



# Storytelling in the Digital Age

Go from broadcasting your message to engaging your audience.



# What was our motivation to do this project?

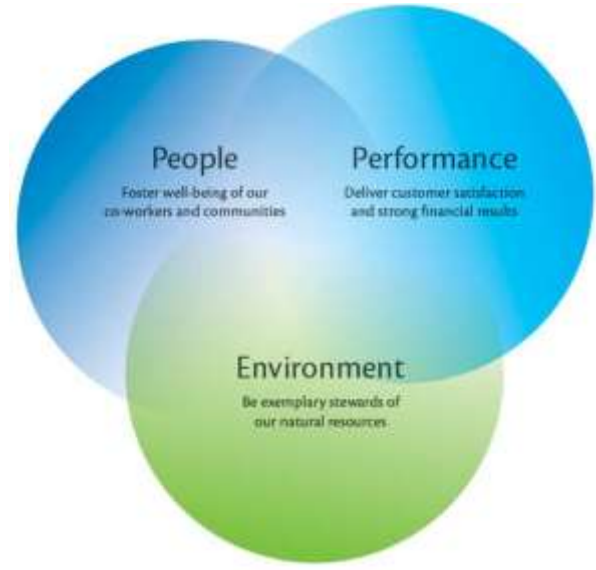
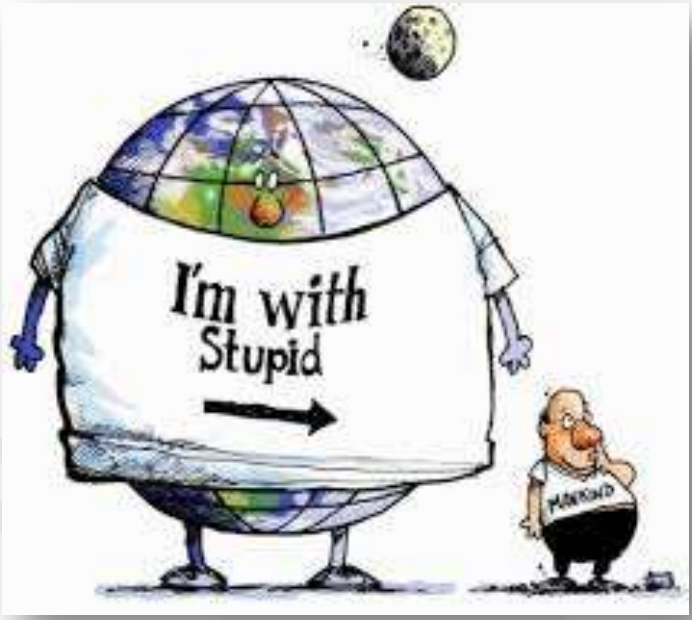
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**Members of our network expressed interest in the storytelling component of the Embedding Project.**



# The Challenge of Sustainability Stories

**Sustainability stories run on extremes.**



# The Challenge of Sustainability Stories

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**They either sensationalize tragedy or gloss over challenge.**



# Disclaimer

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**Science doesn't necessarily build trust.**

