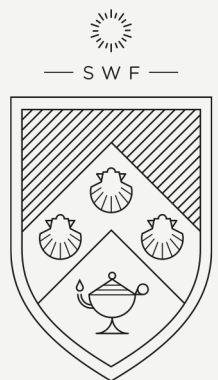


# Leaderful Church: a storytelling approach

David Sims

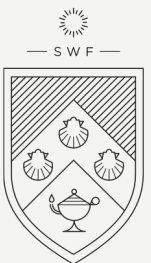
Plenary session at *Leaderful Church?*  
Susanna Wesley Foundation Conference  
13<sup>th</sup> June 2018



JOSEPH A. RAE LIN

CREATING  
*Leaderful*  
ORGANIZATIONS

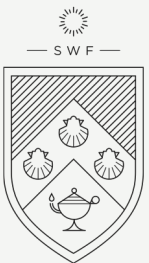
HOW TO BRING OUT  
LEADERSHIP IN EVERYONE



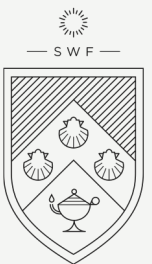
# And the opposite would be?



Image source: <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1001961235838103552>



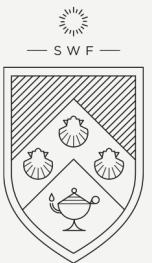
- I'm sad to report that in the past few years, ever since uncertainty became our insistent 21st century companion, leadership has taken a great leap backwards to the familiar territory of command and control.  
— Margaret Wheatley





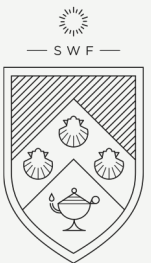
# Definition

- ‘Leadership is imagining, willing, and driving, and thereby making something happen which was not going to happen otherwise.’ (Fineman, Gabriel, and Sims, Organizing and Organizations, 2010)
- Would now change ‘making’ to ‘enabling’

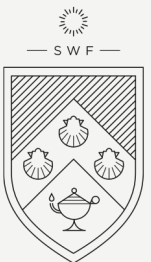


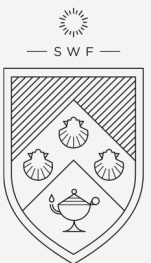
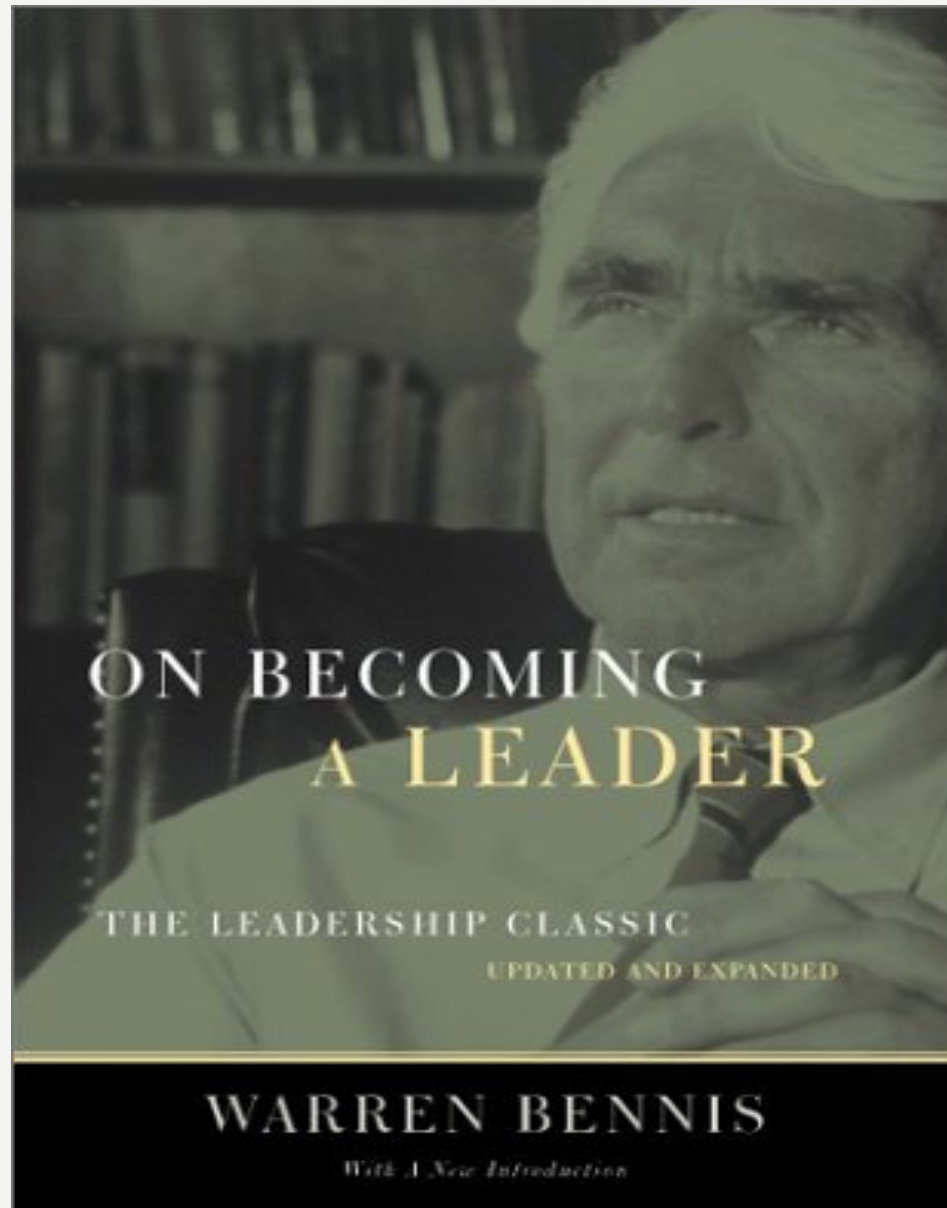
# The implication:

