Chapter 8

Blending Storytelling with Technology in the Professional Development of Police Officers

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Policing is a storytelling profession. Storytelling is a linguistic medium for the sharing of experiences, values, and culture. Organizations have a need to promote the sharing of experiences from senior to junior members. Organizations desire to ensure that proper values and culture are reinforced during this sharing process. Technology affords a tool for the sharing, and for the mediation of what is shared. This study focuses on a case where technology was used for the direct sharing of experiences. This sharing was done through the use of storytelling in the form of video presentations delivered in an e-learning course. Participants viewing these videos reported feeling a sense of engagement and immersion in the experiences of the teller. Participants reported that stories aid their retention and recall of the content of them. Other storytelling professions will benefit from using similar approaches.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

The organization involved in this study is a mid-sized Police Service in the Province of Ontario, Canada. It is responsible for policing a large geographical area consisting of a mix of urban and rural populations. The services provided by the organization include crime prevention, law enforcement, assistance to victims of crime, public order maintenance, and emergency response. Approximately nine hundred sworn officers are employed by the Police Service, working in ten different physical locations within its jurisdictional boundaries. The annual budget for 2012 is approximately $150 million, wholly supplied through local and provincial taxation streams.

The provision of police services in the Province of Ontario is governed by the Police Services Act, an act of the province's legislature. This act and its regulations provide requirements for minimum standards in the area of service provision, including the ongoing training and development of police officers. *In particular, Ontario Regulation 3/99, in section 33 specifies the following in regards to skills development and learning:*

3. *Every police force must have a skills development and learning plan that addresses,*
   a. *the plan's objectives;*
   b. *the implementation of a program to coach or mentor new officers;*
   c. *the development and maintenance of the knowledge, skills and abilities of members of the police force, including,*
      - *the police force's criminal investigators,*
      - *members of the police force who provide investigative support functions, if any,*
      - *members of a public order unit, if any, and*
      - *members of the police force who provide any emergency response service referred to in sections 21 and 22. (O. Reg. 3/99, s. 33).*

In order to meet its requirements under this legislation, the organization employs a number of different formal training delivery systems. Officers receive classroom instruction, physical training, and courses delivered through computer technologies. Training using computer technologies is a relatively new delivery method for the organization. Training within this method is primarily didactic in nature with content delivered through text pages sometimes accompanied by audio voice-over. Developing enhancements to training delivered through computer technologies is a focus of this study.

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