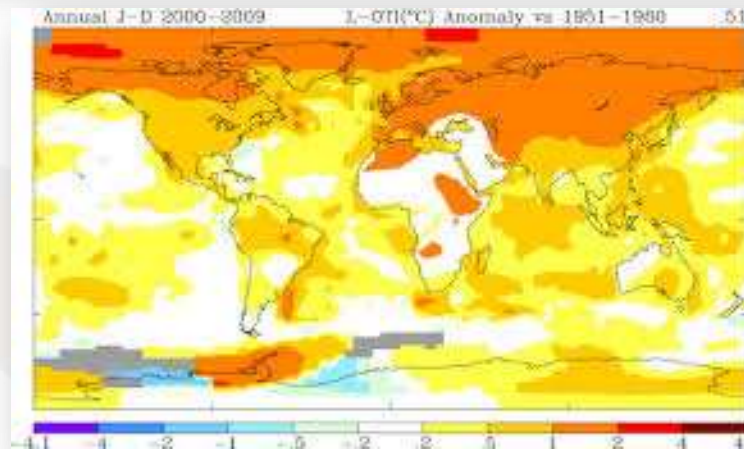
GRAY MATTER

## We're All Climate-Change Idiots

By BETH GARDINER

Published: July 21, 2012

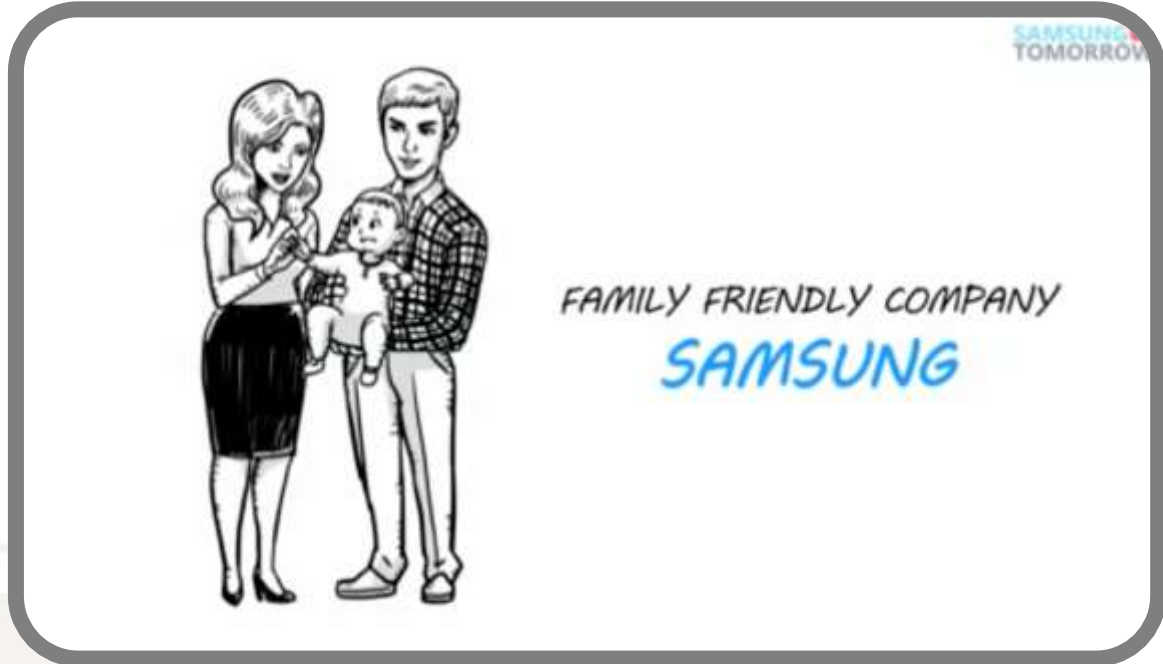
**CLIMATE CHANGE** is staring us in the face. The science is clear, and the need to reduce planet-warming emissions has grown urgent. So why, collectively, are we doing so little about it?

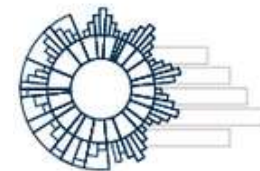




# Samsung's Attempt

Examples of sustainability stories gone wrong are abundant.





# The Embedding Project

1 2 3 →

## The Embedding Project Baseline Assessment Process *step by step*

All companies begin by undergoing a baseline assessment that systematically inventories the extent to which sustainability is embedded in your company's operations. This process helps you to understand your company's journey to date, to calibrate your company experiences against the work undertaken in other companies and to identify areas of strength and opportunities for improvement. Together we will:



Understand your  
company's journey to date

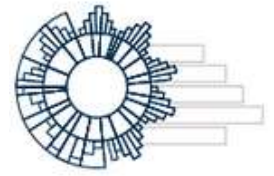


Calibrate your company's  
experience against the  
work undertaken in other  
companies



Identify areas of strength  
and opportunities for  
improvement.

