

## PNI Practicum I: Smaller-scale PNI Sandbox Instructions

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Meeting	Activity	Preparation required?
1	Observe and support conversational story sharing	No
2	Conduct an individual interview	No
3	Conduct a group interview	No
4	Facilitate a story-sharing exercise	Yes
5	Facilitate a sensemaking contact exercise	No
6	Facilitate a sensemaking exercise	Yes
7	Facilitate a full sensemaking workshop	Yes
8	Build a narrative simulation	Yes

## Part 1: Introduction, Fundamentals, Planning

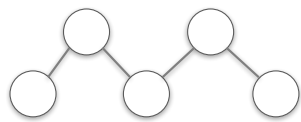
You will participate in an exercise designed to help you notice and work with stories in everyday conversation. No one needs to facilitate this first sandbox session; you can just go through the exercise together.

### Agenda

First explanation	20 minutes	Working together, read the “first explanation” section below. Talk about what you are reading.
First activity	30 minutes	Form groups of three, then follow the instructions for the first activity below.
Discussion and second explanation	20 minutes	Come back together. Talk about what happened in the first activity. Then read and discuss the “second explanation” section below.
Second activity	30 minutes	Form groups of three (the same as before or different), then follow the instructions for the second activity below.
Wrap-up	10 minutes	Talk about what happened in the second activity and in the entire exercise. What surprised you? What did you learn? Did what you saw happen in the activities fit the explanations given? If not, what was different? Can you guess why?

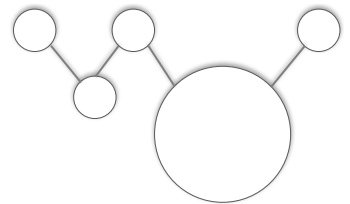
### First explanation

Everyday conversation has a tick-tock **turn-taking** rhythm.



Nice people try to keep things fair and equal.

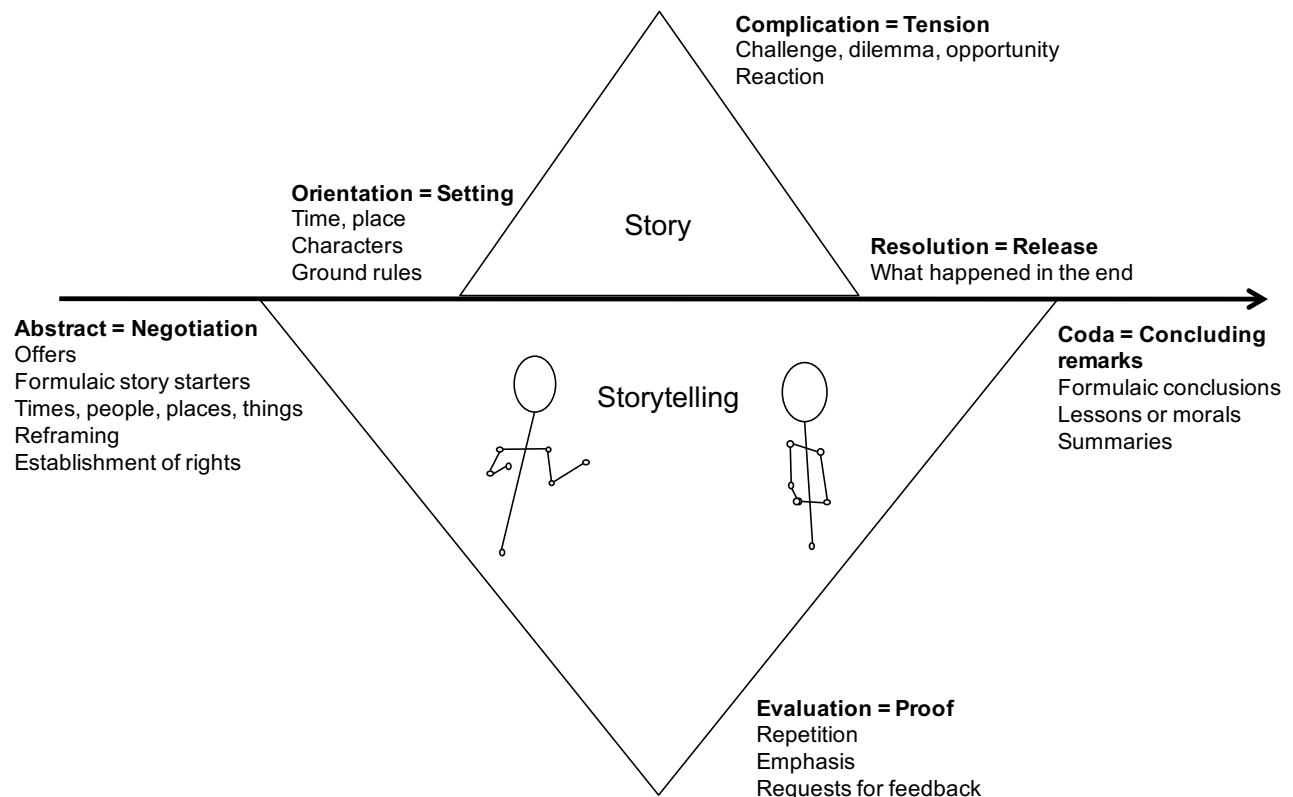
When someone tells a story, they **hold the floor** for a longer period of time than usual.



This is a **privilege** and a **danger** – and privilege + danger = **ritual**. If you want people to tell stories, it helps to understand the ritual.

Every conversational story has a shape like an **iceberg**. Most of what happens takes place under the surface. The story proper, above the waves, has the same beginning-middle-end shape as any novel or movie. Underneath the story proper is a series of negotiations around:

- Telling rights – Who gets to tell the story?
- Audience members – Who wants (and gets) to hear the story?
- Framing – How long the story should be? Should it be profound? Informative? Funny?
- Accountability – Will the story be challenged? Should it be? How?
- Meaning – What does the story mean? How does it matter? To whom?



### How to ask someone to tell you a story

The best way to get someone to tell you a story is to **ask them a story-ended question**, which is:

- a question whose answer is a story
- a request for a story abstract
- permission to hold the floor

Closed-ended question	Open-ended question	Story-ended question
Do you like ____?	How do you feel about ____?	Were you ever surprised by ____? What happened?

To remember how to ask a story-ended question, think of how you ask people “How did you two **MEET**?”

