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Tell the right tale

Corporate stories are important tools for human resource practitioners to influence change



New employees are easily influenced by the stories they hear from their colleagues.

LIKE all communities, organisations have stories and histories.

Today's organisations are witnessing a rise in stories as carriers of knowledge. Some employees share stories as a means of survival; others use stories to challenge, threaten, criticise or bring to the surface accounts of management neglect or lapses.

Why tell stories in organisations? Organisational culture is conveyed through storytelling, personal experience and observation. A corporate story can give people a sense of place that helps them to orientate themselves to the future.

Storytelling is a powerful means of reinforcing organisational values, integrating new hires and strengthening the culture. When done deliberately, stories in organisations teach people how to behave and how not to behave.

Employees can easily pick up on the differences between "what we say" and "what we really do". At the individual level, it can hasten employee departures, and thus increase turnover.

To lessen cultural disconnects, pair new hires immediately with employees who have good attitudes. If you don't, newcomers are socialised into the culture by people who have an attitude problem.

For instance, problem employees may stop by the new hire's desk,

telling him horror stories about the workplace, which leads to morale problems and increased turnover.

Stories are told to convey the history of the organisation through the eyes of the storyteller. Watch out who the storyteller is and what his agenda is.

Stories of successful leadership and stories of failure can tell how power works and does not work in the organisation. These often describe a person doing something and then getting rewarded or punished.

Stories may also say something about power in the organisation. When related as a personal story, it may be used to propagate the power of the storyteller. For example, if I talk about a conflict that I won, I am putting forward the idea that I am not a person to be crossed.

Stories in organisations often tell about the style and quality of the leadership there. The leadership story may also tell of the struggles and difficulties of the journey and how the leader led the people to "the promised land".

These stories illustrate whether the leader acted in a controlling or collaborative way. The implication for future leaders is that they should follow the examples portrayed in the success stories.

Leaders, in some stories, need not be appointed managers. Empowering

companies may tell stories about people from the lowest ranks stepping up to the plate.

For human resource (HR) practitioners, organisational storytelling is a useful tool to implement change and influence staff in the company.

Collecting stories which say something about an organisation, compiling the wisdom that others have contributed, and giving real shape and life to the corporate inheritance are important tasks for the HR department.

Without stories to learn from, the people who make up the current generation have no sense of where they belong.

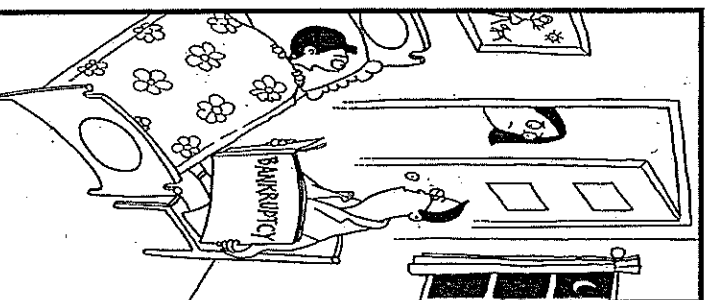
Organisational storytelling is for anyone in an organisation who wants to drive positive organisational change and be effective at it.

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Lunch Box by Noel Rosales



"Mum, can you please ask dad to tell his bedtime stories to his employees instead?"