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# Managerial issues amenable to storytelling in organizations.

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# Managerial issues amenable to storytelling in organizations

**Palesa Morake**

**A research report submitted to the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration**

**Johannesburg, 2013**

# ABSTRACT

Stories are an effective and alternative basis for communication, which connect employees with one another, render their experience meaningful, and make characters come alive. This study aimed to understand the application of stories in business. It looked at business situations that are amenable to storytelling, categorizing these situations, determining if there are differences between South African and international managers and analysing the changes of the applications over a number of years.

The literature review explored different themes in the application of stories and their impact on diverse aspects of the organization. Corporate culture, organizational change, knowledge management, brand management, leadership, transformation and HIV/AIDS were themes that stood out.

A qualitative research paradigm was used for the study; it involved interpreting existing applications, analysing key themes and arriving at an assessment of what the findings meant in relation to appropriate knowledge. The population was the total number of MBA students who enrolled for the 'Every leader a storyteller' elective over the period 2007 to 2013. The census comprised 202 assignments/manuscripts written by practicing managers.

Findings showed that managers believe that several situations exist that are amenable to storytelling in organizations. The majority of these situations were categorized according to themes in the literature review. The financial crisis and transformation were more prominent in the international and South African pool of managers, respectively. An interesting observation was the absence of HIV/AIDS and labour unrest/strikes applications within the international context. A pattern of peaks and downturns was detected over the years under review and one of the recommendations was to study reasons for these changes over time. It was also recommended that South African managers use the application of stories in addressing other issues that are specific to their context.

# DECLARATION

I, Palesa Morake, declare that this research report is my own work except as indicated in the references and acknowledgements. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in this or any other university.

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**Palesa Morake**

Signed at Johannesburg

On the 30th day of July 2013

# DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Adel Tiny Morake and Simon Mosutlhiemang Morake, for their love, endless support, encouragement and most of all for believing in me.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, thanks to God, the Almighty, for His showers of blessings throughout my research work and for giving me the grace to complete the research successfully.

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this research was to examine organizational applications of storytelling, as identified by practicing managers. This was done by categorizing managerial applications, determining if there were any differences between South African and international managers and analysing patterns in the applications over a period of seven years (from 2007 to 2013).

Attempting to remain relevant and competitive, organizations are faced with an increased pressure to improve their operations and technology. Denning (2005) states that audacious scientific and technological innovation, instant global communication, expanded travel, increased international trade, intensified competition, shifting social roles, cultural misalignment, biological transformation, and environmental shifts have made rapid change a pervasive phenomenon of life. Firms are realizing that they need to improve their innovation ability to foster growth and profitability, as classical levers for reducing costs and improving efficiency are largely exhausted (Curran, Niedergassel, Picker & Leter, 2009). Likewise, Baca-Greif and Jensen (2011) argue that the need to adapt to working across distance, time and culture was created by globalisation.

As the business environment changes, business leaders are faced with a new reality in which old methods are no longer applicable. Coercive methods of leading might be effective in the short term but they are not sustainable. Sinotonen and Auvinen (2009) are of the view that a leader can exert personal authority or position in the organization or use various coercive means; however, the traditional concept of power is far too simple and misleading. As such, leaders must come up with other ways of influencing followers and fostering commitment to the organization, as the old methods are no longer as effective.

Consequently, leaders are finding ways to penetrate the mire of facts and institutionalized reports in order to inspire and emotionally appeal to their employees (Marshall & Adamic, 2010). O'Leary (2010) states, business is moving faster than ever today and the need to develop leaders and invest in high-potential employees is becoming increasingly important. Steslow and Gardner (2011) suggest that stories are an effective and alternative basis for communication and that they serve to connect employees with one another, render their experience meaningful, and make characters come alive; and as such, leaders are finding stories to be a very effective tool in today's business world.

Sinotonen and Auvinen (2009) argue that, when used effectively, stories can be a valuable tool for leaders in the modern business environment; this is due to the stories' ability to mediate and shape organizational reality. They are of the opinion that stories are able to influence the culture of the organization and transfer knowledge and values. Similarly, Randall and Harms (2012) believe that when crafted with emotion and logic, potent stories not only help make sense of disparate facts, but also motivate people to undertake a formidable challenge or make consequential changes in behaviour.

This study aimed to understand the above-mentioned potential of the applications of stories in business; it particularly looked at areas where practicing managers believed storytelling could be most effectively used.

## 1.2 Context of the study

According to Caminotti and Gray (2012), storytelling can bring swift communication to an organization thereby fostering a symbiotic understanding among all participants from a cognitive and affective standpoint, leading to behavioural actions that benefit the organization. As such, organizations can use storytelling effectively as a tool to demonstrate complex and multidimensional concepts.

Love (2008) believes that there is an increasing usage of stories by leaders in modern organizations to connect emotionally to their followers. Equally, Kowalewski and Waukau-Villagomez (2011) state that the use of storytelling in organizations has experienced significant growth during the last decade assisting in change management, formulation of short- and long-term strategy formation and rightsizing, to name but a few functional areas.

Despite the extensive literature available on storytelling in organizations, finding literature that provided insights on the applications of stories by practicing managers, in other words, an analysis of actual instances where managers used storytelling, proved difficult. These instances may be organizational challenges, problems, issues, and in some areas, opportunities, that managers believe can be constructively addressed by storytelling.

In a pursuit to address the above deficiency, Part 1 of the exam equivalent assignments, written by MBA students at Wits Business School (WBS), for the 'Every leader a storyteller' course, will be analysed. In this assignment, students were required to identify an aspect of the business wherein they believed storytelling could be positively used.

## 1.3 Problem statement

### *1.3.1 Main problem*

To examine the applications of storytelling in organizations, as identified by practicing managers, and categorise the applications accordingly.

### *1.3.2 Sub-problem 1*

Examine the applications of storytelling in organizations as identified by practicing managers.

### *1.3.3 Sub-problem 2*

Categorise the applications of storytelling in organizations.

### *1.3.4 Sub-problem 3*

Determine if there any differences in the application of stories between the international and local managers.

### *1.3.5 Sub-problem 4*

Examine if the various managerial issues or challenges have changed over the years.

## 1.4 Significance of the study

Several publications deal with the application of storytelling in organizations. Rolfes (2008) research focused on literature published in the field of storytelling, wherein she identified three central themes namely:

(1) Storytelling applications in organizations;
(2) Storytelling as research methodology; and
(3) Storytelling skills.

Further interesting research was done by Pascoe (2012). Both these studies provided comprehensive literature on storytelling themes in organizations, however, the literature that demonstrates the analysis of actual stories within an organization is scarce.

This research aimed to add to the body of knowledge on the subject and provided a report on applications of stories using practical examples.

## 1.5 Delimitations of the study

This study looked at Part 1 of the exam equivalent assignments, written by MBA students, for the ‘Every leader a storyteller’ course. The students were required to consider their own working situation and identify an aspect (project, function, dynamic, relationship, issue, problem, challenge) for which the knowledge, understanding and communication thereof in the organization could be improved through oral storytelling. Their submissions were written manuscripts wherein they described instances that managers believed could be constructively addressed by storytelling.

The analysis was limited to the students’ descriptions of organizational applications amenable to the use of storytelling.

## 1.6 Definition of terms

- *WBS*: Wits Business School
- *FT*: Financial Times
- *MBA*: Masters of Business Administration

## 1.7 Assumptions

The data for the analysis was readily available from Peter Christie, the lecturer for ‘Every leader a storyteller’ elective at WBS.

# CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 Introduction

*"Two long-time friends were riding the ferry back to their village many decades ago. They were laughing and talking about their trip to the city and their plans once they got home. Most of the other passengers knew the men and how well they got along. At one of the stops, a stranger boarded the ferry and sat facing the men. He observed the camaraderie between them. After listening to the men for some time, the stranger greeted them and asked if they had any wishes. The men quickly responded that everyone has wishes, and they were no different. The stranger pondered for a minute then proposed that if the men told him their wishes, he would grant them. The two friends looked puzzled. "You mean you are able to grant wishes?" asked one friend, jokingly.*

*"Oh, yes." The stranger replied. "But with certain conditions."*

*"What conditions?" the other friend asked.*

*"Whatever the first person wishes for, the other person gets twofold," replied the stranger.*

*The two friends were unconvinced but started discussing what they might wish for. They also joked about who would go first. Then the discussion got serious.*

*"Well, why should I go first?" one friend asked, "You go first."*

*"But you always get your way," said the other. "You can be less selfish for once."*

*As the men argued, their faces became stern, and it was apparent to the other passengers that the friendship that the men shared was*

> *under great strain. Finally, one friend volunteered to go first. The other friend was relieved yet pleased that his friend was giving up. The friend who offered to go first turned to the stranger to speak his wish. "I wish," said the friend, with a pregnant pause, "I wish to be blind in one eye" (Speak, 2008, p. 367).*

This haunting story is both memorable and influential, Speak (2008) states that it has stayed with him over the years and that he often uses the moral of this story as a touchstone for judging his decisions when faced with personal and professional challenges.

