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**ONCE UPON A TEAM: THE IMPACT OF  
PERSONAL STORYTELLING TYPES  
ON DESIRE TO COLLABORATE**

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**A Research Project  
Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graziadio Business School  
Pepperdine University**

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**In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Science  
In  
Organization Development**

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**by  
Matt Ebeling  
August 2020**

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This research project, completed by

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under the guidance of the Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the faculty of The Graziadio Business School in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE  
IN ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT

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## Abstract

Personal story disclosure supports the development of interpersonal relationships through the building of trust and feelings of closeness. In organizational teams, trust is key to the promotion of cooperative behaviors and team performance, and collaboration within a team and across teams becomes exceedingly important as organizations grow and increase in complexity. The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of specific types of personal storytelling on a person's desire to collaborate with others in the workplace. I conclude that the following characteristics of personal story sharing by co-workers have a positive impact on desire to collaborate with the sharer: stories that reveal or imply attractive professional traits; stories perceived as having a deeper, more emotionally-driven narrative; and stories with a high degree of relatability to the recipient. These conclusions drove recommendations to organizational leaders to design interventions among their teams that elicit the sharing of personal stories.

*Keywords:* story, disclosure, trust, teams, collaboration, relatability, depth, narrative, vulnerability

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Organizations everywhere depend upon teamwork and collaboration to accomplish their goals. One would be hard pressed to find organizations of any kind today whose employees can work by themselves in a vacuum and still be successful or contribute to organizational success. Good teamwork is what makes the team work. However, it does not always happen naturally. Systems Theory shows us that as organizations grow and become increasingly complex, they begin to differentiate functionally and come to depend more on communication, integration, and collaboration among and across the organization's growing teams (Donaldson, 2001; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967).

When a new employee is hired, orientation activities are often facilitated by their leaders and/or human resources staff that help the employee get acclimated to policies, procedures, protocol, and cultural norms of the organization. However, could there be opportunities for organizations to improve their methods for helping employees develop collaborative behaviors through onboarding techniques, teambuilding exercises, or other means? Various team building methods have been studied and utilized over the years in an attempt to address collaboration challenges (e.g., Dyer, Dyer, Dyer, & Schein, 2007; Nurick, 1993; Shuffler, DiazGranados, & Salas, 2011), and many of these are designed to build up an important ingredient for collaborative behavior: trust. Research has shown that trust among team members leads to increased collaboration, which consequently leads to improved overall team performance (Barczak, Lassk, & Mulki, 2010). Jones and George (1998) propose that trust is a "psychological construct, the experience of which is

the outcome of the interaction of people's values, attitudes, and moods and emotions” (p. 532).

So how is trust built and sustained in teams? Fiore, McDaniel, and Jentsch (2009) offered that a particularly effective method is through storytelling, saying that the sharing of personal stories improves authentic connection, cohesion, and trust. According to Dautenhahn (1999), human beings are hard-wired to tell and receive stories - calling us ‘autobiographic agents’ - so it is easy to envision how personal storytelling could help people connect more intimately to one another on a professional level. Through stories, we make sense of our world, our relationships, and our purpose. Narrative Paradigm Theory serves as a seminal foundation for story-related research, telling us that the sharing of stories offers a quicker path to understanding and trust (Fisher, 1985).

There is value in the informal communication that happens between employees and teams in an organization, especially within close physical proximity to one another. These informal interactions (i.e., light, unplanned exchanges in hallways or over lunches; personal self-disclosures) can serve as a supportive layer to the assigned group work by helping members get to know one another better and develop more context around relationships and the collaborative work at hand (Kraut, Fish, Root, & Chalfonte, 1990). If this informal communication is important, if not crucial, to increased team effectiveness, then how can we intentionally introduce the sort of personal storytelling that can most effectively contribute to the bonds we are seeking to establish in teams?

Silverman (2006) highlights tremendous potential benefits from simply cultivating a habit of eliciting stories from your employees, colleagues, leaders, or customers. Instead of just pursuing shorter, fact-based answers in our interactions with

colleagues and constituents, we are opening the door to an open-ended response that brings out deeper, more colorful stories that foster engagement. The key is allowing some silence after your prompt and being genuinely attentive and appreciative to the storyteller. Also, these story-listening skills, when modeled consistently, can be contagious and shift the organization's culture as others begin to use them (Silverman, 2006).

Organizations everywhere could be more effective if its members were more naturally apt to intentionally, purposefully, and even joyfully work together toward shared goals. While there has been much research done on the positive effects of storytelling on teamwork and collaboration (e.g., Auvinen, Aaltio, & Blomqvist, 2013; Bartel & Garud, 2009; Cragan & Shields, 1998; Evans, Slater, Turner, & Barker, 2013; Fiore et al., 2009; Klein, 1998; Lohuis, Sools, van Vuuren, & Bohlmeijer, 2016; Ryfe, 2006; Tesler, Mohammed, Hamilton, Mancuso, & McNeese, 2018), there is little in the literature looking at specific elements or formats of storytelling that have the strongest impact on that spirit of collaboration.

### **Purpose**

This study explored the impact of specific types of personal storytelling on perceptions about team cohesion and collaboration at a liberal arts college, drawing from the definition of 'story' or 'storytelling' offered by Fiore et al. (2009) as a "structured expression of a given team member, or team's experiences" (p. 29). The present study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the elements of personal storytelling that most build/strengthen professional relationships in teams?

2. Are there specific types of personal stories that have a greater impact than other types on an employee's desire to engage in work-related collaboration with co-workers in the same organization?

### **Significance of Study**

There is so much need and so many opportunities that organizational teams have to develop stronger work relationships toward the collective achievement of organizational goals. Teams go on special group outings, attend training sessions together, and participate in energetic teambuilding activities or programs, all in an effort to deepen relationships. In the course of these activities together, employees' personal narrative is often shared with co-workers, which the literature generally reveals to be positive in its contributions to effective team collaboration. However, what if we could discover and harness just the right sort of personal storytelling at the right times to maximize the positive effects stories can bring to teams? Understanding this on a deeper level could introduce refined methods of employee orientation and team building to organizations that could result in increased effectiveness.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The present study explored the following research questions:

1. What are the elements of personal storytelling that most build/strengthen professional relationships in teams?
2. Are there specific types of personal stories that have a greater impact than other types on an employee's desire to engage in work-related collaboration with co-workers in the same organization?

In support of this exploration, a review of existing literature was conducted. The resulting information has been grouped thematically by the following central concepts related to the research questions: collaboration and the role it plays in team effectiveness and performance; trust; and storytelling, narrative, and self-disclosure. This chapter helps to draw connections between these elements, providing context and support for this study. The chapter concludes with some opportunities for further research on the subject of the impact of personal storytelling on team collaboration and performance.

### **Team Effectiveness and Performance Through Collaboration**

In a smaller organization, people can take on a myriad of responsibilities. However, Systems Theory has shown us that as an organization grows and as its external environment changes, it increasingly develops differentiated roles, areas, departments, and/or divisions (e.g., finance, sales, marketing, and communication) (Donaldson, 2001; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). Along these lines, Ashby's (1956) law of requisite variety goes as far as to say that if a system/organization is to survive at all, it must have within it appropriate states, responses, or solutions of a number and variety that match or exceed the external environmental issues, problems, or states that it faces. With that growth and

differentiation, systems have to concurrently increase their communication and integration efforts. When they fail to do that, these newly divided functional groups have difficulty coordinating (Daft, 2010) and can begin to operate apart from one another. This is often described by organizational members as silos, signaling an increased need for these teams to be highly cooperative in order to be effective (Cohen, Ledford, & Spreitzer, 1996). Accentuating these challenges is the possibility that leaders may not be placing a high enough level of value upon the need to develop the interpersonal skills that foster the highly integrated system they need. As such, as these increasingly complex and growing organizations seek this advanced integration, it becomes crucial for leaders and their employees to be trained well in interpersonal skills and group communication (Byrd, 2007; Okoro, 2012).

Research has shown that collaboration promotes increased performance and competitive advantage (Jones & George, 1998). However, collaboration does not always come naturally to people. Obstacles include the lack of top-down collaborative modeling by leaders (Ibarra & Hansen, 2011) as well as the interpersonal conflict common within and across teams. Interpersonal conflict can be very emotional (Chen & Ayoko, 2012) and can tarnish team cohesion and relationships (De Dreu & Weingart, 2013), and this can negatively impact team outcomes (Greer, 2012). Overcoming these and other challenges requires some understanding of the things that support cooperation and teamwork between people. Jones and George (1998) would say that shared values between team members is an important ingredient for fostering a spirit of cooperation. Kraut, Fish, Root, and Chalfonte (1990) argued that this important coordination between organizational group members is promoted by informal communication. This social

communication lays a foundation of mutual understanding that effectively primes team members for solid coordination with one another. Informal communication in teams, especially when team members are in close physical proximity, is necessary for effective coordination and collaboration. The absence of informal communication can not only make it difficult for collaboration to be initiated; it can inhibit that collaboration from being sustained over time.

In the vein of co-workers getting to know one another better, research has also shown the positive correlation between co-worker friendships and improved team performance due to an increased desire to help one another and cooperate (Pedersen & Lewis, 2012) and the discovery of common ground that deepens the relationships (Byron & Laurence, 2015). If cooperation and coordination is so important in organizations, then it may be prudent for us to explore one of the key elements that makes people comfortable working with one another - trust.

### **Team Trust**

Researchers have acknowledged the relevance of the study of trust throughout several scholarly disciplines, including psychology, sociology, anthropology, and social psychology (Beldad, de Jong, & Steehouder, 2010). Among the extensive research on the subject, there has been much agreement among scholars that trust drives cooperative behaviors in people at multiple levels - individually, in teams, and through organizations (e.g., Cho & Park, 2011; Gambetta, 1988; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; McAllister, 1995). For the purposes of this study, I lean on two related definitions of trust. Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995) define trust as “the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will

perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or confront that other party” (p. 712). Put another way, “when we say we trust someone or that someone is trustworthy, we implicitly mean that the probability that he will perform an action that is beneficial or at least not detrimental to us is high enough for us to consider engaging in some form of cooperation with him” (Gambetta, 1988, p. 217).

Scholars have looked at the distinction between conditional trust (a functional sort of trust that continues as long as criteria is met) and unconditional trust (where shared values lay a foundation of connectedness and full assurance). With unconditional trust, people are more likely to take on personal risk and sacrifice and throw themselves into collaborative, team-based endeavors. Those acts of teamwork can be contagious; they create good feelings that bring others into similar behavior. Those who experience unconditional trust also tend to be more focused on the future because they feel safe in the present. This unconditional trust needs to be present for teams to experience true synergy and the sort of tacit knowledge that makes collaboration so powerful (Jones & George, 1998). Many scholars agree that a crucial determinant of how well an organization functions and succeeds in meeting its objectives is the prevalence of interpersonal trust among their members (Brower, Lester, Korsgaard, & Dineen, 2009; Davis, Schoorman, Mayer, & Tan, 2000; De Jong & Elfring, 2010). More recently, scholars have continued to find that trust is a major factor to building collaborative teams, and collaboration leads to project management success (Bond-Barnard, Fletcher, & Steyn, 2018; Costa, 2003; Rispens, Greer, & Jehn, 2007). Another study drew a distinction between short-term teams and ongoing teams, suggesting that while trust may not influence effort put forth by members of a short-term team, trust does indeed play a



positive role in the effort exerted among members of an ongoing (long-term) team (De Jong & Elfring, 2010). The findings went on to suggest that in order for leaders to improve performance in their teams, especially with ongoing teams, it is important that they are intentional about engaging team members in trust-building activities. Further, Tan and Lim (2009) offer that high levels of trust among co-workers have a positive impact on trust in the overall organization and organizational trust contributes to successful realization of the organization's goals.