[embeddingproject.org](http://embeddingproject.org)



# The Embedding Project

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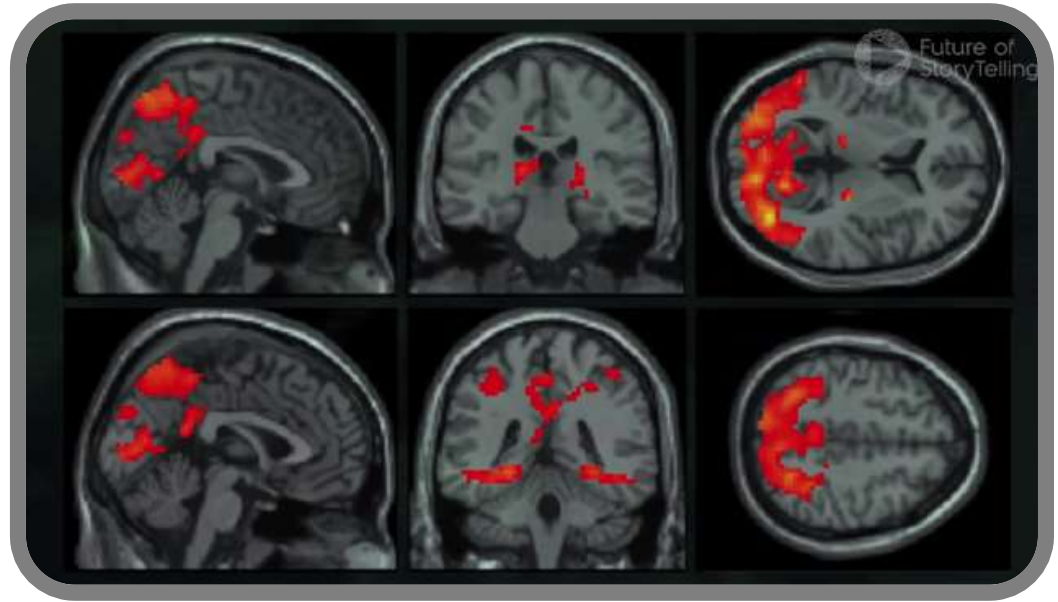
# The Case for Organizational Storytelling

In this section:

- Story Psychology
- A Fiscal Argument for Storytelling
- Organizational Narrative
- Engagement



# Stories change the way our brains work.



“Stories are powerful because they transport us into other people’s worlds...  
They change the way our brains work and potentially change our brain chemistry.”

– Dr. Paul Zak  
*Professor of Economics, Psychology and Management  
Claremont Graduate University*

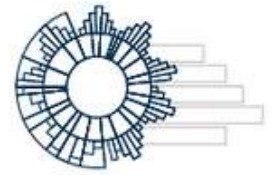


## Stories add value.

eBay's *Significant Object* experiment demonstrates how storytelling can add tangible value to an organization's products and services.



Attaching fictional stories to items for sale on eBay caused a dramatic increase from the list price to the final selling price.



## Stories provide insight into the *why* and *how*.

An organization typically has a few, familiar, core narratives that describe *why* and *how* it operates. Consider your core narrative.



Nike's example of Bill Bowerman pouring rubber into a waffle iron represents **innovation** at the company.



RAC's narrative of how railways have been foundational to **nation-building** in Canada.

