Conveying the adaptation of management panaceas: The case of management gurus

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INTRODUCTION

A number of authors have pointed out that management panaceas are produced and disseminated by a set of knowledge entrepreneurs typically identified as management gurus, management consultants, business schools and publishers (Abrahamson 1996; Suddaby and Greenwood 2001; Ernst and Kieser 2002). It is widely recognized that thought leaders flourish depending on their ability to convince the broad management audience that their ideas are applicable to addressing pressing contemporary problems (efficiency, culture change, performance gaps and so on) in a wide range of organizational contexts. However, how ideas flow from these management entrepreneurs into organizations so that they might then be situationally adapted is not well understood. This arises because the literature on the production of management panaceas, referred to above, and that on their adaptation/consumption within organizations (for example, Kelemen 2000; Kostova and Roth 2002; Ansari et al. 2010; Wilhelm and Bort 2013) are presently distinct (see Groß et al. 2015). In this chapter we do not seek to bridge these collections of literature. Rather our approach is to step back and examine the preconditions necessary for adaptation to occur. If an idea is to be adopted, and then adapted from an organization's 'institutional environment' (Corbett-Etchevers and Mounoud 2011), it has to be perceived as applicable. Indeed, for an idea to enter an organization it requires internal advocates who are convinced of its applicability whatever the original source. With this in mind we focus on how one particular group of knowledge entrepreneurs – management gurus – present their ideas to audiences of managers during their lectures. In advance of giving a lecture a management guru is unlikely to know, with respect to each audience member, the specific characteristics of their organization or the context/sector in which it operates. If they wish their ideas to leave the auditorium with the audience members they

therefore have to present them in ways which convincingly demonstrate that they are potentially pertinent to the variety of working lives of those who attend. In this chapter we examine how gurus convey the adaptability of their ideas when telling stories about change. We focus on these stories because they are a central means through which gurus convey the potential applicability of their ideas across a broad range of organizations and sectors (Bhatanacharoen et al. 2013). In essence, the gurus consistently use a small number of practices that not only effect the transition from the stories to post-story assessments that contain messages which relate to the central themes in their talks, but also underpin a shift in emphasis from the specific issues contained in the stories to their wider relevance.

The chapter is structured as follows. We begin with a brief review of the literature on management gurus as orators and storytellers. We then discuss our methods and results before identifying the ways in which the chapter contributes to understanding and practice with regard to the adaptation of management panaceas.

MANAGEMENT GURUS AS ORATORS[2]

Management gurus are often viewed as the figurehead and leader of a particular idea movement (Huczynski 1993; Abrahamson 1996; Suddaby and Greenwood 2001). One way in which they build their relationship with followers is through writing best-selling management books. Few write more than one best-selling management book (Huczynski 1993; Furusten 1999; Jackson 2001). Indeed, after their initial success many management gurus find it extremely difficult to write a second book and some stop writing books altogether (Clark and Greatbatch 2004). As the popularity of their book begins to wane the importance of giving talks on the international lecture circuit becomes paramount if they are to maintain their relationship with a managerial audience. Many gain reputations as outstanding public speakers and subsequently market recordings of their talks as podcasts, DVDs and as parts of management training packages. Indeed, many gurus become better-known for their live performances than their books as they build and sustain a large live following by giving lectures over a long period of time. They achieve this by using their lectures to build their personal reputations with audiences of managers.

Although the body of literature is small, guru live lectures have overwhelmingly been depicted as quasi-religious events. They are therefore regarded as exercises in persuasive communication where the purpose is to transform the consciousness of the audience to the guru's way of thinking through passionate oratory (see for instance, Huczynski 1993;

Jackson 2001, 2002). The idea that guru public performances are episodes of persuasive speaking and opportunities for conversion was first explored in Huczynski's (1993) seminal study of management gurus. He wrote that 'it is in his interest to make a convert . . . How can a speaker persuade members of his audience to his [sic] way of thinking if they are not already predisposed to it? A realistic aim of the guru's persuasive communication is not that his [sic] ideas should necessarily and immediately modify the *actions* of his [sic] audience, but that they should alter their *beliefs*, *attitudes* and *feelings* towards his [sic] suggestions' (p. 245, emphasis in the original).[3]

Huczynski's (1993) analysis of the progressive stages of gurus' live performances and the reasons for their impact on audiences is detailed and has been highly influential. Indeed, the notion that gurus were management witchdoctors deploying seductive rhetoric to win the hearts and minds of vulnerable audience members also dominated early popular understandings of these events (see Baur 1994; *The Economist* 1994a, p. 90, 1994b, p. 101; Caulkin 1997, p. 14; Krohe 2004, p. 34). Summarizing this broad depiction of management gurus' lecturing style, Greatbatch and Clark (2005, p. 21–2) write:

> gurus' live lectures are repeatedly portrayed as equivalent to evangelical religious revivalist meetings. They are evangelists who pass among their flock. Their talks are replete with parables about companies and individuals that saw the light and were saved. They are presented as whipping their 'congregations' into a state of hysterical compliance with their message by engaging in hellfire preaching.