Stories are not a new phenomenon; they have been around for centuries. In recent years, however, storytelling has become a frequently used business management tool to address various business issues due to the stories' ability to influence and convey ideas. Storytelling, no doubt, is as old as mankind; however, only since the post-mediaeval age of enlightenment, and the rise of rationalism in the Western world at least, has the written word been constrained and subjugated by the need for clear ideas which correspond to the physically possible (O'Gorman & Gillespie, 2010). Mládková's (2010) work demonstrates that a transformational story plays on emotions, feelings and memories of people and influences them. Volker, Phillips and Anderson (2011) are of the view that the use of storytelling in organizations has experienced significant growth during the last decade, assisting in change management. The formulation of stories is a pastime and oral tradition as old as humankind is; cultures throughout the ages have used storytelling as a vehicle to pass on traditions and cultural expectations.

The ability of a leader to influence is crucial in ensuring buy-in of the business strategy and execution of the key business initiatives. Leaders who seem to have an innate ability to tell stories, are able to pull out an appropriate tale, with a poignant message, just right for the situation or audience at hand (Hurt & Metzger, 2003). Kaufman (2011) argues that many business leaders, mistakenly, look at the value and purpose of influence in the very limited domain of generating business through marketing and sales. This, Kaufman (2011)

says, is a false understanding of influence; influence is relevant to every business transaction.

## 2.2 Storytelling applications in organizations

Every company is on an epic-like quest for results, a journey fraught with obstacles that take form in escalating competition, rising material costs, battles for talent, pressing shareholder demands, and increasing healthcare costs (Marzec, 2007). Marshall & Adamic (2010), use the analogy of the David versus Goliath story to demonstrate how a small company from Joliet, Illinois led to the eventual breakup of the Bell System and became the story of success for generations of MCI employees. The story provided continued motivation and a constant reminder that anything can be accomplished.

Denning (2002) considers the application of stories in modern organizations to be a far too powerful a tool to be relegated to the realms of bedtime fables or bar room banter. His view is that humans in fact make use of stories to make sense of the world. He emphasised this point using a story that was in the Financial Times (FT) in January 2002 where the giant conglomerate Tyco was splitting itself into four parts (Denning, 2002). According to the FT the split was not because anything had actually taken place, but because its investors were uneasy about Tyco's complex and aggressive accounting techniques as they were thinking about another story, which happened to be the second story in that edition of the FT (Denning, 2002), the Enron collapse. Here we had a company that just a year ago was worth US$60 billion, and was hailed as one of the best companies in the world, the seventh largest in the US and growing fast. That was the story we all read, which most of us believed, and which resulted in the company being a flourishing US$60 billion concern. Now we all believe a very different story about Enron, and so the company, instead of being worth US$60 billion, was worth practically nothing. Same company, different stories. A huge financial impact comes from believing a different story.

It was with this in mind that the literature on the applications of stories in modern business was reviewed; it particularly looked at the different business

themes that arose in storytelling. The following key themes quickly became apparent: corporate culture, knowledge management, change management and leadership. Storytelling is becoming widely embraced in the corporate world as a means to create cultural change, knowledge transfer, and diversity awareness (Stephens, 2009). Shirazi, Hashtrood, Iran, Shekari, Taft and Veyseh (2011) believe storytelling can:

- Communicate a managers' vision of the future and invoke others' commitment;
- Create a collective sense of shared purpose and meaning that can enhance cohesion around an organization's culture;
- Build leadership through wisdom stored forward, by capturing and disseminating learning to the next generation of leaders;
- Enable people to find patterns in their lives, enhancing self-knowledge and a productive interpretation of experiences; and
- Inspire alignment in support of a change initiative.

Volker et al. (2011) further emphasized that there are three primary purposes for deliberate stories: first, to provide new organizational members with an understanding of organizational history and expectations of behaviour, second to pass on situational problem solving knowledge, and third to provide a vision of the organization's past, present, and future (either real or imagined).

Volker, et al. (2011) affirms the view that storytelling is being prominently adopted in management and organizational practices in order to achieve specific purposes such as developing the identity of an organization or leader, connecting individuals and organizations, managing organizational change, and transferring and saving knowledge.

### *2.2.1 Corporate Culture*

Wortmann (2008) defines culture as the "behaviours and beliefs characteristic of a particular organization" (p. 134). He goes on to say that these behaviours and beliefs emerge over time, usually as a result of a strong founder or CEO's

influence (think Microsoft, General Electric, and IBM), a ‘near-death’ experience (think AT&T), a positive customer reaction to the business model (think Dell, FedEx, and McDonald’s), or a particular work ethic (think Accenture).

Kondra and Hurst (2009) demonstrate that organizational culture shapes values and norms and is learned and transmitted between individuals and teams through social learning, role modelling and observation and as a result, it contributes towards the organization’s ability to deal with external pressures that threaten organizational survival and/or internal integration. In their view, shared experiences, values and assumptions are created, adapted and constrained through culture.

Sinotonen and Auvinen's (2009) work demonstrates the influence of stories on the organizational culture, and on the atmosphere, trust, understanding of strategy and everyday flow of information in an organization. Likewise, Marshall and Adamic (2010) argue that one of the key elements in developing and defining corporate culture is the narrative: a story told by a leader which becomes not only part of a company’s folklore but eventually the unconscious fabric of employees’ behaviour patterns. Marshall and Adamic (2010) show the impact Kellher’s stories had on the culture of Southwest Airlines. The stories illustrated Southwest Airline’s dedication to customer service, including a nearly legendary tale of a gate agent who took the extraordinary step of accompanying an elderly passenger on a flight to ensure he reached his destination without incident. This was based on the good-to-great theory: while a good employee would have a cordial, procedurally correct customer encounter, a great employee would act like the agent in the story. Ideally, the story would not only reach its immediate audience, but also spread, through word of mouth and managers at all levels, until it becomes part of corporate heritage and culture.

### *2.2.2 Communicating vision*

Love (2008) states that leaders who are most adept at engaging their teams are those with very specific communication ability, they are able to make their communication accessible to audiences by presenting them as stories or

anecdotes, which allow the listeners to make an emotional connection with what the speaker is saying. In addition, Marshall and Adamic (2010) believe that the defining element of an effective story is an appeal or call to action that expresses a leader's vision for his company. According to Caminotti and Gray (2012), swift communication can foster a symbiotic understanding among all participants from a cognitive and affective standpoint, leading to behavioural actions that benefit the organization.

The fact is, a story makes a strategic priority or goal more real to an audience than other forms of persuasion because it reframes the argument in an easy-to-grasp format to which anyone can relate (Kaufman, 2011).

O'Leary (2010) shares a story's ability to inspire shared vision. He uses a story about a fortune 500 company that chose to no longer chase share at the expense of profitability. They elected to bring unique value to their clients, putting their clients at the heart of what they do, attract the right clients that are willing to pay a fair price for the value they offer; striving to grow but growing in the right and profitable way. The company's leadership vision/story was put to test when one of the organization's popular vehicle models was proving to be unprofitable. The management made a decision, based on the values above, to discontinue the car despite its popularity based on the story. This story evokes a common vision of the future, sketches the journey to achieve that vision, identifies critical milestones along the way, creates a clear path for employees to follow and defines success in observable terms (Marzec, 2007). O'Gorman and Gillespie (2010) believe that by telling stories, leaders aspire to deliver direction, information, insight, and inspiration.

Entrepreneurs have also been found to use storytelling to sell their ideas and vision. McKenzie (2011) states that entrepreneurs use storytelling in a wide variety of ways: to share best practices among organization members, as a way of documenting organizational structure, to learn business practices in a family setting and as a way of articulating the entrepreneur's vision to organization members. Furthermore entrepreneurs use storytelling to clarify a business

model and as a means of explaining complex relationships within the organization.

### *2.2.3 Communicating values*

Values are important in business, they establish a foundation upon which expectations and trust are built, it is therefore vital for a leader to ensure that organizational values are effectively communicated, understood and adopted. Volker et al. (2011) affirm the fact that stories may be used to motivate and to pass on organizational values as well as expectations. Likewise, Hurt and Metzger (2003) state that stories are useful conduits for reinforcing business priorities and values, they help employees understand what corporate values mean in terms of behaviour.

Sharing and understanding stories can make the appreciation and adoption of its values more profound. Volker et al. (2011) believes that the understanding of organizational stories can lead one to a richer understanding of the organizational culture and the core values supporting that culture. Research has shown organizational storytelling to be one of the most effective and influential methods of sharing values, developing trust and building an emotional connection (Wilson, 2012).

Baker and Boyle (2009) explain that stories in organizations are not only a useful tool to convey information, but they also convey values and a vision; they are the essence that draws people and allows them to take their own form of ownership. Stories convey values and emotions, and can reveal the differences and similarities between people's experiences (East, Jackson, O'Brien & Peters, 2010). Through stories, leaders align the organizational mission and values with people's intrinsic needs to belong and contribute (Kaufman, 2011).

