



Storytelling is not just for marketing: Cultivating a storytelling culture throughout the organization

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Abstract When managers consider storytelling part of their organizational strategy, it is generally considered a marketer's task. However, we argue that intentionally building a storytelling culture across domains and functions can provide value to all parts of the organization. Even so, storytelling can often feel like a formidable undertaking, exclusive to firms with ample in-house resources or finely tuned existing brand stories. This is not the case, and in this article we offer examples and concrete advice for companies of all sizes and resource levels to embed storytelling throughout the organization. Likewise, we build a case for developing organizational culture and capacity to harness the power of storytelling not only for marketing strategy, but also for overall organizational functionality. We provide examples of potential storytelling applications, a review of storytelling benefits, and step-by-step guidance on how to manage and embed storytelling.

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1. Storytelling is a powerful communications tool

Storytelling takes place in organizations every day. A senior company leader shares how the firm grew from a single store to over 100 franchises in three years. A marketing team crafts a story about

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a new product line that aids environmentally conscious consumers in their quest to reduce plastic consumption. During a product demonstration, a salesperson explains how the software product streamlined a customer's operations and helped achieve a 50% reduction in lead time. A technology engineer at a cybersecurity company tells a cautionary tale warning personnel about ransom attacks and data breaches. A customer service representative listens to a customer's story of how the company's sleeping aid product helped her get more and deeper sleep. Organizations are filled with stories.

Decades of research support that storytelling enhances communication. Because storytelling involves presenting information in a compelling way, it helps people attend to and retain information (Escalas, 2004). Stories act "as a clear aid to memory, as a means of making sense of the world, as a way to make and strengthen emotional connections, and as a way of recognizing and identifying with brands of any type" (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010, p. 21). Presenting information through a narrative framework gives audiences a reason to engage with and remember proposed ideas (Escalas, 2007; Key et al., 2021; Miller, 2017; Peterson, 2019). Stories are also more persuasive than factual arguments and statistics (Adaval & Wyer, 1998; Escalas, 2007; Kaufman, 2003; Polyorat et al., 2007). The human brain is hard-wired for narratives (Abbott, 2002; Schank & Abelson, 1995; Turner, 1998), as people tend to think in terms of stories.

Because stories are such powerful communication tools, the practice of storytelling offers many benefits for organizations. For example, storytelling helps increase trust with decision-makers and clients (Anaza et al., 2020; Gilliam & Flaherty, 2015), articulate risks and opportunities in strategic plans (Denning, 2006), generate positive attitudes toward a brand (Coker et al., 2017), facilitate how organizational members make sense of a crisis (Kopp et al., 2011), and enhance customer-brand experiences (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Lundqvist et al., 2013). Not only are stories beneficial from a storyteller's perspective, but they can also aid in better understanding customers via story listening (Gorry & Westbrook, 2011). As firms increasingly rely on big data and analytical research to support their decision-making, storytelling has become a sensemaking bridge between data science and strategic persuasion (Boldsova, 2020; Dykes, 2015).

2. Storytelling is relevant across an organization

While storytelling is often nested in communication-intensive segments of organizations, it can provide powerful results when nurtured across domains. Storytelling is not just for marketing, as all parts of an organization can make valuable contributions. Storytelling spurs impactful cross-functional communication and developmental engagement at all levels (McDougal et al., 2021; Pfeffermann, 2011).

While internal stories by and for employees are an accessible starting point for building a storytelling culture, external stories are also a rich and ready resource for developing more extensive, meaningful narratives about the brand and organization. Stories can readily be discovered and integrated from many external sources (e.g., testimonials, social media videos, and media coverage). Even without organizational involvement, stories are being shared about brands. Instead of taking a reactive approach, brands have an opportunity to be proactive and leverage the co-production of stories from stakeholders. Co-production or co-creation of stories with stakeholders allows for more content creation through unique perspectives (Aimé, 2021; Antonopoulou, 2018; Gensler et al., 2013; Kay, 2006; van Laer et al., 2019).

