

RISE

Retrofit information,
support & expertise

Senior management buy-in

Toolkit

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Summary

Getting the buy-in of senior managers and other key stakeholders is vital for a successful retrofit project. To get buy-in, you must tell a convincing story. Facts and projections are not enough. People must feel the importance of the project.

This toolkit will help you create and deliver a compelling story.

Who should use the toolkit?

This toolkit is designed for project leaders, whose crucial role includes fostering and maintaining the commitment of their senior managers.

When should you use the toolkit?

From the beginning of the project, develop and use the project story. At each stage of the project, the toolkit can help you get permission from decision-makers to move to the next phase of development and delivery. From initial thoughts to outline, formal business case and delivery plan, and execution.

Your story will help you navigate each checkpoint and will grow with the project.

How should you use the toolkit?

The toolkit has three levels of increasing detail:

- **Level 1** – a brief introduction
- **Level 2** – a framework for understanding the main tasks in getting buy-in
- **Level 3** – checklists and an explanation of each part of the framework with high-level guidance on what to do, together with templates, links to masterclass videos, and external reports and tools

If you are an experienced project developer and manager, you should go through Levels 1 and 2, complete the [self assessment form](#), and examine the Level 3 checklists to ensure no aspect has been overlooked.

If you are less experienced, review all of Levels 1-3 (including the [self-assessment form](#)) and use Level 3 to help you cover areas where you need more support.

Recommended process

1. Read the information in Levels 1 and 2 to understand the basics
2. Take the self-assessment questionnaire to get a picture of your current areas of strength and weakness, and where you need to focus your attention
3. Use Level 3 to suggest key activities, tools, and ways to bridge any gaps

Level 1 Introduction

A successful project needs the support of the organisation's leadership team. A leadership team always has more investment opportunities than they have available resources. Your project must earn its place at the top of the list.

Whilst senior management buy-in and agreement are typically necessary to allocate resources for the project, their support can provide benefits that extend far beyond this:

- The commitment of your senior team is vital in any bid for external funding. A firm commitment from the leadership team strengthens the bid
- When seeking external funding, evidence of senior management commitment can be a requirement of bid submission
- Many functions, departments and individuals must work together to deliver a large retrofit project. The leadership team can commit the whole organisation
- You will almost certainly involve external partners in the project, either consortium members or critical suppliers and contractors. Senior commitment will give them confidence to put their energy, expertise, and resources into the project
- Senior managers can have information about plans that may affect your project. For example, estate regeneration or disposals. Early information will avoid wasted effort
- A large retrofit programme is a complex activity. You will ask many parts of the organisation to do difficult things, sometimes taking resources from other priorities. The leadership team can show the organisation this is an important activity. They can break through organisational barriers in a way that you probably cannot


Surely the project will sell itself?

What is the problem in gaining the support of senior management? You are developing a business case and a delivery plan. The facts and figures are there.

Unfortunately, although we all like to think we are rational decision-makers, the reality is different. To get the support of everyone needed to get a project off the ground, you must tell a compelling story. A story that connects with the issues they think are important. Something that delivers a priority or solves a problem. They must have confidence that you will deliver.

Marketeers have an acronym for the journey you want people to take – A.I.D.A.:

- **A**ttention – in a busy and noisy world, you must grab their attention
- **I**nterest – create interest in the solution you are proposing
- **D**esire – translate the interest into a positive desire to support the project
- **A**ction – and a commitment to take the actions necessary



Without attention, there is no interest or desire to act, and therefore no commitment to action. People are hard-wired to respond to stories; we have been telling them to each other for thousands of years.

It is a proven way to engage with people. You don't drop a report of tens to hundreds of pages on their desk; you tell them a story.

This toolkit will help you create the story to support your project and generate the commitment you need from senior management. You will tell the story many times. Adapting it to the audience and filling in the details as the project progresses.

