STORY GUIDE

BUILDING BRIDGES USING NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

"In many of the stories there was a point of despair, just before the turning point – there was a moment where we went 'oh dear, how are we going to do this?' Hearing all those other stories it seems that this is normal and it's a good thing. It can signal that just before change, you have to go through a moment of discomfort or difficulty."

Participant of the "East meets South Workshop", 2004

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SDC SWISS AGENCY FOR DEVELOPMENT AND COOPERATION
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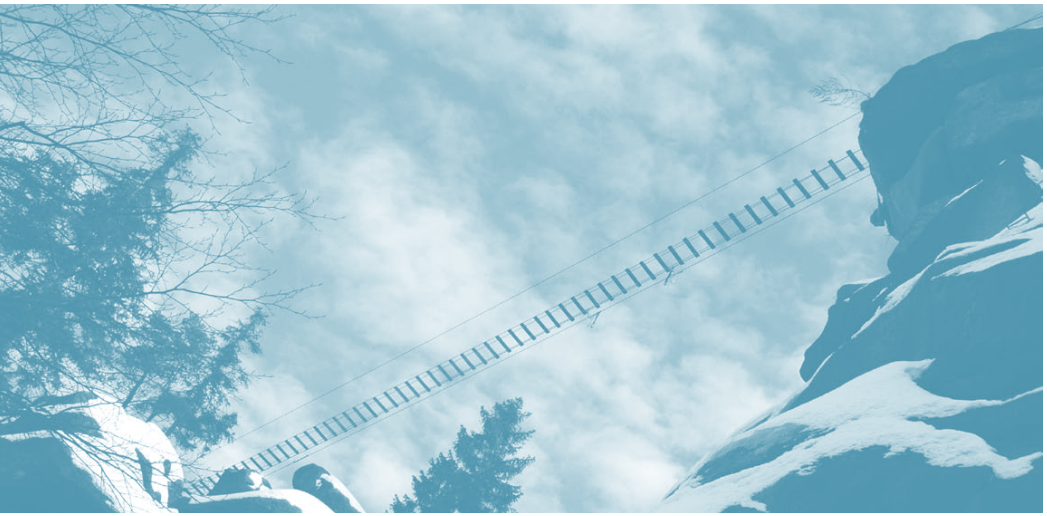
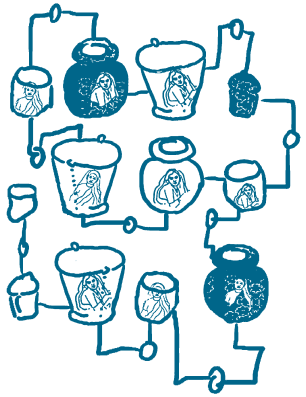
NOTE: Inevitably, the labels we have attached to particular methodologies or approaches are working labels; there are countless connections, overlaps and ambiguities.



1. Introduction

A) The Inspiring Pot: the difference between a report and a story[1]



Version A:

In our evaluation of a project in Bangladesh we noted a wide variance in the competence of individual villages to develop sustainable and effective solutions to problems encountered, for example in replacing broken parts or developing low cost products such as new latrines. The lessons to be learned from this evaluation are that we should:

- work against over-dependence on donors;
- note and encourage entrepreneurial approaches to problems;
- identify existing and repeatable good practices;
- build and strengthen communication between villages to assist cross-fertilization of ideas at the grassroots level.

Version B:

Bangladesh is a really impressive place… in a positive sense. I was in a village last year working in water and sanitation. We were trying to promote the use of improved latrines, but could not produce concrete slabs and rings locally for a low cost. Somebody told me to visit the latrines of a lady in the village, so I went along and said, "Can I see your latrines?" She had made a latrine out of a clay pot with the bottom cut off. Then with a potter from the area she developed a small local production of bottomless pots, and they became the latrines. Ingenious.

A few weeks later I was in another village and saw a hand pump; it was broken, just a small piece missing. So I said to the villagers, "Why don't you repair your pump?" And they said, "Oh, we just wait for another donor to bring a new pump." So I said, "Why don't you visit the lady in the village over there? She finds ways of getting things done for herself."

1 Raw material from a Jumpstart Story (see page 28) told by Jacques Mader, a participant in a Story telling workshop run by Sparknow for staff and partners of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation in Bern, December 2004. The two versions demonstrate the difference between traditional reporting and a simple personal story.

B) What is this Guide for?

DEFINITIONS

Story
The vivid description of a chain of events – true or imagined – spoken or written in prose or verse.

Narrative
The underlying structure, coherence or organization given to a series of acts. The way in which events are strung together to create sense and meaning.

Narrative research
An approach that seeks to emerge episodes that might illuminate a greater whole and create insight into the qualities of an experience that are not easily accessible through other analytical methods.

Story telling
The act of speaking or writing a story.

Organizational story work
The use of story-based methodologies to help achieve a specific goal or outcome.

The act of telling a story is a deceptively simple and familiar process, a way to evoke powerful emotions and insights. By contrast, working with stories in organisational settings – to aid reflection, build communities, transfer practical learning or capitalize experiences – is more complicated.

This Guide was designed to be both thought provoking and of some practical use to SDC and its collaborators and partners. The materials contained here should help you develop competence and confidence as tellers or facilitators of telling and may also support the development of more complex methodologies and programmes involving knowledge sharing, change and communication. In it you will find

- Tips, templates and tools to help you find, share and capitalize experience.
- Reflections on the practical and the emotional aspects of story telling.
- Consideration of the challenges and risks in institutionalising these approaches.
- Illustrations from SDC's experience so far of putting stories to work.

Story telling is not suitable for every situation. Methodologies should be selected by practitioners with due care to the wider working context and intention. Some methods, for example the systemic introduction of story into core organisational processes such as evaluation, need patience and management backing over a long period, for the right approach to be developed through trial and error.

The guide makes an attempt to generate possibilities rather than to define them and should stimulate you to begin shaping your own repertoire. This is the beginning of a conversation – we would love to hear about your experiences using these or any other story or narrative techniques. Please contact knowledgeandresearch@deza.admin.ch.

C) What are the benefits of story telling?

Story telling helps individuals and groups to connect with each other, share their experiences and reflect on practice in a way that energizes and creates lasting bonds. Simple stories can illuminate complex patterns and deeper truths – one should never underestimate the power of the particular. The process of telling your story – and seeing it touch other people – can be empowering. Being touched by the stories of others makes a difference to bonds of trust, as well as insights. In addition the weaving in of narrative elements into more traditional reports not only captures the reader's attention but also sends a strong signal that many voices and perspectives are valued.

Story telling experiences can create:
- shifts in attitudes and behaviour
- shared understanding about future ambitions and direction
- a sense that the "whole person" (the heart and the mind) has been engaged at work
- lasting personal connections that survive the immediate situation
- re-usable processes and raw materials
- story selection which identifies those stories that move beyond anecdotal and become small stories which illuminate bigger themes

Beyond these more basic interventions, you might be facing more complex challenges, for example developing a policy or strategy, a country programme or undertaking an evaluation. In this case it will be necessary to adopt a more sophisticated approach, combining methodologies or embedding narrative elements into your processes in more systematic or strategic ways. While these issues are beyond the scope of this guide, many have already undertaken such experiments. For more information please contact knowledgeandresearch@deza.admin.ch.

2. Warm up exercises and ice breakers

You can use the following exercises and ice breakers to prepare and foster a story telling environment.

A) Who are you?

Method

1. Introduce yourselves by giving your name and job title, something important about you, plus a surprising fact.

My name is Sylvie, and I work as a researcher for SDC. The most important thing to know about me is that I value time for reflection at work. Something that might surprise you about me is that I love the salsa dancing and am learning to be a salsa teacher at a Spanish wine bar in Berne on Tuesday nights.

Guidance notes

1. This kind of introduction communicates personal values as well as corporate values, etc. Prompting the response, "I didn't know that about you!"
2. Surprising facts and apparently insignificant details are what bring stories to life and this point could be made as a way into story making during a workshop.

Variation

1. Interview each other in pairs to discover a surprising detail. (5 minutes 2 1/2 minutes each). Introduce your partner to the group.

B) X marks the spot

Method

1. Think of a day at work when you were in a situation – positive or challenging – you will never forget.
2. Take 5 minutes to draw the scene as it, marking "X" on the spot where the most important incident occurred. Make the drawing as detailed as you can. (5 minutes)
3. Take 90 seconds each to tell your story.

Guidance notes

- Asking people to draw stimulates the whole memory of the event, not just one turning point. It also helps you access and remember seemingly insignificant details and emotional memories of the situation.
- Helpful prompts to access more background and details are: At what point did you enter the story? Where? – Where did the situation happen? Was it inside? Was it outside? Who? – Who else was involved in the situation?

C) 'Yes, but...' 'Yes, and...'

