

Storytelling as a key Leadership competency

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Abstract

This research examines the part that storytelling plays within a leadership role, with the aim of understanding whether storytelling contributes to a leader's efficacy, and should thus be considered a key leadership competency.

The research focuses on the former CEO of WesBank, Ronnie Watson, and examines his leadership efficacy and use of storytelling within WesBank.

The research was conducted in the qualitative paradigm, and took the form of an in-depth case study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Mr Watson, as well as a number of respondents who had shared close working relationships with Mr Watson. The research was aimed at developing insights into how storytelling contributed to Ronnie Watson's leadership efficacy within WesBank.

The research found that Mr Watson was perceived to be an effective leader fulfilling the roles and possessing the characteristics cited as effective within the literature.

Mr Watson made use of a number of formal and informal storytelling initiatives while in a leadership position at WesBank. These stories aided him in fulfilling his leadership roles of creating a shared vision, inspiring and motivating people towards that vision, and building a strong implementation network to carry out the vision. The research concluded that storytelling facilitated Mr Watson's efficacy as a leader, and should thus be considered a key leadership competency.

Declaration

I, Sarah Gordon 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.

Sarah Gordon

Signed at the University of the Witwatersrand

On the 4th day of September 2009

Dedication

This research is dedicated to my Grandmother, Sue Gordon, a writer and teacher who instilled in me a love of stories.

Acknowledgements

I wish to express my gratitude to:

Ronnie Watson, who has been an inspiration to me

The participants who kindly shared their time and experiences during the interviews

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My father, Jeremy Gordon, for his love and support

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Stories are familiar to humans – from early childhood they are used to pass on lessons and transmit values. Stories do much more than simply inform – they invite the listener to enter another world, to see and taste it, and to feel the emotions of the characters as their own.

I have always been drawn to stories, especially those involving fantasy or fables. My grandmother, whose voice was rich and expressive, read to me often. At aged five I moved with my parents and older brother to England. My grandmother's stories continued by way of post; a package would arrive with a bundle of audio cassettes on which she had narrated an entire book. My father was also a talented storyteller, and had the ability to make up a story on request; inevitably the story featured me as the central character engaging in various escapades.

More recently, I discovered how hearing a story can be a life-changing experience. In August 2007, I attended a class with Peter Christie, at which he told the old Native American tale of “Jumping Mouse”. From the start I was entranced, seeing myself so clearly in the little mouse that had heard a roar in the distance and knew that beyond his little community lay something greater. Along his journey to find greatness, Jumping Mouse encounters a dying Buffalo. The Buffalo tells Jumping Mouse that the only thing that can save him is the eye of a Mouse.

Jumping Mouse gladly sacrifices one of his eyes and the Buffalo is instantly healed. The Buffalo repays Jumping Mouse, by sheltering him along his journey from the hungry Eagles circling above.

When Jumping Mouse finally reaches the Sacred Mountains, where he believes his destiny lies, he comes across yet another dying creature, a once powerful and

mighty wolf. Again, the only treatment that can save the creature is the eye of a mouse. Out of unlimited compassion Jumping Mouse sacrifices his remaining eye. Now blind, the helpless mouse is vulnerable to the eagles circling above. He hears them nearing, and feels himself swooped up. This, he imagines, will be the end of his life. Terrified he opens his blinded eyes and discovers that instead of being devoured he has been transformed into a majestic eagle.

The story held great meaning for me. I moved in with my boyfriend straight out of school and by the time I was 23 we had two children. Even at this early stage I had realised that the relationship was not a good one, but I resolved to stick it out and keep the family together. Time passed and he became increasingly dependent on me, emotionally and financially. I supported him through an engineering degree, and then an Honours degree believing that this would free him, and ultimately me.

When he had completed his studies and finally began to work, I saw my chance to leave him. At that. he fell apart and seemed so weak, unable to live without me. Putting my own need for freedom and independence aside, I realised that I could never abandon him. This final sacrifice in my relationship occurred shortly before I heard the story of Jumping Mouse.

Jumping Mouse's sacrifice of both his eyes, leaving him blind was a painful recollection of my own sacrifice. In a moment of great insight I realised that the sacrifice I had made was too big, I could not give up my vision or my dreams for the future. I told and retold the story to friends and each time I felt tears well up in my eyes when I reached the part about the final sacrifice. I integrated the story into a personal journey. Within days of hearing the story I ended the relationship.

1.1 Purpose of study and research problem investigated

The purpose of the research was to understand the role that storytelling plays within a leadership context, with particular focus on whether storytelling enhances a leader's efficacy.

The research focuses on a single case site, WesBank, an asset finance institution, and the leadership and use of storytelling of Ronnie Watson at the time when he was the CEO of WesBank. Prior to his appointment as CEO, Mr Watson had been employed in various positions within WesBank for his entire working career, spanning over 43 years. During his reign as CEO, Mr Watson used stories, both formally through productions such as the *WesBank Soapie*, a twelve part story of WesBank's history and significant events, and informally, through mediums such as newsletters and the Induction Programme.

There are a number of circumstances under which the single case study design is appropriate. One such instance is what Yin (1994) refers to as the revelatory case. In this scenario the single case study reveals descriptive information and insights into a phenomenon, possibly stimulating future research. The research design is revelatory in nature, with the aim being to understand Mr Watson's leadership style and characteristics and his use of storytelling within WesBank. Interview questions were open-ended with the aim of eliciting information that participants felt was relevant. Therefore new information that arose was incorporated into the results and analysis of the data, thus meeting Yin's rationale for performing a single, rather than a multiple case study design (1994).

Yin (1994) cites Elliot Liebow's *Tally's corner* in which the author befriended a single group of men living in a poor inner-city neighbourhood, as a successful example of single case study design, performed with a revelatory rationale in mind. The research led to several insights into the group's lifestyles, coping behaviour and feelings on unemployment and failure. Yin explains that Liebow's research led to a greater understanding of a prevalent subculture in the United

States and showed how investigations of such topics could be undertaken. Additionally further research and ultimately the development of policy actions arose because of the study (Yin, 1994).

The leadership style and use of storytelling of Mr Watson were investigated to understand whether his use of storytelling enhanced his effectiveness as a leader. Two areas formed the basis of the research, leadership style and characteristics were investigated to understand the factors that constitute an effective leader. Mr Watson's leadership characteristics and style were then examined within this context to determine whether he was perceived as an effective leader and the characteristics he possessed that rendered him effective in his role. Storytelling as a means of achieving influence was investigated, with Ronnie Watson's use of storytelling within WesBank examined to understand the contexts in which he used stories, as well as to whether the stories were effective in influencing employees towards the company's goals. The research also aimed to gain insight into the development of Mr Watson's leadership style and storytelling competency through understanding his background, people who may have influenced him and his working history.

People who had shared close working relationships with Mr Watson over a number of years were interviewed. These participants in the research included members of Mr Watson's leadership team at the time when he was CEO of WesBank, as well as leaders within partner companies or dealerships. Mr Watson himself was interviewed to understand how he used storytelling within his leadership role, as well as to gain insight into the motivation behind these initiatives and his perceptions of their effectiveness. Further insight was gained into Mr Watson's character and storytelling style through his use of anecdotes during our conversations.

1.2 Significance of the study

The insights gained through the research will lead to a greater understanding of the ways in which storytelling enhances a leader's efficacy. It is anticipated that this study will add to the body of knowledge on storytelling with specific reference to storytelling as a leadership competency. The findings may be of benefit to leaders, organisations or institutions who may choose to improve leadership efficacy through developing a competence in storytelling. Additionally, the foundations of theory and methodology developed during the research process may stimulate further research into the topic.

1.3 Basis for research

This research follows on the work of Anton Roskam (2008) whose thesis was entitled: *The perceived impact of storytelling on an organisation in South Africa*. Roskam's work focussed on the perceptions of senior managers within WesBank of the impact of the *WesBank Soapie* within the organisation. The *Soapie* was conceived, commissioned and co-created by Ronnie Watson during his tenure as CEO of WesBank. (2008)

The *Soapie*, as the name suggests, was presented in a soap-opera format. The story of WesBank was dramatised in 12 episodes spanning from 1895, preceding WesBank's inception, to 1997, the year prior to Mr Watson's appointment as CEO. The story combines fact and fiction, relating the bank's history and key events through the use of fictional or semi-fictional characters. Compared to a straightforward historical elucidation of the WesBank story, the soap-opera format allowed for greater creativity, and the addition of emotional content. The objectives of the *WesBank Soapie*, as identified by Roskam, were to document the bank's heritage and to transmit the values and culture of the organisation to existing and new employees. (2008)

Roskam found that the perceptions amongst senior management, who took part in the research, were that the *Soapie's* impact on the organisation had been limited

mainly because it had not been widely read by WesBank staff. Through his interviews, Roskam identified the perceptions of the poor response to the *Soapie* as a lack of a culture of reading amongst WesBank staff, the lack of a collective process for reading or discussing the *Soapie*, insufficient marketing and promotion of the *Soapie* to the staff, erratic distribution of the episodes of the *Soapie* and a lack of management “buy-in” to the *Soapie*.

Roskam (2008) found that the dominant perception amongst managers was that the *Soapie* had played a valuable role in transmitting the culture and values of the organisation on those employees who had read the publication. It also helped define the heritage “story-line” by which the bank wished to be viewed. It laid the foundations of a mythical framework to inspire and motivate staff. Roskam commented that the *Soapie* was used by Mr Watson as a powerful induction tool for new employees. (2008)

Roskam’s thesis focussed on the perceptions of staff of the effectiveness of a specific storytelling intervention, the *WesBank Soapie*. This research differs from Roskam’s in that the primary focus lies in storytelling within a leadership context, with the aim being to understand how Mr Watson used storytelling within his leadership role at WesBank, and whether this contributed to his efficacy as a leader.

1.4 Delimitations of the study

The research focused on a single case study, Mr Watson’s leadership style and use of storytelling, within a single case site, WesBank.

In depth interviews were held with Ronnie Watson, as well as six other people who had formed part of his leadership team or were leaders within dealerships or partners of WesBank. The respondents were chosen because of their intimate knowledge of Mr Watson’s leadership style and use of communication within the context of WesBank. They had all shared a close working relationship with him

over a number of years. No other leaders or organisations were scrutinised to understand storytelling within a leadership role. No family members or people from outside of the context of WesBank were interviewed to understand Mr Watson's character or use of stories outside of his role in WesBank.

1.5 Assumptions

Among the assumptions made were that Mr Watson and a number of other people who had shared a close working relationship with him would agree to be interviewed, and would, during the interviews, provide honest and detailed information regarding their experiences. One person declined to be interviewed, while all the other participants who were approached readily agreed to the interview. The people who were interviewed provided detailed information, and included balanced views on his leadership style. Mr Watson's participation was critical to the research, and in depth interviews were held on two occasions on which he provided detailed information on his experiences and use of storytelling within WesBank.

It was also assumed that respondents would have a clear recall of storytelling initiatives such as *The Wesside Story* and the *WesBank Soapie* as well as other communication initiatives that may have included a storytelling aspect. All of the participants were able to provide insight into Mr Watson's communication style and could provide examples of how he had used communication effectively. Most of the respondents could recall aspects of *The Wesside Story* or *WesBank Soapie*. Mr Watson provided detailed information on the various formal and informal storytelling initiatives he undertook within WesBank.

The assumption was also made that permission would be granted by Mr Watson, the organisation, and the selected employees, to allow direct observation by the researcher. However, direct observation was not possible as Mr Watson no longer plays an active role within WesBank. Although he still speaks at motor dealerships he was unwilling to allow direct observation by the researcher, commenting that it

would cause him to behave unnaturally. However, it is unlikely that the research findings were compromised as the researcher was able to observe Mr Watson during conversation in which he used a number of anecdotes to relate his experiences, providing an opportunity for direct observation of his style and use of stories.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The literature review examines peer reviewed articles to develop an understanding of how storytelling can be used as a tool to enhance the effectiveness of leadership. Articles or texts relating to leadership are reviewed to understand the definition of effective leadership. Leadership theories are reviewed in order to understand the dominant thinking behind the leadership style or characteristics that contribute to a leader's efficacy.

The literature review also focuses on storytelling, and examines the mechanisms behind the power of stories to influence an audience. The contexts in which stories can be effectively used within organisations are investigated to understand their ability to influence people towards the organisation's goals. Literature that relates to storytelling within a leadership role is examined to understand the role that storytelling plays within effective leadership.

Yin (1994) suggests that the review of previous research may be helpful in developing focused questions, rather than in finding answers on the topic. As such, the aim of the literature review is to develop appropriate questions to be used as a starting point for enquiring into the role that storytelling played within Mr Watson's leadership role.

2.2. Leadership efficacy

2.2.1 A definition of leadership

Robbins (1989: 302) defines leadership as the "ability to influence a group towards the achievement of goals". Kotter (1988) concurs, defining effective leadership as producing movement through non-coercive means, towards the best future interest of the group and its members. Werner, in Nel (2005) agrees, and adds that leadership is the influence of one individual over others, so that they willingly and enthusiastically work to their capacity towards achieving the

company's goals. Robbins (1989) however, asserts that leadership assigned through formal rights does not guarantee effective leadership. He argues that the ability to influence others outside of formal sanction is a more effective predictor of leadership ability, and as such leaders may emerge from a group.

Gardner (1996: 8-9) includes greater detail on the effect that leaders have on their followers in his definition of leaders as "persons who, by word and/or personal example, markedly influence the behaviours, thoughts, and/or feelings of a significant number of their fellow human beings".

2.2.2 The leadership role

Kotter (1988) compares the need for good leadership in business to the requirements of war. An army operates along administrative principles until war occurs, at which time the army requires leadership rather than management or administration. Decisive and strategic leadership, with the ability to inspire a winning vision, is required to lead men into battle. In a similar sense business today is fighting a continual war; with global competition on the rise, companies need to keep pace with, or be ahead of, the changing environment.

Werner, in Nel (2005) distinguishes between managers and leaders by suggesting that leaders initiate the strategic goals and vision of the organisation; thereafter management implements the vision. The following table is reproduced from Werner and illustrates the roles that distinguish leadership and management. (Nel et al., 2005: 333)

Table 1: Leadership and Management Roles

Criteria	Leadership Role	Management Role
Change	Provides vision, Initiates change	Implements leader's vision or changes
People	Inspire and develop	Control
Power derived from	Ability to influence others	Authority
Task	Do the right things	Do things right
Commitment to goal	Passionate	Impersonal

A leader's power is seen here to be derived from their ability to influence others, not from their position of authority. This ability may be partly ascribed to their passion and their ability to inspire people. A leader should additionally initiate change and provide a vision for their followers to work towards.

2.2.3 Leadership theories

Robbins (1989) identifies four broad leadership theories that seek to explain the factors underlying leadership efficacy:

a) Trait theories

Trait theories sought to find universal personality traits that were present in leaders to a greater degree than in non-leaders. This approach suggests that effective leaders could be selected based on the possession of a number of identified traits. The philosophical basis of this argument is that leaders are born, not made, and therefore possess genetic traits that render them effective in their role. Robbins relates that from a review of twenty studies over eighty separate leadership traits were identified. However, not all traits could be said to be possessed by all leaders. Robbins cites research by Stogdill in 1974 as most promising in identifying common leadership traits. According to Robbins (1989), Stogdill identified five traits: "intelligence, dominance, self-confidence, high energy

level, and task relevant knowledge” which correlated modestly but consistently with effective leadership.

Robbins (1989) concludes that trait theory fails to predict effective leadership as it excludes situational factors and the needs of followers from its explanation. The approach is further criticised for its failure to explain cause-and-effect relationships between personality traits and events, with the example given of whether self-confidence pre-exists as a trait or whether it arises out of experiencing success.

b) Behavioural theories

Behavioural theories attempted to identify behaviour patterns that differentiated leaders from non-leaders. It follows that if behaviours could be identified that led to effective leadership, then leaders could be trained into their position. In contrast to the philosophical assumptions of trait theory (leaders are born), behavioural theory suggests that leaders are made. The researchers working under this theoretical framework sought to identify behavioural characteristics of leaders that appeared to be related to measures of performance effectiveness.

Robbins (1989) argues that the behavioural approach could not make general statements identifying certain behaviour with leadership efficacy because results varied widely depending on the circumstances. The theory failed to explain how effective leadership behaviour varied according to the situational factors present.

c) Contingency theories

Contingency theories sought to address the shortcomings of behavioural theories by explaining the effect that situational factors had on leadership behaviours. Theorists attempted to isolate and identify which situational factors would impact on leadership effectiveness. Robbins (1989) highlights six of these theories which have gained wider recognition.

Autocratic-Democratic Continuum Model

This model described leadership behaviour according to how decision making is handled by the leader. On the autocratic extreme of a continuum the leader makes decisions and expects subordinates to carry out instructions given, and on the other, democratic extreme the leader shares decision-making with their subordinates so that each has an equal say. Along this continuum lie a range of leadership styles. After a review of a number of studies, Robbins (1989) concludes that a participative or democratic management style generally resulted in higher satisfaction levels among staff, but that there was no conclusive evidence to suggest productivity would increase.

Fiedler Model

Fiedler (1967), as cited by Robbins (1989) proposed that effective group performance depended on the proper match between the leader's interactional style and the degree to which the situation gives control and influence to the leader. Fiedler argued that leadership style was fixed and could be measured. Once determined he recommended that leaders be matched to situations that complemented their leadership style. He measured the situational factors according to three dimensions:

1. *Leader-member relations* – the degree of confidence, trust and respect subordinates have in their leadership
2. *Task Structure* -the degree to which jobs are structured or unstructured
3. *Position power* – the degree of influence a leader holds over power issues such as hiring, firing and promotions.

Hersey-Blanchard's situational theory

Robbins (1989) cites this theory, developed by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard in 1974, as one of the most widely practised leadership models. This theory suggests that leadership style should be chosen based on the follower's maturity levels. The focus on the followers is based on the premise that effectiveness is dependent on the actions of the followers, which in turn is dependent on their

willingness to accept the leader (Robbins, 1989). Hersey and Blanchard identify four leadership styles:

1. *Telling*: The leader defines tasks and is directive about achieving them
2. *Selling*: The leader provides directive and supportive behaviour
3. *Participating*: The leader provides a communicative and facilitative role and shares decision making
4. *Delegating*: The leader provides little direction or support.

Hersey and Blanchard suggest that the higher the level of maturity of followers, defined as the ability and willingness to take responsibility for their actions based on their knowledge, experience and intrinsic motivational levels, the less directive the leadership style should be.

Leader-Member Exchange theory

This theory, developed by George Graen and associates in 1973, suggests that leaders establish special relationships with followers that are relatively stable and may be based on the similarity of the followers' personalities or their special competencies. This group of favoured subordinates receives disproportionate attention and rewards from the leader but performs better and has a lower turnover compared to other staff (in Robbins, 1989).

Path-Goal theory

Robbins (1989) cites this theory, developed by Robert House (1971: 321-338), as suggesting that it is the leader's job to provide direction and support to their subordinates so that they might achieve goals consistent with those of the organisation. House identified four leadership behaviours, which he believed any leader could make use of given different situations or subordinates:

1. The *directive leader*, who lets subordinates know what is expected of them and provides scheduled work and guidance to achieve goals,

2. The *supportive leader*, who is friendly and is concerned with the needs of the employees,
3. The *participative leader*, who gathers suggestions from subordinates before making decisions,
4. The *achievement-orientated leader*, who sets challenging goals and expects subordinates to perform at their highest level.

Leader-Participation Model

Robbins (1989) discusses one of the more recent additions to contingency theory; the leader-participation model proposed by Victor Vroom and Phillip Yetton in 1973. The researchers suggest that leader behaviour should adjust according to the given task and environment. The model provides five behaviours ranging from an autocratic to a group based decision making process based on the situation.

d) Implicit theories

Implicit theorists acknowledge that the public in general share expectations of what successful leadership traits are. Robbins (1989) suggests that implicit theories are intuitively appealing as they view leadership as the average person would; however, he states that it is still unclear as to whether these theories can be used to predict leadership effectiveness. Robbins discusses two popular theories that fall under this theoretical framework: attribution theory and charismatic leadership theory. Attribution theory says that people make attributions about others as leaders based on their perception of traits such as intelligence, verbal skills and industriousness. Robbins cites research by Powell et al. in 1984, which shows leaders high on both initiating structure and consideration to others were consistently perceived by their followers as effective leaders, regardless of their situation.

Charismatic theory is an extension of attribution theory, and suggests that followers make attributions of heroic or extraordinary leadership abilities when

they observe certain behaviours (Robbins, 1989). Charismatic leadership is discussed in further detail within the following sections.

2.2.4 Characteristics of leaders

Kotter (1988) argues that leadership characteristics should include a sound industry and organisational knowledge, solid relationships in the firm and industry and a good reputation and track record. He further proposes that most leadership attributes can be learned through experience, however, motivation and a high energy level, which contribute to leadership efficacy, are fixed character traits.

Walters (1999), believes that leaders should have a well developed emotional intelligence; this allows them to adapt their style to the needs of the situation and to understand people's emotions and concerns. Kotter (1988) agrees, stating that emotional skills such as empathy and good interpersonal skills are helpful to leaders. Research conducted by Kerr et al. (2005) found that an individual's Emotional Intelligence (EI) score was a key determinant of leadership effectiveness as perceived by their staff.

Nel et al. (2005), suggest that the way in which organisations respond to changes in the environment is linked to the values and attitude of its leaders. Harvey et al. (2006) argue that leaders who display authenticity are more likely to understand how present actions might affect future outcomes. They further suggest that authentic leaders are able to better project their true selves to others because of a deeper understanding of their own strengths, weakness and their internal values. Authenticity can be promoted through increasing psychological closeness which allows people to see the situation from another's perspective. Kotter (1988) agrees that leaders should possess personal values such as high integrity and should respect and value a broad range of people.

