Practical Skills for Better Stories

A Narrative Framework for Community Involvement and Conflict Resolution at Superfund Sites

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Today you will learn

- The components of a narrative

- The difference between narratives that support conflict and those that promote collaboration

- What is in *A Narrative Framework for Community Involvement and Conflict Resolution at Superfund Sites*, and how to use it

- Tools to build narratives that promote collaboration

Narrative Basics

Definition of Narrative

- A sequence of events (i.e., a story)
  - Beginning, middle, end
- With an evaluative point
  - A moral to the story

Building a Narrative, Interactively

- **Plot** – the sequence of events, the action
- **Characters** – the persons who play roles in the story
- **Values –** terms that are used to designate the "good" and the "bad
  - Judgments about 'Self' and 'Other'

What is a 'Narrative Lens?'

➡ An approach or 'lens' for assessing community dynamics that draws on narratives

- o Can understand a conflict between EPA and a community through EPA's and community's narratives about themselves and one another

- o Reveals how communities make meaning of their situations

- o Allows us to see how people are anchored in the stories they tell

Collaborative Narratives

Position the Other Positively

➡ Well intentioned

➡ Legitimate

Examples of Collaborative Narratives

➡ "We understand why people in the community are concerned about their children's health."

- *Positioned as legitimate*

➡ "We appreciate that EPA treats us as a partner in this cleanup."

- *Positioned as well-intentioned*

Conflict Narratives

Position Other Negatively

➡ Wrong

➡ Untrustworthy

➡ Incompetent

Examples of Conflict Narratives

➡ "EPA keeps telling us the water is safe, but they're not listening to us and taking us seriously."

  o *Positioned as incompetent*

➡ "This community doesn't want information. They just want to yell at us."

  o *Positioned as untrustworthy*
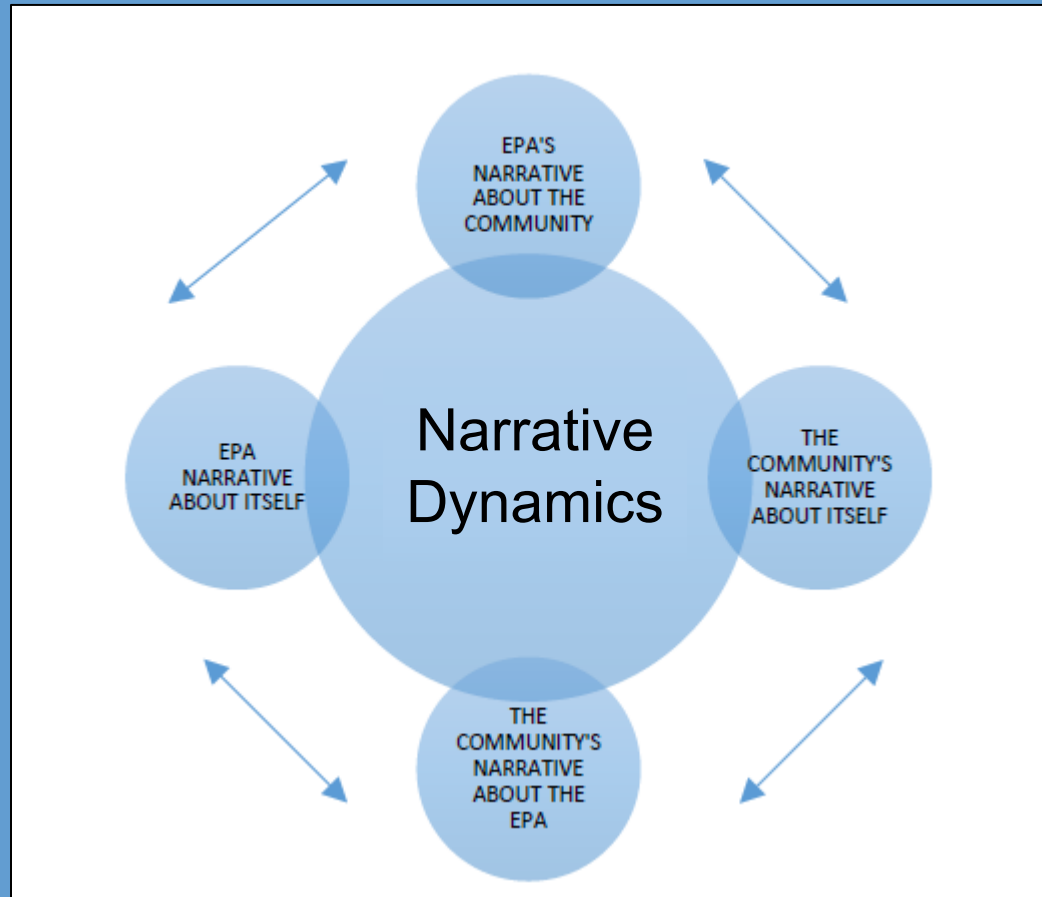
Conflict Narratives: Components/Dynamics