### *2.2.4 Organizational change*

Change is the only constant in modern business. Change is a constant at the core of human experience, an inescapable necessity, a paradox, a mystery

(Brown, Gabriel & Gherardi, 2009). Organizations no longer have the privilege of time when dealing with change because the business world is changing at a remarkable rate and they must keep up in order to be successful. The traditional practice of using a comprehensive set of analyses of the reasons for change generates enthusiastic action, creating the capability in the audience to see for themselves the world and their relations with others in a new and more truthful light, this occurs generally through the use of a story (Denning, 2008).

To facilitate this change and make the transition to a new situation easier, an opportunity can be created in which stories can be used to achieve tangible and long-lasting benefits. Consider an account shared by Homan and Thorpe (2003) about Andrew, a recently appointed manager of a group of researchers in the research and development (R&D) section of the chemical company. Until his promotion, Andrew had been a highly respected member of the research team. However, now he was the 'the manager', at least that is what the announcement on the R&D noticeboard stated. On his first morning, he arrived at the laboratory and attempted to do some managing. His plan was to establish his position right from the start. However, it soon became apparent to Andrew that the rest of the team was somewhat resentful of his change of identity. Andrew felt that his team was refusing to respond in the appropriate manner, the manner expected by 'a manager'. Instead, the responses were those of one team member to another, and of a friend to a friend. Andrew was still seen by others as Andrew, 'the research team member', and it soon became clear that this was a pattern that the rest of the team wished to sustain. This began to concern Andrew, it was not what he expected after having been identified as the right kind of person for management in an assessment centre last year, especially during the simulation exercise where his performance was classified as 'highly effective'. He also attended a management development programme, provided by a prestigious business school, which senior managers in the company feel are essential for those who are recommended for management positions. After a brief consultation with another manager, Andrew decided to assert himself. Needing some vital data, he approached one of the team, Mary, and made a request for the data. He

was astonished when the request was denied. ‘But as your manager, I insist you provide me with the data’, Andrew asserted. He was even more astonished when Mary replied, ‘As a manager, I do not wish to give you the data, but I will happily provide it for you as Andrew.

Two key aspects are highlighted in the above narrative; that change is a sensitive aspect of business and as a result it should be carefully managed but it is also apparent that constant communication and providing direction for the organization is vital in today’s ever-changing business environment. Law (2009) goes on to say that, stories become especially prominent in turbulent environments such as technological change when stories and storytelling are often used to cope with the dynamics of change and learn the new ways.

Incidentally, the McKinsey global survey conducted in 2007, wherein nine out of ten executives insist that organizational change is either ‘extremely important’ or ‘very important’ to building or maintaining competitive advantage (Martin, 2007).

As effective as stories may be in business, it is important for leaders and change agents to be aware of the fact that stories can be used to try and prevent change from happening. While storytelling can be an instrument of change, it may also be perceived and used as a means to prevent such change and to consolidate dominant models (Murgia, 2009).

### *2.2.5 Knowledge management*

Intellectual property or knowledge assets are ways in which organizations stay competitive in today’s business, as such, it is vital for organizations to have ways of not only retaining the knowledge within the organization but also to pass it on to new employees. The application of stories as a knowledge management tool has proven to be very effective. Stories are an important part of organizational learning, and balancing the past, present, and future through storytelling is an essential skill for strategic leaders who hope to promote it (Shirazi, et al., 2011).

Brand (1998) goes on to say that, effective knowledge management is essential to innovation and it too needs an atmosphere of generosity, freedom and safety if it is to act as the river on which innovation can sail. Brand (1998) shares legends about top managers who joined the company when they were young and who have absorbed the company's traditions and stories, re-tell those stories to reinforce the values and atmosphere that encourage innovation. A case in point, Brand (1998) elaborates, is the story about Dick Drew who ignored his boss in the 1920s when asked to stop developing Scotch™ masking tape and yet he carried on successfully. The same story was used by Lew Lehr in the 1950s when he was ordered to stop developing adhesive backed surgical drape, but he also continued successfully. Richard Miller, the inventor of immune response modifiers, in the 1990s again had the story in mind when he carried on working with his ideas even after his project had been officially terminated and he had been put on the unassigned list.

Storytelling can also help companies to identify and harness transferable skills within their workforce; if a group of co-workers is placed into a situation where they are encouraged to share personal stories, some quite startling discoveries are made about the individuals concerned (Love, 2008). According to Marzec (2007), neuroscientists are uncovering the ways in which the human brain processes, retains and recalls information; their findings suggest that all three actions are aided and enabled through storytelling. Caputo (2010) explains that stories allow complex ideas to be expressed; they allow the tellers to recount context and intricate details that cannot be accurately described in artefacts like training manuals, which are straightforward and comprise just basic details. In addition, Leung and Fong (2011) state that the ability for stories to influence human cognition is driven by story structure and the features of its elements that are easily conveyed into patterns and symbolic information by human brains. Furthermore, storytelling also provides opportunities for receivers or listeners to stimulate knowledge creation, while stories are knowledge packages.

### *2.2.6 Brand management*

Is it important for leaders to understand that managing their brand is not only important for external clients, but internal stakeholders, who need to believe in the brand in order to carry the message of the brand externally. Gill (2009) believes that through the use of organizational stories, employees may become reputation champions for their organization, simply by adopting and adapting stories that positively represent the organization and making the narration more applicable to the particular stakeholders that they encounter. Speak (2008) further argues that an organization must look inside to build and manage a strong brand on the outside, their view is that organizations with strong, admired corporate brands all have one thing in common a strong, aligned culture. Herskovitz and Crystal (2010) agree and state that storytelling is essential to successful branding, since the brand is the sum of all corporate behaviours and communications that inform the customers' experience with the product or company.

Breda, Delattre and Ocler (2008) explain that a story about a brand is crucial for the process that makes the consumer and the brand become altogether closer. Additionally, Woodside, Sood and Miller (2008) demonstrate that people relate to each other in terms of stories, products and brands often play both central and peripheral roles in their stories. As storytelling increasingly catches the eye of the business community, the mantra has become: companies must tell a story that beats a path to the heart of the consumer (Fog, Budtz & Munch, 2010).

As a company thinks about storytelling for the brands that it manages, it must remember that building great stories around brands and sharing with others is an incredibly powerful way to build momentum in the marketplace and achieve new heights of success (Baker & Boyle, 2009). Likewise, Mathews and Wacker (2009) argue when one tells a great story and they can create a movement, wrap a great story around an iconic symbol and you can sometimes create an industry. Nike managed to create a whole industry from great stories. Herskovitz and Crystal (2010) state that long lasting and implicit trust is what

distinguishes the great brands, like Johnson & Johnson or General Electric, from the rest of the pack. They go on to say that, trust will also protect the brand when it makes a misstep. Nike, for example, has a strong brand persona that is all about performance and winning, their long-used tagline, 'Just do it', is instantly recognizable as is their logo, the swoosh.

Nilsson and Nordgre (2012) explain that storytelling can add greater value to the external brand and make the consumer more willing to pay extra for the products or services; this is evident with Nike products. Palmenfelt (2009) argues that the willingness to pay for branded products is due to the fact that when commercial enterprises use narratives to sell their brands, customers are invited to enter fictitious tale worlds, where material goods, consumption and commercial success represent the good forces that promise to lead us towards the happy ending. Scientific research has laid the foundations for a sound empirical understanding of storytelling as a clear aid to memory, as a means of making sense of the world, as a way to make and strengthen emotional connections, and as way of recognizing and identifying with brands of any type (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010).

### *2.2.7 Leadership*

The Instructive and fact-driven approach to leadership is no longer an effective leadership tool; influencing and providing direction are fundamental roles for a leader in the modern organization. Kaufman (2011) believes that the power of influence is particularly important in an environment that requires executives to manage a growing number of projects and business conditions through collaboration and persuasion rather than direct authority. Furthermore, a quality that distinguishes transformational leaders, that is able to persuade and influence peoples likes, is the ability to communicate a vision and inspire others to action (Marshall & Adamic, 2010). Similarly, Denning (2011) states that leadership is essentially a task of persuasion, of winning people's minds and hearts. Storytelling is seen as a primary skill of all world-class leaders and a means of sustaining organizational culture (O'Gorman & Gillespie, 2010).

Leaders have become aware of the power of storytelling. Leung and Fong (2011) argue that storytelling is prominently adopted in management and organizational practices in order to achieve specific purposes such as developing the identity of an organization or leader, connecting individuals and organizations, managing organizational change, and transferring and saving knowledge.

A mistake that leaders make repeatedly is that they over rely on facts to lead people, as if a clearer understanding of the facts will suddenly affect their behaviour; this approach does not work any better than relying on the facts to tell people that smoking will kill them (Wortmann, 2008). Instead, Denning (2005) believes that at a time when corporate survival often requires transformation and change, leadership involves inspiring people to act in unfamiliar and often unwelcome ways. Likewise, Caputo (2010) claims that storytelling is an incredibly useful tool for managers to motivate their employees. In order to influence and motivate people, leaders must be able to connect and effectively communicate their ideas. Leaders who are most adept at engaging their teams are those with a very specific communication ability, they are able to make their communication accessible to audiences by presenting them as stories or anecdotes, which allow the listeners to make an emotional connection with what the speaker is saying (Love, 2008).

