

CHAPTER FOUR

NARRATIVE AS CREATIVE QUEST: THE HERO'S JOURNEY AND ITS ALTERNATIVES

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Abstract

The ancient creative practice of narrative is recognized as an important meaning making activity in business, in the contexts of both academic study and commercial practice. Drawing on these developments, this chapter will focus on the creative potential, within business, for narrative models developed in the field of screenwriting. The latter is an area of creative writing that focuses particularly on story structure. It has produced a range of normative narrative models that recur as the underpinning templates of film and television narratives. The most well known of these is perhaps Christopher Vogler's reworking of Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey. Taking this text as my starting point, I will discuss the particular implications of the use of the Hero's journey narrative model in a business context, examining the power of narrative retelling and the meaning making possibilities and limitations of different narrative models.

Narrative as creative quest: the Hero's journey and its alternatives

While it may have fallen out of favour in the past, the ancient creative practice of narrative is now recognized as an important meaning making activity in business, in the contexts of both academic study (Barry & Elmes 1997, Boje 2001, Czarniawska 2004, Dailey & Browning 2014) and commercial practice (Duarte 2010, Rose & Pulizzi 2011, Schultz 2013). As Czarniawska (2004) points out, this recognition hinges on the acknowledgment that narrative constitutes a particular form of knowledge, which is central to human experience and understanding and, as such, is able to open up insights, in the study and practice of business, that are both unique and profound. One of the key differences between narrative logic and scientific logic, is that a narrative is particular—it provides an explanation of a specific situation, whereas sci-

ence aims to establish general laws and would therefore aim to explain a particular event by recognizing it as an instance of a general law (Ricoeur 1984; Czarniawska 2004:8). Narrative, on the other hand does not make sense of events by placing them in categories, but rather by integrating 'the event into a plot whereby it becomes understandable in the context of what has happened... Thus, narratives exhibit an explanation instead of demonstrating it' (Polkinghorne, 1987 in Czarniawska 2004:8).

It is thus the plot of the narrative, rather than the truth or falsity of individual story elements, which gives a narrative its logical force and its power to persuade. This allows for the possibility of reordering the events and changing the plot and therefore the meaning of the story. Czarniawska gives the example of a narrative statement such as 'With the company suffering unprecedented losses, the top managers were forced to resign', which is quite different from 'a law-type statement such as 'when a company suffers losses, its managers resign'' (Czarniawska 2004:7). This latter statement can be refuted or confirmed, but it cannot be negotiated or reworked. The former, narrative statement, however, would be open to such a renegotiation such as 'Are you sure? I've heard they started losing when the managers resigned and they took their customers with them?' (Czarniawska 2004: 7). Narrative logic and meaning is always constructed after the fact. Events are made sense of by a particular temporal ordering, what Ricoeur calls an *emplotment* (Ricoeur 1984: 64), which establishes a connection, most often a relationship of cause and effect, between them. This logic of cause and effect is usually established by projecting from the end back to the beginning and identifying actions and events, at the beginning of the temporal order, as the causes of the actions and events, which occur later in the chain (Ricoeur 1984: 144).

Beyond its role in making sense of the past, narrative can also be used as a hypothesis to project into future situations. In his well known essay 'The Storyteller' Benjamin defines stories as containing 'openly or covertly, something useful' (Benjamin 1999:86) to the reader or listener. He suggests that the storyteller 'is a man who has counsel for his readers... a proposal concerning the continuation of a story, which is just unfolding' (Benjamin 1999:86). Playwright, David Mamet, makes a similar point when he states that being able to learn from experience is a basic human survival mechanism, which 'orders the world into cause-effect-conclusion' (Mamet 2000:8) and that audiences learn lessons from watching drama. The intimation here is that the lesson is not only for the past, but also for the future.

As Mamet also states, such a strategy does in fact involve some level of rational synthesis and establishing of general principles and probabilities. To learn from previous experience, one needs to draw the conclusion that, if a particular set of actions or events produced a particular outcome once, then it is likely to do so again. However, as Czarniawska points out, stories are open rather than definitive hypotheses (Czarniawska 2004:9). Since they do not establish laws that need to demonstrate absolute truth, stories are more ambiguous, but also more subtle, layered and flexible ways of informing and

directing action than are laws. While laws are either true or false, stories can be adapted to many variations and different ones tried, in relation to new situations. Boje underlines the fact that often what we are working with here is what he terms ‘antenarratives’, collections of story fragments, rather than fully developed narratives with a coherent plot (Boje 2001:2). It is a uniquely human skill to be able to draw on stories and narratives in this way: operating somewhere between the specific case and the general law. In seeking to apply an existing story to a new context, the storyteller will de-emphasize or disregard some elements of the story and bring to the fore those that are most relevant. Narrative understanding is iterative and recursive, negotiating a path between sameness and difference, which allows for a constant reworking of stories and the possibility of finding new meanings within them (Daily and Browning 2014). This is often an instinctive process, part of the wider human activity of pattern finding, matching and elaboration, and draws most often on tacit understanding, rather than consciously articulated reasoning. Narrative understanding thus constitutes both an elusively imprecise and an impressively subtle aid to human action and interaction.

