

3 Stories and storytelling

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter, in line with the overall research problem, is to review the sources identified during the literature search about the nature of stories and storytelling, with specific reference to their use as knowledge sharing practices as part of an organisation's knowledge management strategy. The use of stories through storytelling is a valuable knowledge management practice because it is already so deeply a part of the general culture that is easy to adapt to knowledge management goals and objectives¹ and "the significance of story and storytelling is apparent when one reviews the current body of published research," (Boyce, 1995:107).

This chapter starts with a section on the nature of stories and storytelling. It includes a discussion about the origins and definitions of stories and storytelling, the formats in which stories can be told and the structure of the stories. There is then a review of the various purposes or uses to which stories might be put and the benefits and pitfalls that arise from such use. A number of models for the use of stories and storytelling have been identified and these are analysed and a model for use as an analytical tool is selected. The chapter concludes with a discussion about the implementation of stories and storytelling as part of a knowledge management strategy.

3.2 The nature of stories and storytelling

3.2.1 The origins and definition of stories and storytelling

Stories and the telling of stories have probably been with us since the beginning of human existence - in one sense stories and storytelling help to define the nature of humanity. Stories, including myths, legends, and folktales (McLellan, 2002; Reamy,

¹ Shah and Patrick (2002:41) stated that, "although knowledge management gurus and management journals have been writing about storytelling for a number of years, humankind has been doing it since it began."

2002) have been used to pass on wisdom, knowledge, and culture² for thousands of years³.

The word ‘story’ has its origins in the 13th century, with roots in both French and Latin, and literally means an account of incidents or events. A story may be a fictional narrative shorter than a novel or a recital of real or imaginary happenings. It has synonyms in narration, narrative, tale, and yarn (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 2002). The English word ‘story’ and the related words ‘narrate’ and ‘narrative’ have etymological roots in Latin and Greek words for knowing, knowledge and wisdom (Gill, 2001). Some authors (BSI, 2003b; Denning, 2001, 2004b; Hannabus, 2000; Smart, 1999) have used the terms ‘narrative’ and ‘story’ interchangeably⁴. For the purposes of this research the term ‘story’ will be used in preference to the words ‘narrate’ and ‘narrative’.

A comprehensive review of story-related research from 1978 to 1991 revealed that stories typically possess a setting, a cast of characters and a plot that resolves some sort of crisis (Hansen and Kahnweiler, 1993) while a second study which traced the history of the development of studies of stories and storytelling from the 1970s to 1998 offered this definition: “a story describes a sequence of actions and experiences done or undergone by a certain number of people, whether real or imaginary,” (Ricoeur in Boje, Luhman and Baack, 1999:342). Neither of these definitions is ideal. That of Hansen and Kahnweiler (1993) is too narrowly focused on ‘crisis’ whilst the second definition (Ricoeur in Boje *et al.*, 1999) does not adequately encompass the setting in the organisation for the purposes of this research.

Therefore, the definition of a story (developed by the researcher) used for the purposes of this research is that, “a story describes a sequence of decisions, actions or events (past, present or future; real or imaginary) which involve a number of

² Sole and Wilson (2002:1) observed that “storytelling is traditional and even ancient means of passing on wisdom and culture.”

³ Denning (2004b:122) wrote of “the age-old practice of storytelling.”

⁴ BSI (2003b) described narrative as the capture, interpretation, distribution and stimulation of knowledge through story, while Denning (2004b:123) refers to “ a story -- that is, a narrative that links a set of events in some kind of causal sequence.”

characters (named or unnamed), in an organisation where a business challenge or opportunity must be addressed.”

Whilst not being restrictive in terms of the format (for example oral versus written) nor the purpose (objective) for which the story is used, this definition recognises several key attributes of a story:

- That decisions, actions and events may all be included as part of the story
- That events of the story are not limited in terms of timescale (offering flexibility in terms of the construction and purpose of the story)
- That it may involve real or imaginary events or characters (allowing flexibility to base the story on a combination of factual and/or fictional circumstances and role players/characters)
- The setting is within an organisation (but may include individuals, teams and the organisation as a whole)
- Both business challenges/problems and opportunities may be addressed.

This chapter discusses both stories and storytelling. If a ‘story’ is the content then ‘storytelling’ is the method or way in which the story is told. The two often go together and may be inter-dependent. If the definition given of a story presented here is accepted, then it is still necessary to identify what ‘storytelling’ is. It has been suggested that, “storytelling is an act of creating future opportunities,” (Buckler and Zien, 1996:405) whilst storytelling used as part of a knowledge management strategy has also been defined as the sharing of knowledge and experiences through narratives and anecdotes in order to communicate lessons, complex ideas, concepts, and causal connections (Sole and Wilson, 2002). Neither of these definitions is ideal. The first says too little about the possible ways in which the telling of the story may be accomplished, whilst the second adequately explains possible purposes without explaining exactly how to tell the story.

For the purposes of this research storytelling is therefore: “the practices, tools⁵ and role players involved in communicating the contents of a story or stories to the audience however defined.”

This definition recognises that:

- There is a choice of practices (methods, methodologies) and tools (instruments, techniques, technologies) to use when the story is told (narrated)
- There is a choice of the role players (individuals or groups/teams) who are involved in the act of the story being told
- That the audience is to be defined (which may include individuals or groups, internal or external, of whatever composition).

Given the definitions of stories and storytelling presented here it is useful to explore what formats and structures might be used where stories are part of a knowledge sharing strategy, the focus of this research.

