An integrative review of storytelling: Using corporate stories to strengthen employee engagement and internal and external reputation

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Abstract

This literature review paper aims to examine the use of corporate storytelling as a valuable strategy to heighten employee engagement, which may improve internal loyalty to the corporate brand and ultimately strengthen internal and external reputation.

The paper includes an integrated literature review of contemporary text and theories from academics and industry leaders relating to: the benefits of using corporate stories; corporate stories and employee engagement; employee engagement and enhanced internal reputation; the link between internal and external reputation; and the limitations of corporate storytelling. Many theorists endorse corporate storytelling as a valuable medium for engaging with employees and improving internal reputation. However, both contemporary academic and industry analysis appears limited in acknowledgement of a link between internal storytelling and external reputation.

The paper examines contemporary literature in these areas and draws a link between using corporate stories to engage more deeply with staff in order to strengthen internal loyalty and effect a stronger external reputation, as organisations seek to make employees their reputation champions.

Introduction

Can storytelling be a valuable internal communication strategy to engage more effectively with employees and improve reputation? The following integrated literature review examines the link between corporate storytelling, employee engagement and reputation. It concludes that a strong link exists between building engagement through

corporate storytelling and reputation. The paper is the foundation for a wider research programme into the calculated use of storytelling to improve engagement and enhance reputation.

The purpose of this paper is to identify from the literature how corporate storytelling has significant strategic benefits for internal communication and employee engagement, leading to improved internal reputation and enhanced external reputation. Public relations (PR) practice plays a critical role in engendering the values for an organisation's brand through internal communication strategies that engage with employees. The paper also identifies distinct criteria to effectively use storytelling as an employee engagement strategy, as opposed to more traditional communication mediums. This review is important as there is insignificant literature relating corporate storytelling as a public relations strategy to building internal loyalty in order to strengthen external reputation.

Contemporary academic and industry literature currently accepts that there is a relationship between the use of corporate storytelling and heightened employee engagement. Corporate storytelling is the practice of using narration from within the organisation relating to its people, practices, policies and visions to effectively engage with staff. The literature demonstrates storytelling that is targeted at building internal engagement is an effective public relations and communication strategy through its ability to reach out and connect with employees. Corporate storytelling as a strategy to engage more deeply with employees is recognised through the value of storytelling as a means to personalise the message between the sender and receiver, greatly enhancing the capacity for

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commitment and recollection (Sinclair, 2005; Simmons, 2006). "Effective internal communication is crucial for successful organisations as it affects the ability of strategic managers to engage employees and achieve objectives" (Welch & Jackson, 2007, p.177).

However, this paper aims to further investigate literature in order to make the connection between corporate storytelling as a means to deeper engagement with employees, which results in an improved internal reputation as a consequence of establishing positive recognition for their employer's brand. This can lead to improved external reputation as they become reputation champions for their organisation.

It is envisaged that the findings of this paper will drive greater recognition in strategic communication planning for formal acknowledgement regarding the benefits of storytelling, and recognition of the practice of corporate stories as a calculated and deliberate approach to improving employee engagement and enhancing reputation (see **Figure 1,** below).

Methodology

An integrated literature review of contemporary academic writings and industry publications was used as a means of ascertaining support for the use of storytelling within organisations. The objective of the review was to audit reliable literature on the topic to identify common themes relating to: the benefits of using corporate stories; corporate stories and employee engagement; employee engagement and enhanced internal reputation, the link between internal and external reputation; and the limitations regarding corporate storytelling. An integrated approach (including text from industry and academic theorists) to the literature review was considered one of the best ways to capture data with a blend of concepts from various emerging fields, akin to human resources, management, communication and academia (Shuck & Wollard, 2009).

Framework of the method

The framing for the literature review involved identifying a synthesised concept for corporate storytelling as a means to enhancing employee engagement from a variety of fields and disciplines in order to capture any diversity in conceptualisations. Reviewed literature on the theme is drawn from a broad range of disciplines, including human resources, PR, legal and management.

