Stories About Us

Developing your own social enterprise story

A self-study workbook

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Contents

Foreword

How stories of your enterprise can become an asset for your company and change your business life

Stories, unlike conventional business reports, crammed with facts and figures, are things that people know, love, and remember. This gives them the potential to be a real asset for a social business, enabling entrepreneurs to reach out to their network of investors, customers, and other stakeholders.

People ask for data, but believe in stories. Good narratives can be used for organizational development, by explaining the value proposition of a business, identifying and overcoming communication gaps to improve understanding between partners in an enterprise, revealing constraints, conflicts, and cultural patterns of behavior, and facilitating marketing and advertising.

The ecosystem of entrepreneurship, encompassing public policymakers, investors, customers, employees, and suppliers, is a complex system with a multiplicity of actors, involving diverse expectations and ways of communicating, specific regulations and systemic constraints, and different cultural patterns of understanding.

Siemens Stiftung is convinced that storytelling – the use of narratives – offers a valuable complementary method of enabling players to see a social business from different perspectives. Switching viewpoints leads to a deeper understanding of the other participants. Misapprehensions and prejudices can be overcome and conditions created for sustainable and successful relationships.

When stories are told well, they can help to communicate and co-ordinate overall meanings within the entrepreneurial ecosystem. The challenge is to understand how to make stories more valuable and more effective in spurring behavior change, with regard to beliefs and values as well as organizational systems.

Siemens Stiftung has created this hands-on workbook to support social entrepreneurs, business trainers and coaches in developing practical skills as a storyteller.

In whatever context – a boardroom presentation, a coaching session with a group of business partners, a meeting with customers, or a one-on-one exchange with an individual – using elements of storytelling brings the speaker closer to the audience.

Using stories makes messages memorable, gives the audience something to relate to, and above all captures the listeners' attention, motivating and inspiring them in new ways. A story taps into more than one element of communicating. Great storytellers are great communicators and effective leaders.

Storytellers, like entrepreneurs, are agents of economic and social change. And the art of using narratives is an innovative method for transforming communication and the understanding of what we see, listen to, or consider to be true.

Siemens Stiftung initiated the project "Stories about us – How to tell your business narrative" in 2015 in the Foundation's "empowering people. Network" to increase the impact of capacity building programs through storytelling. This workbook now provides a basis for self-study and for the application of the storytelling tools by entrepreneurs and facilitators.

Beate Grotehans
Siemens Stiftung

Introduction

A short story about stories in business contexts

Yelanga Isisombululo is a South African business selling small solar power systems to customers in remote rural areas. Although the company markets its products with radio advertising spots and has hired local sales staff, results remain stubbornly below expectations.

CEO Anathi decides to test storytelling for the company's advertising. A range of radio spots is produced, with stories focusing on changes in the life of a family. In one episode, for example, a family is threatened by a loan shark and has difficulty in making ends meet. But then the family purchases a solar energy system through a rent-to-buy scheme. The mother increases her income at the sewing machine by continuing to work after dark. At the end of the spot, the family has paid off all its debts and can rid itself of the loan shark. The stories, which always end happily, are based on the realities of family life in the rural environment where the company is active.

In addition, Anathi teaches the local sales force how to sell the products personally by telling good and truthful stories (usually of a less dramatic kind than in the radio spot).

Sales are improving, but Anathi realizes something is still missing. Until now, when conducting market research, the company simply asked the customers how they liked the products and whether they would consider buying them. However, a big discrepancy remains between the answers of the potential customers and the numbers of people actually buying the products. Anathi talks to a colleague selling water purification products who seems unaffected by this problem. On finding out that the interview technique made all the difference, Anathi sends her product manager Khanyiswa out into the villages to conduct narrative interviews.

Khanyiswa meets with mothers in their homes and asks them about their daily routines, from early morning to last thing at night. Khanyiswa learns a lot from these narrative interviews, which give her a better understanding of when electricity is needed and when a simple solar lantern is enough. She hears all about people's weekly spending on kerosene and candles. Coming back to the office, Anathi and Khanyiswa adjust their product range to include solar lanterns, and also change their marketing strategy.

Two years later, Yelanga Isisombululo has been growing quickly from a small to a medium enterprise, and faces the typical problems of a business in this situation. CEO Anathi therefore starts a team-building process, one element being the joint elaboration of the company's story. The team collects information on all the important aspects of the business, its past successes, and the challenges it has faced. Group discussion of these findings enables everyone – especially new team members – to achieve a better understanding of the enterprise. Anathi decides to hold these storytelling workshops once a year to keep everybody integrated.

It sounds as though storytelling can solve many entrepreneurial challenges. The methods you learn in this workbook are enablers, like items in a handyman's toolbox. One tool doesn't solve every problem, but all are helpful, and you need only a few of them to resolve most everyday issues. We shall be looking later in detail at the variety of ways in which storytelling can be helpful in your enterprise. But now it's time to get started with a first exercise.

EXERCISE

Before we go any further, do you already have any ideas about where storytelling could make sense in your organization? Take five minutes to write down your ideas, and look again at your list when we reach the end of the next chapter, dealing with the applications of storytelling.

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

SUCCESSFUL CHANGE PROJECTS

SHARED CLARITY ON MISSION & IMPACT

STORY OF ENTERPRISE

MARKET RESEARCH

GAIN CUSTOMER INSIGHTS

NARRATIVE INTERVIEW

VALIDATE ASSUMPTIONS

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

STORIES
YOUR TOOL FOR A BROAD RANGE OF USES IN YOUR ORGANIZATION

MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

TURN COMPLEX MATTERS INTO DIGESTIBLE INFO

VISUALIZE THE DIFFERENCE YOU MAKE IN YOUR CUSTOMERS' LIVES

REPORTING & PROPOSALS

BENEFICIARIES DOCUMENTING STORIES

CHANGES ON THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

PARTICIPATORY MODELS

EXTRACT EMPLOYEE KNOWLEDGE

ONBOARDING

Applications of Storytelling

Understanding your customers, getting your message across, and dealing with your organizational challenges

Stories can have a powerful impact, not only where the storyteller is especially captivating, but also by virtue of their context and form. The first applications of storytelling that come to mind are communications and marketing.

Marketing and communications – getting your message across

In marketing your products and services, stories help you to visualize the difference your product makes in your customers' lives. You may be working in a challenging environment, delivering complex solutions. Stories can explain complex matters in a digestible form.

Example:

Incubators for inclusive business empower entrepreneurs to create more impact through offering business skills training, coaching and other services. You as an entrepreneur know the impact they can have, but for outsiders this may be difficult to grasp. Sharing stories about impact can show why an incubator is important, how it works, and what changes it can bring about.

Reporting and proposals – making your point in formal communication

Facts and figures are important when writing proposals and reports, but the analytic part may be difficult to digest. Including a story can support your case, by illustrating the various facets and dimensions of your work: for example, explaining processes and changes at an individual level.

If you want to use storytelling systematically in your reporting, it may be helpful to integrate new methods in your evaluations. You might use participatory models, where your customers and beneficiaries document changes with cameras or videos.

Example:

The women's self-help groups in a remote Tamil Dalit village have been active for twenty years. With their savings group, they financed the micro-businesses necessary to their livelihood – such as keeping goats, building and repairing earthen stoves, or running a phone and internet shop. They supported each other in building small, weatherproof houses and engaged in many other ways in improving their socio-economic situation.

Many of these committed and energetic women are unable to read or write, and therefore use cameras to create photo stories documenting the changes in their village, their own circumstances and the lives of their children. These stories are used in reports by their partner, the local social service organization, thereby enabling the self-help groups to take an active role in reporting to donor organizations. The stories also improve the quality of the reports by making change visible – instead of merely listing indicators and results of number-crunching.

The latest project in the village is a radio station run by the teenagers in school. They conduct narrative interviews with the women from the self-help groups to share their experience and know-how and empower other villages to follow their example.

Knowledge management – accessing the know-how in your organization

Stories can be used for knowledge management. In many organizations, much knowledge is hidden in people's heads. You can extract it by asking employees and others for their stories or their experiences. This can also be helpful in the onboarding process, enabling new staff to acquire a better understanding of the organization's structure, processes and people.

As the founder and CEO of your company, do you have the impression that most of the important organizational know-how is locked away inside your head? If so, this might be a good moment to think about the importance of sharing your experience and knowledge. What would happen if you left the organization tomorrow? Would your organization survive the brain drain? You could consider acting as a guinea pig for your staff to train narrative interviews, and use this as an opportunity to share your knowledge.

Market research – deepen your insight into your customers' requirements

Another relevant way of using stories is as material for research and analysis. You already talk to your customers, and you may also be carrying out interviews to find out about their needs and wants. This workbook will show you how to conduct narrative interviews, which can help you to find out how customers really use your products and services, and whether your assumptions match this reality.

This helps to differentiate between wants and needs. When asked about their energy needs, consumers in a remote village may ask for an entire power supply, on the basis of wanting the same standard of comfort as their relatives in bigger cities. However, a simple solar lantern that charges their cellphone may be more attuned to their actual needs and their financial resources. This is something you can ascertain by asking about the villagers' daily routine and the money spent on energy to date.
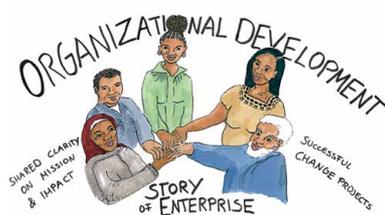
Organizational development – getting a better understanding of your organization

In the field of organizational development and coaching, stories may enable you to unearth hidden rules in your company and make change projects successful. Through narrative interviews you can make challenges visible without putting your team into "blame mode." Developing the story of your enterprise in a retreat can enable your team to get a better understanding of the organization. Together you can assess pressing issues – e.g. your mission, your working atmosphere, or your impact – through working on the story of your organization.

Example: Organizational development

The founder of the solar startup was unhappy. Sales had not risen as far as hoped, even though he had done everything to support the sales team. A consultant conducted narrative interviews with the entire team of the solar enterprise. This revealed some hidden problems: for example, that the staff liked the Western interns personally, but found their contribution unhelpful. The team members felt that they spent too much time helping the interns to understand the organization and the local culture, instead of reducing their own workload, let alone receiving competent support to increase sales.

This was news to the founder, as he thought additional hands at no cost were always helpful. Moreover, the interns came from a renowned business school, so they should know how to sell. In coaching sessions, the founder realized how expensive the interns were in reality (considering the time his staff spent on them). Together with the team, he developed alternatives. As funding is always an issue in a startup, the company decided to try out interns from the nearby business college, who needed no introduction to local culture, behavior and sales, and could become staff members if sales and qualifications matched.

EXERCISE

Take ten minutes to answer the questions.

1. Take a look at your list from the introduction on page 7. Are there any areas we haven't mentioned yet? Did additional uses occur to you while reading this chapter?

2. Then consider the fields you find especially important for your enterprise. You can adapt, change or expand your list while working your way through the book.

Why Tell Stories?

How our brain processes stories and how storytelling sustains corporate identity

The short answer to the question "Why tell stories?" is that our brain loves them and leads us, therefore, to think about change and process in narrative terms. Two findings from cognitive science and psychology show that storytelling reaches people better than pure facts.

Our brain has a story memory

Cognitive science has discovered that we have not just one memory, but (at least) two: fact memory, which stores individual, singular facts (such as "the value of pi is 3.14..." or "my mother's birthday is July 17"), and episodic memory, which stores events and experiences, and also stories. Stories, therefore, are processed in the same part of the brain as our personal experience. This is one of the reasons why stories have such a strong impact: recounting a story is like sharing an experience with the listener. And what could interest and captivate people more than an experience?

