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## **Exploring entrepreneurial architecture for the service industries: the emerging role of storytelling in higher education**

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between entrepreneurial architecture and diversity and its significance to service based industries. This research explored how entrepreneurial architecture and specifically, storytelling, has become a strategic tool that contributes to the achievement of several outcomes including diversity goals. Document collection and semi-structured interviews took place with high-level leaders in which the purpose, use, and characteristics of storytelling were revealed along with exposing the relationship with diversity. The need and ability to adapt and relate narratives emerged as highlights to successfully use storytelling as a strategic tool. The findings of this study will help service based industries to identify areas of opportunity and potential strategies to strengthen their diversity, selection, and retention achievements.

**Keywords:** diversity; storytelling; service organisation; entrepreneurial.

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### **1 Introduction**

Global economic conditions, market-driven competitive forces, continuing calls for accountability, and dramatic changes in funding streams contribute to an environment characterised with challenges for many service intensive industries including higher

education institutions. Furthermore, with the evolution of emerging technology and the sharing economy, as examples of disruptive innovation, existing paradigms need further examination to maintain competitiveness (Christensen et al., 2015).

These factors have facilitated an ideological transformation shaping service based organisations into entrepreneurial models coupled with the growing belief that diversity, when well-managed, can provide tangible, positive competitive advantages (Borasi and Finnigan, 2010; Vorley and Nelles, 2008). Proponents of diversity hold that differences among group members give rise to varied ideas, perspectives, knowledge, and skills that improve their ability to solve problems and accomplish tasks (Polzer et al., 2002). These advantages are often referenced as value-in-diversity and they have been linked to increased organisational creativity and flexibility, key attributes of entrepreneurs (Ely and Thomas, 2001; McLeod et al., 1996; Jackson, 1996). In turn, this entrepreneurial transformation amplifies the importance of employing and achieving organisational diversity as well as a potential catalyst for disruptive innovation. This has required institutions to link diversity to the central values and mission of the organisation emphasising the instrumental benefits of diversity and interpersonal interaction (Berrey, 2011; Hurtado, 2007; Kezar et al., 2008; Wilson et al., 2012).

The establishment of entrepreneurial architecture has been identified as the foundation to support this transformation (Borasi and Finnigan, 2010; Nelles and Vorley, 2010). This infrastructure is necessary to aid service leaders and educators in their transformative exercises as well as in the development of leadership capacity and organisational preparedness for change. Likewise, entrepreneurial narratives or storytelling is a critical element of the change process as narratives shape how leaders view themselves and more importantly how other individuals view these leaders in constructing organisational identities often referenced to as interpersonal congruence (Polzer et al., 2002).

This high interpersonal congruence enables diversity to have a positive effect on task performance by encouraging individuals to apply to the task differences in knowledge, experiences, perspectives, and networks associated with each individual's identity (Jehn et al., 1999; Polzer et al., 2002). Storytelling is further defined as a critical entrepreneurial skill set in which an organisation or individual maximises the use of language and the telling of a story to communicate organisational identity, vision, strategy, objectives, and rationale for strategic decisions surrounding resources and organisational goals (Kotter, 1996; Morris, 2010; Martens et al., 2007). As a result, organisations have begun to place an emphasis on intellectual development demanding leaders be aware of their own identities, capable of communicating across differences, and possess the skills necessary to develop positive relationships across cultures (Kezar et al., 2008; Scisney-Matlock and Matlock, 2001).

Although numerous studies have documented the value in overall diversity outcomes, there is limited research clarifying and supporting the existence of a relationship with entrepreneurship in the service based organisation. While research encompassing entrepreneurial practice and diversity as described above exist, limited literature has been published that explores the relationship between entrepreneurial architecture, storytelling, and diversity and its significance to service intensive organisations (Morris, 2010; Nelles and Worley, 2011; Nelles and Worley, 2010). As a result, there is a gap in the literature addressing the critical factors and relationship between entrepreneurship, storytelling, and diversity in which this study seeks to contribute.

