NRG

NARRATIVE RESEARCH GROUP

2020

2019 – 2020 Report

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Executive Director

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Introduction

In the world at large, we are living in a technocentric society where everybody is focused on their devices. In fact, the chances are you are reading this very report on a digital device of some sort. Our society today loves technology to a point where we often miss what is right in front of us, human relationships. This report will reflect on three diverse populations and how the StoryPathing™ tool aided them in focusing, strengthening, and exploring human relationships. The first group of the three populations are college students from the University College of Roger Williams University, with incentives from the professor who is also the executive director of StoryPathing™, Dr. Dennis Rebelo.

The information gathered comes from surveys, Dr. Rebelo's own reflections and observations, and spontaneous feedback. The second group are students from the New England Chiefs of Police. The students from the New England Chiefs of Police were able to utilize StoryPathing™ to expand their knowledge on forming relationships. Allowing the students to create stronger connections with upper managerial positions within the department, as well as to learn about themselves to grow inside and outside the workplace. The information gathered comes from the feedback of surveys given out to the students following the instruction. The third and final population is a financial business. This enterprise currently is using StoryPathing™ to renew client relationships, as well as form strong relationships with new incoming clients. These are three very diverse populations with three very unique applications to utilizing the StoryPathing™ model.

The Narrative Research Group aims to help individuals or organizations establish a mechanism for understanding and promoting narrative identity through targeted reflection and doing, which is the storytelling. Based on these incites, all from instructors and instructional designers that were a part of all three efforts, this report finds that narrative identity tools have similar benefits across diverse audiences and applications. This illustrates the multigenerational and multicultural application of StoryPathing™, as a mechanism to light the fuse of self-reflection; to help an individual articulate a sense of self with a focus on worth and value in their current role. Whether they are police officers, a college student looking for a scholarship, or a senior wealth advisor attempting to secure a new client.

Narrative tools can reach populations that have previously not been accessible or invited to such a rich humanistic, yet systematic way of thinking about self and work. This report relies on the instructor and author of StoryPathing™, The PEAK Story Methodology, and the book *Story Like You Mean It*, who also is a professor at Roger Williams University, a guest speaker participating in events around the world, and an executive director, Dr. Dennis Rebelo. This is a different take on previous reports, that is to say that this report really is interview based with Dr. Rebelo, leveraging student incites that he has received but also combined with his own incites. It does not represent an IRB study, rather survey responses to help inform other practitioners who leverage StoryPathing™ and narrative identity tools to help integrate a sense of self into work and career discernment.

Definition of Key Terms

Mid-level Management: This phrase refers to the managers holding positions in the "middle" of policing agencies. In this study, law enforcement officers including mainly lieutenants and some sergeants, depending on the size of the department.

Story and Narrative: The culmination of a persons 'past, experiences, and passions that give meaning to their life and provide guidance for their future. This report uses "story" and "narrative" interchangeably. Aptly stated in (Rebelo 2015), "A story herein, like a narrative, has a past chapter or element being connected to a current situation en route to a plausible future."

Role Identity: Role identity represents how a person sees, accepts and feels about a particular role (work, family, or recreational in nature). Role identities can be complementary or very dissimilar. Since human beings have multiple role identities, it is possible and probable that some of these identities cause internal strain or external conflict with self or others.

Narrative Identity Tools: Learning tools that individuals use to reflect on their past and unpack their formative experiences, leading them to discover their skills, motives, concerns, and style. Narrative identity tools give people the ability to understand who they truly are.

Skills: The "things" one is good at. These are specific abilities that one has gained over time, or perhaps has a natural inclination for. Examples of skills might be playing a musical instrument, writing, or computer programming. In the workforce, skills include the parts of a career that one excels at in relation to their co-workers.

Motives: *"Why"* one does what he, she or they do. Everything one does, he, she or they do for a reason. One's motives define why doing something is meaningful to them. It might be because that individual is passionate about it, or because it is a necessity for survival.

Concerns: In this report, concerns are used synonymously with motives. Law enforcement officers often must operate very quickly on their concerns to ensure the safety of their co-works and for the public safety of the community. But not everything a mid-manager does is motivated by fundamental safety needs.