Leaders must understand that stories are already present in organizations; they are now taking advantage of this existing channel and using it to facilitate communication and foster a healthy and productive culture. Stories are being shared whether they are officially recognized and utilized by the organization or not, and used by leadership at all levels to mentor and train new employees. Commercial enterprises have not only created stories about their brands, they have also developed techniques of using storytelling as a method of leadership that is regarded as being more efficient than the older techniques of coaching and team building (Palmenfelt, 2009).

As such organization leaders must not be afraid of using storytelling, instead see it as a way to enhance their ideas (Kowalewski & Waukau-Villagomez,

2011). Leaders must strive to achieve their strategic goals using the storytelling channel that is known to win both the listeners' hearts and minds (Randall & Harms, 2012).

Organizational challenges are leadership challenges, it is clear from the above that leaders play a fundamental role in organizations, and as a result, it is important that we explore their role in the modern organization before analysing their application of storytelling in organizations. The bond formed by a transformational leader with his or her constituents, through effective communication, is of outmost importance as it facilitates the cascading of strategic objectives to the followers. Leaders who are most adept at engaging their teams are those with a very specific communication ability, they are able to make their communication accessible to audiences by presenting them as stories or anecdotes, which allow the listeners to make an emotional connection with what the speaker is saying (Love, 2008).

## 2.3 Challenges specific to South African managers

### *2.3.1 Transformation*

Booysen (2007) states that since the profound and radical change of the dismantling of apartheid, South Africa has experienced an enormous political and social transformation. Furthermore, due to these changes in social identity, societal norms and power shifts, major changes are occurring in the workplace, and societal level identity crises and conflicts are increasingly spilling over into the workplace. As such, managers are under pressure to gain an understanding of the current nature of South African society still economically and socially divided, and to run their organizations within a complex and rapidly transforming business environment (Magner, 2007).

Vincent (2008) highlights that even though race discrimination has been formally and legally discarded, it continues to have an often unacknowledged and unseen power to determine perceptions, experiences and relationships. Gill

(2011) states that there is a need for a deeper solution and through stories, employees can develop a stronger association and deeper understanding of the corporate message from their employers and as such stimulate a more meaningful understanding of the organisation's strategy for change and result in maintaining or enhancing the employees' loyalty. Hammond, Arnold and Clayton (2007) point out that, like South Africa as a whole, firms are not approaching their history by imposing silence, or by demanding justice and restitution from those whites who refused, for decades, to hire black trainees, or to work with black trainees when a few were hired. Instead, the stories are told, it seems, as a way of both recognizing the past and, paraphrasing Archbishop Desmond Tutu, closing the door on it.

### *2.3.2 HIV/AIDS*

HIV/AIDS is a pandemic with serious implications for South Africa in general and South African industries (Meintjes, Bowen & Root, 2007). The disease is expected to have a massive effect on future national development and as such, corporate South Africa is finding creative ways of addressing the surge (Akoojee, Gewer & McGrath, 2005).

The living positively narrative is not merely creative story making, but rather seeks to accommodate new realities within pre-existing expectations for the life course and focuses on the ability, through modified behaviours and attitudes labelled 'positive living advice', to enhance self-fulfilment in the face of the adversity accompanying diagnosis with a life-threatening illness (Levy & Storeng, 2007). These narratives are filtering into the business fibre; consider the narrative about Robert Mokwena, a 45-year old African miner who works for Mineco – a fictitious name for a large South African mining company. Over the past decade, he has watched family and friends die. His best friend of many years, Benny Modise, died shortly after telling Mokwena that he was HIV-positive. At the time of his friend's death, antiretroviral treatment was unavailable. Becoming more and more debilitated, Modise was unable to work and was put on medical disability. Admitted to hospital he grew increasingly

despondent. Finally, Modise hung himself from a tree in the hospital grounds. Soon after this tragedy, Mokwena's niece died of AIDS and her infant daughter soon followed. Mokwena could do nothing for them but stand by helplessly and watch them die. At work, after over twenty years underground, Mokwena had been promoted to a surface job as a training instructor for new recruits. Part of his orientation program included a module on HIV/AIDS. People asked questions. Questions he could not answer. Therefore, when the opportunity arose to enhance his knowledge of this epidemic, he took it. He became what is known as a peer educator, a commonly promoted communication channel that, in the context of AIDS means a lay person who helps educate co-workers, community members, and family and friends about HIV/AIDS, how to prevent infection and how to deal with the disease. "I became a workplace peer educator because I wanted to help my brothers and sisters," Mokwena explains. "Most of my colleagues cannot read and write. They need someone who knows their language and culture, someone with good communication skills." He wants to give his co-workers, family, and community not only education but also hope. There was no hope for his best friend, and that is why he believes Modise took his own life. "I think I would have convinced him to live if I was trained as a peer educator by then." On the death of his niece and her child he explains, "All the family was affected by this. I still believe I could have done something as a peer educator." Becoming a peer educator was Mokwena's way of responding to the AIDS epidemic. "Fortunately I was chosen to be among the first volunteers to be trained [by the company] as a peer educator in the year 2000. I received a four-day course and a certificate. Empowered with information I have influenced a lot of people" (Dickinson, 2009).

If South Africa is to achieve a reduction in the rate of HIV infection in the workplace and thereby increase productivity and profits, corporates need to align themselves with the various initiatives and programmes that are aimed at managing the surge.

### *2.3.3 Labour unrest/strikes*

Van der Walt, (2013) states that labour unrest has been hurting the South African economy for quite some time. She further states that the damage is far-reaching and amounts to millions of Rands according to a conclusion reached by several companies hit by labour unrest over the past six months, which include but are not limited to:

- The strikes late last year in the mining and transport industries cost the Aveng group R123 million in operating profits. It resulted in its South African construction division, Grinaker-LTA, having shown a loss for the six months ending December 2012;
- Henry Laas, Murray & Roberts chief executive, said the same strikes cost this group R200 million in turnover. Both these construction groups are extensively involved in construction work at Eskom's Medupi power plant where little has been accomplished thus far this year because of labour-related trouble;
- Upon issuing its interim results, the diversified Bidvest Group said that Bidvest Electrical was adversely affected by last year's strikes in the mining and electrical industries. Bidvest provides food and electrical components to the Medupi construction site, and the impact of work stoppages will be seen in the next results to be issued;
- The Clover dairy group says labour unrest in those regions with good sales, such as Rustenburg and the Western Cape, has affected volumes negatively and the transportation strike resulted in the group having to conclude more expensive transportation contracts; and
- Cashbuild reported poor sales in Northwest because of the mining strikes in the Rustenburg area. Moreover, the transport strike in October last year caused a drop of around six percent in the group's turnover for the month of October.

Traditional ways of managing labour unrest have not worked as year after year, corporate South Africa is faced with strikes. As such, an innovative method to

address the issue is needed similar to Steslow and Gardner's (2011) suggestion of using stories are an effective and alternative basis for communication.

## 2.4 Conclusion of Literature Review

Effective communication can be a powerful tool in business. Its ability to get buy-in, evoke emotions and influence constituencies is very important in the modern business world.

The following key themes emerged from the literature review:

- Corporate culture;
- Organizational change;
- Knowledge management;
- Brand management; and
- Leadership.

Furthermore, transformation, HIV/AIDS and labour unrest/strikes were prominent in the South African context and could be classified as sub-themes.

The research questions are as follows:

### *2.4.1 Research Question 1*

What situations are amenable to storytelling in organizations?

### *2.4.2 Research Question 2*

Are there any categories noted in the applications?

### *2.4.3 Research Question 3*

Have there been any noticeable changes between local and international applications?

### *2.4.4 Research Question 4*

Were there any noticeable changes in the applications of stories over the years?

# CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

## 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter the methodology used for the research is described and the implications for the research given. The chapter then goes on to describe the following topics:

- Research methodology/paradigm;
- Research design;
- Population and sample;
- Research instrument;
- Procedure for data collection;
- Data analysis and interpretation;
- Limitations of the study; and
- Validity and reliability.

## 3.2 Research methodology/paradigm

The research involved interpreting existing stories, analysing key themes and arriving at an assessment of what the findings mean in relation to appropriate knowledge. The qualitative research paradigm was the most suited to this type of research, as it requires the researcher to be actively involved, to understand and interpret the different concepts and construct a reality. Qualitative research involves generating theory or new conceptual models or making theory-based generalizations that can be further developed in later comparative studies (Daymon & Holloway, 2002). Qualitative research generally starts with the assumption that individuals have an active role in the construction of social reality and research methods that can capture this process of social construction are required (Boeiji, 2010). Qualitative implies that the research relies primarily on human perception and understanding (Stake, 2010).

