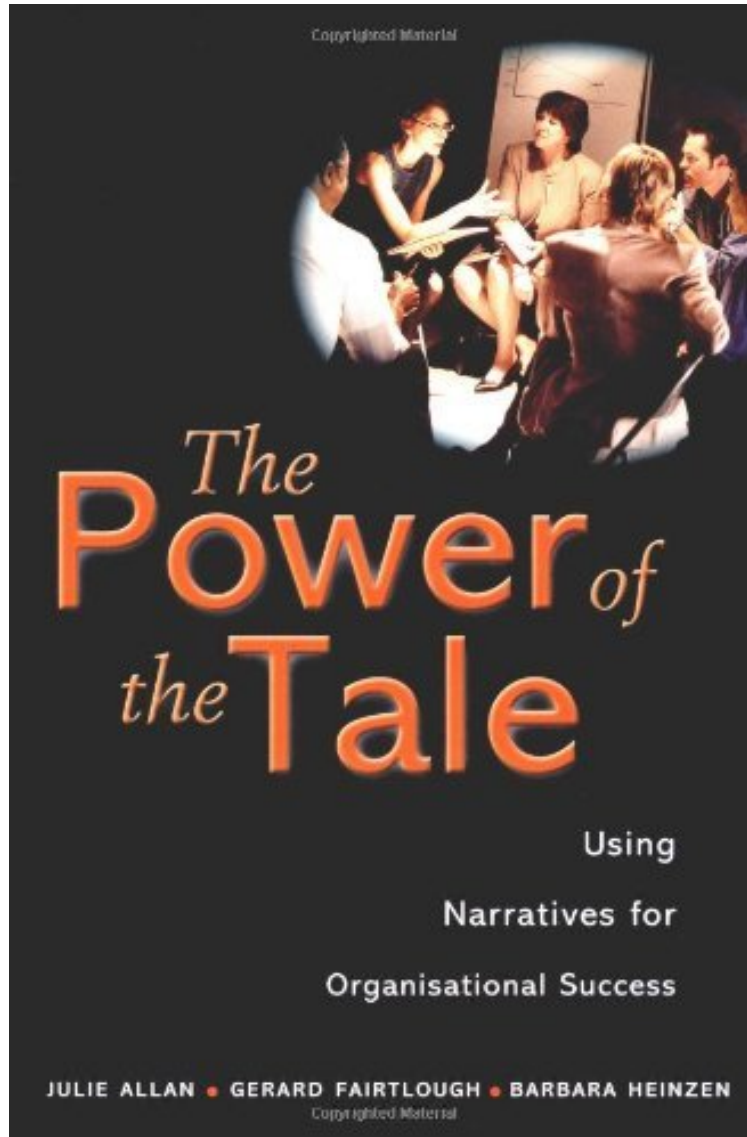


[FREE] The Power of the Tale: Using Narratives for Organisational Success

## The Power of the Tale: Using Narratives for Organisational Success

*Julie Allan, Gerard Fairtlough, Barbara Heinzen*  
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**Julie Allan, Gerard Fairtlough, Barbara Heinzen : The Power of the Tale: Using Narratives for Organisational Success** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Power of the Tale: Using Narratives for Organisational Success:

7 of 8 people found the following review helpful. The subversive power of the tale ...By Philippe Vandebroek This book has obviously been conceptualised as a primer. It provides a broad survey of findings in various fields, particularly psychology and to a lesser extent anthropology, philosophy and linguistics. In the treatment of its material it is very didactic: the language is straightforward and non-technical, themes and issues are gradually introduced and