MEET – a MEMORY of an EVENT you EXPERIENCED in TIME

the MEMORY	the active, meaningful <b>choice</b> of a memory you want to look back on	as you look back, in your experience, over the years, do you recall, do you remember, what stands out, what comes to mind, what rises up, when have you
of an EVENT	something that <b>happened</b> (verb), not a condition or situation (adjective)	what happened when, did it ever happen that, what took place when, a time, an incident, an event, an experience
you EXPERIENCED	<b>to you</b> , from your perspective, through your eyes	you thought, said, saw, felt, wanted, needed
in TIME	at a <b>specific point</b> in time, not as things “usually” happen	a moment, a day, an hour, a morning, a meeting, a visit

To help people think of a story to tell, think of how you say “**Cheese**” when you take a photo:

CHEESE – Change, High/low point, Event, Emotion, Surprise, Evaluation

Change	Transition, turning point, transformation, moment when things changed or shifted
High/low point	Best or worst, highest or lowest, most or least happy, proud, instructive, memorable
Event	A birthday, a doctor’s visit, an accomplishment, an argument, a happy accident, an epiphany
Emotion	When you felt happy, sad, relieved, angry, proud, disappointed, hopeful, hopeless
Surprise	Something you didn’t see coming, that made you stop and think, that woke you up
Evaluation	Something you’d like to see happen more often, or you wish hadn’t happened

What if the person you ask to share a story with you doesn't respond with a story? **Guide them toward a story** with another question:

If they give you an opinion	Could you tell me about a <b>specific incident</b> that would help me understand your thinking on this? Did you always feel this way? If not, what happened that changed your mind?
If they tell you about a situation	Was there ever a time when this was <b>particularly true</b> ? What led to the situation? What happened as a result?
If they describe an emotion	Can you remember a moment when this feeling had a particularly big <b>impact</b> on your life?
If they outline a scenario (what usually happens)	Can you recall a <b>specific time</b> when this happened, a time that stands out in your mind? How exactly did events play out <i>that</i> time?
If they mention an event but not an experience	How has this event affected <b>your life</b> ? What have you seen happen as a result of it? Can you recall a moment when this event had an impact on you, or on someone you know? What happened then?

## First activity

In your group of three people, decide who will be the question asker, the storyteller, and the observer. Then:

- Question asker: Ask a story-ended question. Use the previous explanation for ideas. If the storyteller doesn't tell a story, guide them in the direction of their experiences.
- Storyteller: Answer the question.
- Observer: Listen. Take notes. When the story is over, briefly report back on what you heard.

Then **rotate the roles and repeat**, twice, so everybody gets to tell a story.

If you run out of time, don't worry; there will be another chance to tell stories later. If you all tell stories and still have some time left over, ask another question and tell another story.

## Second explanation

After someone has told a story in conversation, in their story coda and just afterwards, **they feel vulnerable** because they've been dominating the conversation for so long. If you want people to tell you stories, the worst thing you can do is not to ask the wrong question – it's to leave people hanging after they've told a story.

Asking questions about a story says to the storyteller:

- I am listening to you – because a story is a communicative event

- Let's think about this – because a story is a way to make sense of experience
- We are together in this – because a story is a way for people to connect

Some “I am listening to you” questions:

- The facts
  - Who?
  - What?
  - Where?
  - When?
  - How?
- Your perspective
  - How did you feel?
  - What did you think, want, need, know, or expect?
  - What surprised you?
  - What did you like/dislike?
- Elements of the story
  - What did [someone else in the story] think, want, need, know, or expect?
  - Why did people do what they did?
  - How they know what they knew?

Some “Let's think about this” questions:

- Interpretation
  - Who or what helped you?
  - Who or what held you back?
  - Why do you think this happened?
  - How did it affect you?
  - How do you feel about it now?
- Imagination
  - What do you wish had happened?
  - What should have happened?
  - What would have happened if things were different?
  - What would you do if you could go back in time?
- Learning
  - What lessons did you learn?
  - What dilemmas or decisions did you face?
  - What discoveries or surprises did you encounter?
  - What mistakes will you avoid repeating in the future?

Some “We are together” questions:

- Your voice
  - What do you want me to do with this story? Learn from it? Pass it on? Make a change?

- Who needs to hear about this?
- Who shouldn't hear it?
- Other perspectives
  - Who would want to hear it? Who wouldn't want to hear it?
  - What do you think other people would say about this story, if they heard it?
  - Who would approve or disapprove of what happened?
  - What would other people have done differently? How would that have turned out?
- Accountability
  - Did this really happen?
  - Who else was there?
  - Can you give me details on the people, places, and events of the story?
  - Whose responsibility was it to take care of this?
  - Who actually took care of it?

## Second activity

In your group of three people, decide who will be the question asker, the storyteller, and the observer. Then:

- Question asker: Ask a story-ended question. When the storyteller has finished telling the story, choose a question or two from those above to ask about the story. Ask the question and listen to the answer.
- Storyteller: Answer the questions.
- Observer: Listen. Take notes. When the story and questions are finished, briefly report back on what you heard.

Then **rotate the roles** and repeat (twice if you have time).

## Stretch challenges

After you finish this exercise, if you want to and have time, you can explore this topic a little more deeply. Open up the book *Working with Stories* (not the *Simplified* version), go to Chapter 5 ("Stories in Communities and Organizations"), and find the section called **Local Story Sharing Cultures**. Read the section together. What are the characteristics of the story-sharing culture you discovered within your course cohort? What does that tell you about how you should approach this course?

Page forward in *WWS* to section called **Assessing Story Sharing**. Read through that. Talk about how you might answer the questions there with respect to your course cohort and with respect to the groups, communities, and organizations you intend to work with in your projects. What do your assessments tell you? Are there any opportunities or risks you should watch out for as you work through the course?

## Part 2: Collection I

In this session you will gather some stories in individual interviews. You can choose facilitators during this meeting; no preparation is required beforehand.

### Agenda

Role selection	2 minutes	Choose two people to be the interviewer and interviewee.	Repeat steps 1-3, with a new person as the interviewer, as many times as you can, saving 10 minutes to wrap up at the end.
Preparation	2-5 minutes	Interviewer: Read over the practice interview instructions below. Everyone else: Wait.	
Interview	10-20 minutes	Interviewer: Use the interview instructions (verbatim or in your own words, your choice) to ask the interviewee to tell a story and to answer some questions about it. Interviewee: Listen and respond. Everyone else: Listen. Don't interrupt. If you have observations or advice, take notes.	
Review	10 minutes	Talk about what just happened. What did you notice in these interviews? What surprised you? What went well, and what didn't? What does that tell you? Did different people have different interviewing styles? How did that play out?	

### Instructions for individual interviews

Introduction: 2 minutes

Say:

Hi. I'm \_\_\_\_\_, and I'm working with members of our community to think about **our many ways of learning**.

I would like to ask you some questions about your experiences with learning. We will be using all of the things people tell us in a **group discussion** a few months from now. You are invited to take part in this discussion, and I will give you details for it at the end of our interview.