Style: *"How"* one lives his or her life. Identifying one's style is especially important, as it tends to influence all aspects of life. It is difficult to have one particular style in one setting, but then another somewhere else.

Leadership: Traditionally, the ability to inspire others individually or as a movement while remaining true to one's own self-identity. Good leadership can impact entire systems for the better, by involving all members of a group. In this report leadership is also referred to the ability to influence people or resources. In the policing community, leadership is often required in high-stress situations and can require split-second, judgmental thinking.

Receptivity: In this report, the opposite of leadership. Receptivity is the ability to empathize with others and have contextual awareness. In law enforcement, there is often a receptivity gap between entry-level officers, mid-level management, and upper-level positions within the department.

Essential Findings

- Across all student-learner types, this year's participants and groups felt that going through StoryPathing™ and the tools that they learned, would help them create a more unique and personal relationship with potential clients or better their previous relationships with current clients.

- Students expressed they learned a lot about the underpinnings of leadership and how it applies to telling our own story.

- One student stated, "I now feel like I have a toolkit to be able to better speak to various audiences and relate on different levels."

- Another student stated, "I had viewed my age as more a roadblock in building client relationships, but through StoryPathing™ it is possible to bridge the age gap and better express the knowledge and experience I have accumulated."

- A student expressed, "I feel confident in my decision making moving forward and place a higher value on what activities, people, or places bring me closer to a virtuous experience, and will continue to pursue those moments."

- A student stated, "I feel much more confident in my intentions when speaking due to having stories and moments to reference and support what I am saying."

- Students felt StoryPathing allowed their organizations to stand out when being compared to similar businesses and organizations.

- A student expressed, "It has helped me to really break down experiences in my past and understand how they have helped me become who I am today.

- A student stated the importance of utilizing StoryPathing™ in the Armed Forces, "In the Navy. There is a revolving door of people coming and going and you are constantly telling your story to someone new and I learned that it is important to always put your best version out there no matter how many times you have to tell it."

Participants from each cohort had different exposure to the StoryPathing digital tool and learning modules within it. Some students used it as their digital text, whereas others used it in conjunction with a live, one-time workshop and then returned to the digital tool in a hybridized fabrication. Another group used the StoryPathing digital tool remotely over the course of the year with telephonic coaching. Each application had a different way of treatment. A side note; the psychological profile was used with the New York financial individuals and as a formal assessment compared to law enforcement where it was used as a leadership. It was used as neither with the students but instead used as a learning tool in the classroom.
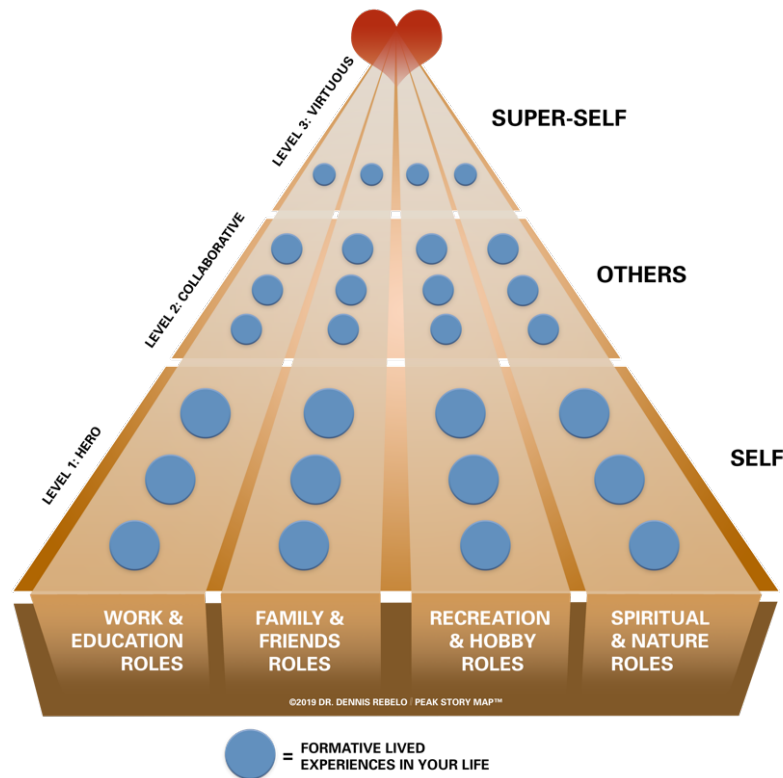
These are visual representations of tools that promoted a sense of self. One is a PEAK Storytelling Model, illustrated above. The idea with each is that they would be integrated in any form of delivery with the StoryPathing digital tool. This is to anchor concepts that will be used throughout the learning programs.

