
Discovering the Sustainability Story

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EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

Our goal is to brand the notion of ‘sustainability’ and create an emotionally powerful ‘brand story’ that will be the source of attitudinal and behavioural change. We employed a proven market research technique—StoryTellings™—that has been successfully used by major Canadian and US brands: Ford, AirMiles, Intrawest, M&Ms candies, TD Bank Financial Group, Centex Homes, to name but a few.

STORIES COMMUNICATE

Stories are *the* fundamental form of human communication. If we want to communicate in a way that captures peoples’ imagination, touches them at a deeply emotional level, and activates behaviour, we tell a story.

More than a generation of neurological research shows that many—if not most—of our so-called rational decisions are actually driven by our emotions. But what is the source of our emotions? It is our imagination. Imagination allows us to ‘see’ what does not yet exist. How our imagination is externalized and made public is through symbols, images...and most commonly, stories.

WHAT WE DISCOVERED: OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

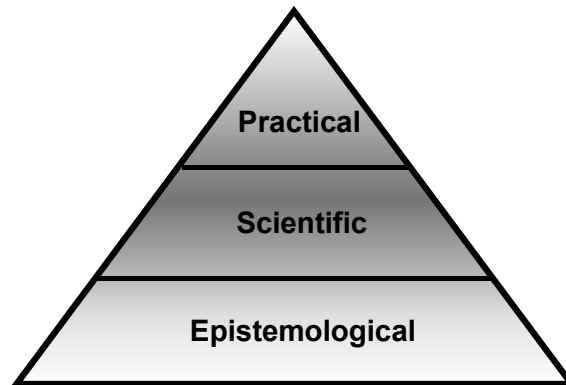
Sustainability

The prompt for WordPlay—the first phase of StoryTellings™ sessions—was *sustainability*. Thought Leaders and the General Public held both similar *and* different views and perceptions about the word ‘*sustainability*’.

Similarities

All five (5) groups—Thought Leaders and the General Public—spoke intelligently and enthusiastically about sustainability. The words, categories, and ensuing discussions from WordPlay can be generally broken into three broad thematic groupings: 1) epistemological or ‘meaning and being’ issues, 2) technical or scientific issues, and 3) practical or applied issues. These groupings appeared in both Thought Leader and the General Public sessions. The three thematic groupings are hierarchical, building upon one another as in the following diagram:

Thematic Grouping



Below are some of the issues, concepts, and ideas that weave through these three thematic groupings:

- *Complexity of meaning*: the word ‘sustainability’ can mean many different things to different people, depending on personal perspective and point of view.
- *Interrelationships*: there are a vast number of possible linkages between actions and potential consequences. What one person does may ultimately affect others and vice versa. This was described and discussed in one way or another in all five sessions. In sessions four (4) and five (5) the more specific concepts of the ‘web of life’ and the ‘circle of life’ were identified and discussed. The notion of interrelationships is also a very powerful theme in the stories about *Working Toward our Long-term Well-being*. (See below.)
- *Trade-offs*: sustainability often requires trade-offs between costs and potential benefits. We cannot have it all; we have to make choices.
- *Power*: who has the power to create and oversee change? Who should have the power?
- *Education*: people need to know what to do, how to do it, and why it is important. They need periodic indicators of their successes to keep them motivated. They need to know they are doing the ‘right things’ and ‘making a difference.’
- *Economic incentives*: sustainable solutions must have economic benefits that use the market place to motivate change.

- *The role of the individual and the community*: change must originate with individuals. Small steps by a few dedicated people can initiate change. And, change must also come from the community at large, as well as governments and big business. Everyone is responsible and accountable.
- *Hope*: things are slowly getting better— there is still a long way to go — but we are doing better than before. Therefore, the general belief is hopeful.

Differences

There were three (3) areas where Thought Leaders and the General Public differed in their response to the word ‘sustainability’.

1. Complexity of meaning in the word ‘sustainability’

Thought Leaders saw this complexity as both *inevitable* and *good*. It is *inevitable* because sustainability informs many disciplines and its meaning needs to relate to the rigours of those disciplines. This is *good* because complexity can be the basis for dialogue and discourse—there is something for everyone to feel passionately about—ultimately leading to a deeper understanding of the notion of sustainability.

Because in their minds, the notion of sustainability is so complex, Thought Leaders are uncertain about what to communicate and how to communicate it. In a similar vein, Thought Leaders are unclear about what the public wants to hear.

The General Public prefers a clear and definitive understanding of what sustainability means. If sustainability means many things to many people then how can they know what to do, how to do it; what works and what doesn’t? They want specific and concrete solutions to specific and concrete problems. They are hopeful that there are solutions to the problems, but they are not yet sure what these solutions might be. Thought Leaders and experts are expected to provide the direction and guidance in finding these solutions.

2. Values vs. issues

Thought Leaders talked more to the epistemological ‘meaning and being’ issues than the applied or practical issues. They were more thoughtful and reflective about the ‘whys’ of sustainability and how these affected their approach to their respective fields and what was most important in their personal lives.

The General Public focused more on the concrete ‘issues’. In WordPlay, the words ‘food’, ‘water’, and ‘trees’ were the top three most prevalent words—along with the word ‘environment’—that the General Public associated with sustainability. This should not imply that values and

beliefs are not important to the General Public. Rather, their importance is a given and it is time to focus on what to *do*.

3. *Power and powerlessness*

Thought Leaders feel they have the power—through their various disciplines, as well as through their personal commitment—to have significant impact on the future. They also believe that we, collectively, are empowered to make the right choices regarding sustainability and our future.

The General Public has a relatively more limited sense of its collective and individual power to make positive change. Relative to points 1 and 2 above, they are willing to follow, but hesitant to lead. They view experts and Thought Leaders as having the knowledge and vision to lead them forward; they see government and big business having the power, but not the vision or will. Still, even with this limited sense of power, the General Public still remains hopeful that things can and will change. Their hope is centered in their instinctive ability to ‘make a difference’, by doing ‘little things.’

Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being

The Field Team (See Sustainability Story, in following sections) decided on the prompt – *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-Being* — for the team (StoryTime) and individual (Reflections) stories. This prompt tapped into very deep and personally meaningful emotions. Participants from all five groups shared stories that reflected not only these deep emotions but also, fundamental truths of the human condition: birth and death, disease and healing, bonding and belonging, to name but a few. If we wish to ‘brand’ sustainability and ‘own’ a strong emotional space that evokes powerful emotions and unconscious mythic images, *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being* is a strong and viable candidate.

From the first two sessions with Thought Leaders, we began to see recurring themes, words, and images in the stories. These themes are consistent across all five sessions, emerging in stories for Thought Leaders and the General Public alike.

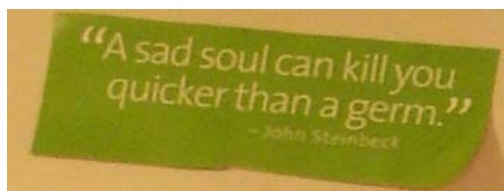
The tone of the stories is overwhelmingly positive—as we might expect from the words ‘*well-being*’ in the prompt—but more importantly, emotionally and archetypically rich. We see similar themes and plot-structure in both the team stories of StoryTime and the individual stories of Reflections.

Many of the stories are tinged with a vague sense of discontent, an underlying malaise. There is an uneasy feeling that things are ‘not quite right’ and ‘out of balance’; a sense that we—individually and collectively—have lost our way and are ‘not on the right path.’ Yet, these are not hopeless stories or stories of despair. In many of the stories there is a defining moment of understanding or ‘awakening’, when the teller becomes aware that he or she—or we, collectively—

is not doing 'the right things'. This triggers a fundamental and often transformative change in attitude and behaviour, leading to an awareness of the need to re-find the 'right way'.

The stories are rich with words such as renew, return, re-evaluate, repay, reinvent, reflect, etc.; these and similar words with the prefix 're' appear again and again. The 're' prefix indicates the idea of 'going back', 'doing again'. Why do we need to go back? To re-find what is lost or forgotten, to repair that which needs fixing, to 'make things right'...to heal. The answers to our questions, the solutions to our problems do not require totally new ways of thinking; possibly new technologies, yes, new ways of thinking, no. From the stories we see clear indications that we know intuitively (see Sustainability, above) what we must do. Our values are clear; they still resonate strongly in our collective psyche; it is a matter of realigning our behaviour with our beliefs.

What makes the presence of 're' so intriguing is its recurrence in a number of other StoryTellings™ projects over the course of the years. Research topics and their prompts that have little or nothing to do with *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being*, also have multiple references to words with the prefix 're'; i.e., recharge, rejuvenate, recreate, relax, restore...and the list goes. These and other 're' words almost always appear within the context of life being too stressful, too difficult, too fast, too complex, too focused on short-term material gain, etc. The 're' words associated with *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being* appear in a similar context. This is the malaise of contemporary culture, documented or referred to almost daily in the media. This malaise is manifested in the vague feelings that 'things are not as they should be' or things 'could be easier'. The stories indicate again and again that *Working Toward Our Long term-Well-being* is a way of healing this cultural 'sickness'; turning dis-ease into ease. The following image from a StoryTime team story says it all:



StoryTime Session 3/Team 1
(ST 3/1)

KEY STORY ELEMENTS

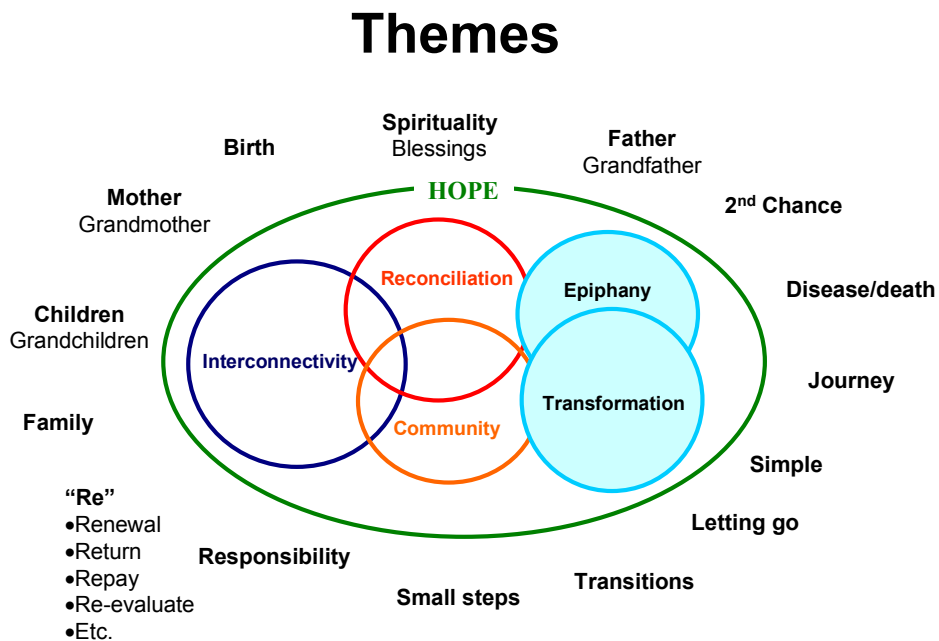
Below are the highlights of two—themes and plot-structure—of the four key elements of an effective brand story. These and the other two critical elements are discussed and explained in detail in the following chapter: **The Sustainability Story**.

Themes

From the stories about *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being*, five (5) **core themes**— *interconnectivity, reconciliation, community, epiphany, and transformation*—emerged. Core themes speak to the deep emotions; they resonate at the archetypal and mythic levels of the story.

There are fifteen (15) **secondary themes**. Secondary themes are essential to the comprehensiveness of the story; speaking primarily to the intellect. However, without the meta-theme and the core themes the secondary themes do not speak to the deeper levels of emotion, archetype and myth.

The **meta-theme** is the fundamental essence of the story. It is the summation of the core and secondary themes. The meta-theme is *Hope*. The themes are illustrated below:



Meta-theme

Hope is the very simple, yet powerful meta-theme of the Sustainability Story. It is evident in numerous stories—both StoryTime and Reflections stories—of *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being*. The stories from all five sessions are extremely positive and hopeful. Although negative characteristics—death, disease, ill-will, anger, frustration, etc.—are clearly and often present, the stories almost always end not just happily, but at a higher and better state than they began. Even when the stories portray a very dire or difficult situation, there is a glimmer of hope. We will fix what is broken. We will re-find our path. The future will be fine.