The initial body of literature on management gurus therefore viewed these live performances as occurring within an evangelical frame that creates an emotional arousal to soften and seduce the audience members so that they are open to the messages delivered by the gurus. Once converted, they are assumed to return to their organizations as active advocates for implementing the guru's ideas (Groß et al. 2015).

However, in a series of studies Greatbatch and Clark (2003, 2005, 2010) have sought to develop a more nuanced understanding of these lectures and gurus' oratorical styles by examining speaker–audience interaction and the forms of audience response through fine-grained analyses of video recordings of four gurus' lectures. Their research found that audience laughter played an important role during the gurus' lectures and that this laughter was rarely a spontaneous response to inherently humorous remarks by the gurus but rather was largely invited and therefore signaled as relevant by the gurus (Greatbatch and Clark 2003). In order to orchestrate a collective response so that individuals are not left in the potentially

embarrassing situation of being the only person to laugh, the research found that the gurus regularly deployed a range of rhetorical techniques associated with 'persuasive' talk in other forms of public speaking, which emphasize messages and project clear message completion points around which audience members can coordinate their responses. These include the use of lists, contrasts, puzzle solutions and so forth (see Atkinson 1984; Heritage and Greatbatch 1986). The gurus also regularly deployed non-verbal cues including smiling and using 'comedic' facial expressions, gestures and prosody to signal that they intended their remarks as humorous. Critically, the management gurus generally provided opportunities for audiences to affiliate with them through laughter without audience members being required to publicly affiliate with the values underpinning their core messages. Even though the audience members may not be demonstrating their unambiguous agreement with the gurus' management ideas, their collective laughter played an important role with respect to the maintenance of rapport and group cohesion at these lectures: by laughing, they publicly constituted themselves at that moment as members of an in-group (Greatbatch and Clark 2003, 2005).

Furthermore, the research by Greatbatch and Clark (2003) suggests that the evocation of collective audience laughter enables gurus to enhance the 'entertainment value' of their lectures, making gurus' messages more memorable and the audience members more receptive to the gurus' recommendations. Greatbatch and Clark (2003, p. 1539) conclude by suggesting that '[g]iven that speakers are unlikely to persuade audiences to empathize with their positions unless they sustain the attentiveness of audience members, it seems likely that humour is one means through which gurus and other public speakers create the conditions necessary to win and retain converts'.

More recently, addressing the notion that management gurus are inherently charismatic speakers, Clark and Greatbatch (2011) conducted a study which involved showing video-taped extracts from speeches given by seven management gurus – Kenneth Blanchard, Stephen Covey, Daniel Goleman, Gary Hamel, Rosabeth Moss Kanter, Tom Peters and Peter Senge – to different audiences. After viewing each extract, audience members were asked to rate the extent to which they found the speaker charismatic or non-charismatic and why. Clark and Greatbatch found that Gary Hamel, Rosabeth Moss Kanter and Tom Peters were generally rated as charismatic whereas Kenneth Blanchard, Steven Covey, Daniel Goleman and Peter Senge were more likely to be ranked as non-charismatic. Furthermore, in analyzing speeches given by these seven gurus, Clark and Greatbatch found that when the speeches were taken as a whole the speakers who were generally rated as charismatic differed

significantly from those who were generally rated as non-charismatic only in terms of delivery. Analysis of the comments of audience members indicated that they felt the charismatic speakers supplied greater levels of emphasis, rhythm and spacing between points. They were more dynamic and animated. In contrast, the style of those speakers rated as non-charismatic was more constrained, flatter and monotonic. When the sections of the speeches that contained key points were examined, delivery continued to be significant but in addition the speakers rated as charismatic used a higher proportion of the rhetorical techniques associated with persuasive oratory[4] (see also Atkinson 1984; Heritage and Greatbatch 1986). Clark and Greatbatch (2011) conclude that what differentiates charismatic from non-charismatic speakers in this context is the variations in the verbal and non-verbal practices used to package and deliver their messages rather than the content of their speeches.

