

## **Risk Communication Through Storytelling**

**Joachim Adebayo Adenusi, CFIRM**  
The Risk Doctor Partnership

Albert Einstein is reported as saying “*Logic will get you from A to B. Imagination will take you everywhere.*” A lot of our risk communication is very logical but not very imaginative. Experience shows that people listen better if the message is presented attractively, and storytelling is one powerful way to achieve that goal. An expressively-told story grabs the attention of the listener and creates vivid images in their minds which aid understanding and retention of the underlying message, especially when we’re dealing with concepts of uncertainty and risk.

What makes storytelling unique as a communication method?

- Stories translate difficult concepts into a concrete form that can be handed down verbally or in written form, helping to shape and preserve culture.
- Storytelling is interactive and flexible, causing the listeners to engage with the story and the storyteller.
- A strong connection is formed between the storyteller and the listener, allowing the message to penetrate to the listener’s subconscious mind.
- Stories engage reluctant or unbelieving listeners who would not listen to the same message if it was communicated in a more traditional form.
- A well-told story stimulates creative thinking, and allows listeners to use their own imagination to put themselves in the story.
- Hearing a story together creates a positive group identity.

The use of stories to communicate key messages has been part of the African heritage for many years. In pre-colonial times, many villages faced huge challenges that could only be overcome by careful planning and strong leadership. For example, when facing enemy invasion, the community leader would develop a detailed plan to defend the village and defeat the invaders. But then he had to encourage and motivate the community to implement the plan. One of the best ways to help them see the possibility of victory was to tell stories of previous successes achieved by their ancestors, or by narrating examples of other communities that had won in similar circumstances. The leader would also remind them that what they were about to do would not only be for the benefit of today’s community, but that future generations would tell of their mighty deeds.

The same storytelling approach can be used to engage and motivate staff facing a significant risk challenge. The following guidelines will help you to tell a good corporate story:

- Do we have previous stories of success and failure? What resulted in success and what caused failure? Who were the main characters in the story? What did they learn from it and how? What events or circumstances influenced the story?
- How can we apply the lessons of the past to the current situation? Think about the Objectives, the Operation, the Opportunities, the Obstacles, and the Outcomes.
- Good corporate stories put the audience in the place of the main characters in the story and lead them to say “I can see myself doing that.”

Corporate stories can be communicated in many ways, and creative methods are more memorable. It is not necessary to rely only on written reports or spoken briefings. There are many new communication channels available, and we should explore them to ensure that the risk message is heard. For example, the award-winning film *Moremi* (\*) is a good example of how to use storytelling to communicate creatively about risk. *Moremi* uses an adaptation of a traditional African folklore tale to explore the relationships between strategic planning, risk management, performance outcomes and rewards. How creative can you be in sharing your risk message?

\* Watch the *Moremi* trailer here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZmJGr6Le0tM>

---

To provide feedback on this Briefing Note, or for more details on how to develop effective risk management, [contact the Risk Doctor \(info@risk-doctor.com\)](mailto:info@risk-doctor.com), or [visit the Risk Doctor website \(www.risk-doctor.com\)](http://www.risk-doctor.com).

## About the Author



### **Joachim Adenusi, CFIRM, ACII, MSc**

UK & Nigeria



Joachim Adebayo Adenusi is an expert risk management consultant and an Associate with The Risk Doctor Partnership ([www.risk-doctor.com](http://www.risk-doctor.com)), offering specialist risk management consultancy and training. He is Director of Inspirational Risk Management Services Limited, a risk management business based in the UK, providing a wide range of risk consultancy, training and audit services. He is also Director of Conrad Clark, a risk consultancy with businesses in both the UK and Nigeria.

Joachim is a passionate and inspirational risk professional with over 22 years' work experience across different sectors. He is a keen promoter of performance-based Enterprise Risk Management, and he has developed a unique approach to ERM based on these principles.

Joachim currently advises major UK financial services and underwriters on implementing and embedding Basel II and Solvency II requirements. His main focus is on adding value to organisations and demonstrating efficiency, savings, performance improvement, profitability and waste reduction through effective management of risk.

Joachim won the UK Public Sector Risk Manager of the Year award in 2009-10, and was highly commended in the European Strategic Management Awards in 2007 and 2008. He is a risk certified trainer and a chartered insurer (ACII), and a Chartered Fellow (CFIRM) and former Director of the UK Institute of Risk Management (IRM). He is also the founder and chairman of the Nigerian Risk Awards, which exists to promote and recognise excellence in risk management in Nigeria. The awards have been running successfully since 2013, with categories across all major sectors, and they have gained a reputation as a highlight of the risk calendar in the country.

Email: [jadenusi@inspirationalrisk.com](mailto:jadenusi@inspirationalrisk.com)