THE CASE FOR STORYTELLING.

The case for Storytelling as a way of expressing who you are as a leader, a student or an advisor is vital to create meaningful work in the modern workplace. Your story is a great source of energy and any chance to tell it is an opportunity to provide some positive energy to others, but it doesn't come from the story alone. It comes from the value that your story suggests that you bring. That it might be commercial value, social value, value as a friend or a colleague.

It makes other people more willing to listen to you and that's all anybody needs. In an interview, in a sales meeting, when leading a team or an agency, at a conference or at a seminar; we want people to listen. What makes people listen is to know that the very thing that they are doing right now is the thing they are supposed to be doing and that they are aligned with their story. This is where their story has brought them.

When you tell a story, it provides not only an anchor in the past, but also a compass that points to where one is heading. It brings you to your current reality on route to somewhere you may see yourself. Psychologists call this making a provisional identity claim. Dr. Rebelo calls this StoryPathing™. StoryPathing™ says to the listener here's where I have been, here's where I am, and here's where I am going.

That sentence stakes your provisional identity claim. We have an impulse, as society, to support people who are good at things. We buy tickets to hear people who are amazing singers, we attend plays to see good actors, and we crowd around televisions to watch good athletes. Therefore, if you are good at telling your own story, whether you are a police leader, financial agency, or a college student; you will see not only are you good at what you are doing but also that you have evidence of your value. This is because the evidence is embedded into the story, your story. You are talking the talk because you have already walked the walk.

Everybody wants to know about you as a human being, whether you are a leader of a police department or a financial advisor trying to manage money. This is the tell me about yourself part. But yet, people are still taken by surprise. They hesitate and mumble when asked common

questions along the lines of "what school did you go to?" "What was your major?" "Where do you work?" "How many years of experience do you have?" The response sounds like a copy of a bland google search. They are highly memorized, over-practiced and simply unoriginal. The answer has no flow, an elevator pitch vibe to it, and no character or interest.

Even if a person's response to one that common prompt "tell me about yourself" is n't a complete train wreck, people often lose their line of thought and allow their frustration to show on their faces. Whether someone is leading, selling, or finishing their college degree; this type of response is awkward for both parties involved.

The opposite of this scenario is a person who is ready to answer any and all questions at any time. They are confident in themselves and their story. They are able to answer the question with some personalized interest and flair in a few sentences. They can engage the person they are talking to into a longer and more meaningful conversation. This allows for them to stand out, no matter if they are a police officer, financial advisor, or a college student.

The listener is the second scenario gets the message being portrayed by the storyteller and is able to recall more of their conversation afterwards. The storyteller is able to make themselves stand out and be more memorable. Both the storyteller and the listener are able to form a connection through mutual understandings and experiences.

We all have had moments where we have acted more like the storyteller in scenario one; where we are flat in our response and can tell that the other person is not fully listening. Often, time will pass and we will beat ourselves up thinking about all the things we should have said instead. The good news, it does not have to be like that.

The intent is to provide not only an awareness of what leadership is like but also how to communicate someone's value and worth. Leadership is influence and influenced is leadership. This is done in a humanistic way where the other, the listener, is pulled in by the storyteller in a positive way. When a person actually tells their story, that is informed by their own personally lived experiences, it is a positive experience for the storyteller. When a person feels more positive, they feel more aligned and relaxed.

Insights from Instructors, Authors
& Student Surveys

When you think of narrative development, leadership, and communication do you see the connection?

It is a natural connection because as individuals we have to eventually influence others. Dr. Rebelo suggests that we all have to lead at some point. We all have to influence. Sometimes we are influencing ourselves and sometimes we are influencing other people. Sometimes we have to add creativity to influence and sometimes we have to be a little bit more communicative with the influence.

