

Narrate reading list

These are the books and blogs that have most informed our thinking on culture, branding, storytelling, communication and the future of organisations.

Articles

Three articles in particular to give snapshots of some of the thinking that inspires our approach:

“A Leader’s Framework for Decision Making” – Mary E. Boone and David J. Snowden

Available to buy at http://harvardbusinessonline.hbsp.harvard.edu/b01/en/common/item_detail.jhtml?id=R0711C. Harvard Business Review lead article from November 2007 – a good development of the Cynefin framework and its implications for leaders.

“The new dynamics of strategy: Sense-making in a complex and complicated world” – C.F.Kurtz and D.J.Snowden

Available at <http://www.cognitive-edge.com/articledetails.php?articleid=14> or at <http://xenia.media.mit.edu/~brooks/storybiz/kurtz.pdf>. It took me a while to get through it and longer to understand it, but an excellent introduction to complexity, narrative and sense-making. Re-read it regularly.

Books

Sources of Power – Gary Klein

A critical book – the one book Narrate recommends that everyone reads if you’re looking to help people make decisions or change their behaviour. Scientifically rigorous in a way few management books are, well written and easily read, it’s a book that will make you see new possibilities in much of what you do. Covers some of the same type of material as Malcolm Gladwell’s “Blink” but without falling into the traps of drawing sweeping generalisation from a few examples or of trivialising material. Klein’s other books are also well worth checking out.

The Trusted Adviser – David Maister, Charles Green and Robert Galford

A great book on becoming more of an adviser/consultant to internal or external clients. Highly recommended, as is all of David’s work. He writes about how to manage and lead professional services firms, and much of what he talks about is highly relevant to service departments in all sectors. He’s recently announced his retirement from writing and speaking, but his blog and podcasts should still be available and are well worth a look at www.davidmaister.com

The Age of the Unthinkable - Joshua Cooper Ramo

Our new favourite recommendation - it looks at the world of international relations and policy, picking it neatly apart. It never once mentions complexity, but talks about many of our favourite issues - how different cultures see the world radically differently, how easily we miss important signals, how apparent stability can be misleading and change can occur dramatically with little change in circumstances.

Harnessing Complexity – Robert Axelrod and Michael D Cohen

An excellent introduction to the world of Complexity Science – particularly when coupled with David Snowden’s articles and Emergence by Steven Johnson.

Changing Minds – Howard Gardner

Useful primer from Harvard Professor of Cognition on what is required to inspire people and take them in a new direction. We like his conclusions – but we would: it’s that “stories work”.

Emergence - Steven Johnson

Excellent book on how complex systems produce emergent results - results that couldn’t be predicted and may not be immediately understandable. Read in conjunction with Axelrod and Cohen’s Harnessing Complexity above.

Changing Conversations in Organizations – Patricia Shaw

An excellent challenge to traditional, hierarchical forms of communication and structure. Tends to go to the furthest extreme of lack of structure to make a point about too much structure, but a good one all the same.

Made to Stick – Chip and Dan Heath

A good pop-management book on what makes messages memorable.

Metaphors We Live By – George Lakoff and Mark Johnson

A useful primer on metaphor and some of the subtler implications of the metaphors we often choose by default or by accident.

Blogs

- Dave Snowden at Cognitive Edge:- <http://www.cognitive-edge.com/blogs/dave/>
- Tony Quinlan at The Narrate Blog:-<http://www.thenarrateblog.com/>

While there are many websites that we regularly refer to, we highly recommend the following one in particular:

Cognitive Edge - <http://www.Cognitive-Edge.com/> - Cognitive Edge is the organisation founded by Dave Snowden developing new models and approaches to deal with intractable problems. It also operates on an open-source consulting ethos – the different tools and techniques are available free for download and use. Key tools (and some of the uses we’ve put them to) include:

- Anecdote Circles – for gathering examples and raw material for other activities (e.g. communications, knowledge management and sense-making activities)
- The Future, Backwards – for defining visions, strategic planning, developing action plans, identifying key moments in the organisation’s history
- 2-stage Archetype development – for breaking out of the standard categories of issues and making them more real, more relevant and more organisational-specific. Can be used to identify areas of concern, typical situations, recognisable characters from the organisation to use in a variety of ways.