If trust is important to generating collaborative behavior in teams, then it would benefit us to explore activities and factors that help build trust. Trust scholars have identified several antecedents to the formation of trust among organizational team members. One of the more widely recognized studies proposed a model of trust identifying the following as key characteristics of a person leading to their trustworthiness: ability (relevant competencies and skills); benevolence (perceived likelihood of acting for the benefit of the trustor); and integrity (an allegiance to ethical principles) (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Tan and Tan (2000) confirmed these characteristics and Knoll and Gill (2011) found that these proposed antecedents can also be mostly generalizable across the categories of trust in a supervisor, trust in a subordinate, and trust in a peer. Gefen and Straub (2004) added to Mayer et al.'s (1995) trust antecedent list to include predictability of the trustee. Castaldo, Premazzi, and Zerbini (2010) suggested similar trust antecedents such as expertise, integrity, competence, and honesty in interpersonal relationships. Ahlf, Horak, Klein, and Yoon (2018) found that demographic homophily between individuals (people being more attracted to people who are more like themselves) and higher degrees of interpersonal

communication are both antecedents to trust between people. Barczak et al. (2010) found that team emotional intelligence builds trust, which promotes a collaborative culture, an antecedent to team creativity. Druskat and Wolff (2001) define team emotional intelligence as the “ability of a group to develop a set of norms that manage emotional processes” (p. 133). These norms bring a group together and foster the cooperative behavior that leads to team effectiveness (Druskat & Wolff, 2001). Finally, in light of the established research linking trust to team effectiveness, scholars have suggested that another antecedent to trust is storytelling - specifically in the context of co-workers sharing non-work related, personally relevant stories with a fellow co-worker (Fiore et al., 2009).

### **Storytelling & Self-Disclosure**

There has been a great deal of research addressing personal story and narrative, and the impact they have on people and relationships. Anderson (1997) defines narrative as “the discursive way in which we organize, account for, give meaning to, and understand, that is, give structure and coherence to, the circumstances and the events in our lives” (p. 212). One of the early scholarship pioneers for the study of narrative, Fisher (1985) had this to say about the seminal contribution of his ‘narrative paradigm’:

The narrative paradigm sees people as storytellers—authors and co-authors who creatively read and evaluate the texts of life and literature. It envisions existing institutions as providing “plots” that are always in the process of re-creation rather than as scripts; it stresses that people are full participants in the making of messages, whether they are agents (authors) or audience members (co-authors).  
(p. 86)

This vision of storytelling as a universal way that humans make sense of the world and one another is an extraordinarily dynamic and interactive one that relates well to the nature of work teams. Storytelling may even serve as a powerful unifying agent in organizations with diversity of cultures, languages, and worldviews. According to Barker and Gower (2010), Narrative Paradigm Theory "recognizes that storytelling is a cross-culturally accepted method of communicating" (p. 296) - one that can help bridge communication challenges in multicultural organizations.

Dautenhahn (1999) speaks to the dynamic nature of storytelling, offering that it is at the very core of how people engage one another. Dautenhahn (1999) calls humans 'autobiographic agents' who spend their entire lives telling and re-telling stories, and that this ongoing, dynamic storytelling consequently forms and reforms their own autobiographical history (p. 63). Scholars such as Thompson (2010) have illustrated our relationship with stories as a significant, distinguishing factor in our humanity. In contrast, while there may be evidence that some animals participate in various forms of narration (i.e., telling of events in real-time), there is no evidence that animals are capable of narrating events from a past time (storytelling), so the telling of stories is uniquely characteristic of humans. Thompson (2010) goes on to say that episodic memory is an important ingredient in humans that allows us to be storytellers. Episodic memory, simply put, gives us the ability to remember past experiences (Tulving, 2002). While some animals may also have the ability to record episodic memories, humans are unique in that they communicate their episodic memories to others, essentially converting them into shared, group memories.

Stories become a normal part of everyday existence for people early in life, with children starting to participate in simple storytelling as young as two years old, telling them more competently by five or six (Engel, 1995). Cragan and Shields (1998) offer that the most effective form of any type of human communication is stories. Stories have generally been described as having a beginning, a middle, and an end. More importantly, they are about something, an event or sequence of events that gets stitched together to take us someplace (Martin, 2016; Ryfe, 2006). Another thing stories typically have in common is that they revolve around some sort of problem, complicating event, or dilemmatic situation (Ryfe, 2006) as well as climax (Martin, 2016). Storytelling is often far more powerful, complex, and impactful than taken at face value. Norman (1993) respectfully referred to stories as “important cognitive events, for they encapsulate, into one compact package, information, knowledge, context, and emotion” (p. 129).

In the context of organizational teams, Fiore et al. (2009) defined a story as “a structured expression of a given team member, or team’s experiences” (p. 29). In looking at storytelling through the lens of an organizational setting, we can see through the research that there are multiple ways that stories are utilized to add value to the organization. One way is in the use of stories to convey business information or knowledge to employees and teams. Klein (1998) has studied the way organizational leaders use story-building activities to help team members make sense of situations and retain knowledge. Lohuis et al. (2016) looked at the co-creation of and reflection about the shared stories of work teams, finding that the storytelling helped team members make sense of team effectiveness on three levels: social, temporal, and normative. Some have proposed that a narrative approach can benefit team effectiveness across cognitive,

affective, and social dimensions that help with the transfer and retention of work-related information relevant to the team (Fiore et al., 2009). Tesler et al. (2018) looked at leveraging storytelling as a planned team intervention (as opposed to unplanned, ad hoc storytelling most studies have referenced) to get team members on the same page about work-related info. The focus of their research was on transmitting work-related knowledge. Bartel and Garud (2009) offered theory around how storytelling could help members of a cross-disciplinary team. They submitted that sometimes discipline-specific terminology or culture can be an obstacle to teams achieving a mutual understanding of deeper issues, and creating or identifying stories with those deeper meanings that could be understood by all could help the team bypass those obstacles and synchronize more easily. Studies have also looked at storytelling as a way for teams to deliberate and work through challenging issues together. For example, Ryfe (2006) observed small-group deliberation experiences and found that people generally preferred storytelling over other forms of communication when discussing the issues at hand. Regarding the conflict and/or argument that naturally occurs when groups deliberate together, Ryfe (2006) concluded that communicating through storytelling was a method that reduced the severity of these conflict barriers and led to a healthier, more positive and productive deliberation experience, especially when the group's facilitator utilized more open and relaxed methods that fostered a maximum amount of participation among group members.

Whereas stories can be about most anything and often revolve around people other than the storyteller, self-disclosure relates more exclusively to the sharing of the individual's own personal information, history, and experiences. Self-disclosure has been

defined by multiple scholars as the sharing of personal information that the receiving party does not already know (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Collins & Miller, 1994; Cozby, 1973; Worthy, Gary, & Kahn, 1969). While one's personal narrative or self-disclosure may involve storytelling, not all storytelling involves personal narrative or self-disclosure. Two factors that positively influence the development of workplace friendships are mutual self-disclosure and perceived similarity (Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018). There is an abundance of research identifying personal self-disclosure to co-workers as a factor toward improved workplace relationships (e.g., Ensari & Miller, 2006; Finkelstein, Protolipac, & Kulas, 2000; Fleming & Spicer, 2004; Pratt & Rosa, 2003). Some scholars have studied self-disclosure as it relates to the topic of the boundaries between people's personal and professional lives. Integration behaviors are things people do that blur this personal-professional boundary line (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000; Campbell Clark, 2000; Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009; Nippert-Eng, 1996), such as including family in work events, having personal photos on office walls, or having conversations with co-workers about personal matters (Nippert-Eng, 1996). Self-disclosure studies have shown that people who share personal information like each other more and feel closer to one another (Cozby, 1972, 1973). Psychological research echoes the positive correlation between sharing personal information and closer workplace relationships (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Arber, 2007; Li, 2004, 2005; Werner & Parmelee, 1979). Racial dissimilarity could play a role in the effects that sharing personal, non-work information with co-workers has on that relationship. Dumas, Phillips, and Rothbard (2013) found that relationships become closer and more integrated if the discloser and receiver were more similar to one another demographically.

Also, much of the aforementioned research speaks only to the act of telling stories, but not necessarily the manner of the telling. Some researchers have found that the way in which a story is told or performed is just as important as the content of the story because of the way the implicit values of the storyteller are revealed in their expression (Sharf & Vanderford, 2003). Denning (2001) argued that for stories to be most impactful, they need to achieve an optimal level of relatedness to the receiver. It should neither be a story that triggers strong opinions from direct personal experience, nor should it be something the receiver cannot relate to at all. This places an interesting challenge on the storyteller or the designer of the storytelling activity to attempt to elicit the stories that can hit this sweet spot of relatability. Speaking to its generally unpredictable nature, the sort of interpersonal storytelling that happens normally with individuals is typically unplanned, situational, or is prompted by something unexpected, and it is this unpredictability that can create challenges with harnessing the power of story toward positive work outcomes.

Cragan and Shields (1998) found that storytelling could play an especially important role in organizations because teams often need to quickly come together in an effective manner that necessitates trust, collaboration, and communication. Evans et al. (2013) explored the impact of what they called ‘personal-disclosure mutual-sharing’ (PDMS) on team effectiveness. The study involved a soccer team whose members had to verbally share personal stories with an audience of their teammates and coaches. They found that this act of sharing positively influenced friendships among teammates as well as overall team performance. Auvinen et al. (2013) looked at storytelling in the context of relationships between leaders and their subordinates and discovered a number of benefits

for participants. They found that storytelling in these relationships inspired and motivated the subordinates, built trust with their leaders, helped increase focus, reduced conflict, and directly improved the subordinates' ability to accomplish tasks.

However, some scholars feel that personal self-disclosure between managers and subordinates could have negative consequences. For instance, Gibson, Harari, and Marr (2018) found that when someone of a higher status discloses perceived weakness to someone of a lower status, there can be negative impacts to the working relationship because the perceived strength of the higher-status individual has been tarnished. This negative impact did not seem to be a factor when the weakness disclosure occurred between two people of equal or similar status. Gibson (2018) discussed the concept of disruptive self-disclosure, which is when self-disclosure is at odds with the existing expectations of the relationship. In and of themselves, these disruptive self-disclosures are neither negative nor positive; they are just unexpected. Gibson (2018) also argues that someone who receives/hears a co-worker's personal self-disclosure may question or re-appraise their relationship to the discloser based on the new information learned. These examples may encourage people to be mindful of the timing, content, and manner of their self-disclosure in work settings so as to first consider the potential impact (positive, negative, or both) of their sharing.

### **Summary**

There is a clear progression and alignment across most of the research on storytelling and personal self-disclosure as it relates to relationships and team development. Stories are a natural, foundational element to the ways humans interact with one another. It is a crucial method by which we make sense of our world and all of



its complicated situations and relationships. Stories are powerful teaching tools, helping organizations convey work-related information to their employees through tales that allow abstract concepts to be more easily grasped and retained. Stories go further by also serving the formation and development of interpersonal relationships through the building of trust and feelings of closeness. In organizational teams, trust is key to the promotion of cooperative behaviors and team performance, and collaboration within a team and across teams becomes exceedingly important as organizations grow and increase in complexity.

Several scholars have recommended that further research be conducted to explore the impacts of personal story sharing on team development (Fiore et al., 2009). Others have suggested that more research could help us understand how we can intentionally guide stories (Ryfe, 2006) and how we could perhaps be more strategic about how we are designing or structuring stories to maximize their effects toward the improvement of team dynamics (Goldsmith, Wittenberg-Lyles, Rodriguez, & Sanchez-Reilly, 2010; Lohuis et al., 2016). Concluding their personal storytelling experiment with members of a soccer academy team, Evans et al. (2013) expressed a desire to better understand how different types, forms, or content of personal sharing might vary the impacts of those stories on the listeners and, ultimately, the team dynamics. While there have been decades of groundwork laid in the study of narrative, story, and personal self-disclosure and their impact on team relationships and performance, there is an apparent deficiency of scholarly research looking at the specific elements, styles, or forms of personal storytelling and whether some may have greater impact than others toward stimulating

desire among team members to collaborate with one another. This study sought to address this research opportunity.

### Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of specific types of personal storytelling on a person's desire to collaborate with others in the workplace. The study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the elements of personal storytelling that most build/strengthen professional relationships in teams?
2. Are there specific types of personal stories that have a greater impact than other types on an employee's desire to engage in work-related collaboration with co-workers in the same organization?

This chapter will give an overview of the study's methodology, research design, population and sample, considerations for the protection of human subjects, approach to data collection, and data analysis methods.

#### Research Design

The research study utilized a mixed-methods design. The key to the mixed-methods design is that the researcher integrates the quantitative and qualitative data to help form a more complete picture addressing the research question(s) - one that yields more insight than just quantitative data or qualitative data would (Creswell, 2018). More specifically, the study utilized an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach, with data collection occurring sequentially in two phases: the first phase consisting of quantitative data collection and the second phase consisting of qualitative data collection for the purpose of helping explain the quantitative data (Creswell, 2018). This design was selected because the quantitative survey seeks to understand an order of preference by subjects among three choices, but it does not reveal the reasoning behind their choices. It

was hoped that the qualitative interview questions would help identify themes that further answer the research questions. The quantitative segment involved subjects reviewing three stories and ranking them via an electronic survey, and the qualitative segment consisted of in-person interview questions with verbal responses.

### **Sample**

The target population for this study was a small, private, liberal arts college in the United States. The roughly 700 employees generally identified as either staff (administration) or faculty (academic course instruction). There were some who identified as both faculty and staff. This population was selected because the organization's design is hierarchical and largely decentralized, with many departments focused exclusively on their own department's mission without much desire or initiative to collaborate with staff in other departments. This sparked my curiosity as to elements that could positively influence a desire to collaborate more.

A sample of convenience was selected from within the aforementioned population. I made an intentional effort to select a sample that was diverse, with balanced representation of gender, role (faculty and staff), departments, position levels, and seniority within the organization. Inclusion criteria for the sample required subjects to be current employees, either full-time or part-time. The intended size of the sample invited to participate in the quantitative phase of the study was approximately 200 (100 faculty and 100 staff) with the goal of receiving at least 60 complete survey responses (30 from faculty and 30 from staff).

## **Protection of Human Subjects**

Before proceeding with data collection, I secured consent from all participants. I also completed the Human Subjects Training course certified through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI). Data collected from the quantitative survey has remained (and will remain) anonymous, and data from the qualitative interviews was treated as confidential. Identifying information was not collected (including the I.P. addresses of any computers used to submit surveys), as it was not anticipated that follow-up communication would be required of the subjects. Each file of electronic data (e.g., demographic data, ranking data, audio recordings, qualitative transcriptions) was password protected and securely stored in a Google Drive folder accessible only by me. This data will be stored for no more than five years following the completion of the study. At that time or sooner, the data will be destroyed.

Audio recordings were made using the “Voice Memos” app on the iPhone. The iPhone was locked whenever out of my hands and unlocking required either a passcode (known only to me) or my fingerprint. Data backups from my iPhone to the Apple iCloud servers were encrypted and inaccessible to everyone but me. Immediately after each interview, the audio recordings were transferred to the aforementioned secure internal Google Drive folder and then the files on the iPhone were deleted (including clearing the ‘Recently Deleted’ folder within the Voice Memos app).

At the time of recruitment of each interview subject and before the start of each interview, the purpose of the study was explained and they were informed that participation in the study was voluntary and confidential. The only expected cost to the participants was the time and energy they would invest in the survey and interview. The

only possible anticipated risk was an accidental exposure of subject data (limited to demographic information, ranking responses, and audio recordings). Interviewees also completed a consent form designed to ensure they had the most accurate understanding of the nature of their participation in the study.

### **Data Collection**

I collected data from subjects in two phases: first, an electronic survey; and second, a series of qualitative, video interviews with a subset of the survey sample. The online survey (Appendix A) was designed to accomplish three things. First, it required respondents to read and agree to an Institutional Review Board (IRB) consent form (Appendix B) in order to proceed with the survey. The consent form briefly stated the purpose of the study, gave the criteria for participation, described the survey, its components, and estimated duration, assured participants of anonymity, and clarified that participation in the study was voluntary. The second section of the survey collected demographic information: gender, birth year, role classifications (faculty or staff), and number of years employed by the organization. The third section asked participants to read three different stories as if they were being personally shared from an employee to a fellow employee in their organization. These stories were written by me. One story was of a humorous personal experience. Another story was of a tragic personal experience or painful life challenge or situation. The third was a fond, nostalgic memory from their youth. After reading the three stories, the participant was asked to rank them according to which story contributed most positively to their desire to collaborate professionally with the co-worker who shared the story.

This survey was conducted through SurveyMonkey.com. Response data was housed in SurveyMonkey.com and later exported by me to my password-protected laptop and Google Drive. Both the SurveyMonkey.com account and the Google account used to store this data are accessible only to me. No personally identifiable information was captured. The link to access the survey was emailed to the aforementioned sample (see Appendix C for email copy). Once the survey emails were sent to prospective participants, I monitored responses until at least 30 completed surveys were submitted from faculty and another 30 were submitted from staff. When this threshold was reached, I proceeded to the qualitative phase of the study, which started with the selection of a subset of prospective faculty participants and prospective staff participants. I invited these employees to participate via email (see Appendix D for email copy). When it was established that a prospective interviewee had submitted a completed quantitative survey and was willing to participate in the qualitative interview, a time was scheduled for the participant to meet me in an online video meeting conducted through Zoom and facilitated by a 'Story-Ranking Interview Guide' visible only to me (Appendix E). During the interview scheduling process, the participant was also asked to review and sign an electronic consent form (Appendix F) confirming that they understood the purpose of the study, the expected duration of the interview, what will be expected of them, that their participation, responses, and related data will remain confidential, how to contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) with any questions or concerns, and that their participation is entirely voluntary. These electronic consent forms were collected using a Google Form (Appendix G) and saved in a spreadsheet via Google Drive.

I began each interview with thanking the subject for participating, then provided an overview of what the participant could expect during the session. The participant was first asked to verbally respond to the same demographic questions asked of them during the earlier quantitative survey. Then the participant was presented electronically with three stories (Appendix H), the same stories they were originally asked to read and rank during the quantitative survey.

I then asked the participant to verbally respond to the following questions designed to probe for the reasoning they used to rank the stories during the quantitative survey:

1. What about your top-ranked story most influenced this ranking for you?
2. Does hearing this particular story influence your desire to work with this person?  
If so, in what way(s)? If not, why would you say that is?
3. What aspects of either of the other two stories may have contributed to the lower rankings you gave them?

These qualitative interview responses were audio recorded while I demonstrated active listening with the interviewee. When the participant concluded their responses, I concluded the interview by thanking them, reminding them that their participation and information provided would be kept confidential, and offered them a copy of the finished thesis when completed.

### **Data Analysis**

For the study's quantitative data, descriptive statistics were utilized. They included the following:

- Demographic data on the survey respondents;



- The number and percentage of people who completed the survey against the total sample of invited participants;
- The total number of respondents who gave a top ranking to each of the three story options, and the percentage of total respondents those numbers represent (e.g., 22 respondents, 37% of total respondents, selected “Story B” as their number one choice);
- Frequency distribution of all story rankings;
- Mean rankings to get a perspective on overall popularity among the choices, converting the rankings to scores where the first choice (1) ranking got a score of 3, the second choice (2) got a score of 2, and the third choice (3) got a score of 1, and then calculating the mean of the total score for each story option;
- Top-rank selection frequency and mean rankings by gender;
- Top-rank selection frequency and mean rankings by role;
- A pairwise ranking comparison to determine how many times each option was ranked higher than each of the other options;
- Logistic binary analysis testing for significance among variables (i.e., age, employment duration, gender, and role);
- Chi-square tests to examine the relation between gender and story preference, and between role and story preference;
- Pearson product-moment correlation test to check for relationship between age and story rankings, as well as between length of employment and story rankings.

Missing data was not anticipated, as all fields in the survey were required. The smallest group/unit for which separate reporting could occur was anticipated to be based on

looking at data broken down across demographic descriptors collected (e.g., number of years employed with the organization, birth year). In the study design, it was considered that a review of these descriptive statistics could raise additional curiosity about the survey responses that could prompt changes or additions to the qualitative questions to be asked of participants in the interview phase.

Once the interview recordings were collected, I examined this data to extract similarities, differences, and common themes in the context of the various story types and the quantitative survey ranking data. The audio recordings from the interviews were manually transcribed, then reviewed in order to add field notes from observations made during the interviews, including questions or curiosities the data invoked. Next, I read through the transcribed data again to get an overall sense of any general meanings to begin reflecting upon. Then the data was coded by hand, assigning categories to sections of the data and using the coding info to generate a description of the interviewees along with what was intended to be approximately 5-7 themes to focus the identification and analysis. Finally, I conducted a side-by-side comparison (Creswell, 2018) of the key themes from the qualitative data with the descriptive statistics from the quantitative data, presenting these results in a narrative section by theme to bring clarity and context to the sentiment behind the interviewees' rankings and helping us answer the research questions of this study.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented an overview of this research project's methodology, population and sample, tactics for protecting its participants, data collection procedures, approach to the analysis of the data, and the reasoning behind these design choices. The

study utilized a mixed-methods design consisting of two parts: an online survey and a series of one-on-one video interviews with approximately 14-18 people selected from the pool of online survey participants. Data analysis included descriptive statistics of quantitative story-ranking data alongside content analysis of the qualitative interview data. The next chapter will present the findings from this analysis.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of specific types of personal storytelling on a person's desire to collaborate with others in the workplace. Specific research questions were as follows:

1. What are the elements of personal storytelling that most build/strengthen professional relationships in teams?
2. Are there specific types of personal stories that have a greater impact than other types on an employee's desire to engage in work-related collaboration with co-workers in the same organization?

This chapter presents the findings of the study. The first section offers an overview of the respondent demographics. This is followed by a section describing the response to the quantitative Story Survey Instrument (Appendix A) and the survey's results. The next section presents the results of the qualitative video interviews, including the identification of five key themes that emerged from the qualitative data. The chapter concludes with a summary.

### Demographics

The following section represents a summary of the demographic data collected by the electronic survey instrument and the video interviews.

**Survey.** The survey sample consisted of 66 full-time employees of a small, private, liberal arts college in the United States. The gender distribution of the respondents was 53% female ( $n = 35$ ) and 47% male ( $n = 31$ ). The age range of respondents was 24-74. The mean age was 44. The range of years employed by this organization among the respondents was six months to 41 years. The mean employment

duration was 12 years. Among the total respondents, 47% ( $n = 31$ ) self-identified as faculty (instruction) and 53% ( $n = 35$ ) self-identified as staff (administration).

**Interviews.** The interview sample was a subset of the survey sample and consisted of 13 people. Gender distribution of the interview subset was 46% female ( $n = 6$ ) and 54% male ( $n = 7$ ). The age range of interviewees was 34-74. The mean age was 48. The range of years employed by the subject organization among the interview subjects was 2-40 years. The mean employment duration was 14 years.

### **Quantitative Survey Data Results**

The Story Survey Instrument (Appendix A) was housed in SurveyMonkey.com and distributed via email to 239 full-time employees of the subject organization. It was completed by 66 respondents, yielding a 27.6% response rate. Among those invited to participate, 107 were categorized as faculty (college instructors) and 132 were categorized as staff (administrative roles). The survey was completed by 31 faculty (response rate of 29%) and 35 staff (response rate of 26.5%).

From the 66 total respondents, just over half (51.5%;  $n = 34$ ) ranked “Story B” (the sad/tragic story) as the story that would most strongly influence their desire to work with the sharer of the story. “Story A” (the humorous story) was given a top ranking by 15 (22.7%) of the respondents and “Story C” (the nostalgic story) was top-ranked by 17 (25.8%) of respondents. Table 1 shows the frequency and percentages of top-rank selections for each of the three stories. Figure 1 reflects total distribution of story rankings, including second and third rankings.