Understanding this relationship and how entrepreneurial architecture and storytelling mobilises diversity agendas is critical to inform practice and will provide service based organisations a framework for appropriate entrepreneurial responses to enhance their organisations's overall performance. Institutions need to embrace diversity and strategically shift their policies and practices reflecting these instrumental values (Lipson, 2007). Likewise, service leaders must be more entrepreneurial to compete in a growing neoliberal market rationalising that diversity fosters instrumental pay-offs including achieving a higher level of critical thinking and more marketable skills (Berrey, 2011). Additionally, in identifying critical considerations related to the use of storytelling, service based organisations can strategically plan to develop policies and procedures that support the development of entrepreneurship and drive competitive advantage.

## **2 Literature review**

Affirmative action has required many organisations to articulate how diversity will work and how diversity initiatives are central to an organisation's key mission in practice. As a result of continuous trials and failures to further clarify and protect the original intent of affirmative action, service organisations, and specifically, institutions of higher education, have been required to shift traditional thought surrounding diversity and focus on new, innovative ways to achieve similar results to what affirmative action policy promised (Foley, 2010; Kim, 2005). This has required service providers to link diversity to the central values and mission of the organisation. For example in higher education institutions, this includes a belief that the overall mission is to support the progression of society and emphasise the instrumental benefits of interpersonal interaction (Berrey, 2011; Hurtado, 2007; Kezar et al., 2008; Wilson et al., 2012).

Accordingly, their mission is rooted in preparing students for personal and social responsibility (Hurtado, 2007). As the diversity of the United States population continues to increase, higher education institutions will experience a more diverse student population. The proportion of minorities, such as Blacks and Hispanics, enrolling in college has grown from 2001 to 2011 by 10.7% for Blacks and 26.5% for Hispanics (Baum et al., 2013). These demographic trends, the economic climate, and persistent inequalities within educational systems, emphasise the importance to prepare students for effective participation in civic life (Kezar et al., 2008; Wilson et al., 2012). Additionally, this will prepare students to successfully enter the workforce and service intensive industries.

Likewise, the civic mission is aimed to prepare students to engage in community life and effectively communicate across demographic, ideological, and political differences (Hurtado, 2007; Jehn et al., 1999; Kezar et al., 2008). Accordingly, diversity components have been embedded within standard curriculum to give students better exposure to human differences that they are likely to encounter in the workforce (Wilson et al., 2012). Some service organisations have begun to communicate a vision of diversity including, "Valuing race as one of many valued identities and was expressed through interpersonal interactions that enable those involved to learn and grow" [Berrey, (2011), p.581]. In conjunction with the civic mission and the start of fundamental changes in the rhetoric of diversity, service organisations have begun to place an emphasis on intellectual development demanding that employees and students be aware of their own identities,

capable of communicating across differences, and possess the skills necessary to develop positive relationships across cultures (Kezar et al., 2008; Scisney-Matlock and Matlock, 2001). Accordingly, service organisations and their leaders are compelled to provide their employees and students access and exposure to multiple forms of diversity.

An organisation's ability to achieve a positive climate for diversity is reflected by the commitment to incorporate diversity-related issues into strategic plans and agendas (Mayhew et al., 2005). One aspect where this is particularly clear in higher education is in the influence of curriculum and how faculty practice reinforces diversity goals as well as the necessity to create and propose new courses with a multi-cultural focus that supports classroom diversity (Collins and Johnson, 1988; Mayhew et al., 2005). Students develop a more critical perspective about the ways in which their institutions support and foster diversity. Diversity demonstrates positive workforce, personal, and educational benefits. The overall existence of diversity promotes opportunities for interaction with diverse peers with the possibility of resulting in the employment of new forms of pedagogy and higher experiential learning, reflection, social critique, and commitment to change, with a focus on expert knowledge (Borasi and Finnigan, 2010; Franklin, 2013; Vorley and Nelles, 2008). All valued as critical service related behaviours.

