

How Do Stories and Leadership Create Possibility?

Current findings on storytelling, vision, creativity, imagination, and organizational change

Current research suggests that stories matter because they shape sensemaking, expectations, and what people believe is possible. But strong change narratives do more than simplify. They can leave room for different interpretations, invite people to examine assumptions, and create conditions in which imagination and creativity become part of organizational change.

1 Organizational stories do not need to be perfectly linear.

Sandham challenges the assumption that clarity always requires one coherent story. Emerging fragments and antenarratives can reveal how people are making sense of change before the story has settled.

Source: Sandham (2025)

2 Narrative reflexivity creates room to question dominant stories.

Chung and Norvell describe narrative reflexivity as examining the stories we tell ourselves and one another, including marginalized stories, to create curiosity, doubt, and co-creative tension.

Source: Chung & Norvell (2025)

3 Vision communication can strengthen support for change.

In a study of 279 employees, vision communication shaped change-supportive behaviour through expectations about change outcomes, with stronger effects under greater work uncertainty.

Source: Zhang et al. (2025)

4 Leadership strongly shapes team creativity.

A 2026 meta-analysis of 232 papers and 98,769 participants found positive relationships between multiple constructive leadership approaches and team creativity, while abusive leadership was negatively related.

Source: Lu & Kong (2026)

5 Creativity training is useful - but transfer is not automatic.

A 2024 meta-analysis found positive effects of creativity training, while transfer into sustained on-the-job creative behaviour was less certain. Workplace conditions still matter after the workshop ends.

Source: McKay et al. (2024)

CANADIAN RESEARCH ADDS THREE USEFUL IDEAS

Beliefs about creativity can get in the way.

HEC Montreal research found that strong implicit beliefs about what should boost creativity can sometimes reduce creative effort.

Agogue et al. (2024)

Different tools can change the thinking.

ETS and HEC Montreal researchers found tangible tools produced more elaborated divergent-thinking proposals than pen and paper, though with greater cognitive effort.

Lesage et al. (2026)

Spaces can be designed for knowledge collision.

HEC Montreal research on Hacking Health identified exploring, complementing, mapping, and modeling as forms of knowledge work supported by different temporary spaces.

Dionne & Carlile (2025)

The strongest story may be the one people can locate themselves inside.

Stronger stories.
More possible futures.

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From the Blog

What Leaders Need to Get Right

Use narrative to create orientation and possibility - not certainty and compliance.

CREATE CONDITIONS FOR

- A clear sense of what matters and why change matters.
- Listening for unfinished, contradictory, or marginalized stories.
- Questions that interrupt assumptions and make alternatives imaginable.
- Divergence before convergence - enough time to create options before choosing.
- Tools, prototypes, and temporary spaces that help people think beyond words and slides.

WATCH FOR THE HAZARDS

- Finishing the story too early and closing down interpretation.
- Treating counter-stories as resistance rather than information.
- Inviting participation after all consequential choices are already made.
- Assuming a creativity workshop will overcome everyday structures that suppress creative behaviour.
- Making the leader the hero instead of making organizational learning the protagonist.

QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS

- 1 What story are we treating as fact?
- 2 Who experiences that story differently?
- 3 Where is there genuine room for authorship?
- 4 What could we make or test before we finish the story?

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