One of the key characteristics of a qualitative analysis is that it is subjective, in this instance the researcher was expected to play a somewhat subjective role, as the conclusions drawn were based on an understanding of the existing literature and a comparison to the data presented and analysed. Stake (2010) explains that in qualitative research, the researcher is an instrument, observing action and context, often intentionally playing a subjective role in the study, using his or her own personal experience in making interpretations.

Due to the level of subjectivity involved with qualitative research, it was essential to have a detailed plan and process, with valid checks and balances, of how the data would be interpreted. Sinkovics and Ghauri (2008) explain that to establish trustworthiness of qualitative research, credibility, dependability, transferability and conformability need to be established. Merriam (2009) is of the opinion that the following four characteristics are identified by most as key to understanding the nature of qualitative research: the focus is on process, understanding and meaning; the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; the process is inductive; and the product is richly descriptive. Furthermore, Stake (2010) believes that integrity carries special importance in qualitative research, because the designs and procedures for doing qualitative research are potentially more flexible than doing most other kinds of research, it should be confirmed that qualitative researchers have gone to great lengths to conduct their research accurately and fairly.

## 3.3 Research design

A detailed description of the research and a plan of how the research was executed were drawn up. In the design stage the plan for the interchange of data collection and data analysis was indicated along with the number of cycles planned (Boeiji, 2010).

The research followed the document analysis approach. This involved a detailed analysis of 202 applications of stories written by MBA students as part of their evaluation, and categorization of these applications according to different themes and salient points using an excel spreadsheet. In order to

ensure trustworthiness, a clear audit trail of the applications analysed is evident in the result and a detailed conclusion, supported by literature, was provided. Rather than determining cause and effect, predicting, or describing the distribution of a particular attribute among a population, the study aimed to uncover the meaning of the applications for those involved by categorizing the applications and drawing out their salient points (Merriam, 2009).

### *3.3.1 Document analysis*

Grady (1998) explains that the third major data collection technique is the analysis of the documentation, which are sometimes called ‘artefacts’. In their view, documents can be useful in understanding a situation and setting a context. The key in a ‘narrative’ type of qualitative research is the use of stories as data, and more specifically, first-person accounts of experiences told in story-form; having a beginning, middle and end (Merriam, 2009).

A key advantage to using document analysis was accuracy; in other words clear, tangible record and historical research, when actual subjects may no longer be available for interviews or observation. A general disadvantage of using manuscripts may be the problems with access to useful artefacts, which was not a problem for this study as all the manuscripts were readily available.

According to Bowen (2009), the following are advantages of using document analysis:

- Document analysis is less time-consuming and therefore more efficient than other research methods;
- The documents are easily available and are obtainable without the authors’ permission;
- It is less costly than other research methods;
- As a corollary to being non-reactive, documents are stable; and
- Documents provide broad coverage; they cover a long span of time, many events, and many settings.

Some of the disadvantages cited were:

- Insufficient detail, documents are produced for some purpose other than research; they are created independent of a research agenda;
- They are at times irretrievable, or difficulty is experienced; and
- Biased selectivity, an incomplete collection of documents suggests 'biased selectivity'.

### *3.3.2 Thematic analysis*

A theme is a pattern found in the information that at minimum describes and organizes the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon (Boyatzis, 1998). According to Braun and Clarke (2006) the thematic analysis process starts when the analyst begins to notice, and look for, patterns of meaning and issues of potential interest in the data, this may be during data collection. Furthermore, Buetow (2010) explains that saliency analysis enhances thematic analysis by explicitly considering both the recurrence and importance of individual codes.

The above approach was used for this study and it assisted in adding to the theory and understanding of the subject. This was in line with Merriam's (2009) view that qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds and what meaning they attribute to their experiences.

## 3.4 Population and sample

### *3.4.1 Population*

The population was the total number of MBA students at WBS who enrolled for the 'Every leader a storyteller' elective over the period 2007 to 2013.

### *3.4.2 Census*

The data was made up of all the manuscripts/assignments (202), written by students who were practicing managers at the time of writing the applications. These applications were collected over the past seven years (2007 to 2013).

The respondents were male and female managers from various industries. The pool was made up of both South African and international MBA students that had enrolled for the 'Every leader a storyteller' elective. The composition of the group was as follows:

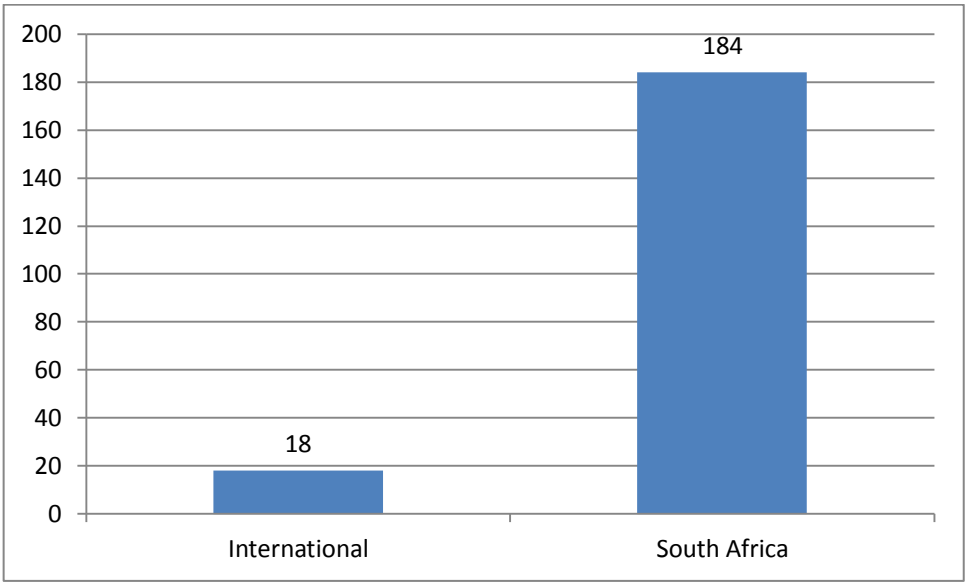



**Figure 1: Demographic profile**

## 3.5 The research instrument

The research instrument comprised the exam equivalent assignments/ manuscripts submitted for the Part 1 section of the 'Every leader a storyteller' elective. The requirement for the assignment was for the students to consider their own working situation and identify an aspect (project, function, dynamic, relationship, issue, problem, challenge) for which the knowledge, understanding and communication thereof in the organization could be improved through oral storytelling (See Appendix A).

## 3.6 Procedure for data collection

In order to contrast findings, the data collection must be robust, this is crucial to the success of the research. The centrepiece of the research design is data collection, for qualitative researchers, collecting data means using observations or document analysis (Grady, 1998).

In the case of this research, the data was already complete, readily available and was safely stored electronically. It was made up of 202 manuscripts, collected between 2007 and 2013 by Peter Christie, the lecturer for 'Every leader a storyteller'. The number and availability of these manuscripts for analysis met the robustness requirement for data collection. The identities of the writers of the manuscripts were not revealed.

## 3.7 Data analysis and interpretation

The sampled manuscripts were read, salient points extracted, the themes categorised and the conclusions drawn up based on the data and the literature. Thematic analysis method was used to analyse hypothetical issues, categorise the applications according to their different themes and augment the understanding of the data.

For each application a standardized framework was used to summarize the objective or focus of the story; for example, who is telling the story, where is it happening, when is it happening, what is happening and why. The analysis involved reading and rereading the stories, writing down initial ideas about the data and at times changing the ideas before final categorisation and comparison to existing literature. Document analysis involved skimming (superficial examination), reading (thorough examination), and interpretation; this iterative process combines elements of analysis and thematic analysis (Bowen, 2009).

### *3.7.1 Interpretation*

The literature review chapter suggested that there are six business areas amenable to the application of stories, namely:

(1) Communicating vision;
(2) Communicating values;
(3) Brand management;
(4) Organizational change;
(5) Knowledge management; and
(6) Challenges specific to South African managers:
    a. Transformation;
    b. HIV/AIDS; and
    c. Labour unrest/strikes.

Each application was carefully read, analysed and accurately categorised. Once the categorisation was complete and the key themes identified, the interpretation of the results/patterns were clear. An authentic analysis is one that offers a genuine interpretation of reality, or an accurate reading of a particular (set of) document(s), this is referred to as ‘measurement validity’ in the quantitative-positivist tradition, and ‘credibility’ in the qualitative-interpretivist tradition (Bowen, 2009).

The fact that the analysis was semi-quantitative and that it had a clear audit trail enhanced the authenticity and correctness of the research. Analysts tend to assess this aspect of trustworthiness in terms of reliability, through inter-coder testing; many qualitative document analysts use the term ‘dependability’ to describe the precision of their research (Bowen, 2009).