Fostering an intentional storytelling culture builds the capacity for storytelling throughout the organization and enhances strategic outcomes. A storytelling focus throughout the firm can enhance brand image, engagement from internal and external audiences, and collaboration among stakeholders.

2.1. Omnichannel content creation

Through prioritizing stories, firms can leverage narratives for maximum impact on strategic and brand image goals. Storytelling enhances content and makes it more compelling across channels, helping marketers produce engaging content that consumers desire. For example, in 2011, Chipotle promoted its stance on "cultivating a better world" via an animated video that showed how food moves through the supply chain. Customers were highly engaged by this video and the overarching omnichannel campaign, as Chipotle's customers care about eating "clean" ingredients from sources with reputations for producing

high-quality food in a sustainable way ([Marketing Evolution, 2019](#)). The video—shared millions of times—allowed Chipotle to reach consumers in various stages of the customer journey and build awareness of its sustainable offerings. After learning of Chipotle's values, consumers were more likely to frequent the restaurants. Further, because the video tied closely to consumer values, viewers likely became more loyal to Chipotle and advocated for the brand by sharing the animated short and spreading positive online word-of-mouth.

The brand's use of storytelling has particular relevance for online engagement as social media platform algorithms make it increasingly difficult for marketers to achieve reach organically (i.e., unpaid). A brand's content must be authentic and highly engaging to reach consumers on social media with an organic strategy, and storytelling provides a means to accomplish this aim. In addition to being useful for social media, storytelling can benefit other digital marketing efforts as it aids in overall digital content creation.

2.2. Listening and connection opportunities

Other key benefits of embedding storytelling throughout the organization are increased active connection and listening opportunities. A storytelling culture fosters team-building efforts via co-production in which employees who may not typically collaborate can connect with others inside and outside the organization. As such, stories can benefit organizations holistically by showing their value across organizational domains as well as building a sustainable system for creating and sharing them.

When employees and leaders train to identify and tell better stories, their listening skills sharpen. Actively listening to stories can help organizations gain insights into the perceptions and concerns of multiple stakeholder groups, including employees, customers, and the community at large ([Gorry & Westbrook, 2011](#)). Training employees to be attuned to value-added stories for the firm creates a channel for recognizing growth opportunities, acknowledging internal and external successes, and identifying and promoting innovative ideas both within and outside the organization. ([Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2018](#); [Sergeeva & Trifilova, 2018](#)).

Engaged and connected teams encourage collaboration, build healthy work relationships, and foster an environment conducive to sharing ([Hu & Randel, 2014](#)). Storytelling is an opportunity to connect employees, customers, and multiple

stakeholders in a powerful way. From the time a customer calls a company and speaks to a customer service representative about their experiences, to a senior leader representing the organization at an industry association meeting, storylines are the threads that connect.

3. Challenges in harnessing the strategic power of stories throughout the organization

Despite the known benefits of storytelling and the prevalence of stories in organizations, multiple challenges exist in harnessing the power of these narratives as a strategic tool to achieve desired organizational outcomes. Storytelling can often feel like a formidable undertaking, exclusive to firms with ample in-house resources or finely tuned existing brand stories. Yet companies of all shapes and sizes must continually develop appealing, relevant, and credible content to engage stakeholders. This pursuit presents three predominant challenges: (1) uncovering untapped stories, (2) getting employees to embrace storytelling across organizational units, and (3) coordinating stories across multiple parts of the firm and external stakeholders.

3.1. Untapped stories

A customer service call, financial meeting, or operations issue might seem mundane initially but reveal a plot line worthy of further examination through the appropriate lens. A challenge for many organizations is not being well attuned to these everyday stories. Besides marketing, many organizational units are not typically coached or encouraged to creatively consider and dig into ongoing stories in the context of their day-to-day tasks. Indeed, pieces of stories that could be utilized for both internal organizational improvements and external brand messaging are emerging daily, waiting to be recognized, captured, and developed.

