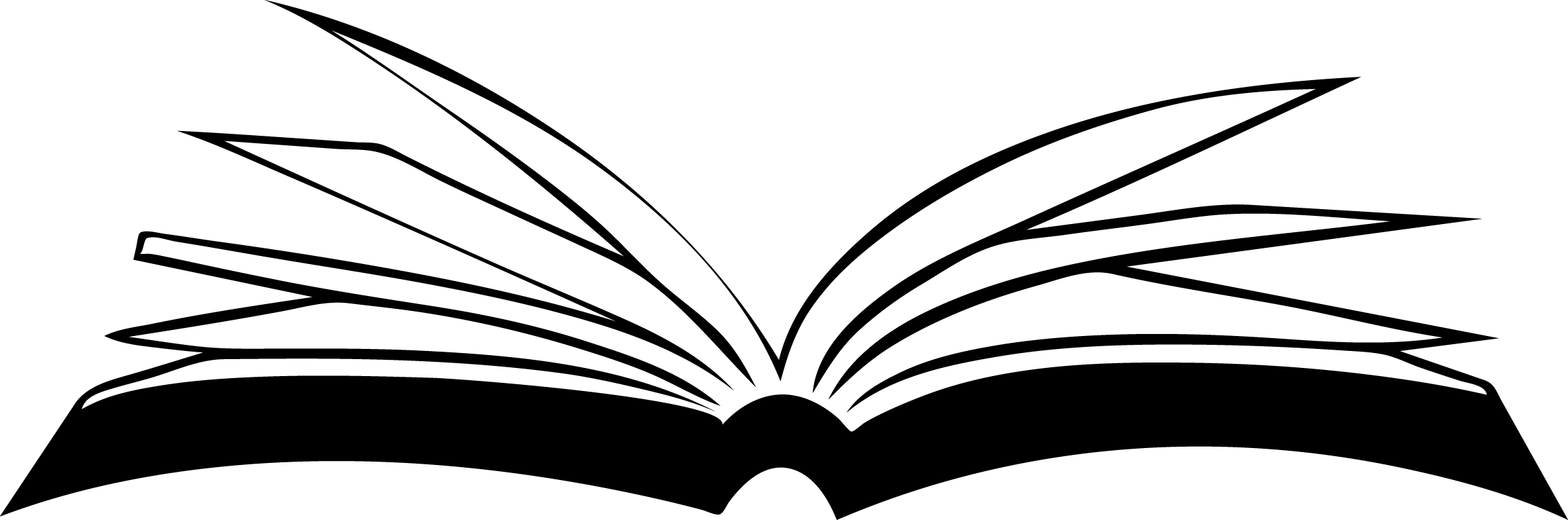
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Interactive Storytelling

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# Table of Contents

**Part 1. Basic Principles and Toolkits** 1

Interactive Storytelling for Face-to-Face and Virtual Training 3

Basic Concepts about Interactive Storytelling 6

Rewriting a Story 9

Co-Created Stories 13

Co-Constructed Stories 21

Microstories 27

Twitter Stories 31

Formula Stories 34

**Part 2. Activities** 41

30 Days 43

Appreciative Encounters 47

Best Drama 48

Best Story 53

Better Story 57

Case Analysis 61

Change Stories 66

Chapters 72

Debriefed Stories 80

FCC 91

Funny Story 99

Galactic Wormhole 102

More Interesting 108

Multiple Realities 111

Plot from Process 114

Principles Into Practice 124

Rotating Roleplay 130

Round and Round 133

Stor 139

Storytelling Tips 145

Success Stories 149

Time Travel 151

Triple Roleplay 154

Troubleshooting a Team 161

Part 1:

Basic Principles and Toolkits

# Interactive Storytelling for Face-to-Face and Virtual Training

Storytelling is a powerful tool for trainers.

Unfortunately, however, traditional storytelling encourages the participants to become passive listeners. In contrast, interactive storytelling encourages them to interact with the stories and with each other. Different types of interactive storytelling techniques invite the participants to create their own stories and share them with each other. Even when the stories come from the facilitator, the participants modify the stories, change the beginning or the ending or characters or the setting, expand or shrink the stories, make decisions at critical junctures, analyze the stories, and role-play them. The result: More engagement during the session and more learning after the session.

Here are brief descriptions of 21 types of interactive storytelling activities:

1. **Analyzed Stories.** Ask the participants to listen to a story or to read it. Use techniques from the case method to encourage the participants to analyze the story, identify problems and their causes, and make appropriate decisions. Conduct a discussion with the entire group.
2. **Case Analysis.** Ask individuals to read a case and answer a series of questions. Later, organize them into teams, discuss their answers, and arrive at a consensus. Finally, conduct a large group discussion to encourage the teams to share their perspectives.
3. **Characters.** Ask individual participants to create profiles of different characters who belong to a specific group (such as effective leaders and dysfunctional leaders). Later, redistribute these character profiles to teams and have them identify lists of desirable and undesirable characteristics associated with the group.
4. **Change the Ending.** This approach enable the participants to explore the factors that can be controlled or influenced by the key people involved in the story. Present the original story with a clear ending. Ask the participants to add some additional twists and turns to the plot line and change the behaviors of the key characters. Have the participants highlight how these changes modify the outcomes of the story.
5. **Changed Settings.** This approach emphasizes key factors that influence the events in the story. Present the original story and suggest some changes in the context (while keeping the character and time span the same). Ask the participants to imagine what would happen to the events in the story as a result of these changes. Ask them to rewrite the story and share the new version with each other.
6. **Co-Constructed Stories.** Identify a theme, topic, or plot line. Ask a team of participants to take turns to construct a story. Each participant supplies one or two words (or sentences or paragraphs or chapters) during her turn. When the story is completed, conduct a debriefing discussion.
7. **Debriefed Stories.** Ask the participants to read a story or listen to a story. After the story, ask the participants to reflect on the incidents in the story. Conduct a debriefing discussion using such topics as how they feel, what happened in the story, how the story relates to real life, what they learned from the story, and how they would use the insights from the story to their real-world situations.
8. **Dialogue.** This approach increases the empathy that the participants feel toward the characters in the story. It is a modification of a roleplay in which the author takes on multiple characters and plays different roles through written dialogue.
9. **Story Formulas.** Ask the participants to create stories by using traditional and modern formulas.
10. **Futuristic Stories.** This approach invites the participants to undertake action planning for applying newly learned principles and procedures. Ask the participants to project themselves into the future and specify a positive or negative outcome related to the use (or abuse) of what they learned. Have the participants share their utopian or dystopian narratives and discuss how to reduce the probability of failure and increase the probability of success.
11. **Plots from Procedures.** Ask teams of participants to create a story whose plotline corresponds to the steps in a job-related procedure.
12. **POV Shift.** This *Rashomon* approach emphasizes multiple realities and how different people see the same events from different perspectives. Present the original story in the form of a first-person narrative from the point of view of a main character. Ask the participants to rewrite the story from the points of view of different characters.
13. **Prompted Stories.** Specify a theme, topic, principle, or procedure. Provide participants with a suitable prompt such as a photograph, a graphic, an opening sentence, or a closing sentence. Ask them to incorporate the prompt and come up with a story related to the specified theme.
14. **Retain the Ending, Change Everything Else.** This approach emphasizes that the same outcome can be obtained through different strategies. Present the original story with a clear ending and a clear strategy used to achieve it. Ask the participants to retain the ending, the characters, and the setting. Ask them to change the behaviors of the characters and still produce the same results.
15. **Roleplayed Stories.** Present a story and stop at a critical juncture. Ask teams of participants to play the roles of important characters in the story and has an appropriate conversation. After some time, continue with your narration of the story. Insert roleplay interludes at different parts of the story.
16. **Sequels and Prequels.** These approaches emphasize that every action is caused by some previous action and causes some future action. Present the original story and ask the participants to write an earlier story involving the same characters and setting. Later, ask them to write a sequel to the original story. In all cases, suggest a suitable time span.
17. **Shared Stories.** Ask each participant to independently create a story to illustrate a principle or procedure. Invite the participants to repeatedly pair up with one another and share their stories. Later, ask teams of participants to share the different stories they heard and analyze them to identify common themes.
18. **Shrunken Stories.** Specify a theme, topic, principle, or procedure. Give examples of short-short stories, hint stories, espresso story, 99-word stories, or six-word stories. Ask the participants to write individual stories and share them in teams. Later ask each team to select the best story and share it with the entire group.
19. **Summarized Stories.** Give examples of 1-minute summaries of classic novels. Ask participants to read a case study, research report, or business proposal and have them summarize it to a 1-minute presentation or 99-word narration.
20. **Unfinished Stories.** Present three-fourth of a story. Ask teams of participants to complete the story, incorporating key principles and procedures.
21. **Zoom Stories.** Ask participants to narrate a story at an appropriate level of detail. When you tell the narrator to zoom in, she continues narrating the story with greater number of details. When you ask the narrator to zoom out, she presents the story in broad strokes, moving away from too many details.

# Basic Concepts about Interactive Storytelling

During the last decade, storytelling has earned its rightful place as a powerful communication strategy. We can take it to the next level with the technique of interactive storytelling.

## When to Tell Stories

Here are brief notes on different uses of stories:

#### Training

**Explaining.** Trainers can use stories to explain complex ideas to participants.

**Concepts and principles.** Trainers can use stories to provide examples of different concepts and principles.

**Procedures.** Trainers can use stories to provide real-world illustrations of how a procedure is applied.

#### Teamwork

**Communicating.** Facilitators can communicate ground rules and roles to team members through stories.

**Visioning.** Team leaders can communicate their vision and the goals for the team through stories.

#### Therapy

**Providing insights.** Therapists can use metaphorical fables to provide insights to their clients.

**Healing.** Mediators can use stories to heal the pain of conflicting individuals and groups.

#### Organizational Development

**Mental models.** Leaders can communicate their mental models through stories.

**Community building.** Employees in an organization can share stories and anecdotes to create an organizational culture.

**Knowledge sharing**. Practitioners can share their real-world strategies by embedding them in anecdotes.

## Limitations of Storytelling

During the past 10 years, we have been investigating the use of stories from different angles. With her theater background, Kat Koppett has designed and used improv-based storytelling activities. Matt Richter explored the conceptual and theoretical bases of storytelling by working through graduate courses on narratology. Raja Thiagarajan is currently co-authoring a textbook on science fiction. I have been experimenting with the use of stories as a needs analysis and appreciative-inquiry technique.

Our conclusion from these explorations is that there is more to stories than just telling them. We believe that we can maximize the benefit from stories by moving from one-sided presentations to two-sided interactions.

## Story Creating

Participants can learn a lot by creating their own stories and sharing them with each other. For example, in SUCCESS STORIES, we ask individual participants to come up with the history of their future by fantasizing how they achieved success and what factors contributed to this outcome. In another activity called CONDUCTED STORY, the facilitator points to different members of a team who make up segments of a story and keep it going. In collaboration with Patti Shank, we created an online version of this activity (called INTERACTIVE FICTION) in which different participants contribute different paragraphs to a continuing story.

## Story Listening

Listening to a story and analyzing its inner message is an important interactive strategy. We frequently tell a story to participants (or have them read it prior to the training session) and conduct an interactive debriefing session. As a variation of this approach, we tell a story to the audience but stop it before the conclusion. We then task teams of participants to come up with a suitable ending to the story.

Participants can also listen to stories that they themselves had created and analyze them to identify common themes. A standard procedure in appreciative inquiry involves participants coming up with positive stories, sharing them, and analyzing them to identify the themes that reflect aspects of the organizational culture.

## Related Interactive Strategies

Several interactive strategies incorporate stories as their foundation. Here are brief descriptions of these activities:

**Cross-Cultural Dialogues.** Instead of using complete stories, this approach begins with a recorded conversation between two people from different cultures (broadly defined to include national, racial, and professional cultures). These conversations involve projection of cultural values and result in confusion or frustration on the part of one or both of the speakers. Participants analyze the dialogues to identify subtle misunderstanding and discomfort.

**Roleplays** involve a form of story creation (or at least the creation of a dialogue around a critical incident within a story). Participants assume and act out characters, personalities, and attitudes other than their own. These activities may be tightly or loosely structured and may sometimes involve a participant assuming multiple roles or reversed roles.

**The Case Method** revolves around authentic fictional problems supported by various documents and records. Participants work individually and in teams to analyze, discuss, and recommend appropriate solutions and to critique each other’s work.

**Computer simulation games** permit a player to take on the role of a fantasy character moving through an elaborate world, solving various problems and building complex systems such as an army, a city, or a civilization. Such story creation strategies can be used with training simulations that involve the corporate world.

We have come a long way from reserving storytelling to charismatic leaders and inspirational speakers. By empowering everyone to create, share, listen, and analyze stories, we are tapping into all of the benefits associated with stories.

# Rewriting a Story

Stories are powerful communication devices. Storytelling should be included as an important tool in every facilitator’s kit.

However, traditional storytelling as a major weakness: It relegates the participants to passive listening or reading. The participants can learn more by creating their own stories, modifying other people’s stories, and analyzing existing stories than by merely consuming them.

One way that participants can interact with a story is to rewrite it. Here are different ways to use this technique:

## Change the Perspective

You have probably heard about Akira Kurosawa’s Japanese masterpiece, *Rashomon*, a film that depicts the murder of a samurai and the rape of his wife. This gruesome incidents are narrated from the points of view of four different people: the bandit, the wife, the samurai, and a woodcutter. The four stories are mutually contradictory. As Kurosawa explained to the actors when they approached him wanting to know the truth, the point of the film is to explore multiple realities rather than to expound a particular truth.

In this type of interactive story, the participants read the original story from the point of view of one of the characters. Later, they rewrite the story from the point of view of another character. This approach is particularly useful to illustrate the limitations of interview as a data gathering technique. We can also use the Rashomon effect to highlight the different perspectives of a customer and a salesperson, a manager and an employee, or a teacher and a student. We can ask different participants to rewrite the story from the points of view of several different characters and compare them.

Change of perspective provides an effective technique in diversity training. In an activity called *Reincarnation*, each participant is required to write an autobiographical story around one of his or her achievements, tracing the influence of various factors on this achievement. When a draft of the story is completed, the participants are asked to imagine a change in their gender, race, generation, nationality, or sexual orientation and reflect how the story would have changed: whether the achievement would have the same impact and what factors would have facilitated or impeded it.

## Write Sequels and Prequels

In this technique, the participants are given a story and asked to imagine what happened before – or what happened after the time span of the story. This activity helps the participants to speculate on the factors that lead up to a situation, and what can be expected to happen in the future. The activity is particularly helpful in analyzing processes and procedures and in linking causes, effects, and future prospects.

Rewind and Fast Forward is an activity that uses this technique to explore sexual harassment in the workplace. It begins with the facilitator reading a story that depicts a female employee resigning her job after accusing her manager of sexual harassment. Teams of participants are asked to improvise earlier incidents that led to this situation. Later, they are asked to predict what would happen in the future as a result of this incident.

## Change the Setting

In this technique, the participants are asked to rewrite a story without changing the plotline but placing it in a different setting. This activity helps the participants to explore how geographic, cultural, political, and religious differences can influence the circumstances. Such exploration is particularly useful in learning about diversity.

Monsoon Wedding incorporates a story about a software engineer inviting his US colleague to his wedding in India. The colleague discovers that his friend has not yet met the bride because what is happening is an arranged marriage. Teams of participants are encouraged to write about the wedding from the point of view of the US colleague by using Internet resources dealing with the legal, social, and religious aspects of Indian marriages. Different stories are compared to each other to determine similarities and differences among the wedding ceremonies.

## Change the Level of Detail

In this technique, the participants are asked to expand a brief description or to compress a detailed explanation. The act of slowing down the narration or speeding it up or zooming in and out of a situation helps the participants to conduct a task analysis and to map the steps of a process.

Zoom is an interactive story activity for providing first aid training for hurricane relief volunteers. It begins with a printed story of a volunteer administering CPR to an unconscious person. Teams of participants are asked to “unpack” a specific sentence from the story. For example, the original sentence:

Sheila administered CPR to the victim.

is elaborated into:

Sheila checked for responsiveness of the victim. She called 911 and checked the pulse. There was no pulse and Sheila performed chest compressions. She tilted the head back to clear the airway…

As a continuation of the activity, the participants are asked to take the first sentence of the new version and provide additional details. In the sample narration above, a participant may modify the first sentence into this level of detail:

Sheila made sure that Charlie had not sustained spinal or neck injury. She shook the unconscious victim gently and shouted, “Are you okay?” Getting no response, Sheila called 911 and proceeded to check for circulation.

In another activity called Essence, the participants are asked to modify the level of detail in a story in the opposite direction: They read a page of the story and compress it to exactly 32 words long. Later, they successively shrink the story to 16 words, 8 words, and 4 words.

Here’s another interactive story activity called Faster for reducing the level of detail. The participants are asked to watch video story, listen to an audio story, or read a text story. Later they are asked to narrate the key elements of the story in exactly 60 second. Still later, they are asked to compress the story into 15 seconds.

## Add Some Dialogue

In this technique, the participants are given a background scenario and asked to write a suitable dialogue that is likely to take place in the situation. Preparing a script requires the participants to recall and apply relevant principles and procedures. One way of looking at this technique is to consider it as a written roleplay in which a participant takes on more than one role. This technique is particularly useful for learning how to conduct difficult conversations.

Mediation presents a confrontation between two people. The participant is asked to play the role of a neutral mediator who helps these two people conduct a civil discourse, tell their respective stories, and to arrive at a win-win solution. The participants do this by writing a script involving all three people (including the mediator) working through the conflict-management process. Later, the participants compare their dialogues and critique them with a list of mediation guidelines.

## Change the Ending

There are two ways to create this interactive story activity: You can present a complete story and ask the participants to change the ending. Alternatively, you can present an incomplete story and ask the participants to supply a suitable ending. In both cases, you are forcing the participants to analyze the events in the story and come to a logical conclusion. This enables the participants to forecast what is likely to happen in their team or in their organization based on what is happening now.

In an interactive story activity called Tragedy, the participants read a story (about the future of their organization) that has a happy ending. They are asked to rewrite the ending of the story and transform it to an unhappy ending. In the process, the participants discover questionable activities in their organization.

In another interactive story called Sentry, the participants read a short-short science fiction story by Fredric Brown (http://www.thiagi.com/pfp/IE4H/december2001.html#Fiction). The last three sentences of this story are withheld and the participants are asked to create them to bring the story to a conclusion. The participants compare their conclusion with Brown’s original surprise-twist ending. In the process, they discover the assumptions people make about alien cultures.

## Change Everything Except the Ending

This interactive story activity uses a strategy that is the opposite of the preceding one. Participants are supplied with the conclusion of a story and asked to create a plot that logically leads to this conclusion. In creating the plotline, the participants are required to incorporate appropriate principles related to the training objective.

An activity called Galactic Wormhole begins with the facilitator explaining key principles of human performance technology. The participants are then presented with time-travel scenarios that involve two different headlines from the future: The good-news headline proclaims organizational triumph while the bad-news headline bewails organizational disaster. Teams of participants are asked to focus on one of these headlines and prepare a timeline of events that transform the current state of the organization to the future state depicted in the headline. In developing this timeline, the participants incorporate events that feature the implementation (or the violation) of performance-technology principles.

# Co-Created Stories

Have you ever watched a bunch of kids making up their own stories? They are totally engaged in the activity and they eagerly take turns building on each other’s narratives.

We have used this type of co-created stories as an adult learning activity. We ask participants to take turns to make up a story. In order to maintain smooth continuity of the story, this activity forces the participants to listen carefully to the others.

We usually warm up the participants by having them create any story without any constraints. Later, we prescribe a training topic and ask the participants to co-create a story that deals with a specific process such as conducting a behavioral interview, mentoring a minority employee, or collaborating with a virtual team.

Here are some interactive story approaches that use this co-creation strategy:

## One at a Time

Here’s the basic technique: Ask the participants to pair up. Identify the younger participant in each pair to say a single word. Ask the other participant to supply another word that goes with the previous word. Ask the participants to take turns to supply one word at a time to create grammatically correct sentences and to string them together to make up a story. Stop the activity when the story comes to a meaningful conclusion or when you reach a predetermined time limit.

Here are some additional guidelines for using this technique:

1. One member of the pair maybe relegated to merely supplying empty words such as articles and prepositions. You can prevent this from happening by giving the choice to the participants to supply one, two, or three words when it is their turn.
2. You don’t have to limit yourself to pairs of participants. You can conduct this activity with a group of three to seven people. This makes the story more unpredictable. However, participants may get bored while waiting a long time for their next turn.
3. Instead of single words, you can have participants supply a sentence or a short paragraph when it is their turn. Watch out for dominating participants from attempting to control too much of the narrative.
4. Instead of the participants taking turns in a linear fashion, conduct a directed storytelling activity that I learned from Matt Richter: Point to a participant to get the story started. Somewhere during this person’s narration, blow a whistle and point to another participant (not necessarily to the next participant) and ask her to continue the story. Repeat this process of stopping the narration and randomly pointing to different participants. Make the activity more challenging and engaging by cutting off the narration in the middle of sentences.
5. Here’s another interesting variation that I learned from Kat Koppet: Supply a list of incomplete sentences that form the spine of a story,   
   such as

Once upon a time …

Every day …

Until one day …

and so on. Ask the participants to supply a sentence making sure that the sentence begins with the next item on the spine and smoothly continues the narrative. You may want to begin the activity by inviting the participants to use the spine to retell *Cinderella* or an equivalent folk tale from your culture before moving on to the training topic.

## Written Stories

The techniques that we described earlier involve oral storytelling. We have also tried our hand at asking participants to create written stories. In using this approach, we ask teams of participants to collaborate with each other in coming up with the stories. This encourages mutual learning among the participants.

## Processes and Plot Lines

An obvious use of co-creating stories is to analyze and apply relevant processes. Here are some examples of such training content:

* Change management
* Conflict management
* Creative problem solving
* Crisis management
* Human performance technology
* Marketing campaigns
* Process mapping and re-engineering
* Starting a business
* Strategic planning
* Writing a research paper

The main advantage of using story creation as a learning tool is that the phases, stages, or steps in the process provide suitable plot lines for the story. The participants can explore each step in detail by creating a fictional account that explores what happens when a step is effectively completed or when it is skipped. The story creators can track the long-term consequences of sloppy work during early steps. In creating a story, the participants frequently become aware that the steps cannot always be applied in a simple linear situation with real-world situations. Also creating stories enable the participants to explore various what-if questions.

## FCC: Fictional Case Creation

The case method is a powerful training technique. In researching and using this technique, we came up an obvious conclusion: the people who create the cases learn more than the people who read and analyze them. This suggested an interesting learning technique that we call FCC (Fictional Case Creation).

Let’s assume that you are going to help your participants explore the four stages of team development. Here’s how you would go about using FCC to achieve your training objective.

1. Make a quick presentation of the four stages of team development. (In case you have forgotten, here’s a quick review: In the *forming* stage, the team gets its mandate and begins to think about its goal and roles. In the *storming* stage, the team attempts to define itself through a series of conflicts. In the *norming* stage, team members establish the structure of the team and negotiate their roles. In the *performing s*tage, team members focus on accomplishing their goals and producing results.)
2. Organize the participants into teams of two to five members and give them the task of preparing a fictional case study about the development stages of a specific team. During the first round, ask each team to write a short prologue of about 150 words, describing why the team was created and who its members are. Ask each team to give its prologue to the next team. (The last team gives it prologue to the first team.) Invite each team to abandon its previous storyline and write the first chapter of the story that goes with the prologue they received. This chapter should describe what happened during the forming stage of the fictional team.
3. Ask the teams to give the prologue and the first chapter to the next team. As before, ask the teams to abandon their previous story lines, review the material they received and create the second chapter. This chapter describes what happens to the fictional team during it storming stage.
4. Continue the process by having the teams give their current story to the next team and adding fictional details as the next chapter.
5. After all four chapters have been completed, ask the teams to rotate their materials one more time and to read the complete story.
6. Debrief the teams by asking questions that require a comparison of what happened at different stages during the development of different teams.

## Chapters

We have incorporated the concept of writing different chapters to go with different stages of a process in another co-creation activity. Here’s how you would go about using this activity called Chapters:

1. Introduce the steps of a process. Let’s assume that you are working on the process of mediating a conflict. Here are the steps: frame the situation, listen to both sides, establish a common goal, brainstorm strategies for achieving this goal, select the optimum strategies, and monitor the implementation of the selected strategies.
2. Ask the teams of participants to write the first chapter of the story, describing how a mediator framed the conversation between two feuding parties. Pause for a suitable period of time.
3. Randomly select a team to read its first chapter.
4. Apologize to the other teams and ask them to abandon their first chapters. Ask each team to write the second chapter that smoothly continues the first one they heard. Emphasize that this chapter should contain fictional details of what happened when both of the conflicting sides are asked to present their perceptions. Pause while the teams complete their story writing task.
5. Repeat the previous procedure of randomly selecting a team and asking it to read the chapter it created.
6. Explain that you are going to continue the activity, one chapter at a time. Warn the teams that you may even choose a team that had read an earlier chapter.
7. Continue the activity until story is completed with the successful implementation of the mediation strategy. Debrief the teams to review the steps in the process.