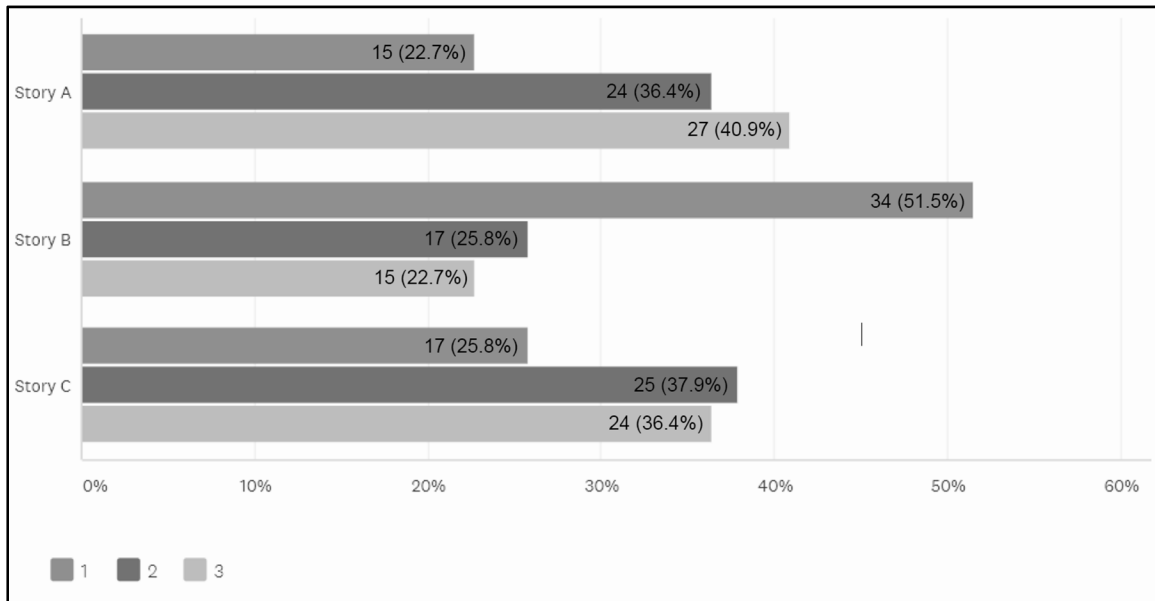
**Table 1**

*Frequency Distribution of Top Story Rankings*

1st-CHOICE TOTALS	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Story "A" as 1st Choice	15	22.7%
<b>Story "B" as 1st Choice</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>51.5%</b>
Story "C" as 1st Choice	17	25.8%
TOTAL:	66	100.0%

**Figure 1**

*Frequency Distribution of All Story Rankings*



This ranking data was also analyzed by reverse-scoring the rank entries (giving each a weight) and then calculating the means of the total scores attributed to each of the three stories. First-choice ranks for each story were assigned a score of three, second-choice ranks were assigned a score of two, and third-choice ranks were assigned a score of one. With the range of scores from one to three, Table 2 represents the mean scores for each of the three stories, which indicate a strong overall preference for Story B.

**Table 2**

*Mean Ranks of Stories*

MEAN OF RANKINGS	TOTAL
Story "A"	1.82
<b>Story "B"</b>	<b>2.29</b>
Story "C"	1.89

The same descriptive statistics were used to look more closely at the survey data in the context of two variables: gender and role. Table 3 below compares female and male respondents, showing the frequency, percentages, and mean rankings of top-rank selections for each of the three stories. Table 4 shows a similar comparison between faculty and staff role designations.

**Table 3**

*Story Ranking: Descriptive Statistic Comparison by Gender*

1st-CHOICE TOTALS (Gender)	FEMALE			MALE		
	FREQUENCY	PERCENT	MEAN RANK	FREQUENCY	PERCENT	MEAN RANK
Story "A" as 1st Choice	8	22.9%	1.89	7	22.6%	1.74
Story "B" as 1st Choice	17	48.6%	2.26	17	54.8%	2.32
Story "C" as 1st Choice	10	28.6%	1.86	7	22.6%	1.94
TOTAL:	35	100.0%		31	100.0%	

**Table 4**

*Story Ranking: Descriptive Statistic Comparison by Role*

1st-CHOICE TOTALS (Role)	FACULTY			STAFF		
	FREQUENCY	PERCENT	MEAN RANK	FREQUENCY	PERCENT	MEAN RANK
Story "A" as 1st Choice	7	20.0%	1.77	8	25.8%	1.86
Story "B" as 1st Choice	15	42.9%	2.35	19	61.3%	2.23
Story "C" as 1st Choice	9	25.7%	1.87	8	25.8%	1.91
TOTAL:	31	88.6%		35	112.9%	

In the case of both variable comparisons, the results resembled those of the overall survey sample, showing a clear preference for Story B. Male and female participants responded similarly. Faculty and staff indicated similar patterns, but staff

appeared to have an even stronger preference for Story B ( $n = 19, 63.3\%$ ) than did faculty ( $n = 15, 42.9\%$ ).

A pairwise comparison was conducted on the overall story ranking data, looking at how many times an option was ranked higher than each of the other two options. Table 5 shows this comparison. Story B was ranked higher than Story A 42 times, and higher than Story C 43 times.

**Table 5**

*Pairwise Comparison of Story Rankings*

STORY	A	B	C
A	-	24	30
B	42	-	43
C	36	23	-

A binary logistic regression analysis was conducted on the survey data. The test found none of the variables were statistically associated with our target variable. Being limited by the sample size, a binary classification of the story choices was created. Stories A and C were bundled as more casual/light stories while story B was classified as a more serious story. Table 6 below shows the respective  $p$  values for the binary logistic analysis for each variable in the context of story rankings. The results of the binary analyses were not significant.

**Table 6**

*Logistic Binary Analysis Tests for Variables*

Variables	$p$ -Value
Age	0.110
Employment Duration	0.774
Gender	0.611
Role	0.632



Next, a chi-square test was conducted to examine the relation between gender and story preference. The relationship between these values was not found to be significant,  $\chi^2 (2, N = 66) = .36, p = ns$  (Table 7).

**Table 7**

*Chi Square Test: Gender*

<b>RESULTS</b>				
	<b>STORY A</b>	<b>STORY B</b>	<b>STORY C</b>	<b>ROW TOTALS</b>
<b>FEMALE</b>	8 (7.95) [0.00]	17 (18.03) [0.06]	10 (9.02) [0.11]	35
<b>MALE</b>	7 (7.05) [0.00]	17 (15.97) [0.07]	7 (7.98) [0.12]	31
<b>COLUMN TOTALS:</b>	15	34	17	<b>66 (Grand Total)</b>

The same chi-square test was used to investigate the relationship between role (faculty vs. staff) and story preference. The relationship between these values was not found to be significant,  $\chi^2 (2, N = 66) = .36, p = ns$  (Table 8).

**Table 8**

*Chi Square Test: Role*

<b>RESULTS</b>				
	<b>STORY A</b>	<b>STORY B</b>	<b>STORY C</b>	<b>ROW TOTALS</b>
<b>FACULTY</b>	7 (7.05) [0.00]	15 (15.97) [0.06]	9 (7.98) [0.13]	31
<b>STAFF</b>	8 (7.95) [0.00]	19 (18.03) [0.05]	8 (9.02) [0.11]	35
<b>COLUMN TOTALS:</b>	15	34	17	<b>66 (Grand Total)</b>

Finally, a correlation analysis was used to check for relationships between age and story rankings, as well as between length of employment and story rankings. For both of these variables, no significant correlation was found.

## Qualitative Interview Data Results

Following the collection and analysis of the survey data, 13 of the survey respondents were interviewed via video calls using Zoom in hopes of gaining more insight behind participants' story rankings and helping to answer the research questions.

The transcription and coding of the interview data resulted in the identification of five key themes representing factors of significance in the participants' consideration and appraisal of the stories and their impact on desire to collaborate with the storyteller. The themes included: context of the story exchange; perceived appropriateness of sharing; skills/competencies/traits of the sharer; the depth of the story content; and relatability of the story to the recipient. There were 134 comments from the interviews that directly related to one or more of these themes. Table 9 gives a snapshot of how the frequency of those comments compares by theme, as well as the number and percentage of interviewees who made the comments.

**Table 9**

### *Interview Comment Frequency Distribution by Theme*

THEMES (factors influencing desire to collaborate)	COMMENTS (N = 134)		INTERVIEWEES (N = 13)	
	n	%	n	%
Context of the story exchange	10	6.8%	5	38.5%
Perceived <b>appropriateness</b> of sharing	11	7.5%	6	46.2%
<b>Skills/Competence</b> of the sharer	35	23.8%	12	92.3%
The <b>depth</b> of the story content	43	29.3%	10	76.9%
<b>Relatability</b> of the story to the recipient	35	23.8%	9	69.2%

**Context.** Ten of the comments (6.8%) from the interview data, made by five of the 13 interviewees (38.5%), were related to the context of the sharing of the story. These participants noted that the timing, location, and/or circumstances of the sharing could impact their desire to collaborate with the sharer as a result of receiving the story. For

instance, one subject said, “It depends if it's in a work setting, like it totally depends like what are they sharing at lunch, or are they sharing this at the beginning of a work meeting when we're supposed to be like going in and focusing?” Some subjects stated that it might matter whether this was the first conversation they were having with the story sharer, or if this was an existing, established working relationship. Another respondent pointed out that their own mood at the time of receiving/hearing the story could have significance in how they received the story. An example of such a comment is: “It could have been my own emotional state like I wanted a more serious story. So that's kind of a curious thing I think about; I think my own experience right now and how I'm feeling and even the seasons has had a different impact on me.”

**Appropriateness.** 11 of the comments (7.5%) from the interview data, made by six of the 13 interviewees (46.2%), were related to how appropriate (or inappropriate) the subject felt the sharing of that story would have been, given the co-worker relationship. Comments touched on feelings that there might be professional boundaries being crossed by the sharing of certain stories, and that over-sharing could potentially have a negative impact. Here are some examples of comments related to this theme:

- “I think there's a line at work that needs to kind of be maintained too about, you know, just how heavy you get with some of the conversations unless it's like people that are in your really tight close circle... and I don't think that that is always maybe appropriate with the supervisor if it's not in the context of what's going on with work or how it's impacting their work.”
- “It's a private story; it's not a public story.”

- “We all have those kind of stories... keep them to yourself. I mean maybe to a close friend in a private conversation but give me a break.”

There was a certain degree of understanding, empathy, and respect expressed by interviewees about the sharing of heavier, more vulnerable, personal stories, but some respondents qualified that sentiment by stressing that such sharing should not happen in a professional environment or in a relationship that has not first reached a deeper level of trust:

- “The heavier stories are, you know, I think there's a time and place for that... but just to throw that out there I think that can get kind of heavy just to like, drop that on somebody.”
- “Some people just openly share but I think just be... It can get awkward.”
- “I'm not trying to sound like a bad person for not caring but it's like it's real heavy when you're like coming onto this professional call, talk about stuff, and you're getting this kind of, you know, these these heavy stories, put on you, and it's like well it's... I'm sorry that they're going through that, but at the same time like it's a lot to process and have to deal with.”
- “Trust is something that's earned. And so you... you're a bit naive if you go into a new relationship saying, ‘Oh I'm just going to tell them everything’; that usually boomerangs real quick, like, whoa.”

The following comment touched on the impact of the existing organizational culture on tendencies to share more openly and vulnerably:

- “That's one thing in the culture at [our organization] that's very different from other places I worked is that openness that people tend to have with how they're

willing to openly share stuff about their stories, and obviously a lot of it has to do with the faith-based environment that we're in.”

