

**Restorying and Postmodern Organization Theater:  
Consultation to the Storytelling Organization**

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**Abstract**

**The focus of this chapter is how consulting is more and more about diagnosing and changing the Storytelling Organization through practices that have been traditionally the province of theater. Storytelling Organization consulting, to us, means employees reconstruct current Organization Theater, as well as craft and rehearse scripts of change. We call this "restorying of Organization Theater in a postmodern world." It is the transformation of theatrics from artificial-metaphor to 'authentic' inquiry, modern (professional) performance, and postmodern blurring of the boundary between actor and spectator, until the boundary between staged and real is impossible to find. Organizational members become self-aware spectators, who are simultaneously actors authoring a new organizational storyline.**

***"We are mere actors on the stage..."* (Shakespeare).**

A woman is on her knees, hands stretched out together over her head, elaborately bowing down to the floor in an exaggerated "salam" motion while reciting an endless

monologue of “I hope this is OK, is what you want oh great one, I am here to serve you....” The person standing over her is peevisly reciting offenses on the fingers of each hand, with headshakes and rolled eyes and a patronizing righteous manner. Each person appears to be in their own separate monologue. They begin to make eye contact, begin to engage a bit, and to react to each other. This scene is typical of a new form of organizational change approach using theatrics. The two characters have been chosen from groups of participants, each enacting in their own monologues a past experience of being disrespected or oppressed, and also at times taking the role of the one disrespecting/oppressing them. They are matched with no regard to the nature of the internal story they enact. As they begin to interact, sometimes confusion at not getting expected responses leads them to each revert to their original internal monologue, and they communicate less and less with each other, each spinning and helplessly caught in their chosen role. At times, the oppressed person turns the tables and becomes the oppressor. At some point we (consultants to the group) stop the action and call for discussion from the spotlighted actors and from the observers. The vignette is both real and art/artificial, and releases a flurry of responses. We will return to this example later.

This chapter describes a use of narrative and theatrics for organization development. We begin by viewing organizational life as a story, and organization development as a means of changing that story or “restorying.” We use a seven step process to guide individuals, groups, and organizations in their own restorying process. Part of that process involves taking apart the opposing “dualisms” (like black-white, right-wrong, etc.) which are often unconsciously embedded in organization members’ language. In this dualism analysis, we use theatrics to deconstruct or analyze situations, and to free organizational members to fashion liberatory responses to exploitive organizational dynamics. In consulting to storytelling

organizations, to change the organization is to change its storytelling processes and enter the realm of theatrics. We could look at organizations as theater in metaphoric ways. We could begin by saying, the way ahead in many organizations looks like a blacked-out theater, where the play has yet to begin, and a common story is not agreed upon. And, others seem to have lost their story script or have a faded one, impossible to read after being recopying so many times. We could explore the theater metaphor, and say, once in a while, unexpectedly, a stagehand shines a moving 'follow spot' to catch an actress, poised and ready to perform a newly written story script to an enthusiastic audience. Is there a backstage where executives and staff check their story lines, adjust costume, and wait for their cue? Our metaphor evaporates as our imaginary spotlight fades.

But what if *organizations are theater* here and there? We could look for examples of theater, and explore face-to-face or virtual stages (i.e. Internet), places where a storyline is made presentable as a rationale and legitimation to spectators, the customers, employees, investors, vendors, and community. In this way theater and storytelling is the full time job of leaders and many consultants.

We will explain our methods through a series of organizational consultation case stories. We include detailed descriptions of some specific structured physical activities. We have used these methods successfully in OD consultations, as well as in undergraduate and graduate classes concerned with organization change and development.

The structure of the chapter is as follows: First, in Part I, we introduce our concept that organizational life constitutes a story, and offer our definition of the Storytelling Organization. Next, in Part II we present our 7-step restorying process. We

explain the process in Part III via a consultation story (The Sci-Fi Case) which offers a broad overview of how we use this restorying process. We follow this with three step-by-step examples of theatrical restorying. Part IV is DePorre's Problem-Externalizing Approach, Part V is The Ritz Hospital Story Deconstruction Example, and finally Part VI is Malbogot's Manipulation Walk Workshop exercise.

### **Part I: The Storytelling Organization**

We believe consultation is about diagnosing and changing what we call the "Storytelling Organization" (Boje, Fedor & Rowland, 1982; Boje, 1991a,b, 1995, 1998; Boyce, 1996; Boje, Luhman & Baack, 1999; Boje, 1999c). We do not mean that organizations are *like* storytelling systems; we say they *are Storytelling Organizations* and ones that are increasingly theatrical, not metaphorical, and therefore call for consulting practices attuned to theatricality.