The aim of the literature review was to collate and analyse solid theories and facts by recognised experts on the concepts of: the benefits of corporate storytelling, fundamentals to good corporate stories, and effective employee management to corroborate the case for storytelling as a strategic medium for building employee engagement and enhancing reputation. The objective of the review was to establish links between the identified characteristics of these concepts to determine if corporate storytelling can improve employee engagement and enhance internal and external reputation.

The integrated literature review also aided in identifying key characteristics and defining corporate storytelling, employee engagement, intangible assets, and reputation. Narration and stories are applied in the same context throughout this paper, even though some theorists argue that narrations are fragments that collectively go towards creating a story (Polkinghorne, 1988; Denning, 2005; Gabriel, 2000).

Selection of relevant literature

Included in the review are contemporary papers, documents and industry text within the last 15 years from recognised academics and industry leaders in the fields of corporate communication and employee communication, including: Boje, 2008; Boyce, 1996; Post, 2004; Kaye, 1995; Denning, 2005; Sinclair, 2005; Simmons, 2006; Dowling, 2006; Lawrence and Mealman, 1999; Gardner, 2004; McKee, 2003, Matthews and Wacker, 2007; and Brown, Denning, Groh and Prusak, 2004. Also reviewed were industry websites and

surveys conducted by reputable research organisations relating to the key words. No discrimination was applied to the origin of the reviewed information, although Australian literature and publications are strongly represented.

Key terms in the review

Key terms searched on the web for relevant literature included: corporate storytelling, organisational storytelling, and corporate narration. Literature was also reviewed for a relationship between employee engagement through storytelling and effective employee management. These searches were conducted between 2008 and 2010. Many articles and papers were identified from the search, so the selected articles needed to reference work of the well-published authors identified above, or reputable organisations.

Synthesised definitions for the following terminology were also established through the literature: storytelling, corporate storytelling, employee engagement and internal reputation.

Analysed data

Overall, 62 sources of information were accessed and analysed: 30 journal articles, 28 books and four websites (see reference list). The words corporate storytelling (or associated words) appeared in the title of 11 journal articles, nine books and one website. Associated words for employee communication appeared in 12 journal articles, 16 books and one website. All literature was analysed in relation to the above criteria and a summary of results is recorded in the tables contained in the key findings.

Literature review key findings

Benefits of storytelling
Storytelling is a phenomenon that is fundamental to all nations, societies and cultures, and has been so since time immemorial, according to Denning (2005). It has been an effective form of communicating a message between individuals and groups for thousands of years (Kearney, 2002). Storytelling is narration that tells of particular

acts, occurrences or events presented in a form of text or art and has the ability to transcend age-groups, cultures and genders and captures the imagination and attention of listeners regardless of background (Kearney, 2002; Sinclair, 2005). Telling a meaningful story can be a valuable communication strategy for organisations as it is a means to separating constructive communication from the 'mundane message overflow' associated with more traditional corporate communication (Sinclair, 2005).

It is believed people receiving the narration often come to the same conclusion as the narrator, but through using their own decision-making processes (Simmons, 2006). Stories can share knowledge amongst employees who interpret the narration in line with their own experiences, allowing personalised cognition about problems, solutions and explanations (Denning, 2005). These characteristics enable stories to carry symbolic information and convey meaning, as well as greatly enhancing commitment and recollection (Sinclair, 2005).

Stories can be designed to tap into personal elements enabling the presenter (narrator) to construct a believable picture for receivers in tune with their own ideas and goals, making the narration more captivating (Sinclair, 2005; Simmons, 2006). According to Lawrence and Mealman (1999) meaning, as in the way people make sense of situations they encounter in their daily lives, is derived through reflection on experience. The value added by stories and metaphor can be substantial because a story can add a personal component of understanding and connection that statistics alone cannot achieve (Hansen, 2008).

Benefits of corporate storytelling
Corporate storytelling is the process of developing a message that creates a new point of view or reinforces an opinion or behaviour by using narration about people, the organisation, the past, visions for the future, social bonding and work itself (Wilkins, 1978; Witherspoon, 1997; Kaye 1995). Stories can be used in organisations as a means to motivate people and create a message memorable enough for people to take cause and action, if

there is an identified interest to the listener (Prusak, 2001; Kaye 1996).