It is interesting to note that all but one of the comments pertaining to the ‘appropriateness’ theme (91%) were in reference to Story B. No respondents made any comments with concerns about appropriateness regarding Story A or Story C. Over a third of the interviewees (38.5%,  $n = 5$ ) felt that the open, vulnerable, emotional, or heavy nature of Story B may be inappropriate for a work setting or professional relationship.

**Skills/Competence/Traits.** Of all comments related to the five key data themes, 35 of the comments (23.8%) from the interview data, made by 12 of the 13 interviewees (92.3%), were related to how the stories revealed skills, competencies, characteristics, values, or traits of the story sharer that influenced the interviewee’s interest in collaborating with the sharer as a result of hearing the story. Comments varied among the perspectives of different interviewees about different stories, with some expressing concerns about ways they felt stories revealed traits in the sharer that made them less desirable to work with, while others found traits in the sharer that increased their desire to work with them.

In the case of Story A, several of the interviewees said that hearing this story made them question the intelligence or competence of the story sharer. Some examples include:

- “It also didn't make me think that ... the person was very smart.”
- “This one, maybe seems just like a little bit of a distracted, maybe kind of a messy person. I’m much more task-driven; again, like I want someone who's really focused if I'm on a work team. I could see maybe this person going on little, little

rabbit trails possibly and not quite as focused, so that was why I ranked them last.”

- “I’m just a, you know, silly, you know, guy at home and couldn’t figure out that my dog outsmarted me.”
- “The intelligence of the first guy bothered me a little bit, you know, ‘cause you need smart people to work with... You should be smarter than your dog.”
- “Um, come on, it took that long for the person to figure out that that’s what the dog is doing? Maybe feeling this person was not as competent.”

However, other comments demonstrated a respect for positive traits they perceived from the sharer of the same story:

- “I picked the funny dog story, because it demonstrated somebody who was, you know, creative and... and can laugh and... and for me that’s like, oh yeah, that’s somebody I’d love to work with. It was, you know, genuinely funny. It had a wonderful little surprise, at the end, it, it tells me that this is a person who is able to... to craft a story well to communicate... to deliver, if you will, a punch. And, and also tells me that this is somebody who... who looks for, you know, light and funny things in life, and has a positive attitude... It tells me that you know this person can be self-deprecating... that they’re willing to share a story that gives them, you know doesn’t necessarily put them in the hero light by any means.”
- “I like that humility... that kind of came through in that story because they were, they were turning the tables on themselves, like actually the dog was smarter, and I do like that aspect and people where they can, kind of, you know, call themselves out in some ways.”

- “So, I could imagine that I could enjoy that person... that they could laugh at oneself. That's a real important characteristic for coworkers, I think.”
- “I just thought that this person sounded like they're a good communicator actually because they could take such a normal everyday occurrence... something that probably wouldn't be very funny to most people... and they could actually tell a really intriguing story with it, and I think communication is obviously very important in work environments and team environments of course and so to me I also associate good communication skills with wit and confidence and, and just being a little bit savvy.”
- “He also seemed like he was a pretty positive person.”
- “He just seemed like he was really. . . would be comfortable to be around because it wasn't a pretentious story; it was a very simple story. And so I would feel just comfortable. . . more comfortable opening up with that person.”

A similar series of contrasting comments was received pertaining to Story B:

- “It's just the person takes himself too seriously and probably has a hard time seeing other worldviews.”
- “I know for sure B is the last choice because it's a sad, negative story.”
- “I like that she's very emotionally aware and I think I can connect with that... I think emotionally aware people are good to work with.”
- “I think the honesty in it. Right, that... that is a trait that I'm... that I value. When working with people, especially teams, the honesty.”

- “I do respect when people are open about those types of things in their lives and... and recognize it as something, you know, important, so I think I would trust that person to understand the emotional experience of other people.”
- “For me, that kind of meant like they... that reflected that they would have empathy towards other people because they were, they were being vulnerable and but then also kind of, if they're being that vulnerable like, then they must be a very honest person.”
- “Just because of the way that they're describing their relationships with other people and they're being reflective on it just makes me think that like, if they were given a task, and they knew that somebody was counting on them and... that they would follow through on it.”

Story C also elicited differing perspectives on the various traits perceived by the interviewees about the sharer:

- “If I had to help them out like if, I mean, if they asked me for help I would probably help, but I wouldn't feel as strong. . . nearly as strongly about it because I don't have a very high opinion of that person's character. Seems to me you might take people you work with for granted.”
- “The most concerning thing about this person is whether he'd get anything done. . . just too casual. . . too loose.”
- “It was just someone who's reflective, someone who's grateful. . . someone who is positive. Um, and, yeah, just those qualities are, what stood out to me. If I think about who I collaborate the best with, I tend to be quite focused and structured and you know task-oriented and that kind of thing. And I enjoy when people



when I collaborate with... people who can kind of step back for a second and be grateful and reflective and help me with that. So it's kind of, I think, about balance.”

- “You can get a sense of someone's character by their, the way they tell stories or the kinds of stories that they tell and character is really important in collaboration.”
- “It is sweet. It is positive.”
- “C has just a more positive feeling and so I sort of am more likely to associate positive things with that person than the person sharing B.”

**Depth.** More of the theme-related comments were associated with the theme of ‘depth’ than any other (29.3%,  $n = 43$ ), and most of the interviewees touched on this theme (76.9%,  $n = 10$ ) as a factor in how they assess desire to collaborate with someone. Many interviewees (61.5%,  $n = 8$ ) emphasized ‘vulnerability’ or ‘openness’ as a central characteristic of Story B that compelled them to rank it higher than the other two stories. Here are some examples of such comments:

- “It was the vulnerability and the openness, the, the sharing of the, the story. . . the personal life.”
- “This is peeling back the co-worker and saying, ‘Here's me as a person.’ And when you have that connection on a personal level, you want to help; you. . . you feel inclined to help.”
- “I liked that she'd come out vulnerably, willing to share. I, again, I really highly value vulnerability. That's not the default or that's not an easy thing for anyone to share.”

- “You share about a death, you share about a serious illness in your family, you should, I mean, I think that, that depth and that vulnerability is, to me, that's a signal. To me that the other person is willing to have that relationship, right, is trusting you. Hopefully I mean it makes me as a recipient, be more willing to be vulnerable with them. There's a deeper human element there.”
- “That's a story of loss, right, I mean that, that's a pretty profound human experience and I don't feel like we share our losses with everyone.”
- “And that issue of vulnerability, made it for me a story that, that opens that connection, makes that connection deeper and sincere.”
- “I think the willingness to be vulnerable, right, the willingness to, I mean, because it'll work in a team that there's vulnerability in sharing ideas and proposing something. There's a vulnerability in being opposed to an idea, right in saying to someone, uh, yeah, I don't know, I don't, I don't think that'll work or, I'm not sure I agree, or, and I think that story about the cancer and the loss demonstrates a willingness, right, to trust to be vulnerable, that I think would be meaningful in that, in that teamwork. Also I just like I feel like that person is being authentically human with you.”
- “For number two, I really appreciated that they were comfortable enough to share something so personal with me, and that would make me also probably feel more comfortable with them, but it really would depend on if I felt comfortable enough to open up back.”

Conversely, many comments reflected on the lack of vulnerability, openness, or depth perceived from Story A and Story C. For example:

- “The story is funny and that people have pets, and all that but that seems, more superficial.”
- “It was so surface level, so like, it was a story that to me, indicated a very superficial person.”
- “I think the element there that's meaningful to me is humor, right, which is a nice thing to have, but that, but that's not as deep or vulnerable as the cancer and the loss piece.”
- “There wasn't a personal revelation of who the person was as much.”
- “You know, I mean something like pizza and hanging out at the beach, I don't know what that adds to the relationship I have with you on any level.”
- “It doesn't carry the same emotional weight.”
- “Number three's conversation wasn't very meaningful and there was no real vulnerability or connection.”

Certainly, however, as presented in the ‘Appropriateness’ section, almost half of the interviewees (46.2%,  $n = 6$ ) expressed that the level of depth shared through Story B might be inappropriate in a professional setting or relationship.

**Relatability.** Of all comments related to the five key data themes, 35 of the comments (23.8%) from the interview data, made by nine of the 13 interviewees (69.2%), were related to the degree to which the interviewees could personally relate their own life experiences with those shared by the co-worker through these stories.

The following are examples of comments from interviewees expressing how the relatability of the stories and their sharers to their own lives positively affected their desire to have a professional working relationship with them.

- “I think just the fact that animals are pretty universal is like a commonality of animal lovers, that it touches something that we all... you know if you're an animal lover, you know, it's easy to listen to other stories about people who love their animals and that seems like a common shared theme. I love animals too so I just, I, I would connect with someone who wanted to share me some, something like that.”
- “I resonate with that, like, you know, in my personal life I have struggles with depression and anxiety and things like that and so this has a very real connection to my own struggles with heaviness and with feeling like you know, oh man, this was supposed to be great and it wasn't.”
- “This would be a very deep personal connection that I would have with this person. And that kind of bond that, that it's opening the door for reciprocal vulnerability connection.”
- “I would feel a very very strong connection to this person. You feel more inclined to help people with whom you have a strong personal connection.”
- “I can relate to some of these things. I've had some heavy stuff in my past. I think I would connect with this person.”
- “It reminds me of a loss in my own life and, you know, I'm sure we would connect.”
- “Obviously there's a cancer connection and a dad with cancer and so there's a commonality and connection there that would, you know, at first, I'm like yeah that would be the initial connection.”

- “Connecting as people, um, and relationally is, is a critical part of working collaboratively, especially if it's a closely knit team or something I'm going to do a project that involves a lot of dividing up tasks and that kind of thing.”
- “Since I grew up close to the beach and went to the beach every day that one kind of sounded a bit like my growing up and so that's why that one ended up being number one. We have something in common from from the get-go. And so that, that might, that would affect, I guess. I think that we have something in common is the key thing there.”
- “. . . implicit sense of trust. There's that implicit sense of sharing this loss. I mean, which I think, I mean that loss piece I think is really a big human thing.”

On the other hand, stories that the receiver cannot relate to at all appeared to be experienced as negative or neutral to the interviewees. An example of such a response is:

“Story C is just, I mean it's skipping stones on a pond. It's just jumping from thing to thing and, you know, we went to school together and we went boogie boarding together and we got pizza together and it's, I don't know, and I can't relate with anything that says, ‘hard to imagine life was ever that carefree.’ In what universe, sir? I don't think so.”

## Summary

Overall, more than half of the 66 survey respondents indicated that Story B, the story characterized as the more emotional, deep, heavier, and more vulnerable sharing, was more likely than the other two stories to positively influence a desire to collaborate with the co-worker sharing the story. Analysis of the quantitative survey response data indicated no statistical significance of any of the study variables on the story rankings. The interview data offered expanded insight into possible influences on participants’ story preferences, resulting in the emergence of the following five themes: context of the

story exchange; perceived appropriateness of sharing; skills/competence/traits of the sharer; the depth of the story content; and relatability of the story to the recipient.

Analysis of the qualitative interview data indicated that the overall theme of depth, vulnerability, openness, and emotion was a strong factor influencing feelings about Story B. About 38% of interviewees found this type of sharing to be too heavy, emotional, or otherwise inappropriate for a work setting, while roughly 62% of interviewees lauded this story's vulnerability, openness, honesty, and sincerity, with feelings that it promoted good trust and stronger working relationships. Interviewees' story rankings were also highly influenced by the ways they felt the stories revealed particular skills or traits of the sharer that could translate to workplace effectiveness or ineffectiveness. For instance, with Story A, the dog owner's intelligence was questioned by some, while others noted an appreciation for the sharer's humor, creativity, and self-deprecating manner. Some felt Story B was too heavy, serious, sad, or negative and expressed concern over a co-worker bringing an office environment down with the weight of all that. However, others looked at the same story and applauded the sharer's qualities (e.g., emotionally aware, honest, empathetic, vulnerable, open). Some felt Story C was too superficial or neutral, lacking meaning, vulnerability, and connection, which they felt left nothing to build a working relationship from, and the work ethic or follow-through of the sharer was questioned. Others felt Story C's sharer had admirable qualities, such as being reflective, grateful, and positive.

