



Storytelling in the digital age

28th of June 2017

Stories are an inherent part of an organization's narrative. They are powerful tools helping people understand what an organization does and what it stands for. This has been the topic of the June session of the INSMEAcademy that benefitted from the expertise of Ms. Tara Hadler, Project Manager of Collaborative Processes at the Network for Business Sustainability – NBS (*INSME Member from Canada*).

There is not a single definition or interpretation of storytelling. According to Ms. Hadler having the message and the target audience clear in mind is fundamental to empathize and engage people. If used properly, **storytelling can be a very powerful tool** to let people remember what an organization does and give the product/service the chance to play a leading role in the market. By telling a story organizations can provide insights on the 'why' and the 'how', meaning that in the case of successful organizational storytelling companies have a clear north star to follow and at the same time both employees and customers understand why they are involved in the 'productive' process.

Among the tips suggested, Ms. Hadler stated that stories have not to be over polished or too seductive, as overly glamorous productions can distract from the real value of the story. An important prerequisite to build an effective story is the **ability to listen** and this is even more true in the digital era where information are quite fleeting. Storytelling requires time, investment and involvement of people - as well as normalization, meaning the ability to accept and integrate stories in the organizational processes and operations as a 'normal' part of them. And not less important it requires the ability to embrace failure in order to overcome challenges and to consider it as an inner part of storytelling.

The speaker also presented an evolution of storytelling from the oral era to the digital one. The last one, called **Digitoral Era**, combines digital elements from nowadays with oral elements that were the focus of storytelling in the past. The *digitoral era* is characterized by a **AAA Connectivity** meaning that we can connect with anyone from anywhere at any time. As we tend to create short videos or stories that can be valuable, we have to be aware that restricting the length of our stories can influence the narrative as well as the level of engagement. If we want to keep people engaged this aspect has to be mitigated. In order to do this, it is of paramount importance to consider the audience perspectives, the challenges they face and let them feel part of the story. The key for organizations is to play the 'facilitator' role to give the audience the possibility to be the 'hero' of the story.

Ms. Hadler closed the session by pointing out that small organizations have the chance to tell stories and that the improvement of this ability is crucial as an effective storytelling could help them to grow.