A Storytelling Organization is defined as a dynamic action sequences and characters (real or imaginary) that comprise a collective memory network in performed stories, the meaning of which is revised as part of the story work of any organization. "Storytelling is the preferred sense-making currency of human relationships among internal and external stakeholders" (Boje, 1991a: 106). Organizations are complex patterns of stories being told, remembered, and restoried to create not only new futures, but also new remembrances of the past. Historians call it "revisionism" but it is something done by every organization.

Strategy is Storying – A strategy is the organization's story of how it will enact its resources (information, people, and technology) to enact some future. Strategic

management involves extensive use of planning scenarios and visioning futures – in short, storytelling (Barry & Elmes, 1997; Landrum, 2001).

In postmodern theater, employees reconstruct current Organization Theater, as well as craft and rehearse scripts of change. We call this evolution the “restorying of Organization Theater in a postmodern world,” the transformation of theatrics from artificial-metaphor to ‘authentic’ inquiry, modern (professional) performance, and postmodern blurring of the boundary between actor and spectator, until the boundary between staged and real is impossible to find.

## **Part II: Change through Restorying**

The 7 steps below demonstrate a storytelling\_based strategy for change, which may be applied at both the personal and organizational levels (Rosile and Dennehy, 1998). Beginning with establishing a positive sense of identity, the questions below lead through problem identification and an assessment of positive and negative aspects of the problem. By identifying a "unique outcome" we may begin to re\_ conceptualize past history. This new history reveals the previously hidden story of an organization or person able to overcome their problem. The final questions identify sources of support for the new story, the story of success at overcoming this problem. These steps were developed by the authors, and are derived from White and Epston’s Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends (1990), and from other examples of restorying efforts, especially by Barry(1997), Kaye(1996), and others. These and other related references are listed in a bibliography by Boje (Storytelling Research in Organizations, 1997, unpublished manuscript, presented at the Organizational Behavior Teaching Conference, 1997, and available from Professor Boje at New Mexico State University).

## 7 STEPS FOR RESTORYING

1. **CHARACTERIZE** (true identity): Describe the organization at its best, if it were functioning perfectly and living up to all its ideals. (At the personal level, how might you be described by your favorite grandparent, relative, or teacher? What are your most outstanding qualities?) Create an “influence map.” Influence Mapping:

- what is the impact or influence of the relevant persons on the problem?
- what is the problem’s influence on the persons?
- what is the “state of affairs” at the onset, middle, and end of the story?
- what is the “state of affairs” we would predict for the future?
- how has the problem affected people’s relationships with themselves?
- what ideas, beliefs, etc. feed the problem?

2. **EXTERNALIZE** the problem: Tell us about a problem the organization currently faces, as if the problem were separate from any individual in the organization and is another character in the organization’s story.

- the problem is the problem
- the people are not the problem; a particular person is not the problem
- make the problem into a character (“overwork”) that the person, as agent, can affect
- reduces the depressing effects of problem-saturated accounts

3. **SYMPATHIZE**: What benefits does the organization derive from the problem? What feeds the problem?

- identify the dualisms supporting the status quo
- explore the dominant side of each dualism

-explore the subordinate side of each dualism

-study the construction of dualisms, how they are two sides of the same coin

4. **REVISE** (commitment to change): Explain the ways in which this problem has had negative effects. Would people really like to be rid of this problem? Why?

-disadvantages of the problem

-explore the limitations of dualisms

-deconstruct the dualisms

5. **STRATEGIZE** (unique outcome) Tell about a time when there was a "unique outcome," when this problem was not as strong, or when it was completely eliminated.

Identify an existing potential to overcome the problem.

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-"double descriptions" or alternative descriptions, so THE STORY becomes "a story"

-multiple stories & outcomes possible

-expand the alternative story--what thoughts and feelings, what happened before, after?

6. **RE\_HISTORICIZE** (re\_story) Take this unique outcome and instead of it being the exception, make it the rule, the dominant story. What evidence is there to support this "alternative" story? What might a news release say, telling about your organization's new ability to overcome this problem? What would they say they saw in the past, which might allow them to predict your success in overcoming the current problem?

-choose the preferred new story

-choose the past “unique outcomes” which support the new story

-choose the future predictions/predictors which support the new story

7. **PUBLICIZE** Who would say they could already see the basis for, or that they would support, this new organizational approach which is overcoming the old problem? How might you enlist the support of these others to ensure continuing success in overcoming this problem?