## 3.8 Limitations of the study

- The categorizing that emerges from the stories might be related to their daily work environment and not necessarily that which the organization needs to address;

- The population was made up of students that studied together and in most cases studied the same subjects. This exposure might influence their accounts;
- The researcher's ability to categorise and analyse the data might have put the study at risk as there might be a bias towards personal fields of interest;
- The researcher might be biased towards existing notions of the themes and this will have an impact on deciding what is valid evidence for or against the theory;
- By turning attention to the end of the study rather than focusing on the conduct of the research itself, the researcher risks missing serious errors until it is too late to correct them;
- Another concern among document analysts surrounds the impartiality of their observations; and
- The sheer number of stories to go through can be daunting for the researcher.

## 3.9 Validity and reliability

This is referred to as 'measurement validity' in the quantitative-positivist tradition, and 'credibility' in the qualitative-interpretivist tradition (Bowen, 2009). From a validity point of view, close attention was paid to the interpretation of data received ensuring that it remained objective and free from personal bias.

The advantage of qualitative research was its high validity; it accurately measured what the researcher claims. However, it can be very subjective as it often includes personal experience and insight as part of the relevant data thus making complete objectivity impossible. The nature of qualitative research inherently has a very low reliability in that it is extremely difficult to replicate a piece of qualitative research due to the fact that it often does not have a structured design and occurs in a natural setting that is ever changing (Karkukly, 2011).

In order to address the issues of subjectivity and bias, R. Manson, a fellow MBA student, analysed 10 applications with the aim of comparing his findings to that of the researcher and 80 percent of their analyses matched. The remaining 20 percent was because the application had more than one issue that needed to be addressed and as a result, the two analysts documented different issues as key.

### *3.9.1 External validity*

According to Klenke (2008) external validity refers to the extent to which the findings, based on the research sample, apply to the population from which the sample was drawn or other populations and research settings. However, in qualitative research, a more appropriate term to use is transferability, which measures the extent to which the results can be transferred to other contexts or settings. The sample size, together with the analysis method, discussed in the research design, enable the transferability of the findings to other contexts.

### *3.9.2 Internal validity*

A more appropriate term to use in qualitative research is credibility or the extent to which the results are credible or believable from the standpoint of the participants (Klenke, 2008). According to Blankenship (2010), it is important for the researcher to establish procedures and control any biases during the data collection process. For the purposes of the this study, the data used were manuscripts that were collected some time before the research started as a result any bias, from the perspective of the researcher, was reduced.

### *3.9.3 Reliability*

Pascoe (2012) indicates that reliability is predicated on some form of coding frame and this is where the notion of validity is of relevance. His view is that the code is normally based on some theoretical concepts, which are defined and categorised within the specification of the set of analysis mechanisms. The

extent to which associations between the various categories and the relations with other indicators can be established, form part of the theoretical network (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000).

Reliability in this research was considered high as the same instrument was used to gather the data across all participants (see Appendix A). Reliability refers to the measure of internal consistency of the instrument used to gather the data across similar variables or areas of research (Kayes, 2005).

# CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

## 4.1 Introduction

The results of the data collection and analysis are presented in this chapter. The results were collected from the census conducted over the past seven years as detailed in the research methodology section.

## 4.2 Demographic profile of respondents

Initial indications were that the researcher would have access to 250 exam equivalent assignments/manuscripts submitted for the Part 1 section of the 'Every leader a storyteller' elective. However, upon detailed analysis, it emerged that only 202 manuscripts met the criteria of practicing manager. The data included full time students that were not employed at the time of completing their assignment and as a result, were excluded from the study.

The manuscripts that were analysed were from male and female respondents, of which 184 were South African managers and 18 were international managers.

## 4.3 Results pertaining to Research Question 1

An array of business challenges/circumstances that are amenable to storytelling were detected using thematic analysis of the data. The first round of analysis provided a useful understanding of the business situations/context.

It was during the initial/first stage of the analysis that 25 themes were identified and tabulated in Table 1. It was also during this analysis of the artefacts that the researcher was able to understand the context for the various issues.

**Table 1: Thematic analysis**

| Main Category | Sub-category | Applications |
|---|---|---|
| Corporate culture | Communicating vision | 31 |
| | Communicating values | 38 |
| Organizational change | Change management | 29 |
| | Transformation | 4 |
| Knowledge management | Knowledge management | 6 |
| | Instructions/directions | 5 |
| Brand management | Brand management | 2 |
| | Selling an idea | 5 |
| Leadership | Motivating | 30 |
| | Providing structure | 3 |
| | Crisis management | 1 |
| | Consequences of not effectively executing a strategy | 5 |
| | Genesis narrative | 1 |
| | Team work | 3 |
| People management | Job security | 1 |
| | Recognition | 3 |
| | Awareness | 12 |
| | Conflict resolution | 8 |
| | Innovation | 5 |
| | Silos | 2 |
| | Problem solving | 2 |
| | Talent management | 2 |
| Projects | Management of projects | 2 |
| | Lessons learned | 1 |
| | New methods | 1 |
| **Total** | **25** | **202** |

## 4.4 Results pertaining to Research Question 2

With further analysis, patterns of meaning and issues of potential interest in the data were noticed. The 25 themes that emerged from the data were then further grouped into seven key themes (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Key themes**

| Theme | Total | South African Managers | % South African Managers | International Managers | % International Managers |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Corporate Culture | 69 | 65 | 32% | 4 | 2% |
| Organizational change | 33 | 30 | 15% | 3 | 1% |
| Knowledge management | 11 | 11 | 5% | 0 | 0% |
| Brand management | 2 | 1 | 0.50% | 1 | 0.50% |
| Leadership | 48 | 44 | 22% | 4 | 2% |
| People management | 35 | 29 | 14% | 6 | 3% |
| Projects | 4 | 4 | 2% | 0 | 0% |
| **Total** | **202** | **184** | **91%** | **18** | **9%** |

It is important to mention that at first, the researcher had some difficulty categorizing the themes that emerged due to fact that the applications were from practicing managers and as a result, they were inherently meant to address leadership/management issues. This posed a challenge in the sense that 'leadership' was a category on its own and one could not place all the applications under this category.

As a result, the researcher had to be specific in her definition of leadership for the purpose of this research. Sinotonen and Auvinen (2009) state, that leaders are able to use stories to influence the culture of the organization and transfer knowledge and values. In addition to influencing, leaders must be able to provide structure and clear goals for followers, work together with their teams to achieve these goals and create motivating environments for their followers (Schaffer, 2008).

Therefore, in the context of this study, influencing culture and values will form part of the corporate culture theme. Providing structure, encouraging teamwork, motivating, crisis management, effective execution of a strategy and genesis narrative will form part of the leadership theme.

## 4.5 Results pertaining to Research Question 3

According to Table 3, corporate culture was the leading application for the South African managers and people management was the leading application

for international managers. The top four themes for both groups were corporate culture, organisational change, leadership and people.

The financial crisis and transformation were more prominent in the international and South African pool of managers, respectively. An interesting observation was the glaring absence of HIV/AIDS and labour relations/strikes applications within the international context.

**Table 3: Top themes**

| Theme | Total | South African Managers | % South African Managers | International Managers | % International Managers |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Corporate Culture | 69 | 65 | 35% | 4 | 22% |
| Organizational change | 33 | 30 | 16% | 3 | 17% |
| Knowledge management | 11 | 11 | 6% | 0 | 0% |
| Brand management | 2 | 1 | 1% | 1 | 6% |
| Leadership | 48 | 44 | 24% | 4 | 22% |
| People management | 35 | 29 | 16% | 6 | 33% |
| Projects | 4 | 4 | 2% | 0 | 0% |
| **Total** | **202** | **184** | **100%** | **18** | **100%** |

## 4.6 Results pertaining to Research Question 4

Careful study of the top four themes (see Figures 2 to 8) indicated an interesting pattern. While corporate culture and organizational change seemed to have remained constant over the years, leadership and people management had noticeable peaks and downturns.