The notion of narrative as hypothesis is further supported by the fact that, even though each narrative may be a unique case, as regards its specific content, it tends to still conform to some general rules of construction and combination. At their most basic level, narratives tend to contain one or more characters, who do something, or to whom something happens and this action or happening produces a consequence. Furthermore, human beings tend to draw on these rules of narrative instinctively in interpreting the world, making them capable of constructing narratives out of the scantest of evidence. This is strikingly demonstrated by the six word story: ‘For sale, baby shoes, never worn’, often attributed to Hemingway, though this is unproven. This six word story relies on the reader’s ability to instantly identify the unworn baby shoes as the consequence and on their imagination to supply the rest. Human beings seem to have a strong drive towards assembling story fragments and antenarratives into a coherent story and this is what they seek in drama, literature and other narrative arts (Mamet 2000).

Beyond the basic paradigms of who, what, where, when and how, ordered into a particular syntagmatic combination by a logic of cause and effect, certain scenarios and archetypes can also be identified as recurring elements of narrative. As Maya Angelou points out, in her memoir, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, these may often be rooted in individual early experiences:

‘Heroes and bogey men, values and dislikes, are first encountered and labeled in that early environment. In later years they change faces, places and maybe races, tactics, intensities and goals, but beneath those penetrable masks they wear forever the stocking-capped faces of childhood’

(Angelou: 1984: 19).

However, scenarios and archetypes are also to be found in the wider narra-

tives that circulate within a culture. Propp (1968) is well known for his analysis of folktales, which he found to be all constructed from the same set of elements in different combinations. In his book *Morphology of the Folktale* (first published in 1928) Propp analyzed hundreds of folktales and suggested that their narrative structures were made up of the same basic 31 functions. A function, according to Propp, is 'an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action.' (Propp 1968: n/a). These functions have a fixed chronological order, so that, although not all of these functions are present in every folktale, or fairytale, the functions that are included always play out in the same order. There can be many variations on the same basic function, resulting in many different stories. Key functions identified by Propp include: 'absentation'—a member of the family, possibly the hero, possibly another person who will later need rescuing—leaves the family; 'villainy or lack'—the villain harms the hero or someone connected to him or her or the hero lacks something they desperately need; 'departure'—the hero leaves home; 'struggle'—the hero struggles with the villain; 'victory'—the hero vanquishes the villain; 'exposure'—a false hero is exposed; 'transfiguration'—the hero gains a new appearance, new clothes, new status etc.; 'punishment'—the villain is punished.

Many of these functions can also be found in what Campbell (2008) terms the 'monomyth'. By this he refers to the recurring story, that he has identified in myths around the world, of the hero who:

'setting forth from his common-day hut or castle, is lured, carried away, or else voluntarily proceeds, to the threshold of adventure... the hero journeys through a world of unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces, some of which severely threaten him (tests) some of which give magical aid (helpers)... he undergoes a supreme ordeal and gains his reward... The final work is that of the return. If the powers have blessed the hero, he now sets forth under their protection (emissary); if not, he flees and is pursued (transformation flight, obstacle flight)...the hero re-emerges from the kingdom of dread (return, resurrection). The boon that he brings restores the world (elixir).'

(Campbell 2008: 211)

While Campbell identifies one universal narrative model, through which to articulate and understand human experience, other theorists, from Aristotle onwards, have identified various other schemas. Drawing on Aristotle, Frye (1957) identified five narrative modes, which, according to Ricoeur, might be divided into Epic, Romance, Satire, Comedy and Tragedy. (Ricoeur 1984: 166). More recently, Parker references Johnson's eight basic plots in playwriting (Parker 1999: 76) and reworks them slightly to produce ten basic plots for screenwriting, making a total of ten, namely: The Romance; The Unrecognised Virtue (finally rewarded, i.e. Cinderella); The Fatal Flaw (Achilles); The Debt that must be Repaid (Faustus); The Spider and the Fly

(Circe); The Gift Taken Away (Orpheus); The Quest; The Rites of Passage; The Wanderer; The Character who cannot be Put Down (Parker 1999: 77-79). Meanwhile Booker, in his book, *Seven Basic Plots: Why we tell stories*, explores the following: Overcoming the Monster; Rags to Riches, The Quest, Voyage and Return, Comedy, Tragedy, Rebirth (Booker 2005).

