

The role of stories in the development of values and wisdom as expressions of spirituality

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This paper explores the roles that stories can play in professional development, taking this term to refer broadly to any kind of vocational, professional and leadership role. Such roles are commonly defined in terms of competencies, but it is increasingly being recognised that there is a spectrum of development that leads beyond competency (the acquisition of knowledge and skills and their application) to the attainment of expertise. At the level of expertise, the exercise of work roles involves values and judgement. Moreover, when we consider the idea of developing from competence to expertise, we can see that expertise may develop into wisdom which is an expression of spirituality.

This model raises the question of what kinds of learning are involved in professional development and how such learning is best facilitated. Expertise, wisdom and spirituality are fostered through a combination of direct experience and immersion in the experiences of others, and reflection on these experiences. The focus of interest in this paper is specifically on the role that stories can play in enabling people to develop an awareness of, and commitment to, values and ethics.

One aspect of stories in professional development is the articulation and sharing of stories by participants. Another aspect is the examination of "received stories", which include organisational war stories, case studies and business novels. There are numerous types of business novel, those with a minimalist story line and a dominant didactic purpose, fables or parables, and full-length novels that deal with deep issues that leaders or professionals face. The value of the "full-length story" type of business novel is explored. The importance of the story in itself is considered, and then a methodology for eliciting learning from such novels is examined. Wisdom and spirituality are inherently personal, and stories enable the worker, professional and leader to step into their own wisdom.

Keywords: stories, business novel, values, professional development, wisdom

INTRODUCTION

Professional and leadership development over recent years has moved in two different directions. On the one hand, professional roles and leadership roles are being articulated in terms of competencies, rational, systematised processes, and scripts for behaviour (Hunt & Wallace, 1997), as evidenced, for example, by Australia's competency-based vocational education system. But on the other hand, contextualised knowledge, intuition and values are being recognised as essential aspects of expertise (Callan et al, 2007; Birch & Paul, 2009; Klein, 1998).

Consideration of the latter aspects has led to the exploration of a broader range of learning and development methodologies than the traditional method of classroom instruction (Callan et al, 2007; Mintzberg, 2004). Among these non-traditional methodologies is the use of stories for the purpose of developing expertise, whether this relates to a vocation (taken to refer to trades, occupations and professions) or to management and leadership. Stories are now used to foster the development of individual leaders and organisations themselves (Denning, 2005), to improve the effectiveness of ethics training programs (De Rond, 1996), to enable clients in counselling to formulate their concerns (Corrie & Lane, 2010), to structure the coaching process (Drake et al., 2008) and to explore ethical issues (Badaracco, 2002, 2006).

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There are essentially three ways in which stories are used for learning. First, they may be “received stories” that are discussed and analysed by the participants in learning. Received stories can be case studies from the participants’ own organisation or industry (Badaracco, 2002), or novels and other literature which is considered to have lessons for professionals, practitioners and leaders (Badaracco, 2006). Second, the learning process may consist of participants articulating their own stories as a form of reflection (Bolton, 2005; Rixon, 2008). These may be shared and discussed among learners. Or, stories may be created as a means of fostering positive organisational values and enhancing performance (Denning, 2005).

The third way in which stories can be part of the learning process is as a metaphor for the entire framework of the professional or leadership context. Stories embody meaning and values, and the work or business context, and all the activities and relationships that occur there, may themselves be understood as a story (Corrie & Lane, 2010). At this level, the endeavour to develop expertise evolves into the quest to live, work and lead wisely.

This paper will give a brief overview of the field of professional development to provide a context for a discussion of the centrality of values in the development of professionals, practitioners and leaders. The focus of interest is in how learning and, in particular, consciousness of values, can be facilitated through the use of stories. We will look at the different types of received stories that surface in the business world, and in particular, at the phenomenon of business novels.

The paper acknowledges the importance of participants articulating their own stories, including journalling, the formulation of one’s own story in coaching or mentoring contexts, reflection on experience in formal or informal learning contexts, and storytelling as a mode of personal and professional development. However, an exploration of this topic lies outside the scope of this paper.