Components

Plot lines

Values

Speaker Legitimacy
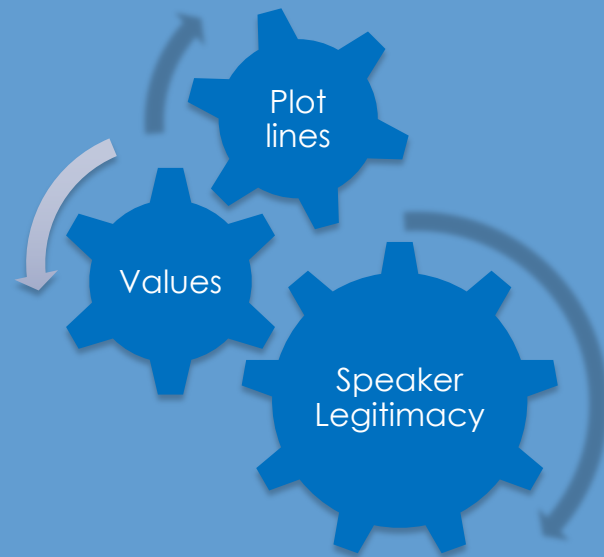
Dynamics

Narrative Dynamics

The role of power

- In a narrative context
  - Power comes from the elaboration of a narrative
  - It is especially powerful when a narrative is adopted or elaborated by Others (not the original storyteller)
  - Power may be held by EPA or community members, and it is dynamic

Marginalized and Dominant Narratives

- Marginalized
  - Told by vulnerable populations
  - Narratives not included in overall site narrative
  - Can challenge solutions that emerge, leading to conflict
- Dominant
  - Overrepresented populations
  - Narratives are circulated/elaborated in public
  - Crowd out marginalized narratives

Moving from Conflict to Collaborative Narratives

Which narratives create or keep us in destructive conflicts?

Which narratives support or move us toward collaborative engagement?

From Conflict Story to "Better" Story

- Increasing Complexity
  - Plot (temporal and contextualizing narratives)
  - Character roles
  - Themes

Telling "Better" Stories

- Complicated plots where characters are imperfect

- Legitimacy for all parties
  - Showcasing positive traits
  - Always attributing positive intention

- Value systems that are not black and white but complex

- Interactively produced
  - Mediations, negotiations, theatre, storytelling workshops

Overview of the Narrative Framework for Superfund Sites

Narrative Framework for Community Involvement and Conflict Resolution at Superfund Sites

➡ Supports EPA's efforts to prevent and resolve conflicts at Superfund sites

➡ Provides an approach for assessing how EPA's and the communities' narratives were created

➡ Offers tools to change the conflict narratives to promote collaboration

Narrative Framework for Community Involvement and Conflict Resolution at Superfund Sites

Contains Four Parts:

1. Part 1 – Defines and explains the concept of narratives

2. Part 2 – Introduces tools for using narrative to transform conflicts

3. Part 3 – A case study highlighting narratives at the Camp Minden site

4. Part 4 – Provides best practices for using narrative tools

Features of This Guide

- Covers the basics of a narrative approach to conflict

- Provides the tools to transform narratives to promote collaboration

- Provides examples

- Discusses how to implement these tools in Superfund community involvement

Outcomes and Applications

The Narrative Framework can help you:

➥ Identify the narrative landscape at your Superfund site

➥ Assess how narratives promote conflict or collaboration between EPA and the community at your site

➥ Implement practices to support narratives that promote collaboration

   o Ask questions to transform conflict narratives

   o Help communities claim agency

   o Build trust with communities

Narrative Tools

Three Narrative Tools for Creating Better Stories

➡ There are three core tools that are particular to narrative practice:

  o Positive Connotations

  o Circular Questions

  o Externalization

➡ All three can be used in private interviews with community members and in public meetings

Positive Connotations:
A Tool for Building Trust

➡ Providing positive explanations/responses to negative stories being told about the Other

