

Sorting The Relationship of Tacit Knowledge to Story and Narrative Knowing

By Jo A. Tyler, Pennsylvania State University
and David M. Boje, New Mexico State University

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ABSTRACT

Our chapter fits the theme, the interplay between creativity and control in organizations. Story is often claimed to be a way to elicit tacit knowledge from people, and their organization. We would like to suggest that this is impossibility. To story something is to shape it intuitively and willfully. Story shapes events into experience and into memory. Without story experience is just reenactment. To reenact is to relive the events, to feel the pain, fear, and terror.

INTRODUCTION

The concepts of knowledge management, and knowledge-intensive work have been developing for quite some time. In both theory and the vernacular of practice, knowledge and the knowledge worker are claimed to be the most important asset of contemporary organizations (Stewart, 1997). Knowledge workers as said to possess tacit knowledge, which various knowledge methodologies and specialized knowledge workers such as the “integrators, librarians, synthesizers, reporters, and editors” (Prusak, 1998, p. 110) convert to explicit knowledge when they “extract knowledge from those who have it, put it in a structured form, and maintain it or refine it over time” (Prusak, 1998, p. 110). Critics suggest that such knowledge solutions are perfunctory and propagandist (Styhre & Sungren, 2005). Managerialist policies rely upon the manipulation of emotions and identity creation (Kärreman and Alvesson, 2004). Managerialism is the view from the top, from the perspective of the managers (owners & executives – or others with power to wield). It is a top-down logic, a one logic that becomes the logic of change. There is a major difference between official organizational rhetoric and common everyday practice (Höpfl 1995; Argyris and Schön, 1996; Knights and Willmott, 1999).

Knowledge-intensive companies, such as in high-tech environments, purport

knowledge-workers to be highly valued members of an organization. At the same time, critics suggest that these same workers are being manipulated and even “engineered” to engage in such performativity that they burn-out, and are deprived of family life (Perlow, 2004). Managers interested in leveraging worker knowledge by transferring it are faced with “the challenge of detaching knowledge from some people and attaching it to others” (Seely-Brown, 2000, 123). The spirit of this sort of language establishes a fundamental tension where the worker must give up a part of herself, ostensibly for the greater good, and the manager necessarily “mines” the worker until the mine is exhausted, no longer useful. The worker in this way becomes a depreciating asset, unless she can simultaneously conjure a new vein of knowledge. Manager and worker conflict is often more obvious than in less knowledge-intensive settings (Roscigno & Hodson, 2004). So too may be conflicts between workers who are likely to be better rewarded for possessing knowledge that constitutes competitive advantage than they are for sharing it.

We propose to study a different paradox that marks knowledge work in knowledge-intensive companies. The purpose of the present work is to look at the quest for tacit knowledge in knowledge management. Storytelling is often said to be a way to elicit tacit knowledge from knowledge workers (Prusak, 1998; Gherardi & Nicolini, 2003; Bukowitz & Williams, 1999; von Krogh, Ichijo, and Nonaka, 2000) and to foster the internalizing of explicit knowledge, converting it to tacit knowledge (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995).

In this study we will first provide a brief overview of Polanyi’s ideas about tacit knowledge and their implications. We will then establish the distinction between narrative and story, so that we can bring these ideas together to examine their interplay in the context of a small selection of popular, contemporary knowledge management and knowledge sharing theories and practices: Cooperrider’s Appreciative Inquiry, Denning’s Springboard stories and Wenger’s Communities of Practice.

Polanyi’s Theory of Tacit Knowing

Michael Polanyi’s concepts of *tacit knowing* and *emergence* are foundational to knowledge management theory, research, and practice. Michael Polanyi (1891-1976) was born (Polányi Mihály) in Budapest. Polanyi’s (1946) early work *Science, Faith and*

Society, was followed in 1958 by *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*, a short book *The Study of Man* (1959), and in 1966 to a book that is the central topic of this essay, *The Tacit Dimension* (based on the 1962 Terry Lectures at Yale University).¹

In this 1966 work, the seminal book for Polanyi's work regarding tacit knowing and emergence, Polanyi argues against Existentialism, preferring to anchor his ideas in pragmatism. Polanyi (1966/1983) develops at least seven definitions and approaches to tacit knowing. Elsewhere Boje (2008a) has reviewed these in detail. We will summarize them briefly.

1. **Neural Processes of Tacit Knowing** - "Tacit knowing is the way in which we are aware of neural process in terms of perceived objects" (1966/1983: x). In the neural approach, tacit knowing is embodied in that "all thought dwells in its subsidiaries, as if they were parts of our body" (p. x). From this basic definition, Polanyi begins to multiply the number of tacit approaches.
2. **Know More Than We Can Tell** -Polanyi states, "*we can know more than we can tell*" (1966/1983: 4). This tacit knowing is rooted in Gestalt psychology, and the study of subception (i.e. something perceived below the threshold of consciousness). Polanyi's model for this is the proximal/distal distinction. For example, in an electric shock experiment, at the *proximal level of awareness*, we know the electric shock, but at the *distal (subception) level* we cannot communicate what are the particulars of behavior that result in someone or something giving us the shock. Polanyi suggests that one disattends from the particulars to pay attention to the shock. The neural type of tacit knowing is related to the Gestalt type. We disattend to certain (Gestalt) things in order to attend or focus upon other things (p. 10). Or, we disattend to the "subliminal process inside our body" to attend to what is happening around us.
3. **Projection and Tacit Knowing:** Our projection of tacitness is a sentient

