

# Gabrielle Dolan

## The Evolution of Organisational Change

Significant demographical and technological shifts are creating unique challenges for corporations as they embark on organisational change.



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# Introduction

Significant demographical and technological shifts are creating unique challenges for corporations as they embark on organisational change. Only the organisations that understand these shifts and respond to them will be successful.

Regardless of whether the organisational change is a new strategy, new values or a major technology change, companies need to be fully aware of how these shifts will impact their organisational change initiatives.

Demographically, Generation Y will be the largest population of employees in the workforce within the next decade and they will be the most educated generation ever. This new generation of employees have different and increasingly higher expectations from their employers and their leaders.

The exit of Baby Boomers over the next decade will create a void of not only experience and leadership but of corporate memory and history.

Technologically, the rapid rise and wide spread use of technology and social media has resulted in information fatigue syndrome. It has become harder for leaders than ever before to communicate messages that have an impact on their employees.

Currently, organisations typically communicate to employees with a strong focus on logic and data. This is having very little impact on employees because of these demographic and technology shifts.

Leaders need to fully understand the impacts of these shifts, in relation to the challenges of organisational change.



# The evolution to date

In the 80's and 90's, cultural change followed a similar format...the 'Rollout'. Corporate values and mission statements were emblazoned on beautifully designed wall posters. Along with the wall posters, employees would usually receive a mouse pad or a coffee mug with the organisational values printed on them. Business cards often had the mission or vision statement printed on the reverse side. They were literally rolled out through the organisation via a communication cascade from the CEO down.

The intention here was good, and some companies did experience success with this. Values and mission statements that were visible at every employee's work desk and every time they took a sip of their coffee, resulted in many employees being able to recite the corporate values and mission statement. Unfortunately, very few knew what they actually meant.

The next wave in the cultural revolution saw the move from 'rollouts' to 'roadshows' or a blend of the two. There was a realisation that the cascade communication approach did not seem to be working for several reasons. The 'Chinese whispers effect' would often result in messages being lost in translation. But more importantly, not all leaders had the skill to communicate the messages in a way that people could connect with them.





The solution was to get only the executive leadership team out talking to the employees. Due to the vast number of employees, this was done via a variety of ‘town hall’ meetings, where members of the executive team would fly into locations around the country delivering the messages of organisational change to a few hundred people at a time. This normally consisted of communicating the reason for the change, what was going to change, the process for change, how the change was going to be measured and how everyone would love their jobs more.

This again had good intention but had limited success. After the execs would fly in with their ‘Are you on the bus or not?’ type talk, they would fly out, and often nothing would change. The reason being that this one-off communication may motivate for a day or a week, but what happens after that? Employees need to be motivated and engaged day-in and day-out ...and this is not just the job of the senior executive team but of all leaders.

There are four big shifts that are occurring now that will significantly impact the future of organisational change.



# The four big shifts

## Great Expectations

By 2020, the Millennials or Generation Y (those born between 1980 and 1994) will make up the vast majority of the workforce. The PwC's NextGen: A global generational study released in 2013 states that by 2016 Millennials will make up next to 80% of their workforce.

Besides being the largest part of the workforce they will also be the most educated. McCrindle research, 'New Generations at Work: Attracting, Recruiting, Retraining and Training Generation Y', reports that Generation Y will be the most 'formally educated generation ever' and that 'hype and superficiality won't cut it with this educated generation'.

The way leaders will need to communicate to this generation will more than ever need to come from a place of authenticity and transparency, and void of the current corporate jargon that permeates business today.

Generation Y have increased expectations on the type of work they do, how they work and who they work for. While helping achieving profits is important to this generation, they also want to make a difference and believe in purpose for profit. They want to be inspired and contribute to their organisation and community.

## Generational Change

We are currently experiencing an ageing population and over the next decade the vast majority of Baby Boomers will exit the workforce. This will not only leave organisations with a depletion of experience and leadership but also the potential for a loss of corporate memory.

Organisations need to find a way to ensure this corporate memory does not exit the company with the employees.



## Harder to impact

With the 24/7 access to information and the rise of social media it is becoming increasingly harder to get cut through and have an impact on employees. We are dealing with not only information overload but Information Fatigue Syndrome (IFS) where we are exposed to so much information that our brains simply have trouble keeping up with everything.

We are not the first generation to experience information overload. In the very first century, Seneca's stated, 'distringit librorum multitudo', which means 'the abundance of books is distraction'. Yet, we are probably experiencing more information overload than our ancestors of the first century.

Eric Schmidt, the former CEO of Google, advised that 'between the dawn of civilisation through 2003 about 5 exabytes of information was created. Now, that much information is created every 2 days.'

There is an abundance of information available today and this actually makes it harder to get people's attention. Herbert A Simon (1916 - 2001), a famous economist stated, 'A wealth of information creates a poverty of attention'.

