

Toolbox: Storytelling for project management

Largely inspired from the toolbox realized for the EU-project



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Storytelling:

- Storytelling is the ancestral way we use to share our vision of the world, our values or our experiences while being entertaining. It is a powerful tool that is deeply anchored to culture : it transmits informations, explanations, but also emotions. When telling a story, we create a coherent unity out of disparate elements, and give them sense and meaning. That's why adults use stories to explain the world to childrens.
- A story acts as a warning coming from our childhood: « now comes something interesting and entertaining». It involves us as readers or listeners a lot better than a formal description or a dry information. Because it awakes our feelings, memories, hopes, and imagination.
- Dealing with changes and transformations, a story helps us to comprehend the processes in life.
- Today, people are interested in immaterial goods: dreams, experiences, and human values. To appeal exclusively to their reason is no longer sufficient: they are waiting for emotional vibes. A good story adds immaterial value to goods and services. Many corporations started to use storytelling to reach their employers or their customers and to gain their loyalty, as well as to pass messages and give sense to transformations.
- The ability of a story to catch our attention and to help us to apprehend the world while touching us, makes it a powerful tool and a valuable instrument in the fields of marketing, organisation and pedagogy.
- But it needs to be used with respect and ethics.

Source:



Storytelling deals with:

Complexity :

A project conception happens in a multi-layered context and involves many actors and diverse elements in a complex process that needs to be made meaningful. Both complexity and diversity create gaps to be bridged. And that's exactly what a story does: not only for the public, but mainly for the author of the narrative.

Change:

A project often operates a change to be made intelligible. Stories deal with transformation, evolution, trying to give them sense. A good narrative integrates explanations with emotions on an entertaining mode, making them more accessible to the public

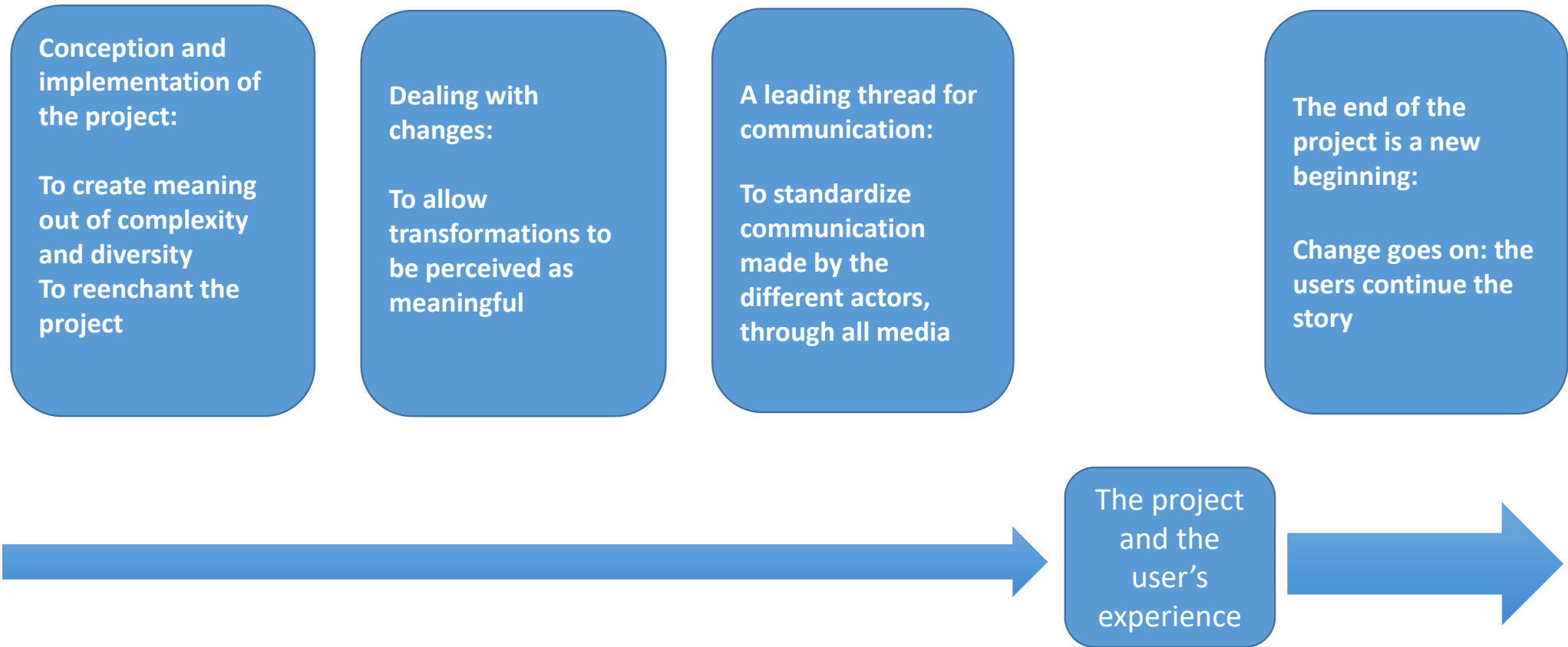
Communication:

A project is influenced by societal, institutional and political orientations that are likely to require some more clarification. The various channels of information used by the different actors of the transformation often give a fragmented picture of the process that reveals confusing and of poor attractiveness. A story is a good tool to standardize communication through all the different types of media.