## Co-Creating Stories Online

The activities described earlier involved creating and sharing stories in a face-to-face situation. We have also used similar activities in online situations.

The web is full of interactive fiction of different types written by talented storytellers. Our favorite approach to using this strategy involves four parallel website tabs. Here’s how we used this online approach recently to introduce the human performance technology process to a group of managers.

The first tab in our website displayed an explanation of the various stages of human performance technology, beginning with performance analysis and ending with the computation of return on investment.

The second tab invited the participants to collaborate in creating a fictional narrative about Chandra, a newly-hired performance consultant assigned to the International Space Station. In the beginning of this activity, this site contained a single opening paragraph setting the scene of the story.

The third tab contained instructions to the participants. It invited the participants to collaboratively create the story by adding one paragraph of about 100 words at a time. They were asked to make sure that there is continuity with the previous paragraphs and the plot follows the steps of the HPT process.

The fourth tab of the website was for comments from the participants. As the story kept developing, the participants were encouraged comment on what is happening to Chandra, what is going to happen, what lessons were learned, and so on. In one sense, this commentary area became an ongoing debriefing section.

## One Tweet at Time

Recently we have begun experimenting with the use of Twitter as a tool for co-creating online stories. In the basic technique, the facilitator begins a story with a tweet and invites the readers to submit the next tweet that would smoothly advance the story. Participants are requested to send this tweets as direct messages to the facilitator so that none of the others could read this message.

The facilitator selects one of these direct-message tweets and adds it to the story. She continues by inviting the participants to send the next tweet as another direct message, and adds a randomly selected tweet to continue the story. The story is continuously updated on a separate web page to help the participants read the current version without having to jump from one tweet to another.

## The Role of the Facilitator

In online story creation activities, it is possible for the facilitator to shape the story by inserting suitable plot twists that highlight instructionally relevant aspects. It is possible for the facilitator to steer the story subtly or blatantly in a pre-determined direction. However, we feel that this subterfuge defeats the spirit and the purpose of interactive story creation. Our advice to facilitators is to resist this temptation and to let the inmates run the asylum.

In our HPT interactive story, for example, we became impatient because the authors kept revisiting the same stage again and again, dragging the project into an epic chronicle. In an attempt to speed up the process, we instructed the participants to wrap up the story in the next six paragraphs. The enthusiastic writers ignored this instruction and kept spinning their yarn like a Dickensian serial. In desperation, we snuck in a paragraph that involved the performance consultant being murdered by an irate employee and put “The End”. Within 20 minutes, however, some participant had resurrected the story with a new paragraph in which the performance consultant Chandra wakes up with a start, realizes her assassination was just a silly nightmare, and proceeds to conduct a SWOT analysis of the current situation at the space station. This taught us a valuable lesson that an engaging story has a life of its own and you cannot control the writers because they are the readers.

## A Matter of Principle

All the examples that we presented earlier dealt with processes as training topics. We can also use activities that incorporate the co-creation of stories to teach principles (also known as rules, guidelines, tips, tactics, and other such things).

Recently, we used a time-travel story approach to teach principles of creativity. If you were one of the participants in our session, this is what you would have experienced:

You receive a 1-page handout explaining one of the rules of creative thinking. Depending on random chance, you might have received any one of these:

* **Walk on both feet.** Learn to use opposing types of thinking: divergent and convergent, logical and intuitive, analytical and synthesizing, innovative and pragmatic, inside the box and outside.
* **Put yourself under the gun.** Work under self-imposed difficult deadlines, feverish schedules, tight budgets, tough quality standards, and other such constraints.
* **Distil crude ideas.** Begin with a bad, stupid, or useless idea. Use it as a starting point to generate useful and practical strategies.
* **Cultivate multiple personalities.** Create your own diverse team by playing the roles of someone who is much younger or older, richer or poorer, and of a different gender, personality type, political preference, or national origin.

Your handout contains the principle of *walking on both feet.* You read the principle, underline key words and try to understand what it means and how you may be able to use it.

The facilitator asks everyone to apply the principle to a real or imaginary personal project. You do have a real project: how to make more money. You decide to apply your principle to this project.

The facilitator asks everyone to project himself or herself 5 years into the future and to make up a story about the effective application of the principle. You come up with a story about how you were able to monetize your newly acquired skill of thinking on all different sides of your brain.

The facilitator asks the participants to pair up and share the story with a partner. You pair up with Hari who has been working on a different principle. You tell your story to Hari who listens enthusiastically and makes encouraging comments. Later, you return the favor by actively listening to Hari’s story.

You find new partners and share your story. Every time you repeat the story, you notice it becomes more realistic and more interesting.

## Key Principles

Here’s a recap of some key points in using the co-creation approach to interactive stories:

* Ask the participants to work in pairs or teams.
* Invite the participants to collaboratively make up stories that incorporate steps in a process or principles related to a goal.
* Require the participants to listen to each other and reward them for doing so.
* Keep disrupting the participants so they have to abandon their current story and work on another one.
* Combine the collaborative story creating activity with other training strategies.

As an application exercise, how about creating a time-travel story about your creative application of these principles?

# Co-Constructed Stories

Here’s how you conduct this type of activity: Ask two or more participants take turns to supply equal elements (a word, a sentence, a paragraph or a chapter) of a story, gradually building up the narrative. When the story is completed, conduct a debriefing discussion of either the process used to construct the story or the outcome.

## An Example: The Longest Sentence

We use this activity to explore the requirements for (and the outcomes of) a collaborative dialogue. We divide the group into pairs of participants and challenge each pair to come up with a lengthy sentence that features intriguing twists and turns. Each participant takes turns to supply one, two, or three words to construct a meaningful and lengthy sentence. We announce a time limit of 5 minutes and let the participants take off.

At the end of 5 minutes, we conduct a debriefing discussion to relate the activity to a true dialogue. We point out that an open dialogue has the following features that are spontaneously incorporated in the activity:

* There are no hidden agenda or goals.
* The focus is on the process, not on the result.
* Neither person dominates the conversation.
* The result is unexpected and fascinating.
* Each person builds upon the other person’s contribution.
* The participants listen activity and mindfully.
* You act in a spontaneous and playful manner because you run into problems if you attempt to plan ahead.

## Variations

In the example above, we used a few words during each turn. Instead, you can ask the participants to use sentences or longer units during a specific period of time. For example, the participants may exchange their roles at the end of each minute. (This requires you to use a timer and blow a whistle at appropriate intervals).

The focus in the example was on the process of collaboration. You can also use this type of activity to work with some specific content:

At the beginning of the training session, you can ask the participants to take turns to supply a sentence to a story that predicts what is going to happen during the session. Encourage the participants incorporate their wishes and anxieties.

At the end of a training session, you can ask the participants to construct a story about what will happen when they attempt to apply their new skills and knowledge back at their workplace.

At the beginning of a session and again at the end, you can ask the participants to define a key term related to the training topic, one word at a time.

In the examples, we had the participants to pair up and take turns. Instead, you can organize a group of three to five people and have them co-construct a story or make a presentation. During the activity, you can point to different people randomly. This person will continue the story (or the narrative presentation) from where the previous speaker left off. You can keep the participants on their toes by unexpectedly shifting the speaker in the middle of a sentence or even in the middle of a word.

## Play Samples

In case you are curious about the outcomes of co-constructed stories, here’s one:

She abruptly braked her car and jumped out through the sun roof to escape from the SUV that was tailgating her with the latest dental equipment because she had panic attacks due to her being hurt by a dental hygienist while she was in the Kindergarten even though her reading ability was at the college level as demonstrated by her critique of Chaucer’s use of dramatic irony that foreshadowed Harry Potter’s unexpected acrophobia…

And here’s a co-constructed story reflecting the participants’ paranoid thoughts about a training workshop:

Death by Powerpoint was the technique used by the instructor who wasted our time with autobiographic anecdotes that had nothing to do with the training objectives that were useless for confronting the realities of the workplace where more tasks were piling up while we went through frivolous icebreakers that made everyone look foolish and tired with too many activities and zero content that made the stale donut for the coffee break looking exciting…

## Online Versions

It is easy to facilitate the co-creation of stories on line.

For example, you can use Twitter to co-create a story. Invite the participants to reveal and exciting adventure one tweet at a time. Each tweet should build upon the previous tweets to continue the narrative.

A possible problem: Your authors may forget what happened in the early parts of the story since the latest tweet may be buried inside other irrelevant tweets. You may mitigate this problem by using a hash tag with the name of your yarn. Alternatively, you can archive the earlier episodes on a web page, continuously updating it. This will remind the new authors of the story so far.

Another possible problem: You may receive several tweets from enthusiastic authors in response to the latest tweet. Unless you want to explore the concept of parallel universes and alternative histories, your plot may become unwieldy and confusing.

Here are two ways to prevent this possible confusion:

1. Ask people to submit the possible next piece of narration as a direct message to you so it is not visible to the others. Select one of these tweets (a random selection is as good as any) and add it to the narrative string. (Unfortunately, this wastes the other tweets but the authors may hopefully recover and contribute the next one.)
2. Enroll a panel of authors to help you create the story. Five to ten is an optimum size for this panel. Give each author a number. Reserve number 1 for yourself. Kick off with the first piece of the story. Author 2 adds the next tweet. Other authors take turns to add their tweets in the sequential order. Each author can add his or her tweet as soon as the previous tweet appears online or take some time to work out an intriguing twist or a logical consequence. However, if an author delays for more than 24 hours, then the next author in the queue jumps in to add his or her tweet. After the last author in your panel has contributed a tweet, the cycle continues with Author 1 (that’s you) adding the next tweet. You can continue the story for a long time until it comes a natural ending or the readers die of boredom.

## Example of Online Co-Creation: Chandra, CPT

Here’s a real story about a fictional story that was co-created on the Internet.

About 15 years ago, long before Twitter was around, we came up with a couple of interesting insights:

1. Most simulation games involve the co-creation of a story.
2. The people who learn the most from a simulation game are the designers of the game. So, instead of preparing a simulation game asking the participants to play it, we got everyone involved in co-creating a story related to a specific procedure.

For our experiment, we selected the systematic process related to human performance technology (HPT). We created a website with four different sections:

1. A brief introduction to the steps in the human performance technology process
2. Instructions to the participants
3. The continuing co-created story
4. The concurrent debriefing section

These are the initial instructions given to the participants:

In this activity, you and your teammates will take turns to add short segments to a continuously growing story.

First, read the current version of the story. Pay particular attention to the last segment.

Use the text box at the end of the story to add a short segment (50-75 words). Make sure that the segment follows what has happened in the story so far, and smoothly continues from the latest segment.

You may contribute more than one segment, but with this important constraint: You should wait for at least one other participant to contribute his or her segment before you add another segment.

Check back often to see what happens in the story and how your contribution has affected the flow.

The co-created story section began with these three segments of the story:

Chandra worked for a governmental agency in Sri Lanka. She was surprised — and delighted — when the minister she worked for nominated her to the post of Performance Improvement Consultant at the International Space Station. She will be the first Sri Lankan woman to be given such a major responsibility. She had no clue what exactly she was supposed to be doing with the international team at the space station.

"Neither do I," said the commander of the space station. "It's the Americans who created this position. Your job description says that you should continuously and systematically improve the performance of the international team through the systematic application of appropriate analyses and interventions. You have 3 months to show some results."

On her first day on the job, Chandra recalled everything that she learned about performance improvement strategies. She also reviewed the profiles of 12 professionals working at space station along with the reports on different projects. One common problem that immediately attracted Chandra’s attention was the number of intercultural clashes among the team members.

People who saw the instructions and the beginning of the story enthusiastically responded to our invitation and began cranking out additional segments using the HPR process as the plotline. Some of the authors stuck to the ideal HPT approach beginning with a systematic analysis. Others preferred to create chaos and confront Chandra with unexpected twists and turns.

The concurrent debriefing section was a combination of readers’ comments and administrative instructions. We encouraged the readers to discuss Chandra’s behaviors and to coach her through appropriate strategies.

The story was obviously engaging and addictive because it grew rapidly, took various twists and turns, and continued for a long period of time with contributors from around the world.

I personally got tired of the way that the co-created story was transforming itself into an epic and suggested to the participating authors that the narrative should end within five more segments. The participants ignored my advice and kept going on and on.

As a drastic measure, I added this concluding segment:

Knock, knock.

Chandra groggily got up and stumbled to the front door. When she opened it, she was surprised to find a figure in a black mask, holding a gun.

Bang, Bang.

As Chandra fell dead, her last thoughts revolved around her mentor’s comment early in her career:

“Remember the job of a performance consultant is a thankless one. As many people hate you as the people that admire your efforts.

I felt smug about bringing to the story to an end. However, within 20 minutes, someone from Manila posted the next segment:

As the alarm rudely woke up Chandra, she realized that she was having the recurrent nightmare again. She shook her head, dashed some cold water on her face, fired up her computer, and proceeded to re-analyze the 360-degree data she had collected the previous day.

I should know better: It is tough to kill a co-created story. We ended up unplugging the web pages to abruptly terminate the story.

## Your Turn

Co-constructed stories are highly engaging both in the face-to-face classroom and online. Add this approach to your interactive toolkit and send us a story about your success

# Microstories

As an interactive storytelling technique, you can encourage your participants to write the Great American Novel, or an epic, or a saga, and share it with each other. But I prefer the microstory approach.

Microstories are pieces of flash fiction that are brief. Here are examples microstories in different sizes.

Here’s a short-short story that is less than 400 words long:

## The Three-Legged Goat

The young goat had only three legs. No one knew whether it was born that way or lost its left rear leg in an accident. However it happened, the goat had learned to hobble on his three legs.

The three-legged goat always stayed in the middle of the herd as the goats grazed in the meadow outside the village. The villagers left the herd alone most of the time except on the Nagore festival. On that day, they caught the fattest goat. The village priest killed the goat with a long ceremonial sword as a sacrifice to the local deity. Later, the villagers feasted on mutton biryani.

A young boy from the village was trying to catch a goat. At first, the goats ignored him because they could easily escape from his grasp. But for some reason, they suddenly panicked and ran away helter-skelter. The boy ran chased them until the herd disappeared into the mango grove, leaving behind only the three-legged goat.

With one final spurt, the boy grabbed the goat by its lame leg. The goat fell to the ground, struggled for a few moments, and lay still, panting hard. The boy squatted near the goat, also panting hard. After a while, he changed the grip to his left hand and reached into the pocket of the shirt. He pulled out a sharp shining knife.

The boy sat on top of the goat because he needed both his hands now. The goat tried to struggle free, but the boy adjusted his weight to keep the goat pinned down to the ground.

The boy lowered his face, disfigured by an ugly scar, close to the goat’s ears.

“I am not going to hurt you,” he whispered. “I just want someone to talk to. The other boys don't want to talk to me because I am ugly.”

The goat stared at the boy's face.

“If you don't run away, I will share this mango with you,” the boy said. He reached once again into his pocket and pulled out a ripe mango. He sliced a piece with his sharp knife and fed it to the goat.

When the boy stood up, the goat also stood up. It did not run away.

Here’s a short story about the futility of mindlessly listening to words and writing them down. It uses the 99-word format that was popularized by my friend Brian Remer.

## Revolutions

His father told him: *You have to listen carefully to your teacher and write down everything he says.* The teacher talked about the Russian revolution. Jim faithfully wrote everything down.

During the next class, Jim’s mind began wandering. The science teacher was talking about engines. Jim daydreamed about sitting inside a cylinder and being squeezed by the piston. He giggled because it was funny.

Now 50 years later, Jim is the best mechanic in the engine shop. The only thing he remembers about revolutions has to do with the maximum rpm of the turbo engine he is fixing.

## Six-Word Stories

When asked to write a full story in six words, Ernest Hemingway was supposed to have responded with *For sale, baby shoes, never worn.*

Sometime ago, the online magazine *Smith* invited its readers to submit their autobiographies in six words. Here’s a sample: *Baby changed my life and body.* There is a book with a collection of these memoirs: *Not Quite What I Was Planning.*

When I asked her to describe the concept of interactive stories, here’s what Nitya Wakhlu wrote as a six-word story: *Stopped talking. Started listening. Magic happened.*

## Uses

Obviously, microstories can appear on printed pages or on web pages. If you are planning to use the 500-word or 99-word stories, you may assign it as a pre-session exercise or as homework. You may use six-word stories as an end-of-the session review activity in both face-to-face and virtual training sessions.

## Where is the Interactivity?

I am supposed to talking about interactive storytelling and so far I have merely given you examples of microstories. You may be wondering, *where is the interactivity?*

The secret is to embed these microstories in interactive storytelling activities. Here’s a list of suggestions:

**Co-created stories.** Instead of asking individuals to write a micro story, ask the participants to work with partners or in teams.

**Shared stories.** Ask the participants to write individual microstories on the same topic or them. Ask them to share their stories with each other. Eventually ask teams of participants to identify common elements in the stories they shared.

**Debriefed stories.** Ask the participants to take turns to read their stories to a group. Ask the group members to debrief themselves and discuss their emotional reactions, the learning point in the story, and its implications for personal action.

**Futuristic stories.** Ask the participants to write autobiographical micro stories located in an imaginary future. To increase the effectiveness of future fiction, ask your participants to write microstories of what happened 30 years, 30 months, and 30 days hence.

**Prompted Stories.** Provide a picture or a title or the first sentence as a prompt. Ask the participants to write their microstories, share them with each other, and compare and contrast them.

**Unfinished stories.** Ask the participants to create microstories on a common topic. Then ask them to black out the last sentence, exchange it with another participant, and come up with alternative endings.

**Alternative POV.** Ask the participants to exchange their microstories and rewrite the story they received from the point of view of a different narrator.

**Zooming in and out.** Ask the participants to exchange their 99-word stories. Then ask them to shrink the story they received into a six-word story or to expand it into 500-word version.

## Here’s Your Homework

Write a 99-word story on the use of microstories. Set it in your future life after the next 12 months. Send it to thiagi@[thiagi.com](http://thiagi.com) to share it with other readers.

# Twitter Stories

The attention span of today’s readers is shrinking rapidly. No wonder, writers are increasingly creating micro stories, flash fiction, and six-word stories. It is inevitable that 140-character twitter stories are becoming popular.

## Twitter Authors

Arjun Basu, an award winning Montreal-based author calls his less-than-140-character stories *twisters*. You can follow this author on twitter at <https://twitter.com/arjunbasu> .

Here’s a sample of one of his twisters:

She took me home. It was the largest house I’d ever been in, and I promptly got lost. By the time I found her, she’d been married six years.

Sean Hill is another established author who writes twitter stories. He calls them *very short stories*. You can follow him on twitter at <https://twitter.com/veryshortstory> . You can also visit his web site and buy his book that contains a collection of 300 twitter stories.

Here’s a sample from Sean Hill’s very short stories:

Gerald cared for his mom's neglected plants. Grateful, a fern felt compelled to speak, "Thank you." Terrified, he got rid of the plants.

Max writes very short stories about people and things. You can follow him at <https://twitter.com/vryshrtstrs/> . Here’s a sample from Max:

America! Freedom! Hot dogs! Fifty years later, Uncle Enzo had tried all three and decided hot dogs offered the best bang for your buck.

I am sure that there are several other story tweeters. If you know of someone, let us know in the comments section.

## Other Famous Authors

The *Guardian* challenged 21 well-known authors to try their hand at twitter stories. They called them 140-character novels. You can read the collection here: <http://bit.ly/1AdPm9k> .

My favorite entry is this one by Ian Rankin (who is also one of my favorite mystery writers):

I opened the door to our flat and you were standing there, cleaver raised. Somehow you'd found out about the photos. My jaw hit the floor.

## Twitter Chains

Presenting a short story in a series of tweets is an interesting approach.

You can read David Mitchell’s short story “The Right Sort”. Luckily, you don’t have to wait for one tweet at a time: All the tweets are strung out together here: <http://bit.ly/1nRqFqX>

Teju Cole, the well-known author of a novel *Open City*, recently posted this tweet:

. . . to the subway, I saw a man on the ground. He sat on the sidewalk, under trees, with his feet out to the quiet street.

This was immediately followed by other people’s tweets to produce a coherent story about a homeless man who has a heart attack. Read more about this co-creation — and the entire story — in this Slate article: <http://slate.me/1dgBinN>

## Making Fun of Me

I have been trying my hand at tweet stories to laugh at my own pretenses as a trainer and performance technologist. Here are a few of my attempts that were retweeted by others:

In my report, I recounted how I systematically designed the training. I did not mention that I merely rewrote the Wikipedia entry.

He felt guilty not having thanked his Kindergarten teacher. He wanted to do it now, but it’d be too much of a hassle to dig her up.

In 1954, he took time off to learn more about different performance-improvement interventions. We haven’t heard from him since.

*This PowerPoint presentation is boring. Do something before I fall asl*

The course came with a lifetime guarantee. Alas, the trainer died before I could ask for a refund.

Impressive performance test results for unarmed combat training: Seven dead, 15 injured.

## Your Turn

Yes, you can write your own twitter stories that are better than mine. Go ahead, impress me.

# Formula Stories

Storytelling is a powerful tool for trainers. Unfortunately, however, traditional storytelling encourages the participants to become passive listeners. In contrast, interactive storytelling encourages them to interact with the stories and with each other. Different types of interactive storytelling techniques invite the participants to create their own stories and share them with each other. Even when the stories come from the facilitator, the participants modify the stories, change the beginning or the ending or characters or the setting, expand or shrink the stories, make decisions at critical junctures, analyze the stories, and role-play them. The result: More engagement during the session and more learning after the session.

## Story Formulas

I read (and listen to) several stories every day, ranging from tweets to multi-volume epics. I also watch videos and movies to increase the daily dosage of fiction. If you are a consumer of stories like me, you are probably aware that most stories fall into different genres and they all can be reduced to a few tried and true plot formulas.

The term *formula stories* is often used in a pejorative fashion. However, consciously or unconsciously, most authors use a set of standard formulas. You too can use these formulas (just like templates for framegames) to efficiently generate stories for presenting the training content. You can also train your participants to use these formulas to create and share their own stories.

## Story Spine

The story spine is a versatile formula. I learned it from my colleague Kat Koppett in one of her excellent improv workshops. She attributes the formula to Kenn Adams. It is also associated with Brian McDonald and to Pixar Studio.

Here are the seven sentence stems that constitute the story spine. To create an instant story, you just complete each sentence and string them together:

1. Once upon a time...
2. Every day...
3. But, one day...
4. Because of that...
5. Because of that...
6. Until, finally...
7. And, ever since then...

Try your hand at creating your first story-spine tale right now. Fill out the sentence stems without spending too much time on each. Remember, this is supposed to be an improv exercise.

Here’s my spontaneous output (while waiting for a flight connection at Chicago O’Hare airport):

*Once upon a time,*there was a private investigator called Ken Steele. *Every day* he worked on boring cases involving fraudulent insurance claims. *But one day,* he found a corpse propped up behind his office desk, inside locked doors. *Because of that,* the police warned him that they are going to arrest him within 24 hours. *Because of that* Ken had to employ his amazing sleuthing skills. He decided that the dead person was murdered by his wife for the life insurance money. *Until finally,* Ken was able to clear his name and identify the real culprit. *And, ever since then*Ken was in big demand for homicidal investigations, making more money than a performance consultant.

I can use this story in its raw form as a part of an interactive storytelling activity. I can treat it as an outline and ask the participants to expand it.

Obviously, not too many of my sessions deal with homicide investigation as the training topic. So let me try my hand at applying the story spine to a workshop on diversity and inclusion. Here’s another story (created during the short flight from Chicago to Indianapolis):

*Once upon a time,*there was a corporate trainer called Chris Hamilton. *Every day* he conducted technical training sessions at a high-tech company in San Jose, California. *But one day,* he was transferred to a branch office in Chennai, India to train the local employees on Agile software development technology. *Because of that,* he decided to learn as much as possible about the cultural values and norms of people in Chennai. He found the information from online searches to be inconsistent and confusing. *Because of that* Chris asked one of the Indian programmers in his San Jose office for some help and advice. His colleague gave lengthy lectures on what not to do in Chennai. Chris continued to get confused. *Until finally,* Rajiv, the programmer, said, “Chris, you are taking this too seriously. Remember there are more similarities between you and the programmers in Chennai than there are differences. Find the key similarities and build upon them.” *And, ever since then,*Chris stopped confusing himself with all the books on cultural differences and focused on the fact that all human beings like blue jeans and *masala dosai*. He was a great success in Chennai with his focus on the shared experiences and common challenges.

