

CHAPTER 19

STORYTELLING AND THE COMPLEX EPISTEMOLOGY OF ORGANIZATIONS

Ken Baskin

This chapter uses a complexity perspective to argue that, in addition to the traditional management picture of organizations as coherent entities, organizations are cultural ecosystems in which their members work together to create the knowledge they need to survive and meet other 'personal' needs. In doing so, the author suggests that human beings transform information into knowledge by fitting it into the stories they tell themselves to reduce the complexity of the world to manageable dimensions. Organizations, then, can be viewed as ecosystems of story creating local workgroup cultures in which employees develop the knowledge they need to meet their needs, rather than the knowledge management believes they should be developing. The author illustrates these ideas drawing on an original research study he conducted in 2001. He concludes that senior managers have a particular responsibility to think of their organizations as cultural ecosystems, as well as coherent wholes, so that they can take advantage of the insights thus provided.