3.2.2 Story formats

Since earliest times stories have been told in many formats and using a variety of media. These formats include: oral delivery; written texts (such as The Holy Bible); painting (rock painting and other forms) and tapestry (such as the world-famous Bayeux tapestry). Table 3.1 indicates some of the formats⁶ identified in the management literature for the telling of stories in organisations. These authors, in some cases, express a strong preference for a particular format (Armstrong (1992) and Roth and Kleiner (1997), for example, and the use of the written format) while others (such as Edmond and Tilley, 2002) have a much broader view of the ways in which stories might be told.

⁵ Where the difference between practices and tools has been defined in section 2.3.7.

⁶ Where format involves a combination of both practices and tools.

Source	Story format indicated
Armstrong (1992)	Written only
Roth and Kleiner (1997)	Written only, with a specific two-column layout
Jensen (1999)	Oral and written form, through images, using drama
Snowden (1999a, 2000b, 2000c)	Strong preference for oral, uses some media support ⁷
SAI (2001).	Oral plus illustrated images, engaging presentations
Denning (2000, 2001, 2002, 2004a, 2004b)	Mainly oral, but uses written format as well
Edmond and Tilley (2002)	Primary focus on industrial theatre, complemented by comic books, oral storytelling, song, dance, chanting
BSI (2003a)	Oral complemented by the use of images and objects
CEN (2004)	Oral storytelling; drama; written

Table 3.1 Story formats

Thus, as shown in Table 3.1, forms of story delivery can include drama (possibly on stage or on radio, film, or television) as well as a variety of print (magazine, books, various types of images) and online media (circulated via email, web sites, chat-rooms and so on). All of these forms involve individual or groups of storytellers and listeners. The implications for this research are that the formats (practices and tools) used for storytelling identified in Table 3.1 provide a useful basis for analysis of the empirical finding in the case study organisation.

Of particular interest, given the setting of this research in the South African mining industry, is the discussion by Edmond and Tilley (2002) of the use of industrial theatre at Harmony Gold Mining Company (HGMC) in South Africa. Those authors reported on the combined use of comic books and industrial theatre⁸ to support the

⁷ Snowden (2000b) has discussed the use of multiple media for the delivery of a story for an IBM internal training course. The story was delivered as a voice recording from a single narrator, reinforced by cartoons. The use of the story, particularly using multiple media, meant that participants increased the speed with which they went through the training modules.

⁸ Edmond and Tilley (2002: online) observed that “industrial theatre...does not stand alone as the answer to employee communication problems. It is only effective within the context of an overall strategic communication plan with carefully managed objectives.” They also stated that industrial theatre also has the significant disadvantages of being expensive and difficult to manage.

‘Harmony Way’, an initiative to introduce employees of HGMC to aspects of the company’s culture.

It is also important when analysing the use of stories and storytelling to examine the possible options for the structure and flow of the story itself. This follows in the next section.

3.2.3 The structure of stories

Aristotle defined the classic ‘beginning, middle, end’ story structure more than 2,300 years ago and this has been used by countless others, “since it seems to reflect how the human mind wants to organise reality,” (Ibarra and Lineback, 2005:67). In this section Aristotle’s structure will be used as a departure point when looking at the findings from the literature search. Table 3.2 indicates the finding of the literature review on story structures.

Source	Story structure indicated
Hattersley (1997)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opening strategies: getting their attention. • Building strategies: hold their attention. Use episodic delivery; build the tension • Concluding strategies, driving home the point.
Reamy (2002)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equilibrium of the situation • Disruption of the situation occurs • Recognition of action required • Effort to restore the equilibrium • Results of efforts
BSI (2003a)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The main character/setting (who and where?) • The task and mission (what?) • The helpers (who else?) • The obstacle (what problems?) • The way the characters cope with the obstacle (how?) • The outcome (after the story -- what

	happened?)
Denning (2004b)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A description of the problem • The setting • The solution
Parkin (2004)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once upon a time -- the status quo, where the story begins • Then one day -- the characters encounter some problems or challenge • Because of this -- the story changes direction to deal with the problem • The climax -- the characters deal with the challenge • The resolution -- the results of the action • The moral -- their lives are changed
Ibarra and Lineback (2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introducing a protagonist the listener cares about. • Providing a catalyst compelling the protagonist to take action. • Trials and tribulations. The story's second act commences as obstacles produce frustration, conflict, and drama. • A turning point. This represents a point of no return, which closes the second act. • A resolution. This is the third act in which the protagonist either succeeds magnificently or fails tragically

Table 3.2 Structure of stories

It can be seen that there is some commonality in the views of the six sources outlined in Table 3.2. In several cases there is a sense of progress being made (almost in the sense of a journey being undertaken) towards a successful conclusion, albeit whilst encountering hurdles or difficulties along the way. Some authors (Parkin, 2004; Reamy, 2002) are explicit about the definition of the Aristotle-like ‘beginning, middle, end’ structure. On the other hand, other authors (Denning, 2004b; Hattersley, 1997), whilst also following the same overall structure, have a less restrictive approach to the detailed structure of the story. Particularly restrictive seems the approach of Ibarra and Lineback (2005) where they defined ‘acts’ which may not offer the flexibility required in some stories. Overall, however, there is a reasonable

degree of consistency between the views of the authors surveyed in Table 3.2, and their definitions of story structure will be useful when it comes to analysing the stories used in the case study organisation.

In summary, according to these authors (Table 3.2) and since the time of Aristotle, a story has a beginning, a middle and an end; it includes a flow of events that happen involving characters who undergo an experience during the story; a story will often involve a challenge or opportunity with an eventual resolution. Attention will now be turned to the possible uses, benefits and pitfalls arising from the implementation of storytelling, as part of a knowledge sharing strategy in an organisation.

