

Stories of Change

Short training programme for academic researchers of the Global Challenges Programme (GCP) and the Applied Research Fund (ARF) in The Netherlands, organised by NWO-WOTRO.

This report gives an impression of the content of the programme and the headlines of some stories of change written by training participants.



The stories of change training programme is developed and facilitated by Petra de Boer & Lisette Gast of Perspective, facilitators of change in complexity.

Capturing Change

Stories of change are a tool to communicate progress and the value of a research project in an accessible way.

Explore and demonstrate change

Stories of change are used to explore and demonstrate change that happens during a research project or programme. They allow you to supplement quantitative indicators with qualitative information about changes in knowledge, behaviour, attitudes, practice and policies. Information that cannot easily be captured in quantitative metrics.

Bring your project to life

Stories of change can help to bring your project to life. Especially for outside audiences, such as financiers and the general public.

Stories of change usually do not cover the entire project, but focus on small changes, showing little steps towards impact. This often leads to a wider understanding of the overall results or potential future results. After all, impact is not linear and it takes time.

Induce adaptive learning

Stories of change induce adaptive learning within the system, both for internal and external stakeholders. It allows stakeholders to reflect on and investigate factors that have enabled or constrained the change to occur, both intended and unintended. This may reveal important lessons about the assumptions underlying the intervention. The insights are captured in a story.

Training Programme

One-day group training: 1 November 2017

- Get in the storytelling mode: Appreciative Inquiry
- Storytelling: The human nature
- Little Red Riding Hood: Getting to the essence of your story
- Scripting your story of change in 3 steps:
 1. Brain writing
 2. Free writing
 3. Scripting
- Writing tips
- Publishing formats: blog, podcast, infographic

Homework: Individual writing exercise with follow-up coaching and group reflection.



“Storytelling is an art, not a science.”

Step 1: Brain Writing - Download any information that you feel is significant for your story of change on this canvas.

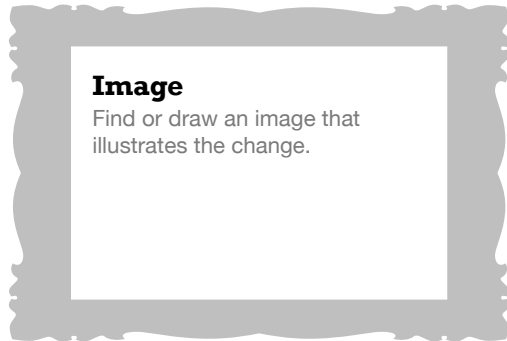
Brain Writing

Context?

Describe the context in which the story takes place. i.e. place, political climate,

Image

Find or draw an image that illustrates the change.



Assumptions?

Which assumptions were challenged?

Change

What is the change you observed?

So what?

What is so special about this?

And what I also want to share

Actors?

Who are the social actors involved?

Type(s) of actors?

- ☐ Individual ☐ Group ☐ Organisation
☐ Institution ☐ Community

Emotions

How do actors feel about the change?



Type(s) of change?

How would you characterise the change?

- ☐ Agendas ☐ Actions ☐ Relationships
☐ Practices ☐ Behaviour ☐ Policies

Internal _____ **External**
(institutional, management) (programme, development)

Intended _____ **Unintended**
(expected) (surprise)

Positive _____ **Negative**



Step 2: Free Writing

Write freely and then share your story by reading it out loud to a colleague or a friend. This will enable you to get to the essence of your story: *“Who changed what, when and where?”*

