

ORGANIZATIONAL STORYTELLING IN ROMANIA

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ABSTRACT

The aim of our research was to identify, how, when and why are the stories used in Romanian organizations. Based on the literature review analyzed, we have designed a questionnaire. Our finding showed that communication through storytelling is mostly used in marketing, journalism and educational fields and that the communication through stories is a tool insufficiently or very little used to boost performances in Romanian organizations.

KEYWORDS: *education, journalism, marketing, organizations, storytelling.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In everyday life we all communicate through stories. The main way that human beings order their experience in time is through stories. The primary ways that humans made coherent sense out of seemingly unrelated sequences of events was also through stories. In order to achieve the purpose of this article, we identified, at global level, the areas of activity in which are used communication through storytelling.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Stories and storytelling

Stories are "something with a beginning, a middle, and end" (Moezzia et al., 2017). Likewise, stories can be defined as "series of chronologically and logically related events" (Spear & Roper, 2013). "In traditional oral stories, there is generally also a protagonist, usually a human but possibly another animate actor, an object, a practice, or an idea. Then something happens, such as a conflict between protagonist and antagonist, or a transformation" (Moezzia et al., 2017). The principle way that human beings order their experience in time is through stories. The main ways that humans made coherent sense out of seemingly unrelated sequences of events was also through stories. (Worth, 2008). We tell stories in order to share information, influence others (Kent, 2015; Si, 2016), build support for coalitions, and elicit emotional responses and initiatives (Kent, 2015). Narratives can help the public make choices by setting out a scientific issue's contexts, establishing the stakes involved, and offering potential solutions" (Kirby, 2018). In the process of telling stories are two "actors": the storyteller and the listener. According to Boje, "storytellers are somewhat aware of the constructive influences their audiences as they adapt and create their telling in each venue and with each audience" (1999). In other article, the same author highlights that "as listeners, we are co-producers with the teller of the story performance" and the process of listening "...is an embedded and fragmented one in which we fill in the blanks and gaps between the lines with our own experience" (Boje, 1991).

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Storytelling is often defined as the “sharing of knowledge and experiences through narratives and anecdotes” (Sole & Wilson, 1999). Although, “storytelling is a commonly taught skill that can be practiced, learned and improved” (Herskovitz & Kristal, 2010). According to Boje (1991) “stories are to the storytelling system what precedent cases are to the judicial system”. Though storytelling people are able to organize their experiences, to communicate them to others and to better understand their world (Cooper et al., 2010). Stories are also told in social media context: “when people connect in social media and share content with their virtual friends and acquaintances, they are in essence all storytellers and the sharing of stories is how they perform socialites.” (Lund et al., 2018). Nowadays, another way that we can tell stories is through short videos created by integrating image, video, background music and audible or written narration via some basic hardware and software, named *digital storytelling* (Wang & Zhan, 2010).

2.2 Organizational storytelling

Organizational storytelling is a "collective storytelling system in which the performance of stories is a key part of members' sense-making and a means to allow them to supplement individual memories with institutional memory" (Boje, 1991). Storytelling, in organizations, is “the preferred sense-making currency of human relationships among internal and external stakeholders” (Boje, 1991). Boje (1991), reveal that “the important fact is that the most storytelling is done in conversation and involves the listeners in various ways”. Stories are used in organization, in order to create a message memorable enough for people to take cause and action, motivate people (Boje, 1999), influencing corporate behavior and shape corporate culture (Eray, 2018). According to Eray (2018), those who can create organizational stories are leaders or co-created with organizational members. Organizations are telling three types of stories: “the story of the firm itself, stories of the firm’s products or services, and customers’ own stories and their relationship to the firm” (Denning, 2011).