Everything you tell me today will be **completely anonymous**.



Let's get started.

### Elicitation: 2 minutes

Say:

Now I'm going to show you four questions. Please choose one question you would like to answer. Take your time. I'm listening.

Show these four questions on a whiteboard or shared screen.

1. When you think about the fact that **different people learn in different ways**, is there a particular experience you can recall that connects to that fact? What happened in that experience?
2. Can you remember a time when you were supposed to learn something in one way and you discovered that you needed to **learn it in a different way**? How did that play out?
3. Did you ever have a conversation with someone who **learns differently than you do**? What happened during that conversation, and what impact did it have for you?
4. Is there any **other experience** related to varied ways of learning that you would like to tell us about? Go ahead and do that.

If the interviewee doesn't respond, wait a bit, then rephrase the questions.

### Storytelling: 5-10 minutes

Listen while the interviewee talks. If they don't tell a story, guide them towards recounting their actual experiences by helping them focus on events and times that mattered to them.

### Interpretation: 5-10 minutes

Say:

Thank you for telling me about that experience. Could you please answer these questions about the story you just told?

1. How do you **feel** about that story? (wait for a response)
2. Who do you think would **benefit** from hearing that story? (wait)
3. What do you think would **happen** if those people heard the story?

Say each question out loud and listen while the interviewee responds. If you feel the urge to ask more (or other) respectfully curious questions, go ahead and ask them. Just don't use up too much time. Let others have a turn.

## Stretch challenges

If you want to challenge yourself to do more in this session, after the first story has been told, try out any of these variations:

- Ask the interviewee to **avoid telling a story**. Ask the interviewer to guide them in the direction of storytelling.
- Ask the interviewee to describe a **scenario** (this is what usually happens), a **situation** (we were stuck, that's how it was), or an **opinion** (young people are lazy these days). Ask the interviewer to guide the interviewee towards telling a complete story.
- Ask the interviewee to **tell a story about an unrelated topic**. Ask the interviewer to guide them in the direction of the topic you are exploring.
- Ask the interviewee to **tell a very long story**. Ask the interviewer to help them bring the story to a close.

## Part 3: Collection II

In this session you will gather some stories in a group interview. You can choose facilitators during this meeting; no preparation is required beforehand.

### Agenda

Role selection	2 minutes	Choose one person to be the interviewer. Everyone else will be an interviewee.	Repeat steps 1-3, with a new person as the interviewer, as many times as you can, saving 10 minutes to wrap up at the end.
Preparation	2-5 minutes	Interviewer: Read over the practice interview instructions below. Everyone else: Wait.	
Interview	30 minutes	Interviewer: Use the interview instructions (verbatim or in your own words) to help everyone else share stories with each other. Everyone else: Listen and respond.	
Review	10 minutes	Talk about what just happened. How were these group interviews different from the individual interviews you did in the previous sandbox session? What was easier and harder? What worked better and worse? Were the stories different? If so, how? What did you notice about the group dynamics during the group interview?	

### Instructions for group interviews

Introduction: 2 minutes

Say:

Hi. I'm \_\_\_\_\_, and I'm working with members of our community to think about **how we learn how to learn**.

As part of our project, I would like to ask you to **talk to me and to each other** about your experiences with learning how to learn. We will be using the things you say today in a group discussion a few months from now. You are all invited to take part in that discussion. I will give you details for it at the end of this interview.

Everything you say today will be **completely anonymous**. For that reason, the first thing we need to do is to give each of you a **participant number**.

Ask each person to choose a number, or give them out yourself. Ask each person to remember their number in some way. (If you have few people, you might be able to give them sticky note colors.)

Initial elicitation: 2 minutes

Say:

Now let's get started.

I am going to show you **four questions**. Whoever thinks of an answer they would like to give, go ahead and speak up.

Show these four questions on a whiteboard or shared screen.

1. When you think about **learning how to learn**, what one experience comes to mind? When did learning about learning matter to you?
2. Were you ever in the middle of learning something, and you stopped and thought to yourself, "Hold on, I think I can **learn this better**"? What was it you were learning, and what happened after you thought that?
3. Looking back over all the learning experiences you have had in your life, what one experience **taught you the most** about learning? What happened in that experience?
4. Is there **any other experience** related to learning about learning that you would like to tell us about? Go ahead and do that..

Wait while everyone looks at and ponders the questions. If nobody says anything, read the questions out loud. If nobody responds to that, rephrase the questions. **Do not tell a story.**

As each story is being told – 15-25 minutes

As you listen to each story, jot down at least one **respectfully curious question** you could ask about it and least one **connection point** you could use to remind other people of other stories they might like to tell. When the story is over, say:

Thank you for telling us about that experience.

If nobody else responded to the story, and if the storyteller looks embarrassed or awkward, **ask your prepared question**. Don't let the person take up too much time, but help them feel heard. Then say:

Could you please give that story a **name**, so we can refer to it later?

**Write the name** and their participant ID number on a sticky note. If it's a physical sticky note, **give it to the person** who told the story. If it's a virtual sticky note, place it on a shared screen near a sticky note with their ID number (or of the right color). Then say:

Does that story remind anyone of a similar experience they've had? Or would anybody like to answer one of the questions we started with?

If no one responds, **use the connection point** you found in the story. If no one responds to that, rephrase the original questions.

Keep people sharing stories. Keep track of how many stories each person told. If one person has not told a story, step in to give them a chance to speak. But don't force them to speak.

### Answering questions – 5 minutes

Say:

Now I would like you all to reflect on the stories you told and answer a few questions about them.

Use a whiteboard or shared screen to show everyone these questions.

1. How well would you say that story ended? Perfectly, horribly, or somewhere in between?
2. What do you wish had happened in that story?
3. What would have to happen for your wish to come true?

Wait while everyone pastes their answers into the chat or into a shared document (as sticky notes or as bullet points after each question).

## Stretch challenges

If you want to be more ambitious, ask one interviewee to try to disrupt the session (and present a challenge to the interviewer) in one of these ways:

- Try to dominate the session by telling a very long story. Refuse to stop talking.
- Try to change the topic by telling a story about something unrelated.
- Try to avoid telling a story, instead giving an opinion or an abstract statement of fact.
- Become angry. Vent your emotions.
- Tell a story that blames someone in the group (or the interviewer).
- Perform a story. Make it seem bigger and better than the other stories.

- Try to derail the discussion with jokes.
- Break in on someone else's story and criticize it or them.
- Try to stop someone from telling a story.

Interviewer: Respond to any of these challenges by respectfully asking everyone to explore their experiences and perspectives while at the same time respecting the perspectives and emotions of the other participants. Remind people of your goals and ask for their help in meeting them.