Stories are in essence about our search for meaning and purpose (Mellon, 1992). The paper concludes with a reflection on the importance of stories in learning and development, as a pathway that takes us from competence to expertise and on towards values and wisdom as the expression of spirituality.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In our rapidly changing work environments today, professional development is a pertinent issue for people in any occupation, trade or profession, or in any management or leadership position. Professional development (PD) can be defined as the systematic maintenance, improvement and broadening of knowledge and the development of personal qualities necessary for the person to sustain their relevance and effectiveness at work throughout their working life (adapted from Kennie, 2000). People engage in PD in various ways. A UK study (Rothwell & Arnold, 2005) of HR practitioners found that the most favoured PD activities were informal and concerned with the person’s current job and organisation. Activities included reading of journals, sharing knowledge and discussing with colleagues, spontaneous learning arising from work activities and action learning through projects. Formal activities included participation in training courses, membership of project committees, attendance at PD events and undertaking qualification-based study.

Rothwell and Arnold advocate the use of a wide range of options for PD, addressing individual needs, catering more for informal learning approaches, and including the use of online learning, information repositories and peer-to-peer dialogue. They observed that reflection on experience was important to learning; it gives context and meaning to experience. The capable practitioner has a mental framework that makes sense of work situations and enables the person to generalise from their experiences, following Schon (1983).

This perspective suggests the need for the approach to learning offered by Peter Senge et al. (2004). He described “reactive learning” as the familiar model, where we “download” facts and habitual ways of thinking, and end up “getting better at what we’ve always done”. In contrast, he points to the need for different types of learning, in situations where reality is complex, uncertain and changing, and values are important as the key to making sense of our situation and our role.

This perspective on PD is informed by the goals of learning in this context. To be an expert, professional or leader requires mastery of certain kinds of knowledge, along with the mental framework and the situational knowledge to make sense of it and apply it in a variety of circumstances. Expertise is more than following a manual of instructions (Gold, Rodgers & Smith, 2002).

There is also a social and ethical dimension to the practice of a vocation, profession or leadership role. Accomplished practitioners of any type are expected to be trustworthy and to exercise their own judgement in their decisions and actions. We can identify five basic principles that underlie the conduct of experts, professionals and leaders (Martin, 2010, p45):

- **rationality:** the assumption that reasoning makes sense, that it is possible to follow a chain of reasoning through to a conclusion in a consistent and reliable way, and that this is linked to the way the world is; implicit in this conception is the ability to observe the world objectively, taking that to mean being able to see things in an ego-free way;
- **autonomy:** there would be little point discussing ethics or development if one believed that people did not have any understanding of or control over their own actions;
- **responsibility:** this follows from the previous assumption, because it affirms that, having acted autonomously, persons are accountable for their decisions and actions;
- **self-awareness:** the person is prepared to take time to reflect on and understand the self, and to acquire insight into their values, feelings, beliefs and behaviour; and they cultivate awareness of their effect on others;
- **commitment to learning:** this quality follows from the previous, in that the person is willing to evaluate their current state and commit to developing in every way – skills, knowledge, spirit, and physical and psychological health.

This account indicates that PD may involve various types of learning, but central to it is “values-based development”. A key characteristic of experts, professionals and leaders is that “their values are not unconscious motivators, they are conscious motivators” (Minessence, 2010).

THE CENTRALITY OF VALUES IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The term “values” is often used loosely in ordinary talk, to mean anything from an attitude to a belief, a goal, a strong emotion, a desire or a mere preference. And the content of these values may relate to anything from moral principles to market domination, from codes of behaviour to organisational image. However, values are rightly seen as central, orientating principles in our lives. Barry Posner and Warren Schmidt (1992, p81), describe values as “the silent power in personal and organisational life. Values are at the core of our personality, influencing the choices we make, the people we trust, the appeals we respond to, and the way we invest our time and energy. In turbulent times, values can give a sense of direction amid conflicting views and demands.”

Values have been described as mental constructs about the worth or importance of people, concepts, or things (Chippendale, 2001; Minessence, 2008). Our values affect the entire field of our actions, including orientations towards power, harmony, fun, cooperation, obedience, predictability and passivity. They motivate our choices and judgements across the full range of human situations, and concern both mastery (or competence) and ethics (or morality). Rokeach (1973, p15), one of the leading researchers of social values in the 20th century, defined values as “an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence”.

Values thus arise from people’s beliefs. One implication of this is that values, although they may be relatively stable over time, are not fixed for a person for life. Experience that impacts and moulds beliefs will likewise influence values. In fact, the evolution of values is a function of the development of a person’s beliefs, according to Brian Hall (1986), and Collins and Chippendale (2002). People live in a matrix of tension between different “attractors”, tensions such as security versus adventure, concern for self versus concern for others, narcissism versus desire for intimacy.

