

NARRATIVE PRACTICES IN CAREER ENRICHMENT AND TEAM DEVELOPMENT WITH A LEADERSHIP TEAM

INTRODUCTION

This paper presents a case study in two parts encompassing career enrichment and a team development process for a leadership team comprising twelve individuals, each in different leadership roles, including their General Manager, within a local manufacturing site of global manufacturing business.

This paper demonstrates ways in which individuals are encouraged to construct their own rich identities as individuals and as a leadership team through reflecting on what is valued and purposeful in their personal and work lives with a full appreciation of the context within which they operate.

THEORETICAL INFLUENCES

The work is informed by both constructivist and social constructionist influences (Young & Collin as cited by Patton & McMahon, 2006, p. 5) and narrative practices in the postmodernism paradigm which values the subjective experiences of individuals and their group contexts in ways that strive to ascertain personally meaningful and integrated understandings of their work, career and life contexts.

The design for the team development process was inspired by Vigotsky's concept of the *zone of proximal development* (White, 2007; Holzman, 2006) recognising the value of distancing from the immediacy of usual experience and learning in incremental steps within a context of social collaboration.

The work also draws on Kolb's Experiential Learning Model detailing a natural unconscious process of four abilities (also termed stages) to learn and grow in an integrated way: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, active experimentation. In a team context, the phenomenological orientation to reflective observation in the sharing of individual experiences in small groups and with the collective enriches the insights and understandings of each other and the team (Chapman, 2009).

In encouraging desirable behaviours for effective group thinking, the work of Nancy Kline is also acknowledged in the inclusion of her Ten Components of a Thinking Environment™ (Kline, 1999). These are conditions "under which human beings can think for themselves with rigour, imagination, courage and grace" (p.12). We also referred to Kline's work on structuring meetings as a Thinking Environment™.

Drawing on all the above influences and accepting that much of corporate experience is rooted in structuralist thinking and practices by defining, labelling, categorising and mandating people in particular ways: psychometrically, by role, grade, job function, career category, performance ratings, goals and outcomes achieved, the approach taken in this instance represents a departure from individuals conforming to the prevailing way towards acknowledging individual

thinking, meaning-making, intentions, hopes and aspirations. It assumes individual agency and resourcefulness in responding to their work challenges.

Narrative Practices:

Story telling was encouraged as a metaphor for both the individual and team components of the work undertaking.

Narrative practices are based on the premise that our lives are shaped by the stories that we tell ourselves and the stories that others tell about us. Stories shape our sense of history, morality and reinforce the bonds we feel between each other in relationships. In this way we develop a richer sense of ourselves in our lives. In a similar way stories can inform something about our identity and what we can offer individually and as a team in the workplace. Work-related stories exist within a particular organisational context with embedded cultural assumptions that can either hinder or liberate individuals in bringing their best to their work situations.

Narrative practices are typically deeply respectful of the insights, knowledge and skill that reside within individuals to make sense of challenges and to respond resourcefully in managing them. Furthermore narrative practices concentrate on teasing out what is valued that is pertinent to a preferred identity which is personally relevant.

Through eliciting richer stories and identities of individuals and teams in organisational settings and exploring pools of resourcefulness, it is assumed that constructive actions can be brought to personal, operational, career and team challenges in an increasingly complex workplace in ways that are relevant for individuals' values, intentions and purpose for their lives.

CONTEXT FOR CASE STUDY

Changing world of work and implications for careers:

The increasing complexity in the fast-paced, global workplace holds significant implications for supporting organisations in the retention and engagement of valued employees and in supporting individuals in making optimal career and life choices.

Viljamaa, Patton & McMahon (2006) suggest the following shifts that support a more holistic and relational conceptualisation of career and suggest that the traditional once-off "test and tell" approach to career decision making is no longer adequate. This is motivated by changing work trends listed below:

- Competencies for one job may not serve for a period of time
- Work does not comprise a set of tasks which are mastered once

- Career is no longer a vertical process of advancement within one organisation, but rather a spiral of periods of paid and unpaid employment, interspersed with periods of learning and retraining
- Individuals are confronted with a broader scope of career and life choices
- Jobs have become unstable, more so with recent economic pressures
- Institutions are in a continual state of flux and adjustment to external pressures

As a result, making career choices is a qualitatively different, increasingly more complex and frequent process as individuals attempt to navigate changing career and life circumstances throughout their lives. Viljamaa et al (2006) suggest that the changing and uncertain reality of the early twenty-first century necessitates a more proactive, personalised and self-directed approach to navigating careers.