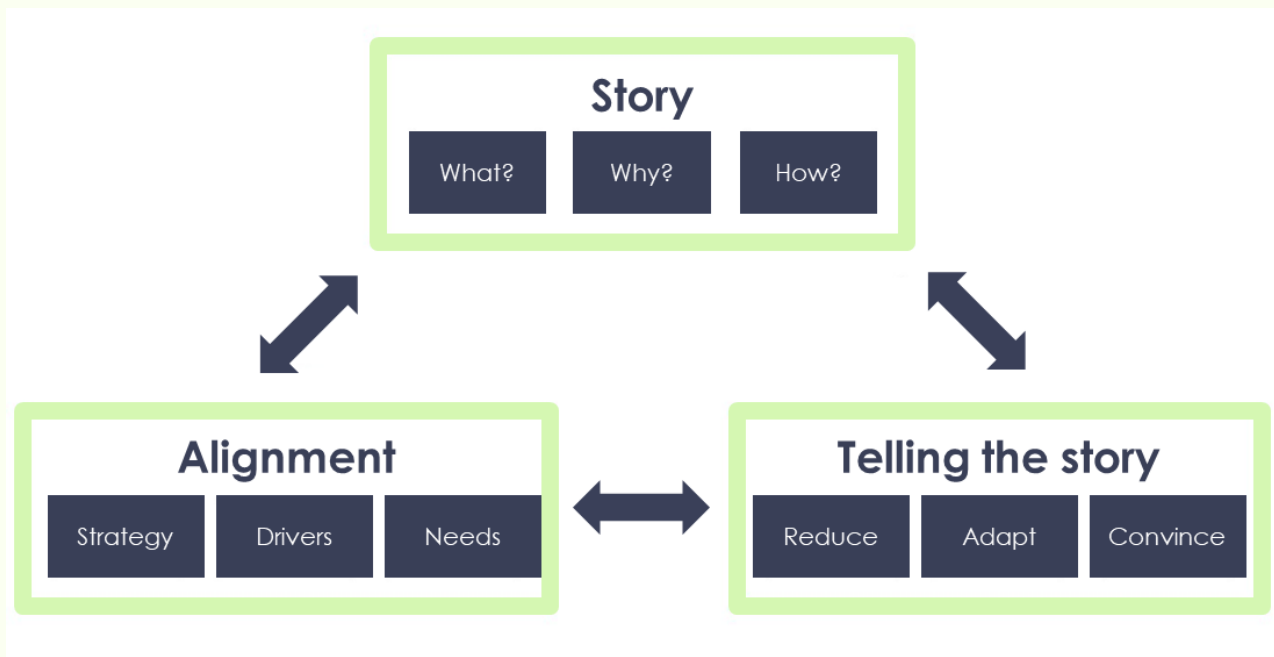
Level 2 Framework

Getting senior management buy-in is about more than having a good business case. The facts and projections won't carry a project on their own. We may like to think that we always make rational decisions, but emotion – gut feel – also plays a powerful part. You must tell the story in a way that connects with the various stakeholders, addresses their needs and wants, and is powerfully persuasive.

This toolkit will help you develop a clear and coherent story for your project and use it to gain the understanding and support of key decision-makers and resource managers.

The framework breaks the task down into three components:

- Creating a compelling story
- Aligning the story with the goals of the organisation and the decision-makers
- Telling the story as effectively as you can



Breaking down the problem of getting senior management buy-in into these components makes it easier to explain the tasks and to provide supporting tools. However, as the double-headed arrows show, each group of tasks affects the others. Developing the story is an iterative process. You need an initial story to check its alignment with the goals, but it will be changed by the alignments that you find. Through telling the story, you will learn how best to present it and that may subtly change the emphasis.

There is no right order to tackle the various tasks, and the story will change and evolve as the project develops.

Story

To create a compelling story, you must be clear on **What** the project will deliver, **Why** it is important to your organisation, and **How** you will deliver it?

Alignment

Your story needs to show that the project aligns with the goals and needs of the organisation and important stakeholders.

Some examples of goals and needs could be:

- Internal to the organisation – the corporate strategy
 - E.g., declaring a climate emergency and a target date to reach net zero
- External forces – trends and drivers
 - E.g., by 2030, the UK Government aims to upgrade as many privately rented homes in England and Wales to EPC Band C as possible
- Based on the wants and needs of specific individuals or teams
 - E.g., our repairs and maintenance service has a target to reduce repairs time by 50%, increase customer satisfaction ratings to 99%, and reduce costs by 10%

Telling the Story

Once you have a story well aligned with the organisation's goals and needs, you need to tell it effectively.

