Organizational Storytelling, Ethics and Morality: How Stories Frame Limits of Behavior in Organizations

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Abstract

In this article it is argued that codes of conduct may be a starting point in examining the ethics of a business organization, but a deeper understanding of the ethics and morality of a firm may be found in the stories that circulate from employee to employee and, more specifically, from one generation of employees to another. The search for the basis of a firm's stance on how employees should implicitly respond to both external and internal conflicts should begin with determining the "genesis" story of the firm, the primary organizational metaphor that is derived from that narrative, and how both the master narrative and metaphor frame employees' organizational self-perception and their responses and subsequent actions in dealing with internal and external conflict.

Stories are food for the 'epistemic' hunger of our species. This metaphor is, however, obviously incompatible with the notion of 'perfect fulfillment.' Just as we cannot be ever satisfied with a single meal, or even multiples ones, even if they are absolute gourmet delights, but have to keep eating at regular intervals all our lives, so we cannot ever be fulfilled by binges of narrative activity. (Rukmini Bhaya Nair in Narrative Gravity)

This paper will integrate theories of organizational storytelling and its role in forming a firm's morals and ethics, how an organizational "genesis" narrative and subsequent organizational metaphor develop, and then how these two frame the organization's ethic and moral responses to ambiguous situations.

I. Ethics in the business context

Ethics can be approached from a variety of directions: descriptive ethics –non-judgmental explanation of the ethical framework of societies or large institutions in a society; normative ethics – presents a specific view or approach to ethics which aims to set a standard of behavior for a group or society; and applied ethics – an offshoot of normative ethics that tries to develop ethical standards for specific areas of human endeavor like bio-medical ethics, scientific ethics, academic ethics and business ethics (Buchholz and Rosenthal, 1998). Business ethics, as used in this text, pertains to human interactions when sourcing, producing and marketing goods and services for profit, and include the relationships between business management and their employees, the firm and its primary stakeholders, the business and its relationships to the community, government and society in general.

In the broadest sense, ethics is a society's ongoing examination and pursuit of actions and practices that best promote the enrichment of peoples' lives- both materially and spiritually. It is a society's quest for defining and understanding what constitutes "the good life" or "the good [that] has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim" (Aristotle, 350BC), and creating the conditions necessary for potentially all individuals to achieve it (Buchholz and Rosenthal, p. 2). Ethics is a societal discussion of what ought to be considered for overall human well-being, including the broader concepts of fairness, justice and injustice, what rights and responsibilities are operable under certain situations, and what virtues a society admires and wants to emphasize. Ethics takes an over-view, investigating the state toward which the society should be progressing economically, politically, socially and morally.

As business is a purely social construct, it, too, must be engaged in a society's ethics debate. Economist Milton Freidman is not incorrect in suggesting that the responsibility of business is to produce goods and services people are willing to pay for and, in the process, create wealth for its owners. However, as an integral, legally sanctioned constituent of the society in which it operates, business, like every other member of society, should be a participant in ethics; that is, how business might or might not participate in establishing larger social objectives which promote a fulfilling life. For business not to participate in this discussion and eventual realization of a society's goals is to subject itself to increased regulation and legal constraint. Regulation is merely society's way of saying that it does not approve of the way business is operating or, that by operating the way it, is business is ignoring what the society as set as objectives and goals for itself.

Unlike ethics, morality reflects what we are currently practicing, not ethically investigating and conceptualizing where we should be. In other words, morality more pertains to our everyday experience - our "local world" as Kleinman puts it. "Experience is moral.... because it the medium of engagement in everyday life in which things are at stake and in which ordinary people are deeply engaged as stake-holders who have important things to lose, to gain, and to preserve (Kleinman, 2000, p. 362). In business organizations, people are concerned with their status in the organization, what their work means, job security and the angst the threat of job loss can generate, definitions of their worth, relations with subordinates and superiors, coping with aggression and/

or humiliation, responding pressures to perform, and the subjugation of one's non-working morality to the demands of the organization; and each of these has a moral component. Thus, business "ethics," then, should not be confused with business "morality." Morality is the sum total of a particular society's or organization's current perceived traditions, beliefs, values, attitudes and norms that have been cultivated over time, institutionalized in religious doctrine, laws, regulations and codes of conduct which explicitly or implicitly suggest how an individual should behave in situations as they are encountered daily. Ethics may well include a discussion of moral trends, but, again, morality defines primarily where we are.

