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Understanding stakeholder engagement using narrative research

the narrative lab

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Foundations

non-linearity
Adaptive
Social-Ecological
interactions
Complexity
Narrative
management
understanding
Systems
for complex in vehicle as systems challenges and a
dynamics





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Anecdotal evidence matters





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About narrative



- Used by anthropologists to understand the characters, behaviours & values of societies
- Uncover patterns of belief & behaviour in indirect, safe ways
- Aspects of Narratives (anecdotes):
 - Resonance with patterns of behaviour
 - Displacement (externalisation)
 - Ambiguity
- Outputs are derived in workshops which encourage conversation
- A cartoonist is often used to work with the group to create visual representations to increase resonance



Relevance to water research



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- Most water and other environmental research takes place within complex socio-ecological systems, specifically IWRM initiatives
- Agent behaviour in these systems are governed by perceptions, beliefs and mind sets based
- Traditional research methods often uncovers surface patterns or symptoms, but fail to uncover the “real story” or provide quantitative trends without providing an explanation
- Narrative based research offers a robust way to collect get “below the surface” and gain a perspective on the real dynamics at play in a complex system



The pre-hypothesis approach



- Ask open ended questions designed to elicit narrative – accounts of **actual experience**.
- Patterns in the narrative reveal actual **cultural attitudes**
- **A survey question:**
 - My leader cares about my emotional wellbeing (1 ... 5)
- **Pre-hypothesis question:**
 - What experiences would you share with your best friend if they told you they'd been offered a position in this department if you wanted to encourage/discourage them to join





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Application



- Understanding Innovation culture within a division of the CSIR
- Investigating engagement and performance management strategy within SANParks
- Investigating behavioural drivers for stakeholder engagement and volunteerism
- Knowledge Sharing and lessons learnt (ICMA)
- Various other domains (e.g. monitoring & evaluation, mine safety, organisational culture, change, team development).





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An example



Understanding the behavioural drivers of engagement and volunteerism within communities around Hartebeespoort



Outputs



Metaphors:

“Being a water activist/volunteer is a marathon not a sprint. Make sure you don’t run out of steam”

- Actual narrative fragments
- Emergent archetypes, themes and values
 - Archetypes are personas that represent dominant behaviour patterns or belief systems within a specific culture.
 - They are not stereotypes - every one of us should see a little bit of ourselves in an archetype
 - Archetypes don’t exist in isolation, they operate in relation to other archetypes and dynamics in the system





Sample narrative fragment

Rich Sandton golfers (contributed by a volunteer in a leadership role)

“So we tried to motivate people, we got a group together, we got Water Affairs people, we even got the Minister of Water Affairs at the time, to come out here physically, take him on a boat, take him on the water, show him all this green, smelly stuff everywhere. And, I do quote him at time from that particular meeting because, he was very impressed, he said, ‘You guys really have got a dirty dam and it’s terrible’. He says but, and that was typical what maybe, maybe he’s correct. He said do you want me to go back to Parliament tomorrow and ask for, in those days, R200 million, to fix your dam for you bunch of rich Sandton golfers who want clean water. He says I’ve got 20 million people who don’t have any water. You know, how do I motivate government to apply that money to the problem? It was a short-sighted reaction really, because, although we maybe even felt ourselves it’s recreation and therefore we are worried you know, we’d like it clean. But, the more you get involved over the years, the more you realise it’s far deeper than that, it’s not just we want it clean because you’d like to go and swim in it. It’s health-related and there are many issues.”



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Sample archetypes

Involved stakeholder perspective



Un-involved stakeholder perspective



Perspectives on engagement and attitudes



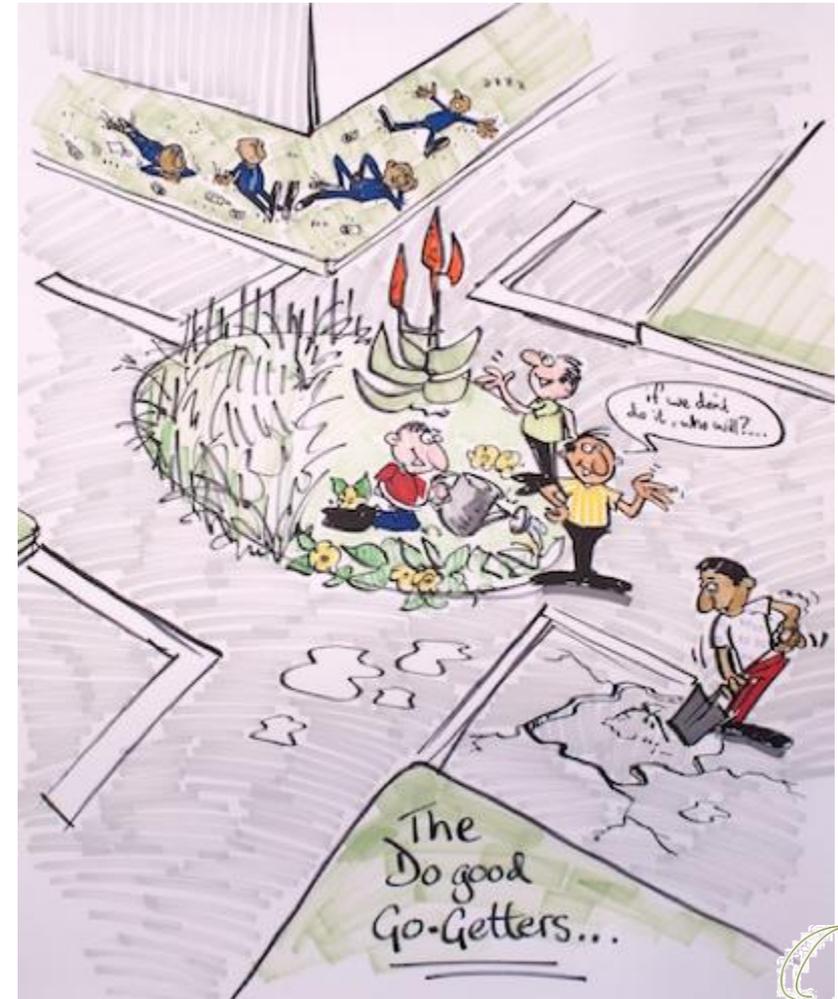


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Sample archetypes

Involved stakeholder perspective

Un-involved stakeholder perspective



Miss-guided agency and impact of salience





Key Insights

- Providing information is important, but not sufficient to drive engagement. One size also does not fit all, communication needs to be tailored according to specific target groupings.
- Individual and civic agency is essential to engagement and volunteerism. If agency is lacking, engagement and volunteerism will not be possible without outside intervention. However, agency without guidance could be destructive.
- The salience of an issue significantly impacts the levels of engagement and the number of volunteers as well as the length of time that engagement can be sustained. That is why potholes and crime prevention activities attract more volunteers.
- Appropriate leadership can significantly fast track the emergence of high levels of engagement and volunteerism. Leadership can either be an individual, a project or an initiative. It could also be a shared vision of the future or goal such as is provided by the Strategic Adaptive Planning Process that was employed in the Komati ICMA (Strategic Adaptive Management as a Framework for Implementing Integrated Water Resource Management in South Africa, Rogers & Luton, 2010)
- Identity may be a key “attractor” mechanism to create and sustain engagement and volunteerism. Sustained engagement is not possible without a level of emotional engagement.





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Questions?

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