¹ The following typology is adapted from forthcoming article Boje for E:CO (Emergence, Complexity & Organization Journal, due to publish in 2008)

extension of our body attending to a feeling (i.e. a relation between proximal awareness of the feeling and the distal particulars we can not tell about). However, *a priori* to, or *transcendent* to, the sensemaking (5 senses of perception), there can be various kinds of projections that follow, such as indwelling.

4. **Indwelling and Tacit Knowledge:** Indwelling then is a kind of reflexivity that has moral import. Indwelling is an attempt to understand the proximal terms of tacit knowing re relation to inquiry into the distal particulars. Indwelling goes beyond a neural, narrative, or projection type of tacit knowing, and Polanyi distinguishes it from empathy. Indwelling is “tacit framework for our moral acts and judgments” (1966, p. 17). It establishes moral knowledge (a framework for moral acts) in relation to practice. Here we begin to read in Polanyi, that tacit knowing is about a structure or more precisely, a theoretical-framework that is internalized for understanding the moral act. Polanyi is definite that this is bending his earlier conception of tacit knowing into a new type: “The identification with indwelling involves a shift of emphasis in our conception of tacit knowing” (p. 17). Polanyi assumes that it is not possible to recovery some original meaning (p. 19). At the same time, “the meticulous dismembering of a text, which can kill its appreciation can also supply material for a much deeper understanding of it” (p. 19). This brings us to the possibility of something in-between the unrecoverable origin, and a deeper understanding.
5. **Tacit Reintegration** – Tacit reintegration is an appreciation of how a coherent narrative (with its linear emplotment), sacrifices so many particulars that the indwellment of meaning in some new story, i.e. in a (tacit) reintegration of omitted particularities, is impossible. For Polanyi, tacit reintegration is a sort of reflexive practice, such as when the engineers understand more particularities than the non-engineer, and can afford therefore a deeper understanding. However, just as there is no recovery of an origin (due to complexity of movement), there is no “explicit integration that can replace the tacit counterparts of knowing (p. 20). It is here that

Polanyi provides an insight into the contemporary knowledge management fallacy of trying to turn tacit knowing into explicit knowing (p. 20). To summarize, Polanyi claims modern science that tries to detach an objective knowledge by eliminating the tacit is misguided. Tacit is indispensable to all knowledge, so eliminating it would be a destruction of all knowledge (p. 20). It is one of the “devastating fallacies” (p. 20) of contemporary knowledge management theory and practice.

6. **Type Six – Past Lives:** Another kind of tacit projection is an act of reflexivity upon all that is hidden by the inattention of narrative “coherence” (p. 21). Narrative coherence can devitalize living (embodied-indwelling) story. The initiation of some ordinary narrative to supplant tacit reintegration ends the inquiry into discovery of what is hidden in all the discarded particularities. It is at this point that Polanyi pulls out yet another definition of tacit knowing: “... all discovery is a remembering of past lives” (1966/1983: 22). This is a very transcendental turn to defining tacit knowing in ways far beyond the previous five sorts of approaches. Sorting through the particulars discarded in narrative coherence (& control) will not give us an inkling of tacit reintegration that is rooted in past lives. Polanyi lists as one of his references for the ‘past life’ approach, Plato’s *Meno* (p. 22). Plato’s dialogue, known for the character *Meno*, is a theory of *anamnesis* (i.e. the recollection of past events). The soul knows that it has been incarnated before and conveys some of its recollections forward to the next incarnation. *Meno* is used by Polanyi to tease out the foreknowledge of tacit knowing: “we can have a tacit foreknowledge of yet undiscovered things” (p. 23). The insights of tacit knowing from past lives are “an indefinite range of unexpected manifestations” (p. 24). For Polanyi it is “foreknowledge which guides scientists to discovery” (p. 33). Whereas indwelling is paying attention to unspecifiable particulars, *Meno* is a conviction there is something more to be discovered, as in a hidden truth which no positivist methodology or procedure will uncover. This transcendental turn to a recollection that recovers past memory of the

eternal soul in its reincarnations is for Polanyi an alternative to positivism.