-letter writing to recognize & encourage the storyteller’s efforts

-”letters of reference”

-concretize the “reauthoring” process

-tangible evidence of support and interest

Next, we offer an example of using the above 7 steps in a consultation setting.

### **Part III: Restorying in the Case of the Sci-Fi Organization**

Following is the story of SciFi, a high-tech military-related organization of over 2000 people. I, Grace Ann Rosile, am the author of this story version (Rosile, 1998a and 1998b). Over a period of 6 months, my husband David Boje and I, gathered data and conducted a four-day strategic planning organizational consultation involving the top leadership at SciFi. This is the story of how we encouraged SciFi to restory itself. The concepts of storytelling, story deconstruction, and restorying, all were used throughout this process, from the initial data-gathering, through the consultation process and the final report. As story listeners, you will judge how successful we were. You will use your own retelling of this story to explain your conclusions regarding the validity and usefulness of our story methods.

Below is part of the story David and I co-created with the people of SciFi, in the process of researching and consulting with them.

"I grew up never really knowing what my father did, because he worked at SciFi and he wasn't allowed to talk about it. It was the same for lots of kids around here."

Hearing this comment, I was beginning to understand the daily lived experiences behind the big sign we saw as we arrived for our first day of interviews at SciFi. Right there on the brick archways housing the armed guards, bold letters prohibited cameras and recording devices. First-day jitters blossomed into a moment of panic. Surely we had mentioned that we had planned to tape record our interviews, hadn't we? Later we discovered that while others in the past had been forbidden to tape record, no one objected to our doing so. Looking back, shouldn't we have guessed that in this environment of routine secrecy, communication would be a serious problem?

SciFi is a high\_tech military\_related government organization, established at the height of efforts to bring an end to World War II. As with most such organizations, they are highly sophisticated with regard to personnel and equipment, with high security requirements. They are governed by a complex overlaying of military bureaucracy and governmental regulations. Their environment has always been greatly affected by global military and political actions. As with most defense\_related activities, the end of the cold war brought reduced funding. But every military "hot spot" like the Gulf War, brings an upsurge in demand for service and a corresponding release of government funding, which may be too late to meet crisis needs. In peaceful times, SciFi is under increasing pressure to recover high overhead costs by bringing in more revenue from private entrepreneurial ventures, i.e. using their high\_tech staff and equipment for non\_military purposes. These

efforts represent a new and as yet fairly small portion of their income. Some think that the SciFi technology is too specialized to adapt to private industry uses, at least not on a scale broad enough to replace the vast scope of their military activities. SciFi also leases space to small hi\_tech private organizations, which are also customers. Next to their US military customer services, SciFi's other mainstay is selling their services to foreign governments. This practice is common with other branches of our government/military organizations. It is justified by noting that we retain the most advanced weapons technologies for ourselves, while selling only older weaponry against which it is claimed we can easily defend ourselves.

About two years earlier SciFi decided to become more proactive in managing its destiny, by engaging in a strategic planning and reorganizing effort. Their intention was to become more flexible and more competitive, and to make SciFi more “businesslike,” and the plan was called “SciFi Inc.” Some called it “reengineering.” A small group of top people worked with a consultant to design a more business\_like, reengineered organization. Implementation of this plan was met with great resistance, resulting in seriously low morale and high perceived uncertainty. People whose parents had spent their careers at SciFi and retired from there, suddenly realized they might not be able to do the same. These reactions occurred in spite of the fact that great efforts had been made to avoid any forced lay\_offs.

At the time of the consultation, there were differing views on the success of the reengineering efforts at SciFi. Some felt the reengineering plan was both necessary and good. Some said they would not participate in any future effort which did not build on the good work begun and yet to be completed by the first reengineering project. Others

felt that the plans may have been good, but poor participation and communication with the workforce made implementation problematic. Still others felt the early work was a near\_disaster, and recommended that we not even use certain words, which had become negatively associated with the earlier reengineering change program.

In retrospect, it appears the workforce and most of the leadership of SciFi believe they had little or no voice in the plan or its implementation. Over 20 briefings were offered to inform and educate, but apparently personnel still did not understand the nature of, or the justification behind, many of the changes. Then David and I were brought in, to begin a new “strategic planning” process. After interviewing key people, we began our consultation with a letter.