3.3 The use, benefits and pitfalls of stories and storytelling

3.3.1 The uses of stories in organisations

Stories have long been recognised as useful in organisations. Thirty years ago it was observed that:

“If accounting and finance are the backbone of organisations, then the stories which permeate all organisations of any size are their lifeblood. Stories are so central to organisations that not only do organisations depend on them, but stronger still, they couldn't function without them. Big or small, every organisation is dependent upon countless stories for its functioning,” (Mitroff and Kilmann, 1975:18).

Accepting this view, it should be expected that stories can be used for many different purposes within organisations. Examples of the many possible uses of stories and storytelling can be found in Table 3.3.

Source	Use to which stories and storytelling can be put
Mitroff and Kilmann (1975)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For problem solving
Martin, Feldman, Hatch and Sitkin, (1983)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generate, as well as reflect, changes in organisations
Wilkins (1984)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passing on a culture
Hansen and Kahnweiler (1993)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To exert significant influence on employee attitudes • As a means of generating commitment
Boyce (1995)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amending and altering the organisational reality • Preparing a group for implementing plans
Buckler and Zien (1996)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster innovation
Stewart (1998)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge sharing
Kaye and Jacobson (1999).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate a vision • Build a sense of shared goals and meanings • Create community among diverse people • Making a new start • Calming employees during a crisis • To tell personal histories • Explain events and circumstances • Outline future possibilities • Inspire and motivate people to share the same vision
Smart (1999)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the creation and use of specialized economic knowledge
Snowden (1999a)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To understand the current situation • Anticipate possible futures • To prepare the organisation for action
Brown and Duguid (2000a)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To tell something exciting • To have fun • To entertain someone or keep them in suspense • To let others know what we are thinking • To express our feelings • To teach somebody something or to explain something • To save our experiences forever
Shaw, Brown and Bromiley (2000)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In strategic planning function to gain a shared understanding and to encourage teamwork
Brown and Duguid (2000b)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To develop a common outlook
Snowden (2000b)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow the communication of complex ideas

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Means of mapping knowledge within the organization • Embedding sustainable lessons learned
Gill (2001)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diffusing knowledge • Capturing what is tacit • Creating a memory framework
SAI (2001)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where the organisation has come from • Where it wants to go • Significant milestones
Swap, Leonard, Shield and Abrams (2001)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detailed narrative of past management actions • Reflect organisation norms, values, and culture
McLellan (2002)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulating and focusing vision • A tool for learning and communicating important institutional knowledge about effective business practices, • Adapting to innovation • Conceptualising and identifying challenges and opportunities • Provide a road map which outlines all of the actions and tasks which need to be accomplished
Reamy (2002)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diffusing knowledge • Capturing what is tacit • Creating a memory framework • As cautionary tales (horror stories) • Success stories • Lessons learned • Bonding stories
Sole and Wilson (2002)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate embedded knowledge/share tacit knowledge • Develop trust and commitment/resolve conflicts • Innovation and new product development • Kickstarting a new idea (in a team) • Learning/facilitate unlearning • Mending relationships (within and between teams) • Organisational renewal • Sense-making • Share norms and values/generate emotional connection • Sharing wisdom (within and between teams) • Simulate problem-solving • Socialisation of new employees

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socialising new members (team building)
BSI (2003a)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get people talking • Help create connections between people and ideas • Inspire imagination and action • Render abstract concepts meaningful • Allow multiple perspectives to emerge • Create sense, coherence and meaning • Communicate powerful messages in a compelling way to any audience
CEN (2004)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To describe complicated issues • Explain events • Communicate lessons learned • Bring about cultural change
James and Minnis (2004)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To sell products • Generate idea buy-in • Develop and cultivate corporate culture • Manage change • Transfer knowledge
Parkin (2004)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To communicate the future of the organisation clearly and enthusiastically • An aid to memorable learning • To encourage individuals to discuss and share their own fears or concerns about change
Brown, Denning, Groh and Prusak (2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To solve problems • Make decisions • Manage change • Buy into new ideas • Exemplify corporate culture • Transfer knowledge

Table 3.3 Uses of stories and storytelling⁹

The views of the thirty-nine authors identified in Table 3.3 are not exclusively limited to material with a focus on knowledge management (the term was in any case not widely in use prior to the mid-1990s, and several of the references date from before then). Some authors have a narrow focus (quoting only one or only a few uses for storytelling – such as Buckler and Zien, 1996; Mitroff and Kilmann, 1975; Wilkins, 1984), whilst others see a very broad role for the use of stories (such as Kaye and

⁹ This table is presented in chronological order.

Jacobson, 1999; Sole and Wilson, 2002). At least one group of authors restrict their interest in terms of the application area (such as Shaw *et al.*, 1998; Smart, 1999), whilst most are not restrictive in terms of the application of the use of stories.

There is a distinct commonality for the majority, however, in the relationship to the management of knowledge in the uses of stories which they identified: several specifically mention ‘knowledge transfer’ or use very similar terminology: stories are widely recognised and have been for many years, as a way of sharing knowledge in organisations. This provides support for the research problem and will provide a useful reference point for the analysis of the use of stories in the case study organisation.