In developing professionally or as a leader, people necessarily encounter the values that are inherent to the role they are taking on, and they may need to make significant personal changes in order to fulfil the potential of the role. A new manager, for example, may come into a situation where challenges need to be addressed, such as reducing costs, restructuring, creating a new strategic focus, introducing new technology or building a new organisational culture. In order to achieve a positive outcome, they will need to integrate, and reconcile, a great many different personal qualities – qualities that inherently consist of a commitment to a set of values.

In the case of the manager, in one study (Morley, 2001) those qualities were identified as visionary, inspirational and motivational, honest, trustworthy, credible, having integrity, communicative, approachable and available, caring and empathetic, strategic, having focus and clarity, supportive and a good coach/mentor. The study commented that “the results point to a conundrum between being visionary and inspirational on the one hand, and being seen to be approachable and available on the other. These two sides must unite for the leader to fulfil the ideal”.

Morley's conclusion suggests that becoming a manager (or leader) will invariably require a person to exercise increased self-awareness, to re-evaluate their current skills and attitudes, and to engage in new practices that will reshape their perception of self. This is a developmental process that leads to an examination of one's personal values. Barrett (2010) says that to become a leader we must begin with self-leadership, which he sees as learning the shift from "I" to "we", from a preoccupation with our own survival to a consideration of others, towards greater inclusiveness and a sense of connectedness. In making this shift, we face the fears that separate us from others.

A similar account can be given of the development from novice to expert, showing that values lie at the core of this development process. The subject matter will differ in many respects from managerial/leadership skills, but when it comes to identifying the common qualities of vocational or professional experts, it can be seen that these qualities will include ethical values as well as cognitive and physical/technical competencies. Such qualities have entered human resources discourse as employability skills, and include honesty, commitment, positive self-esteem, adaptability, teamwork, problem-solving, initiative and positive attitude towards learning (DEST, 2005).

Our focus of interest now is in how the development of professionals, practitioners and leaders can be facilitated through the use of stories. What evidence is there that stories are helpful in developing people, and what does it mean to use stories for development purposes?

STORIES IN LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Practitioners and leaders develop through a combination of formal education and training, further professional development, on-the-job experiences and projects, and support for learning via coaching and mentoring (Callan et al, 2007). Contemporary training and development practices emphasise blended approaches to the design of learning initiatives, and learning has been found to be most effective when multiple methods are used (Cross, 2007; Martin, 2002). Methods might include group instruction, small group discussion, case studies, mental imagery tasks, role plays, work observations, journals, online self-paced modules, coaching, mentoring and informal learning (Lawson, 2008; Cross, 2007; Martin, 2008).

A burgeoning practice in PD programs is the use of stories. Stephen Denning, formerly of the World Bank, is one of many who have popularised the use of stories in organisations (Denning, 2005). Storytelling has also begun to feature in coaching practices, in the form of narrative coaching (Drake et al., 2008). Advocates maintain that storytelling is an important means of learning, particularly with regard to issues that evoke deep emotions, such as values.

In the context of ethics training, De Rond (1996) suggests several innovative methodological approaches, including the use of novels and short stories, films and autobiographies, short, interactive seminars, suitable cases, and mentoring communities.

William Kirk Kilpatrick (1992) argues that stories serve to bring values to life; stories are powerful because they show humans in the context of particular situations, vulnerable and imperfect, and people can relate to the experiences of the characters. The presentation of data and facts seldom achieves such engagement.

Mark Johnson (1993), in exploring the concept of moral imagination, maintained that narrative is a fundamental mode of understanding, by which we make sense of all forms of human action. Learning through stories and other people is not confined to certain classes of people, but is true of all people. As such, narrative stands alongside reason and logic as a mode of understanding. Johnson observes that people who care about their moral self-development turn, not to philosophical texts on moral theory, but rather to fiction. Stories about people are an important vehicle for learning "about what it is to be human, about the contingencies of life, about the kinds of lives we most want to lead, and about what is involved in trying to lead such lives" (p 196).