➡ Creates narratives that lead to collaboration and mutual trust

Positive Connotations:
How They Help You

- Enable people to reframe their view of Others in a more positive light

- Change narrative dynamics

- Interrupts cycles of blame and opens up new storylines between the community and EPA

- Increases productive engagement

Positive Connotations Role-Play Example

Questions: A Tool for Evolving Narratives

Calls for a given response:
"Don't you think that this was the wrong thing to do?"
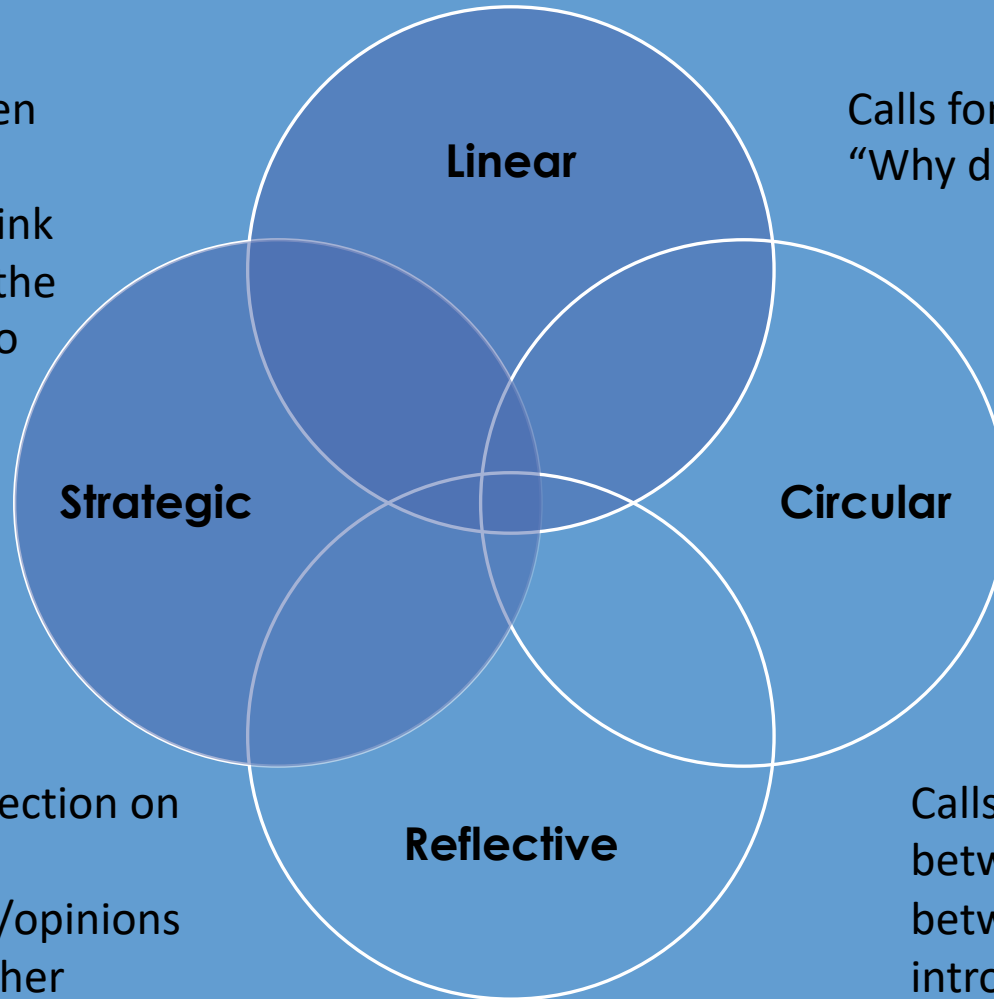
Calls for causal explanations:
"Why did this happen?"

Linear

Strategic

Circular

Reflective

Calls for reflection on actions or perceptions/opinions of Self or Other

Calls for comparisons between people, or between times that introduce new language and develop relational knowledge

Circular Questions:
A Technology for Relational Knowledge

➡ Use comparisons as a way of understanding the Other

➡ Call for the speaker to reflect on the explicit and implicit assumptions people have about themselves, each other, and the past and future

Circular questions role-play example

Circular Questions:
The Two Comparisons

- Temporal (comparison between Time 1 and Time 2)
- Relational (comparison between people)

Circular Questions:
How They Help You

- "Disobey" the existing characterizations, plot lines, and value systems

- Introduce new values, plot events, and new character roles into the narrative landscape