3.3.2 Benefits of the use of stories and storytelling

Whatever the use (or purpose) of the story, there may be a number of benefits to be achieved. For example, significant benefit can come from the use of stories to share knowledge and meaning and stories allow the communication of complex ideas in a simple, memorable form (Scholtz, 2003; Snowden, 2000b; Sole and Wilson, 2002)¹⁰. A search of the literature revealed that a number of authors have identified benefits from the use of stories and storytelling, as depicted in Table 3.4.

¹⁰ A possible explanation as to why these benefits can be achieved through stories may be in terms of the way people learn. Stories are powerful because they are based on cognitive learning mechanisms:

- The availability heuristic: stories make events more top-of-mind
- Elaboration: the use words and images to create vivid means of remembering
- Episodic memory: based on direct experience (Swap *et al.*, 2001).

The availability heuristic holds that “when an event is made more available from memory, there is a strong tendency to believe that it is more likely to occur or to be true.... if aspects of corporate culture or systems are made more vivid, such as through a story, the availability heuristic predicts they will become more memorable, more thoroughly processed, and judged to be more true than those supported only by probabilities or abstract data,” (Swap *et al.*, 2001:106). Elaboration is the extent that people reflect upon and integrate information with what they already know, so that they will remember it better, whilst episodic memory allows the listener to process the story into logical, easily remembered elements.

Source	Benefits from the use of stories and storytelling
Wilkins (1984)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tend to stick in mind longer than abstract ideas alone • Information is more quickly and accurately remembered when it is first presented in the form of a story
Armstrong ¹¹ (1992)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple to communicate a message • Message is memorable • It is fun to work with stories
Hansen and Kahnweiler (1993)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A powerful means of generating commitment • Stories enjoy widespread acceptance as a means of communication
Boyce (1996)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expressing the organisational experience of members or clients more clearly • Confirming the shared experiences of and shared meaning of members and groups within the organisation • Orienting and socialising new members more effectively • Co-creating vision and strategy more easily
Kaye and Jacobson (1999)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stories can be a highly effective instructional practice as they enable people to understand things in meaningful and relevant ways • Stories encourage a broader understanding
Snowden (1999a)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stories offer a highly effective way to capture tacit knowledge
Denning (2000)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to communicate quickly, naturally, clearly, truthfully, collaboratively, persuasively, accurately, intuitively, entertainingly, movingly, feelingly, interactively through the use of stories more than by other means
Snowden (2000a)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A highly effective means of mapping knowledge within the organisation • Embedding sustainable lessons learned
Snowden (2000b)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stories are more effective in sharing knowledge in diverse populations
Denning (2001, 2004b, 2004c) and LaPorte (undated)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved buy-in from stakeholders at the World Bank compared to other communications methods
Gill (2001)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved speed of communication¹²

¹¹ As identified in section 3.2.2, almost all the stories described and used by Armstrong are in written form, in contrast to other authors' clearly stated preference for the oral delivery of stories (Denning, 2000; Snowden, 2000c).

¹² Gill (2001) quoted the example of a story created by IBM Global Services for a UK retail customer where a dropped grocery bag incident was turned into a story and was deliberately shared at a

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to capture tacit knowledge more easily
Swap <i>et al.</i> (2001)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Powerful conveyors of meaning and tacit knowledge
Sole and Wilson (2002)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A very powerful way to represent and convey complex, multi-dimensional ideas • Can convey both information and emotion, both the explicit and the tacit, both the core and the context
BSI (2003a)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A very powerful tool • A natural solution to complex communications • Most sustainable form of communication
Scholtz (2003)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stories offer a simple tool through which to share complex meaning quickly, in a way that is accessible, and empower people
James and Minnis (2004)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stories can inspire and motivate organizational members • Stories engage both reason and emotion
Parkin (2004)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The transition of the organisation can happen more quickly, at less cost, with a greater degree of success

Table 3.4 Benefits of the use of stories and storytelling¹³

Several practical examples can be found in the literature of the benefits to be achieved by using stories and storytelling. Buckler and Zien (1996) looked specifically at innovative companies in the mid-1990s in the USA (including 3M and Apple), Japan (including Sony and Toshiba) and in Europe (Club Med and Océ amongst others), where they found extensive benefits in the use of stories to reinforce the innovative culture in these businesses. Stewart (1998:165) discussed the use of storytelling in a number of cases, including at Fortune Magazine; at Eskom (South Africa's public electricity utility) with a Zulu imbizo (gathering); at Xerox with copier repair men¹⁴ (the Eureka success-story database was credited with \$100 million in savings); at IBM for winning global accounts through making tacit knowledge explicit and then sharing

watercooler. Two days later the story had reached at 600 'story listening posts' around the organisation, in six countries and three languages.

¹³ This table is presented in chronological order.

¹⁴ Brown and Duguid (2000a:77) also told the story of the Xerox copier repairmen. "The constant storytelling about problems and solutions, about disasters and triumphs over breakfast, lunch and coffee serves a number of overlapping purposes" but most significantly, knowledge sharing.

that knowledge through stories. A more recent illustration of the use of stories can be found in Brown *et al.* (2005). One of the authors explained that:

“We would have four or five bullet points that we were hoping that people would learn. We were spending our time focusing on the precise wording of those bullet points. What we discovered almost by accident was that the wording hardly mattered. The only points people remembered one or two weeks later were the points that had been embodied in a story. So we told a great story, then people remembered the points. Otherwise not. We found that when people would come to a meeting a couple of weeks later, they had completely forgotten the bullet points, but they could repeat the story back to us almost verbatim. Following the story, they knew what they were supposed to have learned. That was a powerful discovery,” (Brown *et al.*, 2005:148).