The use of formal, codes of conduct and carefully constructed principles of corporate "ethics" which explicitly define corporate morality in its policies regarding specific, concrete situations such as payments to suppliers, contract bidding, conflict of interest, external relations, corporate governance and so on, is widespread among large business organizations today. The larger and more complex the business and the greater the number and types of internal and external stakeholders, the more complex and comprehensive is its code of conduct. In the very complex, litigious, and highly regulated world in which we live, it is no wonder. Codes of conduct are widely used to inform employees and other stakeholders about the firm's recognition of regulatory obligations, to communicate corporate policies that have evolved over time, and/or to iterate the formal relationships between the firm and its employees.

For example, United Technologies' (UTC) Code of Ethics is an extensive statement of its Corporate Principles and Standards of Conduct that addresses the firm's relations with suppliers, customers, employees, shareholders, various communities worldwide, competitor relations, and its employees' responsibilities. Each of these main categories is, in turn, divided into specific topics. Under conduct toward employees, there are subtopics of adherence to equal opportunity, workplace environment, drug and alcohol abuse at work, the privacy of employees, communications policies (including use of e-mail), training, and compensation and benefits. In total there are thirty-five subsections in the UTC Code of Ethics. Additionally, the company has created a network of Business Practices/Compliance Officers to explain elements of the Code and to advise employees who may have a specific question (United Technologies). Obviously, UTC takes its Code very seriously.

Where UTC's Code attempts to be legally comprehensive, a smaller firm's codes or statement of business ethics may be quite simple and address only broad values that frame the firm's response to moral issues. Specific rules and regulations may be stated more explicitly in corporate charters and human resource publications, but the "ethics" of the firm may be stated less formally. For the mid-sized firm, the code may be a simpler statement of "Immutable Values," such as:

1) Always service the customer first – the hierarchy of service, growth, cost and profit.
2) Business designed to make profit.
3) Always have a strategy
4) Strive to be better before bigger
5) Strong work environment exists
6) Ownership and Accountability is pushed down and clearly understood.
7) Always share the improvements.
(quoted by permission)
and toward customers, its "Service Values" are:
We do what we say. Integrity
What we do, we do well. Quality

We are no more that we say we are. Honesty
We say we are not more that we deliver. Modesty
We abhor mediocrity because we deserve better. Courage
(quoted by permission)

These values, then, form a structure within which ethical issues might be addressed. Given the rather terse way these principles are outlined, we can assume there is a more implicit set of rules or values the firm employees daily. For example, we do not know what the "hierarchy" mentioned in the first line of "Immutable Values" really is. We can assume they mean service is the highest and that profit the lowest, meaning that profit will flow from providing consistently good service to customers, although the next line gives profit some additional emphasis. Likewise, the "courage" to not be mediocre must have some implied meaning for the firm. It is not a connection one would normally make.

