Gordon Institute of Business Science
University of Pretoria

How storytelling supports strategic change: An organisational experience

Giselle Willcox

A research project submitted to the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy (Corporate Strategy).

<29 November 2021>

ABSTRACT

Storytelling plays a significant role in organisational life, with more and more leaders using storytelling strategies in their work. Storytelling also has an important part to play when it comes to driving strategic change. Research, however, is lacking in the area of how stories can be supportive of change – especially when it comes to the way in which audiences within such contexts experience those stories.

To understand more about how storytelling supports strategic change, a qualitative, interpretative study was undertaken within a newly restructured business in the financial-services sector. This entailed an exploration of how employees experienced an example of storytelling. Feedback was gathered from 12 participants, all of whom were in the employ of the business at the time of the restructure. Data was gathered based on their experience of and insights into the storytelling as shared with the company by the chief executive officer.

Supported by insights from organisational storytelling literature and centred on the research findings, presented in the form of a thematic analysis, a conceptual framework was developed to incorporate four important and interconnected elements – setting, story, storyteller and storytelling. Insights based on participant feedback and researcher observations are shared for a deeper understanding of how leaders might use storytelling in contexts of transformational change and, more, broadly, appreciate the broader role that stories are able to play within organisations.

Keywords: Storytelling, strategic change, organisational change, transformational change

DECLARATION

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy (Corporate Strategy) at the Gordon Institute of Business science (University of Pretoria). It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination to any other university.

I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent from both organisation and participants to carry out this research.

Giselle Willcox
Johannesburg

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF APPENDICES

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

> *"Stories are found everywhere around us from the funky display of modern art on the coffee shop wall to the barista's conversation with her colleague about the events of last Friday evening to the TV news reporter's account of the events impacting the Dow Jones Industrial Average today. In this broad sense, stories can be visible and concrete (like the modern art object) or immaterial and abstract (like the barista's story). Stories could thus be conceived as anything that transmits an author's message or inspires meaning within an audience. The ubiquity of stories seems to stem from a universal and timeless … human need to convey meaning to other humans."* (Cleary, 2021, p. 146)

Stories play a crucial role in our lives (Bietti, Tilston, & Bangerter, 2019). Human beings are considered "innate storytellers" (Brown, 2015, p. 83), sharing actual information, ideas or insights – so much so that there is a view that people think mostly in terms of stories (Woodside, 2008) and that it is through stories that individuals make the majority of their conscious choices (Denning, 2007). Stories "create knowledge and develop the mind" (Boje, Hansen, Barry, & Hatch, 2007, p. 5); they help with learning and the sharing of that knowledge (van Hulst & Ybema, 2019); and they are essential as a means by which sense is made (Boyce, 1996; van Hulst & Ybema, 2019).

Storytelling has been the focus of academic attention for many years, with organisational narratives playing an important role in organisations (Rosile, Boje, Carlon, Downs, & Saylors, 2013) and storytelling seen to play a key role in the organisational-change process (Fleming & Miller, 2019). There are a number of reasons that people tell stories within an organisation, with the "why" of storytelling the focus of many studies. van Hulst & Ybema (2019) include reasons such as that of stories helping people connect with each other, that stories play a role when it comes to innovating, managing, strategising – and that stories play a role when it comes to both stirring and resisting change. Studies of organisational discourse have also put much emphasis on the "what" of stories – what stories are about (Antunes, Tate, & Barros, 2020). More recently, there has been research on the "where" of storytelling, with a spatial or setting-sensitive approach to studies of organisational storytelling conducted by van Hulst & Ybema (2019). This piece of research focuses on the "how" of storytelling – not on the way in which stories are told as such, but on how stories are experienced or received on the part of an audience. This area has received less attention (van Hulst & Ybema, 2019) – especially when it comes to how stories within an environment of organisational change are experienced.

This paper aims to offer an understanding of how storytelling might support strategic change by offering insights into a storytelling experience during a time of organisational change. How, from the perspective of an audience, is storytelling in such a context experienced? (Cleary, 2021) This is an important question because humans are not only considered natural story*tellers*, they are also considered to be excellent "story listeners" (Brown, 2015, p. 83). This work is an exploration then of how storytelling is "heard" or experienced by an internal audience within the context of organisational change. It is conducted within the financial-services sector in South Africa and explores audience responses to a written story as shared by the company's chief executive officer (CEO) in the early phase of a recent business restructure, which was effective just months after the detection of COVID-19.

Such a study was considered best served via research that was qualitative in approach. The research design was interpretivist, with a research method that utilised the interview as instrument. This, in line with Josselson's (2013) view that a "how" research question necessitates interview-based research methods. Other research methods included data collection, a thematic analysis of that data and its interpretation and validation. An inductive approach to theory development was applied, inductive research focusing on generating theory from collected data (Williams & Moser, 2019).

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

It was Fyodor Dostoevsky who wrote: "Much unhappiness has come into the world because of bewilderment …" (Management and Leadership quotes, n.d.). The Russian philosopher penned these words in the 19th century, but it could be argued that they ring truer than ever two centuries later.

Fyodor Dostoevsky's bewildered world is encumbered by an array of issues. Fleming & Miller (2019, p. 310) write of humanity facing an "avalanche of unpredictable geopolitical developments". There are global crises constituting wicked messes (the world considered to be in a mess and many of its problems, wicked), with international issues such as poverty, climate change, corruption, sustainability and inequality examples of such messes (Waddock, 2019). These messes are deemed wicked because they entail complex social issues (involving people and their varied and various values) that cannot be solved by simplistic systems (Alford & Head, 2017). Such chaos and complexity have even earned their own acronym, VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity) – a term adopted in 2002

by the US Army War College (Hayes, 2020) and have been embedded in today's world such that "navigating and working with the complexities of continuous change has become the norm" (Hayes, 2020, p. 1).

Similarly, organisations are being confronted with "challenges which are radical, hard to predict and hard to mitigate (Fleming & Miller, 2019, p. 310), with today's work environment considered best described as an "age of change" (Grønstad, 2021, p. 1). This leaves renders the term change management redundant in that change is no longer something that can be managed based on expectations of the known (Hayes, 2020). The driving force in our global business world today is the urge to "go faster, to sustain competitive advantage in a continuously evolving environment" (Hayes, 2020, p. 1). Fleming & Miller (2019) note, however, that the stark reality of how extreme the effects of change are – especially on employees in an organisation – are not always properly appreciated by leaders of those organisations.

In essence, organisational change can be "more intimidating, disrupting and disturbing than is often assumed" (Fleming & Miller, 2019, p. 310). The complexity of such change is exacerbated in the current context and international impact of the Coronavirus. Our COVID-19 world, observe Ramalingam, Nabarro, Oqubay, Carnall, & Wild (2020), is changing all of the time and requires of leaders that they contend with "unpredictability, imperfect information, multiple unknowns, and the need to identify responses quickly".

Hence Denning's (2007, p. 22) conviction that one of the most important responsibilities of a leader is to "help others get through critical moments of crisis" – especially in light of view that the world is facing a sensemaking crisis (Denning, 2007; Ramalingam, Nabarro, Oqubay, Carnall, & Wild, 2020; Waddock, 2019). Cleary (2021, p. 148), who studies organisational stories within the context of major change events (such as restructures, mergers, takeovers), highlights the power that stories have within an organisational context, stating that they are able to "provide a sense of certainty as they enable individuals to make meanings out of their seemingly random experiences". Storytelling is seen to be an important way in which to help make sense of situations and plays a key role when it comes leaders taking their organisations though a period of change (Waddock, 2019).

1.2 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

While the role of storytelling in organisations is understood to be important, the nature and role of storytelling for leaders has not received much attention from organisation studies and management scholars (Grafström & Falkman, 2017). Organisational storytelling scholars generally focus on the storyteller – the author – of the story in their storytelling analyses and that the "role of the story's audience members in the process of organizational storytelling is largely absent from organizational storytelling literature" (Cleary, 2021, p. 148). van Hulst & Ybema (2019) note the lack of research on how storytelling in organisational life is situated. While their specific area of interest concerns comparing the various literal, physical situations in which storytelling occurs (locker rooms versus briefing stations etc.), their point is taken. Hulst & Ybema's (2019) observation therefore offers an opportunity to be deliberate about seeing stories as something more than their substance – as something connected to the sensemaking magic that surrounds them. How then is a storyteller by leader experienced by an audience? So, what does that listening present as? How, in the audience's mind – and in their lives – are those stories "situated" (van Hulst & Ybema, 2019) How are stories experienced – especially against a backdrop of perpetual change.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION

The researcher requirement at hand is to explore how storytelling supports strategic change. This, in response to Dalpiaz & Di Stefano's call for more research to be conducted on stories as drivers of strategic change (2017). Considered alongside an observation by van Hulst & Ybema's (2019) – that there is a need that storytelling as an experience be studied – the following research question is proposed: How, within an organisation that is undergoing change, is storytelling as an occurrence or event experienced? (van Hulst & Ybema, 2019).

Since story is both the content of it and the communication around it, both substance and experience (Antunes, Tate, & Barros, 2020), two research sub-questions are set out as follows:

1. How, in a storytelling experience and from the perspective of the audience, does the content of a story present change as positive?
2. How is storytelling – as told by the CEO – experienced?

1.4 RESEARCH PURPOSE

This paper explores how storytelling supports strategic change within an organisation undergoing transformation from the experience of an audience. By engaging employee responses to a story as shared by the CEO of a recently restructured business, insights were obtained into the strategic role that stories might play within a transformational-change context. A conceptual framework was crafted in order to better understand where organisational stories may be located contextually and how best they might function.

For the purposes of clarity, this study is not an organisation-wide study but one that explores an experience of storytelling within an organisation.

1.5 RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION

It is the aim of a researcher's that the particulars of a study undertaken bring to light bigger, broader issues and in this way, contribute something meaningful in relation to a particular field of study or area of interest (Collins & Stockton, 2018). By presenting such an experience of storytelling, the researcher intention is that more might be learnt about how storytelling supports strategic change. It is hoped, at a broader level, that this work might enhance an understanding of, and appreciation for, the role that storytelling is able to play within organisations – especially within an organisational-change context. With a clearer sense of some of the ways in which storytelling might be experienced by internal audiences, leaders – especially those steering businesses through processes of reform, restructure or reorientation – might be better equipped to use storytelling strategically and with sensitivity.

1.6 RESEARCH OUTLINE

This paper encompasses seven chapters and a set of appendices (See Contents page for list of appendices), with the longer chapters (Chapters 2, 4 and 5) proceeding with upfront chapter overviews. In Chapter 1, and by way of introduction to the research, a background to the research problem was given, followed by a brief discussion of that problem (as regards both the business and academic needs for addressing it). The research question and subsequent sub-questions that might address the problem at hand are posed, with the intended purpose of the research communicated and the intended research contribution put forward. Chapter 2 opens with some key definitions and terms and offers a review of a selection of some of the

relevant storytelling literature, both foundational and current, concluding with a presentation of a conceptual framework informed by key constructs emerging from that literature.

Chapter 3 hones the discussion by posing the research question and showing the connection between the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2 and the proposed research question and sub-questions. Chapter 4 unpacks the design and methodology of the research. This includes details on the approach (qualitative, inductive), underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions (constructivist, interpretivist) and methodological specifics such as research instrument and associated aspects of the analysis. In Chapter 5, research findings are presented, with Chapter 6 locating those findings within the context of the storytelling literature reviewed for further discussion. Chapter 7 brings the study to a close, showcasing consolidated findings, stating research limitations and offering research contribution. Implications for management and further research are outlined.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a literature review for the purposes of identifying key constructs from the works studied, with these constructs guiding the way in which a conceptual framework is crafted. Table 1 presents an overview of the chapter's sections. Section 2.2, *Definitions and terms*, offers some definitions and explanation of terms that help to contain the conversation for a more meaningful discussion. These terms and definitions encompass a working definition of story; organisational stories; a definition of organisational storytelling; and storytelling and strategic change. Section 2.3, *Foundational scholars*, provides some positioning of three seminal scholars in the field of organisational storytelling and includes a high-level literature review as well as related themes for purposes of contextualising the discussion.

Section 2.4, *Current scholars*, looks more closely at some of the work of nine more scholars, whose insights inform the approach to this research. Section 2.4.1 offers a high-level literature review as shown in Table 3. These contributions are unpacked in more comparative detail in Section 2.4.2, with Section 2.4.3 presenting key constructs identified. Section 2.5 concludes the literature review by drawing the theoretical framework into the study and presenting relevant literature gaps before final chapter conclusions are outlined in Section 2.5.3. A conceptual framework is proposed and explained in Section 2.6.

SECTION	2.2 DEFINITIONS AND TERMS	2.3 FOUNDATIONAL SCHOLARS	2.4 CURRENT SCHOLARS	2.5 CONCLUSION	2.6 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
SECTION BREAKDOWN	2.2.1 Working definition of story	2.3.1 High-level review: Weick, Boje and Czarniawska (Table 2)	2.4.1 High-level review: Grafström & Falkman; Dalpiaz & Di Stefano; Antunes, Tate, & Barros; van Hulst & Ybema (Table 3)	2.5.1 Theoretical framework	2.6.1 Introduction of a conceptual framework (Figures 2 and 3)
	2.2.2 Organisational stories	2.3.2 Themes and thoughts	2.4.2 Literature comparison and contrast	2.5.2 Literature gaps	
	2.2.3 Definition of organisational storytelling		2.4.3 Key constructs (Figure 1)	2.5.3 Final conclusions	
	2.2.4 Storytelling and strategic change				

Table 1: Overview of Chapter 2

Source: Author's own

DEFINITIONS AND TERMS

2.2.1 Working definition of story

The academic literature records a number of definitions of story as well as an array of associated words and terms – fable, myth, story virus, anti-story (Salicru, 2018); counter-narrative (Frandsen, Kuhn, & Wolff Lundholt, 2017); meme, living story (Svane, 2019); rhetoric (Grafström & Falkman, 2017) etc. One view is that the word story is synonymous with narrative (Cleary, 2021). Another is that stories are a subset of narratives – with all stories considered narratives, but not all narratives stories (Dawson & Sykes, 2019). Some scholars understand narratives to be both self-contained stories with a beginning, middle and end, and fragments of a story with only a few of these structural elements (Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2017). The idea of a fragmented narrative aligns to forerunner scholars such as Boje, who deems "fragmented, non-linear, incoherent, collective, unplotted, and pre-narrative speculation" (Dawson & Sykes, 2019, p. 100) whole in and of itself, although the word he uses in this regard is not narrative or story, but antenarrative. According to this understanding, just a few words can denote meaning in such a way as to constitute a story (Dawson & Sykes, 2019).

For purposes of this discussion, however, the working definition of story is a unit that is complete and coherent, comprising a beginning, a middle and an end (Dawson & Sykes, 2019) and consisting of three elements: actions, characters, and a time and place (Cleary, 2021). This understanding of story supports the specific study at hand in that the piece of company data referenced in Chapters 4 and 5 and presented in full in Chapter 5 (Figure 8) – a story communicated by a CEO within the financial-services sector in South Africa. This piece of data aligns most directly to such a reading of story insofar as it has a beginning, a middle and an end and contains a character, his actions, a time and a place. What are not considered to be stories are pieces such as documents or reports. According to Dawson & Sykes (2019), stories possess a particular characteristic that documents and reports do not: they interpret events for the purpose of engaging the emotions of the audience and. While stories may contain facts, they are essentially entities that sustain, generate or shift meaning (Dawson & Sykes, 2019). This view of story is shared by van Hulst & Ybema (2019, p. 3), for whom stories are able to contain explanations and evaluations but also "can, and often do, trigger emotions".

2.2.2 Organisational stories

Organisational stories are the stories created by members or actors within an organisation to arrange an incident, state of play or something that happens into the present through a plot

that is organized around themes that are meaningful (Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2017). Stories play a critical role when it comes to the organisational reality's production and reproduction (van Hulst & Ybema, 2019), with epistemological and ontological functions such that leaders and strategy-makers can use stories to "construe organisational reality" (Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2017, p. 667), influencing the way in which that reality is interpreted by that audience. Stories have the ability to make sense of and give sense to experiences in organisations (Dawson & Sykes, 2019).

There are a number of roles that stories can play within the context of an organisation. Not only can organisational stories be about innovation and identity-building (van Hulst & Ybema, 2019), they can also be about new-employee induction (Antunes, Tate, & Barros, 2020). They can be about advocating acceptance and creating a sense of conformity (Antunes, Tate, & Barros, 2020) and employee bonding (van Hulst & Ybema, 2019). They also serve to communicate to employees the way in which an organisation does things or to institutionalise important management imperatives (Antunes, Tate, & Barros, 2020). Of particular importance for purposes of this study is that stories can be associated with bringing about change (van Hulst & Ybema, 2019), with scholars acknowledging a clear relationship between story and strategy take-up (Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2017).

2.2.3 Definition of organisational storytelling

Storytelling is considered by scholars to be essential to an organisation (Boje, 1989; Weick, 2020) and it is understood that members of organisations spend a substantial amount of their working lives telling stories to each other (van Hulst & Ybema, 2019). It is important that stories and storytelling be distinguished from each other, the significance of this differentiation discussed in more detail from Chapter 2. While story refers to the item, story product or the story as artefact, storytelling refers to the communication of those stories. Rosile, Boje, Carlon, Downs, & Saylors (2013) define storytelling as an interplay between grand or master narratives, which are wither epistemic or empiric, and living stories (with their ontological relational networks). As has been discussed in Section 2.2.1 and, based on an understanding of story as complete (with beginning, middle, character, actions, time and place), a working definition of organisational storytelling for purposes of this discussion is an "instance in which someone tells someone else about events that have taken place or are taking place in a particular time and space" (van Hulst & Ybema, 2019, p. 3).

It must be noted that this discussion hones specifically on a story not told verbally but as presented in written form (and showcased in Chapter 5, Figure 8). The contention here, as per Balogun, Jacobs, Jarzabkowski, Mantere, & Vaara (2014, p. 175), is that that strategy work "involves talk in all its forms" – and that "some of the most powerful resources for making and signifying an organization's strategy" can be stories that are not only spoken but words that are materialised in text.

2.2.4 Storytelling and strategic change

As referenced in Section 2.2.2, stories serve a number of different purposes. With strategic change as specific context, organisational storytelling is the process by which stories are told to entertain, engage and persuade the audience – and in so doing, "provide meaning and a sense of coherence to complex sets of events in enabling temporal connection" and reduce the uncertainty, confusion and complexity of organisational life (Dawson & Sykes, 2019, p. 99). During the process of strategic change, influencing how audiences interpret the reality being presented via stories is very important when it comes to overcoming resistance to that change and for winning support for it (Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2017).

Storytelling is therefore considered an important practice for strategy-making – specifically because of its potential power when it comes to formulating and rolling out strategy to influence employees' willingness to accept change (Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2017). And while storytelling is only part of the organisational-change process, write Fleming & Miller (2019), it has to potential to offer understanding, convey communication that is consistent, encourage commitment, enhance professional development and align beliefs that are held by individual employees and organisational culture to company vision.

Since the term strategic change is often used interchangeably with transformative change (Fleming & Miller, 2019) and considering that organisational change is the wording referenced across much of the literature – organisational change defined as a desired state of affairs, "a means to an end" (Fleming & Miller, 2019, p. 314) or a process reflective of the predominant view regarding change – for ease of reading, the terms strategic change, transformative change and organisational change will are used interchangeably in this study.

2.3 FOUNDATIONAL SCHOLARS

This section offers a high-level literature review that relates to works by and work on some of the seminal scholars in the organisational-storytelling space. This is followed by some related thoughts and themes.

2.3.1 High-level review: Weick, Boje and Czarniawska

Table 2 highlights some of the contributions of Weick, Boje and, Czarniawska – either referenced directly from their work (some of this work co-authored) or from the observations of other scholars where relevant.