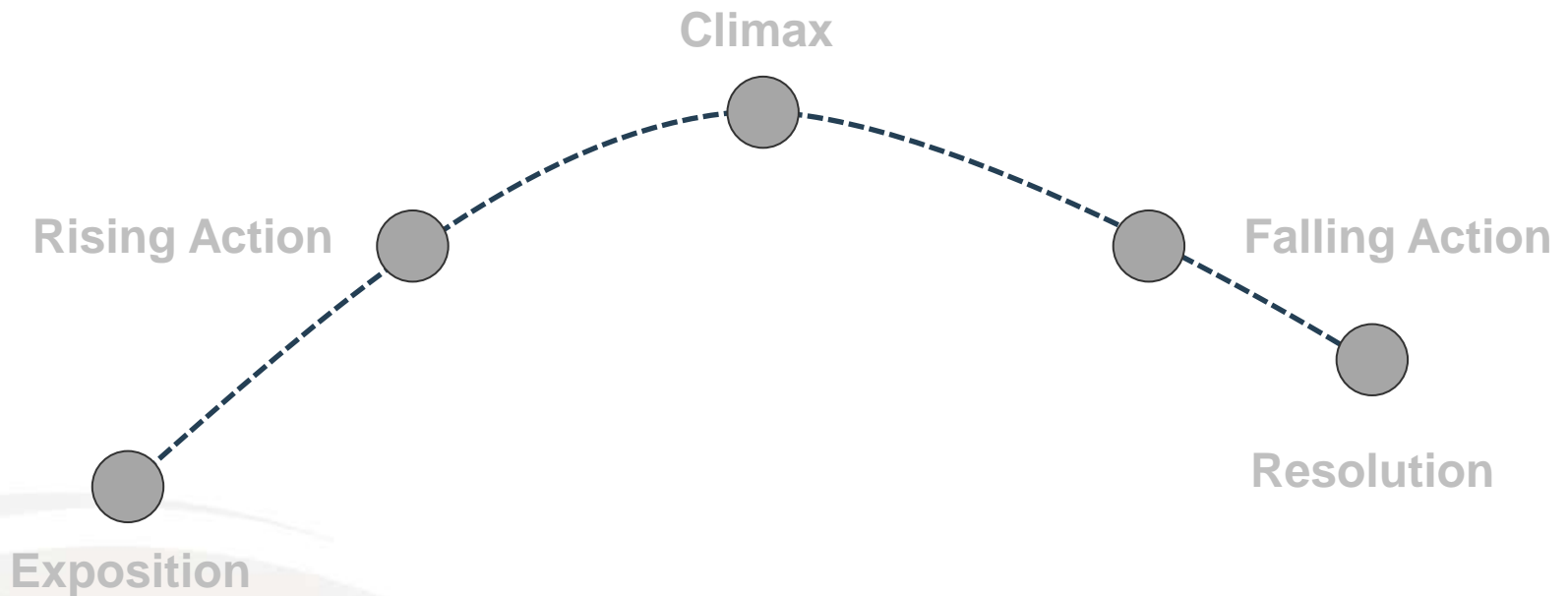


Amazon employees point to symbols of the company's frugality – a result of the founder's door-to-desk story.

# Stories engage people.

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**And, using a Story Arc, to outline exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and resolution, can make a story more engaging.**



“It seems like there may be a universal kind of story structure...”

– Dr. Paul Zak  
Professor of Economics, Psychology and Management  
Claremont Graduate University

# Foundations of Storytelling

In this section:

- Storytelling Basics
- The Story Arc
- Origins of Storytelling
- Organizational Storytelling
- Challenges

# What is storytelling?

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## In the words of storytelling experts...

“Think of a story as a sequence or pieces of information that we try to find relevance between...”

– *Robert Pratten, CEO, Conductr  
Transmedia Storyteller*



“It can be film, an expression like dancing; it can be poetry or music like rap music...”

– *Maria Grau Stenzel, Project Manager  
“Milli” at Honig Studios, Berlin*



“There shouldn’t be a definition of storytelling...”

– *Cornelia Funke, Author  
Inkheart and Mirrorworld*



## Storytelling consists of two main parts.

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**Understanding these parts allows us to analyze their relationships, dependencies and changes to make us better storytellers.**

STORY	+	TELLING
Ideas...		shared, rated and presented by the storyteller.
How can we comprise the structures, elements and concepts necessary to create a story?		How do we effectively use people, tools and channels to tell stories effectively?

# Origins of Storytelling

Storytelling began as an oral tradition. Literacy invoked a structural change.

