhanced. Good leaders recognize this and ensure that their verbal and interpersonal competencies form a strong part of their leadership repertoire.

Thus stories, storytellers and storytelling are the resources from which the essence of an organization's identity can be shared. In organizations that ignore this vital function of leadership, the potential exists for their members to disconnect from the identity of the organization. As LM de Pree⁸ writes: 'Without the continuity of storytelling and the messages they contain from the leadership of the group, the people of any organization will forget who they are.'

Secondly, to infuse an organization's mission, vision and values with stories, is to help direct attention and give focus throughout the various operating units of company. Storytelling creates alignment in the organization, in that the stories become symbols for management and staff of valued behavior.

Stories thus create a highly concrete picture of 'the way things are done around here'. The leadership role in establishing trust in organizations is of critical importance. Stories in organizations suggest to listeners that a particular philosophy is either truly followed or merely espoused, not practiced. Leaders must therefore be willing to act decisively to establish their beliefs as living and credible guides for behavior. Employees are exceptionally sensitive to how serious their leaders really are in acting out their stated beliefs and values. Where there is a mismatch between espoused policy and management action, the result is cynicism and lowered levels of trust. For instance, levels of trust in an organization that espouses the value of integrity, and has numerous stories to support this contention, will be higher than in an organization espousing the same value but having no supportive stories--or worse, contradictory stories.

A key lesson then for leaders in establishing trust is that trust is a by-product which can only be produced by a series of experiences. Trust is a gift people give each other as a result of how they have been treated. Leaders, through their actions of today, create the stories told tomorrow. New stories are created by present behavior. The actual stories are thus a barometer for measuring levels of trust and other aspects in organizations.

Storytelling is a powerful way for leaders to re-establish trust in organizations. This requires that the leader re-creates the old storyline to tell the 'full' story, so to speak, rather than a one-sided version. The propagandistic pitfalls of one-sided storytelling are clearly articulated by Y Gabriel¹⁰ in his statement that: '...organizational myths are comprehensively manipulated by those merchandisers of meaning who make it their task to enrich and strengthen organizational cultures. It seems particularly important to mistrust all those stage managers of standing ovations and propagators of corporate fantasies which purport to fill the vacuum at the heart of some organizations.'

Telling a balanced story overcomes tendencies for listeners to intervene with 'Yes, but...' responses, in that they feel their side of the story has been truly represented. In this way, inclusive storytelling is an important mechanism for building trust in organizations.

The trust-building element to storytelling is vividly illustrated by its role in working through grieving, in particular the phases of forgiving and forgetting. The healing imperative of storytelling is beautifully expressed by V Glendinning in her novel, *The Grown Ups*¹⁰. 'Around them the city moaned ... and turned over in its sleep. In dark bedrooms, people insisted on telling their lovers the stories of their lives. None of the other people were listening properly--they were too preoccupied with their own histories, so the stories were mostly lost. Hell is where all the stories of the world lie crying to be heard.'

Storytelling is a healing remedy for organizations beset by past resentments and low levels of trust. In such situations, it is important for grieving members of the organization to be given the opportunity to either tell their own stories, or at least to hear them being told. However, in many organizations there is simply no place for employees to tell their stories to someone who is willing and prepared to listen. Equally, the stories told by others with more power often do not incorporate the side of the story experienced by more alienated employees. There is the potential for a one-sidedness to stories in organizations that results in increased alienation and hostility on the part of many listeners.

There are many other applications for storytelling in organizations, such as learning. Stories inform and instruct, as any parent or teacher will testify. In making abstract concepts concrete, storytelling can, for example, be used to empower illiterate employees in developing societies. Storytelling is also relevant to sales and marketing functions, in that stories are a mode of influence that can affect consumer buying behavior. Effective advertisers recognize this and include stories in their brand-building strategies.

It is clear that the enhancement of leadership performance is only one of the practical applications of storytelling, and that stories can fulfill more pervasive functions in organizations than mere individual competence.

Extensive studies of the function of organizational stories indicate that stories are powerful in answering the following kinds of questions:

- What kind of organization do we have?
- How does this compare with what is needed?
- What kinds of people do we want to attract and keep?
- What are our goals and purpose?
- What past events are we proud of?
- What shall we do in the future?