You should **Reduce** the complexity of your story so that you can carry all the key points in your head. You must be ready to tell the story at any time to any audience.

There is more than one version of the story. You must **Adapt** it to different audiences. Emphasising particular points and using different arguments, depending on who you are talking to.

Use the story to **Convince**. With a good story aligned with the goals and needs of the organisation, adapted to the perspective and expertise of your audience, and well presented, you can persuade decision-makers and stakeholders of the value and importance of the project.

Level 3 Questions and Actions

3.1 Story

Checklist:

- Do you have a simple clear statement of the desired outcome of the project?
 - Why is the project important?
 - How does it fit the organisation's objectives?
 - What are the benefits?
 - Who benefits?
- Can you estimate the value of the benefits?
- Can you explain quickly and simply how you will deliver the project?

Key question – What is the project about, and why does it matter?

Construct your story around a core framework of straightforward statements. You may embellish them as needed and pull in additional information, but the heart of your story is a set of single-sentence ideas.

What?

What is the project? What will it deliver? What will change if the project is successful?

“We will take this set of properties and upgrade them from an average EPC E to all EPC C.”

Why?

Why should this project be supported? What are the benefits? Who does it help, and how does it help them?

“This project will show our commitment to net zero while reducing fuel poverty and housing maintenance costs.”

How?

How will you go about delivering the project? How will you organise it? How much will it cost and how long will it take?

“We will work with our key supplier over a 9-month period to use external wall insulation, loft insulation and draught proofing to improve each home from EPC E to EPC C, at an average cost of £15,000.”

Story – Tools and Resources

To create an effective story, you must be clear:

- What the project is
- Why it matters
- How you will deliver it

If you have already started to develop your business case, you can distil it down to provide short, sharp, and clear statements of the core ideas. Even before the business case has taken shape, you should have a clear idea about the project aim and why it matters to the organisation.

As you get deeper into the project design, more detail will emerge, and the story will change. That is not a problem if managed correctly.

If you start by saying “we are going to make our housing stock net zero by 2030”, and then change it to “actually we can only upgrade 20 properties from EPC E to EPC C”, people will be disappointed. Better to start with, “We have a net zero target, and dramatically improving the energy efficiency of our housing stock is an important part of that journey. We are looking at how far and fast we can go”.

What, why, and how is not enough. The story needs to be relatable and engaging. It needs to generate enthusiasm among different stakeholders. It must be compelling and persuasive. The challenge is to organise the story to have the greatest impact.

[Stronger Stories](#) is a social enterprise dedicated to helping organisations of all types to create stories that have maximum impact. They have created a Stronger Stories Canvas that combines features of Joseph Campbell's [Hero's Journey](#) and the [Lean Business Canvas](#). Their website is full of ideas, examples of great stories, and tools for developing your own story.

The language is focused on more general business stories, but the different perspective is refreshing and helps sort out your key messages and make it a powerful statement. Stronger Stories treat the story as a journey, an adventure, and divide it into a series of steps:

1. **Everyday hero** – the people who will be changed
2. **Ordinary world** – the starting point with its frustrations
3. **Compelling villain** – the problem that needs to be fixed
4. **Call to adventure** – the trigger for change
5. **Crossing the threshold** – what is the first step?
6. **Allies and gifts** – the people who will help us and what they bring
7. **Mentor and gifts** – wisdom and support from someone who has been on the journey
8. **Three challenges** – difficult but confidence building hurdles
9. **Better world** – what we have accomplished

Thinking about these steps helps to refine your story and make it appealing.

External Resources

- [Stronger Stories](#)

- [Bluffers Guide to Framing 2020](#)
- [5 Essential Tips for Business Storytelling](#)

3.2 Alignment

- Review sources of organisational strategic goals and imperatives
 - Organisation strategy statements
 - Regulatory drivers
- Specific goals of key departments, functions, and decision makers
- Map your project to these strategic goals and imperatives
- How will your project deliver the goals?

Key question – How can I show that the project meets the goals and needs of the organisation?

Strategy

Your organisation will have a variety of goals. One or more targets it plans to reach and a strategy to get there. These are internal to the organisation.

To show that your project is aligned with the strategy, you need to know what that strategy is. Look for published corporate strategies, business plans or statements of objectives.

