OLD AND NEW STORIES: NARRATIVE AND INNOVATION IN PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

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Outline

- Essentials of public sector narratives
- Four archetypal public sector fables
- Evidence-based and narrative-based styles of government
- Fables about innovation in private and public sectors
- Archetypal narratives about innovation identified by innovation awards
- Conclusion
Narrative: a basic mode of human communication, recounting a set of events in a meaningful sequence

- Now a cultural buzzword: rationale, justification (with a historical connotation); 100 million Google hits

Innovation (400 million Google hits):

- Private sector: commercialization of an invention
- Public sector: diffusion of innovation – the first time an organization or individual uses a product or technology

What is the relationship between narrative and innovation?
Public Sector Narratives

- Narratives have one or more protagonists (narrative focal point, generally a character)
- Public sector narratives also concern institutions
- Stuff happens: things get better or worse for both the protagonists and for the institutions
- A narrative has a narrator
  - omniscient third person (19th C. novels, 21st C. docs)
  - first person: Holmes or Watson?
  - unreliable narrator
Four Archetypal Fables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational renewal</th>
<th>Growth for protagonist</th>
<th>Decline for protagonist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Heroic</td>
<td>Sacrificial</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ironic</td>
<td>Retributive</td>
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<td>Tragic</td>
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<td>Satirical</td>
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</table>
## Examples from Cinema

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational Renewal</th>
<th>Growth for Protagonist</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The King’s Speech</td>
<td>Saving Private Ryan (sacrificial)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adventures of Priscilla, Queen</td>
<td>All the President’s Men (retributive)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of the Desert (heroic)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizational Decline</td>
<td>Inside Job (ironic)</td>
<td>Gallipoli</td>
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<td>The Fog of War (tragic)</td>
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<td>Doctor Strangelove (satirical)</td>
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## Audience Sentiments

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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Heroic: inspired to emulate hero</td>
<td>Sacrificial: (re)dedication to the cause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Retributive: sober satisfaction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizational Decline</td>
<td>Ironic: Anger</td>
<td>Tragic: sorrow, pity, awe</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Satirical: disdain</td>
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## Election Campaign Fables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Renewal for the polity</th>
<th>Growth of Party Leader</th>
<th>Decline of Party Leader</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incumbent: Leader has grown in office, polity better off, and this will continue</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Challenger: expected benefits for polity justify elevation to office</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leader sacrificing self to serve (infrequent – Roosevelt in 1944)</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Decline for the polity</th>
<th>Attack politics: corruption story</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Contrast between decline for the polity and personal benefit for the party leader being attacked</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Exhaustion story: leader tired and polity declining (effective against long-serving incumbents)</td>
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Politicians’ Use of Narrative in Governing

- Want good news stories to communicate success of programs (response to 2008-09 economic crisis)
- 100,000 jobs were created or Sam, a worker with a 9th grade education, was retrained and went from working in a kitchen to a shipbuilding job [protagonist of heroic fable]
- Opposition’s use of “horror stories” (e.g. interminable ER waiting times) to attack the Government
Two Styles of Governing

(Individual politicians may display both)

Evidence-based (Cuomo’s “governing in prose”)

- Interested in development of databases and application of metrics
- Put in place PerformanceStat systems for government programs

- Policy wonks: Mayor Bloomberg (Mayor’s Management Report), Premier McGuinty (Ontario Progress Report)

- Problem: evidence can be ambiguous
Two Styles of Governing

Narrative-based (“governing in poetry”)

- Have strongly-held values that are reinforced and communicated by stories
- Ignore evidence that contradicts their values (faith-based policy making)
- Ignore data on government performance
- Want to avoid “horror stories” and less interested in performance improvement (risk averse)
- Cut spending on policy analysis and data-gathering
- Spend more on communications function, outsource to advertising agencies that “know how to tell a story”
Advocates policy by business case (evidence plus comprehensive policy analysis and consultation) instead of “policy on the run,” “policy by fiat,” or “policy by spin doctor”

“a business case approach [to communication] … is based on content developed from the business case itself. Good communication is not represented by glossy, aspirational publicity documents. It’s much more than publicity and spin. It’s about talking with people to understand their needs so that policy serves their ends rather than those of the producer.” (IPAA Report, p. 20)
Implications for Public Servants

Difficulty of working with narrative-based style

- It rejects “speaking truth to power”
- It rejects “everyone is entitled to their own opinions but not their own facts”
- In this style, stories are facts
- Public servants must strengthen narrative component of policy analysis
- Look to external sources — public auditor, advocacy groups, bloggers — for counter-narratives to the government’s narrative
- Badly-designed policies are likely to fail (IPAA message)
Why does Government Innovation Matter?