- Leadership is an activity, not a position
- There are several different activities involved (imagining, willing, and driving)
- We may need more of it than any one person can supply
- We may need people to move in and out of leadership



Become a High Performance Organization











# Are leaders special?

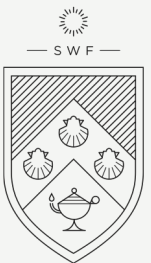
- There are a lot of people being highly paid, or well promoted, or receiving adulation, for their 'leadership' qualities
- There are a whole lot more people making money out of developing that first group
- There are long standing myths about the proportion of the population who can lead
- Leadership is sometimes confused with having the confidence to boss others around



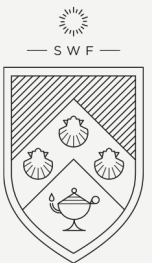
# A group of leaders?



Photo credit: Christopher Burns on unsplash.com



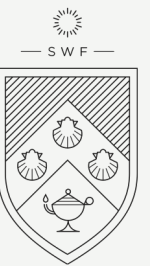
“Often stepping back  
you see more,  
don’t you?”  
- *David Hockney*





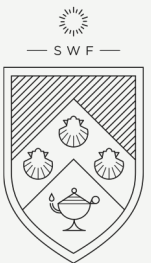






# The arts of leadership (Grint, 2000)

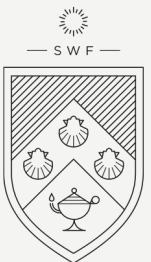
- We know that leadership is an art, but perhaps we should think of it as a number of arts



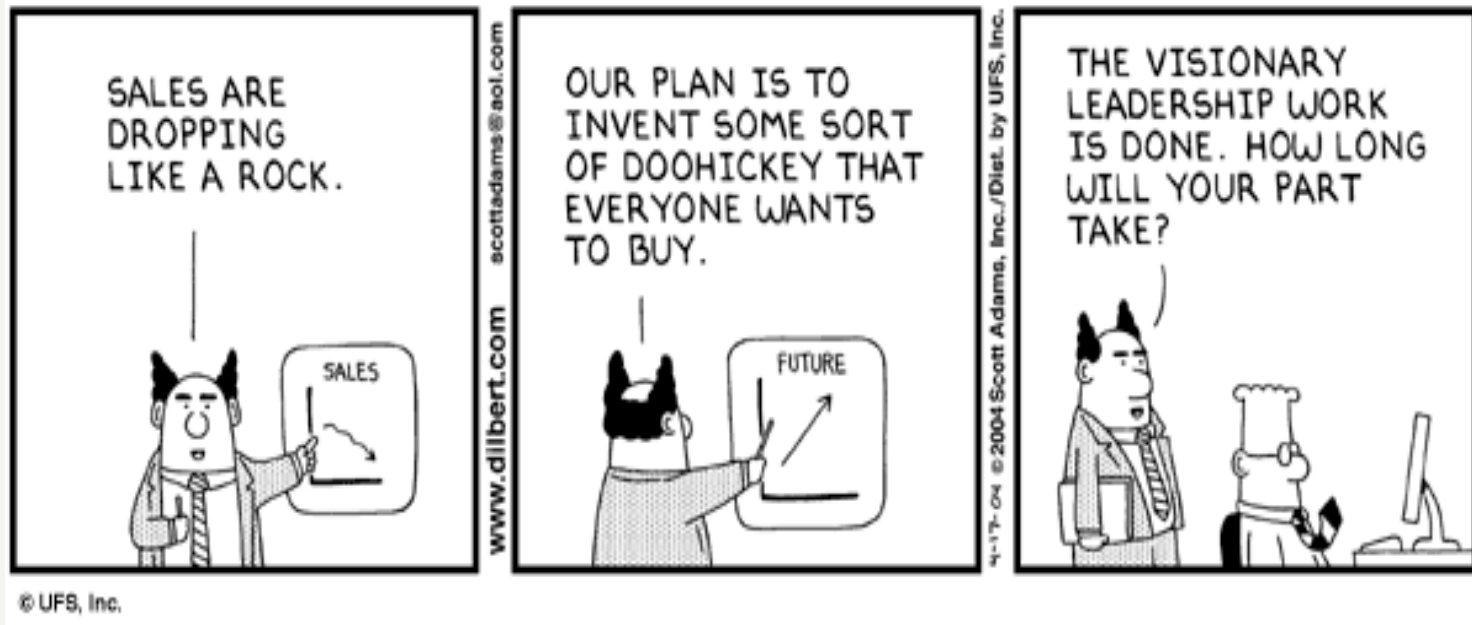
# Philosophical art: identity: creating the story



