

Title: Strategic Narratives as a Methodology to Create Stakeholder Alignment

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Abstract

This paper explores the development of 'strategic narratives' as highly appropriate accounts of the world of a company and a company as such and their potential to generate high levels of alignment among internal and external stakeholders. To this end we explain how the very nature of a company suggests that narratives are a way of giving a holistic, consistent and truthful account of a company. Further to this we suggest a process, including a summary of its actual application, of developing strategic narratives to give an account of the realities and potential of a company that generates high levels of strategic alignment among its stakeholders.

Strategic alignment in companies is usually understood as follows: The ‘strategic thinkers’ decide what the company should do, communicate this to the implementers, who then need to make sure the relevant stakeholder groups behave in such a way that the strategy is realised – this is ‘strategic and operational alignment’. Failures in strategy are often ascribed to failures of implementation, that is, failure to align. In this line of thought alignment is fundamentally a question of information about the required change on the one hand and action on the other. Individuals inside and outside the company need to know what to do, so that they can do (action) it. Information becomes a key resource in the achievement of alignment, and the presentation of that information, and ‘buy in’ of individuals to the content and objectives conveyed in the information constitutes some degree of alignment. Approaches such as the Balanced Scorecard (Kaplan and Duchon 1988; Kaplan and Norton 1992, 1993, 1996), for example, act as mechanisms for alignment by providing information about objectives, and additionally a means for measuring their achievement (thereby motivating ‘buy-in’).

These descriptions present a very simple view of alignment, and, as we will argue, they are oversimplified. In practice, it is evident that alignment and implementation is far from simple and suffers from an exceptionally high failure rate (Kiechel 1984). We start out following Mintzberg et al. who point out that “every failure of implementation is also, by definition, a failure of formulation” (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, and Lampel 1998). In this paper, we will argue that failures of alignment arise not because alignment should be complicated, but because in practice often the account of the strategy we are giving to the relevant stakeholders and stakeholder groups neither resonates with those who are to align themselves nor succeeds in giving an appropriate account of the entities and issues of that are fundamental to alignment. We try to align companies and individuals inside and outside of the company by providing information about one to the other without understanding either how it is that individuals might understand this or what the company, in its very nature, is. We will show that companies are fundamentally not mere objects that can be exhaustively described in technical terms, but rather the kind of entities that in philosophical terms are called ‘works’, similarly to the use of the word when talking about a ‘work’ of art. As we will explain, because companies are works, narratives are a highly appropriate way to give an authentic account of them. At the same time narratives and story telling are a means of giving stakeholders and stakeholder groups a highly engaging account that is capable of capturing much of the complexity of the required alignment and calling them into action. Alignment, we argue, is not brought about by conveying technical information; it is about being ‘truthful’ and telling the ‘truth’. In order to illustrate this, we will further describe a process of strategic narrative development and story telling that is designed to do just that in a major South African telecommunications company, Telkom SA Limited.

Telling the ‘truth’ about companies

The challenge to give a truthful account of a company, its past and current reality and an appropriate account of its potential for the future warrants a few preliminary questions to be clarified and answered. The first question is: What do we mean by the notion ‘truth’, particularly when the challenge is to tell the truth about a company? This leads us to a second question: What actually is a company in its very nature and what therefore is the appropriate way to tell the truth about the kind of entity we call a

company? As these questions about truth and the very nature of entities are of a philosophical and ontological nature we will follow the thinking of Heidegger (Heidegger 1984, 1992; Heidegger 1994), arguably the most prominent contributor of the 20th century in responding to these types of questions.

Usually we regard the 'truth' as the correspondence of a statement with a fact. For example we say a ring is of true gold when the chemical composition is indeed that of gold and not of another material that merely looks like gold but really is not. This understanding of 'truth' is not problematic as long as the facts that are talked about can be verified via empirical methods. Or, to put it another way, such statements of truth are not problematic if the statement can easily be verified because it is manifested in physical and therefore measurable terms.