Type Seven – Tacit Knowing Relation to Emergence: Tacit knowing is related to emergence in a way that has not been noted or addressed in contemporary reviews of Polanyi. And it is a relationship that speaks directly to the transition from systems thinking to complexity thinking. For Polanyi has a foot in both ways of thinking. On one hand, Polanyi is caught up in systems thinking, where the “universe [is] filled with strata of realities” that are ordered, in “higher and lower strata” (p. 35, bracketed addition, mine). On the other hand, he theorizes the ills of [narrative] coherence that blind science to the more tacit acts of comprehending that are ontological (as well as transcendental aspects of complexity, of type six). For Polanyi, the systems thinking is revealed in the assumption that “principles of each level operate under the control of the next higher level” (p. 36). For Polanyi, the hierarchic orders of system-levels are a “process of morphogenesis” (p. 36) in which, for example, the sciences are ordered, where physics and chemistry cannot explain the complexities of biology and biophysics, or the perceptions and consciousness of ethnology and psychology. “The laws of physics and chemistry include no conception of sentience” (p. 37), nor do the principles of machine operation tell operators how to work the machine or the purposes the machine is to serve. In Polanyi’s hierarchy-view, above the basic sciences is linguistics, where constituting speech making in words, sentences, style, and composition) makes literary criticism a higher order of systems than lexicography (vocabulary) or language-grammar. This hierarchic ordering of one systems relation to another of a different sort, is brought together in the “*principle of marginal control*” (p. 40), where “successive working principles control the boundary left indeterminate on the next lower level” (p. 41) and “each lower level imposes restrictions on the one above it” (p. 41). His example of speech acts that control the order of utterance is that otherwise “words are drowned in a flow of random sounds, sentences in a series of random words, and so on” (p. 41).

In sum, Polanyi posits a special relationship between some types of tacit knowing and his concept of emergence. Tacit knowing (indwelling, projection, tacit reintegration & recollection of past lives) and emergence assume a hierarchic structure of stratas, as well as of alternative realities. Emergence, itself, is a function of the assumption of hierarchic relations among levels: “But the hierarchic structure of the higher forms of life necessitates the assumption of further processes of emergence” (pp. 44-45). More specifically, Polanyi’s theory of emergence is complicity bound to hierarchic order assumptions:

Thus the logical structure of the hierarchy implies that a higher level can come into existence only through a process not manifest in the lower level, a process which thus qualifies as an emergence (p. 45).

And it is this structure of hierarchy in emergence that for Polanyi has its counterpart in the field of “tacit comprehension” (p. 45). Polanyi admits, that emergence represents yet another conception of tacit knowing: “I have included all stages of emergence in an enlarged conception of inventiveness achieved by tacit knowing” (p. 44). That is, the mental powers of tacit knowing are linked to an evolutionary emergence in an overall “theory of stratified universe” (p. 50).

Implications for Story, Narrative, and Knowledge Management

One way to extend Polanyi is to look more critically at his we “know more than we can tell” thesis. Another way to extend Polanyi is to look at his concept of integration in a more narrative conception of tacit knowing. We can look at the relationship of narrative-control (acts of explicitness) and story-diffusion (acts of reflexivity upon tacit reintegration). If narrative-order and story-tacitness are in a relationship it could be a handle on the very nature of self-organizing of knowledge. If narrative-explicit-coherence is a counterpart to story-tacit-reflexivity then it is important to not disembodify the process of knowing. Eliminating story knowledge to make narrative-abstract-theoretic-explicitness is impersonal, misleading, and logically unsound because it collapses the counterforce of self-organization.

Third, is indwelling. It is a shift to an inquiry into the distance between unbridled lucidity of coherence (such as a simple narrative) and the complexity patterns (that

simplifying narratives would destroy). While we can inquire into distal particulars of complex patterns,

Rather than a system thinking “hierarchy of controls” that Polanyi (p. 42) posits, it could be that systems are not so finalized, not so ordered, and could be more holographic such as Edgar Morin’s (19973, 1996) approach to complexity. Positing a hierarchy of systems (Boulding or Polanyi, as examples) seems to remove the possibility of systems freely associating, or not being determined by principles of one level to another. It could be that there are more equipotential relationships between various modes and sorts of systems, and that the whole construct of levels (or strata) needs to be challenged and conceptualized non-hierarchically. Putting systems into level-by-level array is a definite form of linearization that does not allow for the possibility of self-organization in non-linear relationships. This is not saying there are no strata, and no important relational principles. Rather, the criticism is that there could be a relation between linear and nonlinear aspects of complexity, as force and counterforce of self-organizing processes.

TOWARDS A NARRATIVE AND STORY THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

We will now turn our attention to the concepts of narrative and story, their connection to tacit knowing, and their relevance to the practice of knowledge management in organizations.

The Difference Between Narrative and Story

Many authors (and practitioners) make no distinction whatsoever between narrative and story, using the words interchangeably (Tyler, 2007a). They accept Aristotle, or reinvent him, and see no difference. We prefer to follow Bakhtin, Derrida, Calvino and our own storytelling roots, and theorize a very important difference between narrative and story. In that difference is a very important lesson about change. Linear change is a ‘systems thinking’ that needs to wake up! There are non-linear change approaches that are dialectic and dialogical. The dialectic I have in mind is between narrative order (control) and living story differences (disorder). The dialogic I have in mind is a multiplicity of types of narratives and types of stories that consummate the

essence of self-organization, emergence, and complexity. To see the dialectic and dialogic, you need to move out systems thinking into complexity thinking, and notice the dance of narrative and story.