Over two thirds of the interviewees (69.2%,  $n = 9$ ) expressed that being able to relate their own life experiences to the story content increased their desire to collaborate. These comments were spread fairly evenly across the three stories, not indicating any one

story as necessarily more relatable than another. A handful of the interviewees also reflected that the context of the storytelling could affect their appraisal of or feelings about this co-worker (e.g., informal lunch vs. formal meeting; first interaction vs. established relationship; emotional state of the receiver at that moment). The next chapter provides a discussion of these results.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of various types of personal story sharing on one's desire to collaborate with the sharer. More specifically, the study hoped to gather data from employees of a small, private, liberal arts college in the United States to help us understand if particular types or elements of storytelling contributed more than other types or elements to that desire to collaborate or work with someone on professional tasks. Understanding aspects of the sharing of those stories could help the organization enhance the design of programs and activities related to orientation, training, and teambuilding that could result in increased organizational effectiveness through the strengthening of interpersonal working relationships. This chapter concludes the study by presenting a discussion of the study results, including conclusions, limitations, recommendations for future research, and suggestions for future study.

### Conclusions

Although the quantitative survey data did not yield statistically significant differences between the variables of age, gender, role, or employment duration with story rankings, the clear preference for Story B expressed through participants' survey selections prompted some insightful dialogue with interview subjects. The qualitative interview data revealed several specific dynamics of personal story sharing that this study finds to be key factors influencing the recipient's desire to have a professional, collaborative relationship with the fellow employee sharing the story. The study's results suggest the following conclusions:



1. Personal story disclosure that exhibits or reveals professional traits or capabilities considered by the recipient/listener to be valuable in a working relationship positively impacts desire to collaborate.
2. Stories perceived as having a deeper, more emotionally driven narrative are generally more likely to create a connection to the recipient that has potential to contribute to an effective work relationship.
3. The relatability of a storyteller's personal experience to the recipient's own personal experience is a key contributor to the recipient's desire to engage in a working relationship with the sharer.

**Professional traits revealed through personal story.** One of the more prominent commonalities among interview participants was the way that they made judgments about the professional competencies of the storytellers based on what was shared. Since participants were asked to assess the three stories based on how those stories might influence desire to engage in professional partnerships, it was natural that many analyzed stories in the context of what it could reveal about the sharer's ability to be an effective partner in collaborative work. The qualitative data from this study suggests that personal story disclosure that exhibits or reveals professional traits or capabilities considered by the recipient/listener to be valuable in a working relationship positively impacts their desire to collaborate.

A related study found that when self-disclosure exposes weaknesses or vulnerability in co-workers, it only really made an impact on the recipient's perception of the sharer if the sharer was considered to be of a higher status in the organization relative to the recipient (Gibson, Harari, & Marrs, 2018). That conclusion is at odds with the

results of this study, which suggest that a disclosure perceived by some subjects as evidence of weakness could indeed negatively impact the sharer's status or the likelihood of a positive working relationship with that person regardless of status difference between the two people. The opposite of this is also suggested by the data; if positive professional competencies can be inferred by the sharer's story (e.g., intelligence, creativity, communication skills, humility, or positive attitude), then the recipient's desire to collaborate with that person is likely to increase. This dynamic in some ways resembles that of a job interview, in which a question such as "Tell me about yourself" can elicit personal storytelling that the interviewer will use as a basis for the assessment of job qualifications in the interviewee.

**Story depth promotes deeper workplace connections.** A recurring theme that appeared through most of the interviews was related to the level of vulnerability, openness, or depth that study subjects perceived in the sharer of the three stories. This factor was a key influencer of participants' story rankings, sometimes in favor of a story (which was predominantly the case with story B), and sometimes as reason for disliking a story (which happened more with stories A and C). Overall, the data from this study suggests that stories perceived as having a deeper, more emotionally driven narrative are generally more likely to create a connection to the recipient that has potential to contribute to an effective work relationship. The risk taken by the sharer to disclose an authentic, vulnerable experience that is important to them often promotes a positive response from the recipient, including, but not limited to, feelings of respect, sympathy, empathy, trust, and/or an openness to reciprocate by sharing an experience of their own of similar depth. These findings support the results of a number of previous studies.

Ensari and Miller (2006) found that the sharing of “personal, intimate information with others” (p. 592) involves risk and vulnerability from the sharer, leading to trust, familiarity, reduction in anxiety, and an increase in communication, task productivity, and overall team and organizational effectiveness. Pillemer and Rothbard (2018) found that mutual self-disclosure at a more vulnerable depth is a key driver of closer, stronger, more intimate relationships. The results of the present study would also suggest that the context of when, where, and/or how these deeper stories are shared could play an important role in the perceived appropriateness of the sharing. If an employee chooses to share something personal with a co-worker with the goal of improving that working relationship, it may be wise for that sharer to first appraise their physical environment, organizational culture, and receptivity of prospective recipients of that disclosure to consider what level of depth could be most impactful, relative to the context at hand, without being judged as inappropriate.

**Story relatability lays a foundation for collaborative relationships.** Finally, the relatability of a storyteller’s personal experience to the recipient’s own personal experience is a key contributor to the recipient’s desire to engage in a working relationship with the sharer. The qualitative data demonstrated a great deal of consistency around this factor. Over two thirds of the interviewees elevated this as a major influencer in their rankings. People who commented that they could highly relate to a story tended to rank that story highest, while those commenting that they could relate very little to certain stories ranked those stories lowest.

These findings support the results of a number of previous studies. Denning (2001) concluded that the most impactful stories are those that achieve an optimal level

of relatedness to the receiver. Evans et al. (2003) found that the common experiences revealed in stories created empathy, team commonality, and socioemotional bonds that translated to team performance and success. Byron and Lawrence (2015) concluded that the discovery of common ground contributes to co-worker friendships and improved team performance. Pillemer and Rothbard (2018) named ‘perceived similarity’ as a major influencer in driving friendships, as well as mutual self-disclosure. Humans gravitate toward the people with stories that give evidence to such similarity. Further, this relatability conveyed through storytelling breeds trust as the listeners open themselves up to fully receiving the stories, and we know that trust contributes to increased team effectiveness (Brower, Lester, Korsgaard, & Dineen, 2009; Davis, Schoorman, Mayer, & Tan, 2000; De Jong & Elfring, 2010).

These factors discussed from the qualitative data (skills or traits of the sharer revealed through the story, the story’s perceived depth, and the relatability of the story) have a greater impact on a person’s desire to collaborate with that co-worker than general descriptive categories such as happy vs. sad, positive vs. negative, or funny vs. serious.

### **Limitations**

Limitations of this study were related to population/sample size and study location. These findings were limited to a single university campus population. Since the study drew from a relatively small population, the sample size may have been a contributing factor in the lack of statistical significance found among variables for the quantitative data. However, the trends of the study, especially those revealed in the qualitative results, would suggest that the factors discussed in this chapter are worth

further exploration. Future research might want to consider whether the same findings would hold up if studied across multiple locations and with a larger sample size.

## **Recommendations**

Given the results of this study and the potential that they suggest for improved team performance in the workplace, there are a number of recommendations that organizations and their leaders might consider. Leaders should facilitate more activities during the formation or changing of teams, as well as periodically within and among existing teams, that elicit the sharing of personal stories that specifically target the most influential factors from this study: depth or vulnerability, potential relatability, and/or evidence of professional traits valued in teams. To encourage comfort, trust, and openness, it is recommended that these story-sharing activities be conducted in smaller groups when possible, and that they are introduced through comfortable, informal settings. Also, in light of data from this study that suggests that going too deep, too quickly could feel inappropriate or overwhelming to the recipient, the manner of storytelling should start small with content considered more surface-level, and build toward deeper, more personal content. In addition, the activities should be designed for reciprocity, inclusive of sharing from all employees in the group as opposed to a dynamic where some share and some only listen. A recommended intervention addressing these goals is Lencioni's (2005) 'Personal Histories Exercise.' This deceptively simple activity is a great start for trust building in new and existing teams working toward establishing or increasing team performance. In relatively small groups of employees (recommending between three and 12 participants), ask each person to verbally share their own personal responses to each of the following three questions:

1. Where did you grow up?
2. How many siblings do you have, and where do you fall in that order?
3. Please describe a unique or interesting challenge or experience from your childhood.

To this list of questions, I might also suggest adding one that more directly relates to traits that could illustrate how they would approach professional tasks, such as, “Please share why you chose to work for this organization and what you feel you bring to the team.” However, as the data from this study indicated, such professional traits are likely to be naturally revealed in some way, even through questions that are less overt in their focus on assessing such traits.

After everyone has shared, each person would be asked to share what they learned about each other that they did not already know. Such a discussion would have great potential for a level of depth, relatability, and revelation of professional traits or characteristics that would, in accordance with this study’s findings, promote stronger co-worker trust and a desire for professional collaboration. This exercise serves as an example of what should be considered but a starting point in an ongoing series of teambuilding activities over the life of the team designed to help these work relationships continue to grow in deeper ways that further cement collaborative desire and team efficacy.

In addition to organized group interventions, another shape this storytelling could take is in the form of organizational newsletters and social media posts that showcase individual employees. These packaged stories of team discovery could be the result of designated staff interviewing various employees one-on-one. The interviewer would then

write up a summary of the story, emphasizing story aspects that align with this study's key influential factors: depth or vulnerability, potential relatability, and/or evidence of professional traits valued in teams. The story would then be published through internal organizational channels with a photo of the employee (perhaps either a friendly headshot or an action shot corresponding to their personal story). Alternatively, if resources and capabilities allowed, these stories could also be shared in the form of a short, engaging, edited video. As employees became accustomed to seeing this regular story sharing, it could prompt more connections between the readers/viewers and the stories' subjects, and it could help more employees feel comfortable enough to share their own stories. The very culture of the organization could experience a shift as the sharing and discussion of these stories become organizational norms.

In addition to the intervention examples already discussed here, organization development practitioners providing help to organizations who are seeking improved team effectiveness might consider how team-based interventions could leverage these storytelling opportunities in ways that maximize the potential benefits of the factors suggested by this study.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

The findings of this study affirm several past studies regarding the positive relationship between storytelling and teambuilding and shed light on opportunities for designing teambuilding interventions that elicit specific story dynamics that may contribute powerfully to an increased desire among co-workers for collaboration. There are a number of ways that future research could build upon this work.

Increasing the size of the sample could provide us with a better chance at determining statistical significance among variables. It is also acknowledged that the variables used in this study were mostly demographic in nature, and future research might consider incorporating additional variables such as the level or status of the subjects' roles in their organization or whether they currently work in a team versus contributing individually to their organization. Also, this study used written, fabricated/fictional stories that study subjects experienced by reading them alone. It would be interesting for researchers to facilitate live story sharing interventions, such as the Personal Histories Exercise (Lencioni, 2005) to study whether a live exchange of true, authentic, personal stories would result in similar findings. Finally, since this study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, it prompted my curiosity about how the dynamics of in-person, personal story sharing might compare and contrast with similar exchanges over virtual channels (e.g., video meeting tools, phone/audio-only conversations). Is storytelling as effective through Zoom as it is in-person? As organizations continue to evolve around the ever-changing, complex environmental dynamics they operate in, further research and organization development practitioners can play an important role in supporting the leaders of these organizations by helping them better understand and unleash the power of story that resides within each of their employees.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented a summary of the research findings, discussed conclusions from the study, and noted the study's limitations. Recommendations were offered for organizations and organization development practitioners for approaches and



considerations to leverage the findings of this research in the practice of organizational teambuilding. The chapter concluded with suggestions for future research.

