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TITLE: TELL ME A STORY: STORYTELLING AS A SUPPORT TOOL FOR PROJECT MANAGEMENT

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Abstract: Over time, academics and practitioners have developed a variety of project management tools and methods. One of the contemporary corporate tools that has been successfully deployed for such purposes is also storytelling. In this paper we studied students’ awareness about storytelling and the possibility of deploying this technique in various kinds of projects. The results show that students are in general not familiar with concept of storytelling neither the possibilities with of using this concept in the domain of project management.

Keywords: project management, storytelling, project threats, survey
1. PROJECT, BUT CHANGE MANAGEMENT TOOL

The resistance of organizational members can impede every project plan, even those that at the first sight seem perfect. Uncertainty usually follows new project and as such triggers doubt and skepticisms by the employees. According to the Project Management Association, bad communication between project stakeholders represents the major threat to project success, as show in their project management survey.

Table 1. Major threats to project success (http://www.apm.org.uk)

Therefore, overcoming these difficulties is not possible only through the set of project management skills and tool. That is where the change management starts playing a complementary role.

Often, having a well-developed project plan is not enough to ensure the influence on the behavior of project participants, which is why alternative tools, such as project stories, may start to play a role. Stories provide a flexible framework for the narrator since it can manipulate objectives, as well as perspectives on those same objectives, in accordance with the interests of targeted stakeholders (Dowling, 2006)

2. ONCE UPON A TIME...

Traditionally, in the project implementation, stories are used to highlight safety as well as potential outcomes on the one hand, but also to reduce risks on the other hand.

From the perspective of a project manager, potential significance of corporate storytelling is in persuasion, motivation or inspiration of employees, especially during the period of change. Overall, it can strengthen loyalty within the organization.
A nice example of the use of storytelling in project management gave Dan Vinson in his blog. In regard to the use of analogies and storytelling in project, program and portfolio management, he states the following:

“For example, if a project sponsor doesn’t understand why the resources that he has made available are not enough to get the job done, the project manager can present columns of figures that he or she thinks are self-explanatory. But a better approach may be the analogy:

"We can get the project done, but it is like attempting to dig a 10 foot hole with a tablespoon."

The main purpose of storytelling is to control expectations and align multiple project goals. Stories explain why projects look the way they do since many answers to and potential explanations of problems can be hidden in the stories from a companies’ history. Moreover, they tend to reflect cause-effect relationships among issues and answers.

Therefore, it can be said that stories trigger ideas about whether a project is on the right track. Similarly, they can contribute in supporting employees to provide personal contributions in the common interest of sense-making (Weick, 1995).

Stories engage our feelings – they have the inherent capacity to drive our emotions and direct them toward change in regard to expectations and needs throughout different stages of the project. At the same time, they help to connect people thus making more bounded teams, which then creates an atmosphere in which aspirations are higher and each employee more valued both internally within the project team and externally in the overall organization.

A good story allow managers to hold disparate elements together long enough in order to energize and guide action, plausibly enough to allow people to make retrospective sense of past actions and engagingly enough to obtain deeper meaning, since the stories are, by nature, mostly about the irregularities in the business lives – things that usually catch the attention because of their specificity and visibility. Such irregularities arouse one’s curiosity, or even fear, but impact future behavior.

3. AND WHAT THE STUDENTS THINK?

Earlier this year, a study was conducted among the students of the Faculty of Organizational Sciences tied to their levels of familiarity, as well as the use, of the concept of storytelling in project management. The survey involved 102 students of all years and study programmes. (Table 1.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study programme</th>
<th>FIRST</th>
<th>SECOND</th>
<th>THIRD</th>
<th>FOURTH</th>
<th>MASTER</th>
<th>PhD</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information systems and technologies</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33</td>
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<td>53</td>
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<tr>
<td>Operations management</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality management</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A striking fact is that the students’ familiarity with this concept is at a low level. Namely, students of all study programmes who participated in the survey have largely been insufficiently familiar with this concept (please see Graph 1).

Graph 1. Familiarity with the corporative storytelling/study programme

Furthermore, an interesting conclusion is that regardless of their study year the largest number of students agree that bad communication is the main cause of a project failure. Moreover, this figure corresponds to the fact that regardless of the type and the number of projects in which the students participated, they again recognize the communication as an important factor for the success of a project (see Graph 2, Graph 3). Communication is in fact the base on which the concept of storytelling is formed.

Graph 2. Project failure reasons/year of studies                      Graph 3. Project failure reasons/number of projects

Then again, it is interesting that students who rated their knowledge of the methods and techniques of project management as “high” are not to a large extent familiar with the concept of corporate storytelling, which can be an incentive for larger inclusion of this concept into the teaching material and/or other forms of learning activities (please see Graph 4).
4. JUST PERMANENT TREND OR..?