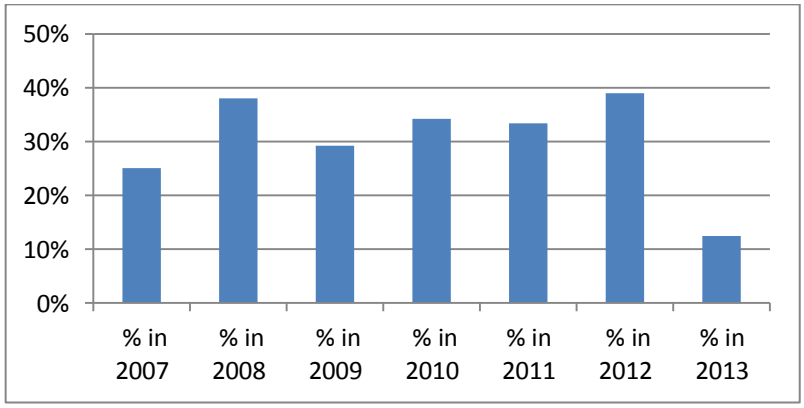



**Figure 2: Corporate culture**

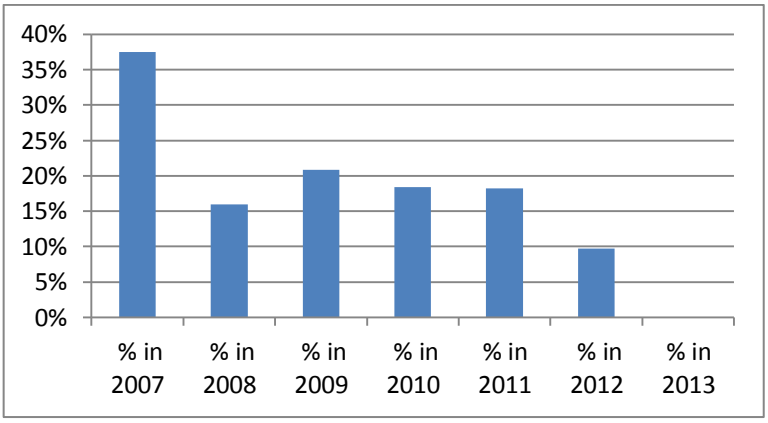



**Figure 3: Organizational change**

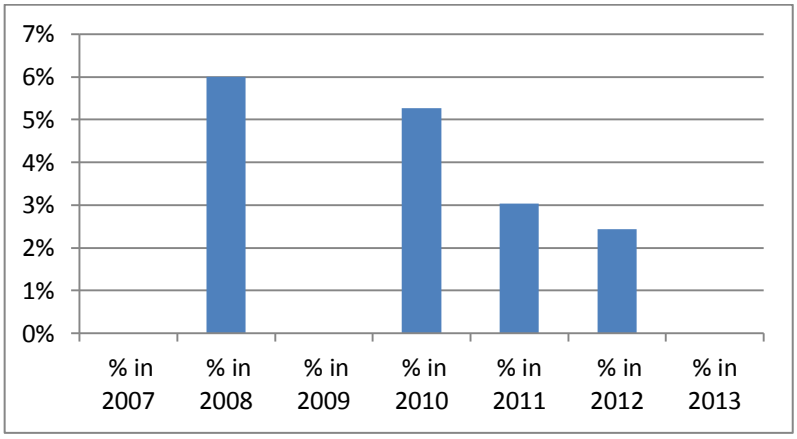



**Figure 4: Knowledge management**

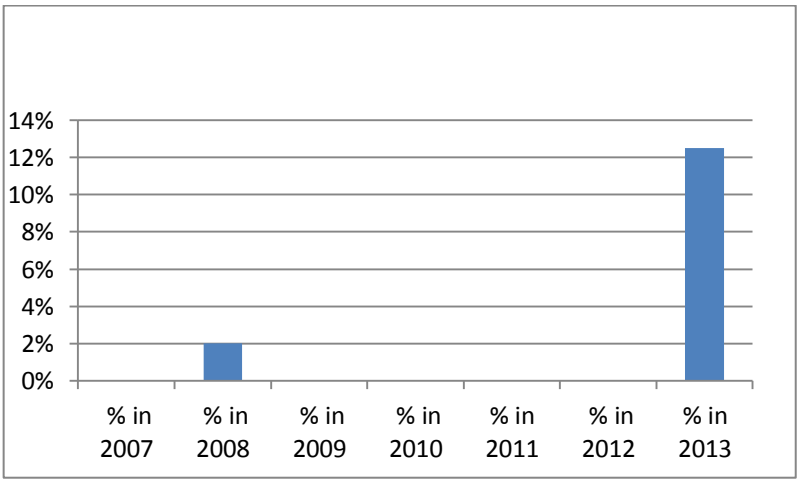



**Figure 5: Brand management**

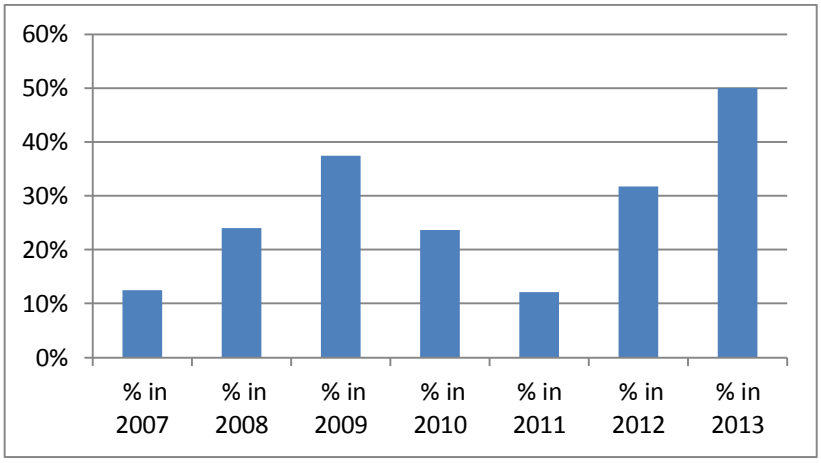



**Figure 6: Leadership**

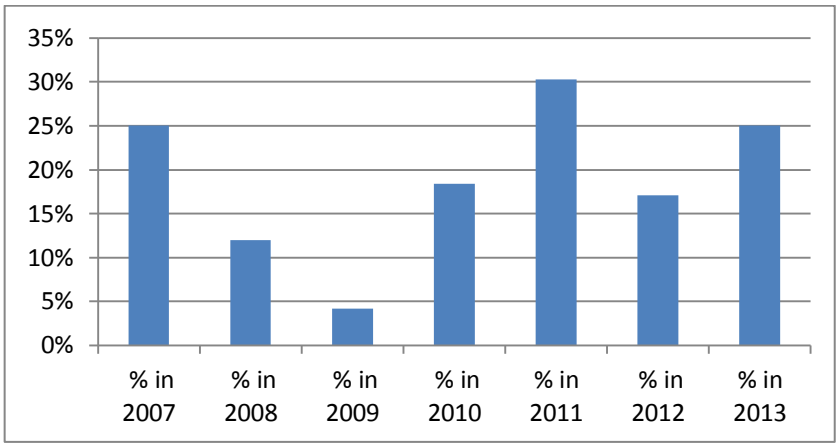



**Figure 7: People management**

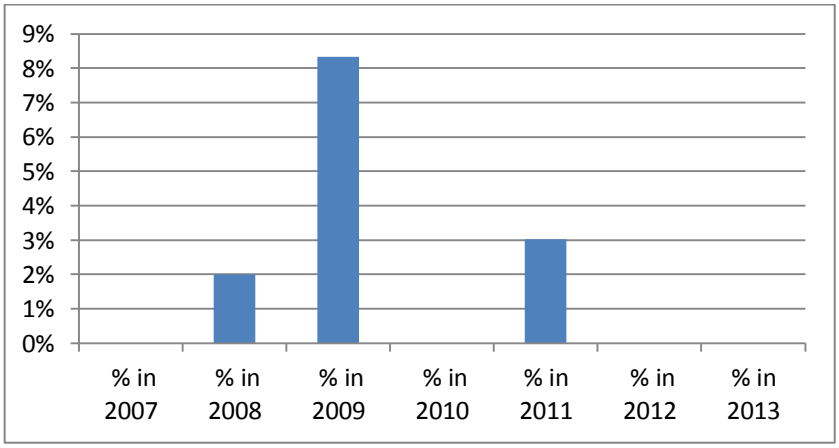



**Figure 8: Projects**

## 4.7 Summary of the results

Manuscripts totalling 202 was the starting point, of which 184 were applications from South African managers and 18 from international managers.

Using thematic analysis 25 managerial applications emerged from the data of which seven salient, recurring themes were recognizable. Corporate culture was the leading theme for the South African managers and people management was top for international managers. The top four themes (i.e. themes that were most prominently observed across the data) were corporate culture, organizational change, leadership and people management.

The above results were used in the observations and assisted in adding to the theory and understanding of the subject.

# CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the practical implications of the results presented in the previous chapter. The demographics are discussed in order to give context to the respondents that were part of the research. This is followed by a discussion of the different themes observed from the data.

## 5.2 Research Question 1

Caminotti and Gray (2012) stated that storytelling could bring swift communication to an organization thereby fostering a symbiotic understanding among all participants from a cognitive and affective standpoint, leading to behavioural actions that benefit the organization. As such, organizations can use storytelling effectively as a tool to demonstrate complex and multidimensional concepts. This was no different from the respondents in this study, the managers clearly appreciated the role storytelling could play in addressing various organizational challenges. This point was further emphasized by the array of situations/challenges (see Table 1) that managers felt were amenable to the application of stories. This was evident for both the international and South African managers.

## 5.3 Research Question 2

Owing to the fact that the manuscripts were collated from practicing managers, leadership was the underlying theme across the manuscripts. This posed an interesting challenge as leadership was identified as a theme on its own. As such the thematic analysis approach played a vital role in identifying salient and recurring points, as explained by Buetow (2010) and the differences between the underlying theme of leadership and the actual theme of the application was identified.

