

# PNI Practicum Prelude: A Taste of PNI

## *Sandbox Instructions*

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Meeting	Sandbox	Preparation required?
1	Observe story sharing	No
2	Facilitate a story-sharing exercise	Yes
3	Facilitate a sensemaking exercise	Yes
4	Cluster sensemaking clusters; build narrative simulation	Yes

## Part 1: Introduction, Fundamentals, Planning

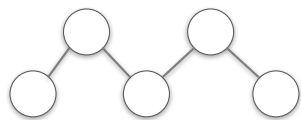
You will participate in an exercise designed to help you notice and work with stories in everyday conversation. No one needs to facilitate this first sandbox session; you can just go through the exercise together.

### Agenda

First explanation	15 minutes	Working together, read the “first explanation” section below. Talk about what you are reading.
First activity	20 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	20 minutes	Form groups of three (the same as before or different), then follow the instructions for the second activity below.
Discussion and wrap-up	15 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?

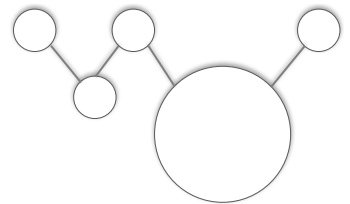
### First explanation

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



Nice people try to keep things fair and equal.

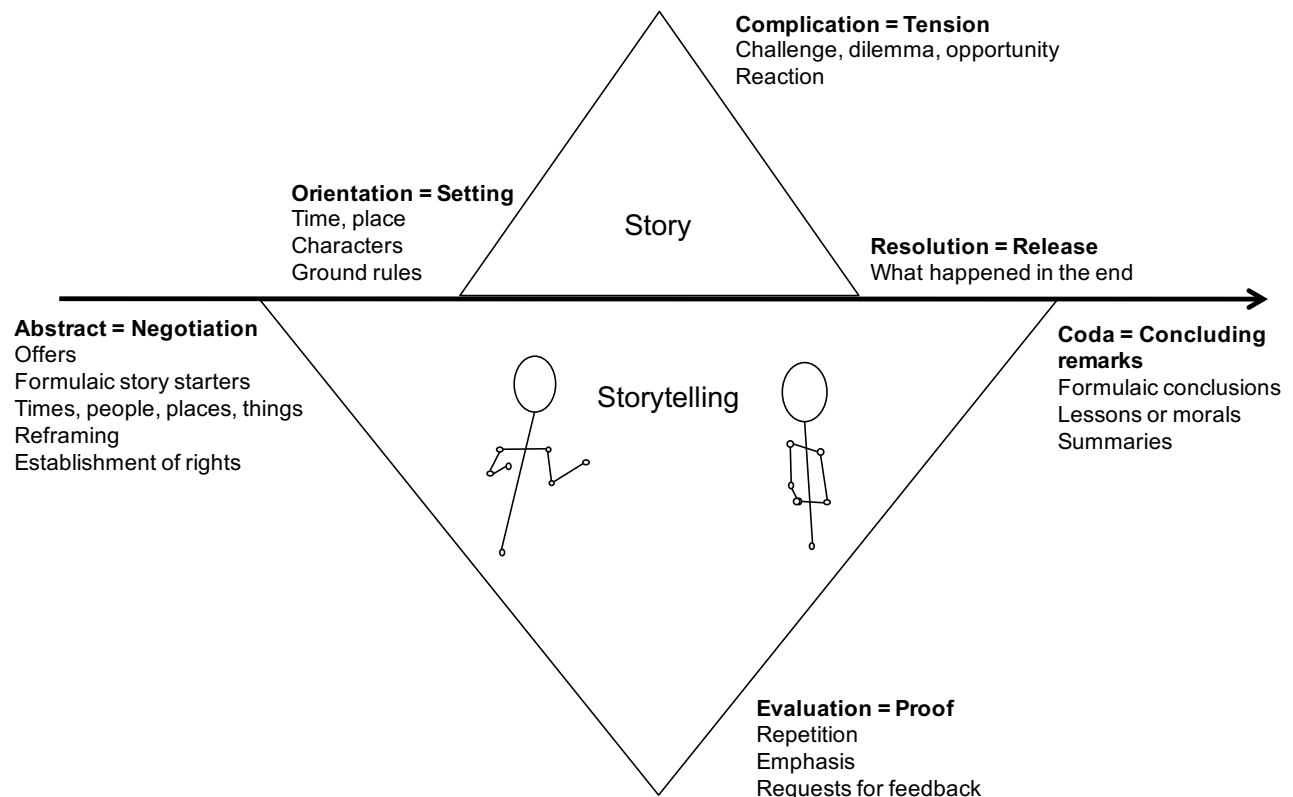
When someone tells a story, they **hold the floor** for a longer period of time than usual.



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).

