

Your strategy isn't failing. The story underneath it is.

Helping leaders shape the stories that shape organisational reality, so the strategy you committed to on paper becomes the one your people actually live.

For HR Directors and Chief People Officers driving a transformation the board is watching, where the plan is right and the behaviour isn't following it.

When you've been through the restructure, the hybrid transition, the departures nobody explained publicly, and you held it together. Now the CEO wants to know why the new strategy isn't landing, and "it's a culture thing" isn't an answer you're willing to give.



Anna Katharina Schaffner, PhD • www.annakschaffner.com

01 • THE IDEA

People don't respond to strategy. They respond to the stories they tell about it.

In most organisations, strategy doesn't fail because it's flawed. It fails because of how it's interpreted, trusted, and emotionally received.

Strategy is read through stories: stories about leadership, trust, fairness, identity, and the future. These stories are powerful interpretive filters. They decide whether change feels credible or threatening, whether leadership is trusted or doubted, and whether people experience their work as meaningful or merely demanding.

We never simply respond to facts. We respond to the stories we tell about the facts. And every organisation is telling itself one, whether or not anyone has stopped to read it.



Story shapes perception.

Perception shapes behaviour.

Behaviour shapes reality.

02 • THE STORY GAP

Two stories run in every organisation. The distance between them decides everything.

The official story is the strategy leaders communicate. It's on the slides, in the town hall, on the wall.

The lived story is what people actually believe. It's in the corridors, the kitchens, the private messages.

For you, that gap shows up as the strategy that made perfect sense in the leadership offsite and doesn't survive contact with the floor.

The gap between the two determines whether people embrace change, resist it, or quietly disengage. When behaviour stalls after a sound strategy, that story gap is almost always the reason. And it stays invisible, because the leaders best placed to close it are inside the story too.

BEFORE THE STORY IS SURFACED	AFTER
Strategy interpreted differently across teams	Aligned understanding of strategic intent
Resistance feels irrational	Leaders understand and repair the stories driving it
Communication repeats but doesn't land	Conversations become meaningful
Trust erodes, change fatigue rises	Trust strengthens, ownership rises
Behaviour changes slowly or stalls	Strategy translates into action

03 · THE CAPABILITY

Story Leadership™ is the capability to see and reshape those stories with purpose.

Leaders are not only decision-makers. They are interpreters, sense-makers, meaning-builders, and stewards of the collective stories their organisations run on. The organisations best equipped for change are the ones whose leaders can see those stories clearly and shape them consciously.

That capability has a name: **Story Intelligence™**, the human ability to recognise, interpret, challenge, and consciously reshape the stories that drive behaviour. It's a core human capability that will become ever more important. AI can generate information. It cannot decide what that information means for your people and how they will interpret it. Meaning-making stays human.

- **Story Awareness:** seeing the stories at work beneath behaviour
- **Story Diffusion:** releasing the ones that no longer serve
- **Story Stewardship:** consciously tending the narratives that shape culture
- **Vision Storytelling:** building a compelling future narrative people can act on

Where this sits on the map

The Story Leadership Maturity Model gives a board a way to see progress in something usually dismissed as soft:

1. **Story Blind:** stories drive behaviour unconsciously
2. **Story Aware:** leaders recognise the impact of stories
3. **Story Fluent:** teams use story language and tools intentionally
4. **Story Led:** leaders consciously steward organisational narratives
5. **Story Generative:** story leadership is embedded in culture and fuels sustainable performance.

04 · WHY THIS WORK IS DIFFERENT

Most culture work treats the symptom. This works one layer upstream.

Most culture and change interventions focus on behaviour or communication, the visible layer. Story Leadership works upstream of both, on the narrative conditions that decide whether any downstream effort succeeds or fails.

It complements strategy and consultancy programmes rather than competing with them. It treats resistance as meaningful sense-making, not dysfunction. It releases the stories that no longer serve before trying to write new ones. And it builds lasting capability inside your leaders, rather than a temporary lift in engagement that fades the moment the programme ends.

Story Leadership works upstream.
It addresses the narrative conditions
that determine whether everything
downstream succeeds or fails.



05 • THE PROGRAMME

The Story Leadership Transformation Programme.

A structured journey from insight to impact, delivered to a leadership cohort of 8 to 12, over 4 to 12 weeks.

PHASE 1 • SEE THE STORY

Surface what's actually there

The Story Leadership keynote and the Story Check Narrative Diagnostic Workshop surface the dominant organisational stories, the hidden interpretations, and the gaps between the official and lived versions.

Deliverables: Narrative Diagnostic • Story Map • Executive Insight Report

PHASE 2 • SHIFT THE STORY

Release what no longer serves

The Story Repair Workshop. Leaders learn to understand the assumptions holding the old story in place, facilitate Story Diffusion, hold psychologically safe conversations, and reshape the narratives limiting the change.