2.2.5 Charismatic leaders

Robbins (1989: 329) makes a distinction between transactional leaders and transformational leaders. Robbins defines transactional leaders as those who

“guide or motivate followers in the direction of established goals by clarifying role and task requirements”. Transformational leadership, a term Robbins uses interchangeably with charismatic leaders, “inspire followers to transcend their own self-interest for the good of the organisation”. Charismatic leaders exert a profound effect on their followers by way of their personal or social abilities. Their followers, in turn, attribute heroic or extraordinary qualities to their leaders.

Robbins (1989) suggests that charismatic leadership is appropriate to organisational situations such as an impending crisis or the introduction of a radically different product.

Jung and Sosik (2006) attempted to uncover the basic mechanisms by which the charismatic leader exerts influence over his followers. The authors found that self-monitoring, self-actualisation and self-enhancement scored highly as charismatic traits. Self-monitoring, the authors suggest, involves monitoring and adapting behaviour in order to build and sustain a charismatic image in the minds of their followers. Self-actualisation was defined as the leader's desire to transcend his immediate circumstances, allowing communication of messages that resonate with followers. Self-enhancement relates to the leader's desire to enhance his image so that followers perceive them to possess enhanced abilities.

The research concluded that leaders, who were identified as charismatic, generated a higher level of extra effort on the part of their followers. Additionally they found that the employees of charismatic leaders showed increased organisational commitment behaviour, in that they initiated tasks and duties beyond their job descriptions.

According to Anderson (1990: 147-167), the charismatic leader will actively monitor situational and social cues adjusting his message and the way in which it is delivered to convince his audience. Authentic leaders were found to be more

highly motivated by higher order self-actualising needs, which would allow them to transmit vision to their followers.

Howell and Higgins (1990: 317-341) state that openness to change is a characteristic of charismatic leadership and suggest leaders use appealing communication techniques to create a sense of crisis among followers and thus justify the need for changes. Jung and Sosik (2006), suggest that charismatic leaders' openness to change may stem from their ability to recognise future trends. Werner, (in Nel et al., 2005), argue that the ability of the leader to influence his followers may be based on a number of sources of power including what Werner terms *referent power*. According to Werner, this is the extent to which the followers identify with the leader and hold him in high esteem. The followers perceive the leaders as being attractive or charismatic. Werner emphasises that the leader's source of power is based on the perceptions of the followers, and not on objective reality.

Hwang et.al. (2005) conducted research across three countries in which they examined the influence of *leadership charisma* and *vision* on *follower commitment* and *reported performance*. Research showed that the visionary factors *expert/analytical* and *visionary/futuristic* influenced reported performance of the company. *Social sensitivity* and *persuasive personality traits*, which were defined as factors of the *charismatic* construct, were found to influence subordinate commitment. *Social sensitivity* was the only trait found to influence both subordinate commitment and reported performance suggesting its important role in enhancing organisational performance. They concluded that both charismatic and visionary dimensions have different roles to play in influencing the attitudes of followers.

2.2.6 Leaders as change agents

Kotter (1988) concludes that effective leadership comprises creating an agenda for change and building a strong implementation network. The agenda for change

should include a strong vision of what could and should be which takes into account the legitimate long-term interest of the parties involved and includes a comprehensive strategy for achieving the vision. The implementation network should comprise of a highly motivated group of people, committed to making the vision transpire. Kotter suggests that leaders should have sufficiently strong relationships that ensure compliance, cooperation and teamwork. Kotter further explains that to elicit cooperation, leaders must be credible and have built an impressive track record and a good reputation. Interpersonal skills and integrity assist a leader in developing broad and effective relationships with stakeholders (1988).

Kantabutra and Avery (2007) researched the impact that vision had on staff and customer satisfaction levels. They suggest that communication and organisational alignment are important factors in determining the impact of the vision. Baum et al. (1998) investigated the link between vision and organisational performance. They found that the way in which the vision was communicated had an impact on organisational performance. The results were enhanced if the following elements were present; brevity, clarity (know what needs to be done), future orientation (attracts emotional commitment), stability, challenge, abstractness, ability to inspire (shared vision) and content of the desired organisational improvement. For optimum effect all of these elements should be present.

Kotter (1988) cites an example of effective leadership through Lee Iacocca, who took over leadership of Chrysler in the 1980's. Iacocca managed to transform the flailing business through two effective leadership mechanisms: firstly, he created a bold vision for the future which saw the firm producing high quality products and becoming not only profitable but competitive too. His vision included all the stakeholders of the business and focussed on improving the interest of those groups. Secondly, Iacocca managed successfully to attract and maintain cooperation and teamwork from the network of people who were needed to help accomplish the vision. Kotter (1988: 18) believes that Iacocca accomplished this

through “articulating his agenda in emotionally powerful ways”; by appealing to the goals they all shared. He was able to use his personal selling skills to maintain momentum on building the vision through his inspirational communication techniques (1988).

2.2.7 Conclusion

Effective leadership involves the ability to initiate change, and to motivate others to embrace and work towards that change. To achieve this, the leader must provide an inspiring and clear vision of the potential future state of the organisation. To be an effective motivator, the vision should take into account the legitimate long-term interests of the followers, and should include a comprehensive strategy on achieving the vision (Kotter, 1988).

Communication and organisational alignment are necessary for the realisation of a vision (Kantabutra and Avery, 2007). The style of communication has a significant effect on the impact of the vision. For optimum results communication should be clear and consistent and should inspire people through creating a shared vision which is both future orientated and challenging. (Baum et al., 1998)

However, it is not enough for leaders to create an inspiring vision; they need to have the ability to influence others, creating organisational alignment. Influence involves affecting the behaviours thoughts and feelings of others (Gardner, 1996). This hints at an underlying emotional connection that occurs between leaders and followers in the process of influence. This can be achieved if the leader has, amongst other things, built a strong implementation network. Besides having good communication and interpersonal skills, followers must see their leader as possessing integrity and leading through example (Kotter, 1988).

Leadership theories differ in their explanations of the factors that contribute towards leadership efficacy. Trait theory offers some evidence that traits such as intelligence and self-confidence contribute to effective leadership (Stogdill, 1974,

as cited by Robbins, 1989). Behavioural theories suggest that a participative leadership style resulted in higher satisfaction levels amongst staff (Robbins, 1989). If followers trust and respect their leader, the leader's style tends towards a participative role, in which the leader provides a communicative and facilitative role, sharing in the decision making (Fiedler 1967, in Robbins, 1989).

Attribution theory provides an explanation for leadership efficacy through their assertion that followers make attributions about leaders based on their perception of traits such as intelligence, verbal skills and industriousness. (Robbins, 1989) The extension of attribution theory suggests that the followers of the charismatic leader attribute heroic or extraordinary qualities to their leader. The leader's source of power arises out of the perceptions of their followers, who hold them in high esteem (Nel et al., 2005). The charismatic leader can by means of his personal or social abilities, inspire followers to transcend their own self-interests in pursuit of the goals of the organisation (Robbins, 1989). Charismatic leadership traits defined as social sensitivity and persuasive personality traits were found to influence subordinate commitment. (Hwang et al., 2005: 960)

2.3 Storytelling as a means of influence

2.3.1 A definition of storytelling

Simmons (2001) defines a story as a narrative account in which character and events combine with emotional and sensory detail. Poulton (2005: 4-9) describes the role stories play as conveying a consequence or moral through a new and more interesting approach. He suggests that stories provide a way for us to make sense of our experiences, and in turn to relate those experiences to others.

Gabriel (2000) distinguishes between stories and other narrative forms such as opinions and reports. Opinions, Gabriel argues, may consist of facts or symbolic material, however lack plot and character. Reports are monological in nature, and relate an historic and factual account of events but fail to integrate symbolism. Stories are recognised by their organic quality and depend on poetic license, plots and embellishment to generate meaning.

Heil and Whittaker (2008: 369-397) suggest that narratives have as their subject human actions and events that affect them. These are connected through the roles the respective actions and events play in bringing about a conclusion. What seemed disconnected is brought together to form a meaningful whole. Simmons (2001) suggests that storytelling cannot be broken down into pieces but must be understood as a whole.

Gabriel (2000) provides a framework to understand the dynamics behind the construction of stories, showing how they integrate a number of *poetic tropes* or attributions that make events meaningful. These include aspects such as unity, in that a group becomes unified, emotion, fixed qualities of characters, and causal connections between events.

Gabriel (2000) identifies the comic tale and the epic as among the main poetic modes or story genres. Comic tales frequently expose the character flaws of the

main protagonist, and are designed to elicit laughter from the audience. Epic tales inevitably highlight the triumphs of their hero in overcoming adversities.

2.3.2 Why storytelling works

According to Poulton (2005), single events do not hold the same significance as a sequence of connected events. He describes the general format of a story as following *steady state*, *disruptive predicament* and *solution*. Through this sequence, the listener can picture themselves within the story, envision their own responses to the predicament and feel relief at its resolution. He further relates the real physical and emotional sensations a listener may experience when reliving a character's humiliation or pain.

Silverman (2006) suggests that people connect to stories on four levels; physically, cognitively, emotionally and through the human spirit. If people engage at all of these levels with an organisational story, their commitment to the company's goals is likely to be strengthened. Denning (2001) proposes that the effectiveness of storytelling lies in its ability to entrench an idea into the collective consciousness of the firm. This happens because a future is co-created through the participation of the listeners.

Simmons (2001) describes how people use stories to make sense of things and organise their thoughts. Thus stories can serve to reframe negative or neutral experiences into hopeful or positive ones. Changing the story within a workplace can give people the opportunity to visualise a new role for themselves and make them eager to embark on a transformative journey.

Poulton (2005) argues that individuals experience stories differently; making meaning of them according to their psychological frameworks. Simmons believes people create their own stories and character roles, seeing themselves as *victim*, *survivor* or *hero*. (2001)

2.3.3 How stories influence people

Simmons (2001) believes that stories reveal truths that need not be measured empirically to be believed. She explains that stories resonate with listeners when they recall their own experience of those truths.

Simmons (2001) argues that attempting to influence people with facts, even if accurate and relevant, is ineffective due to the information overload people experience. Simmons suggests people already know the facts but may ignore them or not afford them enough importance. Poulton (2005) comments that simply listing the positive aspects of an impending change will fail to take into account the listener's experience of events and perhaps invalidate their apprehension. A rational approach may create resistance and suspicion, rather than personal commitment in the mind and heart of the listener (Simmons, 2001). She further believes that a story arouses curiosity in people. It helps them to interpret the facts and imagine a personal role in the outcome of the story. She defines the psychological goal of influence as connecting the listener's self interest with your own. She argues that by telling a story you allow others to see what you have seen and thereby convince the strongest opponents to believe in your vision (Simmons, 2001).

Poulton (2005) explains that a story becomes part of the listener's frame of reference; from then on any experience is filtered through the story, altering their perceptions of, or their reactions to the experience. Simmons (2001) believes that stories work because they leave the listener to draw their own conclusions. She describes this strategy of influence as a *pull* strategy; unlike other methods of influence such as bribery, persuasion or charismatic appeals, described as *push* methods.

2.3.4 The role of the storyteller

Simmons (2001) believes that discovering and telling new stories, will build wisdom and is a way for leaders to practice the art of influencing others. Stephen

Denning (2001), former programme director of knowledge management at the World Bank, describes how he used storytelling to effectively deal with a confidence crisis amongst the senior management at the World Bank. Denning argues that adopting the role of storyteller within the organisation may mean a relinquishing of power or position to sit permanently on the threshold observing the organisation as it is and pointing towards possible futures. The teller is effective if he has the ability to understand and convey the current situation realistically as well as to present the main dimensions of an envisioned future. From there the listener participates, filling in the details of the ending. Storytelling helps people to move beyond adopting an adversarial stance, defending realities that lie in the present; and towards the role of co-creator of the envisioned future.

When an audience has no first-hand experience of the storyteller they can experience them in action through a personal story. Simmons (2001) says that a personal story allows the audience to know what the storyteller values and how the teller behaves within a context. She suggests that this kind of story could be told in the form of a parable or allegory in which the narrator and the context is represented symbolically through fictional characters. Stories literally show someone a perspective in a manner that they can relate to it.

Simmons (2001) describes two story types that a newcomer to an organisation can use as vehicles to gain their audience's trust. These stories, *Who I am*, and *Why I am Here*, allow the listener to gain insight into the narrator's character through examples of their moral or ethical behaviour, or their track record of achievement. Simmons argues that if the storyteller fails to demonstrate their character through stories such as these, listeners will draw their own conclusions. Simmons advocates self-disclosure on the part of the narrator when telling a personal story. She suggests that if the narrator reveals their flaws and shows themselves to be vulnerable, the audience will feel they are trusted and thus more likely to let their own guards down. Denning points out that many leaders find the process of revealing their flaws as uncomfortable and counter-intuitive (2006).

James and Minnis (2004) caution that stories will fail to move people if they lack an element of essential truth. The story will seem genuine only if the leader believes strongly in its message. Leaders who are sincere and communicative can use stories to motivate and inspire their staff towards the company's goals. Simmons (2001: 7) says that an audience filters words through a "believability index based on our judgements about who they are."

Denning (2006) discusses the important role of the storyteller, arguing that a well-crafted story will fail to make an impact on its audience if it is performed unconvincingly. Although he distinguishes between a story performed for pure entertainment and one performed in a business environment, he cites non-verbal aspects, such as tone, and facial expressions as critical to its delivery.

2.4 The business case for storytelling

Organisational storytelling has a number of useful applications within a business context. Denning (2006) argues that a story can be used as a tool to achieve business purposes, but is not an end in itself. He proposes that different forms of story can be used depending on the desired outcome. Forster (1999: 11-17) suggests that effective communication is the primary means by which things get done in organisations. He comments that the choice of communication medium is vital in ensuring the information is understood and integrated. Forster argues that stories provide a rich medium of communication conjuring up complex cognitive emotions, appealing to emotions and intuitions of people.

2.4.1 Identification with a group

Heil and Whittaker (2008: 12) suggest that stories help participants to "establish identity within the broader community in and around an organisation." Randall and Martin (2003), define the family as a social group in which individuals develop identity and a self-concept through social interaction. In much the same way as a family, the organisation can be seen as a social group, made up of individuals who interact within a social framework. They suggest that the family's story serves to create meaning for both the family, as a group, and the individuals within the

family. The story or narrative that defines the company could then be seen to play an equally important role in the creation of meaning or purpose for each individual as well as for the company as a whole.

Kitchell et al. (2000) hypothesise that people are motivated to take change actions when they feel they identify with, and belong within, a group. Their research examined groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and looked at members who both told their own story and listened to other stories in the group. They concluded that storytelling played an important role in promoting identification with the group, which in turn resulted in increased motivation toward making change.

Blair (2006: 9) suggests that letting staff members tell stories to each other signals recognition by the company of each person's contribution to its success. Sharing stories builds trust, by allowing staff to experience a real and human side to one another. The staff members begin to find areas of agreement rather than difference and thus create a coherent and strong community.

2.4.2 Stories as a learning tool

Simmons (2001) identifies a further story type as the *Teaching* story in which stories can be used to convey lessons. Simmons suggests that a story can halve the amount of time needed for effective teaching. This she argues is because the message is not about *what* should be done, but about *how* it should be done. Stories, Simmons feels, are able to combine information about what needs to be done, but more importantly how it needs to be done, in a meaningful sequence.

Warren (2004: 3-16) argues that prospective entrepreneurs could benefit from the experiential learning of successful entrepreneurs. This knowledge is best acquired through storytelling that can be incorporated into training programmes.

Short and Ketchen (2005: 817) suggest that the parable is a useful tool because of its ability to "convey rich lessons in a format that is poignant, straightforward

and memorable". As such it is reasoned by the authors that the parable can be used to teach strategic management topics to students with little or no experience in the field. Short and Ketchen (2005) illustrate the applicability of the fable to highlight strategic management issues in a simple yet poignant message. In Aesop's fable *The Ass and the Grasshopper*, the Ass admires the Grasshoppers' singing, which they attribute to their strict diet of morning dew. On seeking to emulate their success the Ass follows their regimen only to die of starvation. The fable, it is suggested, can be used to convey the problem of resource immobility, in which firms succeed because of their unique capabilities and essential character, making it impossible to transfer success to another firm by simply replicating the successful firm's strategy.

In another example, Short and Ketchen (2005) show how Aesop's fable of the *Lion and the Dolphin* can be used to highlight the problems that may arise from mergers involving incompatible partners. In the tale the Lion and the Dolphin form an allegiance based on their equally dominant positions in their respective habitats. When the Lion calls for help in fighting off a bull, the Dolphin is unable to leave the water, and therefore fails to meet the expectations of the partnership.

2.4.3 Creating competence

Bjurklo (2006: 34-37) argues that stories that help managers and employees to understand the company as a whole will assist them in developing competence within their respective roles. Blair suggests that problem solving can be enhanced if a leader asks staff to relate stories on how problems were solved in the past. In this way many previously successful strategies can be explored. Poulton (2005) believes that within organisations, rules are restrictive and do not involve the employees in dealing with complex situations. A story provides a framework in which creative solutions can be found by employees to problems such as difficult customers, without resorting to a rule book. The result would be empowered employees and more satisfied, possibly even delighted customers. Blair (2006: 9)

believes that much of the value of storytelling lies in the time spent afterwards talking about the lessons learned.

Bjurklo (2006) suggests that financial reporting can be enhanced through the adoption of a “narrative accounting” approach. She advocates supplementing the reporting of financial ratios with narratives or anecdotes concerning the company’s ambitions and values. It is proposed that the combination of these two forms of accounting will lead to a greater understanding by all stakeholders, including employees, as to the real activity behind the company's balance sheet.

Denning (2006) suggests stories can be used to share knowledge and generate understanding between co-workers. These stories tend to highlight a detailed explanation of the cause and effect relationship between an action and its consequences. Denning argues that these stories are effective because they not only relate what type of action should be taken but also provide the context of why that particular action is appropriate.

2.4.4 Creating strategic alignment in times of change

Strategic Alignment refers to the alignment or “buy-in” of staff towards the company’s vision, goals and business strategy. Kathuria et al. (2007: 503-517) suggests that alignment requires a shared understanding throughout the hierarchy of management and staff, of the organisation’s goals and objectives.

Bergeron (2004: 133) states that “the success of business strategy execution is dependent upon people.” She suggests that the people within the organisation are the medium of strategy formation and execution. These people make choices in the level of contribution given to the organisation in aspects such as customer service and innovation. An organisation may formulate a sound business strategy but without the support of its people, it is unlikely to execute or sustain changes. She concludes that people provide the most powerful source of competitive advantage for an organisation and that talent strategy should be revised

whenever strategic change is imminent. Cobb et al. (1998: 32-43) state that major strategic change requires changes in organisational structure, culture and employee behaviour. Without due consideration for these intricacies companies may face higher costs and extreme resistance from staff.

Silverman (2004: 40-47) suggests that organisational storytelling is an effective method of increasing staff commitment and motivation in times of organisational change. Randall and Martin, (2003) provide a useful example of how companies use stories of legendary leaders during critical periods. These stories create continuity in times of change and provide a central purpose to which the members can identify themselves with.

Blair (2006) discusses the bridging function served by storytelling, citing the example of a wedding where the community gathered engages in storytelling about past episodes of the community. This aids the community in preparing for the new phase of development in which the husband and wife, and their families are joined. Similarly sharing stories amongst the community of a company helps staff to prepare for and deal with change and to recognise and honour the past.

2.4.5 Promoting the vision

Heil and Whittaker (2008) describe the challenge of strategic management as the ability to convey a powerful story in which the organisation is represented truthfully. The story should outline a strategic intent that describes that which is not yet true but can and should be true in the future. Simmons (2001) suggests that storytelling can be used to engage in scenario planning in which different futures are envisioned. In this way the possibilities for the future become real to the audience and strategic planning can be undertaken in a detailed manner.

Denning (2000, 2006)) contrasts *personal narratives*, which include aspects such as a hero character and plot, with *springboard stories* which are used to spark transformational change. Denning suggests that springboard stories should be

positive in tone and embody an implicit change message, allowing the audience to interpret and discover meaning individually. Thus he argues that the story should be told from a minimalist approach, and should thus exclude excessive detail. This style he feels allows the audience to create their own image of the future for the organisation. The future then is both believable and compelling, precisely because of the audience's role. Denning states that in effect, the audience is “co-creating the strategic shift” (2006: 44).

Simmons (2001) describes how leaders can use visionary stories to inspire employees towards accepting and engaging with impending changes in the company. She refers to this story type as *The Vision*, in which the leader describes in detail how the future will look for the company. Simmons cautions that leaders should not simply explain their own vision for the company as this may fail to inspire. Their vision should connect with their audience in a way that lets them know how they will benefit from it. One of the ways to connect, Simmons suggests, is to be completely authentic. Simmons describes a *Vision* story as an antidote to meaningless frustration, so that the struggles of change take on a higher purpose. The story becomes a sense-making one, in which adversities become challenges fought towards a better future for all. *The Vision* story may inspire employees to envision a role for themselves within the change process and to engage willingly in executing it successfully (2001).

Shaw et al. (1998) relate how 3M recognised the power of stories in relating the complexities of proposed business plans. The traditional method of presenting business plans was through bullet points that reduced goals to numbers, graphs and statements. This approach they felt, failed to inspire their audience on a number of fronts. Firstly the goals represented were so generic as to be applicable to many organisations and failed to communicate the insights or thoughts of the plan's author. Secondly, relationships between goals, or competitors could not be adequately expressed through bullet points. Finally the listener could not envision the challenges they faced nor the final outcome of the

changes proposed and thus would not be able to locate their role in the plan. Commitment to the plan and personal involvement would be enhanced through a story of the plan which could follow the sequence of *setting the stage in which* the current market and business environment is described, introducing a dramatic conflict illustrating the problems the company will face if action is not taken, and ending with a resolution that describes how the company can overcome and win within the market.