key messages are regularly revisited. 'The Power of the Tale' starts off rather inconspicuously with a short and very general presentation of the main themes of the book. Then it moves on to the central part, consisting of seven chapters in which the role of story-telling is highlighted in a range of different organisations: formal and informal, small and large, temporary and durable, business and non-business. Some of the settings are fictitious transpositions of the author's real-life experiences, others are existing and recognisable organisations. Thus we dwell consecutively in a maturing start-up company, a large car producer, an informal community of practice, Britain's National Health Service, a not-for-profit organisation in the cultural sector and a countrywide society. Each of these settings provides the backdrop for a different way of leveraging the art of story-telling: for building trust, for furthering personal and organisational learning, for dealing constructively with dilemmas, for spurring innovation and self-organisation, and for enriching the strategic conversation. Of course this book implicitly invites to be read as a story. From this vantage point, it reveals a number of interesting subtexts. To my mind, there are at least two protagonists playing a key role in the background of this narrative. First there is 'the stranger', or 'the outsider'. He can be an external or internal consultant, who joins a constituency and reanimates it with the power of story-telling. It can also be a full member of the organisation who, after having developed a certain level of proficiency in the discipline, takes her leave from her erstwhile peer group. This implicitly forces the insight upon us that stories by their very nature are subversive. The narrative paradigm constitutes a deep antithesis to the command-and-control approach which is still dominating many of our contemporary organisations. Stories are 'Fremdkörper', wayward entities that develop their own viral logic once they're out in the open. A commitment to introducing story-telling in an organisation, therefore, is a serious affair. It constitutes a leap of faith which over time literally might change the organisational dynamics beyond recognition. It seems that the capacity for story-telling can only lead a tenuous, unstable existence within the confines of organisations as we know them today. This brings us to the second mysterious protagonist: the 'senior manager' or the 'decision taker'. At first sight he seems conspicuously absent from the scene. But he is present enough, and in not a terribly flattering role, as a 'corporate bully'. Isn't it striking that the capacity for story-telling is, with exception of the start-up company, invariably injected at lower management levels? It's as if the top of the hierarchy is simply incapable of mustering a level of trust in their own organisations that allows them to constructively embrace the power of the tale. If Allan, Fairtlough and Heinzen are right, then we have no choice but to wage a guerilla war in our own organisations. Long term viability is at stake. Whether we like it or not, the larger system we are part of is self-organising. So we'd better measure up and, humbly, unleash the power of story-telling. There are no guarantees, only that we'll be better prepared for the pains of failure and the glories of success. It may not be what the average reader of business books these days likes to read. At least we need to congratulate the authors of this book for their honesty.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A Good Read! By Rolf Dobelli If you think story-telling is just for little kids, three experts - psychologist Julie Allan, biochemist Gerard Fairtlough and consultant Barbara Heinzen - disagree. They have discovered significant value in story-telling within organizations. After briefly describing the multi-cultural history of stories and oral traditions, they dissect the purposes of story-telling, such as increasing rapport, appealing to the emotions and explaining situations. They use seven composite company case studies to demonstrate how stories can build truth and trust, promote learning, develop skills, break new ground and create scenarios you can use in planning the future. These well-intended examples tend to meander confusingly, but you'll get the point. The last section of the book is devoted to thinking about stories and their uses, an innovative subject that gets little general attention and is the real meat of the text. While the book is very informative and useful, it is not always clear about the purposes of particular stories. We from getAbstract found many helpful lessons about story-telling here, including, unfortunately, a demonstration of the need for sharp editing.

" . . . I thoroughly endorse the book. . . Fairtlough is an excellent thinker." Napier Collins "Takes Arie de Geus's thinking forward . . . I have no hesitation in recommending it for publication." Gill Ringland "The most important aspect is the potential to legitimise the use of storytelling in a business environment . . . and help management think outside the box." Arie de Geus Story-telling is one of the best ways for individuals, groups, organizations and societies to learn. Skill in story-telling and in other narrative activities allows us to understand complexity, live with uncertainty, communicate well and increase personal and organizational effectiveness. As organizations move away from old-fashioned command and control, they will increasingly need the bonds of shared stories, which create shared language, shared visions and shared values.

".... the approach allows management teams to think constructively, help personal development and can be used to explain complex issues." (People Management, 21 March 2002) "definitely a book to recommend to those with curiosity;" (Journal For The Association Management Development (Organisations People) "The Power of The Tale is itself full of entertaining stories. The authors hope you will be entertained by the stories they tell, because while stories will aid your organisation's performance, they should also be fun!" (Management Abstracts) "an interesting and thought-provoking book, which I am sure will encourage many to attempt the story-telling technique;" (Personnel , Vol.32, No.3, 2003) From the Inside Flap Storytelling has held a central

place in all societies, all cultures and across all time but if you thought that only designated storytellers could tell stories, think again. Storytelling is now acknowledged as a rigorous approach, increasingly valued in business and public policy for its ability to offer fresh insights, raise awareness, enhance creativity and deal with complexity and uncertainty. This book takes the everyday stories of life in a variety of organisations and suggests, not only why they are vital, but also how to start telling stories that could make a difference in a working environment. Based around seven diverse settings, the book weaves a picture of life in these places through telling stories of them and about them. Some of the accounts are fictionalised but their truth is clear - they describe situations, and characters, we have all met at some time in our working lives. But this is not simply a book of stories. Bringing together an intriguing, and eclectic selection of stories, theories and exercises, the authors provide a practical and stimulating way of doing things differently. If you have ever despaired of overheads and numbers and searched for a better way to communicate important information, this book is for you. Whatever else you do, don't make heavy weather of it. Stories are best when they're lightly held and told for the fun of it.

From the Back Cover 'This book - full of stories about storytelling - contains some remarkable, real life examples of how story-telling in organisations leads to learning and dilemma resolution and how it makes possible the realisation of a vision.' Arie de Geus, Former Head of Group Planning, Royal Dutch/Shell Group and author of *The Living Company* 'The real power of narrative is that the threads can be interwoven to create ferocious antagonisms, happy endings and elegant syntheses. This is a book for all who would enthral others with their enterprise.' Charles Hampden-Turner, The Judge Institute of Management Studies, University of Cambridge. Co-author of *Riding the Waves of Culture* and *Building Cross-Cultural Competence*. 'Tales, of the sort described in this book, are a powerful antidote to the overly analytical culture that afflicts many organisations today. Like many of the best business ideas, telling stories is both old and new. This book develops a new way to use stories to create the elusive competitive edge - a must for managers in our increasingly complex world.' DeAnne Julius, Former Member of the Monetary Policy Committee, Bank of England. 'A gift to story-lovers. After an hour or so, one is entirely engrossed by this delightful book. Full of rich stories, narratives and ideas, it will appeal to the scholar, the student and the practitioner, the story-teller and the listener.' Yiannis Gabriel, School of Management, Imperial College, University of London. Author of *Storytelling in Organizations*.