For Mikhail Bakhtin (1973: 12), “narrative genres are always enclosed in a solid and unshakable monological framework.” Narrative dances with a more dialogic manner of story. Story, for Bakhtin, is decidedly more dialogical than narrative, for example in the “polyphonic manner of the story” (Bakhtin, 1973: 60). And the two (narrative & story) are dialogical with each other.

Jacque Derrida also treats story and narrative as quite different.

Each “story” (and each occurrence of the word “story,” (of itself), each story in the story) is part of the other, makes the other part (of itself), is at once larger and smaller than itself, includes itself without including (or comprehending) itself, identifies itself with itself even as it remains utterly different from its homonym. (Derrida, 1979: 99-100).

Derrida is more radical than Bakhtin, viewing narrative as an instrument of torture, and the way it is used in story consulting (particularly in Knowledge Management work), it is the torture of the Inquisition:

... The question-of-narrative covers with a certain modesty a demand for narrative, a violent putting-to-the-question an instrument of torture working to wring the narrative out of one as if it were a terrible secret in ways that can go from the most archaic police methods to refinements for making (and even letting) one talk that are unsurpassed in neutrality and politeness, that are most respectfully medical, psychiatric, and even psychoanalytic. (Derrida, 1979: 94).

Story Consulting that passes for Knowledge Management is a wringing of Living Story out of the Knowledge Workers, so it can be passed about as a tortured until death, Narrative Text.

Finally, Italo Calvino (1979: 109) imagines stories in relation to a space full of stories:

I’m producing too many stories at once because what I want is for you to feel, around the story, a saturation of other stories that I could tell... A space full of stories that perhaps is simply my lifetime where you can

move in all directions, as in space, always finding stories that cannot be told until other stories are told first.

For Calvino, story necessarily opposes itself in a web of stories.

Implications for Knowledge Management, Narrative, and Story Consulting

Our main thesis is that none of these approaches to narrative and story differences appear in the knowledge management theory and consulting practice. We think that it is because of the way the managerialist writers shun any kind of dialectic relationship of narrative and story as agencies of change.

The upstart profession of story consulting began to specialize in something I call BME (Beginning, Middle, and End) narrative coherence. This idea comes to us from Aristotle (350 BCE), in his renditions of the Poetics of BME where he posits how proper story must have a narrative sequence of beginning, middle, and end, and thereby be a whole narrative with a plot sequence of events, characters, themes, dialogue, rhythm, and spectacle.

The field of narrative studies emerged from Aristotle's (350 BCE: section 1450b: lines 1-20: pp. 232-233) conception that narratives must be coherently plotted: "We have laid it down that a tragedy is an imitation of an action that is complete in itself, as a whole of some magnitude... Now a whole is that which has beginning, middle, and end" (1450b: 25-30: p. 233).

As Aristotle's mimetic of BME of linear, whole, representation becomes adopted by Russian Formalism, and other traditional narratologies, a double-move occurs. Story becomes relegated in the first move to a mere chronology of event. In the second move, narrative self-deconstructs its initial duality (the hierarchy of narrative over story), in order to double back to efface supposed underlying order of event (Culler, 1981: 171).

STORY AND NARRATIVE IN KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Schreyögg, Georg and Koch (2005) invited chapter writers for their edited book to answer two implicit questions: "*what is the relation between story and narrative?*" and "*how can Knowledge Management (KM) or Knowledge Engineers (KRs) explicit science protocol extract, codify, and disseminate tacitness using story/narrative?*"

Boje's (2006,a b) critique was that with two exceptions, the KM and KE writers craft a hegemonic commodification and colonization project that is decidedly managerialist. Secondly, chapter authors and editors leave the reader to sort out and interrelate *story and narrative* to what is *explicit and tacit knowledge*. Explicit knowledge is reasonably clear. Davenport and Prusak (1998) characterize it as knowledge which "can be embedded in procedures or represented in documents and databases and transferred with reasonable accuracy" (p. 95), and this will suffice for our purposes here. Tacit knowledge on the other hand is more complicated and we have already seen from the summary of Polanyi's work. Boje (2008, forthcoming book), linking to Polanyi's notions of tacit knowing, asserts there are at least five types of tacit sensemaking. They are: tacit mindfulness, an awareness of here-and-now (in the moment); retrospective sensemaking and codifying stories into coherence narratives; making sense of fragmentation, such as in terse narratives, and codifying fragments into proper narrative wholes; enactment sensemaking in ways of framing, such as unconscious logics, metaphors, or archetypes that precede retrospection; multiple discursive dialogisms, such as ways that Lyotard challenges the duality of explicit science versus tacit narrative (i.e. pointing out that science legitimates through narrating or being incredulous of grand narratives).

Boje's critique of the Schreyögg, Georg and Koch (2005) edited volume feels answerable to an examination of some of the popular approaches to knowledge management consulting that incorporate story, storytelling, and story consulting as central to their processes. We have chosen three reasonably well-known approaches to consider here: Denning's Springboard Story (2001), Cooperrider's Appreciative Inquiry (2000, 2003), and Wenger's Communities of Practice (Wenger,1998; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). We chose these based on three shared characteristics. First, they each enjoy a fair degree of popularity in practice. Second, each integrates story and narrative into their central thesis. Third, one of us (Tyler) has first-hand experience with them as an attendee in a workshop delivered by the central thought leader for each, and as a practitioner making choices about ways (and whether or not) to incorporate these approaches into practice in the Fortune 500. We will first discuss each approach briefly, with attention to their investment in story/narrative, tacit/explicit, and reflexive/coherent

dualities, and then in our conclusion draw out some implications of our observations for knowledge intensive organizations.