## Another Formula: Double Jeopardy

Whenever I introduce a new principle or procedures to my training participants, I take great care to warn them against the mindless misuse of what they learned in the session. To drive home the point that the overuse or abuse of any technique could result in more problems than it solved, I use engaging stories. I noticed that these stories fall in a standard formula and I specified this formula. I call this formula *Double Jeopardy*. The reason for this name will become clear as we explore the formula:

1. **First problem.** The protagonist faces a problem.
2. **First solution.** The protagonist masters an effective technique for handling the problem.
3. **Misuse of the first solution**. Carried away with the impressive success in solving the problem, the protagonist begins to misuse, overuse, and abuse the technique.
4. **Second problem.** The misuse of the technique results in a set of new problems.
5. **New and improved solution.** The participant thinks through the limitations of the first solution and comes up with suitable modifications to the technique.
6. **Conclusion.** The new and improved technique prevents the types of problems created by the mindless application of the original technique.

Here’s a train-the-trainer application of this story formula:

*First problem:* Participants are bored by my technical training workshops. Most of them multitask while I make my presentations and some of them even fall asleep.

*First solution:* I discover the power of training games.

*Misuse of the first solution:* I begin the training session with an icebreaker in which each participant discovers which animal he or she most closely resembles. Later, I insert a bridge-building activity in the middle of the session. In addition, I repeatedly use a set of engaging games throughout my training sessions.

*Second problem:* The participants are engaged. They run around the classroom as headless chicken. They focus on completing the activity and winning the game. But they don’t learn anything useful. They soon discover that they are wasting their time in all this fun and games.

*New and improved solution:* I think through the advantages and disadvantages of using games in training. I discover the relevance of the activity to the training topic is a key factor. So I select or design activities that clearly and directly incorporate the principles and procedures taught during the session. I highlight these principles before the activity as briefing, during the activity as coaching, and after the activity as debriefing.

*Conclusion:* As long as I link the game to the training objectives, the participants are engaged more and learn more. The instructional and motivational effectiveness of my training improves significantly.

## Glenn’s Seven Sentence Formula

My mentor and co-author Glenn Hughes ([www.SMARTasHell.com](http://www.SMARTasHell.com)) uses a seven sentences story formula as a no-B.S. approach to influencing people by using stories.

Here’s Glenn’s formula:

1. **Opening.** Specify the when, where, and who.
2. **Context.** Provide important background information
3. **Conflict.** Select among man vs. man, man vs. machine, man vs. nature, and man vs. society.
4. **Proposed Resolution.** Explain what attempt was made to end the conflict.
5. **Cliffhanger.** Explain how the outcome was at risk.
6. **Actual Resolution.** Explain how the conflict ended and who won.

For more explanation, examples, and a job aid visit Glenn’s web page <http://bit.ly/1w59xbQ> .

Here are my seven sentences based on Glenn’s formula:

1. A month ago, my colleague Matt told me that one of our potential clients decided not to hire us because our web site looked antiquated.
2. This was not the first time that Matt has complained about our web site.
3. In a meeting with Matt and Raja (our web master), we had major differences of opinion: Raja was a pure technologist, Matt wanted more modern look and feel, and I wanted to maintain the quality of our content.
4. We decided to outsource our web redesign to a group that specialized on the use of latest platforms.
5. We plunked down an advance payment and the design folks walked us through the initial design. Matt and I were impressed but Raja was not because of the limitations imposed by the platform.
6. We told Raja that he could talk to the designers and resolve his concerns. In the meantime, I came up with suitable workaround solutions for transferring the text and graphic content. We are at a temporary cease fire and my prediction is that everything will eventually work out fine.

Notice I cheated. Some of the seven “sentences” are more than a sentence. But who’s counting?

## Using Story Formulas Interactively

Invite your participants create their own stories using one of the formulas. Whichever formula you choose, begin by demonstrating its application and by sharing a relevant story you created.

To increase the interactivity, invite the participants to work with a partner or in a team. Ask them to take turn applying different steps to co-create a story.

Here are some additional approaches for increasing interactivity in creating formula stories that are relevant to the training objective:

**Story comparisons.** Ask different participants to write individual formula stories on the same topic or theme. Ask them to share their stories with each other. Finally, ask groups of participants to identify the common elements in the stories they shared.

**Debriefed stories.** Ask the participants to take turns to read their stories to a group. Ask the group members to debrief themselves and discuss their emotional reactions, the learning points in the story, and their implications for personal action.

**Prompted Stories.** Provide the appropriate information related to one of the step in the formula. Ask the participants to complete the other steps and assemble the final story. For example, here’s the information related to the *until-one-day* step: *Until one day, Ramon came to the meeting after only 3 hours of sleep during the previous night. He sounded totally incoherent during the discussion.*

## An Assignment for You

Choose a training topic. Use one of the two story formulas presented earlier to create a story related to the topic. Also generate a set of debriefing questions to follow up the presentation of your story.

If you want a wider audience, email a copy of your story to me at thiagi@thiagi.com.

Part 2:

Activities

# 30 Days

The plot of a typical story involves a series of situations and responses. These elements create the ups and downs of the arc of the story.

In this interactive storytelling activity, the players create a series of positive and negative situations related to 30 days in the life of a manager. Later, players pull out one situation at a time and plan how to respond to it.

Purpose

To plan for capitalizing positive situations and containing negative situations at the workplace.

Participants

Minimum: 4

**Maximum:** Any number, organized into playgroups of 4 to 6

**Best:** 12 to 30

Time

15 to 45 minutes

Handouts

Sample situation cards, two for each participant

Supplies and Equipment

* Blank situation cards
* Pieces of paper for outlining plans
* Small pieces of paper for recording score points
* Pencils or pens
* Timer
* Whistle

## Preparation

**Prepare sample situation cards.** Prior to conducting the game, prepare four sample cards that specify types of workplace situations that a typical manager may face. Two of these situations should have a potential *positive* impact and the other two, *negative* impact.

Here are some samples that we used recently:

* Your team has finished a project ahead of schedule and 10 percent under budget.
* Your company is planning to outsource its data processing operations to Ukraine.
* Your Manager asks you to let two people go from your team. Everyone on your team is a good performer and you feel they all serve essential functions.
* An executive stops you in the hallway and grills you about your project.

Reproduce each situation on separate pieces of paper. Assemble a set of four for each play group.

## Flow

**Distribute sample situation cards.** Give the four sample cards to the playgroup, with two positive and two negative situations. Ask the players review the items for later use as models for creating their own situation cards.

**Ask players to write situation cards.** Place several blank index cards on the middle of the table. Ask the players to work independently and write different situations, one on each card. Encourage the players to write as many cards as possible, balancing between positive and negative situations. Announce a suitable time limit. Collect the cards from the participants at the end of this time.

**Exchange the situation cards.** If more than one group is playing, give the cards written by one group to the next group. (The cards from the last group go to the first group.)

**Start the play of the game.** At each playgroup, ask someone to turn the cards written side down and shuffle the packet. Take the top card, turn it face up, and read the situation written on it. Place this card on the middle of the table so everyone can read the situation.

**Come up with a plan for handling the situation.** Ask each player to develop a plan for capitalizing the positive situation or containing the negative one. Remind the players that the goal is to reduce the negative outcomes and to increase the positive outcomes that may arise from the situation. Instruct the players to write a brief outline of their plan on a piece of paper. Announce a 2-minute time limit for this planning activity.

**Present the plans.** Identify the player with the closest date of birth and ask him or her to read the plan. Then ask all other players to take turns to read their plans.

**Evaluating the plans.** At the end of the plan presentations, ask each player to reflect on the plans of the *other* players and give 1, 2, or 3 points to reflect the potential effectiveness of the plan. After making this decision, players write the number of points on small pieces of paper, fold the paper, and place it in front of the appropriate player.

**Continue playing the game.** Turn over one card at a time and use the same procedure: come up with a suitable plan, read the plan, and award score points for each of the other player’s plans.

**Conclude the game.** Keep your eyes on the clock. After a suitable time period has elapsed, blow the whistle to indicate the end of the activity. Ask the players to open the folded pieces of paper in front of them and add up the score points. Find the player with the highest total score and congratulate this winner.

**Debrief the activity.** Discuss the similarities and differences among the strategies used for capitalizing positive situations and containing negative ones.

## Variations and Adjustments

**Don’t have enough time?** Use a prepared set of situation cards. Conclude the session after two or three rounds.

**Have ample time?** Ask the players to generate several situation cards. Have them edit these cards, remove duplicates, and select the most realistic ones.

**Don’t trust the participants to generate situations?** You are probably suffering from unnecessary paranoia. Anyhow, ask the players to use your set of situation cards. Alternatively, collect their cards and replace them with edited cards generated by previous players.

**Not interested in management training?** Change the backstory to some other character that is relevant to your training topic. Like, *30 Days in the Life of Leader, 60 Days in the Life of a Mortician, 90 Days in the Life of an Accountant, or One Day in the Life of a Forensic Pathologist*.

# Appreciative Encounters

One approach to interactive storytelling involves the participants to create their own stories and share them with each other. Here’s an engaging activity based on appreciative inquiry techniques that involve focusing on strengths, successful results, and positive encounters. The sample activity described below deals with diversity and inclusion. The frame of this activity can be applied as a template to many other soft skill areas such as customer service, coaching, giving feedback, leadership, and critical thinking.

## Purpose

To identify factors that contribute to positive cross-cultural interactions.

## Participants

Minimum: 4

**Maximum:** Any number

**Best:** 15 to 30, divided into five teams.

## Time

30 -50 minutes

## Flow

**Form teams.** Divide participants into two or more approximately equal-sized teams, each with 2-5 members.

**Create stories about positive interactions.** Ask each participant to work independently to come up with a story related to a positive intercultural interaction. This story should feature a delightful encounter with one or more people from a different culture. It could be a real or fictional narrative. Exchange the participants to keep their stories short.

**Share stories.** Invite participants to walk around the room and pair up with someone from a different team. The two participants should share their stories with each other. Ask participants to listen carefully so they can recall details of the other person's story at a later time. Announce a 4-minute time limit for this activity.

**Repeat exchanging stories**. Whenever a pair of people has finished exchanging their stories, they thank each other and walk around, looking for other partners. They keep sharing their stories with each other.

**Return to the team.** After a suitable number of exchanges, ask all the participants to return to their teams. At this time, each participant would have his or her own original story along with one or more stories from the others.

**Discover common themes.** Ask members of each team to think back on all the stories they heard and identify the common themes among them. Ask them to make a list of factors that contribute to enjoyable interactions with people from other cultures. Also encourage the team members to brainstorm techniques for increasing the probabilities of such positive encounters.

**Pair and share the conclusions.** After a suitable pause, ask each participant to pair up with another participant from a different team. Ask the participants to take turns sharing their list of factors that contribute to positive encounters and techniques for increasing these factors.

# Best Drama

In a recent teambuilding workshop, I wanted participants to learn and apply the skills related to mediating disputes among team members. Instead of conducting the usual type of roleplay, I asked the participants to stage dramatic segments. The activity turned out to be highly motivating, probably because everybody loves to put on a play.

## Key Idea

Different teams create and stage a dramatic segment incorporating key principles and procedures associated with mediating a dispute among team members. One of the teams does not produce a play but evaluates other teams' plays.

## Index Tags

Conflict management. Mediation. Teamwork. Teambuilding. Facilitation. Improvisation. Procedural simulation.

## Purpose

To effectively mediate a dispute between two team members.

## Participants

Minimum: 9

Maximum: 35

**Best:** 16 to 30

(Participants are divided into 3 to 5 teams, each with 3-7 members.)

## Time Requirement

45 to 90 minutes

## Handouts

*Mediation Checklist*, one copy for each participant.

## Supplies

* Timer
* Whistle

## Room Set up

Tables and chairs for each team.

Waiting area for the other teams while one team is staging its play.

## Flow

**Brief the participants.** Explain that you are going to explore techniques for mediating among team members who are having major disagreements. Distribute copies of the *Mediation Checklist*. Walk participants through the items on the checklist, briefly discussing appropriate behaviors associated with each item. Encourage the participants to ask questions. Respond briefly and clearly.

**Form teams.** Divide participants into 3 to 5 teams, each with 3 to 7 members. Seat each team around a convenient table.

**Explain the play-production task.** Announce that you are going to produce a 3-minute videotape for training facilitators to mediate in disputes among team members. The task for each team is to prepare a dramatic segment for this video and to act it out. Announce a 9-minute preparation time. Because of the limited time, encourage teams to identify a critical situation between two team members, prepare an outline for the segment, quickly rehearse key incidents, and improvise the lines.

**Explain the evaluation task.** The dramatic segment staged by each team will be evaluated along these dimensions:

**Focus:** Does the segment emphasize key principles and procedures in the mediation procedure?

**Conflict.** Does the segment present a realistic conflict that is balanced between the two parties?

**Selection.** Does the segment leave out trivial and irrelevant elements?

**Characterization.** Does the segment feature two important and realistic characters?

**Setting.** Is the segment set in a typical workplace situation?

**Authenticity:** Is the segment realistic and believable?

**Interest:** Does the segment attract and maintain audience attention?

Randomly select one of the teams. Explain that while the other teams are playing the role of a production company, this team would play the role of drama critics. Ask the team to come up with a rating scale for comparing and evaluating different dramatic segments along the different dimensions that you identified.

**Coordinate preparation activities.** Explain that the play production teams and judging team have the same 9-minute preparation time. Start the timer. Let teams work on their own. If the judging team completes its task ahead of time, ask its members to silently observe the production teams in action. Give a 2-minute warning at the end of 7 minutes. Blow a whistle at the end of 9 minutes to signal the end of the preparation time. Send all teams except the judging team out of the room.

**Stage the plays.** Randomly select one of the teams to return to the room and stage its play. Remind the 3-minute time limit and strictly enforce this limit. Make sure that the members of the judging team are carefully observing the play and taking notes.

At the end of 3 minutes, invite the next team to return to the room and stage the play. (The first team may stay in the room and watch the enactment.) Repeat this process until all teams have presented their dramatic segments.

**Ask the judges to announce their ratings.** After the staging of the final segment, ask the judging team to make their decisions. Invite this team to briefly explain the items in their rating checklist and to give evaluative feedback for each dramatic segment. After the judging team has presented its feedback, ask it to identify the best dramatic segment.

**Present your comments.** Congratulate the winning team. Give your feedback, focusing on how accurately each team emphasized the key elements in mediation process.

**Conduct a debriefing discussion.** Ask questions similar to those listed below. Encourage participants to respond to each question and discuss alternative responses.

1. How typical was the conflict portrayed in the dramatic segments? Which one was the most typical?
2. Which item in the mediation checklist is the most important one? How did different segments portray this item?
3. Which item in the mediation checklist was frequently ignored? What was the reason for teams ignoring it?
4. Which item in the mediation checklist was the most difficult one to portray? How did the actors portray it?
5. In each of the segments, how would you rate the effectiveness of mediator? How could the mediation performance be improved?
6. In each of the segments, did the mediator intervene too much or too little? Why do you think so?
7. In each segment, did the mediator appear to be neutral? How could we improve the appearance of neutrality?
8. In each segment, how realistic were the behaviors of the disputing team members? How could we make their behaviors more realistic? More challenging?
9. If we created a 30-minute segment, what additional incidents and behaviors would you have included?

## Adjustments

**Not enough time?** Reduce the number of teams to three (and increase the number of participants in each team). Stage two segments.

**Too many people?** Ask all teams to prepare the play but randomly select two teams to stage their plays. Ask members of the other teams act as the audience.

**Digitally sophisticated?** Ask each team to record its dramatic segment on video. Let all the participants watch all the segments. Ask the panel of judges critically evaluate these segments and select the best one.

HANDOUT

Mediation Checklist

1. Frame the session:

* Explain that conflicts are inevitable results of healthy diversity among team members.
* Explain that a well-managed conflict provides an opportunity for future growth.
* Stress the importance of listening to each other.

1. Gather information and analyze the conflict:

* Focus the conversation on the current dispute.
* Ask the disputants to take turns to tell their story.
* Maintain neutrality. Don’t take sides.
* Summarize the dispute in objective terms acceptable to both sides.

1. Help disputants to establish mutual goals:

* Establish task-related goals.
* Establish relationship goals.

1. Brainstorm strategies for achieving the goals:

* Focus on win-win strategies.
* Use a variety of brainstorming techniques.

1. Select the best strategy:

* Ensure that the strategy is fair and equitable for both disputants.
* Set up an action plan for implementing the strategy.
* Identify the first small step for immediate implementation.

1. Debrief the participants:

* Encourage disputants to reflect on what happened.
* Encourage disputants to share their insights for preventing and resolving future conflicts.

# Best Story

Here’s an interactive storytelling activity that uses the E&E technique. This acronym stands for *exchange and evaluate*. That’s exactly what the teams do during the activity.

## Purpose

To create a short story on a training topic by using Glenn Hughes’ Seven-Sentence formula.

## Synopsis

Individuals create a story using Glenn Hughes’ formula. Groups exchange the stories and select the best one in each collection.

## Participants

Minimum: 4

**Maximum:** Any number, divided into teams of two to five

**Best:** 9 to 30 (divided into 3 to 6 teams)

## Time

10 to 20 minutes, depending on the number of teams

## Handout

An explanation of Glenn’s Six Sentence Story along with an example.

## Supplies

* Paper
* Pencils or pens
* Timer
* Whistle

## Flow

**Explain the story formula.** Distribute copies of the handout with the formula. Walk the participants through the steps, using the example.

**Assign individual task.** Announce the topic (the theme for the story) and briefly explain it. Distribute a piece of paper to each participant. Tell the participants to individually write a six- sentence story illustrating the application of principles related to the training topic. Ask the participants to limit themselves to a single page. Announce a 5-minute time limit. Start the timer.

**Organize the participants into teams.** At the end of 5 minutes, blow the whistle and ask the participants to stop writing (or rewriting their stories. Divide the participants into teams of three to five. It does not matter if the number of people in the teams are not exactly the same. Seat each team around a table.

**Collect and exchange the stories.** Ask someone in each team to collect the stories (without reading them). Ask this person to give its collection of stories to the next team. (The collection from the last team is given to the first one to complete the chain.)

**Collectively evaluate the stories.** Ask the members of each team to act as a board of editors, review the different stories in the collection, and choose the best one. Suggest that the teams use realism and readability as the criteria for their evaluation. Announce a suitable time limit for this selection process.

**Select the best story.** Make sure that all teams have completed the selection process. Ask the teams to take turns to read aloud the best story in their collection. At the end of each story, identify the author of the story and read a round of applause.

**Select the best of the best.** After all the selected stories have been read by different, ask individual participants to select the best of these stories. Conduct this poll by giving a number to each story and ask the participants to write their choice on a piece of paper and give it to you. Announce the story that received the most votes and lead another round of applause for its author.

**Conduct a debriefing discussion.** Ask the participants to talk about the common themes among the story and critical features of the selected stories.

**Follow up.** Collect all of the stories. Select the best ones for use as examples during future sessions.

HANDOUT

Six Sentence Story

Glenn Hughes ([www.SMARTasHell.com](http://www.SMARTasHell.com)) has created a seven sentences story formula as a no-B.S. approach to influencing people by using stories.

Here’s Glenn’s formula:

**Opening.** Specify the when, where, and who.

**Context**. Provide important background information

**Conflict**. Select among man vs. man, man vs. machine, man vs. nature, and man vs. society.

**Proposed Resolution**. Explain what attempt was made to end the conflict.

**Cliffhanger**. Explain how the outcome was at risk.

**Actual Resolution.** Explain how the conflict ended and who won.

**MIP.** Present the most important point of the story.

#### Sample

Here’s a story that I created with Glenn’s formula for use in my training session on motivation:

**Opening.** My boss told me she needed a new product to show to our venture capitalist.

**Context.** She wanted a new software program in 3 months’ time. She wanted a working prototype.

**Conflict.** It takes time to come up with ideas for a new software program. And more time for creating a prototype.

**Proposed Resolution.** Our division had seven talented programmers. I met each of them individually and asked him to rapidly come up with a brilliant program.

**Cliffhanger.** Each programmer wanted to prove that his ideas are the best ones. It was clear to me that the 3-month deadline did not provide enough time to develop any one of the prototypes.

HANDOUT

**Actual Resolution.** I assembled all seven programmers and asked them to select one of their ideas and work as a team to complete the prototype on time. They collaborated with each other and successfully completed the task.

**MIP.** This project taught me the difference between motivating individuals and motivating a team.

# Better Story

You learn a lot about writing stories by editing other people’s stories and rewriting them. This is what the participants do in this interactive storytelling activity. At the conclusion of the activity, each team ends up with two versions of a story related to a training topic.

## Purpose

To revise a story on the basis of negative and positive editorial comments.

## Synopsis

Teams write microstories related to a training topic. They exchange these stories and perform these different tasks with different stories during each of the next four rounds: write critical comments, write appreciative comments, rewrite the original story, and compare the two versions of the story.

## Participants

**Minimum:** 10, divided into five pairs

**Maximum:** 30, divided into five teams

**Best:** 15 to 25

## Time

30 minutes to 2 hours. (Five rounds, each lasting about 5 – 20 minutes)

## Flow

**Brief the players.** Explain that the interactive storytelling activity consists of five rounds, each lasting for about 5 minutes. Indicate that the participants will work in teams, performing these five tasks:

1. Write a microstory related to a training topic.
2. Write critical editorial comments about a story from another team.
3. Write appreciative editorial comments about a different story.
4. Rewrite another story to make it better based on the critical and appreciative comments.
5. Compare another original story and the rewritten version. Provide a score to indicate the value of the rewritten version.

**Organize teams.** Organize the participants into five teams of two to five people each. It does not matter if a few teams have one more member than the others.

**Ask for stories.** Select a topical area related to the training objective. Ask the teams to come up with a microstory (of less than 200 words) related to the topic. This story could be based on some real workplace experience or could be totally fictional. Explain that the story would be evaluated both in terms of its appeal to the readers and its relevance to the topic. Ask the teams to write legibly to permit other teams to review the story. Announce a time limit of 5 minutes for completing this task.

**Exchange the stories.** If any team finishes the task ahead of time, ask its members to keep polishing the story to make it more appealing and more relevant to the training topic. At the end of 5 minutes, blow the whistle and ask each team to give the piece of paper with the story to the next team. The story from the last team is given to the first team.

**Ask for critical comments.** Tell each team that they would play the role of editors with high standards and a sadistic twist. Ask the team to jointly review the story it received and write several critical comments on another piece of paper. Encourage the teams to ignore all positive aspects of the story and focus on its weaknesses, examples of bad style, irrelevancies, and grammatical errors. Announce a time limit of 5 minutes for this task.

**Exchange the stories and the critical comments.** At the end of 5 minutes, blow the whistle and ask each team to give the piece of paper with the original story and the other piece of paper with critical comments to the next team. The packet from the last team is given to the first team.

**Ask for appreciative comments.** Tell each team that they would play the role of editors who like to encourage new authors. Ask the team to jointly review the story and write several appreciative comments on a separate piece of paper. Encourage the teams to ignore all negative aspects of the story and focus on its strengths, examples of good style, the theme, and brevity. Announce a time limit of 5 minutes for this task.

**Exchange the stories and the editorial comments.** At the end of 5 minutes, blow the whistle and ask each team to give the pieces of paper with the original story, critical comments, and appreciative comments to the next team. The packet from the last team is given to the first team.

**Ask for rewrite to make the story better.** Tell each team that it would play the role of a rewriter during this round. In this role, ask the team members to jointly review the original story and all of the comments it received. Based on the comments, ask the team to rewrite the story on a separate piece of paper. The team should improve the appeal of the story and strengthen its relevance to the training topic. Announce a 5-minute time limit for completing this task.

**Exchange the packets.** At the end of 5 minutes, blow the whistle and ask each team to give the pieces of paper with the original story, critical comments, appreciative comments, and the rewritten version. The packet from the last team is given to the first team.

**Ask for comparative scores.** Tell each team that it would play the role of an evaluator during this round. Ask the members of each team to compare the original story and the rewritten version. In the role of objective evaluators, instruct the team members to distribute 13 points between the two versions to reflect their relative merits. Announce a 5-minute time limit for completing this task.

**Conclude the activity.** Tabulate the scores from different teams by recording the scores for the original story and the revised story. Give each pair of stories to the team that wrote the original story.

**Conduct a debriefing discussion.** Ask each participant to reflect on the different roles assigned to the team and think about what they learned in each role. Ask them to announce the major learning outcomes. Then ask the players to share what they learned about the training topic.

## Variations

**Lots of players?** If you have more than 30 players, divide them into two equal-sized subgroups. Then organize the participants in each subgroup into five teams of 2 to 5 members. Use the same procedure as described above with the teams from each of the two subgroups.

**Too few players?** You can have “teams” of just one participants. Even if you have only three people, you can still conduct the activity, rotating the three participants through the different roles.

**Not enough time?** Instead of asking the teams to write their own story, give each team a ready-made story that you had written earlier. Reduce the time limit for each round to 3 minutes. Also skip the last step that requires evaluation and awarding score points.

**Not enough time for a single session?** Spread the activity over five different sessions. Exchange the packets during each session, give instructions for the next session, and let participants complete their task at their own time.

**Players in different locations?** You can conduct an email version of the activity involving individual players in different locations.