This value in diversity, existence and effects of disruptive innovation, and marketisation of service organisations has shifted priorities and for higher education institutions, this has included moving from personal and civic responsibilities to this greater emphasis on content knowledge acquisition (Kezar et al., 2008). This shift is essential as the demand is increasing in conjunction with competition for resource and funding prioritisation (Johnstone, 2003; Kezar et al., 2008; Wilson et al., 2012). Furthermore, extracting the value of diversity and leveraging marketisation reveals entrepreneurial attributes associated with risk taking and competition over scarcity of resources that results in further viewing knowledge as a commodity (Lyotard, 1988; Nelles and Vorley, 2011).

Although this list is not exhaustive, the existence or manifestation of entrepreneurship in service organisations is a more ambiguous phenomenon as a result of its diverse applications and intentions. Within higher education institutions, research acknowledges the existence of a common goal between the mission of higher education and entrepreneurship to improve the overall condition of society (Kezar et al., 2008; Mars and Metcalf, 2009). At the heart of an entrepreneurial economy, knowledge as a commodity is a core factor of production and the value of knowledge based activities are more explicitly important with an economic focus (Lyotard, 1988; Nelles and Vorley, 2011). As identified by Kezar et al. (2008), this focus is demonstrated in the mission prioritisation change in which the concentration on personal and social responsibility has now shifted to content knowledge helping organisations to realise their broader socioeconomic potential through knowledge exchange and partnerships in the market place.

### *2.1 Entrepreneurship in service based organisations*

Several factors have been identified as being integral to a service organisations ability to fully engage in entrepreneurship and provide the necessary support structure for diversity. Collectively, these factors are referred to as entrepreneurial architecture. The term entrepreneurial suggests a transitional approach to engagement with society using a market philosophy to stimulate the creation of new revenue streams through patents and

fees, as presented by academic capitalism and the corporate university (Morris, 2010; Slaughter and Leslie, 1997). Additionally, architecture refers to the extent in which routines and norms are established, similar to the framework of a mission statement (Lowman, 2010). These factors include but are not limited to structure, systems, leadership, and culture. Each of these factors exists and may develop independent; yet, they are mutually supportive and each is required for successful engagement in third mission objectives.

These factors encapsulate the complexity of decision-making and actions that effect and affect engagement within and beyond organisational boundaries while engraining mission activities into the fiber of the organisation. Thus, entrepreneurial architecture serves as a conceptual framework and pragmatic approach for conceptualising service based organisations and the contemporary higher education institution and its adaption to the new entrepreneurial roles and can be used to analyse internal and external engagements and initiatives and institutional diversity (Morris, 2010; Nelles and Worley, 2011, 2010).

Entrepreneurial narratives or storytelling has been identified as a critical entrepreneurial skill set in which an organisation maximises the use of language (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001; Martens et al., 2007). Marketing campaigns and collateral are examples of the physical manifestation of storytelling, a strategic entrepreneurial architecture tool. Stories provide accounts that explain, rationalise, and promote a new venture to reduce the uncertainty typically associated with entrepreneurship (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001; Martens et al., 2007). Stories define ventures in ways that can lead to favourable economic opportunities and function to identify and legitimate these ventures through organisational symbols using verbal expression or written language. The process of storytelling emphasises that organisations must cultivate cultures in ways that resonate or relate with societal beliefs or with an intended audience (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001). Storytelling is used to build distinct identity profiles and reputations and provides images of the organisation and what it wishes to represent to relate and attract stakeholders, consumers, and staff (Steiner et al., 2013).

There are three main arguments for the use of storytelling in which stories are used to provide clarity surrounding an organisation's identity with describing tangible and intangible capital of the organisation concisely; stories help prospective investors to assess overall opportunity and risk associated with the potential investment or partnership; and has the power to generate potential investor interest and commitments through facts and symbols that highlight the endeavour's uniqueness (Martens et al., 2007). In specifically relating the use of storytelling to mobilising diverse agendas, storytelling is intrinsic to build a diversity communication strategy that includes identifying objectives and understanding how the objectives relate to the organisation's mission, determining the audience, what is the key message for each audience, and what is the appropriate media for each (Hubbard, 2006). Within this strategy, leadership is critical to assure team members are able to connect diversity initiatives and their value to the mission.

