

# Storytelling as a Critical Success Factor in KM Processes & Outcomes

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“The story is one of the basic tools invented by the mind of man for the purpose of gaining understanding. There have been great societies that did not use the wheel, but **there have been no societies that did not tell stories**”

- Collison, 1999:38

# Background

## Question:

1. Is storytelling a critical success factor in Design & Communications Consulting Relationships?
2. What are storytelling applications?

## Methodology:

1. **Literature Review** on storytelling & consulting
2. **Survey** of 584 design & communications professionals with **16.7% response rate** (96 respondents)
3. **Interviews** with survey respondents

## Survey Questionnaire:

1. What are critical consulting relationship success factors?
2. What story forms are used & witnessed
3. In what situations are stories critical success factors?
4. What benefits derive from story use?

# What is a Story?

- an oral or written performance involving 2 or more people interpreting past or anticipated experience. – Boje, 1995
- a sequence of dramatic events that evokes an emotional experience. – Voelpe, 1999
- “the preferred sensemaking currency of human relationships ... in organizations. – Boje, 1991 in Boyce, 1996:13
- linear 3 part sequence of events involving situation, complication & resolution – Vincent, 2002

# Story Types & Forms

- Hero
- Survivor
- Steam Valve
- Aren't We Great
- We Know the Ropes
- Kick in the Pants
- Learn from Mistakes
- Trust
- Positive Competitor
- Rites
  - passage,
  - exchange,
  - communion,
  - affliction, etc.
- Physical Objects
- People
- Games

# Literature Review

# Story Applications

- Sense-making
- Strategy Articulation & Visualization
- Cultural Development & Reconciliation
- Knowledge Transfer & Learning
- Leadership Demonstration
- Change Management
- Client Service

# Sense-Making

- “We collapse our experience into narrative structures” to make sense of our worlds”.  
- Cowley (1995)
- “Good design (communications) is really just good storytelling” in that both make a connection with others and translates meaning and purpose. - Philmlee (2003)

# Strategy Articulation/Visualization

- Strategy is “the most costly story organizations tell”. - Barry (1997: 430)
- Influences action, understanding, commitment.
- Shapes historic and futuristic perspectives and organizational discourses.

# Cultural Development

- Culture component vital to its development, maintenance and *reconciliation*.
- Part of the “battle to interpret and influence what goes on consciously and unconsciously in the decision process” (Greco, 1996:49)
- Organizations are storytelling systems containing simultaneous and *competing discourses*. - Boje (1991)

# Knowledge Transfer

- Knowledge transfer and learning medium
- Enhance memory, believability & vicarious experience
- Sets expectations and gains attention
- Lend context to facts distinguishing knowledge from information

# Leadership

- “Leaders’ impact depends on the story they relate and *embody* and the reception of that story by their audiences” - Kaye, 1999:2
- Means of conveying world view and vision
- *Story compatibility* is critical between leader and follower to support trust, confidence and loyalty

# Change Management

- Expresses the need for change, the change process and its outcome.
- Enables and facilitates:
  - alignment with the present
  - structures historic context
  - forecasts the future
  - grieves and honors the past

# Client Service

- A means of uncovering expectations
- A source of delight and instruction
- Training and developing vehicle
- **Story listening** is a means of gaining insight and sharpening responsiveness.

# AHA!!!: Story Listening

- A window into cultures, histories, world views, value systems, and preferences
- A systematic way of tracking preferences, desires & requirements and improving current services, as well as creating new ones - Maister (1993)
- How to get beyond the “empty gesture”?