Boje (1991) taped “everyday organization conversation to capture spontaneous storytelling episodes among seven executives and twenty-three managers, customers and vendors of a large office-supply firm” In his study, Boje (1991) conclude that “stakeholders tune into stories as real-time data and tell stories to predict, empower, and even fashion change” and the “customers, vendors, salespeople [...] performed stories not only to make sense of their setting but to negotiate alternative interpretations and to accommodate new precedents for decision and action.” In organizational context “storytelling and story-listening can connect diverse stakeholders and foster imaginative forms of collaboration and collective action.” (Moezzia et al., 2017). Storytelling is also used as an “effective tool for solving crisis” (Eray, 2018). Crisis communication, according to Eray (2018), “is also about the protection of corporate reputation. Therefore, stories should consider corporate reputation when they are used to deal with crises”. On the one hand, Eray (2018) suggests that “organizations should tell the truth in order to overcome crises successfully and maintain their existence”. On the other hand, Spear and Roper (2013) noticed that “corporate stories present the official version of the truth, which may not agree with perceptions of other stakeholders.” Organizational stories can be communicated through websites, press releases intranets, speeches, and the annual report, as well as management decisions, recruitment and development, approaches to competition and customers, investment and community stewardship.” (Spear & Roper, 2013). According to Spear and Roper (2013) a corporate story is effective if there are minimal gaps between the organization’s claims, and its actions.

2.3 Organizational storytelling in marketing

Storytelling is also used in marketing. Dias and Dias (2018) admitted that “using storytelling applied to products themselves instead of promotion – creating product narratives – adds value to such products”. According to Delgado-Ballester and Fernandez-Sabiote (2016) “an effective brand story must have four key elements: authenticity, conciseness, reversal and humour”. A brand is the

sum of all corporate behaviors and communications that inform customers' experiences with product or company that means storytelling is essential to successful branding. (Herskovitz & Kristal, 2010). Hjelmgren (2016), in his case study suggests "that compelling brand meanings can be based on a large jigsaw puzzle of stories told via various media, facilities, goods and services". A retailer may need to orchestrate all the stories its customers receive in their various points of contact with the corporate brand, in order to create a compelling brand meaning. Stories told are included through "the range, supplementary services, and in-store environment" (Hjelmgren, 2016). Corporate storytelling help a firm to bond with its employees, demonstrate the importance of the corporate brand to internal and external stakeholders, and create a position for the company against competitors (Spear & Roper, 2013). An area of academic interest within corporate branding and reputation is the use of storytelling in order to differentiate the corporate brand (Spear & Roper, 2013).

2.4 Organizational storytelling in journalism

In the domain of *journalism*, the concept of storytelling is a topic of current and widespread interest, reflected in a growing number of newsrooms embracing narrative formats to deliver their news content (Shim, 2014). In this field, storytelling is the way to make news more meaningful for audiences. Also, it is often presented as "standing vis-à-vis journalists' truth-seeking mission" (Boesman and Meijer, 2018). Social media have four technologies of power: text, images, actions and ideas, storytelling is the most central of them (Lund et al., 2018). According to Lund et al., (2018) "as stories are the means of communication, it underscores the notion of social media as spaces of storytelling". A recent study examined how journalistic multimedia stories uses storytelling techniques and how the audience is immersed in news events using features of text, image, video, audio, and graphic animations (Krieken, 2018). In another study, Buananno (2018), revisit from a critical perspective some issues related to the contemporary landscape of fictional TV storytelling. The initiatives of European Public Service Broadcasters make "a significant effort to integrate new narratives to the audiovisual public service and reconnect with young audiences." (Azurmendi, 2018). The emerge of new journalistic genres and formats are due to the increasing use and popularity of transmedia storytelling. This is the case with Newsgames, an interactive format feeding off videogames and journalism to show news in a playful, immersive and participative way. García-Ortega and García-Avilés (2018), in their paper, analyze "a tool to measure quantitatively the journalistic and playful component of newsgames, in order to determine whether news reporting or gameplay content prevails".

2.5 Storytelling in education

Besides the use of storytelling in marketing and journalism, it is also used in education. Walker (2018), in his research project examine, how oral storytelling within the classroom can influence various aspects of narrative writing and demonstrated that there were echoes of oral storytelling within the students' written work. The role of storytelling approach in conflict management process for increasing the school achievement is discussed by Seylani and Dağlı (2017). For resolution of conflict through storytelling approach, teachers need empathy. To enhance conflict management, the team spirit, technology, professionalism, metaphors become a harmonic picture of storytelling approach (Seylani & Dağlı, 2017). The impact of the storytelling strategy on developing the story writing skills was studied and the main findings were: 93.4% found the strategy useful, 92% liked this strategy and 92.4% agreed that whilst they prepared for writing the story. Teachers' opinions indicated that "most of the teachers agreed that they have benefited from the strategy." (Alkaaf, 2017). D'Abate and Alpert (2018) talk about using storytelling as a tool in mentoring. They focus on how stories can convey meaning, inspire listeners, and transmit wisdom to help protégés grow, learn, develop in their jobs and careers, then conclude that "storytelling is indeed a powerful tool in mentoring" (D'Abate & Alpert, 2018). The particular interest of Karppinen et al. (2018) is on what

kinds of learning outcomes emerge in relation to learning in a group and how pre-service teachers perceive improvisation and storytelling as a pedagogic approach.