The meta-theme of hope also mirrors the hopefulness of both the Thought Leaders and the General Public during WordPlay when they played with all the words associated with ‘sustainability’. This is a clear and direct link between the notion of sustainability and the emotions emerging from the stories about *Working Toward our Long-term Well-being* (See Sustainability, above).

Core themes

Core themes are what the ‘deep story’ is all about; they speak to powerful emotions and archetypal and mythic images. Therefore, they are closely related to the meta-theme. It is important to note that three (3) core themes: *epiphany*, *reconciliation* and *transformation* are also significant events in the plot-structure (see Plot-structure below). The overlapping circles of the previous graphic illustrate how the core themes interact and at times blend into one another.

Core Theme: Interconnectivity

This is a very strong—possibly the strongest—and frequently recurring theme across all five StoryTellings™ sessions. Interconnectivity is prevalent in both the discussions that followed WordPlay and in the stories about *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being*. There are two dimensions to interconnectivity: *time* and *affect*, both are related to the notion of ‘being part of something bigger.’

Time

Participants are very much aware that there is a connection between who and what came before them and what will be in the future. In the stories—both StoryTime and Reflections—grandparents and children often play this role of ‘connector’. The grandparents are our link to the past. They are the elders, the keepers of the story (family, clan, tribe, etc.) and in this role they have the responsibility to pass on their knowledge to their children and their children’s children. Grandparents or elders are witnesses at significant transitional and transformational moments of our lives; our rites of passage.

Children are our links to the future. They are the hope of something better to come; the symbol of fresh and hopeful possibilities. In our children our unfulfilled dreams and aspirations live on.

Affect

The second dimension can be described as affect or impact. Participants talk about—in both their discussions and stories—the belief that they are ‘part of something bigger’; and what they do affects others and what others do affects them. This suggests the idea of regeneration and supports interconnectivity: physically—passing on genes; emotionally and intellectually—passing on ideas and knowledge; and spiritually—being interconnected at levels that we can neither see nor fully comprehend.

Words, phrases, and images to use when speaking about interconnectivity

- | | | |
|-------------------|---------------|---------------------|
| -Generations | -Birth | -Grandchildren |
| -Cycle of life | -Seasons | -Children |
| -Web of life | -Legacy | -Roots and branches |
| -Seeds, seedlings | -Grandparents | |

Core Theme: Reconciliation

The stories are full of instances—physical, emotional, and spiritual—of ‘healing’, ‘forgiveness’, and ‘re-finding our way’. Participants alluded to the metaphor ‘on the wrong path’ several times in the sessions, both in the stories themselves and the discussions following WordPlay and StoryTime. The stories reveal—sometimes quite clearly—that we are out of balance, out of synch with those things that are most important to us; we need to restore the balance and renew our sense of meaning. We need to heal ourselves, our relationships, our communities and our world. Life should be about ‘ease’, not ‘dis-ease’, especially *dis*-ease that we impose upon ourselves. Currently our lives are anything but ‘easy’.

Words, phrases, and images to use when speaking about reconciliation:

- | | | |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| -Healing | -Restoration | -Coming home |
| -Forgiveness | -Repair/fix | -Renewal |
| -Giving back | -Reunion | -Cleansing |

Core Theme: Community

Like the notion 're', community is a recurring theme not only in the stories of *Working Toward our Long-Term Well-being*, but in stories from many diverse prompts across a variety of very different StoryTellings™ projects. Community—or more appropriately, the perceived lack of genuine community—is part of our cultural malaise, a source of our collective discontent.

At a very concrete and rationale level many stories allude or refer to people coming together, collaborating and solving problems for a collective good. Some of this purely rational point of view can be attributed to the prompt: *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being*.

At the deeper level of emotions, community is about feeling safe and secure, accepted, and recognized. We are a social species and we are extremely uncomfortable outside the circle of community. Not to be part of a community is to be vulnerable and feel isolated and alone. In response, we withdraw, further increasing our sense of isolation and insecurity. This is a vicious circle that ultimately ends in feeling powerless. Powerlessness breeds paralysis, and therefore, we lose the desire and possibility for change.

At the deepest level—the archetypal and mythic level—where we confront the fundamental issues of the human condition, the notion of community is strongest. Here we are talking about kinship, bonding and most importantly, *belonging*. Belonging is about sharing in a common story, a common identity; who we are and where we come from. We feel part of something and this gives us a sense of meaning

In the stories from all five sessions, the locus of control for *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being*, is seldom larger than the community. Our collective experience as a species has a much longer history of belonging to bands, clans, tribes, etc, than with larger more modern and impersonal entities like government or business. Our sense of responsibility is more acute at the level of community. We are more likely to see and experience the results of our actions (or inactions). More importantly, we are much more emotionally invested in our community, because it is the source of our identity and the promise of our future.

Words, phrases, images to use when speaking about community:

- | | | |
|-----------------|------------------|--------------------|
| -Sharing | -Roots/origins | -Values/traditions |
| -Identity | -Compromise | -Responsibility |
| -Belonging | -Strength | -Common values |
| -Welcoming | -Safety/security | -Common purpose |
| -Collaboration | -Bonding | -Common story |
| -Teams/teamwork | -Acceptance | -Family |

Core Theme: Epiphany

One of the critical things to happen in the stories about *Working Toward Our Long-Term Well-being*—and something we do *not* see in other StoryTellings™ projects—is a moment of epiphany. That ‘aha moment’ when everything becomes absolutely clear. It is as though the teller suddenly awakens from a deep sleep; ‘awakening’ being a word we encounter quite frequently in the stories.

Epiphany seems stronger and more prevalent in the Thought Leaders’ sessions one (1) and two (2). Reading the Thought Leader stories, especially the individual stories from Reflections, there is the sense that for many, their introduction to the ‘world of sustainability’ can be likened to a conversion experience; a moment of sudden clarity and understanding that changed their lives.

The event that triggers the epiphany is often sudden and shocking; the word ‘suddenly’ is found in many stories describing this triggering event. As noted previously *epiphany* is a key element of the plot-structure.

Words, phrases, and images to use when speaking of transformation:

- | | | |
|--------------|------------------|---------------|
| -Realization | -Clearly | -Conversion |
| -Recognition | -Awakening | -‘Aha moment’ |
| -Clarity | -Suddenly | |
| -Awareness | -Defining moment | |

Core Theme: Transformation

Like epiphany, transformation is a critical element in the plot-structure. In fact the two are closely related. Without the epiphany—and the clarity that comes with it—the transformation is doubtful.

Transformation is much, much more than the usual North American ‘happy ending’. It implies fundamental change; there is no turning back. And because the transformation is positive, there is no desire to turn back.

Transformation is a state of certainty, a deep understanding about what really matters. There is no equivocation; everything is as it should be. Transformation is the panacea for our cultural malaise—both at the personal and societal levels. In the stories, words associated with transformation include: ‘wholeness’, ‘peace’, ‘joy’, ‘meaning’, ‘fulfillment’, ‘love’, ‘appreciation’.

Words, phrases, and images to use when speaking of transformation:

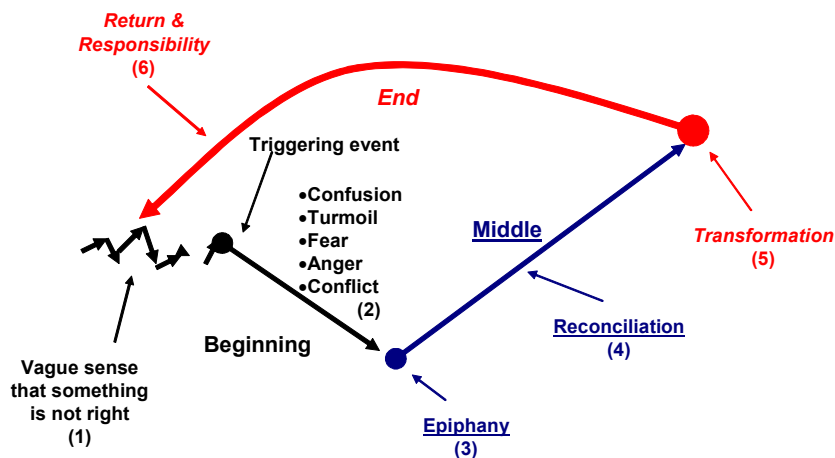
- | | | |
|--------------|---------------------|------------------|
| -Joy | -Peace | -Love |
| -Relief | -Fundamental change | -Appreciation |
| -Confidence | -Whole/wholeness | -Gratitude |
| -Letting go | -Fulfillment | -Authentic |
| -Fulfillment | | -No turning back |

Plot-structure

Plot-structure defines the action of the story. It portrays the events and activities of the story in a sequential, orderly, and meaningful way. By ensuring that a story has its three essential components: Beginning, Middle and End, plot addresses the questions: What happened? What happened next...and why?

The plot-structure for *Working Toward Our Long-Term Well-being* is illustrated below. There are six (6) critical events or elements in the plot sequence. Those events in black are the Beginning of the story; blue (underlined) is the Middle, *red (Italics)* is the End or resolution.

Plot Structure



Below are further brief explanations of the key events in the plot.

1. The Beginning: A vague sense that something is not right.

We are out of balance; life is a bit too hard, a bit too stressful. We feel caught in a trap without any easy way out. This is the malaise, the *dis-ease*.

2. The Beginning: The triggering event

We continue to go through the motions of our daily lives until an event forces us to stop and take stock of what we are doing. The triggering event is a 'wake up call'; all is not well. This wake up call is often followed by powerful and potentially debilitating emotions such as: fear, anger, despair, etc. or trials and challenges. There is often hard work to be done. These can be dark times.

3. The Middle: Epiphany

This is an awakening to a new way of seeing, not just to the problem but also to an understanding of what caused the problem and its possible solutions. It is like viewing the world through different lenses. What was unclear or unknown before is seen with clarity. Solutions present themselves and we find—or re-find—the 'right path'. The confusion, trauma or turmoil from the trigger event begins to dissipate.

4. The Middle: Reconciliation

What was broken we begin to fix. Disease is arrested, pain relieved. Relationships are mended. And most importantly, we begin to make peace with who we are and our place within the community and the world. Our healing is the start of a joyful journey to wholeness and transformation. This is a time of restoration and renewal.

5. The End: Transformation

We are fundamentally changed. What was meaningless now has meaning. What was fragmented and hurt is now whole and healed. We attain a state where 'peace', 'joy', 'harmony', and 'fulfillment' prevail.

6. The End: Return and Responsibility

The protagonists in our stories do more than celebrate their new found sense of meaning. They return or 'come home'—transformed, of course—to help others see what they have seen, experience what they have

experienced.... to give back and help others find the path to reconciliation and transformation. This is *not* an odious responsibility; rather it is the work of joy and fulfillment; a labour of love, the manifestation of the transformation.

Another way of thinking of this plot-structure is as a sequential and ordered map of the emotions—the sequence of emotions—we encounter as we go about *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being*.

EMOTIONAL TRIGGERS

The most compelling and effective brand stories touch us at a deeply emotional level. It is the emotions that are triggered by these stories that are the underlying drivers of behaviour. There are three emotional triggers or dimensions associated with sustainability and *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being*. Like the Key Story Elements above, these dimensions are further explored in the following chapter: **The Sustainability Story**.

Quest for meaning and fulfillment

Participants—both Thought Leaders and the General Public—want their lives to matter, to make a difference for themselves and their communities. The stories clearly show that participants want their lives to ‘mean something’ more than semi-sleep walking through their day-to-day routines; hence the recurring presence in the stories of ‘awakening’ and ‘epiphany’. At these key moments in the stories, we are freed from the myopic state of our routine existence and awakened to new possibilities. We begin to see how our lives fit into a greater scheme. We realize that we are part of a much bigger picture—spanning time and space—and what we do, does matter.

We are in this together

Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being is—in the end—an *emotionally* collective effort. There is much we can do as individuals; in fact the stories are clear about the role of individual responsibility and taking necessary action, by one’s self if required. Still, the emotional support of others provides the necessary impetus for continuing our efforts when the going gets tough. This is the essence of community; people working together, sharing, and feeling the safety and security of belonging.

Make it right; make it whole

Throughout the stories there is a consistent premise; we are dysfunctional as individuals and communities. We allow ourselves to be over-burdened

with goals, responsibilities, and expectations; many of which do not add anything to our sense of long-term well-being or our quest for fulfillment and meaning. Our current path has many seductive benefits and on the surface it is very inviting. However, we know it is short-term and transitory; in the end we never *really* seem to get what we are looking for. This path is not sustainable!