# Case Analysis

The case method is a classic approach to interactive storytelling. Most cases involve two types of training objectives: the content-related objectives deal with the topic of the case and the process-related objectives are related to such competencies as working teams, critical thinking, and decisionmaking. I use this method as an interactive storytelling technique by asking the participants to individually review and analyze a case, discuss their analyses in small groups, and facilitate a discussion involving everyone in the entire group. This is the approach used in the following Case Analysis activity.

This particular activity deals with cross-cultural clashes. You can use the frame of the activity to explore any training topic that involves multilayered situations.

## Purpose

To explore the impact of cultural differences on working overseas.

## Synopsis

Individual participants analyze a case and answer a series of questions. Later, they form teams, discuss their answers, and arrive at consensus. Finally, the facilitator conducts a large-group discussion to encourage the teams to share their perspectives.

## Participants

**Minimum:** 2

**Maximum:** Any number

**Best:** 10 to 30

## Time

20 to 40 minutes, depending on the number of participants and the complexity of the case.

## Handouts

*Harriet’s Adventures in Chennai,* one copy for each participant

*Questions about Harriet’s Adventures,* one copy for each participant

## Supplies

* Timer
* Whistle

## Preparation

**Become familiar with the case.** Read *Harriet’s Adventures in Chennai*. Respond to the list of questions. Anticipate alternative answers from different participants.

**Collect responses from experts.** Ask two or more people who are knowledgeable about intercultural communications to respond to the list of questions. Do not be disturbed if the responses differ from each other. Actually, it is preferable that way.

**Collect resources for follow up assignments**. Make a list of books, novels, short stories, articles, movies, and websites with relevant information.

## Flow

**Distribute the case.** Give a copy of the handout, *Harriet’s Adventures in Chennai*. Announce a 2-minute time period for the participants to review the case.

**Ask the participants to reflect on the events.** After 2 minutes, ask them to think about the lessons they learned from the case.

**Distribute the list of questions.** Ask the participants to work individually and jot down some responses. Encourage them to think of alternative responses to each question. Announce a 2-minute time limit.

**Organize the participants into teams.** Each team may include two to five people. Ask the team members to share their answers to each question, discuss these answers, and try to reach a consensus. Announce a 5-minute time limit.

**Facilitate a discussion among all participants.** Use the following process to work through each question:

1. Randomly choose a participant to share his or her individual answer and the team’s consensus answer.
2. Ask the participants from other teams to provide different answers to the same question.
3. Invite everyone to comment on the earlier answers.
4. Share the responses provided by experts. Compare them with the group’s answers.

**Continue the discussion.** Walk through each question, using the same procedure.

**Conclude the session.** Ask each participant to jot down one important lesson that he or she learned from this case analysis activity.

**Assign follow-up activities.** Suggest different resource materials that the participants may want to read, listen, or view.

## Variations and Adjustments

**Want to save trees?** Instead of distributing the handout with the case, just tell it as a story. Alternatively, make an audio recording and play it back.

**Want to save time?** Distribute the case and the list of questions ahead of time. Ask the participants to review the case and answer the questions before they come to the session.

**Want to create your own case?** Go ahead and experiment. Remember that your case could be short and simple or long and complicated. It could be presented through different media.

HANDOUT

Harriet’s Adventures in Chennai

Harriet is a technical trainer from Santa Clara, CA. Her company sends her to Chennai, India to train her counterparts in a software engineering corporation.

Soon after getting started in Chennai, Harriet convinces the local trainers to replace traditional lectures with experiential activities and agile games. The local trainers accept her ideas and begin designing training activities and interactive lectures. They practice facilitating training activities among themselves.

During an afternoon session, Mr. Kumar, the grandfather of the founder of the corporation, visits the training group. Without checking with Harriet, he launches into a rambling speech in which he extols the trainers as gurus who should be respected and obeyed by their students.

Much to Harriet’s horror, most local trainers immediately agree with the old man. To prevent major damage, Harriet interrupts Mr. Kumar and explains that recent research has demonstrated the benefits of encouraging students to challenge the trainer’s statements. Mr. Kumar ignores Harriet and talks about the importance of humility as a critical requirement for the students to learn from their superiors. In spite of Harriet’s protests, several participants rush to agree with Mr. Kumar’s platitudes.

After Mr. Kumar leaves, Harriet confronts the group about their unwillingness to challenge inaccurate and outmoded paradigms. Her participants now agree that Harriet’s views are accurate and useful.

Two days after this incident, Harriet’s company abruptly recalls her to its California headquarters. She has been replaced by another trainer.

HANDOUT

Questions about Harriet’s Adventures

1. What do you think went wrong? How would you explain your theory to Harriet?
2. Do you think Harriet was recalled was a result of her disagreements with Mr. Kumar? Why do you think so?
3. Which of these differences contributed the most to Harriet being recalled: gender difference, age difference, or nationality difference?
4. What do you think are the reasons for the local trainers’ inconsistent behavior?
5. What do you think that people in India really think about Harriet? About Mr. Kumar?
6. What should Harriet’s company do to ensure that her replacement has a better of satisfying the people in Chennai?
7. What are the chances that local the trainers would implement Harriet’s approaches to technical training? Why do you think so?
8. What things did you learn about the cultural values of people in India?

# Change Stories

Here’s an interactive storytelling activity called serial roleplays. It involves the same teams roleplaying under different situations and making appropriate decisions.

The topic of the sample activity below is rapid change. Technological progress continues to catch us by surprise. We create more efficient keyboards, and computers begin accepting voice commands. We design better books, and pocket computers display multimedia presentations inexpensively. We invent better mousetraps, and ultrasonic speakers chase away household pests.

White water simulates this type of chaotic future where constantly changing goals demand flexibility. In this game, the task given to teams keeps changing unpredictably. The team with the highest total score (which rates the team’s resilience) wins the game.

## Purpose

To explore strategies for coping with rapid and constant change

## Participants

**Minimum:** 4

**Maximum:** Any number, divided into teams

**Best:** 10 to 30

## Time

30 minutes to an hour

## Handouts

* *General Instructions*, one copy for each team
* Five sets of *Product Specifications*, one set for each of round, one copy for each team

## Supplies

* Blank sheets of paper
* Timer
* Whistle

## Flow

**Form teams.** Divide participants into 3 to 10 teams, each with 2 to 7 members. It does not matter if some teams have an extra member.

**Assign team roles.** Randomly select one team to be the judges. All other teams play the role of Marketing Teams hired by a large publishing company.

**Distribute instruction sheets.** Give each team (including the team of judges) a copy of *General Instructions*. Ask team members to review the information. Clarify the instructions by answering questions from participants.

**Brief the judges.** While the other teams are reviewing the instructions, give the following instructions to the team of judges.

* You will receive a list of suggestions from each team.
* Compare these lists and arrange them in order from the best to the worst.
* Give 10 points to the best list and 2 points to worst list. Assign suitable number of points (between 2 and 10) to each of the other lists.
* You will have 3 minutes for rating the lists.
* During the later rounds of the game, you will be repeating this judging procedure Five times, each time with different lists of suggestions.

**Begin the activity.** Distribute a copy of the first *Product Specifications* to each team. Explain that teams have 5 minutes to come up their list of suggestions. Start a timer.

**Stop the activity.** After 3 minutes, blow the whistle to get the participants' attention. Explain that you are interrupting their activity because there has been a significant change in the project. Before explaining the changes, ask teams to give you copies of the list of suggestions in its current form.

**Begin the second round.** Distribute copies of the *Round 2 Product Specifications*. Ask the teams to restart their activity.

**Rate lists from Round 1.** Give copies of the lists of suggestions from Round 1 to the judging team. Ask the teams to rate the activities while the other teams are busy with the next activity.

**Shift to the next round.** After 3 minutes or when the judges have rated the list of suggestions from the Round 1, blow a whistle to attract participants’ attention. Explain that more disruptive changes have taken place. Collect the lists of suggestions in their current form and give them to the judges.

**Distribute the results of the Round 1.** Explain that the scores range from 2 to 10. Return the lists of suggestions to the appropriate teams so they can check their scores.

**Proceed to the next round.** Distribute copies of the *Round 3 Product Specifications*. Repeat the instructions as before.

**Repeat the procedure.** After 3 minutes, stop the activity. Return the previous lists with scores awarded by the judges. Give the next Product Specifications and ask teams to come up with fresh lists of suggestions. Repeat this process until the end of Round 5.

**Debrief.** After collecting the lists from Round 5 and handing them over to the judges, begin debriefing the Marketing Teams. Discuss the following types of questions:

* How did you feel about the frequently changing scope of the project?
* How does the situation in this roleplay reflect what happens in your workplace?
* What are some of the causes of these frequent changes in specifications?
* Are frequent changes likely to increase or decrease in your workplace?
* What strategies did you use to cope with the constantly changing specifications?
* What advice do you have for people in similar situations?
* Under what conditions is it better to build on the results of your previous activity? Under what conditions should you begin from scratch?

**Announce the final results.** Return the lists from Round 5 with the scores to the appropriate teams. Ask teams to add up their scores and announce the total. Identify the team with the highest total score. Discuss the implications of these scores.

**Conclude the debriefing.** Ask the judges for the comments. Ask each participant to come up with two or three personal action ideas for coping with frequent changes in the workplace.

HANDOUT

General Instructions

You are a member of a Marketing Team hired to provide suggestions to a large US-based publishing company.

The publisher has definite plans for a new product and a specific target market based on systematic market research. You will be provided with details.

Your task, as a team, is to provide 5-10 specific suggestions (each expressed in 1-3 sentences). Your suggestions should provide guidelines for improving the competitive position and potential profitability of the product.

Please record your suggestions legibly on a single side of a piece of paper.

You have 5 minutes to come up with your suggestions.

HANDOUT

Specifications for Each Round

## Round 1

**Context:** Retired people are traveling in larger numbers.   
**Product:** Travel guide to the top 30 vacation destinations around the world.   
**Target Market:** Affluent U.S. American senior citizens.

## Round 2

**Context:** A Japanese publishing company has acquired your publishing company.  
**Product:** Travel guide in seven different languages.   
**Target Market:** Young middle class professional in Asia.

## Round 3

**Context:** Your publishing company has organized a multimedia group.   
**Product:** A series of 30-minute TV shows about attractive travel destinations.   
**Target Market:** TV audience around the world.

## Round 4

**Context:** Your company has opened a web portal.   
**Product/Service:** Web site with updated vacation travel destinations.  
**Target Market:** Same as before, with a focus on young professional women.

## Round 5

**Context:** The R&D group has developed a virtual-reality kiosk with a motion-activated treadmill, helmet-mounted 3-D goggles, data gloves, data shoes (that enable the wearer to feel different ground surfaces), along with temperature and odor control.  
**Product/Service:** High fidelity virtual travel to popular vacation destinations.  
**Target Market:** Affluent people who can pay the hefty fee.

# Chapters

This is another example of interactive storytelling.

The Chapters activity incorporates the following features of effective interactive storytelling:

1. The chapters in the plotline is derived from the steps of a job related procedure.
2. Team members co-create the story.
3. The team build upon the parts of the story supplied by another team.

This particular activity interactive storytelling to explore performance needs analysis procedure. The frame of the activity can be used as a template to provide interactive stories for training session related to any other procedure.

## Purpose

To identify the steps in the basic needs analysis process and to apply them to a simulated project.

## Participants

Any number can play. This activity works best with 12 to 30 participants.

## Time

30 to 45 minutes

## Supplies

* Copies of *Needs Analysis,* a handout that explains the need analysis process*.*
* Copies of *How We Figured Out How To Double Our Monthly Income,* a case that illustrates specific application of the process*.*

## Preparation

**Master the model.** Your success in using this activity format will depend on your fluency with the basic needs analysis model. Carefully study the handout that explains the process. Figure out what is happening in each step and how the steps are linked to each other.

**Create a story.** The best way to master the model is to make up a fictional case that illustrates the application of the needs analysis process. This is what you will be asking the participants to do, and you need a sample story to prime them. Review the case study to figure out the plot line for your story. You can base your story on one of your own successful projects. If you do so, don't let facts get in the way of a good story that clearly tracks your progress through the needs analysis steps. If you are adventurous, create a story around some popular TV show. If you are fainthearted, plagiarize the case from the handout.

## Flow

**Brief the participants.** Using your own words, present some introductory comments about the basic needs analysis process.

**Distribute the handout that explains the needs analysis process.** Point out that the handout identifies the steps in the process and the relationships among them. Ask the participants to read and review the handout. Announce a 2-minute time limit for this activity.

**Tell your story.** At the end of the time limit, announce that you are going to tell a story of the needs analysis process in action to make the abstract model become concrete. Narrate your story, pausing at the end of each “chapter” to refer to the steps in the process.

**Distribute the case.** Explain that this case study illustrates the application of the needs analysis process. Suggest that the participants refer to this case study later—after you give them an assignment.

**Assign the story-creation task.** Divide the participants into teams of three to five members each. It does not matter if some teams have an extra member. Ask each team to begin creating a fictional case study of a successful application of the needs analysis process. The first chapter of the story should clearly illustrate the application of the first step (*Identify the ideal performance*). The teams have 3 minutes to create the first chapter.

**Invite a team to present its first chapter.** Give the teams a 1-minute warning. Ask the teams to give finishing touches to the chapter. After another minute, randomly choose a team to send its storyteller to the front of the room. Ask this person to present the first chapter.

**Add the second chapter.** At the conclusion of the presentation, ask all teams to continue the story they heard by writing the second chapter. Apologize to the members of the other teams. Explain that you are going to ignore the first chapter they had created earlier. Make sure that the teams understand that they are to create the second chapter to continue the first chapter they heard. Explain at the end of the 3-minute time limit, you will randomly select a team (that could even be the team that read its first chapter) and hear the second chapter.

**Continue the story writing activity, one chapter at a time.** After 3 minutes, select another team and have them read the second chapter. Ask the teams to create the third chapter to continue the ongoing case study. Repeat this process with all teams writing the ensuring chapters and the chapter from one random team being added to the continuing case study.

**Conclude the activity.** At the end of the sixth chapter, congratulate the teams on their depth of understanding of the needs analysis process. Discuss the advantages and possible disadvantages of the needs analysis procedure.

HANDOUT

Needs Analysis

Needs analysis is the process of identifying a suitable solution to a performance problem. You do this by specifying the problem as a gap between the ideal state and actual state, discovering the causes of this gap, and selecting a suitable intervention to remove (or reduce) these causes.

The need analysis process consists of the following six steps:

## Step 1. Identify the Ideal State

Interview the client and other stakeholders (such as the members of the work team, managers, and customers) to specify the desired performance of typical employees that will produce the results they would like to see. This level of performance is known as performance to standard or the ideal performance.

## Step 2. Identify the Actual State

Interview the client and other stakeholders to specify the current level of performance of typical employees. Validate this actual performance level by observing the employees, conducting surveys, and analyzing existing records.

## Step 3. Specify the Performance Gap

Use the information collected in the earlier steps to define the performance problem as the difference between the ideal and the actual state. Whenever possible, convert both the ideal state and the actual state to the same units of measurement, and define the gap in specific quantitative terms.

## Step 4. Identify Possible Causes

Continue with additional interviews and other data collection strategies to discover the probable causes for the gap between the ideal and actual states.

## Step 5. Identify the Root Cause

HANDOUT

Analyze the probable causes identified in the previous step and organize them into suitable categories (such as lack of skills, lack of motivation, or lack of tools). Through additional analysis and interviews with different stakeholders, narrow the causes to one (or two) root cause that, if removed, will narrow the performance gap.

## Step 6. Identify Suitable Intervention

Review the performance gap and its root cause. Select a suitable intervention: a strategy that removes or reduces the gap by removing the root cause.

HANDOUT

How We Figured Out How To Double Our Monthly Income

## Chapter I. The Ideal State

I am the CEO of a small company with four employees and a couple of freelance associates. Among the other job responsibilities that I have, I act as a performance technologist in my company.

One day in September, in one of our staff meetings, somebody asked, “When are we going a pay raise?”

This was a silly question because we were having difficulties even in meeting our current payroll. After laughing at this question, we decided to take it seriously and use it as a trigger for conducting a needs analysis.

I asked the folks to begin at the beginning and suggest the ideal state. Here are different ideas that were offered:

Give everyone a 20 percent pay raise.

Make more money every month.

Get a bank loan and pay people more money every month.

We decided that most of these ideas did not incorporate SMART objectives. Eventually, we decided to stick with this statement of the ideal state:

Make $50,000 every month.

This amount should enable us to give everyone a 10 percent pay raise to everyone and meet our monthly payroll without any difficulty.

## Chapter II. The Actual State

HANDOUT

We knew that we had difficulty making our monthly payroll frequently. But we did not have any idea on how much money we were making each month. Different people came up with different estimates and they varied significantly. Even our bookkeeper was clueless about our monthly income. When confronted, he mumbled something about wide variances in our earnings and the differences among accruals, receivables, cash flow, and so on. We asked him to get some solid data and report to us during the next meeting. We threatened to fire him if he did not have accurate and up-to-date data.

At the next meeting, our bookkeeper did bring some credible data in the form of a spreadsheet. The bad news was clear for all of us to see: We made an average of $23,487 during the past 8 months. The predicted income for the next 4 months did not appear to be significantly different.

## Chapter III. The Performance Gap

The performance gap was easy to figure out:

Ideal state: $50,000

Actual state: $23,487

Gap: 50,000 – 23487 = $26,513

## Chapter IV. Possible Causes

We asked ourselves the question, “Why are we not earning as much as we should every month?”

There were a lot of wild speculations, and some of them had nothing to do with the performance gap.

Here are a few of the ideas offered by everyone:

Some people are paid bloated salaries.

It’s the economy, stupid.

Our clients are cheapskates.

The government is moving toward socialism.

Most clients want eLearning. We don’t have a credible track record in that area.

We are not listening to our customers.

We don’t have the bells and whistles that the other consultants flaunt.

HANDOUT

We need a marketing person.

Eighty percent of our income comes from two major clients.

We are not charging enough. Look at Tom Peters. He charges $20,000 for each keynote speech he delivers.

We should develop and sell products. We have reached our capacity in providing consultation and conducting instructor-led workshops.

## Chapter V. The Root Cause

After a lot of discussing about the possible causes and yelling at each other, we settled down to this statement of the root cause:

We are not marketing our products and services.

## Chapter VI. The Intervention

After talking about the cause behind the root cause, we figured out that we lack sufficient capacity to handle the demands of marketing. So our intervention was to hire a hot-shot marketer.

## Chapter VII. Epilogue

We had a clear idea of the intervention but we were caught in a Catch 22: We cannot hire a marketing person unless we made more money and we cannot make more money until we hired a marketing person. So we are still continuing our business as usual, mumbling philosophical inanities like, “Money is not everything”.

# Debriefed Stories

Sorry to disillusion you, but people *don’t* learn from experience. They learn from *reflecting* on their experience.

As a facilitator, you encourage appropriate reflection by conducting a debriefing discussion. During this debriefing, your participants reflect on their experience, relate them to the real world, discover useful insights, and share them with each other.

In conducting research on debriefing, I have discovered that you could debrief real experiences (such as *being downsized*) as well as contrived experiences (such as *participating in an immersive roleplay*). More importantly, you can debrief first-hand experiences as well as vicarious experiences. In other words, you can debrief people’s interaction with a story.

This fact enables us to design and use debriefed stories for training purposes.

## Six Questions for Debriefing

I use a convenient set of six questions for conducting the debriefing discussion of a story:

1. **How do you feel?** Invite the participants to get in touch with their feelings from reading (or listening to) the story.
2. **What happened?** Encourage the participants to recall and share the sequence of events in the story.
3. **What did you learn?** Ask the participants to share different insights from the story.
4. **How does this relate?** Request the participants to relate the events in the story to events in the real world.
5. **What if . . .** Urge the participants to explore how people’s behaviors change when the context changes.
6. **What next?** Inquire how the participants would apply their insights from the story to their everyday life.

## Sample Debriefed Story: A Death in the Family

In a workshop on cultural differences, I used a short story called *A Death in the Family.* The training objective for the workshop is to explore the differences and similarities in the way different cultures handle major life events.

After briefing the participants about the training objective, I distributed copies of a short story called *A Death in My Family*. I ask the participants to read the story individually and come back to the classroom in 20 minutes.

When the participants return, I conducted a debriefing discussion using a prepared set of questions.

## Alternative Approaches

The short story and the debriefing questions begin on page 84. You may want to read the story and respond to questions to experience this approach to interactive storytelling. You may write down your responses to the debriefing questions or just think of the answers.

Training topics in diversity and inclusion lend themselves nicely to the interactive storytelling approach. In addition, you can use this technique with short stories to explore soft skill topics such as leadership, conflict management, critical thinking, motivation, negotiation, and team work. All you need is to find (or write) a suitable story. Very often, you may not want to use an entire story. You can select a self-contained excerpt that illustrates the key principles and concepts you want to get across.

Different participants have different reading speeds, making it difficult for you to keep your group synchronized. But you don’t need to present the story in a printed format. You can read the story or use an audio or video recording.

## Online Approaches

You can display the story on a web site and ask the participants to read the story. You can follow up with a debriefing discussion through a forum or a chat room.

Whether you use text or audio or video to present your story, remember that the effectiveness of this training technique depends on the interactive elements of the debriefing. This discussion should not be an afterthought. You should carefully structure your debriefing questions and set aside sufficient time.

## Using Games for Debriefing

There are a couple of problems in holding the participants attention in conducting a debriefing discussion:

* After an absorbing story, the debriefing discussion may appear to be anticlimactic.
* A few people may dominate the large-group discussion, preventing the less articulate participants from sharing their insights.

Following the lead of Roger Greenaway, a specialist in debriefing, we have been using fast-paced games to involve everyone in debriefing discussions. Here are a few sample debriefing games:

**Got a Question?** Each participant receives a card with a debriefing question. During the first round, the participants repeatedly pair up and collect answers to their questions. During the second round, they share the answers they collected earlier.

**Last Player Standing.** Groups of participants stand in a circle and take turns to answer an open-ended debriefing questions (example: *What did you learn from the story?*). Any participant who repeats a previous response, hesitates too long, or supplies an inappropriate answer is eliminated. The last surviving player is the winner.

**Live Likert.** The facilitator says a word that identifies a feeling or emotion (example: *gratitude*). The participants listen to the word and stand next to one of the numbers on the floor to indicate the level of intensity of that feeling they experienced while reading the story.

**Men and Women.** Each participant individually writes down a response to an open-ended debriefing question. Later, men predict the most probable response from women and *vice versa*.

**The Missing Lesson.** Participants are given a list of five important lessons learned from the story. Working in teams, they attempt to discover one or more missing lessons that should be included in the list.

Although we described the debriefing games in a face-to-face classroom context, with minor adjustments we have used them in virtual classrooms and in elearning sessions.

## An Integrated Approach

The important principle that contributes to the effective use of debriefed stories is to make sure that these four elements are tightly aligned with each other: the training objective, the story, the debriefing questions, and the activity to structure the discussion. As long as these elements are effectively integrated, it does not matter where you begin your design activity. You may start with any element as you as remember the design of interactive storytelling activities is always and an iterative process.

# A Death in My Family

When I woke up, it was not yet daylight outside. The electric light was on and my big brother Maniannan was combing his hair in front of the mirror.

“Are you going somewhere?” I asked.

“Yes, Father wants me to go to take a letter to uncle.”

“What letter?”

“This one.”

I looked at the letter written in Father’s tight handwriting. I recognized some words but the others were too big for me to sound out. I asked Maniannan, “What does it say?”

Maniannan read the letter in a low voice:

After a lengthy illness, Mrs. Valliammal attained gracious peace at the feet of Lord Siva at 3:30 this morning. The cremation will take place at 11:30 in the Mambalam mayanam.

I did not understand what the letter said. I asked Maniannan, “What does it mean?”

“It means Mother’s dead.” Maniannan said softly.

Maybe “Mother’s dead” meant that she was sicker and in greater pain. I went to the sick room where Mother stayed the last few months. Several grown-ups were whispering to each other.

I quickly understood the reason for their whispers. Mother was in her bed, fast asleep. She was wearing her silk sari and had a big rose garland around her neck. Her face looked beautiful so she could not be hurting.

I looked around for Father, but he was not in the room. Neither was Granny.

I got closer and whispered into Mother’s ear, “Mother, are you sleeping?’ She did not reply. I asked her in a louder whisper: “Mother, what does *dead* mean?”

She did not reply.

Granny knew everything and I would ask her. I went to the back room.

Granny was in a corner, crying silently. I had never seen Granny cry, not even when she broke her hip. But she was crying now and the tears were running down her cheeks.

Several women around Granny were also crying. When aunt Kalyani saw me, she started wailing. “Oh my sister, why did you have to die in such a young age? Who’s going to take care of your little ones?”

This served as a signal for the other women to begin sobbing. I heard some words but could not understand what they were saying. One woman complained about God’s cruelty. Another woman recalled the time Mother took care of her when her husband lost his job. Another woman said that Mother was the kindest friend she ever had.

The wailing of the women became so loud that I got scared and went back to the sick room.

Mother was still sleeping. The cook placed some incense sticks in different corners of the room.

I followed him to the kitchen. I asked, “What’s Mother going to do?”