Denning's Springboard Stories

Denning burst on to both the knowledge management and organizational storytelling landscapes in 2001 with his book, *The Springboard Story: How Storytelling Ignites Action in Knowledge-Era Organizations*, based on his work in implementing knowledge management at World Bank in the late 1990's. In the course of this organizational change effort, Denning stumbles on storytelling (p. 3) as an effective means to build understanding and ignite the action invoked by the title of the book. In the book, Denning essentializes storytelling as the key element to effective knowledge management strategy, though Denning makes no distinction between stories and narratives. He uses the terms interchangeably, as we see in this excerpt from the introduction: "The attractions of narrative are obvious. Storytelling is natural and easy and entertaining and energizing" (2001, p. xv).

A closer look at the constitution and role of the Springboard Story reveals that they are more narrative than story. Though he positions storytelling in organizations as the antidote to "reductionist simplicity" (p. xv) and a complement to analytical thinking in the introduction of his book, he goes on to provide a set of rules for developing and identifying Springboard Stories that move them toward the controlling nature of narrative. These stories are, for example, brief and explicit, contain sufficient specifics (particulars in the vernacular of Polanyi) so that the listener is "hooked by the conflict or problem" (p. 197), but not too much, so that the listener "doesn't get lost in the story, but can follow its meaning" (p. 197). They should contain actions that are challenging for the protagonist, contain a predicament that his addressed in an unusual manner, tension between characters in the story, events that happen in an unpredictable sequence, which Denning summarizes as "an element of strangeness" (p. 198). There are nine additional elements, including the notion that the stories should have happy endings, persuade listeners by encouraging them to identify with the protagonist, be specific and "prototypical of the organization's main business" (p. 199). In *The Springboard (2001)* Denning encourages the crafters of these stories to tell true stories rather than invented

ones, and to “test, test, test” a story with individuals or small groups to ascertain whether it “is going to work with that audience or not” (p. 199).

Though Denning uses the terminology loosely, drawing on the prior discussion of the distinction between storytelling and narrative, he is primarily concerned with narrative. He is focused on instrumental, performed stories (Chapter 9 is devoted to “Performing the Springboard Story” (p. 135)). that are practiced, rehearsed with the unabashed intention of persuading listeners in the spirit of change management. In one incident he relays, he accepts the point of a critic that “there are some analogies between persuading an organization to change and the subtleties of seduction” (p. 176). In another he suggests that “the less the listeners realize that they are listening to ‘a story’ the better” (180). While he concedes that there are two types of stories (p. 181), the distinction he makes are between what he calls “maximalist stories, or stories with a capital ‘s’” (p. 181) and “stories with a small ‘s’...mini-stories of less than fifty-five words” (p. 182) that he likens to “the spare stories of Raymond Carver, or the parables of Jesus Christ” (p. 182). While this may sound at first blush like Boje’s “tersely told” stories (2006c, p. 29), it is quite different on the basis that the stories Denning is driving toward are carefully crafted, not implied (though he says the main message should be implicit and available for discovery by the listener) in a “you know the story” (2006, p. 29) understanding between the teller and the listener. Moreover, they are practiced, so as to be told in a manner consistent from one telling to the next, and consciously placed in the context of the persuasive presentation, not emergent in connection with the audiences’ reaction and the flow of conversation.

Neither is Denning particularly concerned with expressing tacit knowledge in *The Springboard Story*. In two of his subsequent books (2005, 2007) targeting an audience interested in learning about leadership, Denning increases his use of the term narrative, perhaps because it is often perceived by management to be more serious and business-like (Tyler, 2007a). In the 2005 book, both storytelling and narrative appear in the title of the book, while in the 2007 book, only narrative makes the marquee. Even so, a reading of these two books indicates that the terms still feel synonymous to Denning. In the 2005 book, in his discussion of the relationship of storytelling to tacit and explicit knowledge, he indicates that we “have a certain amount of *tacit understanding*, which is acquired

through experience and which we may [sic] be able to articulate explicitly....But a substantial part of our expertise also lies in *narratives* that describe how unusual situations have been handled in the past” (p. 178 *italics in original*). In this later work focused on leadership, we also see that while Denning is still advocating highly coherent narratives, crafted and rehearsed, he has moved ever so *slightly* in the direction of emergence and reflexivity, or at least toward a form of adaptive storytelling, at the same time continuing to provide allowances for fiction as a conscious tool in instrumental story performance. In talking about the “knowledge sharing story...the workhorse of narrative” (p. 181) for example, he instructs his readers that, “When you prepare a story version of an experience, you include some details from the actual experience, sometimes embellish it with potentially fictional details, and leave out much of the experience altogether. This process is called *leveling and sharpening*. You do this...so that you can give a coherent account of the experience to your listeners. Each time you find a reason to tell the story, you level and sharpen it in different ways to meet the current context” (p. 181).

