

Re-Authoring Futures

CON-TEXTS

A person is silhouetted against a bright, hazy sky, standing on the edge of a dark, rocky cliff. The person is looking out over a vast, misty landscape that stretches into the distance. The overall tone is contemplative and expansive.

Beyond Storytelling Conference 2018

The Magic of Working with Stories

by Yannis Angelis

It was back in 2015 when a group of us, as experts in the area of narrative work, decided to share our wisdom on how we work with stories in organizations and also to join our forces to support the creation of a global storytelling community. We decided the vehicle for this would be the publication of a book and an annual conference, where participants could also share their own work with stories. The book would cover the impact of stories in a range of almost all attributes of an organization's life and growth like change, leadership, learning, culture, community building, etc. Both the book and the conference have been given the name "Beyond Storytelling".

Since then, a lot has happened in our lives and to our planet. The rising of dichotomies, more uncertainty, bigger personal and systemic struggles and much more. At the same time, the idea of telling your authentic story was taking more space, especially in the organizational parlance as an antidote to deal with the above-mentioned challenges. This led to the overuse and sometimes to the abuse of the term "storytelling", especially in specific corporate functions like sales and marketing.

However, a core question remains valid: How stories could become an elixir that ignites individual and systemic transformation? How could we leverage the magic power that stories carry so that lingering effects could emerge towards a greater good?

There are many examples where working with stories beyond storytelling becomes the magic wand that illuminates the individual/organizational/societal field of change and initiates a re-authoring process for a desired future. Here are just a few of them:

1) Stories as polarity resolutions

If we imagine a terribly crazy world with a lot of negative disruption as one pole, then the opposite pole may be a human configuration of conscious visionaries that are rising and collectively work for a better world. When one pole seems to dominate our present and future, building on the other pole may bring a required balance. This is what Otto Scharmer and the Presencing Institute are currently doing with the HuffPost collaboration project, on "Transforming Capitalism".

Or approaching a hot polarity by using a personal story it may open a space for a middle ground discussion to emerge, which may make meaning for both poles' supporters. This is what Brené Brown tries to do when she shares her childhood story as a vehicle to talk about responsible gun ownership in the US. This is also what the Social Project "Stories for Europe" offers by inviting all the voices and individual stories to be listened to, ranging from favouring the European idea to the realm of Euro-scepticism. When someone tries to eliminate or devalue the stories that identify the one pole, a substantial resistance is created and stretches the polarity to its edges. It is like trying to separate the two different sides of a coin. Of course, this doesn't work because a story is attached to each actor's identity. Working with stories can guide us to land safely in the middle ground of a highly polarized field.

2) Visionary story-work

I use this approach in my coaching practice. A person starts with their own story, and then they combine it with a bigger vision/mission/message, which reflects their call for this world. In a social level, the "Stories for Europe" project is capturing this. Sharing our own authentic stories which

are related to moments that we felt connected to a “European idea” may help us re-author and co-create a better future for Europe. The inquiry process becomes appreciative when you explore questions in a way like “What was a moment in which Europe appeared beautiful in my eyes? What if Europe’s political aim was to be beautiful?”

Working with a visionary story can also happen the other way around: I start by imagining a mission or a future and then I dress it up with my own story projected in that future. I actually include myself and my current environment in it. An example could be to take any Foresight Scenario on a big subject (e.g. climate change, food and energy supply, etc.), which resonates best with me and imagine myself and my life in it. The narrative of the data-based scenario changes totally and integrates an emotional loading when I deploy it starting with the word “I”. In both cases, this approach may help us to create a strong future brand story of ourselves/company/work, etc.

3.) Story as an intervention

This taps into the idea of how I would like and what it takes for people to meet in their humanity in the hearing of my story. Sharing our authentic story, how we share it and to whom, are important aspects in our effort to illuminate and create an impact. Self-confidence, power, powerlessness, drama, joyfulness, etc, are all expressions of our behaviour and are related to how we tell our story. However, the most important aspect is from which inner state we share our story. Because this dramatically changes its impact. The inner state has to do with our level of presence at the moment we are telling our story and the transformation process that evokes both within ourselves and in our audiences in the “here and now”. Bringing awareness about

the importance of the inner state that a story is told is an essential part of working with stories.

A Story holds such a power and as Michael Margolis nicely said: “... this stuff is dynamite, it can also do damage ...” For example, the inner state and intention are what differentiates storytellers from populists. Thinking of stories that shape the identity and enhance the pride of a nation in its diversity, could we imagine how different would have been the impact of the story behind the phrase “Make America great again”?

This brings into my mind a beautiful poem by ...

Nayyirah Waheed

*some people
when they hear
your story.
contract.
others
upon hearing
your story.
expand.
and
this is how
you
know.*

Contributors

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is a facilitator, coach, Gestalt organizational practitioner and a narrative futurist. His work is focused on Corporate Learning and how working with stories can enhance the learner's engagement. He is the creator of "Lov-e & Car-e-osity", a participatory model for e-learning development and member of the BEYOND STORYTELLING coreteam.

Stephanie Bachmair

is a facilitator, entrepreneur and executive coach. Combining process orientated psychology and narrative practice, she supports organizations and individuals with storywork practice in the field of brand/identity development, cultural transformation and inspirational leadership. She is founder of B-onfire, a narrative agency, and co-initiator of the BEYOND STORYTELLING conference.