The cook looked confused for a moment and said, “She’s going on a trip.”

“Are we going with her?”

“No.”

“Will she be gone for a long time?”

“Yes.”

“When will she come back?”

“Not for a long time.”

If Mother was going on a trip, I wanted to go with her.

Some men brought in a mat made of green coconut palm fronds. My cousin’s grandfather, the oldest man in our family, put some holy ash on Mother’s forehead. Some women put flowers in Mother’s hair. Aunt Kalyani removed Mother’s gold wedding chain from around her neck and replaced it with a yellow string.

And all through these activities, Mother continued to sleep.

At 11 o’clock, Father and my uncle lifted Mother from the bed and laid her on the coconut mat. Four men lifted the mat and moved Mother to the verandah. After placing another garland around her neck, they carried Mother on the mat to the street.

Mr. Natarajan, the nice man who was a clerk in Father’s office, picked me up. I told him, “I want to go with Mother.

“That’s what we are going to do.”

He put me behind the handlebar of his bicycle and propped it up by the window. Then he went into the house and brought back my little brother Chidambaram—who was crying softly—and put him on the saddle.

Mr. Natarajan pushed his bike and we followed the others in the procession behind Mother. Maniannan walked with Father up ahead, carrying a small clay pot.

We went through several side streets. I listened to the conversation among the people who were walking with us. One of them said he liked processions with music. Another announced that they had declared a holiday in the school where Mother taught.

There were no women in the procession, but some women in the street looked at Mother and reverently patted themselves on their cheeks. A milk woman walked a little while with us and chatted with Mr. Natarajan.

“They say it’s a good omen to see the body of a sumangali who dies before her husband. She looks so young. What did she die of?” Mr. Natarajan replied that she was sick for a long time and that she was indeed a virtuous sumangali.

The procession continued. I asked Mr. Natarajan, “Is Mother going on a long trip?”

He was taken aback. After thinking for a while, he said, “Yes.”

We stopped behind a small temple that had a hut behind it. The hut looked strange because it had a tin roof and mud floor, but no walls. A lot of firewood was piled up neatly near the jut.

The men who were carrying Mother placed the mat on top of the firewood pile. I was worried that it might hurt Mother. But she did not wake up.

Mr. Natarajan put the bicycle on the stand. Chidambaram was drooping on the saddle and Mr. Natarajan straightened him up and covered his eyes.

The men poured something on the firewood. It smelled like ghee. Father put a sliver of firewood inside the pot Maniannan was carrying. When he took it out, I saw a flame at the end of the stick. Father touched the firewood pile with the burning stick and the whole pile lighted up suddenly.

I shrieked and closed my eyes.

When I opened my eyes after a long time, the flames were roaring. I tried to figure out what was happening. Was Father angry at Mother and punishing her? But Father did not look angry. Actually, I could see tears rolling down his cheek.

I asked Mr. Natarajan, “When the fire goes out, will Mother be better?”

He looked perplexed. “When the fire goes out,” he said finally, “We will collect your Mother’s ashes and sprinkle them in the holy river.”

For the first time, I thought I might not see Mother again.

When we returned home, everything was quiet. The men had gone to work and the women had gone to their homes. Even the cook was nowhere to be seen. Father had made Maniannan go to school for the rest of the day.

I went to the sick room. Somebody had removed Mother’s bed and had cleaned the floor with Dettol. I sat down in a corner, trying to figure things out.

Granny came to the room. She sat by me and laid my head on her lap. I looked up at Granny’s sad, kind, wise face.

“Granny, where did Mother go?”

“She has gone to God.”

“Will I ever see her again?”

“Yes, Thiagu, but not the way she looked before.”

“Will she look older?”

“No, she will be born a baby. She could be a baby ant or a baby elephant. She could be a baby bird. She could be a baby boy.”

I did not like that. “How can I talk to her if she becomes a baby ant?”

Granny did not answer my question but continued with her explanation. “ It all depends on God’s will.”

“Granny, why does God do these things?”

Granny pulled out the old book, *The Legend of the Graceful Games*. I had seen that book before. It had pictures and funny stories about the playful things that God did.

Granny read a verse from the book. The only word that I understood was *play*.

“I don’t understand what it means, Granny.”

“Remember how you play hide and seek? God is a great game master and he has all of us playing hide and seek. God plays with the whole universe that has many worlds. When you play hide and seek, you have a boundary. But in God’s game, there is no boundary. When you play hide and seek, the game comes to an end when it gets dark. But God’s game never ends. Your Mother and you and I will be playing His game for ever and ever.”

“Granny, I want to die so I can see Mother.”

Granny said, “You cannot do that.”

“Why not?”

“Because those are the rules of the game. The game must go on. We need you to explain the rules to your little brother Chidambaram. And when you become a big man, you will have your own children and you will have to help them learn the game. Remember, you have to make sure that the game never ends.”

Granny patted my cheeks.

I went looking for Chidambaram to explain the rules of the game that never ends.

## Debriefing Questions

These questions are organized under the six key questions used for debriefing. They encourage the participants to discuss the content and the impact of the story.

Begin with the first few questions to start the discussion. Encourage a free-flowing conversation among the participants. Return to pick up more questions when the conversation slows down:

#### How Do You Feel?

* What’s your overall emotional reaction to the story?
* How do you feel about the cultural values, beliefs, rituals, and behavior patterns presented in this story?
* How do you feel about Thiagu, the narrator of the story? How do you feel about the other characters: Thiagu’s elder brother Maniannan, Father, Granny, the cook, and Mr. Natarajan?
* While most readers report sadness as their primary emotion, some readers have reacted with anger, confusion, relief, peace, and fear. What elements in the story could have caused each of these types of reactions?
* How do you think children would react to this story? Why do you think so?

#### What Happened?

* What were some of the important events in the story?
* What details do you recall from the story?
* How did your feelings and emotions change through the events in the story?
* How do you feel about these specific events in the story: Thiagu's attempts at talking to his mother, behavior of women in the back room, Thiagu’s conversation with the cook, the funeral procession, cremation, and Thiagu’s conversation with Granny?

#### What Did You Learn?

While the story has several different aspects, let’s focus on its cross-cultural factors. What are the similarities and differences between your culture (and religion) and the culture (and religion) of the narrator with respect to these factors?

* Rituals related to death
* Gender differences in roles related to death
* Age differences in roles related to death
* Differences in the roles and reactions of family members, other relatives, friends, acquaintances, and strangers
* Differences in the way adults talk about death among themselves and how they talk children
* Religion explanation of life and death

#### What If . . . ?

How would your reactions to the story been different if –

* the narrator was an adult?
* you watched a movie instead of reading the story?
* you listened to an audiotape of a child narrating the story?
* you read the story in some other language?
* the story was about the death of a child?
* the story was about the birth of a baby?
* the story took place in your own culture?

#### What next?

* How would you react to a death in your family?
* How would you explain death to a child?

# FCC

Here’s another example of interactive storytelling. The FCC activity uses the stages in a process to create chapters in the plotline for the story.

This storytelling technique is based on our experiences with the case method. In working with cases, we discovered that people who write up the cases learn much more than people who analyze them. Also, from an instructional point of view, creating fictional cases are as effective – and more fun – as creating real cases. The FCC acronym stands for *Fictional Case Creation*. That is exactly what the participants do in this activity.

## Purpose

To recognize and apply the four stages in the development of a team.

## Participants

Minimum: 10

Maximum: 100

Best: 15 to 30.

Participants are divided into 5 or more teams, each with 2 – 7 members.

## Time

1 to 2 hours

## Handouts

* *Four Stages of Team Development*, one copy for each participant
* *Sample Case 1: The Quality Team*, one copy for each participant
* *Sample Case 2: The Alien Contact*, one copy for each participant

## Supplies

* One flip chart for each team.
* Felt-tipped markers
* Timer
* Whistle

## Flow

**Distribute the handouts.** Give a copy of each of the three handouts to each participant. Ask them take a couple of minutes to skim through the handouts.

**Brief the participants.** After a suitable pause, blow the whistle and explain how the handouts will support the performance of their task in the activity. Explain that the participants will form teams and write fictional case studies about the development of different teams. The handout on the stages of team development will provide the plot for the realistic piece of fiction they will be creating. The two sample case studies provide two very different examples of the fictional case studies. Both case studies are from earlier teams of typical participants. They are not meant to be perfect examples of what is required of the teams today.

**Form teams.** Ask participants to create five teams of approximately equal size. It does not matter if some teams have one more member than the others. Ask team members to stand around a flip chart and introduce themselves to each other.

**Ask teams to write the prologue.** Tell each team to provide the context for the fictional case study by writing a prologue. Recommend that they include in this prologue answers to the what, why, where questions related to team by specifying the mandate for the team, the organizational setting, and the number and nature of its members. Invite the participants to review the prologue sections of the two sample cases. Suggest a limit of one flip chart page and announce a 4-minute time limit for this activity.

**Ask teams to move to the next flip chart.** After 3 minutes, blow the whistle and announce a 1-minute warning. After 4 minutes, blow the whistle to indicate the end of the task. Ask the participants to emotionally detach themselves from the prologue that they created and move to the next team’s flip chart with an open mind. (The last team moves to the first team’s flip chart.)

**Ask teams to write Chapter 1.** Suggest to the participants that they forget the earlier prologue they created and carefully study the new prologue on the flip chart they moved to. Explain that each team is going to write the first chapter of the fictional case study dealing with interesting details of the forming stage in the development of the team described in this prologue. Invite participants to review the first chapters in the two sample cases. Suggest a limit of one flip chart page for this chapter and announce a 7-minute time limit for this activity.

**Repeat the procedure for Chapter 2.** After 6 minutes, blow the whistle and announce a 1-minute warning. After 7 minutes, blow the whistle to indicate the end of the activity. As before, rotate the teams to the next team’s flip chart. Explain that each team will now write the second chapter to continue the story in progress in their new flip chart. Before they begin their creative procedure, each team has to carefully read the earlier prologue and first chapter to ensure smooth continuity. Recommend that teams review the description of the storming stage in the four-stages handout as well as the second chapters in the two sample cases. Announce the page limit and a new time limit of 10 minutes.

**Continue the procedure.** Conclude the second-chapter activity after 10 minutes. Repeat the same procedure for the third chapter (norming) and the fourth chapter (performing).

**Conclude the activity.** After the completion of the fourth chapter, ask each team to post all five flip chart pages on some convenient location of the wall. Invite all teams to walk around the gallery and read the different case studies, paying particular attention to how the teams integrated the five different contributions.

## Debriefing

**Ask teams to examine the stages in their own development.** After a suitable pause, assemble all participants back for a debriefing discussion. Briefly recap details of the four stages in team development and discuss how they are manifested in the five different cases. Now ask participants to apply these four stages to the development of their FCC team today. Ask and discuss these two questions:

What stage of development is your team in?

What happened to your team during earlier stages of development?

**Follow up the activity.** Tell participants that you will type up today’s fictional case studies and post them all on a web site. (Be sure to follow up on this promise.)

HANDOUT

Four Stages of Team Development

In 1965, B. W. Tuckman, who had been studying the behavior of small groups, published a model that suggested that all teams go through four distinct stages in their development:

**Forming.** The first stage in a team’s development is *forming*. During this stage, the team members are unsure about what they are doing. Their focus is on understanding the team’s goal and their role. They worry about whether the other team members will accept them. Team members frequently look for clarification from their leader.

**Storming.** The second stage in a team’s development is *storming*. During this stage, the team members try to get organized. This stage is marked by conflict among the members and between the members and the leader. Through this conflict, the team attempts to define itself.

**Norming.** The third stage in a team’s development is *norming*. This stage follows storming, after the team members have succeeded in resolving their conflicts. They now feel more secure with one another and with their leader. They effectively negotiate the structure of the team and the division of labor.

**Performing.** The fourth stage in a team’s development is *performing*. During this stage the team members behave in a mature fashion and focus on accomplishing their goals. This stage is marked by direct, two-way communication among the team members.

HANDOUT

Sample Case 1: The Quality Team

*(Created by Steve, Sara, Les, Matt, and Raja)*

## Prologue

The small government agency suddenly had a need to create "quality teams." A functionally diverse, yet surprisingly intelligent team was recruited from various units of the agency. The team was given a mandate to better the workflow and the esprit de corps of the agency.

## Chapter 1. Forming

Some problems arose immediately--what does it mean to better the work flow? How could they improve the esprit de corps of the agency? One group within the team felt that bettering the workflow simply meant speeding up the process, so that the end results could come quicker. Another group thought that it meant simplifying the tasks of people who do the actual work. Nobody seemed to agree on how to improve esprit de corps.

## Chapter 2. Storming

The team’s frequent bickering suggested the exact opposite of better workflow and improved esprit de corps! The team agreed to meet weekly, but that seemed to be all they agreed on. Arlene was appointed committee lead by the agency's Director. However, her emails went unread and phone calls went unreturned. The customer service officer on the team turned his back on the fiscal officer whenever she said something. Arlene began the meeting.

"Ladies and gentlemen," she said, "we simply have to move forward. I am going to make some assignments, and I need you to be ready to report on them at next week's meetings." The computer technician muttered something to the customer service officer, who snickered.

"What was that?" Arlene asked.

"You might as well know now," he replied. "The rumor is that the only reason you are leading this team is because you're sleeping with the Director. People are pretty unhappy about it."

Arlene took a deep breath. "First," she said, "those rumors are untrue. Second, I am appointed to take the lead here, and I will expect these assignments to be carried out.”

HANDOUT

She paused for a minute. The team hadn't been this quiet since it was formed. Everyone was looking intently away from anyone else.

"Since we have practiced some unhealthy behaviors," Arlene continued, "let's set some ground rules for our team behavior.”

## Chapter 3. Norming

Setting up ground rules, agreeing to live by them, and then living by them – these things turned out to be different things. At the next meeting, Arlene decided to address this personal and highly inaccurate belief about her rise to power. She kicked off the meeting by saying flatly that the rumor was not true. Then through an open dialogue, people started to actually believe Arlene had been maligned. To close the meeting, the team reviewed its purpose and promised each other to support the goal and move forward.

## Chapter 4. Performing

So it was that after getting off to a very bad start, the team actually started working on their task. Things weren't perfect – they had their share of problems and disagreements later on – but everyone respected Arlene and bought in to the importance of the task, and the importance of openness about their problems.

HANDOUT

Sample Case 2: Alien Contact

*(Created by Steve, Sara, Les, Matt, and Raja)*

## Prologue

Aliens have sent a radio message to Earth, announcing that their spaceship will come to earth in seven days. You have been chosen as part of a team to brainstorm ideas and suggestions for the President of the United States. Your team is to start from the assumption that the aliens will be hostile and decide what we should be doing.

## Chapter 1. Forming

Each team member was a recognized expert in a different field. The team included a physicist, military strategist, medical doctor, systems engineer, and anthropologist. An artificial intelligence facilitator was also part of the group, as was common at this time. Almost immediately, the military strategist asked the team members themselves and their perception of the situation. Within 15 minutes two patterns of responses became apparent: defensive first-strike versus dialogue. The military strategist then asked the group to appoint the anthropologist as leader.

## Chapter 2. Storming

The military strategist’s suggestion prompted an immediate debate.

"Why are you suggesting we let Arthur, the anthropologist, be our leader?" asked John Richter, MD. "Leadership should be based on qualifications, not appointment."

"Wait a minute," interjected the Ken Caulton, the physicist. "Certainly we need a more thorough decision-making process that includes more than just qualifications. I have 25 years of experience, and I am highly regarded in the field of theoretical astrophysics."

"Hold on, hold on," Arthur Johnson, the anthropologist, shouted, "We have only 2 hours to submit our recommendations to the President. We can't waste valuable time with this type of bickering."

## Chapter 3. Norming

HANDOUT

"Arthur’s right," the systems engineer said softly. "We should prioritize our tasks. Do we all agree that submitting a recommendation is our highest priority? Good. How can we select a leader quickly, then, given the differences in our opinions that we've just witnessed?"

The discussion was short: the team selected the artificial intelligence facilitator to guide the meeting.

## Chapter 4. Performing

With the guidance of this facilitative robot, team members were able to maneuver around each other’s egos and see the contributions different people were making. The anthropologist demonstrated a keen understanding of interracial communications and helped the team decide what actions might appear hostile, and what might appear friendly, to a culture with no common references to planet Earth. The MD added some speculation about biological functions that the aliens might have in common with humans. General Richter was firm in his first-strike conviction.

"Are you all willing to gamble the life of everyone on Earth that these alien creatures are not hostile? We have to assume they have been watching us for some time now, with their superior technology. Bloody their noses now and they'll respect our strength when we contact them."

Eventually, a funny thing happened. History, normally doomed to repeat itself, became the guiding principle for the group's decision. Arthur suggested that the team look at past conflicts. At no point in history had a first strike in the name of potential self-defense led to anything good.

The physicist suggested that the President’s group must attempt communication first. "If we don't hear from them, then perhaps a first strike is suggested. But how can we in good conscience attack a group of people without fully understanding their motives? What makes us right in that case? What makes us good? First blood goes against the values of our planet."

The military strategist harrumphed. "Is it better to go against a stupid value and stay alive, or to live by a set of values and die?"

The physicist said, "Of course, it is better to be alive, but we are more than drones set to survive at all cost. We have a morality that we have claimed makes us more than just another species of mammal."

And the debate continued for several hours, culminating in a high-level strategy that all on the team could support. And the military strategist and physicist became best friends.

# Funny Story

Can you laugh at yourself? This interactive storytelling activity helps you find and share humorous stories from your personal life.

## Purpose

To create and share funny stories that are personal.

## Synopsis

The first part of this activity helps to increase the level of awareness of the participants by asking them to look for circular objects in the nearby landscape. In the second part, they search for humorous events from their recent past. They make stories out of these incidents and share it with each other.

## Participants

**Minimum:** 2

**Maximum:** Any number (working individually and in pairs)

**Best:** 10 to 20

## Supplies and Equipment

* Timer
* Whistle
* Room Set Up
* Chairs and table space for participants to work individually. Plenty of empty space for people to move around, pair up, and have conversations.

## Part 1. Rounding up circular objects

**Explain the task.** Ask the participants to quickly look around and count the number of circular objects in the room. Ask them to count as many round things as they can within the next 30 seconds. Start the timer and pause for 30 seconds.

**Share in pairs.** Blow the whistle and ask each participant to find a partner. Ask the two people in pair to take turns and share the circular objects that they noticed, one at a time. Encourage the participants to keep looking for these objects.

**Conduct a debriefing discussion.** Invite the participants to respond to these types of questions:

* *How many circular objects did you find?*
* *Did you "cheat" while performing the task? For example, did you include parts of noncircular objects that were circular as in the case of a circular knob in a rectangular radio?*
* *Did you count the same object twice as in the case of a round CD and a round hole in the middle of the CD?*
* *Did you treat an oval as a circle as in the case of the buttons on your telephone dial?*
* *Did you count multiple occurrences of the same object as in the case of all the buttons in your shirt?*

## Part 2. Laughing at Life

**From landscape to timescape.** Explain that you are going to move on to the second part of the exercise. Recall that the previous exercise involved scanning the landscape for tangible objects. The next exercise involves scanning your timescape for intangible feelings.

**Recall the last week.** Ask the participants to close their eyes and think of everything that happened last week in their personal life. Ask each participant to count the number of **funny** things that happened. Encourage the participants to be creative in coming up with laughable events. Ask each person to pretend that he or she has a remarkable sense of humor and looks at life for comedy materials. Announce a 1-minute time limit for this activity.

**Share in pairs.** Blow the whistle and ask the participants to pair up. Ask the people in each pair to share one or more of the funny segments from their past week. Encourage them to laugh uproariously at each other’s stories. After exchanging the stories, ask the participants to switch partners for encore performances.

**Watch and listen.** Pause for 2-4 minutes. Roam around the room eavesdropping on different conversations.

**Conduct another debriefing discussion.** Assemble all the participants and discuss these types of questions:

* How many funny stories did you come up with? How can you improve your ability to put a funny spin on ordinary incidents in your life?
* Why did some people find it difficult to recall funny incidents? Why did some others find their life to be a comedy? How can you improve your ability to see the funny side of life?
* What was the funniest story you heard? What made it funny? What did the storyteller do to emphasize the humorous elements?
* Would it have been easier if your task were find sad and depressing incidents from the last week?
* Did you find it difficult to talk about yourself? Was it difficult to laugh at yourself?
* What one tip do you have to help people to find comedy materials from their personal life?

**Conclude the activity.** Thank everyone for his or her participation. Encourage everyone to keep finding and sharing personal stories, especially funny stories, from their everyday lives.

# Galactic Wormhole

In a training session, many facilitators use traditional storytelling techniques. They tell a story to inform, inspire, and influence the participants. The facilitator is active but, unfortunately, the participants are passive just listening to the story. In the interactive storytelling technique, the facilitator conducts an exercise that requires the participants to actively create, share, and process their own stories.

Here’s a type of interactive storytelling activity called *future stories.* This technique provides a futuristic setting and requires team members to co-create stories.

As an example of this technique in action, let me recount what happened recently at an introductory training session on *human performance technology* in which I presented these key principles:

* Focus on producing measurable business results.
* Select suitable strategies based on root causes of performance problems.
* Continuously evaluate and improve the business strategy.

After presenting a set of principles and briefly explaining each of them, I asked the participants to engage in an activity called Galactic Wormhole. In this activity, teams of participants project themselves into the future, create science-fiction scenarios, present the plot line of their stories, and analyze the stories for common themes.

Here are the details of this interactive storytelling activity.

## Purpose

To relate the principles of human performance technology to the future of an organization.

## Synopsis

Teams of participants are given future headlines related to their organization. Equal numbers of teams are given optimistic headlines (that identify organizational success) and pessimistic headlines (that identify organizational failure). Teams prepare appropriate timelines that link the current state of the organization to the futuristic headline. Later, all participants review alternative timelines and discover common themes.

## Time

30 – 40 minutes

## Participants

Minimum: 4

Maximum: Any number

Best: 10 to 30

## Handouts

* Headline from the Utopian Herald and instructions for creating a timeline. (Copied on yellow paper.)
* Headline from the Dystopian Herald and instructions for creating a timeline. (Copied on green paper.)

## Supplies

* Flipcharts
* Felt-tipped markers
* Countdown Timer
* Whistle

## Flow

**Brief the participants.** Present (or review) key principles of human performance technology. Explain that you are going to conduct a science-fiction activity to relate these principles to the future success or failure of the organization.

**Present the back-story.** To prepare the participants for the activity, narrate the backstory. Use your own words to present the following plotline:

You have been mindlessly surfing the Internet. Obviously not during the working hours.

You had a tough day at work, participating in a few exhilarating meetings. You are somewhat tired and sleepy. You feel like taking a nap. Your eyelids are feeling heavy. You struggle to keep yourself awake, trying to catch up with latest memo from your CEO.

You notice strange things happening to you. Suddenly, your hand gets attached to the computer mouse. It feels like somebody poured Superglue on your fingers and palm. You are not able to shake off the mouse.

And now the mouse begins to drag your hand. Your whole body is dragged toward the monitor. You are sucked inside the monitor with a strange “whoosh” sound.

Within a few seconds, you are back at your computer desk. Next to the monitor, you see a newspaper. The blaring headline on the front page attracts your attention. It is a shocker.

You look at the date of the newspaper. Another shocker. It is dated May 17, 2030.

**Distribute copies of the handouts.** Give one handout to each participant, giving out equal number of copies of the two handouts.

**Organize teams.** Ask the participants to organize themselves into teams of three to six people who have a handout of the same color.

**Give instructions.** Ask the participants to read the handout. Explain that the top of the page contains the shocking headline from January 6, 2030. The rest of the page contains instructions for teamwork: Each team should create a timeline of a chain of events that led to the state of affairs depicted in the newspaper headline. Teams should begin with today’s date and make list of events that led to what happened on January 6, 2030. Each event should be logically connected to the next one in the list. Ask the participants to limit their timeline to one page of the flipchart. Announce a 7-minute time limit. Start the timer and tell the participants to begin.

**Conclude the activity.** Blow the whistle at the end of 6 minutes and announce that the team should complete the task within the next minute. Blow the whistle again a minute later to announce the end of the activity.

**Conduct a gallery walk.** Show two areas of the wall for the dystopian and utopian posters. Give pieces of masking tape and help teams to tape their posters to the wall. Tell all participants to take a few minutes to walk around this gallery and review the timelines. Ask them to compare the events that are associated with both positive and negative headlines.

**Conduct a debriefing discussion.** Use the following types of questions to encourage the participants to reflect on the activity and share their insights about the impact of human performance technology on organizational success or failure:

* Which headline is more probable?
* What are some key connections between principles of human performance technology and the future of the organization?
* What can we do to reduce the likelihood of the pessimistic dystopian future?
* What can we do to increase the likelihood of the optimistic utopian future?

Facilitate the discussion, one question at a time. Invite additional insights from the participants. Record interesting ideas on a flipchart.