Sometimes we have to use our analytical skills to help influence others. Know matter what you do, you are going to have to influence somebody at some point. If you are able to influence through storytelling you will be more provocative because you will be able to connect your life moments over time. Part of this process is to see how individuals respond to the PEAK Storytelling Model and how they reacted to it in all three of these different formats.

How did you interpret learner's reaction to the concept of self-authorship throughout each program?

With all three cohorts, self-authorship was realized. Sometimes it was realized and shared in online forums with other students. Other times it was realized in telephonic conversations with an individual's StoryPathing™ coach. It was also acknowledged in group meetings in hybridized formats. Self-authorship seemed conceptual, to me as an instructor and author, but I could see individuals develop a sense of autonomy and agency and realized that they have control, even over negative moments in their lives. Those self-event connections, and understanding them, help them take any life moments into positive learning connections. This was an insight that a lot of the individuals had.

Did any of the populations show any hesitation in speaking about themselves?

It is an interesting question, that some individuals would consider talking about themselves a foreign concept as every time they meet a community group, or client, run a conference or attend a workshop that they actually have to tell others about themselves. It is a concept that some people bring up, I think, because they want to run away from accepting that they are going to have to connect the dots and do the work. Steven Pressfield, in his book *Turning Pro*, how migrant workers used to pull the pin. Pulling the pin is a concept to pull a pin to uncouple a box car on trains. Migrant workers at lunch would ask where somebody was and if they had decided to quit and throw in the towel, they would say that and so pulled the pin. In telling one's story sometimes people, and I think in life as a whole when things are done differently, they tend to tap out quickly as opposed to leaning into resistance.

In all of the conversations I had, my role as the instructor was to ensure that we had everybody get little wins along the way so that the resistance did not feel as strong. So, nobody would pull the pin. Every one of them eventually did talk about themselves. They acknowledged that in reality they have to self-introduce at work, in business development, to get a job or a scholarship. That became something that faded quickly. As one student said, "if I am going to do it, I should do it in a systematic way that makes me feel like myself and makes me actually be valued."

What do you think about policing today and the challenges to leadership development programs and workshops linked to supporting the modern police officer?

We are at a crossroads. We have to honor the fact that human beings are police officers and police officers are human beings. In the words of Warren Bennis, "becoming a leader is synonymous with becoming yourself. It is precisely that simple but also that difficult." I think we all know that if you are going to be a good leader you have to be yourself. We have all been around great leaders who do that or emerging leaders following that same pathway. Integrating the sense of self though, through a leadership development program, is a little tricky. With the instructional designers who have worked with the Narrative Research Group, Dr. Rebelo has ensured that the publishing of the tools out loud for police officers to get what they are not necessarily getting in normal, sort of agency, life. Namely a chance to light the fuse of self-reflection and to go back to hero moments, collaborative moments and virtuous moments of their lives. These moments are called blue dots in the StoryPathing™ Program. Once they were able to do this, they started to see connections and they started to reclaim a sense of their own identity. They felt more confident in being themselves within the exercises, simulations, and the final PEAK Story they developed over the length of the course.

What did you discover in your capacity as a professor at Roger Williams University College using the StoryPathing digital tool as a way of helping individuals in your public speaking class?

In particular, within the public speaking class, I don't have the traditional class. I have students who are sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, forty-eight, forty-nine and fifty. Some students were taking the class from US Navy ships, remotely, and I never met or spoke to them. We were relying exclusively on the digital tool and the conversation online. Other students were local Providence police officers who were going back to school. Some students were advanced kids from the city of Providence; advanced meaning wanting to push themselves and dual enroll in a college course while still being in high school. Finally, some students were also representative of traditional college students.

In this multi-generational and multicultural classroom, I found that there was cross learning from those that were from the older generation and were acknowledging the complexity of what it is like to be a young person. In words of my friend and two-time best-selling author, Chip Conley, I saw folks who were chronology a bit older being more like modern elders in the class. But also having an internship like mentality as they were learning while trying to also be wise. I also saw, overtime, more conversation coming from the younger folks where they would be more verbally quite at the beginning and by the end they were much more conversationally motivating. Striking up conversation with folks throughout the age range before and after class. This created a culture of openness and vulnerability so that once individuals discovered key life moments, they were able to share that as well as gain comfort in speaking on that. They were also speaking across the audience as this particular class was so diverse.