In summary, Denning sees storytelling and narrative as interchangeable terms for oral conveyance of experiences, perhaps adapted with fiction to strengthen their ability to persuade listeners to be followers moving toward an organizational goal. These stories are explicit and formulaic – in Denning’s 2001 “Storytelling Masterclass” (Nov. 15 in Washington DC) attended by Tyler, attendees were provided with a 12 step template for building a three-minute story – in an effort to drive coherency, lessen resistance, increase understanding of why the message of the story is worth following and inspire aligned action.

Cooperrider’s Appreciative Inquiry

David Cooperrider is best known for his development of a method popular in the arena of organization development known as Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider, Sorensen Jr, Whitney, and Yaeger, 2000). Though Appreciative Inquiry (hereafter AI) is a method grounded in social construction that reverses the deficit problem solving model to focus on the “best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them” (2000, p. 5). It is variously considered not only a method for organizational change or transformation, but a “philosophy of knowing, a normative stance...and as an approach to

leadership and human development” (p 5) that has attracted the attention of those interested in the design of Knowledge Management systems (Avital and Carlo, 2004). For our purposes here, we will consider it as a method for organization development. Like Denning, Cooperrider is also interested in mobilizing people in the interest of organization change, and like Denning, stories lie at the heart of his “four-D” (Discover, Dream, Design, Destiny) process (Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros, 2003).

The process pivots on upfront interviews that may be conducted to choose a topic for intervention, or to explore a topic pre-determined by management. Cooperrider acknowledges that “topic choice is a fateful act” (2003, p. 38), but does not appear to be critical of the differences between topics that emerge from the interviews with employees and those pre-selected based on management decisions about what is in the interest of the organization. Instead he stresses only that “organizations move in direction of inquiry” (2003, p. 38). That inquiry involves the collection of stories from employees (and sometimes customers and suppliers since AI is a whole-system approach to change) in the initial interviews since, AI “assumes that every living system has many untapped and rich and inspiring accounts of the positive. Link the energy of this core directly to *any change agenda* and changes never thought possible are suddenly and *democratically mobilized*” (Cooperrider, Sorensen Jr, Whitney, and Yaeger, 2000, p. 6, *italics ours*). The irony of agendas set by management followed by a purportedly democratic process goes unnoticed in this text. The interview is structured to elicit this “positive change core” (2000, p. 9) through questions designed to elicit stories of positive experiences on which the organization could capitalize in the later stages of the process. Negative or shadow stories are not collected (Tyler, in press). Employees are asked to temporarily put these aside, and instead “share stories of exceptional accomplishments, discuss the core life-giving factors of their organizations, and deliberate upon the aspects of their organization’s history that they most value” (Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros, 2003, p. 39).

In describing the second stage, the Dream Phase, we see Cooperrider incorporate the use of the term narrative in a way that echoes a little the distinctions we made earlier in this essay: “As the various stories of the organization’s history are shared and illuminated, a new historical narrative emerges. This narrative engages those involved in

much the way a good mystery novel engages a reader” (2003, p. 39). We move from something that (though clearly manipulated by the nature of the questions chosen by those in power) was a personal story of experience with possibilities of tacit and reflexive properties, to a composite and compiled narrative, coalesced to suit a goal that is for the greater good of “the organization,” and therefore subject to its hegemonic intentions. It is clearly intended to belong to and represent everyone, but in the process of amalgamating all stories into a narrative arc that will drive the remainder of the process, organizations end up with a story that belongs to and represents no one. While Cooperrider and his colleagues make no mention tacit or explicit elements of the process or the stories collected, this movement toward narrative coherence drives reflexivity out of the process and keeps the sensemaking explicit. In the 2004 workshop Tyler attended at the Taos institute, the process was taught as a series of mechanical steps akin to common approaches to narrative analysis. “Data can be reduced and displayed in diagrams, charts, tables, pictures, storybooks, newsletters, and other visual aids...look for common threads and anomalies in the data. Specifically, what are the best stories, practices and wishes that came out of the interviews?...A primary goal is to reduce and interpret the meanings and, through dialogue, make sure these are the interviewees’ meanings” (Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros, 2003, p. 98). This combination of reduction and interpretation may be done with the best of intentions, but it has at least two flaws.

First, it is grounded in a “Wholeness Principle” (Whitney and Trosten-Bloom, 2003, p. 69) drawn on what we consider to be a selective understanding of Bohm’s assertion that the “wholeness or integrity [that] is an absolute necessity to make life worth living” (from Bohm, 1980, quoted in Whitney and Trosten-Bloom, 2003, p. 69). Bohm’s paradigm is inherently in opposition to the reductionism that is evident in the Design phase of AI, and in any case, we believe that in the pursuit of only the positive stories about experience, the “whole story” is not made ever made available in the context of AI. Instead we end up with directed narratives that are, at best, a partial representation of the experience of an individual or of the organization at large. Cooperrider asserts the importance of the question and direction of the inquiry, but in the unrelenting focus on the positive, his process fails to gather the story in all its entirety. It splits the yin-yang diagram, ignoring the notion that the seeds of the opposite are contained within the other.