To this end, many parts of the organization are practically swimming in data, reports, and other information that can be cultivated into a compelling story ([Boldosova, 2020](#)). The challenge is not a lack of source material but rather a lack of guidance detailing how to transform that source material into a cohesive, strategic brand story ([Spear & Roper, 2013](#)). As the majority of firm employees are not equipped to identify or chronicle stories, prospective stories can be overlooked. With so many channels available to share content, a

comprehensive storytelling strategy can aid firms in collecting more stories with higher-quality narratives. By ensuring employees and other contributors understand how to clearly communicate and share their stories, the resulting narratives will be more powerful (Da Costa, 2017).

3.2. Engagement challenges

Another key challenge is the belief that storytelling is primarily the purview of marketing. Employees and managers across various departments may be hesitant to take agency in the storytelling process and may not see the importance of stories as an intraorganizational, holistic endeavor (Goddeau, 2019). On average, less than 5% of employees understand their company's strategy and 90% of organizations fail to meet their strategic targets (Cote, 2020). As not all parts of the organization understand how their contributions can create positive outcomes related to their job function or organizational strategy, creating buy-in for strategic storytelling can prove challenging. It may be easier to create buy-in with employees whose job functions include more communication responsibilities (e.g., sales, marketing, corporate communications) than those in less communication-heavy jobs (e.g., technicians, financial analysts). Employees across the firm are focused on their own salient goals and deadlines. Therefore, they may not see value in participating in a task like storytelling with inconsistent, unpredictable payoff. For example, crafting stories may be perceived as a meaningless task by an accountant working on a tight deadline to submit the year's budget.

An additional related struggle in storytelling practice is a lack of employee engagement. Employee engagement has been experiencing an overall decline, as a recent study revealed 80% of employees are disengaged in the workplace—a percentage that has increased over recent years due to COVID-19 (Gallup, 2021). Employee engagement is directly correlated with productivity and organizational resources (Albrecht et al., 2018). Without ample resources, employees may be less productive or motivated and lack the drive to engage meaningfully with more significant strategic initiatives, including storytelling.

3.3. Coordination challenges in strategic storytelling

Creating meaningful multidimensional stories can be arduous because coordination must happen between different departments and stakeholders.

Developing a cohesive brand voice from multiple inputs is a salient challenge for brand storytelling. For a singular brand voice to arise, someone must first take ownership of and create a system for gathering stories. This can be an overwhelming undertaking, particularly for small organizations that likely have limited resources (Gonzalez Natal & Diaz, 2017). In addition, communication silos—which are not uncommon in organizations—can create additional barriers to effective storytelling practice. Employees in each job function often stick to working with others in their area rather than branching out to work with those in different disciplines (Aaker, 2008). Interesting, helpful, and meaningful stories may get stuck in or relegated to a single organizational silo.

Moreover, some stories originate from outside the organization, presenting an additional layer of complexity to the challenge. Storytelling and brand identity development are not unilateral. Firms do not create stories or brands in isolation. Rather, these are complex, socially constructed processes in which multiple stakeholders contribute to the brand's meaning, including employees across the organization as well as customers and other stakeholders (Aimé, 2021; Essamri et al., 2019; Gensler et al., 2013; von Wallpach et al., 2017). With many parties engaged in the co-production of brand meaning, this process can be messy and difficult to coordinate. Although firms do not have complete control over the co-production of stories, they need to put systems in place to facilitate strategic story coordination.

3.4. Moving from challenges to opportunity

These challenges provide an opportunity to build organizational capacity for harnessing the power of storytelling. Although much research has examined the importance of stories, ways to create stories, and the influence of stories on consumers, less work has examined the use of stories in strategic brand management (Aimé, 2021; Mills & John, 2021). Further, limited research has examined ways to build organizational culture, capacity, and systems for gathering, creating, and managing stories (Verghese, 2019). To contribute to these gaps, we synthesize the importance of strategically building a storytelling culture across organizational functions. Next, we advocate for embedding a storytelling culture throughout the firm and highlight examples of companies that have embraced storytelling in their organizations. Finally, we offer a process for building storytelling capacity in organizations—even those with limited resources.