I found the financial advisors to be very closed off and very non receptive at the beginning. I did a live workshop with this group for three hours and had to gently show them that how they were self-representing and self-narrating in business development applications was, from their perspective, inadequate and made them blend in with their competition. In other words, they believed that they sounded just like other financial advising firms and were not standing out to possible new clients.

The initial workshop had to be designed so they could see how poorly they sounded. Senior advisors, who have been doing this work for years, usually rest on the line "I have been doing this for eighteen years, I have the credentials, I am a part of this certain association", etc. Interesting to this population is they were always thinking of application because they were always thinking with a practical mindset.

Compared to the students who were thinking about themselves because they were in a class looking to gain something for themselves from it. Compared again to the police officers who were focused on reaching older and younger generations while working in their communities. Focusing on the financial population, they were almost immediately interested in the application of the learning tool.

As their instructor, I had to keep them focused on the long term gains, while still helping them take parts of what they were learning and show them how they could use it along the way. The StoryPathing™ program holds the PEAK Storytelling model in it and I had to make sure that people going through the certification program, which was happening at the same time as the regular program for this population, how to use creativity and how to use different skills while coaching so the new certified instructors could be more successful with various different groups in the future.

The good news about this group is that they always did their homework. Over the course of the year that I worked with this group they were

amazing at completing the work I asked them to do. They would show up with real problems that they were faced with, in terms of storytelling. This was approximately ninety-eight percent business development storytelling so that they were better set for future new clients, meetings, boards, and deepening connections with old clients. In the end, I found that they were much more settled, even speaking over the phone on our monthly telephonic meeting.

They were able to have more conversations about what they were learning. We did one monthly call over the course of twelve months. At the beginning they almost did not talk at all. Around the four months mark, I saw some progression as I was coaching them at the same time they were in the digital tool. By the seventh month they were moving along and by the end of the year they were on fire. They also looked for more learning; asking where they could apply this method in meaningful ways. They spotted other opportunities that were not a part of the original curriculum.

How do narrative tools, such as the StoryPathing program, help individuals positively shape modern workplaces, colleges, and institutes?

Narrative tools increase participant self-understanding within an individual's work role activities; yet, such self-understanding expands to other roles such as parenting, collaborating recreationally or gathering with family and even amid spiritual or nature-based activities such as hiking.

Heightened awareness of personal identity and narrative identity claimed by students. In addition, the instructor and support staff noted how many participants began to shift their tone to openness while showing increased courage to share work-related and non-obvious work related self-event connections with other in the course.

It is clear that learning experiences can be transformed by carefully layering tools like StoryPathing™ into leadership, public speaking and professional development experiences. Such learning is presumed to be precedent to shaping modern workplace cultures and ethos.

How does learning become transformed when using tools - like StoryPathing™ - in career development?

Organizational leaders, followers, members, and students from varied backgrounds light the fuse of self-reflection and gain a deeper understanding of their value and worth once self-reflection is integrated with an organized plan of building an outcome. For example, a PEAK story, which can be told within one's work activities.

How does the StoryPathing digital tool present a framework of continued learning?

Individuals who are encouraged to use the StoryPathing tool and PEAK Storytelling method as an on-going framework were encouraged when they saw further application could be used along the portability of the mindset. They felt a sense of resolve that it was not simply over but an on-going, integration-based, sustainable framework that could help them make sense out of life.

How do courses, trainings, and learning programs which use the StoryPathing™ digital tool to help increase an individual's understanding between their self-identity and work role identity?