We need to make things right—make amends—for ourselves, our communities, and for everyone and everything we touch. We seek to repair those things we have damaged, either intentionally or inadvertently. This becomes our new path; it is a path of healing and reconciliation. It is the path that ends in transformation and responsibility. We are whole once again. The circle is once more unbroken.

TOP LINE SUMMARY

We started our journey of exploration seeking to ‘brand’ the amorphous notion of sustainability around the emotional space of *Working Toward Our Long-term Well being*. The results of the analysis and interpretation of the stories and the session discussions show that this not only possible, but potentially powerful and beneficial. The emotional and archetypal energy around *Working for Our Long-term Well-being* is strong and deeply personal; it can alter attitudes and change behaviour when we link these emotions to the notion of sustainability.

RECOMMENDATIONS: TELLING THE SUSTAINABILITY STORY

Strategic

- Acknowledge the complexity of the meaning of the word ‘sustainability’. It triggers different emotional responses.
- Speak of sustainability in terms of the themes, plot-structure, emotional triggers, etc. of *Working Toward Our Long-term Well being*.
 - Emphasize hope as the transformative key component of the story. This is not a story about doom and gloom.
 - Leverage core themes, especially interconnectivity, community, and reconciliation.
 - In the plot-structure acknowledge the confusion, turmoil, fear, etc. of the triggering event as well as the potentially transformative and healing aspects of the epiphany. We live in a culture that sees reward as the result of hard-work and struggle (no pain; no gain).
- *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being* can be an effective and relevant tag line for sustainability.

- Position sustainability as a possible panacea for our ‘cultural malaise’; it is not about giving up and sacrificing, but letting go of those activities and distractions that add stress—and detract from meaning—in our lives.
 - Sustainability can be about hope for a more meaningful, fulfilling, and humane future.
- Acknowledge that the public ‘knows’ more about ‘sustainability’ than we currently give them credit.
 - Thought Leaders and the General Public ‘know’ about sustainability in different ways.
- Use symbols and imagery that speak at an unconscious and archetypal level, i.e., the circle or sphere or earth image as a symbol of wholeness; grandparents and grandchildren as a symbol of generational interconnectivity and community.

Tactical

- When speaking of sustainability to Thought Leaders speak about, ideas, values, and core beliefs; when speaking to the General Public speak in terms of concrete issues, problems, and solutions.
- Use ‘re’ (*renew*, *restore*, *revitalize*, *recharge*, etc.) generously. They connote a meaning of going back, doing again, making things better, stronger; ‘making it right’.
- Emphasize the importance of taking ‘small steps’. Sustainability is a huge and seemingly daunting concept, however big outcomes can result from many small efforts.
- Emphasize the role of individual responsibility for making a difference; playing a role. *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being* is everyone’s responsibility.
 - Similarly community—people with a common purpose or working sharing a common interest—also play a significant role.

THE SUSTAINABILITY STORY

PROLOGUE: BRANDING SUSTAINABILITY

What if we ‘branded’ sustainability? What could we learn from the great contemporary brands that might advance our cause? How would the ‘sustainability brand’ look and feel? How would we tell the sustainability brand story? These are just a few of the questions that fuelled the journey documented in this report. It is a journey of exploration and discovery. Our end goal, our grail: to discover *the* new Sustainability Story.

A brand is a promise, a guarantee of a certain level of quality. Originally created by the great medieval guild houses as a way to identify which guild made what products, the notion of brand has continued to evolve. Today, there are a select number of successful brands—Nike, Starbuck’s, Harley-Davidson, Levi-Straus, Jack Daniels, Intrawest, to name a few—that have taken branding to new levels. We call these brands ‘*storied brands*’, because they have succeeded in creating a brand story that resonates at a very deep, often unconscious emotional level.

Managers of storied brands know the specific and deep emotions they want consumers to experience. To facilitate this, they create a unique ‘emotional space’ around their brand. For example, Harley-Davidson understands that they are not just selling motorcycles; they are helping their very loyal customers participate in the distinctly American story associated with the romantic notion of the rebel, the outlaw. Harley-Davidson is selling a story. To paraphrase one Harley-Davidson executive:

“What we are selling is the ability for a 43 year-old accountant to dress in leather and ride through small towns scaring people”.

Harley-Davidson consciously and continually strives to nurture and guard this story. The story lies at the source of some very powerful emotions that ultimately trigger behaviour, in this case buying Harley-Davidson products and accessories. For Harley-Davidson and other storied brands, the story is the brand and the brand is the story. This is the essence of owning emotional space; Harley-Davidson ‘owns’ the emotional space of the outlaw.

The power associated with brand story has an empirical basis. A generation of brain research shows that many of our major life decisions emanate not from the seat of reason, the neo-cortex, but rather from the part of the brain that governs emotions: the amygdala. Millions of dollars of market research have been spent verifying this. If emotion is at the source of behaviour, what is the source of emotions? It is our imagination. That limitless and uniquely human trait that allows us to ‘see’ what does not yet exist. How is imagination manifested? In symbols, images...and stories. The following diagram is a simple representation of this:



Concepts or ideas can be branded as well as products or services. They can also have an emotionally persuasive story, one that touches the public at deep and emotionally powerful levels. This is our challenge in creating the Sustainability Story.

Creating the Sustainability Story

A brand story does *not* just appear. It exists in every aspect of the brand: the minds and hearts of the public, the brand strategy, the strategic positioning of competitors, and the vagaries of the marketplace. What we are attempting to do for the 'sustainability brand' is similar. We want to identify the *key* elements of a compelling story that will form the skeleton—the structure—of the Sustainability Story as it grows and evolves over time.

The Sustainability Story must speak to all of us – Thought Leaders in the field as well as the General Public. It must touch us at many different levels and it must change attitude and behaviour. Past StoryTellings™ research has identified three levels of a comprehensive and compelling brand story: *Message*, *Meaning*, and *Myth*. Together they are powerful because they speak to the mind (reason), the heart (emotion), and our archetypal imagination (dare we call it soul?).

Message, Meaning, and Myth and the Sustainability Story

Message: The Message is top of mind, conscious, and public. It is about facts, attributes, characteristics, and opinions. It is rational and logical, with little, if any, emotion. A strong Message is necessary, but not sufficient for the Sustainability Story to be effective.

Meaning: This level is more subjective, more personal. Meaning touches us at an emotional level. Because it is unconscious, or at least subconscious, it is much more powerful than Message. The Meaning is about 'me': How does the Sustainability Story speak to me as an individual? What does it say about who I am, what I hope to be? How does it make my life more meaningful? How does it enhance my personal story?

Myth: The deepest and most powerful level; Myth is archetypal, universal, and almost always unconscious. At this level, we are deeply connected with ageless emotions, archetypes and symbols associated with the Sustainability Story. These sustainability related archetypes, symbols and emotions help us to remember and participate in those ancient and universal stories that speak to the fundamental truths of the human condition.

All three levels of Message, Meaning and Myth are evident in both the Thought Leader's and the General Public's stories. In many cases the Message, Meaning, and Myth exist simultaneously as both Thought Leaders and the General Public tell stories of their actual experiences using symbols, images, and metaphors that are personally meaningful, as well as mythic and archetypal.

STORYTELLINGS™: WHAT WE DID

Goals

We began our journey of discovery with three goals:

- Understand the words, phrases, concepts, etc. Thought Leaders and the General Public associate with the notion of ‘*sustainability*’.
- Identify and ‘own the emotional/semantic space’ around the phrase: *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being*. Understand what we must do and say to ‘brand’ sustainability in this emotional space.
- Provide input to communication strategies that can speak at deeply emotional and compelling levels, levels that will help change attitudes and behaviours.

The Prompts

The critical first step in the success of any StoryTellings™ project is the identification of the ‘prompt’: the word or phrase that is the stimulus for participants to think about their stories. After a series of pre-research discussions, representatives of the Field Team (comprised of key people from subscriber organizations and members of the JHA research team) chose *sustainability* as the prompt for WordPlay, the first hour activity (see below; The Process). The rationale behind this decision is two-fold. First, we wanted to see what words and phrases participants—both Thought Leaders and the General Public—associated with the word ‘sustainability’. Secondly, we wanted to intentionally connect the word ‘sustainability’ with the prompt for the StoryTime team stories and the individual stories of Reflections.

After some discussion, the Field Team settled on the phrase: *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being* as the prompt for the stories. We easily agreed that ‘long-term’ and ‘well-being’ denoted a potentially powerful ‘emotional space’ that we might possibly link (brand) to the concept of sustainability. ‘Our’ would allow the StoryTellings™ participants the option to create and write stories about collective *or* individual examples of *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being*. They did both.

The Process

Each StoryTellings™ session is approximately three hours long and includes the following phases.

Phase One is called *WordPlay*: This is a series of “quick hit” word associations, exploration, and facilitator probing designed to get participants to think and talk about *sustainability* outside the realm of its

everyday use. *WordPlay* usually lasts forty-five to fifty (45-50) minutes, with a ten minute break at its conclusion.

Phase Two is called *StoryTime*: Working in teams of four or five, participants have approximately forty-five (45) minutes to create a fictional, pictorial story about *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being*. Collages are the medium in which the participant teams create these stories. Each team has five (5) minutes to present its story to the facilitator and the entire group. The facilitator and other members of the Field Team probe for any deeper meanings in each story. *StoryTime* lasts approximately ninety (90) minutes, and the exact words of each story are recorded and transcribed verbatim for later analysis.

Phase Three is called *Reflections* and is an individual exercise. Participants are asked to sit quietly and reflect upon their most memorable experience associated with *Working Toward Our Long-Term Well-being* and then write a detailed personal story about that experience. They are asked to include *all* the details that they can remember. After they have completed their personal story, participants are free to leave.

Team and individual stories are analyzed and interpreted by examining: the form (structure) of the plotline; key and recurring themes; the form (structure) of key themes; the context in which the stories take place; and the relationships between the primary actors in the stories with the plotline, each other, and the context. We look closely for recurring symbols and images—both verbal and pictorial—and try to determine if these have meaning that is more emotionally compelling and powerful than might first appear.

The Sessions

The Sustainability Story derives from five (5) StoryTellings™ sessions: two (2) Thought Leaders and three (3) sessions with the General Public. These sessions were conducted in Vancouver in late October and early November, 2005. From these five sessions we collected twenty (20) team stories and ninety-five (95) individual stories. There are 258 hand written pages of individual stories.

Thought Leader participants were nominated by peers and invited to the two StoryTellings™ sessions on the evenings of October 25 and 26.

Participants for the General Public sessions were recruited from the Greater Vancouver area, using random digital dialling. General Public sessions were conducted on the evenings of November 1, 2, and 3.

Attendance at all five sessions was higher than our expectations and higher than what we usually see at other StoryTellings™ sessions.

Past StoryTellings™ projects have shown repeatedly that at the level of Myth—and to a slightly lesser degree, the level of Meaning—demographic and geographic differences become less and less a factor in what we discover. When we are dealing at the archetypal level, we are dealing with fundamentals of what it means to be a human being. The stories about a given prompt are structurally similar even across seemingly diverse groups.

At the levels of Meaning, however, this is not always the case. It would be interesting to explore the prompt, *sustainability*, in other General Public groups with different demographics, i.e., First Nations, teens, seniors, etc. or from different geographical locations.

WHAT WE DISCOVERED: FINDINGS

Themes

The themes are the general categories of content that emerge during analysis and interpretation. In the StoryTellings™ analysis and interpretation process, we examine three types of themes: *core themes*, *secondary themes*, and the *meta-theme*.