Implications for leadership teams:

Leaders hold a special position in the landscape of change. A leader's clarity of purpose, and his ability to connect the people in his organisation to that purpose go a long way toward mobilizing the necessary forces for change.

(O'Neill, 2000, p.4)

Leaders, operating in teams, are mandated to inspire ever increasing standards of performance from the people who report to them as well as to nurture their own and others' career and work experiences in ways that foster an organisation that is flexible, fit for change and sustainable.

Leaders need to interpret and communicate a changeable business landscape into a clearly defined purpose, vision and goals and translate challenges into opportunities; build relationships and develop the teams that produce the results (O'Neill, 2000).

Leaders need to have a clear sense of what they need to achieve as a collective, and (in order to do so) what the individual contribution and role of each team member should be to enable delivery (Janse van Rensburg, 2009). In reality possible individual contributions to support the team effort are less clearly defined than one would expect.

A further opportunity lies in understanding something about the identity of the leadership team in the context of its history, prevailing challenges and its intentions for the future.

Organisational Context:

This work was conducted at a local manufacturing site of the organisation. The organisation has a "high performing" culture that requires dedicated attention to rigorous standards, fierce internal competition and constant measurement of all aspects of the business on diverse and increasingly stringent criteria. A successful employment strategy based on psychometrically screening all short-listed employees at the recruitment stage to ensure a disproportionate number of highly aspirational, well-adjusted, performance oriented, resilient extraverts is regarded as a cornerstone of the success and international expansion of The organisation globally.

All employees in this company are psychometrically screened for intelligence (WAIS - Weschler Adult Inventory Scales III), resilience and extroversion (CPI – California Personality Inventory) and career potential (Career Path Appreciation). Individuals' psychometrics and proven track record in the company are important considerations in their successful appointment to leadership positions.

Introducing the Leadership Team:

At the time that the facilitator was briefed by the head of Human Resources to design the team and career development processes the team was described as functioning well, despite having lost several members and several new team members having joined in recent months. In the face of operational priorities little time has been allocated to team process work.

A further aspect that was raised was the ongoing development of the leadership team in keeping with their goal to improve relationships with external stakeholders and a strategic initiative to address their World Class Manufacturing (WCM) rating as a five year priority.

This particular division had won the fiercely competitive best manufacturing plant award for two years consecutively raising the question of "What next?" for the leadership team. What compelling vision would inspire and motivate sustaining exceptional performance?

Proposal Development:

Career enrichment and team development were explored in more detail in several meetings over a period of several months together with the Human Resources Manager and the General Manager of the team.

An earlier successful pilot of the Career Storm Navigator process in the company had pointed to the possibility of broader application. It was felt that the members of the leadership team would benefit from a personalised career enrichment process for the following reasons:

1. to encourage reflection and self-insight into their own career planning
2. through exposure to a deeper more reflective career process they would deepen their skills to perform the 'career coaching' aspect of their roles as managers
3. it would inform their thinking about future choices for career development to the rest of in keeping with a company initiative to streamline individual career development and career development discussions

Two narrative interviews with the General Manager of the team informed the facilitator's view of his sense of:

- What he valued about his team members
- What he hoped for in the team

It also enabled the facilitator to pose write the GM a reflection letter prior to the workshop about the meetings her observations, curious questions and acknowledgements of valuable aspects of his team were noted, including what he felt his own "gift to the team" was. In this letter an interesting observation was his inclination to think of his team primarily as individuals, in relation to their performance, action orientation and other criteria and less so as a collective suggesting scope for developing a deeper and more clearly understood sense of team identity over time.

A draft and final proposal were submitted and discussed with the Human Resources manager and the General Manger. The above needs were addressed in an initial two-step process that offered:

1. An individual career enrichment process structuring on-line reflection through CSN tools together with face-to-face "debriefs" to extract insights and develop a plan for realising or resolving future plans. It was planned that once individuals have completed the process they would be debriefed individually but that the experience would be reflected upon as a group and that further applications would be considered at the start of the team development process.
2. A one-and-a-half day team development workshop was scheduled upon completion of the individual career enrichment processes. The focus of the workshop would be to appreciate something about each other as team members and the mix of talent, strengths, opportunities and resourcefulness residing within the team as a first step towards "making a good team great." team imperatives and an appreciation for the mix of talent, strengths, opportunities and resources residing within the team.