# Survey Results

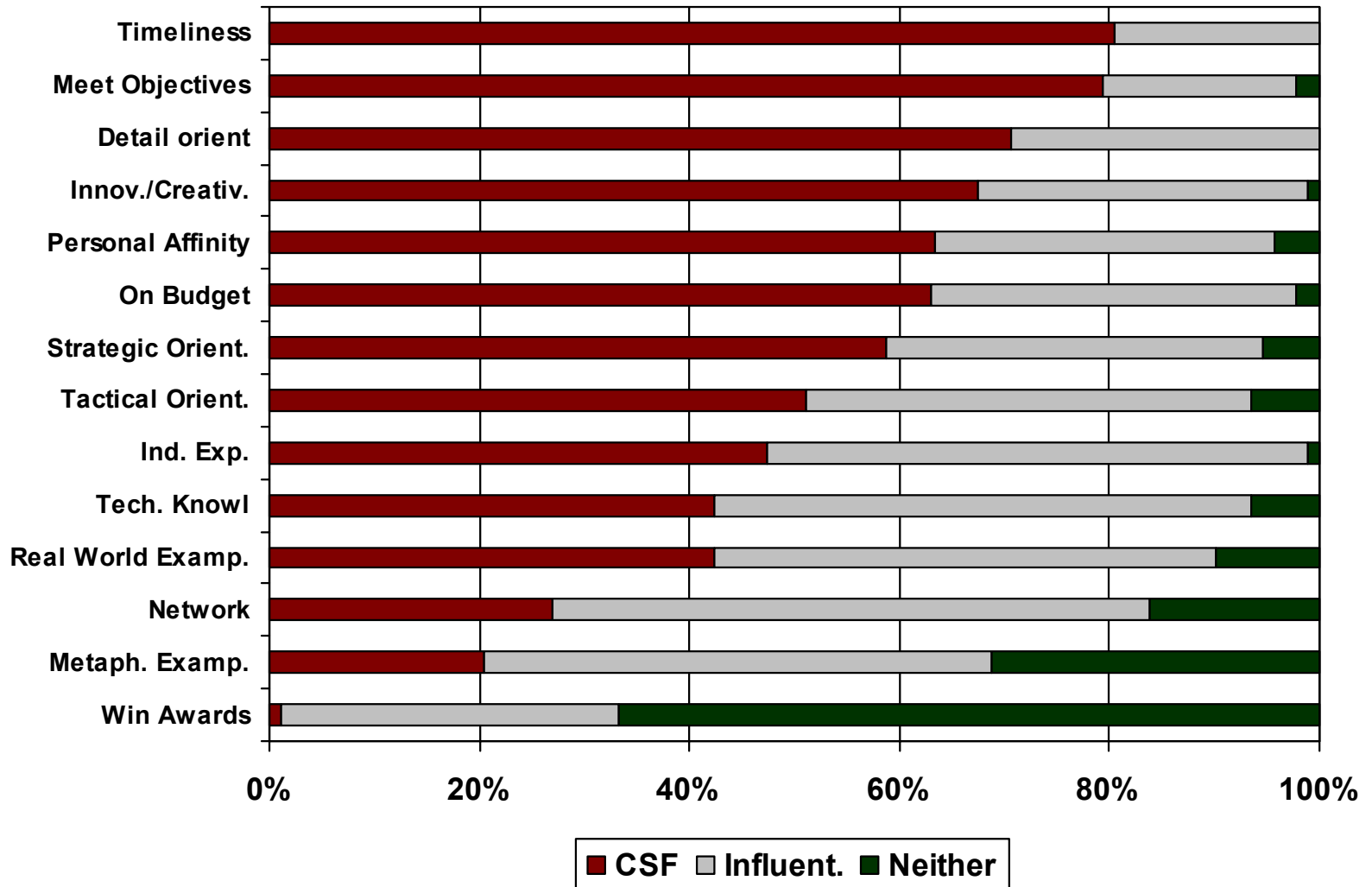
# Survey Questions

1. What are critical consulting relationship success factors?
2. What story forms are used & witnessed?
3. In what situations are stories critical success factors?
4. What benefits derive from story use?

# What are critical consulting relationship success factors?

- Timeliness
- Meeting objectives
- Detail orientation
- Innovation and creativity
- Personal affinity
- Perform on budget

# On Time & On Goal Makes the Grade



Q3: What factors contributed to success?