SEMINAL SCHOLARS	KEY TERMS AND THEORIES	KEY THEMES
WEICK	• Organising process (Weick, 2020) • Organisational renewal (Weick, 2020) • The introduction into academia of sensemaking as a term (Ancona, 2012)	• Weick's 1969 definition of organising (as per his *Social Psychology of Organizing*) is the "resolving of equivocality in an enacted environment by means of interlocked behaviors embedded in conditionally related processes" (Weick, 2020, p. 1421). (This sequencing was: enact > select > retain > enact > select.) (Weick, 2020) • In 1979, Weick defines organising as "a consensually validated grammar for reducing equivocality by means of sensible interlocked behaviors" (Weick, 2020, p. 1421) • Considered the "father of sensemaking" (Ancona, 2012, p. 4) • Defines sensemaking as "ongoing retrospective development of plausible images that rationalize what people are doing" (Weick, 2020, p. 1421) • Examines relationship between storytelling and sensemaking (Weick, 1995) • Describes an evolving vocabulary of organised sensemaking intended to focus on meaning (Weick, 2020) • Looks at sensemaking in organisation versus sensemaking as organisation (Weick, 2020) • Compares immanent sensemaking (forward experience of absorbed coping) to deliberate sensemaking (thematic, abstract, suited to renewal) (Weick, 2020) • Notes the importance of the idea of understanding as ongoing accomplishment (Weick, 1995)

BOJE	• Worked based on organisation theory or the theory of organisations as collective storytelling system (Boje, 1991) • Contributed notion of antenarrative to organisational storytelling research (Boje, 2012) • Methodology is that of ethnography (Boje, 1991) • Informed by Russian socio-linguist Bakhtin as regards chronotypes (Boje, Haley, & Saylors, 2016) • Use of narrative analysis (Boje, Haley, & Saylors, 2016) • Use of organisational narrative analysis (Boje, Haley, & Saylors, 2016)	• Looks at relationship between storytelling and sensemaking (Boje, 1991) • Understands story as content, context and re-context • Storytelling seen as something that spreads different kinds of stories around organisations (Vaara, Sonenshein, & Boje, 2016) • Accounts considered "people's own narrative descriptions of organizational processes, events, and phenomena" (Vaara, Sonenshein, & Boje, 2016, p. 498) Stories considered existing narratives old and retold • Specific attention given to organisational narratives (non-intentional and vs. narrative, which is seen to be intentional) (Vaara, Sonenshein, & Boje, 2016) • Organisational narratives seen to be stories formulated for the purposes of arranging organisational events and actions temporally (Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2017) • Focus on narratives as sources of stability and change in organisations (Vaara, Sonenshein, & Boje, 2016) • Explore how organisational stories form and justify strategic change (Boje, Haley, & Saylors, 2016) • Identification of key approaches to organisational narrative analysis on stability and change: interpretative and poststructuralist (Vaara, Sonenshein, & Boje, 2016) • Antenarrative extensions considered to have implications for change management (Boje, 2012) • Notion of antenarratives as pieces of organisational discourse not fully formed that help construct identities and interests (Boje, Haley, & Saylors, 2016) • Boje's "classic critique" (van Hulst & Ybema, 2019, p. 3) is that organisational storytelling research often studies isolated stories taken out of their natural setting
CZARNIAWSKA	• Considers herself a constructivist • Organisation theory (informed by systems • Applies narrative approach to organisation theory (but later than Boje did) and via a combination of psychology, constructivist philosophy and literature theory • Is associated with the term narratology (Czarniawska, 2011)	• Sees narratives as "temporal representations of events that construe the past, the present, and envision the future" (Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2017, p. 665) • Believes that "storytellers 'emplot' reality" (van Hulst & Ybema, 2019, p. 3) – place an event in the context of a plot or storyline to make a narrative – by selecting and connecting story elements and bringing into focus a particular view of the elements at hand • Focuses on what people do when they act together to achieve something (Czarniawska, 2008) • Applies MacIntyre's idea that "selves are produced in interactions in which people account for their actions by placing them in a relative narrative" (Czarniawska, 2011, p. 340) • Sees the manager or leader is an important character to organisation theory for an analogy between individual and organisational identities (Czarniawska, 2011)

Table 2: High-level literature review: Foundational scholars

Author's own

2.3.2 Themes and thoughts

Academically speaking, organisational narratives have been the focus of scholarly attention for decades, with storytelling seen as playing an important role when it comes to crafting and maintaining organisational identity (Rosile, Boje, Carlon, Downs, & Saylors, 2013). Weick, with

his early definitions of organising (Weick, 2020) and organising process (Weick, 2020) and the introduction of sensemaking as a term into academia (Weick, 2020) and scholars Boje and Czarniawksa, are considered forerunners in the field (Grafström & Falkman, 2017). Table 2 references some of the contributions that these scholars have made to the academic literature.

An important contribution of these scholars to this research – especially in the light of the background to the research problem (the world's VUCA challenges etc.) presented in Chapter 1 – is that of the concept of sensemaking. Weick, the "father of sensemaking" (Ancona, 2012, p. 4), introduced the term, which simply means "the making of sense" (Weick, 1995, p. 4). Sensemaking is a way by which people try to understand events or issues that are new, unclear, confusing or in some way defy expectation (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Stories help people make sense of such change by helping locate people in "context, time and space" (Salicru, 2018, p. 133), which, in turn, creates a sense of structure and order to reality, offering employees a sense of stability. From this reading of sensemaking, leaders are considered sense-makers "for" an organisational audience and as such, need to be equipped to communicate complex concepts in words that are understandable and in ways that help audiences make meaning and sense of the unknown (Waddock, 2019, p. 934)

2.4 CURRENT SCHOLARS

Section 2.4.1 offers a review of four examples of current literature in the organisational storytelling space. The observations and insights from examples of the work of Grafström & Falkman (2017), Dalpiaz & Di Stefano (2017), Antunes, Tate, & Barros (2020) and van Hulst & Ybema (2019) inform the approach to this study. Section 2.4.2 compares and contrasts some of those insights. This, in order that some of the key constructs at play be identified. These constructs are presented in Section 2.4.3.

2.4.1 High-level review: Grafström, Falkman, Dalpiaz, Di Stefano, Antunes, Tate, Barros, van Hulst and Ybema

Categorised chronologically from 2017-2020, Table 3 highlights some of the key findings emerging from the work of four sets of scholars currently doing research in the organisational storytelling space: Grafström & Falkman (2017); Dalpiaz & Di Stefano (2017); van Hulst & Ybema (2019); and Antunes, Tate, & Barros (2020).

CURRENT SCHOLARS	KEY FINDINGS
GRAFSTRÖM & FALKMAN (2017)	• Significance of storytelling in organisations • Stories as drivers of change • CEO can bring legitimacy to overall corporate narratives • Storytelling as successful leadership tool • Scholarly focus here is on CEO communications in social media (external rather than internal) – with particular emphasis on Twitter • Focus is a content analysis of the stories of Hákan Nygren, CEO of Swedish digital bank, Nordnet • Data was captured during a period without major company crises or events
DALPIAZ & DI STEFANO (2017)	• Stories identified as drivers of organisational change • Stories important for influencing processes like strategic change • Stories play a role in ongoing transformation • Creating stories is an appropriate way for guiding how processes (like strategic change) are interpreted because of the inherent temporality of stories • There is a relationship between story and strategy take-up • Stories are important for the creation of a desired future • Stories are both artefact and event • The importance of story content is its criteria as regards being effective within a transformative-change context • To influence how audiences perceive transformative change, narratives must captivate attention • Important to capture both hearts and minds of the audience; otherwise, transformative change will fail. This is because disruptive nature of transformational change needs audiences to be its dedicated advocates. • One of scholars' directives: present change as something positive • Scholarly findings: the strategy-maker studied constructed and reconstructed the meaning of change. • Narrative practices that leader used are significant (Italian company Alessi's leader, Alberto Alessi)
VAN HULST & YBEMA (2019)	• Stories need to help make sense • Stories significant in organisations for formation and reformation • Stories are about innovation, bonding, identity-building but also about bringing about change • Distinction between content and context of stories • Story as both story and an occurrence (scholars focus on content rather than the telling of stories) • Focus is on "situated storytelling" (van Hulst & Ybema, 2019, p. 2) or setting-specific experiences that are spatial in nature (e.g., meeting-room talk, workstations talk, canteen talk and closed-door talk – here as regards everyday storytelling at Dutch police station). In reference then to physical context and • also spoken etc. • The generic framework in the research (everyday storytelling in police work) focuses on four questions, two of which have relevance: 1. What form does the storytelling take? 2. What work does storytelling do?
ANTUNES, TATE, & BARROS (2020)	• Story as both content and communication • This research focuses on internal business process (i.e., IT) documents • Proposes purposes for why leaders tell stories: 1. the induction of new employees 2. conveying to staff how the company does things 3. entrenching a critical management imperative 4. promotion of a sense of acceptance and conformity 5. they include a purpose that has to do with convincing people of something

Table 3: High-level literature review: Current scholars and key findings

Source: Author's own

2.4.2 Literature comparison and contrast

As set out in Table 3, scholars Grafström & Falkman; Dalpiaz & Di Stefano; Antunes, Tate, & Barros; van Hulst & Ybema are in agreement on the significance of the role that stories and storytelling play in organisations. Recognised as drivers of strategic change (Grafström & Falkman, 2017; Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2017), stories play an important role in "formation and reformation" (van Hulst & Ybema, 2019), in ongoing transformation and in shaping stategic-change processes (Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2017). Stories offer leaders a way to manage and strategise, as well as to oppose and promote change (van Hulst & Ybema, 2019). In fact, note Dalpiaz & Di Stefano (2017, p. 665), stories are particularly suited to "influencing the interpretation of processes like strategic change, which is 'inherently temporal'" in nature.

The focus of the work of Grafström & Falkman (2017) is on the content as communicated by Hákan Nygren of Swedish digital bank, Nordnet. Their area of interest, however, is on storytelling that is external and public-facing rather than internal communication, with the content of Nygren's social-media posts (Twitter, in particular) the object of study. This is in contrast to van Hulst & Ybema (2019), whose focus is on everyday stories told as not by CEOs, but by employees working at a Dutch police station, i.e., on internal – and informal – communication. While neither of these studies was conducted in organisations during a period of strategic change Grafström & Falkman (2017) note that their data was gathered during a period without major company crises or important events of any kind), both have significance for this study. This relates, firstly, to what *is* included in the literature and, secondly, to what is *not* – a point pertinent to all the examples of the current literature analysed. In this vein, key constructs generated during the literature review (and presented in Section 2.4.3) guide the crafting of the conceptual framework proposed in Section 2.6. Similarly, what is *not* included – by way of literature gaps (either explicit, as noted by the scholars, or implicit and inferred) are referenced in Section 2.5.2 and play a key role in informing the approach to this inquiry.

What *is* included in the work of Grafström & Falkman (2017) – as well as in the work of Dalpiaz & Di Stefano (2017) – helps to frame the discussion at hand by creating points of connect and helping to outline the confines of this conversation. Here, both sets of scholars direct their attention to the CEO level: Hákan Nygren is CEO of Nordnet (Grafström & Falkman, 2017) and the phenomenon that Dalpiaz & Di Stefano (2017) study is the storytelling of Alberto Alessi, who heads up Italian company, Alessi. Moreover, as part of their respective research, both sets of scholars undertake a content analysis of the stories under scrutiny. While the research being conducted as regards this paper is not a stand-alone content analysis on the

part of the reseacrher as such and while the work of Grafström & Falkman (2017) hones in on social media posts that may not be within the scope of this study, that the focus for Grafström & Falkman (2017) and Dalpiaz & Di Stefano (2017) is on CEO stories offers insights that are meaningful for purposes of this study. Their work augments the understanding, firstly, that storytelling by a CEO can bring legitimacy to overall corporate narratives and secondly, that storytelling is a tool of successful leadership (Grafström & Falkman, 2017).

The Alessi study offers another essential overlap for purposes of crafting a conceptual framework: Alberto Alessi's stories were constructed against a transformative-change background. Alessi, the company, was shifting from being manufacturer of steel kitchen utensils to producer of an array of household products (Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2017). In order to be effective within such a strategic-change context, explain Dalpiaz & Di Stefano (2017), the story that is being told – i.e., the story content – becomes critical. Even though the narratives studied by Antunes, Tate, & Barros (2020) are essentially documents related to internal business processes (e.g, Information Technology) and not "stories" in the Alessi or Nygren sense, the researcher are in agreement on how important a part stories play in the change process. So too are van Hulst & Ybema (2019).

Of particular interest is a key finding that Dalpiaz & Di Stefano (2017) bring to the conversation. Owing to the disruptive nature of transformational change, stories and storytelling have to impact audiences in such a way that they become dedicated advocates of that change. In fact, they go so far as to assert that transformative change is destined to fail unless both the "hearts and minds" of audiences are captured (Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2017). One of the ways that hearts and minds are captured is to present change as something something positive (Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2017). In the case of the transformational change at Alessi, the work that the CEO was doing was around constructing and reconstructing the meaning of change (Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2017).

One of the strategic upsides of highlighting the benefits of change is that optimism about outcomes can be induced – as can confidence on the part of the audience about its ability to overcome any associated challenges (Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2017). In the mind of the researcher, this connects the conversation to the idea of sensemaking. And as put forward by van Hulst & Ybema (2019, p,6), stories "help to make sense of the problems that organizational members encounter." This sensemaking aspect to storytelling is important –

not only when it comes to organisational change but change in general. In short, stories need to help make sense (van Hulst & Ybema, 2019).

While the content of story is important when it comes to transformative-change processes as has been demonstrated, van Hulst & Ybema (2019) argue that storytelling is about both story and the occurance of story. Despite the fact that their particular focus is on "situated storytelling" (van Hulst & Ybema, 2019, p. 2) or setting-specific experiences that are spatial in nature (e.g., the meeting-room talk, workstation talk, canteen chats and closed-door discussions in the Dutch police station in which they research is conducted), their observation is valid and aligns to Dalpiaz & Di Stefano's (2017) contention that stories are equally artefact and event.

2.4.3 Key constructs

Based on the literature review outlined in Section 2.4.2, Figure 1 offers a visual representation of the key constructs that emerged.

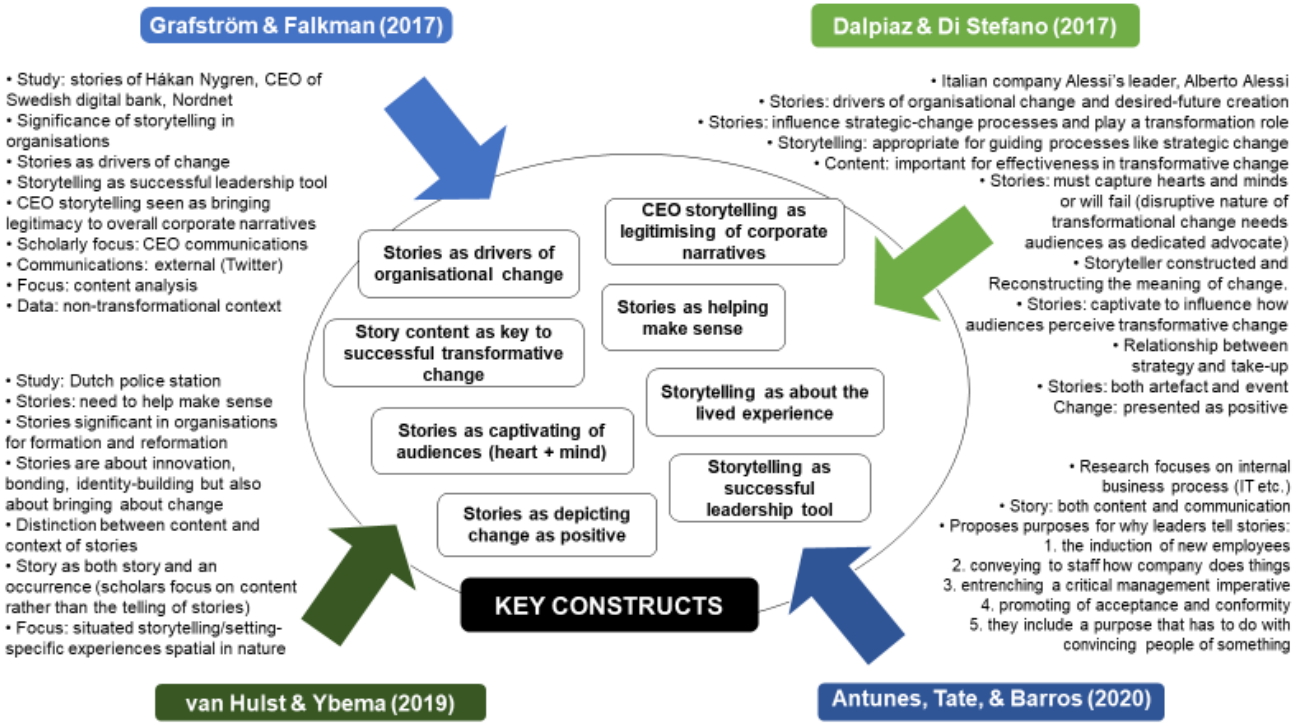

Figure 1: Literature review: Key constructs emerging

Source: Author's own

2.5 CONCLUSION

2.5.1 Theoretical framework

According to Collins & Stockton (2018), a theoretical framework has to do with the application of theory in research that communicates a researcher's values and offers an articulated perspective on how it will process knowledge that is new. A theoretical framework is at the intersection of: "1) existing knowledge and previously formed ideas about complex phenomena, 2) the researcher's epistemological dispositions, and 3) a lens and a methodically analytic approach" (Collins & Stockton, 2018, p. 1).

The theory that forms the foundation for this research is that of organisational storytelling theory, which is associated with the social construction of reality. According to organisational storytelling theory, "knowledge is communicated, shared and institutionalized by the members of the organization in the pursuit of integration" (Antunes, Tate, & Barros, 2020, p. 1184), with organisational stories serving as the means for the engagement, socialisation and institutionalisation of practices that concern the organisation.

2.5.2 Literature gaps

Between the scholars studied, there are number of gaps in the literature that emerge. For purposes of this particular study, these opportunities serve to focus the direction of the discussion insofar as the research question, as proposed in Chapter 3, is concerned. In this regard and based on the findings of their study, Dalpiaz & Di Stefano (2017) call for more research to be done on stories as drivers of organisational change. This is in line with Fleming & Miller's (2019) statement that the organisational-change space is where academic attention is needed in light of the fact that transformational leadership is studied mostly in conditions that are stable. This is against a broader backdrop – an understanding that there is, in fact, a lack of storytelling research in general organisational life (van Hulst & Ybema, 2019).

In addition to that, scholars have been focused on the content of story rather than the telling of it, with studies of organisational discourse, for the most part, having put emphasis on "what" stories are about. The work of van Hulst & Ybema (2019) looks at the "where" of storytelling – where it occurs spatially in their setting-sensitive approach. This piece of research examines the "how" of storytelling – not at how stories might be told but how those stories have been received. This is especially in relation to stories told within the context of organisational change

in order for insights into how stories support strategic change. Dalpiaz & Di Stefano (2017) acknowledge that while they *did* study stories within a strategic-change context, they did not observe audience reactions to Alessi's narratives, going on to note that readership and interpretation are just as important as and authorship "as audiences' perceptions … ultimately determine whether or not a flow of narratives is captivating" (Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2017, p. 691). Few descriptions of the activity of storytelling have been presented, contend van Hulst & Ybema (2019). Antunes, Tate, & Barros, 2020 (p. 1179) make a related request – that a spotlight be shone on the "lived experience of end users" of stories. van Hulst & Ybema (2019) concur, stating the need for research to be conducted on storytelling as an experience. More specifically, however, their question is this: how, within an organisation that is undergoing change, is storytelling as an occurrence or event experienced (van Hulst & Ybema, 2019)?

By way of summary then, the following six related observations are noted:

1. There is insufficient storytelling research when it comes to general organisational life.
2. Studies have focused on the content of stories rather than the telling of them.
3. Descriptions of the activity of storytelling are lacking.
4. The lived experiences of audiences of stories warrant further attention.
5. There is a need for more for study on the experience of storytelling – especially as it relates to the experience of storytelling within an organisation that is undergoing change.
6. More research on the topic of stories as drivers of organisational change is required.

2.5.3 Final conclusions

This chapter has presented, firstly, terms and definitions helpful for this discussion. To note here, the working definition of story used is that of a narrative that has a beginning, middle and end; storytelling encompasses stories that are not only told verbally but communicated in written form; the term "strategic change" is used interchangeably in this discussion with transformative change, transformational change and organisational change. Based on the review of literature presented, key constructs were drawn from nine current scholars. The work of these scholars has enabled the identification of literature gaps. That there are a number of gaps in the literature as reflected in Section 2.5.2 seems appropriate justification for the conducting of the research in question.

With this in mind, organisational storytelling theory as a theoretical starting point for such a study, and in consideration of the constructs drawn from the texts referenced, a conceptual framework makes for a final step before the posing of a research question that might prove suitable for exploration. This framework is presented in Section 2.6.

2.6 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A conceptual framework serves to reflect the way in which a research is studying a case within the context of a larger phenomenon (Collins & Stockton, 2018). Motivation for and explanation of the conceptual framework that follows is laid out in Section 2.6.1.

2.6.1 Introduction of a conceptual framework

A conceptual framework is often best explained by the design of a visual map that shows how existing ideas in the literature work together (Collins & Stockton, 2018). Figure 2 visually represents the key constructs of the literature review presented in Section 2.4 and shows the connection between constructs and consequent conceptual framework. (See Figure 1 for a detailed breakdown of these constructs.)

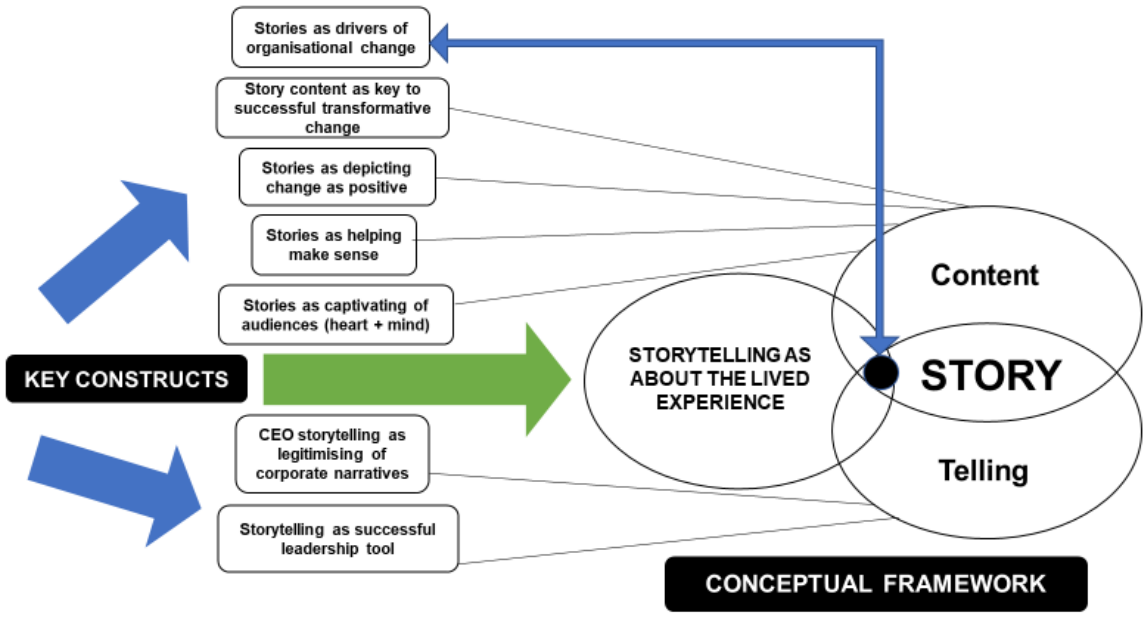

Figure 2: From key constructs to conceptual framework

Source: Author's own

Linked to the overarching idea of story as “lived experience” (Antunes, Tate, & Barros, 2020, p. 1179), Figure 2 maps a loosely configured “splitting out” by the researcher of key literature constructs as related to story content and story*telling* respectively. This is aligned to an understanding of conceptual framework that allows a researcher to build out based on beliefs, theories, expectations, concepts and assumptions that informing a piece of research (Collins & Stockton, 2018). A seemingly natural categorisation presented itself, both of which hold importance for how they might be experienced.