## Part 4: Collection III

In this session you will facilitate a group story-sharing exercise. **You will need to choose facilitators before this meeting starts, as there is some preparation required.**

### Agenda

Before the session begins		Decide who will facilitate in the session. Facilitator(s): read over the instructions below.	
Exercise	1 hour	Facilitator(s): Carry out the instructions using the instructions below. Everyone else: Listen and respond.	You can repeat this exercise with a second person or group as the facilitator, remembering to save 10 minutes for wrap-up.
Review	10 minutes	Talk about what just happened. How did gathering stories in this exercise differ from the individual and group interviews you practiced earlier? What was the dynamic like in the group? What went well in the exercise? What could have gone better? Are there any other story-sharing exercises you want to try?	

### Instructions for the stepwise landscape exercise

Introduction: 2 minutes

Say:

Hi. I'm \_\_\_\_\_, and I'm working with members of our community to think about **help and hindrance in learning**.

As part of our project, I would like to ask you to **work with each other** to explore your experiences with learning how to learn. We will be using the things you say and build today in a group discussion a few months from now. You are all invited to take part in that discussion. I will give you details for it at the end of this interview.

Everything you say today will be **completely anonymous**. For that reason, the first thing we need to do is to give each of you a **participant number**.

Ask each person to choose a number, or give them out yourself. Ask each person to remember their number in some way. (If you have few people, you might be able to give them sticky note colors.)

Initial elicitation: 2 minutes

Say:

Now let's get started.

I am going to show you **four questions**. Whoever thinks of an answer they would like to give, go ahead and speak up.

Show these four questions on a whiteboard or shared screen.

1. The author Zig Ziglar famously said, "If you are not willing to learn, no one can help you. If you are determined to learn, no one can stop you." Does that quote **remind you** of anything that has happened in your own learning (or that of someone else)?
2. Did you ever encounter a situation in which the very thing that **helped you** to learn **hindered someone else** - or vice versa? What happened?
3. What was the **best or worst example** of learning support that you've seen lately? Could you tell us what happened?
4. Is there **any other experience** related to learning help and hindrance that you would like to tell us about? Go ahead and do that.

Wait while everyone looks at and ponders the questions. If nobody says anything, read the questions out loud. If nobody responds to that, rephrase the questions. **Do not tell a story.**

As each story is being told (first dimension): 20-30 minutes

As you listen to each story, jot down at least one **respectfully curious question** you could ask about it and least one **connection point** you could use to remind other people of other stories they might like to tell. When the story is over, say:

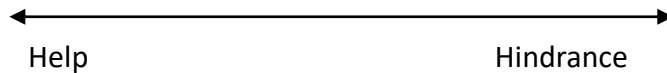
Thank you for telling us about that experience.

If nobody else responded to the story, and if the storyteller looks embarrassed or awkward, **ask your prepared question**. Don't let the person take up too much time, but help them feel heard. Then say:

Could you please give that story a **name**, so we can refer to it later?

**Write the name** and the storyteller's participant ID number on a sticky note.

If this was the first story told, **draw an axis** line horizontally across a shared screen or shared document. Label the axis thus:



Then say to the person who told the story:

Could you please place the sticky note that represents this story somewhere on this axis?

Watch while they do it. They can put it above or below the line if they want to. Answer any questions they have about what the axis means.

Then say:

Does that story remind anyone of a similar experience they've had?

Or does this line remind anybody of an experience that falls somewhere along it?

Or would anybody like to answer one of the questions we started with?

If no one responds, **start with the connection point** you found in the story. If no one responds to that, explain the meaning of the dimension shown on the line. If no one responds to that, rephrase the original questions.

Keep people sharing stories. Keep asking them to place their sticky notes along the line. Keep track of how many stories each person told. If one person has not told a story, step in to give them a chance to speak. But don't force them to speak.

[Answering questions: 5 minutes](#)

Say:

Now I would like you all to reflect on the stories you told and answer a few questions about them.

Use a whiteboard or shared screen to show everyone these questions.

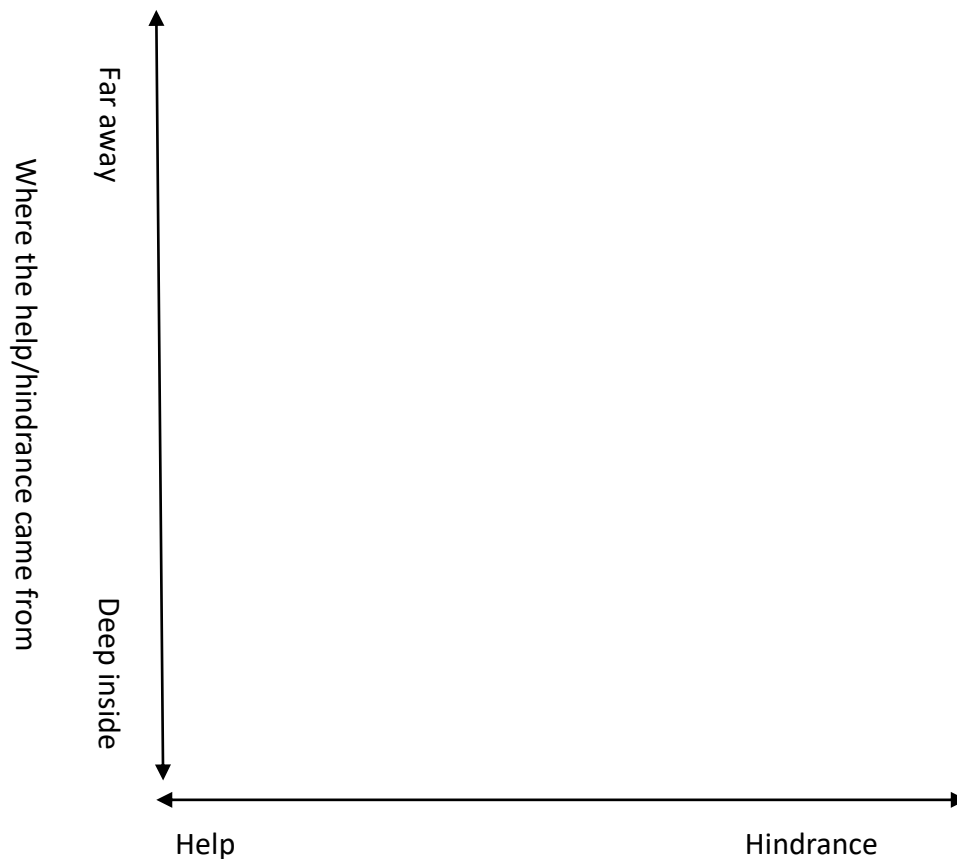
1. What would you say is the **emotional tone** of that story? Negative, neutral, or positive?