Stories appear in management literature to address the challenge of bridging the gap between theory and practice. The logical, scientific approach of management theory offers theories about causal links between behaviour and performance outcomes for individuals and organisations. It is guided by formal logic, the level of abstraction is generally high, and causation is emphasised (Czarniawska, 1999, p16). However, it is impossible to understand human conduct by ignoring its intentions, and it is impossible to understand human intentions if the settings in which actions occur are ignored. Jerome Bruner (quoted by Czarniawska) claimed that narrative knowing is as important as logico-scientific knowing. Czarniawska says that a good story must have both facts and a point. In a good story, events are the facts, and theory is the point. She says "a narrative is able to produce generalisations and deep insights without claiming universal status" (p16).

Czarniawska laments the fact that “in their eager desire to be as modern (and scientific) as possible, organisations tend to ignore the role of narrative in learning. Tables and lists (many ‘models’ and taxonomies are complicated lists) are given priority as teaching aids. While they can fulfil certain functions which narratives cannot, the reverse applies even more. Almost certainly the greater part of organisational learning happens through the circulation of stories” (p19).

Given the view that values lie at the heart of professional and leadership development, complementing the dimensions of reason and emotion, stories serve the functions of expressing, embodying and conveying values. They are the primary way that new insights about values are internalised. Kohlberg, in his model of moral development, concluded that most people did not reason in terms of abstract principles, but in terms of social affiliations (in Sprinthall, Sprinthall & Oja, 1994). A moral philosopher (Goldman, 1993, p 341) put it this way: “Ordinary moral thinking may consist more in comparing contemplated activities with stored exemplars of good and bad behaviour than with the formulation and deduction of consequences from abstract principles.” Taylor (2000), in discussing how to teach with a developmental intention, observes that most transformative learning invariably translates abstract ideas into real-world contexts. Stories in one form or another offer a powerful vehicle for initiating the learning process, as a way of presenting concrete experience for observation and reflection. Stories may be used to prompt individual reflection, as well as to provide material for group discussions. In one-to-one contexts such as coaching and mentoring, stories can provide a way of illustrating salient learning for the person being coached or mentored.

THE PURPOSES OF STORIES

If stories play a useful role in learning and development, we may begin an examination of them by asking what purposes they serve. Stories are narratives that are designed to entertain, influence or instruct (Mellon, 1992; Denning, 2005; Schank, 2005). They are an important vehicle for knowing, for expressing and eliciting emotion, and for embodying values. Since ancient times, they have been used to reinforce cultural norms, solve problems and teach both children and adults. They complement logico-scientific ways of knowing. Stories fulfil a range of purposes in organisational and development contexts (Martin, 2003):

- they are a form of communication for leaders, who may elicit commitment to the organisation through stories of the organisation's beginnings or how it prevailed over challenges;
- stories told by workers are an expression of the organisation's culture and values;
- new employees get much more of a feel for the organisation through stories than from merely reading the policy and procedures manual; and
- stories form an important part of coaching and mentoring.

Stories also serve the ends of learning (Martin, 2003; Shakiba, 2010). They can be used to:

- build rapport with learners
- establish the teacher's credibility and empathy
- communicate the purpose of a learning process
- elicit a change in learners' mood or perspective
- present a message in a vivid way
- provide a problem or situation in a real-life context for exploration.

As the list above indicates, stories can perform the peripheral purpose of “breaking the ice” in learning situations. They can also be used to enhance the teaching of cognitive material. The educational philosophy of situated cognition claims that all useful knowledge is bound to social, cultural and physical contexts (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989), and that learning likewise needs to be grounded in stories that present realistic (whether fictional or not) situations that raise a question or problem.

Using stories in learning contexts can be likened to the case study method of teaching, such as was developed at Harvard Business School to teach business skills. Case studies are detailed accounts of particular business situations, written by business school faculty with particular learning objectives in mind and accompanied by teaching notes and questions for discussion. However, the deeper aspect of stories is their ability to precipitate and embed personal change. Stories are a basic and universal form through which people make sense of the world and their experiences. They show us patterns, they help us make connections between things. They may show us the way out of problematic situations; they are a form of “expert system”, but more than that, they are an ancient tool for self-knowing, both as individuals and as communities.

Our focus here is on learning beyond the sphere of knowledge and skills (where we learn about something and how to do something). We are interested in the more complex levels of learning where emotions, attitudes and values are involved as well as conceptual skills (ie, we learn to be someone and become someone).