This conceptual framework – presented as a stand-alone concept in Figure 3 – visually integrates these two important aspects of storytelling with the experience of storytelling, intersecting with the notion of the experience of the. At the core of the study is the concept of stories as drivers of strategic change.

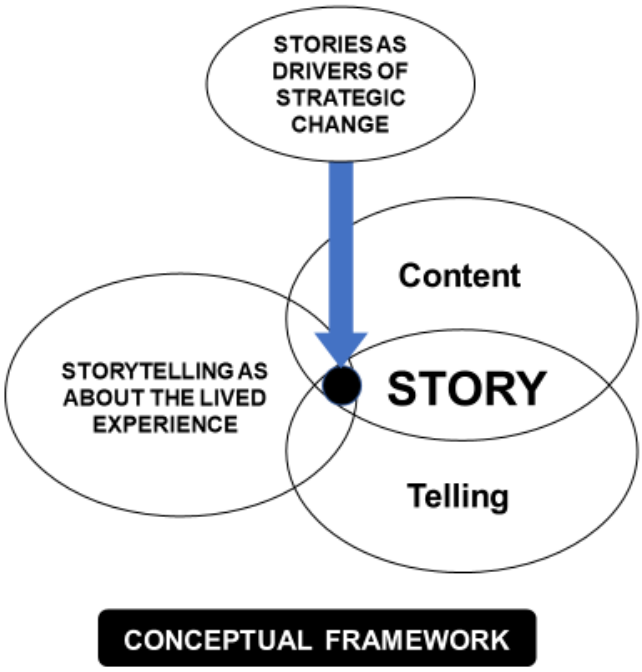

Figure 3: Conceptual framework

Source: Author’s own

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTION

By connecting constructs to specific research questions, the researcher is able to demonstrate that the particulars of a study may be able to illuminate larger issues, thereby offering something meaningful in relation to that field of study or area of interest (Collins & Stockton, 2018). In an attempt to contribute something meaningful to the broader area of interest in question – organisational storytelling – the research question proposed ~~and the findings that follow are~~ in response to Dalpiaz & Di Stefano's wider call for more research on stories as drivers of strategic change (2017). Overlaid with van Hulst & Ybema's (2019) observation – that there is a need for research to be conducted on storytelling as an experience – a research and two sub-questions are put forward.

In order to explore how storytelling supports strategic change, the research question proposed is: How, within an organisation that is undergoing change, is storytelling as an occurrence or event experienced?

But what encompasses such a "lived experience" (Antunes, Tate, & Barros, 2020, p. 1179)? Bsed on a reading of the literature studied to date, it is proposed that there exists an opportunity to explore this lived experience – an experience as encountered by an organisational audience – in a way that considers both the content of story and the telling of it. As the literature review has shown, the content of a story is key. Having a sense of what the story is about is vital (Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2017). This theme is an important one; it has to do with the company's outlook ahead because essentially, storytelling is a means to the creation of a desired future (Boyce, 1996; Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2017; Weick, 2020). As such, it informs the first research question.

When it comes to the story*telling*, the academic gaps in the organisational storytelling space around storytelling as an event may be because scholars have focused more on what the story is about than the telling of it (van Hulst & Ybema, 2019). Directing attention to the story alone – the artefact or content of it – does not go far enough to understand or explain it, since story is both content and the communication around it, both subject matter and process (Antunes, Tate, & Barros, 2020). There is also a need for insights into how CEO storytelling might bring legitimacy to overall corporate narratives (Grafström & Falkman, 2017)

In accordance with van Hulst & Ybema (2019)'s query as regards how storytelling as an event is experienced then, are two sub-questions, which, if answered, might offer up something by way of understanding:

1. **How, in a storytelling experience and from the perspective of the audience, does the content of a story present change as positive?**
2. **How is storytelling – as told by the CEO – experienced?**

Figure 4 shows the connection between the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2 and the proposed research question and sub-questions.

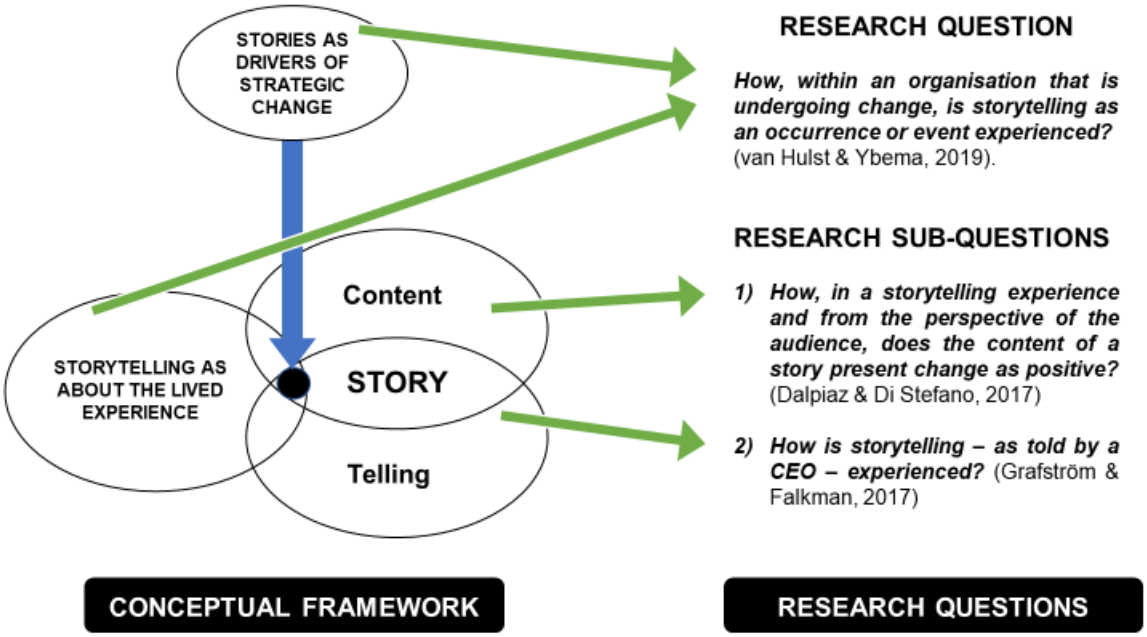

Figure 4: From conceptual framework to research questions

Source: Author's own

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The research question and subsequent sub-questions suggested that a particular line of inquiry be followed insofar as exploring how stories support strategic change. Table 4 gives a chapter overview as regards its related components. Section 4.4.1 offers a visual outline of the research approach employed, while Section 4.2 presents the ontological and epistemological assumptions on which the research is based. The research methodology is explained in Section 4.3, with Sections 4.4, 4,5 and 4,6, outlining the respective processes followed in relation to data collection, data analysis and data validation from an inductive perspective for the development of a pattern of meaning (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018).

SECTION	4.1 INTRODUCTION	4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN	4.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	4.4 COLLECTION OF DATA	4.5 ANALYSIS OF DATA	4.6 VALIDATION OF DATA
SECTION BREAKDOWN	4.1.1 Research paradigm (Figure 5)	4.2.1 Ontological assumptions	4.3.1 Research setting			
		4.2.2 Epistemological assumptions	4.3.2 Interviews			
		4.2.3 Research implications of assumptions	4.3.3 Sample size and purposive sampling			
			4.3.4 Access to and recruitment of participants			
			4.3.5 Role of researcher and related ethical considerations			
			4.3.6 Interview protocol			

Table 4: Overview of Chapter 4

Source: Author's own

4.1.1 Research paradigm

The process of inquiry on which researchers embark should begin with the assumptions they have from a philosophical perspective about ontology (the nature of reality), epistemology (the theory of knowledge or how a researcher knows what is known), methodology (how the research emerges), axiology (values to which the researcher subscribes) and their writing structures (rhetorical) (Creswell, Hanson, Plano Clark, & Morales, 2007).

Figure 5 represents the research paradigm, with paradigm defined as the "confluence of theory, method, and practice" – all crucial when it comes to a storytelling research method that is properly designed (Rosile, Boje, Carlon, Downs, & Saylors, 2013, p. 558). Here, the ontological and epistemological assumptions informing the research methods are referenced. The research was based on a social constructivist worldview, which is the philosophical perspective generally associated with a qualitative researcher (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). An interpretivist epistemology was employed. Commensurate with a social constructivist worldview and an interpretivist stance were research methods that made use of the interview as instrument. This is in line with Josselson's (2013) view that studies with a "how" research question, of which this study is an example, necessitates interview-based research methods. Other research methods exercised included data collection, a thematic analysis of that data as well as its interpretation and validation.

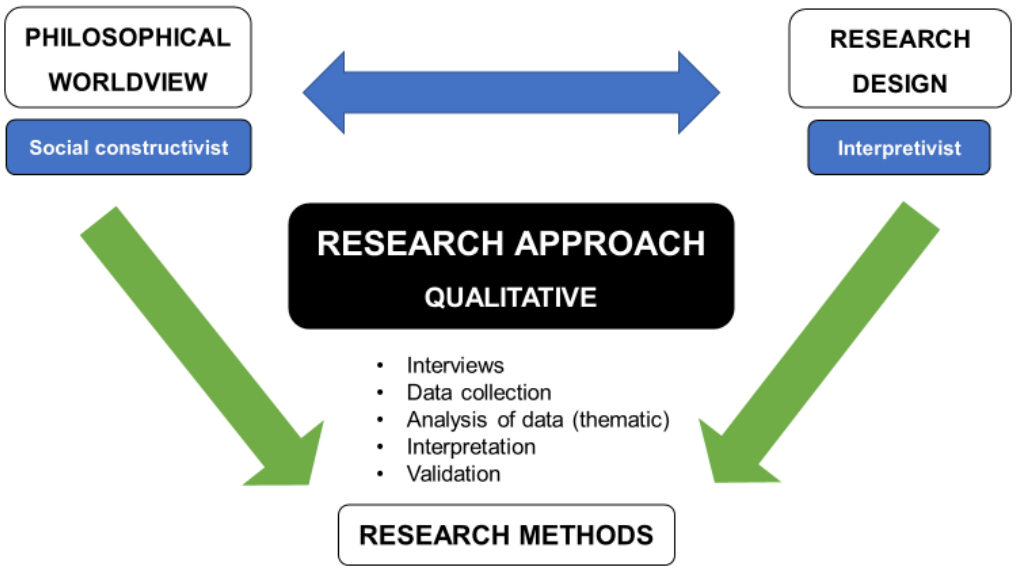

Figure 5: Research paradigm: Worldview, design and methods framework

Source: Author's own

A qualitative approach was the approach considered best suited to this research. Firstly, research based on a social constructivist worldview tends to lend itself to research that is qualitative (Josselson, 2013). Secondly, qualitative research is seen to be a dynamic and rich way in which to better understand the experience of people (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, & Mattis, 2007) because at the heart of qualitative research, write Jacob & Furgerson (2012, p. 1), "is the desire to expose the human part of a story", which aligns to the nature of the research. Thirdly, qualitative researchers generally base themselves in hermeneutics (or the

science of meaning-making) and in reading something in such a way that layers of both meaning and intention can be understood (Josselson, 2013) – also an important aspect of this work. Fourthly, qualitative research generally elevates the importance of exploration and description (versus hypothesis-testing and interpretation) (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, & Mattis, 2007), both of which were top of mind for the researcher.

4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

4.2.1 Ontological assumptions

The ontological assumption on which this study was based was that of social constructivism. This is the view that holds that people build their own social reality (Josselson 2013; Gehman, et al., 2017) and that this reality has to do with how a person frames, categorises, comprehends and makes meaning via both language and knowledge (Hart, 2018). Social constructivism is founded on the idea that people look to make sense of the world as it appears around them (Boyce, 1996; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In so doing, they create "subjective meanings of their daily experiences – meanings directed towards certain objects or things" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 8), with these meanings crafted as opposed to being something inherent to a human being. These meanings are made via human interactions (so, constructed socially) through an array of historical and cultural patterns that play themselves out in their lives. Social constructivism is a paradigm that advocates many subjective realities (Hlady-Rispal & Jouison-Laffitte, 2014) because people identify, feel and build their realities differently as they see them (Boyce, 1996).

This idea of a socially constructed world is considered by some to be extremely significant in social and organisational study, meriting an approach that encapsulates that experience meaningfully as regards theorising about research participants' experience and the meaning that they make (Gehman, et al., 2017).

4.4.2 Epistemological assumptions

Epistemologically speaking, an interpretivist reading informed this study. Interpretivism is seen to be a framework that is eclectic, comprising phenomenology, hermeneutics, interpretive anthropology, symbolic interactionism and social constructivist thinking (Rosile, Boje, Carlon, Downs, & Saylors, 2013). It is a subjectivist standpoint from which the formation of knowledge is considered to be something that shifts, owing to the fact that experience is always ongoing in the lives of people (Packard, 2017). Interpretivists produce or inductively develop a theory of pattern of meaning (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018), as was the case with this study.

It is understood that interpretivists access individual knowledge externally through what they experience as humans (on the understanding that humans learn and understand reality by how they engage it, with each life experience shaping peoples' construction of reality), and internally via their imagination, which is an important aspect of person's mental reality and the configuration of a reality that is coherent to them (Packard, 2017).

The ultimate objective of an interpretive researcher is to understand people more clearly (Josselson, 2013), and in so doing, focusing on the specific contexts in which research participants live or work in order to better understand them (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). What is important for purposes of this research is that interpretivism elevates subtleties and nuances and supports an individualist view of how events unfold (Packard, 2017, p. 542), with this individualist angle an important aspect to the work undertaken.

4.2.3 Research implications of assumptions

In this research, interpretivism is overlaid with social constructivism to locate the analysis of data as captured at the individual level. This, considering that interpretivism focuses on intentionality and interaction at the individual level (Packard, 2017).

Social constructivism is particularly suited to research related to storytelling in that social construction is considered to be at play within and via stories (Vaara, Sonenshein, & Boje, 2016). A social constructivist approach to this study is especially apt in that it aligns to the theory that underpins this research – organisational storytelling theory. As referenced in Section 2.5.1., organisational storytelling theory has to do with knowledge being imparted and entrenched by organisational members for the purposes of integration (Antunes, Tate, & Barros, 2020). Social constructivism overlays naturally with story and organisation (Boyce, 1996), making for an obvious philosophical lens on the discussion at hand. For Vaara, Sonenshein, & Boje (2016), narratives have an onto-epistemological role: individual stories are the objects of the study and interpretative patterns are important aspects across the stories. Social constructivism aligns to storytelling as it pertains to sensemaking. Storytelling is not about searching for scientific truth but about constructing reality (Denning, 2007), with the same able to be said for sensemaking. Sensemaking is not about a correct answer but instead about drawing "an emerging picture" that becomes more comprehensive through the processes of conversing, collecting data, experiencing and acting (Ancona, 2012, p. 6).

From this perspective, stories are seen to be people's constructions of organisational phenomena (Vaara, Sonenshein, & Boje, 2016). In organisation and management studies, this understanding of story has been associated with sensemaking as a general theoretical

frame, comprising two primary forms. These are composite narratives and individual narratives (Vaara, Sonenshein, & Boje, 2016). Much of the interpretative research has concentrated on the first – on collective meanings of a group of members of an organisation (Vaara, Sonenshein, & Boje, 2016). This report, however, sought to focus on the second type of study analysed – individual accounts or stories.

The aim of the research, through the conducting of interviews, was to offer a thematic analysis of the data collected and interpreted. An inductive approach to theory development was proposed, this decision related to the perspective that there were aspects of the phenomenon at hand that were considered under-theorised and under-researched (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In the case of this particular study, which relates to the phenomenon of stories within the context of organisations as drivers of organisational change, more research had been called for by Dalpiaz & Di Stefano (2017).

The researcher intention was to draw from the perspectives of the research participants via semi-structured interviews comprising open-ended questions that left participants free to express themselves, having made – and being in the process *of* making – their own meaning in relation to the phenomenon at hand (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Considering the negotiation of meaning according to a constructivist paradigm, the social generation of meaning implies for the researcher herself an inductive development of meaning-making of the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The typology associated with the Storytelling Diamond Typology and related model as developed by Rosile, Boje, Carlon, Downs, & Saylors (2013) gave guidelines for the design of the research and for checking for appropriateness of approach, as well as laying out the standards appropriate to each paradigm and communicating the benefits and limitations of each. As Figure 6 shows, the interpretivist approach adopted was consistent with a social constructivist stance; it was acceptable that the researcher be within the study sample in question; and it was appropriate that patterns of themes emerged for purposes of a thematic analysis.

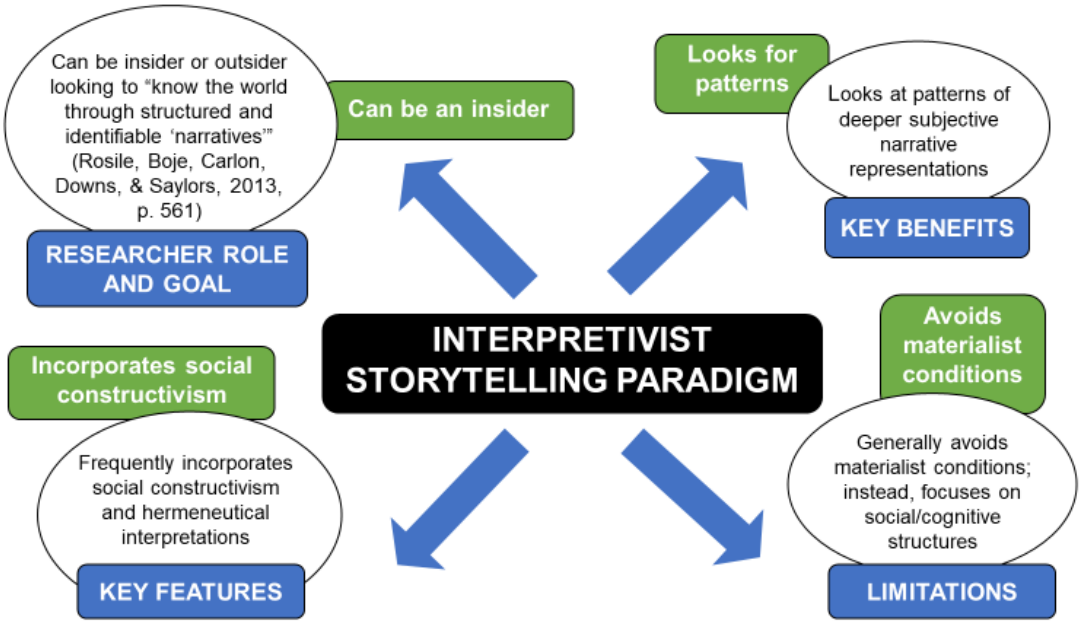

Figure 6: Characteristics: Interpretivist storytelling paradigm

Source: Author's own, includes application and extracts from the Storytelling Diamond Typology as per Rosile, Boje, Carlon, Downs, & Saylors (2013, p. 561)

4.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As regards the research methods that were employed, the following offers a breakdown related to the study that was undertaken: research setting, interviews, sample size and purposive sampling, access to and recruitment of participants, role of researcher and ethical considerations and interview protocol.

4.3.1 Research setting

As regards the research setting, interviews were conducted with participants from one of the business divisions of a company in an organisation within the financial-services sector in South Africa.

4.3.2 Interviews

The interview method was the means by which particpant insights were obtained. This was considered as an appropriate approach to garnering people's stories, with the purpose of collecting these stories so that human experience in its myriad forms could be studied (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). This research instrument was able to facilitate a "rich account" of

“experiences, knowledge, ideas, and impressions” from participants (Alvesson, 2003, p. 13) – in essence, a “totality of experiences” (Berglund, 2015, p. 479).

The objective of such an approach was to “document people’s experience, self-understanding, and working models of the world they live in, in order that an attempt might be made to make meanings of these phenomena at levels of analysis beyond simple descriptions of what we have heard” (Josselson, 2013, p. 2). In qualitative research especially, interviews serve to enable a conversation to be had, one that invites the telling of sharing of information that will help address the research question (Josselson, 2013). The interview is also seen as a place in which an understanding of the whole and the parts (insofar as interpretivism and the hermeneutic cycle are concerned) happens automatically and researcher comprehension grows when transcripts are read post-interview (Josselson, 2013). Basing research on interviews, says Josselson, is built on the assumption that something is actually knowable – some type of reality – that exists beyond our own minds (Josselson, 2013) and that even though reality is constructed, researchers are able to arrive at some kind of understanding of the experiences of others. In line with that thinking, participants are considered “knowledgeable agents” (Gehman, et al., 2017) who know what they are trying to do at work and can explain their thoughts, feelings, actions and intentions knowledgably.

More specifically, the research instrument or measurement deployed was that of semi-structured interviews, the nature of a semi-structured-styled interview considered helpful for facilitating the exploration of themes that are seen to be important and yet still able to accommodate follow-up on answers in such a way that such the interview flows conversationally (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, & Mattis, 2007). The level of analysis was at the micro (individual) level, with interviews held on a one-on-one basis accordingly.