Mirror neurons activate emotions

Some twenty years ago, researchers discovered a special kind of nerve cell (neuron) in the brain: the so-called mirror neurons. A key function of these neurons is to facilitate empathy, enabling us to understand and share the emotions of others – making

us feel happy when others are happy, and sad when they are sad. The mirror neurons are referred to sometimes as "empathy neurons." And they also become active when we see or hear a story. This is the reason why we cry over a sad love story, or become excited when reading a thriller, or laugh if we hear a funny story on the radio. The existence of mirror neurons means that stories are a particularly effective way of arousing people's emotions and encouraging them to identify them with ideas or goals. Moreover, stories linger in memory, staying with us far longer than mere facts.

Stories shape corporate identity

Over the past twenty years, psychology and organizational research have arrived at a further important conclusion: that identity – be it individual, or collective, as with a company – is essentially shaped by stories. This is obvious at an everyday level: if we meet someone in a bar, for example, we introduce ourselves to the new acquaintance by telling stories, about past experiences, things we have done and particular events in which we have been involved. That is how we make it clear who we are, by recounting stories instead of enumerating facts. The identity of an organization is similarly constituted by the stories people tell about it, both inside the organization and in the world outside.

The identity of a company is influenced by several types of story:

- **Owned stories** are the stories the company tells about itself: the story of its founder, for example, or the stories used in its marketing and advertising, but also those told by staff members about their work and about the organization.
- **Earned stories** are told by customers, business partners, financiers, or members of employees' families. These, as one can easily imagine, are at least as important as the owned stories. The positive or negative stories told by customers will have a decisive impact on sales. Ideally, the marketing stories will be constructed in a way that evokes positive feelings in the customer.
- **Contextual stories** are those circulating in society about a particular industry or a group of products. For example, the reputation of an industrial sector may be tainted by its behavior in polluting the environment. A company in this field cannot afford to ignore these negative contextual stories and must try to respond to them with stories of its own.

Stories make the world go round

Stories therefore have a key importance for every company and business. They have a strong impact, whether the entrepreneur is aware of it or not, since the company's products and services, and the company as a whole, will always be the subject of stories: by nature, we are storytelling animals. Consequently, working with stories is a central leadership task. The entrepreneur has to be clear about his or her personal business story, about the story of the company, and about how working with stories can benefit different areas. In the course of this workbook we shall explain how this can be done.

EXERCISE

What stories shape the identity of my company?
Take ten minutes to think about the following questions:

1. What stories does my company tell about itself? (For example, stories about how the company was founded, or how the product/service was developed, or what benefits the product/service brings to customers. Think about your marketing messages – what are the stories hidden behind them?)

2. What stories do others – customers, partners, financiers, etc. – tell about my company and its products or services?

3. Do these stories match, or are there contradictions and gaps between them? If so, what changes would be needed in communication?

Benefactor

Beneficiaries

Aim / Target

Supporter

Main Character

Antagonist
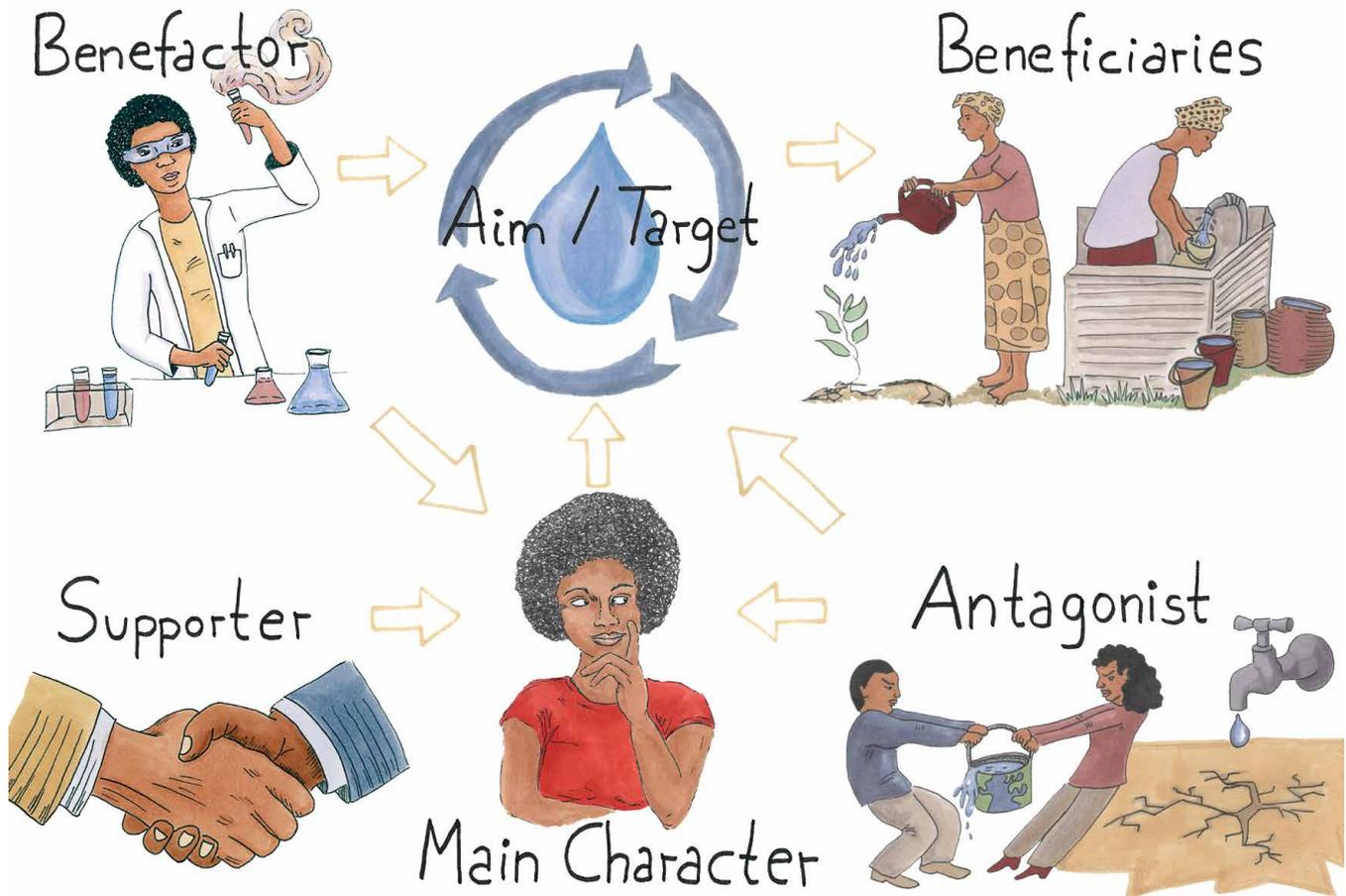
The Elements of a Good Story

How stories are constructed and how to tell an interesting story

What exactly is a story? We can all tell stories and we do so, every day. But if we want to work with stories in business, we have to be clear about the basic elements that make up a story, and the differences between a good and an inferior story. We can then work with these elements in a purposeful way, and think, for example, about how to construct a story for a particular target group or area of use.

Let us look first at the characters in our story and what impels them to act.

Every story has a Main Character

The focus of every story is a person, the Main Character. Every story is about someone, an individual or a group of people. The first question that arises in developing

a business story is therefore: who is the Main Character? It can be a single person (e.g. the company's founder), or a team (the group responsible for developing a particular product), or indeed the entire company. Identifying the Main Character is crucial – otherwise, there is a risk that the story will comprise too many narrative strands, which will weaken its impact.

In the case of your entrepreneurial story, you could decide, for example, that the Main Character should be yourself, or the team involved in setting up the company.

Every Main Character has an aim

The Main Character of any story has an aim, a focus of desire, that he/she is determined to attain. In a love story, the aim is winning the hand of the adored one; in a crime story, it is catching the murderer; in an adventure film, finding the hidden treasure; in a company story, the creation of the company or the marketing of a product. The Main Character and his/her goal – this is the backbone of any story. The aim can be chosen by the Main Character itself ("I'm determined to marry X or Y"), or it can be defined by the situation, as in many thrillers: the Main Character becomes the victim of a mysterious threat and must fight to recover his/her freedom.

EXERCISE

The Main Character and its aim in my business story

Who is the main character in my business story (for example, me as an individual, the founding team, etc.)?

_____

What is the Main Character's central aim?

_____

In business stories, the aims can differ widely, from the goal of wanting to earn a lot of money (obvious, but not very interesting as the basis of a story), to qualitative targets such as "I want to ensure that people can have clean drinking water," or "I want to create jobs for people in our village."

The Main Character and his/her aim – the backbone of any story

Supporters, Antagonists, Benefactors and Beneficiaries

In addition to the Main Character, stories include further roles, which can be filled or not, and can help to enrich a company's story and make it more interesting:

Supporters are persons who help the Main Character to achieve the desired aim. A supporter can be a team, a business partner, an NGO or a government program – or an adviser or consultant who assists the entrepreneur in setting up the company.

The **Antagonist** is the opposite of the Supporter. He/she makes life difficult for the Main Character by seeking to block the achievement of the aim, possibly because his/her own activities are directed at the same goal. In a love story, the Antagonist is the love rival. In a business story, the Antagonist can be a competitor, who may even resort to unfair means, or a social group that opposes the entrepreneur's business model. The role of the Antagonist can also be filled, not by a person, but by adverse circumstances such as an economic crisis. Or, as in a story told by a participant at the Storytelling Workshop in Kampala, a natural disaster. The entrepreneur had just set up a fish farm and was raising fish in ponds near Lake Victoria. A storm caused the lake to burst its banks and flood the ponds – when the floodwater retreated, all the fish were gone. The entrepreneur had to start again from scratch. A sad story, in which the flood is the Antagonist.

The **Benefactor** is a person who helps the Main Character by providing the means for him/her to achieve the desired aim – this can be, for example, an investor, or an inventor who licenses the entrepreneur to manufacture a product.

Finally, the **Beneficiaries** are those who benefit from the achievement of the Main Character's aim. In the first place, this is the entrepreneur himself/herself, who ends up with a successful company. However, the customers too are Beneficiaries, since they now have, for example, clean drinking water or an app that makes life easier for them. The entrepreneur's family, or the people of the village where jobs have been created, can also be Beneficiaries.

EXERCISE

Think about which persons play which role in your business story and fill in the blanks on the next page.

Supporter

Benefactor

Main Character

Aim / Target

Antagonist

Beneficiaries
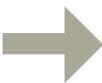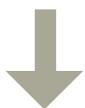
The Basic Structure of Stories

Once the roles and the backbone of the story (Main Character → Aim) have been defined, the story can be set in motion, by focusing on the plot. The basic elements of a story are very simple and are always the same:
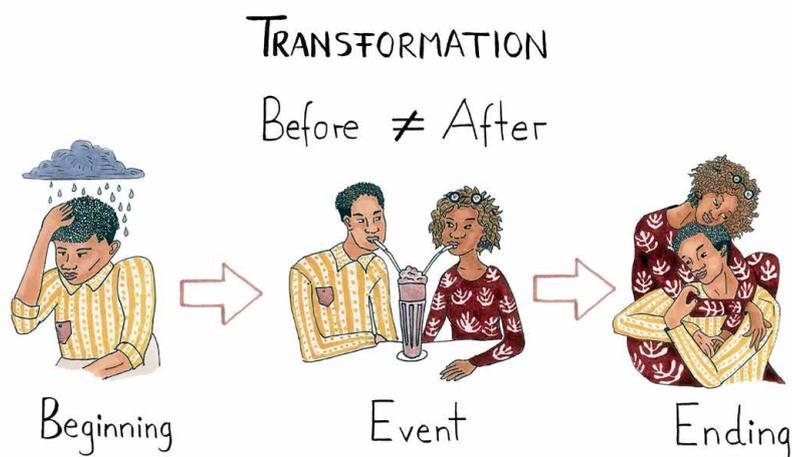


The basic structure of a story

A story begins at a certain point in time and ends at another point in time. Stories always have a temporal structure, a feature that distinguishes them from other forms of communication, such as a description or a datasheet. A product description has a logical structure, listing the product's features and applications, whereas a story, with a temporal structure, presents a sequence of events: first, one thing happens, and then another.