## Part 2: Collection

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

### Agenda

Before the session	Decide who will facilitate in the session. Facilitator(s): Follow the "Before the session" instructions below. Then read over the instructions for carrying out the story-sharing exercise.
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Stepwise landscape exercise	80 minutes	Facilitator(s): Carry out the instructions using the instructions below. Everyone else: Listen and respond.
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?
After the session	30 minutes	Facilitator(s): Enter the stories and answers collected into a common spreadsheet. See the instructions below.

## Before the session

Open the story form file included with your course materials.

- If you plan to meet in person, **print** a few copies of the story form for each person.
- If you plan to meet online, either:
  - Use the story form to set up an online **survey** (on a surveying platform such as SurveyMonkey).
  - Within a single document, copy and paste the story form so that there are **at least three copies** for each person. Then upload the document to a server where you can give other people permission to edit it.

Don't give out the story form before the session begins.

## 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 to which you are all invited. I will give you details for it at the end of this exercise.

Everything you say today will be **completely anonymous**.



The first thing we need to do is to give each of you a **participant code** so you can be anonymous.

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

Initial elicitation: 3 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): 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:

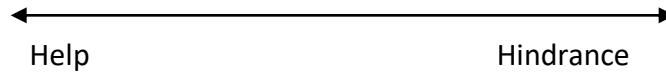
Thank you for telling us about that experience.

If nobody else responded to the story, and if the storyteller looks embarrassed or awkward, **ask your respectfully curious 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 (real or virtual).

If this was the first story told, **draw an axis** line horizontally across a table, wall, 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 the note above or below the line if they want to.

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:

1. Start with the **connection point** you found in the story. Say something like, "That story took place on a train. Does anybody else remember a learning experience related to trains?"
2. If no one responds to the connection point, explain the **dimension** shown on the line again.
3. If no one responds to that, rephrase the original **questions**.

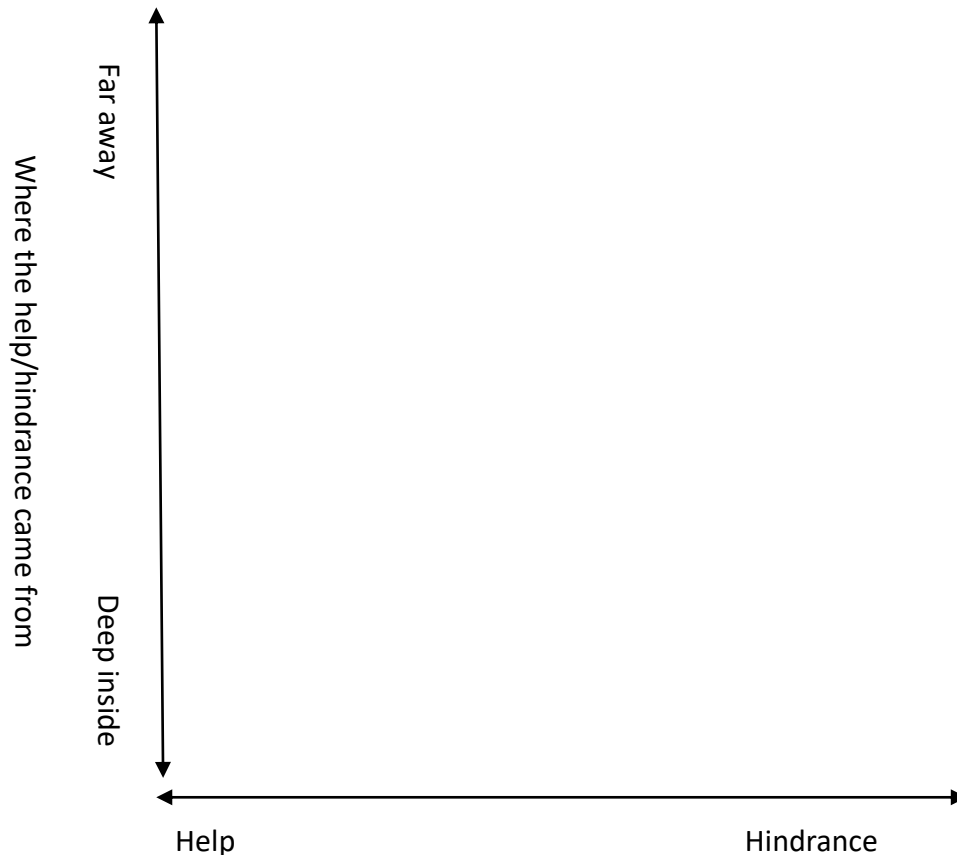
Keep people sharing stories. Don't give people a time limit for telling each story, but if someone goes on for a very long time, do quietly give them a signal that it's time to move on.

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.

Keep asking people to place their sticky notes along the line.

[Introducing the second dimension, moving stories: 5 minutes](#)

Now add a vertical line to your space, like this.



