

FLOW SYSTEM

PARTICIPANT WORKBOOK

Complexity Thinking

Workbook: Storytelling and Narratives



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Storytelling and Narratives

In the section on Story Telling and Narratives we talked about what stories are and the benefits that they offer in sensemaking. We also revealed that there is more to storytelling. Other than determining hidden meanings, storytelling is an art. Effective storytelling requires practice and can be mastered using a few simple techniques.

To make a connection with your audience during storytelling, there are three essential phases of storytelling: excavating, crafting, and presenting (Nossel, 2018).

Excavating involves identifying what the story is about, which events to include, and in what sequence. Excavating also relates to *deferment*, express your ideas free of bias, fear of judgement, and of significant value (Nossel, 2018).

Crafting is where one's artistic craft is reflected. This is where the "creativity of storytelling comes alive" (Nossel, 2018, p. 13). Shaping the components from the excavating phase into the crafting phase builds the story—its beginning, middle, and end. This phase compiles the parts of the story into a coherent message.

The third phase, **presenting**, is where one tells the story. Because your story is built upon personal experiences, the story is close and personal, and easy to recall. This also helps to connect with your audience in that your story is unique to them: "When a story is told from that place of embodiment, it never fails to connect you with your audience" (Nossel, 2018, p. 14).

Using Anecdote Circles to Cover All Three

Anecdote circles provide the excavation site, attendees provide the craftsmanship and the collective shares in the presentation.

Anecdote circle sessions provide organizations with low prep, high value returns in the excavation of stories. Why this is useful to try and keep trying is because we may never know the stories being told inside our walls, inside the informal networks, or outside the organization unless we ask. In addition to this, the more we practice storytelling, the more comfortable it becomes for all members of the organization, allowing members to speak up without fear of being ridiculed or punished.

The following steps can be followed to launch your own anecdote circle sessions:

1. Select a topic or theme.
2. Acquire and set up the way to record and capture the anecdotes.

3. Find a quiet room for each group, typically around the size of 5 to 12 members.
4. Utilize a passive facilitator who is trained in conducting anecdote circles and guides the process with minimal interference.

Some of the supplies/tools you may wish to use to capture your anecdotes are as follows:

COLLABORATION TOOLS	
IN PERSON, ON-SITE SESSIONS	VIRTUAL SESSIONS
Board Room, white boards, or smart board	Mural - Online Collaboration WhiteBoarding https://mural.co/
Large craft papers placed on walls	Miro - Online Collaboration WhiteBoarding https://miro.com/
Post-it notes for placement on craft papers	ConceptBoard - Online Collaboration WhiteBoarding https://conceptboard.com/
Sharpies (at least 1 per attendee)	EasyRetro.io https://easyretro.io/

Once you have set up your capture mechanism(s), a quiet space is called for so that each group can have time to discuss and reflect on the topic or theme presented. The topic or theme will be presented as an excavation question, where each participant is expected to comment on and participate in the discussions. The facilitator will guide the process and collate the information from the session. It really is this simple.

Like many dialogic sensemaking sessions, as a facilitator, you may need to lean into some complex facilitation techniques, such as the following:

- Removing yourself from the conversation as much as possible.
- Asking short, simple, and ambiguous questions.
- Leaning into the silence.
- Asking for examples or clarity.
- Letting the stories assemble from the attendees as organically as possible.

Below are some situational prompts we have used to provoke great anecdotal stories within the organizations we have supported:

SITUATIONAL PROMPTS	
COMMON SITUATIONS	EXAMPLE PROMPTS
Organizational Design / Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about the last conversation you may have had with a peer about how things are structured at your organization. What did you say that was positive about the structure? What did you say that was concerning about the structure? • Imagine being invited to contribute to redesigning how this organization is structured for success. What might your contributions be and why?
Organizational Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imagine yourself at a social gathering where someone asks you what is great about where you work. What is the story you will tell? • Imagine yourself at a social gathering where someone asks you what challenges your organization faces. What is the story you will tell them (assuming you are free to tell any story, no matter how confidential)?
Team Additions / Formations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about your vision of a successful team. What does a successful team look like? What does the opposite look like? • Imagining the future for this team, what would success for this team need to look like for the next six months? • Exploring what great might look like, what are the key requirements for successful teams in your organization?

SITUATIONAL PROMPTS

COMMON SITUATIONS

EXAMPLE PROMPTS

Team Tensions

- Exploring the concept of tension in teams, what are some of the paradoxical tensions in this team that are both good and bad for the team / organization?
- Thinking back to a moment where the entire team was in flow, what tensions were present and where do they come from?
- Thinking back to a moment where the entire team was at its worst, what tensions were present and where do they come from?

Communication and Knowledge Management

- When thinking about the kind of communication or knowledge you need to send/receive regularly, when have you found yourself happy with the communication channels and when have you found yourself frustrated?
- Think about an ideal environment where communication and knowledge management are completely optimized. What contributes most to the successful flow and accessibility of information and knowledge?

Organizational Learning

- When thinking about the kind of learning you need to grow professionally, when have you found yourself happy with the existing learning opportunities you have and when have you found yourself frustrated?
- Think about an ideal learning environment where learning is completely optimized. What contributes most to the success of this learning

The insights your organization can gather from these anecdote circles will be extremely valuable. The key is to know how to take them further.

After your anecdote circle session, you should have a collection of stories or themes to review. *The question is, who reviews them and what do they do with these stories?*

There are many ways to review and take action. A few that come to mind include inviting attendees to review all stories collected from the session, have attendees dot vote (blindly, deferment without judgment), or have attendees summarize content on a separate board. These extra activities could highlight additional items that your organization may need to address, items that could have been unknown or blind (unconscious meaning) to those closest to the problem.

Connect the Three Helixes:

Flow can only be achieved when the three helixes are interconnected. To identify how this could occur, the next exercise requires the reader to identify examples of different methods from each of the other two helixes (distributed leadership, team science) that might work well with, or support, weak signal detection. Knowledge of all three helixes will be required to make these connections.



CONNECT THE HELIXES	
Select a scenario or problem that would include a storytelling.	
Identify three methods from distributed leadership that could work with storytelling and give a brief description about how they complement one another.	
DL Method 1:	
DL Method 2:	

CONNECT THE HELIXES

DL Method 3:

Identify three methods from the team science helix that could work with storytelling and give a brief description about how they complement one another.

TS Method 1:

TS Method 2:

TS Method 3:

Provide a description explaining which methods from each of the three helixes (with storytelling being the CT method) work best for the scenario/ problem identified earlier.