A final meeting with the GM shortly before the team workshop allowed the facilitator to understand the prevailing business issues and challenges as they were at the time as well as what he would value as possible outcomes from the workshop.

Business imperatives were derived from a recent set of challenges laid down by the Managing Director. The General Manager expressed his wishes for the team as follows:

- To be more energised, focused, disciplined and to take quicker action.
- To move from being a good team to being a great team
- To do all this in with a good work-life balance (wellness)
- Demonstrate behaviours that sustain the team
- Appreciate what exists within the team by way of individual contributions
- Explore of what could make this good team a great team

The facilitator's intentions emerging from the preparatory meetings and possibilities that a narrative orientation fosters were:

- Strengthening the links between each others' stories around shared memories, milestones, shared values and themes informing individual perspectives with collective team knowledge
- Appreciating the team's identity historically
- Setting intentions for future actions
- Developing a preferred future identity as a team

It was intended that a narrative approach would enable all these issues to be explored with an appreciation for what resides within the team and with clear intentions emerging to respond to the team mandate while encouraging appreciative, healthy and sustainable team behaviours.

CAREER ENRICHMENT

The career component of the process was supported by the use of Career Storm Navigator™ (CSN) as developed by Heidi Viljama and her company Career Storm (Viljama et al, 2006).

Background to Career Storm Navigator™ (CSN):

Career Storm Navigator is a non-psychometric suite of seven web-based career tools, accessed from a secure user account and offered in conjunction with skilled narrative coaching/counselling to assist individuals to attain a deep sense of career purpose and priority by taking stock of their life intentions and work goals in a holistic way. It is most suitable for use with diverse communities.

CSN employs a metaphor of career navigation and invites critical reflection on current situation and career destination focusing appreciatively on resources and personal criteria for decision making in 3 stages:

Map: Awareness of where you are and where you might be going.

Compass: Clarifying unique resources (skills, interests, style and values) that can be used to move toward desired destination.

Compare: Evaluating career alternatives based on personally meaningful criteria.

Process:

The leadership team was introduced to the process of career enrichment as follows:

1. Group orientation expanding on the concepts and a strategy for career navigation and career enrichment as well as an orientation to the Career Storm Navigator™ career tools and deriving an individual plan for their completion within their busy schedules.
2. Individual goal and intention-setting for the process together with their coach.
3. Assigning confidential user accounts to each individual.
4. Completion of career tools on-line in own time.
5. 60-90 minute review, reviewing insights and addressing areas of conflict or misalignment within their broader career-life context or generating ideas for future career steps.
6. In certain instances narrative letters were forwarded to clients adding depth to the reflections within the session.
7. Clients were directed towards additional research needed to inform future career decision-making and offered a further session to review and finalise plans and intentions.
8. Individual feedback sheets were given to individuals during the workshop and reviewed for the value derived from the process.

Meaning Making:

The benefits of the career enrichment process were unique to each individual and based on their hopes and dreams for themselves and their current situation. Each person was able to access deeply held values and intentions for themselves and consider the relevance of their current situation in relation to those intentions.

In other instances the CSN process affirmed that individuals were well suited to what they were doing and enabled them to explore ways of enriching their lives outside of work in ways that mattered to them, ranging from setting sporting goals, being more involved with their children's school routine to crystallising a comprehensive three-year plan to make the best contribution to both personal and company goals.

Outcomes of career enrichment process

Written feedback from the CSN process was obtained in the workshop setting asking individuals to respond confidentially and in writing to the following questions:

- In what ways were the CSN career tools and coaching process relevant to your career and life planning?
- How have your established understandings of career, life and identity shifted?
- What implications does your experience of CSN hold for how career discussions are held in future in your company?

Participant's comments are summarised as follows:

"Much more introspection and appreciation of things outside of work. I have better insights to how I can manage these two."

"The process has asked questions that surfaced past decisions and actions."

"Good time for me – at crossroads. I have been privileged to have had the opportunity for career reflection previously – this provided a new perspective."

"It seemed to 'make real' what was floating around in my thoughts and affirmed many positives and drew out some negatives in terms of preferred working conditions." "I managed to shelve a lot of lingering questions around whether I was on the right path."

"I spend a lot of time reflecting anyway, but the CSN tools helped me to do it in a more systematic way and the meeting helped in finding direction and identifying blindspots."

"It made me reflect on the past, present and future and made me appreciate what is happening in my life." "The people that have been an inspiration in my life have affected and influenced me more than I have been aware of."