However, this is not enough to make the story work, as the following example shows:

> **Example**:
> *John is sitting around at home, bored. Then he goes into town and walks around for a while. Then he goes back home and sits around some more.*

Here we have a beginning and an end, but any listener would ask: Why are you telling me this? There's nothing happening! To make John's afternoon into a proper story, something has to happen: an event has to occur that triggers a change.

> **Example:**
> *John is sitting around at home, bored. Then he goes into town and walks around for a while. Suddenly he sees Mary, a childhood sweetheart, and instantly falls in love again. He arranges a date with Mary. Back home everything has changed: John is deliriously happy, life is wonderful, and his boredom has evaporated.*

The pivotal event in this story is that John meets Mary and falls in love with her. This changes everything: at the start of the story he is bored, and at the end he is happy. All stories have as their subject a change that triggers an event or sequence of events.

If we want to tell a business story, we have to decide, first, when the story is to begin. Is the starting point to be the setting-up of the company, or should the story begin when the entrepreneur first had the idea for his/her business model? Or should it begin even earlier, perhaps in a previous job, when the entrepreneur was dissatisfied and realized that he/she wanted to do something different? The decision is up to you! Ultimately, the best starting point depends on the context in which you want to tell the story.

Similar decisions have to be taken in respect of the events. Obviously, a business story can contain many events, but which of them are really relevant? The main question here is: which are the events that clearly illustrate the transformation between the beginning (e.g. "I was the penniless founder of the company") and the end (e.g. "I am now a successful entrepreneur").

Conflicts Make Stories Interesting

The stories that are most suspenseful, and interesting for the listener, are those in which events are combined with conflicts, challenges, problems, and the finding of solutions.

> **Example:**
> *John meets Mary in town and falls in love with her. He says to her: Mary, I'm so in love with you! Let's get married! Mary wastes no time pondering, and says: Oh yet, let's. And then they get married.*

Here there is an event and a transformation – but the story is boring. It becomes more interesting if Mary hesitates at first, because she isn't sure whether she's really attracted to John, who then has to do all kinds of things to win her over. John, in this case, has a problem that he must solve – and now the story becomes exciting: we, the listeners are on tenterhooks, waiting to find out whether John succeeds in winning Mary's affection.

In a business story, conflicts and challenges can arise at very different levels. There are problems in developing a product, the prototype is not yet working properly, and the company has to put a great deal of energy into improving the product. Or an economic crisis breaks out, and the entrepreneur has to think again. Or a natural disaster occurs, such as the flood in the story of the fish farm, which wrecks everything. And so on and so forth.... Conflicts and challenges not only make the story more interesting and plausible, they also highlight the achievement of the entrepreneur or the company, inviting us to admire their skill in mastering problems and leading the company to success.

Pure success stories are boring and unconvincing!

By contrast, pure success stories with no conflicts or challenges are implausible, as well as boring.

EXERCISE

Develop a structure for your own business story:

1. Where does the story begin and end?

2. What is changed or transformed?

3. What are the main events that trigger the change?

4. What are the conflicts that make the story interesting?

The Storyline Graph

How to visually prototype your social enterprise story

As we all know, telling a story is first and foremost a social activity. Every storyteller needs an audience to listen to their story, and the better the story, the more the audience will immerse itself in the story and remember key elements of it – elements that you can prioritize through the way you structure the story and how you tell it. So how do I as a social entrepreneur get my audience to listen and immerse itself in my stories? The answer is simple: You have to tell good stories! The better your story, the more likely people will remember it and subsequently tell it to others, thereby extending your outreach beyond the primary audience.

However, making a story known to a large audience is the second step in the process. Let's pause for a moment to consider what precedes the actual storytelling process. The answer lies in the conception of the story. Good stories do not happen by accident; they are made and shaped as good stories by their author. So the question is, how do I make my story a good story?

As you have doubtless already understood, the backbone of every story is transformative change. The story describes change within the enterprise, but transformation does not only happen inside the story: ideally, perspectives also shift, or insights are generated in the mind of the reader or listener. Remembering this, let's get our hands dirty and start working on your social enterprise story, in order to make it a good story.

Agile development of your social enterprise story

In the past, people working on their own story often spent hours thinking about different aspects of it, and then got lost in writing and rewriting chapters and polishing the text word by word, only to realize at the end that they had chosen a completely wrong starting point, or tailored the story to the wrong target audience, or omitted essential dramaturgic elements. We therefore want to suggest a different development approach that can help to save you from this tedious experience – an agile development approach to drafting your social enterprise story through visual prototyping.

Visually prototyping your story

The key ingredients for your story are simple: a starting point, an end point, events along the way, and tension created through oscillating between positive and negative developments. To begin, have a look at the Storyline Graph sheet, which you can find on the next page or below on the right, and look at the structure. You will see that the graph consists of two axes. The horizontal axis from left to right indicates the timespan that your story will cover. The vertical axis from the bottom to the top visualizes how your story at a specific time is about success (if at the top) or about challenges and risks (if at the bottom).

Whichever starting point you choose for now, don't spend too much time thinking about it. You can easily copy the structure of the Storyline Graph onto a blank sheet of paper and redo multiple drafts. You can, and no doubt will, create a number of graphs before arriving at a storyline that is the best structure for your social enterprise story. You can also use several sheets to draft different types of stories about your enterprise, depending on the target audience you have in mind, but we will come back to that later.

The adjacent graph shows a typical storyline.
Here, the story begins at a neutral starting point and moves in a positive direction, with two major events that take the enterprise forward. This is followed by severe challenges that are then mastered, by gradual steps. The story ends at a point where the outlook for the enterprise is very positive.

Example Storyline
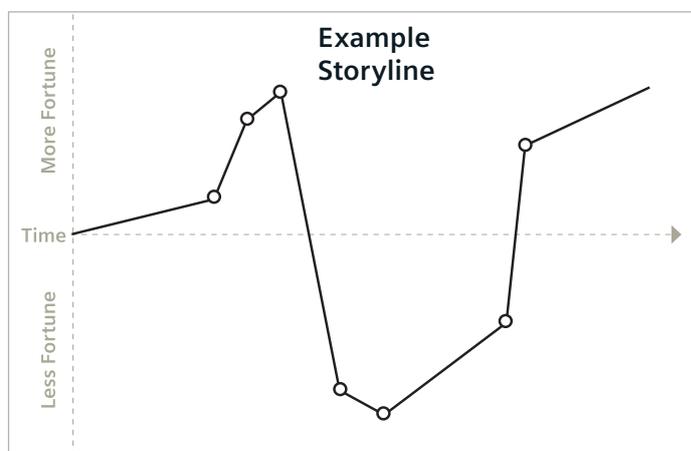
EXERCISE

Start by taking twenty minutes to draw your Storyline Graph.

1. Use the Storyline Graph template on the next page, or take a blank sheet of paper, and draw a horizontal axis that represents time and a vertical axis that represents the type of developments in your story. As you are visually prototyping your story, don't spend too much time pondering over this.

2. Think for a few seconds about where you want your story to begin, and then get straight into drawing. You can go directly to the first development after your starting point. Was it positive or negative for your enterprise? Move it higher up if it was positive or lower down if it was negative. You can either let your story end in the present or continue with a dotted line that visualizes how you expect your enterprise to develop in the near future.

3. Finish off by taking five minutes to analyze your first Storyline Graph. What do you think about your drawing? Is there anything you missed out? Is your graph curvy, moving at least once or twice between positive and negative developments? If the line is too flat, the story will lack suspense.

Less Fortune   Time   More Fortune

My Storyline Graph
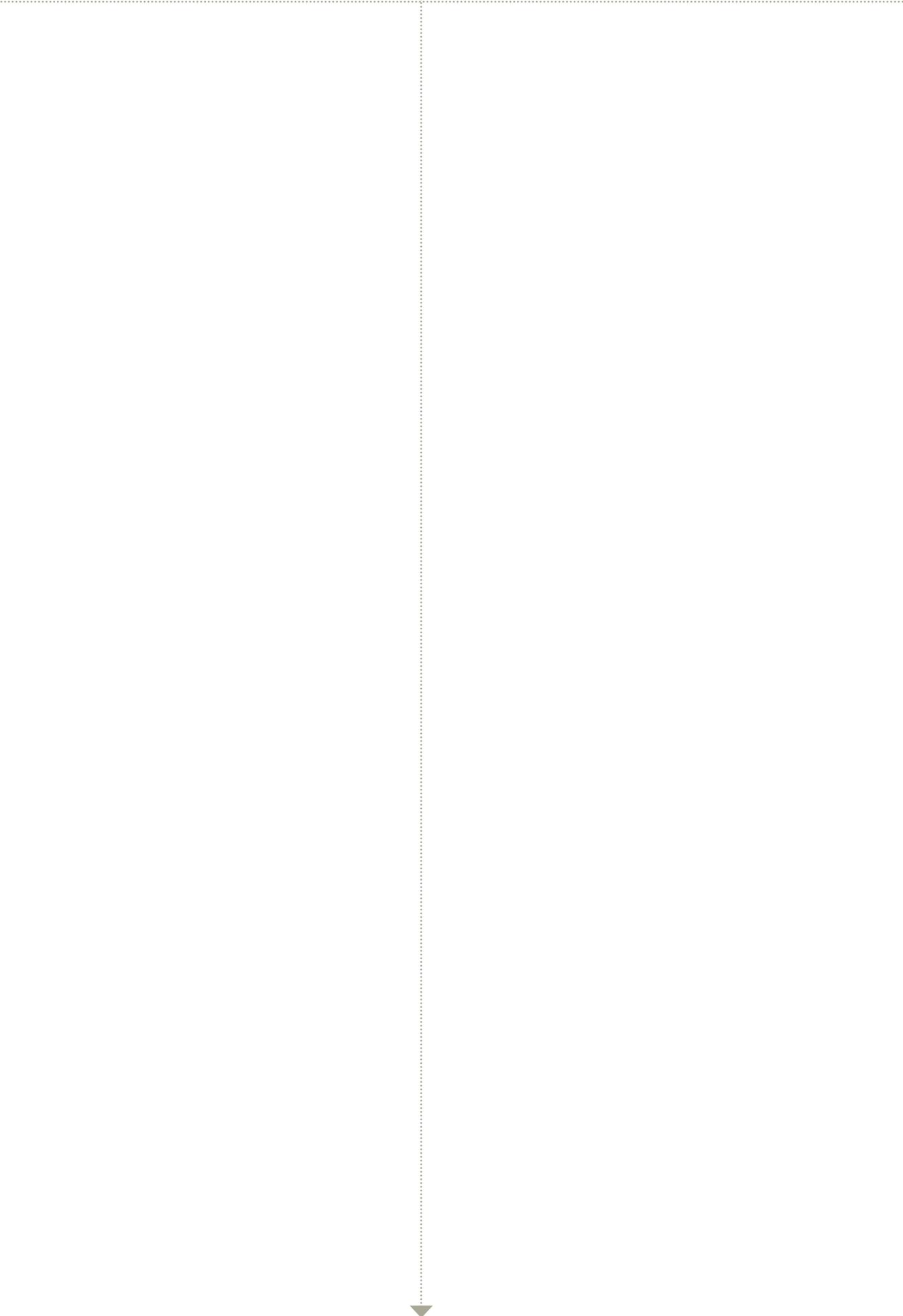
Key Turning Points

Enhancing and refining your social enterprise story

When entrepreneurs tell their stories, they often overemphasize success. They point to all their great achievements in founding their business, overloading the story with details of why they were so successful with a new product of service, and biasing the overall enterprise story towards the same narrative pattern: Success, Success, Success!