Accordingly, many service organisations and higher education institutions maximise the use of language to communicate organisational identity, objectives, and rationale for strategic decisions. Entrepreneurial storytelling provides robust accounts that explain, rationalise, and promote a new venture or student matriculation to reduce the uncertainty typically associated with any change (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001; Martens et al., 2007).

The process of storytelling emphasises that organisations must cultivate cultures in ways that resonate with societal beliefs or risk problems associated with the lack of legitimacy (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001). Accordingly, there is a relationship between entrepreneurial narratives and an organisation's ability to secure external resources including attracting, retaining, and supporting a racially diverse organisational profile (Harper and Yeung, 2013; Martens et al., 2007). These factors create an environment in which diversity rhetoric can move from traditional definitions to a more sophisticated and valuable resource as found as part of an organisation's entrepreneurial architecture to aspects of the sharing economy and wider service industries.

### **3 Methodology**

This research was conducted in the form of a multicase study guided by Stake's (2006) *multiple case study analysis*. Stake (2006) provides structure and guidance by clarifying the importance of defining the case, or the quintain, "An object or phenomenon or condition to be studied – a target but not a bulls eye...the quintain is the arena or holding company or umbrella for the cases to be studied" (p.32). Accordingly, the primary objective of the case study was to understand the quintain and how it manifested similarly or differently in relatable contexts. This multicase study included intense exploration through organisational leaders with an attempt to construct theoretical statements with more sophisticated descriptions and powerful explanations of storytelling outside a single case within the service industry.

According to the US News and World Report, "College-bound students who believe that studying with people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds is important will want to consider student-body diversity when choosing a school" [Morse, (2013), p.127]. To identify organisations where students are most likely to encounter individuals from diverse groups, US News factors in the total proportion of minority students, leaving out international students, and the overall mix of groups. Informed by this data, two organisations for campus diversity were selected for this study in which institutional review board (IRB) approval was received. These sites for this study are in the top 30th percentile and represent some of the most diverse organisations that serve an undergraduate and graduate population and provide a variety of variables to consider such as departments committed to institutional diversity agendas, primarily residential or nonresidential, and city demographics.

Two forms of data collection were used as part of this research: document collection and participant interviews. Semi-structured interviews averaging two hours took place with each participant. During the interview, the responsive interview method was used to extract additional depth of this phenomenon as experienced by the participants (Rubin and Rubin, 2012). The interview protocol used the tree-and-branch structure to guide the interview using main, probing, and follow-up questions. During the interview, documents collected from the organisation's website were used to elicit a more in-depth interview conversation and clarify interpretations. In addition, during each interview, critical parts of conversations were restated to ensure interpretations were appropriate and documented.

A total of 42 administrators (managers, directors, and vice presidents) were identified as an appropriate fit for participation in this study. Participants who identified as not

having direct responsibilities and contributing to diversity initiatives, were omitted. One administrator representing university admissions stated not having direct responsibility or accountability to diversity initiatives at the conclusion of the interviews, this data was omitted from analysis. The IRB set the sample size to a maximum of eight participants at each site. To help provide reliability in the results, a limit was set to mitigate institutional bias.

#### **4 Findings and conclusions**

Data collected at each organisation revealed the use of storytelling as having or taking place in many different forms to achieve outcomes including but not limited to: securing funding and/or support from stakeholders in and outside the walls of the organisation; recruiting; selling of products and services; and supporting retention rates that contribute to diversity agendas.

Participants described their ability to relate their story and the organisations' story to an intended audience which includes communicating critical information about the organisation and student profile that explain, rationalise, and promote building a connection and relationship between the organisation and its students. Accordingly, storytelling is defined as serving two purposes. First, storytelling provides the statistical rationale describing the tangible capital associated with the organisation. This may include demographic information, diversity statistics, retention rates, offerings, and outcomes. From a stakeholder perspective, an organisational narrative communicates the statistical analyses of an offering and why or how that is valuable. For example, one participant described, "We use storytelling and we use the merits of our student population to help companies invest in who we are".