Ask yourself how will this project advance these goals? What strategic objectives does it support? How big an impact could you have on the organisation? How does the project link to your corporate mission, vision, and values?

An example strategy statement you can connect to:

“We recognise we are in a climate emergency and are committed to all our operations being net zero by 2030”.

Drivers

Organisations do not operate in isolation. They are embedded in a social and business structure that exerts external pressures. All organisations require a ‘licence to operate’ from society. If you do not comply with society’s expectations, that licence can be withdrawn.

Drivers may be:

- Regulatory or legal requirements e.g.,
 - The Regulator of Social Housing is proposing mandatory reporting on a range of Tenant Satisfaction Measures
 - Requirements for minimum EPC rating in rental properties, or new fire safety standards
- Economic drivers e.g.,
 - The cost-of-living crisis is creating pressure on the financial circumstances of both households and organisations
- New technologies or industry practices e.g.,
 - Development of offsite manufacturing methods for external wall insulation

- The expectations of society e.g.,
 - Pressure for sustainability, or to reduce fuel poverty or improve the quality of life for residents and voters

Find the current external pressures on the organisation and look for drivers that may become important in the next few years. How will your project address these drivers? Will it make it easier to deliver society's expectations?

Needs

Besides strategic objectives and external pressures, every team, function, and senior manager will have their own individual objectives and concerns.

You are much more likely to get their agreement and support if you can show how the project addresses their targets and concerns.

An individual's targets are often linked to team and corporate targets. These should be documented.

Failing that, you can ask people what their most important targets and challenges are.

You want to show how your project can help them meet their objectives, how it can make some of their problems disappear, and ideally, how it can make them heroes.

"Our repairs and maintenance service has a target to reduce repairs time by 50%, increase customer satisfaction ratings to 99%, and reduce costs by 10%".

Be aware of the pressures and constraints on the leadership team from influential stakeholders. For example:

- Elected members of councils
- Trustees and boards
- External sources of finance, such as public sector funding agencies

The views of these stakeholders can define what is desirable and possible for a retrofit programme.

Alignment – Tools and Resources

Strategic fit

Senior Management must see the strategic importance of the project to your organisation. There will always be competition for resources, and the value of the project must be visible to the decision makers. Why does this specific project matter? How does it align with the corporate objectives?

Get a clear picture of what matters to the organisation. Map your project to these goals. Where can you help deliver on the strategy?

- Review the corporate strategy and other internal strategies and plans:
 - How will this project advance the declared strategic goals?
 - List the objectives. Which does this project support?
- Review public commitments made by your organisation. For example, a commitment to net zero by a specific date, or a plan to reduce fuel poverty:
 - List these commitments. Which does this project support?

Trends and drivers

The strategy describes the internal goals of the organisation, but there are also external forces to consider. Some of them are already known and may be included in the corporate strategy:

- Current or short-term regulatory requirements
- New legal obligations
- Changing standards – such as new requirements for fire safety in cladding and insulation after the Grenfell fire

It is helpful to scan the external environment to explore the major trends and drivers that will affect your organisation over the coming years. These scans are given various names (PEST, PESTLE, STEEP) depending on the factors you look at. They include:

- **Political** – actions of governments and the laws and regulations they promulgate
- **Economic** – what is happening in the economy? Growth, recession, interest rates, inflation, etc
- **Social** – how the population is developing. Demographics, education, culture, attitudes and expectations
- **Technological** – impacts of new and emerging technologies
- **Legal** – a specific focus on the law. Consumer, equality, employment, as well as health & safety law
- **Environmental** – biodiversity, climate change, access to natural capital

What are the key trends and drivers for the coming years? What is their impact and how can your project address them?

Excellent sources for external scans are market analysis reports, reviews by professional and trade associations, Government statistics, reports and white-papers, and foresight studies (for example, sector reports from the [Committee on Climate Change 6th Budget](#)).

Team and individual needs

The project also needs to be aligned with the objectives and needs of the senior managers and their teams. You are much more likely to get their agreement and support if you can show how the project addresses their targets and their concerns.

What are the key challenges and objectives of senior managers and their teams?

These targets may be set out in the overall strategy, or in specific functional targets. If there are no accessible documents covering the objectives, you will need to ask them directly.

