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Storytelling Among the Shadows

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ABSTRACT

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Increased globalization, accompanied by rapid changes in technology and population demographics, has led to uncertainty and instability as traditional boundaries have become increasingly porous or nonexistent. Reactionary efforts to contain and control meaning by fortifying boundaries reflect the outdated reductionist, separatist, and linear-causal thinking that lead to domination and victimization. Imposing one's "truth" upon another is a form of colonization. Shared meaning and the coordinated action that depends on it are unlikely under conditions where boundaries--of meaning and of roles--are overly constrained and forcefully instituted.

Organizational forms for many centuries coped with uncertainty with *personal authority*: as exemplified by both the traditional and the charismatic, and then moved to the *impersonal authority* of the rational-legal, which was meant to be more fair, uniform, predictable, etc. (Weber 1924/1947). Our traditional view of authority as external containers of eternal truth, or no longer serves us, guided as it was by the assumption that there could be clear and universally meaningful categorical distinctions. In order to make sense out of ambiguous, even chaotic, events, we are beginning to turn to one another, to the *interpersonal* as the source for sensemaking and authority. Relatedness depends on contradiction: being *both* separate *and* unified in a greater whole. Stories have a *both/and* quality to them, including the expression of both rationality and emotionality, happiness and unhappiness; fact and fiction; yours and mine: "Let's hear your side of the story." Stories are individual and communal; historic and potent, pointing beyond themselves to

actions not taken. Sharing stories suggests new roles and boundaries--that both respect differences and contain community. Narratives, therefore, are of increasing interest to researchers in many fields, including those in organizational studies. Stories are useful for learning, for expanding a vision, for seeing the possibility of a whole in the smallest of details. Stories have the power to expand the horizon of possibilities between the exceptional and the ordinary; they point to emancipatory possibilities.

This issue of the journal Tamara seeks to support the mission of the Standing Conference for Management and Organization Inquiry (SCMOI):

To publish "special issues based upon cutting edge presentations from our *intellectual carnival*. This is a place where people can develop creative and critical contributions to social science, but also be highly self-reflexive." Further, "knowing cannot be separated from the knower...Reflexivity is the ability to problematize and question how one constitutes and makes sense of one's world and self" -- Matt Eriksen. (<http://scmoi.org/>).

Reflexivity is inherent in stories; we construct them as we look back upon our lives and the events that shape them.

The approaches to sensemaking, stories, and the power of relatedness portrayed herein have the both/and quality to them, particularly both reason and emotion; both light and dark. They are liminal, describing life at the place of shifting shadows of desire and fear. Both pieces, Steven Hobbs and Bob Boozer et al., consider the archetypal stories behind contemporary stories of organizational efforts toward

Durant

effectiveness. Two pieces address antenarratives in different contexts: international assignments and the US Coast Guard (Durant et al. and Eriksen et al., respectively). Hansen explicitly describes the recursive structure of stories alluded to by the other authors. In her description of the intertextuality of careers, she weaves a story about how careers are stories as she presents the stories gathered in interviews with people struggling to make sense of career transitions. Like Hansen, Dennehy et al. report on the value of stories during times

of change. Dennehy et al. tell a story about Thomas Paine to illustrate the way in which language can construct organizational reality by helping to articulate collective identity. When such a telling includes frank portrayal of genuine pain, it generates conversations about change among widely dispersed networks and thereby promotes collaboration. It is not my intention to weave any more of a metanarrative about the contents of this special issue. Instead, I hope to suggest the play of meaning among and between the contributions herein.

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