Yet, despite carefully or, in some cases, not so professionally crafted codes, we may in fact discover more about a firm's ethical and moral environment by listening to the narratives of employees and management. Where the formal code may address unambiguous moral circumstances, there are always situations which require an interpretation of rules and may rely more on personal ethics than those formally discussed at the corporate policy level (Buchholz and Rosenthal, p 177). How do individuals learn how to respond to those "gray" areas of organizational behavior? What does an employee do if the Code does not address a particular circumstance? Perhaps, as suggested in this paper, the answer lies in the stories about solutions to ethical conundrums or morally bounded situations which have occurred within the organization and which, when taken as a whole, eventually frame the ethical limits of employee responses in the future. In other words, codes of conduct represent what the firm espouses what individuals should do normatively, while stories may transmit to others what individuals in the firm actually did do – successfully or not – at any given period of time. One could argue that stories are merely tales of a response to a particular situation at a particular time in the firm's history, representing the existing morality of the firm "at that time." However, there are some values in a firm which become, over time, truly "immutable" as the stories are told repeatedly. There are moral responses for any business that do not change drastically over time as discussed below.

II. Stories in Organizations

The narrative is a way for us to make sense of our experiences to ourselves and relate those experiences to others. Generally speaking, a narrative is merely the recounting of a series of events in a particular place in which actors (ourselves, included) move through or cause a series of chronological events – a fabula (Bal, 1997). A story is a structured narrative related in a particular way, that is, the sequence of the events may not be perfectly chronological, the recounting may use non-verbal signs, descriptions of place, actors, or reactions may use a variety of tropes, and the voice of the narrator may well be a participant or observer of the fabula or simply a conveyor of the story itself. The purpose of a "good" story is to make the common themes new and fresh by using a range of poetic techniques (Shklovski, 1965; Tomashevsky, 1965). A story is a narrative that conveys a thought, a moral or virtue, a consequence in a way that forces us to look at a common message in a new way, allowing us the opportunity of not being repetitive or mundane conversationalists, that is, "story-tellers tell particular stories in order to illustrate general truths which they expect their recipients to infer; story-

tellers prefer to imply rather than baldly state the general truth they are illustrating" (Nair, 2003).

Oral stories can take many forms – "terse stories" (Boje, p. 115) like "You know the story, don't you?"(implying the listener already knows the story and has full command of the storyline and its meaning), the joke (punch line defined), anecdotes (crystallized, unadorned tales), narratives of great length and told with dramatic zeal (epics, sagas, myths), carefully constructed "stories" with public relations intent, and simple recounting of events. Unlike written texts, an orally recited story can be and probably will be told in myriad ways. In all cases, however, there is a moral/general truth motivating the telling.

Storytelling is a powerful tool in organizational learning as well in that they communicate implicit organizational values (Schein, 1984; Randall and Martin, 2003), "legitimise [sic] types of behavior" or relate events or actions of individuals that exhibit that behavior (Johnson and Scholes, 1999), control the behavior of others in an organization (Wilkins, 1983;) by the use of stories themselves or the words used to tell the tale (Czarniawska-Joerges and Joerges, 1988), play a significant role in organizational change and are basic to the process of organizational socialization (Brown, 1985) and change (Denning, 2001) and are in integral to the storage and retrieval of organizational memory (Walsh and Ungson, 1991). An organization might be even viewed as a "collective storytelling system in which the performance of stories is a key part of members' sense making "(Boje, 1991). But perhaps most importantly, "the power of stories and narrative derives from the story's ability to create a framework that our mind can understand" (Brown, 2005).

Weick suggests that sensemaking in an organizational setting consists of creating a meaningful present through a "combination of a past moment + connection + present moment of experience" and that "frames are past moments of socialization and cues are present moments of experience" (Weick, 1995). To create meaning for ourselves we look to the past for generalized circumstances we have either witnessed or learned about and connect them with present experiential events, and by doing so provide ourselves with some sense of what it all means. As Weick also points out, stories are part of an organizations total "vocabulary" of sensemaking (Weick, p 111). Stories can be about frames or past socialization events, past connections made, and the cues which were extent at the time the story took place. In fact, the format of a fabula is similar to Weick's formula above. Every story has a beginning+ middle+ end, which is in turn a kind of life dialectic of steady state + disruptive predicament + solution (new steady state). It is not a single event that makes a story, but rather a sequence of connected events. The very "sequence is the source of sense" Weick, p. 128).