Gardner (2004) is a strong advocate for the use of storytelling by business leaders and communication strategists. His research in the field of cognitive psychology strongly links using stories to change people's minds and reinforce opinions, which complements many objectives for a successful public relations internal communication programme (L'Etang, 2008; Harrison, 2007). From an organisational perspective, employee interpretation is an emotional and cognitive response (intrapersonal communication) to information presented (Taliaferro & Ruggiano, 2010; Mohan, McGregor, Saunders, & Archee, 2008).

Storytelling already plays an important role in the world of organisations, business and contemporary politics (Brown et al., 2004). It is also a valuable method for engendering loyalty within an organisation. However, what is evident from the reviewed literature was that over time organisations had displayed little documented evidence of formally utilising this medium as a public relations strategy to engage with their staff and other key stakeholders in order to build engagement and improve reputation (see for example, Boje, 1991; Denning, 2006; Hansen, 2008; Kaye, 1996; McConkie & Boss, 1994; Shamir, 1998; Wilkins, 1978; Witherspoon, 1997). Traditionally, stories in the workplace have been used to emphasise safety and wellbeing and to decrease risk (Prusak, 2001; WorkSafe Victoria, 2004; Wilkins, 1978). From an employer's perspective, a broader value for corporate storytelling is its potential to persuade, motivate and inspire employees about their organisation, thus strengthening internal loyalty and reputation (Simmons, 2006).

Another key benefit of storytelling is its universal appeal to culturally diverse audiences who have a range of interests and learning styles. Many large organisations have a range of stakeholders. Stories provide a flexible framework for the narrator to reflect the organisation's position in line with the selected interests of the particular stakeholders for whom it wants to make an impression upon (Dowling, 2006). Through stories public relations practitioners can foster trust and support for their organisation by creating an emotional bond with employees and other key stakeholders, as a result of explaining the behaviour of the organisation in terms of its mission and morality (Taliaferro & Ruggiano, 2010; Dowling, 2006).

Corporate stories need to have relevance and an appropriate structure to achieve intended objectives, yet remain engaging. The story must stay true to the organisation's identity and brand. Stories must not lose sight of what the organisation is, what it offers and what it stands for (Dowling, 2006; Fombrun, 2005). A number of the reviewed theorists have identified fundamentals that aid in composing, developing and implementing a 'good' corporate story that contributes to the strategic plan and communication objectives for an organisation.

Table 1 reviews text from leading academic theorists on corporate storytelling who have put forward fundamentals to designing effective narration to maximise engagement with listeners and achieve communication objectives.
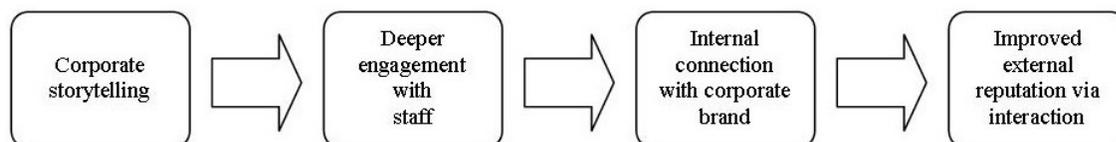
Figure 1: Storytelling to reputation model

Table 1: Fundamentals of good corporate stories

Key points	Author	Year
To create interest in the organisation Help shape expectations of stakeholders (internal and external) Lifecycle models – unfold over three parts: yesterday, today and tomorrow Where the organisation has come from Where it currently is Where it is heading Employees become part of the history of the organisation	Dowling	2006
Similar to Dowling's lifecycle Springboard approach to the future Future is kept vague so that listeners are encouraged to be part of the solution and direction Employees get a sense of contributing to the future	Denning	2006
Suggests four attributes – endurance, salience, sense-making, and comfort level Durable stories may have changed names and circumstances, but the behavioural lesson remains the same Salience refers to relevance and punch in the story Sense-making, meaning that is true to the receiver's own experience Receivers need to be comfortable with the feeling they get from the narration	Prusak	2001
Needs to project expertise, sincerity, likeability and powerful characteristics Expertise fosters esteem and respect Sincerity promotes trust and corporate citizenship Stakeholders will identify with the organisation if they like what it stands for Organisations are leaders as a result of their perceived power	Rossiter & Bellman	2005
Move beyond text to a living example Use collective memory from the organisation Supplement the individual's memory with organisational memory Decentralise the narrative Sense-making from retrospective, here-and-now, prospective narrative	Boje	2008
Display a struggle between expectation and reality Personalise the message Present all the statistics, including the negatives Acknowledge the weaknesses along with the strengths Self-knowledge is the root of great storytelling	McKee	2003
Attention to aesthetics through design Empathise with audiences' circumstances Sympathy through holistic pictures with all the pieces Putting fun into the activity Extend the value beyond the moment	Matthews & Wacker	2007