Stakeholder Analysis

Stakeholder analysis is a well-developed tool for understanding how a policy, project or innovation affects interested parties (stakeholders), and how you should engage with them. It can tell you where key decision-makers and influencers within your organisation stand. Are they positive or negative, and what is their interest?

The steps of stakeholder analysis are:

1. Brainstorm a list of stakeholders:
 - Those who need to approve the project
 - Those who need to provide resources
 - Those who will be affected by the project
 - Those involved in the project
2. Map the stakeholders against influence on the success or failure of the project and their level of interest. This allows you to develop different approaches for different stakeholder groups:



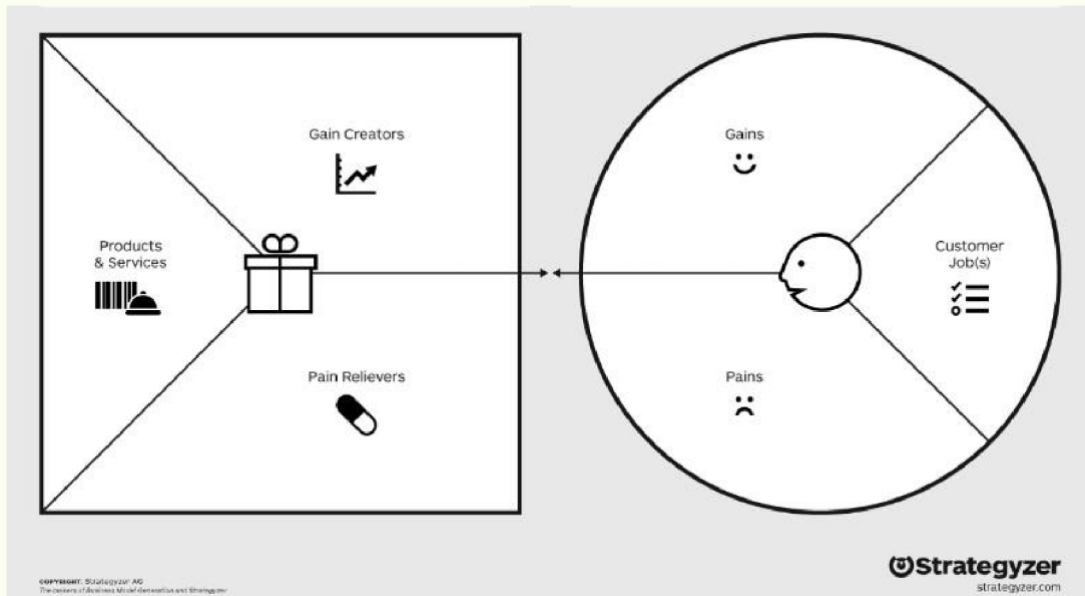
- High influence and high interest – Will have the biggest impact. These need the greatest focus
 - High influence and low interest – keep them up to date and on-side, but do not overwhelm with information
 - Low influence and high interest – keep them up to date and ensure no major issues arise
 - Low influence and low interest – minimum effort
3. Identify the priority stakeholders, their current position on the project and their needs and concerns:
 - What do they think is important?
 - What do they want or need? – how do they measure success?
 - What are their worries and their aspirations?
 - Does the project look positive, negative, or neutral to them?
 4. Use a simple template to track the key stakeholders, the messages you want to get across, and the progress you are making

| Stakeholder | Level of influence | Level of interest | Level of commitment | Wants, needs and concerns | Actions and messages | Progress |
|-------------|--------------------|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|----------|
| | | | | | | |

Value Proposition Canvas

The Value Proposition Canvas is another approach to identifying team and individual needs. This was developed to help companies develop new products

and services, but it can be applied to building connections between a project and key stakeholders.



The Value Proposition Canvas has two components. On the right, you describe your stakeholder:

- What jobs do they need to do?
- In doing those jobs, where are the current pain points? What problems do they face?
- What improvements would they value? What gains would make them happier?

You are trying to build a picture of the situation from their point of view.

On the left, you describe your project. How will it help your stakeholder to complete their jobs? How will it deal with the pains and provide gains?

The connections between the project characteristics and the needs and wants of the stakeholder tell you how much alignment you have with them. Which features of the project will be attractive and should be emphasised, and which are less relevant to this stakeholder?

A quick exercise with the Value Proposition Canvas for each key stakeholder will help refine the story.