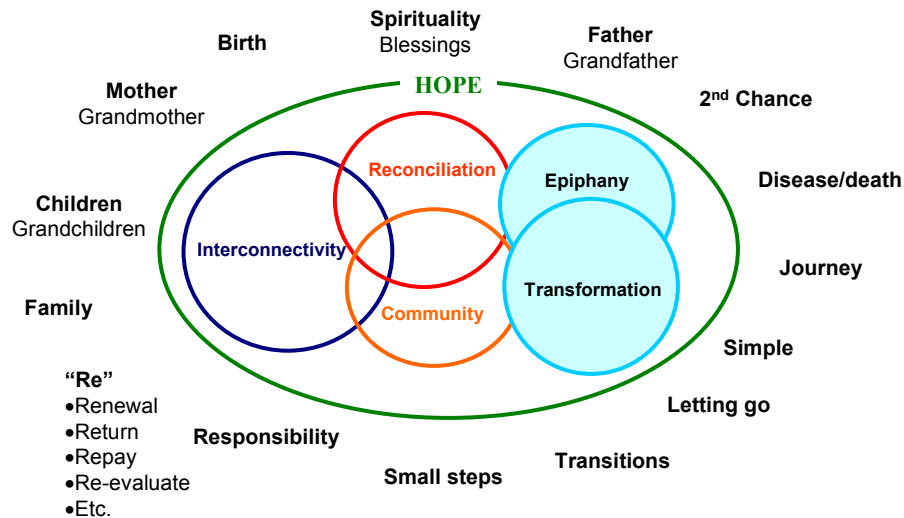
From the stories about *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being*, five (5) *core themes* emerged — *interconnectivity*, *reconciliation*, *community*, *epiphany*, and *transformation*. Core themes speak to the deep emotions and mythic dimensions of the story.

Secondary themes are essential to the comprehensiveness of the story; they are important components of the more rational, intellectual oriented Message. However, without the meta-theme and the core themes the secondary themes do not speak to the deeper levels of Meaning and Myth. There are fifteen (15) secondary themes:

- | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| -Father (grandfather) | -Transitions | -Children |
| -Second chance | -Journey | -Mother (Grandmother) |
| -Disease death | -Responsibility | -Birth |
| -Small steps | -“Re” | -Spirituality |
| -Simple | -Family | -Letting go |

The *meta-theme* is the fundamental essence of the story. It is the summation of the core and secondary themes; the meta-theme that emerges from the stories about *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being* for all.

Themes



Meta-theme

Every story has a meta-theme whether it is formally articulated or not. The meta-theme is the fundamental belief system that is illustrated by the story. It completes the statement: This is a story about_____.

Hope is the very simple, yet powerful meta-theme of the Sustainability Story. It is evident in numerous stories—both StoryTime and Reflections stories—of *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being*. The stories from all five sessions are extremely positive and hopeful. Although negative characteristics—death, disease, ill-will, anger, frustration, etc.—are clearly present, the stories almost always end not just happily, but at a higher and better state than they began. Even when the stories portray a very dire or difficult situation, there is a glimmer of hope. Things will get better. We can and will learn, change, and do what we must do in order to find what we really seek. We will fix what is broken. We will re-find our path. The future will be fine.

Examples of hope from Reflections individual stories:

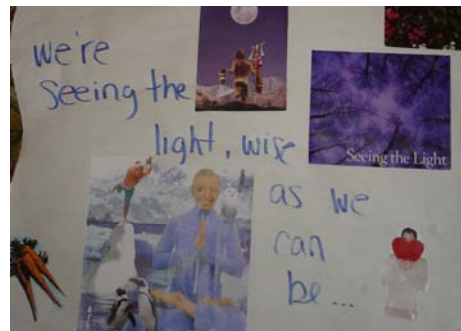
“I had been in the presence of greatness, yet at the same time, simple people who have chosen to devote their lives to real tasks to make the world a better place. I felt a sense of peace and hope.” (R3-33-34)

“At least in the end, though, I can think back about my experience here and have hope that if I won’t change, then someone else will.” (R3/12)

“If Wendy really did not have a future, how is that I am writing this and you are reading it. We can all make a difference.” (R5/29)

Excerpts from the StoryTime team stories

“They started singing and started swinging...they began to see the light...and they began to live more simply. They allowed the green space. Trees could grow. So some day you can grow to be a big wise old tree (ST1/2)”



“If you only kept hope, if you only think that you can change...then you can change how you live.”(ST51)

GRANDMA WHAT CAN WE DO
HOPE

Meta-Theme: what it means to The Sustainability Story

We have grown accustomed to the doom and gloom stories about sustainability. As a consequence, we don't pay them much heed; no one likes a constant stream of bad news. By linking sustainability to the hopeful emotional space surrounding *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being*, we move from the scolding negative to the confident and empowering positive.

Hope is a powerful human emotion. It is especially powerful in the North American culture. Hope is the reason why most of our ancestors left the certainty—no matter how oppressive—of the Old World for the uncertainty of a new life here. The hope of a better material future has fuelled our consumer culture for over a hundred years; today we are reaping the consequences of this misplaced hope. What the Sustainability Story can offer is a different focus for

our hope: the hope for a more humane, more meaningful and fulfilling future as opposed to the hope for more or better ‘stuff’.

The meta-theme hope also mirrors the hopefulness of both the Thought Leaders and the General Public during WordPlay when they played with all the words associated with ‘sustainability’. This is a clear and direct link between the notion of sustainability and the emotions emerging from the stories about *Working Toward our Long-term Well-being* (see Sustainability, above).

Core themes

Core themes are what the ‘deep story’ is all about; they speak to the significant emotions and archetypal images of Meaning and Myth. Therefore, they are closely related to the meta-theme. It is important to note that three (3) core themes: *epiphany*, *reconciliation* and *transformation* are also significant events in the plot-structure. The circles of the graphic above, illustrate how the core themes overlap and at times can blend into one another.

Core Theme: Interconnectivity

This is a very strong—possibly the strongest—and frequently recurring theme across all five StoryTellings™ sessions. Interconnectivity is prevalent in both the discussions that followed WordPlay and in the stories about *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being* created and written in StoryTime and Reflections. There are two dimensions to interconnectivity: *time* and *affect*, both are related to the notion of ‘being part of something bigger.’

Time

Participants are very much aware that there is a connection between who and what came before them and what will be in the future. In the stories—both StoryTime and Reflections—grandparents and children often play this role of ‘connector’. The grandparents are our link to the past. They are the elders, the keepers of the story (family, clan, tribe, etc.) and in this role they have the responsibility to pass on their knowledge to their children and their children’s children. Grandparents’ age and experience—and the fact that they are usually less involved in the distractions of day-to-day routines—allow them to see the world from a different temporal point of view, providing perspective and meaning to every day events. In mythic terms grandparents—or elders—often appear in the role of guides and helpers, pointing the way to the right direction. They are witnesses at significant transitional and transformational moments of our lives; our rites of passage.

Children are our links to the future. They are the hope of something better to come; the symbol of fresh and hopeful possibilities. We live with a fundamental belief that we pass on to them a better world than we were given. In our children our unfulfilled dreams and aspirations live on.

Affect

The second dimension can be described as affect or impact. Participants talk about—in both their discussions and stories—the belief that they are ‘part of something bigger’; and what they do affects others and what others do affects them. This is akin to our western notion of the Golden Rule and the eastern concept of the Karma. In either case, awareness *and* acknowledgment of this interconnection is a fundamental step toward understanding and reconciling our place in the universe.

In the WordPlay phases of all five sessions—where ‘sustainability’ was the prompt—interconnectivity and the similar notions of ‘inter-relationships’, the ‘web of life’, or ‘circle of life’ were raised and discussed by participants. Similarly, in all five sessions, there are a number of stories about *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being* that refers to the cycle of life: birth and death, the natural order of the seasons, etc. All of this points to the idea of regeneration and interconnectivity: physically—passing on genes; emotionally and intellectually—passing on ideas and knowledge; and spiritually—being interconnected at levels that we can neither see nor fully comprehend.

From Reflections:

“We thanked the ‘Grand Mother Rocks’ who bore witness for 1000’s of years before being heated in the ground and placed in our sweat lodge...’We all felt like we belonged to something bigger than ourselves and we all found a little peace.” (Reflections Session 5/ page 49 or R5/49)

“We rented a space and dug a plot...and planted seeds and Jen watched them grow to vegetables all summer long. She helped to weed and water. The carrots, peas, corn, etc. tasted very good when it comes from your own garden. When growing season was over we cleaned up our plot and prepared the garden for spring.” (R3/1)

“She (great grandmother) died the next day. But she had indelibly written on my soul the message of the importance of the continuity of life. We are important to our ancestors. And we are important to our children and their children” (R1/35)

“This helped my long-term well-being by reminding me of my place in the natural world and the grand scheme of things.” (R5/13)

From StoryTime:



“He realizes that children are the future and he remembers his roots...”
(ST 3/1)

“Together the two families began working together for their long-term life goals, not only for themselves and their families, but for the future in general.” (ST3/4)

not only for themselves, and their children... but for the future of the human race.
... generations to come...

Words, phrases, and images to use when speaking about interconnectivity:

- | | | |
|-------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| -Generations | -Birth | -Children |
| -Cycle of life | -Seasons | -Roots and branches |
| -Web of life | -Legacy | |
| -Seeds, seedlings | -Grandparents | |
| | -Grandchildren | |

Core Theme: Reconciliation

This is another very strong theme. The stories are full of instances—physical, emotional, and spiritual—of ‘healing’, ‘forgiveness’, and ‘re-finding our way’. Participants allude to the metaphor, ‘on the wrong path’ several times in the sessions, both in the stories themselves and the discussions following WordPlay and StoryTime. The stories reveal — sometimes very clearly—that we are out of balance, out of synch with those things that are most important to us; we need to restore the balance and renew our sense of meaning. We need to heal ourselves, our relationships, our communities and our world. Life should be about ‘ease’, not ‘dis-ease’; especially *dis*-ease that we impose upon ourselves. Currently our lives are anything but ‘easy’.

In the stories, reconciliation is also about making amends, taking personal responsibility for fixing what is broken, especially when we sense that we are somehow the source of the original transgression or problem. Life is not a zero sum game; there is always another chance to do what is

right...if we take responsibility, acknowledge our errors and make good on our commitment to do things better or give back what we have taken. The result: a deep seated appreciation that we are 'making things right'.

From Reflections:

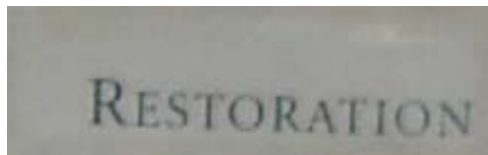
"It was renewal of marriage, parenthood, sanity and health...makes me content and happy to be in this crazy life because I know we can stop and...find ourselves anytime we want." (R 4/22)

"The disease that was in me was the disease in the world outside...as I worked on my disease, I worked on the diseases of the world...We are healing." (R1/12)

"I named my son after my father and I have enjoyed a relationship, friendship, and love that my poor father could never imagine. This is how I have stopped hating and have begun to forgive." (R1/28)

"We all began to weep. Each and every one of us. They were tears of electrifying joy...The sense of awkwardness and discomfort washed away by our collective tears. All of us feeling a sense of burdens lifted, barriers dissolved, a lightness of being." (R1/45)

From the StoryTime team stories:



"What am I here for? I've lived my life with a band-aid around my eyes, hiding from survival—trying to make things alright and survive in a way that is barely living." (ST 1/1)

Words, phrases, and images to use when speaking about reconciliation:

- | | | |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| -Healing | -Restoration | -Coming home |
| -Forgiveness | -Repair/fix | -Renewal |
| -Giving back | -Reunion | -Cleansing |

Core Theme: Community

Like the notion 're', community is a recurring theme not only in the stories of *Working Toward our Long-Term Well-being*, but in stories from many

diverse prompts across a variety of very different StoryTellings™ projects. Community—or more appropriately, the perceived lack of genuine community—is part of our cultural malaise, a source of our collective discontent.

In the words and stories of participants, community exists at a number of levels. At a very concrete and rationale level—the level of Message—many stories allude or refer to people coming together, collaborating and solving problems for a collective good. Some of this purely rational point of view can be attributed to the prompt: *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being*. But it is not this rational response that is most interesting; community gets its emotional power at the deeper levels of Meaning and Myth.

At the level of Meaning, community is about feeling safe and secure, accepted, and recognized. We are a social species and we are extremely uncomfortable outside the circle of community. To be apart from community is to be vulnerable and feel isolated and alone. In response, we withdraw, further increasing our sense of isolation and insecurity. This is a vicious circle that ultimately ends in feeling powerless. Powerlessness breeds paralysis, and therefore, we lose the desire and possibility for change.

At the deepest level—the archetypal level of Myth—where we confront the fundamental issues of the human condition, the notion of community is strongest. Here we are talking about kinship, bonding and most importantly, *belonging*. Belonging is about sharing in a common story, a common identity; who we are and where we come from. In this sense, community plays a similar role as the theme interconnectivity. It places each one of us within the context of a bigger picture, a higher purpose. We feel part of something and this gives us a sense of meaning. Meaning gives us reasons to act and the powerlessness of isolation is transformed into the power of the group.