In summary, there are many benefits, which have been identified, supporting the use of stories and storytelling as practices for use by individuals, teams, and the whole organisation. By using stories, the key benefits brought to knowledge sharing are that it can become much more memorable, meaningful, easier, longer lasting and of greater value. This provides a further basis on which to analyse the empirical research findings.

3.3.3 Pitfalls in the use of stories and storytelling

Some authors (Denning, 2000; Ready, 2002; Reamy, 2002; Snowden, 2000b; Sole and Wilson, 2002; Swap *et al.*, 2001) have expressed a note of caution about the use of stories and storytelling as a universal cure for all knowledge management ills: judgement must be exercised as to where and when stories are used.

Denning (2000), for example, despite his overwhelming enthusiasm for stories and storytelling, suggested not to use a story:

- Where the audience does not want one
- Where analysis would be better
- Where the story is not ready
- Where a story would be deceptive.

Stories do not lend themselves equally well to transferring different kinds of knowledge. For example, indiscriminate use of stories to transfer critical skills, managerial systems and norms and values would be misguided. “Critical skills, including deep knowledge of a content domain, would be very difficult to transfer via stories. For such concrete forms of knowledge, people rely on formal education, apprenticeships or mentoring, training programmes and self-study for mastery the use of stories to communicate managerial systems does occur,” (Swap *et al.*, 2001:103).

Another warning came from Ready (2002:69) in that storytelling should by no means be viewed as a panacea. “It can help build an important part of an organisation’s capabilities, but only in conjunction with other tools and the hard work required to use them well.”

There may be traps in using stories: seductiveness (getting too deep into the story to see the meaning); stories told from a single point of view (they may lose relevance to the listener) and static-ness (stories need regular revision to update and keep relevant). In addition, stories are not appropriate, for example, in specific skill-building or emergency situations (Sole and Wilson, 2002).

Reamy (2002) also saw a problem with the use of stories, as the knowledge embedded in stories is difficult to codify in such a way as to capture the richness and multiplicity of stories without losing the immediacy and power of the storytelling experience. He advocated the creation of a rich and powerful knowledge architecture to overcome this problem (although he failed to explain exactly what that architecture would look like)¹⁵.

In summary, although the use of both stories and storytelling represent potentially powerful practices in the knowledge management arsenal, a balanced approach appears to be advocated by a number of authors in terms of proactively selecting where stories and storytelling represent the most appropriate practices to use for sharing knowledge (as well as for other purposes).

¹⁵ Reamy (2002) questioned what kind of stories will be told. Will the stories told have a positive or negative effect; will they dwell on the past or deal with what organisations need to know today?

This chapter has thus far discussed the nature of stories and storytelling; the possible uses, benefits and pitfalls in their use to share knowledge. To be able to make effective use of stories and storytelling it would be useful to have a model or framework for the use of stories and this is discussed in the next section.

3.4 Models for the use of stories and storytelling

3.4.1 Review of models

Five models of how to use stories and storytelling as part of a knowledge management strategy were identified during the literature search and are presented in Table 3.5.

Source	Model elements
Welles (1996)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The starting point (the story itself) • The point of view (space for the listener) • The storyteller (crazed but not crazy) • The mission (a heroic narrative)
Roth and Kleiner (1997)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Learning History, a 20 page to 100 page two-column document
Snowden (1999a)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elicit anecdotes • Compare to existing values and rules • Decompose the anecdotes • Store elements • Compare to desired values and rules • Construct story
Reamy (2002)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Storytelling skills • Story understanding skills • Story creation skills • Story capture skills
Sole (2002)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Story-crafting: the story itself, including the design of the story, level of complexity, relevance • Story-telling: who tells the story, whether it is oral or captured, use of media • Story-listening: monitor the reception, use the feedback for design and content of future stories

Table 3.5 Models for storytelling¹⁶

¹⁶ This table is presented in chronological order.

In the first model, Welles (1996) identified the story content, the listener, the storyteller and the way in which the story is told ('heroic narrative'), with an emphasis on oral storytelling. This is similar to the model of Reamy (2002), although Reamy laid an emphasis on story capture for reuse which is absent from Welles. Welles's model is also similar to that of Sole (2002) but Sole has only three elements, making the role of the storyteller and the telling of the story a single element of the model. In contrast, Snowden's (1999a) model offers little guidance in terms of the storyteller or the audience with the emphasis rather on the construction of the story. One point of commonality between these four of the five models is that they are oriented towards oral storytelling.

The Roth and Kleiner (1997) learning history model is significantly different from all of the other four models, being a written narrative (without an oral component) of a company's set of critical episodes, captured on paper in two columns: the right-hand column carries events described by those who took part in them, the left-hand column carries analysis and commentary by *learning historians*. Once completed, the learning history is used as a basis for group discussion by those involved in the story and those who can learn from it: it is a *jointly-told tale* based on community storytelling.

For the purposes of this research a single model for the analysis of the use of stories and storytelling in the case study organisation should be selected. Of those models identified during the literature search and presented in Table 3.5, the Sole (2002) model is selected for use in analysis in Chapter 7¹⁷. The reasons for this selection are:

- Completeness of the model: it includes the key elements of the story, the teller and the audience (Snowden's model specifically falls short in this respect)
- Flexibility of the model: it is not prescriptive in terms of the format (practices and tools) that must be used (Roth and Kleiner is too restrictive for this purpose).

¹⁷ Within which the views of other sources from the literature can be accommodated or positioned.

The next three sub-sections will explore the Sole (2002) model in more detail, integrating the work of other authors as appropriate.