For all of its nature-based metaphors, such as the principle of heliotropism, in which we turn toward the light, it ignores the practical reality that it is the very casting of the light which creates shadows (Tyler, in press). This tearing apart is a discursive manipulation by the process, and because of it, the sort of ontological holism that Bohm is interested in can never be achieved.

The second flaw in the reduction of the data into what is essentially a control narrative is that it ignores the implausibility of this in practice on the basis of social heteroglossia and the power structures (both overt and covert) inherent in the organization at large and especially in organizational change initiatives (Marshak, 2006). Reflexive storytelling can hardly stand its own ground in the face of such pressures and collapses into narrative-explicit-coherence.

Wenger's Communities of Practice

Etienne Wenger's work (Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002) privileges Communities of Practice (hereafter CoP) over individuals and the organization at large as the prevailing social structure in which learning occurs, meaning is made and identity is formed. Wenger, in 1998, is compelled by the phenomenon of Communities of Practice and their inherent dynamics, which include knowledge exchange, stories (as a form of reification) (p. 59) and storytelling (as a form of participation) (p. 204). Wenger (1998) considers knowledge, both explicit and tacit, in the context of a duality between participation and reification, which he sees as distinct and complementary. Reification for Wenger is both "a process and its product" (p. 60), and requires the participation of humans to render them meaningful. He explains that "A certain understanding is given form. This form then becomes a focus for the negotiation of meaning, as people use [it]" to accomplish a task, e.g. "use the law to argue a point, use the procedure to know what to do, or use the tool to perform an action....Indeed, no abstraction, tool, or symbol actually captures in its form the practices in the context of which it contributes to an experience of meaning." (p. 58-59). Like the undulating interplay of participation and reification, wherein each "makes up for the inherent limitations" (p. 64) of the other, Wenger also considers knowledge to be not a continuum of explicit to tacit (or vice versa) wherein "moving to one side implies leaving the other" (p. 67), but also as an

interacting duality. Here he supports Polanyi's notion that "the process of formalizing all knowledge to the exclusion of any tacit knowing is self-defeating" (1966, 1983, p. 20), contending that "classifying knowledge as explicit or tacit runs into difficulties...because both aspects are always present to some degree" (p. 69). In this context, he contends that "it is not possible to make everything explicit and thus get rid of the tacit....It is only possible to change their relation" (1998, p. 67). Wenger, in 1998, is not concerned so much with the management of knowledge (that interest comes later), but with the way it is put to work and the way it behaves in the social context of Communities of Practice. He is very precise in his use of language, giving cogent examples in the hopes of making his meaning clear. Indeed, Wenger echoes Polanyi's notion of the knowledge of the aforementioned machine operator versus the knowledge of the engineer (1966, 1983, p. 19) (as well as Polanyi's contention that "our body is the ultimate instrument of all our external knowledge, whether intellectual or practical" (p. 15)), raising the example of the embodied knowledge of walking and how "requiring only this [walking] yields a good enough relation between the explicit and the tacit for certain purpose, though probably not good enough for an orthopedist who needs to know which muscles I use to keep my balance and move my legs" (p. 69).

There is in Wenger also a metaphorical connection to Polanyi's proximal and distal noticing, when he asserts that learning depends on "locality, proximity, distance...the point is that learning is impaired when experience and competence are too close *and* when they are too distant. In either case they do not pull each other" (p. 140). When Wenger stresses that learning (and by extension transfer of knowledge) occurs "when participants are able to recognize and experience of meaning in each other" (p. 140), and that this occurs in "boundary encounters" (p. 140) between proximal CoPs, we begin to get a sense of the role that stories and storytelling can play in his theory.

For Wenger, stories are social events connected to imagination (and play) that can be "appropriated easily because they allow us to enter the events, the characters, and their plights by calling upon our imaginations. Stories can transport our experience into the situations they relate and involve us in producing the meanings of those events as though we were participants" (1998, p. 203). Taken together with his concept of stories as a process and product of reification we see that Wenger goes beyond the popular notion,

challenged here, that stories can express tacit knowledge, that they are a vehicle for eliciting tacit knowledge from knowledge workers. Rather he sees stories and other products of reification as “tokens of vast expanses of human meaning” (p. 61), which inherently vesselize the tacit in its dualistic relationship to the explicit, along with “all the implicit relations....Most of these may never be articulated” (p. 47). In this way stories are negotiated, alive, and emergent (Tyler, 2007b) in a way that we have not seen in Denning or Cooperrider. Though Wenger uses narrative as a term interchangeable with stories (after Linde, 1993, who correctly, in our view, considers life histories a narrative attempt to create coherency), we find in his theory that stories and storytelling are simultaneously produced by members of CoPs and are the fabric that knits the CoP together relationally: “Old timers deliver the past and offer the future, in the form of narratives and participation both. Each has a story to tell. In addition, the practice itself gives life to these stories, and the possibility of mutual engagement offers a way to enter these stories through one’s own experience” (1998, p. 156). Here, along with the connection he makes with imagination, we see intimations in Wenger of reflexivity. Nowhere in the 1998 text does Wenger consider storytelling a tool for the purposes of persuasion (Denning), inspiring change (Cooperrider), or purposefully prompting action, as both Denning and Cooperrider intend. Stories are not instrumentalized through Wenger’s 1998 lens, only considered as a social phenomenon supporting and creating the social fabric of the organizations.