- Create "relational knowledge" (knowledge about relationships)

Temporal Comparisons

- Introduce new plot, character or value components

- Allow communities to envision differences between past/present or present/future

Circles of Time

Present

Dangerous

No Opportunity

10 years from now

Increased resilience

Empowered Community

Relational Comparisons

- Speaker reflects on differences in the community using a specific characteristic provided by the interviewer
  - Who is most/least anxious
  - Who is most/least likely to participate
- Speaker relates their view of the Other's view of an issue

Circles of Perspectives (Relational)
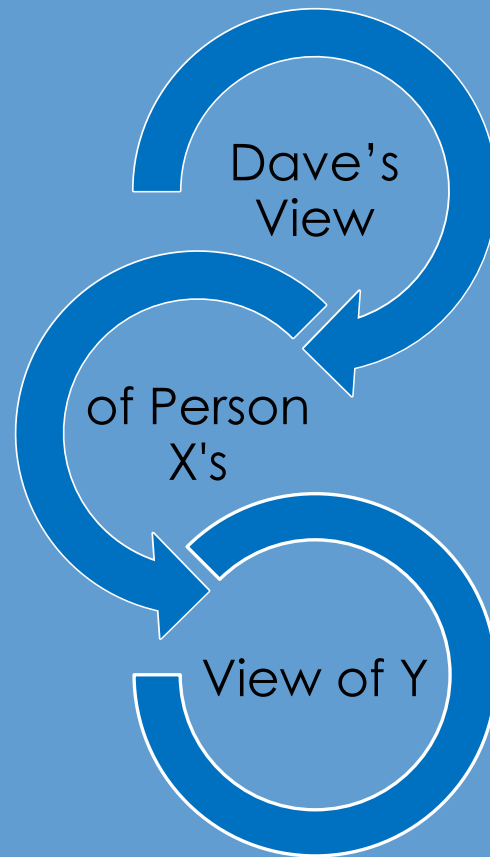
Examples of Temporal Circular Questions

- What differences would you like to see in your community 10 years from now?

- What makes that vision different from where you are today?

Examples of Relational Circular Questions

- Which groups within your community seem to be the most distraught?

- Why did you respond as you did?

- What does that tell us about how you see the different groups in the community?

Now It's Your Turn

- Provide us with a few examples of relational or temporal circular questions drawing on experiences from your sites.

Externalization:
A Tool for Claiming Agency

- A process to reframe narratives in a way that gives back power
  - Individuals/communities name a problematic emotion or behavior (of Self or Other)
  - Characterize and discuss the emotion or behavior
  - Reframe this emotion/behavior as separate from them
  - Invent strategies to control it

Externalization:
How It Helps You

- Helps people feel in control of their feelings and behavior in a given situation

- Positions people as agents of power rather than victims

- Presents the possibility of controlling/minimizing negative emotions and responses

- Opens up discussion on how to reduce negative emotions

- Helps people reflect on the consequences of their emotions/behaviors

Case Study

USS Lead Superfund Site Example

"The Environmental Protection Agency recommends cleaning up the area where the West Calumet Housing Complex once stood to residential standards. But in a letter to the EPA, Mayor Anthony Copeland suggested the property could be used for commercial or industrial purposes — which could mean the EPA wouldn't have to remove as much contaminated soil.

As a result, the EPA has built a contingency into its plan — the cleanup will be to a residential standard, unless the city decides to take an offer from a commercial or industrial company later on.

At a recent meeting, Sherry Hunter with Calumet Lives Matter says the Mayor doesn't care about his residents.

"I don't know why. We didn't ask for what we're going through," she says."

Thiele, Rebecca. "East Chicago Residents, Mayor At Odds Over Superfund Cleanup Plan." *WBAA: News, Classical & Jazz from Purdue*, 30 Nov. 2018, https://www.wbaa.org/post/east-chicago-residents-mayor-odds-over-superfund-cleanup-plan#stream/0. Accessed 15 August 2019.

The stories we tell are inscribed on us and our world, which then structure what stories we tell.......

Questions?

EPA's Conflict Prevention and Resolution Center

Our Purpose: **To make agreement easier!**

We do this by:

➡ Coaching, advising and consulting with clients about resolution of environmental cases

➡ Providing access to mediators and facilitators through our contract to assist with case challenges

➡ Teaching EPA staff and managers skills to help prevent and defuse conflicts

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Thank You!