2.4.6 Fostering a corporate culture

Simmons (2001) says that the norms and habits of a culture are passed down through stories that are told and retold. She emphasises the importance of this role through explaining the great responsibility that rests with the storyteller. The stories they tell about the culture eventually influence the culture. Denning (2006) argues that a traditional management approach to transmitting values to employees involves using abstract concepts and as such fails to make an impression. Stories that reveal how the conflicts between values are resolved provide a context in which the company's multiple values can be meaningfully interpreted.

Blair (2006) suggests that companies ask employees to relate a story based on a word within the organisation's mission statement. This may serve to engender shared meaning and attachment to the company's core values.

Denning highlights an organisational story that can be used to dispel rumours that might undermine the company's or the leader's reputation. In this approach instead of avoiding the rumour, the storyteller would actively engage in it through satire and self-deprecatory humour. The efficacy of this approach lies in its subtle message that the rumour or issue in question has not overwhelmed the individual (2006).

2.4.7 Enhancing the brand

Denning (2006: 45), identifies the central role that stories play in shaping the corporate brand. He cautions however, that the brand story should provide more than “a manipulation of meaningless abstractions”. In order to effectively create a brand story the role of the brand manager becomes increasingly important. His task is to create, extend and continually reinvent the brand story, while ensuring that the company's product or service matches the core message.

2.4.8 Conclusion

Communication is vital in sharing the goals of the company, and necessary to create strategic alignment towards those goals. The choice of communication medium is instrumental in ensuring that information is both understood and integrated by the audience (Denning, 2006).

Stories provide a rich form of communication that appeals to people's emotions, and can thus be used to motivate and inspire staff towards a company's goals (James and Minnis, 2004). The springboard or visionary story, that describes a future state and embodies an implicit change message, can spark transformational change (Denning, 2006). Stories can also serve as an effective method of increasing staff commitment and motivation in times of organisational change (Silverman, 2004).

The audience's role in the story is important, the co-creation of the vision renders it believable and compelling enough to create strategic alignment (Denning, 2006). To convince or influence others, the storyteller must be authentic and believable (Simmons, 2001). To create trust, stories should contain an element of essential truth that will resonate with listeners (James and Minnis, 2004: 23-32). Furthermore, the storyteller can reveal his character through the use of personal stories that show an element of vulnerability (Simmons 2001).

Different forms of stories can be used depending on the outcome that is desired. Stories can create competence through the sharing of knowledge and generation of understanding between co-workers, providing a framework in which creative solutions can be found (Denning, 2006).

Simmons suggests that organisational culture is transmitted and influenced by stories that are told and retold. Furthermore, stories that describe how things should be done, rather than what should be done, can be used to teach employees behaviour frameworks. Stories can be used as a means of influence, allowing others to see what you have seen, thereby connecting their interests with your own (2001).

2.5 Leadership and storytelling

Forster (1999: 13) argues that the means by which leaders influence their employees is an important, yet often overlooked leadership skill. Forster suggests that inspirational leadership involves shaping people's perceptions of reality, and thereby influencing their behaviours, thoughts and actions. Forster suggests that leaders can achieve this level of influence through creating "a mental picture that helps listeners to discover who they are, where they are coming from...., and where they should be headed." Although a wide variety of communication tools are available, Forster suggests that the most powerful means of communicating remains face-to-face contact. He comments that within this forum many political and organisational leaders use storytelling as a means of communicating important concepts to their followers.

Gardner (1996) argues that leaders can be placed along a continuum based on their level of direct contact with their followers. On the one end of the continuum direct leadership describes leaders who exert influence through direct communication, specifically stories. Gardner cites Winston Churchill as a prime example of this leadership style. At the other extreme, indirect leadership, embodied in leaders such as Albert Einstein, describes leaders who exert influence through indirect means of communication such as ideas or theories.

Gardner (1996) suggests that leaders achieve influence through the stories that they relate. According to Gardner, these stories need not be communicated through words but could be expressed through artistic or mathematical symbols. He further suggests that an important aspect of a leader's ability to influence others is their embodiment of the stories they relate, conveyed through the way in which they lead their lives. Followers should be able to clearly perceive these embodiments in order for leadership to be effective. Forster (1999) concurs in this regard stating that, communication can only be effective if conveyed with integrity through words and actions.

Gardner (1996) categorises leaders according to the level of innovation found in the stories they tell. The ordinary leader relates the story of his group effectively, but without seeking to stretch the consciousness of the group. The stories told by this type of leader are unlikely to describe the ways in which the group will evolve in the future. The innovative leader takes a story that exists within the culture or group and provides an interesting twist to it, thereby capturing the innocence or glory of the original tale within the context of contemporary counter-stories. By contrast, the visionary leader is not content to refresh an existing story nor to relate a current one, he creates a new and fresh story and conveys this effectively to his audience. Gardner cites religious leaders such as Buddha and Jesus, scientists such as Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud, and the artists Pablo Picasso and Claude Monet as examples of visionary leaders within their domains.

2.6 Conclusions

Effective leadership entails initiating change and setting a bold vision towards which the organisation must move. Leaders need to shape their followers' perceptions of reality. Forster (1999: 11-17) suggests that leaders maintain influence through understanding the importance of symbolism and managing this through the use of evocative language.

Influence can be achieved through a number of factors, including creating a strong interpersonal network and possessing social skills or charisma. Communication techniques that connect the leader's goals to the audiences allow a co-creation of the organisational story by the staff. Stories have the ability to influence when they connect with emotions and involve the participation of the audience in creating the desired outcome. A story can render the leader's vision believable and compelling and encourages the audience to integrate themselves into the story. Forster (1999) argues that if a leader is able to make important points in a memorable way by using stories, then people will listen.

Forster (1999) comments that despite the importance of storytelling as a leadership tool there is relatively little academic discourse enquiring into the use and effectiveness of storytelling as a communication tool in organisations. Additionally, little research was found on storytelling as a leadership competency.

2.6.1 Research questions

What kind of leader uses storytelling in his communication style?

How does storytelling aid a leader in fulfilling his leadership role?

How does a leader develop a competency in storytelling?

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section of the report describes the research methodology that was followed. The chosen research method and its applicability to the material is discussed as are the advantages and disadvantages of the approach. A discussion on research design includes a description of the methods used to collect, analyse and interpret data. Issues pertaining to validity and reliability conclude the section.

3.1 Research methodology

The research methodology was qualitative in nature and took the form of an in-depth, single case study. Qualitative research methodology aims to make sense of phenomena in terms of the meaning people attach to them (Falconer, Mackay, 1999). Unlike quantitative research methodology, which isolates variables to enhance the reliability of results, qualitative research studies phenomena within their natural setting or context. Yin comments that researchers may distinguish between quantitative and qualitative research based on the type of data obtained. (1994) Qualitative research aims to uncover “rich descriptions of the social world” (Falconer, Mackay, 1999: 288).

A frequent criticism of the qualitative approach is that findings are subjective and therefore unreliable. It is unlikely that another researcher would achieve the same results if the study was replicated as much of the data collected relies on the interaction between researcher and the interview subject. The researcher may also choose to focus on or probe different areas and when interpreting the data the researcher's subjectivity adds to the problems with reliability (Falconer, Mackay, 1999).

Falconer and Mackay state a benefit of this methodology as the ability for the researcher to get closer to the subject's perspective, made possible through both detailed observations and open-ended interviews (1999). This proved particularly relevant within the research conducted, the aim of which was to gain insight into the participants' perceptions of Ronnie Watson's leadership style and use of

communication. This allowed each participant to recount their own experiences and opinions and to provide additional information they felt was relevant. The interviews with Ronnie Watson aimed to gain insight into his character, leadership style, and use of storytelling within WesBank. The interviews relied on collection of detailed experiences and perceptions of the participants, rendering the qualitative approach effective.

3.1.1 Grounded theory/ emergent design

Rowley (2002: 16-27) contends that case study research is widely viewed as a useful tool for the exploratory stage of a research project, frequently laying the foundations for future, more structured research. In contrast to the positivist approach which advocates the definition of propositions in advance of data collection, grounded theory assumes that questions, insights and propositions emerge during and after the data collection. Yin (1994) states that grounded theory avoids the development of propositions prior to the collection of data; however he cautions that field contacts or respondents may depend on an understanding of the topic of study. The research conducted used broad questions to elicit the perceptions and experiences that the participants felt were relevant. These broad questions included “How would you describe Ronnie Watson’s leadership style?” as well as “How would you describe Ronnie Watson’s communication style?”

3.1.2 Case studies

A case study is applicable to investigating phenomena within their context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon in question and its context are not clear (Yin, 1994; Rowley, 2002). This approach is in contrast to the experiment which deliberately isolates variables from their context. This research focuses on Ronnie Watson’s leadership style and use of storytelling within WesBank. The context of the study is of relevance as Mr Watson’s leadership style and use of storytelling was adapted towards the specific time in the bank’s history as well as the culture and values of the organisation.

Prior research and theoretical propositions guide the researcher on data collection. Multiple sources of evidence are collected and used in a triangulating fashion to confirm propositions.

Rowley comments that a frequent criticism of the case study approach is the lack of rigour and objectivity as compared to other social research methods. She contends however, that this research method is widely used because of its ability to generate insights that might not be achieved through other research methods (2002). The intention of the research conducted was to explore the ways in which storytelling contributed to Ronnie Watson's efficacy in his leadership role. Therefore the case study method is well suited to the research which intends to generate insights rather than prove pre-conceived hypotheses. The case study design is comprehensive in that it includes approaches to data collection and analysis (Yin, 1994).

3.1.3 Case study method

Case study methodology is well suited to studying phenomena within their natural setting and where control or manipulation of subjects is not necessary. The research was idiographic, focussing on a single phenomenon within its context as opposed to nomothetic research, which seeks to find general laws that can be universally applied (Benbesat et al. 1987).

3.1.4 Single case studies

Benbesat et al. (1987) describe a key characteristic of case studies as the intensive study of the complexity of a unit. Yin (1994) suggests that a single case study can be used as an exploratory device and could serve as a pilot study that would stimulate further research into new fields in which multiple case studies or comparative case studies could be conducted. Rowley argues that multiple case designs are preferred on the basis that they result in more robust conclusions. However she concurs with Yin in that the single case study may be used when a case may reveal unique results (2002).

Yin cautions that a single case study may result in problems for the researcher. The phenomenon being investigated may be misrepresented due to a lack of comparability amongst the same phenomena in other situations. A further problem may result if access to the single case site is limited, and in this regard Yin suggests that the researcher ensure that access will be granted to the case site prior to commencing (1994).

The research undertaken focused on a single case study, Ronnie Watson's leadership style and use of storytelling, within a single case site, WesBank. However, a number of participants were interviewed in addition to Ronnie Watson, so that comparability between responses was possible and a multi-dimensional perspective was gained. Ronnie Watson, as well as a number of other participants readily agreed to the interviews and provided detailed information on the topic.

3.2 Research design

The research design is the process that connects the initial research questions to the data collected, and ultimately to the conclusions drawn (Yin 1994). According to Yin (1994), a research design includes the study's questions, its propositions, if any, its units of analysis, the logic linking the data to the propositions; and the criteria for interpreting the findings.

Case study research will usually include questions that seek to gain greater insight into the units of analysis and will thus be formulated as *how* or *why* questions (Yin, 1994). The questions posed in this research served as an initial guideline to direct the line of questioning. Their open-ended nature allowed new information to emerge, and led to the generation of further questions. The study's unit of analysis, in this research focused on Ronnie Watson's leadership style and use of storytelling within a single case site, WesBank.

Yin advocates the formulation of propositions within the research design, even if the unit of analysis is an individual, in order that they may assist in directing the line of questioning. Two broad questions were posed to participants “How would you describe Ronnie Watson’s leadership style?”, and “How would you describe Ronnie Watson’s communication style?”

Yin includes among possible propositions the influence of early childhood or peer relationships. In this regard Ronnie Watson was questioned on his background and on people who influenced his career. The other research participants were asked whether they knew of any factors in Mr Watson’s background that may have influenced him. A literature review was not conducted on leaders’ backgrounds as the intention lay in understanding the unique factors within Ronnie Watson’s background that had influenced his development and not in gaining information that could be compared with existing literature.

3.3 Case site

A single case study was conducted focusing on the leadership style and use of storytelling of Ronnie Watson, within a single case site, WesBank. The research focuses on Mr Watson’s leadership and use of storytelling at the time leading up to, and during his tenure as CEO.

WesBank is a division of FirstRand Limited established in 1895. It is an asset finance company, providing vehicle and capital equipment finance and value added services.

3.4 Sample and sampling method

Interviews were initially set up and held with Ronnie Watson, as he was considered to be the primary research subject. Following two in-depth interviews with Mr Watson, a snowball sampling method was used to select participants for further interviews. Snowball sampling is a technique that is considered to be useful when seeking to obtain confidential information from a population that is difficult to find and secure interviews with. (Fredericks, 2005: 327-341) Mr Watson

was asked for the names of two people whom he had worked closely with. Thereafter each participant was asked for the names of two people who had worked closely with Mr Watson, either within WesBank or within a partner company or motor dealership. In total Mr Watson was interviewed on two occasions, and another six participants were interviewed on one occasion each.

Table 2: Profile of Research Participants (excluding Ronnie Watson)

Alias	Relationship to Ronnie
Paula	WesBank employee, who shared a close working relationship with Ronnie over a number of years
Malcolm	Currently a senior leader within WesBank, previously a member of Ronnie's leadership team
Dave	Currently a CEO of a First Rand business, previously a member of Ronnie's leadership team
Susan	Currently a senior leader within WesBank, previously a member of Ronnie's leadership team
Neville	CEO of a motor dealership, long working relationship with Ronnie
Bob	CEO of a partner company, long working relationship with Ronnie

Potential participants were initially contacted by phone, at which time an introduction was made and a brief description of the purpose of the research was provided. Mention was given that Mr Watson had been interviewed on two occasions, reassuring the participants of his cooperation in the study. Once the participants agreed to be interviewed a meeting request was e-mailed accompanied by a reminder of the purpose of the interview and the subject of research. A request to record the interview and conditions of anonymity were outlined within the e-mail. An example of the introductory letter can be found in Appendix B, along with the research instrument or interview guide used.

All participants readily agreed to the interviews except for one who declined to be interviewed, stating that he had not shared a good relationship with Mr Watson and was reluctant to share views on Mr Watson's leadership style. Despite assurances that the research sought to provide a balanced view on Mr Watson's leadership and communication styles, looking at positive and negative aspects, the individual was unwilling to participate.

3.5 The research instrument

A semi-structured interview schedule was used as the primary research instrument. The questions were open ended, and served as a guide to allow for elaboration and the introduction of new information by the participants. Two versions of the schedule were designed, one for questioning Ronnie Watson, and the other for questioning the participants. Examples of these interview schedules, as well as a covering letter are included in an appendix to this document.

3.6 Data collection

3.6.1 Interviews

The data collection relied on information gained during in-depth semi-structured interviews with Mr. Ronnie Watson, the former CEO of WesBank, as well as other participants who had shared close working relationships with Mr Watson over a number of years.

Participants were assured that the results would be presented anonymously. This was stated at the initial request for the interview to ensure participants felt comfortable expressing balanced views on Mr Watson's leadership and communication style. It was feared that results would be skewed towards presenting Mr Watson in a favourable light if anonymity had been optional. Yin (1994) suggests however, that it is preferable for case studies to correctly identify their subjects so that information gained from prior research can be built on. The participants have been assigned an alias so that their contributions can be referenced within the presentation of results. Alias' actual names and contact

details will be retained by the researcher and will be available on request (subject to prior approval by the participants). This will allow for further research to be undertaken at the case site.

The interview schedule included broad open-ended questions which were used to initiate conversations with the participants. Breakwell comments that unstructured interviews allow the researcher to cover a number of topics without the constraints of specific questions or the reliance on the rigid ordering of questions (1995). Questions are allowed to develop as a result of the exchange between interviewer and participant. This approach was adopted during the interviews so that topics arose naturally within conversation, allowing for a free flow of information from the participant. If topics had not been covered towards the end of the conversation, then a new line of conversation was opened by the interviewer.

The questions served as a guide to achieving information on Ronnie Watson's leadership style as well as his use of storytelling within WesBank. Questions regarding storytelling initiatives such as *The Wesside Story* and the *WesBank Soapie* were included to understand the participants' perceptions of their impact. The researcher used reflective and probing techniques to encourage elaboration on issues where necessary.

According to Rosnow and Rosenthal interviews hold some advantage over questionnaires in that they offer the researcher the opportunity to establish a rapport with their respondents (1996). The researcher can use this basis of trust to probe sensitive areas or to expand the line of questioning in response to new information. Thus information that would not have arisen in a structured questionnaire may be revealed. An additional advantage of interviews is that the researcher has increased flexibility in determining the sequence or wording of questions. This ability for the researcher to adapt the line of questioning can render the process conversational in nature and increases the free flow of ideas. Asking open-ended questions is advantageous in this type of research because it

allows participants to elaborate on their answers and highlight areas of importance to them.

The disadvantage to conducting semi-structured interviews is that the same questions may not be asked of all participants. This results in a lack of comparability between responses. Open-ended questions may result in lengthy and possibly unrelated responses making the data difficult to analyse (Rosnow and Rosenthal, 1996). Yin states that interviews are beneficial for case study research because of their targeted nature, focussing on the topic of interest, and their ability to produce insightful inferences (1994). He comments that interviews may prove problematic on the following fronts: the subject may have poor recall of the topic and thus provides inaccurate information; the subject may provide the answers they believe the researcher wishes to hear; and the interviewer may weaken the ability of the interview to produce valid information if the questions have been poorly constructed.

Interviews with Ronnie Watson referred specifically to the term storytelling to elicit detailed information on the initiatives undertaken at WesBank. Interviews with the other research participants veered away from using the term storytelling. The reasons for this were twofold. Firstly, Mr Watson warned the researcher that participants would not understand his initiatives as storytelling; secondly the researcher did not wish to lead the participants into confirming these initiatives as storytelling initiatives. Therefore questions were focused around Mr Watson's communication style. This allowed for a broad description of the various initiatives undertaken within WesBank, as well as a description of his communication style and techniques.

3.6.2 Documentation

The *WesBank Soapie* was used as an additional source of data. The *WesBank Soapie* is a partly fictional account of the significant characters and events within WesBank's history. Ronnie Watson commissioned the *Soapie* and contributed

much of its content. As well as participating in its creation, Mr Watson plays a central character in the *Soapie*. Anton Roskam's thesis entitled: *The perceived impact of storytelling in an organisation in South Africa*, was also used as a source of data. The thesis examined the perceived impact of the *WesBank Soapie* on the organisation (2008).

Examples of Ronnie Watson's newsletter to staff were obtained and read to understand the contexts in which he used storytelling as a method of communicating with staff.

Yin (1994) comments that documentation as an additional source of data is beneficial because it is stable, in that it can be reviewed repeatedly. Additionally, Yin cites the broad coverage that documentation offers, spanning a length of time and including multiple events and settings. A further strength of documentation is the fact that its creation precedes the onset of the case study research and therefore provides unobtrusive data. Weaknesses of documentation as a data source may include biased selectivity on the part of the researcher or the research subject, where documents may be selected based on their ability to validate the research propositions.

3.6.3 Direct Observation

The researcher aimed to make use of direct observation in which Mr Watson would be observed during the course of his normal interactions with his colleagues, and observations about his use of storytelling, if applicable, would be recorded. However, following the first interview with Mr Watson he related that he no longer played an active role within WesBank. Although he still speaks at motor dealerships he was unwilling to allow direct observation, commenting that this may cause him to behave in an unnatural manner. The researcher was however, able to observe Mr Watson during the interviews in which he used a number of anecdotes to relate his experiences, providing an opportunity for direct observation of his style and use of stories.

Yin (1994) cites the fact that direct observation provides a context in which to place the phenomena being studied, as well as the ability to observe events in real time, as benefits of this type of data collection. He cautions however, that direct observation may be time-consuming and subject to selectivity bias from the researcher or the subject in terms of what events are observed and subsequently recorded. An added risk of direct observation is reflexivity, in which the event may unfold differently due to the presence of the researcher. This was pointed out by Mr Watson in his refusal to allow direct observation by the researcher.

3.7 Data analysis and interpretation

Yin (1994) cites the pattern-matching approach used by Donald Campbell, in which evidence from the data is matched to the initial propositions or matches one proposition better than another, as an appropriate means of analysing qualitative data. Qualitative content analysis provides an extension to the pattern matching approach in which the analysis involves the subjective interpretation of data through the identification and isolation of themes or concepts. Breakwell (1995) suggests that the research questions act as a prism through which data collected can be viewed. Concepts or themes are identified and coded based on this initial view, and expanded on once data has been collected and emergent themes are detected. Coded segments may include long exchanges, phrases or sentences. From that point interview transcripts can be cut and sorted, with the aim being to identify quotations that illustrate themes or strands of meaning within the texts.

Qualitative content analysis proved valuable in analysing the transcripts. Only broad themes could be identified within the interview schedule as the questions posed were deliberately open-ended, and avoided prescribing theories through the use of narrow terminology. Potential themes also arose within the literature review, so that the repeated mention of aspects such as Ronnie Watson's charisma, were quickly identified.

Breakwell (1995) cautions that in the attempt to generate meaningful information from the content analysis, knowing where to cut the information flow may be tricky. A systematic approach was taken to analysing the data into meaningful themes in which information was first cut into broad concepts, and progressively sliced into narrower themes. The method used to achieve this involved the use of different coloured highlighters to initially isolate broad themes present in the interview schedule. These included references to Ronnie Watson's leadership style or characteristics, as well as references to storytelling and related aspects including Ronnie Watson's communication style, the *WesBank Soapie*, *The Wesside Story* and the Induction Programme. A separate theme involved references to Ronnie Watson's background and how this may have influenced him. A number of iterations of data sorting followed, in which the data collected from the various transcripts was cut, sorted and collated to form meaningful themes, and ultimately to relate a coherent story about Ronnie Watson, his leadership style and use of storytelling within WesBank. Care was taken to ensure that quotations were not cut so as to lose the context within which they were stated.