In a story from my working life in agribusiness, there was one about a silo that was both storing federally owned grain and privately owned grain for an export silo on the Gulf of Mexico. The manager was asked to ship a trainload of grain to the export silo immediately due to the unexpected arrival of a ship. Not having enough of his own privately owned stock, he shipped federally receipted grain on a Friday, hoping to replace it on Monday. As fate would have it, the federal inspector arrived on Monday to verify the federal stocks, which were unfortunately on their way south. The manager, it was always noted, had five to ten years in Leavenworth to think about his error. The moral of the story to young silo managers was clear and is still clear today – manipulating Federal receipts is dangerous.

The point here is that each event by itself carries no real meaning; but the sequence of events and the ending steady state meant a lot to a new managerial trainee. By hearing the story

and putting ourselves in the role of the main character, we could envision what the consequences of our actions would be should we do the same thing. Thus, it is the stories about those employees who responded morally and were applauded or about those who exceeded the ethical and moral limits of the firm and suffered the consequences which will begin to frame the organizational morality.

At the same time, stories allow us to learn by vicariously living experiences of others through story. Throughout our lives, much of what we learn we do so through stories that they provide a opportunity to "organize lived and listened-to experiences" (Bransford, Brown and Cocking, 2000, p. 108;) in ways that provide new or enhanced understanding and meaning (Prusak, 2005). In fact, it is interesting to consider Vittorio Gallese's theory of embodied simulation and its implications for understanding the power of storytelling, that is, if simulation is "an automatic, unconscious, and pre-reflexive functional mechanism" of the brain that "generates representational content," it could, therefore, "…play a major role in our epistemic approach to the world" (Gallese, 2004). Similar experiments using disgust as the basic emotion have determined that "there is a common mechanism for understanding the emotion in others and feeling the same emotions in ourselves." (Wicker, Keysers, Plailly, Royet, Gallese and Rizzolatti, 2003)   Further experimentation may conclude that when individuals listen to stories (which generally includes visual cues by the teller) and "relive" someone else's humiliation embarrassment over an admonishment, fear of losing one's job or respect, joy at attaining success and so on, they may well be simulating those same feelings and responses on a neurological level. This could create as powerful a meaning or be as significant a learning tool as experiencing the events of the story oneself. It is beyond the scope of this paper to delve into the current theory of embodied simulation, but further studies may well suggest that much of the meaning of story may well be in "shared body states" (Gallese, 2004). If this is true on an individual level, it may well add to the understanding of organizational memory as "not just an individual-level phenomenon, but [one that] can apply to a supraindividual collectivity as well through a process of sharing" (Walsh and Ungson, p. 68) with storytelling only one of several methods of sharing and retaining organizational experiences as memory (Walsh and Ungson, p.64).

Stories people tell evolve over time as external conditions and their own sensemaking needs change. After all, it is well known that Charles Perrault's original 17th century Little Red Riding Hood ("Le petit chaperon rouge" -1697) was a precautionary tale for young girls concerning the dangers of getting into bed too quickly with unsavory, but determined, sweet-talking "wolves." In Grimms's "Rotkäppchen" version (in Kinder- und Hausmärchen, 1812) it becomes a tale of resurrection with the live grandmother being cut out of the wolf's stomach by the huntsman. Today, it is more a tale of courage, revenge, and the triumph of good (Riding Hood and the since added Woodsman/Huntsman) over evil (the Wolf) and may completely spare children the gory details about slitting open the wolf. In the modern tale the wolf is merely drowned in a well. Some versions have even pacified it further by having the huntsman make the wolf "spit up" grandma, knocking the wolf out, and carrying him off deep into the woods where he will not hurt anyone again. The point here is that stories develop depending on how the morality they were initially meant to convey itself changes. After all, stories are constructs. They are seldom concrete representations of reality. Stories are what individuals interpret as experiential reality as it is filtered through their psyches. As

their realities change, so do stories.