*Dear SciFi Leaders*

*We have finished a series of 15 interviews, each lasting an hour and a half, with the top leaders of SciFi and we want to write to tell you our discoveries. We appreciate your openness and candor during our interviews. From those interviews we present below a summary of the results most relevant to our first day's meeting.*

*First, we present our general assessment of SciFi. You are the people who made possible the joke about the job that "doesn't take a rocket scientist." Your jobs do require rocket scientists, and you have, as one person said, "the best of the best." You have work areas that look like science fiction movie sets. In spite of budget cuts and the end of the cold war, you had "scud-busters" in place and working within 48 hours during Desert Storm. People enjoy their work so much, that it was reported that they cheerfully arrived at 3am, for no extra pay, to carry out tests. They do "just great...(in spite of) 1950s*

*equipment." You are the premier (competitor in your field). You are proud of your beautiful setting....(and) You are good neighbors, contributing between \$1-1 1/2 million per day to the surrounding local economies. What has disturbed this ideal scene?*

*According to some, this is the story of people who until very recently were the best and the brightest, they were the solution; now they feel they are treated like they are the problem. Yesterday they were the shining white knights; today they are white elephants. They were scud-busting heroes; now they are budget-busting expense items. What happened between yesterday and today?*

*SciFi is experiencing trouble and everyone would like to help. There was high agreement that the employees are the greatest strength of SciFi. One person described this strength as: "the devotion of employees toward accomplishing the mission...to make things happen successfully; the most technically sound people (in this field)." These are the people who worked around the clock during Dessert Storm. Yet, these people with all their years of dedicated experience and expertise were not consulted about the SciFi Inc plan. The approach of having over 60 people in a meeting proved unwieldly, and the strategic planning process was then delegated to three persons. Those persons were chosen for their years of experience and presumed relatively unbiased perspectives. Their recommendations went to (the chief executive), who announced the plan in a series of briefings. In retrospect, it appears the workforce and most of the leadership of SciFi believe they had little or no voice in the plan or its implementation. They attended the briefings but did not understand the reasoning and justification behind many of the changes. Thus, to some, it appeared as though "yesterday we were the best workforce and today we are worthless." What happened between yesterday and today were many*

*changes, changes so rapid one person said "I would stop changing here" and "We are not in the status quo mode now, we are in the mode of "where are we?" and "It's that C word."*

*While everyone recognized that change is difficult and typically resisted, it is believed to be especially difficult to manage the recent changes here at SciFi for several reasons, some of which are: 1) Initial expectation levels may be unusually high at SciFi. Some employees saw their parents retire from a lifetime of service here, and they were expecting to do the same. 2) Lack of communication regarding the changes; one person suggested that even saying "We still don't know what will happen" would be helpful communication.*

Stop. As the storyteller, I will intervene now before I present the restorying recommendations which David and I presented to SciFi. I want to give you, the reader, a chance to restory this situation yourself. Below is some additional background on SciFi, followed by an outline of steps to take to restory.

**RESTORYING** Fueling the forces for change at SciFi are an impressive series of economic, environmental, political, and regulatory pressures which are acting on a global scale. Seeking to proactively manage this turbulent environment, SciFi leadership embarked on the SciFi Inc. Strategy. It is difficult to know which of the current problems stem from the above-named external pressures, and which stem from flaws in the SciFi Inc plan itself. Most comments indicated that problems were perceived to flow not from the SciFi Inc plan itself, but from its implementation. Such problems were described most often as "communication" problems.

But almost everything is a communication problem. By examining the steps below, you, the reader, may discover how David and I, as the consultants in this story, composed the above letter to SciFi in a way which we hoped would enable them to see their situation as a story, and by seeing it as such, they would be able to restory themselves. Do you see in the letter, the restorying elements listed below? (See Part 2, above, for longer descriptions of the restorying steps).

1. **CHARACTERIZE** Describe the organization at its best, if it were functioning perfectly and living up to all its ideals.
2. **EXTERNALIZE** What is the problem, viewed as separate from any individual, as an external entity?
3. **SYMPATHIZE** What benefits does the organization derive from the problem?
4. **REVISE** Disadvantages of the problem, benefits foregone, reasons to change.
5. **STRATEGIZE** Find a “unique outcome” from the past, even a potential, which allowed the organization to defeat the problem.
6. **RE-HISTORICIZE** Make the “unique outcome” the rule (instead of the exception) in a NEW story of freedom from the problem.
7. **PUBLICIZE** Enlist support for the new story. Use letters, ceremony, etc.

**Recommendation Letter** Now we go to the recommendations David and I presented to SciFi. Our recommendations also were initially introduced as a letter telling the story we saw. We attempt to lead the SciFi top management into redefining their problems as a story which can then be changed or restoried. Do you think we convinced them?