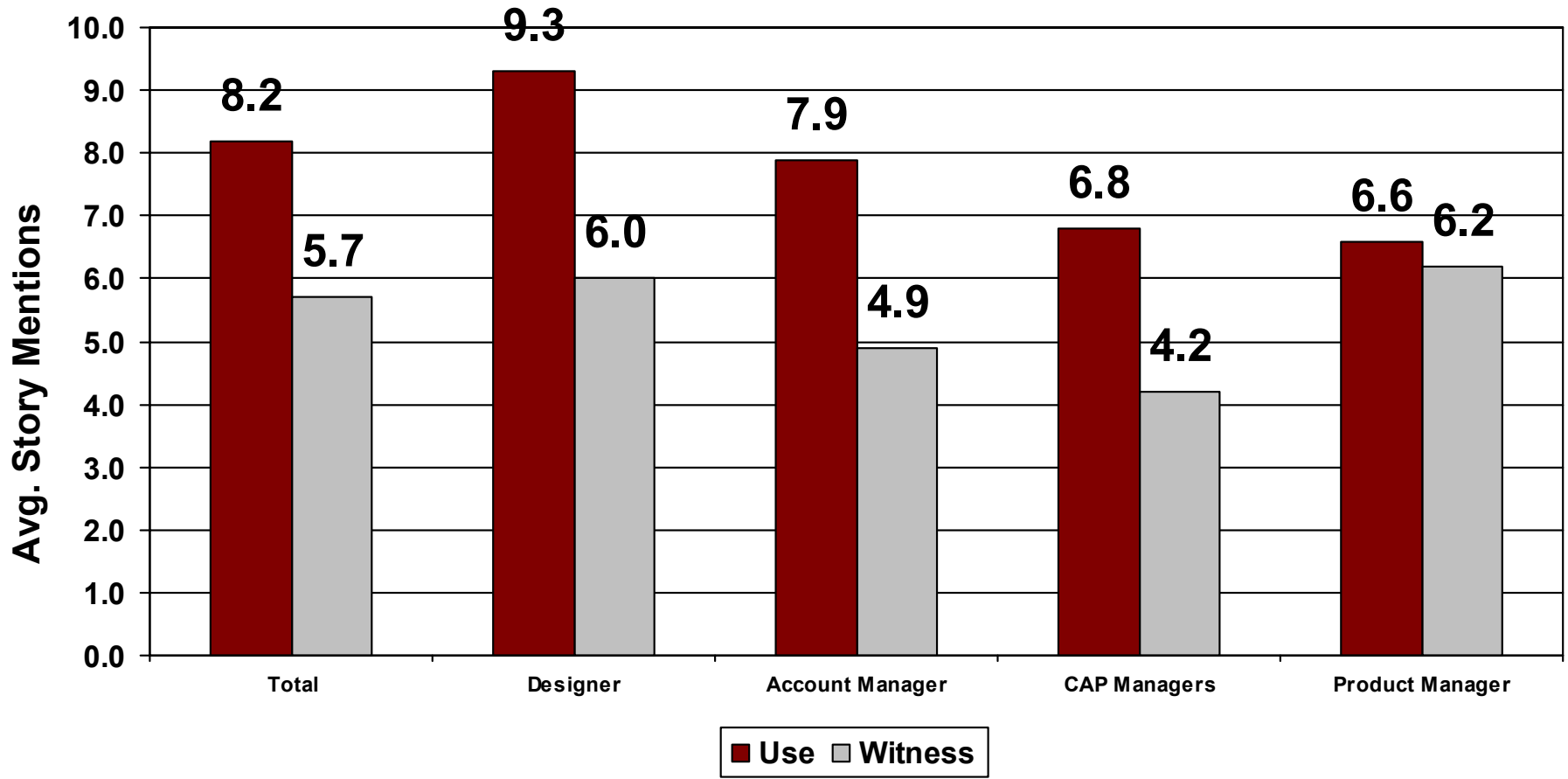
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# What story forms are used & witnessed?

- Story use is prevalent in consulting relationships
- Consultants tell and clients witness.
- *Active Story Listening is an opportunity!*

<b>Top 5 Story Types Used &amp; Witnessed</b>	
<b>Top Used</b>	<b>Top Witnessed</b>
Trust	How Smart We Are
Learn from Mistakes	How Great We Are
Events	Hero
Competitors	Trust
Survival	Learn from Mistakes