2. How **common** of an experience do you think that is, among the people you know? Is it an everyday thing, or is it rare?
3. What do you think people can **learn** from that story? What is the most useful **lesson** you see in it?

Wait while everyone pastes their answers into the chat or into a shared document (as sticky notes or as bullet points after each question).

#### Introducing the second dimension: 2 minutes

Now add a vertical line to your space, above, below, or both above and below the line you started with. Create a space like this.



(Where “far away” means from some source the person didn’t feel close to, like a bureaucratic rule, and “deep inside” means from the person’s own quality or experience. You can also change either or both of these axes if you want to.)

#### Moving notes: 5-10 minutes

Ask each participant to move the sticky notes that represent the stories they told up or down in the space.



### As each story is being told (second dimension): 20-30 minutes

After all of the existing story notes have been moved, ask the participants to **use the space** to remind them of other experiences they would like to recount. Don't bring up your original questions (or any connection points) at this point. Give the people some time to look at the space and think of some other experiences to tell about.

If they don't say anything, **point to an area on the space** and say something like, "How about this space, where people were hindered and the experience was rare? Does anyone remember a time like that?"

If they still don't say anything, choose a story (at random) that was already told, **find a connection point** in it, and say something like, "Does anybody else remember anything related to learning about farming?" (Or some such thing.)

If that also fails, then it's time to bring up the **original questions** again.

As each story is being told, do exactly what you did in the first round, except that you want to encourage people to place the story sticky notes **anywhere inside the two-dimensional box** you have created.

### Answering questions again: 5 minutes

Ask people to answer the same questions as they did before, but only about any new stories they have added to the space.

### Finding patterns: 5-10 minutes

Now it's time to ask the participants to look over the populated space and choose a few features to highlight. They might see a cluster of stories (do they have a common theme?), a gap (why are there no stories here?), or a boundary (why are these stories so different from those stories?). Encourage people to discuss and mark up the space.

## Stretch challenges

To make this exercise even more challenging, add a **third dimension** to the space as you work with it. You can do this in two different ways.

1. Before you look for patterns in your stories, **move each story into a third dimension** by marking it in some way: drawing a symbol on it, placing a colored dot on it, cutting off one of its corners. Find a way to indicate a value that is low-high (or low-medium-high) in a third dimension. Then go through a **third round of story sharing**, placing each story in all three dimensions.
2. Before you look for patterns in your stories, without going through a third round of story sharing, **use the answers you gave to the questions** about each story to mark a third dimension value on each sticky note.

In either case, use your third dimension to enhance the patterns you find even more.

## Part 5: Sensemaking I

In this session you will facilitate a sensemaking contact exercise (pairing). You can choose facilitators during this meeting; no preparation is required beforehand.

### Agenda

Before the session begins		Decide who will facilitate in the session. Facilitator(s): Find the file in your materials called <b>Stories for Sensemaking Practice - Bridging Divides.xlsx</b> . Set it up as a shared document everyone can see and move around in.	
Preparation	2-5 minutes	Facilitator(s): Quickly read over the instructions below. Everyone else: Wait.	You can repeat this exercise with a second person or group as the facilitator, remembering to save 10 minutes for wrap-up.
Exercise	30 minutes	Facilitator(s): Carry out the instructions using the instructions below. Everyone else: Listen and respond.	
Review	10 minutes	Talk about what just happened. What did you notice about the pairing? How were the stories people told similar to and different than the stories they read? What connections did you notice?	

### Instructions for the pairing exercise

Introduction: 2 minutes

Say:

Hi. I'm \_\_\_\_, and I'm working with members of our community to think about **bridging divides** among our community members.

Explain that the stories we are using for this exercise were drawn from the public mailing list of the US-based National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD). In this exercise we are going to pretend that we are all members of the NCDD community.

### Reading the stories: 10 minutes

Ask people to break into small groups of 3 people each.

Say:

As we begin to look at the stories we have gathered in this project, I would like to ask you to **take in the stories** by considering how they connect to your own experiences.

Please choose a “batch” of eight stories from this file. Choose a batch at random, one that is different from the batches chosen by the other people in your group.

Read over the batch of eight stories you picked out. As you read, **choose one story that resonates** with your own experiences. Then think of an experience you would like to recount to the group that connects to the story you read.

Let people do this quietly for 20 minutes. If some people are done early, tell them they can read more stories if they want to. If some people lag behind, explain that they don’t have to read all eight stories; four is enough. The important thing is to choose a story, then think of a related story to tell.

### Telling the paired stories: 20 minutes

Say:

Now, speaking to the other people in your small group, read out loud or tell in your own words – your choice – the story you chose from the eight stories you read. When you are finished, tell the story it reminded you of.

You have 20 minutes. Make sure everyone has a chance to speak.

Watch over these conversations. Make sure everyone has a chance to share a story of their own. If people want to respond to a story with another story, encourage this (as long as nobody gets left out).

### Wrapping up the exercise: 10 minutes

Bring the whole group together again. Ask the people in each small group to tell the rest of the room what they learned from the stories they read and heard and told. If you have little time left, just ask people to call out things they found surprising or interesting in the activity.

## Stretch challenges

After you have finished the basic pairing exercise, if you have time, you can reshuffle your groups, then dive deeper in with a second and more complicated round of pairing. For example, on the second pairing you could ask people to:

- Choose a story that does *not* resonate with their experience – that is quite **different** – then tell about an experience of their own that contrasts with the story they chose.
- Choose a story that brings up a specific **emotion** for them – hope, fear, anger, and so on – then tell about an experience that brings up the same emotion when they think of it. (Or choose a story that brings up the opposite emotion.)
- Choose a story that seems (to them) to resonate with the experience of **another person** they know (or know of) – maybe someone who is very *unlike* them – then tell a story about that person (about something that person did or said or felt) that connects to the story they chose.
- Choose a story about events they would like to see **happen more often** in the future, then tell a fictional story about a future in which such events do happen more often.
- Choose a story about events they would like to **stop happening** in the future, then tell a fictional story about a future in which such events no longer happen.

In any of these cases, afterwards, ask people afterward to explore the similarities and differences between the two rounds of pairing they experienced: the straightforward round and the more complicated round. What came up in each round? What did they learn?

## Part 6: Sensemaking II

In this session you will facilitate a sensemaking exercise (story elements). Everyone will pretend to be employees of FictCo, a fictional corporation I made up to show people what it's like to work with stories. **You will need to choose facilitators before this meeting starts, as there is some preparation required.**

### Agenda

Before the session begins		Decide who will facilitate in the session. Facilitator(s): Find the file in your materials called <b>Stories for Sensemaking Practice – FictCo.xlsx</b> . Set it up as a shared document everyone can see and move around in.	
Exercise	1 hour	Facilitator(s): Carry out the instructions using the instructions below. Everyone else: Listen and respond.	You can repeat this exercise with a second person or group as the facilitator, remembering to save 10 minutes for wrap-up.