These examples highlight the fact there is much overlap between different narrative models: demonstrating the same negotiation of sameness and difference that we saw at work in our earlier discussion of the processes of narrative understanding. They also demonstrate that recurring emplotments of ancient myth and folktale have continued to endure in contemporary literature and film. As has already been discussed, however, such emplotments are not confined to the world of fiction, but constitute important ways in which human beings and human societies make sense of their world as a whole. When trying to make sense of events as a narrative, one will tend to draw on the narrative models and conventions one is familiar with, both from one's personal experience and from fictional narratives that one is familiar with. This overlap between the two reoccurs in all areas of life. There is likely to be a tendency to identify heroes and villains, to establish relations of cause and effect and patterns of change leading to a transformation, whether these are, for example, positive patterns of progress and development, driving towards a happy ending (Romance), or patterns of deterioration or disorder, leading towards tragedy. Ricoeur perceives Frye's typology of plots as pertaining, not only to fiction and drama, but also to the emplotments of historiography (Ricoeur 1984: 166), while Boje asserts their continuing relevance of to the study of organizations (Boje 2001:108), as does Czarniawska (Czarniawska 2004: 20).

It can therefore be said that, although narrative might not claim to establish general laws, there are some narrative models, such as the ones discussed above, which are invoked so often, that they might almost seem to attain that status. They tend to be the touchstones we return to, the patterns to which we try to match new patterns of experience. Therein lie both their strength and their weakness. As Dailey and Browning point out, the retelling of well-known narratives can help engagement and understanding within an organization 'by referencing and building on members' commonalities' (Dailey & Browning 2014: 31). However they can also function, whether intentionally or unintentionally, as a mechanism to control behavior and repress other narratives. There is thus a dual potential in the repetition of familiar narratives. It is a process, which can effect 'control/resistance, differentiation/integration and stability/change' (Dailey & Browning 2014: 26).

An interesting account of the effects of narrative retelling and the potential dualities involved can be found in Boje's empirical work. He recounts how the official story of Walt Disney as a creative genius and saintly figure who embodied the American Dream (a Romance emplotment) was contradicted by non-official stories told by Disney employees, in which Walt was 'Der Fuhrer, Mr Fear, Simon Legree, Ebenezer Scrooge, Beelzebub the Devil and

Mickey Mouse' (Boje 2001: 39). These counter stories offered local resistance to the dominant story within the Disney organization; however, they did so by drawing on other well known cultural narratives, matching the story of Walt Disney to different cultural patterns.

In his analysis of the monomyth (which might potentially be equated to the category of either Romance or Epic), Campbell makes a case for its positive value in shaping human understanding and guiding human action. In his view, the Hero's journey fulfills 'the prime function of mythology to supply the symbols that carry the human spirit forward, in counteraction to those constant human fantasies that tend to tie it back' (Campbell 2008: 7). Campbell sees the Hero's journey as representing the rite of passage to adulthood. Christopher Vogler, whose version of Campbell's Hero's journey (Vogler 2007) has become a dominant paradigm within screenwriting and the film industry, agrees with Campbell. He believes that '*the hero's journey is a handbook for life, a complete instruction manual in the art of being human*' (Vogler 2007: xiii). However this totalisation of all human experience into one all encompassing metanarrative is clearly a form of universalism, an attempt to establish a 'grand narrative' (Lyotard 1984), that is open to criticism. Certainly critiques of the Hero's journey's dominance of mainstream screenwriting see it as a reductive template within which to constrict the whole of human experience (e.g Dancyger and Rush 2007 Aronson 2010).

Since the Hero's journey has begun to gain some traction as a structure of meaning within both the study and practice of business, it may be helpful to explore its creative potential and limitations by drawing on insights taken from the field of screenwriting. Later on in our analysis, we will return to the critiques and potential limitations outlined above. Let us begin, however, by examining in more detail the key elements and effects of the Hero's journey as a narrative model and how these have been brought into the discourse of business and management by both scholars and business practitioners.

Vogler was working as a story analyst at Disney on animation films, when he wrote his book *The Writer's Journey* (2007). In this book, drawing on both Propp and Campbell, he takes Campbell's hero's journey and reformulates it into a three act structure, involving 12 stages, which he presents as a narrative model for screen drama. These stages are mainly named using terms already established by Campbell. At the beginning of the story, we find the hero in the 'Ordinary World'. He receives a 'Call to Adventure', however he usually responds initially with a 'Refusal of the Call' and usually needs to be persuaded by a 'Meeting with the Mentor' to take up the challenge. Act 1 then ends with the hero 'Crossing the First Threshold' which takes the hero from the ordinary world into the special world of adventure. In Act 2, the hero encounters 'Tests, Allies, Enemies'. An 'Approach to the Inmost Cave' results in a final 'Ordeal', after which the hero gains his 'Reward'. Act 3 concerns the 'The Road Back', on which the hero will face further obstacles, followed by his final 'Resurrection' and 'Return with the Elixir' (Vogler 2007).