The [Strategyzer](https://www.strategyzer.com) website provides downloadable templates and instructions for using the Value Proposition Canvas, as well as links to a reference book.

External Resources

- PESTLE Analysis
- Stakeholder Analysis
- Planning Stakeholder Engagement Activity

3.3 Telling the Story

- Distil the business case down to a short pitch:
 - What is the objective?
 - Why does it matter?
 - How will this benefit the organisation?
 - How will you deliver the project?
- Make sure you can adapt the story to connect to the needs of key decision-makers
- Understand how the key decision-makers think and work and flex your presenting style to interest and engage them
- Listen to your audience and make your pitch a conversation

Key question – How can I best use the project story to persuade?

Having a good project story is essential, but having a good story is not enough. You must also tell the story effectively. You must persuade people of the importance and value of the project.

Reduce

To drive a project through, you will spend time repeatedly telling your project story to different people. To get their agreement to invest in the project, to make sure they understand it, and to keep them updated with progress, problems, and changes.

You must be on top of the most important information at all times. So, you need to strip the story back to its essentials. To have the what, why, and how at your fingertips.

There are two extremely useful ideas for reducing a story to its essentials:

- The 'elevator pitch' – a brief description of the project that covers what it is, what it does, why it matters and how it can be realised. Something that can be explained to anyone in 30-60 seconds, so that they understand the essentials. Details can be added later. You can tilt the emphasis and content of your elevator pitch depending on the interests of the individual or audience you are talking to
- Inverted pyramid thinking and writing – a story structure where the most important information is presented first, with background and additional information later. This is a common approach in journalism. It is the reverse of what many of us have learned in report and paper writing. Start with the main points you want them to take away, and they will read on to get the supporting detail. Give them the history and the context first, and they will never make it to the important conclusions

Make sure you know the most important features of your project and are ready to pitch them at any time to anyone.

Adapt

Different groups and individuals have different objectives and problems and like to receive information in different ways.

You should be ready to adapt your story to the audience. Emphasising the benefits the project will bring to their specific challenges and presenting it in a way that maximises their engagement.

Make sure you know their needs (below) and then find the connection.

You also need to adapt the way you present the project. What is their personal style and way of working? Are you dealing with an imaginative, 'big-picture' person, or a careful and thorough 'details' person? To get the attention and make a link with people who work in different ways, you must fit your story to their way of thinking.

The Social Styles Matrix tool (below) can help direct you how to adapt.

Convince

Now you have your story. It has been stripped back to the essentials, and you are ready to adapt it to your audience. All you have to do is to 'sell' the story convincingly.

The key to being convincing is not only to be master of your brief, but to pay attention to the audience. Storytelling should be a conversation, even if you are doing most of the talking. You want to bring your audience into the story and keep them there.

Communications experts talk about the words, the music, and the dance.

- **The words** – selected with care to connect to the audience
- **The music** – tone of voice, pacing and pauses
- **The dance** – body language, eye contact and gesture

To use these effectively means 'listening' to your audience. Listening to their words, music, and dance. Techniques like [Active Listening](#) help draw your audience into a conversation.

Telling the Story – Tools and Resources

Elevator Pitch

An Elevator Pitch is a brief description of an idea, product or project that gets the key messages across quickly.

You have just bumped into the CEO in the elevator. You have 30 seconds between floors to put across your new idea or sell your project. What are the points that you must get across? The elevator pitch is about grabbing attention and getting permission to go into more detail later. So the story must be stripped back to the bare bones. What is the project, why is it important, and how you going to deliver it?

If you have the key details at your fingertips, you can quickly adapt the story to any audience, making it short or long as required. A good way to strip back the story to its essentials is to use the Inverted Pyramid. This approach to structuring stories is widely used in print journalism and web-writing.