Many characteristics identified by the leading theorists (**Table 1**) have a function in creating effective narration for corporate storytelling, depending on the objective for the story. These characteristics include: an inclusive approach; emotional content; relevance; prospective value; and promotion of trust. Considering the key characteristics identified in **Table 1**, a well-designed and executed corporate narration links well with the premise of using stories to be more engaging with staff through heightening their understanding and commitment to the message.

The role of internal communication managers utilising corporate stories is to ensure the content is appropriate to the communication objective and that the audience has the ability to comprehend the message of the story (Harrison, 2008). This makes storytelling an ideal mode for delivering communication that is engaging and relevant to individual employee's roles and contexts (Boje, 1991).

Corporate storytelling and employee engagement

Employee engagement is defined by Harter, Schimdt and Hayes (2002, p. 417) as an "individual's involvement and satisfaction with, as well as enthusiasm for, work". According to Shuck and Wollard (2009), employee engagement focuses on building an engaging culture between staff and the organisation in order to advocate the targeted outcomes of higher productivity and strong profits resulting from staff who are healthier, safer, less likely to leave, and more willing to engage in discretionary efforts. Therefore, employee engagement moves beyond employee satisfaction and commitment (at an individual level) towards actively engaging in pursuit of organisational-level outcomes (Schneider, Erhart, Mayer, Saltz and Niles-Jolly, 2005: Shuck & Wollard, 2009).

'Good' employer engagement is reliant on internal communication; the sharing of meaning between employees and management, and employees and employees (Waters, 2010; Mohan et al., 2008). Scholes (1997) considers internal communication to be the professional management of interactions between all those with an interest or 'stake' in the organisation. Cheney and Christensen (2001) define internal communication to be at three levels: day-to-day management of employee relations, strategic planning to carry out the organisation's mission, and project management.

A key consideration for organisations is developing an 'employer of choice' working environment that positively engages with employees (Waters, 2010). Pivotal criteria put forward by employees regarding the type of organisations they would choose to work for are strong leadership and healthy interrelations, followed by safety, wellbeing, opportunities, inclusion and community involvement (Hull & Read, 2003; Hewitt, 2003; Gill, 2009). The management of employee relationships regarding these criteria is essential to developing a culture of engagement and connection, reliant on valued leadership and open communication (Gill, 2009). Welch and Jackson (2007) emphasise the role of clear, continuous and consistent internal communication in building employee engagement. Such a role is often the responsibility of public relations or dedicated internal communication strategists.

Much of the literature reviewed made a connection between the strategy of using storytelling internally and improved employee engagement, as evidenced in the above section defining corporate storytelling.

Table 2 summarises the primary benefits to using storytelling for internal communication as a strategy for employee engagement. It highlights specific themes that have been supported by three or more of the identified authors from the reviewed literature, and demonstrates that many leading theorists in the field have connected storytelling with a deliberate strategy to engage more deeply with employees.