One of the most appealing aspects of both Campbell and Vogler's under-

standing of the hero's journey as a narrative model is their emphasis on how it brings into play the elemental, powerful forces that drive human behaviour and characterize human experience. Both authors draw, not only on ancient myth, but on Freudian and Jungian psychoanalysis in their elaboration of the meaning of the hero's journey and the character archetypes that people the ordinary and the special world of the story.

The archetypes that Vogler identifies, in addition to the hero, are: 'The Mentor' (who advises and helps the hero); 'The Herald' (who provides the Call to Adventure); 'The Threshold Guardian' (who guards the threshold into the special world); 'The Shapeshifter' a character whose attitude to the hero may be unclear, or who may turn from good to bad or vice versa; 'The Shadow' (the antagonist or villain); 'The Ally', and 'The Trickster' (another unreliable character).

Vogler suggests that all these characters in the story represent different facets of the human personality and that this is why audiences find it so fascinating to see them embodied on screen. Stories that engage these archetypes map the human psyche in a way that is extremely compelling. It is as if, he suggests, we see our whole multifaceted self, represented in all its aspects and conflicts. Vogler further suggests that '*The hero archetype represents the ego's search for identity and wholeness*' (Vogler 2007: 29). The ego represents the separation of the individual from the rest of the human race, from the mother, the family, the society, the process we all go through. All the other characters that the Hero encounters represent possibilities for who the hero is or what he or she might become. Vogler says that what the hero incorporates or learns from his or her encounters with the other characters is what makes him or her '*into a complete human being, who has picked up something from everyone she has met along the way.*' (Vogler 2007: 24).

The hero thus provides the audience's window on the story. However, at the same time, the suggestion is that the audience, whose own ego is also trying to integrate separate personality facets into a unified, stable, balanced identity, is therefore also invested in these other characters, as well as in the Hero.

This deep connection with human experience and behaviour has found resonance in a business context in various ways. Writing in the *Journal of Human Resource Management* and *Career Development International* respectively, and drawing on Campbell rather than Vogler, Osland and Hudson & Inkson outline the ways in which the Hero's journey can provide insights into the expatriate experience and so offers 'practical lessons for companies and human resource professionals who want to handle expatriates more effectively' (Osland 2000). The latter is a serious concern, Osland states, since 20% of expatriates resign from their company on their return (Osland 2000). One of the reasons for these resignations might be that expatriate 'heroes', returning with the Elixir from their Adventure and Ordeal abroad, often experience resistance, even hostility, on their return. This is just as Campbell describes the Hero's return in myth. The hero's ordeal in the special world

brings enlightenment and understanding that it is the hero's duty to bring back to the ordinary world to help enlighten and transform his whole society (Alexander 2014). However the ordinary world may not be ready to accept the new knowledge that the hero brings. The hero's society may instead ignore or reject his insights and indeed the hero himself. Osland describes how this plays out in a business context, where returning expatriates often find pressure on them to 'fit in' on their return from abroad, to show that they haven't changed. She identifies this as a huge loss for the organization concerned, since expatriate workers generally do gain new knowledge and skills that are of value in the workplace, such as 'a bi-cultural perspective, increased self-awareness... the inner resources to master a difficult situation' (Osland 2000: 235). Osland proposes that an understanding of the Hero's journey, as a model for expatriate experience, can help organizations to understand and value the new knowledge and skills that expatriates gain and to take steps to make sure both the expatriate and the organization reap the benefit.

Business professionals have also found inspiration in the Hero's journey for communicating and connecting with customers. Duarte (2010) suggests that, since stories are concerned with change and transformation, they provide a model for designing effective business presentations, since the latter are also concerned with persuading and changing people. Duarte's profession is to design presentations for businesses and, in her book *Resonate: present visual stories that transform audiences*, she explains how she draws on Vogler's version of the Hero's journey to do so (Duarte 2010). Duarte casts the presentation audience as the Hero of the story, with the presenter taking the role of Mentor. The aim of the presentation, according to Duarte, is to get the audience to cross the threshold from their ordinary world into the special world presented to them during the presentation. The role of the presenter/Mentor is to persuade them to do so.

Duarte is thus only concerned with the first five stages of the Hero's journey, in which the presentation presents the audience first with a conflict or imbalance in the ordinary world, then with the Call to Adventure—a 'big idea' of how that conflict or imbalance might be addressed. The presentation goes on to elaborate on this idea and then ends with a Call to Action to the audience – inviting them to do something that will take them over the threshold and into the special world of the 'big idea'. It also points out what the reward might be if the audience does indeed 'Cross the Threshold'. After that, Duarte reflects, it is up to the audience.