## Galactic Wormhole as a Framegame

This interactive story activity can be used as a template for creating training sessions for exploring the impact of basic principles. Here are some of the sets of principles that we have incorporated in the Galactic Principles frame:

* Increasing and improving trust levels in an organization
* Innovation strategies
* Integrating the global workplace
* Giving and receiving constructive feedback
* Creating an intrinsic motivation system
* Improving communication

HANDOUT

## Headline:

The Utopian Herald

**Organization Scores a Hat Trick**

**Earns highest customer rating,   
voted best company to work for, and   
generates the highest profit for the past 3 years**

## Instructions:

1. Read the headline from the *Utopian Herald* dated January 6, 2030.
2. Think of possible causes that contributed to this triumph.
3. Avoid external causes (such as economic boom) over which we have no direct control.
4. Create a timeline.
5. Begin from today and work toward January 6, 2030.
6. Relate the headline event to the implementation of principles of human performance technology.
7. Work as a team.
8. Create a logical timeline on your flipchart.
9. Limit yourself to one flipchart page.
10. Finish your timeline within 7 minutes.

HANDOUT

## Headline:

The Dystopian Herald

**Organization Declares Bankruptcy**

**Managers and associates blame each other   
while unhappy customers sue the company**

## Instructions:

1. Read the headline from the *Dystopian Herald* dated January 6, 2030.
2. Think of possible causes that contributed to this disaster.
3. Avoid external causes (such as economic recession) over which we have no direct control.
4. Create a timeline.
5. Begin from today and work toward January 6, 2030.
6. Relate the headline event to the violation of principles of human performance technology.
7. Work as a team.
8. Create a logical timeline on your flipchart.
9. Limit yourself to one flipchart page.
10. Finish your timeline within 7 minutes.

# More Interesting

Many interactive storytelling activities involve the participants creating their own stories and sharing them with each other. More Interesting goes one step beyond. It asks the participants to edit and embellish each other’s story.

This activity involves writing and rewriting flash stories. These are short, short stories that are limited to one side of a 3 x 5 index card.

## Synopsis

Each participant writes a flash story on an assigned topic. Later, the participants rewrite the story written by someone else to improve its interest level.

## Purpose

To write and rewrite interesting flash stories

## Participants

**Minimum:** 6, divided into 3 groups of 2 each

**Maximum:** Any number, divided into equal-sized groups of 2 to 6

**Best:** 20 to 30

## Time

30 to 40 minutes

## Supplies

* Index cards
* Pens
* Timer

## Flow

**Divide participants into groups.** You should have three or more groups. Each group should contain the same number of participants. Seat the groups at different tables.

**Ask each participant to write a short short story.** Distribute index cards. Specify the topic and ask each participant to work independently. Assign a 3-minute time limit for writing a flash story related to the assigned topic. Tell the participants to keep their short very brief because they are limited to one side of the card.

**Ask for an identification number.** Blow a whistle after 3 minutes. Ask each participant to write a four-digit number on the top right corner of the card. Request the participants to remember their numbers.

**Exchange the paragraphs.** Ask the participants at each table to collect everyone’s flash story and pass the collection to the next table. (The collection from the last table go to the first table.)

**Ask for rewrites.** Direct each participant to randomly pick one of the cards from the previous table and review the flash story carefully. Tell the participant to rewrite the story (on one side of another blank index card) to make it more interesting. Also, ask all participants to place their identification number on the top right corner of this card.

**Paper clip the cards.** Ask the participants to use a paper clip and attach the original flash story to the rewritten version. Suggest that the written sides of the two cards should face each other so people will not immediately recognize which one is the original and which one is the rewrite.

**Exchange the cards.** Ask the participants at each table to collect all the paper-clipped pairs of cards and hand them over to the people at the next table. (As before, the cards from the last table go to the first one.)

**Score the cards.** Ask all the participants at each table to work jointly to review each pair of cards and to distribute 100 points to reflect their interest level. Ask the groups to write the score values on each card and make sure that the two scores add up to 100.

**Return to the sender.** Ask the participants at each table to collect all the pair of cards (with their scores) and send them two tables back to the people who wrote the original versions.

**Conduct a comparison.** Ask the participants to compare their original flash story and the revised version. Invite them to identify the writing techniques that mad the story more interesting.

**Conduct a debriefing discussion.** Ask the participants in each group to share their insights about techniques for making a story more interesting.

# Multiple Realities

Are you familiar with the Rashomon effect? It refers to alternative (and sometimes contradictory) perceptions of the same event by different people. It is named after after Akira Kurosawa’s Japanese movie, Rashomon in which the accounts of the witnesses, suspects, and victims of a rape and murder are all different. Any time you hear multiple eye-witness accounts of an event that contains conflicting information, you experience this effect in action.

Retelling a story from the points of view of different characters is a useful exercise to increase our level of awareness and understanding of what happened. That is the primary objective of this interactive storytelling activity.

## Purpose

To narrate an incident from the alternative perspectives of different people involved it.

## Synopsis

Two teams (1 and 2) retell a story from the point of view of the same character. Two other teams (3 and 4) select the better version and comment on the differences between the two versions. Later, teams 3 and 4 retell the story from the perspective of another character while teams 1 and 2 select the better version.

## Participants

**Minimum:** 8

**Maximum:** Any number, organized into an even number of teams.

**Best:** 16 to 24

## Time

15 to 30 minutes

## Handout

* Original version of the story, *Brittany Loses her Cell Phone,* one copy for each participant

## Supplies

* Timer
* Whistle

## Flow

**Distribute copies of the incident.** Point out this is a story about a missing cell phone narrated by Brittany, an airline passenger. Tell the participants to take a minute to read the story.

**Organize participants into teams.** Divide the participants into four teams, each with two to five members.

**Distribute different characters to the teams.** Each pair of teams should receive the same character. For example, if you have four teams, Teams 1 and 2 should take on the character of Oscar; Teams 3 and 4 should become Michael.

**Ask the teams to rewrite the story.** Tell the team members to work together and narrate the same incident from the perspective of the character assigned to it. Announce a time limit of 5 minutes and start the timer. At the end of the time, blow the whistle and ask the teams to stop writing and get ready to make their presentations.

**Conduct team presentations.** Ask Team 1 to read its version of the story (from the perspective of Oscar). After the team member finishes reading, ask someone from Team 2 to read its version of the story from the perspective of the same character.

**Invite comments.** Ask the members of teams 3 and 4 to decide which of the two rewritten stories was better and why. Invite participants to comment on the presentations. Add your own brief comments.

**Repeat the procedure.** Ask teams 3 and 4 to take their turns to read their stories modified from the perspective of Michael, the manager. After the two presentations, ask teams 1 and 2 to decide which story was better. Invite them to comment on the presentations. Add your comments also.

**Conclude the session.** Conduct a debriefing discussion about different perspectives and multiple realities. Invite the participants to share workplace examples of how alternative perspectives led to misunderstanding and confusion.

HANDOUT

Brittany Loses Her Cell Phone

I arrive at my hotel and realize I had left her cell phone on the plane. I am very upset.

I call the airline’s lost and found department. The customer service agent, Oscar, searches the storage area and confirms that he has found my phone. I am relieved.

I take a $50 taxi ride back to the airport. When I arrive, Oscar has gone home. The on-duty manager, Michael, searches for the phone, but after 30 minutes, he is still unable to locate it. He calls Oscar at home and discovers the cell phone found earlier actually belonged to another passenger. I am disappointed.

I complain to Michael about the airline misleading me. Michael apologizes and reimburses me for the taxi fare. I am still disappointed but somewhat consoled.

# Plot from Process

Different types of interactive storytelling techniques invite the participants to create their own stories and share them with each other. Even when the stories come from the facilitator, the participants modify the stories, change the beginning or the ending or characters or the setting, expand or shrink the stories, make decisions at critical junctures, analyze the stories, and role-play them. The result: More engagement during the session and more learning after the session.

This is another interactive storytelling activity.

## Creating the Plot

In an earlier article we introduced the concept of formula stories in which the same outline structure for a plot is used as a template to rapidly create new stories. In this article, we explore the use of the steps from a job-related procedure to form the plot for a story.

This example is based on the steps in the Human Performance Technology (HPT) process. The frame of this storytelling activity can be easily modified to provide interactive stories related to any other procedure. Several sample applications involving other procedures at found near the end of this article.

## Purpose

To identify the steps in a process and to explore their application to a personal project.

## Participants

Any number can play. This activity works best with 12 to 30 participants.

## Time

Generally, 45 to 60 minutes. The exact time required depends on the complexity of process and the number of steps.

## Supplies

* Copies of a handout that explains the process: *Human Performance Technology (HPT) Process*
* Copies of a sample story that illustrates a specific application of the process: *How We Held on to Our Best Talent*

## Preparation

**Master the process.** Your success in using this interactive lecture format will depend on your fluency with the HPT process. Carefully study the process and figure out what is happening in each step and how the steps are linked to each other.

**Create a story.** The best way to master the model is to make up a story that illustrates the application of the process. This is what you will be asking the participants to do, and you need a sample story. For the basic format, review the sample story. You can base your story on one of your own successful projects. If you do so, don't let facts get in the way of a good story that clearly tracks your progress through the steps in the process. If you are adventurous, create a story around some popular TV show. If you are fainthearted, plagiarize the sample story.

## Flow

**Brief the participants.** Present some introductory comments about the HPT process model.

**Distribute the handout that explains the process.** Point out that the handout identifies the steps in the process and the relationships among them. Ask the participants to read and review the handout. Announce a suitable time limit for this activity.

**Tell your story.** At the end of the time limit, announce that you are going to tell a story of the process in action to make the abstract model become concrete. Narrate your story, pausing at the end of each section to refer to the steps in the process.

**Distribute the sample story.** Explain that this story illustrates the application of the HPT process. Suggest that the participants refer to this story later — after you give them an assignment.

**Assign the story-creation task.** Divide the participants into teams of three to five members each. It does not matter if some teams have an extra member. Ask each team to create a story of a successful application of the process. The story may be based on a team member's experience. It should clearly illustrate the application of different steps in the process. The teams have 11 minutes to create the story.

**Conduct a storytelling session.** Give the teams a 1-minute warning. Ask the teams to give finishing touches to the story and to select a representative to present it to the whole group. After another minute, randomly choose a team to send its storyteller to the front of the room. Ask this person to present the story. At the conclusion of the story, select another team. Repeat the process until all teams have presented their story.

**Conclude with a caveat.** Briefly comment on the stories and congratulate the teams on their depth of understanding of the process. In your own words, explain the advantages of using the systematic process. Follow up by pointing out the inherent danger in using a mechanical, step-by-step process. Warn the participants against rigid, obsessive use of the process.

## Variations

**Too little time?** Divide the players into teams and distribute both handouts. Immediately assign the story-creation task and announce a 5-minute time limit. Skip the storytelling session.

**Ample time?** Allow plenty of time for the teams to come up with their stories. During the storytelling session, ask different teams to comment on each story.

**Too many players?** Conduct the early parts of the activity as usual. However, select only two or three teams to tell their stories.

**Too few players?** If you have only two or three players, ask them to create a joint story. With fewer than seven players, ask them to pair up with each other and work on the stories.

## Other Plot from Process Applications

Plot from Process is a framegame: It is deliberately designed to permit the easy removal of old content and insertion of new content. It is a generic template that permits instant design of new training activities.

Here are seven examples of different instructional content loaded into the Plot from Process frame:

## Team Development

**Process**: Development of a team

**Steps**: Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing.

## Dynamic Change

**Process**: Implementation of a new system

**Steps**: Awareness, Interest, Evaluation, Tryout, and Use

## Idea Power

**Process**: Creative Problem Solving

**Steps**: Investigation, Goal Specification, Idea Generation, Integration, and Implementation

## Investing in Real Estate

**Process**: The Real Estate Cycle

**Steps**: Low Vacancies, Leveling Off Prices, Increasing Prices, New Construction, Oversupply, High Vacancies, Declining Prices, Absorption of Space

## Intercultural Sensitivity

**Process**: Dr. Milton Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

**Steps**: Denial, Defense, Minimization, Acceptance, Adaptation, and Integration

## How To Become a Leader

**Process**: Action Learning Strategy

**Steps**: Selection of Task, Team Formation, Data Gathering, Analysis, Recommendations, and Debriefing

## The Life of a Widget

**Process**: The Product Life Cycle

**Steps**: Introduction, Commercialization, Growth, Maturity, and Decline

HANDOUT

Human Performance Technology (HPT) Model

The HPT process consists of eight activities. Because some of these activities are very closely associated with others, the HPT process presents them as four steps, each integrating a pair of associated activities. The paragraphs below briefly describe each steps.

## Analysis and Allocation

The purpose of this step is to define the performance problem, identify the probable causes of the problem, and select one or more specific HPT interventions. This step begins with an intimation of an opportunity or a performance problem. It uses a variety of data-collection techniques (such as testing, observation, interviews, and analysis of existing records). At the end of this step, we obtain a clear definition of the performance problem as a gap between what should be and what actually is, a list of causes of this gap, and suggested of HPT interventions to remove or to reduce the impact of these causes.

## Design and Development

The purpose of this step is to systematically design and produce HPT interventions to solve the problem or to exploit the opportunity. This step begins with a clear definition of the problem, a list of probable causes, and one or more suggested interventions. It uses strategies associated with the selected intervention to prepare a blueprint, design and produce components of the HPT intervention, and integrate the components into a total package. At the end of this step, we obtain a total HPT intervention package consisting of materials and methods that are ready for implementation.

## Implementation and Institutionalization

HANDOUT

The purpose of this step is to manage the change effort associated with the HPT intervention. This step begins with an intervention package. It involves planning for implementation, training local managers, implementing the intervention, troubleshooting transition problems, and ensuring smooth working of the new system. At the end of this step, we obtain improved performance, increased productivity, and local commitment and capability for the sustained use of the intervention.

## Evaluation and Enhancement

The purpose of this step is to improve different materials and methods based on expert review and user feedback. This step is used in conjunction with all three earlier steps of the HPT model, especially with the design and development step. It begins with draft reports and prototype products. The step begins with collecting data through expert reviews, individual tryouts, and field tests. These data are analyzed and used to revise the materials and methods. At the end of this step, we obtain improved reports, methods, and materials—along with data on the effectiveness of the HPT intervention.

HANDOUT

How We Held On to Our Best Talent

## Chapter I: Analysis and Allocation

I am performance consultant.

It all started when the personnel manager of a software design company called me with a problem. The CEO of the company was concerned about the high turnover among software engineers. The personnel manager thought that this was an unavoidable problem plaguing the entire industry. However, the CEO wanted a motivational seminar and threatened to take drastic action if “employee loyalty does not improve soon”.

I interviewed several people. In addition to the CEO and the personnel manager, I talked to employees who quit their job after the first year, employees who have stayed on their job for more than five years, and newly recruited employees. I also reviewed the company’s employment records, exit interviews, and information about employee turnover in the software industry. By analyzing the information, I came up with these conclusions:

* The turnover rate in this company is greater than the industry norm. It should be possible to reduce turnover by 50 percent.
* Most of the new software engineers are recruited from other companies with a salary that is significantly higher than their current salaries. The candidates are treated like royalty during recruitment. They receive special bonuses when they join the company. Once they join the company, however, they are frequently given uninspiring tasks to “get them used to the company’s way of doing things”. The pay raise at the beginning of the second year is insignificant.

Based on this analysis, I identified the cause of the performance problem as an inappropriate incentive system. I tactfully communicated my findings to the personnel manager.

## Chapter II: Design and Development

HANDOUT

With the approval of the personnel manager, I worked with a team of compensation-and-benefits specialists. We carefully reviewed the system of salaries, bonuses, incentives, and non-monetary rewards. What we found out confirmed my earlier suspicion that employees leave their jobs at the end of the first year because the incentive system does not reward them for staying with the company. We came up with alternative pay-and-reward systems. After suitable reviews and revisions, we recommended the following package:

Recruitment of new software engineers will be less aggressive. More attention will be paid to recruiting new graduates. Recruiters will stress long-term prospects of working for the company. The beginning salary will not be significantly higher than the industry average. There will not be any bonuses for signing up. Instead, new employees will be given stock options at the end of the first year. Working conditions for the new employees will be significantly improved and they will receive sustained attention from the top management. New employees will be invited to work a third of their time on their own projects and all initiatives will be recognized and rewarded. Annual salary increases will be significantly higher than the industry standard.

## Chapter III: Implementation and Institutionalization

Throughout the project, we kept the CEO and the top management informed of our plans and progress. We explained how we can fund the new package by a redistribution of the recruitment budget and how we can save money by avoiding the costs associated with replacing and training software engineers who leave the company. We received buy-in from the top management for all major decisions. We provided information on the new recruitment and retention system to HR managers through a briefing conducted by the CEO and the personnel manager. We provided additional information through the company’s intranet. We supported the new recruitment strategy with attractive brochures outlining long-term prospects of joining the company. We accompanied the company personnel during their new recruitment efforts and provided feedback on their performance. We completed our project at the end of 3 months.

## Chapter IV: Evaluation and Enhancement

HANDOUT

We integrated evaluation activities during all phases of the project. For example, we asked an expert on incentive systems to review our analysis and recommendations. We made suitable revisions to the draft report on the basis of this expert’s suggestions. We designed different types of compensation and incentive packages and had them reviewed by senior managers and outside experts. Most importantly, we tried out alternative packages with focus groups of current employees and potential recruits. We continuously improved the system until fresh focus groups rated it as the best possible package. We also tested our new recruitment brochures and revised them on the basis of reader feedback. During the first 2 months of implementing the new system, we made minor changes based on recruiters’ feedback. Although it is too early to prove the bottom-line impact of the intervention, most old and new employees predict that the turnover rate will be drastically reduced.

# Principles Into Practice

This training activity started out as a LOLA (Live Online Learning Activity) in a virtual classroom session that Tracy and I conducted 3 years ago. The activity combines a job aid with a list of principles, a case study told in the form of a story, and interactive discussions among the participants.

## Purpose

To discover how different principles of rapid instructional design are applied to a real-world training project.

## Time

30 to 45 minutes

## Participants

**Minimum:** 2

**Maximum:** Any number

**Best:** 10 to 20

## Handout

*Rapid Instructional Design Principles*, one copy for each participant

## Supplies

* Timer
* Whistle

## Preparation

**Review the principles.** To effectively conduct this training activity, you should be familiar with the set of principles included in the handout. Review these principles:

1. **Let the inmates run the asylum.** Empower the participants to process the content and discuss them with each other.
2. **Build the airplane while flying it.** Design training while delivering it.
3. **Don’t reinvent the wheel.** Use the content that is already available. Use activity templates that have been already field-tested.
4. **Be spontaneously flexible.** Combine, omit, and re-sequence the steps in the instructional design process.

**Rehearse the case story.** Read the following story and modify it to suit your presentation style. Get ready to tell the story in your own words.

## How I Designed a Leadership Training Course

A client calls me and asks how long it would take to design a leadership training workshop for all employees in his high-tech corporation.

I say, “If all employees become leaders, then maybe there would be nobody left to follow them!”

The sarcasm is lost on the client. After some more conversation, I tell him that I’d run a pilot test of the new training package on Monday. My client becomes suspicious since it is Friday afternoon now. But he agrees to assemble a group of participants for the pilot test on Monday.

I know that there is a lot of stuff written about leadership. To test this hypothesis, I google “leadership” and find more than 490 million documents available on this topic. Next, I go to Amazon.com and find 125,972 books on leadership. I browse through the website and select 30 different titles (judging the books by their cover) and order them to be shipped overnight.

On the fateful Monday, I drag in three cartons of books and dump them in the middle of the workshop room. Without any preamble, I announce, “We are going to master powerful practical leadership principles and procedures. Here’s what I want you to do: Each one of you grab a book from these piles. Choose any book you like. Later, if you don’t like it, throw it back and pick a substitute. Then grab a highlighter. Sit down anywhere you want and speed-read the book. You have 20 minutes to discover six practical ideas that you can use tomorrow on your job. Highlight these six ideas. If you finish ahead of time, read some more and see if you can locate better ideas.”

After 20 minutes, I blow a whistle and ask everyone to find a partner. When everybody is paired up, I give these instructions:

“Take turns sharing your leadership ideas to each other. Share one idea at a time. When you are listening, practice all of your active listening skills. Lean forward, maintain eye contact, make enthusiastic noises, and take notes. You have another 20 minutes. If you finish sharing all 12 ideas before times up, talk to your partner about how you plan to apply these ideas tomorrow.”

Within a few minutes, a pair of participants come to me and complain, “These two ideas are exactly the same. They are in different books stated in different words, but they mean the same thing.”

I exclaim, “Congratulations, you have obviously discovered a powerful principle. Make a note of it.”

Twenty seconds later, another pair approaches me with a confused look.

“These two statements contradict each other. How could both of them be correct?”

I exclaim. “Congratulations, you have discovered the basic tenet of situational leadership. Some leadership principles work very effectively in some contexts but fail miserably in other contexts. Talk about these contradictory ideas and figure out under what conditions each of them will work …”

After 20 more minutes of these interactions, I ask each pair of participants to join another pair. In each group of four, participants take turns to share ideas presented by their partners during the previous round. So in another 20 minutes each participant listens to 12 new ideas — in addition to the original 12 they shared during the previous round.

Twenty minutes later, I announce the final round: I ask each group of four to select the most useful leadership strategy and send a representative to the front of the room to explain it to everyone else.

I then ask the participants to discuss the similarities and differences among these ideas.

For the rest of the day, I conduct six other activities, all related to practical leadership principles and their application to job-related situations. I don’t have any prior plan about which activity to use at which time. I select the suitable activities based on what happened during an earlier activity in terms of participants’ reactions, responses, and comments. The activities are flexible templates that permit me to plug in relevant content and work toward achieving the training objectives.

**Integrate the story and the principles.** Take a minute to figure out how the principles and incorporated in the story. This is what you will be requiring your participants to do in the activity. Be sure however, not to rearrange the story in terms of each of the principle. Narrate the story in the chronological order and let the participants figure out the connections.

## Flow

**Present the principles.** Distribute copies of the handout with the four principles. Explain that these principles are useful for designing training rapidly, inexpensively, and effectively. Pause for the participants to read the principles. Tell the participants that they will be discovering the applications of these principles in a story that you are going to tell them.

**Present the case study.** Narrate the story of how I designed the leadership training course in a chronological sequence. Do not explain or highlight how the different principles were used in the project.

**Specify a principle.** Ask the participants to focus on the first principle in the list. If necessary, explain the principle briefly, without relating it to the case.

**Conduct a poll.** Ask the participants to think about how heavily this principle was used in the case study, use this four-point poll:

1. Not used  
2. Used slightly  
3. Use moderately  
4. Used heavily

Ask the participants to individually select the most appropriate response. Announce a 1- minute time limit.

**Conduct a group discussion.** Ask the participants to organize themselves into groups of 2 to 5, share their poll choices, and discuss why they selected a particular response. Encourage them to justify their selection with specific examples from the case study. Ask the participants to arrive at a consensus within a time omit of 2 minutes.

**Discuss the choices.** Invite different groups to share their consensus choices and justify them. Comment on these choices and justifications. Explain which alternative you would have selected and why you would have done so.

**Repeat the procedure.** Present the other principles, one at a time. Conduct the poll, invite group discussions, comment on the participants’ choices, and present your own opinions as an expert.

**Conclude the activity.** Review the set of four principles. Encourage the participants to ask questions and respond briefly to clarify the principles.

## Variations

**Too shy to tell the story?** Ask a friend to make an audio recording of the case. Introduce it to the participants as a report from an experienced instructional designer.

**Are you co-facilitating?** One of you can act as the subject-matter expert and present the case and the principles. The other person can be the game facilitator and run the polls and conduct the discussions.

**Want to reinforce the principles?** Use two case studies, as different from each other as possible. In our rapid instructional design session, we present a case study involving a technical topic (how to program a telephone-exchange switch) and another involving a soft-skill topic (leadership development).

## Other Applications of Principles into Practice

You can use the frame of Principles into Practice as a template for creating training activities for exploring a set of related principles, rules, guidelines, heuristics, or tactics. Here are some soft skill topics that contain sets of principles.

* Change management
* Creating a web site
* Creative problem solving
* Crisis management
* Facilitating training sessions
* Marketing your consulting services
* Mediating a conflict
* Motivating employees
* Negotiation

HANDOUT

Rapid Instructional Design Principles

1. **Let the inmates run the asylum.** Empower the participants to process the content and discuss them with each other.
2. **Build the airplane while flying it.** Design training while delivering it.
3. **Don’t reinvent the wheel.** Use the content that is already available. Use activity templates that have been already field-tested.
4. **Be spontaneously flexible.** Combine, omit, and re-sequence the steps in the instructional design process.

# Rotating Roleplay

Roleplays perfectly fit our definition of interactive storytelling. In a roleplay, the participants are presented with a backstory and assigned characters (in the form of roles). They co-create the continuation of the story through suitable dialogues.

Merely asking a couple of participants to act out the roleplay does not produce effective learning. This is why we use the Rotating Roleplay that provides equal opportunities for all the participants. We have been successfully using this roleplay activity to explore various interpersonal skills for the past 10 years.