*At this point we would like to make a recommendation regarding how to redefine these reported problems. We recommend a process we call "externalizing" the problem. With this approach, we do not view the problem as being due to the characteristics of the people in the organization. This step alone helps us to avoid finger-pointing and blaming, and the strong tendency for attributional biases to lead us to see other people as "the problem." Instead, we look to external factors influencing the problem, and we assume that "the problem" IS "the problem." This subtle yet powerful redefinition allows our people to be part of our solution, to again be our heroes. We plan to spend a part of the time during our first day's meeting to focus on this positive and productive way of describing problems. By revising the story of the problem ("restorying"), we escape the victim language and dynamics of the "problem-saturated" storyline. We then control the problem, and have thus empowered ourselves to take action against it.*

*Following are some examples of "externalized" problem definitions, highlighted in capital letters. These externalized problems are the common enemy of everyone in the organization, and are not presented as caused by any particular individual or group within SciFi.*

*The problems cited most consistently by everyone were FEAR and UNCERTAINTY. These problems were usually perceived to be due to a HIGH RATE OF CHANGE perceived as unpredictability. Yet gloomy predictions predominate: "There is no good news; '97 will be viewed as good, later on." This leads to LACK OF TRUST, due to the LACK OF COMMUNICATION about the values behind decisions and the reasons why certain choices were made, leading to one comment that "it is all ego and politics."*

*Lack of communication about reasons and especially about the values behind decisions, leaves those decisions open to multiple interpretations in times of uncertainty. This is compounded when goals are unclear, or are not shared by all. Thus, the purchase of a new piece of equipment may be interpreted as “They value technology more than people here” or “That unit got the equipment and we did not; they are the favorites of management” or “They are replacing us with computers” or “Management wants us to have the best equipment available to help us do our jobs even better.”*

*Even when values-oriented information is communicated, the communication may be ineffective, and the message may be distorted or not received at all, if the fear and trust issues have not been addressed. Otherwise, as one person put it, the impression is created of “a used car salesman, saying everything is OK, you still have your job, that (the job) would be the bone that would make it OK. That ain’t enough!” Even the promise of continued employment may be interpreted as belittling the employee’s reasons for working there: “It’s not just for the paycheck; we care about more than that.”*

*Recognizing these fears and concerns as the common, externalized enemy, allows us to work together to overcome them.*

**Conclusion** I interrupt again, not to present my conclusions but to invite you to create your own. After days of wrestling with understanding the various aspects or parts of their problems, the SciFi top management group was floundering. They had steadfastly resisted all attempts to get them to restore themselves. On the morning of the last day, David showed a video of a business case example of a turn-around. On overheads, David showed how SciFi could adopt a strategy along similar lines. The impact was dramatic. They saw the light. “That’s us! We’re just like the company in

the video! We want the same plan. Let's just adopt what is on David's overheads!"

They were saved, and David was their savior. Could we have just used the video, and skipped this story stuff? I believe our days of work allowed this group to understand the elements of their story, and the video-model then triggered their ability to restory.

What's your story? Next, DePorres demonstrates a method for externalizing the problem, and making it a

**Part IV: DePorres' Play-ful Problem Externalizing Approach** For the past several years we have been teaching Storytelling Organization practices to Pepperdine and Benedictine University doctoral students. One Pepperdine student, Daphne DePorres, applied what she learned to her consulting work (DePorres, 2000). We obtained Daphne's permission to share her exercise with you. It demonstrates how to "externalize the problem" as characters in a play.

DePorres used restorying in consultation work with an agency which served victims of abuse. Interestingly, organization members described many of their own organizational problems in terms of abuse of power, almost as if the clients' presenting problems were becoming internalized in both the fabric of the organization and in the lives of its individual members. DePorres addressed the need to externalize the problem in two ways: first, by addressing each individual's personal connections with abuse of power; and second, by externalizing both the personal and organizational experiences. She began in a small-group setting, where each staff member was asked to give a brief example of how violence had touched their lives. This served to draw out both a vast range of experiences, as well as a range of emotions, in a very powerful way.

DePorres next helped the group to externalize their experiences of power abuse. The process began by viewing abuse not as something by a person or persons ("my

co-worker,” “my boss,” or “the administration”) which was directed at me, the victimized employee. Instead, the problem was externalized. It became three new characters in the organizational story: Power, Power Struggles, and Casualties of Power Struggle (P, PS, and CPS). This allowed the organization members to address the problems, to “play with” the problem(s), without pointing fingers, without labels, and without the complex web of explosive emotions underlying these issues and enmeshed in both personal and professional/client experiences---i.e., without recreating the scenarios with which they were inundated daily as the essence of their jobs.