Table 2: Primary benefits relating to the use of storytelling in an organisation (Gill, 2009)

Benefit	Link	Author
Storytelling is an effective means of communicating with internal employees	Employee engagement	Kaye, 1995 Post, 2004 Denning, 2005 Sinclair, 2005 Shuck & Wollard, 2009 Brown et al., 2004
The use of stories by management is more engaging and appealing to employees	Good employer practice	Kaye, 1996 Prusak, 2001 Simmons, 2006 Dowling, 2006
Story objectives can remain the same, even when the content is adapted by the narrator to make stories more personal	Internal communication	Lawrence & Mealman, 1999 Gardner, 2004 Sinclair, 2005
Knowledge presented through narration is more believable as receivers apply their own interpretation and experiences to the information	Employer engagement	Boje, 1991 Sinclair, 2005 Simmons, 2006 Hansen, 2008
Effective corporate stories appeal to emotions and have a lifecycle relating to the organisation	Internal communication	Brown, 1995 Prusak, 2001 Fryer, 2003 Denning, 2005 Dowling, 2006 Taliaferro & Ruggiano, 2010
Employees may adopt a notion of ownership over corporate narrations and stories by applying their own experiences to the message	Employer engagement	Harris & de Chernatony, 2001 Drucker, 1989 Mohan et al., 2008
When employees are comfortable with their organisation's values and work practices, they become important assets to enhancing company reputation	Good employer practice	Beder, 2002 Post, 2004 Herman & Gioia, 2004 Leary-Joyce, 2004 Dowling, 2006 Brown et al., 2004

Table 2 demonstrates that there is strong consensus for using corporate storytelling as a means to deeper engage employees through opening up more appealing internal communication channels where individuals apply their own intrapersonal interpretation and emotional connections to generic text (Mohan et al., 2008). Many theorists endorse the belief that engaging with staff on a more personal level builds stronger loyalty that can galvanise a committed internal reputation towards the employers and the organisation.

Employee engagement and internal reputation

Reputation is defined as the estimation in which a person or thing is held by the community or the public generally (Macquarie, 1991). More specifically, organisational (corporate) reputation refers to the esteem in which the

organisation is held by its public and stakeholders (Beder, 2002; L'Etang, 2008). The internal reputation for an organisation is the esteem in which it is held by its employees, significantly influenced by the culture within the organisation (Hull & Read, 2003; Hewitt, 2003).

The gap between what an organisation promises in terms of its corporate brand and what it is perceived to deliver determines its reputation (Beder, 2002; Scott & Walsham, 2005). The risk to reputation is when the gap becomes significant and an organisation's reputation is damaged (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001). From an employee perspective, the desired brand communicated internally is compared against the operational culture, in order to establish the internal reputation and determine loyalty for the organisation (Welch & Jackson, 2007).

Storytelling, as demonstrated, is a valuable internal communication medium for engaging with staff. A key concept for internal communication is to advance employee commitment to the organisation through strengthening internal reputation (L'Etang, 2008). Welch and Jackson (2007, p. 186) describe the aims of internal corporate communication as "promoting commitment to the organisation, a sense of belonging to it, awareness of its changing environment and understanding of its evolving aims". Internal communication reinforces those values that represent the organisation – its brand.

Table 3 summarises robust research conducted by global research houses into effective employee management. This is important as it illustrates the connection between employee perspectives on good management principles and strategies used by leading organisations to engage and motivate staff. The table highlights key criteria relating to what makes an organisation successful, identified by employees and researchers.

Table 3: Global research into effective employee management (Gill, 2009)

Report	Focus	Sample	Relevant key findings
KPMG International Survey of Corporate Sustainability Reporting 2002	Analysis of environmental social and sustainability reports	2000 international companies including the Global Fortune Top 250	All reporting companies analysed underline importance of communication with stakeholders, with employees being singled out as the main stakeholder
'Good Employee Practices Are Good For Your Business 2003', Business Practices and Performance Study	Key issues to consider in moving a business to a more competitive position	New Zealand businesses	Business leaders had a deep relationship with stakeholders Employee welfare addressed Employee reward and recognition for staff Comprehensive values programme Assessment of employee satisfaction
The IBM Global Human Capital Study 2005	Links between successful organisations and leading human capital practices	300 organisations from 40 countries	Most successful organisations are those that: Source and manage talent in line with business strategy Hold leadership accountable for development and growth of people Utilise organisational knowledge effectively
The KPMG International Survey of Corporate	Questionnaire and analysis of CSR reporting	Global Fortune 500 companies and Top 100 from N100 list	The top three reported economic drivers are: Innovation and learning