Explain that “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 personality or values.

After you have labeled the new axis, ask each participant to **move the sticky notes** that represent the stories they told up or down in the space. People don’t need to talk about or reflect deeply on this task. Just ask them to move each note where it seems to belong.

*As each story is being told (second dimension): 20 minutes*

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

If nobody says anything:

1. 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?”

2. 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.)
3. 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: 10 minutes

Ask everyone to use the story forms you prepared to fill out one form for each story they told. Remember to ask them to enter their participant codes.

### Finding patterns: 10 minutes

Now it's time to ask the participants to look over the space they filled 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 talk about and mark up the space.

## After the session

If your sandbox meeting was in physical space, gather up the filled-out story forms. Then **use a photocopier** to make as many copies of each filled-out form as there are students taking the course. (The goal is for every student to have a copy of the entire story collection.)

If your sandbox meeting was online, **create a spreadsheet** with a columns like this. Copy and paste in the stories and answers as people typed them into your online survey or shared document. (I've added some made-up data to show you what the spreadsheet might look like.)

Story name	Story text	Feeling	Remember	Age	Curious
Thanks but no thanks	I thought I could see a way to improve our...	Sad, frustrated	8/10	25 or younger	9/10
My solution	We were facing a deadline, and we needed..	Relieved, excited, hopeful	7/10	41-65	4/10

When you are done, put the spreadsheet somewhere online where everyone who is taking the course can see it and edit it. You will all be adding more rows (one per story) to the spreadsheet in your next outside-of-class activity.

## Part 3: Sensemaking

In this session you will participate in a sensemaking exercise (story elements). In order to not bias your upcoming facilitation of the same exercise (with people who are not taking the course), you will not use the stories you have collected in the course. Instead, you will use a story collection I made up to show people what it's like to work with stories. In this sandbox session, you will pretend to be employees of FictCo, the fictional corporation in which the stories were "gathered." **You will need to choose one or more 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</b> . Set it up as a shared document everyone can see and move around in.
Story elements exercise	80 minutes	Facilitator(s): Carry out the instructions using the instructions below. Everyone else: Listen and respond.
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?

### 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: 30 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 and abstract, 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 whiteboard, one that has virtual sticky notes.

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 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, 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 virtual sticky notes they wrote and paste them on an empty page or whiteboard space, one that everyone in the meeting can see and change.

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, 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 to get everyone to engage in it. (Usually only about half of any group of more than three people will actually do any clustering, but do try and get people to at least pay attention to what is happening.)

When the 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: 20 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?

Still working together in one large group, 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 them 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 described with attributes, ask people to **cluster the 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 see here that you would like to explore more deeply?

## Part 4: Return

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In this session you will merge the outcomes of all of the sensemaking sessions you held outside your class meetings. Then you will use the combined clusters to **build a narrative simulation** using the stories you collected. **You will need to choose one or more 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) Prepare a series of empty spaces everyone can work on together (physical spaces or online whiteboards). Everyone: During the check-in portion of your call, cluster all of the cluster names from your facilitated sessions together. Give the meta-clusters names. Talk about what you see.
Simulation-building exercise	80 minutes	Facilitator(s): Use the instructions below to facilitate the simulation-building exercise, using the stories you gathered and the clusters you created. Everyone else: listen and respond.
Review	10 minutes	Talk about what just happened. Is building a narrative simulation an intervention? Or is it 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 the building a narrative simulation

### Introduction: 1 minute

Say:

As you know, we have been working together on a project about learning. Today we are going to use our stories and the results of our sensemaking exercises to build a **narrative simulation**: a choose-your-own-adventure game that will help people think about learning. Let's get started.

### Forming small groups: 1 minute

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

### Choosing skills: 8 minutes

Say:

Look through the clusters you created earlier (in the meta-clusters exercise at the start of today's meeting). Based on what you see in those clusters, **choose a single skill** that seems important to you. The skill can be mostly present or mostly absent in the clusters. In the context of learning, what would you like to help people learn how to do?



### Choosing, clustering, excerpting stories: 30 minutes

Say:

Now that you have chosen a skill, read through the stories you collected in your shared project. As you read, find **5-10 story excerpts** that illustrate the presence or absence of the skill you chose. Copy the excerpts onto sticky notes (real or virtual).

If you have extra time, think of a second skill, and choose 5-10 story excerpts that connect to that skill as well.

### Building simulations: 30 minutes

Say:

Use the story excerpts you drew out of our collected stories to **build a fictional simulation**. Fill 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 whose outcomes run from best to worst.

Write each text in the second person (e.g., "You are late for work"), so the people 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 one sticky note on top of another) or virtually (with one 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 have extra time (and you had extra time when you were finding story excerpts), see if you can build a second simulation.

### Playing simulations: 10 minutes

Bring everyone together into one group and play the simulation(s) each group created.

“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 you learned from the experience.