Organizational stories are no different (Weick, p. 128). As one aspect of an organization's overall culture, stories begin and evolve over time as the organization develops through its lifecycle (Schein, p. 13) and as their ecologies change. If stories are a significant aspect of organizational memory in that they create a basis for relating how organizational problems were handled in the past (Boje, p. 106, Walsh and Ungson, p. 61), those stories also must be flexible in order to handle new and perhaps even more destabilizing circumstances. At the same, time, organizations will witness the emergence of new stories as individuals comprehend, summarize and create a meaningful wholes out of the bits and pieces of organizational information that come their way (Daft and Wiginton, 1979) and become part of an organizations memory banks. Walsh and Ungson note three functions of organizational memory (1) an 'informational role' by which organization collect and retain facts and problem-solving in the past which are then used to expedite future problems, (2) a "control function" to reduce the time necessary to implement a newly arrived at decision, and (3) a "political role" in that information and its control provide a source of power by which the actions of others can be influenced (Walsh and Ungson, p. 73). Storytelling plays an important role in the first of these three uses in that it may well be a primary method for collecting, transmitting and retaining information about past decision-making. But the question still arises, within what context do all of these bits and pieces become framed into a coherent whole so that specific solutions to internally or externally instigated problems can be approached by all members of the organization ethically and morally, using a unified model?

III. Genesis narratives as ethical frames

A metaphor may be used to define an organization in that the metaphor becomes a "experiential gestalt" (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980), but the organization's use of a metaphor to describe itself is something more. The metaphor is derived from the genesis narrative as a way of simplify a complex of events that make up the story. The metaphor and the causal narrative behind it become the basis for how individuals in organizations frame their perception of who they are, what the organization is, and how it responds to conflict or chaos. The genesis narrative is the wellspring for understanding the new cues which employees glean form incidental narratives heard everyday. The genesis narrative is a frame for interpreting cues to add meaning to the purpose of the organization, relations within the organization, and individual location in the organization.

From a social science perspective, Somers and Gibson list four types of narratives: (1) "Ontological narratives" or those which individuals use to define themselves, (2) "Public narratives" or those used by organizations to define themselves and act as frames for ontological narratives, (3) "Conceptual narratives," or those narratives used by social scientist to establish a "vocabulary" by means of which major issues of society can be understood, and (4) meta- narratives or master narratives which are those all encompassing narratives of the environment in which we live such as narratives of social and economic progress and are general perceived as general truths (Somers and Gibson, 1994). Here a meta-narrative can become so powerful that it may shape our theories of history, economics, and social research despite the fact that the narrative may not coincide with the truth. It is our search for "the answer," the great "Why?" of systems and civilizations. For nearly 80 years, the meta-narra-

tive of the battle between capitalism versus communism as the great ideological conflict of the last century shaped our views of politics, history, theories of economics (Marxism and market capitalism) and even good and evil. The idea of a master narrative concept for history, for example, seems to falling out of favor (Fulford, 1999), but the term is still used in many other fields and may be useful here is discussing the genesis story.

In this paper, a "genesis narrative" is the overriding, overarching story of an organization. I am reluctant to use the terms epic or myth – both terms conjure up something magical, ethereal, and god-like. That is, an epic is highly involved, complex narrative of discovery full of chance meetings with exotic, fanciful characters and "myth frequently involves fantastical elements (e.g. man-eating ogres) subject neither to the constraints of logic nor empirical falsifiablity" (Pondy, 1983). Despite the desire of some to infuse organizational stories with mythical properties, the reality is that organizations are made up of ordinary people, albeit some with a more circumspect sense of leadership. It is normal for people to use metaphor or simile in narratives about "heroic" acts of past and, occasionally, present leaders, but storytellers are merely reconstructing events that involved the actions of quite regular people. True, storytellers may well exaggerate a founder's or ground breaking hero's "bravery," tenacity, vision, "heroism," honesty or borderline dishonesty in attaining organizational goals by "being victorious" over the "enemy" and "battling" regulators (my apologies to Lakoff for using such metaphors), but certainly they cannot attain the mythical qualities of Achilles, Odysseus, Cuchulainn, or Gilgamesh – even over time. A business boardroom is no pantheon.