So far, we have been considering Wenger’s theoretical framework for CoPs from his seminal text, which explores the many facets of his theory deeply, with great care and careful articulation. In his follow-on book (2002), co-authored with two colleagues (McDermott and Snyder), the audience is practitioners rather than academics (2002, p. x) and the tone is decidedly different. Here, we see not just stories and storytelling instrumentalized, but the entire of concept of Communities of Practice is itself instrumentalized in the interest of knowledge management. Rather than a social phenomenon that is emergent, naturally occurring in organizations, that can be recognized and perhaps fostered, CoPs in *Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge* (2002) are something to be planned and launched (p. 65). There are even “seven principles for cultivating Communities of Practice” (p. 49). Stories

become one of several “communal resources....[that] include both the tacit and the explicit aspects of the community’s knowledge” (p. 38). Now they are seen as a “mode of communicating and capturing knowledge” (p. 39). While they consider stories as a means of measurement, of “assessing the value of a community of practice” (p. 168), they maintain some of Wenger’s original spirit; that stories can describe “complex causal relations while incorporating implicit contextual factors” (p. 168), but this aspect is teamed up with “a number of additional benefits....Stories provide recognition of the protagonists; they reinforce the importance of making one’s practice visible in the organization; and they help build a culture that values innovation and knowledge sharing” (p. 169). We would agree with the authors contention that “stories are a powerful component of any culture” (p. 169), but Wenger et al are quickly distancing themselves from the reflexive nature of stories when they stress the importance of “legitimizing the storytelling process” (p. 169), a move which will almost certainly yield coherent narratives that align with the dominant texts of the organization. In this text we no longer get the sense conveyed by Wenger’s seminal work (1998) that the tacit-explicit duality matters, or is even present. Instead there is movement toward a coherent (and repeated) narrative that will make a case, or prove a point. The authors ultimately confirming this trajectory when they cite Denning and provide their own version of a World Bank story (pp. 187-190) to illustrate stories as “instruments of change” (p. 188). Capitalizing on the knowledge management trend and the burgeoning interest in Communities of Practice appear (2002, p. x-xi) to have resulted in the development of templates, formulas, and recipes that leave little room for reflexivity, and little interest in emergent story.

Implications of Popular Knowledge Management Approaches for Story and Narrative

In the three popular approaches to knowledge management explored here with an eye toward their stance on stories and narrative, tacit and explicit knowledge, and reflexivity and coherency, there seems to be a force driving toward the a notion that the term *story* can be used interchangeably and therefore replaced with the term *narrative*. Attending this casual substitution of terms is a wish that narrative can somehow unearth the unarticulated secrets of the organization’s members, that which Polanyi says we

know, but cannot tell (1966, 1983, p. 4). But as we have shown, it cannot. Reflexivity in storytelling is expanded in the social aspects of living story, which is deadened by the attempts of the knowledge management process to develop explicit and coherent narratives that capture story.

The commoditizing of storytelling into coherent narrative approaches that can be delivered in templates and recipes with discreet steps are antithetical to reflexive storytelling. These approaches are about making storytelling efficient and speedy by molding it into palatable narrative shapes, but reflexive storytelling is about slowing down, and about noticing.

The temptation on the part of knowledge management professionals to seek out tidy answers to puzzles of knowledge management is great. The quest for solutions that can be packaged into training modules and rolled out to employees is ongoing in earnest. Polanyi, in considering the process of “tacit integration” (Polanyi and Prosch, 1975, p. 40), suggests that it “is intentional throughout, and as such can be carried out *only by a conscious act of the mind*....Such integration cannot be replaced by any explicit mechanical procedure....It can only be lived, can only be dwelt in” (p. 40-41). In the context of the knowledge management turn toward narrative coherency seen in the approaches of Denning, Cooperrider, and ultimately Wenger (as he departs from his study of the CoP phenomenon to a packaging of it for institutional implementation), knowledge managers may do well to consider the ways in which the move from reflexive storytelling to coherent narrative will leave behind much of the richness they seek.

CONCLUSION

Tacitness, is generally, considered, a pre-scientific knowledge, or a knowledge that is not explicit, because it is taken-for-granted, it becomes inexplicable. However, in the case of story, the experience is already rendered explicit. Narrative is hegemonic to story, ever-controlling and disciplining story, to render events and characters into an emplotment that shapes memory into experiential representationalism. Without the shaping, it would be accurate to call the knowledge (more accurately pre-knowledge), tacit knowledge.

We would like to suggest a way out of this dilemma. We propose that tacitness is not the same thing as reflexivity. In tacitness, events are reenacted, but unshaped. In story, the events become shaped into experience. Reflexivity is the way meaning of events is being made meaningful, the way the language is making meaning in a particular way.

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