A good story, however, is a story in which success is only achieved after failed attempts, by facing unforeseen challenges. A good story is a story people can connect with: a story closer to real life than the potted accounts of company history in glossy promotion leaflets. A good social enterprise story is real and authentic. You are telling your story because you want to convince others that you believe in your business model, your goals, and the team you have put together to realize them.

Avoiding the social impact bias in your story

A common mistake in social enterprise stories is a narrow focus on social impact. This is understandable, of course, as the desire to make a difference in this respect is the main driver for social entrepreneurs. However, overemphasizing social impact leaves the audience with a key question: This is a great story, they have made a big impact, but how do they actually run this thing as a business? Many listeners will feel that the issue of organizational sustainability, essential to every entrepreneurial activity, has been evaded. They are likely to question whether the impact will last, as the story seems to lack a solid basis: it is a story of grand aspirations, with major potential benefits, but showing little sense of sustainability or scale.

How can we avoid telling a story that is biased towards success or focused purely on social impact? To answer this, we have to take a closer look at the visual prototype that you developed for your story in the previous chapter: the Storyline Graph.

Categorizing key turning points in your story

During periods of success, growth and diversification, as in times of realignment, shifting business priorities or severe financial constraints, an entrepreneur's story is driven by certain events – small story elements in themselves – that can be categorized on the basis of how they affect your overall enterprise story. This categorization activity is the next step in developing the Storyline.

A few categories of this kind, as suggested below, can help you analyze how you intuitively structured your story during the visual prototyping with the Storyline Graph. Refer to your graph and look at the points where your fortunes changed. Then categorize each point by adding a symbol next to it (you may prefer to create your own symbols):

Finance

Financial turning points are common in many business stories, regardless of whether they concern a social enterprise or a conventional company. Overcoming financial problems, obtaining a first loan or receiving a significant capital injection can spice up your story significantly. A financial turning point can be a dramatic moment; for example, in cases of averting bankruptcy.

> **Example:**
> *The subject of the story is Parvathi Inc., a small solar cooker distribution company in India, supplying its products to over a hundred villages in rural Gujarat. The company ran into serious financial problems, as the payback rate for the cookers was not increasing as anticipated. This almost drove Parvathi Inc. to the wall, but in the nick of time, an investor helped the company by pointing out a fundamental flaw in its financial model. The mistake was rectified, and the same investor provided a large loan. The financial crisis turned into a positive development for the enterprise, helping it grow.*

The audience is bound to engage with this story when you describe your feelings after going through such a development.

Education

An educational turning point can be a decisive learning experience during your journey, but it can also be an event such as obtaining a university degree, leading you to pursue a different career path that took you to where you are now in setting up a social enterprise. Including such elements in your narrative will help make the story more personal, as most people who have been in a similar position will be able to connect with your experience. An educational turning point can also be linked to employment or to the realization that you lacked the necessary knowledge to refine your product or service. It could also arise from the recruitment of a new team member or a decision to seek outside expert advice, helping you to gain further significant insights that propelled your business further. Honestly highlighting the knowledge gaps that you were able to resolve helps to build trust in you as a thoughtful and resilient entrepreneur who doesn't give up easily.

Employment

The initial recruitment of staff, when starting up the company, is an unforgettable milestone for every entrepreneur. Losing a key expert, on the other hand, can be an equally decisive turning point for an enterprise. As previously mentioned, a story can be used for internal organizational development and in the onboarding process for new staff. In the latter case, the inclusion of such milestones in the business story can help new team members to understand how the enterprise is structured, what their role is, and how they can exercise responsibility in helping the enterprise to grow. Especially in social enterprises, where employers often have to compensate lower salaries with a positive team culture and dedication to a greater good, the employment component in the enterprise story can be a powerful driver.

Health

The inclusion of this personal element in your enterprise story is a matter of choice, depending on how you want to shape the story. As the person listening to your story is also human, it generally does no harm to include events related to health issues if they have influenced how your enterprise has evolved. It could be that health issues obliged you to rely for a time on someone else in your enterprise, who brought in new ideas and put the business on a path that turned out to be better than what you initially had in mind. In some cases, health issues are the general starting point for a social enterprise.

Example:

John Tsungwire lives in Western Uganda. John suffered from a personal tragedy when his wife was denied the medical care she needed at the time of their son's birth. As a result of his own experiences with insufficient medical aid for pregnant women, he started a social enterprise that helps low-income populations in the area through a cellphone-backed community mobilizer.

John's story would also work without the personal narrative, but including it makes the story a lot more authentic.

Innovation

Entrepreneurs love to talk about innovation. Their absolute favorite subject is how they devised a new product or service that offers the perfect solution for a particular problem. A social enterprise story without mentioning innovation would miss a key opportunity for entrepreneurs to parade their ingenuity and the uniqueness of their product or service. However, focusing unduly on the innovation element can move the story beyond the tipping point at which the technical aspects of the innovation take precedence over its impact on the final beneficiaries or the question of how the innovation is linked to the specific business or financial model of the enterprise.

Example:
An ambitious startup in Sub-Saharan Africa has developed a waterless toilet that separates liquids and solids and at the same time helps to tackle various socio-economic problems. The description of the technical innovation and the background details can be interesting, in showing how the technology can be tweaked even further through the use of different materials. But the story should avoid focusing too much on this aspect. A more valuable and interesting angle would involve showing how the innovation affects the lives of the customers or the solution's final beneficiaries.

Research

Research turning points can emanate from new partnerships established with a research organization: for example, where the organization in question has helped you in refining the measurement of positive health impacts for your social enterprise beneficiaries. Presenting research as a turning point in your story should be done with caution, as such events are often narrated with far more attention to detail than is needed for the audience to understand the importance of the turning point for your overall storyline.

Technology

Besides access to finance, one of the key challenges for start-ups, especially for social enterprises, is access to know-how and the right technology. Often the business is set up quickly, relying on low-tech solutions that are appropriate at the outset, but as soon as the enterprise begins to expand, technology becomes crucial – as an obstacle to further development or a key factor for growth. Where technological aspects pose a challenge to a social enterprise, the story you tell is likely to culminate in the statement that you need access to improved technology, and thus to finance, to grow further.

Example:
Imagine a social enterprise in rural Bolivia that is contracting formerly unemployed housewives to turn banana leaves into fancy bags, using very simple machinery. The business becomes so successful that it can no longer cope with the growing demand for the bags without investing in new machinery. In a story to a potential investor, the end point could be a technological turning point that allows the investor to become part of a success story by helping the enterprise to solve the technological issues it faces.

EXERCISE

Start by taking ten minutes to refine your Storyline Graph.

1. Take a look at your Storyline Graph from the previous chapter. Follow the graph from its starting point to the end point and mark the events when your story changed according to the categories above. Did you miss a category? If so, feel free to amend your graph.

2. Continue for twenty minutes by analysing your refined Storyline Graph. Is there a good balance of topics mentioned in your story prototype? Are you perhaps putting too much emphasis on Finance at the expense of Innovation or Employment? Did you completely omit a category that could perhaps enrich your storyline?

Financing

Education

Employment

Health

Innovation

Research

Technology
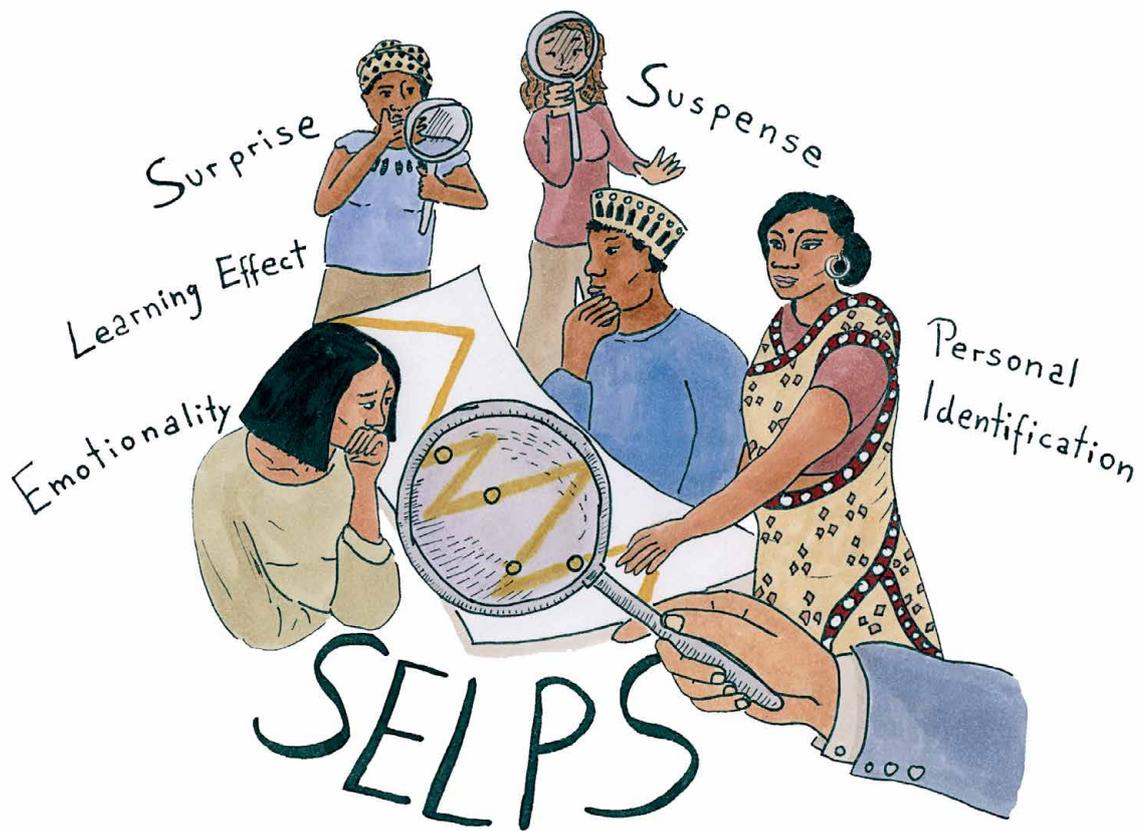
The SELPS Help System of Storytelling

Making your social enterprise story more convincing

Now that you have visually prototyped your social enterprise story, it's time to look again at what you have done so far and assess the story as a whole, instead of considering the individual elements. After all, what you want to share with your audience is not a sequence of events described one by one, but a coherent and consistent narrative. At this stage you should do a few "test-runs" of your story by telling it to your peers or giving it to a small focus group to see whether they find it convincing and exciting. Before doing this, however, there is a further way to assess the impact potential of your social enterprise story on your own and if necessary refine it or make it more coherent. Using the "SELPS Help" system of assessment, you can check whether your story contains enough

S urprise Factors, arouse sufficient
E motionality with the story listener, achieves a
L earning Effect in the audience, allows for
P ersonal Identification with the individuals, and includes elements of
S uspense to maintain the audience's attention to the end.

Now let's see how you can apply the "SELPS Help" system yourself:

Surprise Factor: Is there a "wow" effect?

The listener or reader tends to lose interest if the storyline becomes flat: i.e. when one event simply follows another or the course of the story is too predictable. At this point, the audience turns its attention to what might happen next, instead of remaining immersed in the story and listening to it without straying to other thoughts. Periods of flatness are an inevitable part of every story, but they need to be short and scarce, serving only to build momentum for a major element of surprise in the story, which is enhanced by the contrast between the unexpected event and the flatness preceding it. There are various ways of including a surprise factor – and influencing the audience's perception of your story – through events that can be positive or negative.

Emotionality: How does it feel?