However, the terms 'true' and 'truth' are also used in a different sense when talk is for example about 'true and genuine friendship' or a 'truly empowering environment'. The notion of the word 'truth' or 'true' is then closer to 'agreement', 'integrity', 'honesty', 'good faith' and 'genuine' rather than correspondence. How, after all, can we ascertain whether a friendship is genuine or not with the toolkit of empirical methodologies?

In looking at the examples of different types of truth it is important to note that not only do they express two different types of notions of truth, they also refer to different types of entities, namely, physical objects and human beings. What we suggest here is that the appropriate notion of truth is actually derived from the very nature of the entity that is being described.

Heidegger makes a distinction between 'true' and 'correct' which we regard as relevant here. Heidegger calls statements that merely comply with circumstantial facts but do not tell us anything with regards to the very nature of these entities as merely 'correct' and he calls only those statements to be 'true' that resonate and correspond with the very nature as entities (Inwood 2000).

In this sense we would not doubt that a well executed methodology in the standard arsenal of a corporate strategist will lead to a 'correct' outcome. However we would contend that mostly well executed strategic analyses do not come to a truthful outcome because they are built on an insufficient or merely metaphorical understanding of the very nature of the company. We would further contend that current efforts of implementing strategy and aligning stakeholders fail at such a high rate because they are built on correct rather than true strategic statements. Both contentions will be explained in more detail below.

Consequently, before we can determine the appropriate way of telling the truth and make a true statement about an entity we first need to answer the ontological question of what an entity in its very nature actually is. Philosophy has long distinguished three types of entities: physical objects, organisms and humans. All of these entities have served in different ways as metaphors for describing companies (Morgan 1997) In an earlier paper we have argued that while these metaphors are helpful in communicating certain aspects of companies, they fail to describe them literally (Heil, Maxwell, and Whittaker 2003). The question then arises what then is a company literally rather than metaphorically?

Heidegger acknowledges the three entities physical objects, organisms and humans (Heidegger 1992) but he knows a fourth type of entity that he calls a 'work'. The word 'work' is used here in the same sense as one talks about a 'work of art' or the Latin word 'opus'. To be a work means to be the kind of entity that sets up a world. Poetry, literature, music, art, religion, philosophy, architecture and states are also works. While they all have physical properties, works cannot be understood via an analysis of these properties. They can only be understood appropriately as works by attending the world they set up (Heidegger 1994). To explain the notion of the entity called 'a work', Polt uses the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial in Washington, which was designed by Maya Lin and is usually referred to as 'the Wall' (Polt 1999). The memorial is a simple V-shaped trench made from a series of black stone sheets inscribed with the names of all the American soldiers who lost their lives in the war. While it may be 'correct' to contend that the Wall is really a physical object, this does not describe the role and function that the Wall 'truly' has in people's lives. The Wall has become a sacred site both in and beyond the United States. What makes it a work cannot be found in the material from which it is made nor in its beauty or aesthetic appeal, but in its effect of creating a world and the establishment of *truth*. The Wall makes the Vietnam War present, and establishes and preserves this event as a fundamental dimension of American identity, regardless of the political conviction of the visitor to this work. Such revelations belong to every work.

Heidegger says that works 'set up a world' (Heidegger 1994). The word 'world' here is used in a similar sense as one talks about the 'public world' or the 'corporate world'. The word 'world' is used in a similar (though not identical) sense as one uses the word 'context' or 'culture'. World in this sense is the always already totality of relevance we find ourselves in and which allows us as human beings to make sense of everything including ourselves. "World worlds and is being more fully than the tangible and perceptible realm in which we believe ourselves to be at home. World is never an object that stands before us and can be looked at. World is the ever non-objective to which we are submitted as long as we are [human beings]" (Heidegger 1984). Because, unlike all other entities, human beings are always in a world, their way of being has been called 'being-in-the-world' (Heidegger 1984). When humans make decisions or act, they never do this outside a context or world but always within a context or world. In other words, humans never make decisions either in a detached way or with complete information but always based on a certain limited understanding, meaning in a certain context or world and every decision and action of human beings is made possible and limited by the world it happens in.