Duarte also points out that many presentations are internal to organizations, with the aim of persuading workers and stakeholders to change. Thus the audience for the presentation is often the same organization that is giving the presentation, making the organization simultaneously both hero and mentor of the story. The aim of the presentation, as part of a change management strategy, is therefore to change the narrative, so that the organization becomes perceived and ultimately actualized by all its members as the hero of a new

story. Vogler's 12 stage Hero's journey thus provides organizations with a practical step by step guide to how to make actionable the well recognized truth that narratives can convince and persuade in ways that logico-scientific reasoning cannot (Barry and Elmes 1997, Dailey and Browning 2014).

Rose and Pulizzi use Vogler's Hero's Journey in a similar way to help marketers understand how to approach the challenge of content marketing, suggesting that it provides a useful model to help businesses decide the story they want to tell about their organization or their product(s). They suggest that 'by aligning a story with classic structure you can quickly determine what is "missing"' (Rose & Pulizzi 2011: n/a), reformulating Vogler's 12 stages into a '10-Step Brand Journey' (Rose & Pulizzi 2011: n/a). Rose and Pulizzi do stress, however, that they are not presenting a template, but rather a framework that can be modified and departed from. It is a starting point, rather than a destination and could indeed be used as a tool for brainstorming, rather than a final plan. They position the content marketer as the creator of the story, with the brand or product taking the role of hero, asking, for example, 'what is the call to adventure for your product?' (Rose & Pulizzi 2011: n/a)

As is apparent from these examples, the Hero's journey is a fairly flexible tool for the creation and development of narratives within an organization. It is quite easy to adapt the role of hero to suit different aims, as shown above. The organization itself might take the role of hero in one scenario, or this role might instead be taken by the customer, or by the brand, or a particular product, or by an individual member of the organization. It follows also that the roles of the other archetypes are equally variable. Valuable insights might be obtained by asking who or what might represent other archetypes in relation to the hero of the story (Schultz et al 2012). Who might play the role of Mentors, Shadows, or Allies, or perhaps Shapeshifters or Tricksters? How might this cast change when the hero of the story changes? Do the customer and the organization share the same Allies? Who are the Shadows in each story? The same questions pertain to different Hero's journeys within the same organization. It is likely that different members of the organization will identify different casts to play the same archetypal roles.

Furthermore, Vogler also points out that these archetypes are masks that can be put on and taken off by different characters at different points in the story. The same character in a story can play several archetypal roles. One character might, for example play both Herald and Mentor and might perhaps even be later revealed as the Shadow. An Ally might also be a Shapeshifter and so on. This insight brings extra depth and complexity to the charting of the Hero's journey. A character, who is consecutively or simultaneously both Mentor and Shadow, is more complex and challenging to understand than one who is just one or the other. Such characters make a story more interesting. In the context of business, they are likely to provide a more complex analysis and understanding of a situation.

The Hero's journey thus provides a potentially fruitful framework for

brainstorming and planning (Rose and Pulizzi 2011), as well as for communicating the resulting ideas and strategies and gaining support for them, since ‘the successful strategic story may depend less on tools like comprehensive scanning, objective planning, or meticulous control/feedback systems and more on whether it stands out from other organizational stories, is persuasive, and invokes retelling’ (Barry & Elmes 1997: 432).

However, there are some pitfalls relating to the employment of the Hero’s journey within the field of screenwriting that might provide a good starting point for understanding what the issues might be in a business context. First, it is never enough for a writer to simply structure a screenplay according to the 12 stages of the Hero’s journey. There are other things he or she needs to consider. One of these considerations is to make sure that their story has high enough stakes, or to formulate it another way, enough jeopardy. Jeopardy is not simply about physical danger and stakes are not simply about material loss or gain. Certainly in drama, but also in genres such as action films, these elements usually have an emotional element to them. The hero needs to have something that he or she cares about, which is put at risk as part of the story and which provides the stakes for the story, what they stand to win or lose. The jeopardy in the story is the threat to this thing that the hero cares about. The possibilities here are wide ranging and open to the writer’s creative invention. However, there are also some well established paradigms for him or her to draw on, some of which we have met before in our examination of Propp’s story functions. The ‘absentation’ function is one example, as in the film *Taken*, where the hero’s daughter is kidnapped. It might equally be some other kind of ‘villainy or lack’ that provokes the hero into action. The point is that the stakes are emotional—perhaps for the hero alone, perhaps for the wider culture, as with the quest for the ring in *Lord of the Rings*. Stories are rarely compelling if there is nothing at stake for the hero.