Peter Steiner, New Yorker magazine, 1993



# Fine art: vision: imagining a possible future

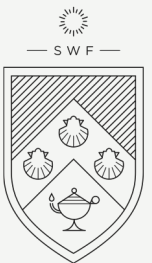




# Martial art: planning: making sure everything works

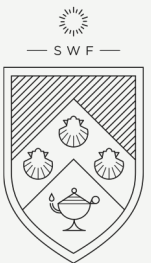


# Performance art: charisma: using symbols to engage emotions



# These are four aspects of storytelling

- **Creating identity** – why our story is different from others' stories: developing character
- **Vision** – knowing where our story might go next: developing plot
- **Organizational skill** – freeing people up to focus on the story
- **Charisma** – getting people to listen to the story



# LEADING STORY

BY

Rethinking  
Church  
Leadership

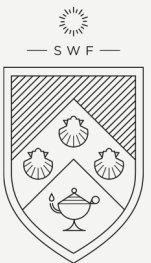


**Vaughan S. Roberts and David Sims**



# We lead storied lives

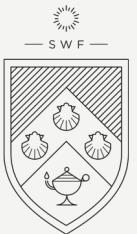
- *Homo narrans narratur* (Christie and Orton, 1988)
- We make choices about how to tell our story
- You are not just listening, but also considering how to tell the story of this session to others
- We rehearse, edit, improve stories
- And that is all without any untruthfulness





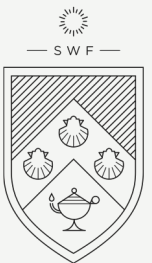
# Stories everywhere

- ‘We dream in narrative, we daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, we hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, review, criticize, build, learn, hate and love by narrative (Hardy, 1968)
- Stories are how we give meaning to life (Sims, 2015a, 2015b)
- We live by, or in, narrative (Goleman, 2010)