When telling a social enterprise story, you have to touch the emotions of your target audience. Emotions are already important in conventional business stories, and are even more so in the case of social enterprises. A degree of subtlety is needed here. It is easy to inspire outrage in your audience by vividly depicting the wretched situation of your target group – for example, low-income households deprived of access to safe drinking water, purely because the political will to resolve the problem is lacking. But outrage, frustration or despair should be invoked with caution when telling your story. After all, you want to tell a story of entrepreneurship, in which someone worked to achieve a solution despite all odds, instead of merely lamenting and accepting an untenable situation.

Think about the level of emotionality you want to include in your story, and adjust it to the nature and size of your target audience. In front of a larger group, a more emotional style of storytelling can help to create a community of feeling among the audience, giving individuals an opportunity to connect with one another afterwards by engaging in conversation about your enterprise story. In smaller groups, this may not be necessary.

Learning Effect: Insights for replication

The stories you heard as a child generally included a key message: the "moral" found in fairy tales. A social enterprise story is not, or should not be, a tale told for the purpose of conveying a single teaching that the listener should adopt. Nevertheless, stories are memorized far better when they have a learning effect. In fact, a story with an emotional appeal can have the same learning effect as if the listener were an actor in the story. Thus, a story well told can be a true learning experience. You, as the storyteller, will want to achieve this effect, since you have an interest in ensuring that people absorb and remember your story, and ultimately act on it, by becoming, for example, your customer, an investor or a new business partner.

Personal Identification: Is he or she like me?

Telling a story to someone is not a one-sided way of communicating. What you are really achieving by telling the story is to trigger a reaction in the other person, who relives your experience as if it were their own. Remember the discussion of mirror neurons earlier in this workbook: they allow a story listener to experience the events being recounted as if directly re-living them. However, a key element has to be in place to achieve this effect: your story must overlap with the reality of the listeners' daily life, so that they can identify personally with your experience. In the story of a social enterprise helping women in rural Tanzania to find alternatives to collecting firewood, it might be difficult to identify with the reality of these women's lives, unless your story gives enough detail of the women's situation, if the audience for the story is a group of impact investors at a conference in London.

Suspense: Surprise and narrative connection

Regarding the suspense element as part of the SELPS Help system, one might think that suspense involves building the story around one big surprise at the end, which is suddenly revealed like a rabbit pulled out of a magician's hat. However, there is a world of difference between including surprise elements in a story and creating a story that is suspenseful as a whole. Surprises can help in building suspense, by playing with the reader's expectations, but real suspense can only be achieved by building upon events iteratively throughout the story and connecting them with a narrative thread.

EXERCISE

Look again at your Storyline Graph as a whole.

1. **S urprise:** Are there elements in your story where positive developments suddenly take a negative turn, or vice versa?

2. **E motionality:** Are there situations or episodes in your story where you expect the audience to be especially moved by the events? Is there perhaps a little side-story of you as an entrepreneur that you could add in at a specific moment in the storyline to make that episode even more emotional?

3. **L earning Effect:** Where did you learn from failure, or from developments such as the unveiling of new research that made you choose a different path for your enterprise or your product?

4. **P ersonal Identification:** Who is the real target audience for your story and what is the reality of their lives? Do you know enough about this, or do you need to do some research? Did you include the right amount of personal elements in your story, so that your readers can identify with you?

5. **S uspense:** Is there a common thread that connects the individual elements of your story? You can also introduce a further element of suspense by restricting the information you provide at the beginning and then disclosing the remaining information to the reader piece by piece, arousing more interest in how the story will eventually end.

The Stakeholder Landscape

Tailoring your story to different target groups

Are you eager to tell your story, now that you've developed the story graph and analyzed the elements of your narrative? Your story might vary according to your audience – you might want to leave some things out or highlight others.

Your customers may not be interested in the details of your personal motivation: they simply want to buy a product that is affordable and does its job. A sponsor, on the other hand, might want to hear more about your motivation to see whether you are really committed to impact. Banks tend to find any mention of failure disturbing, but if you focus on your problem solution skills, the response to your story will be quite different. Tell the bank how you brought the enterprise back on track after a natural disaster such as the flooding of your fish farm.

With any audience, however, it is vital that your story is authentic: the difference lies in detail and focus.

Let's take a look at your stakeholders to adapt your story accordingly. Instead of mapping the stakeholders with a typical graph, this aspect can be visualized in the form of a landscape showing relevant information about your business ecosystem.

1. **Consider your stakeholders**
   If you haven't done so before, take a moment to think about your stakeholders. Who is relevant for your organization? Who could support or hinder your activities? Your stakeholders are more than the customers or the bank. Think of local authorities, friends and family, and all the other people and organizations in your environment.

2. **Draw your map**
   Now think of your enterprise again – in terms of geographic images. Is your enterprise a harbor, a village or a river? This is the first element of your landscape map. Continue drawing elements in your map by adding your stakeholders. Through the image of the landscape, further stakeholders may occur to you – individuals or organizations you have never thought of before. Let your imagination run free!

3. **An alternative: your stakeholder in a film poster**
   If a map fails to inspire you, maybe a film poster will set your creativity free. Who is the villain in your film, and who is the young hero or heroine with a mission to save the world? Is the hero figure alone? Are you the producer or the director? What is the background scene in the poster – a city slum or a beautiful landscape?

4. **Look at your map and analyze your stakeholders**
   What does your map look like? Are there investors perched at the top of steep mountains or crocodiles lurking in your river of independence? The images you have chosen tell you a lot about your stakeholders. Are your investors sitting on the mountain top because you lack contacts, or is the financial situation in your country so out of control that donors are reluctant to contribute? Consider your reasons for choosing the various symbols. In the case of SINA, the investors up on the mountain could also indicate that they are far removed from the reality of SINA's target group: marginalized youth. For the latter, the story could explain their living conditions and point out the difference the program makes.
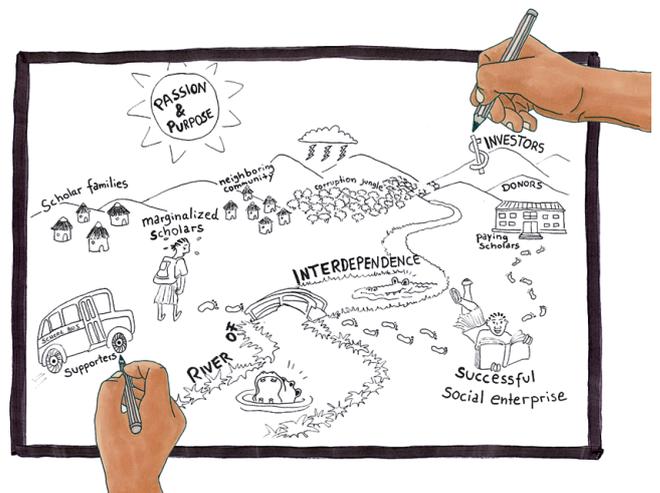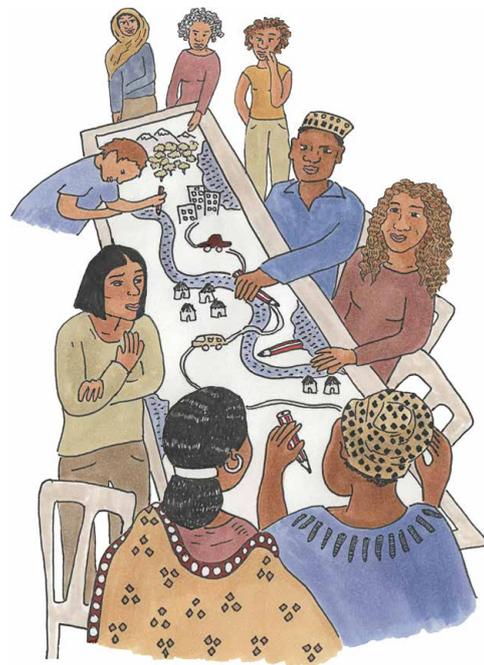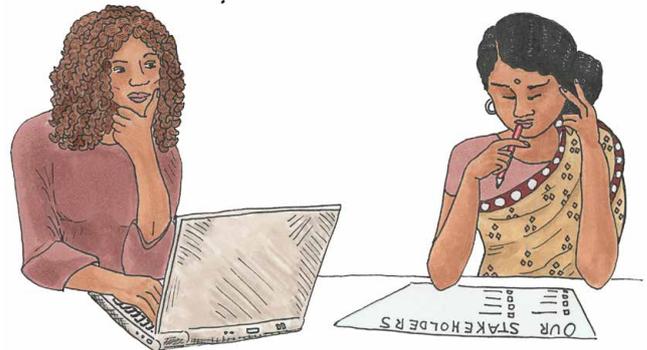
5. Consider the appropriate story for each stakeholder

Do you think you have gained a deeper understanding of your stakeholders? Then develop your story for each one of them. Write down the stories and present them to a colleague: time spent doing this is time well invested. The clearer you are yourself about your story and the persons you want to address, the more convincing the result will be. The story itself remains the same, but the way you tell it differs, according to the specific needs and interests of your stakeholder audience.

Consider the appropriate story for each Stakeholder

How did your investor pitch change after drawing your story?

EXERCISE

Additional exercise:

If you have realized that you don't know your stakeholders well enough, take the time to do some homework.

If the stakeholders in question are your customers, get to know them better, conduct narrative interviews (see the relevant chapter of this workbook). If investors or donors are concerned, do some research and talk to them. Find out what matters to them. The same applies to your ecosystem as a whole. You need to know all the players in the field.

6. Assess the differences

Now that you have your range of stories, think about the similarities and differences among them. It may also be interesting to look at your communication before and after using the workbook. How did your investor pitch change?

The stakeholder landscape map reveals your relationship with your stakeholders and the role they play. This will give you a better understanding of how to address them when telling your story. It can help to explain what kind of information is relevant for your stakeholders and how to make it digestible.

THE RETURN
THE CALL TO ADVENTURE
CROSSING THE FIRST THRESHOLD
THE TREASURE
THE ROAD OF TRIALS
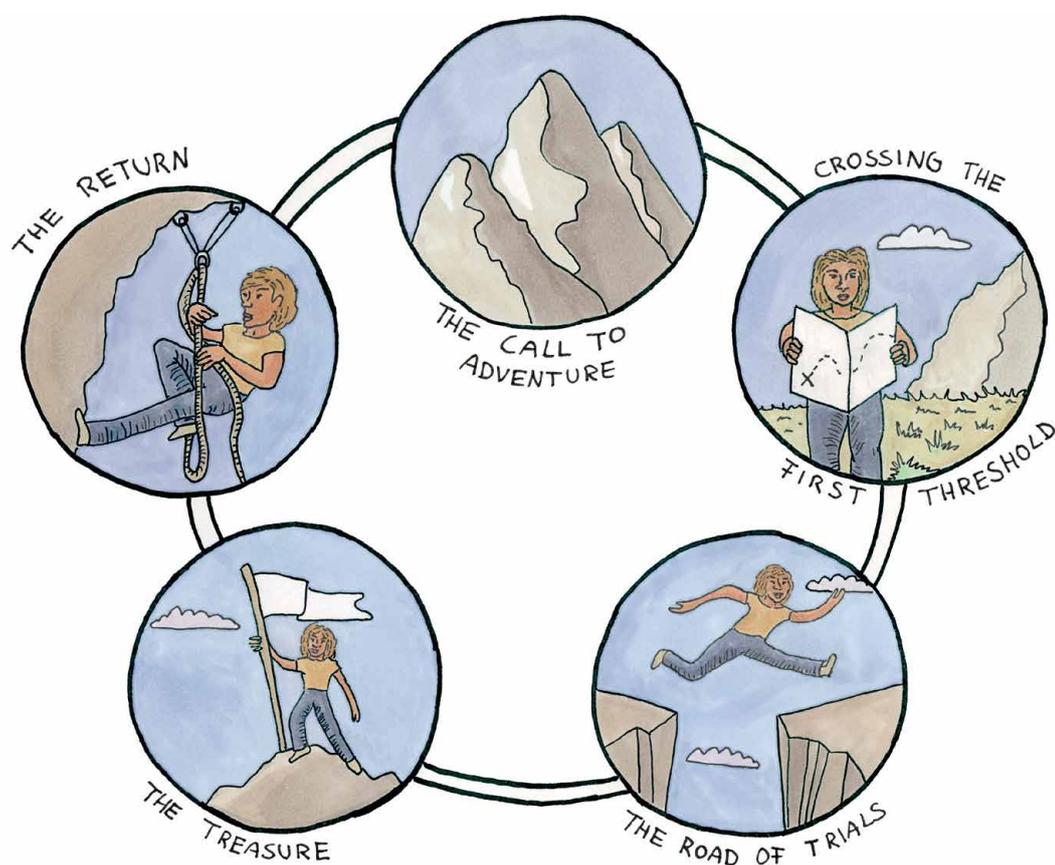
Plotting Your Stories

Using different plots to enrich your storyworld

You are now familiar with the basic elements of a good story, and you have used the Storyline Graph to develop your business story, which you can now tell. In some cases, however – e.g. in marketing and advertising or when dealing with an investor – it can make sense to confine yourself to a particular episode, instead of telling the whole story. A marketing story, for example, could focus on how a particular product was developed or how a customer solved a specific problem with your product. Topics like this can be addressed in a range of different ways, using the many plots on which stories can be based. Let's look at some plot structures that are particularly suited to business stories.