2. METHODOLOGY

The aim of our research was to identify, based on the literature review analyzed, how, when and why are the stories used in organizations. We have designed a questionnaire, using the google docs tool

(<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfuKTmpPTu9vDDLqAFNhFtCXgt41vXTT19hyF5dwY-pug7t8Q/viewform>). The distribution of this questionnaire was made in social media. The questionnaire has been completed by 150 respondents, from different Romanian organizations. The main hypothesis we wanted to validate was that the communication through stories is a tool insufficiently or very little used to boost performances in Romanian organizations. As well, through this questionnaire we wanted to identify what kind of Romanian organizations are using the communication through stories. We supposed that storytelling in communication is known, but not efficiently applied in the organizational management. This was a secondary hypothesis to validate. Another one was that the communication through stories is used mostly in mass media organizations.

3. RESULTS

From 150 respondents, 55% graduated College (82 respondents), 34.9% Postgraduate Studies (52 respondents), 6% Phd Studies (9 respondents), and 4% Secondary School (6 respondents). In figure 1 is presented the structure of the latest educational form completed. An percentage of 64.4% are employees (96 respondents), 27.5% entrepreneurs (41 respondents) and 8.1 % managers (12 respondents). Among the respondents with Phd Studies completed, 6 are entrepreneurs and 3 are employees. Half of the 6 respondents with Phd Studies completed, avowed that they are familiar with the term storytelling in business and that communication through storytelling is used in the organizations in which they work. The other half of the 6 respondents with Phd Studies completed, reported that they are not familiar with the term storytelling in business, and that communication through storytelling is not used in the organizations in which they work. Also, the results showed that from those 52 respondents who have followed postgraduate studies, 38 are employees, 8 are entrepreneurs and 6 are managers. Less than a half of the 38 employees that have followed postgraduate studies (12 respondents), avowed that they are familiar with the term storytelling in business and that the communication through storytelling is used in the organizations in which they work. A number of 5 respondents who followed postgraduate studies, reported that are familiar with the term storytelling in business, and that the communication through storytelling is not used in the organizations in which they work. More than a half of the 8 entrepreneurs that have followed postgraduate studies (5 respondents) avowed that are familiar with the term storytelling in business and that the communication through storytelling is used in the organizations in which they work. A quarter of the 8 entrepreneurs that have followed postgraduate (2 respondents) reported that are familiar with the term storytelling in business and that the communication through storytelling is not used in the organizations in which they work. Among the 6 managers that have followed postgraduate studies, 3 reported that are familiar with the term storytelling in business and that the communication through storytelling is used in the organizations in which they work. From the respondents of our study, 56 are employees with college completed, 17 entrepreneurs with college completed and 9 managers. Among the 56 employees with college completed, 6 avowed that are familiar with the term storytelling in business and that the communication through storytelling is used in the organizations in which they work. A nearly double number of employees with college completed (11 respondents) avowed that are familiar with the term storytelling in business and that the

communication through storytelling is not used in the organizations in which they work. From the 6 respondents that graduated Secondary School, 4 entrepreneurs avowed that are familiar with the term storytelling in business and that the communication through storytelling is used in the organizations in which they are working.