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## Appendix A: Story Survey Instrument

## APPENDIX A – STORY SURVEY INSTRUMENT

**Study Title:** The Impact of Personal Storytelling Types on Desire to Collaborate

This survey instrument will be completed and submitted online by study participants (via SurveyMonkey.com) to (A) record their consent to participate, (B) provide the researcher with some basic demographic information, and (C) to read and rank three short stories.

Identifying information such as name and contact information will not be collected. The live Demographic Survey Instrument can be found at [bit.ly/StoryTypeSurvey](http://bit.ly/StoryTypeSurvey). The following is a series of screenshots of the survey instrument.

### Story Survey Instrument

#### Invitation to Participate

My name is Matt Ebeling, and I am a student with the Master of Science in Organization Development (MSOD) program at the Pepperdine Graziadio Business School.

I am conducting a study examining the impact that personal story sharing may have on sentiments toward team collaboration in organizations, and you are invited to participate in the study. If you agree, you are invited to take this short, online survey. The survey is anticipated to take no more than 15 minutes.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your identity as a survey participant will remain anonymous during and after the survey. If you have questions, please contact me at [matt.ebeling@pepperdine.edu](mailto:matt.ebeling@pepperdine.edu).

Thank you for your participation!

Matt Ebeling

Student, Master of Science in Organization Development, Pepperdine Graziadio Business School  
Executive Director, Alumni Relations, Seaver College  
Pepperdine University

OK

### Story Survey Instrument

#### Consent

Please review the attached consent form pertaining to your participation in this study >> [CLICK HERE](#) >> then return to this survey window to proceed.

OK

## APPENDIX A – STORY SURVEY INSTRUMENT

\* 1. By checking this box, I confirm that I have read the [consent form for this study](#), and understand that completing and submitting my survey responses constitutes my consent to participate in this voluntary research.

I give my consent to participate

PREV

NEXT

### Story Survey Instrument

#### Demographic Information

Please respond to each of the following questions. No identifying information will be collected, and your information will remain confidential.

OK

\* 2. What is your gender?

Female

Male

\* 3. In what year were you born? (enter 4-digit birth year; for example, 1976)

\* 4. As a Pepperdine employee, which of the following most accurately describes your role?

Faculty (teaching)

Staff (administration)

## APPENDIX A – STORY SURVEY INSTRUMENT

\* 5. About how long have you been employed by Pepperdine?

Years

Months

PREV

NEXT

### Story Survey Instrument

#### Story Ranking

Please read the following three stories as if a fellow employee in your organization is sharing something personal with you from their own life experience. Each story represents a different experience that a co-worker might share with you.

OK

#### STORY "A"

After this weekend, I will never again underestimate my dog's intelligence. She sheds her fur a lot. I'm always finding it all over the house—on the couch (even though she's not supposed to be on there), in the little corner of the living room she loves to curl up in... even in my basket of clean laundry. Well on Saturday morning she comes over to me and drops a ball of her own fur down at my feet, then looks up with what seems like a smile. I was pretty amused and thought, "Hey, one less fur ball for me to pick up... that's probably worth a doggie treat," so I put the fur in the trash and gave her a treat. Not ten minutes later, she comes back with another furry gift, so I put that one in the trash and give her another treat.

Over the next hour, she repeats this a half dozen times, and I'm thinking, "Outstanding!... Next I'll train her to wash my car!" Then I see it. The trash can. There's no fur in it, and I'm suddenly not as impressed with myself. Yeah, my "considerate helping buddy" here was just sneaking the same piece of fur out of the trash over and over again and bringing it back to me because she figured out that I'd give her a treat each time she did. Apparently, if you ask my dog, I can be pretty easily trained.

OK

## APPENDIX A – STORY SURVEY INSTRUMENT

### STORY "B"

I got invited to a wedding for a good friend, and I'm really excited for him. I'll go, of course, but the whole thing is bringing up some tough memories. My own wedding was 14 years ago, and just about everything was perfect. It was in my parents' big backyard. We decorated the place and handled most of the arrangements ourselves. The weather was amazing. Everything from the ceremony to the relaxed reception to the food went smoothly, and I got to marry my best friend. The only thing that would have made it better would have been my dad. He was so happy for me despite everything he was going through; he never brought attention to himself or his cancer... only talked about me and how much joy it gave him to see me happy. I guess I just didn't ever consider he might not make it to the wedding. When he finally lost his long battle the month before the wedding, I didn't know how to feel. It felt like a part of me had died at the same time that this beautiful new chapter of my life was starting up. I felt like Dad was there at the ceremony—that same proud smile on his face he'd always had—and I believe he's always with me, but there's also the sadness. So yeah, weddings now just feel a little... heavy.

OK

### STORY "C"

Seeing all these kids in their last week of school, without a care in the world... wow! Does that bring back memories or what? I had this one buddy—we'd known each other since we were maybe two years old and we spent pretty much all of our free time together. When school got out for the summer, it usually meant going to the beach most of the week. I think I took it for granted how kind his mom was, driving us 40 minutes each way to San Clemente Pier and back so we could bodyboard and swim for hours at a time. How did we have so much energy back then? Looking back, I think part of what was so magical about it all was that we truly didn't have a care in the world. It was just the beach, the sun, the sand, the waves, and our friends. Hard to imagine life was ever that care-free. Of course, we were always hungry back then too, and one of the best parts of those beach days was getting to fuel up on pizza when it was time to head out. There was this little spot near the pier on the way back to the car that had these cheap specials for pizza-by-the-slice. The actual pizza was probably nothing much to speak of, really, but somehow the way I remember it, enjoying it with my friend on our way back to the car after this amazing summer day at the beach... that pizza was unbeatable.

OK

\* 6. Considering all three of these stories, please rank them by which story, if shared with you by a fellow employee in your organization in the context of getting to know them better personally, would most contribute to a desire to collaborate with that person on work-related tasks or projects. (You can use the "Previous" button below to review any of the stories.)

☰ Story A

☰ Story B

☰ Story C

PREV

DONE

**Appendix B: IRB Consent Form For Survey**



**IRB Number:** #

**Study Title:** The Impact of Personal Storytelling Types on Desire to Collaborate

Dear Colleague,

My name is Matt Ebeling. I am conducting a study examining the impact that personal story sharing may have on sentiments toward team collaboration in organizations. If you are 19 years of age or older and are currently employed by Pepperdine University (full-time or part-time), you may participate in this research.

The purpose of the study is to seek answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the elements of personal storytelling that most build/strengthen professional relationships in teams?
2. Are there specific types of personal stories that have a greater impact than other types on an employee's desire to engage in work-related collaboration with co-workers in the same organization?

Participation in this online survey will require approximately 15 minutes. You will first be asked to answer basic demographic questions about yourself. Then you will read three short stories (fewer than 250 words each), followed by a ranking of those stories. Participation will take place online through an electronic survey instrument, accessible by computer, smartphone, or tablet.

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research. I will use the results of this study in the writing of a Master's thesis (A) to help me gain a deeper understanding of the disciplines within the field of Organization Development (OD) and (B) to contribute to the collective knowledge of the OD field and the existing and future research on this subject.

Your responses to this survey will remain anonymous. No information about you will be collected in this survey that could connect your responses/data to your identity. Your I.P. address will also not be recorded by the survey. Further, the survey response data will be kept only by the researcher under password protection, and data will be retained only as long as needed to complete the thesis or five years, whichever occurs first.

## APPENDIX B – IRB CONSENT FORM FOR SURVEY

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in the study. For study-related questions, please contact the researcher:

Matt Ebeling

- Phone: (310) 506-6582
- Email: [matt.ebeling@pepperdine.edu](mailto:matt.ebeling@pepperdine.edu)

For questions concerning your rights or complaints about the research, contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB):

- Phone: (402) 472-6965
- Email: [gpsirb@pepperdine.edu](mailto:gpsirb@pepperdine.edu)

You can decide not to be in this research study, or you can stop being in this research study (“withdraw”) at any time before, during, or after the research begins for any reason. Deciding not to be in this research study or deciding to withdraw will not affect your relationship with the researcher or with Pepperdine University. You will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. By completing and submitting your survey responses, you have given your consent to participate in this research. You should print a copy of this page for your records.

Thank you for your participation in this study.

Sincerely,



Matt Ebeling

Student, Master of Science in Organization Development  
Pepperdine Graziadio Business School

Executive Director, Alumni Relations, Seaver College

**PEPPERDINE**



## **Appendix C: Email Invitation for Prospective Survey Participants**

## APPENDIX C – EMAIL INVITATION FOR PROSPECTIVE SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

**Email Subject:** Story Time

---

**Email Copy:**

Hello, <<FIRST NAME>>,

I am writing to request your participation in a short survey of Pepperdine faculty and staff as part of a study I am conducting to examine the impact that personal story sharing may have on sentiments toward team collaboration in organizations.

The purpose of the study is to seek answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the elements of personal storytelling that most build/strengthen professional relationships in teams?
2. Are there specific types of personal stories that have a greater impact than other types on an employee's desire to engage in work-related collaboration with co-workers in the same organization?

Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary and all of your responses are anonymous. None of the responses will be connected to identifying information.

The survey should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

To participate, please click on the following link: [bit.ly/StoryTypeSurvey](https://bit.ly/StoryTypeSurvey)

If you have any questions about this survey, or difficulty in accessing the site or completing the survey, please contact me at [matt.ebeling@pepperdine.edu](mailto:matt.ebeling@pepperdine.edu) or (310) 506-6582.

Thank you in advance for helping me with this study. It is so appreciated!

Sincerely,

*Matt*

**PEPPERDINE**

**Matt Ebeling**

Executive Director, Alumni Relations  
Seaver College and George Pepperdine College

o: 310.506.6582

## **Appendix D: Email Invitation for Prospective Interview Participants**

## APPENDIX D – EMAIL INVITATION FOR PROSPECTIVE INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

**Email Subject:** What's the Story?

---

**Email Copy:**

Hello, <<FIRST NAME>>,

I previously emailed you about an opportunity to assist me with a research study by completing an online survey that looked at the impact that personal story sharing may (or may not) have on one's desire to work with others.

Apologies, but since the survey was completely anonymous, I have no record of who submitted, so...

If you did not complete this survey, you can still participate at this link if interested:

[bit.ly/StoryTypeSurvey](http://bit.ly/StoryTypeSurvey)

If you did complete and submit the survey, then I have two things to follow up with you on:

- 1) First, **THANK YOU!** I really appreciate you taking the time to do that; and
- 2) **Would you please consider allowing me to schedule a 30-minute, confidential follow-up conversation with you (via Zoom) to further add to my research data?**

Your participation in the interview would be entirely voluntary and would be kept confidential. None of the responses will be connected to identifying information.

If willing to assist me with my study in this way, or if you have any questions, would you please let me know at either [matt.ebeling@pepperdine](mailto:matt.ebeling@pepperdine) or (310) 506-6582?

Either way, thank you for your time in reading this.

Sincerely,

*Matt*

**PEPPERDINE**

**Matt Ebeling**

Executive Director, Alumni Relations  
Seaver College and George Pepperdine College

o: 310.506.6582

## Appendix E: Story-Ranking Interview Guide

## APPENDIX E – STORY-RANKING INTERVIEW GUIDE

### Script for Verbal Delivery to Research Subjects

*(for use by researcher; not to be distributed to interview subjects)*

This interview instrument seeks to collect data from live interview subjects in an online video call format to help the researcher to better understand quantitative ranking data collected from the same subjects at an earlier date. The purpose of both the quantitative data and qualitative data is to help answer the following research questions:

1. What are the elements of personal storytelling that most build/strengthen professional relationships in teams?
2. Are there specific types of personal stories that have a greater impact than other types on an employee's desire to engage in work-related collaboration with co-workers in the same organization?