"Relevant to allow reflection of current reality, but the value came through being able to frame and prioritise future alternatives and possibilities."

Sharing stories in the team

During the ensuing team workshop individuals were invited to reflect on their individual experiences and to sculpt a metaphor out of modelling clay that represented their view of their careers and the meaning derived from the CSN career tools and "debriefing" process. These metaphors, reflect the depth and personal nature of the CSN career enrichment process, the depth of subjective reflection that the process elicited in a spirit of storytelling with the team. The relaying of multiple individual storylines imbued with rich complex meanings intersected with the stories that emerged from the team to develop and enriched sense of themselves as a leadership team.

TEAM DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP

The one-and-a-half day leadership team workshop was conducted at a carefully selected venue nestled among some mountains with a view of the ocean. Narrative practices were incorporated and reinforce in a detailed letter sent to the team two weeks after the workshop.

Workshop Design:

The thematic overlay for the team development process was inspired by narrative practices and Vigotsky's concept of the *zone of proximal development* (White, 2007; Holzman, 2006). Team members were introduced to the idea of developing, enriching and documenting their team story by way of conversations held around their:

- Past (Exploring recollections of history, milestones, membership, character, relationships, values, shared experiences ...)
- Present (Current performance, defining success, How we function as a team? What can we ask of this team? How do we connect with other levels in the organisation?)
- Future (How do we ensure the basics are in place? How do we define and achieve success as a leadership team and at what cost?)
- Scaffolding the future (What do we expect of ourselves in order to lead the way that we have envisaged?)
- Keeping on track – yet to be considered

This was particularly relevant as half the group were newer team members (less than one year) and half the group had significant tenure (five years or more) with the leadership team.

Introducing and framing the workshop:

The workshop opened by asking individuals what they were appreciative of in getting together away from the business.

The facilitator positioned some intentions for the workshop that had informed the design of the time together, which the group acknowledged and agreed to. These were:

- Appreciation of what exists within the team;
- Exploration of what could make this good team a great team
- Acknowledging what is implied about membership of the team that would be helpful to make more explicit

Participants were introduced to the idea of story-telling as a means to enrich their sense of themselves and their possibilities within their particular organisational context through the themes that would be explored.

Participants were invited to create a list of behaviours (listed below) associated with storytelling from their own experiences and these were recorded and encouraged as a way of working together in the workshop.

- Being suspended from tasks
- Time keenly anticipated
- Giving full attention
- Exploring something unknown
- Provoking curiosity
- Demanding details
- Recording impressions, events and actions
- Leaving impression, moral or insights
- Often appreciated
- Linking us to our world

The group warmed instantly to the opening ideas of storytelling which had the effect of shifting their energy to being more attentive and receptive to one another and to the process than is typically achieved in their work environment. Their detailed stories held their attention throughout each session.

The facilitator positioned her role as offering some structure, facilitation and time-keeping and also as a curious observer and witness to their process by paying attention to her own reactions and insights.

Individuals would be telling stories in a variety of small group and full group exercises alternating as storytellers, listeners and witnesses to stories told.

Workshop Structure:

Group debrief of career enrichment (CSN) experience

At the start of the workshop, to bridge the career and team processes individuals were invited to share their experiences with the group as described earlier and to explore implications for broader application within their business.

The creative use of metaphors in clay as well as assuming the role of storytellers in the workshop with elicited perspectives and language that was personally meaningful and that facilitated sharing of the individually oriented career reflection process.

Telling stories

Team stories linking past and present experiences to future possibilities as well as how this could be achieved in a progression (scaffolding) of conversations generated rich material for participants to generate an in-depth appreciation of the team's identity, resourcefulness and intentions.

Inspired by White's scaffolding of incremental steps to support insights and change, participants were encouraged to offer an active appreciation of one another's stories. Narrative practices were introduced to team interaction activities to encourage deeper reflection on issues of identity and purposeful action in the group in ways that acknowledged:

- the links between each others' stories around shared memories, milestones, shared values and themes informing individual perspectives with collective team knowledge
- speculating about how the team's identity might appear to others
- speculating about future actions and a preferred future identity

In this way the team was able to refine their perspectives of how the leadership team had operated over time in response to challenges. They gave names to earlier "eras" of the team's existence, scaffolding the past to the present and identifying possibilities for the future. In this process a more complete sense of the team's identity emerged, one that does justice to the full experience of the collective memory of current team members.