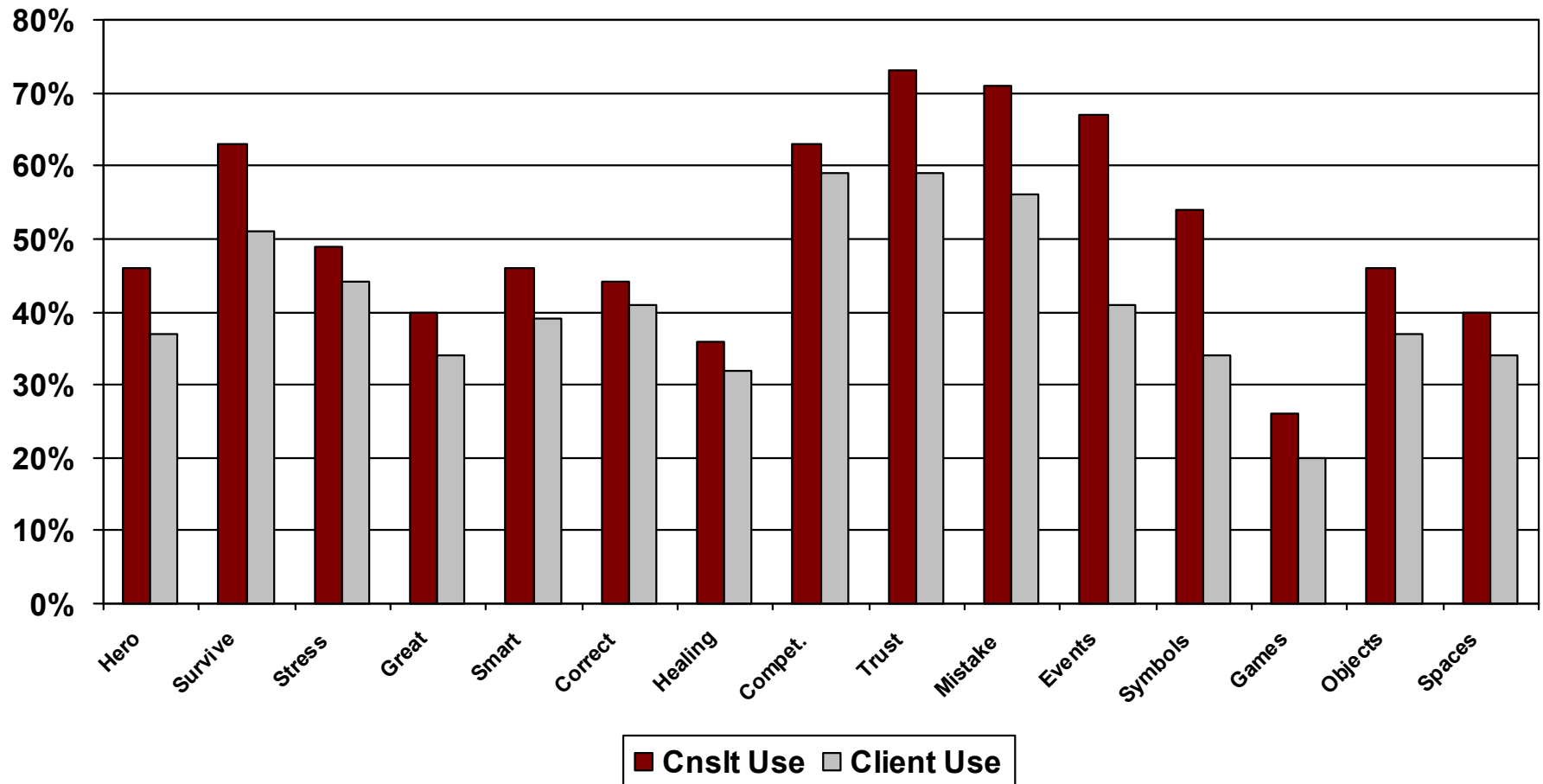
# Segment Story Use/Witness



Q5 & 7: Which story forms have you used or witnessed?

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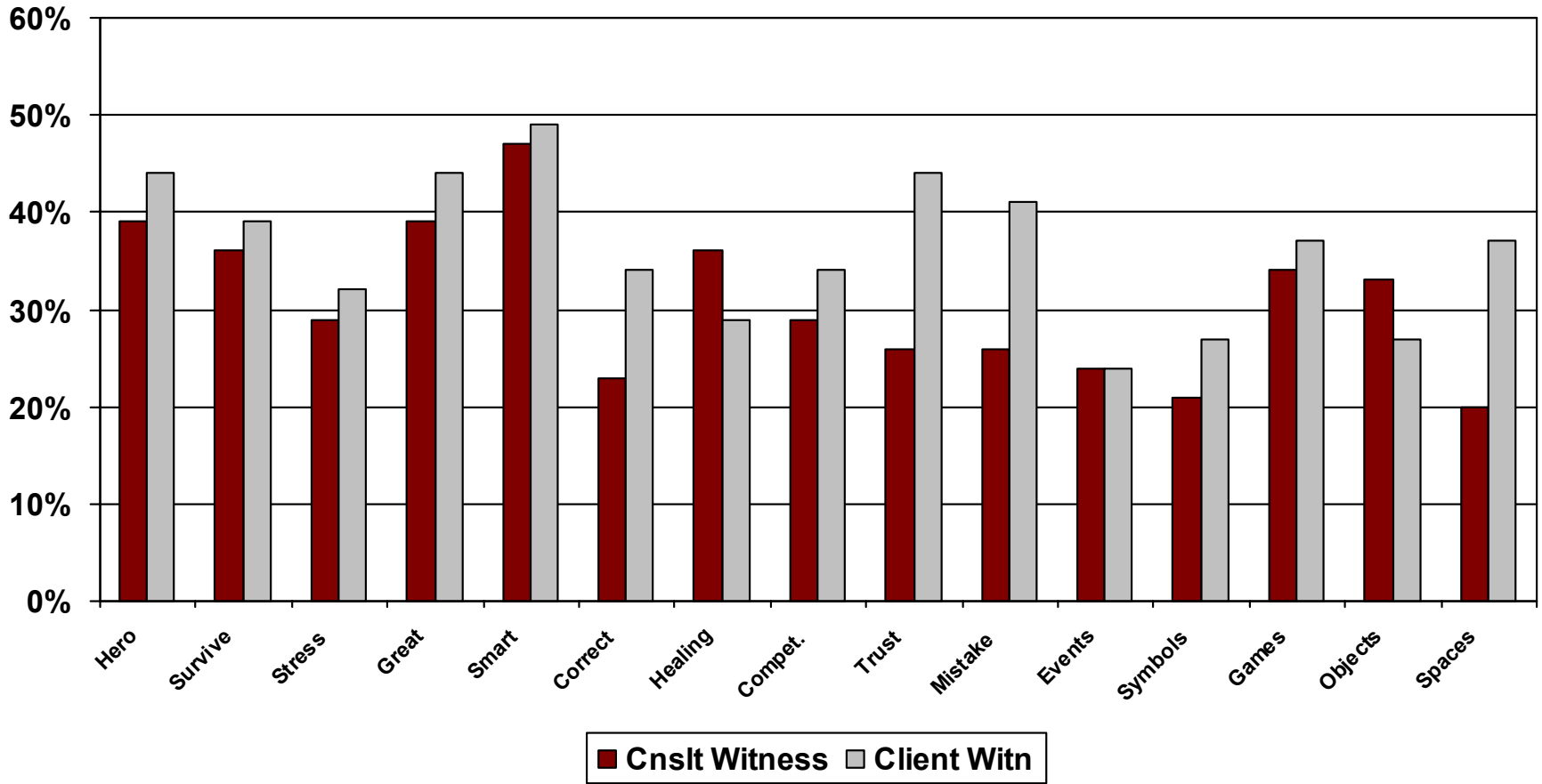
# Relationship Build & Learning: Most Prevalent Uses