Locating the very nature of a company within Heidegger's typology it is clear that companies as entities are works. Companies by their very nature are the kind of entity that set up a world. For this reason companies due to their very nature always have a culture and a reputation and it is not possible to think of an actual company without a culture or without a reputation.

Acknowledging the company as a work raises the question what is the appropriate way of giving and account of a work in general and a company is particular. Since any strategic effort and any effort in successful reputation management that is to be sustainable is to build on an authentic and a truthful reflection of the organisational

realities (Fombrun and Van Riel 2004), the question of how to give a truthful account of a company is of critical importance.

In analysing the implicit assumptions of the prominent approaches to strategic analysis, formulation and implementation, particularly those that fall under Mintzberg et al.'s (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, and Lampel 1998) prescriptive schools, those approaches to strategy that are designed to tell us how strategy should actually be done, we came to the conclusion that they are predominantly build on the notion that companies are actually merely physical objects. Their preference to describe companies in technical and quantitative language fails to describe the richness and nuances that are critical to understand a company. While this way of describing companies would be perfectly adequate if companies indeed were by their very nature physical objects, as this is not what they are, the prescriptive school mostly fail to make true statements about companies and merely succeed in saying what is correct.

What then would be the characteristics or genre of a truthful account of a company? Looking at other works such as music, literature, art or architecture we can get an idea of how to appropriately account for them. A skilful account of such works, also called a 'critique', itself has an artistic and poetic character. The account succeeds as such to the degree that this account itself sets up allegorically the world set up by the work that is to be accounted for (Gadamer 1961). Heidegger states that in their very nature works are poetic (Heidegger 1994). Since works in their very nature are poetic, it might be most appropriate to actually articulate the world of a company, in this case a telecommunications company, by writing a poem.

The Bearer of Tales

*I am the bearer of tales
The carrier of news, woes and wishes
Through me triumphs are celebrated
The news good and the news Better
The news best unheard, news better unknown
It is I who gives the spoken word its voice*

*As for my people,
A medley of sorts pace my ventricles
Giving life in all manners and taking strain from time to time
Giving of talent, time and temperament
It is I who, like the spider's web dare to carry
the heartfelt wishes of my nations people and
the head pounding troubles of the young and the aged*

*As the wind carries the unseen seeds of life's potential
So too I give life to thoughts and action to timid contemplation
I am the vibration of my people's precious moments
I am the drum that beats louder than our ancients' drums
I am the silence beneath the dreams of a million wishfuls
So too the scream that breaks the frozen chains of silent moments*

I am the teller of fortunes

*The distant whisperer into a loved-one's ear
I am a new-born plant that survives again and again
the wrath of change through out altering times
I am the carer for the being well of my nations poor
I am a heart beat away from the thumbprints of my people
Beating louder and louder in a world filling up with foes*

*I pay allegiance to the sound of words so too their form and their shape
I am the companion that fades not when the tired sun bids farewell
The lullaby that ceases not when peace-less dreams beckon mere mortals
Through my ropes the spoken word finds my power and thus its own voice
As the wind carries the unseen seeds of life's potential
So too I give life to thoughts and action to timid contemplation
I am the drum that beats louder than our ancients' drums
I am the bearer of tales and the teller of fortunes
It is I who gives the spoken word its voice*

By Kgari Moshopyadi Heil

While this is an example of having done this very successfully, we feel that poetry reaches the levels of pure artistry that we have not been able to provide much guidance for. Heidegger himself does not limit his understanding of poetry to verse with rhythm and rhyme but a way of using language that is generative. As such, all literature can be poetic. We found that stories have a sufficiently clearly defined range of generic structures, themes, metaphors, archetypes, etc. so that a process can be developed and suggested that gives helpful guidance to the development of the kind of allegory of the world of a company that we call a 'strategic narrative'. In the following section we describe further why it is that narratives are not only very appropriate to the nature of the company as a work, but also appropriate in creating meaning for stakeholders in side and outside the company that is aligned to the reality of the company.