Method

1. Played in couples, standing up. Participant A makes suggestions by saying "Let's…" (For example, *"Let's go for a walk"*, *"Let's have a coffee"*) while participant B keeps replying by saying "Yes, but…" (For example *"Yes, but I am tired"* or *"Yes, but I don't like coffee"*). Continue the dialogue for 2 minutes.
2. Swap roles.
3. The whole group watches one couple engaged in this dialogue.
4. Back in pairs, explore a different type of dialogue: participant A makes a suggestion by saying "Let's…" and participant B replies by saying "Yes, and…" From this point, both participants keep replying to each other by saying "Yes, let's…" (For example, *"Let's have a coffee!"* – *"Yes, and let's have a cake, too!"* – *"Yes, and let's go for a walk afterwards!"* and so on). Continue the dialogue for 2 minutes.
5. Then whole group watches one couple engaged in this dialogue.
6. As a group, explore the difference between these two dialogues. What did it feel like? Note: generally people find the first dialogue frustrating and the second exciting and enjoyable.

Guidance Notes

- Saying "yes, and…" rather than "yes, but…" is a basic principle of good conversation. Insights from the experience can then be applied or referred back to during the remaining workshop to create an open learning climate.

D) 'Whom does this belong to?'

Method

1. Bring in, and keep hidden, an object which tells a story about you, for example an heirloom, souvenir from travels.
2. In groups of 4, share the stories behind your objects while still keeping the objects out of sight of the other group.
3. Someone else - not the original owner of the object – is chosen to retell the story back to the other groups in plenary, convincingly, as though it is his or her object and story.
4. The other groups then have to guess whose object and story it was originally.

Guidance Notes

- This is a useful way of finding out more unusual things about people. In addition it can trigger discussion on the use of objects in story telling and performance or insights into the experience of being the custodian of someone else's story.

3. Questions for finding out stories

The questions below can help you access stories – your own or someone else's. This open and interested attitude can help create an open space in a conversation.

"Tell me about a time when… " "Tell me about a moment when…"

- you or your team faced a dilemma in a project
- you or your team experienced a significant turning point in a project
- you dealt with a real crisis on a project. What happened before, during and after it?
- you felt really proud to be part of something
- you took a real risk and it paid off or didn't pay off
- you were really inspired by what was going on around you
- you encountered an obstacle and overcame it
- you saw (one of your organization's values) really brought to life/ being acted out
- your partnerships were working really well
- you saw positive changes happen as a result of your work

Asking open 'how' questions (story telling mind-set) rather than 'why' questions (analytical mind-set) can sidestep defensiveness, helping people to stay inside the story. It is also useful to encourage people to tell stories as 'I' rather than 'they', or 'we'. When eliciting a story in an interview, you might consider this framework, drawn from the script for Sparknow's story competition follow-up calls:

QUESTIONS FOR FINDING OUT STORIES

Setting the scene	"I'd like to hear you tell your story in your own words, to get under the skin of it." "Are you ready to start?" "Take a moment to think back…"
Beginning	"So tell me about how you first got involved with/ met/ started doing X?" "How did it all begin?"
When things are too general	"What were some of the memorable moments?" or "for instance?" or "can you give me an example, so I can picture it?"
Qualifying the difference	"Can you pinpoint a time when you really saw you were making a difference?" "What did that feel like?"
Engaging emotions, finding turning points	"Can you remember a particularly magic or moving moment? One that really sticks in your mind?" plus follow-up comments like "what did that feel like?" or "you must have been proud to be a part of it".
Audiences and messages	"Who should hear this story?" "If you were telling this story to X what key messages would you want them to take away?"
Catchy title	"Hearing you tell your story I listened for nice turns of phrase. But if this story were a book, what would its title be? Can I suggest X?" Note: this is a really important part of the process. Titles should contain the essence of the story and make it really memorable. People also appreciate you playing back their words – it makes them feel both heard and creative.
Digging deeper	The best results were when we reflected back saying things like "so it sounds like you really had your work cut out..." etc.
Direct and indirect	Direct questions can sound quite intimidating and block people "Were you frightened?" Whereas indirect questions can prompt deeper recall and develop empathy "It sounds like that might have been quite frightening for you?"
Interrupting	Interrupting, to check facts or to express surprise can send people off in a different direction to the story they wanted to tell. Containing your surprise is important to prevent diversion from the original direction.
Silence	Holding long pauses feels unnatural but allows the story to unfold.

4. 7-Element Structure: shaping and sharing stories

Based on classic story telling structure, this simple and versatile template can help you access, shape and share all kinds of stories.

When first publicly launched at the World Bank's Knowledge Sharing workshop in June 2004, a senior World Bank director called the template, and the exercise on finding turning points "a little piece of magic." It has since been adopted by people working at all levels in development agencies and non-development organisations across the world mainly because of its simplicity. Please remember that this template is an intermediate step; to help individuals and groups collect and enrich memories of experiences. The actual retelling is best done by putting the template to one side and speaking from the heart. If a record is needed, this can be captured with recording equipment and transcribed to hold true to the strength of the spoken word.

Method for working in pairs

1. Close your eyes for a moment and think of a moment in response to a particular question that may be set for you, or which you may set for yourself, e.g. the moment at which you felt proud to part of a community, the moment at which you had to take a difficult decision, a moment when you were stuck in a project and did not know where to turn. Make prompt notes on a postcard, thinking: "what do other people need to know about my story?"
2. Find a partner and introduce yourselves.
3. Take it in turns to tell your story, describing the events before, during and after that moment of change. Do your best to transport your partner to that time and place by creating strong visual images linked in a clear sequence. Write nothing down.
4. Now use an A3 version of the template on page 15 to develop a stronger, deeper version of that story. Conducted as a conversation, the partner acts as scribe and interviewer, ask any question that helps you both achieve a deeper understanding. The partner digs deeper; probing for more detail around each part to ensure the story builds to a strong satisfying conclusion. Please note: Every story is about a change from one status quo to another. Be clear by the time you finish what the change implicit in each story is, or at least the change you most want to communicate.
5. End by naming the story and writing the names of the co-authors on the template.
6. When the ingredients have been assembled in this way, spend time rehearsing the new teller, so that they can put the template aside, and tell the story from the heart.
7. As the final test, the teller can give permission for their partner to tell their story to a broader group. This helps ensure that the story is memorable to someone else and that the essential meaning has been retained. Alternatively, the story facilitator could name the story and introduce the teller so that the partnership is maintained and acknowledged in a different way.

7-ELEMENT STRUCTURE: SHAPING AND SHARING STORIES

Variation for working as an individual

An individual wanting to deepen recollection of a particular episode can use the template. Try finding someone to tell your story to. Rehearsing a written story by telling it out loud often illuminates imperfections and helps you write more fluidly.

Variations for working in larger groups

Pairs can share their stories, and then pairs join up to make a group of four and all four stories are told again. One of these four stories is then selected to work on in more detail, and the template is introduced at this point. Instructions from the facilitator can invite a 'truthful' retelling, or invite people to feel free to develop a more fictional version of the story.
Using this structure to create a group story around a flipchart for example – factual or fictional e.g. allegorical – can be an energising process, unleashing creativity and encouraging lively conversation.
When introducing the chosen story back to the other groups, the teller should briefly recount the subjects of the other stories shared privately in the group.

If capitalization of experience is important, you may wish to record they key points of the first four stories on postcards before choosing one story to work on in more detail with the template.

If a story is sensitive you might construct 'factional' stories. Combining facts with fictional embellishments creates "Faction". It can be particularly useful when you are seeking to either write a story that carries group resonances (for example a 'who we are' story, articulating organisational culture) or to communicate difficult truths to your audience, for example when communicating the detail of an experience where lessons were learned the hard way and hence certain details have to be modified to protect the identities of those concerned.

NOTES ON FINDING AND USING TURNING POINTS

"In many of the stories there was a point of despair, just before the turning point – there was a moment where we went 'oh dear, how are we going to do this?' Hearing all those other stories it seems that this is normal and it's a good thing. It can signal that just before change, you have to go through a moment of discomfort or difficulty."

Participant of the "East meets South Workshop", 2004

Turning points are those pivotal moments in everyday life when we are faced with a difficult choice, when there is crisis or conflict, or when something changes, for the better or for the worse. These are often the points at which deep learning and insight occurs. Sharing turning point stories is one way to find rich lessons.

One challenge is identifying in a longer process, for example a five-year project, the crucial moment or sequence around which to tell the story. Different turning points might be relevant to communicate different messages.

Some ways to respond to this challenge include:

- Use precise language when phrasing your prompt question. The question 'think of a time when something went really well in this project' is likely to produce a less personal story than 'think of a time when you were part of something you are really proud of in this project." It is likely that more personal stories hold richer lessons.
- Ask people in private to identify several turning points. These private turning points can be written on postcards and put in sequence on a papered wall. Groups then choose the turning points that resonate most and use the 7-Element template to provide more detail, either through the experience of one individual, or through that of the group. The turning point, for example "the Djibouti debacle" will signal its significance and indicate the kind of turning point the story holds, and so act as a useful aide memoire.
- Turning points can also be used to imagine different outcomes. You might construct a Half Story (see page 33) about them then ask: "what if things had gone better or worse?"
- Interview members of a project team and ask them individually: "what were the significant turning points for you?" Then construct a timeline to show a composite view. The timeline will inevitably present contradictory views and this can be used as a map to guide group reflection or evaluation.