Now, instead of people drowning in problem-saturated accounts, the problem was externalized into separate characters. Now, the people of the organization could be the heroes. They could “play” with the problems and figure out how they might outsmart and defeat them.

In the proper restorying fashion, DePorres kept the focus on the organization’s control of the story. She worked with organizational members to design the following theatrical exploration of organizational power abuses through the role playing of these three characters (P, PS, and CP). As a result of the exercise, participants were able to better understand and address the power dynamics at work, without denying emotions yet without dysfunctional emotionalism.

### **DePorre’s Problem Externalizing Exercise**

(Daphne DePorres may be contacted at [daphne\\_udem@yahoo.com](mailto:daphne_udem@yahoo.com) regarding this exercise.)

**Goal of this Exercise:** Better Understanding of - not necessarily agreement on - the issues/problems facing the organization’s functioning.



three things at (organization), but for now, you're bringing what you know about the 3 from any facet of your life. **“Power” - Who are you?**

What does power look like? Its physical body. Describe. What colors does it wear? What styles of clothing does it like? How does it smell? What is power's usual behaviors?

How does power speak? What is power struggle doing when its not speaking? Who does power struggle report to? Who does power hang out with?

### **“Power Struggle” - Who are You?**

You need to discuss these questions as a way of getting to know who “power struggle is.”

What does ps look like? Its physical body. Describe. What colors does it wear? What styles of clothing does it like? How does it smell? What are ps usual behaviors? What do ps's actions look like? How does power struggle speak? What is power struggle doing when it's not speaking? Who does power struggle report to? Who does power struggle hang out with? Who are power struggle's friends?

### **“Casualty Of Power Struggle” - Who are You?**

What does the casualty of power struggle look like? How do I feel? What do I look like?

How do I stand? How do I communicate? How do I try to get power? How do I contribute to your hold on me?

**Step Two -The Interview Process: “Questions for Power Struggle and Casualty of Power Struggle” from the interviewer**

**Power**

- What do you look like? What else do you look like? How do people recognize you? Power, what are your strengths? Why do you exist? How do you help this organization accomplish its mission? Power, How are you misunderstood? Why don't people like you?
- Do you have friends? How do you make friends? How do you make enemies? What do you want people to understand about you that they just don't get?

**Casualty of Power Struggle**

How did you become a Casualty of Power Struggle? When did you become a casualty of Power Struggle? What keeps you a Casualty of Power Struggle? What benefits do you derive from interacting with power struggle? What are the costs of being a casualty? What do you need from power struggle not to be the casualty of power struggle? How else might I achieve satisfaction besides hanging out with power struggle?

**Power Struggle**

- Power Struggle, how might people describe you? What do you look like? What do you wear? What do you smell like? What feeds you and keeps you going? What do casualties do to keep you alive and happy? Where do you live? What does a day in the life of Power Struggle look like? What would make you no longer have a reason to exist?

### **Step Three- Open Interview Process w/questions**

Instructions:

- At this point, any participant may ask questions of any entity.
- Questioners must continue to be in A Role - can be any role they choose; P, PS, CPS.
- When the participants speak , they must identify themselves in one of the three roles: Power, Power Struggle, Casualty of Power Struggle.
- Anyone can answer the question, but must be in a role.

Dialogue – What is our understanding of the three entities? In this phase, the group spends about 45 minutes to an hour in dialog between the three groups, power struggle, power, and casualty of power. Again, the instruction is given, “When you speak, you must be in role, until notified otherwise. When you speak, for example, say, (example) “As Power, \_\_\_\_\_”

Example:

1. *A person who was in the Power Struggle has a question to ask as Casualty of Power Struggle.*
2. *Someone else in the room answers, speaking from the perspective of P, PS, CPS.*

### **Step Four - Shared Understanding**

- Do we have a better understanding of Power, Power Struggle, and Casualty of Power Struggle?
- What is our understanding of Power, Power Struggle and Casualty of Power Struggle?”
- Closure – There is active reflection on the exercise, applying what they learned to their day-to-day work life.

Now that the organization has externalized their problem, they are ready to begin creating their new story where they, the heroes, defeat those problem characters.

### **Part V: Deconstruction and Ritz Hospital Restoring Theatrics**

Deconstruction is an important tool in the restoring process. Our workshop design for Ritz Hospital incorporated theatrics and deconstruction. Any (or all) of the first seven methods (below) help to understand and break the grip of the dominant storyline. The eighth method leads us to a new story which is “resituated” and free of the old dualism. When resituation is accomplished, we can return to the Restoring process. While a deconstruction cycle may be used almost anywhere in the restoring process, we find it most helpful during Steps 4, 5, and 6 (Revise, Strategize, and Re-Historicize).