Responsibility Reporting 2005		(including Australia)	Employee motivation Risk management
Simply the best – workplaces in Australia: 2001 Study	Questionnaires and interviews on employee conditions	16 workplaces from 10 companies with a diverse range of industries (Australia)	Fifteen key drivers in each of the leading workplaces, including: Quality of working relationships Workplace leadership Having a say Clear values Getting feedback A sense of ownership
The Hewitt 'Best Employers' surveys	Benchmarking report on human capital management	Australasian survey of CEO, employees and inventory – self nominated for report	Top performing companies have: Solid senior leadership Compelling promise to employees Alignment of people practices to support High performance culture Measurement and employee engagement
PWC Global Human Capital Survey 2003	Identify good human management practices	1,056 businesses across the globe	Financial performance strongly linked to: Productive employment relations Measuring employee satisfaction Employee support Employee development

Many of the key findings from **Table 3** align with theorists' beliefs that employee engagement and employee satisfaction, which contribute to good human capital management, are considerable drivers of organisational success. The collective results above have identified several significant findings regarding well-managed staff, relating to: effective two-way communication; employee satisfaction; opportunity and advancement; strong values and leadership; and employee support.

Organisations that performed well in human capital management surveys from **Table 3** provide staff with a sense of importance, strong direction, opportunity for growth, and an opportunity to align with their employer's values. An important element from the literature for the corporate brand identified, from the employees' perspective, the organisation's qualified support for its staff and its responsibilities within the community (Waters, 2010; Harrison, 2007; Macnamara, 2005; Hewitt, 2003; Hull & Read, 2003). Employees who perceived their employer proffered a combination of the above have accordingly responded positively to the surveys.

The above data demonstrates a link between strong employee engagement and sound employee management processes. The global research identified the concept of engaging with employees through strong leadership, support and recognition and pathways to development (linked through good internal communication practice) as being positively connected to successful organisations. Corporate storytelling has been shown to be an effective internal communication strategy, particularly regarding trust for the brand as a result of deeper engagement with employees.

Employees have a vested interest in information that relates to their own wellbeing and opportunity for advancement (see **Table 3**). According to Green (1998) employees often seek out information they can use to improve their professional position or make a change for the better. Engagement with staff on issues, such as what motivates them and aligns with

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their values, has primary importance for employers (Green, 1998; Boje, 1991). Many organisations already have in place policies and practices that complement what employees desire from their employers (Hewitt, 2003; Hull & Read, 2003). But effectively communicating this to staff can be problematic through traditional modes of business communication, such as policy documents, intranet and email (Harrison, 2007, Mohan et al., 2008). Storytelling may provide the 'cut-through' regarding building loyalty to the brand that traditional business communication struggles to achieve with busy employees (Brown et al., 2004; Schneider et al., 2005).

The use of narration via face-to-face stories is one of the richest communication mediums for engaging with staff and reinforcing the organisation's brand values (Sinclair, 2005). This medium has the potential to promote dialogue, or symmetrical two-way communication, that allows greater communication balance between the organisation and its internal stakeholders, therefore, advancing trust (Welch & Jackson, 2007; Mohan et al., 2008). Gaining employee trust and respect are critical to building a healthy internal reputation and opening the lines of engagement with employees (Dowling, 2006).

Two-way dialogue provides potential for both management and employees to share reality and evolve the organisation's values (Boyce, 1996). Storytelling opens up a more human and personal side of management by embracing an acute social system of relaying information (Simmons, 2006). Stories enable staff to identify with the narrator on a personal level, and through their interpretation take a form of ownership over how the brand is represented.

The significance of narration regarding an organisation's values endures beyond the original delivery, as it has the capacity to become a story in itself told by employees (Prusak, 2001). Employees can take ownership of relevant information from corporate stories, passing on appropriate information to colleagues and other related stakeholders. In a sense, stories generate brand values like business relationships, commitment and discussion on vision and values, along with enabling employees to share and understand organisational culture and opportunity (Sinclair, 2005).