Review	10 minutes	Talk about what just happened. How did the exercise work out? What did you see happen as people moved from the concrete to the abstract? Were there any places where people got stuck or confused? What was the end of the exercise like? Were the people surprised by what they built?	
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## Instructions for the story elements exercise

### Introduction: 2 minutes

Say:

Hi and welcome. I'm \_\_\_\_\_. As you know, my team and I have been gathering stories from a variety of FictCo employees, including some of you, to explore how we can make FictCo a better place to work. Today we are going to work with the stories we have collected. Please bring your enthusiasm and your hopes for a better FictCo to what we do today. And please treat everyone and every story with respect.

Remind people that this is a fictional example and that we are pretending to be FictCo employees.

### Question answering: 20 minutes

Ask people to break into small groups of 2-4 people each.

Say:

Working within your small group, everyone choose a "batch" of eight stories from this file. Choose a batch at random, one that is different from the batches chosen by the other people in your group.

Read over the batch of eight stories you picked out. As you read, **choose the two stories that resonate most** with your own experiences.

After everyone has chosen two stories, take turns reading the stories out loud to each other. For each story, write 2-4 answers to this question on sticky notes:

**What is going on** in this story? What sorts of situations are happening here?

Keep your answers short, like “People are competing for resources” or “One person is helping another meet a deadline.”

If you are doing this physically, give each group a pad of sticky notes and a pen. If you are doing it online, give each group their own page or space in a shared document.

Let people do this quietly for 20 minutes. If some people are done early, tell them they can read more stories and write down more answers if they want to. If some groups haven’t written many sticky notes, ask them to write down as many as they can.

#### First clustering: 10 minutes

Bring everyone together into one group. Ask them to bring all of their sticky notes together. If you are doing this physically, it is easy: just put the sticky notes at the bottom of a large wall or table surface. If you are doing this online, ask people to copy the “sticky note” shapes they wrote to a new, empty page or space.

Say:

Now we’re going to cluster all of these sticky notes together. **Place like with like.** Don’t worry about who is going to move what: just start moving things around. If you don’t like where something is, pick it up and move it. If two people disagree about where a note is, you can copy it into two notes; but write an extra note on each to explain what aspect of the situation each note refers to.

Watch over the clustering. Try and get more people to engage in it. (Usually only about half of the people will actually do any clustering, but do try and get people to at least pay attention to what is happening.)

When the large group has arrived at 5-10 stable clusters, ask them to **give each cluster a name.** If you are doing this physically, hand them a new color of sticky note (so they don’t get mixed up). If you are doing this online, ask people to use a different sticky-note color.

#### Writing attributes: 10 minutes

When the group has created and named their clusters, ask them to talk about each cluster and answer these questions about it:

1. What is **good** or useful or helpful about this type of situation? For example, does it draw people together? Does it energize people? Does it help people learn?
2. What is **bad** or useless or harmful about this type of situation? For example, does it divide people? Does it drain energy? Does it promulgate misconceptions?

Ask people to **write down 2-4 positive and 2-4 negative attributes for each cluster** on a new color of sticky notes. If you are working in physical space, ask people to place the sticky notes at the bottom of the previous clustering space, or just hold on to them. If you are working online, ask people to write their sticky notes on a new page or space.

### Second clustering: 10 minutes

When every cluster has been adequately described, ask people to **cluster their attributes** on a new space, putting aside their original clusters. As before, when the new clusters stabilize, ask people to give them names. This second batch of clusters is a set of **story elements**: abstract representations of the situations present in the stories.

### Discussion: 10 minutes

Invite everyone to talk about what they see in the story elements. Ask:

- What do you think these clusters can tell us about the topic we are exploring together?
- What surprises you about these clusters?
- What are you curious about? Is there anything you would like to explore more deeply?

## Stretch challenges

The story elements exercise can be used to consider the situations that arise in stories, but there are several other element types, each with its own starting question.

- Themes: What is this story about?
- Characters: Who is doing things in this story?
- Values: What matters to the people in this story?
- Relationships: How are the people in this story related to each other?
- Motivations: Why do the people in this story do what they do?
- Beliefs: What do the people in this story believe?
- Conflicts: Who or what stands in opposition in this story?
- Transitions: What changes take place in this story?

The rest of the exercise is the same for all of these element types, but the items being clustered differ, so the final story elements differ as well. The most exhaustive use of this exercise is to consider every type of story element (and maybe another type you come up with yourself!). Probably nobody will ever do that, but you can improve the utility of the exercise by adding one or two more types of story element to the mix. Consider trying one of these elaborations:

- **Parallel** explorations. Split into small groups. Have each group choose a different starting question to develop a different set of story elements. Ask each group to show everyone else what they found.
- **Sequential** explorations. Go through the whole process with one type of story element, then go back and do the whole thing over again (faster this time) with a second type. Then juxtapose what you can see from the two sets of elements.
- **Concurrent** explorations. As you read through the stories, don't answer one question about each story: answer two. (For example, list what is happening *and* who is doing things in each story.) Write the answers on two different colors of sticky notes. Once you have two piles of sticky notes, go through the cluster/describe/cluster process with

one pile, then the other. Finally, juxtapose the two sets of story elements. What do they tell you together?

Another stretch challenge is to end the story-elements exercise by asking people to **build fictional stories** in which the various story elements interact. This can be especially fruitful if you have built two or more types of story elements. What would happen to a “worker bee” character who found themselves in an “arms race” conflict? What might happen if a “cat and mouse” relationship was plunged into an “apocalypse now” transition? Since story elements are derived from stories of real experience, they can help people make sense of real forces that affect their lives. See what you can do with the exercise.

## Part 7: Sensemaking III

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In this session you will facilitate a complete (though shortened) sensemaking workshop, with a contact task, a story exercise, and a wrap-up task. As in the previous session, everyone will pretend to be employees of FictCo, a fictional corporation. **You will need to choose facilitators before this meeting starts, as there is some preparation required.**

### Agenda

Before the session		Too much to explain here; see below.
Contact task	30 minutes	Facilitator(s): Carry out the instructions using the instructions below. Everyone else: Listen and respond.
Exercise	1 hour	Facilitator(s): Carry out the instructions using the instructions below. Everyone else: Listen and respond.
Wrap-up	15 minutes	Facilitator(s): Carry out the instructions using the instructions below. Everyone else: Listen and respond.
Review	15 minutes	Talk about what just happened. How did the three parts of the session flow? Were there any problems during transitions? What do you think the session would have been like if you had omitted any of the parts or used different parts? What other exercises would you like to try? How can you see yourself using these tasks and exercises in your own sensemaking workshops?