Narratives and Storytelling as Communications of truth

It may seem counter-intuitive to suggest that narrative and storytelling provide a mechanism for communications of truth. After all, we were all admonished as children not to tell 'stories', 'fibs', or lies. The basis of our contention, however, - that stories can be truths rather than lies - is the idea that narratives and stories play a fundamental role in human life. Boland and Tenkasi (Boland and Tenkasi 1995), following Bruner, point out that narrative is not an idle luxury of tea-time chatting, but a fundamental cognitive process through which communities of practice¹ are

¹ A community of practice is a group of individuals who engage in common practice, and in so doing, develop 'unique interpretive repertoires' (Boland and Tenkasi 1995) Such a community may not coincide with organisational boundaries (Boland and Tenkasi 1995), or even physical settings (Tyre and Hippel 1997) A single individual may very well simultaneously be a member of multiple communities of practice, within and external to the company.

constructed and maintained. Narratives are distinct from logical arguments, validated by criteria of interest and plausibility, rather than only logic and consistency. Rather than relying on demonstrable proof, they show how events and things might fit, given a particular cultural situation. This creates room for negotiation (Czarniawska-Joerges 1996) not only of the situation, but of the very meanings attendant in the situation. Czarniawska-Joerges gives an example:

‘Corporation X began to suffer losses, and only when the general manager introduced “lean production” did it start making profits again’; ‘You are mistaken; what they did in fact was to restructure their investment portfolio, and that did the trick’ (Czarniawska-Joerges 1996)

The outcome of this negotiation will determine not only what caused the company to make profits, but also the understanding of concepts such as ‘lean production’ (company-saving or job-destroying) and ‘restructuring’ (company-saving or selling-off-the-family-silver). Not only the why’s, but the what’s and the who’s are established in a stories and sagas. Thus, as Polkinghorne states “[n]arrative is a form of “meaning making” ... Narrative recognises the meaningfulness of individual experiences by noting how they function as parts of the whole. Its particular subject matter is human actions and events that affect human being, which it configures into wholes according to the roles these actions and events play in bridging about a conclusion. ... The narrative scheme serves as a lens through which the apparently independent and disconnected elements of existence are seen as related parts of a whole” (Polkinghorne 1988: 36).

For stakeholders inside and outside the company then, the use of language as narrative may be used to tell a story which surfaces the implicit assumptions, or background of meaning on which actions are taken [Boland, 1995 #205], as well as the events themselves [Goldstein, 1992 #247]. This process is one of collaboration and social construction, since ‘shared narratives are obviously communal and thereby collaborative’ [Brown, 1998 #444, p225]. These narratives serve not only informational functions, but also help participants develop situated skills, and establish identity within the broader community in and around a company. Ultimately, ‘collective wisdom depends upon communal narratives’ [Blackler, 1995 #370, p1037]. As Boland and Tenkasi express it, the unique knowledge of a community ‘develops by refining its vocabulary, its theories and values and its accepted logics through language and action within the community of knowing.’ [Boland, 1995 #205, p355].

The human disposition to tell such stories, to narrativise continually, ‘exploits the richness of the existing repertoire of stories and plots, but it also enriches, challenges and develops this same repertoire’ (Barry and Elmes 1997; Czarniawska-Joerges 1996). For example, in a study of copier repair technicians at Xerox, Orr found that

a quick breakfast can be worth hours of training. While eating, playing cribbage, and gossiping, the reps talked work, and talked it continually. They posed questions, raised problems, offered solutions, constructed answers,

laughed at mistakes, and discussed changes in their work, the machines, and customer relations (Brown and Duguid 2000)

Studies such as Orr's (Orr 1990) support the claim that the main source of knowledge in companies is narrative. Thus the suggestion that knowing is narrated in communities of practice refers not to a process of knowledge transfer, but to the very process of knowing. As Boje notes, "storytelling is the preferred *sense making* currency of human relationships among internal and external stakeholders" (Boje 1985).

In other words, people in and around companies tell stories, thereby creating meaning for themselves, all the time, anyway. The challenge for alignment of the company as it is, and as it wishes to be, with its stakeholders, is to create and tell powerful stories that have this express intention. Such stories must be true (truth-ful), rather than alienating, and yet they must also have the capacity to convey strategic intent – that which is not yet true but can be true in the future. According to Gardner, a story that succeeds is fulfilling this challenge "builds on the most credible of past syntheses, revisits them in the light of present concerns, leaves open the space for future events, and allows individual contributions by the person in the group" Gardner (Gardner 1995) As Shklovsky (Barry and Elmes 1997) points out, stories work when they have both credibility (or believability) and efamiliarisation (or novelty).