A question that logically arises is whether storytelling is more than a contemporary managerial trend? The answer is positive, specially is storytelling is seen as a kind of a proactive treatment rather than a tool for fixing project issues. Communicative leaders, who have had a positive experience with the use of storytelling may retain this tool as an advantage during the process of organizational change management. Stories have a role in clarifying ambiguities as well as providing meaning. They also act as a potential vehicle for the change of beliefs and behaviors through cognitive and emotional processes. Once project leaders seize the transformational power of language to motivate and inspire, they tend to undoubtedly conclude that organizational storytelling definitely makes sense.

REFERENCES


http://www.apm.org.uk/news/successful-project-management-through-storytelling
TITLE: WOMEN IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT

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Abstract: The purpose of this research is to identify the position of women in Project management around the globe. The first part of the study will be focused on theoretical background of project managers and basic qualities each of them should posses; continuing with the recent research that indicates why women could be better in PM. In order to clarify the subject of this article the most powerful women in PM gave their answers about gender equality issues. To wrap up, the final part of the article contains research conducted to identify women position in PM in Serbia.

Keywords: women, project, position, Serbia
Project management in numbers

France
- 21% Percentage of female project professionals in 2005
- US$86,773 Median annual salary for female project professionals in 2009

Italy
- 18% Percentage in 2009
- 16% Percentage of project professionals
- US$71,525 Median annual salary for female project professionals in 2009

United Kingdom
- 19% Percentage of female project professionals in 2009, up from 14% in 2005
- US$95,000 Median annual salary for female project professionals in 2009

United States
- 39% Percentage of project professionals who were women
1. WOMEN ARE MORE SUCCESSFUL PROJECT MANAGERS THEN MEN SOUNDS IMPOSSIBLE?

Wait a minute, you are at right address to clarify all your doubts about this topic.

Going back in 1977, women in Germany had to have a signed permission from their husbands if they wanted to work. (www.nytimes.com) Nowadays, considering the fact that the world has gone a long way when it comes to women in workplace, there is no field of work that women haven’t conquered, including project management.

Although women progress in every way, there are still some difficulties they are facing on their workplace/women in the profession are still tackling the dual issues of career progression and work balance.

Examination of masculinities and femininities is contentious in organizational research, generally because people view masculine behaviour as outside the realm of possibility or appropriateness for women, and feminine behaviour as outside the respectable capacities of men. Taking our lead from developmental theories that claim that healthy adult life involves moving toward wholeness, we argue that both male and female project managers need to understand the differences inherent in masculine and feminine ways of managing projects and claim the strengths of both approaches. (Marie-Josée Legault)

Of the nearly 35,000 project management practitioner respondents from 19 countries around the globe, 70 percent were male! (PMI Project management salary survey - sixth edition)

Most common obstacles are mix of conservatism and gender stereotypes, as some men still refuse to see women as their equal. Next, there is a generally accepted opinion that women are less of managers because of their family roles, as wives and mothers, that are keeping them from fully dedicating themselves to their work; or they simply find that women are not as aggressive, direct, or willing to take a risk as men are. Some men even consider that women have worse technical/computer skills, and therefore, they are not desirable candidates for high positions. (Really guys, in 21st century?) These are merely some of the things women have to cope with when it comes to progressing on workplace, especially to managerial positions. However, every day women are finding a way to show not only they are as worth as men managers, but sometimes even few inches higher on the business leader, and not just because they are wearing high heels.
2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Generally speaking in order to be more effective as project manager, whether you are man or women, there are ten basic qualities each project manager should possess. These qualities are: (2020projectmanagement.com)

1. Vision
2. Communication
3. Integrity
4. Empathy/compassion
5. Competence
6. Delegation
7. Composure
8. Team building
9. Problem solving
10. Enthusiasm/passion

Recent researches have shown that women are even BETTER project managers than men are, because they tend to have slight advantage in some qualities. Yup, that’s right, and there are some of the reasons why:

1. **Interpersonal communication** is very important for project managers, and studies have shown that women are better in this field, both in verbal and non-verbal communication. (Snyder, 1996)

2. **Teamwork** is something that is more suitable for women. Namely, “…women have significantly more of a team management style than do men, characterized by a high regard for people and high regard for task, they are less traditional and more visionary in their approach to business, and they may have a more heightened sense of awareness and a greater sense of cultural incongruence and gender exclusion” (Gale & Cartwright, 1995)

3. **Sensitivity and influence** are also things that dissociate women from men. Women are more likely to exert an influence on their boss and are more concerned about the members of their team. (Vilkinas & Cartan, 1997)

What is obvious in the allegations above is that all of these qualities are something inborn in the most of women, something than comes from their nature. Therefore, the position of project managers is actually more suitable for women, at least when it comes to the soft skills, would you agree?