### **8 Story Deconstruction Methods**

- ∩ 1. Duality Search – List terms that are bi-polar opposites or express dichotomies (e.g. male/female, management/labor) and divisions in the organization (engineering/marketing). For example, stories may be male or female-centered and articulate more male or female images.



and rewrite the dominant story, so that its hierarchy is not a trap, more views get included, and the plot can change, instead of just getting repeated.

### **Ritz Hospital Case**

**Characterize and Externalize** Ritz Hospital shifted direction dramatically 17 years ago. They managed to remain independent of the large hospital chains and still financially successful, by being different and innovative. Ritz Hospital wants to stay ahead of the curve, to keep on being different and innovative. At the same time, Ritz wants to keep a strong sense of identity and values, of WHO and WHAT Ritz is, to guide them into the future.

**Sympathize** In the past, hospital-based health care was little more than charitable caretaking of those likely to die. As the recipients of charity, patients were expected to be silent and grateful for whatever care they got. The patient did not have a “voice” in the health care story, they were the “other,” the “object.”

**Revise** About 17 years ago, Ritz Hospital put the patient at the heart of the organization, as the first priority. Patients had a voice, and their voice was heard.

### **Revise and Strategize: Questions for Deconstruction of Ritz’s Present Story**

Who is on the bottom now? Who is marginalized in this story? (Rebel voices)

How can we remain small and stay independent? (Dualism; deny the plot)

What challenges and opportunities are we offered by new technology?

(Between the lines)

What is our product? Can we offer an experience, not just a service?

(Resituate: not the well/ill dualism but a third alternative)

**Story Deconstruction** – To deconstruct a story is to discover the many other sides of the story. Part of that process involves taking apart the dualisms embedded in organization members' language (duality search). In our work with Ritz Hospital we asked participants to identify dualities. Their list included:

Sickness/health	Doctor/patient	Cost/revenue
Male/female	Patient/non-patient	Doctor/nurse
Access/cost	Money/public service	Self-pay/third party pay

Administration/staff

Ritz had done away with most titles and positions, and already had a reputation as a flatter, more customer-focused place to work. However, they still discovered places where hierarchy crept in. We used theatrics as part of our exploration of Ritz's dualism of administration/staff (listed above), and our process yielded the example with which we opened this chapter. Resituating that dualism eventually involved redefining the roles of administration and staff in relation to the client/patient and away from the old power struggles with each other. This incorporation of the client into the new story, ultimately led to a redefinition of their product not as a service offered, but as a co-created experience.

We offer next, a technique deeply rooted in the highly theatrical workshops of Augusto Boal (1979) which were themselves based on Paulo Freire's critiques of education. This activity uses methods such as stop-action theatrics, to allow participants to artificially break down interpersonal and group events. Beginning with a series of

scripted physical behaviors, each person experiences their own behavior, then sees the effect of their behavior on others, then reacts to others' responses, in a chained sequence of scripted activities. These activities build, from those designed to enhance simple awareness of self and others, to the recreation of past events. The past is re-created as a living present, which is subjectively perceived by participants. This method is both social and liberatory. It emphasizes simultaneously the connectedness of individuals along with the freedom of each to act.

### **Part VI: Malbogat's Manipulation-Walk Workshop**

We (David and I) invited Simon Malbogat to offer this introductory workshop on theatrics for organizational change, for the Organization Development Division of the Academy of Management, in Toronto in 2000 (Boje and Rosile, 2000). Malbogat is Director of Toronto's Mixed Company theatrical troupe. This group, which performs all over the world, is devoted to using theatre for social change, for corporations, community groups, and high schools. Simon Malbogat may be contacted at [mixedco@echo-on.net](mailto:mixedco@echo-on.net) or 416-515-8080 in Toronto Canada, regarding this workshop. Following is a description of the workshop, which was designed by Malbogat (2000) to address corporate power dynamics.

**Phase I: Introduction** Malbogat begins with warm-up activities, first presenting his own enacting of a series of 7 masks. Each painted facial mask has an expression, each expression related to the 7 forms of external manipulation (guilt, aggression, etc.). Malbogat identifies and then enacts each form, often directing his actions to one of the audience members, who may or may not respond. (There are also 7 internal forms of manipulation which people do to themselves, but in the interests of time, these were not

presented at this workshop.) In this initial phase, people become used to theatrical representations of behaviors, and see the behaviors (the masks) as separate from the person enacting them.