The second purpose is to communicate the unique profile or create the relevant, personal connection in which stories are used to explain, rationalise, and promote the more human side of the investment. This included what does enrollment and the pursuit of a degree mean to the individual and what his/her aspirations are during and post enrollment. Additionally, this means to tell a compelling story or an 'elevator speech' in which knowing the product, the organisation and its identity, is critical. This requires having a well-articulated and active mission.

Organisations held a unique stance on diversity; some negated a specific commitment to diversity as part of their mission statement yet described it as being essential for an institutional commitment to diversity that expands beyond one department and includes the entire organisation from the top, starting with the President, down to a front line level experience on the value of diversity. Additionally, a commitment to diversity must be clearly articulated in the organisation's mission, vision, and strategic plan to provide a framework that defines the organisation's image, influences hiring practices, and creates synergies with all departments that support the one organisational voice. The importance and potential impact of having a clear mission statement and priorities as part of a strategic plan were identified as necessary to espouse and implement a commitment to diversity. In addition, relatability to consumers may result in greater outcomes and alignment from the top, the President, down to a front line level. On the other hand, another organisation articulated a much broader view and focused on how the organisation will impact the community, the state, and even the nation. Accordingly, this

was identified as beginning with the appropriate diversity of staff in order to be able to effectively communicate, including having the resources to communicate, the unique organisational profile to explain, rationalise, and promote the more human side of the investment.

Storytelling is not exclusive to recruit; however, it plays a critical role in retention. Having to relate a story was described as part of recruitment and retention at each organisation. The ability to relate a message to consumers not only explains, rationalises, and promotes building a connection and relationship; it conveys understanding of the customer through the reference to a leader's journey. By describing this parallel, trust can be built and an organisation may have greater influence relative to selection and retention.

Each organisation stressed the importance of the story in making a connection and being relative to a variety of highly service oriented industries. In addition, there is acknowledgement of the inability in using a story to connect with everyone. Accordingly, there must be the ability to adapt stories. Adapting a story was described by participants as their ability to use a story and share it in a relevant way to connect with the target audience. All participants acknowledged the necessity of having a story that resonates with their consumers and stakeholders to form a connection with the intent to result in a partnership of selection, investment, support, or retention. Furthermore, adapting a story includes the ability to tailor or customise the story to each unique audience while maintaining the core organisational identity. In order to form a connection, one must first listen and that, "[p]art of listening is to get an understanding of what they [students] need or are going through because this is new to them". Listening is critical as it helps to build rapport to support a shared experience.

Adapting a story in conjunction with having the ability to relate the message to the target audience contributes to building trust based on these connections, similarities, or parallels. The ability to relate and adapt a story starts with listening. This act of listening provides the opportunity to learn about the wants, needs, struggles, interests, and culture of those seeking the product or service. Understanding these characteristics helps to appropriately adapt the story with the ability to focus on what is most important to the student while maintaining the university's identity to form a connection. Accordingly, the use of storytelling is the verbal expression that ignites the potential for such a connection. To reach diverse audiences, the story must be adapted by positioning the story in a relevant way to each type of audience and the means in which the story is communicated. As one participant explains, in the absence of adapting the message and being intimate with the organisation's identity, the organisation may struggle from a growth perspective.

Storytelling provides service based organisations a resource and tool to compete in a growing and complex market challenged by scarcity in resources, increased accountability, and changes in revenue streams and funding. As organisations continue to seek ways to differentiate and drive competitive advantage, it requires focusing on relating and adapting stories leveraging existing diversity of its leaders. Service leaders and educators must work to bridge gaps within their understanding of their organisation's mission and identity in order to successfully use storytelling as a strategic tool and identify the appropriate means to broaden the reach of their stories.



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