The importance of these features of speech are further emphasized in a study that Greatbatch and Clark (2010) conducted of Daniel Goleman, the author of *Emotional Intelligence* (1996), telling the same story on two separate occasions. The story concerned Goleman's experience(s) when he caught a bus in New York. In the story Goleman observes how a bus driver succeeded in engaging and energizing passengers who were initially irritable and unsociable due, in part, to the hot weather. This study demonstrated that, although the wording was very similar on each occasion, the manner in which the story was told and the audience response differed in significant respects because Goleman's vocal and non-vocal actions differed. Thus, one telling was serious and one humorous. As the authors write, the audience's 'differing interpretive frameworks and reactions . . . [rest] on the storyteller's use of different paralinguistic and visual cues' (Greatbatch and Clark 2010, p. 117). The key difference between the two tellings was that the location of the invited collective audience response differed because of variations in his visual and paralinguistic conduct. On one occasion he evoked collective audience laughter at the conclusion of the story and on the other audience members laughed during his post-story assessment. In the first telling of the story Goleman therefore delivered his post-story assessment in a serious frame whereas in the other telling it is delivered humorously. Greatbatch and Clark (2010) found that the first story structure (laughter at the end of the story) occurred during an epiphanic version of the story since Goleman set up the story as depicting events that changed his life ('Now I am going to tell you the story that changed my life'). He therefore used the humorous frame to emphasize the unusualness, incongruity, and extraordinary nature of the event depicted in the story rather than his post-story assessment. In contrast, the second story form (laughter during the post-story assessment) characterized

a non-epiphanic telling where the story was used to illustrate the fifth element of emotional intelligence, which he defined in the story preface as 'handling emotions in relationships'. In this case the humorous frame was used to accentuate the significance of the point that followed the story rather than the story itself.[5]

In this chapter we develop this latter study by examining how stories are structured to convey the level of adaptability of gurus' ideas. In guru lectures and books stories in general are a critical mechanism through which they frame and project messages about their ideas (Clark and Salaman 1998; Collins 2012). Stories do not simply contain entertaining illustrations of their messages but are also used to communicate both the degree of adaptability of their ideas and their significance by highlighting them from surrounding speech material. Earlier research by the authors indicates that not all stories are equally important in conveying their ideas to audience members (Clark and Greatbatch 2001; Bhatanacharoen et al. 2013). Stories about change are particularly significant since they disproportionately act as a preface to summary messages that relate to the core themes of their talks. In what follows we examine how these stories are structured to communicate their ideas as relevant to a wide range of contexts.

METHOD AND DATA

To understand how management gurus in real time convey the extent to which their ideas are malleable across different contexts our analysis draws on the approach and findings of conversation analytic (CA) research on speaker–audience interaction in the context of both management and political oratory (Heritage and Greatbatch 1986; Greatbatch and Clark 2003, 2005, 2010). CA involves detailed, qualitative analysis of audio and video recordings of naturally occurring social interactions, using transcripts that capture not only what is said, but also various details of speech production (such as overlapping talk, pauses within and between utterances, stress, pitch, rhythm and volume) and visual conduct (such as gestures and gaze direction) (Psathas 1995). These transcripts facilitate the fine-grained analysis of the recordings, enabling researchers to reveal and analyze tacit aspects of human conduct that otherwise would be unavailable for systematic study.

We focus on 21 video recordings of public lectures given by Daniel Goleman (2), Gary Hamel (2), Charles Handy (4), Rosabeth Moss Kanter (5), Tom Peters (4) and Peter Senge (4). Although the selection of lectures was partly determined by their availability, each of the speeches

elaborates and is marketed on the basis of their key ideas and so can be considered as 'pivotal' (Emrich et al. 2001). These speeches contain over 80 stories, of which 19 are stories about some kind of change. These change stories are told by Goleman (2), Handy (2), Hamel (2), Kanter (6), Peters (4) and Senge (3).

FINDINGS

Our analysis of the *in situ* telling of change stories in the gurus' lectures reveals two types of stories – those that are presented as epiphanic and those characterized as non-epiphanic – across the 19 examples identified. By epiphanic we are referring to stories that present the central character as experiencing a sudden, discontinuous and personal transformation (Miller and C'de Baca 2001). In this respect it conveys a tipping point moment in their life in that an apparently mundane event led to a complete rethink of how they thought about some aspect of the world. By contrast, non-epiphanic stories present a more cumulative, incremental and slow-burn change as individuals ponder the implications of a single event or series of events and gradually make sense of them. In the next two subsections we discuss a number of examples of each type of story, drawing on detailed analysis of transcripts to illustrate different types of structure and what these imply for how the gurus communicate the relevance of their ideas to a range of contexts before discussing the broader implications for gurus and the diffusion of management ideas.

