



The Storytelling App for Inclusion, Engagement and Skill Development

It's 2021. Communication is broken. Trust is broken. Personally, institutionally, and systemically. Organizations around the world are embracing the challenge to fix these fractures and build forward. A panoply of solutions exist, allowing each organization to select the tools best tailored to their company culture, goals and risk management demands. ULUstory™ provides a startlingly effective and multi-use companion or standalone solution: a science-based scalable, simple, and skill-development tool which helps employees build trust, foster inclusiveness, break down bias, foster pro-social action and improve communication. It works across barriers. With strangers. And even with people we don't like.

This tool is "U-stories" - true, personal, transformational stories with a dramatic arc, crafted in a particular pattern. Telling these stories is the single most powerful universal communication tool in our human repertoire.

The Science: theory of mind + oxytocin/dopamine + neural coupling

Stories with a dramatic arc create trust between the teller and the listener. Exchanging these stories motivates people to engage in cooperative behaviors. Why? Because verbally telling a story in this particular pattern generates three crucial, well-documented responses:

- **Theory of mind.** Theory of mind is the understanding that other people have mental states that drive their actions and that those mental states can be different from one's own. This has the power to affect our attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors.
- **Oxytocin/dopamine.** Power stories cause both oxytocin and dopamine releases in both the teller and the listener. The neurochemical oxytocin is synthesized in the human brain when one is trusted, and it motivates *reciprocation*. Releasing oxytocin signals that another person is safe, familiar, and trustworthy. This occurs *even between strangers without face-to-face interactions*.¹ Dopamine, released when we follow the events in a power story, promotes continued empathic response, "sticking to the journey."
- **Neural coupling.** At its core, communication is always about the transfer of information, from one brain to another. The most effective transfer emerges when the neural activity of two people match or is "coupled together": that is, we feel empathy with the other person. When our patterns couple, "you're going to understand me better, you're going to have similar feelings to the feeling that I am having, and you're going to remember it better."²

The Tool

The ULU enterprise story app is being developed to generate, support and maintain employees' sense of identity, full participation, clear recognition and full belonging within an organizational structure. How?

¹ Paul J. Zak, Ph.D, "Why Inspiring Stories Make Us React: The Neuroscience of Narrative," Cerebrum February 2015

² Uri Hasson, as quoted in <https://medium.com/future-of-storytelling/q-a-with-professor-of-neuroscience-uri-hasson-b57e23476fab> (January 10, 2020)



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By providing a deeply engaging, user-friendly, easily available and multi-functional skill-building mechanism to help employees find, craft, tell and share their true stories. Here are some of the ways the app may be used.

Selected Organizational Uses

1. **Onboarding | Problem:** when new hires start, the new processes, team members, structure of company can feel overwhelming. **Solution:** If a new employee is assigned to a particular department or team or group, HR/Inclusion may provide access to new user to a set of videotaped “welcome stories” from individuals that the new hire will be working with. These stories would be light, introductory moments which would allow new hire to easily remember their new team, feel an immediate sense of connection to the team, minimize anxiety, and support better performance from the outset. In addition, the new hire may be requested to complete an introductory module on storytelling (just as they would a module or training on harassment, workplace violence, etc.), and offered the opportunity to tell a short story about themselves which they may use to highlight any particular identities or aspects of their sense of self, thereby given immediate agency over how they prefer to be perceived.

2. **Teams | Problem:** whether all workplace-based, all WFH, hybrid, local, national, or global, teams all face communication problems. While certainly some flow from differing agendas, competing tasks, disparate funding and/or internal politics, miscommunications often flow unintentionally from differing preferences, assumptions and beliefs about workplace interactions: these “dimensions” include approach to conflict, emotional display, time management, power structure, negotiation style, even “face”. These differences often lead to conflict. **Solution:** A manager or team leader might identify the possible differences and challenge employees to identify and share with the group a story about where they may fall on any given dimension. This serves several purposes: it eliminates or minimizes the use of categorical assumptions, removes the implicit moral value assigned to a particular preference, reveals surprising and connective similarities, allows each team member to better understand other team members’ perspectives, and supports a sense of community. Both the team leader and the employees, knowing of the potential differences, are then more able to develop solutions in a context already more user-friendly.

3. **Identity | Problem:** We all have a number of core identities: those acquired, those achieved, those born into, those presumed by others. Shifting, minimizing, or even concealing one’s core identities at work is hard work. What do we tell, what do we bring to work, how much do we reveal, to whom and how? We may feel unseen or invisible in a profound sense, resulting in a sense of being “the other” and excluded from the work community. **Solution:** Sharing U-stories allows us to present ourselves the way we see ourselves and wish to be seen – in a range of situations. Perhaps within your team, in larger presentations, mentor/mentee relationships, within ERG groups, even internal interviewing or onboarding. This activity allows each storyteller to feel genuinely seen and listened to- and further provides more opportunity to share those stories of identity with others in the company, deepening a sense of community and belonging.



4. **Mentors | Problem:** well-designed mentor programs can significantly improve employee retention and success. Yet despite the best organizational intentions, mentors may often feel the program is a success whereas the mentees may not.³ **Solution:** Well-designed mentoring programs assist mentees to work successfully across cultures, which requires development of cognitive complexity and critical thinking – both of which may be driven by selective use of storytelling for several purposes: to transfer information, provide a virtual reality simulation, create greater openness to difference, and generate genuine empathy between mentor and mentee.

5. **HR in employee relations | Problem:** HR is tasked with resolving employee conflict, supporting retention, driving better performance, minimizing costs for the company, and 832 other responsibilities. **Solution:** Thoughtful, curated use of stories in dispute resolution is a powerful aid in dispute resolution, both in informal discussion, mediated conversations, and even when a complaint has already been filed internally.

6. **Inclusion programs | Problem:** unlike diversity programs which can be relatively easily measured quantitatively, inclusion programs are less susceptible to measurement as their goals and KPIs are distinctly more qualitative. **Solution:** Use of true stories at work supports connection, whether employees like and respect each other, or not. The impact of storytelling can be quantitatively and qualitatively measured with interlaced ongoing research pre-use, and during use. For example, identifying the quantitative difference in numbers of employee relations matters brought to HR in a given period of time, administrative claims filed, or litigation commenced. Qualitative insight is derived from pre- and post “intervention” surveys (that is, before, during and after employees use ULUstory™).

7. **Employee development | Problem:** often, employee development is a single training or workshop. Directive, self-assessment, and procedural trainings likely accomplish many of their goals in 1 – 3 hours: however, some skills, including cognitive and communication skills, are best learned and exercised on an ongoing basis. Also, 100s of studies suggest that anti-bias training, while serving certain important goals, “do not reduce bias, alter behavior, or change the workplace.”⁴ **Solution:** ULUstory™ provides an initial tool to create stories, which the users can re-purpose and use repeatedly in different contexts. To support the pro-social mindset created by the storytelling, we also provide on-going storytelling opportunities and challenges every month, to help employees in building community, presentation skills, and engagement. That is, U-stories actually alter both perception and behavior, benefitting both employer and employees. And, of course, clients.

What’s YOUR story?
And, how can we help?

For more information or a free consult:
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³ <http://www.boeing.com/news/frontiers/archive/2007/february/mainfeature.pdf>

⁴ *Anthropology Now*, 10:48-554, 2018 * <https://doi.org/10.1080/19428200.2018.1493182>