The link between internal and external reputation

Employees play a central role in an organisation's reputation through their interaction with stakeholders. They represent the organisation's brand through interaction with external stakeholders by their work practices and their attitude towards their employer. Public relations practice plays a critical role in engendering the values for the organisation's brand through internal communication strategies to reinforce the desired values (L'Etang, 2008). The interaction between employees and various stakeholders ordains the reputation for the organisation (Waters, 2010; Dowling, 2006).

Fombrun and Shanley's seminal model (1990, p. 235) hypothesises that corporate reputations represent the public cumulative judgements of organisations over time, which in turn affect the organisation's relative success in fulfilling expectations of multiple stakeholders. Key stakeholders for any organisation are the employees. Any interested public has their perception (reputation management) significantly shaped by the media and the stakeholders' experiences with the organisation (L'Etang, 2008).

An organisation's wealth is increasingly attributable to 'soft forms' of capital – reputation, trust, goodwill, image and relationships, commonly referred to as intangible assets (Post, 2004). These intangible assets, which originate from inside the organisation, undeniably deliver value to the company according to 96 percent of executives polled in an Accenture Survey (Post, 2004). Other previous Accenture surveys have also shown that in 1980 the book value of a company comprised 80 percent of its market value. In 1990 the book value comprised 55 percent, while intangible assets comprised 45 percent of the market value. In 2002 only 25 percent of a company's book value was

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reflected in the market value, with intangibles ballooning to 75 percent (Donaldson, 2006).

An organisation's brand and reputation have become very important assets that require nurturing and protection, and need to be considered for their value in line with all other assets (Beder, 2002). Therefore, management must pay attention to strategies that make employees the organisation's reputation champions (Campbell, 2004). Narrative communication with internal staff is a valuable strategy for reputation management and building a strong corporate brand (Dowling, 2006). Stories have been shown to be a natural medium to represent an organisation's significance, values and mission, along with demonstrating to employees those elements held in importance by the employer (Gardner, 2004).

Drucker (1989) describes individuals who carry organisational knowledge as a powerful resource, which the individual owns rather than the organisation. Greater conviction and belief in the brand and the positives it stands for by the employees will strongly contribute to expressing this belief among the various stakeholders associated with an organisation; strengthening the desired reputation (Louiset, 2004). In terms of reputation, the benefit is two-fold: the employee has custody over the formation of their knowledge, and the employee has a deep belief and trust in the conviction of their knowledge – having formulated their own meaning through interpretation (Mohan et al., 2008). Employees take ownership of the meaning. Therefore, the conveyed meaning regarding the virtues of the organisation through the employee to external stakeholders has greater passion and conviction, resulting in an enhanced reputation.

Reputation for the brand is fortified as a result of the employee's belief in their organisation; a belief that can be significantly driven from within the organisation through stories. An example of corporate storytelling being a strategy for galvanising staff to work

harder for the brand values of an organisation is The Body Shop story. The Body Shop proclaims through its text, promotion and dialogue that it was born from a desire to sell natural cosmetics that are not tested on animals, do not harm the planet, and are not developed through exploitation of the primary producers (The Body Shop: About us, 2011). The Body Shop uses its story internally and externally as a means to attract and retain staff who align their values with the company's (The Body Shop: Careers, 2011; Cahalane, 2006). These values are guiding principles for commercial decision-making within the company and encourage staff to live these values through their professional work. These values also form part of the recruitment process. The company's sustainability drive has had a significant and positive impact on emissions-related staff operations by raising employees' awareness of their environmental footprint (Values Report, The Body Shop, 2009).

Limitations and considerations regarding corporate storytelling

The reviewed literature provided insight into the benefits of storytelling. However, there are many considerations and limitations to using stories as a means of employee engagement and generating a strong reputation as a valued brand identified through the literature review. Focusing on employee engagement to build internal loyalty to the brand relies on a diverse and strategic approach, often deliberately planned through a variety of communication channels. The use of corporate storytelling is often one part of a strategic plan or internal communication campaign (Mohan et al.2008; Denning, 2005; Harrison, 2007; L'Etang, 2008).

Table 4 details those limitations and considerations to using corporate storytelling as a means to engage with staff, identified by the leading academics who have researched corporate storytelling.

