Business Communication Quarterly

<http://bcq.sagepub.com/>

Video Storytelling in a Transient, Volunteer Organization

Cecilia Katzeff and Vanessa Ware

Business Communication Quarterly 2007 70: 381

DOI: 10.1177/10805699070700030505

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://bcq.sagepub.com/content/70/3/381>

Published by:

<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:

[Association for Business Communication](#)

Additional services and information for *Business Communication Quarterly* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://bcq.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://bcq.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations: <http://bcq.sagepub.com/content/70/3/381.refs.html>

>> [Version of Record](#) - Aug 22, 2007

[What is This?](#)

11. *To provide leadership in the therapeutic relationship.* Flight lessons and fairly quick and relatively easy learning and are all metaphors of leading and learning.

By using stories, the therapist presumably intends something therapeutic and beneficial for the patient. However, stories don't work for everyone. Some clients are annoyed by my telling stories for therapy or may find the stories to be distracting, tangential, or wandering off point. Ultimately, then, clients have to translate the stories into their own language and for their situations, just as they have to heal in their own way.

Ken Land, MSW, is clinical director of the Counseling Center of Ann Arbor in Michigan, which he founded in 1983. The Center is a comprehensive outpatient mental health and substance abuse clinic located in Ann Arbor's central business district. He earned his master's in social work from Wayne State University in 1982 and specializes in men's issues, stress and anxiety management, hypnotherapy, and in-service training. He is also a trainer in the art and science of Storytelling Therapy™. Address correspondence to the Counseling Center, 342 S. Ashley Street, Ann Arbor, MI 48104; email: thecounselingctr@sbcglobal.net.

VIDEO STORYTELLING IN A TRANSIENT, VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION

Cecilia Katzeff

Interactive Institute, Sweden

Vanessa Ware

Interactive Institute/University of Karlstad

TO MAKE SENSE of and learn about their work environments, people actively construct their own knowledge and share stories of their experience. Using the metaphor of the landscape, Bruner (1990) likened books' stories to "mountain tops jutting out of the sea. Self-contained islands though they may seem, they are upthrusts of an underlying geography that is at once local and, [yet] part of a universal pattern" (p. xi). This is also true for stories. But telling stories is particularly challenging in a transient organization where people are hired on a voluntary, temporary basis. Such is the case of

a nonprofit music festival organization in Sweden, which is rebuilt every year starting with recruiting the top management. The festival is an annual, 3-day summer event that attracts an audience of 11,000 to 15,000 people.

In the summer of 2005, we conducted an ethnographic study to understand the festival organization's learning processes, so as to design a digital tool that would enhance knowledge construction in the organization. We focused on one unit of the festival organization that was responsible for the Alternative program (performances and events off the major stages). Data were collected through participatory observations and through interviews with key festival workers.

The results of the ethnography (Katzeff & Ware, 2006) indicated that the festival organization lacked formal rules, valued innovative thinking, and attributed job responsibility to the individual festival worker. Although it did not promote specified ways for performing tasks, it provided a means for enculturating new volunteers into possible ways of thinking about the festival. The volunteers from prior years were relied upon to informally and orally share their knowledge and experiences with new volunteers, but this was not always consistent. Thus, we decided to test the use of a video booth to encourage more sharing and archiving of stories about the experience and roles of a larger number of the volunteers.

Designing the Video Storytelling Booth

Although information and communication technologies (ICTs) have been used to capture knowledge in organizations, they usually require informants to formalize their input into an abstract structure suitable for the format of the database. However, workplace learning typically occurs in practice (Wenger, 1998), so that incorporating ICTs into a formalized sharing process often diminishes the social and emotional quality of the informant's narrative. We felt that to adequately reflect the personal experience of festival volunteers, a more direct presentation format was needed. Popular techniques and tools such as digital still, video cameras, and Weblogs represent a type of unfiltered presentation format and are thought to be well suited for technology-based learning (Walker, 2004).

The video booth, called The Well, was situated inside a building hosting the canteen for festival workers. It was strategically placed to attract the attention and curiosity of the functionaries. The Well was designed with the intention of placing its users in an emotional state that would facilitate their opening up and freely expressing their minds through a video-recording visible and audible to themselves. The worker entered The Well and pulled a curtain to allow for privacy during the recording process. Upon entering, the worker faced a computer screen and a decorative sculpture of a face. On the computer screen, the worker saw his or her face communicating with an animated monkey, which created a playful atmosphere yet played the role of a neutral partner to which the worker directed the stories or confessions. A video camera mounted above the computer screen captured the speech and movement of the worker.

