KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND THE PRACTICE OF STORYTELLING

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KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND THE PRACTICE OF STORYTELLING

The Competencies and Skills Needed for a Successful Implementation

BY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

To Paulina, my mother and first storyteller,
whose life continues to be the most exciting story
I have ever heard.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Johel Brown-Grant is a storytelling strategist and knowledge management practitioner with extensive experience in the practical application of storytelling to transfer critical knowledge in organizations. A sought-after speaker, his practice-driven workshops, seminars, and presentations focus on finding storytelling solutions for complex organizational problems requiring a communication strategy.

Grant's professional experience includes substantial work developing knowledge resources to support process improvement and operational efficiency in business, science and technology, higher education, and the federal government. He has written about user-centered design, information and communications technology, and knowledge management. His most recent publication was the coauthored book *Assessment of Knowledge Strategies* by Emerald publishing.

A former Fulbright scholar, he holds graduate degrees in Information and Knowledge Strategy, Linguistics, English Literature, and Communication and Rhetoric with a specialization in Human-Computer Interaction.

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PREFACE

The Importance of This Book

Even though there is a burgeoning storytelling discussion in the field of knowledge management (KM), and narratives and stories are being applied as methods to transfer knowledge, not much has been said about the practical side of storytelling. Unfortunately, the literature lacks a careful analysis of what it actually takes to do storytelling to foster knowledge exchange throughout an organization. There have been discussions on some of the skills needed to engage in storytelling, but a comprehensive account of the competencies and skills needed to engage in enterprise storytelling is severely lacking. This book, therefore, answers the following questions: "how do you actually do storytelling in an enterprise environment?", "What do you need to know to implement a storytelling initiative?", "What specific practices can help you acquire or apply storytelling competencies and skills?" The ultimate goal of this book is to provide practical arguments, rooted in robust academic research, to advance the analysis, study, and application of storytelling in knowledge management.

The Book's Premise

The premise of this book is unique. It is based on the idea that, in a knowledge organization, storytelling is not the result of an individual narrative act; rather, it is the by-product of a complex set of activities that frame the inception, development, organization, delivery, and evaluation of narratives in order to support the creation, transfer, storage, and application of knowledge throughout an enterprise operation. The book examines the competencies and skills needed to carry out that complex set of activities in two areas:

- *Personal competencies and skills:* These are the rhetorical and performative competencies and skills that an individual needs to craft and tell a story, retell a narrative, and communicate and collaborate with the audience to shape the narrative.
- *Strategic competencies and skills:* These are the research and evaluation competencies and skills required to elicit and capture stories, understand the

organizational culture and define its storytelling needs, determine the value of narratives in relation to organizational needs, conceive a storytelling strategy, and evaluate its impact on the enterprise.

At a given point in the life of an organization a knowledge worker may be required to develop proficiency in one or both of these areas to respond to a critical knowledge sharing need; this book offers practical ideas to address those challenges.

Who Is This Book Written for?

First and foremost the book is written for knowledge management practitioners who are developing or implementing storytelling initiatives to support a knowledge management strategy, but need a comprehensive understanding of the practicalities involved in a storytelling initiative, or need useful information to evaluate the effectiveness of their storytelling project. This book is ideal for knowledge management practitioners who, as part of their storytelling initiative, may need to develop training resources to coach or train others to craft or tell a story that shares critical knowledge. This book will also benefit those knowledge management practitioners who need to elicit stories from other knowledge workers, but may lack the tools to do it effectively to uncover tacit knowledge.

Most importantly, this book offers knowledge management professionals practical advice to connect specific storytelling practices and activities to knowledge management methods and approaches. This book will prove useful to other knowledge workers, particularly those in the fields of change management, organizational development, and data analytics, because it details the specific competencies and skills needed to meet the unique challenge of creating and presenting a narrative to frame complex processes, intricate concepts, difficult problems, and innovative solutions.

Structure and Organization of the Book

This book is organized in four sections and nine chapters:

Section I, Conceptual Review, offers a review and analysis of the concepts that provide the foundation for the methods, practices, applications, and recommendations offered throughout the book.