TYPES OF STORIES

Whether the focus is on stories selected by the facilitator to present to learners, or on learners creating their own stories, there are a number of different types of stories (Simmons, 2002):

- 1. “Who am I?”** These are stories that give others an insight into “who you are” better than a list of facts and figures. They present an episode, or a series of episodes, that show what you have experienced and how you dealt with it. They reveal, better than any statement you could make, what your values and qualities are. These stories are an act of self-disclosure. They can help to build rapport and a sense of community in a group.
- 2. “Why I am here?”** People tend to be suspicious of someone they do not know or if they cannot figure out what their motivations are. This type of story provides an historical perspective that explains how you got to this point and what your intentions are, so learners know the basis of your relationship with them. This establishes a platform for learners to talk about what they hope to get out of the learning process.
- 3. Vision, meaning and purpose.** The two previous types of stories form the preconditions for this type. This type targets the universal human need for meaning and aspiration. In a learning context, vision stories establish a sense of common purpose and inspire commitment.
- 4. “Teaching” stories.** These stories are specifically aimed at teaching a skill, a concept or a value. They seek to embody the idea in a tangible form. The story may present a model person who excelled at a task or exemplified a value, or use an extended metaphor to illustrate a concept.
- 5. Values-in-action stories.** The best way to teach a truth is by personal example. The next best way is to tell a story that provides an example, that locates the value in real-world circumstances and events. Stories allow you to instill values in a way that keeps people thinking for themselves. Abstract statements do not compel or inspire with the same emotional intensity as stories and metaphors.
- 6. “I know what you are thinking.”** These stories make the listeners wonder if you have read their minds, and thereby draws them in. Such stories are based on studying learners carefully and understanding their motivations, and using the story to respond constructively.

THE BUSINESS NOVEL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

As the list of story types above shows, there are many different types of received stories in business and professional development contexts. The range includes case studies, organisational war stories and legends, business novels and other literary works that may be examined to derive lessons for participants’ own practice. As noted earlier, received stories are stories that are received by participants in a development program, in contrast to stories they have generated themselves.

Our interest here is in a particular type of received story – what is commonly known as the business novel. In this part I explore a number of business novels and analyse the qualities that are desirable if stories are to foster learning about values. Jeff Cox, co-author with Eliyahu Goldratt of *The Goal* (2004), describes business novels as “teaching stories” (as described above). He says (Cox, 2010) “whether the story ‘really happened’ or not is irrelevant. What matters is whether the writing reveals a meaningful piece of truth for its audience.”

Cox says that the essential elements of a business novel are: (i) the story seeks to reveal some concept or principle that is meaningful in the business world, and (ii) it has a didactic purpose – it is written with the motive of instructing the reader, and is not just for the reader’s entertainment. Having said this, it is still worth asking how important the story element is to the purpose of the business novel.

The genre of the business novel has become hugely popular, with some books selling millions of copies around the world. The examples on which comments here are based are:

- *The One-Minute Manager*, Kenneth Blanchard
- *Who Moved My Cheese?: An Amazing Way to Deal with Change in Your Work and in Your Life*, Spencer Johnson
- *Fish! A Remarkable Way to Boost Morale and Improve Results*, Stephen C. Lundin, Harry Paul and John Christensen
- *The Goal: A Process of Ongoing Improvement*, by Eliyahu Goldratt and Jeff Cox

- *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable*, Patrick Lencioni
- *Jack's Notebook*, Gregg Fraley
- *The Boss*, Andrew O'Keeffe
- *The Greatest Planet in the Universe*, Neville Lake

THREE TYPES OF BUSINESS NOVELS

Three different types of approaches can be identified. Some are comprehensive stories in their own right, like Andrew O'Keeffe's *The Boss* (356 pages), where there are characters who inhabit a real-life setting and experience challenges, threats and uncertainty. In this approach, the story may be based on real life, but even if it is not, it presents as if it *could* have really happened. It offers the complexity and ambiguity that characterise real life – readers have to invest themselves in defining the salient issues, not just solve a given problem.

The second type of approach is to locate the story in a business context, with a minimalistic story line. In *The Goal*, for example, the main character faces a crisis at work (as well as a crisis in his personal relationship). The novel shows how he works through the problems, using a business model called the Theory of Constraints.