Results of the Video Booth Test

A total of 70 volunteer workers used The Well, producing 128 video clips. All video clips were watched, transcribed, and analyzed, and three major categories of interactions emerged: tests of the video booth (to satisfy curiosity); playful interactions; and testimonies of the work of a volunteer, which was the largest of the three categories. All of the testimonies dealt with the role of a festival worker.

The content of the workers' testimonial clips fell into three categories:

1. *Advice* to the next year's festival organization
2. *Physical* and *psychological contexts* in which the festival work is taking place
3. *Problems* related to communication, social-relational, and task-related, practical concerns

There were several examples of the types of problems, the largest of the testimonial categories. For example, workers felt that the organization failed to communicate relevant and appropriate information. An example of social-relational problems was that an 18-year-old female worker did not feel respected by men or that relations with colleagues felt strange. An example of a practical problem was that there was not enough food for artists.

Testimonies also conveyed that the role of a volunteer worker was a very social one, and that the workload was heavy so that workers did not get much sleep during the festival.

Conclusions

The biggest benefit from using the video booth was that the festival organization was able to capture the experiences and stories of its volunteers and gain a more in-depth image of the multifaceted role of a festival worker. Each video clip was a fragment of a personal story of a festival worker, and also part of an identity formation process; yet in telling his or her story, the worker contributes to the construction of his or her own identity as a festival worker.

Testimonies expressed through The Well also make specific references to experiences beneficial for next year's festival. At a later stage, when stories may be shared by other festival workers, they will contribute to the construction and development of the community of festival workers in a similar way to Orr's (1990) findings in his ethnographic study of service technicians' work. Orr showed how anecdotes or "war stories" serve as a medium for knowledge preservation as well as learning within a community of service technicians.

Finally, the real success of documenting the stories of the festival organization's volunteers must be measured by the future dissemination among new volunteers. The organization will have to find procedures for taking care of the material; drawing inferences from it; and applying insights to the management of tasks, problems, and people in coming festivals. For instance, the material could be used for introducing new volunteer workers to their roles and relating social information concerning the culture of volunteer festival work.

References

- Bruner, J. (1990). *Acts of meaning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Katzeff, C., & Ware, V. (2006). Video storytelling as mediation of organizational learning. In *Proceedings of NordiCHI 2006, Oslo, Norway* (pp. 311-32). New York: ACM Press.
- Orr, J. (1990). Sharing knowledge, celebrating identity: War stories and community memory in a service culture. In D. S. Middleton & D. Edwards (Eds.), *Collective remembering: Memory in society* (pp. 169-189). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Walker, K. (2004). Learning on location with cinematic narratives. In B. Barry & K. Brooks (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 1st ACM workshop on story representation, mechanism and context* (pp. 55-58). New York: ACM Press.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Cecilia Katzeff is a senior researcher at the Interactive Institute, a Swedish research institute engaged in the intersecting domains of art, technology, and science. She is a doctor of psychology and has since the mid-1980s studied the psychology of human-computer interaction, both in academic and industrial settings. She focuses on the design of interactive digital media for adult learning in organizational contexts. Address correspondence to Cecilia Katzeff, Interactive Institute, P.O. Box 1197, SE-164 26 Kista, Sweden; email: cecilia.katzeff@guide.se.

Vanessa Ware is a PhD student in the Department of Media and Communications Studies at the University of Karlstad. She has worked for the Interactive Institute with the Learning and Innovation in Festival and Event (LIFE) organisations project from 2004 to 2006, which allowed her to merge her research interest in learning in the context of large creative projects with the practical work of producing digital communication artifacts. Address correspondence to Vanessa Ware, Interactive Institute/University of Karlstad, P.O. Box 1197, SE-164 26 Kista, Sweden; email: vanessa.ware@june.se.

UNDERSTANDING *GUANXI* (CONNECTIONS) FROM BUSINESS LEADERS' PERSPECTIVES

Yunxia Zhu

University of Queensland

Allee Mengzi Zhang

Accenture Melbourne

GUANXI, THE CHINESE word for personal bonds or connections, is a recurring theme in the research forum, and researchers (e.g., Fan, 2002; Fei, 1985; Kipnis, 1997; Yang, 1994) tend to agree that it is essential to establish *guanxi* with Chinese businesses. Much has been written about *guanxi* regarding doing business in the Chinese business economies such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, and People's Republic of China (PRC). However, very little has been done about how business executives establish *guanxi* through storytelling. Stories are important vehicles in communication to indicate how people construct reality, and they can also illustrate concepts with specific scenarios. Rhodes and Brown (2005) have further synthesised the validity of this multifaceted research method in a number of areas of organisational study. This article attempts to report research findings based on a preliminary discussion of 20 stories collected from business executives of mainland China.

The success stories were collected from 20 Chinese business executives, and the interviews were conducted in Beijing, Zhengzhou, and