- *Chapter 1: Understanding the concept of storytelling*
  This chapter provides an in-depth analysis on the concept of storytelling and its various manifestations. It includes an examination of the cognitive basis of storytelling and its universality across cultures; and introduces a discussion on what it means to practice storytelling.

- *Chapter 2: The practice of storytelling as knowledge management*
  In this chapter, the conceptual foundations of knowledge management are explored with particular emphasis on the differences between tacit and explicit knowledge. The focus then turns to the practice of knowledge management and its functions and variations across organizations. The argument continues exploring how storytelling can work as a methodology to support knowledge capture and knowledge sharing.
- *Chapter 3: Literacy, competencies, and skills*
  Chapter 3 opens with a substantial review of the concepts of literacy, competency, and skills. These concepts are then explored within the framework of storytelling to carefully build a foundation that provides the definition and characteristics of the storytelling competencies and skills. The discussion closes with the classification of the storytelling competencies in three separate groups: Rhetorical, performative, and ethnographic.

Section II, Competencies and Skills, offers an exhaustive analysis of the rhetorical, performative, and ethnographic competencies and skills required for the practice of storytelling. Each chapter offers important contextual information in the form of a competency matrix which summarizes the competencies and associated skills, selection rationale, practical applications, and impact questions for further discussion. Additional resources included in the chapters are guided instructions for the implementation of competencies and skills, and information on the potential challenges associated with their implementation.

- *Chapter 4: Rhetorical competencies and skills*
  This chapter discusses the rhetorical and discursive foundations of storytelling, including an analysis of the basic structure of a story. The chapter then identifies and reviews the specific rhetorical competencies associated with storytelling: plot development, character development, persuasion, and audience analysis.
- *Chapter 5: Performative competencies and skills*
  Chapter 5 reviews the concept of performance, the types of performance and its implications for the telling of stories. The discussion continues with an exploration of the connections between performance and knowledge sharing, with a keen interest on tacit knowledge. The performative competencies associated with storytelling (performance development and performance co-production) are then identified and explored in detail.
- *Chapter 6: Ethnographic competencies and skills*
  The discussion in this chapter begins with a review of the concept of ethnography and a rationale for its inclusion in an analysis on storytelling

and knowledge management. Ethnographic methods are then examined to determine the competencies that are applicable to the storytelling environment. Those competencies are ethnographic observation, ethnographic interview as storytelling interview, and narrative analysis.

Section III, Assessment and Evaluation, presents an extensive discussion on assessment and evaluation of storytelling competencies and skills, including conceptual reviews and guided instructions to measure the efficacy and impact of storytelling.

- *Chapter 7: Assessing storytelling competencies and skills*
  This chapter explores the definition and types of assessments used for the systematic collection of information in knowledge organizations, with a specific focus on the assessment of competencies and skills. What follows is a careful examination of the practical considerations required to assess the rhetorical, performative, and ethnographic competencies and skills associated with storytelling.
- *Chapter 8: Evaluating the effectiveness of storytelling*
  Chapter 8 continues the discussion on assessment, but from a different vantage point. In this chapter, the argument is about evaluating the effectiveness of storytelling on the organization. The analysis provides guidance on the implementation of a storytelling audit, as a pre-assessment activity, to obtain an overall picture of storytelling practices in an organization. The discussion then focuses on the assessment of storytelling outcomes, using the Kirkpatrick model as an illustration, to measure the effectiveness of storytelling.

Section IV, Lessons and Takeaways, provides a reflection on insights and recommendations resulting from the discussions and analyses held in the previous sections.

- *Chapter 9: Lessons learned*
  The final chapter covers lessons learned and recommendations on the kind of role this book could play within the field of knowledge management, potential pathways or models organizations could follow to develop storytelling competencies and skills, the role of competencies and skills in building a case for organizational storytelling, and the urgent need for a holistic approach to developing and implementing storytelling strategies. The chapter concludes with a proposal for a standard institutions could use to develop storytelling competencies and skills in order to help harmonize the preparation and training needed to craft and tell stories in knowledge organizations.