In guiding member behavior and creating alignment, empirical research reveals that certain similarities can be observed across organizations in terms of story content. This finding calls into question the 'claim of uniqueness' of most organizations. J Martin, S Feldman, MJ Hatch and SB Sitkin¹¹ have identified these common organizational stories:

- Is the big boss human?
- Can the little person rise to the top?

- Will I get fired?
- Will the organization help me if I have to move?
- How will the boss react to mistakes?
- How will the organization deal with obstacles?

This phenomenon is not surprising, given the anthropological¹² and psychological¹³ insights that fairy tales, legends and myths exhibit remarkable similarities in content and structure across the most diverse of cultures.

African management and storytelling

It has been proposed that the underlying philosophy of African management is humanism. One would therefore expect that storytelling competence is one area in which managers in Africa can significantly contribute.

There is little doubt that an overriding reason for the increasing interest in organizational storytelling is the recognition from researchers and practitioners of the relatively dehumanized working environment of the typically large bureaucracy, so prevalent in the modern-day economy. In situations characterized by extreme forms of division of labor, job evaluation systems and pay scales, hierarchical structures, and so on, there arises the need for the rehumanization of work. This is the vacuum which storytelling, as a symbolic form of communication, helps to fill. As Gabriel¹⁴ so eloquently states: 'Stories may represent attempts to humanize the impersonal spaces of bureaucratic organizations, to mark them as human territory in a similar way to the vase of flowers or the family picture on the executive's desk... Many organizations are not generally pleasant places to live or work. They place severe restrictions on the individual's rights and freedoms and allow little room for those aspects of the human soul which are not directly relevant to the organizational objectives. Emotions, spontaneity and play are largely disenfranchised as is, in any real sense, the pursuit of pleasure and happiness. If vast areas of the human soul are systematically excluded from the organization, is it not possible to argue that myths represent attempts to gain re-admission in surreptitious ways and diverse guises.'

The humanizing function of storytelling in organizations is possible particularly because of the tension between, on the one hand, the poverty of cold facts, such as reports, statistics and finance and, on the other, the power of the imagination, color, drama and emotion inherent in stories and storytelling. This power is derived from storytelling events where the teller and the listeners share, albeit vicariously, in the experience of the original event. Participation in this kind of event engages the whole person in a way never possible through the mere presentation of facts or statistics. While facts may stimulate a person's intellect, stories also engage his or her emotions, and his or her will for subsequent actions and behavior. In short, stories 'stick,' motivate and inspire and, at the same time, entertain participants. As part of a transformative process then, healthy storytelling is a conscious way of moving from the prison factory of the overripe bureaucracy, to an inclusive form of organization which truly recognizes the human side of enterprise.

In South Africa we are blessed with consummate storytellers in the artistic and business realms. Recent empirical research¹⁵ strongly supports this contention. As part of a postgraduate human resources development course, students were instructed to telephonically contact an executive member of any organization. The students asked this person if he or she could identify any other member of the executive who could be characterized as a storyteller. Invariably, leaders who consciously used storytelling as part of their leadership were identified. Once identified by their peers, the corporate leaders were, where possible, interviewed by the students. The list of people identified in this research reads like a who's who of South African leadership, and includes leaders in business, politics, labor, religion and education:

- **Politics:** Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki, Tokyo Sexwale, Albie Sachs, Cyril Ramaphosa, Jay Naidoo, Van Zyl Slabbert
- **Business:** Albert Koopman, Andrew Levy, Anton Rupert, Christo Nel, Clem Sunter, Clive Weil, Colin Hall, Conrad Strauss, Danie Cronje, Donald Gordon, Harry Oppenheimer, Ian Macrae, Johann Nel, Lovemore Mbigi, Meyer Kahn, Mike Burgess, Neil Cumming, Raymond Ackerman, Sol Kerzner
- **Education:** Nick Binedell, John Ford, John Samuels
- **Labour:** Chris Dhlamini
- **Religion:** Desmond Tutu

This list of leaders is not included to suggest that storytelling is the preserve of a few, highly charismatic leaders. Each and every person in an organization has the capacity for storytelling. The thousands of stories told every day help to perpetuate or to transform the essence of an organization's identity. In virtually all human interactions in organizations, the stories of the participants are told. These stories either support or undermine the company's core beliefs and values. Storytelling is *not* limited to executive managers or a few natural raconteurs.