3.4.2 Story-crafting

This element of the model requires a story topic to be selected and the story to be crafted (constructed). The theme, or story subject matter, would usually be dependent upon the specific objectives being set for the use of the story. For example, a typical story may articulate the realisation that all an organisation's problems are not being solved with current technical and managerial approaches and a vision of the future may be proposed in the story or the story may promote the achievement of continuous innovation (SAI, 2001). The choice of theme may include one or more of the uses and benefits identified in Tables 3.3 and 3.4.

The story structure may be built taking into account the possibilities identified in Table 3.1 and 3.2, such as through the use of the model advocated by Snowden¹⁸ (1999a) or with the assistance of internal or external facilitators (Kaye and Jacobson, 1999; SAI, 2001)¹⁹. Important at this stage in terms of the selection of the topic and construction of the story is consideration of the relevance of the story to the potential audience and the level of complexity of the story content (Sole, 2002).

The real maximum potential of the use of stories is more likely to be achieved when the story itself is in some way captured for reuse²⁰. To help to make stories reusable, stories can be captured (through the creation of a library of stories), indexed, analysed and retrieved and where that activity is done well, it is possible to enhance the power of storytelling (Reamy, 2002). To enact the capture of stories organisations should:

- Create a central group to administer, metatag and facilitate story capture
- Create a reward system for submitting stories, monetary and otherwise

¹⁸ As discussed in section 3.4.1: the steps from elicit anecdotes to construct the story.

¹⁹ Armstrong (1992) and Denning (2000) provided useful checklists as to how to go about writing stories, such as the use of external facilitators.

²⁰ Weil (1998) (in the case of Hewlett-Packard) Snowden (1999b) (in the case of IBM) and Eisenhart (2001) (in the case of the US government) give examples of projects where stories were systematically captured for reuse.

- Use various media: voice, text, video, and multimedia
- Create a referencing or indexing system (Reamy, 2002).

Having successfully selected the specific theme of the story (in support of knowledge sharing) and then constructed the story, the next step in the Sole (2002) model is to focus on the selection of the storyteller, the medium to be used and the actual telling of the story itself.

3.4.3 Story-telling

The key issues at this step in the model are to determine who tells the story (one or more individuals), how the story gets told (the choice of the media) and when the story gets told (BSI, 2003a; Sole, 2002).

The selection of a suitable storyteller (and number thereof) needs a good understanding of audience considerations. There are two main considerations. Firstly, at times the size of the audience may rise dramatically (such as with the use of industrial theatre to carry a particular story, where actors play out the roles of the characters portrayed in the plot). Secondly, at other times the storyteller may be on his or her own but face a potentially smaller or larger group of listeners (either small teams in an informal environment, or with bigger groups such as at a large venue used for a corporate gathering), and their skills must be appropriate to the setting (Kaye and Jacobson, 1999).

“There are many skills that contribute to the telling of a great story. Everyone has had the experience of listening to a story that is boring or confusing. Even if the message or intended outcome is clear, the story can still fall flat in the telling,” (BSI, 2003a:178). The key to the art of storytelling is the capacity to trigger dramatic and memorable pictures in the minds of the listeners (BSI, 2003a:61). It may not be necessary to employ the services of a professional storyteller, although in certain circumstances this may prove an attractive option (BSI 2003a; SAI, 2001).

What a good storyteller needs to do is to set the stage (define the current situation in a coherent manner), introduce the dramatic conflict (what is the main challenge

involved), and reach resolution in a satisfying and convincing manner (Hattersley, 1997; Shaw *et al.*, 1998). Storytelling requires planning and support and it may be necessary or worthwhile to consider storyteller coaching or training (Boje, 1991).

The choice of storytelling method may include a number of quite different alternatives; for example, using the traditional oral method; using a written presentation of the story; acting the story out in a dramatic way; using various supporting media; or through the use of a combination of some or all of these methods. A number of authors have identified the potential to enhance the value of storytelling through the use of images and objects as props to prompt sharing of experiences and trigger memories. These can include the use of various images with presentations or the use of social spaces, notice-boards, brochures, diagrams or objects (artefacts), which represent or illustrate the underlying knowledge or idea (Brown *et al.*, 2005; BSI, 2003a; Jensen, 1999; Sole, 2002; Sole and Wilson, 2002)²¹. One of these possible supporting media tools is a storyboard. The storyboarding²² tool can prove useful in involving everybody in creating the story (Collison and Parcell, 2001²³). A similar view is held by Brown *et al.* (2005) who advocated the creation of a storyboard which they said works just as it does in the production of movies. People come together around a storyboard, and start to visualise what the ideas could mean for them in their separate contexts.

Finally, consideration must also be given as to when the story will be told. Storytelling opportunities can happen in three ways: spontaneous (casual, opportunistic), existing (regular, ongoing occurrences during which stories can be told), and deliberate (planned opportunities for storytelling) (Kaye and Jacobson, 1999). Organisations need to recognise these opportunities and plan the telling of stories for knowledge sharing using a combination of all three.

²¹ Some researchers have begun to investigate how to use technology to leverage widely distributed storytelling (Dorner, Grimm and Abawi, 2002).

²² According to Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary (2002) the term storyboard first appeared in 1942 and is defined as "a panel or series of panels on which a set of sketches is arranged depicting consecutively the important changes of scene and action," (as for a film, television show, or commercial). The example is given of the film director Alfred Hitchcock who planned the script thoroughly and designed pictorial outlines, or storyboards, depicting specific scenes or shots before shooting any film.

²³ It is interesting to note that in their book Collison and Parcell use a brief story in each chapter to illustrate their ideas.

