



## **How to Use Storytelling for Positive Cultural Change**

*A Breakfast Seminar by  
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### **Overview**

- Storytelling and Cultural Change
- The Neuroscience of Storytelling
- Storytelling Processes for Organisational Diagnosis and Cultural Change
- Tips for Eliciting Stories

## Storytelling and Cultural Change

- Create a group/community culture
- Strengthen a positive culture
- Build relationships that underpin culture
- Diagnose organisational culture
- Address a specific cultural deficiency or develop a cultural value
- Rebuild organisational identity
- Develop a new culture around an inspiring vision

## Neuroscience of Storytelling

- Brain-to-Brain Coupling – similar wave patterns and “lighting up” of the brain
- Projection – projecting yourself into stories, what is happening in the story is happening in your brain – engaging emotions
- Creating connections with own experiences
- Whole brain is engaged (teller & listener)
- Creates rich meanings – listener “reads between the lines” uncovering deep meanings at multiple levels.

## Storytelling Processes

- Appreciative Inquiry Interview
- Visioning
- Turning Points
- Story Circles
- Metaphor and Fairy Tale
- Sociodrama
- History Trip
- Future Search
- Appreciative Inquiry

## Appreciative Inquiry Interview - 1

- Tell me about an achievement you are proud of.
- What was the situation?
- What did you do?
- What outcomes did you achieve?
- What qualities, knowledge & skills did you use?
- How could you use those qualities, knowledge & skills to help you to be what you want to be?

## Appreciative Inquiry Interview - 2

- What are some of our best achievements?
- What are some specific examples of these achievements?
- What is it about our organisation that allowed us to achieve them?
- How can we use those qualities to achieve even more?

## Appreciative Inquiry Interview - 3

- Describe a time in your work experience here when you felt most alive, most engaged or most successful
- Can you tell me the story?
- What was it organisationally that made it stand out?
- What was it about you that made it a highpoint?
- What key insights do you have for us?

## Turning Points

- from Bob Dick

- People work individually to identify six turning points (TP) – events or people who made a difference
- Form into small groups and share three turning points – each person takes turns to share their first TP, then the process is repeated two more times
- Debrief the process in the small groups.

## Turning Point Questions

- What happened at the Turning Point?
- Why was it a turning point?
- What are the turning point's present results – what does it say about you, now?  
How are you different as a result of that turning point?

## Turning Points Exercise Debrief

- Did the exercise make a difference about your feelings towards your group colleagues?
- If so, what difference did it make?
- If so, what was it about the exercise that led to that difference?

## Story Circles

- People in a small group tell stories around a theme/event
- Stories generate other stories
- Stories are tape recorded and transcribed
- Transcriptions can be interpreted by a small group
- Story Circles can be used to elicit personal stories or organisational stories, to compile an oral history or as a knowledge management tool.

## History Trip – Building Shared Identity Through Shared History

- Compile a time-line or history for the organisation
- Identify the present and past significance of each event in the time line
- Identify the trends in the events and their significance
- Identify implications for follow-up activities.

## History Trip to Build a New Culture

A new Faculty of Science had been created in a University bringing together three distinct sciences with a poor history of collaboration.

Ron and Anne-Marie facilitated a two day workshop for the 80 members of the new Faculty – day one being a history trip and day 2, strategic planning.

Participants were asked to record significant events impacting the discipline of science over the years. These were recorded on butcher's paper fixed on the walls around the room.

Then the longest serving member took everyone on a history trip as they walked around the room. People shared stories about people and events and their significance.

The energy and conviviality of day one was then channelled into Strategic Planning on day 2. The Dean reported 5 years later that the Faculty was still working off the energy, collaboration and vision from the two days.

## Visioning

- Drawing a vision and share the story
- Building a collage to represent your vision and share the story
- Future Search – collective development of a desired future state

### Visioning and Storytelling for Cultural Change

Ron facilitated the design and conduct of an action learning Program for the University of Queensland over 6 years. The Program was designed to build a culture of innovation.

Each year 10 project teams were funded to pursue a self-Selected project that was aligned to the university's goals.

At the start-up residential workshop each team created a drawing of a vision for their project. One person who needed more team members drew her recycling vision and then hawked it around the University to gain new members. Her final team won an award from Brisbane's Lord Mayor for their contribution to recycling in the city of Brisbane.

Each team presented their story publicly at the end of their Program (which was run annually with new members). The Program became the major source of innovation across the whole University.



## Future Search – Bob Dick

- Develop the vision as an aspirational goal
- Refine the vision in the light of current and future trends
- Convert the vision to something achievable
- Determine the organisation's shared priorities for each element of the vision
- Set up task forces for each priority element.

## Future Search to Build Collaboration and Pursue a Vision in a Community

In the 1980's Ron co-facilitated a one day Future Search with Bob Dick for 100 members of the Nanango Community on the Sunshine Coast.

Through a progressive process of individual work, small group work and convergent voting, participants developed a vision for the community (using Bob's workbook).

Following the collaborative development of the vision, projects were identified to pursue the vision and project team leaders established. A Steering Committee oversaw the process of building the teams and monitoring progress on the projects.

The Community, with the support of the Mayor who had attended, went on to implement their projects including beautifying the approaches to the town, improving the business centre and building a retirement village.

## Fairy Tale as a Diagnostic Tool - Bob Dick

- We all know how to start – “Once upon a time...”
- Taps into our rich store of memories
- Draws on an endless supply of stereotypes (e.g. wicked witch, evil prince)
- The standard ending (“And all lived happily ever after” can elicit a desired future state.
- Can be an intervention combining history trip and future search.

## Metaphor and Fairytale – Organisational Diagnosis

Ron was teaching “Organisational Structures” at Griffith University and used the metaphors in Gareth Morgan’s “Images of Organisations” to discuss each form of organisational structure.

The student group assignment required each group to analyse a real organisation in terms of a metaphor and present their analysis in both written and oral form.

One group got a bit carried away and presented their analysis as an illustrated fairy tale which they not only presented in class but also in their organisation. It showed the Indian Chief (the manager) living in a huge tent on an island surrounded by a shark infested moat. The Indians (staff) lived in small tepees and had no way of crossing to the island.

After the presentation, the manager was summoned by the Director to explain why his staff felt so isolated from him. This led to cultural change!

## Metaphors Shared by Organisation Members – Examples

- Koala – warm and cuddly on the outside but when threatened attacks with its claws
- Elephant – slow and ponderous, doesn't adapt
- Toothless Tiger – does not have the power to pursue its community charter
- Ostrich – sticks its head in the sand
- Feral Cat – when approached, attacks

## Sociodrama and Storytelling to Strengthen Organisational Identity and Culture

A few years ago a colleague of ours facilitated a workshop for all Merit consultants. The driver was the need to do strategic planning in the face of a major economic downturn.

We were asked to stand along a line which began with the earliest members of Merit. As each person joined the line in order of joining the organisation, they told their story.

The story covered where they had come from, what Merit was like when they joined, what they had achieved through Merit and what Merit meant for them now.

This strengthened the sense of corporate identity, reinforced Merit's values and created a sense of pride and energy that was then channelled into strategic planning.

## Appreciative Inquiry- Bushe (2013)

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a method for studying and changing social systems (groups, organizations, communities) that advocates collective inquiry into the best of what is, in order to imagine what could be, followed by collective design of a desired Future that is compelling and thus, does not require the use of incentives, coercion or persuasion for planned change to occur.

## Appreciative Inquiry Process (Cooperridder & Whitney, 2005)