NRG was curious to understand, through interactions with Dr. Rebelo, the reaction of these varied populations to the digital learning tool. It is important to note that today's desired workers continue to want qualitative different outcomes then workers of past generations and the search for meaningful work is central for that shift. For some of the populations, such as students, they are more conscious of that shift. On the other hand, law enforcement is less conscious and financial advisors are a bit unsure of how to express this shift. Accordingly, it is noteworthy that each population type, were aware of the shift, to varying degrees. NRG's inquiry is expected to contribute to an increase of self-understanding of all populations as well as providing encouragement to future teachers, trainers and certified professionals who wish to imbue a sense of narrative identity and leadership development, career discernment, college decision making and readiness, and business development activities. To reiterate past reports, experiences of identity matter to us and that identity can be meaningful when it is brought in through career.

OVERALL SUMMARY OF THE DATA

When StoryPathing™ is integrated across varied audiences, distinction-making happens, but eventually gives way to receptivity of other perspectives. Students from all three cohort types, take stock of how their experiences shape their identity, they become better able to understand self-event connections, motivations, mental muscles, power of place and people, and how each contributes to a theme that is connected to their work-life story.

Through the use of narrative work; coaches, instructors, and professors can become more creative in how they reach leaders, business development experts, and financial professionals as well as traditional and non-traditional students. This narrative identity teaching framework is a way of assuring the student leverages agency and self-authorship to craft an engaging self-narrative at whatever stage or age they may be.

Future Training Considerations

What are your plans ensuring future adoption of the StoryPathing™ method?

We are doing our 6th year of work with Justice Systems Training Research & Institute at Roger Williams University. This work is in cooperation with the New England Chiefs of Police, as well. We currently have adjusted our way of training, mid-pandemic, to become fully online with the StoryPathing™ tool linked to leadership development.

We have supplemented telephonic meetings and coaching to pair with the online course. Another new development would be seven new StoryPathing™ coaches being certified, two of which are from Western Massachusetts, two in Providence Rhode Island that work for the campus re-entry program, one in South Carolina, and finally one in Albany New York. We are also fielding more inquiries for people to be certified in the program to be able to bring it into organizations in ways we never imagined. Onboarding new leaders for remote leadership development, etc.

A newer initiative is the Journal of Narrative Identity, JNI, which has been established with an editorial board so journal articles can be written linked to narrative identity work across varied populations, whether it's traditional students, non-traditional students, English language learners, police agency leaders, financial professionals and advisors. It will allow us to further build a repository of research for individuals, learners, leaders, professors, and institute initiatives that we have a refined resource that supports narrative identity and has become an essential thread in modern learning.

About Narrative Research Group

Narrative Research Group (NRG) was formed in order to connect people at work with educational offerings designed to integrate personal and workplace identity; that is, NRG promotes becoming more of oneself at work. We promote the awareness of passions, a growth mindset, and a life of excellence. To help people make these connections we develop teaching tools and workshops for instructors that help engage thoughtful reflection. NRG also notes the significance of transitions in life, whether they be professional or personal, and that transitions are an opportune time for engagement in self-reflective narrative understanding.

A Special Thanks To: NRG would like to offer a special thank you to the following individuals for their insights in this report.

- **Robert W. McKenna, M.S.,J.D.,** associate Dean and Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice Studies at Roger Williams University. He is also the director of the Justice System Training and Research Institute. Previous law enforcement experience includes serving as a Lieutenant with the East Providence, Rhode Island police department and City Solicitor. He is a member of the Rhode Island Bar and the Federal Bar.

- **Dr. Dennis Rebelo, Ph.D.,** professor of Technology and Leadership at Roger Williams University. His PhD research study and his supported model for integrating work-life storytelling are internationally recognized. He is the founding board member and primary Story Creator for The Sports Mind Institute. Dennis also is a Board Member of the Human Science Research Institute; Executive Director at the Narrative Research Group, Inc.; and Chief Learning Officer at Financial Executives International. "Dr. D's" calling in life is to serve students to make sense of their life-work path in a positive efficient manner to help increase the likelihood of living an engaged life worth living.

For More Information: Our team of narrative identity work experts is always willing to provide information about how we work to create meaning in the narrative of peoples' lives. Please visit https://narrativeresearchgroup.org/contact/ for further details and to begin your groups' narrative journey.

Disclosures: All data engaged in this report was taken directly from published surveys, and no original studies were completed specifically for this report.

Additionally, all commentary was voluntarily provided from instructors of narrative identity work.

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