

Inside the mind of a toddler: Using storytelling for impactful project success^{1, 2}

By Keith Tinashe Katyora

Storytelling is one of the most powerful (and underrated) tools that can be used to increase the likelihood of project success. By framing project goals and objectives in the form of a story, project managers can create a shared understanding among stakeholders of what the project is about and why it matters. This can help to motivate and inspire team members, increase engagement and commitment, and ensure that everyone is working towards the same vision. In addition, storytelling can be used to communicate progress and milestones in a way that is engaging and meaningful, and to build a sense of community and connection among team members.

Some of the greatest projects in history can be attributed to not only the great project managers but also the shared vision of the entire team who were behind these projects. The [Tesla Model S](#) development is the first example of this phenomenon, which has been greatly attributed to the cohesive teamwork and leadership of CEO Elon Musk and his supporting project managers who oversaw the development and production. Another example of a great project would be the project team behind the first [iPhone](#), under the leadership of one of the greatest storytellers of our time, Steve Jobs. The flagship project became a cultural phenomenon due to the collaborative efforts of the different teams from product designers and the engineers.

Undoubtedly, central to any project or process will always be the team behind the work, and as such over the years, it has become quite evident that using storytelling as a tool could possibly have a huge impact on project success. To understand the concept, we need to look into the mind of the toddler and how storytelling is used for the following benefits:

- Enhancing their **listening** skills
- Fostering their imagination and thus unlocking their **creativity**
- Increase their **cultural understanding** whilst also allowing them to develop **empathy** for anything within their surroundings.
- Enhancement of **communication** skills

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- Improvement of **social skills** and sharpening of their **memory**

As a parent, and storyteller whether it's reciting a storybook or folklore, the main goal is to deliver these stories with the following aspects in mind:

- Every part of the story must be essential and simple.
- Use vivid language that kids can understand.
- Delivery of the story is important and as such be committed.
- Each story also has a hero and villain, with an ending which has an important takeaway.
- Have patience and empathy even as the toddler tries to make sense of the story.

So the big question here is, where is the correlation between storytelling for toddlers and storytelling the tool used for ultimate project success?

If you look at the benefits listed for toddlers, you will see that these are all applicable to adults, especially within a project setting. For project managers, the problem statement of the project can be narrowed down into a story, which then can have different scenarios and outcomes (i.e. a story with an ending which has an important takeaway). Through storytelling, project managers can also use it to celebrate project successes and share lessons learned (i.e., the heroes); and share insights gained from the project. Ultimately, which can then help to build team morale and a sense of pride in the project's accomplishments. One of the most contributing factors to [low retention rates](#) in companies or even across project lifetimes, has been poor communication between management and the project members and lack of recognition.

Overall, incorporating storytelling into project management can have a significant impact on project success. By using stories to create a shared vision, build trust and collaboration, address conflicts, make goals more memorable, aid in problem-solving and decision-making, and celebrate successes and lessons learned, project managers can create a positive work culture and achieve impactful project results.

Undoubtedly, we are all wired to love stories. As toddlers, we cherish them and as adults, we're constantly entertained and inspired by them. It's no surprise then that storytelling has made a significant impact in the business world. As a PMO leader, why should you care about storytelling? When you're leading the communication on your PMO's performance and its projects, providing just facts and figures will only inform your stakeholders and project team, but sharing stories will engage them, whilst creating a shared vision.

About the Author



Keith Tinashe Katyora

South Africa



Keith Katyora, PMP®, CEM®, Pr. Eng (CAND), is a seasoned professional with vast expertise in electrical engineering, project management, and advisory services. He has acquired extensive experience in the energy sectors across Southern, Central, West, and Eastern Africa. His core competencies include renewable energy design and modeling (solar PV and wind), competitive electricity market modeling and regional power trading, green hydrogen technologies, grid compliance studies, primary plant designs, and development of new energy markets. He is a technology enthusiast and passionate about utilizing technology to address various social causes.

Currently, Mr. Katyora is a Senior Project Manager at Sunelex, an independent power producer based in South Africa, spearheading the development of over 6 GW of new, clean and green energy. Mr. Katyora previously served as Outcome 3 Deputy for the Southern Africa Energy Program (SAEP), where he collaborated with the Outcome 3 Lead in managing program operations to achieve its objectives. He contributed his expertise towards developing regional harmonization and trading systems to improve the Southern Africa transmission system.

Mr. Katyora is a Certified Energy Manager (CEM) and a Project Management Professional (PMP); over the years has received numerous awards which include Young Independent's 2019/20 SADC Top 100 most influential young people; 2020/21 Young Engineer of the Year (via the South African National Energy Association Awards (SANEA)); and 2019 Mail & Guardian Top 200 Young South Africans (Science & Technology Category), recognition for work done within the energy and leadership space.

He can be contacted at katyorakeith@gmail.com or on LinkedIn.