Another consideration is that other characters in the story also require attention. If, for example, the hero is a three dimensional, complex character, but his adversary, the Shadow, lacks complexity, is too much of cardboard cutout villain, or is too easily defeated, the audience is likely to be bored. In general, if the obstacles faced by the hero are too easily overcome, if she eagerly answers the Call to Adventure, hops unopposed over the threshold into the special world and makes an easy beeline for the Inmost Cave and so on, the audience will again most likely be bored. As Mamet points out, audiences like to see their heroes sweat and suffer:

‘What do we wish for in the perfect game? Do we wish for Our Team to take the field and thrash the opposition from the First Moment, rolling up a walkover score at the final gun? No. We wish for a closely fought match that contains many satisfying reversals.’
(Mamet 2008:8).

Ball games, Mamet points out, satisfy the same needs as drama. We want the hero to win in the end, but we don’t want it to be easy. We want him or her to

suffer, to struggle, to learn, to struggle some more, to overcome adversity, to deserve their triumph.

Aristotle (1987) explains this need through the concept of catharsis—the purgation of pity and fear. The suffering and horrors of life are played out on stage, allowing the audience to experience the feelings they induce, without the material consequences. Aristotle discussed catharsis in relation to tragedy, so he wasn't envisaging a happy ending to provide the ultimate reward for hero and audience. He appears to have had more in mind the idea that the theatre was a controlled space for such experiences to play out, in which the audience might learn how to manage them.

This idea is highly germane to the context of business. The Hero's journey narrative model offers the potential for a rich, complex and emotionally deep imagining of a journey that might be undertaken by the designated hero. It allows individuals and organizations to explore scenarios in a controlled situation, yet in a way that might potentially be more compelling and revealing than a logico-scientific approach, such as a SWOT analysis. However, the organization or business practitioner, just like the screenwriter, needs to take care not to turn the Hero's journey into an empty formula, without emotional depth and with the Reward at the end a foregone conclusion. Rather, the Hero's journey offers the potential for a process of deep exploration and challenging thinking, a process that might throw up unexpected, even unwanted insights. In fact, as Campbell stresses, once the hero crosses the threshold, he must open himself up to a world that may contradict everything that he held until then to be true, 'the passage of the threshold is a form of self-annihilation' (Campbell 2008: 77). This process involves coming to terms with unwelcome new truths about the world and oneself: 'generally we refuse to admit within ourselves and within our friends, the fullness of that pushing, self-protective, malodorous, carnivorous, lecherous fever, which is the very nature of the organic cell' (Campbell 2008: 101). For Campbell the Hero's journey is very much a journey of spiritual enlightenment, in which the hero must confront his personal flaws, as well as the disturbing truths and paradoxes of human nature as a whole, and move beyond them. However, the outcome of this letting go of self, of past certainties and convictions, is in no way certain. As Osman points out, within the context of the experience of expatriates, to survive in the special world, the hero needs to find and draw on previously unknown resources within herself (Osman 2000). She will not know until she undertakes the tests if she is up to the task. However, if she does fail the tests, she will never return with the elixir.

Within a business context, just as in screenwriting, over simplification and schematizing the Hero's journey to the level of a supposed formula for success is likely to result in failure. Indeed, it is likely to mean a failure even to leave the ordinary world and cross the threshold to the special world in the first place. Another way of thinking about this issue is in considering the tendency for ritual to become ceremony. Alexander (2014) defines ceremony as a reified version of ritual. Ceremony pretends to be ritual, but offers in its

place a ‘ritual-like performance’, which, rather than effect real change within a community through a process of symbolic death-rebirth, instead ‘serves the purpose of preserving differences and sustaining the status quo in the interest of the groups in power’ (Alexander 2014: n/a). Referring to his own experiences as co-founder and president of animation company, Pixar, Catmull (2014) explains how easy it is for ceremony to take the place of ritual within the practices of an organization. He explains how Pixar engaged a particular process to nurture and develop ideas and take them into production. They felt this process was unique and vital to the company’s success and it was therefore one of their guiding principles to ‘Trust the Process’. However, during the production of *Toy Story 2*, it became apparent to him that this belief in the process had become a mantra that had come to stand in for the real thing. He states that ‘“Trust the Process” had morphed into “Assume that the Process Will Fix Things for Us.” It gave us solace... But it also coaxed us into letting down our guard and, in the end, made us passive. Even worse, it made us sloppy.’ (Catmull 2014: 79). His conclusion was that ‘We should trust in people... not processes. It is just a tool - a framework. We needed to take more responsibility and ownership of our own work, our need for self-discipline and our goals’ (Catmull 2014: 79). In other words, everyone in the company had to re-engage with ‘the process’ as a fully enacted ritual, new and different each time it was entered into. Each time threw up new challenges and each time brought new learning as a result of grappling with these challenges.