The delicacy of the balance that has to be achieved between story and theory is evident in reviews of the book on Amazon.com. One reviewer described it as “an entertaining novel and at the same time a thought-provoking business book”. Another said, “The way the author weaves an interesting back story of a troubled engineer turned manager with an astute evaluation of complex production issues brings to life the dead equations and theory in our textbooks.” However, another reviewer was unimpressed with the approach: “The book tries to pass itself off as a novel, when in reality it is a textbook, written in story form.”

Neville Lake's *The Greatest Planet in the Universe* offers the story line that a man in a galaxy far away is assigned the task of finding out the blueprint for success for a trading colony that is to be established on a newly discovered planet. He is given the names of several prominent experts whom he can consult on various aspects of the mission. The author did in fact consult with many CEOs about their experiences and their thinking, and the lessons related in the story are derived from interviews he conducted with them.

Readers of Lake's book will probably arrive at similar conclusions as readers of *The Goal*. Some will find that the story vehicle makes the digestion of business truths more accessible, as they are located in a specific context. This is the widespread reaction to *The One-Minute Manager*, for example. Others will feel that the story is gratuitous and simply a distraction.

The third type of approach is the fable, or the parable, which Spencer Johnson uses in *Who Moved My Cheese?* The story features animals (mice) which are anthropomorphised. The fable illustrates a moral lesson, which Johnson expresses in a number of pithy maxims (eg “If you do not change, you can become extinct”). Kenneth Blanchard's *The One-Minute Manager* is a similarly short tale which offers some practical management techniques. The feedback from multitudes of readers is that it is accessible, it carries a worthwhile message and it is easily remembered and applied.

Many of these business novels are incorporated into leadership development programs. *The Goal*, for example, is explicitly marketed as a resource for business students. *The One-Minute Manager* is assigned reading in many leadership and personal development programs. Some writers provide teaching notes for educators wanting to use the book deliberately as a learning tool, eg Andrew O'Keeffe does so for *The Boss*.

THE IMPORTANCE OF STORY

How important is the story? As our description of the three types of business novels shows, authors differ on the importance of the story itself. The varied reaction of readers suggests that a given approach will not please everyone. The short fable, parable or tale appeals to people who appreciate the humanisation of didactic content. For example, a reviewer (on Amazon) of Patrick Lencioni's book described *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* as “an astutely written fictional tale to unambiguously but painlessly deliver some hard truths about critical business procedures”.

For some readers, the business novel is seen as a form of extended case study. They see the novel as a vehicle that immerses them in a situation so that they need to use their wits and knowledge to identify the key issues and think about how they would have acted. The situation is rendered as far as possible in its rich, living complexity. The story is meant to be provocative, and the process is meant to be demanding and engaging. The learner takes responsibility for learning, at a deep level, the skills of their domain through the exercise.

The purposes of stories thus vary, and so they take different forms. But it is worthwhile recalling some of the features of a good story: How does the plot lead to the point of the story? Does the story hold attention? Does it involve surprise and drama, or humour? These questions have a bearing on the question of how stories can be used effectively for professional development purposes.

Badaracco (2006, p3-5) says that “serious fiction gives us a unique, inside view of leadership. In real life, most people see the leaders of organizations only occasionally and get only fleeting glimpses of what these leaders are thinking and feeling”. He says that, in the best stories, “we confront a series of challenging questions – about the individuals in the stories and about ourselves”. Moreover, “the hardest tests for leaders challenge their characters as much as their skills”.

Badaracco maintains that questions of character are not simply useful or valuable, they are crucial to successful leadership. Accordingly, to be useful for development, stories need to go beyond a one-dimensional view of leaders where, for example, a leader is dominated or ruined by the pursuit of wealth and power. Reality is much more complex and nuanced, and stories need to authentically reflect its richness and ambiguity.

HOW CAN STORIES BE USED EFFECTIVELY?

Reading and reflecting on business novels can play a significant part in professional development programs. By exploring what the characters in the novel do well or poorly, participants can explore their own values and consider how to respond to the behaviour of others. In this way the novel becomes a tool to increase their work effectiveness. The best way to become a leader, an expert or a professional is through direct experience. But personal experience is usually narrow and skewed, and reading exposes us to a much broader array of experiences, so that we can reflect on the experiences of others and avoid at least some of their mistakes. We see the consequences of decisions and commitments over an extended period of time.