Kelvy Bird

is an internationally recognized graphic facilitator, supporting groups by translating content and dynamics into visual formats that aid with reflection and decision-making. She leads creative design at Otto Scharmer's Presencing Institute and co-founded dpict llc, a firm specializing in scribing to advance social understanding at all scales.

Griet Bowen

is author of two books around Appreciative Inquiry & Coaching and change towards humanisation in organisations. Currently, she runs her small business Nieuwmakers, where she uses storywork to lift up and connect people. She's co-creator of the Connect Your Story platform and co-organiser of Re-authoring learning journeys in Flanders.

Jacques Chlopczyk

is an organizational psychologist, systemic consultant. He works internationally with profit and not-for-profit clients to ignite, facilitate and sustain transformation in their organizations and teams. He lectures on systemic consulting and change management. He is initiator and catalyst of the BEYOND STORYTELLING network and community.

Christine Erlach

is working with narrative methods for heaving hidden organizational knowledge and values. She is a psychologist with systemic roots and started her career as a consultant and facilitator in the context of Knowledge Management in 2000. Christine is the founder of NARRATA Consult und member of the BEYOND STORYTELLING coreteam.

Sohail Inayatullah

holds the UNESCO Chair in Futures Studies at the Islamic Science University of Malaysia (USIM). He is associated with Tamkang University, Taiwan and the University of Melbourne. Director of Metafuture.org. Professor Inayatullah works extensively with governments, international corporations, and non-governmental organizations around the globe. Inventor of Causal Layered Analysis and the Futures Triangle.

Joe Lambert

has his roots in dramaturgy and performing arts and founded the Center for Digital Storytelling (now StoryCenter) in 1994. Joe and his staff have traveled the world to spread the practice of digital storytelling. He is the author of "Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating Community" and "Seven Stages: Story and the Human Experience".

Michael Margolis

is the founder and CEO of Get Storied, a narrative strategy firm serving Silicon Valley. Michael is a cultural anthropologist, 2x TEDx speaker, and trusted advisor to Facebook, Google, and others. His passion is the story of disruptive innovation - how to sell the future, humanize data, and advance the discourse of storytelling. Michael is left-handed, color-blind, and eats more chocolate than the average human.

Michael Müller

is a consultant and coach who supports companies, organisations and individuals on the basis of narrative and systemic approaches. Published numerous books and articles on organisational storytelling, semiotics and media and is chairman of the "Institute for Applied Narratology (IANA)" at Stuttgart Media University. Member of the BEYOND STORYTELLING coreteam.

Marco Ruckebrod

is truly addicted to narration and works as a freelance brand & creative strategist. For more than 9 years now, he tinkers with brands and communication within the digital space. His experience spans 70+ brands across 20+ industries and 10+ countries. Besides that, he passionately writes, speaks and lectures.

Joanna Sell

is Coach, Trainer and Facilitator and enhances intercultural workshops and coachings in the corporate world with storytelling and story sharing. She also lectures storytelling and intercultural teamwork at two German universities. Joanna is the founder of Intercultural Compass, promoting team development and leadership development across cultures and member of the BEYOND STORYTELLING coreteam.

Chené Swart

is the author of the book "Re-authoring the World" and has applied the narrative approach and practices in the fields of coaching, consulting, organisational cultural transformation, diversity work, leadership development and work with women. Based in South Africa she works across the world with individuals, businesses, and civil society organisations as an executive coach, consultant and lecturer.

Wolfgang Tonniger

studied philosophy, literature and sociology. As video producer, systemic coach, idea butler and writer he is living the balancing act between creation and consulting. Recently published: "Wegmarken im Möglichkeitsland". Founder of "ALMBLITZ - stories that change" and member of the BEYOND STORYTELLING coreteam.

Beyond Storytelling

Core Team Members



BEYOND STORYTELLING NETWORK is a global cooperation between like-minded narrative experts and practitioners. It was founded by an inspired and committed core team in 2015 to share expertise and knowledge in working with stories in organizations.

The BEYOND STORYTELLING NETWORK is active in many fields - from initiating and facilitating change in organizations to the development of brands and marketing campaigns. From enhancing collaboration across cultures and inspiring leadership with stories to digital learning and knowledge management. We are marketers, facilitators, coaches, story wizards, writers and change catalysts.

The purpose of the BEYOND STORYTELLING NETWORK is to strengthen community building of people who are eager to learn from each other, exchange on narrative approaches and share experiences and expectations in the storywork field.

In order to advance the theory and practice of working with stories in different professional fields we are also sharing our ideas and thinking in books, articles and blogs and of course, during our annual BEYOND STORYTELLING CONFERENCE. Which is known as THE possibility to dive into our vibrant community and get a first hand overview of new pathways in the sparkling narrative field.

Additionally, the BEYOND STORYTELLING NETWORK serves as a contact point for organizations, communities and individuals that are interested in addressing their business challenge through narrative practices and approaches.

The BEYOND STORYTELLING NETWORK organizes and facilitates events, trainings, workshops and seminars and serves as a hub for consulting services and projects.

Website

<http://www.beyondstorytelling.com>

The universe is made of stories, not of atoms.
Muriel Rukeyser