*[Before interview, researcher is to assign a "Participant #" into this document's footer to be used to tie together data collected here, on the interview data spreadsheet, and through the audio recordings' file labels.]*

#### **Instructions for Researcher to Deliver Verbally to Interview Subject**

##### **INTRODUCTION**

- Thank you for giving of your time to participate in this study.
- Are you able to participate in a setting that meets any needs you may have for privacy?
- Here is what today's interview process will look like:
  - I will first ask you to review the online consent form you completed and submitted prior to this interview and let me know if you have any questions.
  - Then I will ask you to verbally respond to a series of questions pertaining to some basic demographic information (the same questions from the quantitative survey you already took).
  - Then I will ask you to review the three stories you originally ranked during the electronic survey (to refresh your memory and to provide us some context for our conversation).
  - The interview conversation will be audio recorded, and responses will later be transcribed and possibly published, but no identifying information will be connected to your responses.
  - Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and will be kept confidential. The audio recordings will be stored in a protected file accessible only to me and will be destroyed within five years following the conclusion of the study.
  - Does everything I've covered so far make sense to you? Do you have any questions?

PARTICIPANT #: \_\_\_\_\_

Page 1 of 3

/ 0

## APPENDIX E – STORY-RANKING INTERVIEW GUIDE

### CONSENT FORM

*[Share screen to show a copy of the IRB Consent Form already agreed to by the interviewee.]*

- Please take a moment to review this form and let me know if you have any questions or concerns about anything in the form before we proceed.

*[Once the interviewee has given verbal confirmation that they have no questions or concerns about the consent form, proceed to next step.]*

- Thank you.

### DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

- Next, I'd like to ask you to respond to a few demographic questions:
  - In what year were you born?
  - About how long have you been employed here?

*[Enter subject's responses to the above two questions into the data collection spreadsheet. In addition, without asking the subject, enter the following into the same record of the data spreadsheet: gender; and "faculty"/"staff" designation.]*

### STORY-CARD & RANKING REFRESHER

*[Share screen and present the three story cards for the interviewee.]*

- These are the same stories you read and ranked during the online survey.
- I'd like for you to review these three stories as if a fellow employee in your organization is sharing something personal with you from their own life experience. Each story represents a different experience that a co-worker might share with you.
- When you have finished reviewing all three stories, please let me know.

*[Silently allow the interviewee to read the story cards. When interviewee has indicated that they are ready to move on... (next page)]*

- You were asked in the online survey to rank these stories in the order of which ones would most contribute to a desire to collaborate with that person on work-related tasks or projects. Having refreshed your memory of these stories, what do you recall as your original rankings?

*[Record the interviewee's recollection of their rankings below using A/B/C, and also write the "Rank #1" choice into the space in the second bullet below.]*

RANK #1: \_\_\_\_\_ RANK #2: \_\_\_\_\_ RANK #3: \_\_\_\_\_

PARTICIPANT #: \_\_\_\_\_

Page 2 of 3

19

## APPENDIX E – STORY-RANKING INTERVIEW GUIDE

### STORY-RANKING FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- Now I'm going to ask you a few questions about your selections. I'm going to audio-record your responses, which I'll later transcribe and use to help me better understand the overall ranking responses from everyone. Your identity will be kept confidential.

*[Ensure that the participant understands instructions, then start the audio recording and begin the qualitative interview.]*

- You ranked story \_\_\_ (participant's rank #1 selection: A, B, or C) as the story that, if shared with you by another employee in your organization, would most make you want to work with that person (compared with the other two stories). Is that correct?

#### **1. What about that story most influenced this ranking for you?**

*[Listen actively. You can take short notes if needed, but rely on the audio recording to capture the full responses from the participant.]*

#### **2. Does hearing this particular story influence your desire to work with this person? If so, in what way(s)? If not, why would you say that is?**

#### **3. What aspects of either of the other two stories may have contributed to the lower rankings you gave them?**

*[When the participant has finished responding to these questions, stop the audio recording and close out the session as follows...]*

- That concludes the interview. I want to thank you again for taking the time to participate in this study.
- I also want to mention again that your identity will not be associated with the responses you've given here or in the online survey you submitted.
- Finally, if you are curious and reach out in August 2020 to request a copy of my finished thesis, I will gladly provide you with one.
- Thank you and enjoy the rest of your day!



## Appendix F: IRB Consent Form For Interview

## APPENDIX F – IRB CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEW



**IRB Number:** 19-11-1223

**Formal Study Title:** The Impact of Personal Storytelling Types on Desire to Collaborate

**Principal Investigator:** Matt Ebeling

- Phone: 1(310)506-6582
- Email: [matt.ebeling@pepperdine.edu](mailto:matt.ebeling@pepperdine.edu)

You are invited to take further part in this research study by participating in a one-on-one, online video conversation. The information in this document is meant to help you decide whether or not to participate. If you have any questions, please ask.

You are being asked to be in this study because you are currently a full-time or part-time employee of Pepperdine University. You must be 19 years of age or older to participate.

As organizations grow and become increasingly complex, they begin to differentiate functionally and come to depend more on communication, integration, and collaboration among and across the organization's growing teams, but achieving a high level of collaboration does not come without effort. A key to authentic, effective collaboration is trust between people, and an effective method of building trust is through personal storytelling. This study will explore the impact of specific types of personal storytelling on feelings about team connection and collaboration among employees.

Participation in this interview will require approximately 30 minutes. You will first be asked to answer a few basic demographic questions about yourself. Then you will be asked to read three short stories (fewer than 250 words each; the same stories you reviewed during the online survey you took for this study) and will be asked to verbally respond to a few follow-up questions.

Any perceivable risk for your participation in this study is minimal at most. Potential risks associated with participation include: anxiety from being away/diverted from job responsibilities (as most of the interviews will likely take place during working hours); boredom; or the very unlikely possibility of the exposure of your data collected through the surveys and/or interviews (which will not include any sensitive or identifying information).

You are not expected to get any benefit from being in this study.

The potential benefits to organizations from this study could include refined methods of employee orientation and team building that could result in more effective, collaborative employees and teams.

## APPENDIX F – IRB CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEW

There is no cost to you to be in this research study.

You will not be compensated for your participation.

Your welfare is the major concern of every member of the research team. If you have a problem as a direct result of being in this study, you should immediately contact one of the people listed at the beginning of this consent form.

Reasonable steps will be taken to protect your privacy and the confidentiality of your study data. It will be your responsibility to choose a location/setting from which to participate that affords you the level of privacy you prefer.

Electronic data collected from the study will be stored through a secure server. This electronic data will only be seen by the research team during the study and for five years after the study is complete. No information about you will be collected in this study that could connect your responses/data to your identity.

The only persons who will have access to your research records are the study personnel, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and any other person, agency, or sponsor as required by law. The information from this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but the data will be reported as group or summarized data and your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study.

For study related questions, please contact the investigator listed at the beginning of this form.

For questions concerning your rights or complaints about the research, contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB):

- Phone: 1(310) 568-2305
- Email: [gpsirb@pepperdine.edu](mailto:gpsirb@pepperdine.edu)

You can decide not to be in this research study, or you can stop being in this research study (“withdraw”) at any time before, during, or after the research begins for any reason. Deciding not to be in this research study or deciding to withdraw will not affect your relationship with the investigator or with Pepperdine University (list others as applicable).

You will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

## APPENDIX F – IRB CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEW

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to be in this research study. By completing and submitting the online consent form associated with this notice, you are giving your consent to participate in the aforementioned interview as part of this research study. You should print a copy of this page for your records.

Thank you for your participation in this study.

Sincerely,



Matt Ebeling

Student, Master of Science in Organization Development, Pepperdine Graziadio Business School  
Executive Director, Alumni Relations, Seaver College

## **Appendix G: Interview Consent Survey**

## APPENDIX G – INTERVIEW CONSENT SURVEY

**Study Title:** The Impact of Personal Storytelling Types on Desire to Collaborate

This survey instrument will be completed and submitted online by study participants (via SurveyMonkey.com) to record their consent to participate in the online video interview (qualitative) portion of this study.

Identifying information such as name and contact information will not be collected. The live Interview Consent Survey can be found at [bit.ly/InterviewConsentSurvey](http://bit.ly/InterviewConsentSurvey). The following is a series of screenshots of the instrument.

### Interview Consent

#### Invitation to Participate

Thank you for your participation thus far in my study examining the impact that personal story sharing may have on sentiments toward team collaboration in organizations. I appreciate you taking the initial survey and agreeing to a brief follow-up interview.

Participation in the interview is voluntary. Your identity as a participant will remain confidential. If you have questions, please contact me at [matt.ebeling@pepperdine.edu](mailto:matt.ebeling@pepperdine.edu).

Appreciatively,

Matt Ebeling

Student, Master of Science in Organization Development, Pepperdine Graziadio Business School  
Executive Director, Alumni Relations, Seaver College  
Pepperdine University

OK

### Interview Consent

#### Consent

Please review the attached consent form pertaining to your participation in this study >> [CLICK HERE](#) >> then return to this survey window to proceed.

OK

\* 1. By checking this box, I confirm that I have read the [consent form for this interview](#) and understand that completing and submitting this online form constitutes my consent to participate in this portion of the study.

I give my consent to participate

## Appendix H: Story Cards

After this weekend, I will never again underestimate my dog’s intelligence. She sheds her fur a lot. I’m always finding it all over the house—on the couch (even though she’s not supposed to be on there), in the little corner of the living room she loves to curl up in... even in my basket of clean laundry. Well on Saturday morning she comes over to me and drops a ball of her own fur down at my feet, then looks up with what seems like a smile. I was pretty amused and thought, “Hey, one less fur ball for me to pick up... that’s probably worth a doggie treat,” so I put the fur in the trash and gave her a treat. Not ten minutes later, she comes back with another furry gift, so I put that one in the trash and give her another treat.

Over the next hour, she repeats this a half dozen times, and I’m thinking, “Outstanding!... Next I’ll train her to wash my car!” Then I see it. The trash can. There’s no fur in it, and I’m suddenly not as impressed with myself. Yeah, my “considerate helping buddy” here was just sneaking the same piece of fur out of the trash over and over again and bringing it back to me because she figured out that I’d give her a treat each time she did. Apparently, if you ask my dog, I can be pretty easily trained.

A



I got invited to a wedding for a good friend, and I'm really excited for him. I'll go, of course, but the whole thing is bringing up some tough memories. My own wedding was 14 years ago, and just about everything was perfect. It was in my parent's big backyard. We decorated the place and handled most of the arrangements ourselves. The weather was amazing. Everything from the ceremony to the relaxed reception to the food went smoothly, and I got to marry my best friend. The only thing that would have made it better would have been my dad. He was so happy for me despite everything he was going through; he never brought attention to himself or his cancer... only talked about me and how much joy it gave him to see me happy. I guess I just didn't ever consider he might not make it to the wedding. When he finally lost his long battle the month before the wedding, I didn't know how to feel. It felt like a part of me had died at the same time that this beautiful new chapter of my life was starting up. I felt like Dad was there at the ceremony—that same proud smile on his face he'd always had—and I believe he's always with me, but there's also the sadness. So yeah, weddings now just feel a little... heavy.

B

Seeing all these kids in their last week of school, without a care in the world... wow! Does that bring back memories or what? I had this one buddy—we'd known each other since we were maybe two years old and we spent pretty much all of our free time together. When school got out for the summer, it usually meant going to the beach most of the week. I think I took it for granted how kind his mom was, driving us 40 minutes each way to San Clemente Pier and back so we could bodyboard for hours at a time. How did we have so much energy back then? Looking back, I think part of what was so magical about it all was that we literally didn't have a care in the world. It was just the beach, the sun, the sand, the waves, and our friends. Hard to imagine life was ever that care-free. Of course, we were always hungry back then too, and one of the best parts of those beach days was getting to fuel up on pizza when it was time to head out. There was this little spot near the pier on the way back to the car that had these cheap specials for pizza-by-the-slice. The pizza in and of itself was probably nothing to speak of, really, but somehow the way I remember it, enjoying it with my friend on our way back to the car after this amazing summer day at the beach... that pizza was unbeatable.