Table 1. Examples of storytelling applications throughout the organization

Department	Responsibilities	Storytelling Applications
Communication-intensive Roles		
Executive Leadership/C-Level/Administration	Grow the business, mentor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep everyone focused on the same goals and objectives • Tell stories to stockholders that resonate with them for continued investment • Present to community groups • Answer questions from the media
Marketing	Engage various audiences and communicate branded messages (branding)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use stories in content across all mediums including videos, social media content, email marketing • Employ storytelling to enhance oral presentations • Incorporate data visualization
Corporate Communications	Communicate the company behind the brand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Showcase stories in annual reports, press releases, and other corporate communications • Use corporate communications to tell compelling stories about the firm's initiatives
Human Resources	Recruiting (talent acquisition), training, retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • View internal employee communication as an opportunity to listen for employee stories • Operationalize employee stories that resonate as a powerful recruitment tool • Use success stories of top performing employees to set new employees up from an expectation standpoint • Prepare for promotional interviews • Tell a story during the hiring or onboarding process to promote buy-in and set the performance tone for what it means to work at the firm and be a high performer
Sales	Engage potential customers and clients, getting their attention/buy-in, driving purchase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share stories of successful customers using their products/services to help their business (proof devices)
Fundraising/Donor Development	Work with individuals to meet the organization's short-term and long-term fundraising goals through relationship building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell stories that resonate with the right audiences to get more funds, develop donors, and get people excited to want to buy-in/donate
Inside Sales/Customer Service	Capture customers' experiences/stories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with customer stories so they feel seen and heard (increases retention)
Noncommunication-intensive Roles		
Accounting	Communicate through financial reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deploy data storytelling using relatable stories to convey information (instead of just looking at numbers) • Create cautionary tales to increase compliance and ethical behavior
Finance	Communicate to external audiences to spur investment in the company	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpret financial data into stories to show performance outcomes, including how the organization is doing and where it is going

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Table 1 (continued)

Department	Responsibilities	Storytelling Applications
Research and Development	Innovate and introduce new products and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell a story to unite the team and push forward around an idea • Invent a story to prompt innovation • Rally teams to advance progress in the organization
Operations	Motivate employees by demonstrating the importance of their everyday tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell stories by recognizing top employees for continuous engagement and a positive company culture
Supply Chain	Network between a company and suppliers to produce and distribute products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include the story and process of goods from raw materials to the shelves for more engagement (blockchain) • Build stronger buyer relationships through storytelling, including negotiating
Technology/I.T.	Oversee network systems and ensure all technology runs smoothly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spur proactive conversations with team members to assist in successful technology solutions • Potential collaboration in being innovative with technology that can assist in telling stories such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality, augmented reality, internet of things (IoT)
All Departments	Social media accounts, presentations, conversations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employ story frameworks to facilitate personal and professional content creation • Inject storytelling to create presentations that resonate with audiences • Engage conversations that showcase positive stories • Encourage better active listening skills to look for stories in all interactions

4. Case studies: Strategic storytelling in action

As mentioned, story opportunities are prevalent in all areas of an organization. Human resources professionals use stories to communicate company values and recruit highly marketable talent. Finance professionals use data-driven storytelling to present quarterly results or new strategies to the C-suite. For R&D departments, stories can spur innovative product development to better fit the target market by putting employees into the headspace of the customer. Sales representatives use success stories as part of proof devices in conversations to win business and increase sales. Customer service representatives listen to customer stories and repeat back stories to show empathy. While challenging, strategically embedding storytelling into the organization is possible in

the right setting. Table 1 builds on examples in each area of an organization by providing tangible strategies to promote organizational storytelling with meaningful results.