Some startling statistics in regards to the abundance of information include:

- ▶ The daily New York Times now contains more information that the 17th century man or woman would have encountered in a lifetime.
- ▶ The number of text messages sent and received everyday exceed the total population of the planet.
- ▶ The typical Internet user is exposed to 1,707 banner ads per month

Today when leaders lead organisational change they are competing with more information than has ever been available in the history of mankind. Getting cut-through and having an impact on employees has never been harder for today's business leaders.

## Acknowledging the three brains

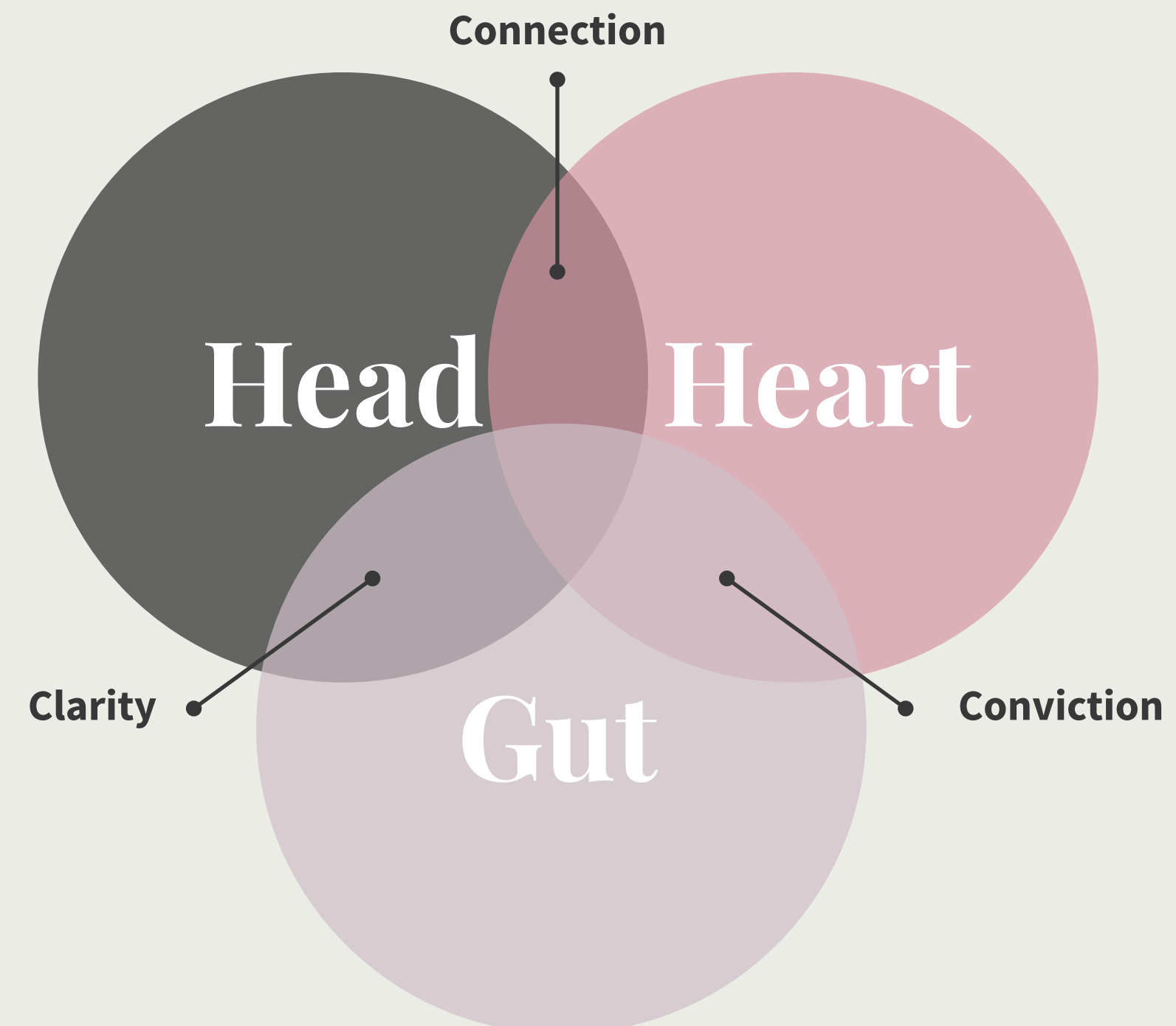
There is increasing awareness of the concept of the three brains we have. Research conducted by Dr Andrew Armour on neuro-cardiology, showed that the heart has a complex neural network which allows it to qualify as a brain. Further research by neurobiologist Dr Michael Gershon discovered the brain in the gut. In 1998 he published a book 'The Second Brain' stating that the brain in the gut utilises every class of neurotransmitter found in the head brain and that just like the brain in the heart and the head it can learn and remember and processes independently.