Developing a strategic narrative

In taking up this challenge, we have created and applied a process of developing a strategic narrative for a major telecommunications company in the effort to create a 'true' narrative. We call it 'true' because it draws on the fundamental nature of the company as a work and the world that people within the company find themselves in. To 'get at' the company and it's world we use questions with regards to those fundamental characteristics to articulate the 'building blocks' for developing an account of the world of a company. These are the questions that should surface that which is always-already known within the company, but to some degree unsaid. In these questions, the very nature of the company as a work, and the world that it worlds can emerge. Therefore the sorts of questions that need to be asked are those that interrogate that world. Deriving these questions requires us to consider what gives us 'what is' in the world of a company. Heidegger gives us a few hints in his seminal essay "The Origin of the Work of Art" (Heidegger 1994)² about the key

² The two most important passages of Heidegger's essay for the formulation of the questions where:

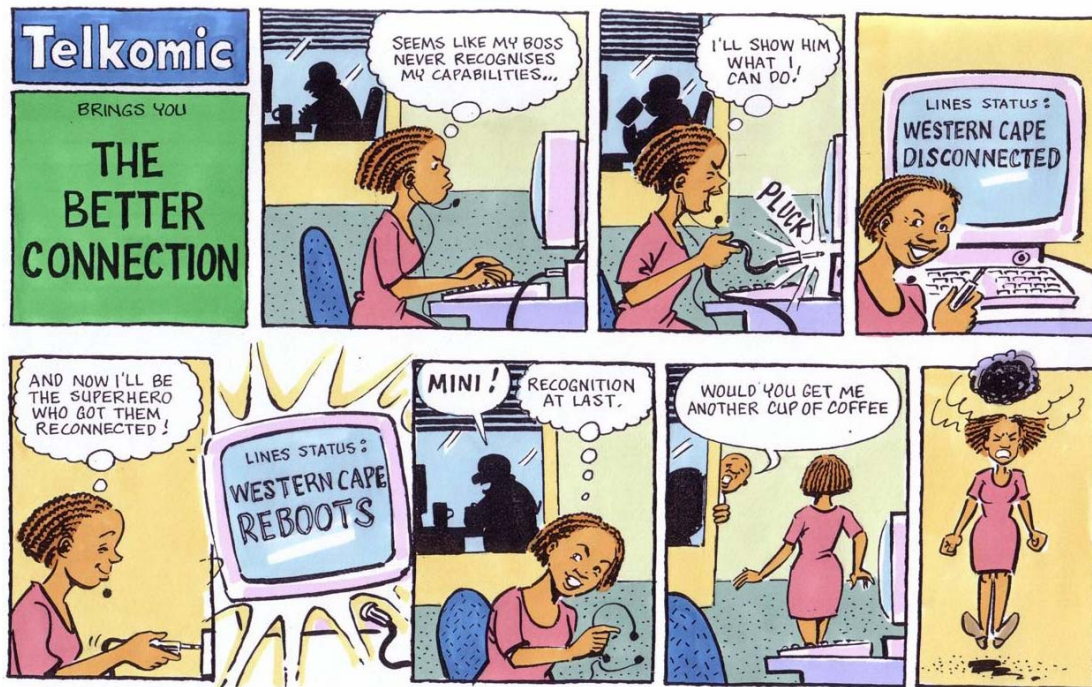
characteristics or dimensions of a world. Out of various statements in this essay we have developed the six categories of questions to ponder the fundamental characteristics of a world:

- What is the style of the company?
- What is regarded as success or failure in the company?
- What is power and authority in a company? What grants or takes away authority and power from a group or individual?
- What does it mean for a human being to be in the company? What is the identity, roles and reputation of a human being in a company?
- Who do we hold ourselves as individuals and as a group accountable to?
- What is the sense of time in the company? (How far do we look into the past or future? Are we past or future oriented?)