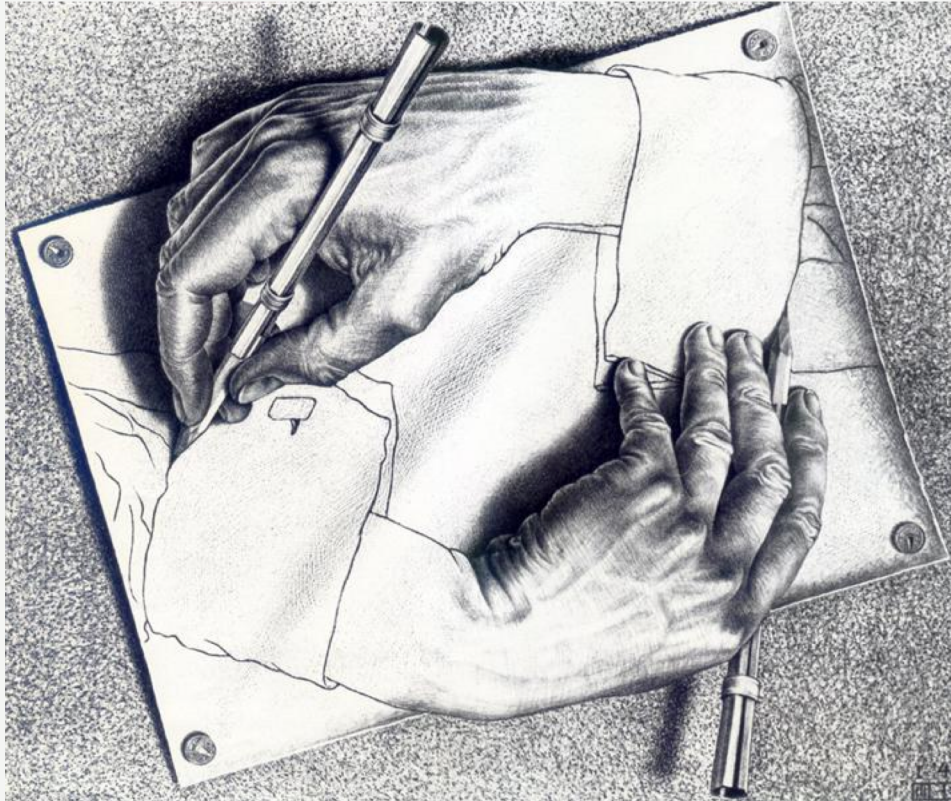


# And Leadership?

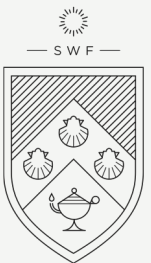
- Leading involves curating and influencing the stories being told
- Leading involves writing ourselves into the stories of others, and letting them write themselves into our stories
- We build characters into our stories
- We emplot ourselves in our stories



# We write ourselves into each others' stories

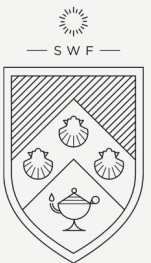


Escher



# My leadership stories in Cass

- Why would you want to join us rather than LBS, Chicago, Imperial College etc.?
- What will it be like here in a few years' time?
- Why would you want to intertwine your story with ours?
- How will being here develop your story?
- How do I think you could contribute to our story?



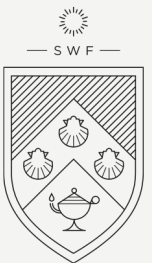
# Alternatives to storying?

- If I don't get involved in telling the story, it will still be told. Am I happy to leave it to others?
- For a university this could be by rankings, or the competition, or the vice-chancellor
- For a church this could be by anyone, (Sam Harris, +George Carey)
- The story is rarely neutral; it can be more or less attractive, more or less enlivening



# Leaderful storying: 3 aspects

- Stories have many contributors
- Audiences matter
- Stories don't march in line





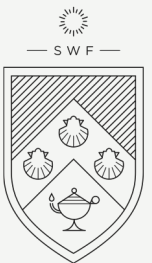
# Stories have many contributors

- Stories usually end up multi-authored (Boje, 1991)
- People join the narrative rather than follow the leader (Parry, 2008)
- We can appear in – or write ourselves into – or intertwine our stories with – the stories of others
- Stories need warranting
- Readerly and writerly stories (Barthes, 1970)



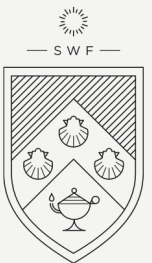
# Audiences matter

- Usually rehearse before we get to an audience
- Audiences are part of the co-creation; we edit stories for and with the audience
- What stories go down well here? Which myths get nurtured?
- The audience may become co-author



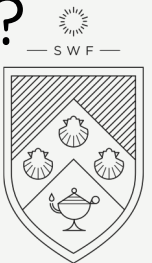
# Stories don't march in line

- Narrative arc
- Stories that give convincing hope are passed on
- Stories are hard for hierarchies to control
- Stories behave as if they had a life of their own
- Is the story telling you?



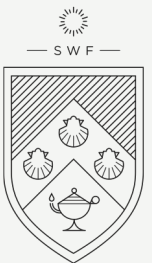
# What does that tell us?

- How story-filled are our churches?
  - Who is telling the stories?
  - Are they multi-authored?
  - Are others invited to be characters in the stories?
  - Are they trusted as co-narrators?
  - Are they invited to intertwine their stories?



# Implications for leading

- The stories that your church lives in make it
- The stories lived in an organization make the future of that organization
- Individually or collectively, we can get bored with our own story
- Stories can wear out – if not refreshed, retold, shared with other tellers



# The leaderful church is story-filled







PATEK PHILIPPE  
GENEVE

Begin your own tradition.

You never actually own  
a Patek Philippe.  
You merely look after it for  
the next generation.

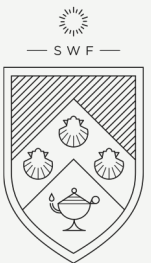


Patek Philippe Diamond Ribbon Ref. 4968R  
[patek.com](http://patek.com)



# You never actually own the story

- You contribute to its telling
- Guest appearances are often memorable
- You help to curate it
- You become part of living it
- You welcome the other characters
- If your story isn't changing, something is wrong





Madonna and child by Il Sassoferato