7-ELEMENT STRUCTURE: SHAPING AND SHARING STORIES

HANDOUT: 7-Element Structure

TITLE:
NAME OF ORIGINAL TELLER:
NAMES OF LISTENER (S):

LANDSCAPE Set the scene in time and space	
DWELLING PLACE Precise location where action occurred	
CHARACTERS Cast list, descriptive attributes and roles in story	
CHALLENGE Problem or task that triggered the action	
ACTION Sequence of events before, during and after your turning point	*And the turning point was the moment when…*
RESOLUTION Ending including lesson learned or message	
IMAGES AND OBJECTS To help you remember and retell the story	[*Add photos or illustrations here*]

Explanations to the template

TITLE: A catchy and imaginative title conveys the essence of the story and will be more memorable over the long term, extending the "shelf life" of both the story and the lessons and messages it contains. It is best to formulate the title once you have your story clear.

NAME OF ORIGINAL TELLER: When we tell a story we give something of ourselves. It is therefore good practice to name the original teller.

NAME(S) OF LISTENER(S): Once a story is told you might say it now belongs to both the teller and the listeners. Name the other members of the group, as their interpretation of the story they heard will affect the final version reported back.

LANDSCAPE: In order that the listeners can connect with what they are hearing and imagine themselves in the teller's story, the teller's job is to set the scene in some detail. Since stories are remembered as sequences of images not words, the teller should try to use language that paints pictures in the listeners' minds. The landscape is the broad setting – historical, geographical, social, economic, environmental, and cultural – for the events that took place.

DWELLING PLACE: The dwelling place pinpoints the precise location where the main activities in the story took place.

CHARACTERS: Choose and describe the main protagonist of the story (if this is a personal story it is likely to be you!). Now describe the rest of the characters, including one or two details to bring them to life. Choose whose point of view you will tell the story from remembering your audience and whom they will identify with.

CHALLENGE: Every story includes the resolution of some kind of dilemma or challenge. Be specific about the scale of the challenge the characters faced and what was at stake.

ACTION: What happened next? The audience should be curious to know. This is where you recount the sequence of events as it unfolded. Try and remember when the turning points came, what key decisions were made and what consequences they had. Be clear about the factors (including the people) that helped or hindered your progress towards resolution.

RESOLUTION: How did the story end? How did things resolve themselves? State what had changed as a result of the events described. Conclude by saying "and the moral is…" or better still, leave it open and ask the audience what they learned or what messages they would take away from the story.

IMAGES AND OBJECTS: Since our narrative memories use images not words, use this space to scribble any images that you wish to convey to your audience. These are the things your audience should remember most from the story.

7-ELEMENT STRUCTURE: SHAPING AND SHARING STORIES

ILLUSTRATION:

"I'm starting to walk", a story told during the East Meets South Culture Workshop, 2004

"Empezo a andar" or "I'm starting to walk", by Diego Gradis, with Hebba Sherif, Joelle Come and Toni Linder	
LANDSCAPE	Above 4000 meters, bare mountains of northern Andean Peru, wind, sun, hunger
DWELLING PLACE	Village of Chuco-cajamarca, Peru
CHARACTERS	Pascual Sanchez – peasant, self-taught librarian Lawyer Diego and his wife Christiane and a German priest all living there
CHALLENGE	Finding our own path to use culture as a starting point for development
ACTION	Pascual – "We have a dream. We want to put in a BOOK what we are, who we are. To exist we have to be in a book." TP Diego – "He made me understand how I could help make his dream come true" A dream (questions) and a concern (answer) met
RESOLUTION	You can't stop dreams from happening. Using outside cultural tools can strengthen your identity.
KEY VISUAL HOOKS	An alphabet, peasant looking at pictures of HIS world in a book he takes with him in his bag. [Object: green book *'Biblioteca Campesina - Empezo a andar: Reflexiones Campesinas Sobre la Tradicion Andina'*]

"What were the other stories told by my colleagues? Toni told us about "mindsetting" through music in Nicaragua. Joelle told us about how the Romanians – after a good drink and a good talk – finally got to talk about cinema. Hebba is from Egypt brought someone to Switzerland to look into artists and how art may not be necessarily a political tool for a national system.

My story is about story telling and takes place in the northern part of Peru. Being a lawyer I wonder whether behind culture there was always – whether in Egypt, Romania or Nicaragua – a pretext for finding oneself or for existing as a human being or a group. If you go to a particular northern part of Peru you find an old man with his quipe, his walking stick, bare feet, a big straw hat. And he is tired. He stops and he puts his bag on the side, and he will take out one of these books. He doesn't read but the book may be much more important than reading. There are pictures, names he can read, and pictures that look familiar to what he is. He exists as a campesino because he is in a book.

In 1986, I was with my wife, walking up the road with a heavy backpack and I spent a night with Pascual, a librarian, a peasant, with 20 books on a shelf. We talked all night, this self taught librarian and me. He asked me about Mitterand's foreign policy priorities and he told me of his dream. He digs potatoes all day. Then, in the evening, people from the village come. Each takes one book and they sit around their fire in the village for a weekly reading session. They think: 'we have something of ours which is also worthy. If a thing is worthy, it has got to be in the book. We have been taught this: worthy, in a book."

The turning point was when I told him: "Do it. You have a dream, so do it. You and 500 other librarians should meet and put your dreams on paper. My commitment of my organization started that moment. His dream made my questioning become reality. I wanted to make his dream come true. One facilitator was from SDC. They said "OK, answer your question, make their dream come true." Seven years later there are 20 volumes of encyclopedias. There have been no anthropologists, no historians. They put it together themselves."

5. Checklists

A) Checklist for tellers

"People said my story worked best when I was describing the actual events and feelings in the relationship, and their minds tended to wander when I provided an analysis of what was going on. So they liked hearing about the action, conversations and feelings, but disengaged slightly when I interrogated the situation."

REMEMBER

Only tell stories that matter to you.

Know your audience and the reaction you seek. This will help you shape your story.

Put yourselves in the shoes of a particular member of the audience and imagine the ears they will be listening through.

Tell a story about a particular time, place and event. Weave in small details that bring the whole scene to life using vivid language (generalised concepts will lose listeners).

Paint pictures in the mind of your listener. People will remember sequences of images and not the words.

Rehearse with a partner. Tell the story. Ask them to tell it back to help you assess whether your structure, messages and images are clear enough.

Think about your relationship to the story. Are you a character in it? Are you telling somebody else's story? Do you need to be clear that you have 'borrowed' the story? Do you need to tell it anonymously to protect the original teller or characters?

Disguise locations and names where the material is sensitive.

Think about what props you could use – images, sounds and objects.

Think about whether you are going to introduce the story or just slide it into the proceedings without announcing it.

Avoid too much explanation and heavy-handed lessons and morals that 'close' the story, rather than leaving it open to the listener to choose how to take it on.

NOTES

B) Checklist for facilitators and listeners

REMEMBER

Make sure you allow tellers time (whether in interview or in workshop) to introduce a little of who they are before working on shared stories.

Encourage people always to talk from personal experience, in the first person, to situate them inside the stories and not generalize as 'we', and to include apparently insignificant details that will add colour and tone.

Once you have opened the space, do not interrupt the teller unless it is essential.

Try to steer the tellers back to the narrative ("what happened?") if they move into analytical mode ("why did it happen?") too early.

Ask permission before recording someone else's story and confirm any issues of confidentiality or anonymity that arise. Before public re-use of the story permission from the original teller must be sought once again, whether you have made changes or not.

Test any recording equipment before using it. And make sure you have a charger or spare batteries.

Choose or create a safe, neutral space for story work, for example a quiet off-site café or meeting room. Think about whose territory you are on, and how that might affect the telling.

Remember that story telling demands reciprocity and mutuality. Perhaps begin by sharing a story of your own.

People often get competitive when story telling in groups. Be clear that each person's contribution has value and that the emphasis is on the quality of the story and its messages and not on the performance.

Sometimes limiting the time available to people helps them to focus the mind on condensing the story into its most succinct form.

It may be useful to have a prop – a rattling seedpod, bell or talking stick – as a way of conducting group processes and changing the environment without speaking.

NOTES

C) Checklist for creating a safe and productive story environment

REMEMBER

To help everyone benefit from this experience we must establish a space in which we:

- can express ideas in a safe and trusting atmosphere: "Yes, and…" instead of "Yes, but…" Build and don't block.
- are honest, without aggression.
- work with the "space between" – the place between "me" and "you" in which new understanding can be made.
- acknowledge any issues and problems that might constrain or block engagement.
- consider how all emerging assets, outcomes and conversations can be put to use afterwards.
- establish a productive tempo and rhythm – slow at the right moments and brisker at others, not necessarily in strict adherence to a rigid preset agenda but in response to the unfolding of shared experience.