Epiphanic Stories

Epiphanic stories are often marked out by the speaker when they announce in a story preface that they are about to recount an epiphanic or life-changing moment that they or someone else experienced. In an example of this type of story Tom Peters tells of his experiences whilst shopping in a delicatessen in San Francisco. He depicts the delicatessen's owner as passionate about their food and as exemplifying the key concept of his talk – 'service with soul'. The story is presented from the outset as depicting a life-changing event in that it represents the moment when Peters came to crystallize his notion of service with soul. As Peters states in the story preface, 'My epiphany came to be very precise at twenty-seven sixty Octavia Street in San Francisco. I had screwed up my schedule in a wonderfully delightful way a few weeks ago and was going to spend an hour wandering down San Francisco's Union Street and I saw this little Deli.' The extraordinariness of what the audience is about to hear is highlighted

by both the characterization of the story as being about his epiphany in relation to the matters at hand (exceptional service) and his recollection of the precise location at which it occurred (2760 Octavia Street in San Francisco). Commentators note that when people recall epiphanic events they frequently specify the date, time and location of the events (Miller and C'de Baca 2001, pp.13–14). Stating the address of the shop where the events took place emphasizes the continuing vividness of the events about to be described for Peters. From the outset Peters therefore alerts the audience that he is going to reveal something significant and personal: the moment from which the ideas that are the topic of his talk originated. These opening comments therefore raise the level of importance and interestingness of what he is about to say. In this way he focuses the audience's attention on his unfolding remarks by heightening their curiosity and importance from the outset.

Transcript 1 – Tom Peters [Service With Soul – 00.04.07]

Peters: It was beautiful we only got into a fight at one point, and the fight we got into was when I said 'You my friend are one hell (.) of (.) a (.) salesman'. 'I am NOT a salesman,

Audience: h-h-h-[h

Peters: [I LOVE MY FOOD AND I AM TRYING TO CONVEY THE ESSENCE OF IT TO YOU' he said.=What I saw at Curry's Delicatessen was something that I'm now calling service with soul. (0.2) You know, (0.2) and the definition of service with soul in part is something that grabs you (.) you don't know why but it's there no issue about it and you can leave the electron microscope at home.

In relation to conveying the adaptability of his ideas there is a risk that telling an epiphanic story has greater resonance for the teller than the audience, given that it recounts a powerful but very personal experience. However, Peters uses a number of procedures that turn the story from being about something he observed and experienced to being generic and therefore potentially applying to everyone involved in service delivery. As Transcript 1 shows, Peters generalizes the events that occurred at '2760 Octavia Street in San Francisco' by linking them to a universal concept – 'service with soul'. Unlike the location of the events that led to the epiphany, the definition of 'service with soul' is left vague. Peters defines the concept of 'service with soul' as something that 'grabs you [and] you don't know why'. In other words, it cannot be defined. It is tacit knowledge. 'Service with soul' can only become known when it is experienced. In defining it in this way he raises a puzzle in the minds of

his audience. He encourages them to ask: 'Have I experienced service like that described in the story?' By defining 'service with soul' in a very unspecific way Peters both generalizes the concept and encourages the audience members to apply it to their experience in order to solve the puzzle as to what it means.

The second structure is a clear transition from the particularities of the story to the general. The story is about something Peters experiences in a specific context (his conversation with the owner of the delicatessen) whereas in his post-story assessment he turns this into the general concept of 'service with soul'. Following this extract he goes on to give examples of 'service with soul' operating in different contexts. This transition from story to post-story assessment is supported by a shift from a humorous to a serious footing. Peters completes the story by recounting the details of an argument that he had with the person who served him in the delicatessen (possibly the owner). This evokes laughter from some members of the audience. Note that Peters does not confirm the relevance of the isolated audience laughter by ceding the floor. He talks over the laughter. However, as he begins his summary he marks the post-story assessment of his experience in the delicatessen by stopping his pacing of the floor, waving his hands vigorously and shifting his intonation slightly upwards. The latter change implies that further talk is imminent and that the message-in-progress is yet to be completed. Peters therefore puts emphasis on the concluding element of the story in which he links his evaluation of the actions of the person who served him in this delicatessen with a revelatory insight into the generic importance of extraordinary service that he terms 'service with soul'. Audience attention is funneled to his post-story summary which conveys a substantive assertion about the core idea he is seeking to convey in the talk. The contrast between the light-heartedness of the story and the seriousness of the post-story conclusion provides emphasis to the message being delivered – the nature and meaning of 'service with soul' – as well as the transition from the specific to the general. Thus the humor underscores the absurdity of the events depicted in the story whereas the serious frame accentuates the gravity of his point and its broad applicability.