Each interview was conducted virtually in the form of a Microsoft Teams meeting. The decision to conduct the interviews virtually rather than in person was informed by the importance of being mindful of appropriate COVID-19-related protocols and not requesting of participants that they expose themselves to any undue risk by engaging in person. Reluctant in-person participation could have rendered the participant uncomfortable – something that needs to be guarded against in the research process (Josselson, 2013). In addition to that, in-person interviews, with the necessary wearing of masks by both participant and researcher and the subsequent social distancing required, could have negatively impacted the clarity of the audio recordings and therefore the quality of the transcriptions, possibly compromising the quality of data and ultimately, the final research itself. Hence the appropriateness of virtual meetings.

This decision was in keeping with the guidance offered that researchers choose the interview type that offers the most practicality and will elicit the most useful data (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, & Mattis, 2007).

The interviews were recorded via the Microsoft Teams functionality (audio and video), with a second audio recording via the Voice Memo functionality on the researcher's device serving as technical back-up. The interview questions were printed out and referred to by the researcher during the interview process in order that she stay focused (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012) and for purposes of ensuring that all questions were covered – and in the same order – so that proper comparative conversations flowed between researcher and participants across the board. While questions were read, notes were not taken during the interview process so as to enable eye contact between researcher and participant – eye contact an important point of connection in the interview experience, according to Jacob & Furgerson (2012). This level of attentiveness was especially important considering that nuance and emphasis are often lost when verbal data is transcribed into text (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, & Mattis, 2007). Two of the 12 participants experienced connectivity issues and asked if they could turn their cameras off in order to improve bandwidth. These interviews proceeded accordingly, with only some face-to-face time being compromised.

4.3.3 Sample size and purposive sampling

While qualitative samples need to be big enough to ensure that most of the important perceptions are accommodated (Mason, 2010), the nature of qualitative research implies that frequencies are not always considered critical. One example can be considered valuable in and of itself (Mason, 2010; Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, & Mattis, 2007). And since this study was that of an individual experience of storytelling, the importance of individual insights and information was consciously elevated.

Speaking specifically to the "numbers" aspect of the size of the sample in question and aligning to the view of Mason (2010) as represented in the paragraph above, sometimes study can be made up of literally just one or two individuals, associated data gathered and those resepctive experiences reported on (Creswell, Hanson, Plano Clark, & Morales, 2007). Sometimes it can take the insights of as few as six participants to reach data saturation, say Fusch & Ness (2015). Although the same scholars reference a study drawing from 560 dissertations that found that data saturation as a goal, rarely, if ever, determines sample size (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Guest, Bunce, & Johnson (2006) alert us to Kuzel's criteria for sample size – that it be

connected to sample heterogeneity and research objectives; and here, six to eight interviews are the recommendation. Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, & Mattis (2007) advocate 10-15 for interview studies that are exploratory and aimed at identifying themes, such as this piece of reseacrh. Having taken into consideration the perspectives of these 14 scholars, special attention was paid to Kuzei's critera (sample heterogenity and research objections) and to Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, & Mattis (2007)'s recommendation of 10-15 interviews for exploratory studies that identify themes. The proposed sample size for this research then was 12, with this sample size achieved. It was intended that this number be raised to 15 to meet the higher end of Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, & Mattis (2007)'s recommendation but owing to a number of cancellations related to participant work demands and schedule clashes, 12 was the final number of interviews conducted, in line with the target number.

In this case, the sampling required was particularly purposive. In other words, the selection of participants was based on criteria predetermined and relevant to the research objective (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, & Mattis, 2007). The phenomenon being studied was one specific to a particular business division within the financial-services organisation in question. In this last 18 months, this business division (a term being used interchangeably with business unit) has undergone a significant restructure. This restructure saw business areas integrated, teams merged, reporting lines changed, and various committees reconfigured, including the executive committee of the division itself. These changes align with the Dalpiaz & Di Stefanos (2017) understanding of transformative change as including reconfigurations in an organisation that divide, remove, transfer, add ot join together business units. The newly reconfigured executive committee of the business unit began employing storytelling in its various communications (e.g., mailers, live online sessions, internal conferences) in the lead-up to – and during – the restructure process, aspects of which were still being rolled out at the time of submission.

The purposive nature of the study – to explore an experience of storytelling within a context of organisational change – informed some of the following research requirements:

1. All interviews needed to be conducted with employees who were located specifically within the business division that had undergone the restructure, aligning to Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, & Mattis' (2007) requirement that participants possess the characteristics relevant to the study. From a researcher viewpoint, the perspectives of such participants were sought to help explain the phenomenon (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012).

2. All research participants in the study needed to have been in the employ from a particular point in time in relation to the below:

    a) During the interview process, the participants were referred to a piece of company data (in the form of an internal communication written by the CEO and distributed in early 2021) for their reflection and feedback. It was therefore necessary that they had been in the employ of the business at the time at which the communication had been distributed. Garnering feedback on this data from the participants was directly for purposes of understanding more about how stories serve to be supportive of strategic change, with such selective sampling making for “information-rich cases for study in depth” (Patton, 2002, p. 230).

    b) It was required that participants be within the business from or before 1 July 2020, the date on which the new business strcuture came info effect, for purposes of having participants able to share meaningful insights in relation to the interview questions posed.

3. The researcher ensured that interviews were conducted with a range of participants from different areas across the business division in order to enable more even representation across the restructured areas. As such, the 12 participants were drawn from an array of areas of the business areas including Legal, Risk and Compliance; Strategy; Data Analytics; Research; Business Strategy and Resilience; Sales; and aministrative areas. For the most part, this level of detail has been removed from transcripts such that no association can be made between feedback and participant in any way so as to reveal the identities as to interviewees, their respective departments or the company in question.

4.3.4 Access to and recruitment of participants

It must be noted that the researcher works in the business division in question, positioned therefore with access to participants and the ability to recruit them accordingly. The motivation for a qualitative researcher is often related to “listening to stories within their own context” (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012, p. 1). That motivation was true in this case. The introduction of storytelling in various forms of communications (mailers, live Microsoft Teams sessions etc.) was observed and an interest in them taken – as well as the observation that the timing of such an approach coincided with significant strategic changes in the business.

4.3.5 Role of researcher and related ethical considerations

The fact that the researcher is professionally located within the business unit in which the research was conducted could be considered problematic from a researcher-bias perspective:

1. Having a researcher also a member of the group being studied implies that he or she may already have an idea of what the participant will share about the experience. Some scholars, note Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, & Mattis (2007) insist that outsider staus is necessary for objectivity.

2. In truth, however, researcher bias (effects of researcher on participant, effects of participants on researcher, other assumptions etc.) can play a part of any research process at any time (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2010). What is important is that these biases are noted and reflected on by the researcher. While not solving entirely for the insider-outsider aspect in relation to bias, one step that was taken in order to miminse researcher bias was to ensure that participants approached for interview purposes were not employees with whom the researcher worked on a day-to-day basis.

3. It is important that researcher interpretations be reflective of the participants' views as far as possible and not of the researcher's – especially for purposes of reaching data saturation. Fusch & Ness (2015), Josselson (2013) and Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins (2010) advise that researchers be participants in their own studies at the outset such that researchers actually answer their interview questions for themselves. Josselson (2013, p. 47) writes: "I have found that when researchers have had the opportunity to produce their own stories in great detail, they are less likely to try to 'find' those stories in what the participants tell them. They are then more prepared to encounter the fact that others' stories are not what they expect. They are ready to be surpised." That advice was followed here. And while the researcher's answers did not form part of the final data for purposes of thematic analysis, they offered a personal point of reference that could be reflected on.

4. Transcriptions were verbatim (with basis punctuation inserted for readability purposes), so that the researcher remained as close as possible to the texts in question. In essence, the researcher is considered the "reporter" of the participants' experiences and how they interpret them (Gehman, et al., 2017). Capturing the words as accurately as possible was paramount.

5. As regards the extracting of themes from the data, the researcher committed to being cautious and conscious. Insofar as possible, the themes drawn adhered to the original wording used by the participants (Gehman, et al., 2017). Gioia advocates a systematic differentiation between first-order analysis derived from “informant-centric” theme or codes and a second-order one, derived from researcher-centric dimensions, themes and concepts (Gehman, et al., 2017).

6. The researcher kept notes (not included in this report) for purposes of self-reflection and self-awareness. The more adept a researcher becomes about recognising personal bias and worldview, the more adept she becomes at hearing and interpreting the views of others (Fusch & Ness, 2015). This step was especially important considering that the researcher is also a novice researcher and the more thorough all aspects of the research journey, the more meaningful the result.

While being a member of the community being studied may have presented as a limitation as discussed, it can be argued that it is only as a result of this “insider” status that observation of these examples of storytelling were able to be made at the outset. Only by being part of the audience receiving said communications and attending Microsoft Teams live sessions, for example (which showcased various stories by Exco members) could awareness be made, and interest piqued. This phenomenon presented itself as an opportunity to investigate rather than a reason not to. Having the researcher based within the business unit enabled ease of access – both to the organisation for purposes of company consent and approved access to relevant data and for permission to approach participants.

The intention here was that having the researcher as audience member to the same organisational stories enable sensitivity in dealing with the data. In fact, some scholars have their doubts about the notion of objectivity, going so far as to insist that insiders actually offer advantages including an awareness and understanding of vocabularies and customs (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, & Mattis, 2007):

> *“One need not be either an insider or outsider, one may be both insider and outsider. Indeed, we must be mindful that people hold a multiplicity of identities … that shape subjectivity and influence interpersonal dynamics”* (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, & Mattis, 2007, p. 300).

It was hoped, at the very least, this identification of the researcher’s perspective increased awareness as regards personal viewpoints – to limitations and the possible effectiveness of

the research design for uncovering other meaning Boyce (1996). In this case, that perspective was undoubtedly layered owing to a personal experience of the phenomenon at hand. But qualitative researchers are never about the business of only observing and capturing what they see. They are themselves individuals interacting with other actors (Hlady-Rispal & Jouison-Laffitte, 2014) and what is in the mind of the researcher, no matter the context, will influence the process and content of the data collected (Josselson, 2013). It is noted here that that restructure did not affect the job description of the researcher, better positioning her with more objectivity during the interview and data-collection processes.

4.3.6 Interview protocol

A good interview protocol is key when it comes to extracting the best information from interviewees. But interview protocol is more than a list of interview questions (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Rather, it is a map of sorts for helping the researcher navigate the interview process itself, drilling down into the procedural level of interviewing, including a proposed script of what could be communicated by the researcher at the outset of the interview as well as for use at the end of the researcher's time with the participant. Refer to Appendix B for a copy of the interview protocol followed. Appendix C offers a list of the nine interview questions asked.

At a high level, interview protocol here made use of a relational interview process as outlined by Josselson (2013), with the kinds of data drawn from in-depth qualitative interviews less reflective of historical truth than enabling the encountering of participants' experience of reality as they subjectively created it (Josselson, 2013). Research such as this is based on the assumption that whatever stories are shared have psychological and emotional truth and that the facts of an intervewee's story account are essentially of little concern; in the words of Josselson's (2013, p. 4), "Whatever is experienced has some truth." Setting the tone here in such a way as to put the participant at ease such that they shed light on such truths was important, with a positive emotional and pyschological connection between interviewer and interviewee helping lay the foundation for what were mostly "good" interviews. While Participant 5 seemed rushed and slightly disinterested in the subject matter (nevertheless polite and able to share important insights), the response of Participant 10 was surprising enough to prompt new code, "Feelings about the interview itself" when she proclaimed: "What an interactive interview! This is awesome!" This space was a confidential one that aimed at enabling participants to feel that the researcher was accepting *of* and interested *in* them, this based in an understanding of the importance of the co-created relationship crafting the context

and the context setting the tone for which stories are told and how they are told (Josselson, 2013).

The proposed researcher script played an important role. This script opened – not always verbatim and as the conversation lent itself to it – with thanking the participant for agreeing to participate in the research, taking the participant through what the interview would entail, referencing once again the area of study (in this case, the exploration of organisational storytelling) and reiterating any pertinent aspects of the informed-consent document (See Appendix A). in order to build rapport and alleviate any possible concerns that the participant might have. These included the fact that the participant was free to withdraw from the interview process at any time and that his or her confidentiality would be protected. In this regard and integral to the integrity of the ethical process was the attaining of written consent from each of the participants. Obtaining such approval and following such a script assisted in ensuring that research was ethically conducted (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Should a prospective interviewee not have given written consent to participate in the research, the interview would not have proceeded. But there were no participants who did not submit consent forms or who objected in any way. All interviews proceeded according to plan.

A single interview slot per participant was planned (Josselson, 2013), since it is not advised that interviews be too long, even for studies qualitative in nature, with long interview times having the potential to render participants less willing to be interviewed. The maximum proposed length of interview for this study was an hour. This time was sufficient; all 12 interviews were completed within the allocated time. From a researcher perspective, distractions were minimised as far as possible, and a quiet place was secured for purposes of concentration and quality of recording. Breaks in connectivity were managed accordingly and parts of the conversation repeated where needed as a result.

As regards the interview questions that were posed to the participant, there were a number of considerations that informed the approach:

1. For the purposes of reaching data saturation, the same nine interview questions were asked of all participants (except in the case of Participant 12, whose answers essentially answered questions that were still to be asked; the interview skipped the unnecessary questions accordingly to avoid repetition). Without the consistency of the same prepared questions being posed, data saturation becomes a “constantly moving target”, say Fusch & Ness (2015, p. 1410).

2. Point 1 nothwithstanding, the order of the questions was consistent across all 12 interviews. Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, & Mattis (2007) emphasise the importance of standardised questions when it comes not just to the wording but their sequencing.

3. The composition of interview questions is key (Josselson, 2013). The questions needed to relate to the participant's experience; as such, they were things with which participants were familiar with or able to speak about.

4. The opening questions were lighter, with more complex questions asked a little later in the interview. This was for purpose of building trust with the participants (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012).

5. The questions asked were open-ended, with the goal of the researcher here to elicit as much about the participant's experience as possible (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). As such, the questions were not phrased in a way as to elicit "yes/no" answers, thereby closing off the conversation. Based on the advice that questions be easier, broader and expansive (the phrase "Tell me about" was included in the proposed script as a recommended way to start a question insofar as it not only invites the interviewee to tell a story but makes the assumption that a story will be told, thereby commanding a response as well as allowing the participant to take the conversation in a direction of their choosing, which could leave room for the interviewee to offer "ideas, impressions, and concepts which you have not thought of to emerge from the data" (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012, p. 4). Qualitative research has everything to do with "the materialization of unexpected data from your participants," explain Jacob & Furgerson (2012, p. 4), "and writing big, expansive questions allows the participant to take your question in several directions. When you write big questions your participant will might say things that you would have never thought to ask and often those things become one of the most important parts of your study. "

Open-ended questions relating to the participants' experiences of that storytelling – and with reference to the organisational change experienced by the organisation – were posed to each participant, "the more open-ended the questioning, the better, as the researcher listens carefully to what people say or do in their life settings" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 8). The same questions were posed to each participant, with space for spontaneous feedback welcomed. That was because the complexity around the perspectives is important – the way the participants see the situation and the meaning that they make of it (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Appendix B presents the interview protocol or interview guidelines, which consist of opening and closing scripts, interview questions, with a high-level rationale for each one asked as well as probing questions. These probing questions were designed to keep the questions and researcher on track and to elicit further information if needed. In accordance with Jacob & Furgerson (2012), they were neither leading questions nor questions that directed the narrative. A stand-alone list of interview questions is provided in Appendix C.

At interview question No. 5, the researcher referred each participant to a story that was shared by the CEO at the beginning of 2021. This story had previously been shared via email and distributed to all employees in the division. (Permission to use the organisation's data was granted in the organisation's consent letter referenced.) This story was emailed as an attachment to the interview participant during the interview. Participants were asked to reread the story – the researcher having decided against reading the story out loud to the participants, lest any expression or tone impact the way in which the story was received. Questions followed.

4.4 COLLECTION OF DATA

Collection of data followed, with the services of a transcriber, who signed an NDA for purposes of confidentiality as regards the participants and their interview responses, utilised. In the final report, no names of individuals (including initials) or that of the organisation in question were reported. Only aggregated information was reported on and data was stored securely without identifiers, with video material disposed of and only the audio version of the recordings retained. This data will be stored securely in an accessible format for a minimum period of ten years as per GIBS requirements. The transcriber transcribed verbatim.

In essence, data-gathering is reflexive, owing to the fact that it is continuous and demands self-reflection on the part of the researcher (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, & Mattis, 2007). Acknowledgement is made of the fact that the researcher of a qualitative study serves as instrument him or herself, owing to the fact that that person is the one gathering and interpreting the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2010). In the same vein, the idea of collection itself is complex: there is an assumption being made about the collector having the ability to collect what is being sought – and also that what is being collected is worth collecting (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, & Mattis, 2007). In line with the social constructivist paradigm from which this research is being conducted, it is acknowledged that the meanings associated with social objects were not objective – and that meanings shifted "in accordance with the contexts in which we and the objects of our interest exist;

meanings also shift with our motivations, with our histories, and with an array of situational conditions" (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, & Mattis, 2007, p. 295).

4.5 ANALYSIS OF DATA

As per Creswell (2018), data-analysis procedures comprised organising and preparing the data for analysis, reading and reviewing the data, using the appropriate qualitative software to code the text data, creating descriptions and themes and the representation of those, following coding procedures. The CAQDAS (Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software) programs (Saldaña, 2013) in this case is ATLAS.ti 9. For ease of reading, the word data is used throughout this paper, whether to denote a singular datum or more than one.

Handled inductively via these procedures, codes, categories and themes led to more abstract units of information. After a to-and-fro process of inductions between the database and various themes, a comprehensive set of themes was established. The data was mined for more evidence to supports each of the themes, with the conceptual framework updated to incorporate findings.

Thematic analysis, which is a way of identifying, analysing and reporting themes or patterns in the data, is considered a foundational method for qualitative research, one of its benefits being flexibility, which can offer data that is rich and detailed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While thematic analysis serves to organise and richly describe a data set, it can go further than that by interpreting aspects related to a research topic. Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-step guide to thematic analysis was followed and comprised: 1) familiarisation of the researcher with the data; 2) generating initial codes; 3) searching for themes; 4) reviewing the themes; 5) defining and naming the themes; and 6) producing the report.

Again, the role of the researcher cannot be underestimated: the researcher is the data collection instrument and cannot be separated from the research (Fusch & Ness, 2015). With thematic analysis, the researcher plays a particuarly active role in when it comes to the identification of themes or patterns, deciding which ones are of interest and reporting on them because if "themes 'reside' anywhere, they reside in our heads from our thinking about our data and creating links as we understand them" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 80).

This interpretation of data involved a summary of overall findings, a comparison of those findings with the relevant literature referenced, research limitations, mention of potential future research and a discussion of a personal view of the findings.

4.6 VALIDATION OF DATA

As terms of research validity, multiple validity procedures were used to check for accuracy regarding trustworthiness, authenticity and credibility (Henry & Foss, 2014). The researcher sought to involve the following strategies in order to build validity:

a) The acknowledgment of researcher bias. Interest/bias plays a role in the actual coding choices since the researcher brings a "personal lens" (Fusch & Ness, 2015, p. 1411) and was top of mind, given that the researcher works in the company in question

b) The identification of themes that departed from the other documented ones

c) Supervisor check-ins to ensure description accuracy

d) A quality of writing on the findings that reflects the depth of the related data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018)

Insofar as research reliability (consistency and stability) was concerned, documentation of procedures aimed at being thorough, definition of codes clear and transcripts checked (for any potential transcription mistakes) (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Important here was triangulation or the "way in which one explores different levels and perspectives of the same phenomenon," assuring validity (Fusch & Ness, 2015, p. 1411). Triangulation is one of the ways that accuracy of findings can be assessed (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). Triangulation is a complex term, however, with some scholars of the view that a researcher does not necessarily triangulate but "*crystallizes* through recognising that there are many sides from which to approach a concept …" (Fusch & Ness, 2015, p. 1412). This was the experience of the researcher in this case, with rich data collected as a result of particularly expressive participant. This lent itself to multiple meanings as made by participants, with nuances observed around a number of issues.

Data triangulation is a method of reaching data saturation, data triangulation ensuring data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015) and achieving saturation is enhanced by the use of multiple data sources, thereby reinforcing the research's validity (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). Data saturation is not easy to define, owing to the fact that study designs are not universal and that there "is no one-size-fits-all method to reach data saturation" (Fusch & Ness, 2015, p. 1409). Needless to say, there is some general agreement among researchers on when saturation is reached – when no new information or data is being shared; there are no new themes being identified that are new and no new coding is needed and the study is replicable. "When and

how one reaches those levels of saturation," however, say Fusch & Ness (2015, p. 1409) "will vary from study design to study design." Data then becomes about its quality. The analogy of thick versus rich data has been used by Fusch & Ness (2015, p. 1409) and offers a differentiation that could be helpful: thick data refers to a lot of data; rich data is "many-layered, intricate, detailed, nuanced, and more". Again, to note is the researcher's background from an experiential and cultural one – with its ideologies, values and biases – can affect the point at which data is considered saturated (Fusch & Ness, 2015, p. 1411).

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Section 1.5 offers a high-level view of the approach to analysis, as informed by the conceptual framework and research question. Information on coding approach, themes and participants is shared in Sections 5.2.1, 5.2.3 and 5.1.4, with detail following on data specifics, before a deeper exploration of that data is undertaken. Aspects of coding and theme-related content appears in this chapter and not in the methodology chapter as they pertain to the nuances of this particular interpretative reading. It is to be noted that the researcher considered a study on storytelling best served by showcasing meaningful stories as cases in point during analysis. As such, preeminence was given to direct participant quotations for the richness of data to be appreciated. The overall approach to data analysis was in accordance with the conceptual framework and research questions, arranged according to Story (Section 5.2) and Storytelling (Section 5.3). Both of these sections introduce the findings, which are then described, analysed and interpreted. In both of the segments, a number of observations are made. These serve to draw attention to some of the themes being interpreted as emerging from the data and, at the same time, reflect the researcher's interpretative process.