Finally, in the stories from all five sessions, the locus of control for *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being*, is seldom larger than the community. Our collective experience as a species has a much longer history of belonging to bands, clans, tribes, etc. than with larger more modern and impersonal entities like government or big business. Our sense of responsibility is more acute at the level of community. We are more likely to see and experience the results of our actions (our inactions). More importantly, we are much more emotionally invested in our community, because it is the source of our identity and the promise of our future.

Some representative excerpts from Reflections:

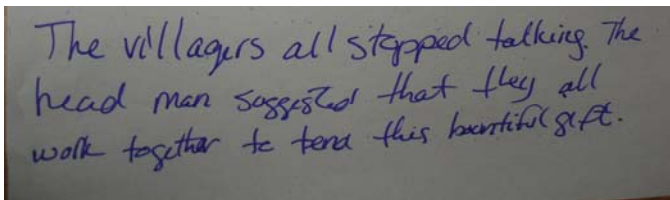
"What I participated in was a team of people agreeing to re-invent their company...and in the process, share what really mattered to them." (R2/14)

"These women wanted nothing from me, only to share their kindness and their good fortune to be on a train together and their luck in having enough to share." (R4/3)

"...made me realize that when people are brought together in an effort to survive they are willing to help each other achieve happiness in their lives." (R5/17)

"I distinctly remember being accepted and no longer being an outsider." (R3/35)

From StoryTime:



"The villagers all stopped talking. The head man suggested that they all work together to tend this beautiful gift...So this tree is not just for one person, it's everyone's and they are responsible for its healthy growth." (ST4/2)

Words, phrases, images to use when speaking about community:

- | | | |
|-----------------|------------------|--------------------|
| -Sharing | -Roots/origins | -Values/traditions |
| -Identity | -Compromise | -Responsibility |
| -Belonging | -Strength | -Common values |
| -Welcoming | -Safety/security | -Common purpose |
| -Collaboration | -Bonding | -Common story |
| -Teams/teamwork | -Acceptance | -Family |

Core Theme: Epiphany

In all stories something always happens—the *climax*—that sets the stage for a final resolution or denouement. If nothing happens, there is no story. Precisely *what happens* is what makes one story different from another.

One of the critical things to happen in the stories about *Working Toward Our Long-Term Well-being*—and something we do not see in other StoryTellings™ projects—is a moment of epiphany. That 'aha moment' when everything becomes absolutely clear. It is as though the protagonist suddenly awakens from a deep sleep; 'awakening' being a word that we encounter quite frequently in the stories.

Epiphany is a strong theme and—like the other four core themes—recurs again and again in all five sessions. However, it seems stronger and more prevalent in the Thought Leaders’ sessions one (1) and two (2). Reading the Thought Leader stories, especially the individual stories from Reflections, there is the sense that for many Thought Leaders, their introduction to the world of sustainability can be likened to a conversion experience; a moment of sudden clarity and understanding. The moment that changed their lives.

For all five groups, the realization, the clarity, the recognition that springs from these epiphanies is at the very least a powerful and lasting life lesson and often, a life altering experience or transformation. The event that triggers the epiphany is often sudden and shocking; the word ‘suddenly’ is found in many stories describing this triggering event. In other (and fewer) instances it is a gradual awakening. In either case, afterwards, the world is seen in a different light... and this is the impetus to change our behaviour.

As noted previously *epiphany* is a key element of the plot-structure.

From Reflections:

“Then at that very instant, sudden unhappiness dawned on me.”(R3/19)

“I remember his visit very clearly because that day I became charged with energy as I realized there is something positive I can do...”(R5/6)

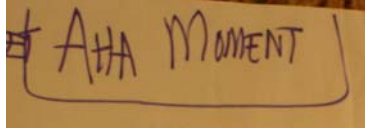
“And then I saw it. The big aha” (R1/38)

“Damaged, broken, non-functional, useless and depressed. It became apparent that if I was going to get better I would have to take control of my care and recovery, this came with an awakening....” (R1/20)

“I realized that I was totally alone in this world and had no one else to depend on. I could not depend on anyone else or blame anyone else. Everything was stripped away. I realized that I could work for good and be a good person or not. I accepted full accountability for myself...” (R2/12)

“Suddenly the sky erupts; we all stop and look up. Northern Lights are dancing across the full globe of the sky. Awestruck we stand together united with the universe. We have been inspired into awareness.” (R1/49)

From StoryTime:



“So there is an aha moment. The kids started talking...they realized that everyone was to blame.” (ST1/3)

Words, phrases, and images to use when speaking of transformation

- | | | |
|--------------|------------------|---------------|
| -Realization | -Awakening | -Conversion |
| -Recognition | -Suddenly | -‘Aha moment’ |
| -Clarity | -Defining moment | |
| -Clearly | -Awareness | |

Core Theme: Transformation

Like epiphany, transformation is a critical element in the plot-structure. In fact the two are closely related. Without the epiphany—and the clarity that comes with it—the transformation is doubtful.

Transformation is much more than the usual North American ‘happy ending’. It implies fundamental change; there is no turning back. And because the transformation is positive, there is no desire to turn back.

Healing and reconciliation are also part of the transformation. Where there was conflict, now there is harmony; where there was emptiness there is now fulfillment and wholeness. Transformation is a state of certainty, a deep understanding of what really matters. There is no equivocation; everything is as it should be. Transformation is the panacea for our cultural malaise—both at the personal and societal levels. In the stories, words associated with transformation include: ‘wholeness’, ‘peace’, ‘joy’, ‘meaning’, ‘fulfillment’, ‘love’, ‘appreciation’, etc.

In mythic or archetypal terms, transformation is a type of psychological dying; dying to the old ways, so that a new way can spring forth. This psychological ‘dying’ is always difficult. It requires the steadfast belief that ‘something better’ is beyond the horizon. Focusing on the frightful and the uncertain is demoralizing and de-motivating and it is often the barrier to experiencing ‘something better’. Maintaining a hopeful vision of what our transformed selves (and world) will look like is crucial. Here lies the strength of the epiphany and its close association with transformation...and ultimately hope.

Again, archetypically, transformation implies wholeness—the movement of the fragmented toward the One—and helps explain the presence of a large number of circular images, some repeated several times over the

course of the five sessions. Below is a very small sample of these circular images—symbolic of wholeness—that are used as pictorial support to StoryTime team stories.



From Reflections:

...it was transformational for me in as far as I had not worked collaboratively with people I had thought of as adversaries..." (R2/7)

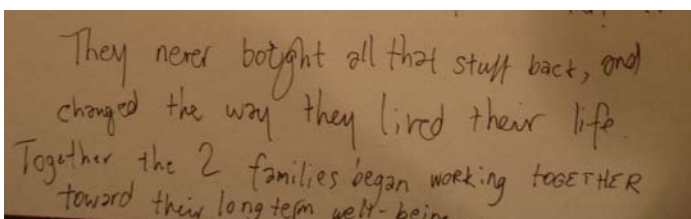
"I changed my path of my life, retired and live a fulfilled life. I also found satisfaction in helping people..." (R4/35)

"I see my wedding as a moment in time of sublime excitement and exhilaration that in turn has led me to a life of spiritual and emotional awareness..." (R3/4)

"We were at a place we'd been many times before, but it felt completely different—we felt farther away from everything that surrounds us and closer to one another." (R2/10)

From StoryTime:

"They came up with a solution that transformed the virus into a garden, into flowers, into peacefulness and in the end everyone lived happily ever after." (ST2/2)



"They never bought all that stuff back, and changed the way they lived their life. Together the two families began working together toward their long-term well-being." (ST3/4)

Words, phrases, and images to use when speaking of transformation:

-Joy	-Peace	-Appreciation
-Relief	-Fundamental change	- Authentic
-Courage	-Whole/wholeness	-No turning back
-Confidence	-Fulfillment	-Gratitude
-Letting go	-Love	
-Fulfillment	-Meaning	

Core theme: what they mean to the Sustainability Story

The five core themes that emerged from the stories of *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being* have strong emotive power. Stories from all five groups speak about our current cultural condition, our collective malaise: our lives are full, but not fulfilled; we have lost touch with those things that are most meaningful to us. This has significant implications.

Linking sustainability to *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being* need not imply limits, or sacrifice. Instead sustainability can be associated with re-finding and reconnecting with those people, ideas, and things that we truly value, those things that matter the most, but seem to be missing in our lives. Sustainability at this deeply emotional level is not about sacrificing or 'giving up', but regaining. The only things we give up are those extraneous stimuli and demands that do not bring true meaning and fulfillment into our lives. We discard those things that make life a little too stressful, a little too hard, etc. We give up dis-ease.

Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being is not about personal gain, money or 'stuff'. Rather it is about experiencing the world with 'awakened eyes.' This is a world full of boundless and—more importantly—*meaningful* possibilities. It is a world focused on community, not ego; on giving, not taking; on living life to the fullest, rather than merely consuming. It is a world where we can make a positive difference. It is a world of joy, wholeness and fulfillment and it sits as a potential counter-point to our too busy and too-fragmented lives.

By incorporating any of these themes into our communications about sustainability, we can impart that communication with some of the same powerful emotions and images that we found in the stories from the five groups.

Secondary Themes

Aside from being important clues—along with the core themes—to fully understand the meta-theme, secondary themes provide a rich source of context and the content. They speak to specific content areas of a potential Sustainability Story. There are several secondary themes that bear further discussion.

Secondary Theme: Spirituality (blessings)

The field of sustainability speaks of the ‘three legs of the stool’: the environment, society, and economics. The findings from the StoryTellings™ suggest a fourth leg: ‘spirituality’ (more politically correct words might be ‘epistemological’ or ‘ontological’). But for now let’s call it what it is. Here again, there is a connection—similar to what we saw with hope, interconnectivity, and community—between the notion of sustainability as discussed in WordPlay and the stories of *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being stories*. More importantly, spirituality seems to transcend the superficial differences between the other three ‘legs’ and it certainly crosses over between Thought Leaders and the General Public.

The malaise or discontent—that vague sense that something is not right, that we see again and again in the stories—is a *dis*-ease of meaning; it is a *spiritual affliction*. Linking sustainability and *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being* allows us to talk about sustainability as a ‘spiritual’ solution. Or using a more universally accepted phrase, sustainability can be a source of higher meaning and deeper fulfillment. It is a way of making whole what is fragmented, healing what is broken.

Situated somewhere between ‘spirituality’ and ‘community’ lies a notion of a moral imperative: ‘do unto others’. We do some things just because they are the ‘right thing to do.’ We don’t expect a reward or even recognition. This is an emotionally powerful intrinsic motivation that fuels many different types of selfless behaviours.

Secondary Theme: Letting go

For many the word ‘sustainability’ means sacrifice, giving up something that is desirable. However, the stories clearly show that sustainability can be positioned not as a sacrifice—a giving up—but as a means of ‘letting go’ of all those stressful and less-than-meaningful activities that seem to dominate our lives and do little to make our lives more fulfilling. When we let go of these distractions, we become more connected...our hurt diminishes ...we see the world and everything in it, in a new light.

Secondary Theme: Small steps

This notion is equally apparent with Thought Leaders and the General Public. It is a continuing conversation in the post-WordPlay discussions and we see it frequently in both the StoryTime team stories and the individual Reflections stories about *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being*. When discussing the word ‘sustainability’ and the words and phrases associated with it, participants describe the task at hand as ‘daunting’, ‘amorphous’, ‘frustrating’, etc. Because sustainability can mean many things and entail seemingly huge and coordinated efforts, we can feel ‘paralysed’; we don’t know what to do, where to start. The answer—in stories and discussion is—the ‘little things’, ‘take small steps.’ A General Public session participant described it during a discussion: “Little things that you do make big things. It just happens.”

This is an especially important learning because we know from a variety of discussions during WordPlay that the General Public is looking for solutions, especially from experts. They want to know *specifically* what to do (see Executive Overview: What we discovered; sustainability, differences) and feel less than optimal power when the answers are lacking. In the absence of this specificity, ‘doing the little things’ and ‘beginning with small steps’ shifts the power to make a difference from the ‘experts’ to the General Public. In this way it also provides a sense of possibility; a glimmer of hope.

Secondary Theme: Grandparents

Grandparents, as well as other *non*-curmudgeonly elders, serve as ‘connectors’. They are the closest link we have to the fading past. As teachers and story stewards, they ensure that community’s stories are passed on to the next generations.