This double-structure is not limited to stories that are overtly defined as epiphanic by the speaker. It applies more generally to implicitly epiphanic stories that involve an account of a sudden and unexpected insight that leads to change. As an example, Peter Senge, a professor at MIT and author of *The Fifth Discipline* (1990), tells a story about a moment of sudden realization experienced by an economist called Fred Kaufman (see Transcript 2).

Transcript 2 – Peter Senge – [Fifth Discipline – 00.04.40]

PS: If we've grown up in America (0.2) or we've grown up in prob-
         ably any industrial culture (0.2) we've bought into a notion
         that more or less goes along the following lines.=There's a
         couple of different variations to this notion. (0.3) It's like
         a (.) a little message that's been whispered in our ears since
         we were very very young. (0.7) And the message goes sort
         of like this. (0.5) To be effective you must first understand.
         (1.1) You must figure it out. You must know how the world
         works.=After all why would you be going to school? (You're
         going to learn in school how everything works).=Right?
         (1.4)
         Right. [hhehehehmm
         (1.2)
         .hh Fred K̲aufmann (.) used to tell a funny story about that.
         He said you know. I went to school in Argentina and I- I
         grew up in a society in a- in a perpetual state of disaster. (0.2)
         I knew that what I re̲ally had to do was to figure out what
         was really going on and so I would become an e̲conomist.
         (0.4) Because clearly (0.2) that was the most pressing set of
         i̲ssues in my country. (0.2) So I became an economist. .hh
         I went to graduate in economics. (0.2) I went to Berkeley
         which is one of the best economics departments in the̲oretical
         economics,=he said I really wanted to be absolutely world
         class (0.4) in- in er theoretical economics understand the
         theories of how economies work. (0.2) And I was somewhere
         about a year or two away from getting my Ph.D .h and an
         odd thing happened.=I started to get invited to give presenta-
         tions. (0.3) He never used to say this but Fred was identified
         as one of the (0.2) three top young economists in the wo̲rld.
         .hh One of the world's leading experts in a field called game
         theory. .hhh He said suddenly I realized .hh people were
         coming to listen to me:: talk about economic theory .hh and
         he said I realized
         (.) [my Go̲::d (0.7) they're listening to me:? (1.1) And=I don't
         have a clue:?

Audience: [hhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh[hhh

PS: [He then left the field of economics.

Audience: hhhhhhh (0.8)

PS: Because he'd suddenly realized that all the quote experts
         (0.2) really didn't have a clue.> (1.6) Because he was one.
         (2.0) So somewhere along the way we all kinda bought into

the notion that life is about figuring things out so that we can be in (1.0) – thank you – (1.2) the gentleman in the front said control. (2.3) And our institutions are based on this notion.

Once again this is a story recounting a moment of unexpected personal realization, but on this occasion it is not projected or explicitly characterized as an epiphanic story. Nor is the story about something experienced by the guru. The subject of the story is a named economist – Fred Kaufman – who experiences a moment of self-doubt followed by a sudden realization that resulted in him leaving the field of economics. This is used to illustrate Senge's point that education does not necessarily tell you everything about how the world works.

The transcript shows that, as with the previous story told by Peters, this story is about the specific experiences of an individual and the general point is developed in the post-story assessment. As the story ends and the coda is articulated, there is a switch from a humorous to a serious footing. This reinforces the shift from the specific to the general. Thus, Senge completes the story by stating that Kaufman gave up his career in economics because he came to question the capability of so-called experts and being portrayed as an expert therefore troubled him. Senge's characterization of Kaufman's realization that he does not 'have a clue' evokes a burst of collective laughter from members of the audience. He confirms the relevance of this laughter by remaining silent and ceding the floor. He begins to finish the story by talking over the laughter as it starts to wane. He then states that as a result of this realization Kaufman left the field of economics. This evokes a second, shorter burst of laughter. This time Senge confirms its appropriateness by remaining silent throughout the full episode of audience response and pauses further after it finishes. He then delivers his post-story summary in a serious frame, broadening the applicability of his point from a particular individual first by saying that 'all the quote experts really didn't have a clue' and then reinforcing this by stating that 'we all kinda bought into the notion'. This example is therefore used to evidence the general point that thinking we are in control is highly questionable. He reinforces this point a little later on in the speech when he generates a humorous response from the audience in relation to these questions – 'How many of you have kids? How many of you feel like you are in control? (followed by laughter) I rest my case.' In summary, as in the case of Peters, Senge first underlines the extraordinary nature of the events recounted in the story through the use of humor. When he subsequently shifts to a serious mode he links his evaluation of Kaufman's decision to leave economics to questioning the broad notion of being in control. This

transition from the specific to the general coincides with the switch from a humorous to a serious frame.