SECTION	5.1 INTRODUCTION	5.2 STORY	5.3 STORYTELLING	5.4 CONCLUSION
SECTION BREAKDOWN	5.1.1 Configuration of constructs	5.2.1 Introduction	5.3.1 Introduction	5.4.1 Summary
	5.1.2 Coding approach	5.2.2 Description • **Observation 1:** Story depicting change as positive • **Observation 2:** Story depicting change as negative • **Observation 3:** Negative feelings about the business restructure • **Observation 4:** Indifference about the business restructure • **Observation 5:** Positive feelings about the business restructure • **Observation 6:** Feelings about restructures and in general	5.3.2 Description • **Observation 7:** CEO as storyteller • **Observation 8:** CEO storytelling as personal • **Observation 9:** Negative responses to the storytelling • **Observation 10:** Stories and sensemaking • **Observation 11** Storytelling and strategic change • **Observation 12:** The power of story	
	5.1.3 Themes	5.2.3 Analysis and interpretation	5.3.3 Analysis and interpretation	
	5.1.4 Participants			
	5.1.5 Coding of data			

Table 6: Overview of Chapter 5

Source: Author's own

5.1.1 Configuration of constructs

As Saldaña (2013) asserts, the nature of a research question and research sub-questions – and the related answers sought – directs the coding choices made. The coding process of this research was based on the study's emergent conceptual framework (Saldaña, 2013). The key constructs (as outlined in Chapter 2) and research questions (as presented in Chapter 3) were overlaid on the conceptual framework as Figure 7 shows. This reflects the researcher's thinking insofar as approach to analysis was concerned, with the eight key constructs emerging from the literature review arranged diagrammatically for purposes of mapping the analytical route to be undertaken.

As Figure 7 highlights, four of the constructs were identified as the ones crucial to the enquiry, with two of them relating most directly to the research sub-questions. Firstly, and at the centre of the discussion (marked No. 1 on Figure 7), was stories as drivers of strategic change. This construct was located within a second one, storytelling as lived experience (No. 2) – a broader conceptual context into which both the story (content) and story (telling) aspects of the study fit. Underpinned by the concept of a lived experience of stories as drivers of strategic change, the focus of the data analysis was on Constructs 3 and 4 (stories depicting change as positive and storytelling by a CEO respectively). For ease of thematic analysis and flow of content, these are presented under the broader categories of Story and Storytelling, the two broader concepts according to which the findings are presented.

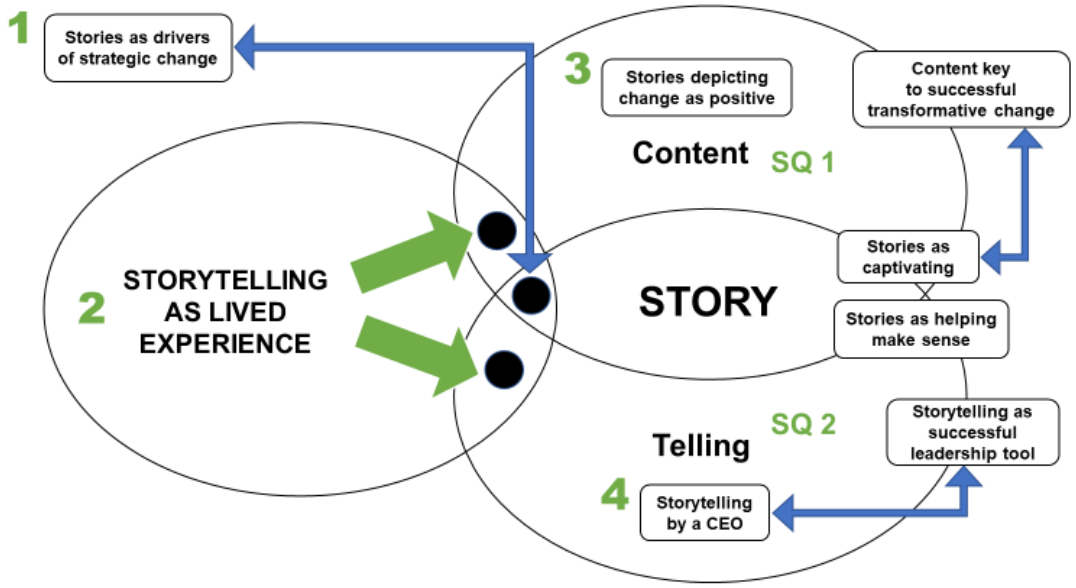

Figure 7: Configuration of key constructs in relation to conceptual framework and research questions for analytical approach purposes

Source: Author's own (number denotes construct; SQ denotes research sub-question)

The process, which entailed the coding of data that was then described, analysed and interpreted, consisted of observations made by and considered important to the researcher, with the researcher's process of thought explained as the analysis developed.

5.1.2 Coding approach

According to Saldaña (2016), a code is "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 4). Coding is a means of decision-making (Elliott, 2018), a way of organising units of meaning categorically so as to incorporate them systematically (Saldaña, 2013, p. 9) using "classification reasoning" and "tacit and intuitives senses" to group items that look and feel as if they belong together. As a heuristic (the Greek word for "to discover"), coding is a way of solving problems in an exploratory fashion "without specific formulas or algorithms to follow" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 8). In other words, explain Hayashi, Abib, & Hoppen (2019, p. 889), coding is "not an exact science with right and wrong answers". It is something that is something that is "primarily an interpretive act" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 4).

The coding decisions taken in this research aligned with the work of Dalpiaz & Di Stefano (2017, p. 671), whose study of organisational stories is a practical way of analysing for "*meanings of particular stories* as opposed to analyzing their grammar, lexicon, or relation to the broader socio-cultural context". The approach also supports the interpretive variant used by van Hulst & Ybema (2019, p.), entailing a certain sensibility, a focus on meaning and meaning-making practices". Coding was conducted with the researcher mindful of the "rich discoveries" to be made, with coding methods taking into account participant feelings and what they value, as well the processes they employ (Saldaña, 2013, p. 14).

5.1.3 Themes

This grouping of data that share similarities is the beginning of a pattern or theme (Saldaña, 2013). As such, coding and recoding "manages, filters, highlights, and focuses the salient features of the qualitative data record for generating categories, themes, and concepts, grasping meaning, and/or building theory" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 8), with a pattern or theme essentially the result of that coding and categorising process. Saldaña (2013, p. 14) is Of the view that if the data is read and reviewed studiously, "we cannot help but notice a theme or two (or a pattern, trend, or concept) here and there." Patterns or themes in the data were identified based on how prevalent the data appeared and its similarities (Saldaña, 2013) – as well as anything that stood out for the researcher. That the analysis is researcher-motivated is key; in qualitative studies, the researcher is considered the main instrument, with coding

and the patterns created in the process of exploration that is essentially an interpretive judgement call (Rogers, 2018).

5.1.4 Participants

All research participants worked in the financial-services-sector business that had recently undergone a restructure. All were in the employ of the company at the effective date of restructure and had received various communications relating to the configuration, including emailers and online engagements with Exco members and relevant stakeholders. Table 5 lists the unique participant identifiers and the dates on which interviews with them were conducted. Also included are transcript abbreviations and their definitions.

PARTICIPANT NUMBER	INTERVIEW DATE	TRANSCRIPT ABBREVIATIONS	DEFINITION OF ABBREVIATION
1	22.09.21	BD	Name of business division
2	27.09.21	CO	Company name
3	27.09.21	ORG	Name of organisation
4	06.10.21	OT	Type of organisation (generic)
5	11.10.21	CEO	Name of head of business division
6	11.10.21	EX1	Exco member 1
7	13.10.21	EX2	Exco member 2
8	25.10.21	T1	Team 1
9	25.10.21	T2	Team 2
10	03.11.21	T3	Team 3
11	03.11.21	T4	Team 4
12	03.11.21	T5	Team 5
		BU1	Business unit 1
		BU2	Business unit 2
		BU3	Business unit 3
		BU4	Business unit 4
		BA1	Business area 1
		P1	Product area 1
		P2	Product area 2
		PUB	Name of publication

Table 7: Participant numbers and transcript abbreviations

Source: Author's own

One piece of communication – a welcome emailer from the CEO of the company – was distributed to the business division in early 2021. A copy of the story was presented electronically to each participant during the interview by way of reminder and for purposes of reference to and discussion of in the interview. Since storytelling is the subject of this study, it warranted inclusion in the report (and is also found in Appendix D). Figure 8 refers.

One month in

Hi everyone,

We're more than a month into 2021 and starting to go the distance now towards the end of our financial year. Going the distance is a great analogy for our business journey. We focus forward for where we want to go, grateful for the distance we've already done.

In the December break, I got to cover some distance: I took a roadtrip, something I like to do when I can. Someone asked me the other day if I've ever found myself in danger on a roadtrip. One experience came to mind – although it was less dangerous than interesting. A year or two back, I had nowhere to stay one particular night, so ended up sleeping in my Fortuner between two trucks at the side of the highway. What can I say? It's not every morning you get to have breakfast with two truckers.

Needless to say, these roadtrips have taught me a couple of things:

- My December trip was 8000km long and took me through dozens of towns, some of which I'd never heard of. If you set the time aside and are willing to go the distance, there's almost nowhere you can't get to.

- I had the best meal of my trip in Upington – "skaapstertjies" – while overlooking the Gariep River. Water is a great metaphor for life, how it ebbs and flows. Anyway. Sometimes the simplest pleasures are the best ones.

- When I travel, I know where I'm going but I'm not too specific about where I have to end up on any given day. I've learnt that it's possible to move forward without having an exact destination in mind.

- Being fixated on a route can leave us disappointed. But there will always be unknowns ahead – from dirt roads and donkeys to roadworks and rain. We must be open to taking the alternative route. Often that's where the adventure is.

Look out for an invite to our Teams session next week and we'll chat more then.

[CEO]

Hondeeklipbaai's Aristea shipwreck. Beauty – even in the wreckage.

You can't always plan for what you meet along the way.

Beautiful Doringbaai (Doorn Bay).

Figure 8: Story by CEO: Mailer to restructured business division

Source: Company data (Identifier banner, company logo and corporate branding removed; CEO name deleted; typeface amended)

5.1.5 Coding of data

In the coding process, 27 different first-order codes were identified, with the number of new identified codes decreasing as further interviews were conducted. Figure 9 lists the first-order codes created, as well as the number of units of data assigned to them.

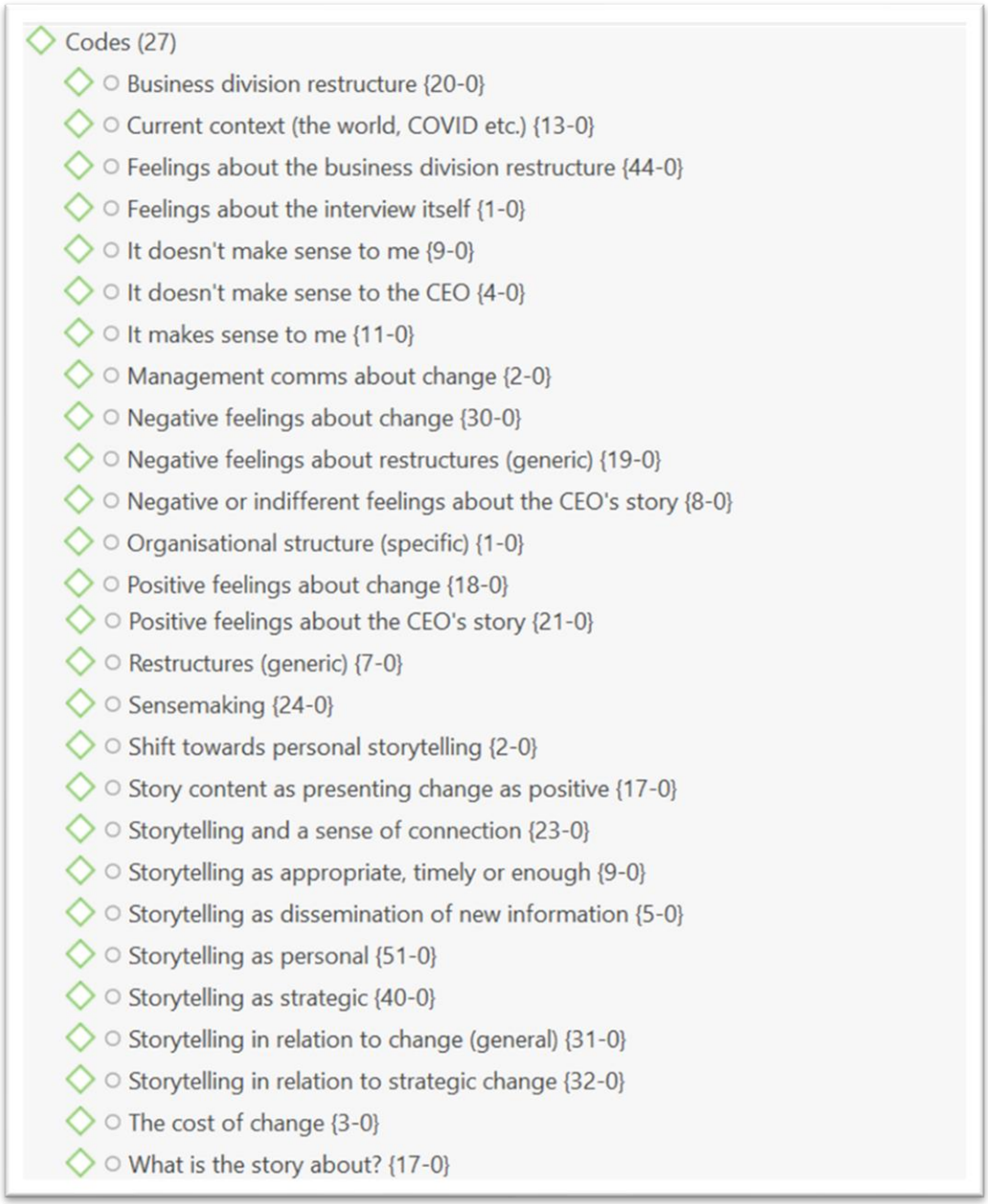

Figure 9: First-order codes

Source: Atlas.ti

CODE	GROUP 1	GROUP 2	GROUP 3	GROUP 4	GROUP 5	GROUP 6	GROUP 7	GROUP 8
Business division restructure							Strategic change	
Current context (the world, COVID etc.)		Change (general)						
Feelings about the business division restructure							Strategic change	
Feelings about the interview itself								
It doesn't make sense to me				Storytelling and sensemaking				
It doesn't make sense to the CEO	CEO as storyteller			Storytelling and sensemaking				
It makes sense to me				Storytelling and sensemaking				
Management comms about change	CEO as storyteller						Strategic change	
Negative feelings about change		Change (general)						
Negative feelings about restructures (generic)							Strategic change	
Negative or indifferent feelings about the CEO's	CEO as storyteller				Storytelling as personal			
Organisational structure (specific)							Strategic change	
Positive feelings about change		Change (general)	Stories as personal					
Positive feelings about the CEO's story	CEO as storyteller						Strategic change	What's the story about?
Restructures (generic)		Change (general)					Strategic change	
Sensemaking				Storytelling and sensemaking				
Shift towards personal storytelling	CEO as storyteller		Stories as personal		Storytelling as personal			What's the story about?
Story content as presenting change as positive	CEO as storyteller	Change (general)						What's the story about?
Storytelling and a sense of connection						Storytelling bringing connection		
Storytelling as appropriate, timely or enough			Stories as personal			Storytelling bringing connection		
Storytelling as dissemination of new information		Change (general)	Stories as personal	Storytelling and sensemaking	Storytelling as personal			What's the story about?
Storytelling as personal			Stories as personal		Storytelling as personal	Storytelling bringing connection		What's the story about?
Storytelling as strategic							Strategic change	
Storytelling in relation to change (general)		Change (general)						
Storytelling in relation to strategic change							Strategic change	
The cost of change		Change (general)					Strategic change	
What is the story about?	CEO as storyteller		Stories as personal					What's the story about?

Table 8: From codes to first-order categories

Source: Author's own, with inputs from ATLAS.ti

5.2. STORY

5.2.1 Introduction

While story content as depicting change as positive was the focus area of this part of the analytical process, the range of responses in relation to the associations that were made with change depicted in the story in general supported the need to widen the lens from concentrating solely on positive associations with change as depicted in the story for a sense of other perspectives on change that emerged from responses to the stories told. The researcher thinking process is reflected in the chapter observations that follow.

5.2.2 Description

Observation 1: Story depicting change as positive

While this study's coding units were made up of terms, phrases and sentences, they did include paragraphs, where appropriate – not dissimilar to the practice by Dalpiaz & Di Stefano (2017) of coding units of data that consist of paragraphs. Saldaña (2013) acknowledges that ffirst-order coding can indeed range from a word to a paragraph – or even an entire page. Two participants gave particularly upbeat verbal responses relating specifically to the story as depicting change as positive, both of whom offering rich answers and it seemed fitting to present the feedback from these two participants in some detail in this observation – especially considering that their words present as examples of storytelling in and of themselves.

These responses are followed by other examples of a favourable reading of the story's depiction of change.

> *It was like going on a road trip and he didn't even think that he would be sleeping, you know, in between two trucks. But I mean, that was the adventure for him; I think that was maybe the highlight – waking up … you know, some people will think 'Oh my word, I am waking up, you know, in nowhere.' But for him, it was like an experience, you know – something to talk about later – that I have woken up in between two truckers having breakfast with them. I mean, people I wouldn't have met if everything was going to be smooth-sailing. So, you know you sometimes plan your way in life, but it doesn't always work out that way. And sometimes the negativities can turn into positives … and I suppose then in time to come (it is not in the story), but in time to come, you can tell your children about it; you can laugh about it. And that is sometimes that we want to not have something planned out straight. But the off-roads can be like an eye-opener and a changing in our lives.* (P3)

Something that I obviously love doing is just getting into the car, travelling and seeing things and experiencing things that you haven't. When he said 'Gariep' on that day I thought 'Geez, I wonder what it looked like?' because when we were there and did our road trip, the Gariep was dry. And my sister couldn't believe it because a couple of years earlier we had gone, and it looked like the sea. It was all blue and absolutely stunning. And here we are almost looking at ash – you know, this whole heap of ash. And I think this is basically where you see this beauty. And you are able to revitalise and believe that things can change. (P11)

I like the idea of the adventures … (P6)

He takes out the positive to say … 'I wouldn't have met those truckers; I wouldn't have seen the scenery that I saw.' And you know, so, it is a life-changer for some … an opportunity to take the good out of a bad situation. (P3)

The travel is part of the experience. (P5)

Okay, like … with the business, we had to re-route – to working from home, you know? Everybody was stressed because now you are working from home; you're not seeing people. But you feel more connected to people sometimes, because you miss them more. So, if you miss them more, then you tend to be closer to them. I don't know if you understand what I mean … And sometimes … there is a bit of uncertainty because now people can work from anywhere, so that is also like a positive end. So, you can go – like a friend of ours went to Spain and he worked from Spain, so he was on holiday and he was working! So, how magnificent is that, you know? (P3)

While this feedback was evocative and emotively expressed, it was not representative of the entire group. Most members did make mention of the change that was depicted in the story, but their association was less positive. It was therefore necessary to examine other aspects of how story content in relation to the depiction of change was received.

Something of interest to note relates to the content of the story insofar as one of the questions asked. One of the nine interview questions that was posed was: "Tell me what the story was about." It was noted that only three of the 12 participants answered the question with the story

being about an actual road trip – two answered “road trip”, while a third used the word holiday in her answer. There were other loose references such as a throwaway comment by one about eight thousand kilometres being “quite a long detour”, while another participant, in the middle of a particularly detailed answer to the question, made a one-line reference to the CEO spending the night between two trucks.

Observation 2: Story depicting change as negative

As regards the story and it portrays change, contrasting views surfaced. Some negative associations were made with the change as interpreted by some of the participants.

> *So, I think what it illustrated was the uncertainty that we are operating in.* (P1)

> *You have a destination in mind, but you are going to have hiccups along the way … So, for him, he was using his example of not having somewhere to stay and sleeping between two trucks on the highway! (laughs) Oh my word, I could never do that versus (laughs) … But you are going to have unforeseen challenges along the way …* (P7)

> *… he used his trip as an analogy of some of the lessons that he learnt during the trip that he thought would be great for us as a business to potentially borrow, or potentially lean into, as we think around this journey that is long term, has quite a bit of uncertainty, does have some volatility in it.* (P9)

> *You have a set flag regarding a destination that you want to get to. But at some point, something happens, and you have to take an alternative route. And it is the same with business. There are times when we are forced to shift and take alternative routes and it can be as a result of different things, you know. I think around now on a hiking trip it can simply be that you missed the indicator that told you that this is the right route; or it starts raining – that is always the worst. (laughs) But in the same vein for [CEO], you know, he had to consider taking a different route – also for business and taking the business itself in a different direction …* (P12)

Noting this difference in response to how the idea of change in the story was experienced, the researcher journey was directed towards gaining a deeper understanding of perceived experiences. This required close analysis in relation to feeling around change as regards the

specific organisational change as experienced by the participants as well as restructures and change in general.

Observation 3: Negative feelings about the business restructure

Prior to the creation of the code, "Feelings about the business division restructure", the code "Business division restructure" was specifically for feedback related to facts pertaining to the business reconfiguration. In other words, how did the restructure impact the factual aspects of a participant's role or team? Owing to the range of answers that followed, many of which included emotive responses, new codes were warranted. This was in accordance with the organisational-experience aspect of the focus of study. As such, a first-order code, "Feelings about the business restructure", was created, to which 44 units of data were assigned. The researcher also needed to ensure that feelings towards restructures in general were captured methodically for a fuller picture of experiences of strategic change. Hence the code, "Negative feelings about restructures" etc.