The next section looks at the listener as the third element of the Sole (2002) storytelling model.

3.4.4 Story-listening

In this element of the model the important issues concern the reception of the story by the audience and feedback to the storyteller (Kaye and Jacobson, 1999; Sole, 2002).

The listener(s) or audience may be defined as real (in the same physical and temporal space) or virtual (displaced by time and/or space); may be single or multiple (a group of listeners) and may enjoy receiving the story via a variety of single (for example, oral) or multimedia (for example, using oral and visual) means. Careful consideration must be given to the cultural diversity of the audience in situations where not everyone comes from the same social or cultural group. It may even be that not everyone in the audience speaks the same language as the stories being discussed. The audience must be able to identify with the story, as those stories are then particularly powerful for transferring knowledge rich in tacit dimensions (Denning (2000, 2001, 2002, 2004a, 2004b; Swap *et al.*, 2001). Care should also be taken to ensure that the appropriate opportunities are created and presented to the story listeners such that the effectiveness of their listening activities can be improved. For example, if the listener is given little opportunity to prepare for the listening experience and faces a number of distractions then the whole story-listening experience is likely to be less than entirely effective (Kaye and Jacobson, 1999).

Storytelling is certainly a collaborative activity, in the sense that at least two parties must be involved (the teller and the listener). Building on the idea of the listener's role being key to the collaborative aspect of storytelling, Denning (2001:50) noted that, "one is never entirely sure what the audience's reaction to a story will be because so much depends on what the listeners themselves bring to it." It is critical to understand the nature of the audience in terms of the ability to understand and interpret the story, to identify with the characters portrayed, to in a sense find the story credible. The reaction of the audience is key. Not only will this help the teller to gauge the reception

of the story, but also it will help in the retelling of the story on a future occasion, as well as guiding changes to the construction of the current and other future stories (Sole, 2002).

How this reaction is measured and feedback is obtained is little discussed in the literature, but might include some of the more recognised practices such as individual and group discussion (largely informal in nature), or by written feedback (using either printed or electronic data gathering practices). This feedback activity emphasises the essentially collaborative nature of storytelling: without the feedback mechanism in place there will be little hard proof that knowledge sharing has taken place.

That completes a review of the three elements of the Sole (2002) model, which as discussed in these sections (3.4.2 to 3.4.4) can be used as an analytical tool for the empirical findings later in this document. The next section explores findings from the literature on implementing the use of stories as part of a knowledge management strategy.

3.5 Implementing the use of stories and storytelling

The implementation issues associated with the use of stories and storytelling in organisations, in support of a knowledge management strategy, has received some attention in the literature over the past several years (see Table 3.6 for the relevant references). Taking these issues into account, a list was compiled of the main elements of an effective implementation of the use of stories and storytelling for knowledge sharing, based on the results of the literature review covered so far in this chapter. These elements were used for the empirical study and are introduced here as a summary of the key elements of a successful implementation:

Implementation issue	Sources identified
Ownership: the day-to-day ownership responsibility for the use of stories and storytelling	APQC, 2000; BSI, 2003a; Davenport <i>et al.</i> , 2002; de Jager, 1999; Earl and Scott, 1999; Ehms and Langen, 2002; O'Dell and Grayson, 1998; Reamy, 2002; TFPL 1999.
Executive sponsorship: the executive sponsorship for use on	APQC, 2000; BSI, 2003a; de Jager, 1999; O'Dell and Grayson, 1998; Reamy, 2002;

stories and storytelling	Skyrme, 2000; TFPL, 1999.
Objectives: the reasons and motivation behind the use of stories and storytelling	APQC, 2000; BSI, 2003a; de Jager, 1999; Denning, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2004a, 2004b; Liebowitz and Chen, 2004; O'Dell and Grayson, 1998; Snowden, 1999a, 2000b, 2000c; TFPL 1999.
Funding: the level of financial commitment to the use of stories and storytelling	APQC, 2000; BSI, 2003a; Ehms and Langen, 2002; Liebowitz and Chen, 2004; Reamy, 2002.
Tools and techniques: what methods are used to develop and deliver the stories	APQC, 2000; BSI, 2003a; Davenport and Prusak, 1999; Davenport <i>et al.</i> , 1996; Ehms and Langen, 2002; Elliott and O'Dell, 1999; Liebowitz and Chen, 2004; Nonaka, 1994; Reamy, 2002; Von Krogh, Ichijo and Nonaka, 2000.
Training and Education: what is offered to support those involved, whether they are the story developers, storytellers or listeners	APQC, 2000; Boje, 1991; BSI, 2003a; Davenport and Prusak, 1999; Ehms and Langen, 2002; Hansen and Kahnweiler, 1993; Kaye and Jacobson, 1999; Liebowitz and Chen, 2004; Ready, 2002; Skyrme, 2000.
Measures: what measures are used for the effectiveness of stories and storytelling	APQC, 1997, 2000; BSI, 2003a; Davenport <i>et al.</i> , 1996; de Jager, 1999; Demarest, 1997; Ehms and Langen, 2002; Elliott and O'Dell, 1999; Gold <i>et al.</i> , 2001; Hiebeler, 1996; Liebowitz and Chen, 2004; Manville and Foote, 1996; O'Dell and Grayson, 1998, 2004; Ruggles, 1998; Skyrme, 2000.
Success stories: what success stories exist for the use of storytelling	BSI, 2003a; Davenport, De Long and Beers, 1998; Elliott and O'Dell, 1999; Gill, 2001; Reamy, 2002.
Benchmarking: to what extent any internal or external benchmarking of these stories is taking place	APQC, 2000; BSI, 2003a; de Jager, 1999; O'Dell and Grayson, 1998.
Reward and recognition: what rewards and incentives there are for participating in the use of stories and storytelling	Davenport and Prusak, 1998; Hansen and Kahnweiler, 1993; Liebowitz and Chen, 2004; O'Dell and Grayson, 1998; Ruggles, 1998.
Storytelling model: to what extent a formal model is used in the construction and delivery of stories	BSI, 2003a; Reamy, 2002; Roth and Kleiner, 1997; Snowden, 1999a, 2000b, 2000c; Sole and Wilson, 2002; Sole, 2002; Welles, 1996.
Capture and reuse: to what extent stories are captured and made available for reuse	Denning, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2004a, 2004b; Reamy, 2002; Snowden, 1999a, 2000b, 2000c.
Catalogue: to what extent these stories are indexed for easy retrieval	Reamy, 2002; Snowden, 1999a.

