

# “Practice of Organizational Storytelling in Indian B – Schools – A Key to Retention of Knowledge”

Kasturi Rohit Naik, Srin R. Srinivasan

*Abstract- Studies related to organizational storytelling dates back to early 1980s. Organizational Storytelling is one of the most recent management trends, and there has been an increased rise in storytelling research as well as consultation. Due to continuous change in demands across nearly every domain of employment, adults who are employed in or who are preparing for particular domain of study are finding that they need to be capable of learning new information at increasingly rapid paces just to keep up with minimum industry standards (Rose and Nicholl, 1997). B-school faculties, organizational trainers, consultants and other adult educators are responding to this information demand by employing learning and development strategies and identifying contemporary teaching methods to more effectively convey the information needed within limited timeframes. There is consent in literature that storytelling offers an extremely natural and powerful means to convey, learn, and retain information. This paper attempted to review the literature on organizational storytelling with the objective of evaluating its effectiveness as retention tool in Indian B-schools for adult learners.*

**Keywords:** Organizational storytelling, Indian B-schools, retention, domain, management, effectiveness

## I. INTRODUCTION

Now is the era of BIG DATA in majority of the sectors (Rose & Nicholl, 1997). Repetitive, low skill jobs are rapidly being replaced by technology and the jobs that are available require increased educational levels and/or detailed areas of expertise especially cognitive knowledge and interpersonal skills. B-schools are the primary training institutions which provide talent to the organizations. Thus B-schools have realized the importance of utilizing learning and development strategy based on brain-based learning theories, experiential learning theories, reflective learning theories and transformational learning theories with the aim of providing quality students to the organizations. There is evidence in literature that organizational storytelling if implemented with accurate modeling techniques improves learning by actively engaging learners in the information they are being exposed to versus passive student participation often found in traditional classroom settings (Richter & Koppett, 2000). Organizational storytelling also appeals to auditory, visual and kinesthetic learning styles and many of the intelligence areas including spatial, linguistic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligence covering wide range of learners (Rose and Nicholl, 1997).

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The purpose of this study is to research and document how storytelling as a teaching and learning method has an impact on the learning and information retention of adult students in Indian B-schools.

## II. LITERATURE

The National Council of Teachers of English (2005) defines storytelling as the relating of a tale to one or more listeners, and they highlight that it is not congruent with simply acting out a drama or reciting a story from memory or a text, but it is the creation of mental images of the elements of a story through voice and gesture to an audience. Other theorists consider storytelling synonymous with and from the perspective of narrative inquiry whether it is written down or provided orally (Denning, 2005; Heo 2003, Rossiter, 2002). McDrury and Alterio (2003) state "a narrative...that we call a story, deals with not just with facts or ideals or theories, or even dreams, fears and hopes, but in facts, theories, and dreams from the perspective of someone's life and in the context of someone's emotions" (p. 32). Educational researchers have strong evidence of the revival of storytelling as a teaching pedagogy and learning tool in modern day educational institutions and business organizations (Parkin, 2004; "What use is Storytelling", 2005). Abrahamsen (1998) states that storytelling forms the very foundation of the teaching profession. According to McLellan (2006) Harvard Business School uses case studies as stories for students to work with so they can understand the practical challenges and dilemmas faced by managers in current business world. Corporations and other organizations have discovered the benefits of storytelling as a popular leadership tool and method for embracing organizational culture and facilitating organizational changes (Denning, 2005). Kouzes and Posner (2003) authors of *Encouraging the Heart*, state that organizational stories are decisive to leading organizations into the future because they produce a sense of personal commitment and they illustrate how to do something versus simply what someone thinks should be done. Denning points out that Peter Senge (1990) in his book *The Fifth Discipline, the Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, alludes to a possible sixth discipline relevant to organizational thinking. Denning offers the opinion that storytelling may well be the sixth discipline that Senge alludes to because it has the characteristics that Senge envisioned such as new and expanded patterns of thinking and a discipline that encourages shared aspirations where people are learning how to learn together.

## III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Problem Statement

Most of the literature on organizational storytelling covers western outlook. India is a country rich in cultural diversity

and provides fertile ground for organizational storytelling. However, no studies are available that reveals the impact of organizational storytelling as learning and teaching strategy on adult learners or has measured effectiveness in retention and transferability of knowledge and skills to the workplace.

**Research Objectives**

There are following objectives this study will attempt to accomplish:

- To review literature on organizational storytelling to determine if organizational storytelling can be used as learning and teaching strategy in Indian B-schools with respect to retention aspect.
- To study different models of organizational storytelling with the objective to develop proposed models for Indian B-schools.

**Research Design**

Descriptive research design is used for the study

**IV. DATA COLLECTION STRATEGY**

The primary data for all the studies is collected by means of observation and formal and informal interview. The secondary data is collected by means of exploring various published and unpublished paper and electronic sources.

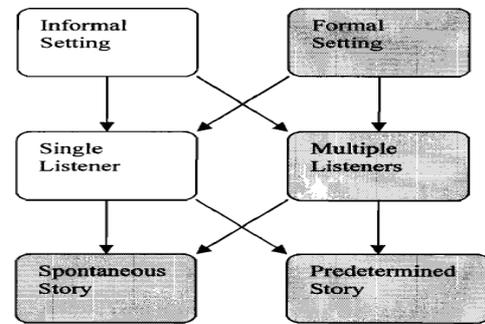
**V. CONCEPTUAL MODEL FOR ORGANIZATIONAL STORYTELLING**

Different models exist related to utilization of organizational storytelling as learning and teaching strategy in academic literature. The model given by Morgan and Dennehy (1997) and McDrury and Alterio (2003) meets the objective of the research and thus is used to develop the proposed model for the research under study.