The changes experienced in relation to the restructure of the business division evoked strong feelings. The following examples listed reflected the lack of clarity associated with the restructure, best summed up by one particular participant's response to the question, "What does that restructure mean for you?" "Um, uncertainty!"

> *… I don't think I fully understand what is going on. I doubt that I am the only one, given that I come across people saying 'Yeah, something happened but don't know what on earth happened' and it is obviously the process seems to be a continuous one that is very difficult to get a good sense of what is going on.* (EI)
>
> *It is … just trying to understand who is who in the zoo. (*P7)
>
> *So, to be honest I don't really know very much about the restructure. I should but I don't …* (P6)
>
> *But it is very, very scary … this huge sense of sort of lack of clarity and instability within [BD] …* (P10)
>
> *So, it is proving to be a bit of a challenge to figure out who has moved where, why and what is the objective of these variation(s) of little business units. It is just very difficult to keep track of. I kind of need like a six-monthly update that*

says, 'This is what happened during the last six months, these little blocks went over there and that is what they are supposed to look for.' (EI)

*I now have kind of a lack of clarity as to who my team is and what we do and how we fit into the organisation, which is a much larger kind of universe of lack of clarity than I have ever before had to deal with. So that I suppose is where my stretch is. (*P10)

So ja, regarding the change … I don't think we have been told enough in English … what the changes actually are. (P6)

Why we are doing what we are doing – especially with the proliferation … of … titles – everybody is a 'head' of something. There is like a whole bunch of new business units. Or are they business units? Or are they some of these cross things where you kind of report this way and that way but you don't have a unit? It is extremely confusing. (P4)

So, I am not entirely certain. I think it does mean that … where we have duplication … we are all under the [ORG] umbrella and streamlining … So that is my understanding. I hope I have it right. (P7)

… in the middle of the maddest time in the world, to be honest it is one of those things where you wait and see. Hopefully it makes sense. Hopefully it works out. (P7)

There were one or two participants whose anxiety was not related to uncertainty but to situation specifics owing to concerns, for example, around personnel changes from a line-manager perspective, with the role of one participant's immediate manager having expanded as a result of the restructure: "And … you can feel you don't get the full breadth and extent that you were serviced when the person was in the prior role because they have to focus on something else." (P12) Another employee was impacted by the tedious processes around the restructure, saying that "we had so many other things to consider in this change journey in restructuring – like risk, compliance, legal entities, Chinese walls and all of those things. And it is almost like at the back of my mind as we go through the journey … and then I can't believe that no one thought of this beforehand … And then we have to pause and reflect and go through Steercos again, delay the process. And it's very frustrating …" (P8)

Observation 4: Indifference about the business restructure

For a number of the participants, emotions in relation to the restructure were ones of indifference, or, more accurately put, a sense of being minimally impacted by the restructure when it came to their day-to-day business roles.

> *… my job remains the same. It doesn't matter where I am sitting.* (P7)

> *I don't think the restructure has affected me all that significantly … there are new reporting lines … But … it hasn't changed what I do on a day-to-day basis.* (P2)

> *The restructuring has never really affected me on a personal basis … it hasn't had a huge impact on my life.* (P5)

> *I don't feel like my role has changed … I do feel my responsibilities towards the broader group probably have changed because of certain divisions either having merged or changed … But my actual job role/description hasn't changed.* (P1)

> *It's very much similar. It is just that there is one person that is out of the team … But otherwise, it is basically the same.* (P3)

Observation 5: Positive feelings about the business restructure

There were positive responses to some of the outcomes of the business changes. These included the reduction of competition between various areas as a result of increased streamlining within the group and having everything be "under one hat" (P5), as well as improved client insights from a financial perspective (P2). Some of the other participants identified the associated opportunities – as well as opportunities lost.

> *… it is … a complete new learning curve because there are so many new products, new ways of doing business. And things that we really haven't done much of in the past opens a door or an opportunity for us to sort of get to know people better, get to do work differently. And then you also have all of this technology that is growing on a day-to-day basis – and that is where, if you didn't have the knowledge, it is something that you can learn from the people that have previously dealt with it in their sort of division or department. And yes, definitely something that we can grow our business with.* (P11)

> *I see it as an enormous opportunity because there is a recognition that there are pieces of the business that need to be relooked at …* (P10)

As noted in Observation 2, a fuller picture of change was warranted for a deeper understanding of experiences of restructures in general.

Observation 6: Feelings about restructures in general

Feedback elicited reflected about restructures is reflected below.

> *Restructures are never easy. I think for one, you are dealing with buy-in from the team and then obviously buy-in from other internal stakeholders. (*P9)

> *… it is naturally very frustrating for any employee because you want to know where you are going. It is a human behaviour and a human need to feel safe. It is part of Maslow's hierarchy. And I think, you take that away from people if you are not sure, as a CEO, exactly where you are going. And it's absolutely impossible in a world like today.* (P8)

> *So, I think people like to know where they fit. And I think when the structure of where they fit changes … if the clarity with which they see their place in whatever structure it is – whether it is a new one or an old one – if that thread is broken, then I think people become a little bit uncertain about not only where they fit but what their role is in where they fit.* (P10)

> *… restructuring can bring up feelings around uncertainty … I think the first thing would be to internalise it and say, 'What does it mean for me? What does it mean for my future? And can I be relevant in this new world? And how do I become relevant in this new world? Is someone thinking about me and my job and what I do? Will that be valued in the real world?'* (P9)

> *Anxiousness, uncertainty … often resentment could also come over because of people not being transparent with each other, and leaders who can't have difficult conversations. And … a sense of insecurity …* (P8)

5.2.3 Analysis and interpretation

As per *Observation 1: Story depicting change as positive*, two participants were particularly expressive in their positive reception of the story's depiction of change as positive. None of

the interview questions posed had raised the possibility of the story showcasing change in a positive light, implying that the substance and spirit of the feedback garnered was unsolicited and shared spontaneously. The association of change as described in Observation 1 was with "adventure", an "experience" and seeing life in a "whole new way" that offers a "different viewpoint". Notions of revitalisation were evoked, with "highlights" to enjoy and even "something to talk about".

As was noted in *Observation 1*, only one quarter of participants answered the question on what the story about in a factually correct way. Owing to the sense that the story was "about" something else for most participants, the data from such feedback was therefore not assigned to the code – the question, "What is the story about?". While the overall data collected across the nine questions did yield results in relation to story content, the inclusion of this particular code was for a specific purpose and prompted by the research question itself (Saldaña, 2013). However, a number of other codes were developed in response to the wide range of answers to the question. Having said that, all transcript sections showing answers to that particular question were collated for purposes of providing context on the complexity associated with individual meanings as regards their answers given. As per Saldaña (2013, p. 10), "Qualitative inquiry demands meticulous attention to language and deep reflection on the emergent patterns and meanings of human experience." As such, other codes needed to be created as they were called for in order to accommodate non-story-specific comments. This, to find ways to describe what the story was "about" for each participant.

Each of these answers were examined more closely to reveal that most of the participants had shifted directly into a less literal mindset, with a range of answers in which the following words and terms were noted: "business" (P1), "goals" (P2), "working as a team" (P2), "your job" (P7), the CEO "taking the business … in a different direction" (P12) etc. From the perspective of the researcher, two "types" of stories – one literal and the other figurative – are considered an example of the power of a story in its ability to be directly associated with another "story" entirely by using language that essentially resulted in two different pieces of subject matter being shared at the same time. As EI remarked about the story, "So, you know some of that could start triggering a thought about what are we doing at the moment in terms of business change."

The depiction of change as negative in the story was shared by most participants, as shown in *Observation 2: Story depicting change as negative*. From this reading, change presented as something undesirable, aptly expressed by the comment, "Oh my word, I could never do that" in the face of an unexpected experience. Of interest to note is that change was

considered by some of the participants as contextual and by others, something to be encountered. As contextual, change was portrayed as “the uncertainty that we are operating in” and by another participant, as a long-term journey with both “uncertainty” and “volatility”. Such a scenario required “coping”, “adapting” and the learning of “lessons”, with the “how” that “cast in stone because that can change”. As an event to be encountered, descriptions of change were as “hiccups” and “unforeseen challenges”, requiring “dealing with … as it comes”.

Whether contextual or something to be faced head-on, a negative reading of the business restructure was strongly associated with a lack of clarity. As *Observation 3: Negative feelings about the business restructure* highlights, there was a markable lack of comprehension experienced by the participants; the quotations included are just a sample of the extensive data gathered. To note, most of the feedback that was negative seemed to be negative not because of being in opposition *to* the business restructure as such, but as a result of confusion *about* it. With the sense expressed that change is continuous, one participant did not know “what on earth happened”, while another did not know “who is who in the zoo”. A lack of understanding of the restructure, a sense of fear and instability and confusion and uncertainty around the business changes surfaced – to the point where one participant expressed: “I don’t think we have been told enough in English, about what the changes actually are.”

Other less favourable responses to the business restructure related to situation-specific contexts as regards the impact of the restructure on reporting lines and frustrations around associated processes. There was seeming indifference to the restructure by participants whose individual level, day-to-day roles and responsibilities had not changed in any significant way (*Observation 4: Indifference about the business restructure).*

Observation 5: Positive feelings about the business restructure were reactions that showed an appreciation for business-area streamlining, which reduced internal competition as well as better financial insights on clients. New opportunities were identified by participants. These included new products and new ways of doing business, which were perceived to translate into new prospects for business growth as well as opportunities for learning, improving technical skills and building connections with colleagues.

One participant’s comment from *Observation 6: Feelings about restructures and change in genera* is reflective of the general sentiment related to restructures: “Restructures are never easy” (P9). Experiences around restructures in general highlighted experiences of frustration, resentment, lack of clarity, insecurity and a sense of not knowing where they belonged, with

one participant noting the human need to feel safe. In this vein, another participant (not referenced above) expressed concerns during the interview about the restructure insofar as age was concerned, hinting at a worry around the possibility of being asked to consider an offer of early retirement. Having some researcher insight here – knowing what the retirement age at the company was and aware that the participant was nearing that age – aided the analysis insofar as appreciating the reality of the participant's situation.

5.3 STORYTELLER

5.3.1 Introduction

The CEO as storyteller is an important aspect of this study. As exploration of participants' experiences of this story as being told by their CEO unfolded, so the approach to data developed in order accommodate the patterns perceived.

5.3.2 Description

Observation 7: CEO as storyteller

Having a story told specifically by the head of the business was an important aspect to address. Two interview questions focused specifically on this issue. One of these was: "The fact that your CEO is telling you a story at all: tell me about that." The following responses reflect some of the recent experiences encountered.

> *I have gained a lot of respect and admiration for some of the talks that we have had and the stories … told – and very humbling coming from somebody who is in a very top CEO position …"* (P11)

> *… it does bring that human element instead of that sort of Exco "sitting in the castle" type of scenario.* (P1)

> *Um, I mean it brings a bit of humanity to him as a CEO.* (P7)

> *He's an on-the-ground type of person and telling that story is to make you aware that the highest-paid people can also go through wobbles in their lives.* (P3)

> *… and shows you a part of himself, where often a CEO sits at the top and the employees at the bottom and they don't necessarily interact.* (P8)

> *It makes him human, and I think it sort of makes him part of the team.* (P9)

So, I think this is more down to earth than what I would have expected [CEO] to have enjoyed. (P6)

But this side of [CEO] it is helpful to see. Because he is human, just like I am. (P9)

So … you know, often you have people that are at … a CEO level … and … they are sort of aloof … But I felt like this message kind of brought you in a little bit towards what they experience. (P1)

Very humbling … because you can be in your Ferrari and have a breakdown and the man on the street will walk up to you and assist you and that must be so humbling … I always use the phrase: 'A Ferrari breaks down and so does a Toyota and it gets fixed almost the same way.'" (P11)

Observation 8: CEO storytelling as personal

While the coded data separated out ideas such as "Storytelling as personal" from "Storytelling and a sense of connection", overlaps and intersections of answers suggested that they be combined for a richer reading. There seemed to be a relationship between CEO storytelling form personal experience and an experience of connection on the part of the audience, the former appearing to enable the latter, as observed by the researcher. It is noted again that the CEO's story features within a broader context of recent examples of storytelling by the division's executive committee and as such, comments related to Exco communications are considered relevant and therefore included where appropriate.

So, this is very personal and very intimate, and I appreciate something like this coming from [CEO]; I mean this is sharing from his heart. (P6)

I have worked for another [OT] where … the CEO will go on leave for four weeks and they come back and there is a stock-standard communication, and you don't feel there being a connection. Whereas, making something a little bit more personal brought about that little bit of connection. So, if you were to bump into him in the corridor, you could say to him you know … 'I like the donkey!' or 'How were the truckers?' or whatever it was. It just gave a more informal opening, instead of a stock standard. And I think it is important. (P1)

I think he has made it personable in that he relates his own stories. (P2)

I think this is awesome! Remind me talk to him about road trips! (P7)

I think what is so powerful about the comms … is almost that compete like vulnerability and openness of someone who shares their personal journey with you – and even includes photos … (P8)

… making something a little bit more personal brought about that little bit of connection. (P1)

Um, you feel you are not alone. (P3)

… preparing for an unknown or having to make a quick transition – even as a CEO, it still hits you; and you try your level best to adapt to it. And I think what he was really trying to communicate by using this exact metaphor was that all of us are in this space where we are consciously and constantly learning how to adapt to different situations, or things that come unprepared. I don't necessarily see it as a CEO directing us and telling us, 'Oh well guys, shucks. I just don't know what next year or the year after is going to look like!' I don't get that sense at all. What I just get is someone saying, 'Listen, I started 2020 and this is what I think will pan out at some point and it didn't. And I had to think of something different. But don't think that that was necessarily easier for me as a CEO. I worked through the same iterations that you did. (P12)

I think they can bring connections. You know for me, even like reading that I was like 'Oh, there is something that him and I probably have in some extent in common.' I love a road trip; I am actually planning my own – smaller and slightly more planned one – but you know ... (P7)

And I think also because it was travelling around SA, it is not travelling around the world – I mean not that we could really – but it is talking to somewhere that we all kind of know. So, it is bringing in a bit of familiarity and a human side aspect to him, where largely he is a person 'in that office'. (P7)

… there was quite a number of problems that had taken place over various months … and you had a lot of senior Exco members telling their stories. And … you felt like you could better connect with that individual. Or if they are talking about any one experience in their life – of what they went through under

lockdown, what they have gone through, what they have experienced … you bring people closer. And I feel … that human element … is … important ... I looked forward to dialling into them and I felt quite good after them. It wasn't the sort of thing that you dialled in and had a Bloomberg screen working! … You felt like you wanted to be engaged. And I think that is quite a big difference. (P1)

That's … a positive – especially given the fact that we have been locked up at home for 18 months … you lose the human connection … so the CEO ... putting a story in a personal way is nice because it allows you to feel some kind of a human connection that you are otherwise normally missing – especially given when it was. (P4)

I have gained a lot of respect and admiration for some of the talks that we have had and the stories that were told – and very humbling coming from somebody who is in a very top CEO position or COO position to have to almost like open that book that was closed for many, many years. I think of [EX1] at some point when I was in one of the talks. And that to me was very, very humbling: you view people completely differently. You realise that they are as human as you are. They hurt the same way you do. They break the same way we do … surprisingly enough … he too goes through anxieties, stress. And you think of people – when you look at them you almost think, 'Oh, they don't have any emotions, and they don't experience the hurt and the pain, and almost to an extent, the shame.' You know, when you don't want people to really know that you have a condition? And that to me was like, you know … you can actually look at the person differently and you can respect him and almost have a conversation. (P11)

*So, for me I think it is incredibly important for leadership to be relatable … I mean there are many different ways that [CEO] could have said what he said. But I don't think any of them would have resonated as well as this one. (*P10)

Observation 9: Negative responses to the storytelling

A number of negative responses to the CEO's storytelling were shared.

*… it did feel a little bit overdone. But at the same time, it was quite a nice story to read. I enjoyed reading it instead of opening it up and thinking 'Gee, another communication!' (*P1)

I mean it is pretty obvious right? I mean we work in a market environment; there is lots of unknowns; that is just par for the course. I guess there is a slight interest in that – that is what he chooses as a theme, and why is he doing that? The fact that there is an unknown is pretty obvious, right? Okay. So, it really doesn't strike me much at all … it is pretty boring … I also wonder if it is a little bit self-centred, a little bit. So, it is a vaguely interesting story. (P5)

"I don't think everyone saw it in the light of: 'You are going through change.' Some would have just seen it as 'My CEO is actually sharing with me'. (P8)

But then you can get also a lot of people who see them as cheesy, and there are people who interpret them as just simply 'Get to the point of what it is you are trying to say.' So, use it, but be conscious of how frequently you do … (P12)

Well, it's a bit of a nothing email, it doesn't do much for me. Ja, we are on a journey and we are in the unknown, so it is all pretty obvious. I guess know you have got to say that, and this is trying to say it in a fun fashion and centre it around the story, but it is pretty lacking in content I would say, it's like 'So what?' you know? (P5)

The message doesn't necessarily land 100% with everyone. Because not everyone is like that. And it is a skill we need to develop in a world like today; it is not wrong to have that. You do need your mavericks and your big-picture thinkers. But it won't always resonate with your employee on the ground. (P8)

Observation 10: Stories and sensemaking

Five codes around sensemaking were assigned to the various units of data. These were: "It doesn't make sense to me"; "It makes sense to me"; "It doesn't make sense to the CEO"; Storytelling as dissemination of new information"; and "Sensemaking" as a generic code. As discussed in *Observation 3: Negative feelings about the business restructure*, there was a large degree of the uncertainty around the business restructure; things were experienced as not making sense.

Below shows some of the impact of the CEO acknowledging in his story that he himself is having to make sense of a new world as well as one participant who reflected on her need for a sense of logic and order.

> *… this is a CEO that is also finding their way …* (P1)

> *Well, if I feel uncertain, then it is okay because the CEO feels the same.' (*P1)

> *I have found that there is like a framework (of almost like bits of routine I need as a framework) to anchor me to reality. Otherwise, I am going to fall off into the abyss. So … I feel like there needs to be kind of a base structure … If you have nothing to hang anything on, then that too is kind of problematic.* (P10)

One example stood out that augmented the connection between storytelling and sensemaking.

> *So, it is often not what you are saying but the way that you are saying it that is so important. And how you help those data points or how you help the facts or how you help the points of the argument that you are trying to put across – how you make them fit together, so you create a logic for your listener or whoever it is that you are talking to.* (P10)

Observation 11: Storytelling and strategic change

Reflected here are some examples of how storytelling as relating to strategic change was interpreted by participants.

> *So, for example that last point (being fixated on a route) … so, I got a sense that there were all the changes but the fact that the changes were not fixed – you know, they are not fixed. So, you could end up with you are going on one route of the change … and you realise that perhaps it may not work, or you may need to adjust. So, the openness to the change of the change.* (P1)

> *it is … around being comfortable with the discomfort. Like the fact that he found himself sleeping in his Fortuner in between two trucks, right? … I mean he said 'slept'; he didn't mention he tossed and turned the whole night wondering whether he was safe or not. He said 'slept'. So, I am assuming he got to that point where he realised that there is nothing else for me to do here. So, I might*

as well sleep, right? So, I think that is one thing that is key: how do we do in the face of discomfort? We are outside of our comfort zone. We don't really have a firm handle on everything. Things are uncertain – but there is a little bit within my control; what do I do?" (P9)

Sometimes you sit on the side of the road and there are instances where … a curve ball gets thrown your way and you take the time to assess it, see what your best options are, and you take a decision, and you go forward with that. (P2)

The way we wanted to implement very often changed. And this is linked to kind of the notion that the CEO wrote around, 'Sometimes you can't find a place to sleep even. And sometimes your destination changes and you don't even know where you will stop along the way.' And that is basically what happened with us in the journey because we had to stop at certain pitstops along the way. And some of the pitstops didn't have proper bedding. And some of the pitstops didn't have good food. And some of the pitstops were on par and we were like 'Great!'" (P8)

And in terms of a restructure … we automatically want to wish it away and hope that this process gets over very quickly. But I have learnt to be comfortable in discomfort to do stuff and to proceed, even as it is uncomfortable. I mean you won't always have the answers, right? You won't always know what the next step is. But I think, again it is not to stop living but to take the next step … (P9)

… there are just unknowns along this journey or trip or whatever metaphor you want to use. How does it make me feel? It is natural; it's normal. But I think like … just the knowledge that there is an unknown makes people prepare for the fact that you can't be ready for everything and you need to have a look at a wiggle room in the way that you are thinking. (P12)

Ja, I mean I think it is a way of saying 'I know that there is change coming up, that the best way to deal with it is to adapt and be open to it, to make a plan.' … you have unexpected outcomes on a journey, and it is about, I suppose, facing it head on – not backing down. (P7)

… it is not necessarily change in itself that is a problem, but it is almost like your ability to cope with the change and to find meaning in the change that is more important. (P10)

Observation 12: The power of story

As participants reflected on the role of stories in organisational life, the following feedback was captured, with no participants dismissing the role of storytelling in any way.

I think stories help us to … buy in. Many people can connect to a story … A story helps people follow you on a journey … It helps with getting people engaged. And it is a different way of communicating because we are so used to presentations and slides and graphs. But once you tell a story, you are shifting the conversation quite a bit. And you are then asking the people to follow you on this journey that you are taking them through, which is quite different. And I think storytelling is important in this context – especially in [BD], because things can get so complicated. You know our acronyms and our buzz words and all of that? … you can add the buzzwords afterwards. But I think it just creates that foundation where everyone can plug in. (P9)

So, I think the corporate storytelling is so much broader than … internal comms and formal kind[s] of thing … there will always be people in a forum, a governance forum, who will go straight to the numbers and they don't care; if the numbers don't stack up to a certain expectation, then it doesn't matter what. But in a strategy, the numbers are only part of the story. And for me, it is always if you do not have a compelling story, you are not going to land your business case. And even if the numbers – and it is not even … Even numbers can be represented – the same set of numbers can be represented – completely differently. I have got so many different cases that I can point to, where it is the same sort of numbers but because you are showing how they fit together and why they fit together, and which piece is more important ... So, storytelling to me is not just about how a CEO relates to his teams or his Exco. It is how we convey the intention of what we seek to do as a business to our various stakeholders. (P10)

… storytelling … triggers an emotional response in people. So, storytelling for me is very powerful I think – if you want to go to the whole being, you know? (P8).