In my first firm, we were amazed at the story we were told about how the founders heroically moved tons of wheat in horse-drawn wagons from Ukraine to Europe to "combat" the hunger due to prolonged drought - but we also realized that the reason for the decision was to earn a profit from grain starved European mills. Yet, this master narrative defined our purpose as young, opportunistic traders and eventually, by telling the story over and over, we convinced ourselves that we were made of the same stuff and were supposed to spend our time looking for prospects to accomplish the same feat - and the same profit. We were living an embedded narrative that transcended our realities. For us, the genesis narrative of the firm relieved us from having to ask the question "Why?" Like our genesis story, we saw a world where commodities moved freely due to market forces, not governmental intervention. We could provide commodities where they were lacking by drawing from areas of surplus. We where the force behind the market's relentless march toward equilibrium - and we were awarded a profit for doing so. Our genesis story, moving grain to alleviate a shortage, crystallized into our metaphor – the "flow." It seemed to us that commodities indeed did "flow" like a global river, emanating from a flood of a glut, streaming into areas of least resistance. We learned we were an instrumental part of the flow.

Genesis narratives can become so ingrained in individuals in the organization that the narrative becomes the primary way individuals organize their perceptions about the organizational component of their lives. Much like Schein's organizational culture, the genesis narrative is similar in that it is deeply embedded in they way individuals conceptualize the organization in which they find themselves. In fact, this narrative can be seen as the foundation of an organization's culture; and where the narrative is particularly prevalent in organizational memory, the organization's culture is strong and more easily characterized. People do not consciously conjure up the genesis story (although some try and spend millions doing so), it is simply there because it

is told and retold so many times that individuals "relive" those aspects of the organization's memory. In reality, it may become one of Boje's "terse stories" in the form of a single metaphor that is able to conjure up the entire narrative. But more than that, the genesis narrative can become so implicit that it dictates behavior – a kind of "this is what we are, so this is the way we should act" – the moral basis for firm and employee actions. The narrative becomes a template for our responses to both internal and external conflicts, a basis for day-to-day motivation, the organization's raison d'etre.

Most young people will recall Steve Jobs' and Steve Wozniak's Apple Computer genesis story that began in the Fall of 1976 in the Jobs' family garage when the two amazingly talented young men (21 and 26 respectively) founded the Apple Computer Co. with the introduction of the first Apple I personal computer. The values their story exemplifies were those of innovation, creativity, experimentation, and a conviction in the belief that personal computers would truly change lives. We also know its downfall in the face of extreme and new leadership. According to Jobs, "What ruined Apple wasn't growth. What ruined Apple was values. John Sculley ruined Apple and he ruined it by bringing a set of values to the top of Apple which were corrupt and corrupted some of the top people who were there, drove out some of the ones who were not corruptible, and brought in more corrupt ones and paid themselves collectively tens of millions of dollars and cared more about their own glory and wealth than they did about what built Apple in the first place--which was making great computers for people to use" (Jobs, 1995). Interestingly enough, HP was also owes its 1939 origins to a California garage, where Bill Hewlett and Dave Packard built the company's first product - an audio oscillator.

The same readers may be less familiar with a private firm like Coca Cola, born in Atlanta, Georgia, on May 8, 1886 when Dr. John Stith Pemberton, a local pharmacist, produced a mildly narcotic, caramel colored syrup, took a sample down the street to Jacobs' Pharmacy where it was mixed with carbonated water. It seems to have been a hit from the beginning. But what the firm has become truly famous for, merchandising, was begun by the man Pemberton sold out to, Asa Candler, in 1889. Chandler was a dedicated and vigorous marketer and promoter, relentlessly pushing the product from the beginning via advertising, coupons, and offering promotional materials all imprinted with the product's increasingly recognizable trademark. The symbol we know today was merely Pemberton's original bookkeeper's hand written rendition of what he thought would be a great name for the new carbonated drink (Coke website). The symbol has become ubiquitous. It exemplifies what the American market capitalist system has become to many - the ability to sell two cents worth of caramel coloring, sugar and carbonated water for a quarter.