According to Morgan and Dennehy (1997) the components of an effective story embrace five sequential components:

- The setting: context in which the story is delivered
- Build up: a sequence of events that gives idea of the problem or opportunity
- Crisis: the climax or high point of the story. This is also the place to introduce a new element and or a turning point.
- Learning: point out what the central character(s) learned. Here lies the moral of the story.
- Feedback: to examine the level of change and retention.

The organizational storytelling model given by McDrury and Alterio (2003) in the book, Learning Through Storytelling in Higher Education comprises of eight storytelling pathway that vary according to setting i.e. informal vs. formal, the number of listeners i.e. single vs. multiple and the type of stories shared i.e. spontaneous vs. predetermined. According to them each pathway will result in varying levels of reflective learning and subsequent learner transformation or insight. The eight pathways of storytelling are created through various combinations of each side of these three elements. The following figure depicts the factors that produce the various storytelling models.

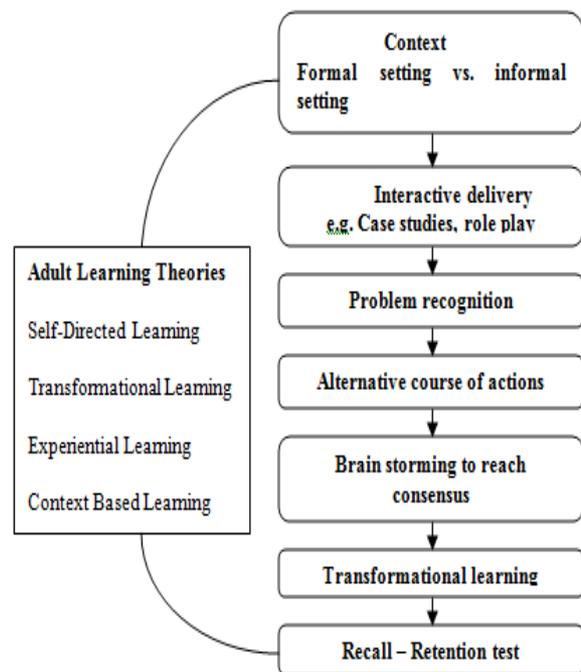


**Fig. 1: Storytelling Pathways**

Source: From Learning through Storytelling in Higher Education (p.56-59) by J. McDrury and M.Alterio, 2003, Sterling, VA: Dunmore Press Limited.

**VI. PROPOSED MODELS**

Based on the conceptual models discussed above and taking into consideration the adult learning theories the model given in Figure 2 is the proposed model that can be used as effective retention tool for management learning.



**Fig. 2: Organizational storytelling Retention Model**

Source: Self generated

**The Organizational storytelling Retention Model (Figure 2) comprises of following steps:**

**Context:** The context comprises of the environment in which story is narrated i.e. formal setting e.g. classroom or informal setting e.g. outbound training

**Interactive delivery:** It comprises of actual delivery of story in form of case studies, role play etc.

**Problem recognition:** It involves the ability of the listener to differentiate between symptom and problem which requires total attention of the listener on the interactive delivery stage.

**Alternative course of actions:** This stage involves suggesting alternative course of actions for solving the problem discovered in stage 3

**Brainstorming to reach consensus:** In this stage brainstorming technique is used so that consensus is reached among the group involved in the storytelling process

**Transformational learning:** If all the above stages take place as planned then transformational learning takes place among the listeners

**Recall –retention test:** The final stage involves taking retention test in the form of theoretical, practical, written or oral test depending upon the objective of the storytelling to determine the recall of the learning and practical applicability of the entire exercise.

## VII. IMPLICATIONS IN B-SCHOOLS

The organizational storytelling can be used in Indian B-schools as learning and development strategy especially with the focus on retention of knowledge for adult learners in this new era of BIG DATA. The technique of storytelling in the proposed model (Figure 2) have implications in Indian B-schools with respect to explanation of concepts of organizational culture (Robbins & Judge, 2013), employee management (Barker & Gower, 2010) and other human resources concepts. The concept of organizational storytelling is also applicable in marketing and brand management especially in the areas of client interactions, advertising etc. (Spear and Roper, 2013). Combining the storytelling methodology with technical automation can also enable the B-school educators to explain and make simpler the complex concepts involved in finance, operations, systems etc. There is tremendous scope for future research in this arena.

## VIII. LIMITATION

The above research is limited to Indian B-schools thus applicability of this research in other domains has to be considered before generalization. The support of quantitative analysis to this research could strengthen the validity and reliability of this research.

## IX. FUTURE SCOPE

There is future scope to replicate this study within a business organization and research the effectiveness of storytelling as a teaching and learning strategy in industry based training. Future research can also concentrate on how storytelling impacts organizational strategic planning processes and outcomes as well as alignment of the employees with the organizational mission, values, and vision.

## X. CONCLUSION

“The choice for leaders in business and organizations is not whether to be involved in storytelling....but whether to use storytelling unwittingly and clumsily, or intelligently and skillfully. Management fads may come and go, but storytelling is fundamental to all nations, societies, and cultures and has been so since time immemorial.”(Denning, 2004).

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