

## STORYTELLING FOR TECHNOLOGY LEADERS: BEYOND THE NUMBERS

“Management is at work trying to format things but reality keeps breaking through the bars.” – Garrison Keillor

The international language of management is focused on analysis and abstractions. Organisations prize sharp, critical, rational thinking backed up by solid business cases. In information technology and in higher education, we inhabit a more data-driven, abstract world even than most business organisations. We can see this, for example, in the recent trend towards academic analytics.

The word “storytelling” may conjure up a different set of words: fuzzy, soft, irrational, anecdotal, emotional. Yet story is one of the most powerful tools available for influencing, motivating, building trust, and sharing knowledge. It is embedded into our nature as humans. Story doesn’t replace analytical thinking, but it is a necessary complement to it, allowing leaders to connect with people directly in a way they will remember, internalise, and pass on to others.

Communicating through story is one of the most important skills technology leaders and IT professionals need to develop in this new world.

In this presentation we will look at the work of organisational storytellers such as Stephen Denning, Annette Simmons, and Doug Lipman.

We will talk about how to build and perform the right story to:

- Inspire others to action
- Build trust
- Build a brand
- Transmit values
- Nurture collaboration
- Share knowledge
- Dispel rumours
- Create and share a vision of the future

Although mastery of storytelling takes a lifetime of practice, storytelling is something everyone already does and that all leaders can learn to do more effectively. The keys are in the delivery and in choosing the right type of story for the leadership challenge,

telling it authentically in conversation with the listeners, and eliminating unnecessary detail.

There is also a view that stories and poetry are needed in the workplace, not only for the utilitarian purposes listed above, but because they help us understand more about ourselves, face our fears, follow our dreams, and find our work more fulfilling and engaging. The work of David Whyte represents this view.

Participants are encouraged to review some or all of the following resources prior to the session to promote an active conversation:

- Denning, Stephen. *The Leader's Guide to Storytelling: Mastering the Art and Discipline of Business Narrative* (2nd edition). Jossey-Bass, 2011.
- Denning, Stephen. *The Secret Language of Leadership: How Leaders Inspire Action Through Narrative*. Jossey-Bass, 2007.
- Kotter, John P. *Leading Change*. Harvard Business Review Press, 1996.
- Pink, Daniel H. *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers will Rule the Future*. Riverhead, 2006.
- Simmons, Annette. *The Story Factor: Inspiration, Influence, and Persuasion through the Art of Storytelling* (2nd edition). Basic Books, 2006
- Whyte, David. *The Heart Aroused: Poetry and the Preservation of the Soul in Corporate America*. Crown, 2002.

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