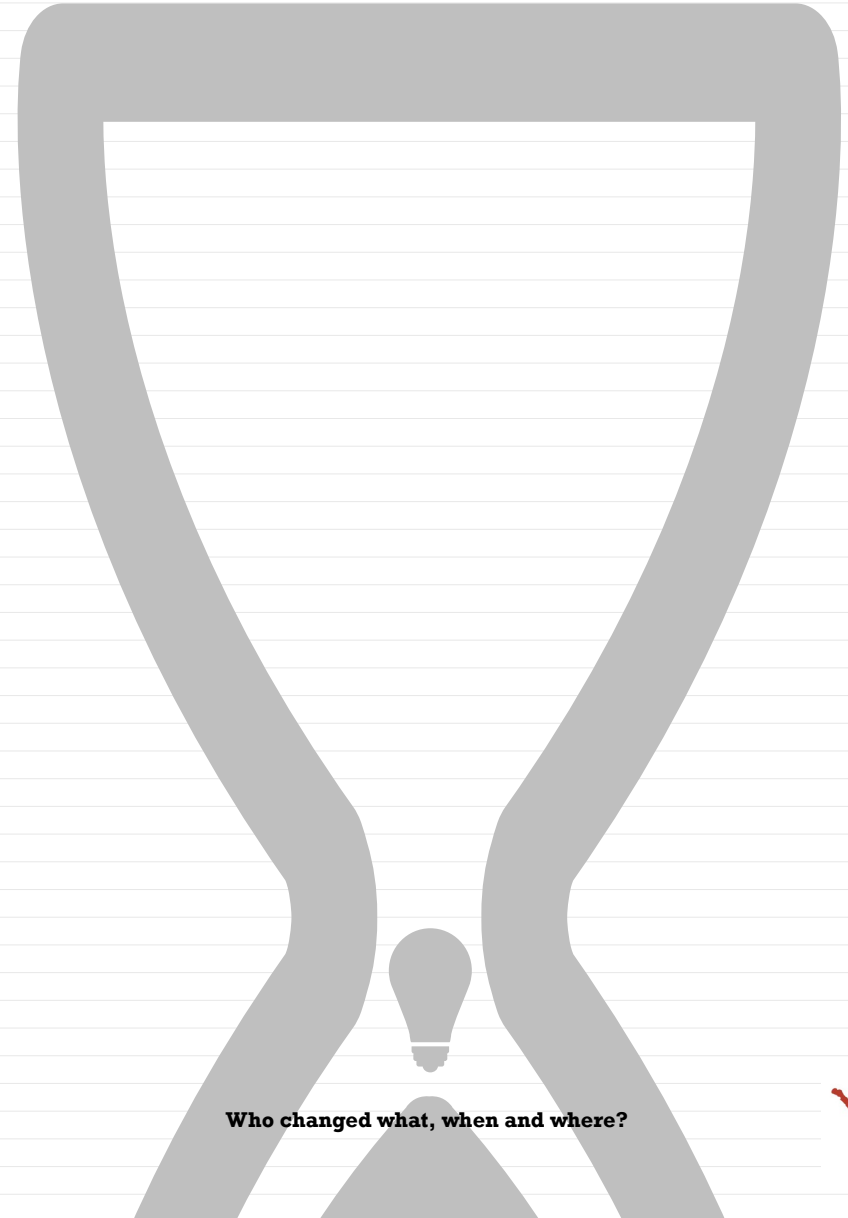


“Change is fundamental in a story; if things go static, stories die.”

Free writing

What is the change you have observed?

Free writing - without taking your pen of the paper - to get to the essence of your story of change.



Who changed what, when and where?

Writing Tips

Make me care

Use words that move your target audience, positive words, without exaggerating

Keep it Short and Sticky

- Short sentences: 5 - 15 words, variation is key
- Stand-alone paragraphs: +/- 50 words, 1 topic per paragraph

Make it visual

A good image can draw the reader into your story. It can be a literal image, from the actual research, but also something more abstract, that triggers curiosity.

“If you are not ashamed of the first version of your story, you’ve waited too long to share.”

Inspired by Reid Hoffman, founder of LinkedIn

Make it active

- Use present tense
- Avoid verbs: ‘are’ / ‘will’
- Avoid jargon, abbreviations and difficult words - or explain them.

Use attractive headers

- News worthy
- Contain key message or explain key value for reader
- Please the search engines (SEO)

Go one step at the time

Remember, writing is a process, take it one step at the time and ask for feedback in-between.

Clues to a great story

“When you're telling a story, have you constructed anticipation? In the short-term, have you made me want to know what will happen next? More importantly, have you made me want to know how it will all conclude in the long-term? Have you constructed honest conflicts with truth that creates doubt in what the outcome might be?”

Advice from filmmaker, Andrew Stanton



“Write what you know, draw from your personal experience.”