The sample activity described below uses the topic of training

## Purpose

To persuade skeptics about the effectiveness of training games and activities.

## Synopsis

Divide participants into two teams and assign the roles of skeptics and change agents to these teams. Conduct a brainstorming session within each team to get ready for a roleplay. Conduct two sessions of one-on-one roleplays. Reverse the roles and repeat the process. Conduct debriefing discussions within teams and across teams.

## Participants

**Minimum:** 6

**Maximum:** 20

**Best:** 12 to 20

## Time

30 to 50 minutes.

## Flow

**Divide the participants into two equal-sized teams.** If you have an odd number of participants, assign the role of an observer to one of the participants.

**Assign the role of skeptics to one team.** Explain to the team members that they resist the use of games and other types of training activities. Ask them the brainstorm a list of objections to the use of these activities. Announce a 3-minute time period for this brainstorming session.

**Assign the role of change agents to the other team.** Explain to the team members that they are enthusiastic about the use of games and other training activities. Ask them to brainstorm techniques for persuading the skeptics. Announce a 3-minute time period for this brainstorming session.

**Arrange the skeptics in a circle, facing out.** Tell them that each skeptic is about to participate in a roleplay with a change agent.

**Have the change agents to pair up with each of the skeptics.** These change agents will form an outer circle, facing in and getting ready for a conversation with a skeptic.

**Conduct a roleplay discussion.** Invite the participants to begin a one-on-one discussion between the change agent and the skeptic. Encourage the participants to stay in their role and respond to each other.

**Rotate the skeptics.** After about 2 minutes, blow a whistle and ask the change agents to move one space in the clockwise direction. Invite the new pairs of participants to begin another round of discussion.

**Prepare for a change of roles.** After about another 2 minutes, blow the whistle again and ask the members of the two teams to gather in separate locations. Announce that there will be additional roleplays with the roles reversed: Change agents will assume the role of skeptics (and vice versa) during the subsequent conversations.

**Brainstorm strategies for the next round.** Ask the new skeptics to think back on the objections used by the earlier skeptics and select the most resistive and pessimistic ones. Also encourage them to come up with their own ideas for expressing their skepticism. Encourage the new change agents to share the best practices used by members of the other team during the previous round. Encourage them to brainstorm additional techniques for persuading the skeptics. Announce a 3-minute time limit for this brainstorming activity.

**Conduct another round of roleplay.** After 3 minutes, blow the whistle to announce the end of the brainstorming session. Ask members of the new skeptics team to stand in a circle, facing out. Ask the new change agents to pair up with each skeptic. Invite each pair to have a conversation in their new roles. As before, rotate the change agents after a 2-minute period.

**Conduct a team debriefing.** Blow your whistle after two round of conversations. Ask the two teams to regroup in separate locations. Tell the teams to discuss their experiences and come up with a list of effective techniques for persuading skeptics to accept training activities. Remind the participants to focus on working effectively in the role of change agents--and not in the role of skeptics. Announce a 3-minute time limit for this discussion.

**Pair up and share idea.** After 3 minutes, blow the whistle and ask the members of the two teams to pair up with each other. Encourage the participants to pair up with someone they had not talked with during the earlier rounds. Ask each pair to share their techniques for persuading skeptics.

**Conclude the activity.** After about 3 minutes, blow the whistle and assemble all participants. If you had an observer, ask this person to share his or her thoughts about the persuasion techniques worked effectively. Add your own recommendations on what to do and what not to do to overcome the objections from skeptics.

## Variations and Adjustments

**Too many participants?** Divide them into groups of 12 to 20 and let each group divide themselves into two teams of skeptics and change agents. Let the groups conduct the roleplay in a parallel fashion.

**Not enough space for forming circles?** Use colored dots to differentiate the skeptics and the change agents. Ask the participants to pair up with a person who has a different colored dot, find a suitable location, and hold the conversations. When the whistle blows, ask everyone to find a new person to have the next conversation.

**Not enough time?** Conduct a single conversation between pairs of skeptics and change agents. Skip the rotations and reversals and immediately proceed to the final brainstorming of suitable change management techniques.

# Round and Round

Here is another interactive storytelling technique. Round and Round combines the ideas of co-creation with the use of story formulas.

The version of the activity explained below was used in a workshop on innovation management. The frame of this activity can be used as a template to explore any other training topic.

## Purpose

To explore a workplace situation by using a suitable formula to create a story.

## Synopsis

A group of participants take turns to create a story, using a suitable formula. Once completed, they retell the story with intentional or accidental changes.

## Participants

**Minimum:** 3

**Maximum:** Any numbers, divided into groups of 3 to 5.

**Best:** 12 to 20

## Time

20 - 30 minutes

## Handout

*Double Jeopardy Story Formula*, one copy for each participant

## Supplies

* Koosh ball or any other soft ball, one for each team. (In case of emergency, or if you are cheap, you may use a wadded-up piece of paper.)

## Flow

**Explain the formula.** Distribute copies of the Double Jeopardy Story Formula handout. Demonstrate how to use the formula by co-creating a story with inputs from the participants.

**Identify a suitable theme.** Work with the participants to identify a theme for a story that is relevant to the training objective.

**Organize teams.** Divide the participants into teams of three to five members each. Ask the members of each team to stand in a loose circle. Throw a ball to each team. Explain that the person who caught the ball would be the first storyteller.

**Narrate the first part of the story**. Ask the first storyteller to start the story by describing the initial problem. Encourage this person to keep the narration brief and to the point. Ask the other participants to listen carefully to the narration because they may be selected to continue the story.

**Choose the second storyteller.** When the first storyteller has completed describing the problem, ask him or her to throw the ball to any other person in the team. This lucky person gets to continue the narration by describing the first solution.

**Continue the story.** At the end of each section, the current storyteller chooses the next person to continue the narration by throwing the ball to someone. Explain to the participants that it is acceptable to throw the ball to someone who had already told an earlier part of the story. (This keeps everyone on his or her toe, listening carefully to the story.)

**Conclude the story.** The story proceeds through misuse of the first solution, second problem, new and improved solution, and conclusion. The person who concluded the story throws the ball to someone else in the team.

**Restart the story.** The story starts all over again, with different participants adding different sections. The participants may repeat the details and events from the previous round or they may change the details to improve the story or to cover up their memory lapse.

**Conclude the activity.** When the story reaches its conclusion for the second time, announce the end of the activity. Conduct a debriefing discussion of what the participants learned about the training topic by co-constructing their story.

## Variations and Adjustments

**Don’t have enough time?** Conclude the story at the end of the first round.

**Have ample time?** Ask the team members to reconstruct the story several times. If you have more than one team, switch the participants around between rounds.

**Don’t like the double-jeopardy formula?** Use some other formula for the story. Or leave the structure of the story completely open.

**Want a follow-up assignment?** Tell the participants to use the Double Jeopardy Story Formula to write one or more stories on the same topic at their leisure. Encourage the participants to share their stories with each other.

## Play Sample

Here’s the story constructed by the team during the first round:

*First problem:* The CEO of our company gave me an important task: I should encourage the managers to fail frequently and to learn from their failures. Apparently his Executive Coach had suggested this idea to him.

*First solution:* So I ran a workshop on failing fast and recommended to all the managers to invite their employees to fail frequently and learn from their failures.

*Misuse of first solution:* The failure rate in our company increased rapidly. People shared their failures proudly to the others. The CEO gave rewards to the Failure of the Week.

*Second problem:* Our customers were affected by our employees’ failures. They started complaining. They stopped buying stuff from us. They cancelled their orders.

*New and improved solution:* I analyzed the data: When we were coming up with new ideas and procedures, failures were useful. It made us more creative and nobody was affected. However, when we were executing established procedures that affected our customer service, failure was undesirable. It produced negative results. I explained these differences to our CEO, the managers, and employees.

*Conclusion:* We identified projects and functions where failure was to be encouraged. We trained people to decide when to take risks and when to avoid them. We also made sure everyone had some creative tasks to perform. This resulted in greater learning without irritating our customers.

Here’s the reconstruction of the story during the second round:

*First problem:* The CEO of a consulting company was unhappy about the way failures in her company was punished and mocked. Employees were afraid to take chances. The hid their failures. He decided to change the company culture.

*First solution:* The CEO had an off-site retreat and extolled everyone to fail fast and frequently.

*Misuse of first solution:* More people started failing. They sent emails to the CEO bragging about how they failed and how much they learned from their failure. The CEO responded to emails and congratulated the failing people.

*Second problem:* Customers were upset by the company’s failures. The company lost its reputation. People stopped hiring consultants from the company. The profits went down.

*New and improved solution:* The CEO analyzed the data and discovered that failure was positive when coming up with innovative idea. Failure was negative when meeting customer expectations. The CEO explained the difference to his employees.

*Conclusion:* The employees identified internal projects where failure was to be encouraged and external projects where failure was to be discouraged. This resulted in regaining the market share and increasing the profits.

HANDOUT

Double Jeopardy Story Formula

Whenever I introduce a new principle or procedures to my training participants, I take great care to warn them against the mindless misuse of what they learned in the session. To drive home the point that the overuse or abuse of any technique could result in more problems than it solved, I use engaging stories. I noticed that these stories fall in a standard formula and I specified this formula. I call this formula *Double Jeopardy*. The reason for this name will become clear as we explore the formula:

**First problem.** The protagonist faces a problem.

**First solution.** The protagonist masters an effective technique for handling the problem.

**Misuse of the first solution**. Carried away with the impressive success in solving the problem, the protagonist begins to misuse, overuse, and abuse the technique.

**Second problem.** The misuse of the technique results in a set of new problems.

**New and improved solution.** The participant thinks through the limitations of the first solution and comes up with suitable modifications to the technique.

**Conclusion.** The new and improved technique prevents the types of problems created by the mindless application of the original technique.

Here’s a sample application of the formula. It’s a story used in a train-the-trainer workshop:

*First problem:* Participants are bored by my technical training workshops. Most of them multitask while I make my presentations and some of them even fall asleep.

*First solution:* I discover the power of training games.

*Misuse of the first solution:* I begin the training session with an icebreaker in which each participant discovers which animal he or she most closely resembles. Later, I insert a bridge-building activity in the middle of the session. In addition, I repeatedly use a set of engaging games throughout my training sessions.

HANDOUT

*Second problem:* The participants are engaged. They run around the classroom as headless chicken. They focus on completing the activity and winning the game. But they don’t learn anything useful. They soon discover that they are wasting their time in all this fun and games.

*New and improved solution:* I think through the advantages and disadvantages of using games in training. I discover the relevance of the activity to the training topic is a key factor. So I select or design activities that clearly and directly incorporate the principles and procedures taught during the session. I highlight these principles before the activity as briefing, during the activity as coaching, and after the activity as debriefing.

*Conclusion:* As long as I link the game to the training objectives, the participants are engaged more and learn more. The instructional and motivational effectiveness of my training improves significantly.

# Stor

The name of this activity is a word rebus puzzle. It stands for “unfinished story”. Get it?

It is human nature to finish what we start and, if it is not finished, we experience dissonance. That’s why we cannot tolerate unfinished stories. Stor exploits the intense compulsion to finish incomplete narratives.

## Purpose

To write a suitable conclusion to an incomplete story. To apply the concept of win-win solutions to a situation.

## Synopsis

Everyone receives a copy of an unfinished story. The participants work in team to write a suitable conclusion. Later, the participants pair up with people from other teams and share their conclusions.

## Participants

**Minimum:** 4

**Maximum:** Any number

**Best:** 10 to 30

## Time

20 to 30 minutes

## Handouts

*The Contest,* one copy to each participant

*Conclusion of the Story,* one copy for the facilitator

## Supplies

* Timer
* Whistle

## Preparation

**Put yourself in the participants’ place.** Read the incomplete version of “The Contest”. Write the concluding section. See if you can write two or more alternative conclusions. Compare your conclusions with the author’s conclusion.

## Flow

**Distribute copies of the unfinished story.** Give one copy of the handout to each participant. Ask them to spend a minute or two to read the story. After a suitable pause, blow the whistle and proceed to the next task.

**Organize the participants in teams.** Form teams of two to five people. Seat each team around a table. Or ask the members of each team to stand around a flip chart.

**Ask the teams to come up with the conclusion to the story.** Instruct the participants to make their conclusions realistic and brief. Assign a 4-minute time limit.

**Ask the participants to remember the team’s conclusion.** Blow the whistle to indicate the end of the story writing activity. Ask the participants to make sure they can remember the conclusion created by the team so they can retell it to others.

**Pair up with people from other teams**. Ask the participants to find a partner from some other team. Ask the two members of each pair to share their conclusions to the story.

**Continue working in pairs.** Ask the participants to switch partners and share their conclusions.

**Compare the endings with the author’s ending.** After a suitable number of exchanges, blow the whistle and ask the participants to return to their teams. Get everyone’s attention and read (or retell) the author’s conclusion.

**Debrief the learning point of the story.** Briefly compare the author’s conclusion with the conclusions created by different teams. Ask the participants to come up with the “moral” of the story or the learning point of the exercise. Invite the participants to recall and share workplace examples of this learning point.

## Variations and Adjustment

**Want to save trees?** Instead of distributing copies of the handout, read the story or tell it in your own words.

**Want to create your own activity?** Specify your training objective. Locate an appropriate story or anecdote or case study. Remove the conclusion of the story. Use the procedure from this activity.

**Want more interaction?** Specify the training topic and ask teams to write a short 1-page story related to the topic. When completed, ask the teams to cut off or black out the concluding section. Exchange the stories among the teams and ask them to write concluding sections. Compare the new conclusion and the original conclusion of each story.

HANDOUT

The Contest

Nobody in the village knew when the tradition started but everybody knew how the contest was conducted.

The contest was very simple: Two contestants stood facing each other. They spread their feet and assumed a stable posture. They placed their palms against each other. The referee stood near them and started the contest by beginning to count.

The rule for winning the contest was very simple. All children had memorized this ancient rule: You win if you make the other person’s feet move before the referee counted to 20.

Everyone played the contest game in the village: men and women, boys and girls. From a very early age, children were taught winning strategies. Among adults, there were secret meetings to share special strategies. In these meetings, the older and wiser people taught others how to strengthen leg and arm muscles, how to stand barefoot and dig one’s toes into the ground, and how to push suddenly to topple the other contestant. In some secret meetings, men and women learned how to cast spells to weaken the opponent, how to tease the opponent to make him lose confidence, and how to stare at the opponent’s forehead to mesmerize him. Some people even bribed their opponents, asking them to pretend to have lost the contest. This bribe was very expensive because of the public humiliation associated with the loss.

On the seventh day of the seventh month in the lunar calendar, the village gathered on the banks of the river for the championship contest. During the last four years, this ceremony was anticlimactic because nobody challenged the reigning champion. Rumor had it that there will not be any challengers this year and the champion would win by default. But all villagers came to the celebration hoping for some surprise and excitement.

The champion came to the middle of the arena and yelled out the traditional challenge. The village elder stood by his side, ready to count to 20. Even though everyone expected that there would be no challenge, there was a hush in the crowd.

But wait, here is someone stepping forward: a frail holy man with a grey beard. Although he looked weak, he strode purposefully to face the champion. Without any delay, he assumed the palm-to-palm starting position.

Some spectators started laughing. Others became apprehensive thinking that the holy man had secret powers to hurt the champion. They held their collective breath.

HANDOUT

The village elder started the count. Before the count of 3, the holy man moved his feet. The crowd howled in disappointment. But the village elder kept counting because, after all, rules were rules. The holy man whispered something into the champion’s ears. When the count reached 17, the champion moved his feet. The crowd was stunned and confused.

The village elder called for his advisors. They talked among themselves in subdued tones. Then the elder stepped in the middle of the arena and said:

I proclaim that both contestants won. Our ancient rules say that a person wins if the other person’s feet move before the count of 20. Since both contestants’ feet moved, both of them have won.

Later, people asked the champion, “What did the holy man whisper to you?”

Conclusion to the Story

HANDOUT

According to the champion, this is what the holy man said:

You have already won. Would you like to achieve a greater victory? There is still time. If you move your feet, I too can win. That way you can demonstrate how cooperation makes everyone win.

That was the year the villagers learned that one could win without making someone lose.

# Storytelling Tips

One key element in interactive storytelling is storytelling. Everyone interacts with the story that you or the participants told. Your participants need to storytellers in addition to being a story listeners and story processors.

Storytelling Tips helps your participants become more fluent in telling stories.

## Purpose

To apply different techniques for improving the storytelling ability.

## Synopsis

All participants listen to a story. Each participant receives a storytelling tip and applies it to retell the story to a small group. The group members review the tip and comment on how effectively it was used by the storyteller.

## Participants

**Minimum:** 2

**Maximum:** Any number

**Best:** 5 to 30

## Time

20 to 40 minutes, depending on the number of participants in each group

## Handouts

*Storytelling Tips,* 2 different tips for each participant

## Supplies

* Timer
* Whistle

## Preparation

**Become familiar with the base story.** This activity begins with a story that you tell. Create your own story or use the one included in the *Flow* section below. Become familiar with the details of the story.

**Prepare the cards**. At the end of this article, we have provided a set of 15 tips for storytelling. Write and add more tips that you like. Reproduce these tips, each on a separate card.

**Put yourself in the participants’ position.** This activity requires each participant to apply a storytelling tip and retell the story. Randomly select a few tips and figure out how you can apply each of them to the base story.

## Flow

**Brief the participants.** Tell them that they are going to learn different tips for improving their storytelling abilities. Explain that you are going to begin by telling a base story. Ask the participants to listen carefully because they will be retelling the story later.

Tell the base story. This could a story you created or the one printed below:

***Revolutions***

His father told him: You have to listen carefully to your teacher and write down everything he says. The teacher talked about the Russian revolution. Jim faithfully wrote everything down.

During the next class, Jim’s mind began wandering. The science teacher was talking about engines. Jim daydreamed about sitting inside a cylinder and being squeezed by the piston. He giggled because it was funny.

Now 50 years later, Jim is the best mechanic in the engine shop. The only thing he remembers about revolutions has to do with the rpm of the turbo engine he is taking apart.

**Distribute tip cards.** Give two tip cards to each participant. Ask everyone to review both tips and select one of them to apply to the retelling of the base story.

**Ask the participants to get ready.** Tell them to spend 3 minutes to think about the storytelling tip, apply it to the story, and jot down a few notes to suitably modify the story. Start the timer.

**Organize groups.** After 3 minutes, announce the end of the preparation time. Ask the participants to organize themselves into groups of three to five members each. Seat each group around tables.

**Retell the story.** At each group, ask one of the participants to volunteer to be the first storyteller. Ask this person to present his or her version of the story. Instruct the other members of the group to listen carefully, paying special attention to the changes from the original version.

**Review the tip card.** At the end of the story, ask the storyteller to show the tip card to the others. Ask him or her to read the tip and briefly explain how he or she incorporated it in getting ready to retell the story.

**Give feedback to the storyteller**. Ask the other members of the group to comment on how well the storyteller applied the tip to the modification and presentation of the story. Also ask the group members how they would have done things differently in applying this tip.

**Continue the procedure.** Allow the storyteller to thank the group members for their comments. Ask the next person in each group to take a turn to be the storyteller. Use the same procedure to cycle through all participants.

**Conclude the activity.** After everyone has retold the story, blow the whistle and get participants; attention. Thank them for their collaboration. Invite everyone to think about the different tips they experienced and think about the possible application to their storytelling projects.

## Variations and Adjustments

**Don’t like the story?** Select or write a story that is more relevant to your training topic.

**Have better tips?** Add them to our list. Or replace them with your own tips.

HANDOUT

Storytelling Tips

1. Don’t meander to a whimpering end. End your story with a clear and strong conclusion.
2. Even if your story is not a joke, it must have a punch line. Every element of the story should lead to this punch line.
3. Make your story intellectually interactive. Don’t give all the details. Let the listeners guess, infer, extrapolate, and anticipate.
4. As a trainer or facilitator, you have objectives beyond entertaining your audience. So blend and balance your story with logical content.
5. Ask yourself, “Do I need a story?” If yes, ask, “Is this best story?” If yes, ask “How can I remove irrelevant elements from the story?”
6. You don’t have to present details of plot, characters, setting, and theme when you tell the story, but you must have a complete picture.
7. No single story tells the whole story. Prevent listeners from overgeneralizing by telling them the story presents only partial truth.
8. Incorporate storytelling techniques in all your explanations and presentations. Present your examples in the form of stories.
9. Read a lot and borrow stories from: science fiction, folktales, children’s stories, anecdotes, plays, biographies, and fables.
10. If you realize that you have missed something, insert it smoothly later in your narration with apologies or explanations.
11. Use a conversational tone. But speak more loudly and slowly.
12. Do not imitate other people’s style. Discover you own storytelling style.
13. End the story with Glenn Hughes’ line: “And that’s why I always say …” Follow up with the takeaway message.
14. Tell your story in a sincere, confident, and intimate tone.
15. Slow down your narration. Build in pauses to permit the listeners to feel, laugh, cry, anticipate, and reflect.

# Success Stories

Here’s another interactive storytelling exercise that is set in the future. Unlike the earlier activity that has a pessimistic element, this one has a guaranteed happy ending. It involves roleplaying elements combined with a futuristic plotline.

## Purpose

To create personal visions of successful application of the skills and knowledge acquired in the workshop.

## Participants

Minimum: 6

Maximum: Any number

Best: 10 to 30

## Time

1- to 15 minutes

## Flow

**Form teams.** Ask the participants to organize themselves into teams of three to five. Ask the team members to seat themselves facing each other.

**Brief the participants.** Inform them that they are going to participate in a roleplay. After the groans die down, tell each participant to play his or her own role. The only difference is that the roleplay takes place in the future, 12 months later. So everyone will be a year older and wiser.

**Outline the scenario.** Use this suggested script:

You three bumped into each other at the O'Hare airport. You have a long layover and you decide to walk down to the bar and catch up with personal news. After a couple of drinks, one of you asks, "Hey, remember the workshop we attended last year? Did you ever use any of that stuff in your workplace?" This triggers a wave of nostalgia and you try to outdo each other with your reports of glowing successes.

**Provide roleplay details.** The roleplay will come to an end after 4 minutes. Participants don’t have to take turns. They talk to each other as in a normal conversation at the bar.

**Encourage imaginative exaggeration.** Explain that the participants’ main goal is to flaunt their success and attribute it to the workshop. They have poetic license to exaggerate how their fame and fortune have taken a quantum leap. Advise participants not to be modest in making up their history of the next year. However, encourage them to relate the brilliant results to specific aspects of this workshop.

**Leave them alone.** Let participants act out the roleplay. Walk around various triads, unobtrusively listening to the glowing reports.

**Conclude the session.** At the end of the 4 minutes, stop the roleplay. Invite volunteers to reflect on the details of the startling success stories they heard.

# Time Travel

In an interactive storytelling activity, the participants create their own stories and share them with each other. Time Travel is an example of a future story activity in which the participants project themselves into the future.

This activity involves participants creating and sharing stories about a piece of practical advice. It encourages them to think about the positive results of consistently applying a piece of advice.

## Synopsis

Each participant reads the piece of advice from the card given to her or him. Participants make up a story that involves the application of this the piece of advice to a personal project. Later, the participants pair up and share their stories with each other.

## Purpose

To imagine (and share) the long-term results of applying a piece of practical advice.

## Participants

**Minimum:** 4

**Maximum:** 50

**Best:** 12 to 30

## Time

30-45 minutes.

## Supplies

* A deck of Practical Advice Cards
* Countdown timer
* Whistle

## Preparation

**Obtain the cards.** Prepare a set of cards each containing a piece of practical advice. You should have at least one card for each participants.

We strongly recommend the use of ready-made practical advice cards that we sell. Available on 25 popular soft skill topics these decks of 52 cards contain evidence based pieces of practical advice.

Here are some samples of practical advice on five different topics:

**Building Trust.** Admit your mistakes as soon as you become aware of them.

**Change Leadership.** Appeal to hearts and minds. Create change- related messages that unite ideas with emotion.

**Coaching for Performance.** Take notes either during or immediately after the coaching session.

**Critical Thinking.** Be skeptical about the “everyone-does-it” argument. The stupidity of the crowds sometimes exceeds the wisdom of crowds.

**Feedback Techniques.** Give feedback, not advice. If the other person asks for advice, start a collaborative problem solving conversation.

## Flow

**Distribute the cards.** Give a practical advice card to each participant. Ask each participant to read the piece of advice printed on his or her card.

**Ask the participants to apply the piece of practical advice from the card to a personal project.** Ask the participants to select some aspect of their current situation and decide how to apply the advice from the card to this project. Announce a 5-minute time limit and blow the whistle at the end of 5 minutes.

**Invite the participants to project themselves into the future.** Ask the participants to imagine that 5 years have passed. They have successfully completed the personal project with significant positive results. Ask each participant to connect the practical advice from the card to his or her fame and fortune 5 years from now. Announce a time limit of 3 minutes and blow the whistle at the end of this time.