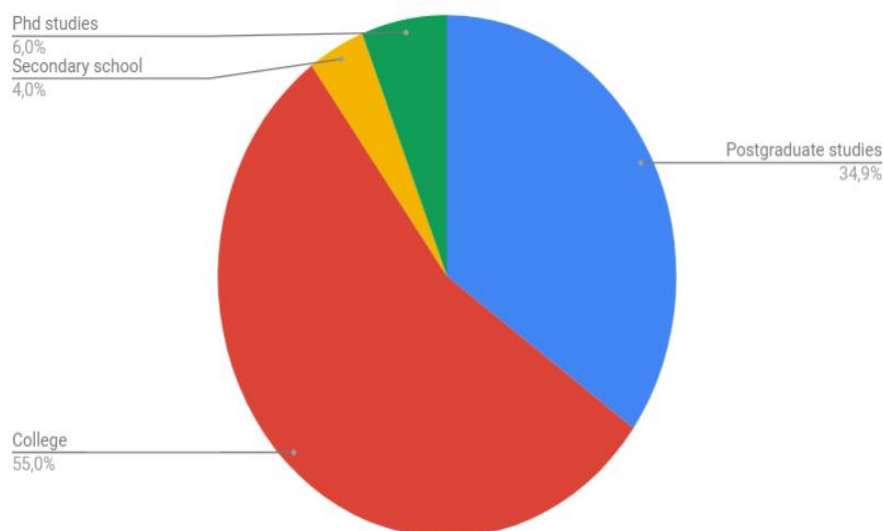


Figure 1. The latest educational form completed
Source: authors

From 150 respondents, 6 % (9 people) are working in sales and accountancy department, 19.5 % (29 people) are working in marketing department, 17.33% are working in another departments (26 people), 24 % (36 people) are working in educational field and 8.66 % (13 people) are working in human resources department (HR). Among this 9 respondents who are working in sales department, 5 avowed that they are familiar with the term storytelling in business. Only one respondent of those who are working in sales department and avowed that are familiar with the term communication in business, report that the communication through storytelling is used in the organization in which is working in.

One third of 9 respondents that are working in accountancy department avowed that they are familiar with the term storytelling, but none of them uses the communication through storytelling in the organizations in which they work.

From the 29 respondents that are working in marketing department, 20 (68.96%) avowed that they are familiar with the term storytelling and 12 (42.37%) of them report that the communication through storytelling is used in their organization.

Also, a number of 29 respondents who are working in educational field report that they are familiar with the term storytelling and 27 of it avowed that the communication through storytelling is used in the organizations in which they work.

Withal, 10 out of the 13 respondents who are working in human resources department avowed that they are familiar with the term storytelling and 9 of it report that the communication through storytelling is used in the organizations in which they work. Only 3 of the respondents that works in other departments report that are familiar with the term communication in business and the communication through storytelling is used in the organizations in which they work.

These data are presented in figure 2.

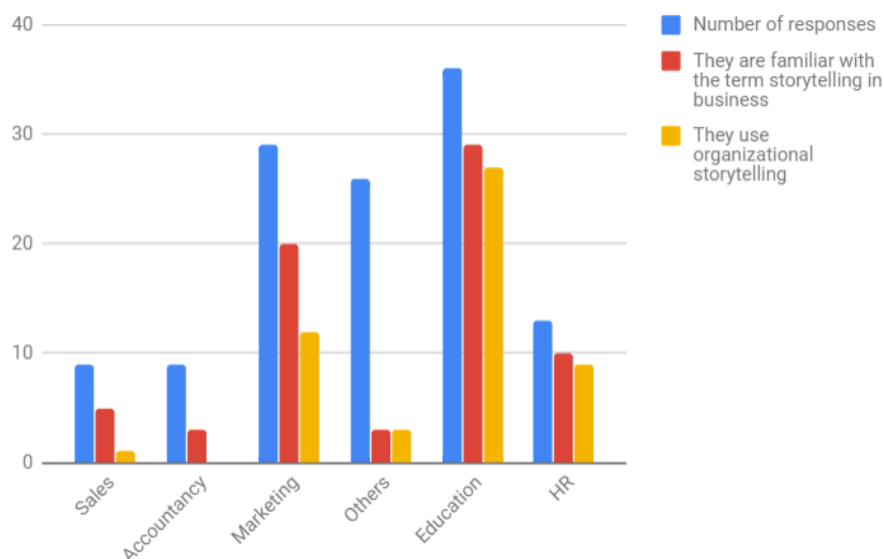


Figure 2. Answers of respondents sorted by departments where they are working
 Source: authors

From the 150 respondents, 22 % (33 people) are working in a mass media organization. A number of 17 are working as Chief Executive Officers, 6 as Tv produces, 7 as Editors and 3 as Secretaries. Among the 17 Chief Executive Officers, 14 avowed that they are familiar with the term storytelling in business and 10 of them report that the communication through storytelling is used in their organization. Only 3 of the respondents that are working as TV producers avowed that are familiar with the term communication in business and that the communication through storytelling is used in the organizations in which they work. From the 7 respondents that are working as Editors, 4 report that familiar with the term storytelling in business and 3 of them avowed that the communication through storytelling is used in their organization. All 3 respondents that are working as secretaries in a mass media organization avowed that they are familiar with the term storytelling in business and that communication through storytelling is used in the organizations in which they work. These data are presented in figure 3.