The Hero's Journey

One of the world's oldest plot structures is the Hero's Journey, which forms the basis of innumerable myths and legends in all cultures. In the 1940s, the American comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell looked at stories from all over the world and found that many of them have a common structure, which he called the Hero's Journey. This plot has become famous through George Lucas, who took it as the structure for his epic film series *Star Wars*. It also provides an excellent basis for stories about entrepreneurs.

Stages in the Hero's Journey	Steve Jobs's Hero's Journey	Entrepreneur's Hero's Journey
The Call to Adventure	Steve Jobs has the idea of developing an affordable personal computer.	Something happens in the entrepreneur's life that gives him an idea for setting up a business.
Crossing the First Threshold	He looks for a partner who knows something about technology, and meets Steve Wozniak, with whom he co-founds Apple.	The entrepreneur draws up a business plan and researches the potential for his idea.
The Road of Trials	Inevitably, difficulties arise. After initial successes (Apple Macintosh), a dispute occurs, and Steve Jobs is fired from his own company. Apple goes rapidly downhill.	The entrepreneur has to solve many problems in setting up the company: problems of finance, product development, staffing, competition, etc.
The Treasure	However, Steve Jobs returns to the company, which achieves unparalleled success with a series of new products: the iMac, iPod, iPhone, and iPad.	The company is established and the product is on the market.
The Return	Apple's success persists, even after Steve Jobs's death. He has clearly succeeded in creating an enterprise that is sustainable (at least until now)	The entrepreneur must ensure that his success is sustainable in the long term.

The final phase (The Return) is especially important in business stories. Setting up an enterprise is not enough: the founder has to ensure that the initial success will continue.

In a business context, the plot of the Hero's Journey, with its five stages, can be used in various ways, as the basis for an entrepreneur story, or in planning a project or developing a strategy. And, of course, it offers an excellent template for structuring a proposal and the corresponding presentation.

The Clothesline Story

The "Clothesline" structure is useful for telling a number of small stories, instead of a single big story. For example, when introducing a new product, you could tell several stories from different points of view – a story about the product developer, a story from the perspective of a customer, or the marketing department, or the entrepreneur, etc. The basic principle is simple:

The Clothesline Story

The clothesline, in our example, tells the basic story of the new product. Hung on the clothesline, as it were, are the various smaller stories from different perspectives.

The basic story would go something like this:

- Basic story part 1: Description of the product
- Single story 1: How the product was developed
- Basic story part 2: The features of the product
- Single story 2: How the marketing department made the product known
- Basic story part 3: The product's fields of application
- Single story 3: How the product made life easier for a specific customer
- Basic story part 4: Interview with the entrepreneur
  about the product's future potential
- Single story 4: How the developer is working on the next version
 of the product
- etc.

As well as providing a structure for product stories, the clothesline story can of course also be used in presenting the enterprise as a whole. For example, the company website could feature a number of smaller stories about customers, staff members, partners, etc.

The Before and After Story

The Before and After story structure offers a means of finding stories where no storyline is immediately apparent. For example, a marketing manager might want to tell a story about a new product, but the development of the product doesn't provide enough material. Seemingly, all you can do is publish a news item saying that a new product is now available that can be used for this or that purpose. But this doesn't amount to a story.

However, a closer look at the case shows that anything new involves a transformation, a change. If a new product is to make sense, it must fulfill needs that were previously unsatisfied – otherwise, the product is superfluous. So, with any new product, we can tell the story of how things were before the product appeared on the market and what has changed, now that the product is available. And that gives us the basic structure of a story, the Before and After story:
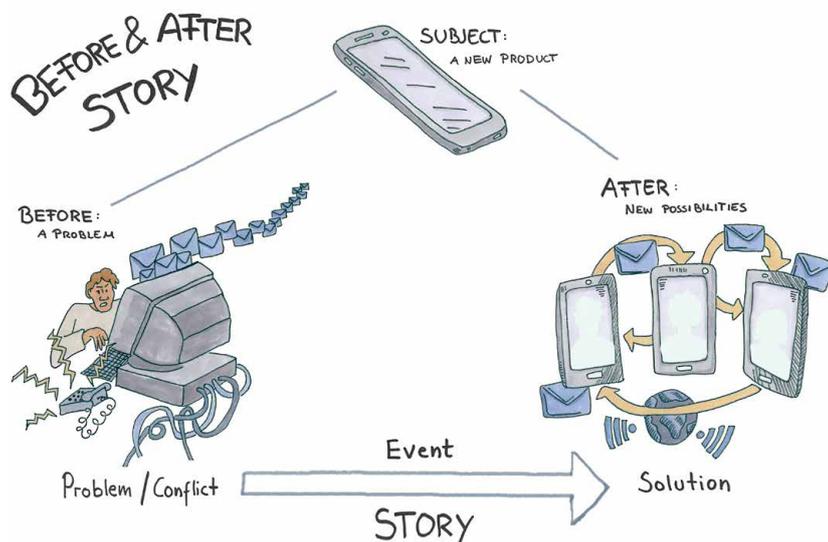
The Before and After Story

The invention of the smartphone could serve as an example of a Before and After story, with an instantly recognizable structure:

Before: People had no mobile access to the internet and had to wait until they got back to their office or home computer. This led to delays in answering emails and searching for information.

Event: The smartphone is invented.

After: Now, anyone with a smartphone can access the internet anywhere and thus make use of spare time while out and about to communicate and perform important tasks.

EXERCISE

Think about the contexts in which you could use the three story structures described above and note down some examples:

1. The Hero's Journey:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. The Clothesline story:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. The Before and After story:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Stories in Different Media

Using video, multimedia and comics for your stories

Oral performance is the oldest form of storytelling – probably dating back as far as the Stone Age, when people began to swap stories around the evening fire – and still has a place in the business world: in conversations about sales and acquisitions, in meetings with staff, or in the presentation of proposals. If anything, the importance of storytelling is growing, especially in the media, including video clips, websites, apps, and online social networks that companies use to convey marketing messages. In the following chapter, we provide some tips for storytelling in various media.

Video

Until very recently, the production of videos was costly and time-consuming, and therefore only considered feasible for large companies. Nowadays, however, most smartphone owners can make their own videos, of a technical quality superior to the results achievable ten years ago by film teams with expensive cameras. Simple video editing is also possible, using standard software that comes with most laptops. And distribution is equally simple: the finished video can be instantly uploaded to YouTube or a similar platform, with a link to the maker's website. And if the story is good, it is sure to find an audience.

CHECKLIST

Storytelling tips for video

- Before you start filming, develop a detailed outline or script. Keep on checking whether the story really works, with enough elements of conflict, suspense, etc. Use the SELPS criteria (p. 30).

- An internet video should be no longer than three or three-and-a-half minutes. Almost no one watches long videos online.

- Most users decide after only a few seconds whether to watch a video or click it away. An internet video story therefore has to build suspense within the first few seconds.

- If possible, avoid long "talking heads" sequences, i.e. interviews in which someone speaks direct to camera, which is visually boring. A better alternative is to show the interviewee briefly and then let the voice run on in the background, overlaid with attractive visual images.

- Humor is key in internet videos. Humorous films are liked and linked far more often than others.

Multimedia storytelling

Multimedia presentation offers an excellent means of telling enterprise stories with a degree of complexity from different perspectives. The story is told on a website with a variety of media, starting with text, followed by a video sequence with information about a particular situation, and then returning to text, interspersed with audio files or info graphics. An example of this kind of multimedia reporting is the BBC program Changing the Rules:
http://www.bbc.com/news/business-36471313

The program provides an excellent illustration of the interweaving of different media. A further example can be found in a multimedia report on refugees in Somalia, with short stories about individuals (using the Clothesline Story structure):
https://www.irinnews.org/feature/2018/02/21/somalia-s-climate-change-refugees

Similar tools can be used to tell your enterprise story.

CHECKLIST

Tips for multimedia storytelling:

- First, design the complete storyline (for example, using the Storyline Graph).

- Consider which media are best suited to each part of the story: e.g. text for the story of how the enterprise was founded (dealing with events located in the past), video for the manufacture of the product, audio files for customer stories, and info graphics to illustrate the development of the company's turnover.

- Finally, design the structure for the multimedia presentation, thinking about how text is combined with other media and where best to insert video sequences or info graphics. Ideally, the various media are interlinked. For example, where the text reads, "And then we put our idea into production," the video can begin showing the manufacture of the product.

Business stories as comics

Comics are a further attractive medium for telling business stories. They are particularly appealing to customers and can convey the advantages of a product or communicate a company image in a form that is easy to read and grasp. Of course, you need a good illustrator.

This is an example of a comic devised by Echo Mobile in Nairobi, Kenya:
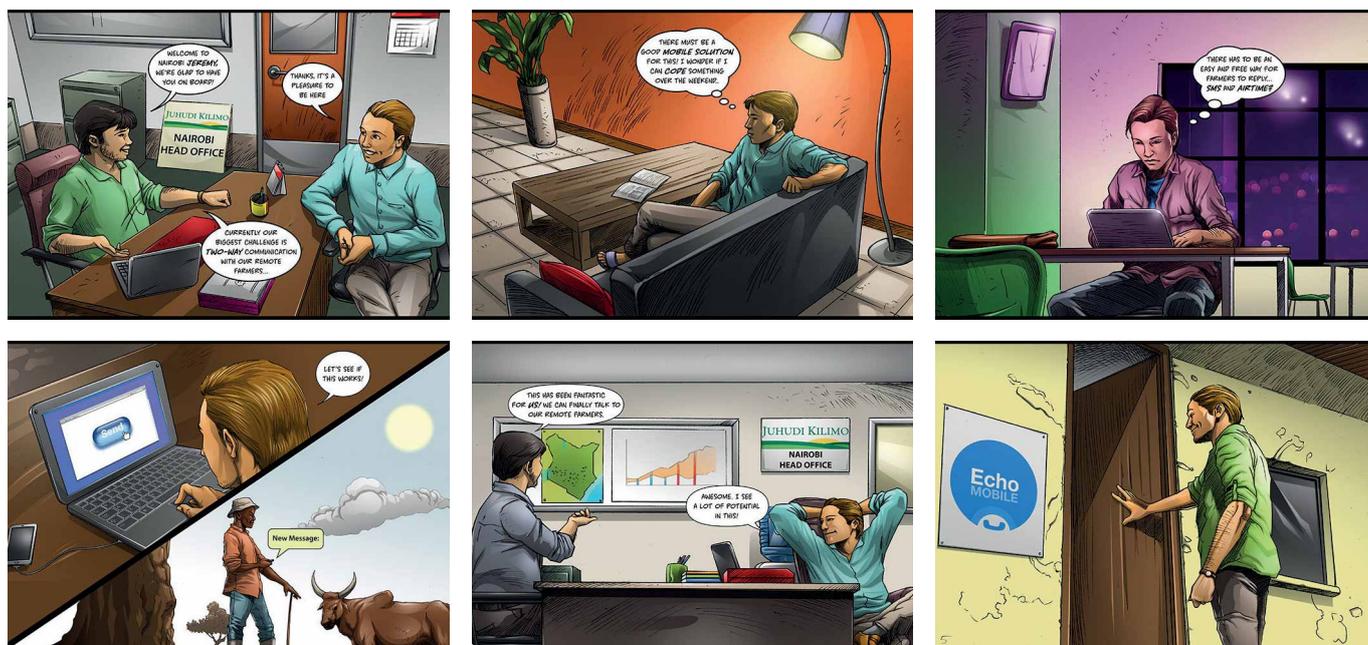
CHECKLIST

Tips for business stories as comics

- Choose a story that is as simple as possible and can be told in a maximum of four to six panels.