Breakwell describes how data can be coded using references to the participant and quotation within a table format (1995). Within this research data was initially analysed through repeated reading and sorting of the transcripts to identify themes. Common themes were then sorted into sections to form congruent conversations about Ronnie Watson, his leadership style and characteristics, his use of storytelling initiatives, as well as his background and factors that may have influenced his style.

Following the identification of themes and supporting quotations, the data is further analysed by comparing the findings to the information found within the literature review. Rowley describes the analysis of case study data as follows: "the researcher trawls through the evidence seeking corroboration or otherwise of the initial propositions". (2002: 24)

3.8 Limitations of the study

Participants were selected through a snowball sampling technique, in which each person interviewed provided the names of two other potential candidates. This may have lead to the selection of inherently biased participants.

Interviews were semi-structured allowing for information deemed important to the respondent to emerge. It is acknowledged that participants may have been biased in terms of their recollections and opinions of Ronnie Watson. There may also have been a bias on the part of the researcher in terms of the questions asked and the information probed. It is recognised that these factors may influence the insights generated by the research.

This research is qualitative in nature and findings were inferred by the researcher from the interpretations of the interviews conducted. The information selected as valuable and the ordering and sorting of information is based on the subjectivity of the researcher. The research is a single case study and therefore generalisations regarding storytelling as a leadership competency are not possible.

3.9 Validity and reliability

3.9.1 Construct validity

Construct validity refers to the establishment of correct operational measures for the concepts being studied (Rowley, 2002). Yin (1994) comments that a frequent criticism of the case study method is that the researcher fails to develop a sufficiently operational set of measures to be observed, and uses subjective methods to collect data. Rowley (2002) explains that construct validity ensures that subjectivity is exposed and reduced through the linking of research propositions to data collection.

Yin (1994) states that construct validity can be enhanced through the use of multiple sources of evidence which can be used in a convergent manner to support a line of inquiry. This implies making use of different data collection

methods such as interviews, direct observation, document reviews and archival records amongst others. The research conducted made use of interviews as well as the review of documentation. Limited direct observation was conducted through the process of observing Ronnie Watson's use of stories during the interviews.

3.9.2 External validity

Research is deemed to have external validity if the findings can be generalised to a wider population. External validity can be achieved by conducting multiple experiments, where the same phenomena are replicated under different conditions (Yin, 1994).

A frequent criticism of case studies is that they provide little basis for scientific generalisation (Rowley, 2002; Yin, 1994). Case studies can attempt to make generalisations through investigating the same phenomena at multiple case sites, however, the findings of a single case study can be generalised only to a theoretical proposition, rather than to a universe or population (Yin, 1994).

The research conducted in this report was not externally valid as findings are only valid to the leader interviewed within the case site, WesBank. Should the findings of this research be used by subsequent researchers, to conduct investigations into case studies of a similar nature, the external validity of the research would improve (Yin, 1994).

3.7.3 Internal validity

Internal validity refers to the establishment of causal relationships and is not applicable to descriptive or exploratory studies (Rowley, 2002). The research conducted examined the individual perceptions of Mr Watson and other participants regarding Mr Watson's leadership style, and use of storytelling within his role, and the efficacy thereof. The study, therefore, did not attempt to prove causality.

3.7.4 Reliability

Rowley (2002) refers to the reliability of a study as the ability for the research to be repeated and to yield the same results consistently. The research does not meet the requirements for reliability in this regard as the interviews were exploratory in nature and results are likely to differ depending on the interaction between the interviewer and participant. Additionally interpretation of data gathered in the interviews, is based on a subjective selection and sorting of information. Another researcher would be likely to interact uniquely with participants and interpret the data differently. Therefore the results are unlikely to be reliable.

Yin (1994) suggests that the reliability of a case study can be improved by maintaining a case study database which records a chain of evidence through a process of thorough documentation. Yin suggests that the researcher collect information in the form of audio-tapes, handwritten or typed notes and stores these in a logical fashion. This allows the researcher to retrieve data at a later date and ensures that an external observer is able to trace information back to its original source and may independently draw conclusions based on the recorded evidence.

In order to meet these requirements, interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Conclusions made from the interviews include the original quotation and a reference to the participant's alias. The original interviews in digital form, and the transcriptions are available for future researchers should they be required. Prior approval to release these recordings or the original participants' names will be gained before release.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

4.1 Observations

I began the process of data collection by interviewing Ronnie Watson. After a brief correspondence with his personal assistant, an arrangement was made to meet at a coffee shop close to his home. I arrived a few minutes early and scanned the busy tables, wishing I had looked for a picture of him on the WesBank website before coming. Glancing up, I noticed a man of fairly diminutive stature, casually dressed in jeans and shirt, scanning the tables, as I had. He looked over at me, and a huge grin lit up his face as he strolled over to meet me with outstretched hand. Any sense of intimidation I had anticipated disappeared and I suddenly felt I was meeting a friend for coffee, rather than interviewing the former CEO of WesBank about his leadership style and use of stories within WesBank.

He laughed when I addressed him as Mr Watson, and insisted that I call him Ronnie, adding that at the WesBank Induction programmes all staff were told to call him Ronnie, or would be asked to leave the room. In keeping with his wishes, Mr Watson will from this point of the document be referred to as Ronnie.

Once we had ordered coffee, the first question that arose came from Ronnie "So tell me about yourself?" This was not just a polite comment, as I spoke he listened attentively and asked questions to clarify or elicit further information - suddenly I was the interview subject, and Ronnie the interviewer. I felt honoured that he showed genuine interest in my background and would come to see this as part of his humility as a leader and an individual.

I had prepared a number of open-ended questions to elicit information from Ronnie but as I initiated the first question, "tell me about your leadership style?" he began to speak and kept me riveted for the next hour describing his experiences at WesBank, throwing in anecdotes to illustrate his point.

Ronnie explained that he had recently retired from his position at WesBank, having worked there for 43 years. Although no longer employed by the bank, his enthusiasm about the culture of WesBank was contagious, I almost felt inspired to apply for a position there by the end of the first interview. I interviewed Ronnie again about a week later, once I had digested what I had learned about WesBank and Ronnie's role there as both storyteller and leader.

I found Ronnie to be charming, open, easy to talk with and quite humorous, he had me laughing often. He exudes energy and enthusiasm and is still as passionate about WesBank, its people, and its culture today as he must have been as CEO.

4.2 Introduction

Results of the interviews with Ronnie Watson and the other participants are presented in the following section. The presentation of the results was structured according to themes identified through the initial data analysis. Themes have been recorded within four broad sections in order to cover the research questions posed as well as the natural ordering of information to form a coherent conversation and flow of information.

The themes presented below include:

- Ronnie Watson's Leadership style
- Ronnie Watson's use of stories within WesBank
- Ronnie Watson's Background
- Leaving WesBank

Quotations from the research participants are shown in quotation marks and a reference to the participant's alias is included. Quotations from interviews with Ronnie are shown in italics and interspersed with the participant's comments to illustrate the theme identified.

4.3 Ronnie Watson's leadership style

Themes that illustrate Ronnie Watson's leadership style are discussed in this section. In keeping with the storytelling genre, leadership themes are presented as leadership archetypes. The figure below shows the archetypes that were defined to represent Ronnie's leadership character. In the section that follows, each archetype is explored further through the selection and coherent representation of participant's perceptions of his leadership characteristics or style.

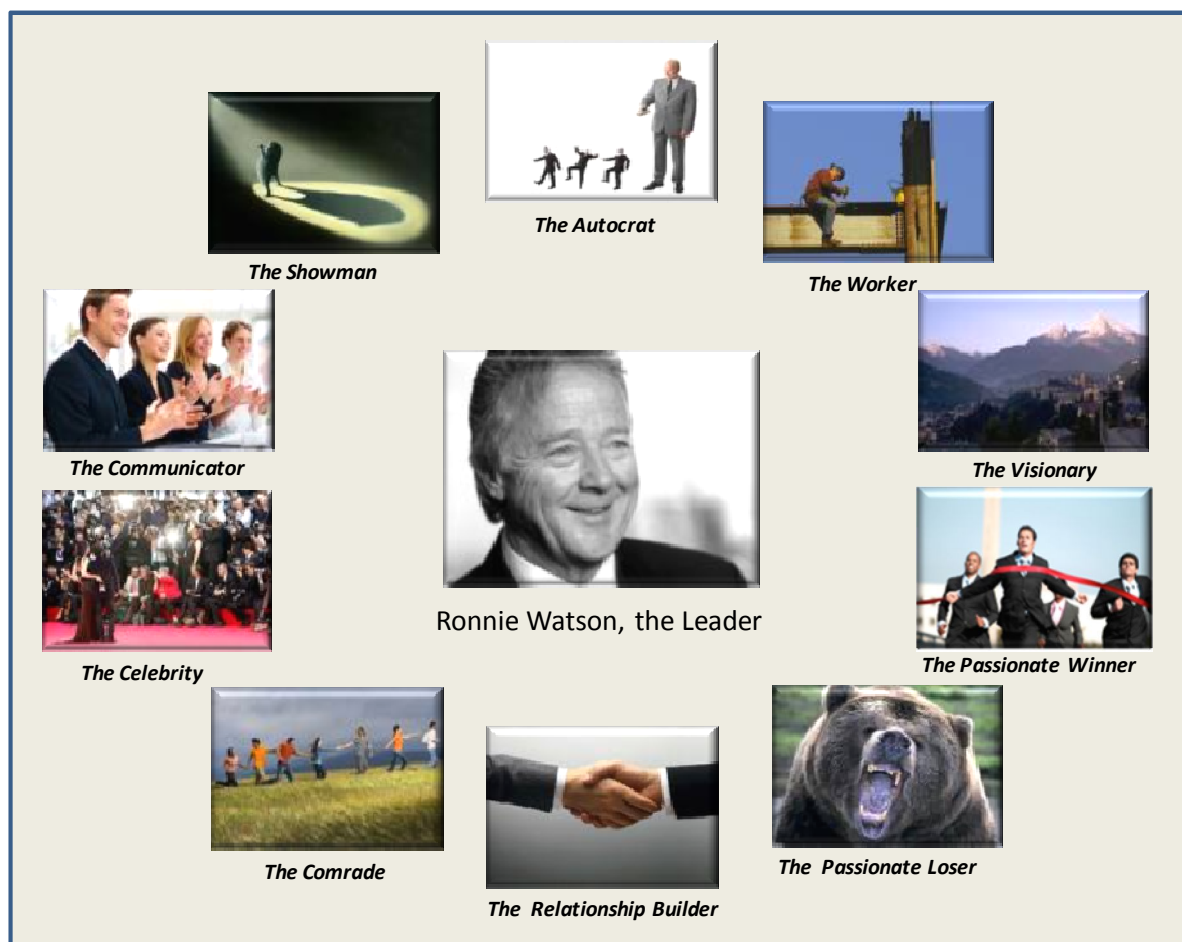


Figure 1: The Leadership Archetypes of Ronnie Watson

The Autocrat

When I ask Ronnie to describe his leadership style, he chuckles but admits to being an autocrat. He quickly acknowledges though that,
...you can't run a business like that.

He relates that on his return from a Harvard University course he tried harder to empower those around him. Ronnie explains that during the course they studied a successful business in which the leader's style was very different from his own, thus prompting him to take action. Seeing Ronnie as such an amiable fellow, I found it hard to believe that he could be autocratic; however almost every person interviewed corroborated this viewpoint.

Susan suggests that what many people viewed as Ronnie's autocratic behaviour was rather "Ronnie being persuasive". Even so, she acknowledges that Ronnie made strides to ensure that his leadership style became more democratic; "he instituted a system where there were divisional leaders, so that decisions were made before they got to Exco." Malcolm describes Ronnie's leadership style as tending towards autocratic, but agrees that Ronnie had tried to adapt and become more participative. Paula echoes others in saying that Ronnie was autocratic at times, but adds that if you told him he was out of line, he would listen to you, and says Ronnie "encouraged his Exco members to disagree with him" Dave didn't hesitate to state that "Ronnie was very much an autocrat", but adds that "he didn't alienate people...he had a way of doing it that didn't come across as an autocrat." Dave credits Ronnie's integrity and lack of personal motive saying that, "Ronnie's actions were never for personal gain, and people saw that". Bob comments that although Ronnie had "a strong ego" that this wasn't a negative thing, he qualifies this and confirms Ronnie's motives by stating "it was about Ronnie, but he always put the interest of WesBank first".

The Worker

Dave explains that Ronnie's leadership could not be characterised by his autocratic behaviour he elaborates that, "Ronnie was a leader by the force of his personality, but he was also a leader because he knew about a lot." He adds that "Ronnie would provide the logic which would say he was right – it was frustrating". Although much of this knowledge could clearly be attributed to Ronnie's years of service at WesBank, Dave comments that Ronnie's hours of preparation before meetings meant that "despite the fact that he didn't have the same skills as some of his employees, he would know the material better than anyone else". He explains that because of this Ronnie "would command the attention - people *knew* that he knew!" Malcolm also comments that Ronnie prepared thoroughly, spending time reading through the material on the weekend so that he would know it as well or better than his colleagues at the Exco meetings. For those who underestimated Ronnie's knowledge in a particular area Malcolm remarks that "if you were a smart accountant, and thought he wouldn't understand this, you did so at your peril. He knew he wasn't a CA, but he knew he was smart." He adds "go into a room with number crunchers, and let them believe you know nothing; it's to your advantage." Dave explains that Ronnie's foundation wasn't in theory, "it was all hands on and practical, not models etc, he would just tell it how it was... and he was logical". He concludes that "people with the same background would relate to that".

Ronnie is quick to point out that intelligence is not his key strength:

...I was never bright, in fact bordering on the opposite! But I did have energy, and passion and I did have enthusiasm...

Ronnie underplayed his intelligence, either intentionally, as a strategic advantage, or perhaps unintentionally as part of his humility. Either way he clearly acted from a deep knowledge base, arising from his experience at WesBank as well as his diligent preparation.

Ronnie relates that he joined WesBank straight out of school, and didn't go to university until much later in his life when WesBank sent him to Manchester University and then Harvard to attend various courses,

...I got a job as soon as possible, thinking I'd go to university later, but I never, ever went to university, it was all 24/7 with the bank after that...

Although Ronnie admits he has some regrets over this he proffers that,

... While everyone was studying to get cleverer, I was working towards something, maybe creating a franchise of myself in a way...

On the importance of a university degree Ronnie comments that although he encourages the bank to employ people with degrees, he doesn't believe a degree in itself guarantees value for the business,

... It opens the door - it doesn't keep it open. Some of my biggest failures, or maybe rather disappointments, were when I thought: 'hell great people, great degrees, but they forgot how to work'...

The Visionary

Despite Ronnie's self deprecation, his leadership ability clearly extended beyond his autocratic moments. Ronnie's leadership efficacy was commended on numerous fronts, his visionary ability, marketing prowess, ability to build relationships and to influence others through his communication style emerged as strong leadership characteristics. On this note, Bob comments that Ronnie had the "unique ability to ride several horses at once", but importantly, "he knew which levers to pull" to get the desired results.

Bob remarks that Ronnie's "opportunity focus" made a big impression on him and observes that Ronnie "generated business, he looked at the horizon and kept on moving forward". Susan describes Ronnie's leadership style as "very visionary", explaining that "he saw things that other people didn't see". She recalls that the industry would anticipate Ronnie's forecast for the growth in car sales, which was

generally accurate. Neville confirms Ronnie's ability to understand and predict the market stating that, "whatever they forecast you'd pay attention to". However, almost all respondents, including Ronnie, recall that he was far off on his prediction of car sales leading up to 2010,

...Some people would say I got it wrong, I said by 2010 we would sell a million cars, but if it weren't for the economic crisis we were well on our way to that...

Susan defends Ronnie, stating that no one could have predicted the economic crisis and subsequent fallout for the motor industry.

Ronnie's ability to "tap into the market" enabled him to strategise, comments Neville. He adds, "You always felt something different would happen...there'd be a new programme or plan or something". He recalls that Ronnie's plans always seemed to work despite the fact that they "may have seemed hare-brained at the time." Dave describes Ronnie's plans as "highly innovative", and comments he was "always thinking out of the box". Bob comments that Ronnie was able to effect marketing ideas because he had a big budget, which he comments "is a powerful thing". He recalls that Ronnie could be "quite frivolous" at times. On this note, Dave agrees that this innovation sometimes came at the expense of governance. Ronnie's marketing prowess could be used to influence people, comments Dave, asserting that this played a big role in growing the business." Malcolm adds that Ronnie "politically knew what story would gain mileage"

The Passionate Winner

Neville intuits that Ronnie "hated to be second, he always wanted to be top". Dave recounts that Ronnie ran ten Comrades marathons in a row, and characterises him as determined, and an "inspirational leader".

Paula comments that Ronnie was "all for the values and culture of WesBank", she adds that his dream around customer service would be that WesBank would have a building where tourists would want to come and visit. Bob comments that

Ronnie was very sincere about his belief that WesBank was the best. Ronnie's passion for WesBank is evident, and he doesn't miss an opportunity to sell the WesBank magic to me:

...Maybe modesty usually prevents me from mentioning it, but WesBank has always been the best company to work for...We've been ranked no. 1 or 2 for the last 22 years (in the Best Company to work for survey), and we've received awards for being the most consistent top performer. It shows how powerful the WesBank story is. I always say if I could take that WesBank culture, that something special and put it in a bottle and cork it, and go to some of these companies and pop that cork and just let it ooze out...

Ronnie's personal style is characterised by his passion and optimism:

...You know companies that rank as top to work for have one thing in common, you can see the passion coming through, the CEO has to be passionate about the place... I can't take negativity, people knocking the company or the team...

The Passionate Loser

Dave says that Ronnie "wears his heart on his sleeve" and recalls that he was "very soft, generous". However, he adds that he had a hard side, and was intolerant of failure. Malcolm concurs, "Ronnie was intolerant of...weakness", however, he relates this intolerance to business issues, stating that Ronnie was trying to effect massive change, and would be angry if someone wasn't "pulling their weight." Dave says that it was Ronnie's passion for WesBank that caused people "to be scared of him", adding that "you knew if you'd disappointed him".

Susan exclaims "I can tell you, you didn't want to be with Ronnie when he was angry. Oh, when he exploded he really exploded! You could hear his footsteps, and you could tell from his footsteps what his mood was". She comments that his anger was sparked by poor service, or "slap dash attitudes". She reflects that "He wasn't good with giving feedback in a way that didn't destroy the person. He may have destroyed a few souls along the way." Malcolm remembers that some people's egos were bruised, leaving them resentful, but concludes that "they didn't

want to face up to their own incompetence and would rather blame Ronnie. Dave reflects that “if he wasn’t a fan of yours you would know about it, he didn’t change his mind even when people justified a change in mind”, and sums up that Ronnie was “soft, a dichotomy, very hard on most people, but on certain people too soft.”

The Relationship Builder

Despite his renowned temper, Bob acknowledges that Ronnie was well liked by his people, and was admired and respected within the industry. Dave agrees and adds that Ronnie had a “great sense of loyalty” towards his people and built long lasting relationships. Susan recalls that she and Ronnie had a “special relationship, one of mutual respect”. She comments that when she joined WesBank, Ronnie’s support and acceptance of her circumstances endeared her to the company, “He enveloped me into WesBank.” Dave saw Ronnie as a mentor, and reflects that he shared a “special relationship with Ronnie” who he recalls “showed faith in me...and supported me”. Dave recalls that he almost left the business on two occasions, and both times Ronnie convinced him to stay. From his own experience, Malcolm adds “if you resigned you knew there would be a call coming for an invitation for a cup of tea with Ronnie, and he was a persuasive character, he was a father figure, very stable.” Ronnie proudly recalls that:

...in the whole time I was there, there was only one guy I lost, and now he is back.

Within the motor industry Ronnie built strong relationships, which allowed him to be as effective as he was, comments Dave. Neville agrees, recalling that Ronnie and his predecessor “built the relationships with people, from the ground”. Susan describes the basis of Ronnie’s relationship with the dealers “he was part of the innovation of the dealer bank, he’s always been associated with that, they saw him as a clear market leader, someone who understood their challenges and listened to them, and someone who fought their cause in different forums, he was a voice to be listened to - he was a true partner”. Bob remarks that Ronnie became the spokesperson for the motor dealers, commenting that he was “very

clever at establishing partnerships". He adds that Ronnie was strategic at building relationships committing WesBank to a number of strategic sponsorships, such as *Car of the Year* and *Motor Journalist of the Year*. Bob comments this "increased his profile and created those bonds."

The Comrade

Paula describes Ronnie as "very much a people's person" explaining that he makes anyone feel comfortable. Susan adds that he "had a way of bringing out the best in people" and says that this is because he believed in them. Bob recalls that if Ronnie heard about a person studying, he would ask them to come and see him, and spend an hour with them talking. He comments that "such personal interest would spread like wildfire". Bob adds that this shows that when Ronnie says "our people are our greatest asset, he stands behind it" Paula comments that he "respected people as individuals", which was clear by the way he interacted with people. Susan echoes this perspective, stating that "he was a man who operated at any level, if he walked the floors he would stand and laugh with staff, or you'd find staff congregating around him. Bob reasons that "one reason why Ronnie ended up with so much influence is that he was the epitome of a visible leader; he interacted with his staff all the time, and with the dealers." Ronnie explains the importance of interacting with the staff,

...management have got to walk the talk! Sometimes I look at companies and I wonder if the CEO actually knows what's happening in his own company, they're out of touch...

Paula suggests that Ronnie was able to relate to the staff because he had experienced those positions during his career; she relates that this "endears him to many people". Susan recalls that "the people at the lower levels of the organisation loved him, they really loved him. He had a way with people." She explains that Ronnie believed in letting people come and talk to him to hear what the staff had to say and recalls that "people loved that sometimes he took the side of staff instead of management."