## Before the session

This session will take too long to repeat, so different people won't be able to take turns facilitating the whole session. However, different people can facilitate the different *parts* of the session (contact, exercise, wrap-up).

Facilitator(s):

- Find the file in your materials called **Stories for Sensemaking Practice - FictCo.xlsx**. Set it up as a shared document everyone can see and move around in.
- If you are facilitating the **contact** task, choose which task you will use. If you plan to use clustering, you will not need to prepare anything past making that choice. If you plan to use sorting or ranking, you will need to **build a question your participants can answer** as they go through the contact task. Look for questions your participants will find interesting and meaningful. Make sure they are questions your participants will be able to answer using the stories you collected.
  - If you plan to use **sorting**, set up a single-choice question, such as:
    - Risk-taking in this story? High, medium, low
    - Face-saving? High, medium, low
    - Responsible behavior? High, medium, low
  - If you plan to use **ranking**, set up a question whose answers lie along a dimension between two extremes, like:
    - How often should this happen? Every day --- Never again
    - If FictCo was like this all the time, would you want to work here? Yes and for nothing --- Not for all the money in the world
    - Have you seen situations like this? Sure, every day --- I've never seen anything like this
- If you are facilitating the **ground-truthing** exercise, prepare the texts in the following table to be used in the exercise.
  - If you are working in **physical** space, write the texts onto pieces of paper, as shown. Fold the papers so that the inside words are hidden. Tape the papers shut. Prepare one set of papers for each small group you will have.
  - If you are working **online**, prepare a slide-set or whiteboard document with two sets of colored text boxes. Hide the inside texts by placing them *behind* the outside texts.

Write on the outside	Write on the inside
Unity	We work as a team at every scale, from every small workgroup to the whole organization.
Integrity	We trust and are trustworthy. We behave responsibly, and we reward responsibility.

Community	We take care of each other. We care about all of our customers and employees.
Long and broad view	We look beyond the local and the present to the global and the future.
Agility	We are nimble and smart. We meet our challenges with ingenuity and energy.

## Instructions for the contact tasks

### Introduction: 2 minutes

Say:

Hi and welcome. I'm \_\_\_\_\_. As you know, my team and I have been gathering stories from a variety of FictCo employees, including some of you, to explore how we can make FictCo a better place to work. Today we are going to work with the stories we have collected. Please bring your enthusiasm and your hopes for a better FictCo to what we do today. And please treat everyone and every story with respect.

Remind people that we are all pretending to be FictCo employees who want good things to happen in the company.

### Forming small groups: 2 minutes

Ask people to split up into small groups of 2-4 people. (Note that for any sensemaking task or exercise that does not include story sharing, you can have groups of two.)

### Sorting/ranking/clustering: 20 minutes

Say:

Working within your small group, everyone, please choose a “batch” of eight stories from this file. Choose a batch at random, one that is different from the batches chosen by the other people in your group.

Read over the batch of eight stories you picked out. As you read, **choose the four stories that resonate most** with your own experiences.

Next, copy the names of the stories you chose onto sticky notes. Then, working within your small groups:

- (for sorting) Write out *this question* and *these answers* on sticky notes. Place the answers at different locations on your [table or wall], making

a series of containers to put notes in. Then place each story-name sticky note **near the answer that works best** for it. When you have placed all of your notes, talk about what you see.

- (for ranking) Write out *this question* and *these two labels* on sticky notes. Place the two labels at opposite ends of a line (draw it or just imagine it) on your [table or wall]. Then place each story-name sticky note **where it seems to belong on the line**. When you have placed all of your notes, talk about what you see.
- (for clustering) Place all of your story-name sticky notes on your [table or wall]. Start moving the notes around. **Place like with like**. Eventually you will see that some clusters of notes begin to emerge. Give each cluster a name. Keep doing this until every sticky note is in a cluster. Then talk about what you see.

Watch the small groups as they do this. If you see people getting done with the task early, encourage them to go back to the stories, read some more, and place some more notes. If you see people struggling to do the task or arguing about how it should be done correctly, explain that there is no correct way to do this task. Placing and grouping notes is not an end in itself, but a way to think about the stories together.

Wrapping up the exercise: 10 minutes

Ask all of the small groups to come back together. Ask someone from each small group to take a few minutes to explain what they saw and discussed.

## Instructions for the ground-truthing exercise

Introduction: 1 minute

Say:

Now that we've had a look at the stories, let's go deeper in and do a more serious exercise using them. This exercise is a sort of game, but it's a serious game designed to help us all think together about the FictCo we would like to work at.

In this exercise we will think about how our experiences and our company's values connect – or don't. We will be using these [papers or shapes] to work with.

Forming small groups: 2 minutes

Ask people to split up into small groups of 2-4 people.

### Choosing/telling stories, writing value statement: 20 minutes

Say:

Working in your small group, choose a **value** you would like to explore from this list.

Next, look through the stories you have read – and maybe some you haven't yet read – and pick out at least **four stories that connect especially well** to the value you chose, either positively (the value is exemplified by the story) or negatively (the value is negated or absent in the story).

While you are doing this, if you happen to think of a story from your own experience that you would like to share in relation to the value, go ahead and do that.

Once you have chosen 4+ stories from the story collection (and maybe told some of your own), draw on the stories you read (and told) to **write a brief value statement** that captures what you would like FictCo to be like in relation that value.

Watch the groups as they do this part of the exercise. If a group is far ahead and bored, explain that they can choose some stories for a second value if they want to. If a group is far behind and losing interest, help them connect with the exercise by inverting it. Ask them to first choose a few stories that resonate particularly well with their own experience, then use those stories to choose a value (and then they might get moving on the exercise). (Also, remind people that we are all pretending to be FictCo employees who care about the place we work.)

### Improving existing value statement: 10 minutes

Say:

You should now have a set of stories and a value statement. Now [open the piece of paper, move the shape] to **reveal FictCo's official statement** about the value you chose.

Your last task is to **improve the official statement** until it takes the experiences you explored into account. Don't simply replace the official statement with what you wrote: merge the two versions. Negotiate between them. Come up with something that could actually, seriously be part of FictCo's official stance.

### Repeat: 15 minutes

Say:

Now we're going to repeat that same process again, only faster this time. Choose a value; choose 4 or more stories that connect to it; maybe share some stories of your own; write a value statement; look at the official statement; improve it.

### Wrapping up the exercise: 15 minutes

Ask all of the small groups to come back together. Ask someone from each small group to take a few minutes to recount the stories they chose and told, read (aloud) the value statements they wrote, and talk a little about the process and what they learned.

