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Creative Due Diligence

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Introduction

The Creative Intelligence Lab (CI Lab) at SFU Surrey is the hub of our innovation and entrepreneurial practice. The CI Lab coordinates case competitions, business plan competitions, and entrepreneurial/creativity training. It also serves as a consulting group to outside industry offering a variety of business services such as business plans, marketing plans, interactive arts and technology services and corporate branding.

Background

The origins of the CI Lab are in the Small Business Consulting Group. Historically, the Small Business Group offered general consulting whereby students were hired as consultants to deliver a variety of services to Small and Medium Size Enterprises (SME's). In May 2007, the group was reorganized and a more cohesive mandate established that complemented the core offerings in the Faculty of Business and Interactive Arts and Technology. The reorganization considered the growing field of design – both from an artistic and technological perspective. Students were recruited based on their overall academic performance as well as their ability to think both critically and creatively.

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[1] Grant, G. (2009). Creative Due Diligence. In T. V. Menzies (Ed.), *University-Based Entrepreneurship Centres in Canada: Strategies and Best Practices* (pp. 147-155). St. Catharines: Brock University.

The Centre Today

In order to accommodate the growing need for both intra- and entrepreneurship in any business venture, a focus on narrative was employed to allow the voice of the business entrepreneur to be strategically utilized by exploring the story behind the enterprise. As branding in practice, stories are everywhere. Some are based on an individual's real-life experience; small groups or large communities share others. In many cases, such stories are presented from one storyteller to her entire audience. In other cases, stories that are more inclusive and malleable over time invite the active participation of many co-creators. In any event, contemporary tools are used to record, share and distribute such stories. Storytelling is a powerful medium that communicates the unique story of an organization - the legs underneath any brand concept that drive ideas into action.

Today, the existence of new technologies allow a new connectedness between corporations and clients, storytellers and brand audiences. The resulting "digital stories" incorporate the new science of visual analytics and current strategic and market research. The digital story becomes a strategic marketing tool – both for internal and external use. Visual analytics provides the scientific underpinning for the art of entrepreneurship – allowing for the development and growth of a more creative approach to business. The story is captured in the following framework (Figure 1).
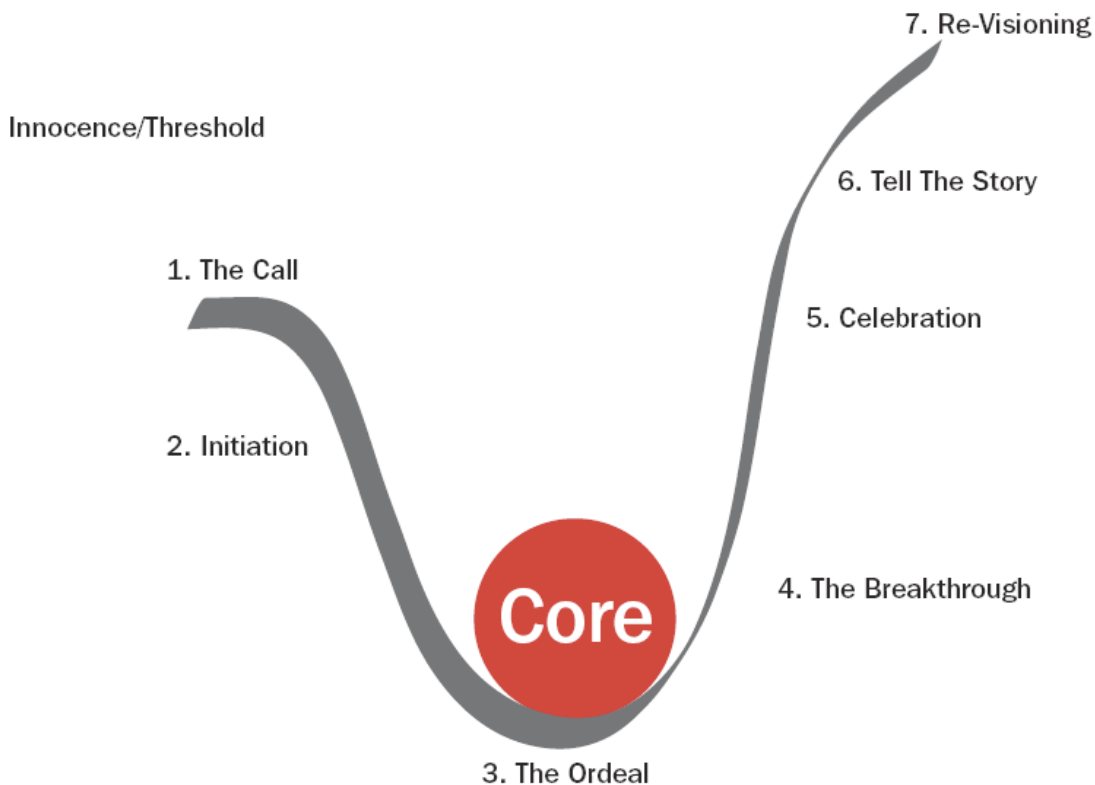