The Celebrity

Malcolm states emphatically that Ronnie was revered by the staff, observing that “the reaction he would get when he walked around the building – that couldn’t be staged!” Bob goes further stating that “it was almost like hero worship at the lower levels at WesBank, it doesn’t happen often.” Ronnie’s appeal shows clearly that he exemplifies a charismatic leader. While I was careful not to mention it, everyone I interviewed brought up Ronnie’s charisma. Malcolm refers to this charisma as an “x-factor” and describes how it could be used to influence people “if you wanted something done quickly you just had to say ‘Ronnie wants...’ and it would happen.” Ronnie’s charismatic personality was not just evident at the lower levels; Malcolm says that at meetings, if Ronnie was present, the effect was tangible, “there was an edge”. Paula agrees, “if he was in a forum you’d know he was there, he would attract attention”. At events after Ronnie spoke Paula recalls that “people would flock around him to ask him questions and talk to him...people would want to be around him”. Neville describes his charisma as “an effervescence” and adds that Ronnie “had the ability to excite people ...you knew something exciting was going to happen”. Paula insists that Ronnie’s charisma was part of his natural style and was felt by most people.

The Communicator

Susan remarks that Ronnie was one of the few people she has worked with who communicated very clearly what his expectations were. Neville agrees that Ronnie’s communication was “clear, concise to the point”. Dave states that Ronnie “would converse brilliantly with people”. It seems Ronnie was a skilful communicator who was able, through the persuasiveness of his argument, to influence others. Susan puts forth that Ronnie “articulated his view in such a compelling way that you could buy into what he was saying”. When faced with counter arguments Susan says that Ronnie would “almost have an answer for all the question marks you would have around a strategy”. Susan describes how Ronnie would use active listening skills and reflection to convince his detractors;

“he acknowledged...or in some cases echoed back what you’d say; in echoing it back he would weave in his argument.”

The Showman

Besides his communication skills it seems Ronnie was a talented performer, able to present to and entertain large crowds. Dave observes that “when you needed him to do a job on stage - he would do the job. He is a showman at heart, as any good marketer is”. Malcolm contends that Ronnie was more than a great communicator, “he was an orator”, and marvels at Ronnie’s ability to “stand up in front of five people or five thousand...and tell the same story a hundred times with the same level of passion! Malcolm recalls that “Ronnie’s great talent was doing things time and again with incredible energy”. Bob comments that Ronnie was able to enthrall the audience rather than simply hold their attention, recalling that “he could inspire them and excite them.” Susan adds “because he had such a way of holding people’s attention, you couldn’t help but almost hold onto your seat waiting for the next thing he would say, almost believe every single word he would say.” As Dave does, Bob also describes Ronnie as a “showman”, arguing that Ronnie had a picture of how he wanted his people to see him, so “he crafted a specific image... and WesBank provided the backdrop.” Bob recalls how the road shows Ronnie staged were “events, the singing, and special songs”, and reminisces over a road show held at a racetrack at which Ronnie parachuted in to the waiting crowd. With his characteristic humour and humility, Ronnie laughingly recalls,

...when I landed there was my management team all in suits with tears in their eyes, and I realised it was tears of disappointment that I’d made it!

4.4 Storytelling within WesBank

This section relates themes regarding the use of stories within WesBank. Amongst the topics that are covered is Ronnie's ability to connect to others on an emotional level, an essential element of telling a convincing story, *The Wesside Story* and the *WesBank Soapie* are discussed with the purpose and perceived efficacy of these explored. Informal storytelling initiatives including the Induction programme, Ronnie's Weekly Mail and other teaching stories are described through Ronnie's words, and commentary from participants. The section concludes with commentary regarding Ronnie's embodiment of the stories he told, again a vital element to ensuring stories are able to influence.

Connecting to the heart

Ronnie sums up his view on creating effective communications:

..It's got to have an emotional barometer, no matter what communication you send out, the reader must somehow be able to relate to the content. I'm the kind of guy, if I walk into a company and see a notice board, I read it, usually it's something like it's been decided that on such and such a date..., on the emotional barometer what will it register? Zero, it's not important in their lives. If companies think that's the way to communicate they're wrong...

Many respondents recognised Ronnie's ability to connect to people on an emotional level through his communication style. Bob acknowledges Ronnie's ability to put equal emphasis on the hard and the soft issues, "he could communicate in a very rational manner, the hard business issues, simultaneously he got through to the hearts of his people, Susan affirms "he knew how to speak to the heart, but also the mind". She comments that "through hooking the heart he got you to implement what needed to be done" This suggests that Ronnie's ability to connect to people's emotions allowed him to gain their commitment and influence them towards his strategy. Malcolm says that Ronnie would get you to

“buy into” his strategies because he had “a great human touch”. Bob confirms this stating that “he knew to get commitment out of people; he knew you had to connect not only at the rational level but also the emotional level.”

Susan recalls an example of Ronnie’s ability to move an audience: “I remember at one of the management conferences, he had everybody sniffing, almost in tears because of the compelling case he made...to carry your management team to the point where some of the men were really blinking hard to not cry.” She explains that part of Ronnie’s creativity when speaking to an audience was his clever use of multi-media in creating emotional connections. She observes that Ronnie would use music or film clips for dramatic or emotional effect; “he weaved it with his speech” and recalls that he played Bette Midler’s *Soar like an eagle*, it was phenomenal!”

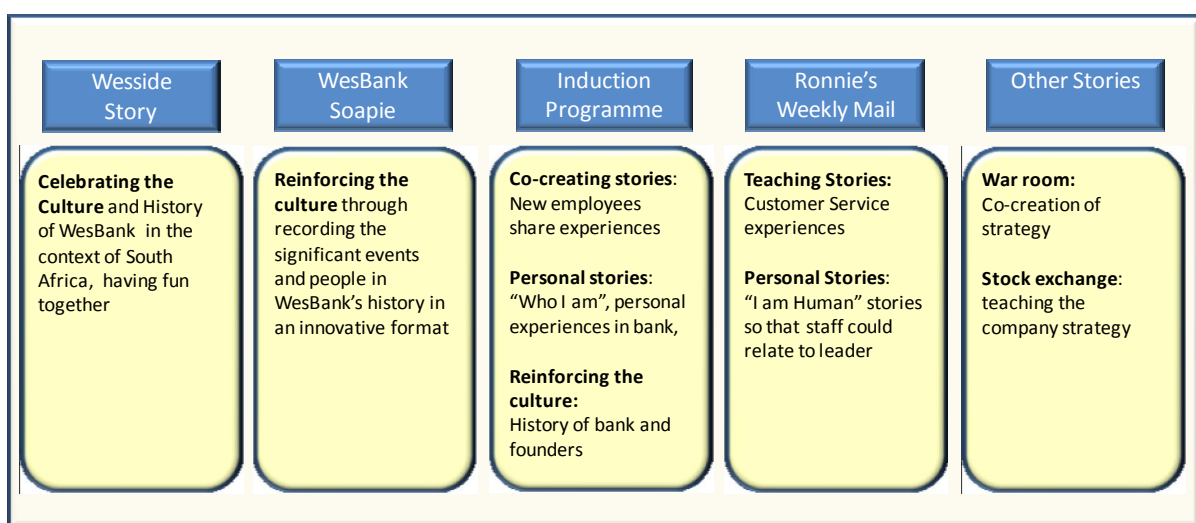


Figure 2: Summary of Ronnie Watson’s use of storytelling in WesBank

Celebrating the story: *The Wesside Story*

In 1997, Ronnie and staff staged *The Wesside Story*, a musical production that told the story of WesBank. Ronnie involved the staff in the writing and production of the

The Wesside Story, and every employee from WesBank was encouraged to audition for a role in the show.

..I wrote to staff and I said I'd like to put together a musical telling the story of WesBank and South Africa into a stage show and I wrote the script, got other people interested and eventually 32 people came to audition on a Sunday afternoon at Kyalami, and how could you say no to anybody? Some people came there thinking they were dancers and ended up singing, others may have just carried equipment... You cannot believe the talent that came out in the show!

The Wesside celebrated the culture of WesBank and included its history within the context of South Africa. Ronnie explains that *The Wesside Story* spoke about...

...what we stand for, but in a different way and in a fun way. It told the story of how we started, how it was started up by an entrepreneur, the ups and downs, and I plotted this against what was happening in South Africa at the same time...

Another important aspect of *The Wesside Story* was showing the fun side of the organisation. Ronnie himself demonstrated his willingness to have fun with his people by playing a part in the show. Neville recalls that Ronnie “would be in the centre playing guitar and singing...he was a pretty exciting guy.”

... that's part of who we are. Everyone had such fun; the audience was dancing in the chairs! ..We ended up performing at the Jo'burg City Hall, Cape Town City Hall, Bloemfontein City Hall ... playing to over 5000 people. It was so good we eventually invited some customers...

Dave recalls that *The Wesside Story* was a “fantastic production”, while Neville comments that it was “very entertaining”. “It made me feel part of a wonderful and significant organisation,” recalls Susan of the emotions the story evoked. Neville says that the show was so successful that “he had the team eating out of his hand; there wasn't a member of the team that wouldn't die for Ronnie at the time.” Paula recalls that there was talk of doing a sequel to *The Wesside Story*, however she comments that it was decided that the show was no longer appropriate, “It

happened in the 80's, would people today enjoy that?" Ronnie remembers that people had enjoyed it so much they asked him before he retired;

...when can we do Wesside Story 2?

Footage of *The Wesside Story* was later used in a promotional video, *The World of WesBank*, to illustrate how the WesBank family had fun together. Paula comments that the new CEO, Brian said that *The Wesside Story* should be taken out of the video as "he didn't think showing the entertainment side was reflecting the professional side".

Remembering the story: the *WesBank Soapie*

The *WesBank Soapie* was a twelve episode part fictional story presented in a soap opera format. It related the story of WesBank, its history and significant events. The *Soapie* centred around two fictional families, the *Windsors* and the *Marshalls*, over the course of three generations. The family members would either work for, or be customers of WesBank. A soap opera format was chosen to appeal to the employees who had enjoyed daytime soap operas. Each employee at WesBank received a black binder in which the episodes, which were released periodically, could be filed. (Roskam, 2008)

Susan recalls that the *WesBank Soapie* captured the history of WesBank, she says Ronnie commissioned it because "he wanted to position the legacy of WesBank...he wanted to make sure that people didn't forget the humble beginnings of WesBank." Ronnie describes how sustaining the identity of WesBank can create resilience in times of crisis:

... (The culture) was already strong but I built on it and sustained it, reminding people about who we are and celebrating that. I think it's important to recognise where you come from and who you are...then when its important, like now, you can rally this family around you, you get together have a war cry.

Dave was in favour of the *Soapie*, and commented that it reinforced the WesBank brand. He adds that it was an effective way of telling the WesBank story, and says that the motivation behind it was to capture the history at a time when many of the participants in the story were retiring. He comments that the *Soapie* could be used to teach people about the organisation; “The objective was for new people to come into the organisation and read up on the story in an interesting way.”

Generally the *WesBank Soapie* was not seen as a success. Dave reasons that it failed to create an impact because there was a lack of support from the executive team. Susan agrees that the idea behind the *Soapie* was good, but reasons that it didn't receive the time and attention it deserved, particularly from the executive team. “It didn't have the impact it could've, it was one of those things that he really believed in, and we didn't buy into it and therefore didn't promote it.” Dave concludes that “People thought it was too long, not necessary, a waste of money and time.”

Paula says that the *Soapie* has not made a lasting impact, and suggests that no one would be able to locate their copy if asked. She adds that the older generation who had been at WesBank for a long time related to it, but the younger generation doesn't relate to it, and concludes “it's a change of generation, it's not important to them.” Dave concurs, reasoning that the *Soapie* was no longer relevant, “the world has moved on so that no one really cares about that, the things that will make us successful in the past are not the same as the things that make us successful today.” Ronnie comments that the *Soapie* was important at the time to reinforce the culture, and believes the story needs to be told regularly to remind people of what it means to be a *WesBanker*:

...It's not that staff will necessarily remember it now, that's not the point, it's what you do at the time which makes a difference...it's the strategy of keeping the legend alive; those principles alive. How do you communicate that in a unique way so that amidst all the communication that goes out, it's memorable?

Ronnie explains that his strategy for reinforcing change was to:

...Continue to tell stories, weekly, come back to it in a few months.

He adds that the *WesBank Soapie* formalised the story of WesBank, but comments:

... We told the story in many other ways ...

Introducing the story: the Induction Programme

Ronnie found a powerful way to speak to people starting their careers at WesBank through the Induction programme. Ronnie explains that this marked the beginning of inculcating the WesBank culture;

...It starts from when the person joins the organisation; I would spend two days of my life with every single person...

Paula describes how employees at every level would attend the induction together. She comments that this gave everyone the opportunity to meet the leaders and decision makers. Ronnie used his personal story at the induction to illustrate that no matter what background, or education they enter the organisation with, the right attitude can lead to success. "People then hear it straight from the horse's mouth, what WesBank is all about".

...and then I would tell them the story again, tell them how I joined the company, how I'm not very bright, and that's not what we look for, we look for that dedication, enthusiasm and passion - that get up and go ...

She adds that there was a large focus on Ronnie as a person. "I had video clips around Ronnie and the things he did, such as him running the Comrades marathon".

...I tell everyone about how I started at the bank in my old station wagon, filled with boxes at the back and how it became known as Watson bank not WesBank, and I'd stop and carry the typewriter, and show them pictures. And so it takes you

right from the early days. But it wasn't just my life story it was the story of the bank as well.

Paula explains that an important focus of the induction process was going through a scenario where each individual would introduce themselves, "he wanted to hear about them, we would have photographs of people that would come up and then you'd have to talk about yourself."

...The first thing I'd do is to ask them to tell me about themselves, all 40 of them. Then I ask them if they've ever met the CEO, or the top management, in 90% of the cases its "no". And that's the big difference immediately, here they are spending two days with the CEO, calling him Ronnie, and I start off by saying 'anyone call me Mr Watson and you're leaving the room'.

Paula continues that Ronnie always included a fun element, such as putting together a WesBank song, and holding a competition where people could test their knowledge of WesBank. She comments that "you'd see such different sides of people coming out and hidden talents. Malcolm recalls that the induction was informal, with Ronnie participating in the activities, "it wasn't *Mr Watson*, it was *Ronnie*, I will sing with you, be a silly idiot with you, joke with you, no collar, jacket and tie, down to earth."

...and we played games together, they all heard when I talk about the passion for the customer, and I told them straight out "you mess up with a customer then you're out of here, if your boss covers up for you then he's out of here as well", so it wasn't just a question of pretty pictures and stories, it was "this is what we believe in".

Paula describes how Ronnie would go through the history of WesBank, which she comments "he loved to share". She recounts that Ronnie would talk about the founding members adding in his personal experience with them. "He would go through the whole history ...why things were done, how did the strategies in the past have an effect today? He'd talk about the structure of WesBank and what role you play in the bigger picture. And he would link ...isolated incidents...

together which you would not have ever known about it...he would pull it all together for you so that you walked out really knowing the company.” Malcolm comments that the induction programme showed new employees what it was to be a *WesBanker*, “it was a great way of saying this is who we are, what the culture is.” To illustrate the culture further, Ronnie showed people a video about a company that sells fish, which has subsequently attracted tourists to watch them in action because of the passion of their staff.

... The staff are actually having fun, you can see it! They throw and catch the fish, they come around the counter, they try and get the customer to learn to catch the fish. They interview the staff who say they can't wait to get to work! It's such a parallel - here's a company selling fish on the other side of the world and WesBank, both employees saying they can't wait to get to work. Then you interview the management and you can see why - because they demonstrated these same behaviours, they are focused on the staff having fun, and the managers are getting involved, and are behind the counter with them.

The video reflects Ronnie's values, that passion for work, no matter what the position or task, creates a fun environment and grows the business. Ronnie relates his philosophy on instilling passion in his staff, implying that he understands the impact of his attitude on others, and crafts his image and stories accordingly.

...You know it's infectious, if your leader is excited about what he is doing then everyone else will be too, I like to think we have a lot of infected people at WesBank.

Ronnie relates a story that reinforces the message that he is passionate about WesBank and “can't wait to get to work”. He is enthusiastic and sincere as he recalls:

...When I lived in Houghton, and our head office was in Braamfontein, it used to take me 8 minutes to get to work, one day one of the ladies , Judy, who was quite high up, said to me: “Ronnie why do you go so fast, you don't have traffic or

anything? I said to her: "Judy I can't wait to get there, I really can't!", I used to get so depressed on a Friday afternoon, because I wouldn't be at work for the whole weekend.

The Induction programme followed a carefully constructed and well-rehearsed format. Ronnie reflects that this was his way of telling the new employees a story about WesBank.

...My whole approach was to keep them enthralled, to have a beginning and a middle and an end, in fact I would structure the two days along the lines of a story and have co-authors contributing to that story, after two days you could have written a book, it would be of their experiences with previous companies, the good the bad, it would just all come together very nicely.

Ronnie was able to integrate the new staff so that they become the co-authors in the WesBank story. In this way they leave the induction feeling that they could equally participate in the story's outcome, alongside their CEO.

...The staff would walk out of there on water! They became personal friends of the CEO, even if they were the coffee maker, or a cleaner or a CEO of one of the businesses.

Ronnie recognised the value of taking best practice and implementing it in the business. Paula says that Jack Welch believed that spending time with his people would lead to improved business results, and Ronnie wanted to incorporate that concept into the Induction programme. Malcolm comments on the value of the CEO interacting with his employees, "As people move up the ranks they lose touch with what it's like to be a junior clerk...If you are in the lower ranks you don't get to meet the CEO." Ronnie explains his view on the importance of the CEO's participation in inducting newcomers into the organisation.

... A lot of people used to say to me: "Ronnie, should the CEO be spending two days a month with the new joiners?", and my response would be, "I'm glad our opposition's CEO doesn't spend two days a month with their new joiners", let

them strategise and those kinds of things, rather focus on the important things - the people.

Dave states that the “Induction programme was brilliant”, and comments that it was successful because Ronnie showed people he was human and inspired them by his passion. Susan recalls that people would leave the induction feeling inspired, “He managed to bring out the light and what was special about WesBank. Anyone who attended would say “Wow! I now understand why I’m here at WesBank”. Although on reflection she comments that it may have left a few people frustrated “because he painted such a wonderful picture of WesBank and some may not have experienced it.”

Teaching through stories

For Ronnie storytelling permeated much of his communications, both formal and informal. When I asked him whether he consciously used stories to communicate within WesBank, he comments that:

...For me it's part of who I am, it's a natural style, a way to relate directly to people and bypass all the office rumours...

Although I avoided using the term storytelling in the interviews, some people alluded to or referred directly to Ronnie’s use of stories in everyday communications. Paula describes how Ronnie used stories to clarify his point, particularly when communicating with staff below Senior Management level, saying that he would “talk a point and then...describe it through a story, it would make people understand better.” Malcolm recalls that if WesBank was going to embark on a new venture, Ronnie might use a story to explain how the decision came about, such as describing how “he had been sitting having a cup of coffee and how the thought came about”. Malcolm suggests that this technique allowed people to identify with Ronnie and the associated strategy, “a lot of leaders miss this, he is not just telling a story to entertain you he is letting you know, that you also have thoughts like that, you also have cups of coffee where someone says

something, and you can also latch onto that.” He recounts another example of how Ronnie used stories to communicate, “He would tell a story about how he had a bad manager and how he dealt with that”. Malcolm reflects that Ronnie did this because he knew that within his own company there were bad leaders, and people in the audience who were dealing with that. Malcolm adds that Ronnie’s message through the story was to provide hope to those experiencing similar difficulties, “don’t be suppressed, find an angle...he was throwing a message out to you so that you don’t have to wake up at two in the morning.”

Ronnie describes how information was openly shared at the communication sessions where every employee in the business was encouraged to participate and share ideas; he explains that if WesBank was experiencing a crisis it was important to share that in an open and honest manner:

...often middle management filters this kind of information out, and that’s where you’ve got to work to unblock these filters. WesBank is a family, lots of people talk like that, but I believe that everybody is an important member of that family, and like a family we should communicate with each other.

Employees were encouraged to communicate back to management at these sessions or to ask questions. Ronnie shared important information with the staff, such as explaining current threats to WesBank, sharing a new strategy, or discussing the financial results. He was able to communicate this so that people from every level and at every position could understand the concept, as well as the role they could play in the outcome. Susan observes that Ronnie “had a way of simplifying it, he would always say ‘talk to me at my level’” She recalls that if someone was on the podium and he saw that some had not understood he would take over. Malcolm recalls that during a crisis Ronnie would communicate fully, “Nothing was hidden, we would go warts and all and put it into plain speak”. He adds that Ronnie would explain why the income was down and what the triggers were to get it back up. Ronnie shares some other examples of ways in which he involved people at every level in understanding the mechanics of the business;

...Some time ago we ran a little stock exchange, just for fun where we listed each business separately, and how well we did affected the share results of the day, the Western Cape was doing dismally. It got to a point where even the cleaners wanted to know how the share price for their company was doing.

Ronnie relates another example of how employees became actively involved in defending the bank against a concerted attack by a competitor,

... A section of the bank was turned into a war room, we appointed a guy as a commandant, and he had a colonel. We had the camouflage nets, the tin pans they eat out of...

Ronnie rejects my comment that this sounds more like fun than work;

...That is work, trying to find out what are our competitors doing. For the first time we were getting meaningful feedback about their strategy and tactics... not just some corporate strategy that someone told us – we were actually hearing it from the line!

Part of Ronnie's success lay in creating meaning around work. Paula confirms this commenting that Ronnie has a talent at being able to "educate you... in an entertaining way. She explains that he took this role so serious that if someone had given poor service he would "pick up the phone and call you, get you to fly across the country if need be, and he would...take you through a whole exercise about why that customer's complaint was so important".