Stephens (2009) states, that storytelling is becoming widely embraced in the corporate world as a means to create cultural change, knowledge transfer, and diversity awareness. This was clearly demonstrated by the array of situations/challenges (25) that were detected in the first round of the analysis. This finding supported Steslow and Gardner's (2011) point, that stories are an effective and alternative basis for communication and that leaders use stories to connect employees with one another, render their experience meaningful, and make characters come alive.

The second and final round of the analysis revealed the salient themes as corporate culture, organizational change, knowledge management, brand management, leadership and projects. These themes matched the themes stated by Shirazi, et al. (2011), which were as follows:

- Communicate a managers' vision of the future and invoke others' commitment;
- Create a collective sense of shared purpose and meaning that can enhance cohesion around an organization's culture;
- Build leadership through wisdom stored forward, by capturing and disseminating learning to the next generation of leaders;
- Enable people to find patterns in their lives, enhancing self-knowledge and a productive interpretation of experiences; and
- Inspire alignment in support of a change initiative.

The top four themes across the data were corporate culture, organizational change, leadership and people management. Based on the context of each application observed from reading the applications, one could detect that managers believed that the effectiveness of stories was due to its ability to evoke emotions, conjure commitment and a shared sense of purpose.

## 5.4 Research Question 3

There were interesting themes that stood out from the South African managers' data, which were not detected for the international managers' data and vice

versa. Issues of diversity and transformation were observed on several occasions but these were however; highlighted as an underlying issue that was the root cause to an even bigger problem in the organization, like organizational change.

Looking at transformation, managers could clearly comprehend the need for transformational programmes however; the difficulty seemed to lie in the implementation of these programmes. Lack of decisive leadership and effective change management processes were cited as some of the reasons for the ineffective implementation of transformational programmes.

Even though the financial crisis during the 2008/2009 period was noted in the South African pool, it was even more evident in the international pool. Similar to transformation the cause of disagreement was not with the crisis itself (as most professionals had accepted the crisis as a business reality) but with the way the after effects were managed. The managers indicated the lack of decisive leadership and effective change management during this period could have been handled differently, and application of stories could have been an alternative way to give direction, motivate and manage the change business faced during that time.

## 5.5 Research Question 4

Careful study of the top four themes indicates an interesting pattern. While corporate culture and organizational change seem to have remained constant, leadership and people management had noticeable peaks and downturns.

The pattern suggests that once a particular issue is addressed during a particular year, it seems to be left out and only addressed again at a later stage. This could however not be confirmed as the reasons for the various patterns did not form part of the study.

## 5.6 Conclusion

This research affirms the storytelling views of Volker, et al. (2011), being prominently adopted in management and organizational practices in order to achieve specific objectives. Managers have an array of situations that they believe can be addressed by the application of stories.

These applications may be categorised into the following key themes:

- Corporate culture;
- Organizational change;
- Knowledge management;
- Brand management;
- Leadership; and
- Projects.

There were some differences between the South African pool of managers and international managers, albeit minimal. These differences were mostly due to the varying contexts within which the different groups operated, for example, transformation in South Africa and the financial crisis in the international community. Application peaks and downturns were detected over the years but the context of this study did not cover the reasons for the various patterns.

# CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

## 6.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the findings from the research, makes conclusions to this research and recommendations for future research.

## 6.2 Conclusions of the study

This research aimed to examine organizational applications of storytelling, as identified by practicing managers, and to categorise their applications. Despite the extensive literature available on storytelling in organizations, finding literature that provides insights on the application of stories by practicing managers – an analysis of actual instances where managers used storytelling – proved difficult. As a result Part 1 of the exam equivalent assignments, written by MBA students at WBS for the 'Every leader a storyteller' course, were analysed with the aim of addressing the deficiency.

The literature review revealed that stories are not a new phenomenon and they have been around for centuries. However, in recent years storytelling has become a frequently used business management tool to address various business issues due to its ability to influence and convey ideas. Furthermore, the following key themes were noticeable during the review:

- Corporate culture;
- Organizational change;
- Knowledge management;
- Brand management;
- Leadership;
- Transformation;
- HIV/AIDS; and
- Labour unrest/strikes.

The research involved interpreting existing applications, analysing key themes and arriving at an assessment of what the findings mean in relation to appropriate knowledge. The qualitative research paradigm was most suited for this type of research, as it requires the researcher to be actively involved, to understand and interpret the different concepts and construct a reality. Applications written by 202 MBA students, as part of their course evaluation, were analysed and categorized according to different themes and salient points using an excel spreadsheet.

The findings were as follows:

- In support of the literature, the data showed that managers believe that organizations can use storytelling effectively as a tool to demonstrate complex and multidimensional concepts;
- In addition, the data could be categorized according to the key themes highlighted in the literature review. However, other topical South African issues such as HIV/AIDS and industrial labour/strikes were not detected in the data;
- The most prominent of the above seven themes were corporate culture, organizational culture, leadership and people management across the data with corporate culture leading in the South African context and people management in the lead for the international pool of managers. In addition, transformation could be clearly detected in the South African context with the financial crisis noticeable in the international pool; and
- Corporate culture and organizational change remained relatively constant over the years with leadership and people management showing a pattern of peaks and downturns over the seven-year period.

## 6.3 Recommendations

Applications of stories have become an effective tool for managers especially given the interesting challenges they face in modern business environments. It is recommended that instead of applying stories to address predominantly

generic business issues, South African managers go further and use the application of stories in addressing other issues that are specific to their context, such as HIV/AIDS and labour relations/strikes.

Furthermore, due to its potency, the application of stories may also be used by employees/followers to address any issues they may have with management and help them make sense of disparate facts.

Application of stories to projects, brand management and knowledge management was minimal for both groups (South African and international managers). It is recommended that managers explore these themes further in their respective businesses.

## 6.4 Suggestions for further research

While the research was successful in highlighting the various situations that are amenable to the application of stories and categorizing these applications into key business themes, it is recommended that further study be conducted to analyse the year-to-year patterns that emerged from the data.

In addition, the study contained a small sample of international managers; therefore, a similar study might be repeated where a much bigger pool of international managers is scrutinized.

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# APPENDIX A: EXAM EQUIVALENT ASSIGNMENT

For the exam equivalent assignment, individual students are required to:

First, consider their own working situation, and identify one aspect (project, function, dynamic, relationship, issue, problem, challenge or whatever) for which the knowledge, understanding and communication thereof in the organisation could be improved through oral storytelling.

Second, write up the literal story, an account of the past, present and desired future, of this organisational aspect, this story being a maximum of 400 words.

Third, transform the literal story into an allegorical story (myth, legend, fable, fairy tale, parable), which is a maximum of 2 000 words, equivalent to about 10 minutes in the telling, and which could be told by leaders and managers as part of their extra-ordinary communications with staff.

Fourth, elucidate the creative process used to transform the literal into the allegorical story, and then comment on the extent to which they believe that their personal knowledge and understanding of the organisational aspect selected for the assignment has been enhanced through the process of transforming the literal story of the organisational aspect into an allegorical equivalent. This aspect of the assignment should be a maximum of 800 words.

# APPENDIX B: CONSISTENCY MATRIX

| To examine the applications of storytelling in organizations, as identified by practicing managers, and categorise the applications accordingly | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Sub-problem** | **Literature Review** | **Research Question** | **Source of data** | **Type of data** | **Analysis** |
| Examine the applications of storytelling in organizations as identified by practicing managers | Hurt & Metzger, 2003; Kaufman, 2011; Marshall & Adamic, 2010; Marzec, 2007; O'Gorman & Gillespie, 2010; Shirazi, Hashtrood, Iran, Shekari, Taft & Veyseh, 2011; Speak, 2008 | What situations are amenable to storytelling in organizations? | Exam equivalent assignments/manuscripts submitted for the Part 1 section of the 'Every leader a storyteller' elective | Quantitative | Thematic analysis |
| Categorise the applications of storytelling in organisations | Brand, 1998; East, Jackson, O'Brien & Peters, 2010; Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010; Law, 2009; Love, 2008; Sinotonen & Auvinen, 2009; Wortmann, 2008 | Are there any categories noted in the applications? | Exam equivalent assignments/ manuscripts submitted for the Part 1 section of the 'Every leader a storyteller' elective | Quantitative | Thematic analysis |
| Determine if there any differences in the application of stories between the international and local managers | Akoojee, Gewer & McGrath, 2005; Dickinson, 2009; Gill, 2011; Magner, 2007; Steslow & Gardner, 2011 | Have there been any noticeable changes between local and international applications? | Exam equivalent assignments/manuscripts submitted for the Part 1 section of the 'Every leader a storyteller' elective | Quantitative | Thematic analysis |
| Examine if the various managerial issues or challenges have changed over the years | Caminotti & Gray, 2012; Denning, 2002; Volker, Phillips & Anderson, 2011 | Were there any noticeable changes in the applications of stories over the years? | Exam equivalent assignments/manuscripts submitted for the Part 1 section of the 'Every leader a storyteller' elective | Quantitative | Thematic analysis |