Figure 1 The Digital Story

The methodology used to capture the story comes from the Stanford Graduate School of Business "Creativity in Business" program and has a 30-year track history of high performance. The Hero's Journey Map was drawn from the work of Joseph Campbell – and is a popular frame for both students and business owners. Emphasis is placed on the discovery and articulation of the core belief system that drives the individual and the organization that results in a corporate culture that drives performance.

Traditionally, an analysis of "corporate culture" is not part of a financial and legal due diligence process, but it is arguably fundamental to the success of an organization. The value of including cultural assessment in that process is both to ensure compatibility with future partners and to make corporate leaders aware of the operational values within the organization. Values are not always well developed much less well articulated; nonetheless, they do drive behavior. This type of cultural analysis will have as much impact on an organization's future viability as do financial or structural considerations. We call this specialized cultural analysis 'cultural due diligence' as it follows the same principles of due diligence set forth by the network of stock exchanges worldwide.

After some years of success, many companies find themselves in the midst of many types of dynamic change (technological, economic, workforce demographics, global and local politics) that prompt the need for change that goes beyond simple adaptation to an actual re-creation. In an uncertain economic climate, Cultural Due Diligence provides to SME's an examination of corporate and regional/national culture. Such investigation provides the valuable strategic insight necessary not only to survive, but in fact to prosper. More than just competitive intelligence, this form of analysis covers corporate and regional culture. This type of research is conducted by the students and utilized in consulting services to the community at large.

Our mode of production has shifted to organizational knowledge creation. In this new economic environment, a traditional mode of production thinking is potentially counter-productive. A new paradigm is needed; one that recognizes that the future belongs to people who use their hearts as well as heads. Awareness of this shift is paramount to understanding cultural intelligence – and the foundation on which Cultural Due Diligence rests.

For organizations that recognize that this paradigm shift has already happened, investing in intellectual capital will become a priority. In other words, the importance of locating and recognizing hidden talent or potential in a responsive organization will be of concern to top management. Locally, our organizations need to strive to create workplaces that are more amenable to creative or innovative work. As Richard Florida states, "access to talented and creative people is to modern business what access to coal and iron was to steelmaking."[2]

To encourage creativity in any organization is not just of value to the knowledge workers within, it is a business strategy that becomes an attractor to knowledge workers without.

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[2] Florida, Richard. The Rise of the Creative Class, 2002. page xi.

Acts of creativity that lead to innovation in an organization need to be celebrated. If change were an easy process, our organizations would have shifted to this new paradigm years ago. It is also important to realize that if any organization wants engagement from its employees, the organization needs to celebrate those who serve the organization, and do so in a public forum. Such celebrations become instant marketing campaigns that demonstrate that the organization walks its talk – and thus a beacon for additional intellectual capital. Assets now have feet.