“The power of stories is that it has an ability to connect with people on an emotional level. An advice that you hear all the time: Write what you know. Put something into it that talks about your own life, how you feel. Because probably, what happened, made you feel some particular way. What you are trying to do when you write a story, is have your audience have that same feeling.”

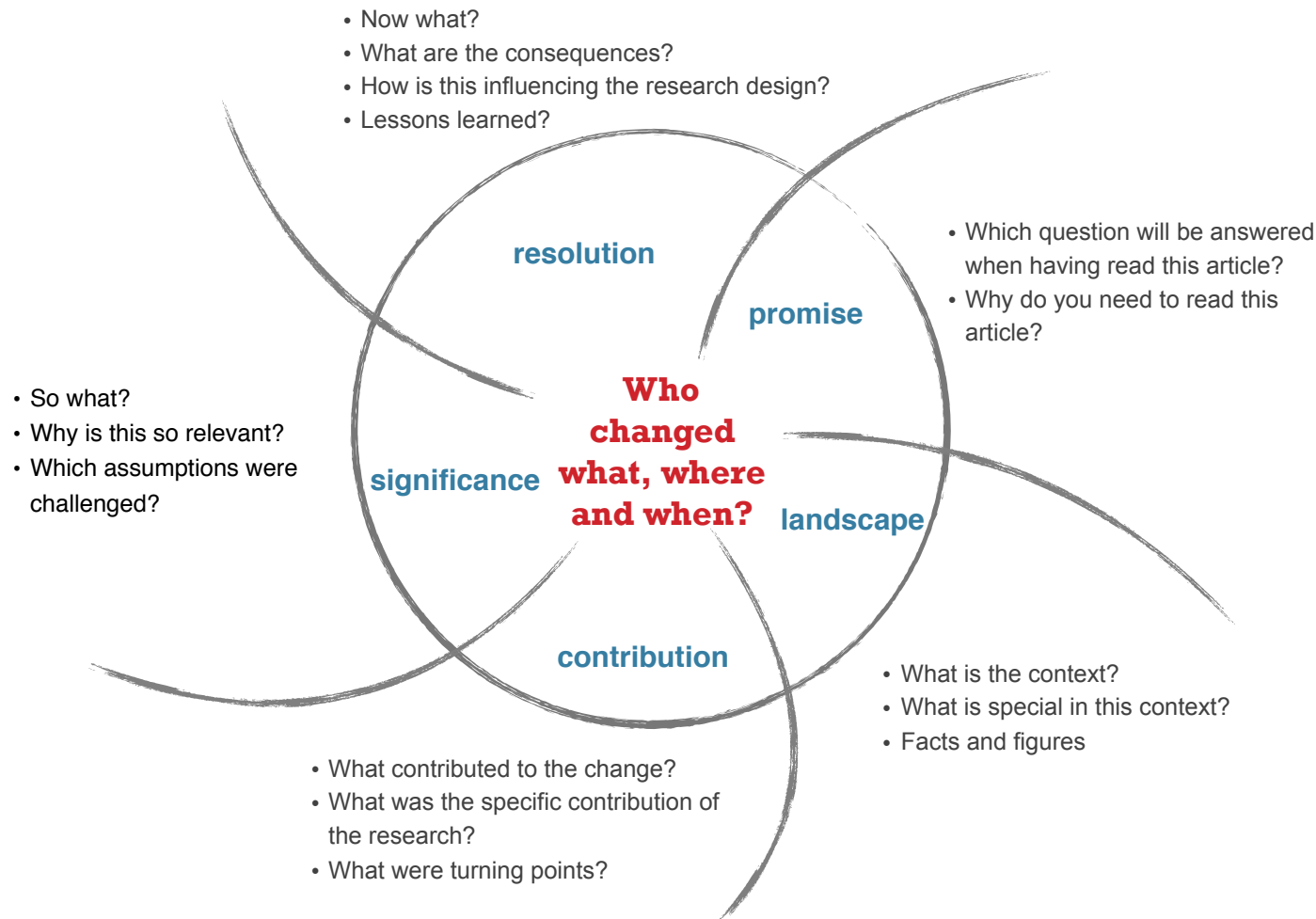
Advice from Pete Doctor from Pixar in a Box.