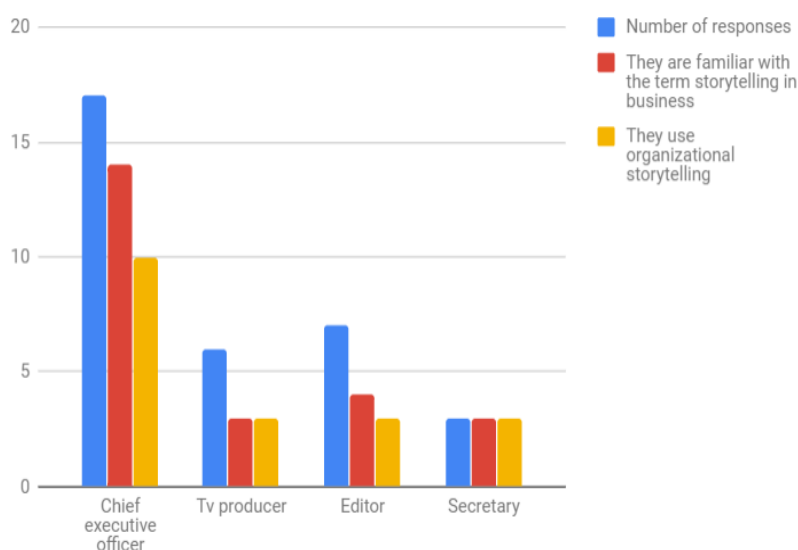


Figure 3. Answers of respondents who are working in mass media organizations
 Source: authors

From the 150 respondents, 36.2% (54 people) are using communication through storytelling in the organizations in which they work. Among the 54 respondents that are using communication through storytelling, 20 people avowed that in the organizations in which they work communication through storytelling is used by managers, as a motivational technique. Communication through storytelling is used by teachers, as a teaching method, according to the 29 respondent. A number of 6 respondents avowed that employees are using communication through storytelling as a way of preventing or solving problems. Another 6 people reported that in their organization the communication through storytelling is used by managers (as a motivational technique) also by teachers (as a teaching method) and employees (as a way of preventing or solving problems). Just 2 respondents declared that in the organizations in which they work, communication through storytelling is used for raising funds. Asked if they are thinking that in the organization in which they are working, the term *communication through stories* is known but not effectively applied by organizational management, 63.1% answered *no* and 39.6% of respondents they answered *yes*. These data are presented in figure 4.

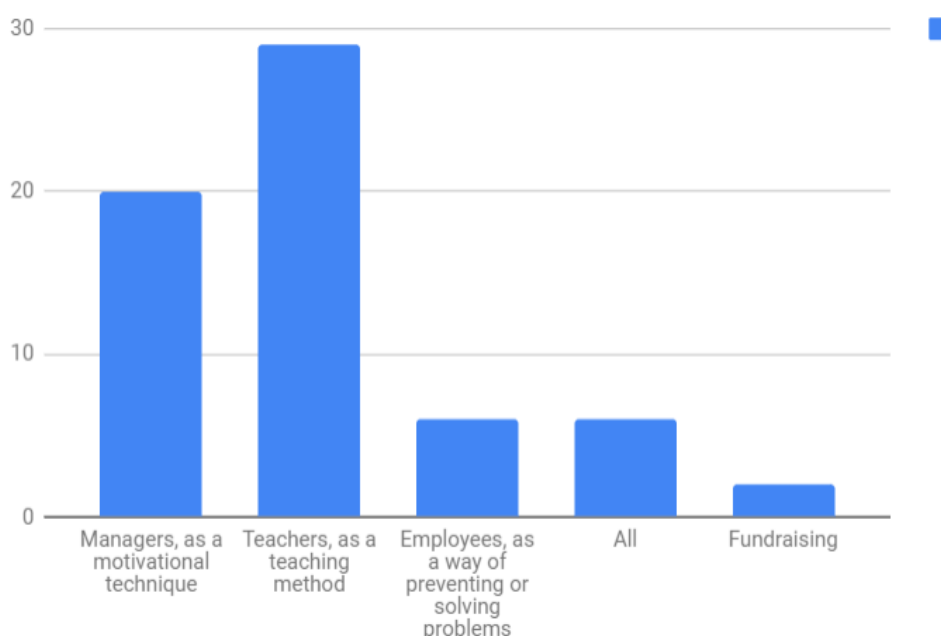


Figure 4. The usage of organizational storytelling in Romanian organizations
 Source: authors