5.3.3 Analysis and interpretation

Observation 7, CEO as storyteller, reflected what was portrayed by some of the participants as a hierarchical association with a CEO archetype. Responses contained words that denoted the perceived position of CEO (or non-CEO) in literal terms – via imagery of height and depth. The CEO's "position" was identified as a "top" one; Exco roles were associated with "sitting in the castle"; the CEO "level" was associated with being "aloof". CEOs were seen to be some of the "highest"-paid people. This, versus the real experience of the CEO himself actually being an "on-the-ground type of person". This sense of "sameness", a shared "humanness" came through strongly as a theme. "Humbling", "human" and "humanity" were some of the other words communicated. In light of the analysis, the researcher wonders whether there is more to explore as regards CEO storytelling – as in stories told specifically by a CEO and stories that offer the audience something that defies expectation. Owing to the fact that expectations for a particular type of engagement are established in the mind of the employee, there could be a "CEO-specific-opportunity" to use that perceived distance as an advantage, by offering audiences something unexpected.

While Observation 7 described a top-down scenario and how storytelling by the CEO seemed to narrow that proverbial gap, *Observation 8: CEO storytelling as personal*, included some of the references to the fact that the CEO shared a personal story, evoking for the researcher a sense of the lateral. Instead of top-down, the CEO-employee relationship was depicted as more equal. He was seen to be sharing from his heart in a personal, intimate and relatable way that brought connection and a sense that participants had something in common with him. This was considered all the more meaningful within the context of COVID-19, which had seen people in lockdown and disconnected from each other.

One piece of feedback in this regard warranted special mention. It was not included among the feedback examples referenced in Observation 8 for purposes of presenting it here as an example of the power of personal, relatable storytelling – told here in a story of its own, with an impact of its own.

> *… stories need to be very personable for them to work in the context of a work environment … So, if I use the exact same story from [CEO] and instead, having him say, 'In 1600, St Francis of Assisi got on a 1000 km trip and wasn't sure as to where it was that he was going,' he probably would have lost me after 'St Francis', right? So, it is a brilliant. Maybe it has the exact same analogy, but it is just not the personal touch. So, you know, storytelling, as effective as people see it as a form of communication, is often, in my view tied to the*

> *experience of the storyteller as well and to having context of the storyteller – vis-à-vis just having a storytelling communication strategy or way of speaking.* (P12)

While the CEO's storytelling was, for the most part, received positively, there were those whose feedback was mixed or whose comments were less favourable. *Observation 9: Negative responses to the storytelling*, presented some of the more measured remarks around such storied potentially being interpreted as cheesy or long-winded if they were used too often. Stronger wording around the CEO's storytelling revealed that it was considered "boring" and "lacking in content" as well as "overdone" and "obvious", because the "unknown is pretty obvious, right?". These remarks were interesting in the light of other remarks that appeared to contradict that view. From this second perspective, not everybody would in fact have even understood it as storytelling around change and taken it at face value to mean that "My CEO is actually sharing with me". Moreover, there was a concern that the message might not "land" with everyone, owing to the fact that the participant saw the CEO as a maverick and big-picture thinker whose message might not have resonated with all employees. From one perspective then, the storytelling was staying too much; from another, not enough for it to be understood, highlighting the role of the individual in sensemaking and meaning-making.

Observation 10, Negative feelings about the business restructure highlighted for some of the participants that the CEO also experienced a lack of clarity at times, serving to help participants to feel relieved – and that they are not alone. Insofar as *Observation 11, Storytelling and strategic change* is concerned, key insights were offered by participants that related to the story and offered significance for storytelling within a transformative-change context. These are that change is a certainty; one must be comfortable with the discomfort; adapt and be open to change; curve balls will come; the pitstops on the change journey will be varied (some will be good, others not); while things are uncertain, there will always be something under one's control such that one must ask: "What do I do?"; one must be ready for everything; knowing that there is an unknown helps to prepare people for the fact that one cannot be ready for everything and you need to have "wiggle room"; changes themselves are not fixed; a route can be "the change of a change".

5.4.1 Summary

The findings presented in Chapter 5 were broadly categorised under two main sections, Story and Storytelling, for purposes of ease of analysis, with a number of observations made.

As shown in Table 8, the coding process included the creation of first-order categories. Table 9 represents the creation of second-order categories. In the research process, some of the codes were used over again and assigned to a number of different first-order categories. This type of repetition is considered “both natural and deliberate – natural because there are mostly repetitive patterns of action and consistencies in human affairs, and deliberate because one of the coder’s primary goals is to find these repetitive patterns of action and consistencies in human affairs as documented in the data” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 5). The original number of unique codes assigned was 27, while the first-order categories were affiliated to 49 codes, in some cases repeated, and included in the eight first-order-category configurations (Table 9).

In allocating first-order categories to second-order categories, change and strategic change were brought together under a wider grouping, Context (change), after researcher findings notes uncertainties and insecurities about business changes and restructures expressed alongside significant concerns over the unknown in general. With this in mind, the conceptual framework was amended to accommodate this wider, pervasive sense of change in which storytelling was poised to play a part. Clarity and Connection were two second-order categories developed from the sensemaking and connecting roles that storytelling is able to play. Stories as personal and Storytelling as personal were each represented at first-order-code level and placed side by side in Table 9 to represent what is perceived to be an important overlap between the content of a story being a personal story and the CEO storyteller as sharing personally. This speaks to the “what” and the “how” of storytelling. The resulting theoretical constructs of Table 9 help inform a revision of the conceptual framework as shown in Figure 10.

FIRST-ORDER CODES	FIRST-ORDER CATEGORIES	SECOND-ORDER CATEGORIES	THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTS
Current context (the world, COVID etc.)	Change (general)	CHANGE CONTEXT	SETTING
Negative feelings about change			
Positive feelings about change			
Restructures (generic)			
Story content as presenting change as positive			
Storytelling as dissemination of new information			
Storytelling in relation to change (general)			
The cost of change			
Business division restructure	Strategic change		
Feelings about the business division restructure			
Management comms about change			
Negative feelings about restructures (generic)			
Organisational structure (specific)			
Positive feelings about the CEO's story			
Restructures (generic)			
Storytelling as strategic			
Storytelling in relation to strategic change			
The cost of change			
It doesn't make sense to me	Storytelling and sensemaking	CLARITY	STORYTELLING
It doesn't make sense to the CEO			
It makes sense to me			
Sensemaking			
Storytelling as dissemination of new information			
Storytelling and a sense of connection	Storytelling bringing connection	CONNECTION	
Storytelling as appropriate, timely or enough			
Storytelling as personal			
Positive feelings about the CEO's story	What's the story about?	CONTENT	STORY
Shift towards personal storytelling			
Story content as presenting change as positive			
Storytelling as dissemination of new information			
Storytelling as personal			
What is the story about?			
Positive feelings about change	Stories as personal		
Shift towards personal storytelling			
Storytelling as appropriate, timely or enough			
Storytelling as dissemination of new information			
Storytelling as personal			
What is the story about?			
Negative or indifferent feelings about the CEO's story	Storytelling as personal	CEO STORYTELLER	STORYTELLER
Shift towards personal storytelling			
Storytelling as dissemination of new information			
Storytelling as personal			
It doesn't make sense to the CEO	CEO as storyteller		
Management comms about change			
Negative or indifferent feelings about the CEO's story			
Positive feelings about the CEO's story			
Shift towards personal storytelling			
Story content as presenting change as positive			
What is the story about?			
FROM REAL →			TO ABSTRACT

Table 9: From first-order codes to first- and second-order categories and theoretical constructs

Source: Author's own

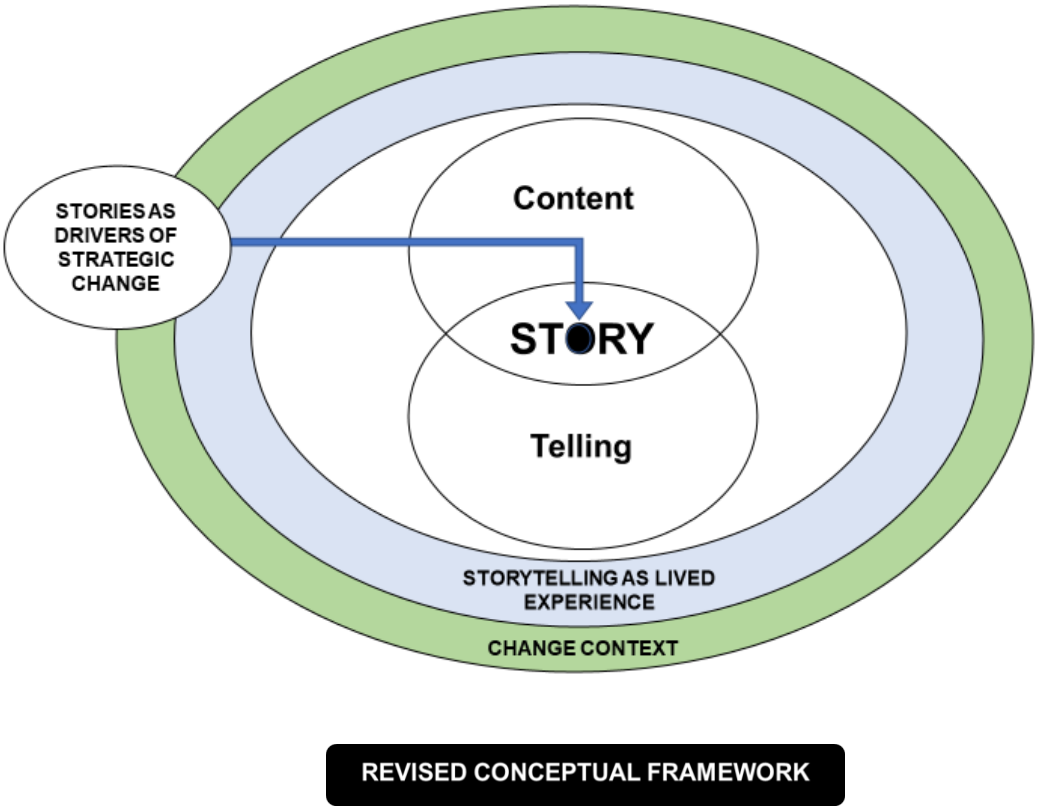

Figure 10: Revised conceptual framework

Source: Author's own

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter highlights some of the key findings of the study conducted in the light of literature reviewed and in accordance with the revised conceptual framework insofar as stories as drivers of organisational change are concerned (Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2017).

6.2 STORY

It is asserted that change must be depicted in a particular way in order to influence how audiences see interpret organisational transformation (Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2017). The directive of Dalpiaz & Di Stefano (2017) is that stories must captivate attention – both the hearts and minds of audiences – or such change will not succeed. As referenced in Chapter 2, the reason for this is that transformational change requires ambassadors who are dedicated. Research findings in Chapter 5 show that the audience experienced the story as captivating, regardless of how change was presented, by their levels of engagment over the story and subject matter, their willingness to share openly and way in which they reflected on the questions posed.

The research of Dalpiaz & Di Stefano (2017, p. 665) on the role of storytelling in organisational change, states that to effectively influence audience perception of that change, stories must not just “captivate attention” but do so in a particular way – by “balancing the presentation of novel and familiar events” (Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2017, p. 665). Twenty years on from Weick’s 1995 sensemaking definition and Dalpiaz & Di Stefanos’ (2017) known-unknown prerequisite is not too dissimilar to Weick’s (1995) “past-experience versus expectation” and “retrospective versus prospective” connect. The one speaks to the known, a familiarity with obvious association to the past by virtue of the fact that it is already known and the other to the novel, the unknown and what lies ahead. By the very nature of storytelling, there is a natural leaning towards surprise and unexpectedness, write Bietti, Tilston, & Bangerter (2019, p. 720) and explain that part of the intuitive concept of what makes a story worth telling is its contrast with the audience’s expectations. In this sense, the research findings confirmed: the audience’s experience of a CEO sharing personal information that was unsolicited and unexpected previously unknown meets this condition.

Where there is a departure, however, is that while audience attention was indeed captured, change did not present for all audience members as positive, which is also considered essential by Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2017 for purposes of successful transformative change. For the researcher, however, this also talks to the subjective realities at play from an interpretivist perspective (Hlady-Rispal & Jouison-Laffitte, 2014) in that people, an individuals, connect, experience and configure realities in different ways and as they perceive them (Boyce, 1996).

The CEO, did, however, meet the criteria for constructing and then reconstructing the meaning of change, as per the strategy-maker who was the subject of the (Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2017) research. Despite change not being perceived by all participants as positive, the depiction of change was in fact percevied – along with CEO directives on how that change might be faced. Whether positive or negative, change was presented in the story as inevitable – and in both the story and in real life, as inferred from the range of particpant responses to this depiction that reflected this double intepretations. One or two participants understood the story to mean that change was essentially predictable in its inevitabilty, and it was percevied by the audience that the CEO exercised his right to respond as best he could in the situation in which he found himself. This is aligned to the view of Dalpiaz & Di Stefano (2017) – that strategy-makers construct and then reconstruct the meaning of change.

It was acknowledged, however, that no audience feedback was garnered during the reseacrh of (Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2017) – whether internal or external. In this way, assessing a story's ability to captivate or the degree to which it depicts change as positive becomes a difficult task as the question must be asked: captivating for who? Hence the importance of describing an exeprience of storytelling.

While very much in accordance with with the view that story content is important as regards its efficacy in a transformative-change context (Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2017) – the CEO story content reflected on and its content able to make meaning for audience members in a visceral way – this study is more supportive of the idea that storytelling that was personal was effective. Since the story content was important, it meant different things for different participants, affirming for the researcher the sense the personal aspect to storytelling was held in high regard by the audience.

6.3 STORYTELLING

Based on the research findings, which reflected an awareness on the part of the participants of the pervasive nature of change, both general (contextual, COIVD-19, general pace of change etc.) and specifc (in relation to the immediate and business-specifc associations of with change in the form of a restructure as inducing insecurity and uncertainty), the conceptual framework was updated in order that the idea of change – both contextual and specific – be visually represented so as to more accurately depict the context in which participants and people in general operate. This, in light of the literature that acknowledges that the world is situated within what is considered to be a sensemaking crisis (Denning, 2007; Ramalingam, Nabarro, Oqubay, Carnall, & Wild, 2020; Waddock, 2019).

The reality of such change and the related confusion, lack of clarity and uncertainty that the particpants associated with both the nature of the restructure and the nature of the unknown in general elevated the role of storytelling as a vehicle for sensemaking. In short, stories need to help make sense (van Hulst & Ybema, 2019). Stories are considered important for purposes of innovation, building identity and connection with others, they also have a role to play when it comes to bringing about change (van Hulst & Ybema, 2019). Here, the sensemaking function of storytelling, as is referenced in the literature review, with its ability to help audiences make meaning and to make sense of the unknown (Waddock, 2019), is all-important.

The example of storytelling showcased in the study highlights the significance of a sensemaking language or “map” as an analogy in order to bring sense to and make sense of by offering connections as yet unseen (Waddock, 2019). The CEO’s journey, fraught with both unknown and adventure, could be considered such a map, with participants usng the analogy to insert into ther own journeys into the unknown. For Weick (1995), sense-makers functoin as cartographers with their maps of meaning. Scholars in the field offer a reminder that while literal maps represent real-life accuracy, sensemaking is less about precision but about plausibility. Sensemaking:

> *“preserves plausibility and coherence, something that is reasonable and memorable, something that embodies past experience and expectations, something which resonates with other people, something that can be constructed retrospectively but also can be used prospectively, something that captures both feeling and thought, something that allows for embellishment to fit current oddities, something that is fun to contrast. In short, what is necessary in sensemaking is a good story” (Czarniawska, 1997, p. 113).*

The story shared was perceived by the participants to capture thought and feeling, contain embellishment in the story details and a sense of fun in the adventurous elements. It was reasonable and memorable for the audience – realistic but and worth remembering. It is when

changes portrayed are unexpected that the adaptive function of sensemaking via storytelling is possibly most obvious (Bietti, Tilston, & Bangerter, 2019, p. 711). In essence, “sensemaking requires a good story” – one able to “contain unrelated elements, holding them long enough so as to invigorate and enable action and reasonably enough to let employees make meaning around what is happening and engagingly enough that people will offer their own inputs in the interest of sensemaking” (Salicru, 2018, p. 133). As a story shared after the fact, it also met the critera for being able to be used prospectively, highlightling the proverbial requirements for the road ahead and, in so doing, meet Dalpiaz & Di Stefano’s (2017) criteria for stories as influencing processes like strategic change by creating a desired future. This is in line with Brown’s (2015) understanding of leader – that they create an imagined future.

The CEO’s storytelling was personable and relatable, aligning to the inerests of scholars who are interested in the personal stories emanating from organisations. For Dawson & Sykes (2019), they offer a “a useful lens on the nature of organizations”.

6.4 STORYTELLER

In their work, Grafström & Falkman (2017) assert that a CEO can bring legitimacy to the overall organisational stories as told by a business. For the most part, this is strongly supported by the research findings. The fact that it was a CEO sharing his personal story was especially well-received in that the information he communicated to the audience – both the fact that it was *him* sharing and the details of the story itself. If connection brings legitimacy by building trust, then this seemed to have been experienced by the participants. As is the case with the research of (Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2017), studies conducted did not assess audience responses to the CEO storytelling as studied. In this regard, the focus was a content analysis of material that was communicated to essentially an eternal audience via Twitter, with all data captured during a time where no significant company crises were being experienced.

If CEO storytelling can bring legitimacy, then a negative reception could be perceived to be particularly damning. In the case of the findings as per Chapter 5, negative remarks were made – and in obvious contradiction to the positive remarks. For the researcher, these responses are less about CEO legitimacy than they are about an interpretivist understanding as regards the participants. From an interpretivist perspective, it is the listeners themselves who make up the story. “Since it's their own story,” writes Denning (2007, p. 35), “they tend to embrace it. What the leader says is … a catalyst to a creative process going on inside the listeners.”

The findings showed that what did prove be helpful for the participants was that the CEO himself expressed a lack of clarity at times on his own part, bringing relief to participants and a sense of shared vulnerability. This aligns to Denning's (2007) regard for the importance of narrative intelligence or the role of truthfulness in storytelling.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Current research shows that stories are able to drive organisational change and that the stories that leaders share tell have the ability to play a role in initiating and supporting strategic change (Grafström & Falkman, 2017).

7.2 RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION

By presenting such a portrayal of an experience of storytelling, more might be learnt about how storytelling supports strategic change. The roles of story, setting, storyteller and storytelling were explored as different constructs in the work, significant in the way in which they intersect. Storytelling itself was situated within a context of perpetual change, with a clearer understanding, as reflected in the conceptual framework presented, offered. This exploratory piece sheds light on individuals' experiences of storytelling as well as on the impact that storytelling might have within a transformational-change context, with implications for leaders guides organisations through change.

7.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT

Based on direct reported feedback on an example of how storytelling is experienced by an audience as well as an enhanced understanding of the location of both story and stoyteller within a broader context of change – along with the reality of transformational change – it is recommended that more cognisence be given to the emotional experiences of audiences in general.

In the view of Fleming & Miller (2019, p. 311), "change acceptance can be low because leaders tend to underestimate the importance of people's emotional experiences". This is this owing to the fact the leaders generally operate from their own implicit internal models, which put focus on the business from an organisational perspective and related rational and logical aspects of organisation (Fleming & Miller, 2019); as such, the attention that leaders pay to "the emotions unfolding around them on an individual level" is lacking (Fleming & Miller, 2019, p. 311).

It is also strongly recommended that leaders reflect deeply on the fact that organisations are complicated systems in which change, contradictions, anomalies, tensions, paradox and disarray are "the standard characterizations of organizing" (Frandsen, Kuhn, & Wolff Lundholt, 2017, p. 2). Change management itself is a contradiction because change cannot be managed

or controlled (Hayes, 2020). This calls for a “new-normal organizational change leader, when change is the norm” (Fleming & Miller, 2019), with such a leader requiring flexibility and resilience, the ability to build trust with stakeholders and creating new skills and tools to respond to required new systems thinking. For Ramalingam, Nabarro, Oqubay, Carnall, & Wild (2020), adaptive leadership requires anticipation (of future needs, choices, trends); articulation of such needs (for purposes of creating a common understanding and support for action); adaptation (to enable ongoing learnings and readjustments) and accountability (openness to feedback and transparency in decision-making processes).

One of critical skills highlighted among CEOs is the ability to communicate and reach target audiences (Grafström & Falkman, 2017) and storytelling offers leaders an opportunity to do so effectively. While only part of the change process (Fleming & Miller, 2019, p. 314), storytelling is considered by some as a feature of the “adaptive functional toolkit” (Bietti, Tilston, & Bangerter, 2019, p. 724) and by others as “the number one skill” of good leaders (Brown, 2015, p. 83).

7.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The academic literature around the exact configuration of this research could be considered to be lacking – the combination of an exploration specifically of an experience of storytelling on the part of an audience in response to a written story as shared electronically by a CEO operating specifically within a transformative change context etc. Hence the engagement with a range of scholars – Antunes, Tate, & Barros (2020), (Dalpiaz & Di Stefano (2017), van Hulst & Ybema (2019) and Grafström & Falkman (2017), whose work combined could guide the approach to this study.