We have also incorporated an exploration of the science of Visual Analytics (VA), which is the science of extracting intelligence from high volumes and disparate kinds of information. It does so by using interactive visual interfaces to collect massive datasets and produce meaningful patterns to inform decision-making across a broad range of activities. VA is inherently disciplinary, combining cognitive science, computer science, mathematics and graphical interaction design. It also has a wide-ranging set of applications in both scientific research and the 'real world.'

VA reveals trends through a visual assessment of a data set, allowing organizations to make better, more informed decisions. By producing meaningful interpretations of data, VA assists in critical decision-making such as assessing the brand culture and operating standards of an organization, identifying flourishing markets worthy of expansion or identifying unprofitable sectors that need to be cut back.

VA is image-based not language-based and literal. Storytelling is a highly effective approach to metaphorical communication. Combining the two permits a living space inclusive of science and art and makes the comprehension of complex information more accessible through the integration of left-brain analytics and right-brain qualities of imagination and innovation. The use of story conveys tacit knowledge, which increases knowledge transfer. These are the philosophies that guide the CI Lab both in theoretical and practical research applications.

Current and Future Developments
Business Plan Competitions – the "Art of the Start"
New ventures have been added to the work of the CI Lab. Business plan training – we call it the "Art of the Start" commenced in Fall 2008 culminating in an internal Business Plan Competition. Teams are formed and the students prepare a business plan as a living document – constantly being honed and improved. Presentation skills are an important asset to any budding entrepreneur so additional training is provided in that regard. Although these training sessions are not part of a credit course load, consultation is made with the faculty in both business and in interactive arts, and provides a bridge between the academic and practical skills required to drive a business forward. The winner of the Business Plan competition is awarded incubator space with support from the university. Hopefully, this will increase the number of spin-off companies from the university.

Case Competitions
Case competitions are also part of the training schedule and teams are formed and developed that compete on local, national and international levels. Case competition

training is held weekly and teams are formed and reformed depending on the nature of the competition itself. These weekly training sessions were started in Fall 2008, so the return on the investment is yet unknown but will become evident over time.

Mentorship Program

A mentorship program is being developed that will allow for the interaction of student entrepreneurs with the entrepreneurial community at large. Guest speakers and lecturers are routinely brought into the training sessions as well as invited into the classrooms.

Story Lab

A Story Lab is currently being developed. Today, the existence of mobile, personal technologies and supporting infrastructures allow a new connectedness between storytellers and audiences. The resulting "mobile stories" proposed are short films that tell these stories, created by everyday storytellers, using their own photos, words, voices and even languages. The Story Lab will be co-created with the students who will be trained to deliver workshops and seminars to SME's.

Amended from the Center for Digital Storytelling, the elements of a good story will be based on 1) a community's point of view, 2) a dramatic question, 3) emotional content, 4) the gift of a storyteller's voice, 5) the power of the soundtrack, 6) economy (the balance of audio and video in the narrative), 7) pacing (the rhythm of a story). Communities are mostly communities of practice or interest, and are rarely experts of storytelling. The Story Lab will introduce them to these skills and train them to tell their stories well.

During the workshop, each participant and community shares a story and receives initial feedback, applies previously collected images with the help of student facilitators, puts the story together through storyboarding, creative scripting, editing sound, video, images, voice etc. and presents it to the other participants.

Stories are treated as work-in-progress, and the continued development of the storyline within and between communities and their members and audiences is encouraged. Accordingly, emphasis will be placed on teaching the social, interactive and communicative components made available through mobile technologies to link all participants.

Credit Courses offered in Project Management as well as Creativity in Business provides the initial academic and practical skills for the students to come to the Story Lab itself.

Benefits of a Story Lab
Storytelling
- Provides a creative outlet, supports shared experiences across communities, supports communication and identity formation in BC.

- Fosters continuous communication and cooperation within and between communities as stories are re-told and re-shaped to fit the changing context of those affected.

Mobile technology & technology in general
- Increases (mobile) technology awareness and proficiency among the user community, in a resourceful, creative manner, beyond simply making calls.
- On the developer-side, increases the invention and innovation of mobile applications and technologies in response to needs that emerge during storytelling workshops and storytelling activities.