These questions ask about the work in an indirect way. They do not ask about the company itself, but about the world it does or even could or should set up. In testing the process, we asked these questions of both senior individuals and operational level workers in a series of interviews in the aforementioned company conducted during August and September 2005. The interviewees frequently shared their situation in an anecdotal (i.e. narrative) manner, of which we depicted a number in the form of cartoons.

As a world opens itself, it passes victory and defeat, blessing and curse, mastery and slavery over to a historical humanity for a verdict. The dawning world brings out what is as yet undecided and measureless, and thus discloses the hidden necessity of measure and decisiveness.

By the opening up of a world, all things gain their lingering and hastening, their remoteness and nearness, their scope and limits.



The interviews notes were analysed via a process of open-coding: themes that emerged during the interviews were allocated an individual code, and tracked across all the interviews, as they occurred. In total 35 individual themes were identified, of which 14 occurred in more than 40% of the interviews, as shown in Appendix 1.

While this process was quite standardised and technical, the concurrent emergent process of developing a strategic narrative that reflected the truth of these interviews comes in the form of an interpretation rather than an explanation. It shows a direction or ‘drift’ rather than describing a final goal (Gadamer 1961). The challenge in creating the story is to give the people in the company a voice rather than telling the story of the observer. A key to writing a high quality strategic narrative is therefore to suspend one’s own interpretations and let the interviewees speak through the actual story rather than the story writer him or her self.

The challenge then, was to turn the output of the interviews into a compelling story, one that would align individuals in the company (who gave us this data) with the intended direction of the company. A story succeeds when it “stands out from other organisational stories, is persuasive and invokes retelling. What the story revolves around, how it is put together, and the way it is told all determine whether it becomes one worth listening to, remembering, and acting upon. Thus strategic effectiveness from a narrative perspective is intimately tied to acceptance, approval, and adoption.” (Barry and Elmes 1997). The true, and also strategic, story needs to give a account of the current world of the company (familiarisation, credibility) and offer the appropriate transformation that allows for the mastery of the existing challenges (novelty, defamiliarisation).

In the case of the telecommunications company in which this methodology was applied, what emerged was an allegory that reflected the reality of the company through the metaphors of loss of speech and hearing, and the strategic objective of the company as the re-attainment of these capacities. Because of the capability of the

suggested process to create high levels of credibility by using the research to get a good understanding into the world of the company and thereby creating high levels of recognition and familiarity, the story has achieved high levels of buy in and alignment. The subsequent suggested new way of seeing (hearing) things is be build on a solid foundation of familiarity. The speech/hearing metaphor is also very pertinent to a telecommunications company.

Since we believe it fulfils the function of giving a truthful analysis and account of the current reality and a vivid and effective account of the future possibilities in such a way that high level of alignment among internal and external stakeholders for the purpose of realising strategic objectives are achieved, we call the product of our process a 'strategic narrative'. And since there is an overarching logic for the strategic narratives, this allows then for developing the strategic narratives in the appropriate form for different stakeholder groups (marketing campaigns, investor communications, internal communications, industrial theatre, etc.).

Ultimately however, the story itself tells the story. In conclusion therefore we invite you to read an example of one the actual the stories:

The Sawubona, Sanibonani Story

*"If I See You, And You See Me,
Together We'll The Richer Be."*

(An Intimacy, 'Into Me, See' Story.)

Just as night fell, the Ndabandaba hunters crawled exhausted into a small cave half-way up a hill on the edge of their fields, still some distance from their village, seeking safety from a ferocious band of marauding rival tribes. The Ndabandaba hunters had earlier been out hunting, oblivious to any danger, for if the truth be known, no-one had, since almost their very beginnings, dared to attack their great and powerful tribe, the surrounding bushveld over which they enjoyed almost complete hegemony.

