**How to accelerate change through powerful storytelling**

**By Stuart Maister, Chief Storyteller, Strategic Narrative**

*Join Stuart in the Digital Leaders Week one hour online workshop on this subject on 18th June at 3pm.*

[*Register here.*](https://digileaders.com/events/online-workshop-how-to-accelerate-change-through-powerful-storytelling/)

The cliché that ‘change is the new constant’ suggests that we live in a permanent situation of chaos, uncertainty and revolution. That can’t be true as, if it were, no one would be able to function.

However, digital leaders are at the front end of the accelerating permanent evolution in which we all operate, with occasional great leaps forward that can be disruptive but – hopefully – transformative.

The rationale for change is rational. It’s based on analysis, strategy and responsiveness to new possibilities or threats. But the key to its success is people, and we react emotionally and then justify rationally.

In fact, we respond to a strong and engaging story and, in its absence, we either create our own or engage with one someone else has developed. Many people will cling to old certainties and ways of doing things, because this represents order while change appears to be a cloud of confusion.

And, to be honest, if there is no clear narrative then that’s sometimes a fair summary of what change actually represents. Different people pointing in different directions with varying perceptions of what is actually happening and why.

You can see where this goes: there is no single change but a series of adjustments across the organisation that are unaligned and therefore ineffective, or there is a big change and no-one really understands why or how.

**The story creates the reality**

The alternative is this. If we all share the same story, then we all point in the same direction. There is real clarity about who is affected, why I should care, how we will achieve our objectives – and what we all need to do.

A well-defined and powerfully articulated narrative of change will contain a clear vision, a strong sense of purpose and powerful themes that are founded in what is real and achievable, so that it is credible and authentic.

It will consciously contain emotional themes, that connect with human ‘beings’, as well as articulate the rational dimension to the change. This ensures we are also human ‘doings’. Importantly, it will demonstrate how this change is consistent with the broader strategy of the organisation, amplifies its purpose and mission and benefits the people it serves.

If you get this right then leadership is consistent, clear and focused. The people involved understand and are engaged. The decisions involved can be made on the basis of a clear story, not in an ad hoc way.

Here’s where it really works: when we’ve created a narrative that people can pick up and run with, build upon with their own experience and tell their own stories that reinforce the big picture. I call this business as jazz. We want to write a tune on which others can riff, improvise and even act as soloists – but always within the discipline of a common melody. Otherwise it’s just noise.

The seminal government report into employee engagement, ‘Engaging for Success’, said this:

“A strong narrative that provides a clear, shared vision for the organisation is at the heart of employee engagement.”

This is always true, but particularly at a time of change.

*If you want to hear my formula for developing this narrative, and work on your own, join the online workshop on 18th June.*