Reinforcing the story: Ronnie's Weekly Mail

Another way in which Ronnie was able to speak directly to the staff was through his weekly newsletter, *Ronnie's Mail*. He explains the motive behind this communication:

...Companies do not communicate with their people...about 10 years ago I started Ronnie's weekly newsletter, where I would write to all our people...you know you can't rely on the managers to make sure that staff are motivated, or effective so

Ronnie's mail and the Induction programme were a way to speak directly to the staff.

Ronnie used the newsletter to reinforce the values of WesBank, particularly the concepts of the WesBank family and that of providing excellent customer service. Dave asserts that Ronnie used personal stories to tell people what the business was about, rather than simply to talk about himself, explaining "It wasn't a *me, me, me* thing, it was never a case of him trying to grow his own stature against the business." Susan recalls that in his newsletters Ronnie frequently spoke about his wife Grace, and "made her look like she was the boss". She reasons that "it was part of Ronnie's humility...that he showed her to be the boss". Paula says Ronnie might use personal stories, such as talking about his holidays, but asserts that this served to project to people that "I am human". Bob commends Ronnie on the personal flavour he gave the newsletter, he concludes that "he wanted to say we are a family, I'm one of you, I also get tired at times, have worries, I don't always have all the answers". Ronnie echoes these comments, explaining how the newsletter served to help people relate to him as part of this family.

... It was to try and explain to people that I'm also human, that if the petrol price went up I suffered too, that my wife spends too much, that my kid is not doing what I thought he was going to do...

Malcolm confirms that there was always a purpose behind the story, "a good will, a WesBank family - that we take care of our people". Bob says that Ronnie "created folklore", commenting that "he was quite deliberate in doing it". He explains that Ronnie would hear about a junior person that really treated a customer well... and he would create a hero there". Bob concludes that Ronnie showed everyone that he recognised people when they lived the WesBank values.

... How do you tell the story? You tell the story by practicing what you preach, we've always said we believe in our people, and every day we say it. If something happens that's positive, we make sure we tell that story to the rest of our people.

He adds that through the newsletter Ronnie was able to reinforce WesBank as a great place to work, so that even the opposition would say: "If only we worked for WesBank!"

Ronnie used the newsletter to relate customer experience stories, and to illustrate how problems could be resolved.

...The story hasn't changed; people need to know why it is important to keep the customer happy...and then I would tell them something that had gone wrong with a customer, and also the positive things that people had done around customer service and feedback I'd received from customers. And also instances where people had gone the extra mile in the organisation.

Malcolm says that Ronnie "was great at relating customer experience stories", explaining that he would describe a phone call received from a customer on a Friday evening, what the complaint had been about, and would then describe how the complaint was resolved. As much as Ronnie communicated around resolving customer complaints he created opportunities to celebrate great customer service.

...there's a real storytelling aspect to talking about customer service, highlighting the good and the bad, like I did in my weekly mail. I think when I get excited about something the best way I can talk about it is to tell a story of sorts ...

In the course of our conversation, Ronnie tells a story of a recent visit to a dealership.

I didn't have an appointment with him, but he wanted to have coffee with me, so we were chatting and this customer came to the door and asked for some help. Instead of jumping up, the manager said to him: "I wonder if you wouldn't mind going downstairs and finding Joe".

Ronnie, incredulous, continues...

... Now that guy was just sitting talking to me, he should have said “excuse me Ronnie, I need to help this customer”. In my opinion that dealership doesn’t have it in its culture. Motor industry sales are right down; he should have jumped up instead of talking to me!

Ronnie advocates that customer service should be entrenched within the culture:
... I don’t believe in customer service programmes, it should be part of the culture, and culture is not a once-off programme...

Living the story

Paula comments that the nice thing about Ronnie is that “you don’t see one person at the office and another outside, he lived his stories, he put his money where his mouth was – he lived and breathed the values of the organisation”. Ronnie recognised his own responsibility in setting the cultural tone of the organisation, and embodied the values of providing excellent customer service.

They actually saw that right from the top, I showed them my daily modus operandi, how any customer could phone directly through to me with a complaint, and I would drop everything, and sort that problem out before the sun went down, and they and I like to think that’s why WesBank has such a high rating in terms of customer service. And it’s not just me, the whole team, I like to think that most of my staff practices what I preach and it’s inculcated in the culture of the bank.

Ronnie says that the CEO who took over from him continues to tell stories about customer service, and Ronnie takes his story and retells it using it again to illustrate the importance of customer service.

... you know if I had to say to Brian, that he was telling stories, he wouldn’t think about it like that, but I get his weekly newsletter. He told a story of how he went into Woolworths last week, and was having a cup of coffee, and the manager came over and said “excuse me do you mind if I sit with you and ask about our customer service?”, and he said he was actually a bit annoyed, he was in a bad

mood and he just wanted to relax and be by himself, but he said “sure”, and he ended up spending 45 minutes with him. The manager asked him what the Woolworths branch was doing right. What would he like to see in the branch? And he was so impressed! So Brian is telling stories to reinforce the principles on which WesBank is run.

The anecdote above may be a direct recollection of Brian's words, or perhaps Ronnie added an additional layer to the story. Either way, he is able to talk about customer service by recounting relevant examples that contain real settings, characters and complex human emotions to which others will relate.

4.5 Ronnie Watson's background

Ronnie's background is of interest to this research as it informs both his leadership style as well as his use of stories. Ronnie uses much of his background story, particularly his early start in WesBank to tell personal stories and to illustrate the possibility of success within WesBank despite one's circumstances. Questions around Ronnie's background elicited a number of anecdotes from Ronnie, providing an example of the type of story Ronnie might include in the Induction programme. The anecdotes are included in their entirety to show Ronnie's storytelling style and to tell the actual story of his background.

The beginning of Ronnie's journey at WesBank

... In some way or another we've always been telling the WesBank story right from when I joined and was a 17, 18 year old, I just felt this something... I actually believed back then that one day I can run this company, I actually believed it! And I think there are people that feel that way – that one day they can run it...I think it's important that they realise that irrespective of their background that they can achieve.

Ronnie often used his personal experiences as the basis for stories. His own story of how he came to join WesBank serves as an example to those in the lower ranks of how with dedication anyone can succeed. Clearly elements of his story have been shared in a number of forums as many of the interviewees were able to describe Ronnie's beginnings in the bank.

Malcolm recalls that Ronnie would tell stories about "what it was like working as a young person at WesBank, stories about his family, his wife, and his sons". Bob recounts that Ronnie started at "the most junior level" and says that he didn't have a tertiary qualification. "I heard about Ronnie's start in WesBank when we celebrated it at an event, we saw his pictures from when he was in the post room...it was done very tastefully by the marketing team who worked with him," recalls Susan. Dave comments that Ronnie had "been there, done that",

recounting that Ronnie started in the mail room. Dave laughs as he recalls that “he loves that story” but adds “I personally don’t believe that he spent much time there.”

... I worked in every department in the bank, starting in the postal department, and that's the best way to know a company, if people join and say this can't be done, I tell them it can, because I've done it; from going out to repossess cars, everything. I'm not sure companies have the right Management development programmes; they should bring them in and make sure they go through all the disciplines, make them experience different parts of the company, not just put them into HR and let them work on the theory.

Mentors along the way

Ronnie also spoke about people along his journey that have influenced his career. Paula recalls that Ronnie often shared a story of his early experiences at the bank; “he was the boy who ran up and down to buy cigarettes, as he was the most junior, and...he was called in by the regional manager and how he shook in terror...he would put it in such a way...people would be glued to what he was saying – you’d hear how people would be gasping! I’d sit through this every single time, but his stories were so real they made you feel part of it.”

The storyteller in Ronnie emerges as he relates the story of his mentor. He is animated and his blue eyes twinkle as he relives the experience, undoubtedly for the 100th time. I find myself experiencing the anxiety that Ronnie must have felt at the time and hanging on his every word.

... I always tell the story about Mr Hamilton... he was eight foot two tall and had this huge beard (or so I'd been told), he was the CEO when I started there, but I'd never met him. I was told that if the phone rings once, it means God wants to see you - and Mr Hamilton was God! And the women there told me that if the phone were to ring invariably you would be in trouble, maybe you didn't fit in here or your reports weren't correct. I was so young I couldn't even have a driver's license.

... Well I just got on and did my work and tried to keep my head down, but then one day the phone did go “triiing”, and all the women looked at me, and each other, one of them took out a tissue and mopped her brow. They were all very motherly towards me, as I always used to go to the café and buy them cigarettes or what have you, and I was this little guy, so they were quite protective over me. Anyway when the phone rang, I just thought “What have I done?” I was summoned to his office, but before you get to God, you have to go through his archangel, who was his secretary, Maureen. She recalls that my legs were actually trembling...

... Mr Hamilton walked out of his office and he filled the whole door he was so huge, with his great beard. And he said “Come in Ronnie, sit down!”, and I was thinking all the time “What have I done?” And he will tell you that I was as white as a sheet. And he took out this form and said we must sit and look over this career development form for you some time, and me not even knowing what a career development form was, but he said: “Well, I’ve filled it in, have a look and tell me what you think. He had planned my career for the next year, and I was thinking, “you mean you think I will make it for a year?” delighted.

We were both chuckling at the end of the story, and I felt I really understood that young man who wanted so desperately to succeed. He continues the story of how his mentor helped to shape his career:

... and over the years he followed my career closely, when I had just turned 21, I had been calling in the Pinetown area, and I used to call on motor dealers and corporates, but all of the sales went to Durban, one day they did an analysis of the business in Durban and they found that 50% of all business came from this one little guy, so they said we must open a branch in Pinetown. They called me in and said they were going to open this new branch and would probably bring in a manager from Johannesburg, and I was thinking “hell, I have done all this work the competition has basically left town, and now I’m going to have to report to this manager!” So we were all called to this hotel for a big event, and Mr Hamilton was there and the owner of the company, and they had this speech and said we’re

taking another bold move, we're appointing the youngest manager ever at WesBank. I was shocked, I was ready to leave the company I had been so disappointed, I believed strongly in loyalty and I had given everything and I felt they had turned their backs on me, so you can imagine how wonderful it was, here I was this young guy, no other experience, never been to university. There was an article in the Sunday Times, with a picture of me and the headline "Youngest manager ever at WesBank". You can imagine what that was like for my father sitting in Rhodesia to get a copy of that, he was so proud. And it instilled a tremendous loyalty in me. I always felt I was in the right place at the right time working under the right person.

Heritage

Ronnie's life before joining WesBank was difficult:

My father was a missionary in Rhodesia, and my mom was a nursing sister, my mom would go and stitch them up, my dad would try and save their souls, and an elder brother and sister, and that's what we came from, very, very poor, I mean nomadic, and I had to get working as soon as possible. My father, who later retired to a farm, was very close to the black population in Rhodesia, being a minister. He didn't believe there was a future for my brother and I there, my sister had already left, so he brought us both down (to SA), got us established, and I went to a cram school to finish my Matric, he just had such foresight!

Bob contemplates that Ronnie may have been so driven because he felt that "he had to prove himself". He reasons that Ronnie was a *baby boomer*, and "was prepared to make sacrifices, work hard, he simply had to achieve". On Ronnie's background Bob says "I suspect he came from humble beginnings, not a wealthy father". He surmises that "he wanted to be a hero".

Susan comments that Ronnie's background may have influenced his communication style. She observes that it was almost as if Ronnie was "talking to a congregation". She concludes "it could explain how Ronnie came to be".

... And that's my life...

4.6 Leaving WesBank

This final section concludes the story of Ronnie Watson's leadership and storytelling within WesBank. This information emerged within the interviews and it is appropriate to include it to understand the summation of Ronnie's impact on WesBank.

The End of a Chapter

Susan says that Ronnie was not ready to leave WesBank "I saw a different Ronnie in his last year, I think he struggled with letting go of something that had become his passion, he could have gone another five years... The energy he had!... It was his life, he breathed, he drank, he ate WesBank, it was his passion". Dave concurs, "He was consumed with WesBank, there are a small number of leaders who are like that, some are passionate but not consumed, but they have a life, in his mind everyone was consumed by it". Bob says that Ronnie's passion for WesBank "wasn't just enthusiasm or optimism... his involvement in the business was intense". Dave comments that Ronnie gave a lot of his life to WesBank, "he regrets missing his kids' childhood, he would never decline an invitation, every night he would have a function, and he didn't need to do that." Some of the light leaves Ronnie as he reflects...

... I realise now how the bank has been 24/7 with me, but I'm struggling to keep busy, I'm bored, I still talk to salesmen at dealerships but it's not enough.

Bob comments that "WesBank *became* him", and reasons that, that may explain why they are now going through a dip, concluding that it can be problematic to link the personal image so closely with that of the organisation.

Malcolm praises Ronnie for his willingness to make decisions, he "was a strong, very courageous leader...If you put yourself out there as a force that's going to challenge the norm, it's a risky form of leadership... to pioneer." Susan recognises

that some people who have experienced the pain that WesBank has gone through as it has lost market share may blame Ronnie. She observes that “because things have gone south it’s easier to blame the guy who’s not here anymore...but he didn’t make those decisions single-handedly. No matter how persuasive or compelling his argument was, if we felt it was a poor decision we should have not agreed on it.”

Dave observes that some of the things he did in today’s context may not be relevant,” today we are run by a seven man team and it’s more consultative, if we’d operated in that kind of environment we wouldn’t have made some of those mistakes.” He concludes that Ronnie’s leadership style may not be appropriate today – “but nor would Winston Churchill or Jack Welch”. The kind of management style needed now of course is different because of the economic times, Brian is far more conservative. Dave says the leader we have now is very much straight down the line, and more emphasis on controls” and comments that “in times like this you don’t need the marketer,

... Sure, and our current CEO, Brian is quite different from me, more professional, which is great but he was under me for 11 years before I let him take over, but he’s different which is good as WesBank needs to continue to transform. There was a long hand-over period where I let him take over two years ago, but I stayed on as chairman, so first the day-to-day work and then the mantle of the culture.

Ronnie’s absence has clearly left a gap at WesBank. Neville says that since he has left the relationships with the dealers have suffered, “I think WesBank have lost their marketing ability since Ronnie’s left, their attention to detail with the dealer. Ronnie was very good with keeping the relationships going”. He feels that if Ronnie were still at WesBank he would have handled the crisis more effectively, “he would have fought like hell with the board to make sure he had money, and to make sure he didn’t let the dealers down.” Malcolm comments that “The culture probably has suffered, it hasn’t all collapsed, it’s changed, his successor is very much a hard line businessman, you needed some change, due to the market but

we could have perhaps had a mix. The leader that took over is a good leader, but...the edge that WesBank had over its competition, in terms of its culture didn't have to be given up." Susan reflects that "today you see a business view, more than you see the character of the leader. Bob remembers that Ronnie was "very bubbly and lively, it's more serious since he's gone."

The legacy of Ronnie Watson

Ronnie's influence as a leader has undoubtedly left an indelible mark on WesBank, and those who knew him. I asked people what Ronnie's legacy at WesBank will be:

Malcolm states that Ronnie was multi-talented. "Bringing costs down is easy, a grey-suited accountant can do it, but to be a banker, and a leader, and a visionary, and a strategist, and read balance sheets...the all-rounder who can achieve what Ronnie achieved – you can't argue with that."

Paula comments that he is fondly remembered, "There are many people who will still pick up the phone and call him to find how he is. The older generation still recognises his legacy." Susan enthuses "For sure he's left a legacy, he will be remembered...there are those who will remember Ronnie very, very fondly because of the 40 years he gave and the contributions... to the company and the industry". Neville observes that Ronnie "will always be remembered for his ability to motivate his own team and the dealers." Dave comments that Ronnie will be remembered for the solid relationships that he developed within the motor industry; he adds that "People remember him as somebody who played a very crucial role in getting WesBank where it is today, and as a very inspirational leader."

Dave says that Ronnie's loyalty, passion and love of WesBank, combined with his energy and enthusiasm meant that Ronnie was a "unique leader...those things combined will never be seen in WesBank again, and those of us who are left always aspire to that type of leadership." He adds that Ronnie "will go down in the

history of our organisation as the greatest leader WesBank has ever had.” Bob says that Ronnie became “sort of a legend in his own lifetime at WesBank”, while Neville comments that he will always be remembered as “one of the best WesBank had.” Bob concludes that Ronnie left with integrity, “he is a person of unquestionable integrity. Not only do we respect him we also admired and liked him.” Malcolm remembers Ronnie for the fact that he “sold the story very well”, and in the most fitting tribute, Neville states:

“Ronnie loved WesBank; he really did.”

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

This section comprises a discussion of the results presented against the background of the literature review to assess where findings are supported by, or contend with the literature.

5.2 Leadership

Based on the preliminary analysis of the results, Ronnie Watson was perceived to be an effective leader. The diagram below illustrates the structure and basis for the discussion around Ronnie Watson's leadership in WesBank.

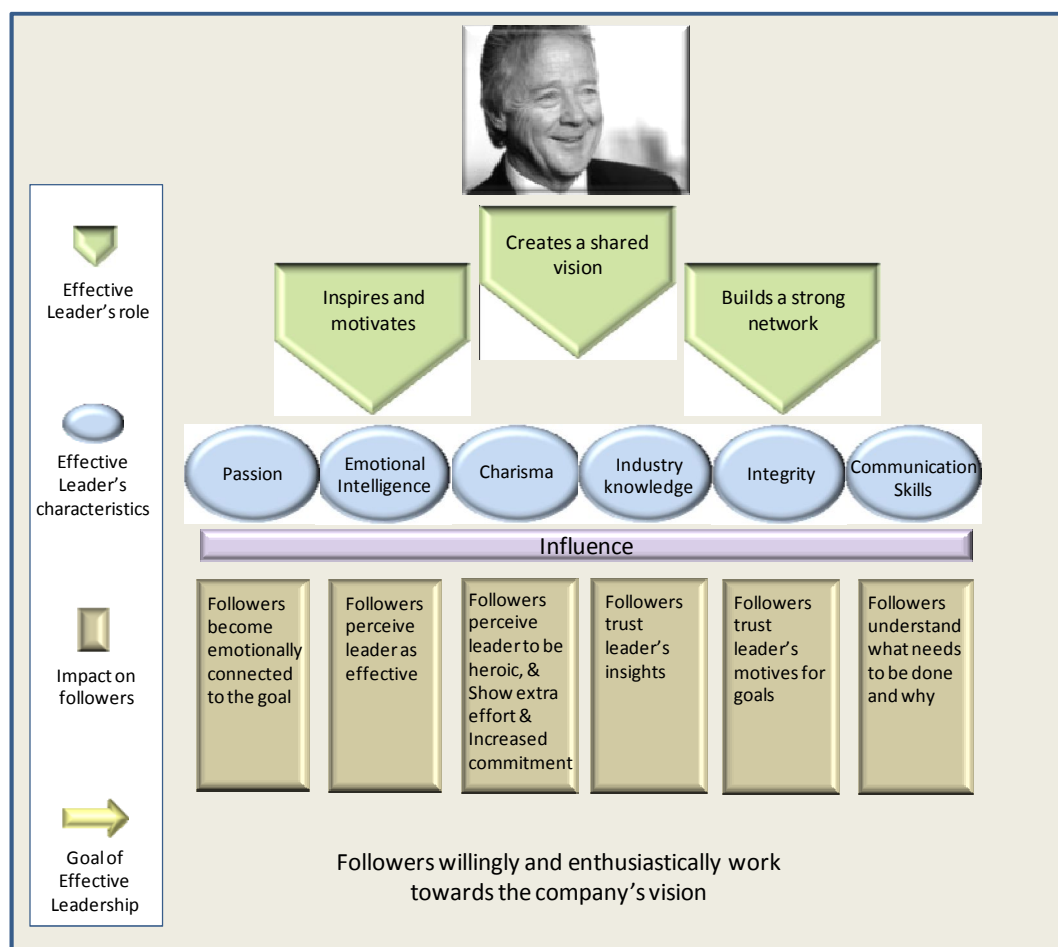


Figure 3: Ronnie Watson's leadership roles, characteristics and influence

5.2.1 Ronnie's leadership role

Leadership is defined in the literature as the ability to influence others to willingly and enthusiastically work towards the company's goals (Kotter 1988, Robbins, 1989). Gardner provides greater detail on how leaders influence their followers; "by word and/or personal example" leaders influence the "behaviours, thoughts, and/or feelings of a significant number of their fellow human beings" (1996: 8-9). The literature describes a number of leadership characteristics that define leaders, as well as roles that leaders should take accountability for that together work towards influencing followers to work towards the company's goals.

Creating a shared vision

Kotter contends that effective leadership involves creating an agenda for change that includes a strong vision, which takes into account the legitimate interests of the parties involved, and includes a comprehensive strategy for achieving the vision (1988).

There was evidence that Ronnie initiated an agenda for change within his role. Neville recalled that "You always felt something different would happen... there'd be a new programme or plan or something". Clearly he anticipated trends, he was said to have great insight into the market, and created a number of marketing ventures to boost sales.

When faced with a competitor targeting their clients, Ronnie created a war room to find intelligence on their competitor's operations. This could be seen as creating an agenda for change, which was to effectively combat the competition and thereby reinforce their position. This vision certainly took into account the long-term interests of all parties, and the strategy was said to be successful, with Ronnie commenting that they began to receive real intelligence on what their competitors were doing.

Other examples include Ronnie's 2010 vision, which forecast the sale of one million cars. The road show was taken around the country and played to different

audiences. It focused on creating optimism and encouraging investment and excellent customer service. The vision was clearly a strong and optimistic one, which took into account not only WesBank's interests but businesses and industries, as well as all South Africans. The vision was a shared one focusing on the combined opportunities for the country with 2010 approaching. Due to the economic decline the forecast was inaccurate, and Ronnie was heavily criticised for this.