If you want to, ask everyone to write their final value statements (the improved versions) on papers or sticky notes and put them all together onto a table or online document so everyone can see them all together.

## Instructions for the wrap-up task

Write these headings on a whiteboard, physically or online.

- I was surprised to find out that ...
- Our leaders need to know that ...
- Our employees need to know that ...
- We could try ...
- We should stop ...

Ask everyone, in one group, to call out items to write on any of the lists. After you get 10-20 items written down, open the floor to discussion about the lists and the whole session. What did/do people find exciting, daunting, confusing, hopeless? In their pretended roles as FictCo employees, is there anything else anyone would like to say to the group?

## Stretch challenges

This is already a pretty complicated workshop, with its three components, so you may not want to complicate things further. Still, here are some small elaborations you could add if you want to challenge yourself.

### For the contact task

Instead of facilitating only one contact task, you can **offer all three tasks** and ask each small group to choose a task. You might even want to suggest that each small group try a different task. Then there will be more to share when people come back together.

### For the ground-truthing exercise

- Instead of using the supplied texts (which I modified from a real set I found on the internet), you can **write your own value statements** before the session starts. Just make sure they are not too far off from the FictCo stories, or they won't connect.

- You can give groups the option to **ignore the values** you have given them and write statements for values not in the list. There will be nothing to compare them to, so that part of the exercise will drop out, but if people feel bothered by the preset values you show them, you can allow them to forge their own path.
- If people want to, and you have time, you could ask them to go to the internet and find a different set of **real value statements** to use (say from some large corporation). It might not connect well to the FictCo stories, but it might.
- You could have each small group **play-act a group** of FictCo employees, such as managers and workers, factory and office, young and old, and so on. Then the discussion at the end of the exercise (and session) might be extra lively.

#### For the wrap-up task

- You can **change my wrap-up list categories** to ones you like better.
- You can put aside my categories entirely and just ask people to write down **anything they would like to say** about the session, then lead a clustering exercise to let the wrap-items emerge more organically from the experiences of the people in the session.

## Part 8: Intervention and Return

In this session you will facilitate a collaborative session in which you will build a narrative simulation (as an intervention in the flow of stories). As before, everyone will pretend to be employees of FictCo. **You will need to choose facilitators before this meeting starts, as there is some preparation required.**

### Agenda

Before the session		Choose one person to be the facilitator. (Or two people can share the role.) Facilitator(s): Find the file in your materials called <b>Stories for Sensemaking Practice - FictCo.xlsx</b> . Set it up as a shared document everyone can see and move around in. Prepare a series of empty spaces everyone can work on together (physical spaces or online whiteboards).	
Exercise	1 hour	Facilitator(s): Use the instructions below to facilitate the simulation-building exercise. Everyone else: listen and respond.	You can repeat this exercise with a second person or group as the facilitator, remembering to

			save 10 minutes for wrap-up.
Review	15 minutes	Talk about what just happened. Is this exercise about intervention or sensemaking? Could it be some of both? Can you imagine some situations in which you might build a narrative simulation for use in your community or organization? What other sorts of narrative interventions would you like to try?	

## Instructions for building a narrative simulation

Introduction: 1 minute

Say:

As you know, we have been working on a project to improve the experience of working at FictCo. One of the goals that emerged from our sensemaking sessions was that we would like to do a better job of helping new employees learn how we do things around here. Today we are going to work together on building a narrative simulation, a kind of choose-your-own-adventure game, that will help FictCo employees, new and old, think about how we do our work. Let's get started.

Forming small groups: 2 minutes

Ask people to split up into small groups of 2-4 people.

Choosing goals: 5 minutes

Say:

Choose an overall **goal** for your simulation. What do you want to help people learn how to do?

Choosing, clustering, excerpting stories: 20 minutes

Say:

Look through the FictCo stories and find **skills – present or absent** – that relate to your overall goal. Summarize each skill briefly on a sticky note.

When you have gathered 20+ skills, **cluster** them into groups. Give the clusters names.

Choose the **three** clusters you think are most important.

For each of the three clusters you chose, find **5+ story excerpts** that illustrate the presence or absence of the skills in that cluster particularly well. Copy the excerpts onto sticky notes.

### Building simulations: 20 minutes

Say:

For each of the three clusters you chose, use your story excerpts to **build a fictional simulation**, filling in these template slots:

You are in a **situation**

This **challenge** arises

    You do this in **response**

        This **outcome** happens

    You do this in **response**

        This **outcome** happens

    You do this in **response**

        This **outcome** happens

Draw all of these parts of the simulation (the situation, the challenge, the three responses, and the three outcomes) from the story excerpts you selected. Choose three responses that run from best to worst.

Write each text in the second person (e.g., “You are late for work”), so the person playing the simulation will experience it like a role-playing game.

When you are done writing, **mix up the order** of the response-outcome pairs so that it is not obvious which is best. Then **hide each outcome** under its response, either physically (with a sticky note on top of another) or virtually (with a sticky-note shape on top of another sticky-note shape). The other groups will “play” your simulation by choosing responses and reading the outcomes under them.

If you run out of time, try to build simulations for at least two of the three clusters you chose to focus on. If you have extra time, you can build a fourth simulation as well.

### Playing simulations: 20 minutes

Bring everyone together into one group. Have people play at least one of each set of simulations.

“Playing” each simulation means:



1. Reading the situation and challenge
2. Choosing one of the three responses
3. Moving the response (physically or virtually) to reveal the outcome hidden under it
4. Reading the outcome
5. (Optionally) Choosing a second response; moving it; reading that outcome
6. (Optionally) Moving the last response, then reading that outcome

After each play-through, discuss what people learned from the experience.

## Stretch challenges

There are a few ways in which you could make this exercise more challenging.

- You could ask each group to **illustrate each response-outcome pair with 2-3 story excerpts**. This will make the simulations more interesting to play, and it will ground the simulations in the collected stories. If a group can't find an excerpt that illustrates a response-outcome pair they have written, they should change it.
- You could ask groups to **build a simulation-based training program** in which the three simulations they build are connected, deepening in difficulty as the sequence goes on.
- You could **ask each group to choose a FictCo employee group to represent**. For example, groups could pretend to be FictCo managers, factory workers, scientists, technicians, or administrators. Each group would build their simulations from the point of view of the employees they chose (and you'd ask the groups to choose different employee groups). Then, when the groups play each other's simulations, they could stay in character and respond to the simulations as if they belonged to the same groups.
- Instead of using the FictCo stories to do this exercise, you could **use some of the stories you gathered** in one of your projects. You could even have different groups work with different sets of gathered stories.