Training and employment for mobile storytelling and beyond
- Develops technology skills, storytelling skills, training and project management skills among workshop facilitators.
- Provides training of project coordinators, production process experts, etc.
- Improves BC's skills in event and film production, online community building, training and curriculum development, educational technology, etc.

The Design Frame

The design frame that we use is as follows (Figure 2). Clarity and consistency in Core communication drives strategy and tactics, and also enables an integrated approach to internal and external processes. Again the use of analytics allows collection of data both from the student population and SME's. Through these various offerings, we hope to develop and grow our internal entrepreneurs.
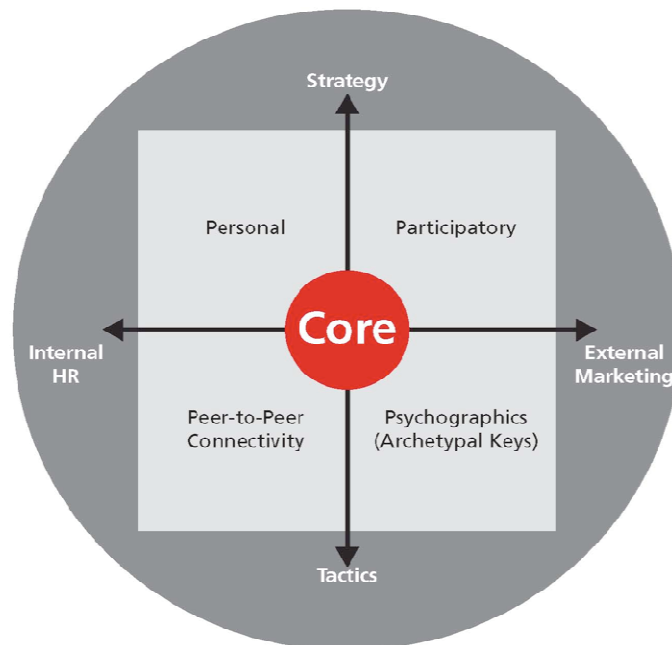

Figure 2 The Design Frame

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Best Practices for Centres of Entrepreneurship

The best advice I could offer is listening to both the voices of the students and the outside community in current contexts. Capturing the core that drives the entrepreneurial spirit and aligning that core belief system with the best we can provide in academe enables growth and development in our business communities, regardless of the size of the venture.