Q5 & 7: Which story forms have you used or witnessed?

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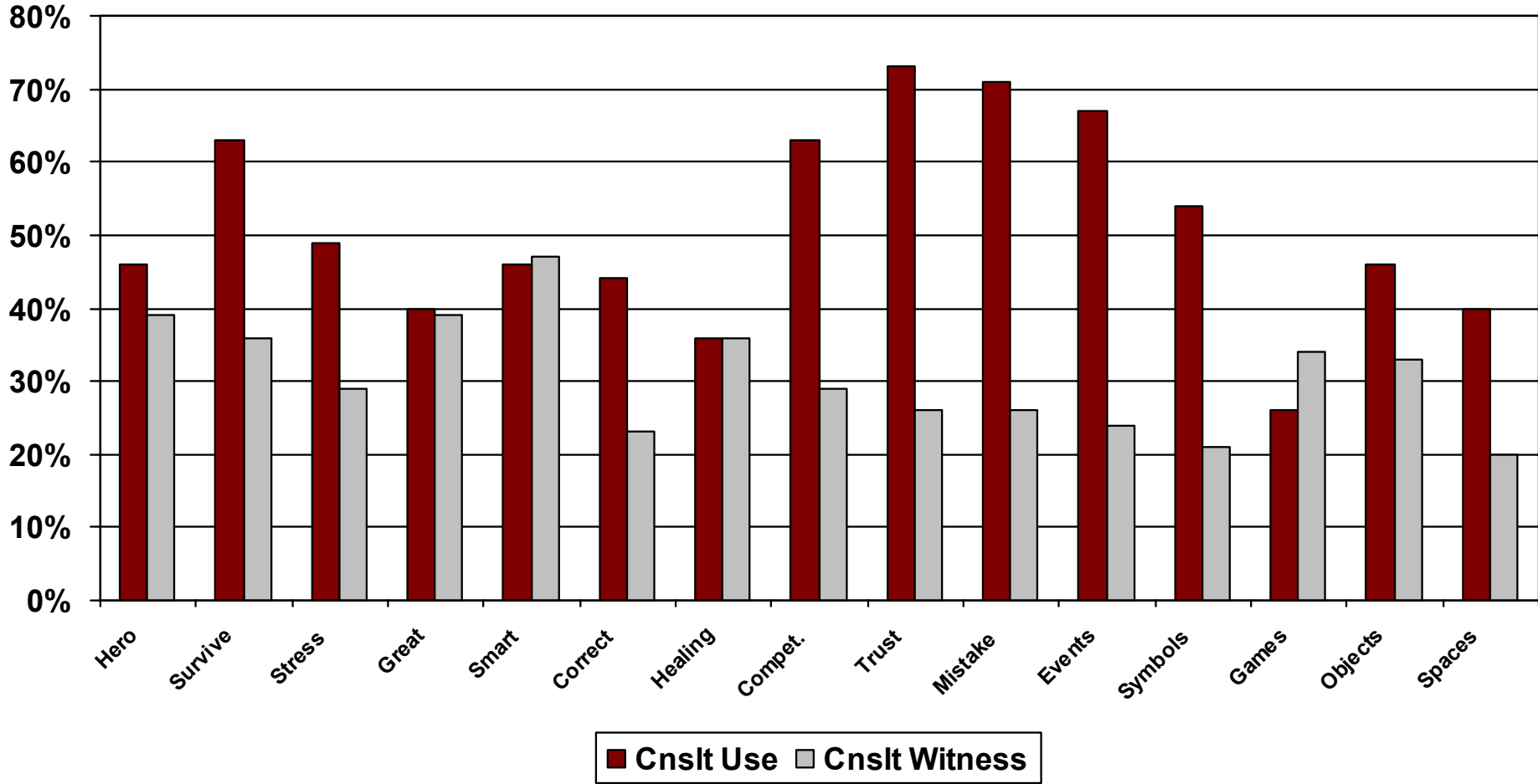
# Success Stories: Most Witnessed



Q5 & 7: Which story forms have you used or witnessed?