However, much of Ronnie's leadership focused around creating and reinforcing a strong culture which he felt would sustain WesBank if faced with crises. Paula recalled that Ronnie involved the culture in everything he did. He spent two days each month with new employees at the Induction programme to ensure that they were introduced and absorbed into the WesBank culture.

Inspiring and motivating

Kotter asserts that motivation contributes to leadership efficacy. He describes motivation as a fixed character trait, that cannot be learned.(1988) Werner states that the leader's role in relation to people, is to inspire them, in contrast to the manager's role which focuses on controlling people.

Dave characterised Ronnie as an "inspirational leader" while Bob remembered that he was able to "inspire them and excite" his audience. Susan said that this was because he "had such a way of holding people's attention".

Building a strong network

Kotter states that effective leaders should develop solid relationships within the firm and industry (1988). It was clear that Ronnie built strong relationships with people in the industry. Both Bob and Neville, leaders from companies external to WesBank, commended Ronnie for his ability to build relationships with the dealers. Bob recalled the "clever sponsorships" of events that Ronnie undertook which helped in creating some of those bonds. Neville despaired at WesBank's

loss of favour amongst the dealer network since Ronnie's departure, commenting that Ronnie would have fought for the dealers during this tough economic climate. Susan, a WesBank employee, recalled Ronnie's role in establishing the dealer network around WesBank.

The Leader-Member exchange theory, developed by George Graen and associates in 1973, suggests that leaders develop special relationships with their followers based on the similarity of their personalities. He argues that this group of favoured employees received disproportionate attention from their leader, but in turn performs better and has a lower rate of attrition (in Robbins, 1989).

Participants from Ronnie's leadership team all spoke of the "special" relationship they shared with Ronnie. Ronnie recounted that he only ever lost one person that he did not want to lose, and then managed to convince him to return. This shows that Ronnie's special followers did indeed have a low rate of attrition. The special relationships Ronnie developed with some would have resulted in extra effort, Neville's comment that following *The Wesside Story*, "there wasn't a member of the team that wouldn't die for Ronnie", illustrates the strength of these bonds.

As Graen suggests, these special relationships may have resulted in the exclusion of other members. Dave recalls that Ronnie was "soft, a dichotomy, very hard on most people, but on certain people too soft." Additionally a respondent from Ronnie's leadership team was not prepared to be interviewed because he felt he had not shared a good relationship with Ronnie.

5.2.2 Ronnie's leadership characteristics

Ronnie's leadership characteristics are supported by the literature as those that define leadership. The section below discusses Ronnie's leadership characteristics and describes how each helped him to influence his followers through reference to the results, or to the literature.

Passion

Werner states that a leader's commitment should be passionate. (In Nel, 2005) Ronnie was passionate in his commitment to WesBank's success. Dave recalled that Ronnie loved WesBank, while others said he was consumed by it, and commented that he sacrificed much of his personal life for WesBank. Bob commented that Ronnie was very sincere about his belief that WesBank was the best. Ronnie was aware of the effect his passion had on inspiring others saying that: *"companies that rank as top to work for have one thing in common, you can see the passion coming through, the CEO has to be passionate about the place"*.

Emotional intelligence

According to Kerr et al. (2006) emotional intelligence, made up of skills such as empathy and good interpersonal skills are a key determinant of leadership effectiveness as perceived by their staff. According to Bob Ronnie had a "great human touch", and was frequently seen laughing and chatting to employees on the ground. Susan said that Ronnie was able to persuade people by actively listening to their concerns and weaving these into his counter argument. This suggests Ronnie had a high emotional intelligence, with the capacity to empathise with the concerns of people, this according to Kerr et al., would have led his followers to perceive him as an effective leader (2006).

Charisma

Everyone interviewed spoke about Ronnie's charisma, and I experienced his charm when interviewing him. Ronnie attracted attention, Bob commented that the reaction he got when he walked around the building "couldn't be staged", and was revered by staff.

From the data collected it is clear that Ronnie had a profound effect on his followers. This "x-factor" could be used to influence people and created an "edge at meetings" (Malcolm). Robbins suggests that charismatic leaders generated a higher level of extra effort on the part of their followers (1989). Evidence that this

was true of Ronnie's team is found in statements such as "there wasn't a member of the team that wouldn't die for Ronnie at the time".

Charismatic theory asserts that the charismatic leader exerts a profound effect on their followers by means of their personal or social abilities. In turn, their followers attribute heroic or extraordinary qualities to their leader (Robbins, 1989).

The results show that Ronnie possessed well developed personal and social abilities. Susan said that his personal abilities were such that he "had a way with people", she added that people "really loved him". Participants from his leadership team felt they shared a special relationship with Ronnie. He was frequently seen chatting and laughing with the staff in the corridors.

Hwang et al. researched the effects of charismatic traits which include *social sensitivity*, and a *persuasive personality*. They found that the *social sensitivity* trait influenced the reported performance of a company (2005). Ronnie's character demonstrates social sensitivity through his emotional intelligence discussed earlier, as well as recollections such as Susan's who said that there was a very soft side to Ronnie, and that he cared about people. Ronnie's possession of the social sensitivity trait would, according to Hwang et al. (2005), affect the performance of the company. The fact that WesBank won numerous awards is testament to the presence and efficacy of this trait in Ronnie. Additionally, since he has left, performance has suffered according to comments such as "WesBank has taken a dip", they've "lost market share", and they "used to be the dealer bank" (Neville).

A *persuasive personality* was found to influence subordinate commitment Hwang et al. (2005). Susan spoke of Ronnie as having a very "persuasive way" in convincing his Exco towards his view. Through the possession of these charismatic traits, it could be surmised that Ronnie influenced subordinate

commitment. Statements such as “he had the team eating out of his hand” (Neville), confirm this proposition.

As Robbins suggests, Ronnie exerted a profound effect on his followers (1989). Bob's comment that “it was almost like hero worship” show that his followers did indeed attribute heroic qualities to their leader.

Industry knowledge

Kotter states that effective leaders should possess sound industry knowledge, (1988). Although Ronnie dismisses his intellect, people referred to him as smart, and spoke of his ability to construct logical arguments based on fact and experience. It can be deduced from the data that Ronnie's industry knowledge was well developed. He spent his entire career at WesBank. Over 43 years he moved from the bottom of the ranks, in the postal department, to finally achieve the position of CEO, and then chairman. Ronnie recalls that he “worked in every department of the bank”. His knowledge was “all hands on and practical” (Dave), and he was a leader “...because he knew about a lot” (Dave). He was a logical thinker who understood the industry well. Neville's comment that he has the ability to “tap into the market” hints at a deep understanding of the industry, as does Paula's assessment that the industry anticipated his forecasts.

Integrity

Werner states that the leader's role in relation to tasks is to do the *right* thing (Nel, 2005). This implies the possession of integrity in the leader's motivation for initiating goals. Kotter (1988) also says that a leader should possess a good reputation, again hinting at the need for integrity.

The results show that people perceived Ronnie as having integrity. Bob commented that he was a leader of “unquestionable integrity”, while Dave said of Ronnie's autocracy that “his actions were never for personal gain, and people saw that.” Ronnie's reported outbursts, which could be seen as Ronnie reflecting his

true self, were caused by “poor service” according to Susan, showing that he was motivated by the interests of WesBank.

Harvey et al. (2006) suggest leaders who are authentic are able to project their true selves to others because of a deeper understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses. Ronnie’s ability to project himself honestly, through his self-deprecatory comments around his lack of intelligence to his *Who I Am* stories show that he displayed authenticity. This ability to project his true self would have allowed people to see his motivations and to trust him. Authentic leaders are effective because they are more likely to understand how present actions might affect future outcomes (Harvey et al., 2006). It could be construed then, that because of Ronnie’s authenticity he was able to understand the effect of his present actions, and adjust them to affect future outcomes. In an example of this behaviour Ronnie understood that through his presence at the induction sessions, he would affect the attitudes of the employees in the future.

Communication skills

Communication skills were not reported in the literature to be a key characteristic of effective leadership; however much of the theory on how leaders influence their followers relies on the use of communication. Howell and Higgins (1990) state that charismatic leaders use appealing communication techniques to influence their followers into implementing changes. Communication also forms part of the persuasive personality charismatic trait, said to influence subordinate commitment (Hwang et al., 2005). Anderson describes how the charismatic leader is effective because he actively monitors social cues and adjusts his message and the way it is delivered (1990).

Ronnie’s communication skills were a central tenet of his leadership style. He was able to construct logical arguments, could “enthral” (Bob) and audience, and used emotion to appeal to the hearts of people. These factors garnered him support allowing him to influence followers towards the company’s goals.

Susan described how Ronnie used active listening skills when trying to convince detractors, and would then be able to weave their concerns into his arguments. She described him as very persuasive. Dave commented that Ronnie would “just tell it how it was” and didn’t use techniques such as models, but would be able to “provide the logic that would say he was right”. Bob, Susan and Malcolm all spoke about Ronnie’s ability to communicate on both a rational level as well as an emotional level. Susan recalled how Ronnie had his management team close to tears at a conference because of the compelling and heartfelt case he made. She said that “through hooking the heart he got you to implement what needed to be done”. This suggests that Ronnie’s communication ability aided in influencing others towards a goal.

General characteristics

According to Robbins (1989), Stogdill’s research in 1974 identified five common leadership traits that render them effective in their role. These include intelligence, dominance, self-confidence, a high energy level, and task-relevant knowledge. Evidence of Ronnie’s intelligence and task-relevant knowledge are discussed in previous sections, however the results also suggest that Ronnie possessed the other characteristics, namely dominance, self-confidence, and a high-energy level. His dominance could be clearly discerned from the numerous references made to his autocratic streak. Ronnie possessed self-confidence that Bob referred to as a “strong ego”. Susan commented on Ronnie’s energy level, stating that he could have continued to work for at least five years “the energy he had!” Ronnie then can be seen to possess all of the five traits identified by Stogdill as those required to render a leader effective (Robbins, 1989).

5.2.3 Conclusion

Ronnie possessed characteristics supported by the literature as those of effective leaders. These included charisma, industry knowledge, passion, communication skills, integrity and emotional intelligence. His leadership role included setting a

shared vision to which the company could aspire, providing inspiration and motivation to his followers towards the vision, and building a strong network, which could implement the vision. These roles were described in the literature as those of effective leadership. Ronnie's leadership, including the roles he undertook and the characteristics he portrayed, were seen to influence his followers in numerous ways. This influence according to the literature and results, results in amongst others:

- An increase in subordinate commitment, (Hwang et al., 2005)
- An increase in the reported performance of a company, (Hwang et al., 2005)
- A higher level of extra effort (Robbins, 1989)
- A perception of the leader as effective, (Kerr et al., 1998)
- Attribution of heroic qualities to the leader (Robbins, 1989)
- Better performance and lower rates of attrition of those who shared a special relationship with Ronnie (George Graen, in Robbins, 1989)
- Dedication, motivation, excitement and inspiration (results)

It can be concluded that Ronnie was an effective leader who was able to influence his followers to willingly work towards the company's goals. He had a profound impact on his followers through his leadership character, complying with Gardner's definition of effective leadership "by word and/or personal example" he was able to affect the "behaviours, thoughts, and/or feelings" of his followers. (1996: 8-9).

5.3 Storytelling within WesBank

5.3.1 Introduction

This section discusses the use and purpose of storytelling initiatives within WesBank under Ronnie Watson's leadership. In order to show how storytelling was a key leadership competency the discussion is structured around the leadership roles defined in the previous section, namely the creation of a shared vision, the inspiration and motivation of people towards that vision and the building of a strong implementation network to execute the vision. Ronnie's use of storytelling within WesBank will be discussed in relation to how stories aided him in fulfilling his leadership role successfully. Reference to the literature will be made where relevant to show where storytelling within WesBank is supported by or contends with the literature.

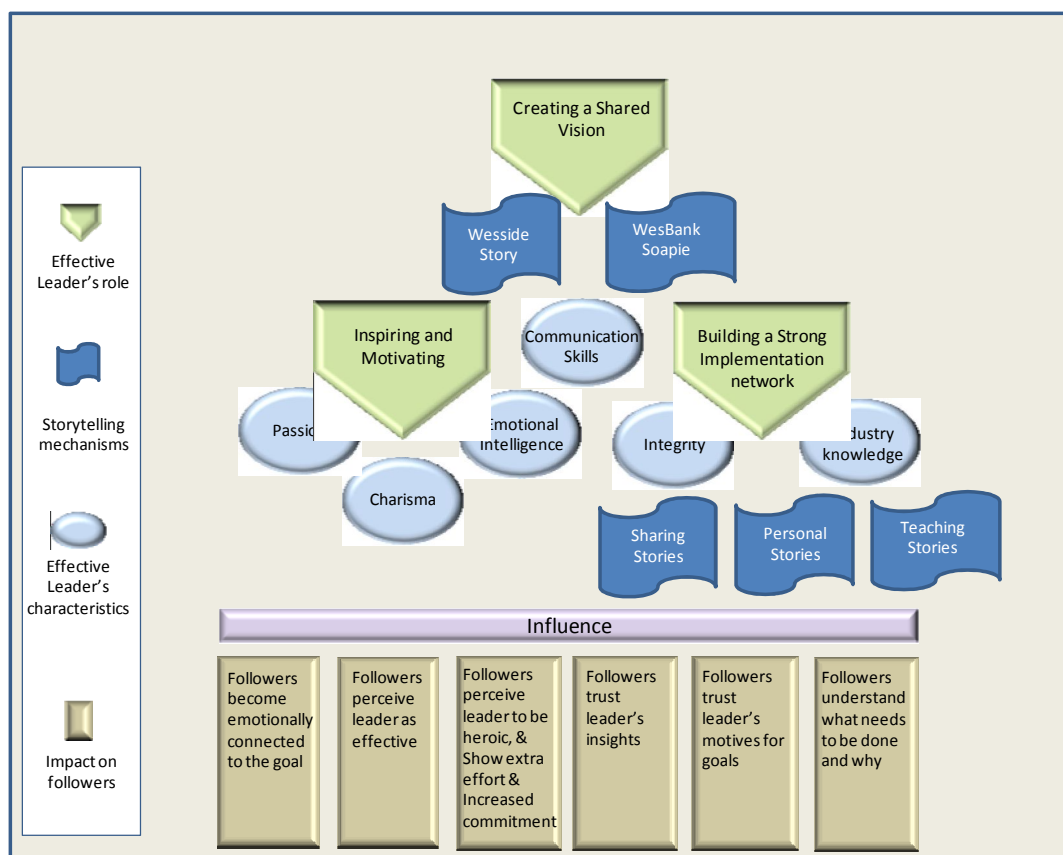


Figure 4: Stories as a mechanism for achieving leadership efficacy

5.3.2 How stories supported the creation of a shared vision

Stories supported Ronnie in his leadership role of creating a shared vision, serving as a mechanism with which followers could identify. The section that follows illustrates how this occurred.

The 2010 Vision

Evidence was found that Ronnie used aspects of storytelling in his 2010 vision in which he described how the future would or could look in an effort to create optimism and improved customer service in South Africa. Part of the vision included the forecast of the sale of a million cars, which in itself would have created optimism and perhaps investment by the audience. The 2010 vision fulfils Kotter's assertion of how leaders can effect change through the creation of a strong vision, which includes a vision of what could and should be, which takes into account the long term interests of the group (1988). Improved customer service, optimism in the country and increased sales, would have appealed to the audience and fulfilled their interests as a group.

The vision fulfils some of Denning's criteria for the springboard story, which is used by leaders to spark transformational change. Denning says in order to create commitment to the vision the story should be positive in tone, as was the 2010 vision, but should exclude excessive detail, allowing the audience to co-create a strategic shift through filling in the details of their envisioned future (2001). Ronnie's 2010 vision was remembered precisely for the detail included, the ultimately inaccurate forecast of the sale of a million cars.

The 2010 vision however does not contain the essential elements of stories as described by Heil and Whittaker, who explain that stories have as their subject human actions, the events that affect them, and their roles with relation to the events (2008). Heil and Whittaker state that through the inclusion of these

elements the story forms a meaningful whole (2008). So although the 2010 vision described an inspirational future it did not contain a central character or plot.

The WesBank culture

Ronnie's primary vision for WesBank, which acted as foundation for any further vision, lay in sustaining a strong culture, in which employees would live the values as he did. Simmons argues that leaders can use stories to connect the audiences' self-interest with their own (2001). Ronnie's interests lay in creating and sustaining a strong culture. He was passionate about WesBank's culture and believed strongly in the WesBank values, particularly those of providing excellent customer service and valuing the people. Ronnie believed that the existence of this strong culture provided WesBank with a competitive edge, evident in comments such as: *"If I could take that WesBank culture, that something special and put it in a bottle and cork it, and go to some of these companies and pop that cork and just let it ooze out."*

Simmons asserts that the storyteller holds a great responsibility as the stories related to the culture eventually influence the culture, Ronnie's comment that *"(The culture) was already strong but I built on it and sustained it, reminding people about who we are and celebrating that"*, shows that he actively and consciously worked towards influencing the culture.

One of the primary ways in which he actively sustained and built on the culture was to tell stories about WesBank. He portrayed the *WesBank story*, which was as Ronnie put it, *"the actual story of WesBank"*, through storytelling mechanisms such as *The Wesside Story* and the *WesBank Soapie*.

Unlike the 2010 vision, which did not use character and plot, *The Wesside Story* and *WesBank Soapie* would meet the criteria for stories as defined by Gabriel. Gabriel says that stories differ from opinions and reports because they combine plot, characters and symbolism. He suggests that stories generate meaning

through the reliance on poetic license, plots and embellishments to generate meaning. (2000).

Gabriel describes a common story genre as that of the epic, in which the hero's triumphs in overcoming adversities are highlighted (2000). *The Wesside Story* could be classified as an epic, in which the story focused on the founding fathers, and how they battled against adversities within WesBank's and South Africa's history. *The Wesside Story* according to Ronnie, "*told the story of how we started, how it was started up by an entrepreneur, the ups and downs, and I plotted this against what was happening in South Africa at the time.*"

The *WesBank Soapie* similarly captured the history of WesBank and its humble beginnings, and centred around two semi-fictional families over a course of three generations. It told their story and the struggles and successes they faced within WesBank, against the backdrop of South Africa's history. This too would classify as an epic story according to Gabriel (2000).

According to Randall and Martin, telling stories of legendary leaders during critical periods create continuity amongst staff in times of change (2003). Dave said that the *WesBank Soapie* wanted to capture the history of WesBank at a time when many people were retiring. The *WesBank Soapie* had the potential to provide a sense of continuity for those left behind.

The two stories were produced a number of years apart, but their storyline and purpose were similar. Ronnie's strategy for sustaining the culture was to "*continue to tell stories, weekly, come back to it in a few months*". He was consistent in promoting his vision of WesBank with Neville commenting that he "beat the drum at every occasion". Ronnie believed that sustaining a strong culture at WesBank would make them resilient, this can be seen within comments such as: "*when its important, like now, you can rally this family around you, you get together have a war cry*".

The Wesside Story was seen as a success and seemed to strengthen the core team, Neville commented that at the time of *The Wesside Story* Ronnie had the team “eating out of his hand” and added that “there wasn’t a member of the team who wouldn’t die for Ronnie at the time”. Clearly then, *The Wesside Story* was successful in creating a vision of WesBank that was shared, and that people wanted to be part of. The reactions to the story seem to confirm that *The Wesside Story* fulfilled Simmons’s concept of a *Vision story* which she describes as an antidote to meaningless frustration, where the story becomes a sense-making one, in which adversities become challenges fought towards a better future for all (2001).

However, the *WesBank Soapie* was not successful in creating a shared vision. Susan commented that the leadership team didn’t buy into it, and therefore didn’t promote it. Dave concluded that people thought it was “too long, not necessary, a waste of money and time”. Both productions related the WesBank story but were produced a number of years apart. Their formats also differed; *The Wesside Story* was a musical that was performed around the country to live audiences, while the *WesBank Soapie* was a twelve-part written story distributed in episodes to employees. Susan, Paula and Dave all attributed the *Soapie*’s failure in part to a difference in the values of the younger generation. They felt that younger people didn’t care about the culture or the history of the company, Paula commented that the culture is “not important to them”, while Dave reasoned that the *Soapie* was “no longer relevant”. These comments suggest that the vision was not appropriate or seen as important by the WesBank people.

Denning proposes that storytelling is effective if a future is co-created through the participation of the listeners (2001). This was found to be true in the creation of *The Wesside Story*. *The Wesside Story* was a stage production which actively involved the WesBank employees in its creation and staging. Ronnie said that people came to audition, and no one was turned away, “*Some people came there*

thinking they were dancers and ended up singing, others may have just carried equipment.”

Besides the employees who helped to stage the show, Ronnie was said to have starred in the production, and the audience enjoyed it so much that Ronnie recalled that they were *dancing in the chairs*. These statements suggest that *The Wesside Story* was successful because the employees shared in the creation of the vision, and in effect became co-creators of the vision.

The *WesBank Soapie*, however, was created by an external consultant based on interviews with a few members of the leadership team. The *WesBank Soapie* did not involve the employees in its creation or production, and its paper based format meant that the *Soapie* was read in isolation of other WesBank employees or leaders. The fact that no co-creation of the vision took place was a likely contributor in the failure of the *Soapie* to inspire.

Denning further suggests that stories have the ability to entrench an idea into the collective consciousness of the firm (2001). It seems the *Wesside Story* did serve to entrench a strong shared vision of what it meant to be part of WesBank, and WesBank’ culture and values within the collective consciousness of the firm. Susan’s comment that it made her feel “part of a wonderful and significant organisation” hints at the *Wesside Story*’s success years after its staging.

Reinforcing the WesBank brand

Through reinforcing the culture, Ronnie effectively reinforced the WesBank brand. Denning (2006), argues that the leader’s task is to create, extend and continually reinvent the brand story, while ensuring that the company’s product or service matches the core message. Ronnie’s vision of the strong culture and values defined the WesBank brand. However, he did ensure that the service matched the vision or brand promise, through initiatives such as his customer service stories, and celebration of excellent service in the newsletters.