Conclusion

The CI Lab focuses first on the individual student and his or her potential as illustrated below in three specific areas – relationships, recognition and meaning (Figure 3).
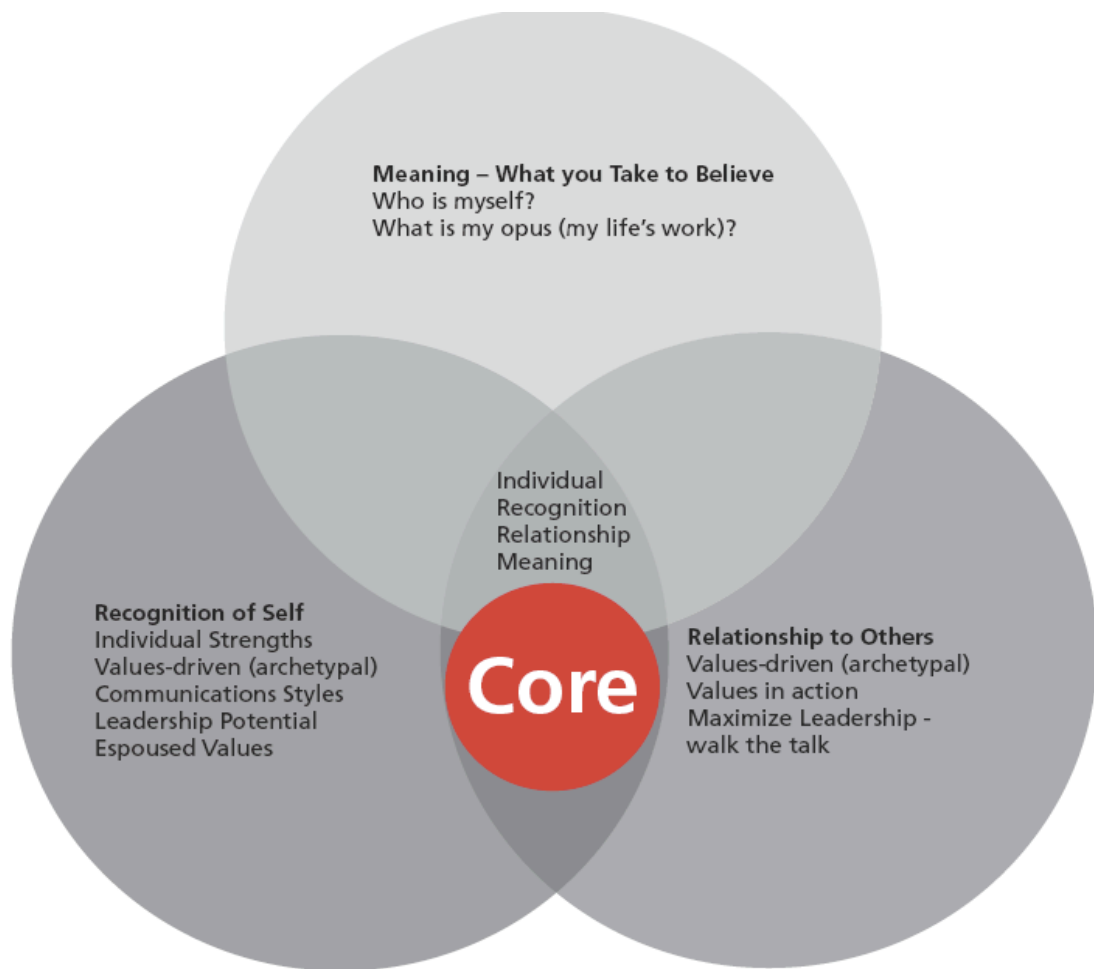

Meaning – What you Take to Believe
Who is myself?
What is my opus (my life's work)?

Individual
Recognition
Relationship
Meaning

Recognition of Self
Individual Strengths
Values-driven (archetypal)
Communications Styles
Leadership Potential
Espoused Values

Core

Relationship to Others
Values-driven (archetypal)
Values in action
Maximize Leadership -
walk the talk

Figure 3 Focus on the Individual

Following on from the individual, the next step is to provide a community of practice that allows the students to form fluid relationships with other students of diverse skill sets.