PHASE 3 • LEAD THE STORY

Build the future narrative

The Vision Story Workshop. Leaders co-create a compelling future narrative that translates strategy into shared meaning, builds behavioural commitment, and creates ownership that outlasts the programme.

EXECUTIVE INTEGRATION

Embed it where the pressure is highest

1:1 Story Leadership coaching for executive leaders, a minimum of two sessions each.

Optional Enhancement: INSIGHTS Discovery integration

Where INSIGHTS is already embedded, the Story Leadership programme builds on and keeps those learnings alive. The two models work together: INSIGHTS gives a shared language for how people's perceptions and preferences differ; Story Leadership gives leaders the capability to reshape the collective story across those differences.

06 · WHAT ORGANISATIONS GAIN

What you take to the Board

- Faster strategy execution
- Greater leadership credibility
- Stronger alignment between strategy and culture
- Increased engagement and improved strategy adoption
- Better cross-function collaboration
- More psychologically safe conversations
- Reduced change fatigue
- Greater organisational resilience
- A shared compelling vision of the future

07 · WHERE IT'S ALREADY WORKING

Already inside rooms where the stakes are high.

Anna is working with leaders across sectors that don't reward soft thinking.

**INSIGHTS · NHS · Oxford University · Brighton & Hove Albion · Saracens
Professional services & private equity**

Most recently, Anna delivered the keynote at the INSIGHTS 2026 Global Leadership Meeting, alongside workshops, leadership coaching, and Story Leadership Labs at multiple levels of the organisation.



Storytelling is not a nice to have. It is a core leadership skill. It is how we connect strategy to what it really means day to day, and how we turn direction into momentum.

Angela Brennan, Global Head of Learning & Talent

One of the biggest shifts has been seeing the teams genuinely adopt the storytelling arc. The language around generative and non-generative stories has become almost second nature, which was one of the key outcomes we were hoping for. It feels like there's a new narrative emerging across the teams, and that's helping create more honest conversations, clearer challenge and better alignment.

Kev Dodwell, Head of Product Learning & Innovation, Insights

It is a privilege to work with Anna, and I look forward to seeing meaningful impact as we continue to cascade Story Leadership throughout our business.

Sandy Wilson, Head of People & Strategy, Insights

08 · INVESTMENT

What a stalled transformation already costs.

You already know what a stalled transformation costs, in budget, in your credibility, and in the people you can least afford to lose. It is the strategy budget already spent, the second and third attempts to relaunch it, the senior time absorbed in managing resistance. Against that, the question is not what the programme costs. It is what another year of the same stall costs.

Story Leadership is priced as an investment against that outcome, not as a day rate. The programme is scoped to the size of the transformation, the seniority of the cohort, and the depth of embedding required, and the figure is set in the Story Review, once the actual problem is on the table.

What you are investing in

- A leadership team that can read and reshape the story behind the strategy
- A named, addressable problem in place of "it's a culture thing"
- Capability that stays in the organisation after the work ends

Ways to work together

- **The full Transformation Programme:** the three-phase journey, delivered to a leadership cohort with executive integration
- **Standalone Keynote:** the Story Leadership Keynote for a leadership event or offsite
- **Story Check Narrative Diagnostic:** a focused entry point for teams testing the ground

Full investment for each is shared in the Story Review. Online and in-person delivery available.

09 · ABOUT ANNA

About Anna Katharina Schaffner, PhD

Anna is the creator of Story Leadership™: a keynote speaker, executive coach, bestselling author, and former Professor of Cultural History. Her work sits at the intersection of narrative psychology, leadership, and organisational behaviour, and is informed by contemporary behavioural science, organisational psychology, solution-oriented coaching and systems thinking, alongside two decades of research into how human beings construct meaning.

Her books have been translated into five languages, and her work has been discussed on the BBC and in Vogue, the Guardian, Psychology Today, and Philosophie Magazine, among others.

Selected Books

- [*The Story Solution: Change Your Toxic Self-Stories and Thrive*](#) (Profile, 2026)
- [*Exhausted: An A-Z for the Weary*](#) (Profile, 2024)
- [*The Art of Self-Improvement: Ten Timeless Truths*](#) (Yale University Press, 2021)
- [*Exhaustion: A History*](#) (Columbia University Press, 2016)



10 • START THE CONVERSATION

Start with a Story Review

Before any programme, there's one conversation worth having. Thirty minutes on the transformation that has stalled and why behaviour won't follow the plan. You leave with the blocker named. Not "it's a culture thing."

The actual story your organisation is telling itself, said out loud, whether or not we go further.

No survey. No deck. No pitch.

[Book your Story Review](#)

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