In their book 'mBraining', Grant Soosalu and Marvin Oka's explore how the three brains impact leadership behaviour. Their findings show that each of the three brains have three core primary functions.

- The **Head brain** is responsible for cognitive perception, thinking and making meaning
- The **Heart brain** is responsible for emoting, values and relational affect
- The **Gut brain** is responsible for core identity, self preservation and mobilisation

With each brain being fundamentally different, with differing concerns and ways of processing, it has a significant impact on the way organisations lead cultural change and communicate.

Only communicating to one or two of the brains will not be sufficient for the time and energy required to achieve organisational change. Without communicating and engaging all three brains, employees will be missing out on either clarity, connection or conviction ...and all three are required to go the distance for organisational change.





# The Future

The evolution of organisational change is not dissimilar to hardware and software. Each new version should bring a better way of operating by offering enhancements and fixing bugs of the past.

This need to change the way we undertake organisational change is brought about predominately by the generational and technological shifts occurring. With Generation Y becoming the most dominant generation, organisations need to address the challenges that accompany this generational change. Including, the greater expectations they have of their employees and the focus of loyalty shifting to purpose and lifestyle.

The exponential growth in technology has resulted in far easier access to information, making it significantly harder for leaders to have an impact.

Organisations need to dramatically alter the way they lead and communicate. They need to obsess about engaging the whole brain and to communicate in a collectic way, not the traditional cascade or collaborative approach. For organisations to be successful in their organisational change, they need to move from the 'rollout' mindset to the 'real thing' mindset and upgrade to the new version.

Version	1.0 - Rollouts	2.0 - Roadshows	3.0 - Real Thing
Platform	Coffee mugs & mouse pads	PowerPoint & Town Hall meetings	Stories & the Grapevine
Communication approach	Cascade - one way	Collaborative - two way	Collectic - multiple ways
Engage	Head	Head & Heart	Head, Heart & Gut
Dominant generation	Baby Boomers	Gen X	Gen Y
Loyalty focus	Company	Company & Lifestyle	Purpose & Lifestyle
Expectation of employees	Low	Medium	High
Access to information	Limited	Easy	Inundated
Ability to impact	Easy	Medium	Hard



# Strategic Storytelling

Once there is clarity on the strategic direction or cultural change, that is when storytelling can be strategically employed. There are four stages to the strategy which include:

- equipping your leaders and influencers with the skill;
- capturing stories;
- sharing stories; and
- generating stories.

At the heart of this entire strategy is authenticity.





# Authentic Storytelling

## Skill

- Formalise the business storytelling process and provide leaders the necessary training so they can skilfully apply it. The ‘How hard can it be’ approach is doomed with failure.
- Avoid just training leaders according to hierarchy. Identify key influencers in the organisation that could also be trained in storytelling to help achieve the change.
- Include support people in the training such as Internal Communications and Human Resources specialist so they can support and encourage the use of storytelling.
- Give leaders the opportunity to practice their stories and to obtain feedback.
- Ideally this should be the first step in the strategy.

## Capture

- Develop formal and informal strategies to capture stories.
- Stories captured should celebrate the past, acknowledge the present and paint the future. Therefore, it is critical to capture stories from a diverse group of people including, age, tenure, position, location, and race.
- Provide leaders with the tools, techniques and time to effectively listen to stories because to be a good storyteller you need to be a great story listener.

## Share

- Find multiple channels to relay stories to other leaders, employees and customers.
- Influence the grapevine but don’t try to control it.
- Create a culture that supports the use of organisational stories, via role modelling and application in all formal and informal communications.

## Generate

- Understand the concept of ‘push’ stories and how actions and decisions of your leaders and employees generate stories.
- Empower all employees to deliver on the promise of the new strategy or culture which will generate stories.
- Use stories to generate further stories.
- Be aware of the ripple effect of stories and know how to maximise that impact.

The stage of capture, share and generate are not linear and should be conducted in conjunction with one another.

# Top Ten Mistakes

1

**Clarity** – not having clarity on the type of desired culture.

2

**Lack of training** – expecting leaders to use storytelling in business skilfully and effectively but not investing in them to learn the skill.

3

**Ignoring key influencers** – only training leaders based on position and ignoring other key influencers.

4

**Lacking individualism** – developing stories by committee.

5

**Incorrect use of stories** – calling something a story without it being a story at all.

6

**Only using one story** – attempting to come up with the one story to communicate everything to everyone.

7

**Not capturing stories correctly** – capturing stories by going out to employees and asking them to ‘Share your story here?’