5.3.3 How stories aided the leader in providing inspiration and motivation

Believability

Simmons says that a leader's stories will only inspire the audience to action if the leader is sincere, commenting that the audience filters their words through a believability index (2001). An important aspect of Ronnie's character was his idea that management should *walk the talk*, he had experienced many roles in the bank, so could be seen to understand the challenges and the possibilities within each position.

Ronnie commented that he showed people his "*modus operandi*", in that customers could phone through directly to him, and he would personally sort the problem out, demonstrating his willingness to do what he asked of his employees. He was therefore believable when he spoke about the importance of WesBank's values and culture. According to Bob, when Ronnie said that "he valued his people, he stood by that", demonstrating his sincerity through celebrating the performance of a junior staff member, or spending time talking with a person who was studying.

Relating everyday truths

Simmons suggests that stories resonate with listeners when they recall their own experience of those truths (2001). Ronnie's stories often attempted to reaffirm that he was "human" thus narrowing the gap between leader and employee and bringing their interests and goals within range of one another. His stories included aspects of real life that any of WesBank's employees could relate to. Malcolm recalled that if WesBank was going to embark on a new strategy then Ronnie would describe how "he had been sitting having a cup of coffee and how the thought had come about". Malcolm understood that Ronnie was deliberate in using this technique so that people could relate to the strategy. He explained that Ronnie was "not just telling a story, he is letting you know that you also have thoughts like that, you also have cups of coffee where someone says something, and you can

also latch onto that”. Paula also recalled how people would be sitting on the edge of their seats gasping as Ronnie told the story of Mr Hamilton, and said that Ronnie’s stories “were so real they made you feel part of it”. According to Simmons then Ronnie’s stories would have resonated with listeners because he depicted experiences that people could relate to.

The Storyteller

Denning suggests that a well crafted story will fail to convince its audience if it is performed unconvincingly. He cites non-verbal aspects such as tone and facial expressions as important contributors to an audience’s receptiveness towards the story (2001). The most compelling evidence found of Ronnie’s ability to perform a story convincingly was found through direct observation during the interviews in which Ronnie recounted the story of his former mentor, Mr Hamilton. His story was animated through his facial expressions and tone: nervous apprehension as a youngster having joined WesBank, fear at being summoned by Mr Hamilton and palpable relief at the conclusion of the story when he is not fired.

In addition he intercepted the story with sound effects such as the “*trriing*” of the phone, and used physical descriptions to add to the drama “*all of the women looked at me, and each other, one of them took out a tissue and mopped her brow*”, in this instance Ronnie imitated the woman mopping her brow with a concerned look on his face. He used interesting character descriptions such as “*before you get to God you have to go through his archangel, who was his secretary, Maureen*”, and of Mr Hamilton’s appearance, “*he filled the door he was so huge, with his great beard*”.

Ronnie’s personal style is characterised by his enthusiasm and passion, which is easily detectable when he tells a story. Ronnie’s leadership characteristics such as his passion, charisma and emotional intelligence likely aided him in his ability to tell convincing stories that would resonate with others as real, and would have the ability to appeal to people’s emotions. In turn, his use of stories made these

leadership characteristics visible to others, influencing their willingness to follow him. Ronnie demonstrated his passion for WesBank through his stories. At the Induction programme Susan recalled that people would leave feeling inspired, “he managed to bring out the light, and what was special about WesBank”.

Poulton suggests that a sequence of connected events holds more significance to people than single events. He suggests that this sequence follows a pattern of steady state, disruptive predicament, and solution (2005). The story of Mr Hamilton follows Poulton’s sequence, with the steady state being set with Ronnie as the young employee “too young to have a driver’s licence”, the protective and motherly older women whom he bought cigarettes for, the disruptive state, which includes the setting of the scene in which Mr Hamilton and the possibility of being in trouble is introduced if the phone were to ring, the actual ringing of the phone, and reaction of the women, and finally the solution, where Mr Hamilton has plotted out his career for the next year, and has not fired him.

Poulton suggests that presenting an effective sequence of connected events can result in the listener experiencing real physical and emotional sensations as they picture themselves in the story (2005). Susan’s recollection of how the management team fought back tears as Ronnie spoke suggests that he had the ability to draw people in so that they experienced real physical and emotional sensations.

It was clear that Ronnie understood the elements that needed to be present to inspire and motivate his people. He explained that communication needed to appeal to people’s emotions, *“It’s got to have an emotional barometer, no matter what communication you send out, the reader must somehow be able to relate to that content”* it was clear that Ronnie was effective in appealing to people’s emotions through his communications. Bob concluded that Ronnie knew that to get commitment out of people “you had to connect not only at the rational level but also the emotional level”, and this is confirmed through Susan’s recollection that

Ronnie's speech had everybody sniffing, almost in tears because of the compelling case he made".

It was also apparent that he believed that if communication included an element of fun, it would be effective in inspiring and motivating *The Wesside Story* presented the story "*In a different way, and in a fun way... everyone had such fun they were dancing in the chairs*". Fun was a central focus of the Induction programme Ronnie related that "*we played games together*" while Malcolm confirmed that, "it wasn't *Mr Watson*, it was *Ronnie*, I will sing with you, be a silly idiot with you, joke with you, no collar, jacket and tie, down to earth."

Ronnie's inclusion of the video of the fish company illustrated to people that he believed that WesBank would be successful if managers and staff had fun together, "*The staff are actually having fun, you can see it! They throw and catch the fish, they come around the counter, they try and get the customer to learn to catch the fish. They interview the staff who say they can't wait to get to work! It's such a parallel - here's a company selling fish on the other side of the world and WesBank, both employees saying they can't wait to get to work. Then you interview the management and you can see why – because they demonstrated these same behaviours, they are focused on the staff having fun, and the managers are getting involved, and are behind the counter with them.*"

Ronnie's strategic initiatives such as the war room and stock exchange successfully involved people in engaging with the company's strategy through a playful format that allowed them to fully participate and own the process. These initiatives were successful it seems, Ronnie commented the stock exchange created great excitement, "*It got to a point where even the cleaners wanted to know how the share price for their company was doing*". Although the war room included camouflage nets and tin pans it produced real results, Ronnie commented that "*for the first time we were getting meaningful feedback...not just some corporate strategy... we were actually hearing it from the line*".

Another theme that emerged was Ronnie's belief in consistency when communicating the message. The *WesBank Soapie* sought to transmit the same messages as *The Wesside Story*, and Ronnie commented that this "*was the strategy of keeping the legend alive*", and he explained that he believed that to do this he should "*Continue to tell stories, weekly, come back to it in a few months*". When discussing the Induction programme Ronnie commented "*and then I would tell them the story again, how I joined the company, how I'm not very bright, how that's not what we look for*", which illustrates that Ronnie's stories were deliberate and consistent and aimed at relating certain messages to people.

Besides his strategy of including emotion, fun and consistency in his use of stories, Ronnie knew that his message should contain real substance. Although the induction involved games and fun, he said that "*it wasn't just a question of pretty pictures and stories*" he backed these up with tough messages which spoke of what WesBank valued, "*you mess up with the customer then you're out of here, if your boss covers up for you then he's out of here as well*".

Although Simmons refers to the ability of stories to contain emotional content (2001), there were no references within the literature review to Ronnie's other storytelling principles such as his belief in consistency or the inclusion of fun, both of which Ronnie used to great effect.

5.3.4 How stories supported the leader in building an implementation network

Bergeron states that the success of a business strategy is dependent on the people within the organisation (2004) Ronnie depended on the commitment of his employees towards the WesBank vision to ensure its success. This section examines how storytelling assisted Ronnie in building a strong implementation network.

Promoting identification with a group

Storytelling plays an important role in promoting identification within a group, which in turn results in increased motivation towards making change. (Kitchell et al., 2000) Ronnie used mechanisms such as *The Wesside Story* and the *WesBank Soapie*, to promote the identification of employees to WesBank. Staff were enthusiastic about *The Wesside Story*, Susan recalled that it made her feel part of a wonderful organisation. Neville claimed that at the time “there wasn’t a member of staff that wouldn’t have died for Ronnie” implying that identification with WesBank and its vision epitomised in *The Wesside Story*, was strong. This identification, the literature suggests would have resulted in increased motivation towards the goals of the organisation (Kitchell et al., 2000).

Ronnie created the concept of the “WesBank family”, and spoke of employees as *WesBankers*. He reinforced this image through showing an active interest in communicating with and hearing from the employees at events such as the communication sessions, and the induction sessions. His personal stories which aimed to show he was human, placed him within the family, and the sharing of his family life through his newsletters invited *WesBankers* to enter his family.

Similarly, the Induction programme used storytelling to create identification of the new employees to the WesBank culture. Employees and Ronnie shared personal stories, and thereafter Ronnie would tell the story of WesBank’s history. He included an analogy of the WesBank culture and the way in which management and employees worked together by showing the video of the company that sells fish. The Induction programme was said to be brilliant (Dave), and Susan recalls that new employees were said to go “wow, I now know why I work at WesBank”. This provides evidence that Ronnie’s stories promoted the identification of the employees to WesBank and its goals.

Personal stories

Gardner suggests that leaders can achieve influence through the stories they relate, however their followers should be able to clearly perceive that the leader embodies the stories they tell (1996). Bob affirmed that Ronnie was a man of unquestionable integrity, and was a visible leader, interacting with staff and dealers. Simmons describes how personal stories, such as *Who I am* and *Why I am Here*, can be used to gain an audience's trust. She argues that the listener can gain insight into the narrator's character and what they value, through examples of how they behave in certain contexts, their track record and achievements. (2001). Ronnie used such stories on a regular basis. In the Induction programme, Ronnie told stories of how he started in the bank, and pictures highlighting his life story and achievements were used to provide an insight into Ronnie's character and values. In this way Ronnie demonstrated his character, and allowed newcomers to know and to trust him, evident in his recollection that newcomers; *"walked out of there... personal friends with the CEO"*.

Ronnie wanted to hear the personal story of each person who attended the Induction programme. Blair (2006) says that allowing staff to share stories builds trust, and signals recognition by the company of each person's contribution to its success. This helped Ronnie to build trust between himself and every employee that entered WesBank, and assisted them in building trust amongst each other as a group.

Simmons advocates that the narrator should reveal their flaws and show themselves to be vulnerable. In this way the audience will feel trusted, and will be more likely to let their guards down. (2001). Ronnie used this technique effectively, disclosing upfront, "I was never bright, in fact bordering on the opposite". Ronnie used stories of his experiences as a youngster in the bank sharing the anxieties he felt. He also frequently spoke of his family in his newsletters, relating stories such as how his wife was spending too much, or his

sons weren't doing what he thought they would (Ronnie). Susan recalled that Ronnie often spoke about his wife, Grace, "he made out that she was the boss". Self-disclosure stories showed Ronnie to be vulnerable, and imperfect. He used these stories to show his employees that he was human. In this way Ronnie could serve as an example to others on the success possible, provided that like him, they were dedicated and passionate about the values of WesBank.

Teaching stories

Ronnie reinforced his vision through teaching stories, such as the customer service stories he told in his weekly mail. He recognised that as well as being emotionally committed to the culture and values of WesBank, staff needed to live those values. Paula recalled that Ronnie was good at educating people in an entertaining way. She commented that he was committed to this purpose, and if necessary would get someone to fly across the country so that he could take them through a whole exercise of why the customer's complaint was important. In his weekly mail he recounted customer service experiences, describing what had gone wrong and how it had been resolved.

Simmons suggests that stories can halve the amount of time needed for learning, as a story explains *how* something should be done, rather than telling *what* should be done. In teaching stories information is provided in a meaningful sequence, thus allowing the audience to contextualise the concepts (2001). Poulton argues that rules are restrictive, while stories provide a framework of how to resolve problems, resulting in empowered employees and delighted customers (2005). An example of how this can be seen in Ronnie's customer service stories includes the story he related to me about his visit to the dealership:

...I didn't have an appointment with him, but he wanted to have coffee with me, so we were chatting and this customer came to the door and asked for some help. Instead of jumping up the manager said to him: "I wonder if you wouldn't mind going downstairs and finding Joe... Now that guy was just sitting talking to me, he should have said: "Excuse me Ronnie, I need to help this customer". In my

opinion that dealership doesn't have it in its culture. Motor industry sales are right down; he should have jumped up instead of talking to me!

This brief story provides an interesting piece of education on customer service and priorities. He is clearly saying that companies have to demonstrate that the customer is a priority. Ronnie's story serves to show that the customer is more important than the CEO and should be treated in a variety of contexts as such.

Ronnie also used the newsletter to celebrate excellent service, highlighting customer's letters of praise, or employees who had provided excellent service. Bob commented that Ronnie would create "folklore" around a junior staff member who had provided excellent service, thus reinforcing the idea that each employee could and should make a meaningful contribution to fulfilling WesBank's vision. By retelling these experiences and celebrating performance Ronnie reinforced the idea that employees were empowered to take action within the framework of "customer first".

Bjurklo suggests that financial reporting is enhanced if supplemented by anecdotes around the company's ambitions and values (2006). Ronnie further built a strong, competent and committed network by involving his employees in the challenges or successes of the business. At his communication sessions, which employees at every level attended, he was able to explain the financial results of a new strategy or a competitive threat in simple language so that everyone could understand. Susan commented that he would interrupt and take over if a speaker had not gotten the message across. In the induction sessions, Ronnie connected events such as explaining how previous decisions affected the company strategy and discussed the results, so that new employees would understand and become true stakeholders within the business. Through initiatives such as the war room, and stock exchange, Ronnie involved staff in co-creating the success of the business. Demystifying the business to the employees at every level allowed them to feel they could understand and participate in its success.

5.3.5 Conclusion

Ronnie's use of stories within WesBank supported him in fulfilling his leadership role effectively. Ronnie created a vision of the WesBank culture and values through his use of stories. *The Wesside Story* and *WesBank Soapie* were epic accounts of the founding fathers of WesBank, and related significant events in WesBank and South Africa's history. *The Wesside Story* was successful in creating a shared vision through the inclusion of employees in its production and the entertaining and inclusive format. Although the *WesBank Soapie* related the same essential vision as that of *The Wesside Story* it did not create a shared vision due to the lack of participation of the employees in its production. Through these and other stories, Ronnie promoted, sustained and influenced the culture of WesBank.

Ronnie was able to inspire and motivate people towards his vision because he was believable. His followers could clearly perceive that he embodied the stories he related. His use of everyday truths within his stories resonated with listeners, allowing them to connect to Ronnie's vision. Ronnie was effective partly because of his visible passion when relating stories, his ability to perform convincingly and make use of facial expressions, tone, and character development all engendered people towards accepting his vision as their own. Ronnie's philosophy of including elements of emotion, fun and consistency within his stories served to inspire and motivate followers to believe in and share Ronnie's vision.

Ronnie was aided in building a strong implementation network through his use of personal stories. Ronnie allowed people to see him as human, and to trust his intentions and believe in his track record. By sharing personal stories people believed that their contribution to the company was valuable thus influencing them to align towards the vision. Ronnie's use of customer service stories showed the employees contexts in which the WesBank values could be understood and interpreted. Strategic stories such as the stock exchange and war room showed people that they could play a part in the company's success.

5.4 The influence of Ronnie's background

Understanding Ronnie's background provides insight into his ability as a leader and a storyteller. He grew up in hardship, which Ronnie recalls as so poor it was "nomadic". His parents were hard working and both served the community, his mother as a nurse, and his father as a missionary. This must have instilled a similar sense of duty in Ronnie, who he went on to serve WesBank, its people and the dealer and partner networks. He was commended for his dedication to WesBank, but some recognised that this came at the expense of time with his family. He was consumed by WesBank, and now that he has retired is struggling to keep himself busy. Bob commented that Ronnie wanted to be a hero, reasoning that he must have come from a poor background. Ronnie's desire to be the best, not content with being second may have arisen out of the desire to escape the desperation of his circumstances.

Ronnie comments that storytelling is part of his natural style, and is not a deliberate or learned ability. However, Susan recognised that Ronnie's style was "almost like he was talking to a congregation". Ronnie was surely influenced by his father, and may have sub-consciously emulated him. He found his own flock in WesBank, whom he lead through difficult times using inspirational stories, (fables), to teach and reinforce the values (commandments) of the organisation.

Ronnie's start in WesBank shaped his attitudes towards the company. He began in the lowest ranks and had to work hard to prove himself and be recognised. Again his circumstances growing up must have contributed to his ability to thrive under hardship. He found inspiration through a number of mentors who took a chance on him and supported him through his career. In turn Ronnie later returned this service by actively supporting people, mentoring them or taking a chance on them.

His family life seemed to be a source of stability for him, and served as a reference point within Ronnie's communications. Susan commented that Ronnie spoke often of his wife Grace, and "made her out to be the boss". She observed that this was part of Ronnie's humility.

Ronnie was able to transcend his difficult circumstances largely because of his ability to self disclose and share details of his life or character that others may perceive as weakness. Ronnie has turned these weaknesses into strengths; his humility, willingness to be human, and ability to interact at every level have endeared others to him.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This is the final chapter of the research and includes a summary of the findings. Final conclusions are drawn based on the initial questions asked, the literature review, as well as the analysis and discussion of the findings. A section on recommendations and suggestions for further research identifies areas which may be of interest for future research.

6.2 Conclusions of the study

Ronnie Watson was an effective leader, who possessed the ability to influence others to willingly work towards the company's goals. He achieved this through the execution of leadership roles, such as the creation of a shared vision for the organisation, inspiring and motivating followers towards the vision, and building a strong network to implement the vision. A number of leadership characteristics such as his ability to communicate in a compelling and sensitive manner, as well as his integrity, industry knowledge and charismatic personality attracted people to him, and influenced them towards the company's goals.

Ronnie used stories as the mechanism through which he achieved influence with his followers. Stories reinforced his leadership efficacy allowing him to communicate the vision in a way that provided meaning and context for followers. In instances where employees were encouraged to co-create stories, such as *The Wesside Story*, the vision was shared by the organisation. Ronnie was believable when relating stories and followers could clearly perceive that he embodied the principles he promoted. His inclusion of elements that people could relate to as well as the addition of emotion and fun all served to aid Ronnie in inspiring and motivating people towards the vision. Sharing of personal stories encouraged trust between Ronnie and his followers, serving to align people towards his vision.

Customer service and strategic stories created the competence required to execute the vision.

As storytelling aided Ronnie Watson in executing his leadership role successfully, it can be concluded that storytelling was a key leadership competency of Ronnie Watson's within WesBank.

6.3 Recommendations and suggestions for further research

Within the case site participants were predominantly from Ronnie's leadership team, further research could be conducted to interview employees from the lower levels of WesBank to understand their perceptions of Ronnie Watson's leadership style and use of storytelling.

A study could be conducted that examines the leadership style of the current leader within the case site, to understand how his leadership style differs to Ronnie Watson's, how he achieves influence with his followers, and the resultant impact on the culture of the organisation as compared with Ronnie Watson's.

The research conducted in this paper could be extended to other case sites, examining leaders and the ways in which they achieve influence through storytelling. This would improve the reliability of the results and may lead to the development of theory on storytelling as a leadership competency. Additionally, the findings of this study may motivate for the development of leadership competency assessments which make use of questions around storytelling abilities. These competency dimensions could be used to develop leadership training material with the aim of developing a competency in storytelling.

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APPENDIX A: Interview Guidelines

Information on Research Subject

Research Participant Code (For Anonymity):

Name:

Position:

Interview date:

Reassure participant of anonymity through use of participant code rather than name or details.

Explain where the research will be published and who will have access to it.

Request permission to record the interview

Explain the purpose of the research to the participant and how their input will be of value to companies facing similar issues.

Use set interview questions as prompts but follow new information with probing questions.

Interview is semi-structured so not all questions need to be asked, particularly if they have been covered in a previous response.

APPENDIX B: Research Instrument

Letter to prospective participant requesting an appointment following an initial telephone call:

Hello Susan,

Thank-you for agreeing to meet with me. As a reminder, the interview is to understand your perceptions of Ronnie Watson's leadership style and communication style. I have already interviewed Ronnie on two occasions. If acceptable to you I would like to record the interview, to ensure that I can recall information accurately. I will be interviewing a number of people from WesBank and responses will be anonymous when incorporated into the thesis. The thesis will not be published and is a requirement for the Wits Business School MBA.

Look forward to meeting with you,

Sarah Gordon

Interview Guide for Ronnie Watson

1. How would you describe your leadership style?
2. How did you develop an interest in storytelling, and become competent at telling stories?
3. Can you tell me about the following storytelling initiatives at WesBank:
 - *The Wesside Story*
 - the *WesBank Soapie* and
 - the monthly Induction Programme
4. What kind of stories did you tell in other contexts, personal or business?
5. Did you use stories as a means of helping people to deal with changes in the company?
6. How do you think WesBank employees felt about these stories?
7. Do you feel that stories you have told have led to a change in the attitude or behaviour of WesBank employees?
8. Do you think storytelling enhanced your effectiveness as a leader?
9. Can you tell me a little about your background, your parents and childhood?
10. Can you tell me how you came to join WesBank?
11. Who has been your inspiration during your working life, and why?

Interview Guide for Participants

1. How would you describe Mr Watson's leadership style?
2. What has and does Ronnie Watson use, as part of his leadership style, to influence others?
3. How would you describe Mr Watson's preferred approach to and style of communication?
4. What do you recall of
 - *The Wesside Story*,
 - the *WesBank Soapie* and
 - the Induction Programme
5. Were these effective forms of communication, why/ why not?
6. What influence do you feel these stories have had on the people in the company?
7. Do you feel people's attitudes or behaviour were influenced by these initiatives?
8. Do you think that Ronnie's communication initiatives enhanced his effectiveness as a leader?