NOTES

THE STORY TELLING TENT

From the briefing note for the Bedouin Tent at the Dare to Share fair, 2004

"When you walk in this tent, it will not feel like the rest of the fair. As you enter you will be asked to take off your shoes and leave them by the door. Someone will stand by the door with a jug and a bowl, and wash your hands as you arrive with water scented with orange blossom oil. You will enter a calm and colourful place, an informal place that encourages people to relax and have long conversations. The room inside will feel intimate and will be scented with incense. The walls will be covered with coloured cloth and fabrics from all over the world and the floor covered with comfortable warm rugs, throws and cushions. People will be seated comfortably on the floor in circles, around low tables. Someone will be circulating with a tray of Turkish delight' and topping up your glass of peppermint tea. In a little dark, perhaps even candle lit, corner there will be a large wooden box – a treasure chest full to the brim with objects from all over the world – artifacts from every continent, strange and bizarre items with unusual qualities plus ordinary or every-day things part of everyday life. This box will sit arousing curiosity in the corner until the workshop is in full swing.

During the Dare to Share Fair this room will function as a place for relaxing, enjoying each other's company. Between workshops the tent will perform the role of a nurturing meeting space encouraging both private reflection and meaningful encounters between friends and strangers, for offering and receiving pertinent stories from experience participants feel could be of value to others. Its role is also to disrupt normal patterns of activity, to slow people down enough to create deep exchange. Outside the tent we will make room for an installation to emerge from the products of conversations going on inside."

CHECKLISTS

6. Different story techniques

A) Objects and displays – triggering memories and finding hidden histories

Objects and displays can create a very physical experience, a way for warm or surprising personal memories to be collected and passed on.

Suggested equipment

Large well-lit table to create a display

Digital and Polaroid cameras

White or vibrantly coloured table cloth

Vertical surfaces such as pin boards

Strong pins to hold the objects

A washing line and pegs

Transparent plastic pockets for suspending objects

String, scissors, glue

When story telling you can use objects to trigger memories of specific experiences. Objects – unlike printed words on a page – have the power to both evoke and contain stories, conveying symbolic qualities. As symbols for an idea or experience they are easy for the memory to recall and can make deeper conversation possible. As tangible things it is possible to make collections, exhibits and displays from them. Making patterns visible arouses people's interest in the subject matter they relate to.

Major Applications

Reflecting on what we (SDC) do – Understand the values gaps
Building communities – Build chemistry, trust and identity
Learning from others and innovating – Make room for new ideas and connections

Method

There are all sorts of things you can do with objects, for example using installation artists, the idea of classification and exhibit. Here is one example from the Dare to Share Fair, SDC headquarters, March 2004. Sparknow ran two experimental workshops in the Bedouin tent using objects to trigger and pass on learning.

The process was as follows:

1. Email message was sent to the whole organization requesting interesting artifacts from around the world. There was a huge positive response.
2. Before the workshop, the facilitators collected the box of objects and spread the contents out on a nearby table, inviting passersby to stop and look.
3. On arrival workshop participants were invited to select an object that helped them tell a story about a moment in which they felt part of a community at work.
4. Participants formed into groups of 4 to share their personal stories orally. Nothing was written down at this point.
5. The facilitators then asked each group to either: a) choose one story to develop into a stronger, deeper version OR b) create a new story knitting those 4 stories into one story that carried elements from each story – a composite or combined view.
6. Groups used the 7-Element template (see page 15) to structure their story. The original teller was banned from writing. This process of group refinement helped the teller clarify the message, meaning and coherence of their narrative.
7. A new teller from each group told their group's story to plenary, using the objects as props where appropriate.
8. The session concluded with a discussion of the themes that emerged, and group stories and objects were made into another, growing, display next to the tent.

Variations

At the point of evaluation or lessons learned session, key project staff members are invited to bring along an object that to them signifies the story of the moment when they gained an important insight or learned a valuable lesson. The stories are told publicly and also recorded on tags attached to the objects, or the objects photographed to form a display. This can become a memory book.

http://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/g4s133.html
Joe Schaeffer's Stone Game uses the silent creation together of a sculpture of stones to "position players as storytellers and witnesses as they experience meaning."

B) Postcards – gathering a wide range of ideas and insights

A way of collecting and recording insights and condensed stories this method uses the common postcard as a metaphor, a way to keep connection between the picture evoked by the story and the messages addressed to others which come from it.

Method

1. Find a partner.
2. In pairs, tell each other a very short story in response to the set question, e.g. tell each other about a time when you experience a good partnership, tell about a time when standing up to authority helped a project get further, etc. Allow 2 minutes each way (no interrupting except to check you have really understood).
3. In pairs, have a 2-minute conversation – What ingredients made it work so well? Summarise the story onto one side of the postcard, making sure that no important words used in the telling are lost in the shortening. Then agree one or two headlines that convey the message of the story, and write these on the right hand side of the postcard.
4. Join up with another pair to make a group of four. Re-tell all four stories.
5. Give your postcards to the facilitator. Take a few minutes to explain anything important that came out of your smaller group discussions.
6. The cards can then be used to share the experiences with the wider group, and to create an exhibit that can be used to record the workshop.
7. If there is a rapporteur for the workshop, brief postcard interviews could be collected orally to help with the capitalization of experience for those who have not been there.

Variations

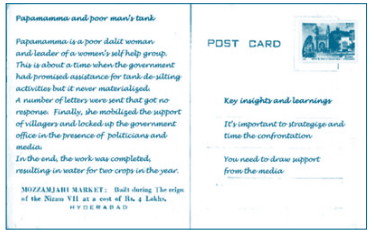
With a large group, after step 4 find another group of 4 and share your postcards. Are there insights that might be important principles for developing SDC's understanding of the subject?

Use postcards to collect news from around the world, or as a way for people to introduce themselves to each other at the outset of a session.

Use Postcards as a preliminary way of identifying project turning points, which can then be fleshed out using the 7-Element template.

Guidance notes

- This is a technique that is being developed by Sparknow to capitalize and consolidate small moments of private spoken experience. Sticking everyone's postcards onto a large wall helps viewers to see connections between two experiences that might be otherwise difficult to detect. The method is underpinned by a principle that more abstract or strategic themes should emerge directly from individual experiences and informal words, and stay connected to these.



Postcard generated in a learning event for the capitalisation of experiences with water resource management facilitated by Intercooperation in Hyderabad, India (December 2005)

Participants in the East Meets South Culture workshop wrote news from the projects on postcards and attached them to a world map. Coloured string was used show the connections between experiences

ILLUSTRATION:

Experience capitalization using postcards

Intercooperation's use of story telling to capitalize experiences with water resource management in India, Bolivia and Mali.

Introduction

'Capitalization of experiences, water land and people' (CE WLP) is the name of a two years initiative of the Natural Resource and Environment Division of SDC. It aims at sharing and deepening the knowledge base of SDC and partners on water resource management issues. The process is based on the analysis of experiences with watershed development programs in India, Bolivia and Mali. It focuses on experiential learning and therefore on learning events where 'experience holders' – the members of the learning group – come together and exchange and analyze their experiences.

In India the first meeting of the learning group consisting of around 20 members was conducted in December 2005. We at Intercooperation who are facilitating this initiative were confronted with the question which method to use to start a learning process that leads to tangible products and is useful for the persons and their organizations. So, for us the challenge was to adopt a method that would create interest, ensure commitment and would provide all the feeling of: *'we learned something, this process is going somewhere, and it is different from 'business as usual'*. We arrived at the conclusion that story telling would be an appropriate methodology to use.

What we did

We introduced the session by telling a story on a lived experience that started with *'I was on a visit to a watershed village…Suddenly, a person who incidentally was the ex-sarpanch and ex-VDS council member, and who till then was silently sitting on a boulder bund nearby jumped down and said …'*

We used it, to explain the difference between a story that narrates a lived experience – something unknown to the participants – and a presentation of abstract principles conceptual approaches and politically correct achievements of watershed development work – the business as usual for all the participants.

Subsequently we encouraged the participants to contribute with their story about a time when they learned a valuable lesson about the importance of a good institutional set up for sustainable management of water resources. The latter being the thematic focus on the learning event. We adopted the three-step process (see below).

Method

1. Find a partner (someone whom you do not know too well) and tell a story (in 5–6 minutes to each other).
2. Each pair finds another pair and works as a group of four:
   - Retell all four stories.
   - Develop four postcards with title, main points and key lessons from the story.
   - Select one story to be told in the plenary.
   - Refine the selected story using the 7-Element template (see page 15)
3. Plenary session:
   - Postcards pinned on India map according to their respective locations.
   - Selected stories retold (5-6 minutes each) in plenary.
   - Plenary discussion or reflection on the lessons learnt from the stories.

We gave a few tips to the tellers and the 'understanders', shared trigger questions and guided them on the reporting through postcards and by using the template described in the manual. We recorded – with permission of the storytellers – the selected stories on video. When the 5 selected stories were retold in the plenary, we noted down the key lessons on cards.

What came out?