But that afternoon they at first heard the sound of warlike drumbeats, and then saw the distant flames of enemy fire torches. Although the Ndabandaba hunters beat a steady retreat towards their village, unprepared for battle, the enemy tribes were hungrier and more athletic, making greater ground than their prey, and the Ndabandaba hunters were forced to seek refuge in the cave. On entering the darkness they lay down breathlessly, then scrambled around on all fours looking for some rocks with which they could protect the cave's entrance. At no time did a word pass between their lips, not entirely from fear of detection by their enemies, but for their belonging to a tribe entirely and utterly cursed by its ancestors.

Where once and always the Ndabandaba tribe had roamed free across the entire bushveld, its members had grown fat and arrogant, neglecting sometimes even to perform the rituals and tell the stories from which the blessings of their ancestors arose. They squandered their abundance, neglected to do their work, and preferred feasting and festivities. But most of all, they stopped caring for each other - stopped seeing one another in the right light - and nothing angers the ancestors more than a tribe that has lost its spirit of ubuntu³. The elders would have a lot to say to the hunters, with instructions and orders and expectations and dictates, but seldom listened in

³ An African philosophy of existence which holds that 'a person is a person because of other people'.

return, and the hunters would often heap scorn and ridicule the elders, maliciously gossiping behind their backs. One night, when all the tribe members were gathered for yet another celebration, a tremendous storm blew up, and amidst crashes of thunder and cracks of lightning, a demon burst out from the flames of fire, cackling into the suddenly still night.

“Oh, elders, your mouths are so full of air, I declare that your ears be filled with despair.” As the demon cried out his incantation, so all sound and noise disappeared from the ears of the elders, all to remain completely deaf from that day since. “Oh, hunters, your tongues so full of bile, so too your mouths I shall beguile,” the bad and bold apparition barked demonically. In an instant the Ndabandaba hunters and their wives, every man and every woman, were struck completely mute, to remain voiceless forever more. Then the demon spat upon the flames, dousing completely the fire, the embers within which he disappeared as suddenly as he had appeared.

So it was that many, many moons back the Ndabandaba tribe had been cursed to have elders who could not hear, and hunters who could not speak. At first this strange affliction did not seem to overly bother the Ndabandaba, who carried on with their lives as best they could. However, word had slowly spread to rival tribes in their vicinity, who sensed their old enemy's new vulnerability. It took a very long time but eventually the warlike tribes had mustered the strength and agreed the strategy upon which events might turn in their favour. Indeed, nothing would wake the Ndabandaba from their slumber quite like what befell them on that fateful day when, in a strategic alliance, the marauding tribes attacked, and the Ndabandaba hunters, as we know, found themselves ensconced in the cave high up on the hillside.

Huddled together, in fear of their very lives, the Ndabandaba hunters looked across the valley towards their village, from where deep inside they could remotely hear the noisy, frenzied and unintelligible cackling, commanding, crying, cursing and cavorting of their elders, naturally none of whom could hear the commotion they were making, and blissfully unaware of their enemy's intent.

All the while however, from the cave the Ndabandaba hunters could hear their enemies' war drums and war chants, and see the flames of their burning stakes as the enemy warriors approached the village. Although distant at first, the noises quickly became louder, and the flames brighter. In desperation, the Ndabandaba hunters banded together to try and chant a warning to their elders, but not a sound was heard to come out of their mouths. In a panic, they jumped around like crazy banshees, beating on their chests and stamping on their feet, raising a cloud of dust that threatened to suffocate all including the ancestors, slapped and licked wildly at one another, but all this was to no avail. Without voices, they could not draw the attention of their elders to their impending plight.

Meanwhile, in the village itself, the Chief of the Ndabandaba and a few elders went to the edge of the village in expectation of providing the returning hunters with a warm welcome from their hunt. Although still low in the sky, the moon was bright and standing alone on the edge of the bushveld, the Chief and his elders could see across the horizon, above the silhouettes of the thorn bushes and the fever trees. Then they saw the flames of the enemy fire torches, and mistaking them for those of the returning hunters, went forth into the clearing, unable to hear the battle drumbeats, and the warning rhythms of conflict and conquest.