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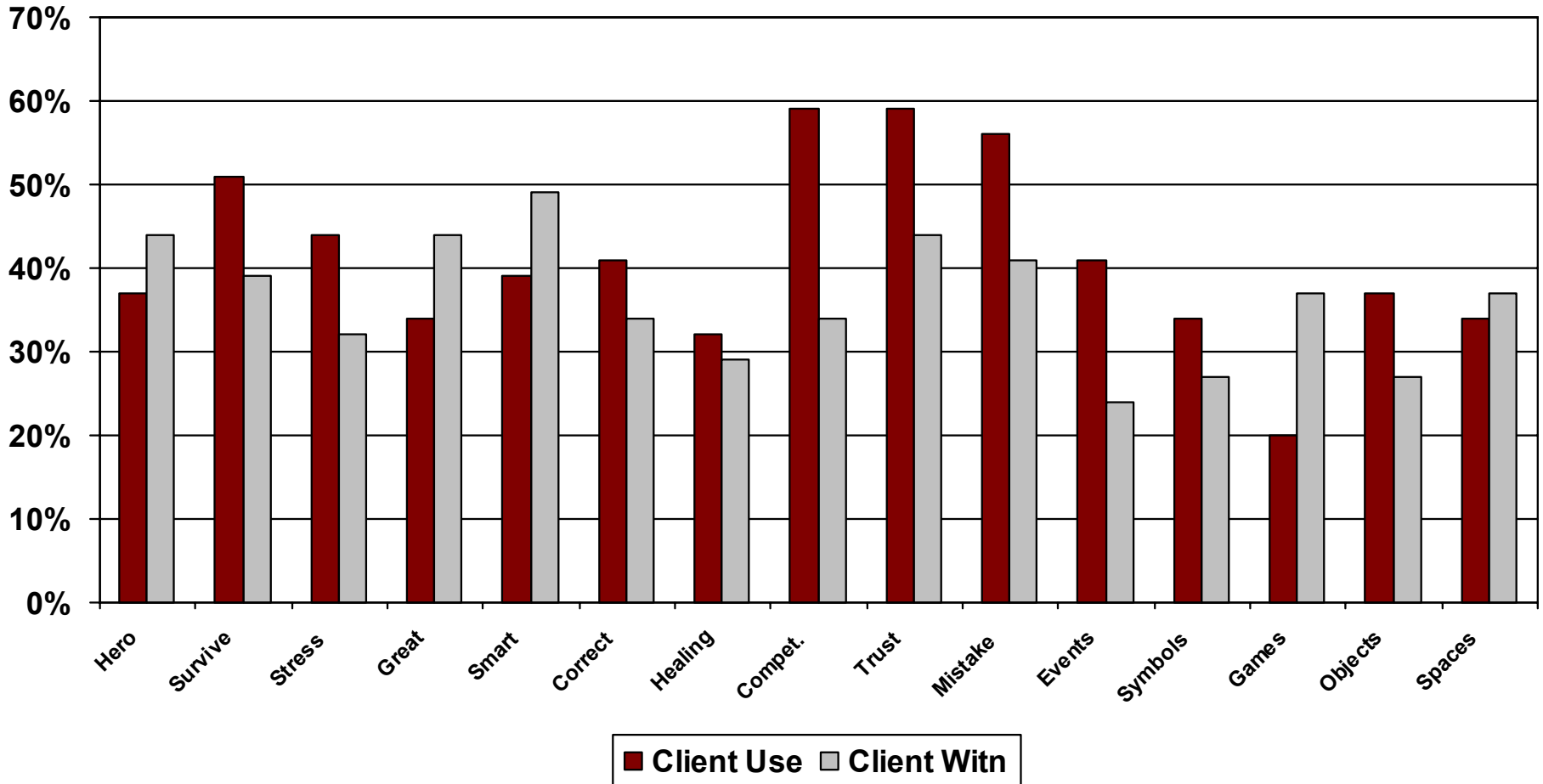
# Consultant Story Use/Witness



Q5 & 7: Which story forms have you used or witnessed?

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# Client Story Use/Witness



Q5 & 7: Which story forms have you used or witnessed?

