

Strategic narrative at Computacenter

Barry Hoffman, Group HR Director at IT infrastructure services company Computacenter plc, tells of the benefits that a simple, clear and compelling narrative has brought the organisation:

“For me, our narrative has brought two major benefits. The first is its ability to unite the senior leadership team, and secondly to provide context for the entire organisation for almost everything we do.”

“Every large organisation has many different types of OD and leadership development interventions. As such, it’s very easy for individual leaders to be cynical and/or not to want to participate. The strategic narrative is something that is co-created by the senior leadership team as a group. It relies on them having bought into the strategy in the first place, of course, and the narrative – or ‘story’ – uses the strategy which belongs to the team already. Co-creating the narrative aligns them behind it. It’s written in plain and simple language, with potentially compromising business jargon removed. In working through it as a team they’ve ironed out all the creases and taken out the hidden nuances of understanding that might otherwise exist. The narrative is one thing that everyone in this company agrees with!”

“The second benefit is to provide context. Strategy, vision, mission and values initiatives are all very well but don’t easily stand up for employees who have not been through the exercise. As such they can therefore sometimes lack credibility. The narrative, however, provides a meaningful, standalone framework which ties them all together, rooted in reality so it’s believable. People often don’t like PowerPoint, and can easily get lost amongst the detail of bullet points and statistics which aren’t all that inspiring or easy to translate. Narrative is so much more effective.

A narrative also gives the CEO a consistent voice, which can easily be repeated by leaders and managers without losing meaning, and importantly, it can be applied by everyone. And without losing the core message, it gives people the freedom to use the story to satisfy their own organisational challenges. So it’s not as inflexible or rigid as some PowerPoint presentations can be; it’s logical, makes sense and they can use it for their own end.”

“A compelling strategic narrative helps unite everyone in the business behind a common purpose. We use it for all sorts of purposes; even recruitment and induction. The first version has lasted nearly three years, and we’re just about to update it. It’s clever.”

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