In many of the participant stories grandparents and elders serve as a calming influence when things go wrong, a reminder that even in the darkest hours, the light will return...because it always has in the past. They are a beacon of hope.

Secondary Themes: what they mean to the Sustainability Story

Secondary themes can be used to provide rich content to the plot-structure of the story. They are ways to present the core themes using *specific* concepts and ideas, concepts and ideas that support the underlying story we want to tell. Because they emerged from the stories, secondary themes speak specifically to the emotional space associated with *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being*.

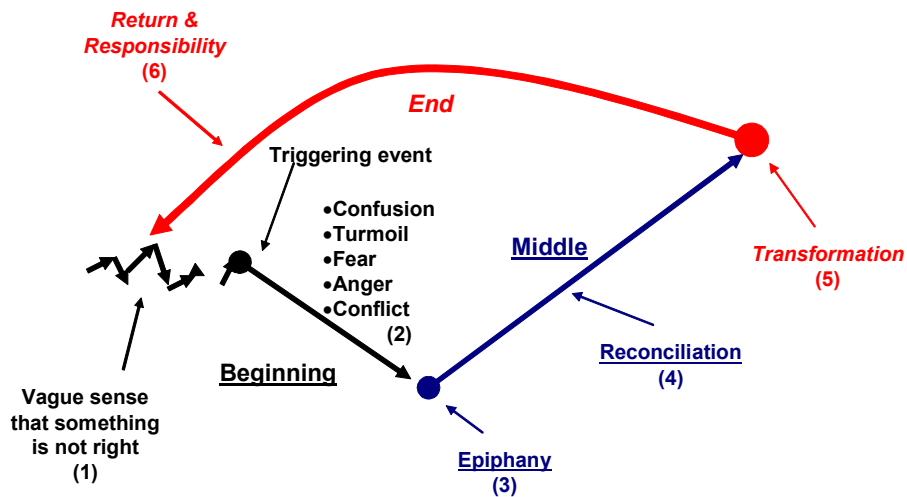
Plot-structure

A critical first step in understanding what both Thought Leaders and the General Public are telling us in their stories about *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being* is identifying and 'mapping' *one* common plot-structure that is representative of the stories we heard and read.

Plot-structure defines the action of the story. It portrays the events and activities of the story in a sequential, orderly, and meaningful way. By ensuring that a story has its three essential components: Beginning, Middle and End, plot addresses the questions: What happened? What happened next...and why?

The plot-structure for *Working Toward Our Long-Term Well-being* is illustrated below. There are six (6) critical events or elements in the plot sequence. Those events in **black** are the **Beginning** of the story, blue (underlined) is the **Middle**, *red (Italics)* is the **End or resolution**.

Plot Structure



Below are the further brief explanations of the key events in the plot.

1. The Beginning: A vague sense that something is not right.

We are out of balance; life is a bit too hard, a bit too stressful. We feel caught in a trap without any easy way out. Because life is not too unpleasant and because there are many immediate and apparent benefits, we continue on our current path, even though we know it is not the right one. This is the malaise, *dis*-ease.

“...and there it was a beautiful day. The sun was shining. The sky, crystal blue. I looked in my rear view mirror and I looked at my face, but it wasn’t my face. It was my fate.” (ST 1/1)

“I was recently out of university and working in research lab. As interesting as the work was, I felt unfulfilled. (R5/11)

“I have worked, in my adult life, for twenty years now. Always for someone else promoting and supporting their goals...”(R 3/6)

2. The Beginning: The triggering event

We continue to go through the motions of our daily lives until there is an event that forces us to stop and take stock of what we are doing. This can be gradual, but in our stories most of these events are sudden and often traumatic. The triggering event is a ‘wake up call’; all is not well. This wake up call is often followed by powerful and potentially debilitating emotions such as fear, anger, despair, etc. or trials and challenges. There is often hard work to be done. These can be difficult and dark times.

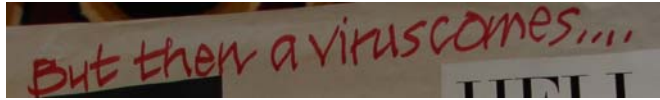
“The trip really galvanized me to pursue outdoor activities...Being a born and bred BC’er, what was I doing missing out” (R5/12)

“I had, in fact received a rejection from medical school. I felt despair and hopelessness. I felt useless.” (R4/4)

“I left the hospital with no hope. I was flooded with emotion. Rage. Anger. Denial...I was dying. “(R 2/11)

“She then realized that this people, the people of the eastern arctic were losing their way of life and there was little they could do about it. It was a powerful moment for her.” (R2/4)

From StoryTime:



“From another world a virus comes which doesn’t discriminate between the young and the old. It attacks everybody...People are dying and it’s a very sad sordid mess” (ST2/2)

“...and they started dying and falling down into the town. The town was littered with dead birds. It was a triggering event.” (ST3/3)



3. The Middle: Epiphany

Sometimes the triggering event itself is the epiphany. However, in most of the stories about *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being*, the epiphany is the result of the triggering event *and* the turmoil, confusion, and challenges that follow. This is an awakening, not just to the problem but also to an understanding of what caused the problem and its possible solutions. It is seeing the world through a different lens. What was unclear or unknown before is seen with clarity. Solutions present themselves and we find—or re-find—the ‘right path’. The confusion or turmoil from the trigger event begins to dissipate.

“The combination of the two experiences led me to understand scale and scope—and gain perspective on my life and how it related to the world. It was enlightenment and epiphany.” (R1/33)

(See other representative quotes above under Themes: Epiphany).

4. The Middle: Reconciliation

We start on a path of reconciliation. What was broken we begin to fix. Disease is arrested, illness relieved. Relationships are mended. And most importantly, we begin to make peace with who we are and our place in the world. Our healing is the start of a joyful journey to wholeness and transformation.

This is a time of restoration and renewal.

“ ‘Mom, I think you may be schizophrenic’. She pauses and doesn’t say anything...She seems be calmer. A wave of calm rolls over me like I have never felt before. It took so much to let those words out of my lips. She had wanted to hear them for years, but never let one

doctor see her more than once...She never spoke another word. She died with peace on her face all her tensions vanished away.” (R5/19)

(More excerpts from the stories above under Themes: Reconciliation).

5. The End: Transformation

The next to the last element of the plot-structure of *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being* is transformation. We are fundamentally changed. What was meaningless now has meaning. What was fragmented and hurt is now whole and healed. We attain a state where ‘peace’, ‘joy’, ‘harmony’, and ‘fulfillment’ prevail. With apologies to William Blake: “God’s in his heaven and all’s right with the world.”

“I only felt calm, despite the chaos around me. I knew that I had a life’s work and a life’s mission before me. I felt meaning, a meaning that brought peace to the cacophony, no barriers just opportunities to explore, stories to tell and minds to convince....Somehow it felt perfect...that ego was losing its grip, I was beginning to get over myself and life was coming into perspective.” (R2/44)

(See above, Themes: Transformation for more examples from the stories.)

6. The End: Return and responsibility

The story is not complete at transformation. The protagonists in our story do more than celebrate their new found sense of meaning. They know they now have a responsibility to share their experiences, knowledge, and wisdom with others. They return or ‘come home’—transformed, of course—to help others see what they have seen, experience what they have experienced....to give back and help others find the path to reconciliation and transformation. This is not an odious responsibility; rather it is the work of joy and fulfillment; a labour of love.

From StoryTime:



“...they realized that had to give the gift that remembers and they joined together and they work to find more solutions...It’s a good thing you are being charitable, that’s what the final edit is about....”

ST2/1

“As a result I try to pass the kindness on, when I travel or see someone in genuine need. I hope to repay their unexpected and profound kindness with kindness of my own generosity.” (R4/3)

“And having been accepted, I now had responsibilities to that family...” (R3/36)

“I made a commitment that day. I promised that if I strive I will strive to create a space for that bird to sit and be itself. I’ll strive to create an environment that is safe for all creatures like this to sit and be themselves.” (R1/25)

Plot summary; what it means to the Sustainability Story

There are many benefits of using the plot-structure of *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being* to tell the Sustainability Story. Three of the six core themes—*epiphany*, *reconciliation*, and *transformation*—are also key elements of the plot, so these powerfully emotive themes are reinforced in the action of the story.

Linking sustainability and the Sustainability Story to the plot-structure of *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being* shows us the sequence and order of these three core themes and places them within a context of the other three plot elements: *a vague sense of unease*, *triggering event*, *responsibility*. More importantly this plot-structure shows that although the five core themes are extremely positive, the process of attaining them is very often difficult. Transformation is not serendipitous; first, we must become aware of our need to change, we need to be ‘awakened’. Often what follows is fraught with confusion, turmoil, fear, hard work and sustained effort. These are difficult but important parts of our story, for two reasons. First, our experience tells us that attaining that amorphous goal of ‘sustainability’ is difficult and challenging. It is often an experience of frustration and seeming failure. Secondly, we are a culture that is suspicious of the ‘easy win’. We believe that hard work and determination are essential ingredients of success. The trials and tribulations are as important to our story as the final transformation. ‘No pain, no gain’; ‘no guts, no glory’.

Finally, the responsibility that follows transformation—and is born out of reconciliation—means we cannot rest on our accomplishments, but we must return to teach, heal, and help others. We must ‘come home’ and ‘give back’ in order to finish making it right. Only then is the circle complete and we are once again, whole. In communicating this end of the cycle, it is important to point out that it is a ‘labour of love’—something that because of our transformation, we really want and need to do—not an odious chore.

Another way of thinking of the plot-structure is as a sequential and ordered map of the emotions—the sequence of emotions—we encounter as we go about *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being*.

Setting

Setting is a real or imaginary place where the story takes place; a mental landscape that we want the notion of sustainability to ‘own’. It is also the feel and emotional tone of the story, what it feels like to be part of the action and to interact with other characters.

The mental landscape of the Sustainability Story is a *transitional* but *hopeful space*—not necessarily a physical place—where we deeply understand those things that are most meaningful and fulfilling *and* where we act accordingly. It is a space of unhurried calm and momentary stillness, where we can pause and reflect on a heron sitting quietly in the sun, smile at the laughter of grandchildren playing in an orchard, or wonder at the stories of our elders. It is a space where we reacquaint ourselves with the people and things that really matter in our lives. A space that is comfortably familiar because we know where we stand in a greater scheme. It is a space of renewal and restoration, where strained relationships can be reconciled, battered psyches healed, and communities celebrated. Note the presence of the prefix **RE**; this is a space of metaphorical re-birth and regeneration. (See Myth below.)

It is transitional because we know there is much work to be done, innumerable challenges to meet, and fears to overcome. The prompt itself—*Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being*—implies work and effort. The plot-structure is clear that part of this journey entails challenges, confusion, fear, etc. There is no doubt; this is difficult work at best. And, this work provides two challenges: physical and emotional (or spiritual, as in the quest for meaning and fulfillment). The most difficult are the emotional/spiritual challenges. Here we face the ‘real work’, transforming ourselves. We must look beyond the limitations we place on ourselves and affirm our wholly human capacity for survival and change. This is a celebration of who we can become.

Setting: what it means to the Sustainability Story

The tone, the feel of the Sustainability Story should be hopeful, even quietly celebratory. It should reflect a space that is different—calmer, more still, more reflective, etc.—than the buzz of activity that characterizes our daily lives.

Hopeful does not imply a ‘feel good’, happy space. We know that our quest is difficult and we have not yet arrived. We are still on our journey and there is no reason to celebrate until we achieve our goal. We experience the tension between:



We do not shirk the hard work because we know that there is really no meaningful reward without effort. (See Plot-summary above). However, we are hopeful that by perseverance, hard work, and focusing on what really matters, we will find meaning and fulfillment.

Characters

The characters in the story are the ‘actors’, the people who play out the plot, interact with one another and who ultimately strive, fail, or succeed. Every story has a protagonist, the primary character around whom the plot centres. Often there are other, secondary, characters also present in the story. They play a supporting role, sometimes helping the protagonist in his ventures; sometimes blocking his way.

Protagonist

The protagonist or primary character in the Sustainability Story is a collective personification of each and every one of us. In the character of the protagonist, we collectively share common characteristics: a bit too harried and hurried; a longing for meaning and fulfillment; a desire to belong, to feel part of something bigger; a vague sense that there should be more to our lives than how we are currently living them. In the end, we are seeking more from our lives, not more in the way of ‘stuff’, more in the way of meaning. It is in this ‘seeking’ that we get our first inklings about the mythic or archetypal dimension of the protagonist in the Sustainability Story.