What the above list does suggest, however, is that storytelling is a core competency for leaders in Africa. Most African cultures are oral cultures and imbued with a large measure of conviviality. A person's social skill determines his or her social standing, and a manager's social insight, sensitivity and technique can be greatly enhanced by his or her ability to tell a good story.

A classification of stories

Clearly there are many different kinds of stories. In what way can they be classified? Building on the four worlds/global business-sphere model used as the analytical framework for this book, four distinct categories can be suggested:

In the western, pragmatic world there is the *anecdote*. Stories with anecdotal qualities include short experiences, incidents, and even jokes. They are the 'Let me tell you what happened yesterday' kind of stories. This is the world of the natural raconteur, who can entertain and motivate listeners through his or her ability to tell a good story. Raconteurs have timing, never confuse the punchline with the plot, and are happy using accents, adopting roles, and play-acting. These are the characters whom the rest say should have been on the stage.

The anecdotal storyteller has superb verbal and interpersonal intelligence qualities which can make for very effective leadership. This storyteller intuitively knows the art of influence, and that people are quickly bored with mere facts alone. They inspire their audiences through the spoken word, enriching important abstract concepts with concrete experiences. As 'infotainers' they entertain while imparting information. These great oral communicators are usually highly visible and accessible, well known by their followers because of their reluctance to mobilize and align people and activities through memorandums. Naturally, these characters also make excellent sales, marketing and training people.

In the northern, rational world there is the *account*. This kind of story is similar to the 'story of the balance sheet'. As a balance sheet provides an account of what happened to a company's financial performance over the period of a year, to tell a story by giving an account of things involves describing, in a systematic way, a particular course of events. Rational accounts of occurrences in organizations are important to answer questions like: What actually happened? Who was involved? When did it happen? What were the circumstances?

Accounts involve gathering information from as many sources as possible, to elicit the 'full story', so to speak. This is crucial if the organization wants to learn lessons from positive or negative events. Stories of the nature of an account therefore help to create the conditions for becoming what is termed a 'learning' organization. They motivate an orientation for taking account of the past in the organization to better manage the future. In the eastern, developmental world there is the *biography*. In a corporate setting, a biographical story concerns an organization's origins, its past life, its present functioning, and its likely future. Understanding the organization's biography is very important for strategy formulation. This is so because, as is the case in individual development, the organization's past acts as a major constraint to its future. Past experiences limit the range of future possibilities. And in attempting to change direction, giving up the old in the organization will be much harder than taking on the new. For instance, in a company whose past involved one core business activity, to choose a strategic direction of high diversification will be unrealistic and risky. In a company whose past involved restrictive, racist and sexist policies, it will be very difficult to truly embody strength in diversity. These are the kinds of lessons to be learnt from biographical storytelling in organizations.

In the southern, metaphysical world there is the *myth*, the legend, the parable and the fable. A mythological story concerns those things that never were, yet will always be. The only witch we are likely to encounter, for example, is the seemingly ordinary person who lives down the street. The closest we will get to encountering a monster is the boss in the corner office. The real demons are the demons in our minds. In other words, in the world of our imagination is captured all that we already know. We may believe that all these

things are somehow otherworldly, yet they arise from our own worldly experience and through our own self-insight. At any time I might be the witch, the demon or the monster, the gallant Lancelot or the scheming, guileful Hlakanyana. We are all these worlds in one: the embodiment of every possibility. We are the rose with beautiful petals and stinging thorns.

Myths and the like therefore speak of and for every person, and are present in an organizational context precisely because they address the inexplicable, spiritual nature of being human. They help to explain that which cannot be explained and to understand that which is incomprehensible. This is the stuff of the south and part of the gift that African management has to offer the business world.

Notes

1. Peters, T: Introduction in Armstrong, D: *Managing by Storying Around: A New Method of Leadership*, Doubleday, 1992.
2. See, for instance, Deal and Kennedy (1982); Schein (1984).
3. Eisenberg (1984).
4. Pfeffer (1981), p 44.
5. Eisenberg (1984), p 231.
6. Smircich and Morgan (1982), p 263.
7. Wilkins (1984).
8. De Pree (1989).
9. Gabriel (1991), p 872.
10. Glendinning (1991).
11. Martin, Feldman, Hatch and Sitkin (1983).
12. Malinowski (1962); Levi-Strauss (1979).
13. Jung (1968).
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