- Create an outline, specifying the visual content of each panel and the text in the speech bubbles.

- Give the outline to the illustrator and let him/her get on with the job. Don't look for slavish compliance with your own ideas – because they think in visual terms, illustrators often have new and better suggestions for conveying the intended message. Your contribution should be limited to checking whether the story works.

AUTHENTIC
Beneficiary Story

FICTIONAL
Beneficiary Story

The Main Character and the Side-Story

How to use the Storyline Graph to enhance your story with a beneficiary side-story

When working with the Storyline Graph, people tend to use it principally for their own story as a social entrepreneur or the story of how the business was founded and built up over time. However, you can also use the Storyline Graph to outline the story of a beneficiary of your enterprise, e.g. an end-user of the product or service you are offering. This beneficiary story can become a side-story that validates your core enterprise story and adds to its impact.

If you decide to use the Storyline Graph for this purpose, you have two main options: the graph can serve to shape an authentic beneficiary story or to draft a fictional beneficiary story. Both approaches have advantages and drawbacks.

Making the story more tangible through an authentic beneficiary story

An authentic beneficiary story must be an "earned" story – i.e. a story you have heard either directly from a beneficiary of your enterprise or through an intermediary, such as a distributor of your products who has been in contact with a beneficiary. Having chosen an earned story that you consider suitable, you can map it out in a Storyline Graph and analyze it. You may, if you wish, refine or enhance it to align it with your core enterprise story, making sure that it fits the overall narrative and is introduced at the right moment. However, you should bear in mind that the key value of this earned story is the authenticity of a real user experience, which can add credibility and legitimacy to your core story. This means sticking as far as possible to the beneficiary's original narrative, instead of inventing new story elements. Anyone meeting the main character of the side-story and challenging its accuracy should come away convinced that the story is real and not fabricated.

Fictional beneficiary stories and their drawbacks

You also have the option of integrating a fictional beneficiary story into your social enterprise story. This gives you full freedom in using the Storyline Graph to map out the structure of your side-story from scratch. A fictional beneficiary story must start with an introduction explicitly clarifying that the story is not taken from real life: it has the ring of truth, and could have happened in the way described, but it is nevertheless invented, to underline the impact of your products or services on a typical group of customers of your enterprise.

Example:
A social enterprise selling low-tech and cheap-to-manufacture eye care products to low-income communities on a subsidized basis plans to present its story to a group of investors. The entrepreneur wants the narrative to include a beneficiary story, showing how the quality of end-users' lives is improved by the low-cost glasses that the company produces. Unfortunately, the enterprise has not yet earned any such stories from beneficiaries. Nevertheless, it wants to emphasize the positive impact of the product for its beneficiaries.

Using the Storyline Graph, the founder of the enterprise develops a story of how a mother of two, living in a poor suburb of Rio de Janeiro, is introduced one morning by her church community to the possibility of becoming a test user of these glasses, through a program implemented by the enterprise for the local government. Arriving back home in the afternoon, she is delighted at the realization that the glasses can enable her to regain control of her finances and revive the micro-enterprise that she had to abandon because of her impaired sight. Now, she can work at night when the children are in bed, and earn extra income that helps the family to pay for better education. All of this would have been impossible without the product made available by the social enterprise.

When enhancing your own story with a fictional side-story of this kind, you have to personalize the side-story as much as possible to make it plausible. One way of doing this is to give the central character a name, which at the same time makes it possible to clarify that the person is nevertheless fictional. For example, you could say at the outset, "I'd like to introduce you to one of our beneficiaries. Let's call her Sally," before going on to explain, "Sally lives in a small suburb of Bogotá and she has been struggling for years with impaired sight, but couldn't afford...", and then add in the side-story that you drafted with the Storyline Graph.

EXERCISE

If you already have some earned stories from beneficiaries:

1. Take a few minutes and list all the stories that you have earned from beneficiaries so far.

2. Categorize them according to the impact of your enterprise on the beneficiary, and single out the stories that showcase the highest impact.

3. Now draft the stories with a Storyline Graph and assess whether and how the storyline could be tweaked for your purposes – without exceeding the limits of authenticity.

4. Finally, take your main Storyline Graph and consider where your earned stories could enhance the Emotionality, Personal Identification or Learning Effect elements of your overall enterprise story. Be careful not to compromise the Suspense component, and keep the side-story as short as possible.

If you have no earned stories from beneficiaries so far and are unlikely to acquire any soon:
In this case, a fictional beneficiary story would be your best choice.

1. Take fifteen minutes to think about an end-user and final beneficiary of the products or services that your social enterprise is offering.

2. Think about the concrete benefits of your product or service for that person.

3. Draw a storyline graph specifying the positive impact of the product or service on the fictional beneficiary.

4. Then take your own Storyline Graph and analyze where such a side-story could add Emotionality or a Learning Effect. Ideally, choose a point in the Storyline Graph where you are not seeking to build up Suspense, as adding in a side-story would undermine such efforts. Try to make the side-story as personal as possible – for example, give the main character a name – and be sure before drafting it that you have identified the key impact message that you want to convey. Also, make sure to inform the audience immediately that this is not a true story, although it draws on real experience.

Narrative Interviews

How to find out more about customers, partners and the general ecosystem of your enterprise

In addition to storytelling, the art of storylistening has a crucial importance for entrepreneurs seeking to develop their business. Storylistening means paying attention to the stories that stakeholders – staff members, customers and partners – tell about the company. These stories are a mine of essential information about the public image of the company and its products. No matter how many positive stories a company communicates – if its customers or the public are telling different stories, it has missed its goal. Narrative interviews make it possible to incorporate third-party stories in the enterprise strategy.

Example:
Alan, a social entrepreneur from South Africa, used to consider himself a fish farmer, since he develops and runs aquafarming projects in townships. When narrative interviews were conducted with his funders, staff, partners, and all the other relevant actors in his ecosystem, the stories he heard were about him empowering people. This made Alan realize that he was farming people, in the first instance, and the fish were only a means to achieve this. Since then, his communication with donors and investors has changed, and now highlights the empowerment aspect of his work.

This story shows that entrepreneurs need to know the stories disseminated by their own staff, as well as those told by their customers. Employees often have a mental image of the company that differs – positively or negatively – from the picture in the mind of their employer. Knowledge of these stories helps to identify hidden potentials and resolve problems at an early stage.

What are narrative interviews?

In contrast to "normal" interviews, a narrative interview does not ask questions of fact or inquire about the interviewee's opinions. Personal experience and actual events are what matter, and the interview's sole aim is to encourage the interviewee to talk and share the stories he has to tell.

But why let people just talk, instead of asking questions in the usual manner of opinion surveys among staff or customers? The answer is that people telling stories from their own experience provide insights into their actual behavior, whereas targeted questions produce only those responses which the interviewee thinks the other side wants to hear. For example, if you ask employees whether they are customer-orientated, they are almost bound to say yes, since the alternative – denying that they are customer-oriented – is almost unthinkable. As a rule, those being interviewed in this way believe that their answers are true. In one case, looking at a sample of over forty narrative interviews from a large company, researchers found not a single mention of the word "customer" or of the concept of customer orientation – to which the company evidently attaches little importance. In the academic world, these issues associated with the question-based interview scenario are well known: narrative interviews offer a way to overcome the problem.

The interviewer's attitude

The main difference between a narrative and a "normal" interview lies in the role of the interviewer. Instead of asking questions about facts and opinions, the interviewer's job is simply to get the interlocutor talking. This can of course involve asking questions, but of a kind that is directed to events and experiences: for example, "Where did that idea come from?" or "Was it sparked by a particular event?"

Successful narrative interviewing therefore depends less on a carefully prepared list of questions than on the interviewer's attitude. The important aspects include:

Attentiveness and respect:
The interviewer is not only an initiator but also a listener, who must respond to the interviewee's story with obvious signals of interest. This includes non-verbal cues: looking at your mobile phone or making long notes on the story will interrupt the narrative flow. The best approach is to look straight at the storyteller and indicate interest by nodding or giving brief verbal signs of approval.

Guiding discourse instead of marshalling topics:
The interviewer's main task is to supply storytelling triggers, not to ask about facts or opinions. There is generally a framework topic, such as a product and its customer appeal, but the interviewer does not ask specific questions about this (e.g. "Do you like the product?" or "What do you think about feature X of the product?"). Instead, the interviewee is invited to tell the story of his or her experiences with the product ("Tell me what happened when you held the product in your hands for the first time"). If a particular feature of the product is never mentioned in any

of the customers' stories, it is safe to conclude that this feature is unimportant to them – which in itself can be valuable information. A narrative interview can of course be supplemented with specific questions, but these should follow after the narrative section.

Narrative focusing:
In the course of the interview, the interviewee will repeatedly refer to facts, opinions, analyses, etc. The interviewer responds by asking about events and experiences that exemplify these facts or ideas, e.g. "Can you remember a particular situation where that came to light?"

Types of story triggers
Possible story triggers fall into two categories. The first comprises narrative questions of a "biographical" kind, directed to the "whole" story, as it were. For example, when conducting narrative interviews with employees of a company, we always start with the following trigger: "Tell me some of the things that have happened during your time with the company, right from day one." Ideally, with a talkative interviewee, this would be the only question needed. In practice, however, the interviewer has to intervene now and again with questions to restart the narrative. Here are some examples of biographical narrative questions:
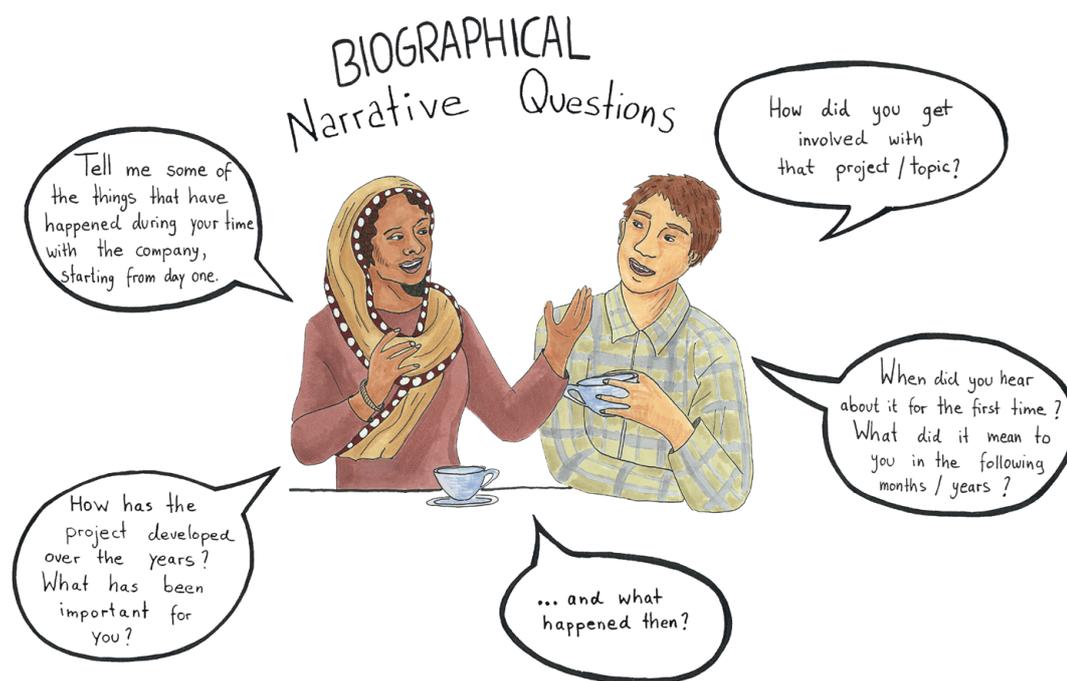
Biographical narrative questions

"Episodic" narrative questions are a second type of story trigger. In this case, the interviewee is invited to recall concrete events in connection with a particular person or subject. Here are some examples of episodic questions:

Episodic narrative questions

A narrative interview in a business context will generally combine biographical with episodic questions.