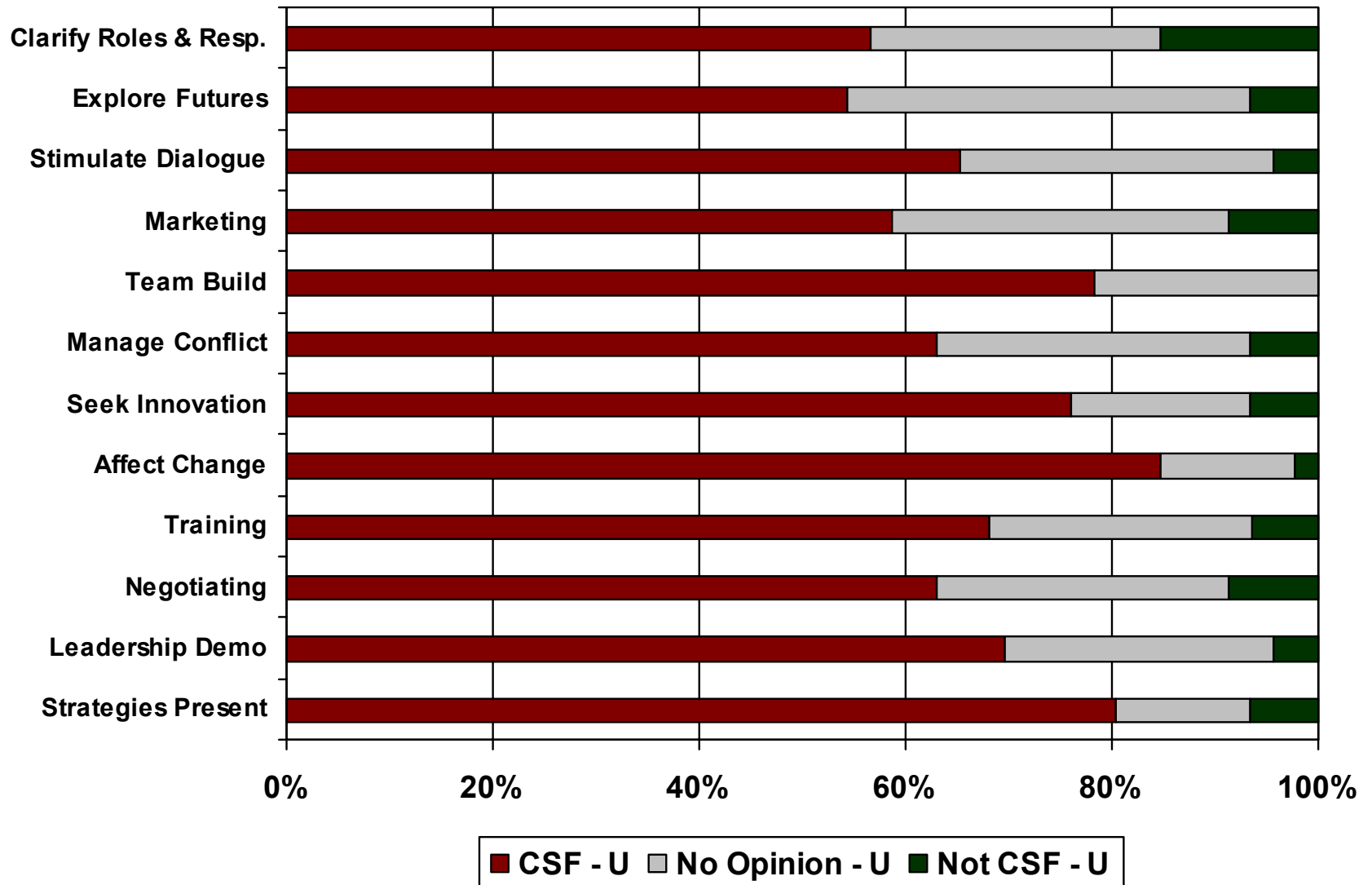
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# In what situations are stories critical success factors?

## Top 4 Situations Where Stories Were Critical Success Factors

Top Used	Top Witnessed
Change	Innovation/Creativity
Presenting Strategy	Team Building
Team Building	Change
Innovation/Creativity	Presenting Strategy