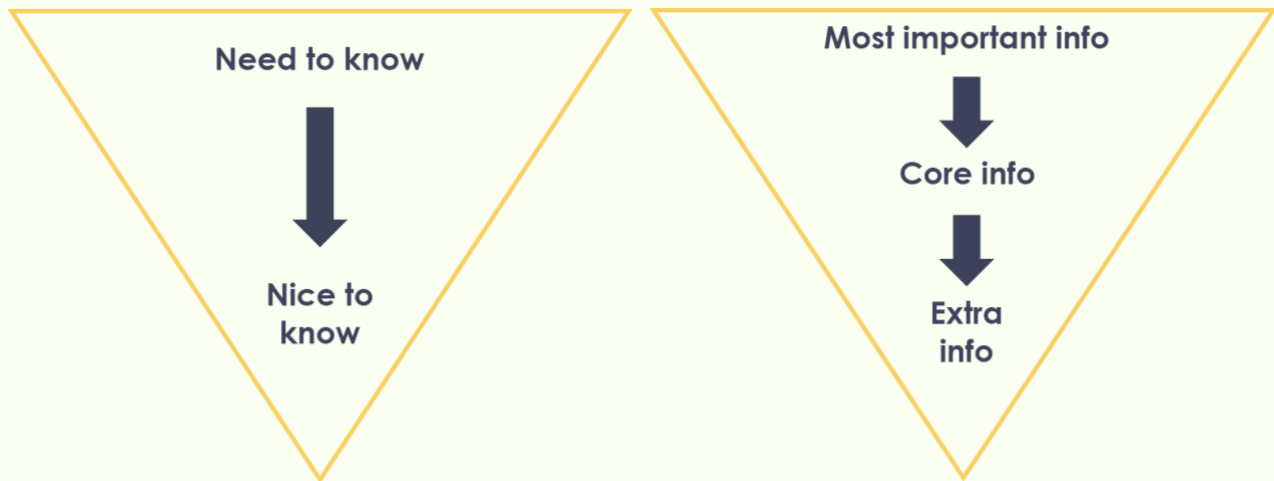
You start with the critical points you want to get across. In this case, the what, why and how of the project. Simple, direct language and the minimum number of words. If you are feeling confident, you can add a 'hook' – an intriguing thought to draw the audience in. "Did you know that...?" or "there is a way we can save £X million on our housing budget over the next 20 years".

Then you add the main story, providing the core argument. Finally, there is other related information.

Specific details of plans, costings, risk assessment and so on.

The great strength of the inverted pyramid is that you can adapt it to any length of time available to tell the story. If you have a short time, you make sure you get the key points across. With a bit more time, you can cover more of the story, but you still hit the important points at the beginning.

It is a technique worth looking at, because it is not the way most of us were taught to write reports or prepare presentations. That is why it is so common to sit through presentations where so much time is spent setting out the context and history that the really important information is lost or rushed at the very end. Invert your pyramid!



Social Styles Matrix

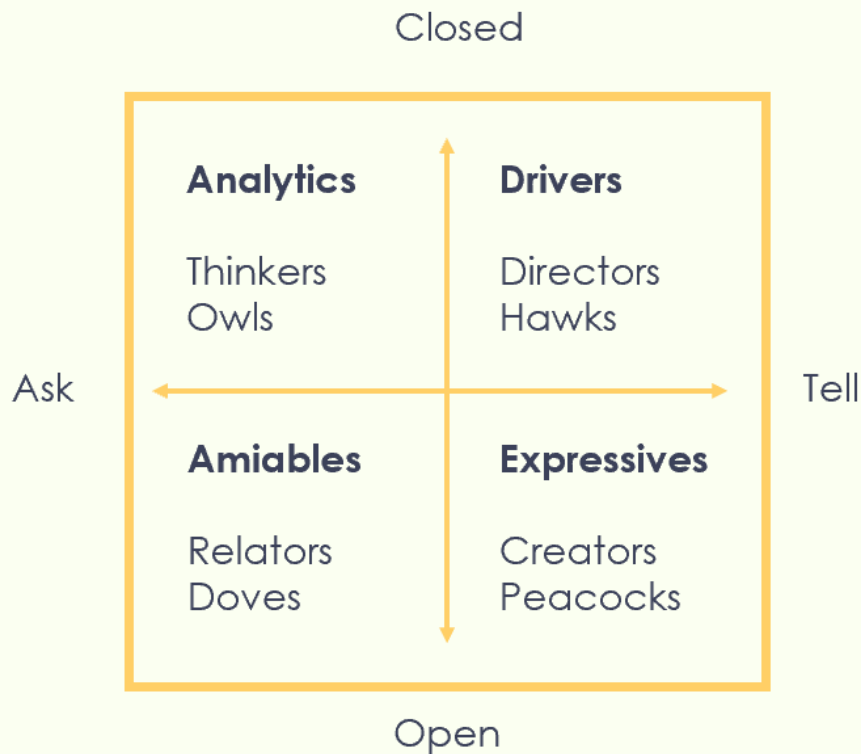
To adapt the story to the audience, you need to know not only what their priorities and interests are, but also their ways of thinking and working. A powerful way of getting a sense of how they work is the Social Styles Matrix. This is a very simple tool that can be applied live in conversation. You don't need to get people to complete questionnaires or tests, you just listen to them. The way they talk, the words they use, and their body language all give important clues to the best way to present an argument.