At first glance, the plot-structure in our stories is the same as that for the archetypal hero. This is not surprising. We can expect this from stories that touch us at the deeper levels of emotion and myth that *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being* do. Because the character of the hero is so ubiquitous—some say she populates *all* stories at some level or another—the presence of the hero doesn’t help differentiate our Sustainability Story from other stories where the hero also resides. There is more to the character of our story than merely the hero.

Here we are assisted by the great mythographer, Joseph Campbell, who believed the hero has a “thousand faces”. What is the face of the hero in our stories? What aspect of the hero archetype best resonates with our stories? And what is the character of the hero that will help us tell the Sustainability Story in the most compelling way?

Clues lie in *epiphany*, *reconciliation*, and *transformation*; three core themes and essential elements of the plot-structure. Transformation results in a new way of knowing, of seeing the world and everything in it in a new light. It requires an awakening, followed by learning, diligence, hard work. And often, the journey to knowledge is filled with danger, challenges, and fear of change and the unknown that it unleashes.

It is important to point out, that the plot-structure of *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being*, shares the same structure as a rite of passage. The conclusion of this transitional rite—if the initiation is successful—is transformation. The girl is now a woman; the boy a man. Returning to the community after the initiation rites, the initiate is ready for the responsibilities and privileges of adulthood. There is no going back to the ways of the child, nor is there any desire to do so.

From the corresponding similarities of the plot-structure in the stories and the rite of passage, we can see that one (there is another) of the archetypal or mythic dimensions of the protagonist of our Sustainability Story is the initiate; one who has passed the tests of the rites of passage and now is initiated into the ways of another level of knowing. The initiate ‘knows’ and understands—intellectually, emotionally and instinctually—at a deeper level than most. He is in a position to provide valuable assistance to his community, teaching others what he knows, and if his knowledge is in the healing arts, healing the afflicted. The community looks to him when they are doubtful and confused. Because he ‘knows’, he is a source of help and hope in dark times.

The initiate is an interesting and powerful archetypal character for the Sustainability Story because she is often tasked with the role of keeping, preserving, and passing on the knowledge she has attained. This gives the protagonist in our story an added archetypal dimension: keeper. We can think of the initiate as a repository or keeper of the ‘truth’. The priestesses who attended the oracle at Delphi were initiated into the secrets of the cult. They were responsible for maintaining the integrity of the rites and rituals associated with the place. This included the training and initiation of those who would take their place. Here we see once again the same structure as the core theme and plot element; *interconnectivity*: being the conduit or connector between the past and the future.

A powerful secondary benefit of emphasizing the keeper archetype is the idea that ‘keeping’ and ‘keeper’ resonate very strongly in the Canadian consciousness. Cross-cultural research, conducted over the last ten years, strongly suggests that the stereotypical notion of Canadian conservatism or perceived caution (compared to the adolescent exuberances and excess of the American culture) rests in our desire to keep and protect what we have. We inhabit one of the richest and most beautiful places in the world. At a deep mythic and archetypal level, we know there is little we can do to make such a wonderful place better; our task, then, is to keep it as it is. Also, our geography requires that we conserve, keep, and preserve our energies through the dark, cold months of winter. Adolescent exuberance in this harsh climate can have dire consequences.

Another relevant feature of the initiate/keeper archetype is a matter of degree. There are degrees of initiation, each representing different levels of understanding and knowledge and each having different responsibilities of keeping, preserving, and passing on that knowledge. Although the StoryTime and Reflections stories from all five groups point to one protagonist—the initiate/keeper character—as appropriate for both the Thought Leaders and the

General Public, the discussions from WordPlay suggest that Thought Leaders are at a different level of understanding than the General Public. They speak of sustainability more at the level of values and belief or ‘meaning and being’, while the General Public is more comfortable speaking about sustainability as tangible day-to-day issues. Also, the General Public looks to ‘experts’ (Thought Leaders) for guidance on the ‘how to’s’ about sustainability. (See Sustainability Overview, and Meaning, above). What the General Public knows about the ‘how to’s’, they know instinctively; for example, ‘little things can make a difference’. Note: it serves no purpose to put a value on whether Thought Leaders or the General Public is at a ‘higher’ level.

The secondary characters are those who will follow and must be guided by the initiate/keeper as they begin their process of transformation. These are *uninitiated*; those in the community who will come after. The uninitiated have not yet awakened or may still be in pain. It is for the good of these people that the initiate returns after his transformation; they are beneficiaries of the ‘labour of love’.

The initiate/keepers’ relationship to the secondary characters is important to the Sustainability Story because it places the characters within the same emotional space as interconnectivity and community—and to a lesser extent, reconciliation—reinforcing their significance as themes and elements of the plot-structure.

Character: what it means to the Sustainability Story

At the deeper levels of Meaning and Myth, the same emotions, images, and symbols apply to both Thought Leaders and the General Public. There are no structural differences in their stories about *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being*. The *initiate/keeper* character applies to both groups in their quest to ‘know and understand’. Thought Leaders and the General Public follow the same plot-structure and experience the same plot-elements on their journey of transformation. Both groups recognize (*re-cognize*: to know again) the elements of the story and it resonates emotionally for them. In this, they are both initiates/keepers.

Speaking to the General Public without acknowledging that many of them are initiates/keepers and that they are ‘in the know’ will more likely do more harm than good. Everyone—the General Public and Thought Leaders, alike—‘knows’ what we have to do. As two General Public participants independently pointed out in sessions three and five: “we know all this....It is instinctual.”

Speaking to the keeper dimension of the initiate/keeper, our story will speak persuasively to that part of the Canadian cultural unconscious that instinctually ‘knows’ the value of keeping, conserving, and preserving. It is one of the elemental differences between the Canadian and American cultures and can be summed in the Canadian belief of ‘peace, order and good government’ vs. the American belief in ‘life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness’. ‘Order’ implies keeping and maintaining; ‘pursuit’ implies going out, expanding.

If we want to fine-tune our character description to include degree of initiation, then Thought Leaders and the General Public are at different levels. Thought Leaders are at a level where talking about values, beliefs—‘the why’ of sustainability—is important. The General Public is more interested in talking about ‘the how’ of sustainability. In this, they look to Thought Leaders as ‘helpers’; those who can provide help about specific things to do. This is the realm of the intellect and reason; the level of communication we call Message. The content of the Message can change to reflect these differences.

MESSAGE, MEANING, AND MYTH

Message

Message is a necessary—but not sufficient—element of an effective Sustainability Story. Message speaks to us at a very rational, logic level.

At the rational level of Message, both the word *sustainability*—in WordPlay—and the StoryTime and Reflections stories in response to the prompt *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being* are extremely positive.

WordPlay

Approximately 78% of *all* the words Thought Leaders *and* the General Public associate with *sustainability* (identified during the WordPlay hour of StoryTellings™) are rated positive. There is very little difference in the percentage of positive words between Thought Leaders and the General Public; Thought Leaders rate 79% of their words positive, compared to the General Public’s 77%.

The word ‘environment’ (23 citations) is most frequently associated with *sustainability*. The words ‘future’ (21) ‘green’ (21) ‘water’ (15), and ‘food,’ (12) are the next most cited positive words, making up the ‘top five’ words associated with sustainability across all five sessions.

Below is a breakdown of the top four most cited *positive* words associated with *sustainability* by session. (Note: the numbers below do not add to the numbers above; some of the words cited above are not in the top four of some sessions.)

**Session One:
Thought Leaders**

- Future 8
- Green 4
- Balance 4
- Environment 3

**Session Two:
Thought Leaders**

- Green 8
- Future 6
- Environment 5
- Balance 4

**Session Three:
General Public**

- Environment 4
- Water 4
- Food 3
- Future 3

**Session Four:
General Public**

- Food 6
- Environment 4
- Trees 4
- Water 3

**Session Five:
General Public**

- Environment 7
- Water 5
- Green 5
- Waste 5

In these group numbers—broken out by Thought Leader and General Public sessions—we have further evidence that the General Public associates sustainability with more concrete day-to-day issues (i.e., ‘food’, ‘water’, etc.) where Thought Leaders tend to associate the word with more intangible concepts, i.e., ‘future’, ‘green’, ‘balance.’

StoryTime and Reflections

In addition, the stories suggest that the following words, phrases, and secondary themes are ways to speak about *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being* at the rational, intellectual level of Message.

“Re” words

These are powerful words to be used in messaging both sustainability and *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being*. They appear over and over again in the stories—StoryTime and Reflections—and in WordPlay. Some powerful ‘re’ words:

- Renew
- Restore
- Return
- Rejuvenate
- Redefine
- Revitalize
- Recycle
- Reuse
- Recognize
- Relax

Small steps and actions

Especially prevalent in the stories, is the notion that big outcomes can result from many small efforts. What can seem to be a daunting and impossible task is more manageable when broken into small, actionable, and measurable components.

“Our part in this story is very small but powerful and helped two kids have a safer cleaner life.” (R3/25)

Everyone has responsibility; everyone can make a difference

This is related to number two (2), directly above. The stories—both StoryTime and Reflections—are full of examples of individuals or small groups of people (communities) taking responsibility for making something better, making a positive impact.

“There are times when you cannot rely on others or let things go. You have to act.”(R3/18)

Children as catalysts of change

In a number of the stories children are the catalysts of change. They see what their parents cannot; and they sense solutions where others only see problems. Or sometimes, the arrival of a new-born provides parents with a radically different view of the world. In either case, there is a sublime acknowledgement of the power of children to precipitate positive change. The stories are clear that children are—or can be—change agents; and need not be relegated to the role of passive victims of their parent’s perceived greed, self-centeredness, and ‘now’ orientation.

Symbolically, children represent the hope of the future and all the possibility it holds.

“...we were home again. Thirty hours ago two of us had set out and now we were three. Now the whole definition of well-being has taken on a new meaning. I’m eager to make the world a better place, not for my family but others as well.” (R2/10)

Message: what it means to the Sustainability Story

In creating a compelling Sustainability Story, Message is a necessary but not sufficient condition. People want ‘reasons’, facts, feedback, and data. These are all part of our decision-making process. The StoryTellings™ findings—words and concepts—associated with the level of Message provide some of these reasons, facts, etc. They also provide the ‘intellectual alibi’ that we use to rationalize our more emotionally based decisions.

As we have seen in exploring the themes and plot-structure of the Sustainability Story, at the deeper levels of Meaning and Myth, the stories about *Working for Our Long-term Well-being* are similar across the Thought Leaders and General Public sessions. However, at the level of Message there is a difference between these two groups. The General Public tends to view and speak about

sustainability in more concrete terms than Thought Leaders. This can be an important factor in communicating to these two groups

The four points related to the level of Message emerging from the stories are necessary components of any effective communication of the Sustainability Story. The idea of ‘small steps’ and ‘everyone has responsibility’ can be particularly effective, serving as counterpoints to the feeling of *relative* powerlessness (compared to Thought Leaders) that was identified in General Public sessions three (3), four (4), and five (5). (See: Sustainability Highlights, above).

Finally, the notion of ‘re’—because of the emotive power of ‘going-back’ and ‘returning’—can serve as a ‘bridge’ between the levels of Message and Meaning. People will recognize some ‘re’ words at an intellectual and rational level, for example the current mantra of reuse, reduce, and recycle. Other ‘re’ words will resonate at a deeper and more emotional level, for example: restore, renew, re-find, etc.

Meaning

The most compelling and effective brand stories touch us at a deeply emotional level. It is these emotions that are the underlying drivers of behaviour. This is the level of Meaning. At this deeply felt, personal, and significantly subtler level, we begin to see the power of story in stimulating compelling images, phrases and symbols. To identify the dimensions of Meaning, we look primarily at the themes and the plot-structure for the key emotional energies that are at their source.

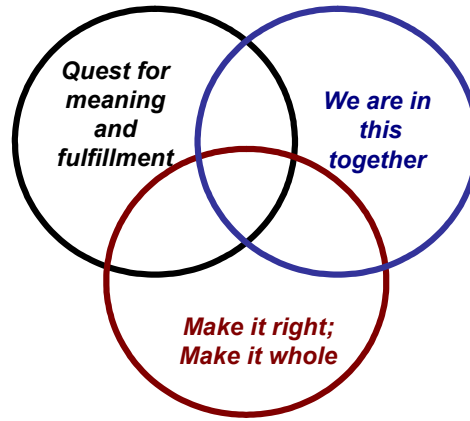
Three (3) key dimensions emerge from participant’s stories about *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being*.