- Animated exchange among participants and appreciation of the method. Interest in each other's experiences. The method provided scope for conveying qualitative information while recreating an individual's experiences, which – with formal structured kind of presentations – would have been lost. There was no tendency to fall back into: *'this we know, this will not work'* – common reactions when 'experts' are brought together. The stories risked giving a rosy picture. Probably we didn't invite enough to tell 'failure' stories.
- A list of key lessons that was further used to identify thematic topics to be deepened as part of the CE exercise. This will be done by subgroups. Story telling was used to glean few lessons; it was felt that it still requires to be followed up by further field visits and other forms of analysis to make the process more complete.
- 15 stories summarized in keywords on postcards and key phrases for 5 stories written into the 7-Element template. Good as intermediary products but not 'fit' for sharing with non-participants as there are no self-explanatory messages.
- 5 stories recorded on video. The idea is to develop a short DVD with a brief introduction describing the background of the learning event, the five stories and a concluding part that explains the key lessons and identified sub-themes. Like the postcards, this DVD is an intermediate product.

Point of concern: In terms of tangible outputs we have intermediary products. How do we make the step from story telling to developing products that can be disseminated and shared with a larger group than the audience during the performance of the teller?

Tips and hints on capitalization

- Rethink the role of your workshops and their relation to each other. Sometimes is pays to gather material in advance to give participants something to respond to. For example you might conduct recorded interviews and bring their voices into a workshop to stimulate discussion and debate.
- Equipping others with story collecting techniques means you must accept variety and inconsistencies in form and quality.
- Pay as much attention to the ways of listening as to the ways of collecting. Set conditions around the kinds of questions that will yield better stories.
- Choose methodologies that involve selection of the strongest or more relevant stories by the community not "expert" outsiders, often through emergent means e.g. Jumpstart Stories (see page 28) or Postcards (see page 23).
- Consider using a rapporteur or curator to ensure full and varied documentation;
- Think carefully about the recording methods you will use. Text, audio and visual all have merits:

	Pros	Cons
Text	• Verbatim transcripts retain the tellers' voices and are easy to disseminate. • Production requires no expensive technology or skill. • Emphasis on what is being said more than the performance	• Verbatim transcripts are resource intensive. • Text-based records have tendency to "shrivel up" the live experience. • Tendency for writers to revert to familiar reporting styles e.g. moving to generalization, simplification and analysis. • May make less of an impact on the listener or be less effective at capturing their attention.
Audio	• Anonymity possible. • Relatively cheap, versatile and not distracting. • Atmosphere conveyed, more room for listener to work at creating their own mental pictures and interpretations. • Listener free to move around while listening. • Audio files can be turned into "podcasts" and broadcast online.	• Requires investment in technology (hardware and software) and skills. • May lead to performance anxiety or bias in tellers. • Poor recordings may not be suitable for broadcast in large workshop spaces. • Permissions for re-using audio may be a challenge and needs careful handling.
Video	• Appeal of the visual to draw people in. • Visible gestures may help convey significance of story. • Refreshing change for those who spend a lot of time reading documents. • Participatory video is emerging as an excellent fieldwork tool.	• Resource intensive to produce a quality product for today's sophisticated audiences. • Viewers may quickly form judgments that block listening e.g. based on appearance of the teller or the quality of the video. • Viewer "glued" to the screen.

- Regard templates as "intermediate products" – the means to an end not an end in themselves. Before telling, templates should be tucked away. While they can help you organize your thoughts or structure a story they can also confuse a more reflective moment of story telling with analytical processes.
- The focus of storytelling should be the spoken not the written word. Recordings should be made and verbatim transcripts produced where necessary. Prime a rapporteur to capture the exact phrases and words used by somebody when speaking, so that the essential meaning is not lost. Excerpts of these transcripts can be threaded into reports to liven up more analytical content.
- Appoint a custodian or archivist and creating proper naming protocols for all records and raw materials. These disciplines will help you find the materials and re-use them at a later date. Good stories have a long shelf-life.
- Some materials will need reworking to be accessible to an outside audience.
- Newsletters are very useful capitalization devices. Create edited versions of longer stories held elsewhere and provide links and references for curious readers.

See SDC's "Guide to Thematic Experience Capitalization" for insights around brief and quick versus more comprehensive and far-reaching experience capitalization.

C) Jumpstart Stories – an interactive way to start an event and build connections

Providing a physical forum for fast exchange and selection this is a transformative way to begin any event or gathering. The process introduces each person to other participants in a meaningful way, establishing warm connections through a common experience.

In June 2003 the gender team used 'Jumpstart Stories' method to catalyse the formation of a new "knowledge community" at their large inaugural gathering of gender practitioners in Fribourg, Switzerland. The experience touched several members so deeply that they were compelled to change the nature of their planned presentations to incorporate stories and examples from the field. This helped set the tone of warm exchange over the week that followed.

Materials

- A bell/ gong
- A large open space
- Possible sound recording equipment

Method

Round One

1. Place the participants into groups of up to 10. Move the chairs to one side – the exercise is run standing up.
2. Ask the participants to take a moment to think of a moment from their own professional experience when (for example) they felt really inspired.
3. Each person in the group has 90 seconds to share their story.
4. A bell is sounded at the end of each 90-second stint to signal the start of a new story.

Round Two

5. When all the ten stories are heard, the group splits up with each person finding a new group of 9 others. When everyone is settled, each person has 90 seconds to tell the same story again.

Clusters and Chains

6. Each person recalls the story that most resonated with them, or the story that most inspired them.
7. Everyone stands up and finds the person who told this story and puts their hand on his or her shoulder.
8. The facilitator asks for a show of hands of all those who have one hand on their shoulder, then two, then three. The aim is to find the top 3 stories in the room (i.e., the tellers with the most hands on their shoulders).
9. The top 3 stories are told in plenary.
10. Each story can be told followed by 20 seconds of silence rather than applause. The audience is encouraged to notice how the story engages them.
11. Each story is given a name that conveys some aspect of its essence.

Variations

With sufficient time, and a large enough group (over 45 people) a third round of story telling (again, the same story) may be inserted between steps 5 and 6.

Build in discussion afterwards, prompting people to reflect on what struck them about the stories. This depends on the context in which you are running the exercise.

Record the top 3 stories when they are told in plenary, for example if your intention is to catalyse the formation of a new network or community. It will be important to be sure that the tellers are comfortable with this arrangement.

Guidance notes

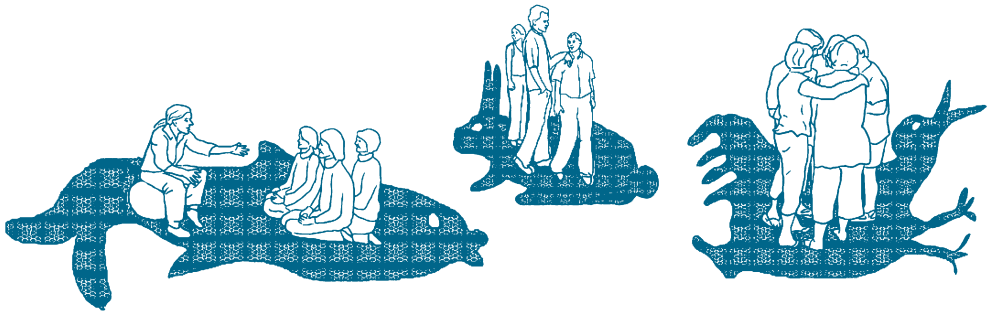
- The story prompt statement is tailored for your own specific needs. For example "think of a moment when you felt you became part of a team or community" or "think of a moment when you were working successfully in partnership with others." The question can be worded to prompt sharing of a more or less personally emotional experience. 'Think of a moment when you were really moved by inspiration in the field' will yield a different telling to 'Think of a moment when you witnessed innovation'. This will create a different relationship between the teller and the story. Great care should be taken to test the prompt to make sure it is likely to yield the right stories.

- You may wish to use the following breakdown in order to establish group size:

Total attendance	People per table
11–30	4
31–55	6
56–75	8
76–100	10

- Watch out: If there are tables, people tend to migrate towards sitting round the table. It is important to keep people standing up and huddled together to listen as the physical intimacy of the experience is an important part of it. You also need to be culturally sensitive. It may be culturally inappropriate for women and men to touch each other on their shoulder, so you may need to establish another gesture of connection that has the same kind of surprise effect. Also, be careful not to reveal the final twist before the rounds of story telling have been conducted, or this will change the way people are listening to each other.

Thanks to Seth Kahan. www.sethkahan.com



DIFFERENT STORY TECHNIQUES

ILLUSTRATION:

Building a community of gender practitioners: a meeting of hearts and minds

Introduction

In the summer of 2003 SDC's gender unit convened an inaugural conference of 60+ gender specialists in a hotel in Fribourg, Switzerland. This group had never been assembled in this way before and they had much to learn from each other. The previous year a member of the unit had attended a story telling "taster" workshop at headquarters and was inspired to integrate story telling into the conference design, as a way of building community. Here is her account:

"During the "taster workshop" – and remembering my experiences of working in the field – I realized story telling could reach people from different countries. If many people from different hierarchies and countries come together there are always those who think they know less about a subject and participate less in the discussion. They may be afraid to say something wrong. To start with personal stories demonstrates that everyone has a valuable experience to share and we can share it in the language we feel comfortable. It helps people to break the ice. By contrast the "theoretical" discussions stress differences between people, like knowledge, access to information, hierarchy, level of participation etc. So it was good to start with something where everybody has the same knowledge, the same background: their own story!"