While the table offers potential examples, it is essential to understand how these strategies can be successfully implemented. For example, Microsoft is an innovator when it comes to strategically incorporating stories across the organization. Putting the right leader in place was one of the company's first moves to ensure a successful implementation strategy. Microsoft created the chief storyteller position to coordinate storytelling efforts and emphasize the importance of stories to co-produce meaning to all stakeholders (McMenemy, 2018). When Steve Clayton was first hired into this C-level role, he knew Microsoft's core mission—empowering and inspiring everyone on the planet to achieve more through

technology—needed to be understood by all employees before storytelling could be leveraged across the organization (Juarez, 2019).

Once Clayton felt the core mission was understood, he moved forward, implementing several initiatives. His first story—called “88 Acres”—included impressive visuals and a company “hero” who saved Microsoft millions of dollars, aiming to inspire employees to tell similar stories about their areas (McMenemy, 2018). The initiative was highly successful, as the site garnered over 250,000 views and caused numerous people to reach out and connect with the hero (Scruggs, 2019). After the success of “88 Acres,” several projects took off for Microsoft, including Story Labs, an internal storytelling platform that highlights employee stories from multiple departments using interviews, videos, and articles.

External stakeholders also have numerous places to engage with Microsoft stories. One example is Microsoft Life, which showcases personable stories so potential employees can feel a sense of community when applying for jobs within the company. In addition, the YouTube channel One Day, One Microsoft features user-generated content. Any member of the community who wants to learn how to tell stories can also access Microsoft’s Storytelling for Champions platform or download its Storytelling Handbook. These are just a few examples of how Microsoft strategically considered multiple stakeholder groups when designing a space for accessing and generating relatable content via stories. Through his efforts, Steve Clayton grew his team of 20 story-focused employees to more than 2,000 storytellers who have bought into the storytelling culture at Microsoft (Patel, 2021).

Like Microsoft’s success stories, Salesforce created a site to share trailblazer stories that any site visitor can filter by industry, product, business size, or type to meet their needs. Stories are an engaging means of communicating value to target audiences. Further, incorporating a company’s history as part of the story can help build the storytelling culture (e.g., Chick-fil-A using the story of its founding to inspire customers and employees). This practice helps communicate the organization’s mission and drives buy-in to the core values.

Building a storytelling culture can be just as impactful in smaller companies with fewer resources. For example, the established but smaller company Minnetonka Moccasin weaves its core story, mission, and customer stories together in a way that differentiates it from other footwear brands. Indeed, storytelling provided the competitive advantage needed to become an iconic

American company and survive for more than 70 years. Minnetonka’s website features a rich timeline of its history, interlacing brand high points with the firm’s commitment to Native American organizations, sustainable practices, and high-quality product construction. The site features stories from company leaders and the Indigenous creators with whom they work, as well as stories from fans through the #MyMinnetonka campaign on social media (Minnetonka, 2022).

5. Igniting and embedding a storytelling culture

Storytelling is an underutilized, inexpensive tool that can be a guiding framework and translation device to build shared understanding, empower teams, and serve as a bridge for effectively creating content (McDougal et al., 2021; Nicoli et al., 2022). Organizations of all types and sizes can benefit from embedding storytelling more broadly. Storytelling not only helps the organization achieve its strategic goals but also helps individual employees hone their communication and listening skills. Building these skills through a storytelling culture is one way to make the most of storytelling throughout the organization.

To fully leverage the opportunities offered by existing narratives, storytelling must be integrated organization-wide by first gaining employee buy-in. Synergistic benefits from storytelling can be achieved if it is a priority throughout the organization, starting with leaders’ commitment to the practice of story. Great leaders and entrepreneurs regularly tell captivating and compelling stories that focus on the organization’s mission (Gonzalez Natal & Diaz, 2017). Leaders must be willing to step forward to tell their own stories and act as role models to make others in the organization comfortable sharing stories (Choy, 2021).