Asked to tell, on a scale of 1 to 5, if storytelling is used (in their organization) to boost performance, 78 answered 1 (barely), 18 answered 2 (some), 12 answered 3 (moderate), 24 answered 4 (a lot) and 17 answered 5 (largely). These data are presented in figure 4.

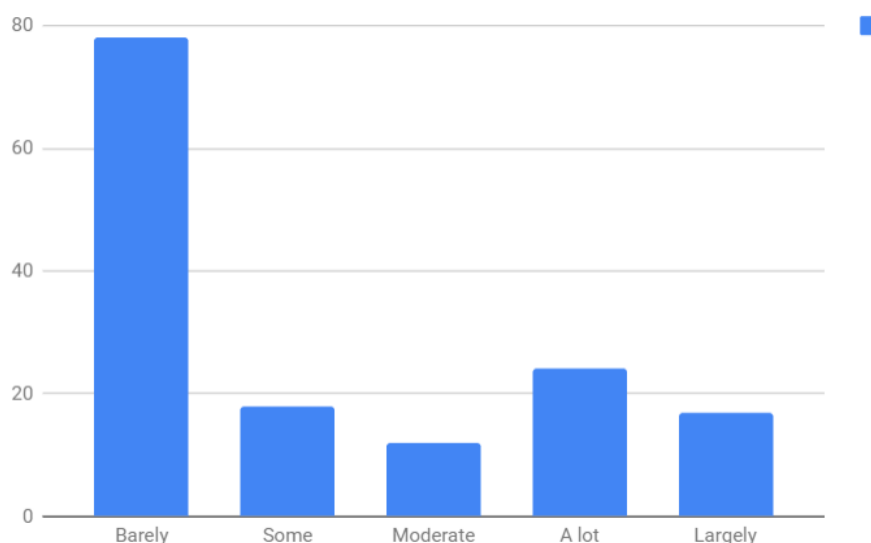


Figure 5. Respondents' opinion on how effectively is applied the communication through storytelling by organizational management

Source: authors

4. DISCUSSION

The study would have a greater relevance if it were intended for a compact group (e.g. organizational storytelling in Romanian journalism). Also, this study would have a greater relevance if the number of responses would be at least 250. At the question 3: "In the organization you are working in, communication through stories is used by:", was 6 respondents who reported that in their organization the communication through storytelling is used by managers (as a motivational technique), teachers (as a teaching method) and employees (as a way of preventing or solving problems). This respondents are all working in educational field. Interpreting the results of our study, we discovered that there may be a connection between the number of respondents that are familiar with the term communication in business and their latest educational form completed. Applying this questionnaire gave us the opportunity to find out that communication through storytelling is also used by Non-governmental organization for raising funds. This study opens opportunities for a new research.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Communication through storytelling is mostly used in marketing, journalism and educational fields.

The results of our study, showed that communication through storytelling is mostly used in marketing, journalism and educational fields. From the 29 respondents that are working in marketing department, 20 avowed that they are familiar with the term storytelling. Only 12 respondents that are working in marketing department report that they are familiar with the term storytelling and that communication through storytelling is used in the organizations in which they work. Also, a number of 29 respondents who are working in educational field report that they are familiar with the term storytelling and 27 of it avowed that the communication through storytelling is used in the organizations in which they work. From the 33 respondents that are working in a mass media organization 24 avowed that they are familiar with the term storytelling in business. Only 19 respondents report that are working in a mass media organization and are familiar with the term storytelling in business and that the communication through storytelling is used in the organizations in which they work.

The communication through stories is an insufficiently or very little tool used to boost performances in Romanian organizations

The results showed that 58 % for the respondents consider that storytelling is barely used to boost performances in Romanian organization.

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