One thing is essential: the interviewer must avoid sticking to a list of prepared questions that are simply rattled off. The interviewee determines the content of the narrative: the interviewer's job is simply to keep the flow going.

EXERCISE

Narrative interviewing is a skill that requires some practice. The following exercises can help you to acquire the right approach:

1. Ask a friend to tell you what he did yesterday. Your role is that of an active listener: avoid discussion or comment, don't tell any stories of your own, just listen – attentively.

2. Find another partner and ask him/her to tell you the story of his/her current job, from the day he/she started, right up to the present. Try to keep the interview going for twenty minutes: if the story comes to a halt, ask narrative questions as new triggers. Conduct and record a narrative interview with a customer or staff member. Listen to the recording and think about possible improvements to your interview technique, applying the criteria described above.

Areas of application for narrative interviews

Narrative interviews can be used in a variety of contexts:

Customer surveys:

What stories are customers really telling about an enterprise and its products? And do those stories match the stories the company is telling about itself? A customer survey using narrative interviews can provide valuable feedback for marketing and further development of products and services.

Market research:

A company considering the introduction of a new product or service is well advised to carry out narrative interviews with the target group in question. Here, it is not possible to ask about the customer's experience of the product, which is not yet available on the market. Instead, the company can collect and use stories about the environment in which the product is situated. For example, if the product is a new app that provides information helping women to avoid unpleasant situations in town, the survey could ask about their experience in public spaces. If the product is a new construction material, the questions would concern experiences in connection with building. In the case of a new filter for clean drinking water, the interviewer would ask about everyday stories relating to nutrition. The alternative strategy – introducing the idea behind the product to interviewees and asking whether they would use it – is definitely not recommended. This approach only elicits opinions that have little to do with the actual behavior of potential customers. The truth of this is borne out by the personal experience of one of the authors of this workbook:

> **Example:**
>
> *Some years ago, plans were underway to set up a new TV channel showing mainly programs about culture. Before the launch I was invited to take part in a focus group: the concept for the channel was explained to me, and then I was supposed to say what I thought of it and whether I would view it. Full of enthusiasm, I said, "Of course I'll watch it – at last, a TV channel with quality programming."*
>
> *A year later, I read in the newspaper that the channel had folded, and realized that I had only watched it twice in all that time – which surprised me, remembering my euphoric response to the idea. I started to think about my viewing habits: I read a lot, and only watch TV when I'm too tired to read. But when I'm tired, I don't generally want to see programs about culture: I'd rather watch an action movie or a lowbrow entertainment show. I had imagined myself to be part of the new channel's target audience, but I was wrong. The market researchers, using a question-based interviewing technique, had failed to discover this. If they had asked me instead about my typical patterns of media use and the TV programs I particularly enjoyed watching, they would have realized that I wasn't a potential customer for the channel. The same probably happened with a lot of interviewees, creating a false impression of the market for programs of this kind, which explains why the channel failed after only a year.*

Staff surveys:
Letting employees tell their own story of their experiences working for the company can provide a highly accurate picture of what they find negative or positive. This makes it possible to discover more about the company's culture – including the hidden rules that govern behavior but are never explicitly formulated – and thus to successfully initiate processes of change.

Narrative interviews in any field will yield a fund of great stories that can then be re-used (anonymizing the storyteller) in other areas, such as marketing).

CHECKLIST

Preparing and conducting a narrative interview

1. What is the purpose of the interviewing exercise (staff survey, customer survey, market research, etc.)?

2. Who exactly are the interviewees? (With narrative interviews, a small sample is generally sufficient – in customer or market surveys, six to twelve interviews can already yield very useful results; in the case of staff surveys, the number will depend on the size of the company).

3. Think of a suitable story trigger to start the interview and note down some further narrative questions that can be used if necessary.

4. Make sure that you have a quiet place to carry out the interviews.

5. Always record the interviews (e.g. with a smartphone). Listening to the recording, you will discover nuances that would otherwise be lost, and recording does away with the need to take notes, enabling you to give the interviewee your undivided attention

6. When you have conducted all the interviews, listen to all the material again and evaluate it.

Epilog

And now? Experiment, learn, use stories

Storytelling is a real multi-tool: it's easy to use, doesn't need complex technologies, and has applications in many contexts. Have we sparked your interest? If so, it's time to make use of your new know-how, now that you've worked your way through this book.

You may find some features more relevant than others. That's fine. Using storytelling involves exploring your personal story, instead of applying a standard formula. Experiment with the tools and adapt them to your needs:

- Share your know-how with your team. Is there a born storyteller who should be the enterprise Chief Storyteller, sharing how you change the world?

- Go to your customers and cultivate your narrative interview techniques. It may take a few interviews until you feel comfortable using the tool. Don't worry: that's normal, and once you've got the hang of conducting narrative interviews, you'll find endless applications for the technique.

- Experiment with the Storyline Graph – maybe in a team retreat, developing together a shared story of the future.

- Throw your "Success, Success, Success!" pitch in the bin and start anew with a story of your enterprise that is appealing and authentic, and shows your initiative.

Your notes

Siemens Stiftung and the "empowering people. Network"

As a nonprofit foundation, Siemens Stiftung promotes sustainable social development, which is crucially dependent on access to basic services, high-quality education and an understanding of culture. The international project work of Siemens Stiftung supports people in taking the initiative to responsibly address current challenges. The geographical focus of the work is on regions in Africa and Latin America as well as Germany and other European countries. The foundation develops solutions and programs with partners for joint implementation. Technological and social innovations play a key role in this work. All actions of the foundation are impact-oriented and conducted in a transparent manner.

The "empowering people. Network" (epN) is an initiative of Siemens Stiftung
that promotes appropriate technological solutions for the major areas of basic
supply in developing regions. It provides a ground for partnership, consultancy,
research, technology transfer and entrepreneurial thinking.

PRIVATE AIMS AND SOCIAL GAINS:
TRIEX – a story
of sustainable
entrepreneurship

Daniela García Sanchez, German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA)
"Stories about us – how to tell your business narrative", an initiative of Siemens Stiftung

The MA&A project (later renamed TRIEX Gestión de Residuos),
launched in 2001, was the result of an initiative developed by
Ana Luisa Arocena and Ruben Martínez, a pair of chemists
concerned about the lack of proper hazardous waste
management in Uruguay. The personal experiences of Ruben
in the sales field and Ana in the pharmaceutical industry
triggered their interest in providing a solution to the problem
from an entrepreneurial point of view.
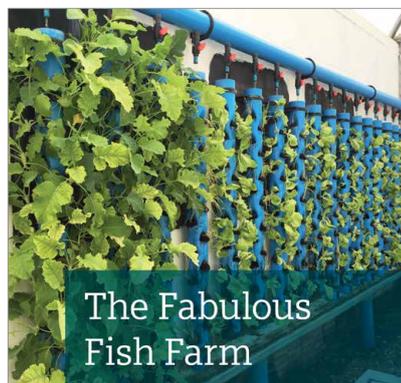
The Fabulous
Fish Farm

Barbara Börner, Endeva
"Stories about us – how to tell your business narrative", an initiative of Siemens Stiftung

A fish farm in a container transforming South Africa's
aquaculture industry? Sounds crazy.
But a container fish farm in a township is already doing
just this. With vegetables growing on the side fed only
by water with the fish waste. And it can be run on solar
energy. Sounds cool? Yes, indeed it is. This is Alan
Fleming's vision and what he's been working on for
the last five years – step by step.
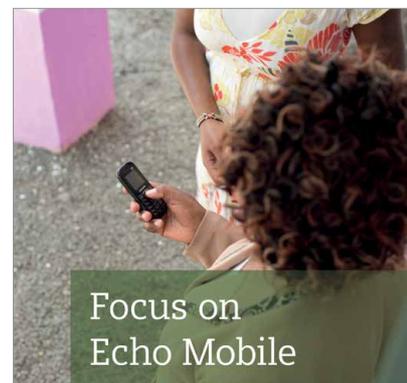
Focus on
Echo Mobile

Jona Liebl, adelphi
"Stories about us – how to tell your business narrative", an initiative of Siemens Stiftung

Enabling social impact through SMS.
How an SMS service is enabling impact
in Nairobi's thriving social enterprise scene

Three outstanding examples of enterprise stories from
Uruguay ("TRIEX – a story of sustainable entrepreneurship"),
South Africa ("The Fabulous Fish Farm") and
Kenya ("Focus on Echo Mobile") are to be found at
https://www.empowering-people-network.siemens-stiftung.org/en/services/publications-survey/

Authors

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is a senior professional with extensive experience in impact-driven commercial companies and not-for-profit organizations. She works for social change as a systemic consultant and facilitator through empowering non-profit organizations and enterprises. Barbara focuses on poverty mitigation through enabling inclusive businesses in the Global South.

For over fifteen years Barbara managed international programs in the sustainability and development sector and advised social enterprises. She led as deputy director Canopus Foundation's program development and worked in the solar industry for Solar-Fabrik AG and S.A.G. Solarstrom AG. Barbara teaches Social Entrepreneurship in an international master's program of Freiburg University. She is a certified systemic consultant and facilitator.

Beate Grotehans

studied history and philosophy in Hamburg and Bielefeld. After receiving her doctorate in philosophy in 1987, with subsequent work as a research assistant at the University of Bielefeld, she was a lecturer at the Universities of Bielefeld, Hamburg, Hagen, Augsburg and Munich. She worked at the Siemens Arts Program, from 1991 until 1993 as a Project Manager for Music, and from 1994 to October 2009 as a Curator and Project Manager for Contemporary Culture, before taking up her present post as a Senior Project Manager at the Siemens Foundation. She is responsible for the International Research Network on Social Economic Empowerment – IRENE I SEE project, the self-assessment tool for social entrepreneurs SAMforSE, and for the project "Learn the art of storytelling", a tool and workshop program for building business narratives.

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Michael Müller

studied literature and philosophy at the University of Munich. After working for a time at the Siemens Arts Program, he set up his own consultancy to advise clients on their internal and external communication. As an author, he has carried out numerous projects in the areas of corporate video production, web design and print media. In 1997 he developed the Storytelling method in cooperation with a group of partners. Since then, he has been supporting companies, organizations and public institutions in the development of corporate communications and culture, the fostering of change, and the introduction of new brands.

As one of the leading Storytelling experts in the German-speaking world, Michael has conducted numerous seminars and training workshops. In 2010 he was appointed Professor of Media Analysis and Media Theory at the Stuttgart Media University, where he heads the Institute for Applied Narratology (IANA).

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