Non-Epiphanic Stories

In the following example of a non-epiphanic story Tom Peters recounts his experience of eating with his wife at a restaurant in Auckland called Volarios (see Transcript 3). It initially intrigued him because there was a sign on the menu board saying that they had not bothered to display a menu but had a great atmosphere, good food and a 'half crazy owner'. At one point during the meal Peters says that he went to the toilet and on his way found letters of complaint pinned to the walls with the very direct and unapologetic responses from the restaurateur beside them. He reports that he was so affected by the quirkiness of these letters that when he returns to his table he and his wife discuss whether they should change their occupations and open a restaurant. Although the changes Peters and his wife discuss are potentially life-changing, any change is momentary and confined to their conversation as they eat. Transcript 3 shows that during the post-story assessment the move from a humorous to a serious frame underpins the transition from the specific to the general. However, in these cases the overarching point is made more tentatively.

In the transcript below, Peters invites laughter to his report of the owner rejecting a complaint about the lack of white wine by smiling and baring his teeth in conjunction with the use of feigned anger. He confirms that laughter is appropriate by letting the audience response continue for some time and only starts to speak as it fades away. He then adopts a quieter tone, drawing the audience attention into his intimate admission about him and his wife considering a possible change of career. He obtains two further brief bursts of laughter, and smiles throughout this section, indicating his remarks can be understood as humorous but that this response is not appropriate because he does not allow the laughter to develop since he continues to speak over it as he completes his point. Then his tone changes and his intonation moves noticeably upward, indicating that he has not finished. He uses a loud and exaggerated tone of voice and contorts his face to demonstrate his utter disapproval of the phrase 'exceed expectations'. Again he confirms the relevance of laughter in relation to this characterization by ceding the floor as the audience laugh. He does not speak again until the laughter has completely died away. At this point he states that the lesson from this story has general applicability.

Transcript 3 – Tom Peters [Service with Soul – 0.05.50]

TP: He said 'as for the white wine, this is an Italian restaurant we don't give a da::mn about white wine.'

Audience: hhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh[hh (5.2)

TP: When I got back (1.0) honest to gosh for the next I don't know thirty (0.2) forty-five minutes, something like that, (0.2) my wife and I sat at that table in that restaurant in Auckland (.) seriously discussing both of us giving up our professional careers and opening a restaurant

Audience: hh[hh (0.4)

TP: [because it absolutely seemed like the most incredible way to sort of you know express yourself as a human being,

Audience: hh[hh (0.8)

TP: [which is beautiful (.) you know and and you know I'm here and I didn't do it obviously.

Audience: [hhhhh (1.0)

TP: [=But it was it was.=But but but let me let me now tie that back to what we are talking about here OK. Because words are important. (1.0) VILARIO'S DID NOT SATISFY THE CUSTOMER. Or to use that phenomenally stupid accountant engineering word 'IT DID NOT EXCEED EXPECTATIONS'.

Audience: hhhhhhhhhh (2.2)

TP: What Vilario's does was an event, it was a transformation. (0.2) It is about a total redefinition about what is possible. (0.2) And I happen to think that it applies to the making of plastics, the making of software as well as the making of good tabbouleh.

What we see from this example, and it applies to the other cases of this type of story, is that the post-story assessment is delivered in two parts. Peters configures it as a contrast to the first part, which is a negative assessment made in a hyperbolic tone of voice and with comic prosody. This generates audience laughter. The second element of the contrast is delivered seriously, structured as a three-part list ('an event . . . a transformation . . . a total redefinition') and linked to his key theme of 'service with soul'. This structure emphasizes the generality of the point he is making in that he uses humor to disparage an alternative interpretation as vacuous management speak. The humor is used to underline the ridiculousness of this point of view. He therefore obtains laughter for a critical characterization of a narrow alternative view of service before presenting

his own broad framing of exceptional service on a serious footing. Although told solemnly, the point is not delivered with the same certainty as in the case of epiphanic stories. He justifies broadening the applicability of his argument to a range of contexts by saying 'I happen to think'. Thus the epistemological status of his claim is different from that in epiphanic stories. Rather than stating the generic relevance of a point derived from a particular context with absolute certainty, as in the case of epiphanic stories, it is instead prefaced by a conditional statement.

Finally, in transcript 4 we show an example of Charles Handy telling a story about an encounter with someone from whom he asked directions that resulted in him changing how he framed his understanding of when people should change the direction of their lives. As he finishes the story he delivers the punchline by raising the tone of his voice, quickening his pace and smiling as he finishes the sentence. The audience responds to his invitation to laugh by laughing collectively immediately after the sentence ends. He then confirms the relevance of laughter by ceding the floor to the audience and resumes speaking only as the laughter dies away. Following this, he starts to deliver the message emanating from the story in the next sentence with a beaming smile and laughing voice (his voice has a breathiness and he interpolates laughter tokens in the word 'right'), which generates further laughter. He pauses slightly, acknowledging the initial burst of laughter, but continues to smile and speak over the laughter as it fades. He shifts to a serious tone as he starts the next sentence ('And I've seen many . . . ') in which he broadens his point to many firms and people.