**Invite the participants to create a short story.** This story should incorporate each participant’s 5-year projection. The theme of the story should emphasize how the practical advice from the card changed his or her life. Encourage the participants to come up with a plot that begins with an initial problem, proceeds through a project that incorporates the advice from the card, details the ups and downs of this project, and dramatically ends with a successful conclusion. Tell the participants to make sure that it is a positive story in which they live happily ever after. Announce a time limit of 5 minutes and blow the whistle at the end of 5 minutes.

**Ask the participants to present their story to a partner.** Ask each participant to find a partner. Tell everyone to imagine that they accidentally met each other after 5 years. They are comparing notes about the consequences of applying the practical advice on their card. Instruct the participants to take turns telling their story. Encourage the storytellers to be enthusiastic and to embellish their success. Encourage the listeners to congratulate their partner. Suggest a 2-minute storytelling period for each partner. At the end of the first 2 minutes, blow the whistle and ask the partners to switch the roles of the storyteller and listener. After another 2 minutes, blow the whistle again and announce the end of the storytelling period.

**Ask the participants to find a new partner and repeat the process.** Suggest that participants share their stories with new partners. Encourage the partners to embellish their stories with new and exciting details. Remind the listeners to exaggerate their pleasure at their partner’s success. Impose a 2-minute time limit for each story.

**Conclude the activity.** Repeat the storytelling sessions to suit the available time. Ask the participants to nominate the best storytellers and have these people present their latest versions the entire group. Remind the participants that they have an opportunity for making the story come true by applying the practical advice from their cards.

# Triple Roleplay

Roleplays are a type of interactive storytelling activity. The participants create the dialogue for the story on the fly as they conduct the roleplay

In Triple Roleplay, you can take the interactivity one step further. You can ask the participants to write the backstory for the roleplay.

## Purpose

To conduct a realistic conversation in a specific role and a specific situation.

## Synopsis

Three participants independently prepare roleplay scenarios. Each participant takes a turn to be the Judge and watch the other two conduct two rounds of roleplay, switching roles. The judge provide score points to reflect the degree of realism of the performances.

## Participants

Minimum: 3

Maximum: Any number, divided into groups of 2.

Best: 12 to 24

Time:

20 to 30 minutes

## Handouts

* *Sample Scenarios*, one copy for each participant

## Supplies and Equipment

* Pieces of paper for writing role-play scenarios
* Score chits (small pieces of paper) for recording the score points
* Pens or pencils
* Timer
* Whistle

## Room Set Up

Chairs and table space for the participants to work individually. Plenty of empty space for the participants to stand up in teams of three

## Flow

**Review the scenarios.** Distribute copies of the handout, *Sample Scenarios*, to each participant. Explain that each scenario is related to a specific training topic and contains a title, a primary role, a secondary role, and a situation. Ask the participants to review the scenarios.

**Write your own scenarios.** Specify a training topic. Ask each participant to work independently and create a scenario related to that topic. Encourage the participants to follow the style and the format of the sample scenarios. Announce a 3-minute time limit for this task.

**Organize triads.** At the end of 3 minutes, blow the whistle and invite the participants to organize themselves into groups of three. In each group, select one person to be first Judge.

**Conduct the first round.** Ask the Judge to read and explain the two roles and the scenario. Then ask the person with the primary role to start the conversation. Ask the other person to make suitable contributions to keep the conversation going. Ask the Judge to observe the roleplay, paying special attention to the performance of the participant in the primary role.

**Reverse the roles.** After the Judge has listened to enough of the conversation, ask him or her to stop the roleplay. Also ask the two participants switch their roles and re-enact the roleplay. The judge asks the two participants to act out a new and different conversation related to the same scenario.

**Scoring.** Ask the Judge to stop the roleplay after a convenient time has expired. At this time, instruct the Judge to distribute 13 points between the two roleplayers to indicate the relative realism in performing the *primary* role. The Judge should not use any fractions in distributing the score points: Even if the two participants performed with equally well, the Judge is forced to award 7 points to one and 6 to the other. Ask the Judge to secretly write the score points on two different chits (small pieces of paper), fold them into fourths and give them to the appropriate participants. These score chits are not to be opened until the end of the activity.

**Repeat the procedure.** The person to the left of the previous Judge becomes the Judge for the next round. The new Judge repeats the procedure of explaining the situation and the roles, conducting two rounds of roleplay, and awarding score points. The same procedure is repeated one more time with the third participant acting as the Judge.

**Congratulate the winners.** The activity comes to an end when all three participants have played the role of the Judge. At this time, each person would have received two score point chits. Ask everyone of open their chits, add the points, and identify the winner.

## Variations and Adjustments

**Not enough time?** Prepare and use a set of your own scenarios instead of asking the participants to create their scenarios. Also, limit the roleplays to a minute, focusing on starting the conversation effectively.

**Too many participants?** Divide them into groups of three. Let each group use the same procedure in a parallel fashion.

**Left over participants?** If you end up with an extra participant, have a group of four. If two participants are left over, join them to form a triad.

**Unsuitable scenarios?** If you don’t think that the scenarios created by the participant will be up to your quality standards, prepare and use your own set.

HANDOUT

Sample Scenarios

## 1. Change of Plans

**Training Topic:** Building Trust

**Primary role**: Subordinate

**Secondary role**: Your boss

**Situation:** You cannot meet the deadline for completing the draft of the annual report tomorrow as promised. You have to take your child to an important game.

## 2. Sharing the Vision

**Training Topic:** Change Leadership

**Primary role**: Change Leader

**Secondary role**: Employees

**Situation:** You are planning to implement a policy to combat the lack of civility your workplace. You are asking individual employees for their ideas to make the change vision a shared one.

## 3. Please Use my Talent

**Training Topic:** Coaching

**Primary role**: Manager

**Secondary role**: Unhappy employee

**Situation:** The employee feels underutilized and wants to take on more responsibility. You don’t feel that the employee is ready to take on additional challenges.

## 4. Get to the Point

**Training Topic:** Conducting a Job Interview

**Primary role**: Interviewer

**Secondary role**: Candidate

**Situation:** The candidate keeps giving lengthy and rambling responses to your questions. Politely tell the candidate to give you shorter answers that are directly related to your question.

## 5. Bleep

HANDOUT

**Training Topic:** Conflict Management

**Primary role**: Older employee

**Secondary role**: Younger employee

**Situation:** You request the younger person to tone down his or her coarse language and profanity. The younger employee sarcastically suggests that you should wear earplugs.

## 6. Not the Whole Truth

**Training Topic:** Customer Service

**Primary role**: *Customer Service Representative*

**Secondary role**: *Customer*

**Situation:** A customer is trying to get a refund on a product because it is defective. You suspect that the customer is not telling the truth.

## 7. Bad Code

**Training Topic:** Giving Feedback

**Primary role**: Manager

**Secondary role**: Programmer

**Situation:** Your programmer just delivered software code with lots of bugs. You were expecting higher quality. Provide constructive feedback.

## 8. Greener Pastures

**Training Topic:** Influencing

**Primary role**: *Manager*

**Secondary role**: *Employee*

**Situation:** Your best employee is considering a position with another organization. Persuade him or her to stay.

## 9. Payroll Crunch

**Training Topic:** Leadership

**Primary role**: Head of HR  
**Secondary role**: Members of the Executive Team  
**Situation:** The company cannot make payroll over the coming months without the executive team taking a pay cut. No one but you sees this reality. You are in an executive meeting trying to convince others to take appropriate action.

## 10. Welcoming a Newcomer

HANDOUT

**Training Topic:** Making Workplace Connections

**Primary role**: *Manager*

**Secondary role**: *Associate*

**Situation:** A newly hired employee is reporting for duty today. Plan with your associate on how to welcome and orient the new hire.

## 11. Gossip

**Training Topic:** Management

**Primary role**: Manager

**Secondary role**: Colleague

**Situation:** Your colleague is making several derogatory statements about a new female employee.

## 12. A Double Ph. D.

**Training Topic:** Diversity

**Primary role**: US Plant Manager

**Secondary role**: US Employees

**Situation:** You are letting the local employees know that the company’s German headquarters has appointed Herr Dr. Bratke as the new International President. The locals (who are proud anti-intellectuals) are skeptical because of Dr. Bratke’s lack of operational experience.

## 13. No Money in the Budget

**Training Topic:** Motivation

**Primary role**: Manager

**Other role:** Employee

**Situation:** The employee is asking for a pay raise. You feel that he deserves a raise, but there is no money in the budget. Explain to the employee that you cannot give a raise. Do this without undermining his (or her) motivation.

## 14. I Apologize

**Training Topic:** Workplace Civility

**Primary role**: *Manager*

**Secondary role**: *Project Team Leader*

**Situation:** In a meeting, you talked about a recent accomplishment without giving credit to your employee, who was the project team leader. Apologize for your oversight.

## 15. Who Are my Team Members?

HANDOUT

**Training Topic:** Teamwork

**Primary role**: Middle Manager

**Secondary role**: Top Manager

**Situation:** Your boss wants you to form a team to organize your company’s annual staff retreat. You are discussing what types of team members you need.

## 16. Flexible Workstyle

**Training Topic:** Innovation Management

**Primary role**: Head of IT Department.

**Secondary role**: Head of Sales and Client Service department.

**Situation:** Your organization has just announced that all people except those of the Security Department and the Sales and Client Service department may work from home or from elsewhere if they wish. You are a firm supporter of this change and your counterpart in Sales and Client Service is a staunch opponent.

# Troubleshooting a Team

Here’s another interactive storytelling approach that incorporates the case method. This involves a longer approach to using loaded case materials. It requires the participants to be selective about the additional information (data sets) they want to receive.

The sample activity below deals with teamwork. You may use the structure of this activity as a template to create cases that explore your own training topics.

## Purpose

To select appropriate data sets and analyze them to pinpoint the causes for performance problems in a team.

## Synopsis

Different teams receive the same memo about the problems with a team. The teams purchase data sets, analyze them, and present suitable recommendations for improving the functioning of the troubled team.

## Participants

**Minimum:** 6

**Maximum:** Any 35

**Best:** 12 to 25

## Time

60 to 90 minutes.

## Handouts

* *Instructions to the Teams,* one copy for each participant
* *Memo to Pat,* one copy for each participant
* *Menu of Data Sets,* one copy for each team
* 14 Different Data Sets, one copy for each team

## Supplies and Equipment

* Account Register for each team to keep track of payments from the team and balances
* Flip chart paper, one sheet for each team
* Felt-tipped markers
* Masking tape
* Paper cups, one for each team
* Poker Chips, 13 for each team

## Room Set Up

Arrange tables and chair for each team to permit discussions and teamwork. Have a convenient area in the front of the room for presentations. Make sure there is plenty of wall space for posting the flip chart pages.

## Preparation

**Read and rehearse.** Read the flow of the activity and review the different handouts. Select a co-facilitator to help you. Walk through different steps of activity and figure out the distribution of labor between you and your partner.

## Flow

**Brief the participants.** Explain that the purpose of this activity is to analyze factors that impede the performance of a team.

**Organize teams.** Divide participants into 3-5 teams of approximately equal size. It does not matter if some teams have an extra member.

**Distribute the instruction sheet.** Give copies of the *Team Instructions* handout, one copy to each participant. Invite questions and clarify the rules of the activity.

**Distribute the first document.** Give one copy of the *Memo to Pat* to each team. Ask the teams to review this memo.

**Explain how to get additional data.** Distribute copies of the *Menu of Data Sets.* Tell the participants that they could collect additional data by purchasing the items listed in this menu. The cost of each item reflects the resources required for collecting the data.

**Explain the financial arrangement.** Inform that each team has an opening budget of $10,000 in virtual money which could be used for purchasing data sets listed in the menu. Since the budget does not permit the indiscriminate purchase of all available data, teams have to be selective about the type of data they want to collect.

**Start the activity.** Announcea time limit of 45 minutes.Set the timer for and start it. Encourage the teams to work rapidly, dividing up the task of reviewing data from different sets.

**Distribute data sets**. Keep an account register for each team, with a beginning balance of $10,000. Whenever a team purchases data sets, subtract the appropriate cost from the balance.

**Distribute supplies.** After about 30 minutes into the activity, distribute a sheet of flip-chart paper to each team. Explain that the team may display any graphics, tables, or messages for use during the presentation.

**Keep track of the time.** Announce the remaining time at 5-minute intervals.

**Select the presenters.** At the end of 40 minutes, ask all teams to prepare for the presentation to be made by a randomly selected representative. After 45 minutes, stop the activity. Shuffle a deck of cards and give one card to each participant. Within each team, designate the participant who received the card with the lowest value to be the presenter. Bring the presenters from different teams to the front of the room.

**Conduct the first presentation.** Randomly select one presenter and send the other presenters outside the room. Ask the first presenter to begin. Remind the presenter there is a 2-minute time limit. Time the presentation and stop it after 2 minutes.

**Repeat the process.** Select one of the other presenters to return to the room and begin the presentation. Continue the activity until all presenters have made their presentation.

**Get ready for evaluation.** Tape each team’s flip-chart sheet to the wall. Place a paper cup immediately below each poster.

**Conduct the evaluation.** Give 13 poker chips to each team. Ask the team members to think about the effectiveness of the *other* teams’ presentations. Within 3 minutes, ask the members of each team to jointly decide how to distribute the 13 poker chips to reflect the relative effectiveness of team presentations. When ready, ask teams to secretly drop the appropriate number of poker chips in the paper cups below each team's flip chart.

**Identify the winning team.** Count the number of chips in each paper cup and identify the winning team. Congratulate the winners, without making a big fuss about it.

HANDOUT

Instructions to the Teams

## Who Are You?

Although you are working as a team, you represent a single Teambuilding Consultant, Pat Rodriguez.

Pat works for an organization that specializes in teambuilding activities. His (or her) boss has asked Pat to investigate a complaint from Steve Johnson, one of the clients. Pat has to make a recommendation to his (or her) boss on what action to take.

## What Is Your Task?

Working as a team, in the role of Pat, you have 45 minutes to collect data, analyze them, make your recommendations, and justify these recommendations. Your report must respond to these questions:

* What does Mr. Steve Johnson want—and what does he need?
* Is there a gap between the team’s mission and what it is doing?
* What should you tell your Mr. Steve Johnson?
* What advice should you give to Chandra Patel, the team leader?
* What data support your recommendations?

## What Do You Receive?

At the beginning of this activity, you will receive a one-page memo from your boss, Paul Spector, outlining your assignment.

You will receive $10,000 in virtual money to fund your data-collection activities. If you run out of money, you will not have access to any more data.

You will receive a menu of the data sets, along with the corresponding costs (that reflect the resources for the collecting the data). You may purchase any of these data sets from your facilitator.

## What Is Expected From You?

A randomly-selected member of your team will present your report responds to the questions listed earlier. This report is limited to 2 minutes of presentation time and one page of flipchart paper.

HANDOUT

Memo to Pat

To: Pat Rodriguez

CC: Dolores Fritz

From: Paul Spector

Date: 10/21/00

Re: Troubled Team?

I had an urgent telephone call from our client, Steve Johnson. As you know, he’s the CEO of Johnson Enterprises where we set up a cross-functional team a couple of months ago.

Mr. Johnson attended one of the team meetings and returned in a major panic. He is convinced that the team is headed toward total disaster. He tells me that team members are bickering and quarreling all the time. Apparently, there are severe personality conflicts among the seven members of the team.

Mr. Johnson wants us to fix the problem immediately. He wants the team to work smoothly and effectively like his top management team (that always makes correct and rapid decisions under Mr. Johnson’s strong and effective leadership).

Pat, we need to investigate this situation immediately and recommend appropriate action. Unfortunately, I will be away for the next 10 days, conducting a teambuilding seminar in Bali at the annual conference of the Asian Federation of Facilitators.

Can you please investigate this situation? I would like to have your analysis and recommendations by the time I return Friday next week.

Thanks!

HANDOUT

Menu of Data Sets

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Subject | Cost |
| Team Mission, Vision, and Goals | $500 |
| Team Member Profiles | $500 |
| Interview with Steve Johnson, CEO | $1500 |
| Interview with Chandra Patel, Team Leader | $1000 |
| Interview with Allen Sheppard, Team Member | $750 |
| Interview with Bob Thomson, Team Member | $750 |
| Interview with Dolores Fitz, Team Member | $750 |
| Interview with Esther White, Team Member | $750 |
| Interview with Fred Weils, Team Member | $750 |
| Interview with George Shelly, Team Member | $750 |
| Team Player Survey Scores | $1000 |
| Team Development Stages Data | $1000 |
| October 17th Meeting: Interview Report | $1000 |
| October 24th Meeting: Observation Data | $1000 |

HANDOUT

Team Mission, Vision, and Goals

## Order Fulfillment Re-engineering Team

Our ***mission*** is to earn long-term loyalty by consistently delighting our customers.

Our ***vision***is to apply diverse perspectives to consistently provide innovative services that meet customers' needs.

Our ***goals*** include:

* To reduce the time between the customer's order and delivery of the product.
* To provide a 24-hour customer-service hotline.

HANDOUT

Team Member Profiles

***Chandra Patel*** is the team leader. She is from the human resources department. She has been with Johnson Consumer Electronics for six years. Last year, she acted as the facilitator of the *Quality Management Team*.

***Allen Sheppard*** is from the marketing department. He has been with Johnson Consumer Electronics for seven years. As a member of the Branding Committee, he helped the company establish standards for the use of the corporate logo.

***Bob Thomson*** is from the engineering department. He has been with Johnson Consumer Electronics for three years. This is the first time he has worked as a team member.

***Dolores Fitz*** is from the information systems group. She has been with Johnson Consumer Electronics for only six months. As a member of the Intranet Security Team, she helped establish security standards for electronic communications within the corporation.

***Esther White*** is from customer services. She has been with Johnson Consumer Electronics for four years. Her earlier teamwork experience includes membership in the *Quality of Worklife Team* for three months.

***Fred Weils*** is from the research and development division. He has been with Johnson Consumer Electronics for two years.

***George Shelly*** is a lawyer from the legal department. He has been with Johnson Consumer Electronics for seven years. He is the Chair of the *President's Award Committee*.

HANDOUT

Interview with Steve Johnson, CEO

## Excerpts

I believe in cohesiveness among team members. If they are going to be arguing with each other all the time, then why have a team?

I appointed this team to speed up the order fulfillment process. I want them to reduce customer complaints. These complaints reflect badly on our business.

Frankly, I shouldn't have appointed Chandra Patel as the Team Leader. I was appalled by her wishy-washy behavior during the October 17th meeting. She does not have what it takes to control the team and command respect.

Dolores is bad news. I can't understand why Chandra added her to the team. She's a loudmouth and she questions everything and everybody. She even started arguing with me at the team meeting. I suggested to Chandra that she get rid of that girl. But Chandra is probably too weak to do that. She keeps claiming that she wants someone with a technical background.

George Shelly is a good guy. He keeps me informed of what's happening in the team.

HANDOUT

Interview with Chandra Patel, Team Leader

## Excerpts

I believe that commitment is the result of involvement and that soft skills produce hard results.

I deliberately chose the team members to increase diversity in our perspectives and opinions.

It's going to take some time for the team to learn to listen to each other. We are well on our way to establishing ground rules for team meetings and following them.

I'm extremely grateful to Mr. Johnson for his support, but sometimes I wish he would leave us alone. I know that he thinks we are not producing quick results, but I want to invest some time right now for defining our goals and analyzing the situation.

One thing that I learned from my TQM experience is that it is cheaper to pay now by spending extra time than pay later to recover from mistakes.

All in all, I've got a great team, and we are almost ready to take on the challenge.

HANDOUTS

Interview with Allen Sheppard

## Excerpt

I have no major complaints about the way the team is operating. Mr. Johnson has given us all the resources we need. I like the way Chandra is making sure that all of us have our say. Our meetings are informal and relaxed. We all know what to do and we all do our homework. Dolores has done a great job of analyzing the delays in our current order-fulfillment system. I like the way she keeps challenging the standard procedures. I know that Mr. Johnson gets impatient sometimes, but after all, we've been working as a team only for a couple of weeks.

Interview with Bob Thomson

## Excerpt

Sometimes Chandra gets carried away with this participation thing. But we are all committed to our goal and we will come up with strategies for speeding up the shipping procedure. Dolores has identified sources of major delays and we should be able to remove them easily.

Interview with Dolores Fitz

## Excerpt

Most of the time most of the team members don't know what's happening. What we have here is a simple problem. All we need to do is to centralize order taking and inventory control at the same data base. I like Chandra, but I hope she focuses on the obvious problem rather than asking everyone for opinions.

HANDOUTS

Interview with Esther White

## Excerpt

At Customer Services, we've been working on this problem for six years. I don't know why Mr. Johnson needs a team to investigate the situation. As we told him earlier, we need to hire more customer reps who talk to customers. I know that Chandra has good intentions but I hope that she does not forget that this is a people problem, not a computer problem.

Interview with Fred Weils

## Excerpt

I have no comments about our team. Everything's fine. I am eager to get the job done and return full time to my R&D responsibilities.

Interview with George Shelly

## Excerpt

I know exactly what Mr. Johnson wants and I am afraid that the team is not giving him what he wants. As I told him during last week's golf game, this situation has several legal implications.

HANDOUT

Team Player Survey Results  
Parker Team Player Survey®

## Primary Team Player Styles

**Chandra Patel:** Communicator

**Allen Sheppard:** Contributor

**Bob Thomson:** Contributor

**Dolores Fitz:** Challenger

**Esther White:** Challenger

**Fred Weils:** Contributor

**George Shelly:** Challenger

## Background information

According to Glenn Parker, all teams need a balance among four types of team players:

***Contributors*** are task-oriented team members who do their homework and provide the team with good technical information and data. They are always dependable but sometimes they have a tendency to become bogged down in the details.

***Collaborators***are goal-oriented team members who focus on the vision, mission, and goals of the team. They are flexible and willing to pitch in and work outside their roles. However, they sometimes fail to consider individual needs of team members.

***Communicators*** are process-oriented team members who are effective listeners and facilitators. They are sensitive people but sometimes they fail to confront other team members.

***Challengers*** are team members who question the goals and methods of the team and even disagree with higher authorities. They are open and direct but sometimes they push the team too far.

HANDOUT

Team Development Stages Data

Analysis of a questionnaire in which each team member selected the top five frequent behaviors:

Behaviors associated with the *forming* stage: 27 percent

Behaviors associated with the *storming* stage: 49 percent

Behaviors associated with the *norming* stage: 18 percent

Behaviors associated with the *performing* stage: 6 percent

## Background information

According to Bruce Tuckman, all teams have to necessarily go through four developmental stages:

During the ***forming*** stage, team members focus on understanding the team's goal and their role.

During the ***storming*** stage, the team defines itself through conflicts among its members.

During the ***norming***stage, team members negotiate the structure of the team and the division of labor.

During the ***performing*** stage, team members focus on accomplishing their goals.

HANDOUT

October 17th Meeting

## Excerpts from Anonymous Comments

Mr. Johnson gave us a pep talk about company loyalty and team loyalty.

Mr. Johnson got impatient with Chandra. He was also upset about Dolores's impertinent comments.

When Mr. Johnson said that we should be loyal to the team and stop arguing, Dolores retorted that we should be loyal to customers because the team's mission demanded that. Mr. Johnson was upset by this comment which he perceived to be a challenge to his authority.

Dolores made some interesting challenges to the company's assumptions about order fulfillment. She also had some tough questions about the way the team is taking care of its business.

It would have been nice if Mr. Johnson left us alone to do our own thing. After all, if he believes in empowerment, why is he telling us what to do?

Mr. Johnson was absolutely right. I wish Chandra demanded and commanded more loyalty from team members.

Maybe Mr. Johnson will disband the team. Then the customer relations group can quickly solve the problem.

HANDOUT

October 24th Meeting

## Observation Data collected by Stanis Benjamin

This is one of the weekly meetings held for an hour every Friday afternoon. The meeting took place in the fifth-floor conference room. The climate of the meeting was informal and involved technical discussions and decision-making.

Apparently each team member had been assigned a task. The meeting began with a report from Dolores on the technical aspects of speeding up the process of taking customer orders and shipping products. This was a continuation of the presentation from the previous meeting that was somewhat interrupted by Mr. Johnson's unanticipated arrival. Using an LCD projector, Dolores identified the steps in the current telephone order-taking process. She identified activities that delay the process and suggested how to eliminate or combine different steps. Several team members asked questions and raised issues. Dolores responded succinctly.

Chandra invited Esther (who had been fairly quiet) for her comments and reactions. Esther complained that Dolores was attacking the customer service department without understanding the rationale behind its process. Dolores appeared to be surprised and suggested that it is time to reexamine and revise all standard operating procedures that do not add value or meet current realities. There was some tense interchange between Esther and Dolores. Chandra intervened and asked other team members for their suggestions. Allen suggested that Esther should be given an opportunity to present the historical perspective on the order-fulfillment process. Dolores agreed, explaining that being a new employee was both her strength and her weakness. Esther wanted to give her reactions to Dolores’s analysis at the next meeting, after collecting some information from customer reps. Chandra congratulated the team for handling a potential conflict in a healthy fashion.