But in order to be fair, not all men are against women running projects and being in charge. Actually, in time the equality among men and women in PM has significantly improved. There is an example from Dr. Chris Sauer, a professor with the Saïd Business School at Oxford University in the U.K. He says that whenever his research group discusses gender differences in project outcomes with practitioners, male PMs readily accept the proposition that females may perform better than males. "Almost none argue to the contrary," notes Sauer. "And the women naturally choose not to contradict!" (pmperspectives.org)
3. EXPERIENCED PM WOMEN

The equality issue may be at notably higher level, but there are still some things that can be improved, and some prejudices that can be broken. Some of the most powerful women in PM world who gave their answers about gender equality issues in an interesting and very informing panel discussion are: (www.apm.org.uk)

**Manon Bradley**
Development Director for the Major Projects Association (MPA)
Actively involved in The Portrait Club – an informal group set up to explore the realities of diversity and gender issues in project management.
“My priority is to see major projects delivering better results, and if the evidence shows us that increasing diversity at decision making level can help us to achieve that, then I consider that to be a strategy worth attention.”

**Sarah Coleman**
Non-Executive Director of the Association for Project Management (APM)
“SIG for women didn’t mean they were struggling to find an equal voice.” - Sarah noted and added: “Although technical skills are absolutely important for the nature of our work, we’re seeing a greater emphasis on the softer skills and the research tells us that those are skill sets more generally exhibited by women.”

**Teri Okoro**
The chair of APM’s Women in Project Management (WiPM) Specific Interest Group (SIG)
Reports show that businesses with more senior women outperform their rivals by 42%: “We also know that looking ahead we face skills shortages and we’ll be competing with other industries for talent.”
“The obvious conclusion is that if we want the project management sector to thrive we need to ensure that we’re encouraging the widest pool of talent into the sector.”
Summing up: the most important question is that Sarah asked: “Are we prepared to step up to the mark, and to identify and ask for the support we need to do this rather than hang back?”

Useful tips from these powerful women in PM world, for women entering the world of project management would be:
- Think like a manager and provide leadership to your project teams
- Don't act like man, you aren't at work to make friends, you are paid to get a job done
- Act, dress, speak like a professional
- Don't be afraid to take risks
- Connect with your project team
- Become involved with PMI (www.pmi.org)
Taking everything in consideration, women’s preparedness to step up will help establishing a voice and more visibility for women, giving them the responsibility for their own development and future improvement.

4. WHAT IS THE SITUATION IN SERBIA?

Knowing these things about position of women in project management around the globe, we have asked ourselves “And what about the position of women in Serbia? Is situation the same here, is it better, is it worse?” So, in order to complete this short article, we have decided to carry out a small research about this topic. We have interviewed people (specialized in project management, but also people from big companies who have worked on projects at least once) about their opinion when it comes to position of women in PM. This little questionnaire of ours has been completed by 70% of women and 30% of men, and all of them had to answer a few questions about their workplaces, communication in project team, and gender preferences when it comes to choosing Project Manager. Here are some of the conclusions that we’ve wanted to share with you.

Table 1 - Years spent in PM depending on gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years spent in PM</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-5 years</td>
<td>11.54%</td>
<td>65.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-10 years</td>
<td>15.38%</td>
<td>3.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-20 years</td>
<td>3.85%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First of all, let’s take a look how many years our respondents have spent in PM. According to the results, men have definitely more experience in this field. As this questionnaire has been completed by 70% of women, almost 66% of them have not spent more than 5 years working in PM.

When it comes to gender, almost seventy percent of respondents finds that it is not important whether the member of project team is male or female. They find that getting the work done is a priority and that there is equal probability that woman or man is going to do the right things in the right time.

Figure 1 - Getting the work done
Within these 69% of respondents who claimed that gender is not crucial for getting the work done, almost 47% were female.

The next things we have wanted to find out put more emphasis on female colleagues in project team. We were wondering if women have to go extra mile to get the job, management positions, and similar. We have asked people about behavior of women wanting to get higher positions in project team: about the impact of physical appearance, aggressive behavior, provocative clothes and gossiping. The results are showing that both women and men think that there is no reason to believe that one woman is going to get the job instead of the other, purely based on which women is more attractive. Key competences, behavior, communicational skills and work experience are the things that employers consider the most important. Having an attractive woman in team is considered merely a plus, not an imperative.

Table 1 - Getting the work done

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
<td>23.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>23.08%</td>
<td>46.15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2 - Role of physical appearance in getting the work done
The same goes for aggressive behavior, provocative outfits, and gossips. Most of the respondents (equally male and female), consider this rather unattractive features, and do not believe that this would assure them desired position in team or company.

**Figure 3** - The impact of gossiping in getting the job

![Pie chart showing percentages of respondents who believe that women who gossip about their colleagues get desired positions or not.](image)

Finally, after we have questioned them about all of the above, we can say we were very pleased with the results obtained. We came to the conclusion that work environments in companies which have participated in our poll are mainly healthy, non-prejudicial and healthy work environments, where success and progress depend entirely on work and competences, and not on gender. That is why we were not surprised when we’ve got results of our final question:

**Figure 5** - Gender preferences of Project managers when choosing the candidate for job

![Pie chart showing percentages of respondents who prefer male, female, or any gender project manager.](image)
In the end, we could only quote sir Cornelius Fichtner and conclude this simple, yet somehow frequently forgotten matter:

“The P in PM is as much about ‘people management’ as it is about ‘project management’.”

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