- Public expects improvement in service quality
- Pressure to reduce cost of government
- Need to respond to “wicked” societal problems
- Professionalism and pride of public servants
- Publication (online) of performance data drives improvement
Why Study Innovation Awards?

- Recognition provides motivation for innovators and innovative programs to self-identify.
- Application provides information for researchers => opportunistic research design.
- Harvard Kennedy School an excellent award to study because of large number of applications in all policy areas, detailed application form provides copious information (including the counter-narrative) to analyze.
# Private Sector Innovation Fables

## Growth of Entrepreneur

**Renewal for the firm**

Innovation Rewarded: successful new products and wealthy entrepreneurs (Zuckerberg in “The Social Network”)

**Decline for the firm**

“financial engineering”: wealthy entrepreneurs, firms damaged, systemic damage to economy and society

## Decline of Entrepreneur

**Successful new products, but entrepreneur is pushed out**

(Winkelvi and Saverin in “The Social Network”)

**Dot-com disasters (bankruptcy)**
# Public Sector Innovation Fables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Growth of Innovator</th>
<th>Decline of Innovator</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Renewal for the agency</strong></td>
<td>Improvement in public services, career advancement for the innovator</td>
<td>Improvement in public services but innovator is pushed out, career suffers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Decline for the agency</strong></td>
<td>Innovation fails, but careers of innovators advance</td>
<td>Innovation fails, and career of innovator fails with it</td>
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Agency Turnaround Innovation Narrative

- Visible and dramatic failure of agency
- Agency head and senior leadership replaced (even in a permanent civil service)
- Openness to change and new ideas
- Dramatic improvement in performance of agency
- Rewards for new leadership
Bottom-up Innovation Narrative

- Front-line staff and/or middle managers with ideas for improvement in agency services or performance
- Supported by middle manager and senior management
- Proven through successful pilot or demonstration project
- Scaled up within the organization
- External replication, rewards for those most closely associated with it, who may leave to become advocates for the innovation
Top-Down Innovation Narrative

- Political mandate for change
- Politicians elected with a mandate for new programs or new ways of delivering services
- Public servants develop the program and put in place capacity to deliver it
- Public servants rewarded if they provide problem-free design and implementation (or pushed out if they don’t “get with the program”)
- Canadian examples: health insurance programs in the 40s, Goods and Services (Value Added) Tax in the 90s
Collaborative Innovation Narrative

- A difficult long standing policy problem reaching across departmental mandates
- Collaboration across departments and levels of government required
- Roles for civil society (business, foundations, non-profits)
- Initiation more likely to come from top-level leaders who see the big picture and can convince other players to get on board
- Rewards for participants who stand out from the crowd
Frequency of the Four Narratives

- **Agency Turnaround**: occasionally (handful in any government)
- **Top-Down Innovation**: most likely at the start of a new government and mandate
- **Bottom-up Innovation**: more frequently than expected, 50% of innovations in my research in the 90s (*Innovating with Integrity*), stimulated by central initiatives (Clinton-Gore Reinventing Government)
- **Collaborative Innovation**: rapidly growing trend (80% of US innovations now have both within-government partnership and outside-government partnership)
Conclusion

- Narrative provides a new and different way of thinking about politics and government
- Identify archetypal patterns of events and protagonists within them (through systematic collection, comparison, and analysis of narratives)
- Narrative may also be used in a variety of other ways
Conclusion: Other Uses of Narrative

- Telling an organization’s story => good news stories about its clients told externally
- Internal stories to convey organizational culture
- Visionary stories in a strategic plan (Steve Jobs’s “insanely great” computer company)
- Exculpatory stories or accusatory stories for auditors or commissions of inquiry
- Personal (biography) stories
Conclusion

- Persuasive power of stories
- Story-telling is a powerful leadership skill
- Hear, read, analyze, learn from stories
- Governing Fables: Learning from Public Sector Narratives