Internal and external use: to what extent these stories are used both inside and outside the immediate community	McLellan, 2002; Sveiby, 2001.
Technology: what role technology plays in supporting the use of stories and storytelling	APQC, 2000; BSI, 2003a; Davenport and Prusak, 1999; Davenport <i>et al.</i> , 1996; de Jager, 1999; Demarest, 1997; Dorner <i>et al.</i> , 2002; Ehms and Langen, 2002; Elliott and O'Dell, 1999; Gill, 2001; Hansen and Kahnweiler, 1993; Reamy, 2002; Ruggles 1998; Skyrme, 2000; Von Krogh, <i>et al.</i> , 2000.
Where not to use stories: whether there is a clear understanding of where it is inappropriate to use stories	Denning, 2000; Ready, 2002; Reamy, 2002; Snowden, 2000b; Sole and Wilson, 2002; Swap <i>et al.</i> , 2001.
Storytelling Community of Practice: to what extent a story community exists in the organisation	BSI, 2003a; Collison and Parcell, 2001. SAI, 2001; van den Berg and Snyman, 2003; Wenger, 2000.
Story value rating scale: the value associated with stories relative to each other or on an absolute scale of values	No literature sources were identified but considered an important issue for this research by the researcher

Table 3.6 Stories and storytelling implementation issues

Table 3.6 not only presents a synthesis of the eighteen most significant issues identified for successful implementation, but also highlights the extent of the coverage by the authors identified. For some issues there were many sources identified, whilst for others there were few (or none, as in the case of the story value rating scale). Some authors commented widely on the range of issues necessary for a successful implementation, whilst others identified only a few of the issues. Certainly, during the literature search, there was nowhere found a single, comprehensive and integrated approach to the implementation of storytelling such as is presented in Table 3.6.

The value of the compilation of this table and its possible use as an assessment and analytical tool is two-fold. First, the compilation of the table led to the development of the research instrument that was used in assessing the maturity of the storytelling activities in the case study organisation. Second, the table can be used as an analytical

tool for use with the data gathered in the actual situation in the case study organisation.

In summary, based on the sources consulted, analysed and synthesised here, this combination of the use of experience from previous story and storytelling initiatives, combined with the expertise of a project team capable of effective implementation, and a process management approach to the ongoing use of stories and storytelling, should increase the success of the use of knowledge sharing, as a practice for effective knowledge sharing, as part of a knowledge management strategy.

3.6 Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to review the nature of stories and storytelling, with specific reference to their use as knowledge sharing practices as part of an organisation's knowledge management strategy.

This chapter opened with a discussion about the origins and definition of stories and storytelling, and a specific definition of a story for use in the research was proposed: "a story describes a sequence of decisions, actions or events; past, present or future; real or imaginary, which involves a number of characters (named or unnamed), in an organisation where a business challenge or opportunity which must be addressed."

This was followed by the identification of the difference between a story and the telling of the story and this definition of storytelling was proposed: "the practices, tools and role players involved in communicating the contents of a story or stories to the audience however defined."

Discussion then moved on to a review of the literature on the formats in which stories can be told (presented in Table 3.1) and the possible structure of stories (presented in Table 3.2). There was then a review of the various uses to which stories might be put and the benefits that arise from such use, as well as the identification of a number of potential pitfalls or limitations in the use of stories. A number of models for the use of stories and storytelling were then identified and a specific model (Sole, 2002) was selected for use as an analytical tool in this research and was explored in more detail,

encompassing related ideas from other authors on the execution of the main elements of the model.

The chapter concluded with the synthesis based on the literature review of the elements of a successful implementation of stories and storytelling as part of a knowledge management strategy. These elements provided an element of the input to the empirical research into the use of storytelling in the case study organisation (part of the basis for the research instrument) and the use of the elements of implementation as an analytical tool.

In summary, this chapter has clearly demonstrated that stories and storytelling:

- Have been in use for thousands of years as a means of communication
- Have been recognised for at least the past thirty years as a powerful means of communication in organisations
- Have been recognised since the early days of the knowledge management movement as a powerful way to share knowledge in organisations
- Come in many different formats and structures
- May serve many different purposes (including related to knowledge management)
- Offer many benefits when sharing of knowledge is being implemented in organisations
- May be implemented more successfully where prior experience is taken into account.

The previous chapter provided the context for knowledge and knowledge management for this research project. This chapter has done the same for stories and storytelling. The next chapter will focus on those elements which represent possible ways of achieving and measuring world-class performance in the use of stories and storytelling as knowledge sharing practices as part of a knowledge management strategy.