Transcript 4 – Charles Handy [Trinity Horne Lecture: 0:11:56]

Handy:	I mean I was traveling in the Wicklow Hills behind the city where I was born Dublin (0.5) not so long ago. And I lost my way because the (.) hills in those days anyway didn't have any sign posts. But then of course after a bit I saw an Irishman at the roadside so I stopped and I said 'can you tell me the way to Avoca'. And he said 'yes of course' he said.=He said 'it's very easy. You go on straight up this hill mm and then down the other side for about for for about a mile and a half (0.2) and you will see a bridge over the river a little bridge and Davy's Bar on the other side. (.) Its painted red you can't miss it. (.) Have you got that?' And I said 'well yes up the hill down the hill bridge Davy's Bar'. He he said 'well' he said 'half a mile before you get there turn right up the hill'.
Audience:	HHHhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh
Handy:	And you see
Audience	h[hhhhh[hhhhh-h-h-h-h-h-h-h

Handy   [this [this is the problem. You only know where you should
               have turned r-h-h-ight up the hill (0.2) when you've passed
               it. (1.0) And I've met many many many firms many people at
               Davy's Bar downing their drinks saying that was good while
               it lasted but you know if only we'd listened, if only we'd (0.2)
               etcetera. (.) So it is very very difficult to know (0.2) and the
               only thing I can tell you is that when you're feeling pretty
               pleased with yourself with business or with life (.) that's the
               time to start thinking.

As in the previous example, the initial post-story assessment is deliv-
ered as humorous. This is used to underline a comment in relation to
the specific context in the story. It therefore highlights the bizarreness
of the events in the story rather than the point he subsequently makes.
Handy then adopts a serious frame when suggesting that what he saw
in Davy's Bar is more generally applicable ('I've met many many firms
many people at Davy's Bar'). Furthermore the strength of this generic
claim is presented conditionally in that he can only give a vague idea to
the audience when they should consider changing their lives ('when you're
feeling pretty pleased with yourself'). This example therefore illustrates
the common pattern of delivering summary points in non-epiphanic
stories whereby a humorous summary comment is made in relation to the
specific content of the story, this is followed by a post-story assessment
stressing the general applicability of the ideas delivered in a serious frame
but softened in some way.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have shown how stories about change are a means
through which management gurus communicate the adaptability/
applicability of their panaceas. The data reveal that the gurus use a number
of common practices that are critical to conveying the adaptability of their
ideas in both types of story. First, the stories illustrate the gurus' ideas
by focusing on a particular example or illustration. They are therefore
focused on singular themes, making them more easily apprehensible and
enabling the audience to collectively concentrate on a narrow set of events.
Furthermore, these stories are told in an arresting and entertaining way,
which both highlights the passage of talk from adjoining speech mate-
rial and makes them more memorable because of the level of audience
engagement. The guru legitimizes the story by either making themselves or
another authority figure the central character. The standing of the main

character is also an attention raiser in that these events are depicted as having been experienced by someone of significance. This person's status is not undermined by the humorous observations since it is certain actions or other characters in the story that are ridiculed through the jocular remarks. However, to demonstrate their applicability to a wide range of contexts, the speaker has to move from the particular to the general. It is here a second set of practices are used.

In both types of story the post-story assessment is initially delivered using a humorous remark relating the specifics of the preceding story. This emphasizes the absurdness of an individual and actions in the story (Transcripts 1, 2 and 4) or an alternative interpretation of the point of the story (Transcript 3). These humorous episodes provide an opportunity for the audience members to demonstrate a public and positive response to the gurus' stories. Whether audience laughter demonstrates their unequivocal agreement with the underlying values attaching to the events being recounted is unclear (Greatbatch and Clark 2003). Nevertheless, at the very least the audience members openly confirm themselves as an 'in-group' by producing displays of shared understanding of the light-hearted nature of the gurus' remarks. These episodes are therefore a public celebration of the audiences' like-mindedness with respect to the witty status of the gurus' remarks which immediately precede the delivery of their central messages. Although the humorous comments are not directed to their messages, since these are subsequently delivered seriously, these episodes nevertheless provide an antecedent affiliative atmosphere between the audience members and the gurus. They are unified in a momentary display of common understanding which provides a positive environment in which the gurus can make their subsequent points. The residual positive dynamic from the laughter ensures their points will be received either neutrally or positively.