A mountain metaphor

Introducing an element of adventure towards the end of the first half-day, individuals were invited to climb and descend a nearby peak as a team. In preparing for the hike participants were invited to:

- Set a personal intention (such as to become more present or to relax into the workshop)
- Observe their own reactions to team interaction
- Notice the effect of the environment on themselves
- As a team decide how they tackled the challenge

The hike provided the team with a kinaesthetic and metaphorical journey from the known and familiar into the unknown, as well as enabling them to experience the soothing effects of being in nature, observing themselves and their thoughts and participating in a shared experience outside of their workplace.

Photographs of the hike, taken by one of the participants, were viewed by the group in a slide show the following morning, which evidenced something of the enjoyment and meaning attached to the team's mountain experience.

Adventure experiences are used in corporate and other settings to introduce a metaphor for the requirements needed for and changes taking place in the real world. The behaviours and thoughts experienced in adventure settings parallel the thoughts and actions in daily life.

Used effectively, adventure becomes a key for unlocking closed minds, stimulating fresh thinking, encouraging meaningful dialogue, triggering learning that is transferrable to the workplace. Removed from familiar work

surroundings and presented with challenges where participants know neither what to expect nor what is expected of them they are free simply to participate. An adventure experience then holds up a mirror to reflect back information about personal styles, modes of interaction, options, choices and potential. The result is often jolting, usually surprising and sometimes transformational. (Smolowe et al, 1999, p. 8)

Adventure settings offer a process of discovery in providing physical opportunities to practice new skills, coping strategies and bonding among people which can analogously be applied to challenges back in the workplace (Priest & Gass, 1997). Being active in the natural environment offers a sense of ourselves as causal agents acting either in nature in an exploratory interaction such as entering a cave or against nature in a challenge such as kayaking white water rivers where we can surmount the difficulties they present (Kupfer, 2003).

A quick gathering after the hike enabled a brief reflection on the hiking experience in keeping with Kolb's model, connecting metaphorically as individuals and as a team to the challenges they face in their work context. The metaphor was also reflected on again at the start of the following day and again in the reflection letter sent to the team two weeks after the workshop. It was noteworthy that different levels of fitness resulted in some members completing the hike with ease whilst others held a steady but slower pace; one member could not complete the hike but waited for the group to return; the group leader started at a fast pace and then looped back to encourage slower members. It was evident how predisposed the group is towards "getting the job done" and relatively less so towards "how we go about it". A sense of achievement was celebrated upon completing the hike.

Group witness practices

Themes:

- o The Past
- o The Present

White (2008) refers to witness practices as *definitional ceremonies* typically referring to outside witnesses who engage in conversations with one another in response to their witnessing a narrative conversation between a therapist and his/her client(s). His work, informed by Myerhoff, reveals the relevance of an informed audience in a three-stage process of telling and retelling as relevant to rich story and identity development. These ideas were introduced between tenured and new members of the team in appreciating the stories and legacies of the past as well as the present reality.

Members were allocated to a tenured or new group based on tenure. In each instance the team was given some themes to explore, such as milestones, values and relationships and time to generate their questions that they wished to have explored further. These questions were documented and in the role of an

investigative journalist, the facilitator posed questions to the tenured group while the new group observed in silence. The new group were encouraged to note their reactions and were asked to hold their own discussion about what they had heard and what had resonated for them. Aspects of expression, images, resonance and transport (White, 2008) were not adhered to rigidly, but surfaced to an extent. The tenured group were able to reflect on the insights and realisations generated by listening to the impressions of their new colleagues.

The discussions proved to be particularly rich in the theme of the past and (not surprisingly) somewhat more mired in the thick of present day challenges when considering the present, which was nonetheless valuable.

Self-directed Small group dialogue

Themes:

- The future
- Scaffolding to the future

Four groups of three people mixing tenured and newer members of the team were allocated time to work on their preferred versions of the future of the team as well as the little steps needed to be taken to progress there.

The teams focused on practical and behavioural issues (landscape of action) and largely overlooked identity issues, capturing their ideas and actions to be taken on flip chart paper.

The final group dialogue was a sharing and appreciative listening of the four scenarios sketched which were varied and required further work off-site to integrate and translate into measurable goals.

Each group offered a different approach towards defining and achieving their desired future bringing richness and diversity of views to the discussion. These were presented to the larger group and filtered into three goal areas: team, strategy and a three-year plan for achieving the goals. These were transcribed and circulated amongst the small group members to flesh out in more detail back at the workplace and were incorporated into their documented team goals.