**Phase II: Manipulation Walk** There are two phases to the Manipulation Walk, the Oppressed Walk and the Oppressors Walk. Here, Malbogot asks the participants to think of a time when they felt put down, disrespected, or manipulated. They are asked to walk around the room, using words and gestures in a monologue which acts out how they felt in this oppressed condition. They are encouraged to be expressive, and cautioned not to injure themselves or others, nor to engage others in this monologue. After several minutes in this phase, action is stopped. Malbogot then asks participants to portray the person or persons who had been oppressing them in the previous walk example. For several more minutes, participants walk around as oppressors, then action is stopped again.

**Phase III: The Improvisation** Now Malbogot divides the group in half evenly, and one half is asked to remain in their oppressor roles, while the other half returns to their oppressed roles. The oppressors are asked to remain still with hands raised, while the oppressed walk around and choose an oppressor with whom to partner. When two people agree to partner, the oppressor's hand is then lowered. When all have found partners, Malbogot asks for a pair to volunteer to demonstrate their interaction while the rest of the pairs observe. The demonstration pair spontaneously begin, each acting their private scenarios, and responding to the other person's actions if and as they choose. Frequently, tables are turned, and the oppressed becomes the oppressor as the scene plays out. Then Malbogot stops the action, and asks what the other participants observed.

After brief discussion of the dynamics observed, each pair conducts their own improvisation for several minutes. Then Malbogot stops action for the final de-briefing.

**Phase III: Discussion** Malbogot concludes with a whole-group discussion, inviting volunteer pairs to relate what happened in their scenarios. This discussion reinforces for participants what they have experienced: they are now more awake, aware, and aroused to action. Malbogot links their experiences back to the manipulation masks. They leave with a liberating understanding of the power dynamics of oppressors and oppressed, as well as self-empowerment and self-disempowerment.

### **PART VII: Putting These Concepts Into Practice**

As with most powerful tools, these methods must be used with skill and caution. Narratives and stories are, by nature, richly contextualized and embedded wholes. Thus they elicit very rich responses, from the whole person. This can mean less separation of personal and professional issues, more emotional involvement, and more powerful responses in general, than approaches which may be predominantly intellectual in nature. Also, many activities described here, especially the theatrics, involve the physical body more than some other methods of organizational intervention. This physical involvement also serves to intensify responses, and may evoke tears, anger, and other actions and emotions. At the same time, expect greater creativity, insight, depth of understanding, and immediate visible changes in behavior. We find these methods highly impactful, exhilarating, and effective.

Using narrative and theatrics places great demands on you as the consultant, challenging all your interpersonal and intellectual abilities. Prepare yourself by practicing some of these methods before adopting all of them. For organizations unused to such methods,

prepare them with “warm-up” activities. Allow plenty of time for participants to translate what their bodies and emotions are telling them, into thoughts and words and ultimately organizational application. Remember also, that with activities such as these, there may be profound effects which everyone experiences as profound, but which may not ever be completely captured in words. Sometimes this is not necessary. A major benefit of theatrics is that some learnings may be applied instantly. New behaviors may be enacted and “played out” without over-intellectualizing analysis-paralysis. Further, even in inherently intellectual abstract organizational change programs, small bits of restorying and theatrics may be used with stunning effectiveness.

We expect that you will find that many of your current organizational change consulting practices are rooted in, or already incorporate, narrative and theatrics. Those are the places to begin, if you wish to expand your use of the methods we have briefly outlined here.

## **CONCLUSION**

In summary, restorying and theatrics offer several fresh insights into the organizational change process, opening new opportunities for change. First, by viewing the organization as a narrative or story, we can use restorying to change the old story.

Second, by externalizing the problem and locating it in the discourse as another character in the organization story, we can address the problem without blaming, pointing fingers, and threatening the identity of self and other organization members. The problem no longer is “them,” it is merely the problem. Third, theatrical methods allow us to “play” with organizational problems. We can role-play the externalized problem(s) to gain better understanding and control. Finally, when our new story is re-historicized and

publicized, we take advantage of the contextual and embedded nature of narrative to elicit support for our new story.

We invite you to “play” with these narrative and theatrical methods for organizational change. Please contact us with your questions and comments, as well as your insights from your own experiences in this area. Rosile and Boje may be reached through [www.horsesenseatwork.com](http://www.horsesenseatwork.com) or New Mexico State University’s Management Department (505-646-1201).

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