Challenges

After formalising the new gender policy and a toolkit, it was time to capitalize on the numerous experiences SDC had acquired and to organise a workshop along with a public conference to exchange experiences on "good practices" in the South and East. The whole conference was designed to support learning within SDC and together with its partners. The challenges were to test the power of story telling to:

- capitalize on and transfer valuable experiences mainstreaming gender in projects
- break down barriers (e.g. cultural, professional, technical, linguistic, gender, personality)
- accommodate exchange and connection between experts working in different cultural, economic and political settings
- support the development of an embryonic network or 'knowledge community' on gender mainstreaming

An additional challenge was that although three different languages were officially catered for via a live translation service – French, English and Spanish – most people present were double-translating, coming from places as far apart as Benin and the North Caucuses, the Ukraine and Nepal. Given the large number of languages spoken by delegates it was felt that story telling would help facilitate cross-cultural communication. At the same time many participants were telling their stories in a language other than their native tongue.

DIFFERENT STORY TECHNIQUES

What happened?

Story telling was introduced in four separate "doses" over the course of the three days:

- Pre-conference warm up – writing and performing a story about the personal experiences leading the organizers to work in the field of gender;
- Jumpstart Stories (see page 28) – delegates told personal stories about what inspired them to work in gender.
- Postcards (see page 23) – sharing positive stories about community membership to divine common qualities of successful communities.
- Future Story (see page 35) – imagining the future for the gender network to create four credible visions of the future.

The focus was on building connections between people. A rapporteur was appointed to ensure stories told could be included in a future 'Capitalization Report.'

The Jumpstart Stories telling session on the first morning opened people up to each other as they placed a hand on the shoulder of the person whose story most inspired them – the atmosphere in the room was electric. Here is an example of one of the stories:

"My name is Sue (*not her real name) and I work in Peshawar, Pakistan. I told my colleagues a story about my personal inspiration to do this job. I want to say how important I feel it is to have this opportunity to share experiences.*

My story is related to my family – to my mother, whose life is my inspiration. My mother is a very simple woman and she is very sweet, but most of her life has been spent obeying my father. She, like many women in Pakistan, has to obey whatever her husband, fathers and sons tell her to do. My father tells her what to do in every way – she even wears clothes of my father's choice and she quit her job as a teacher because she had to serve her large family and in-laws. From there I saw her, and I said to myself – 'no, no, I don't have to do this. I have to lead my own life' and the only thing that I saw was important was to be educated and to get financial security so that even if I am being asked by my father, by my brother to do so, I can have a strong enough argument to lead my own life. Therefore I chose a subject – Agriculture – which is not a subject for most of the women in Pakistan, especially in the Province in which I live, which is close to Afghanistan and is quite a conservative society there, and I was among 10 women students in 200 boy students in university. All shy, all covered up, all eyes down.

So that was my starting point. And then I joined Rural Development that was another restricted field of working Pakistan, especially in NFFP. Very few women join non-government organisations and when they join they face lots of difficulties, not only from their fellow men but also from their families and their relatives back home. And that was another challenging task for me: to prove myself. And then came SDC, and in SDC their focus was poverty-stricken areas in the most conservative region of Pakistan. So there as well I was facing the same challenges. I wanted to be a role model for those who are facing these problems."

Participants gather for a group photograph to symbolise their formation as a new global network of gender practitioners.

Impact

Sharing stories at the beginning of the conference sent a clear signal that alternative ways of communicating experiences were welcome. For example one consultant was so inspired by the first morning's session that she worked through the night to transform her traditional presentation (a case study of the ECOLAN project in rural Ukraine) into a story called "Nadija – meaning 'hope'." The story was written from the point of view of a female character – an amalgamation of 7 women she had met in the field, touched by her micro-financing scheme.

Another team of presenters from a British university chose to promote the service they offer by telling the story of the process of creating one of their information packs. What this indicated was that stories had more resonance with people than more traditional presentation formats.

At the end of the conference participants were asked to evaluate this approach we had taken to exchanging experiences. One delegate from the SDC Coordination Office in Ecuador said:

"This re-affirms something we've known for a while. Let's start with lived experience, not with theoretical statements. Let's work with our hearts and minds to change attitudes, and afterwards this can yield much more important changes in gender attitudes. So I'd like to congratulate the organizers of this workshop for their approach."

For more information:
www.sdc.admin.ch/themes/gender

D) Half a Story – looking forward from the present

Groups use an unfinished story to shape possible paths to the future, logging any risks and opportunities encountered along the way. This is a 'light' way to respond to possibly difficult challenges.

Applications

Building partnerships – negotiate perspectives and differences and challenge assumptions
Advising others (inside and outside SDC) – increase the effectiveness with which others can draw on your expertise
Learning from others, innovating – transfer research insights

Method

1. Participants are told half a prepared story (see example below): (3-4 minutes)
2. They are then split into groups and asked to finish the story, either as a success or as a disaster story (30 minutes).
3. Each group tells their version of the story (3-4 minutes each).
4. Session concludes with a reflection on what can be learned from the exercise, for example, what obstacles or risks were encountered and how were they overcome? What lessons should be learned to avoid the disaster scenario coming true? What good practice should be highlighted to make success more likely? What else did the stories reveal?

Variations

Instead of a prepared half story, an individual can volunteer a current problem that can be shaped – in preliminary group work – into a half story. Other groups can respond with endings.

The setting up of the story could be associated with an installation or exhibition and the finishing halves could draw on these props as objects as resources for finishing the tale.

Guidance notes

- Compared with other methods, Half a Story requires more preparation and thought beforehand and more management.

- It is important to pinpoint accurately the place where the first half of the story stops. There should be two clear moments to choose from. The first is just after the problem or challenge has been set. The second is after the characters have decided what actions will be taken. Stopping at the second point leaves space for participants to imagine the potential consequences of those actions. In either case groups are forced to think through the likely obstacles or setbacks, finishing the story knowing what factors might contribute to success and/or failure.

- The kind of language you chose for the half story is also important. Does it have a fairy tale like quality, which will lift people into more imaginative thinking? Or is it set out more as though it is factual? Are you inviting happy endings, or disaster stories? Allowing more fictional responses and negative stories may unleash great creativity energy. Imaginative stories may, in some circumstances be quite dark, even wicked, and hold uncomfortable truths about how the organization works. If you intend to use the materials to communicate with, for example, leaders about what is going on under the surface, you will need to prepare them to listen well and non-defensively, and to allow room for more fictional modes of communication as valid organizational instruments.

Example: 'The Language of Mountains'

A shortened version of a half story used in 3-day story training session with Sparknow, December 2003.

There was once a land of plenty whose leaders decided to share their knowledge and resources with those who did not have plenty.

In another part of the world there was a community of mountain farmers who worked hard yet only scraped a living from the arid crumbling red earth.

One day a visiting nomad from the land of plenty arrived on the mountain. He said he wanted to help. After much consideration the farmers agreed to accept the help offered by the nomad from the land of plenty. After many years of hard work for little reward, when the mountain farmers expressed their needs they poured out of them with the force of a waterfall. The visiting nomad passed them all onto his colleagues in the land of plenty. They assessed them and a program of help was agreed.

The program was implemented effectively, much to the satisfaction of the mountain farmers who witnessed a great deal of positive changes happen around them. After a number of years had passed the chief nomad back in the land of plenty felt that the mountain farmers had learned a great deal and it was time for the nomads to withdraw and leave the farmers sufficient unto themselves. So he sent a message to the visiting nomad that the next phase of the program would be the final phase.

The visiting nomad passed the message on and the mountain farmers congregated anxiously under the village banyan tree to consider and discuss the message. They felt angry, upset and confused. Were they to be abandoned?

What happens next?

E) Future Story – forming a common vision and planning collective action

Shifting the date and looking back from the future – talking about the future as if it has already happened – supports groups constrained by unproductive or 'stuck' patterns and enables the psychological shifts necessary for change and positive action. It can create a benchmark to look back on when the actual date arrives.

For the ideas about looking back from the future, we are indebted to Madelyn Blair of Pelerei on whose work we have drawn heavily.

Major Applications

Building communities – glue together dispersed members; form a common vision and focus.
Planning collective action.

Method

1. Wind the clock forward to a specific date in the future – anything between 6 months and a year on works best. Establish with the group(s) you are working with that this date is now the present date.
2. Invite groups to work together to construct a short story on the particular theme you wish them to imagine together, e.g. 'It is x date, and the road building project has been very successful. What is life like today?' 'It is x date, and the health centre is fully operation and regarded as a great success. What is it like working there?'
3. Allow a period of around 30 – 45 minutes for the group to develop and rehearse the story, ready to tell it back to the other groups.
4. Offer them the Handout 'What makes a Future Story work?' (see page 37) as an aid.
5. Be specific about the audience they imagine reporting back to – e.g. another group starting the same kind of project? Somebody senior? An external conference?
6. Be clear that the telling time should be no more than 3 – 4 minutes.