Final group dialogue

Theme:

- Keeping on track

It was agreed to post-pone a more detailed focus on this theme to a future team meeting.

As a large group, this was a good time to document what still felt unfinished, what might be covered back at the workplace and in future similar workshops.

Journal:

The idea of keeping a journal through a volunteer capturing something about each session appealed to the group – this included impressions, discussion points, drawings, jokes, actions and later that photographs would be added. The journal therefore captured the essence of the workshop – recording knowledge, affirmations, anything that had captured anyone's attention and "transported them" (White, 2008), turning points or a stand taken. The journal was taken back to the workplace and circulated in team meetings as a living document of their journey.

An intention of the team was to keep the journal alive back in the workplace to document impressions of their meetings, and document their progress against their goals.

Appreciations:

Participants were invited to write something they appreciate about another team member on designated slips of paper as it occurred to them during the workshop. This was informed by Kline's emphasis on the value of appreciation: "*change takes place best in a large context of genuine praise* (Kline, 1999, p. 62); as one of ten components that stimulates fruitful thinking because "*it helps people to think for themselves on the cutting edge of an issue*" (p. 62). In support of Kline's approach of a "*five to one ratio of appreciation to criticism*" (p. 63) to thinking partnerships three rounds of appreciation were held at the start of the workshop answering:

- What can I appreciate about being here today? (At start of workshop)
- What can I appreciate about yesterday? (On morning of second day)
- What can I appreciate about the workshop? (At close of workshop)

At the close of the workshop the facilitator was able to acknowledge individual contributions to the workshop which were quietly but powerfully affirming of the richness and resourcefulness that she had witnessed in the team.

The team decided to create a collage incorporating their expressed intentions and photographic record of the process as a document of the workshop.

Facilitators' Role:

The facilitator's role was interpreted in the narrative vein as "displaced from the centre" (White, 2008, p. 82), privileging the voices of the people consulting them in the attribution of meaning to selected events of their lives" and influential in that the facilitator was there to:

- Offer structure and facilitation to enable progress towards desired outcomes
- To be a curious observer and witness to their process, to capture my reactions, insights
- Manage time

- Encourage leadership amongst peers and facilitate a progression towards desired outcomes
- Take photos (shared with designated team member) and notes
- As a witness, offering a personal appreciation to each person for their contribution to the workshop

Reflection Letter:

As a witness (and note taker) to the process the facilitator was able to write a detailed reflection letter which followed the structure of the workshop and detailed 'next steps'. The Human Resource manager read the letter to the team two weeks after the workshop. The letter was well received and an electronic copy was stored for future reference. The letter serves as a "human voice" reflecting on the richness of the workshop and will inform future discussions and workshop with the team.

FACILITATOR REFLECTIONS

The CSN career-life reflection and enrichment process structured a holistic review of personally relevant career and life priorities giving emphasis to valued choices, hopes and aspirations, challenges and career and personal issues needing resolution. The process was well received for different reasons by each person and it creates a good foundation for self-directed career management in the future.

A spirit of cooperation and appreciation prevailed throughout the workshop. Newer members of the team were able to appreciate something more about the history and nature of the entity of which they were now members and expected to contribute to. Those who had been with the team for longer were able to appreciate the early impressions of their new colleagues. These conversations served as a more informed basis for future planning and participation with one another as members of the leadership team and as leaders of the business.

The physical experience of a mountain hike symbolising them navigating their individual and collective journeys offered introduced richness from a narrative perspective and a collective memory that marked the occasion. It also provided a welcome break from routine to participate in something recreational, process thoughts and interact with one another in a natural setting. The hike itself generated a lot of conversation and camaraderie back at the conference venue and introduced another metaphor for exploring their relevance to one another outside of their work context and in ways that they had not expected.

Narrative practices served to enrich the teams' experience and understanding of one another in ways that are unlikely to have happened naturally within the work environment. Relationships were strengthened and individuals reported feeling energised. Two weeks after the workshop the Human Resources manager reported that the "team felt different", that the spirit of the workshop had endured and that cooperative and appreciative behaviours were evident in members of the team assisting one another in addressing work challenges.

This workshop was intended as an initial step to more regular team workshops. Narrative practices served well to create a foundation of insight, trust and understanding as a foundation upon which to build a deeper sense of team values and intentions into the future. Future work could include collective narrative practices as described by Denborough (2008) to respond to other leadership teams grappling with similar challenges elsewhere within the organisation.

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