The user:

The way we estimate the results of a project does not only depend on the concrete realisation but is also largely influenced by both the preconceived image we have of this achievement and the stereotypes spread in our culture. Storytelling contributes to creating this image and adds an immaterial value to the project, by the way increasing the experience of the user. In turn, the story can be implemented by the user's experience.

Source:



Storytelling in action

Conception of the project:

Many projects aim to create something new or to transform things that were taken for granted. Their success depends on the integration of many factors that are often difficult to put together by the project team. The realisation of all the steps which lead to the success of a project requires to create coherence between all those elements while leaving room for the many voices that need or want to be heard.

For this reason, organizing this complexity into script format, can help the project team get a clearer line of action throughout the process.

Change:

The project process can modify the environment or the habits of the locals as well. Maybe everybody does not understand what's going on, why so much money is spent for this particular purpose. Most people are often skeptical in front of changes. Some will need to be convinced of the relevance of the endeavour. Unlike stories that help us handle with changes by making them significant, explanations and activity reports are boring and are of poor emotional power.

Communication:

This point is all the more important as the information not only comes from different sources (project team, stakeholders, funders, institutions, localities, regions, and so on...) but is also scattered into different types of media (classical newspapers, TV reports, webpages, social networks like Facebook or Twitter). All these various sources and supports must follow an integrated strategy and convey the same message to give a coherent image of the place.

The achieved project and the users:

Creation of a website, dedicated to the results of the project is an ongoing process that requires continuous updating by appropriate communication. The story has to progress, keeping the coherence between the users' experience and the image of the achieved project given by the various media. Therefore, interactivity with the users can guarantee the authenticity of the communication. Users can participate directly in the development of the script by sharing their own experiences on the virtual place. In turn, their input can be solicited by different tools.

Guidelines for the narrator

Source:



Stoytelling in practice

Each project team has to deal with specific problems. Each team is peculiar too. Each team as the capacity to create a own story that will deal with ithe complexity of its own situation. One can given some general tricks to put storytelling in practice. But, it belongs to each narrator to interpret the concrete reality in his/her own way, with his/her own feelings, emotions, and reflexions. A good story includes a part of its author or authors because a story can be multilayered and co-authored.

IMPORTANT!!! A narrative is not always told exclusively in words. Pictures can say a lot and be an easy support.

A story for whom?

It's a key question in storytelling. Indeed, we adjust Inconsciently our narrative to our addressees : we choose a language, a form, a sense of humour, we even adapt the content to whom we address to. We need to share the same values, judgments, cultural norms to be understood.

Your story has to be directed and adapted to your target group. If many groups are addressed, you will have to keep all them in mind when you conceive the sketch of your script. All the elements that support your story - pictures, design of the website, music,...- will have to converge and be appropriated to your target group.

Authenticity

Be careful not awaking expectations that cannot be fulfilled in the real life experience. A false image of a project results may oppose local people wishes and cause their resistance, as it may result in desappointed visitors. Imposed narratives risk to create a gap between the expected results and the reality. Better to ground the story in phase with the practical reality. It's a question of authenticity. The story doesn't need to be absolutely « true » but needs to match the real situation. Even fictional it has to deliver an authentic message. If you preserve the credibility of your message, feel free to stimulate the imagination of your addressees.

Elements of the story

Source:



1. The frame:

- The story is situated in time: past, present, future or a mythical time.
- The space: would it be real or virtual.
- The details: should they be trivial, quotidian, emotional or funny, they give a feeling of credibility to the story.

2. The characters:

- The hero:
 - *A normal person:* involved in the story due to unexpected circumstances and forced to become a hero. He/she has a positive image, good but not perfect, and is growing as a person through overcoming the hardships. It can also be a thing that inspire sympathy.
 - *Identification:* addressees have to be able to identify themselves as the hero. They share the same codes, dreams, needs, and fears.
 - *Action:* the hero doesn't explain or analyse, he acts.
- The good and the villains:
 - *The good:* is helpful to and faithful in the hero. The "project team" is a good.
 - *The villains:* can be either persons, institutions, fate, external circumstances, or a crisis.

3. The plot needs:

- Dramatic: the hardships the hero helps to overcome and the challenges and difficulties he faces enhance his success.
- Tension and relief: keeps the addressees concentrate on the story.
- Surprise: shakes a little bit the addressees and catches their attention.
- Peak: the hero succeeds the trial and solves the problem!!!

4. The end:

- All's well that ends well!
- The action of the hero opens the doors to a better future. It can be an utopia: a dream that requires to become true.

Keep in mind:

- Don't develop a intricate story but a script. Some well chosen words and pictures tell a lot.
- Define your target group. The hero, if a person, must be a symbol with whom your addressees can identify themselves or feel sympathy for.
- Which hardships have to be overcome, how and by who? Which trials and challenges are you facing?
- Define your objectives: what are you dreaming for the project? What's your utopia? Reinvent it.
- Define the space of your story. Situate the place in its environment (smaller or larger scale). This space concrete or virtual provide you with various symbolic elements that can be used as building stones for your narrative.
- Keep your story alive with anecdotes : they give a feeling of authenticity. Even concrete difficulties can trigger the story.
- Truth is not necessary but credibility : fantasy rooted in reality.
- Travell between history (the past) and utopy (the future).
- Rather than explaining the message, impose it. Better to feel than to understand.
- Emphasize the solution, not the problem.
- Limite the choices, choosing feels uncomfortable. Use stereotypes, they ease the comprehension.
- The end is a new beginning.



Source: