

Storytelling for HR

This document can be seen by anyone. Only the hack team can edit it.

Hi fellow hackers!

I have put this document together as a way of sharing some info on our mini-hack and also as a way of getting us started. So, here you have the following:

- 1 Our contact details - please add your details (for Google newbies you do not have to save as it auto-saves)
- 2 A set of links to reading for this hack - it is all background info and useful.
- 3 Our mini-hack template - please can you add your thoughts under each heading and put your initial next to what you have added.

If you are new to Google then you will find this document in the 'Drive' tab at the top of the page when you are in Google email. Should you have any problems or need any help then email me or call me on 07787 548 178. I'm here to help.

1. Contact details (there are seven of us)

Name	Location	Twitter handle (if you have one)	Google
Martin Couzins	Bath, UK	@martincouzins	martincouzins@gmail.com
Simon Jones	Liverpool, UK	@ariadneassoc	sjariadne@gmail.com
Neil Morrison	London, UK	@neilmorrison	neil@themorrisonfamily.co.uk
David D'Souza	Reigate, UK	@dds180	david.souza180@googlemail.com
Erika Lucas	Watford, UK	@sharestory	erikalucas00@gmail.com
Frances McGregor	Huddersfield, UK	@McGregorFrances	f.i.mcgregor.hud.ac.uk@gmail.com
Clayton Glen	Tunbridge Wells	@claytonglen	claytongen1@gmail.com

2. Reading list

1. [Our mini hack and the conversation so far](#)
2. [Developing adaptability hacks](#)
3. [Hack cheat sheet](#)
4. [How to hack management: a practical guide to high-impact disruption and storytelling](#)

3. Our mini-hack template (please add your thoughts!)

1 TITLE:

Give your hack a short title—preferably one that reflects the essence of the innovation you're advocating.

Storytelling for HR (NM) - Like this one (SJ)

Telling the HR story (NM) Like this as does what it says on the tin (EL)

Telling Tales is ok (NM) -< I like this, DDS

Why we all need to tell tales (NM)

Selling the story (DDS)

People tales (DDS)

HR's Fables (DDS)

MultiStory HR (DDS)

I like Storytelling for HR - does Is Telling Tales a bit like spilling the beans in a negative way?

Does it matter? (MC) I agree that Telling Tales does have a "negative" connotation (SJ)

I like HR Story Telling - it's a theme I have been using on a website for inviting international bloggers to share their experiences; regional economics being the backdrop. (CG)

2 SUMMARY:

Describe your hack in 50 words or less, emphasizing the key feature(s) that make it new or distinctive.

Humans have an emotive response to stories that begins when we are young, they stretch and test the imagination. Developing the capability to tell tales effectively is an important way for HR to influence and motivate. (NM) Like this one and DDS suggestion to as it alludes to fact that we have become very data-driven and have lost the 'human' side (EL)

Storytelling is an acknowledged way of helping people bring to life a situation and communicate it's significance. To partner HR's growing focus on data we need to be able to bring storytelling skills to the fore to ensure we retain a focus on people, not just numbers. (DDS)

Stories are memorable. They form a part of a greater narrative. They are creative. They are by humans for humans and so are easy to engage with. This is why HR pros should use

them. (MC) Like this, although NM's above is a good summary too. (SJ)

Would add that telling great HR stories with authentic messages are best done for free and by engaging barter trade with internal stakeholders, (ie. sub internal comms budget), particularly where circumstances are constrained and the audience astute / cynical. (CG)

3 PROBLEM:

What specific problem(s) is your hack designed to overcome? Why do you believe this is an important problem to address?

Too much of our communication is based on the rational and not the emotional. Effective story telling works on both levels.

- failing to effectively sell ideas or opportunity to the business (DDS)
- an over reliance on data meaning that the human impacts of decisions is lost (DDS)
- relationships and dynamics are key teams and businesses and are hard to bring to life through data (DDS)

Stopping HR being viewed as a support function and all that it entails for those who work in it. (MC)

HR is a very complex nuanced subject because it deals with human relationships in the workplace, and it is difficult to bring down to black and white bullet points. Storytelling is a very effective way to explain complex and nuanced issues to people because we can all relate to them (SJ)

HR struggles to get its message across at senior level and research has shown it is often not valued highly as a function by the top team. Developing the ability to 'story tell' effectively would help to solve this issue. Story telling is also a great tool that that can be used to engage people with initiatives that may initially be unpopular. (EL) Yes- great point (SJ)

4 SOLUTION:

What are the core components of your solution and how are they interrelated? (Provide as much detail as possible). What, exactly, are you proposing needs to change in traditional HR practices or processes?

Good stories require a narrative that is compelling throughout. It also requires confident and passionate delivery. Too much of HR practise is fixed on the ordinary and mundane, our agendas are not compelling and our passion for what we do is missing. By learning to tell the story, through whatever means, we will learn to focus on the areas that excite and prioritise those. (NM)

Storytelling should be a necessary part of the craft of becoming a competent practitioner in HR/OD/L+D etc. Learning to structure a narrative to make it compelling and to effectively present business problems using a storytelling structure will enable better relationships and

cohesion across organisations (DDS)

HR isn't very good at articulating why things need to be done - including some of the boring processes. Good storytelling can explain this to staff, line management and make it memorable and relevant to them. (SJ)

Agree with all the above! (EL) but we need to focus on the 'how' - maybe there should be more emphasis in initial training of HR practitioners on influencing skills - plus in ongoing development some workshops on the practical techniques of story-telling. There are some great people out there who do this really well! (EL)

Tell simple stories, eg. DILLO principles, that people in organisations care about, and that reflect authenticity, a degree of bravery and honesty. (CG)

5 PRACTICAL IMPACT:

Try to describe how your hack might work in practice—how would it change attitudes, actions and outcomes? (Paint us a picture). In other words, how would it actually address the problem you described above?

In practice, HR practitioners would develop the skills and confidence to communicate their vision and purpose in a way that excites and compels, they would tailor their vision and purpose to the areas that do this. HR would be a focal point of compelling narrative, it would become the must read thriller, not, the process manual. (NM)

This is about airing and sharing. How can colleagues and peers understand what you do/know/learn if you cannot articulate that in an interesting way? This is about helping to do that - on a personal/professional/organisational level. (MC)

What NM said (DDS) Agree with both NM and MC here (SJ)

I think a lot of this is about role modelling. If someone starts doing this in an organisation and gets great results others will follow (EL)

What NM says is spot on (difficult to cultivate in some cases, so a nice developmental challenge / market), plus what EL says (behaviour aligned with the stories we tell; with authenticity and honesty, or no-one cares what the storyteller says) (CG)

6 CHALLENGES:

What practical problems would organizations face in implementing this hack? What suggestions do you have (if any) for how they might overcome these challenges?

The lack of capability in the HR teams. The considerable change from current practice. (NM)

Lack of capability (DDS)

Noise from and trendiness of focus on data (DDS)

Incorrect belief that it isn't a commercial approach (DDS)

Lack of bravery/courage to attempt new things (DDS)
Perception that soft skills don't bring hard results (DDS)

Finding a voice, practical skills, confidence (MC)

It's about the courage to start...we all have anecdotes that we may tell between ourselves (other HR professionals). We just need to aim the right stories to the right people. How many times have we said "I remember in my last company we had a case where..." or "I've encountered this situation before, it was during the last reorganisation, and what happened was..." At its most basic, that is storytelling (SJ)

Fear of legal implications often gets in the way of HR voicing an opinion or putting their head above the parapet (EL)

Confidence, bravery, judgement and stakeholder engagement / support (CG)

7 FIRST STEPS:

If an organization wanted to test your hack, what would it need to do first? How might it run a quick & dirty experiment or develop a prototype that...

- a. Can be started in 30 days and yield initial results in 90 days?
- b. Relies on volunteers rather than conscripts?
- c. Doesn't require multiple levels of approvals?
- d. Is feasible within existing budget constraints?

Get a bunch of hr leaders to tell their story in writing in a shared space for others to see. What is they are trying to deliver in their organisations and how can others help them develop their story through editing. (NM)

Workshop asking leaders for stories. Work with them to shape stories. Ask them to share stories with teams or more openly (stand in the canteen! run storytelling lunches). Publish a book of the stories. Circulate a recommended format. Encourage teams to create and share their own. All of this could be achieved at almost zero cost (DDS)

Experiments help people walk into the unknown and learn. So, set up an experiment with some expected outcomes and see what happens. Like the ideas above. (MC)

I don't believe this takes vast amounts of resources or approvals - it's about a change of style. We all tell our own story every day and everytime we talk to someone - we need to use that same technique to talk about HR. Everytime someone says "I get it now" is a result. (SJ)

All above are fab ideas - though I think people will need some initial input on 'how' to do it, or they will struggle on their own. Social media channels are also a great way to share stoires, although as we know, HR people struggle with this medium in general. (EL)

Next steps

MC here - thanks for all your comments. Great input and I feel this is really shaping up well. We are aiming to have a 'solid draft' of the mini hack for the 12 August so we need to shape this. My next question is how?!

There are good ideas that we need to work through. How would you like to proceed? please list your thoughts . . .

Hi Martin, thanks for pushing this along - I think you're right that we need to try and set up some kind of virtual meeting. Guess we need to have a more detailed discussion about the 'how' side of things and come up with some recommendations. I'm around Thursday and Friday this week or Tue am or Wed next. (Off on hols from 2nd Aug so won't be able to contribute to anything after that.) EL

I agree with Erika that - if we can arrange it - a virtual meet would be good. Friday morning is best for me, am on hols from Tuesday and would find it difficult to do Monday (SJ)

I have sent a meeting request in Google for 11am on 26 July. We can rearrange if this won't work. (MC)

Here is the recording of our hangout on 26 July: <http://www.youtube.com/embed/qOiJCXbSy1c>

If anyone wants to share the video on their site/blog, then here is the code for the recording:

```
<iframe width="420" height="315" src="http://www.youtube.com/embed/qOiJCXbSy1c"
frameborder="0" allowfullscreen></iframe>
```

Hangout notes

The recording of the hangout is 27m so watch that to catch up on what was said.

We looked at what we need to do to complete the hack. Our conversation focused on:

Why stories are important

We talked about why stories are important in creating impact/understanding/meaning. Do we need to flesh this out as a part of the hack? It might help connect what we are talking about here with the fact people love stories - through film, TV, radio, books, games etc. There is a great opportunity to bring this thinking into the org.

How to create stories

Techniques for HR professionals to help them create compelling stories. Simon shared a good example in employment law specifically about TUPE. It would be good to share examples as a part of the hack.

Here it is (SJ)

Imagine you wanted to explain the concept of “substantial equivalence” in a TUPE situation to one of your directors (I can see your eyes glazing over already). Just tell them the story of the Sainsbury’s cleaners....

It may be that, as the new employer in a TUPE situation, you cannot provide the same benefits as the old employer. This happened to a group of cleaners at Sainsbury’s supermarkets, where they were offered a share option scheme based on the company profits. As part of an outsourcing exercise, a group of cleaners were transferred out to a new employer. The staff raised the question of their lost share options and argued that they were suffering reduced terms and conditions as a result. The new employer – who did operate a bonus scheme - pointed out that it was impossible for them to offer shares options in a completely separate company, and they also could not be bound to pay a bonus based on the profits of a company over which they had no control. The courts agreed with the employer, saying that TUPE did not mean that an absurd or unjust conclusion should be reached. They did however state that the new employer had to provide a benefit that was “substantially equivalent” to the benefit that was being lost. This might therefore mean that a new employer has to set up a bonus scheme just for employees transferred to it under TUPE, or run a separate scheme for such staff.

Now you may or may not think that an interesting story (lacks a cliffhanging ending to me!) but it explains the point without using dry legal jargon, and in a relevant way to the Director in question.

We need to provide some steps to help people tell stories - not sure what this looks like but some basic tips. This is about mindset as well as skills. HR is used to writing instruction manuals and needs to be helped to tell the story - to identify the broader meaning of policy, for example, and share it in a compelling way.

We also talked about role modelling and also identifying colleagues that are good storytellers.

Maybe we need tips on mindset/behaviours as well as practical storytelling techniques?

We also talked about media and suggested that the way an org creates and shares stories should be based on what works for that org. Eg Neil said a 500-word story would work for Random House as that was what colleagues in a publishing house like and enjoy.

We could list a set of 'questions to ask' to help HR professionals identify what media to use to help create and share stories.

What makes a good story

HR pros could start this conversation in their team/with peers/in their org. We could provide them with some tips, links etc. have sessions with colleagues where they discuss stories, why they like them and what makes them compelling. Maybe this bit needs fleshing out.

We could crowdsource this in an open shared document too?

Other bits

We also mentioned potentially having a place (a site/blog) where HR professionals could share their stories - this would be great as a resource for peers as well as on a personal professional level. Happy to ask the CIPD for some cash to do this (it won't cost much). Or we could crowd fund.

We need to package this mini-hack as a story too - which I think we are doing in this document. We also need to think about how we package up our mini-hack.

I'm wondering/hoping we could do a session at the CIPD conference in November on this where we could ask some HR pros who have tested our hack to share their stories (just a thought!)

We now need to work on this as our deadline is **12 August** SO, please pitch in with next steps below based on our Hangout conversation and let me know what you can do. Read this cheat sheet on hacks too:

http://www.managementexchange.com/sites/default/files/MIX_Hack_Cheatsheet.pdf

I think we need to have a structure for the hack. Eg:

What it is - name and aims

Why it is important - the pitch

How to do the hack - that's all the stuff we have described above
(MC)

Just jotting down notes as we go... (DDS)

What would work for different organisations?

What would work for different people? Stages of career - introvert/extrovert

What simple steps could be used to create space? e.g. story telling roadshows where people

get together to share over lunch? Meetings being used to highlight stories of learning or success or failure?

How do we get contact and comfort at each level? Getting HRDs to do it is a win - but so is getting people making their first steps in HR. Can the CIPD help with this?

What are safe environments to practice in - can you have story telling buddies/mentors?

What would be a fun way of doing it that might make things more human? By the time the hack is out could people try putting on a work focussed panto in the office?! (Oh no we couldn't...SJ)

<http://lifehacker.com/5965703/the-science-of-storytelling-why-telling-a-story-is-the-most-powerful-way-to-activate-our-brains> <-I like this

Should the team share their favourite stories -workplace or otherwise to kick things off?

Could we run a free workshop or series of them to get people comfortable?

Video a great storyteller talking about what makes great stories

Liked Neil's point about asking people themselves what makes a great or powerful story - and the cool thing is people normally start that response by talking about a story

Can we list different mediums? e.g. learning maps, books, speeches, cartoons etc.

Would would out deliverables look like for a session/guide/whatever we did? three sections:

1 why is it important?

2 why it's easy and how you can make space for it

3 getting better at it

sorry - think that's the end of the brain dump (DDS)

I particularly liked Neil's point about we all know those who tell good stories (the person we like to meet in the pub, the entertaining chat show guest) and those who don't (the person who bores us easily when we meet them). Identifying what it is about the good story tellers - tone of voice, engaging language, ability to differentiate between relevant and irrelevant detail etc (SJ)

(As an aside, I listen to a lot of audiobooks - wonder if we could get one of the "good" readers via Neil's connections if there is something at CIPD conference? Cost implications obviously) (SJ)

MC - It is Friday the 2 August and i am about to email my fellow hackers with notes on what we need to do get this mini-hack finished off. These are the notes i'll share on email.

First off, thanks again to all the comments and thoughts. This document is quite a resource in itself. I'm enjoying seeing thoughts develop and our mini-hack evolve.

Going through the min-hack template it looks like we have most of what we need. Here is my review:

1 Title

Seems like Storytelling for HR works well (but we can change if there is strong disagreement)

2 Summary

I am happy to edit this based on all your input.

3 Problem

Again, I am happy to edit this based on all your input.

4 Solution

Again, I am happy to edit this based on all your input.

5 Practical impact

Again, I am happy to edit this based on all your input.

6 Challenges

We outlined a few challenges (see above) but we need to flesh out the how. Can anyone help with this. These are the challenges:

- The lack of capability in the HR teams. The considerable change from current practice. (NM)
- Lack of capability (DDS)
- Noise from and trendiness of focus on data (DDS)
- Incorrect belief that it isn't a commercial approach (DDS)
- Lack of bravery/courage to attempt new things (DDS)
- Perception that soft skills don't bring hard results (DDS)
- Finding a voice, practical skills, confidence (MC)
- It's about the courage to start...we all have anecdotes that we may tell between ourselves (other HR professionals). We just need to aim the right stories to the right people. How many times have we said "I remember in my last company we had a case where..." or "I've encountered this situation before, it was during the last reorganisation, and what happened was..." At its most basic, that is storytelling (SJ)
- Fear of legal implications often gets in the way of HR voicing an opinion or putting their head above the parapet (EL)

Are there other 'how' elements we need to cover? I like the idea of asking questions to ascertain

7 First steps

I like the idea of finding HRDs to write their org story, as suggested by Neil. Neil, could you do this to show/lead others in how to do it? Simon's story should be included as an example here. Neil - what do you think?

I will look into creating a space online to share these stories (I'll talk to the CIPD)

David suggested a workshop - could we do this in the first instance as an online meeting?

Where would this fit in to the hack? David - thoughts? **I think if we tied it in with the online**

workspace that might work - in terms of podcasts or similar. If you had the online tools then the workshop might be a way to launch it i.e. comms for this hack and launching the site rather than part of the hack itself? DDS

Erika mentioned using social channels to support HR pros in doing this. We could create a Twitter profile @storytellingforHR and a hashtag to create a space on twitter for these discussions and support. Erika - what do you think?

Resources - throughout these discussions we have talked about the content and presentation of stories. Should we create a list of storytelling resources that help with this? This resource could then be added to the site we create to share the stories - What do you all think? **I think this is a great idea. I've been sharing a few with you - shall we talk next steps at the picnic tomorrow? DDS**

If we could all flesh out our thinking by the end of play on 9 August then I will edit into the template for the 12th.

Hi all, MC here again. I have pasted the final version of the hack below and added it to the hackathon site. Not sure what happens next but just wanted to say a big thankyou to you all for helping get us to this point.

Link to the final version on the CIPD hack site: <http://www.mixhackathon.org/hack/storytelling-hr>

TITLE

Storytelling for HR

SUMMARY:

Describe your hack in 50 words or less, emphasizing the key feature(s) that make it new or distinctive.

Humans have an emotive response to stories that begins when we are young, they stretch and test the imagination. They helping people bring to life a situation and communicate its significance. Developing the capability to tell stories effectively is an important way for HR to influence and motivate.

Problem

What specific problem(s) is your hack designed to overcome? Why do you believe this is an important problem to address?

HR is a very complex, nuanced subject because it deals with human relationships in the workplace, and it is difficult to bring down to black and white bullet points. Storytelling is a very effective way to explain complex and nuanced issues to people because we can all relate to them

Too much of our communication is based on the rational and not the emotional. Effective story telling works on both levels.

Storytelling can help HR effectively sell ideas or opportunity to the business and bring HR data to life.

Ultimately, storytelling will help HR connect with the business and build its influence. HR struggles to get its message across at senior level and research has shown it is often not valued highly as a function by the top team. Developing the ability to 'story tell' effectively would help to solve this issue. Story telling is also a great tool that that can be used to engage people with initiatives that may initially be unpopular.

4 SOLUTION

What are the core components of your solution and how are they interrelated? (Provide as much detail as possible). What, exactly, are you proposing needs to change in traditional HR practices or processes?

Good stories require a narrative that is compelling throughout. It also requires confident and passionate delivery. Too much of HR practice is fixed on the ordinary and mundane, our agendas are not compelling and our passion for what we do is missing. By learning to tell the story, through whatever means, we will learn to focus on the areas that excite and prioritise those.

We feel that storytelling should be a necessary part of the craft of becoming a competent practitioner in HR/OD/L+D etc. Learning to structure a narrative to make it compelling and to effectively present business problems using a storytelling structure will enable better relationships and cohesion across organisations.

HR also needs to be better at articulating why things need to be done - including some of the boring processes. Good storytelling can explain this to staff, line management and make it memorable and relevant to them.

This mini hack is about giving HR practitioners the skills, confidence and a sense of what can be achieved through using storytelling in their roles. As well as what we can achieve with this mini-hack (see first steps) in the short term, there should be more emphasis in initial training of HR practitioners on influencing skills – plus ongoing development on the practical techniques of storytelling. There are some great people out there who do this really well.

PRACTICAL IMPACT:

Try to describe how your hack might work in practice—how would it change attitudes, actions and outcomes? (Paint us a picture). In other words, how would it actually address the problem

you described above?

In practice, HR practitioners would develop the skills and confidence to communicate their vision and purpose in a way that excites and compels, they would tailor their vision and purpose to the areas that do this. HR would be a focal point of compelling narrative, it would become the must read thriller, not the process manual.

This is about airing and sharing. How can colleagues and peers understand what you do/know/learn if you cannot articulate that in an interesting way? This is about helping to do that - on a personal/professional/organizational and peer group level. (MC)

Role modeling is critical. If someone starts doing this in an organisation and gets great results others will follow.

CHALLENGES:

What practical problems would organizations face in implementing this hack? What suggestions do you have (if any) for how they might overcome these challenges?

And the challenges are:

- The lack of capability in the HR teams. The considerable change from current practice.
- Noise from and trendiness of focus on data
- Incorrect belief that it isn't a commercial approach
- Lack of bravery/courage to attempt new things
- Perception that soft skills don't bring hard results
- Finding a voice, practical skills, confidence
- Fear of legal implications often gets in the way of HR voicing an opinion or putting their head above the parapet

In terms of overcoming these challenges, it's about the courage to start...we all have anecdotes that we may tell between ourselves (other HR professionals). We just need to aim the right stories at the right people.

How many times have we said "I remember in my last company we had a case where..." or "I've encountered this situation before, it was during the last reorganisation, and what happened was..." At its most basic, that is storytelling.

See also the next section . . .

FIRST STEPS:

If an organization wanted to test your hack, what would it need to do first? How might it run a quick & dirty experiment or develop a prototype that...

- a. Can be started in 30 days and yield initial results in 90 days?
- b. Relies on volunteers rather than conscripts?
- c. Doesn't require multiple levels of approvals?
- d. Is feasible within existing budget constraints?

Our approach is to start small and build up, role modeling along the way.

First, we will get a bunch of HR leaders to tell their story in writing in a shared space for others to see. What is it they are trying to deliver in their organisations and how can others help them develop their story through editing. (NM)

We will create a shared space online (site) where colleagues/peers can share their stories. We propose supporting this with a Twitter profile and hashtag to provide a focus and support. We will compile storytelling resources on the site.

If these ideas work we would like to build on them with workshops asking HR leaders for stories. We will work with HR leaders to help them shape stories and ask them to share stories with teams or more openly (stand in the canteen! run storytelling lunches).

We would aim to publish a book of the stories. Circulate a recommended format. Encourage teams to create and share their own. All of this could be achieved at almost zero cost.

By the time of the CIPD's centenary conference we would expect to have some stories to share and would like to do that at the event – and record and share them on our site . . . and get more people to try out storytelling. You get the picture.

Ultimately, it's about a change of style. We all tell our own story every day and everytime we talk to someone - we need to use that same technique to talk about HR. Everytime someone says "I get it now" is a result.