In Table 2, we outline multiple strategies for implementing a storytelling culture and how these strategies can be scaled based on the organization’s needs and available resources. While firms may see creating a storytelling culture as a potentially massive effort, we demonstrate that such a culture is within reach, even for firms with limited resources.

As shown in the table, a storytelling culture allows an organization to embed storytelling throughout multiple departments in a scalable format. The strategies for implementation we offer begin with the organization’s “why” to ensure everyone knows its core mission and values. We also recommend implementing a training

Table 2. Strategically embedding a storytelling culture

Recommendations	Strategies for Implementation
1. Ensure everyone knows your organization's "why" and core mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify and communicate your organization's strategic goals and purpose to employees in a way that is easy to understand and act upon • Make big, abstract goals and strategies easy to understand, digest, and tackle for all levels of employees, including those who may not be high-level decision-makers • Create measurable objectives that further the organization's strategic goals to help focus storytelling efforts • Clearly connect larger goals to simple actions for which specialized employees can feel ownership
2. Determine the type of training and scale your organization can implement	<p>Smaller-Scale Training Model:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop online learning modules and/or periodic workshops • Add a storytelling module to a training you are already doing • Host an interactive session(s) to share stories and how they might be used • Compile examples of effective organizational storytelling in an online shared folder for employees to access <p>Larger-Scale Training Model:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hire a chief storyteller to lead storytelling training and efforts • Enlist a storytelling consultant to help build a storytelling system, train staff, and assist with the implementation process
3. Execute training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train key leaders, train others, then identify staff members who can be storytelling trainers • Identify storytelling liaisons within the organization who can work cross-functionally to identify, create, and maximize the impact of stories • Train employees to use a story framework to consolidate stories (e.g., the Hero's Journey) to ensure team members contribute meaningfully to the core story • Train staff in story listening so they can recognize and observe good stories to be utilized (e.g., a salesperson using a customer's story) • As a part of storytelling training, consider developing buyer personas to ensure the right audience is targeted
4. Create a central forum for stories to be submitted for use and incentivize submissions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a simple process for soliciting and coordinating a pipeline of stories • Send consistent reminders for submissions <p>For Noncommunication-intensive Roles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create incentives for submitting stories so employees will participate and engage in storytelling (i.e., key performance indicator (KPI) tied to strategic objectives, such as submitting at least one story per quarter with rewards for submitting)

Table 2 (continued)

Recommendations	Strategies for Implementation
	<p>For Communication-intensive Roles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include storytelling focus in job descriptions and ensure these staff members have a role in facilitating this process (i.e., KPI tied to strategic objectives, such as recruiting and developing at least one story per month)
<p>5. Curate, develop, and refine stories for strategic channels of distribution</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assign designated employees or teams to sift through, develop, and refine stories to be cohesive with brand voice and core messaging • Polish and package stories to include rich details and engaging visuals, such as pictures and videos • Distribute via appropriate channels: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internally: Slack or an internal social media group so members of the organization can see what stories are being told • Externally: social media, press releases
<p>6. Evaluate progress and revise storytelling strategy as needed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a feedback mechanism to ensure everyone has a voice in the process • Track success of stories based on relevant metrics, such as employee likes and comments or customer response rates • Evaluate whether storytelling objectives and KPIs were achieved and adjust as necessary • Encourage and develop more stories that follow similar formats or subject matter to past stories that have been successful

process that can be scaled to suit large and small organizations. An essential element of the training process is teaching employees how to utilize a storytelling framework.

Various frameworks are available, such as the popular Hero's Journey, which easily adapts to many types of stories and purposes. This framework consists of five critical elements: (1) the hero, who has a (2) goal for transformation or adventure, but faces (3) obstacles that can be internal or external in nature. When the hero feels like they cannot reach the goal on their own, a (4) mentor steps in to give the hero wisdom needed to accomplish the goal. Finally, the story ends with a (5) moral or takeaway for the reader (Sachs, 2012). By using a framework such as the Hero's Journey, employees are empowered to clearly communicate narratives from their own perspectives. Like templates, frameworks give employees a starting point and more confidence to tell their stories.