From beneath the cover of darkness the leading enemy tribe suddenly attacked, immediately ensnaring the Chief of the Ndabandaba and his elders. Hordes of enemy warriors poured forth into

the kraal⁴, loosing the cattle, setting alight some of the village's outer huts, capturing some of the Ndabandaba women, before hastily retreating into the bush, and disappearing into the African night. On witnessing the mayhem happening in the village below, the Ndabandaba hunters hurriedly clambered down from the cave, and sprinted to protect the remaining homesteads. But this tactic was already far too little and far too late. By the time they reached the village, the marauding enemy tribes had already long fled.

The Ndabandaba hunters made their way to the Royal Kraal, where the surviving elders were fearfully and fretfully trying to assess the extent of the death and destruction. However, not having witnessed what had happened with their own eyes, with all the conflict having occurred on the village's periphery, the surviving elders mistakenly believed that the village had been betrayed and plundered by its own hunters, seeking to establish their own Kingdom. What else, they thought, could explain the disappearance of the Chief, some elders and some of the women, and their own hunters appearing unblemished and unhurt? Try as the hunters might to explain the circumstances of the marauding enemy tribes to the elders, the former could not speak and the latter could not hear. It was impossible to achieve understanding between the two. So the elders ordered the death of those they saw as the hunter's ringleaders, the punishment being tragically enacted before first light. A gloom descended upon the Kingdom of the Ndabandaba, which lasted for many seasons, during which time not a sound was uttered, not a word was spoken. Elder and hunter alike churned over in their own dismay. Together but apart, the two camps brooded from within.

Then one-day at the burst of spring, a wise elder and a wise hunter sat together for the first time in many months. Nothing needed to be said, nor anything to be heard, from one to the other, for at a level far deeper than language, they began to really communicate. Intuitively and instinctively they began properly to see, a sense they had never lost. In agreement with the other elders and other hunters, they slaughtered the village's oldest and heaviest ox, and sacrificed it to the ancestors that night. For an entire month the tribe fasted, with nothing but air passing their lips.

Then the wise elder and the wise hunter convened a ritual hunt, and for the first time in the Ndabandaba's long history, since pre-antiquity, both elder and hunter hunted together. A single arrow in the left eye felled Arrogante, the giant elephant, greatest of the bushveld's vast elephant herds, and whilst some of the tribe prepared the carcass for sacrifice, the ritual hunt continued. As it did so, something marvellous, miraculous and magical happened, a mystical alchemy unfolded.

The elders found that, in the company of the hunters, the less they spoke the more they seemed to hear. The hunters, on the other hand, discovered that the less they heard, the more they themselves were able to speak. And by the time the long ritual hunt had finished, and the Ndabandaba had returned to their village, elders and hunters alike could both speak and hear, and what was said was heard.

Sitting around the fire later that evening, over the cauldron, and having sacrificed Arrogante to the ancestors, the wise elder and the wise hunter looked deeply into each other, knowing that only when the eyes see can the mouth speak and the ears hear. Then they began to drum and they began to chant, quietly and alone at first, then louder and louder, and together with all their brothers and sisters, elder and hunter alike. The spirit of ubuntu had been resurrected in the Ndabandaba, and the tribe sang out their praises.

“If I see you, and you see me, together we'll the richer be.”

“If I see you, and you see me, together we'll the richer be.”

⁴ Enclosed African village

“If I see you, and you see me, together we’ll the richer be.”

So thereafter for the Ndbandaba tribe, with the spirits of the ancestors appeased, never were the yields more plentiful, the hunts more bountiful and the times more prosperous.

By Peter Christie

Appendix 1:

Theme occurring	all groups (3)	all management (6)	Total
			9
output focused to detriment of employee wellbeing	3	6	9
stifling vs. innovative	3	5	8
recognition, being heard	3	5	8
authoritarian vs. consultative	3	4	7
management by relationship / equity	3	4	7
Pressurized	3	3	6
conflicting expectations/fragmented	3	2	5
insecure because of job cuts	3	2	5
doing your job well / qualified for job	2	3	5
position in the hierarchy is success	3	2	5
scope of authority – position gives power	1	4	5
training	1	3	4
prerogative to decide	1	3	4
power is who you know, political game	2	2	4

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