Taylor (2000) describes an adult education course where a set of global literary readings that deal with ethical dilemmas is presented to participants. At the beginning, participants write short essays giving their views on an ethical question. This is followed by small-group activities and the readings. In their discussions, participants examine both their own ethical views and their understanding of a character chosen from the readings. The groups discuss the diversity of views in the group, and participants are encouraged to articulate the criteria they have used to formulate their own ethical beliefs.

Taylor observes that teaching with this developmental intention facilitates participants’ potential for transformation; the goal is not that participants acquire more information, but that they are able to think differently. Participants face “some experience that problematizes current understandings and frames of reference” (p155). Their learning “leads to a deepened understanding of oneself, one’s responsibility, and one’s capacity to act in the world” (p157).

Questions for discussion may relate to specific ethical or leadership issues. In general, the following questions offer the basis of an approach to the examination of a business novel:

- Which characters in the novel remind you most of yourself?
- What aspects of that character serve you well as a manager, and what aspects might be hindering or limiting you?
- What are the ethical issues that the character faces?
- What are the salient facts in the novel? What ethical claims can be weighed against each other?
- How would you have responded?
- How could the situation have been handled more constructively?
- What are the principles at stake?

Possible formats for work and discussion on the business novel:

- Participants write a short essay on an ethical question.
- In class, participants share briefly their personal viewpoint in small groups.
- Participants read the novel.
- In class, participants address the discussion questions above, perhaps taking the perspective of a particular character.
- In class, participants take the viewpoint of different characters and act out a situation from the novel.

- Participants write another paper, presenting what they have learned from the novel (either from positive or negative examples) that they can apply in their own practice.

FROM EXPERTISE TO WISDOM

Mark Johnson (1993, p196) asks, “Why is it that we turn to literary texts for our moral education? Why do we learn more from narratives than from academic moral philosophy about what it is to be human, about the contingencies of life, about the kinds of lives we most want to lead, and about what is involved in trying to live those lives?” In answer, he says it is because our lives in themselves have a narrative structure. We enter into the lives of characters and their situations because we ourselves are characters in the circumstances of our own lives.

Johnson (1993, p197) then quotes Martha Nussbaum’s book *Love’s Knowledge*: “For stories cultivate our ability to see and care for particulars, not as representatives of a law, but as what they themselves are: to respond vigorously with sense and emotions before the new; to care deeply about chance happenings in the world, rather than to fortify ourselves against them; to wait for the outcome and to be bewildered – to wait and to float and to be actively passive.”

The stories that Badaracco calls “serious fiction” are in essence about our search for meaning and purpose. As such, used astutely in professional development contexts they can take the practitioner, professional or leader beyond skills and competencies to the more difficult terrain of development, that which is about our values and identity. The questions that stories raise for discussion and reflection should invite the learner into the emotional experience of the story more deeply, not leaving them content to look at the story “extractively”, just looking for “lessons”.

In *The Fifth Discipline* (1992), Senge described three stages in the development of expertise – (1) the learning of new behaviours (new skills, knowledge and language), (2) insight into the principles that underlie behaviour, and (3) the internalisation of skills, habits and beliefs that relate to the area of expertise. Stories can be used at all of these stages of learning and development.

However, there is a further stage that follows the attainment of expertise, and that is the emergence of wisdom, which we might see as the expression of spirituality. There is a growing conversation about the importance of wisdom in leadership and professional practice. This is larger territory, more difficult to grasp, but in the end it is necessary if we are to have practitioners and leaders who serve the greater good of all. This stage is best understood as the stage where the expert or leader, having internalised the knowledge, skills and values of the role, comes into their own unique identity. At this stage, the person enters into the narrative of their life: what they do as expert or leader is not simply the performance of the role but the creation of a new story (Chappell et al. 2003; Pullen, 2006).

Baltes (2004) surveyed what writers have said about wisdom. He examines the contrasts between expertise and wisdom. He says that if expertise is about the acquisition of knowledge, then wisdom is the recognition of the limits of knowledge. If expertise is the possession of competency, then wisdom is having the judgement to know when and how competency should be applied. And if expertise is about skill in a given arena, then wisdom is about synergy between competency and character. Wisdom looks beyond the immediate goals of the situation and thinks from the whole and acts for the well-being of all. Baltes’ examination reveals wisdom as the end-state of true expertise, and the qualities of wisdom indicate that immersion in stories is the most helpful way that these qualities can be elicited.

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