The social styles model looks at observed behaviour on two axes:

- Assertiveness – are they asking lots of questions and pulling information, or are they telling you things, pushing their ideas?
- Responsiveness – are they emotionally closed, playing their cards close to their chest, or are they open, wearing their heart on their sleeve?

According to the tendency they show on each axis, people can be grouped into four styles, each with a descriptive label:

- **Analyticals** (also known as Thinkers or Owls) – their style is ask/closed. They are sponges for information and consider problems thoroughly and from every direction before they decide
- **Drivers** (also known as Directors or Hawks) – their style is tell/closed. These are the no nonsense, get things done people what they want from you is three options and a recommendation, and they will decide
- **Amiables** (also known as Relators or Doves) – their style is ask/open. Amiables are all about people. They want to explore ideas in a safe and mutually respectful way. They are rarely interested in conflict
- **Expressives** (also known as Creators or Peacocks) – their style is tell/open. Expressives are enthusiasts. Ambitious, dramatic, and excitable. To work with an expressive, you must connect with their dreams and imagination



Each group has its own strengths and weaknesses. One style is not better than another, it is just the way people are. The easiest way to persuade them is to adapt your story to their preferred style.

It may sound complicated, but with a bit of practice, it is possible to quickly identify someone's preferred style. The model is simple enough to hold in your head, whilst rich enough to handle a variety of personal styles and behaviours.

There are some useful [guidance notes](#) on how to spot different styles and how to connect with them.

Active Listening

Even when you have developed a great story, aligned it to strategy, drivers and needs, and adapted it to your audience, you cannot just stand up and deliver it. You must be sensitive to the mood and level of interest of the audience. You may have to decide quickly whether to go into more detail, skip details, or tackle concerns and objections that are bubbling up. All this must be done on the fly. A very useful tool to manage your story is [active listening](#).

It is very simple, but hard to deliver. It means not paying attention to our presentation but focusing on the audience. Active listening has four steps:

- 'Listen' to the group or individual you're talking to. Pick up on the body language. Are they engaged or zoned-out? Pause your storytelling and ask questions. Make it a conversation, not a one-way information dump
- Feedback what they say to you. Don't just repeat what they said, paraphrase it. Put what you heard into your own words. It engages them with the story, builds trust, and enables you to identify any concerns or barriers

- Ask whether you've heard them correctly. This gives them an opportunity to clarify or add further information. It engages them actively in conversation
- Ask a relevant follow-up question. It should be an open-ended question, not closed. Closed questions have yes/no answers. They don't develop the conversation, and you learn little from them. Open questions such as "why is that a problem?", or "if we could make that work, how much would it be worth the organisation?", invite them to express an opinion. To contribute their own thoughts

You can build short bursts of active listening seamlessly into your storytelling. There are natural breakpoints where you can check in with your audience. Find out whether they are still with you and if they have problems with understanding or unanswered questions. Prompt them with an open question and briefly switch to active listening. This keeps your audience engaged and helps you adjust the story as you go.

External Resources

- [Crafting an Elevator Pitch](#)
- [How to Structure an Article: The Inverted Pyramid](#)
- [Inverted Pyramid: Writing for Comprehension](#)
- [Words, Music and Dance – Getting Your Message Understood.](#)
- [How to Practise Active Listening](#)
- [Active Listening in Sales: The Ultimate Guide](#)
- [Notes on Social Styles](#)

RISE Toolkits available online

The full selection of RISE Toolkits are available at:
www.riseretrofit.org.uk/resources/toolkits

 www.riseretrofit.org.uk

 **RISE – Retrofit information, support & expertise**