Next, employees of all storytelling skill and experience levels should be coached on how to recognize and tell good stories. Training should

include lessons on how to craft a narrative and actively listen as part of this process to look for stories in every interaction (Choy, 2021). Organizations can incentivize employees in noncommunication-intensive roles to participate and engage in storytelling by creating a key performance indicator (KPI) tied to strategic initiatives to measure and reward it. For example, employees in analytical roles might be asked to submit one story each quarter, whereas those in communication-intensive positions could be more involved in facilitating this process by both developing the KPI regarding recruiting and writing at least one story each month.

In addition, a system is necessary to identify, collect, and facilitate participation in sharing meaningful narratives. Building such systems for training employees and collecting stories does not have to be burdensome or require a substantial commitment of time or money. A variety of small-scale training efforts can be implemented to build employees' skills in story listening and storytelling (e.g., online modules, periodic workshops, lunch

and learn sessions, adding a storytelling component to regular meetings, and sharing examples of effective storytelling across the organization). As mentioned, Microsoft has created public resources to assist organizations in their storytelling efforts. Once training is completed, assigned individuals or teams can develop submitted stories and disseminate them to the appropriate channels. Contributing a story to the larger effort can also help create buy-in, as employees can see how a story from their organizational unit advances larger company initiatives.

Organizations can develop their own system or may wish to invest in one of the numerous tools available for capturing stories from stakeholders. For example, the Granicus Stories Tool can be utilized to help a brand community better understand, empathize, and relate to others (Granicus, 2022). This type of software breaks down barriers to entry as it provides an easy way for stakeholders to participate by sharing their stories. Further, it allows administrators to leverage storytelling efficiently—as some storytelling software performs text analysis—which allows quick categorization of narratives by theme or sentiment and easy management of story contributors.

An essential part of a storytelling system is a feedback loop, which ensures continuous improvement and success for the training, implementation, and evaluation of storytelling in the organization. A feedback loop helps ensure everyone has a voice in the storytelling process and that stories are revised, refined, and tailored to maximum impact. This systems perspective is highlighted in Table 2. When firms have appropriate systems in place for soliciting, collecting, and developing stories, strategic communication planning can be mobilized at a higher level.

6. A successful storytelling culture is a journey, not a destination

Storytelling is an underutilized tool with the potential to create a positive impact far beyond the bounds of communication-intensive departments. Building organizational capacity to maximize storytelling may seem like an overwhelming challenge. However, this research provides a step-by-step process for developing a storytelling culture in which employees trained in the art of storytelling are prepared to decide when stories are necessary, which narratives to communicate, and how to craft stories that engage audiences. This adaptable process can be utilized by organizations of all sizes and scaled to fit an organization's needs as it grows.

An intentional storytelling culture can have cascading positive effects throughout the organization for both internal and external audiences. For example, listening to the stories of stakeholders can enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives by encouraging empathetic thinking and promoting a greater number of stories from diverse perspectives throughout the organization. By collecting stories that exemplify the company's core purpose and embedding them in internal and external communications, managers can ensure the company's values are communicated and received by all stakeholders. In addition, compelling digital storytelling will continue to be essential for companies hoping to maintain competitiveness in their online marketing efforts, as algorithms generally reward high-quality stories that resonate with online audiences.

Building a storytelling culture is an attainable strategic goal for organizations whose functions and resources run the gamut. However, this research emphasizes that building such a culture is a skill that requires consistent development. Engaging employees and managers to seek untapped stories and mindfully collecting and deploying them is key to a successful storytelling culture. In the end, everyone has the capacity to tell great stories, but it is up to organizational leadership to develop the culture and systems necessary for stories to flourish into real, tangible, and strategic outcomes.

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