What we are talking about here is the ease with which lip service and box ticking can take the place of genuine experience. This may be the result of a deliberate strategy of control, in which those in power insist on maintaining a particular dominant narrative that is not open to question. However it may be, as in the case cited by Catmull above, that this is rather the result of familiar narratives outliving their usefulness, without anyone noticing that they have become out of date or have lost their power to inspire. As Barry and Elmes point out, the power and appeal of any narrative relies on its successful combination of the credible and the novel (Barry & Elmes 1997). Audiences often find a narrative credible when it draws on a familiar context, yet they find a narrative interesting when it makes them see the world differently. A successful storytelling strategy, therefore, is to mix the familiar with the unfamiliar. Following on from this, Barry and Elmes suggest that the success and failure of business strategies depends largely on their ability to adhere to these principles of storytelling (Barry & Elmes 1997). Their conclusion is that ‘various strategic theoretical frameworks succeed one another because organizational readers have shifting preferences and attention spans, and not because of some Darwinian progression towards an ultra-fit theory. In other words, the currency of today’s strategic models may have less to do with accuracy or predictability than with their appeal to current tastes and interests’ (Barry & Elmes 1997: 437).

If ‘any defamiliarizing perspective or device, no matter how initially exciting and captivating, becomes familiar, mundane, and tiresome with

time' (Barry & Elmes 1997: 436), then the Hero's journey is clearly not immune to such a fate. For a process to be genuinely creative, it needs to be new each time. The triggers that unleash creative thought and action need to be varied and renewed. According to Catmull 'if you repeat the same format, you tend to uncover the same lessons' so 'once you've hit on something that works, don't expect it to work again' (Catmull 2014: 218). In the same way, the use of the Hero's journey as a model needs to involve coming at in new ways and in new angles. As discussed above, the Hero's journey is flexible enough to allow this to happen. It is however incumbent on those employing it to use it creatively, if it is to function effectively as a creative tool.

A further consideration is that Campbell's understanding of the Hero's journey has little to do with individual achievement in a material sense. This is less evident in Vogler's version, but for Campbell the focus is not only on the hero's personal enlightenment, but equally on his ability to return and bring this enlightenment to his society as a whole. Discussing the relevance of the Hero's journey to the context of business, Schultz (2013) emphasizes this aspect. He sees it as lending itself to a strategy of social entrepreneurship, in which the most vital element is to 'return to the world from which we started, baring (sic) what we have learned from the journey so we can share it with those we have set out to help' (Schultz 2013: n/a). However, even if the context is not social entrepreneurship, the question of the return to the ordinary world requires some consideration. It is perhaps the most difficult task of all for the hero 'to confront society with his ego-shattering, life-redeeming elixir, and take the return blow of reasonable queries, hard resentment and good people at a loss to comprehend' (Campbell 2008: 186). As Rose and Pulizzi (2011) acknowledge, the gap in understanding between the returning hero and the culture to which he brings this new understanding may be immense. Organizations and individuals who employ the Hero's journey as an aim to brainstorming and strategy will also need to give careful thought to how to communicate the insights gained and persuade others of their credibility and value. As discussed above, it is of course very possible that the Hero's journey is once again the model adopted.

A final consideration, that I would also like to bring in here, is that alternative narrative structures do of course exist, besides the Hero's journey. As discussed above, particular narrative models construct particular meanings. Tragedy presents a different view of the world than does Romance. The Hero's journey, with its emphasis on the individual hero who stands for good, is a version of the Romance or epic narrative. Such a narrative, Bakhtin points out, tends to communicate one truth, one perspective on the world. He terms such narratives monologic and contrasts them to dialogic narratives, which are polyvocal: incorporating multiple voices and perspectives (Bakhtin 1981). For Bakhtin, the literary form that best realizes these possibilities is the novel. We will go on to examine how Bakhtin's concept of dialogism might pertain to a business context, but first let us examine some other alternative narrative perspectives. There are other questions that one might ask of