Guidance notes

- This exercise brings humour into what can often be a stressful experience – planning for the future. It frees the mind and allows participants to imagine the world after the change they want to affect, can enhance the effectiveness of action plans or risk analysis by creating a very real, optimistic, shared future reality.
- The exercise is probably best used with a group that are already working together, or who will be working together as part of a change process.
- It is most important that it is told in the present tense only. This takes the participants out of an analytical mode and places them in an open and receptive frame of mind.
- The exercise is also most successful when the time span in which change take place is not more than a year.
- You may wish to audio-record the stories and use these as benchmarks at session in a year's time, to compare the reality of what has happened with the imagination.

Thanks to Madelyn Blair who can be contacted through www.pelerei.com

Variation: 'You've made front page news'

Method

"The date is [one year from now] and you and your colleagues have made front page news – because either you are part of something very successful."

1. In small groups, draw the photograph on the front cover. Give as much detail as you can without using words. Write the news story to accompany the photo. Keep it brief, and remember you are writing about something that has happened. Finally, compose a catchy headline to capture the essence of the story.
2. Groups show their drawings and tell their stories in turn.

Variation: "Picturing the future"

Method

Creating collages to represent the transition from a known present to a "felt" future.

1. Everyone is asked to think about the present situation (e.g. of a project or programme) – what it feels like, sounds like, looks like etc. After a short period of reflection they form groups of 3.
2. Each group is given a sheet of A3 paper divided into three sections. Groups are given 10-15 minutes to leaf through the magazines available and find images that represent some aspect of the present situation. These images are cut or ripped out and stuck onto the first section on the left hand side of the A3 page. This is all done in complete silence – no conversation is allowed.
3. Groups are then given a further 10-15 minutes to use the next section (to the right) of the same sheet of paper to find images that represent any potential obstacles they could face, or help they might receive, as they try to get to a positive future.
4. Finally they are given another 10-15 minutes to fill the right hand column with images that represent where they hope to get to in the future – what it will be like, feel like, what will happen etc.
5. When each group has completed their collage, the groups are allowed to discuss for 5 minutes the images they found and what they mean – what are the commonalities? What are the surprises or differences?
6. They are then given 20 minutes to write a story around their collage that plots their path from the present, past obstacles and helpers, into a successful future.
7. Groups elect a teller to briefly talk about the collage and then tell their story.
8. Final reflection for 10 minutes on what struck everyone during the experience, what can be learned.

Guidance Notes

- This method can be used to explore any change-related theme, such as redefinition of relationships with partners or the potential implications of a new policy. Importantly this technique is not new – but the productive use of silence and the creation of image collages as an elicitation technique often leads groups into more metaphorical and symbolic illustrations which allow for hidden emotions, insights and issues to emerge in discussion.

- An alternative could be to use a selection of photographs or postcards and invite groups, in silence, to pick one which illustrates the future best, then give them a short period to discuss the reasons for the choice in their group before a wider discussion.

DIFFERENT STORY TECHNIQUES

HANDOUT:
What makes a Future Story work?

We all love to dream, and helping others to see and join our dream is an important part of making it happen. Here are some aspects of successful stories about the future.

Positive – stories about the future need to be attractive to encourage action toward making them happen. It's in our nature to be drawn to things that are attractive.

Create a clear picture – the destination must be seen in order to entice us to travel the road.

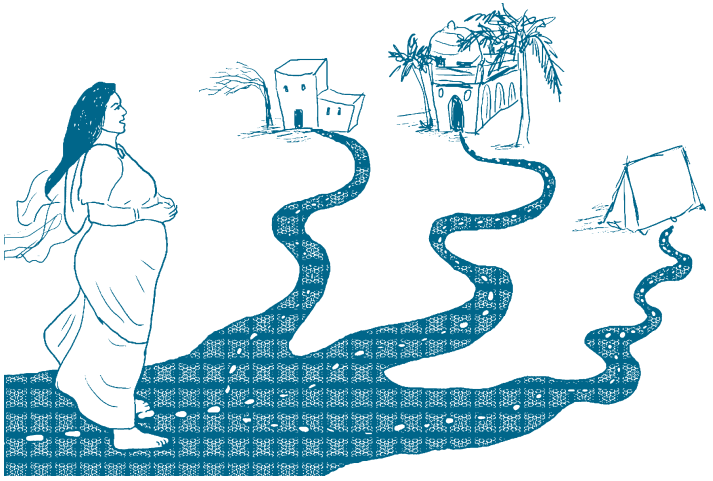
In the present tense – when a story is told as if it exists already its power is magnified.

Short enough to keep it in mind – yes; we have to remember it in enough detail to tell it to others.

Based on reality – stories that are built from what exists today become grounded in reality even if the story describes something that does not exist today. We are practical people who need to feel the story can happen. And beginning with today helps us feel the trip is possible.

Credible – listeners must feel they can be a part of the story. Two things help to make this possible. First, the story is based on a reality that the listeners know already. Second, creating the story together is a powerful way to gain credibility when working in an organisation.

Energizing – the listener must step beyond credibility and see themselves in the story. It must call the listener to action.



F) A Story in a Word – Finding the meaning in words

Words from mission statements, charters, core project documents, can be used as a trigger for personal stories that illustrate those words in action. This creates a deepened shared understanding of the qualities of the words, and strengthens bonds.

Method

1. Ask participants to make a selection of words from a core document – e.g. charter, vision statement or mission.
2. Give individual participants a few minutes to think of their own experience of this word in action in the organization.
3. Invite individuals to share their story with a partner and to reflect jointly on what this has told them about the meaning of the word.
4. Invite volunteers to offer their words and stories to plenary. There can be a discussion following this, appreciating the different qualities that now seem to exist in a word.

Variations

Pairs can work together on the meaning in a word and create some kind of symbolic object or ritual to share back with the group that acts the word out.

With permission, stories can be recorded, and used to communicate and illustrate your organisation in action.

This could be an effective method to use in a retreat for leaders of the organization, to refresh their connections with each other and the charter. An alternative to words from the founding charter could be a short haiku or poem such as a Buddhist koan.

Example

SDC's vision states that it wishes to show 'Switzerland's *openness* to the world, its *generosity* and its *solidarity*'. This statement could be put up on the wall and participants invited to recall personal experiences of SDC's openness, generosity and solidarity.

Thanks

The inspiration for this method comes from three sources: Alida Gersie, a drama therapist who works with story telling in transition, bereavement and change; and Madelyn Blair of Pelerei, who has developed materials with UN Ambassadors using their charter; and Professor Peter Reason at the University of Bath, who has developed approaches to cooperative enquiry.

ILLUSTRATION:

Fictional agenda for a one-day workshop building up to using "Story in a Word"

Workshop to build community, develop materials to capitalize products for the community

Time	Activity	Underlying intent/journey
30	**Context & introductions**	Ensure shared understanding of purpose. Establish casting of facilitators, and conditions that govern the workshop space.
30	**'Yes, but'** **'Yes, and'**	Autobiography – bringing selves into space. Establishes through play some conversation principles for the day.
90	**Jumpstart Story**	'Think about a time when you were proud to be in a community at work.' Weaves a community space. Identifies resonant stories which can be used as products elsewhere and creates 'heart assets' for community. Key words posted to the walls for later.
150	**Half a Story**	Pre-selected volunteers share a current challenge they face with operating in this community or getting work done. All start to share in imagining how to overcome obstacles that face others and themselves. Creates conditions of mutual helpfulness, and practical ideas.
45	*LUNCH BREAK*	
30	**Obstacles exhibit**	Pinboard session that builds on the half story session and identifies key common themes of difficulties faced. Identifies which of these can be changed and sets up Future Story.
75	**Future Story**	'It is a year from today. The community thrives. It has overcome difficulties and people are proud to be part of it, and served by. What happens day-to-day? What qualities does the experience have?' Two perspectives: insider and outsider. What does the community feel and function like? Should create 'quality' words that can be used in the next exercise. Record the stories so that they can be used to benchmark against later.
45	**A Story in a Word**	Refer back to the words that came from Jumpstart and Future Story and select a handful for individuals to use to recall personal experiences that illuminate these words. Record stories and use these words and meanings later to develop a charter for the community.
30	**Rituals of closure**	Space to reflect on practical and emotional lessons. What will happen with the materials? What will be thrown away? What will be kept and worked on and for what purpose? End with a ritual (handshake, exchange of objects, team photograph?) and close the private space.

G) Story Competition – making field experiences available to the public

Please contact knowledgeandresearch@deza.admin.ch for the extended case study on the "SDC – Stories for Sustainability Award" in 2003. Also available on request are the supporting assets. Anyone wishing to organize a competition should contact the originators for further advice and lessons learned.