These two genesis stories have provided their firms with a definition of how they see themselves and provide their employees with an organizational gestalt in terms of their brands – Coca Cola and Apple computers – which have become metaphors themselves.

Apple Computer seems to see itself as was an innovator of playful, user friendly technology, as true creators helping others create. "Almost all of them [people working on the Mac] were musicians. A lot of them were poets on the side. They went into computers because it was so compelling. It was fresh and new. It was a new medium of expression for their creative talents. The feelings and the passion that people put into it were completely indistinguishable from a poet or a painter. Many of the people were introspective, inward people who expressed how they felt about other people or the rest of humanity in general into their work, work that other people would use. People put a lot of love into these products, and a lot of expression of their appreciation came to these things" (Jobs). Thus, Apple's ethics were clear. Their vision was a world where people would have easy-to-use technology to create whatever they wished. It was only later when this vision of itself transitioned into a technology marketing firm did the company itself change as did the meaning of its genesis story and organizational metaphor for a time. Apple appears to be in the process of revitalizing the older narrative, coming out with new, innovative products like the iPod and iPhoto which support user-friendly consumer creativity.

Coca Cola, on the other hand, has become a metaphor itself for universal brand name marketing and brand recognition. Chandler's original ethic of having Coca Cola consumed by millions in every state of the Union has expanded to have Coca Cola become a global symbol of American brand marketing. Coca Cola is what its logo as metaphor implies and is a continuation of the firm's genesis narrative. Like any other story, a genesis story evolves over time. The energies and feats of founders are exaggerated and less savory aspects of their personalities are downplayed, successful problem solving methodologies become inculcated into organizational memory, failed solutions are minimized or forgotten, and new cues and events are "recorded" and relived via each new telling. What remains, however, is the genesis story itself as both master narrative and organizational metaphor. As Schein notes, "Culture is perpetually changing . . . . But this ongoing evolutionary process does not change those things that are so thoroughly learned that they come to be a stable element of the group's life"(Schein, 1984).

Genesis stories can be both positive and negative for an organization's development. On one hand, again similar to Schein's concept of organizational culture, they can be useful in training new employees as they begin a process of socialization, coping with disruptive external and internal conflicts, creating a sense of collegiality, or perpetuating and reinforcing the values and norms of the organization (Schein, p. 12). On the other hand, genesis stories that do not evolve over time can become formidable barriers to change and growth as firms become locked in their own stories and cannot envision themselves being anything else or responding the environment in any other way. Witness the litany of firms that have disappeared because of their inability to change their narrative in face of changing business and societal demands. In these cases, the genesis story became a cataclysmic anchor. This, of course, is material for another article.

One must be concerned, of course, when firms create genesis stories disingenuously, sustained or even "re-energized" to reinforce the metaphor and corporate coherence, and where internal marketing communications "recreate" the firm for control or manipulative purposes. However, forcing organizational change by creating a genesis story and metaphor that are not in tune with the embedded culture of an existing firm or are artificially messaging the facts to develop a story about a start up to force uniform, compliant behavior where none exists can only lead to employee confusion and resentment. "Corporate fantasies" (Gabriel, 2000) or official stories are not the same stories told around the lunch table, during after hours social sessions or at those times when employees discuss personal anxieties or question themselves, their actions or those of the corporation. Genesis stories are just that – stories. The more they are told and retold by members of an organization – and not just its management public relations department – the more embedded the ethics and the morality of the firm become.

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