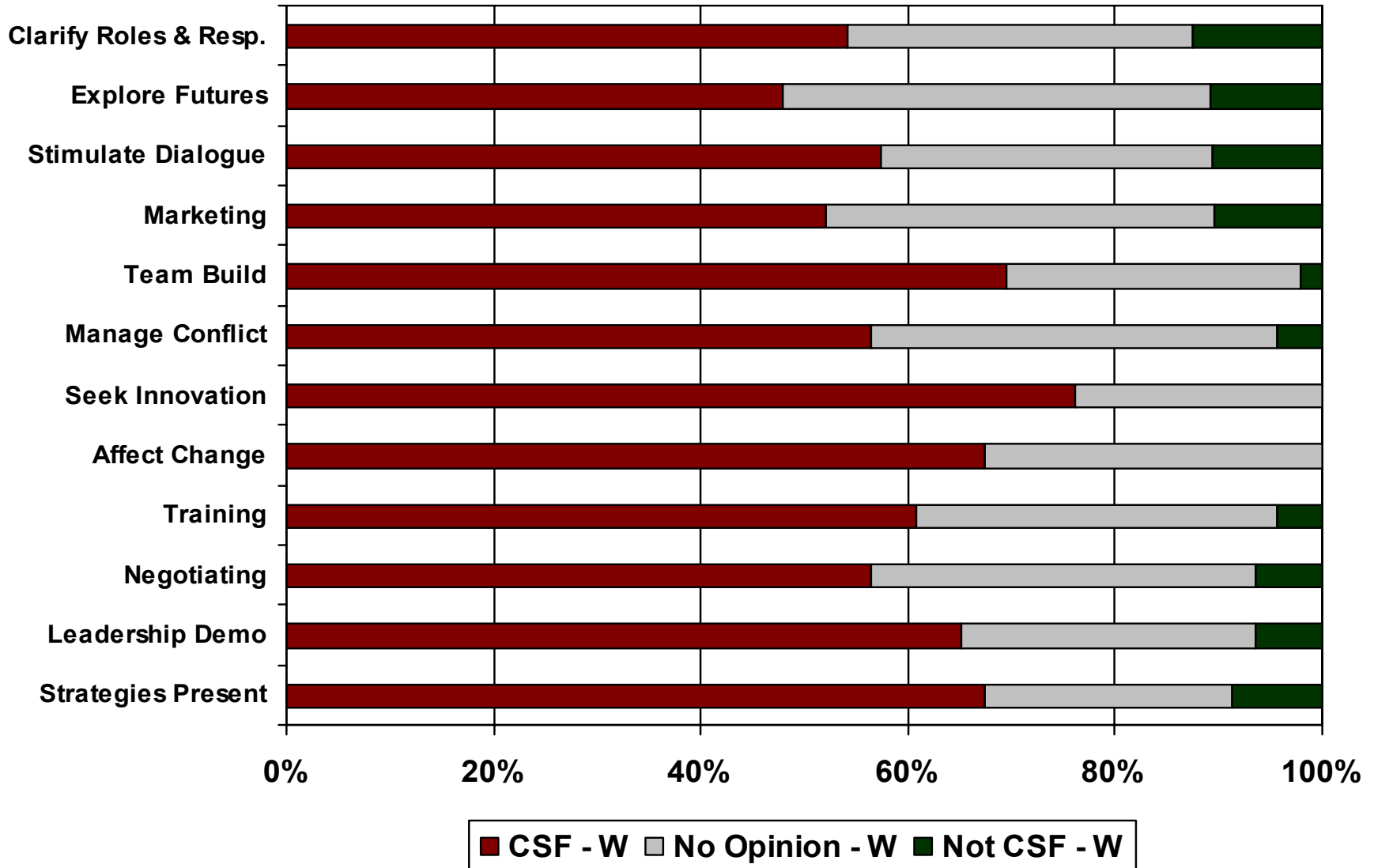
# Change/Innovation Mgmt., Strategy Comm., & Team Building are Critical Use Situations



Q9: In what situations were stories used as critical success factors?

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# Innovation, Team Building, Strategy Comm., Change Mgmt., are Critical Witness Situations



Q11: In what situations were stories witnessed as critical success factors?

# Benefits Verbatims

- Present Strategy
- Leadership Demo
- Negotiating
- Training
- Affect Change
- Innovation/Creativity
- Managing Conflict
- Team Building
- Marketing
- Stimulating Dialogue
- Exploring Futures
- Clarifying Roles & Responsibilities

# Other Learnings

- **Story Listening**, both verbal and non verbal, offers relationship and communications advantages
- **Storytelling is risky** requiring knowledge & judgment about the receiving culture and listener.

# Key Applications

- Move beyond the “facts” and ask, **What is the story here?**
- Practice **active story listening**
- **Recruit storytellers** and encourage storytelling
- Leverage stories as an **“evidence of service”**

# Key Applications

- Use stories to:
  - build, strengthen & change **culture**
  - reinforce product, organizational & personal **brands**
  - training & transfer **knowledge**
  - demonstrate **leadership**
  - build **affinity** in relationships

# Further Reading

- Denning, The Leader's Guide to Storytelling
- Neuhauser, Corporate Legends & Lore
- Vincent, Legendary Brands
- Campbell, Hero with a Thousand Faces

*One of the two reasons business models tend to fail is ...*  
***story failure [in the form of] story that does not make sense to key stakeholders.***

*- Magretta (2002)*

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Published Summary of this Research can be found at

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