“The best stories infuse wonder – anticipation mingled with uncertainty.”



Step 3: Scripting your story of change - Fleshing out and structuring your story.

Start anywhere you like. Once you have elaborated the crucial elements, you can move your paragraphs around and “kill your darlings”.



Participants
about the training:

“The positive feedback helped
me to get rid of my insecurity.”

“Very motivating to talk
through all the
comments over Skype.”

Story formats

You can publish a story in many different formats. Before you start fleshing it out, determine for whom, where and in what format you want to publish your story.

Blogs are personal

As a blogger, you can write about the things you are passionate about. It is a way to share your knowledge in the form of a narrative, with high level of reader friendliness and reach out to a sizeable audience.

Blogs are a common source of information used by countless people and stay in the ether for a long time. Blogging is a good and reliable way to position yourself as an expert in your field of work.

Podcasts are intimate

Podcast are online and on-demand audio programmes. Good podcasts take the listener on an emotional journey which stays with them. Podcasts are intimate - this is one of the most common things people say about them. They offer storytelling in its purest, using the human voice to convey emotions.

Infographics feed the brain

Information graphics or ‘infographics’ are visual presentations of information, data or knowledge. Its purpose is to present information quick and clear. An infographic improves cognition by utilising graphics to enhance the human visual system’s ability to see patterns and trends.

Some stories...

Following the training day in Utrecht, participants wrote blogs and articles or produced a podcast of their story of change. First drafts were shared with the trainers who gave individual feedback in a Skype meeting. Next drafts were also shared with fellow training participants.



I closed my eyes

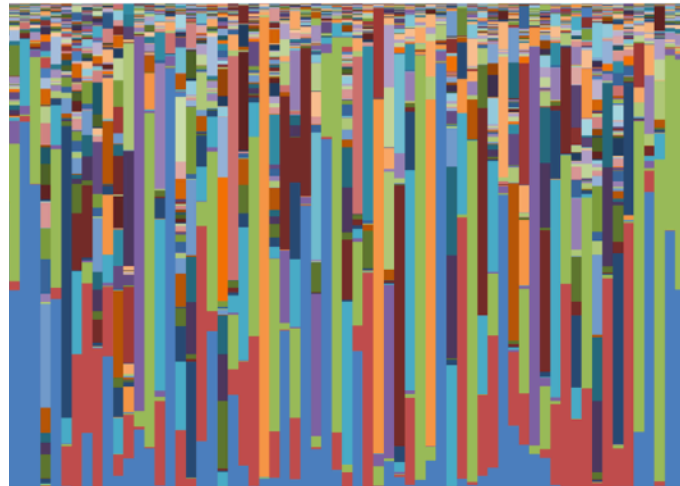
A blog by Ambra Tosto, PhD Candidate at Wageningen University and Research about the importance of an early reality check.

Pruning is the “art and science of cutting away a portion of a tree for horticultural purposes”. It is an essential practice for many commercial tree crops. In this way we can shape and guide the plant development, balance fruit production, facilitate plant harvest and ensure a good light penetration in the interior of the tree.

Female community leaders

A podcast by Nicky Pouw, researcher and lecturer at the Governance and Inclusive Development group at the University of Amsterdam.

The podcast zooms in on the story of a female community leader in Kisumu who is using the research findings to boost income and improve lives. ...



Art in the lab

A blog by Anneloes Groenenboom, PhD in the Laboratory of Genetics at Wageningen University, about colourful bacteria in traditional Zambian products.

Research with microbes usually does not result in the most beautiful pictures. During the yearly symposium of my graduate school a picture award was handed out. The theme of the competition was “How does your research show the beauty of our world?”. As my research is not visible to the naked eye, the beauty of it is difficult to show in a picture. I did not participate and no one was able to see my research.

“A woman doesn’t succeed alone. Women succeed with their family and with their community. So when these women benefit the whole society benefits.”

Eunice Likoko, PhD candidate on Women Food Entrepreneurship



A stakeholders committee can make the difference

An article by Donald Houessou, PhD at the VU Amsterdam and national coordinator “Enhancing urban food security through the development of allotment gardens in and around the cities of Benin”.

This story of change highlights how a committee of stakeholders can change and make the way of doing research successful.