1. Select a theme around which your organization should be sharing its knowledge more widely. State your objectives clearly from outset. For example, previous competition objectives were:

   - To capitalize on experience concerning sustainability in development cooperation
   - To publish the stories which do this effectively in different ways – website, publications

2. Think about eventual dissemination. Agree how and in what format will the stories be produced and shared.

3. Encourage senior management to champion the initiative.

4. Secure prize money (to be awarded to programs not individuals) as an incentive.

5. Get a team of people together to act as a selection committee/ jury. Find someone to cover the administration of the competition e.g. replying to emails, managing the story database, organizing the prize-giving ceremonies etc. Think about how you will ensure the right mix of experience and expertise on your judging panel.

6. Agree a framework for assessing contributions. Take a participative approach to designing the common templates to be used by all those on the selection committee/ jury during the judging process.

7. Send out a comprehensive invitation to your participants (see below for an example) – make sure they have everything they need to write their story. Make sure that the messages get through, and if necessary follow-up with a telephone call – you don't want a whole region to miss out! If possible, give guidance and an example. Ask them to stipulate what – concretely – they would spend the prize money on.

8. Give people around 6-8 weeks to respond. The coordinator or administrator must reply to each entry personally, thanking them for their time and effort and letting them know what to expect next.

9. At the agreed deadline, disseminate the entries to your judging panel and allow a further 4 weeks for reading and assessing. Ask them to choose the 15 top stories.

10. A co-coordinator should then collate the jury's responses and compile the top 15.

11. The jury can then meet face-to-face to whittle the top 15 down to the winning 9 stories. Meeting face-to-face is necessary because at this stage there is always lively debate. Asking: 'which stories really stick in my head?' 'Which ones have I already re-told?' will help you make your final decisions. Remember, the strength of the story itself – being well formed and effective at communicating a message – is being tested.

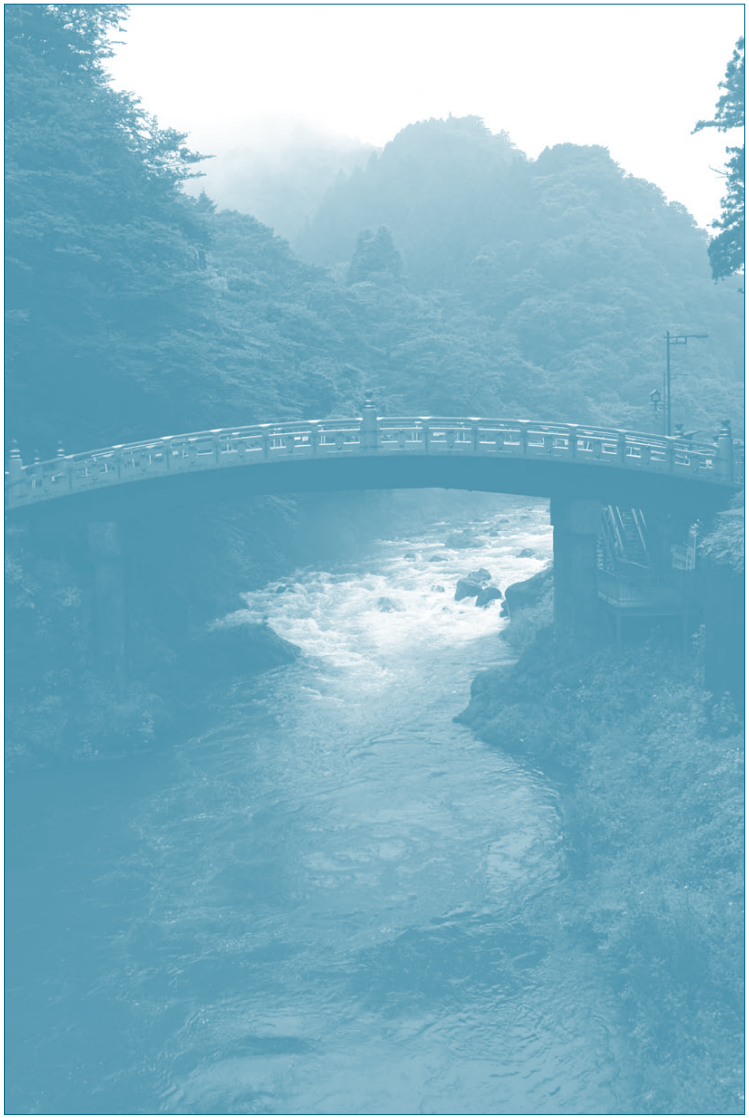
12. Communicate the results to all those who participated, thanking them warmly for giving their time and energy. Try to thank the winners personally, and talk about next steps with them.

13. Ask a senior figure, if possible, to award each prize publicly. Send all participants a certificate.

14. Disseminate the stories as widely as possible. Exploit all available channels and think big.

DIFFERENT STORY TECHNIQUES

The winners of the "Stories for Sustainability" Award show their products at the Dare to Share Fair in 2004



DIFFERENT STORY TECHNIQUES

HANDOUT:
Judging criteria for a story competition

SDC-Contest: Stories about Sustainability **Analysis and rating by:**

Nr.	Title:	Country	Project link	Author (m/f)	Key actor (m/f)	Type (i/c)*	General A.	Total Pts

Sector/Type of project:	Key actors with ownership	Partners and allies	Others

Characteristics of the Story		Pts
Reference to sustainability?		
Structure: Introduction/background /story/lessons		
Sparks, triggers & turning points?		
Language effective?		
Thrilling? "Wow factor"?		
Believability? (Realism/ Credibility?)		
Re-usability (as story for didactic purposes)?		
Reference to cultural context?		
Gender sensitive?		

Concern, problems and solutions		
Description clear?		
"Springboard effect"? ("Nachvollziehbar"?)		
Is solution practical?		
Replicable solution?		

Concerning sustainability		
Clear key messages? / Lessons?		
Processes, mechanisms, rules & tools for improved (chances of) sustainability		
Reference to Empowerment?		
Reference to Ownership?		
Multi-dimensional? (Social, organizational/institutional, economic, financial, ecological, with reference to political context)		
Re-usability (as story for didactic purposes)?		

Overall impression / General Assessment		

Other considerations:

* I/c: Type of story: I = individual life story, or similar / c = collective action experience
Rating/Points: 1=very poor; 2=poor; 3=insufficient; 4=sufficient, 5=good; 6=very good (no 0 please!)
Attention: in the overall impression / assessment the rating is from 1 to 20

7. Troubleshooting Log – things to watch our for

In designing a narrative intervention of any kind, there are some things we have learned to pay attention to, and many we have learned the hard way. Here is a troubleshooting log that you may wish to add to as you develop your own repertoire.

Problem	Possible Solution
Stories contain emotional, as well as a practical dimensions and can create spaces in which deep change becomes possible. This can also lead you into dangerous territory. Without carefully designed processes story telling can unleash old frustrations and grievances that are damaging to any workshop and may block more positive elements.	It is worth considering the kinds of formal and informal environments you wish to create, and how much protection you will need to give tellers if you are asking them to speak candidly. If you are inviting people to speak from the heart, be sure to establish clear boundaries, for example if confidentiality is offered it must be upheld. Be clear about the purpose of the exercise and what is to be done with the stories – if recorded – after the event. For example if the purpose is to talk frankly about change, check that leaders will respond.
"Groupthink": Fear and frustration can quickly become dominant motifs when a critical mass of people colludes, often unconsciously. People relish the chance to reveal the dark side of their organisation and this is often done with great wit.	Avoid "groupthink" by conducting private story collecting sessions one-on-one. Be courageous and open about the "dark side," playing stories containing difficult truths back to leaders as a productive provocation.
An invitation to recall, tell or shape a story often leads to associations with dramatic or "Hollywood" style story telling or it makes people pull their old stories out of the dusty closet. Extreme or "tired" stories like this are sometimes more entertaining but often contain information that is less relevant to our everyday working lives.	If you are a facilitator, give clear instructions that people look for the memorable episodes not necessarily in "car chase moments." The focus should be on the quality of the lesson or message it contains, not the drama of the situation. Be specific if only newer stories – events from the last 3 years or so – are of use.
Story telling asks the question: "where does the truth lie?" Memories can be faulty. What was a significant moment for one may not be for another. Truth may be told through fiction better than through fact. Changing identifying features such as names, dates and locations prevents dismissal of the story's messages through existing prejudice or association.	Find examples of "truthful" fiction, where the tellers have been able to "say the unsayable" due to the relative safety of the form. If you are playing a set of critical stories to leaders, for example, start with a factual one, then tell a "factional" one (part fact, part fiction) ending with pure fantasy to improve receptiveness.
What happens when the workshop is over? It is easy to lose sight of the fact that it may be the process of the workshop that is more important than what is produced from it. Over-emphasising the tangible "products" from a workshop can devalue the intangible outcomes (stronger networks, improved personal confidence and knowledge) that can have a more lasting effect on project success.	It is important to make a distinction between what stays in the workshop room and hearts and minds of individuals and what gets recorded and taken forward. Think in advance about how you will make the workshop experiences accessible to others. Even if the workshop is well documented, the materials could lie dormant, well catalogued, until they are needed.