Third, for audience members to laugh, they need to be paying attention to recognize the cues from the speaker that invite laughter. Those passages of a talk where laughter occurs are therefore highlighted from surrounding speech material, giving them considerable prominence and making their following remarks more memorable. For the gurus' ideas to be subsequently adapted, audience members need to take them from the lecture hall into their different organizations. These stories are therefore critical in that they provide attention and emphasis to central messages within these talks and thereby provide the underpinning conditions necessary for gurus' ideas to flow beyond the venue of their talks.

Despite these similarities, our analysis also reveals that the two types of change story differ in terms of how adaptability is conveyed. Whilst the generic applicability of the final messages in both types of story is clearly

emphasized and expressed, the degree of emphasis differs. In the case of epiphanic stories the message is expressed unequivocally, whereas in non-epiphanic stories it is stated more equivocally. Although the messages in both stories are accentuated by prior laughter, in non-epiphanic stories the lack of specificity may weaken the memorability of the point being made. Furthermore, in addition to their precision, the messages following epiphanic stories may be given further emphasis by the way that the underpinnings of laughter generation parallel and reinforce the sudden change being recounted in the story. Laughter is engendered by emphasizing incongruous elements in the story so that the humorous remarks and incidents described are 'in mutual clash, conflict or contradiction' (Wilson 1979, p. 9). The humor proceeds from a sudden interchange between, or unexpected juxtapositioning of, 'self-consistent but incompatible interpretative frames' (Wilson 1979, p. 9). During the unfolding of a joke, the listener/recipient suddenly becomes aware of an implicit meaning which has previously remained dormant. As Fry (1963, p. 152) puts it, 'the body content of each joke is accompanied by innumerable implicit themes, both conscious and unconscious . . . it is the art of the punch-line to snatch some of this implicit material from the world of Shades and project it into the workaday world or, in other words, into reality'. This is precisely what the guru is doing in an epiphanic story. Their sudden insight derives from connecting multiple implicit frames together. When these are fused into a consistent and integrated framework, new understanding is generated. In telling a humorous epiphanic story the gurus are making the audience go through a similar process. As Boland and Hoffman (1986, p. 196) write:

> 'Making' and 'getting' a joke is a double interact in which the meaningfulness of multiple frames is confirmed by each participant, without explicitly defining what those frames are. In fact, the more possible frames that can be meaningfully juxtaposed, the more levels the joke can operate on, the funnier it is.

Thus, for the audience to laugh they have both to understand that the remarks are intended as funny and need to make the connections between the incongruous elements, as the guru did when they experienced their epiphany, to appreciate the joke.

Finally, in relation to future research the chapter suggests at least two potentially fruitful avenues. First, future research needs to follow audience members back into their organization to understand whether and how the procedures discussed above impact on the likelihood of subsequent adaptation of gurus' ideas in organizations. Such research needs to consider how differences in audience members' organizational status and levels of affiliation impact on subsequent diffusion. Understanding the different degrees of audience affiliation and what undergirds it will enable researchers to

ascertain whether certain messages and passages of speeches have greater impact than others. In this respect, do the elaborately packaged messages that follow stories have a particular impact on levels of audience affiliation and organizational transfer? If a guru's ideas are transferred into an organization, does the nature of their communication also impact on the extent and form of adaptation to which they are then subjected? Does the degree of specificity enable ideas to flow across contexts? More fundamentally, to what extent do the ideas that audience members seek to introduce in their organizations relate to those that the guru communicated? Is the guru used as a legitimizer for other ideas? Second, whilst we have identified the procedures and techniques that management gurus use to convey the level of adaptability of their ideas, future research could examine whether these are used by different categories of thought leader (academic, practitioner, journalist and so on). Furthermore, how does the range of contexts (auditoria, single event versus multi-speaker event) impact on the subsequent transfer, adoption and adaptation?

NOTES

1. We are very grateful to the Editor and Stefan Heusinkveld for their helpful and perceptive comments on an earlier draft of this chapter. The research underpinning this chapter was funded by grant F/00128/BF from the Leverhulme Trust.
2. Parts of this review draw on Greatbatch and Clark (2005).
3. Management gurus are predominantly male. Thirteen of the individuals on the *Thinkers 50* list, which seeks to rank the most influential management thinkers, are women.
4. These rhetorical techniques are also found in all forms of persuasive speaking and writing.
5. Whether one story form is more effective than the other at encouraging the commitment to and flow of their ideas is not revealed by this research. This would require a longitudinal research approach where audience members were followed back to their organizations.

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