- Quest for meaning and fulfillment
- We are in this together
- Make it right; make it whole

Because we are activating deep and meaningful emotions, we did not expect any major differences between Thought Leaders and the General Public. This proved to be the case.

These dimensions are not the realm of *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being* only. We see preliminary hints and foreshadowing of their power in WordPlay and the discussions that follow it. In addition, these three dimensions are inter-related and in some instances there is an overlap as shown by the illustration below:

Emotional Triggers



Quest for meaning and fulfillment

Participants—both Thought Leaders and the General Public—want their lives to matter, to make a difference for themselves as individuals and for their communities. *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being*—no matter if done individually or collectively—is about making whole that which is fragmented, healing what hurts, filling what is empty.

The stories clearly show that participants want their lives to ‘mean something’ more than semi-sleep walking through their day-to-day routines; hence the recurring presence in the stories of ‘awakening’ and ‘epiphany’. At these key moments in the stories, we are freed from the myopic state of our routine existence and awakened to new possibilities. We begin to see how our lives fit into a greater scheme. We realize that we are part of a much bigger picture—spanning time *and* space—and what we do, does matter. We are conduits between the past and the future and what we do has impact more far-reaching than we could ever before imagine. This is the essence of interconnectivity and community and it is a rich source of meaning and fulfillment. It is the counterpoint of the cliché: “on her deathbed, no one ever says: ‘I wish I had spent more time at the office’.”

We are in this together

The Field Team dropped the word ‘together’ from the prompt because we wanted to determine if the stories are about individuals or groups. They are about both. Even in the stories that focused on the individual, there are numerous mentions of others who guided, coached, supported, and encouraged. The protagonists in these stories are seldom completely on their own.

Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being is—in the end—an *emotionally* collective effort. There is much we can do as individuals; in fact the stories and their ensuing discussions are clear about the role of individual responsibility and taking necessary action, by one's self if required. Still, the emotional support of others provides the necessary impetus for continuing our efforts when the going gets tough. This is the essence of community; people working together, sharing, and feeling the safety and security of belonging. When we are tired or discouraged and want nothing more than to abandon the quest, it is the knowledge that we are not alone—that we are in this together—or others are counting on us, that provides the strength, confidence, and the courage to go on.

Make it right; make it whole

Throughout the stories there is a consistent premise; we are dysfunctional as individuals and communities. We allow ourselves to be over-burdened with goals, responsibilities, and expectations; many of which do *not* add anything to our sense of long-term well-being or our quest for fulfillment and meaning. Our current path has many seductive benefits and on the surface it is very inviting. However, we know it is short-term and transitory; in the end we never *really* seem to get what we are looking for. This path is not sustainable!

We feel torn apart by ever-growing commitments, increasing needs and expectations. There is always another goal to strive for, another responsibility to accept; all the while we have a vague sense that we are going nowhere. Instead of feeling fulfilled we feel more and more fragmented.

If we take time to reflect and take a deeper look—or more likely, if we are shockingly awakened by a triggering event—then we see the limitations of our ways and we want to make things better. We need to make things right—make amends—for ourselves, our communities, and for everyone and everything we touch. We seek to repair those things we have damaged, either intentionally or inadvertently. This becomes our new path; it is a path of healing and reconciliation. It is the path that ends in transformation and responsibility. We are whole once again. The circle once more is unbroken.

Meaning: what it means to the Sustainability Story

Quest for meaning and fulfillment; we are in this together; and make it right, make it whole: are 'emotional triggers', providing the emotional energy that is the underlying source of our behaviour. They are essential elements in owning the emotional space associated with *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being*. These are deep emotions and when invoked in the same context as sustainability, they will reinforce the linkage between sustainability and *Working Toward Our Long-Term Well-being*. The five core themes (interconnectivity, reconciliation, community, epiphany, and transformation) *and* the meta-theme (hope) are embodied in these emotional dimensions.

Because Meaning speaks to those powerful and deep personal emotions that are the source of behaviour, it is essential that these three emotional dimensions are incorporated into the Sustainability Story whenever and in as many ways as possible. All three need not be used at the same time in the same communication, but whenever we speak about sustainability we should at least tap into one of these emotional dimensions.

It is important that we speak of these dimensions in subtle ways. Their power lies in their nuances and it is best to allude to them, metaphorically or allegorically through verbal or pictorial imagery. We can find clues to this imagery from the excerpts of the stories—verbal and pictorial—used to illustrate them. For example: quest for meaning and fulfillment might be illustrated by very contented parents smiling upon their newborn child; *we are in this together* might be communicated by the image of one person offering another a helping hand; or a multi-generational family sitting around a fire circle. *Make it right; make it whole*, might be shown as a tree planter carefully replanting a clear cut with seedlings, or a moment of apology and reconciliation, etc.

Myth

This is the level that speaks to ageless and universal truth. Myth speaks to fundamental human experiences: birth, death, growing up and growing old; relationships and kinships; the privileges and responsibilities of belonging to a community tribe, clan etc. The level of Myth is also the level of archetypes; archetypes are images or imprints that are ‘hardwired’ into our consciousness. They transcend time, culture and geography and are manifested in ancient stories, myths, and symbols. Our ability to connect the Sustainability Story with one of the few universal mythic stories provides an opportunity to speak to the General Public and Thought Leaders at a very deep, meaningful, and powerful level.

The Cycle of Life: Rebirth and Regeneration

The structure of our stories—again, from all five sessions—point to a very fundamental mythic story: *The Cycle of Life: Rebirth and Regeneration*. Three of the five core themes—reconciliation, interconnectivity, transformation—speak to this story; rebirth and regeneration—either literally or figuratively—and are significant components of each. In addition, the prevalence of the recurring ‘re’ words show that ‘going back’ is a key element in the StoryTime and Reflections stories.

Many of the stories about *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being* are about defining moments or triggering events in the cyclic drama of human life: birth, death, marriage, illness, recovery, etc. Or they refer to the natural order of things, i.e., the changing seasons, the life cycle of species, planting and harvesting, etc. These are times when we are most open to the possibility that we are part of

something larger, that there are certainties in life that transcend our own sense of time and place.

The *Cycle of Life* is an extremely powerful myth. It is embodied in the rhythm of the changing of the seasons, the cycles of the moon, the ebb and flow of the tides, the parade of planets across the night sky, to name but a few. We experience it daily in the interactions of generations, especially watching the very young and the very old together.

It is a joyful and life affirming story. The death and decay of fall and winter are *always* followed by the blossoms of spring and the fecundity of the summer. In contemplating the mystery of this ever-certain cycle of return, we are seized by one emotion: *hope*. This is a further rationale for defining hope as the meta-theme of the Sustainability Story; in the stories about *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being*, hope truly does spring eternal.

Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being is about re-awakening to that which we already intuitively know. It is a hopeful rebirth of meaning in a less than meaningful world. In this sense, the stories are not as much about the destination, but the journey; there is no end to *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being*. It is our life's work as it was for our parents and their parents and as it will be for our children and all the children who follow. This cyclic nature is complete and whole in its own right. The plot and its component sequence of events play themselves out over and over and over again. In the words of the poet, T.S. Eliot:

*“We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.”*

Myth: what it means to the Sustainability Story

Many of our most powerful and ancient rituals are re-enactments of the ageless story of the Cycle of Life. This story resonates deeply in our collective psyche and is readily activated and brought to conscious awareness with little difficulty. Many of our most popular symbols and traditions—the Christmas wreath, harvest festivals, birthday celebrations, anniversaries, etc.—are contemporary manifestations of this myth. In each of these there lies an element of hope and a connection with what came before and what follows.

Again subtlety is essential. Myth's power lies as much in what is *not* said but implied than what is explicitly spoken. Myth can never be explained, only experienced. To again quote T.S. Eliot, Myth can be considered “the music heard so deeply that it is not heard at all.” Speaking so we are ‘heard deeply’ is the realm of symbol. A few symbols of the Cycle of Life include:

- Changing of the seasons
- Phases of the moon

- Movement of the planets across the night sky
- Pregnancy and birth (humans and animals)
- Mothers and babies (humans and animals)
- Running or bubbling water
- Springs and other flowing ground sources of water
- The circle, spiral
- Perennial plants (the ivy, laurel)
- The diurnal movement (day into night into day, etc.)
- Planting and harvesting

EPILOGUE: WHAT IT ALL MEANS

We began our research with three goals:

- Understand what words, phrases, concepts, etc. Thought Leaders and the General Public associate with the notion of ‘*sustainability*’.
- Identify and ‘own the emotional/semantic space’ around the phrase: *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being*. Understand what we must do and say to ‘brand’ sustainability in this emotional space.
- Provide input to communication strategies that can speak at deeply emotional and compelling levels; levels that will help change attitudes and behaviours.

There are several key insights from our StoryTellings™ sessions that bear repeating or summarizing. They are significant factors in linking sustainability to the emotional space around *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being*.

Hope, Interconnectivity, and Community

The first and most important: there is a clear emotional connection between the notion of sustainability that we explored in WordPlay and the prompt—*Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being*—for the StoryTime and Reflections stories. This makes our goal of sustainability ‘owning’ the emotional space of *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being* much easier to facilitate. We see this connection in the meta-theme of the Sustainability Story: *hope*. The stories from all five groups are filled with examples of hope, especially the hopeful belief that all of us—no matter how seemingly powerless or insignificant—can be a catalyst for positive change. In these many instance, hope is not reserved for the great heroic act, but is often embodied in the ‘little things’ we accept responsibility to do for ourselves and others.

At the more rational level of WordPlay, hope is a recurring topic of discussion in all the groups. It is not as easily apparent in the discussions as it is in the stories,

but it is certainly there, an underlying idea that takes only a little probing to bring to the surface. We may be on the wrong path, but that doesn't preclude our re-finding the way: "We couldn't have had this conversation twenty years ago; we're questioning the path and I think that's a start" was how a participant in the WordPlay discussion of session three (3) described a more hopeful future. Things *have* gotten better and this is cause for hope.

The other clear linkage between the notion of sustainability and *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being* is seen in two of the five core themes: *interconnectivity* and *community*. Both speak to us at all three levels of Message, Meaning, and Myth. In the WordPlay discussions (Message), the word 'interconnectivity' is used several times itself; interconnectivity is also described in other ways, i.e., 'inter-related,' 'circle of life', the 'web of life', etc. The word 'community' is also often used in the discussions, usually in the context of family, friends, and those people to whom we look for help and support and who in turn look to us for the same. Interconnectivity and community both have a strong rational, logical energy as top of mind subjects associated with the word 'sustainability'. This is reinforced at the deep and more emotional levels of Meaning and Myth and in the stories about *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being*.

At the level of Meaning, interconnectivity and community are strongly associated with two of the Meaning dimensions: '*quest for meaning and fulfillment*' and '*we are in this together*'. At this emotionally powerful and often unconscious level, we long to be part of something that will help us heal ourselves, our communities, and the world. We desire to be part of 'something bigger.' As a participant in session five commented: "What you do as one you do as a whole." This mirrors an excerpt from the stories: "We all felt like we belonged to something bigger than ourselves and we found a little peace."

At the level of Myth, *the cycle of life, rebirth and regeneration* is all about interconnectivity. This is an ancient and timeless story that is *the* source of hope at the most fundamental level of human activity: survival. Again a participant in session three summarized this clearly: "We are all one in the circle of life."

Sustainability and Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being

We started our journey of exploration seeking to 'brand' the amorphous notion of sustainability around the emotional space of *Working Toward Our Long-term Well being*. The results of the analysis and interpretation of the stories and the session discussions show that this not only possible, but potentially powerful and beneficial. The emotional and archetypal energy around *Working for Our Long-term Well-being* is strong and deeply personal; it can alter attitudes and change behaviour when we link these emotions to the notion of sustainability.

This is not a contrived linkage. On the contrary, our research shows that it is quite natural. A number of key topics raised and discussed when identifying the words associated with 'sustainability' very clearly mirror some the significant

themes that emerged from the stories about *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being*.

The themes, plot-structure elements, images, and symbols, etc. associated with *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being* resonate deeply in the collective imagination of Thought Leaders and the General Public alike. We have discovered a new and potentially powerful way of speaking about sustainability. *Working Toward Our Long-term Well-being* can become the tag line—or better yet, the mantra—for sustainability. We have the beginnings of a new story.