8

**Forced structure** – over engineering and not trusting the process.

9

**Being inauthentic** – not being authentic and transparent with stories and communications.

10

**Ignoring negatives** – not acknowledging the current reality and trying to sugar coat negatives.



# A case study - Australia Post

## The Challenge

Australia Post is a self-funded government business with approximately 36 000 employees nationwide. Their core business still involves the service of letters and parcels, but the organisation now also offers retail merchandise in a network of over 4000 post offices, along with financial services such as bill payment and banking.

With more customers shopping online, Australia Post needed to respond to the evolving expectations of their customers.

Australia Post has always had a strong sense of servicing its customers. In 2015 they wanted to refocus their existing emphasis on customers and get their employees fully engaged in the new company values and strategy.

## The Approach

To create a program (called The Grapevine) that brings influential people from across the company together to explore their company culture, their new values and capture powerful stories about their people.

The Grapevine needed to not only positively impact the people attending, but also for them to go back to their teams and positively impact the people around them. Allowing the natural process of what happens in a grapevine to occur.

The Grapevine program was delivered at a two-day event with 50 to 100 people from a broad cross-section of Australia Post at each session.

The whole concept of the Grapevine hinged on the impact these employees would have in their teams as they communicated their experiences.

Personal stories about the company values were to be developed and shared at the event. Time was provided to create an action plan around potential questions team members would be asked post event, how they would respond and the corresponding stories they could share to create a positive ripple effect throughout the organisation.

These personal stories were not only shared on the day but were also either video recorded or audio recorded and shared on internal communication platforms throughout Australia Post.



## The outcome

The Grapevine program was piloted with 100 employees from across the enterprise in August 2015, with resounding success. An additional 10 sessions were run across four states within Australia delivering the program to over 1000 employees.

Participants were surveyed at the start of the two-day session and then at the end. The following table shows the four statements the participants were asked to agree or disagree with, and the results before and after the session.

Statement	Pre Grapevine	Post Grapevine
I can confidently explain our Australia Post Group shared values.	50% agreed	97% agreed
I feel confident to have a conversation about Australia Post Group's new brand and culture.	50% agreed	88% agreed
I understand what it means for the Australia Post Group to become a leading eCommerce company.	76% agreed	94% agreed
I would recommend Australia Post as a place to work to friends and colleagues.	78% agreed	85% agreed

In addition, the enterprise-wide employee engagement survey compared how Australia Post employees who had and had not attended the Grapevine session felt about the organisation and its values. These were some of the results highlighted:

1. Overall, employee engagement was 13% higher for those who had attended a Grapevine session.
2. Being proud of the organisation's purpose was 19% higher for Grapevine participants.
3. Connection to the organisation's values was 13% higher for Grapevine participants.
4. Overall engagement was higher in teams where at least one person had attended a Grapevine session. This showed that people were going back to their place of work and sharing what they'd learnt.

## Conclusion

This case study shows how finding and sharing stories about company values can help embed the values. Ensuring they are not just words on a wall but drive actions and behaviours and promote pride in the company.

# Next Steps

If this sounds like something you want to explore, contact us to discuss tailored in-house workshops and how we can work with you to implement storytelling strategically across your organisation.

Contact us by calling +61 3 8383 2128 or send an email to [enquiry@gabrielledolan.com](mailto:enquiry@gabrielledolan.com).

To download a checklist on how to introduce storytelling into your organisation and access other free resources go to [www.gabrielledolan.com](http://www.gabrielledolan.com)



**G a b r i e l l e D o l a n**

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# About the Author

Gabrielle Dolan can tell you a story or two.

In fact, it was while working in a senior leadership role at National Australia Bank that she realised the power of storytelling in effective business communication. Since that epiphany, Gabrielle has found her calling as a global expert on strategic storytelling and real communication.

A highly sought-after keynote speaker, educator and author, Gabrielle's extensive client list includes Telstra, EY, Accenture, VISA, Australia Post, National Australia Bank, Amazon, Vodafone and the Obama Foundation.

Gabrielle holds a master's degree in management and leadership, an associate diploma in education and training and is a graduate of the Harvard Kennedy School of Executive Education.

In 2024 she launched the successful podcast *Keeping it Real with Jac and Ral* that

consistently ranks well in the best business podcast charts. Episodes explore different topics such as personal brand, public speaking, energy management, negotiation and other great ways to keep you real.

Gabrielle is also the bestselling author of seven books. Her latest title, *Magnetic Stories: Connect with customers and engage employees with brand storytelling* was published by Wiley in March 2021 and debuted at number two on Australia's best-selling business books.

Bringing humanity to the way business people communicate isn't just a career, it's a calling. Her dedication to the industry was recognised when Gabrielle was awarded the 2020 Communicator of the Year by the International Association of Business Communicators Asia Pacific region. The ultimate expression of her passion for the cause is her Jargon Free Fridays global movement ([jargonfreefridays.com](http://jargonfreefridays.com)).





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