Table 4: Limitations and considerations regarding corporate storytelling

Limitation	Authors	Date
Corporate storytelling is but one communication method, strategists must consider the theory of varied communications in order to provide the opportunity for shared meaning across a diverse audience.	Mohan et al.	2008
Public relations practitioners need to focus on storytelling as 'one tool from the toolbox' for delivering verbal information, when face-to-face delivery is established as the most effective medium.	Harrison	2007
Storytelling is a supplement for decision-making by enabling employees and communicators to imagine new perspectives and is more ideally suited to communicating change and stimulating innovation.	Denning	2005
Storytelling as a less formal approach to information exchange still applies the general principles of effective communication. Consideration for the audience, their abilities, aspirations and their motivations are still critical to the foundation of any good communication plan.	Harrison Dowling	2007 2006
Careful planning in line with 'good' communication practice applies equally to storytelling when used in a business environment. Research on the target audience and reflection on the desired outcome of the communication still play essential roles in the use of storytelling.	Denning Mohan et al.	2005 2008
Time and location considerations may influence and restrict the practicality of the more personal approach to storytelling. Even though podcasts and video-streaming can overcome the variables of distance and time zones for storytelling, the face-to-face delivery that involves a more personal approach is somewhat lost through these media.	Harrison Macnamara	2007 2005
It is important that the narrator composes the story from a perspective that will resonate positively with the audience. Using a story of a negative tonality will generally fail to spark action, as opposed to using a springboard story for example, which communicates complex ideas and launches people into action.	Denning	2006
Face-to-face delivery of the message is still a form of uncontrolled media, as the storyteller applies their own interpretation to the narration, which may contrast with the filtered message.	Welch & Jackson	2007
Being a good storyteller doesn't necessarily make you a good leader, which requires intelligence and life experience.	McKee	2003

Table 4 has identified some of the key concerns regarding the use of corporate stories. Using face-to-face narration can be challenging, especially for multi-office and larger organisations, where the practicalities of direct communication with all staff can be logistically difficult (Harrison, 2007; Macnamara, 2005). Storytelling needs to remain part of an overall strategic goal, and add value towards achieving the stated communication objectives for the organisation, not just be used in isolation to connect deeper with employees (Harrison, 2007; Denning, 2006; Mohan et al., 2008). Even though storytelling can be characterised by a more personal and informal approach to corporate communication, it is essential that the principles of communication planning are followed to remain effective (Harrison, 2007; Dowling, 2006). Other risks to using storytelling include the narrator's own interpretation on the message influencing the meaning, and good orators projecting confidently and convincingly information of little substance or logic (Welch & Jackson, 2007; McKee, 2003).

Although all of the theorists in **Table 4** have publicised many positives associated with using corporate storytelling, they acknowledge the deficiencies of utilising narration without due diligence to professional communication design.

Conclusion

The literature reviewed in this paper robustly supports the concept that corporate storytelling has a powerful role to play as a communication strategy for building stronger engagement with employees. The reviewed literature has also collectively identified narration that leads to deeper engagement improves the potential for recollection and commitment for the corporate brand, leading to stronger internal loyalty and enhanced reputation, both internally and externally.

According to many of the theorists reviewed, corporate storytelling can heighten awareness for the desired meaning and engender a culture consistent with the organisation's aspired values and brand, through its association with individual interpretation. Corporate stories need to be carefully planned and delivered through narration that reaches out to the employees at a more individual level. Corporate stories encourage internal staff to take ownership of the narration and align the meaning to their own experiences and beliefs.

This may enrol employees as co-narrators of the corporate narrative, strengthening their understanding of the brand values and fortifying internal reputation. Employees will externally represent and communicate the brand and values for their employer more effectively, due to a stronger association and deeper understanding of the message.

Corporate stories are not a standalone answer to improving shared meaning and employee engagement, but form part of an internal communication strategy aligned with a robust professional process.

The next phase for this research is to document to what extent corporate storytelling is currently used by public relations and communication practitioners and to what extent (if any) storytelling is analysed as part of strategic planning for corporate communication. Gathering empirical data on the use of corporate stories and the objectives underpinning their use will provide deeper insight into the practice of using storytelling to improve employee engagement and internal reputation.

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