

Introduction

Great stories happen to those who can tell them.¹

We are born into stories. Along with our first cry after birth, we are exposed to stories about what an experience our birth was for our mother, how beautiful we are, in what way we have been taken care of, and so on. Even if all these things were in the past, they have an impact on us as a subconscious embodiment of our first exposure to stories in this world. We then continue to grow up, witnessing people telling stories to each other, our parents, our friends, and our teachers. These are stories about everyday life, stories at the dinner table, stories about magical lands in fairy tales, love stories, sad stories in classical literature, and so on.

When I was young, at Christmas my parents used to take me to our village for the big yearly family gathering. Most evenings, parents left the house for a big walk through the village streets, ending up at the market place in order to enjoy a hot cup of tea. My grandmother used to invite us, her grandchildren, to join her around the fireplace, where she would tell us exciting stories before our parents came back and put us to bed. Most of the time, she invented those stories while talking.

She also prepared for us a dark brown drink served in tiny cups, boiled in front of our eyes in the hot ashes of the fireplace. She whispered in our ears that this powerful drink was brought from far away by mysterious traders who traveled days and nights, and that it would give us a kind of secret power to cope well with our school duties and homework. She told us that our parents called it “coffee” and that small children were not allowed to drink it, so we should not disclose our small secret to anybody. Everything happened in a conspiring way, and this attracted us more to look forward to her call to join her around the fireplace every evening. She was an amazing story maker and storyteller.

It took me some years as I was growing up to learn that apart of her great stories, what she was offering us was a tiny cup of delicious hot milk chocolate!

If the above story captured your attention and created any emotions, that was exactly the intention. Telling stories to others and ourselves is a basic human act, which helps us to remember and reflect on our own history. Reflection on our lives is crucial for our existence as human beings and telling stories is the main way of doing just that. Stories confirm that we have a history.

When bringing all these to an organizational context, it is important to understand how uses of narrative structures allow organizations to shape and record their own history. Similar to our private lives, we remember better and easily recall and reflect on our knowledge and learning in the working environment, when our experience and learning are related or linked to stories. Nowadays more than ever, there is a need and even pressure in organizations to find new, innovative ways to train employees. This is essential in order to balance the disruptive impact of the fast induction of technology and the augmented workforce

¹ Quote by **Ira Jeffrey Glass** (born March 3, 1959), an American public radio personality host and producer of the radio and television show “This American Life”.

duties and learning needs. Traditional training started giving place to more self-paced and technology-oriented ways of learning. Workers need to learn faster and in a more sustainable way in order to be up to date and effective in any competitive environment. Thus, the role of technology to facilitate corporate learning has become more prominent than ever.

Bringing together digitalization and stories has a profound impact on learning. When using stories, the learning process itself becomes better, and the learning experience is improved, resulting in a positive learning attitude towards similar future initiatives of the organization. The use of stories as they are visualized via digital tools makes the messages to be conveyed memorable, gives employees and customers something to relate to and, along with the creation of the organizational history, frames the foundations of a novel organizational culture.

This chapter elaborates on a participatory and engagement model for e-learning, named “Lov-e & Car-e-osity”. Symbolically the “e-”, which refers to “electronic”, is not placed in the beginning of each of the two words that represent core human attributes (e.g. love, care and curiosity) but at the end or in the middle. The model is demonstrating how the use of narratives throughout the phases of design, development and implementation of e-learning programs, improves corporate learning and maintains or even ameliorates our human interactions. The core approach used is process oriented and technology is employed just as an enabler. It is a process of joining in with people’s lives in their workplace and working with them to co-create new pathways of learning. In the next pages a real-life example about the use and the impact of the above-mentioned model is deployed.

E-Learning and Integrated Stories

The Role of e-Learning in the Corporate Learning Landscape

The main goal of corporate learning is to improve the job performance of employees in order to achieve their business goals. A professionally designed and efficient e-learning program, as part of a blended learning² organizational approach, is of strategic importance to an organization because it engages and challenges learners, allowing them to master their skills. Additionally, it meets the needs of the business, as it is consistent and available to learners at any time, in any place, thus reducing the need for frequent travelling. Therefore, it is time and cost efficient. Especially in the case of large global organizations, e-learning makes it possible to reach a broader global audience more quickly and efficiently.

Apart from the economic advantage, e-learning provides greater flexibility for workplace learning, as learners can learn at their own pace, which minimizes workflow disruption.

² Dziuban et al. (2004), referred to blended learning “as a pedagogical approach that combines the effectiveness and socialization opportunities of the classroom with the technologically enhanced active learning possibilities of the online environment . . .” (p. 3)

tions. This allows the learner to work efficiently, while also engaging with the learning content, which leads to greater personal satisfaction and self-development.

However, there are several challenges that knowledge management and training and development experts have to be aware of when working in a globalized organizational environment. Because the physical interaction between trainers and learners is missing, it is the digital education experts who have to work through these challenges in order to produce a meaningful experience for their learners in a digital ecosystem. Below are some of the most important challenges existing in the field of corporate e-learning, along with questions to be asked on how to overcome these challenges through attempting a narrative structure approach:

- a.) **Learners' cultural diversity:** e-learning has to meet the training objectives and needs of an organization. It also needs to constitute a mutual learning environment for thousands of employees in different locations, socialized in a large variety of national, personal, and sometimes even organizational cultures. *Since people are or could better become influenced by narrative structures, how can a digital story-based approach overcome the complexity that cultural diversity entails? How could they even profit from it by creating a culture where learning is shared in a comprehensible and coherent way?*
- b.) **Content complexity:** The field of knowledge today, has become quite complex. For example, a part of organizational e-learning courses often aims to provide the respective stakeholders with the necessary technical and scientific knowledge on complex products or devices. This knowledge supports employees to develop their personal competencies and also enables them to train their customers more efficiently. *How can a digital story-based approach help to reduce or manage the issue of complexity?*
- c.) **Limited beliefs on the impact of e-learning: "Only traditional classroom training can be effective":** Initially, most of the learning communities in an organization are quite hesitant to change their beliefs and habits, which are biased on school-learning paradigms. They find it difficult to accept that training without the opportunity to connect with trainers and instructors in the same physical space can still be effective. *How could a digital learning development concept bridge, travel through, and "fill with connection" the "spooky space" between an e-trainer and an e-learner?*
- d.) **No previous, limited, or negative e-learning experience:** Many organizational learners, even today, have none or limited e-learning experience. Others might be less motivated to start e-learning training due to previous negative experience of stiff, dry, and soulless e-learning courses. *How could we bring back "the missing soul" to the digital learning process and make it attractive and engaging for the learners?*
- e.) **Learners' availability:** Work overload and the increasingly demanding organizational structures where employees are expected to do more with less, challenge their time availability for additional training. *How could we create a learning path where learners can experience a flow condition as they move through it and make it possible to remain focused on their learning experience until the end of it?*