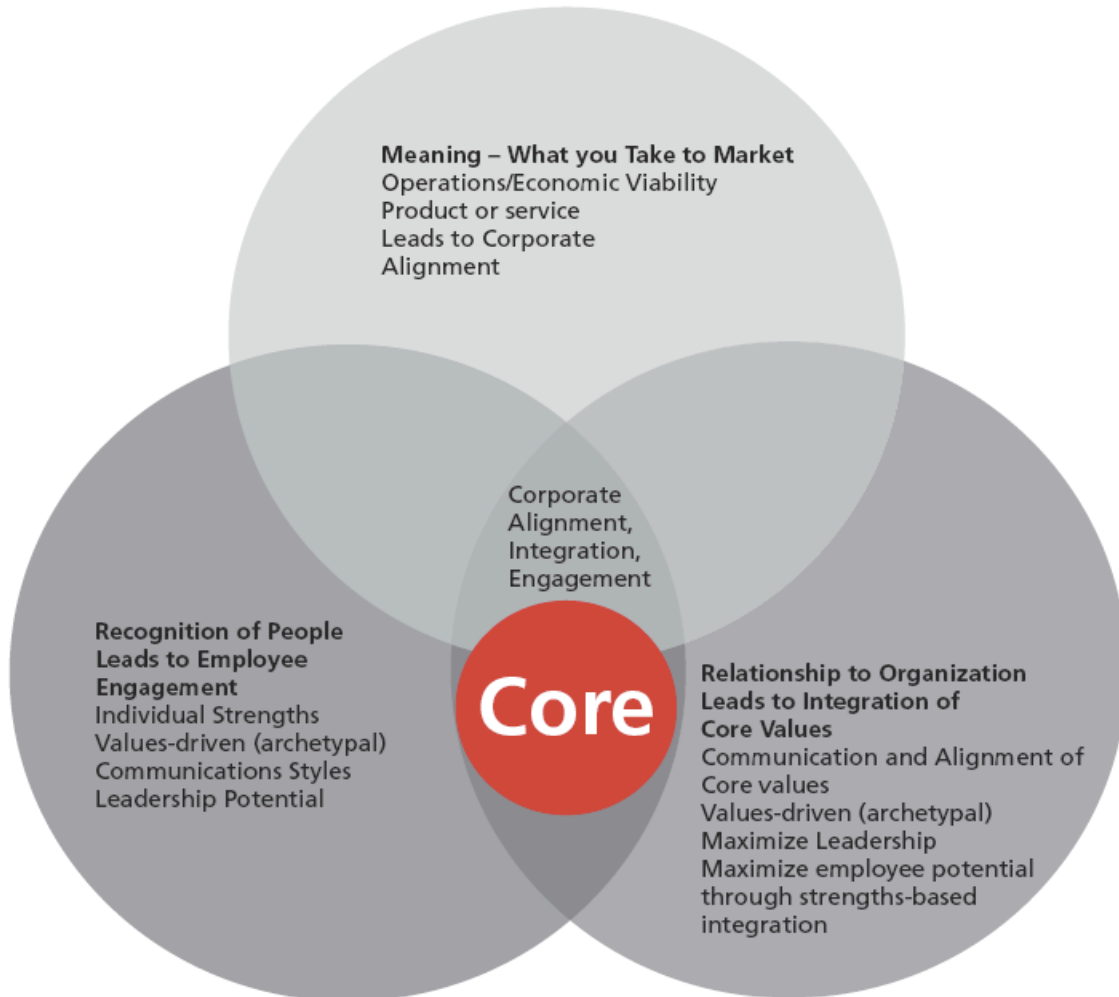That community of practice is the CI Lab, which then reaches out to the external SME community (Figure 4).

Meaning – What you Take to Market
Operations/Economic Viability
Product or service
Leads to Corporate
Alignment

Corporate
Alignment,
Integration,
Engagement

Core

Recognition of People
Leads to Employee
Engagement
Individual Strengths
Values-driven (archetypal)
Communications Styles
Leadership Potential

Relationship to Organization
Leads to Integration of
Core Values
Communication and Alignment of
Core values
Values-driven (archetypal)
Maximize Leadership
Maximize employee potential
through strengths-based
integration

Figure 4 Focus on the Community

With individual focus on relationships, recognition and meaning merged to a collective stance that leads to corporate alignment, integration and engagement, the Core Ideology of an enterprise can be mapped and then sustainably developed as a living entity.

It is hard work with many pitfalls as we move towards a world dominated by human capital. But, we believe that the challenges of a changing workforce, demographic shifts, economic globalization and issues of sustainability all can be met with an increased emphasis on entrepreneurship and innovation. That is both intention and our passion in the Creative Intelligence Lab.

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About the Author

Dr. Ginger Grant is the Director of the Creative Intelligence Lab in the Faculty of Business Administration at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada and an Adjunct Professor with both the Faculty of Business and Interactive Arts and Technology. Previously, her 20-year career spanned the corporate sector in mergers and acquisitions as a specialist in due diligence. She holds a MA and PhD in archetypal psychology/mythology from Pacifica Graduate Institute and a BA (Psychology) from the University of Waterloo. She is the only Canadian in the teacher-trainer group from the Stanford GSB's Creativity in Business Program.

Author of *ReVisioning the Way We Work*, her latest book, *Finding Your Creative Core,* was published October 2008. Her research interests include entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation.

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