the Hero's journey as a narrative model. Is there really only one hero in every story? Might there not be many heroes? Or maybe there's no hero? A useful corollary to bring in here might be the actant model of narrative analysis suggested by Greimas (1982). As Czarniawska explains, this model was also used by Latour and replaces the concept of 'character' with that of an 'actant', which could be human or non-human (Czarniawska 2004). In this model, actants only become actors, or what we might see as characters (i.e. with a stable role in the story), through a trajectory of episodes. The outcome of each episode determines the nature of the next episode and through this trajectory of episodes significant actors may emerge. For example, Latour understands the invention of the Kodak camera and the emergence of the mass market for amateur photography as a series of moves and counter-moves between the Eastman company and photographers that ended with Eastman dominating the consumer market. However, this final ending to the story was not, according to Latour, in any way inevitable, but the result of contingency at every step. Thus, whilst at the end of the trajectory, Eastman emerged as the hero, in the sense that it achieved market domination, Latour refuses the teleological construction of narrative, which works back from the ending to find its seeds at the very beginning and totalizes the rest of the narrative into a single chain of cause and effect. In Latour's analysis, while Eastman ultimately emerges as what we might call the hero of this narrative, there was nothing in its essential character at the beginning of the story that made this outcome inevitable. It was the final emplotment of the story that determined the roles played by the actants within it and not the other way round (Czarniawska 2004: 81).

The actant model has some resonance with the creative strategies of screenwriters and filmmakers who do not use the Hero's journey as their model. Such alternative strategies have a long history in filmmaking and can be identified in quite different historical, geographical and aesthetic contexts. Thus Italian writer/director Rossellini, in *Paisà* (1946), and Van Sant in *Elephant* (2003) both dramatize a momentous real life event in a similar way. Rossellini's subject was the allied campaign against Nazi Germany, at the end of the Second World War, which liberated Italy, starting in the South and moving up through the country to the North. Van Sant was concerned with the Columbine massacre of 1999, in which two pupils attacked their school in Colorado, USA, shooting pupils and staff and killing 12 people. In both cases, the narrative structure of the film focuses on multiple storylines, involving several characters. The structure is episodic, there is no single hero and the majority of the characters' journeys end in failure or uncertainty, rather than success. They are actants, caught up in an episodic trajectory of events, rather than actors, in control of their own story and driving it to a conclusion. The focus of these narratives is on the different human experiences and the different impacts of a single event on a culture (a school or a nation) as a whole.

There is a case for the relevance of such alternative narrative strategies to a business context. An awareness of the actant model can help to avoid essen-

tialising the roles of different actants in a narrative too early in its development. Whether one is seeking to learn from the past, or to imagine or strategize for the future, it is important not to be blind to the different ways in which a story might go or might have gone, but rather to be alive to the way that different outcomes, within a trajectory of episodes, might produce very different heroes and villains and different endings to the story.

Furthermore, as Barry and Elmes point out, narrative models can be used within business as a way of understanding and drawing on the multitude of experiences that exist within an organization. They refer to the example of a large aluminium producer, which embarked on a 'company-wide, story-based inquiry process centered around the garden metaphor' and recount how 'the repeated tellings seemed to come together in a complex, dialogical way (with many interconnected yet separate tales having been told). The new directions embodied in the overall narrative became touchstones for changes in day-to-day actions' (Barry & Elmes 1997: 442). In this example, mythical, archetypal touchstones have been employed, through the metaphor of the garden. Yet the storytelling process employed was more akin to Bakhtin's idea of polyvocality than to the kind of epic narrative model that the Hero's journey represents (Barry & Elmes 1997). Such an activity might be undertaken, moreover, not only in order to imagine or strategize the future, but also in order to better understand the culture of the organization as it stands.

Conclusion

The Hero's journey is an ancient narrative model, which has much to recommend it in the context of business. In particular, its deep emotional and cultural resonances and its openness to different interpretations and uses make it a responsive and flexible creative tool within the context of business. However, it does need to be used with caution. The Hero's journey should never be used as a fixed template, or as a step by step guide with a guaranteed outcome. It functions most effectively as a tool for creative thinking and as a way of achieving emotional engagement. Since its cultural roots are very deep, it also has the potential to establish and maintain a strong connection between the concerns and operations of business and those of the wider society. At the same time, it should not be forgotten that other narrative models also exist and these also have untapped potential for use within a business context.

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Author's Brief Bio

Rosamund Davies has a background in professional practice in the film and television industries, in which she worked with both independent production companies and public funding bodies. As script editor and story consultant for Film London, she oversaw the development of around 100 projects. Rosamund is a senior lecturer in screenwriting at the University of Greenwich and a member of the International Screenwriting Research Network. Rosamund's particular research interest is in narrative as a structure of meaning. This research encompasses both theory and practice. Her publications include 'Screenwriting Strategies in Marguerite Duras's *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1960)' *Journal of Screenwriting* 1 (1) pp149-173, 2010; 'Digital Intimacies, Aesthetic and Affective Strategies in Online Video' in *Ephemeral Media* (Ed. P. Grainge) BFI/Palgrave 2011; hypermedia narrative *indexoflove* (2010), and *Introducing the Creative Industries*, SAGE 2013 (with Gauti Sigthorsson), which explores 'how human creativity, meaningfulness and experience are organized at industrial scale' (review by John Hartley).

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