As such, the limitations of this study must include a number of considerations. Firstly, is the fact that one piece of written story might not be considered meaningful enough as representative of a management’s stortelling strategy as such or of an audience’s appreciation of storytelling in general. Secondly, the fact that it is written and not spoken isolates it in terms of it being relevant as a broader example of storytelling. Thirdly, for a clearer understanding of an organisation-wide experience, more reseacrh might be conducted.

REFERENCES

(n.d.). Retrieved from Management and Leadership quotes: https://management-quotes.net/authors/Fyodor_Dostoevsky/quote/5256

Alford, J., & Head, B. W. (2017). Wicked and less wicked problems: A typology and a contingency framework. *Policy and Society, 36*(3), 397-412. doi:10.1080/14494035.2017.1361634

Alvesson, M. (2003). Beyond neopositivists, romantics and localists: A reflexive approach to interviews in organisational research. *Academy of Management Review, 28*(1), 13-33.

Ancona, D. (2012). Sensemaking: framing and acting in the unknown. In S. Snook, N. Nohria, & R. Khurana, *The handbook for teaching leadership: knowing, doing and being* (pp. 3-19). Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.

Antunes, P., Tate, M., & Barros, A. (2020). Elicting process knowledge through process stories. *Information Systems Frontiers, 22*, 1179-1201. doi:10.1007/s10796-019-09922-0

Balogun, J., Jacobs, C., Jarzabkowski, P., Mantere, S., & Vaara, E. (2014, March). Placing strategy discourse in context: Sociomateriality, sensemaking and power. *Journal of Management Studies*, 175-201. doi:10.1111/joms.12059

Berglund, H. (2015, November). Between cognition and discourse: Phenomenology and the study of entrepreneurship. *21*(3), 472-488.

Bietti, L. M., Tilston, O., & Bangerter, A. (2019). Storytelling as adaptive collective sensemaking. *Topics in Cogitive Science*, 710-732. doi:10.1111/tops.12358

Boje, D. M. (2012, September). The quantum physics of storytelling. *Journal of Change Management*, 1-23. doi:10.1080/14697017.2011.609330

Boje, D. M., Haley, U. C., & Saylors, R. (2016). Antenarratives of organizational change: The microstoria of Burger King's storytelling in space, time and strategic context. *Human Relations, 69*(2), 391-418. doi:10.1177/0018726715585812

Boje, D. M., Hansen, H., Barry, D., & Hatch, M. J. (2007, June). Truth or consequences: An improvised collective story construction. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 1-30. doi:10.1177/1056492607302652

Boje, D. M., Oswick, C., & Ford, J. D. (2004). Language and organisation: The doing of discourse. *Academy of Management Review, 29*(4), 571-577.

Boyce, M. E. (1996). Organizational story and storytelling: A critical review. *Journal of Organizational Change Management, 9*(5), 5-26.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*, 77-1-1. doi:10.1191/147088706qp063oa

Brown, S. (2015). The power of story. *Computer*, 82-83.

Cleary, J. (2021). The role of storytelling in a nonhostile takeover. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An international journal, 16*(1), 145-169. doi:10.1108/QROM-10-2019-1832

Collins, C. S., & Stockton, C. M. (2018). The central role of theory in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 17*, 1-10. doi:10.1177/1609406918797475

Collins, D. (2012, January). In search of popular management: Sensemaking, sensegiving and storytelling in the excellence project. *Culture and Organisation*, 1-20. doi:10.1080/14759551.2011.634198

Cresswell, J. W., & Cresswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches.* London: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Creswell, J. W., Hanson, W. E., Plano Clark, V. L., & Morales, A. (2007, March). Qualitative research designs: Selection and implementation. *The Counseling Psychologist, 35*(2), 236-264. doi:10.1177/0011000006287390

Czarniawksa, B. (2007). Has organization theory a tomorrow? *Organization Studies, 28*(1), 103. doi:10.1177/0170840607073565

Czarniawska, B. (1997). Sensemaking in organizations: by Karl E. Weick (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995), 231 pp. *Scandinavian Journal of Management, 13*(1), 113-116. doi:10.1016/S0956-5221(97)86666-3

Czarniawska, B. (2008). Organizing: how to study it and how to write about it. *Qualitative research in organizations and management: An international journal, 3*(1), 4-20. doi:10.1108/17465640810870364

Czarniawska, B. (2011). Narrating organization studies. *Narrative Inquiry, 21*(2), 337-344. doi:10.1075/ni.21.2.12cza

Dalpiaz, E., & Di Stefano, G. (2017, December 14). A univesre of stories: Mobilizing narrative prctices during transformational change. *Strategic Management Journal*, 664-696. doi:10.1002/smj.2730

Dawson, P., & Sykes, C. (2019). Concepts of time and temporality in the storytelling and sensemaking literatures: A review and critique. *International Journal of Management Reviews, 21*, 97-114. doi:10.1111/ijmr.12178

Denning, S. (2007). *The Secret language of leadership.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Elliott, V. (2018). Thinking about the coding process in qualitative data analysis. *The Qualitative Report, 23*(11), 2850-2861.

Fleming, K., & Miller, C. (2019). Leadership capacity in an era of change: The new-normal leader. *Journal of Organizational Change, 32*(3), 310-319.

Frandsen, S., Kuhn, T., & Wolff Lundholt, M. (Eds.). (2017). *Counter-narratives and organisation.* New York: Routledge.

Fusch, P. I., & Ness, L. R. (2015). Are we there yet? Data saturation in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report, 20*(9), 1408-1416.

Gehman, J., Glaser, V. L., Eisenhardt, K. M., Gioia, D., Langley, A., & Corley, K. G. (2017). Finding theory-method fit: A comparison of three qualitative approaches to theory building. *Journal of Management Inquiry, 37*(3), 284-300. doi:10.1177/1056492617706029

Grafström, M., & Falkman, L. L. (2017). Everyday narratives: CEO rhetoric on Twitter. *Journal of Organizational Change Management, 30*(3), 312-322. doi:10.1108/JOCM-102016-0197

Grønstad, A. (2021). There is more to organisational change than strain, hazard, and harm. *LSE Business Review*, 1-2. Retrieved from http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/id/eprint/111992

Hart, C. (2018). *Doing a literature review.* Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.

Hayashi, P., Abib, G., & Hoppen, N. (2019). Validity in qualitative research: A processual approach. *The Qualitative Report, 24* (1), 98-112.

Hayes, C. (2020). *Transition leadership: Navigating the complexities of organisational change.* Cham: Springer. doi:10.1007/978-3-030-42787-0

Henry, C., & Foss, L. (2014). Case senstive? A review of the literature on the use of case method in entrepreneurship research. *International Journal of Entrpreneurial Behavior & Research, 21*(3), 389-409.

Hlady-Rispal, M., & Jouison-Laffitte, E. (2014). Qualitative research methods and epistomological frameworks: A Review of publication trends in entrepreneurship. *52*(4), 594-614.

Jacob, S. A., & Furgerson, S. P. (2012). Writing interview protocols and conducting interviews: Tips for students new to the field of qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report, 17* (T&L Art. 6), 1-10. Retrieved from http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR17/jacob.pdf

Josselson, R. (2013). *Interviewing for qualitative inquiry: A relational approach.* New York: The Guildford Press.

Maitlis, S., & Christianson, M. (2014). Sensemaking in organizations: Taking stock and moving forward. *The Academy of Management Annals, 8* (1), 57-125. doi:10.5465/19416520.2014.873177

Mason, M. (2010, September). Sample size and saturation on PhD studies using qualitative interviews. *Forum Qualitative Social Research, 11*(3).

Onwuegbuzie, A. J., Leech, N. L., & Collins, K. M. (2010). Innovative data collection strategies in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report, 15*(3), 696-726. Retrieved from http;//www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR15-3/onwuegbuzie.pdf

Packard, M. D. (2017). Where did interpretivism go in the theory of entrepreneurship? *Journal of Business Venturing, 32*, 536-549. doi:10.1016/j.jbusvent.2017.05.004

Patton, M. (2002). Purposive sampling. In *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods* (pp. 230-246). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Ramalingam, B., Nabarro, D., Oqubay, A., Carnall, R., & Wild, L. (2020, September 11). *5 Principles to guide adaptive leadership.* Retrieved from Harvard Business Review: https://hbr.org/2020/09/5-principles-to-guide-adaptive-leadership

Rogers, R. H. (2018). Coding and writing analytic memos on qualitative data: A review of Johnny Saldaña's The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers. *The Qualitative Report, 23*(4), 889-892. doi:10.46743/2160-3715/2018.3459

Rosile, G. A., Boje, D. M., Carlon, D. M., Downs, A., & Saylors, R. (2013). Storytelling diamond: An antenarrative integration of the six facets of storytelling in organizatoin

research design. *Organizational Research Methods, 16*(4), 557-580. doi:10.1177/1094428113482490

Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers.* London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Salicru, S. (2018). Storytelling as a leadership practice for sensemaking to drive change in times of turbulance and high velocity. *Journal of Leadership. Accountability and Ethics, 15*(2), 130-140.

Suzuki, L. A., Ahluwalia, M. K., Arora, A. K., & Mattis, J. S. (2007, March). The pond you fish in determines the fish you catch: Exploring strategies for qualitative data collection. *The Counseling Psychologist, 35*(2), 295-327.

Svane, M. (2019). Antenarratives and heteroglossia in organizational storytelling. *Communication & Language at Work, 6*(1), 63-77. doi:10.7146/claw.v6i1.113912

Vaara, E., Sonenshein, S., & Boje, D. (2016). Narratives as Sources of Stability and Change in Organizations: Approaches and directions for future research. *The Academy of Management Annals, 10*(1), 495-560. doi:10.1080/19416520.2016.1120963

van Hulst, M., & Ybema, S. (2019, January). From what to where: A setting-senstive approach to organizational storytelling. *Organization Studies*, 365-391. doi:10.1177/0170840618815523

Waddock, S. (2019). Shaping of the shift: Shamanic leadership, memes, and transformation. *Journal of Business Ethics*(155), 931-939. doi:10.1007/s10551-018-3900-8

Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in organizations.* Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Weick, K. E. (2020). Sensemaking, organizing, and surpassing: A handoff. *Journal of Management Studies*(57), 1420-1431. doi:10.1111/joms.12617

Williams, M., & Moser, T. M. (2019). The art of coding and thematic exploration in qualitative research. *International Management Review, 15*(1), 45-55.

Woodside, A. G. (2008). When consumers and brands talk: Storytelling theory and research in psychology and marketing. *Psychology and Marketing*, 97-145. doi:10.1002/mar.20203

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: TEMPLATE FOR INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

INFORMED CONSENT FOR INTERVIEW WITH GISELLE WILLCOX

Thank you for being willing to participate in my Gordon Institute of Business Science research. The study I am doing is on the topic of organisational storytelling and I believe that your insights will help me to understand more about storytelling within the context of an organisation.

I really appreciate any views you might be able to share. And to note: the name of your organisation will not be referenced in my research report and neither your name nor any information you share will be referenced in such a way that you can be identified. In this regard, anything you tell me is considered confidential. For the sake of accuracy of analysis, however, I would like to record our interview for purposes of transcription. Please be assured that any comments you make will not be recorded against your name; a numbering system will be used.

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you have the freedom to withdraw from the process at any time and without any reason, with no kind of penalty or prejudice. I will also do my best to ensure that your participation does not prejudice you or your organisation in any way. I am conscious of the pressures on your time, so will try to keep our interview time to 30-60 minutes.

Please could you sign below. In so doing, you are indicating that you have given permission for:

- The interview to be recorded
- For the possibility that that recording to be transcribed by a third-party transcriber (who will be subject to a standard non-disclosure agreement)
- Verbatim quotations from the interview to be used in the report, provided that they are not identified with your name or that of your organisation
- The data to be used as part of a research report that will be publicly available, with all data reported to be stored without identifiers

Signature of participant: _____**Date:** _____
Signature of researcher: _____**Date:** _____

If you have any concerns, both my and my supervisor's details are below. Thank you so much. I'm looking forward to our conversation.

Giselle

Researcher name: Giselle Willcox
Email: giselle@ohmyword.co.za
Phone: 082 463 3453

Supervisor name: Tracey Toefy
Email: toefyt@gibs.co.za
Phone: 082 202 0972

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

INTERVIEW GUIDELINES
FROM RESEARCH TOPIC + QUESTION > PROTOCOL + INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Opening script: "Thank you for agreeing to this time with me. I am studying storytelling within organisations and I am really interested in what you have to say on the subject. I'm going to run through a few questions with you; they are really just to kick us off and get us thinking. Our format will be conversational, so please feel free to respond as you feel most natural or stop me at any time if you would like to. Remember also that if for any reason you don't want to answer a question or continue with the interview, you don't have to. Just let me know and we will stop. And just a reminder that we are being recorded but that once that data has been transcribed, all names will be removed. Do you have any questions before we get going?"

- Make sure that informed consent has been granted before the interview or that it is emailed through at the outset before the interview gets underway

Probing questions should they be needed during the interview (These questions must not be leading questions.):
1. I wonder if you could tell me more about that.
2. I wonder if you could give me an example.
3. I wonder if you could tell me more about _____. (insert something already referred to by participant)
4. Could you clarify that for me? (for use in situations in which the participant uses an acronym etc.)

Closing script: This would include giving the participant an opportunity to reflect on the interview process and add anything that he or she wishes to add that the interview questions may not have asked (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, & Mattis, 2007). "If there is anything you feel you would like to add that you feel you did not get a chance to during the interview, please feel free to share that. Thank you for your time here with me. It has meant so much to be able to hear your insights. You have given me so much meaningful material to work with, so I am really grateful. Thank you. And lovely to "meet" you via Teams! We live online lives now, right? Thanks again."

Research topic + research question/s	**Interview questions**		
	Motivations for interview questions	**What the question is about**	**Interview questions**
RESEARCH QUESTION **How storytelling supports strategic change: An organisational experience**	• Locating the participant in the business from a structure/business unit perspective. • Opening with an "easy" question in order to build connection (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). • Laying the ground that the topic under discussion has to do with the business and how it is configured. This would be for purposes of contextualising. • Even though this is an information-based question, the word "share" is being used to set the tone for openness – and create space in case the interviewee is willing to share more than peripheral business facts.	• Where, in the overall structure of the business unit, the employee works.	**1. Share with me what part of the business you are in.**
RESEARCH SUB-QUESTION **How, within an organisation that is undergoing change, is storytelling as an occurrence or event**	• For Josselson, (2013), the scholar's goal is to start with the phenomenology of experience and then explore structures and dynamics that might explain it. This question – and those that follow – start to draw on the participant's personal perspectives. • Setting the scene for the context of organisational change. The consent letter referred only to organisational storytelling so as not to make assumptions about storytelling and organisational change and in order to elicit more spontaneous responses in the interview. Here, the question locates the research more directly in the context. • Answers here could be factual as regards restructure details or more reflective; the researcher would be guided accordingly. • Use of the word "what" implies that something is indeed "understood", which is more likely to illicit a response (vs. Does the structure mean something for you?) (Josselson, 2013)	• Organisational change by way of the restructure. • The participant's particular experience of that change.	**2. Our business area has just undergone a restructure. What does that restructure mean for you?**

experienced? (van Hulst & Ybema, 2019  **RESEARCH SUB-QUESTION** **1. How, in a storytelling experience and from the perspective of the audience, does the content of a story present change as positive?** (Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2017) **2. How is storytelling – as told by the CEO – experienced?** (Grafström & Falkman, 2017)	• Opportunity to set the tone for even more open-ended questions to elicit views (as per constructivism, people make meaning as they engage and interpret the world) (Creswell & Creswell, Research Design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches, 2018). What meanings are being made? • Taking the idea of change and allowing the association of thoughts and feelings to it (vs. the more factual explanation of Q1) • The use of the word "experience" elevates the personal perspective of the participant. • This question is about deliberately speaking generically about restructure and change; should the participant not have been impacted as directly as someone else, it is desire that the feedback still be meaningful and that organisational change as a generic can be reflected on.	• Organisational change and any associated thoughts, feelings, potential impact etc.	**3. Sometimes business restructures and the changes that they come with can elicit a range of responses and feelings from us. Tell me about what some of these might be for you. This is quite a big question, so please take your time. Your experiences here?**
	• Some people embrace change; some are scared of it. This question is around getting a sense of this particular respondent's feelings around change, which would give context to responses to the questions that follow. • People try to make sense, retrospectively, of where they find themselves Weick (2020).	• The participant's thoughts and feelings in relation to change.	**4. Tell me about your thoughts and feelings about change.**
	• The idea is to bring an actual story into the conversation as per van Hulst & Ybema' (2019) acknowledgement for the need for more study on story as occurrence. • In line with Antunes, Tate, & Barros (2020), stories are "about" something – their content. As with Q1, this question serves to establish the story's content to document anything else that arises from the responses. • This question asks for an initial understanding of the story that was shared. There may be rich data that emanates from a straight-forward yet open-ended question such as this.	• The content of the CEO's story.	**5. I'd like to show you a copy of a mailer you would have received by our CEO. It was sent in January this year. Could you take a couple of minutes to read through it again? I will drop it in our Teams chat now. Let me know when you're done with reading it. Okay. Tell me what this story was about.**
	• This question has to do with positioning the story being shared as an organisational narrative as per Boje and Czariawska (Grafström & Falkman, 2017). • This question is motivated by Boje's (2012) idea of 'living story' – or a story within a story and that stories can be about more than one thing (here an analogy for change, giving guidance on how to embrace change).	• The relationship between storytelling and organisational change and making that connection.	**6. This story was about the CEO's road trip. But it seemed to also be about change. In it, he writes about how he faces the unknown. What do you make of *that* story? How do you respond to it?**
	• Stories need to enable sensemaking (Weick, 1995) • This question sets the tone for people realising their reality by "'reading into' their situation patterns of significant meaning" (Weick, 2020, p. 1425). • For Antunes, Tate, & Barros (2020), there is the need for an understanding of how stories, as shared by organisational leaders, support sensemaking for that audience. • this question relates to how storytelling offers ways to manage and strategise (van Hulst & Ybema, 2019).	Sensemaking of the story insofar as it relates to change.	**7. Considering that this story was shared by the CEO and considering that it was shared just months into our restructure, could you chat about any possible connection to this story and the changes our business has been going through? If nothing comes to mind here, no problem.**
	• Concentrating on the content of the story does not go far enough to understand or to explain it. The communication or process around that storytelling – or the storytelling – is important (Antunes, Tate, & Barros, 2020). • This question relates to Grafström & Falkman's (2017) finding that the storytelling of the CEO brings legitimacy to corporate narratives. An exploration here would add richness to the data.	That the story was told and *how* it was told – and that it was told by the *CEO*.	**8. The fact that your CEO is telling you a story at all: tell me about that.**
	• While this question is a broad question enabling reflection on stories, its motivation is rooted in Dalpiaz & Di Stefano's (2017) findings around stories endorsing change.	Stories and the role they might play during times of change.	**9. Considering what we've chatted about today, any last thoughts on what stories can do in these types of spaces and situations?**

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Giselle Willcox

HOW STORYTELLING SUPPORTS STRATEGIC CHANGE: AN ORGANISATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Qualitative research: Interview guide as regards proposed questions

1. Share with me what part of the business you are in.
2. Our business area has just undergone a restructure. What does that restructure mean for you?
3. Sometimes business restructures and the changes that they come with can elicit a range of responses and feelings from us. Tell me about what some of these might be for you. This is quite a big question, so please take your time. Your experiences here?
4. Tell me about your thoughts and feelings about change.
5. I'd like to show you a copy of a mailer you would have received by our CEO. It was sent in January this year. Could you take a couple of minutes to read through it again? I will drop it in our Teams chat now. Let me know when you're done with reading it. Okay. Tell me what this story was about.
6. This story was about the CEO's road trip. But it seemed to also be about change. In it, he writes about how he faces the unknown. What do you make of that story? How do you respond to it?
7. Considering that this story was shared by the CEO and considering that it was shared just months into our restructure, could you chat about any possible connection to this story and the changes our business has been going through? If nothing comes to mind here, no problem.
8. The fact that your CEO is telling you a story at all: tell me about that.
9. Considering what we've chatted about today, any last thoughts on what stories can do in these types of spaces and situations?

APPENDIX D: STORY BY THE CEO (MAILER TO RESTRUCTURED BUSINESS DIVISION)

One month in

Hi everyone,

We're more than a month into 2021 and starting to go the distance now towards the end of our financial year. Going the distance is a great analogy for our business journey. We focus forward for where we want to go, grateful for the distance we've already done.

In the December break, I got to cover some distance: I took a roadtrip, something I like to do when I can. Someone asked me the other day if I've ever found myself in danger on a roadtrip. One experience came to mind – although it was less dangerous than interesting. A year or two back, I had nowhere to stay one particular night, so ended up sleeping in my Fortuner between two trucks at the side of the highway. What can I say? It's not every morning you get to have breakfast with two truckers.

Needless to say, these roadtrips have taught me a couple of things:

- My December trip was 8000km long and took me through dozens of towns, some of which I'd never heard of. If you set the time aside and are willing to go the distance, there's almost nowhere you can't get to.

- I had the best meal of my trip in Upington – "skaapstertjies" – while overlooking the Gariep River. Water is a great metaphor for life, how it ebbs and flows. Anyway. Sometimes the simplest pleasures are the best ones.

- When I travel, I know where I'm going but I'm not too specific about where I have to end up on any given day. I've learnt that it's possible to move forward without having an exact destination in mind.

- Being fixated on a route can leave us disappointed. But there will always be unknowns ahead – from dirt roads and donkeys to roadworks and rain. We must be open to taking the alternative route. Often that's where the adventure is.

Look out for an invite to our Teams session next week and we'll chat more then.

[CEO]

Hondeeklipbaai's Aristea shipwreck. Beauty – even in the wreckage.

You can't always plan for what you meet along the way.

Beautiful Doringbaai (Doorn Bay).