Oral Era	17 <sup>th</sup> Century	18 <sup>th</sup> Century	19 <sup>th</sup> Century	20 <sup>th</sup> Century	Digital Era
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Odyssey, Iliad, <i>Canterbury Tales</i>	1 <sup>st</sup> Novel <i>Don Quixote</i>	1 <sup>st</sup> Translation of <i>Arabian Nights</i>	The Times, Harper's Weekly	The Twilight Zone	"The Beauty Inside" Intel & Toshiba

# Structural Changes

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**The arrival of stories with a clear start and finish...**



# Structural Changes

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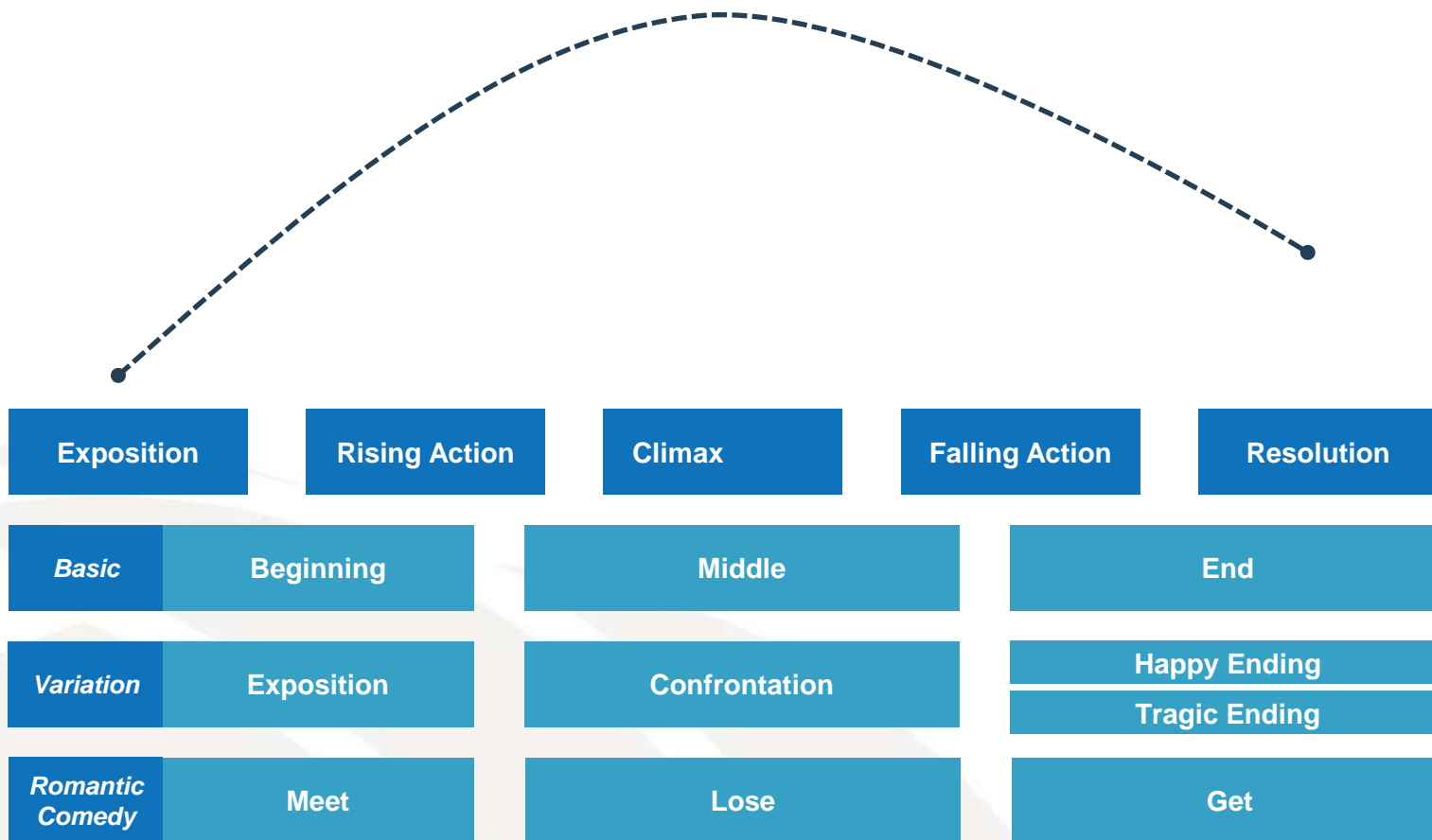
A move from epic storytelling to biographical storytelling...



# How do we tell stories?


The fundamental way that we tell stories has not changed.

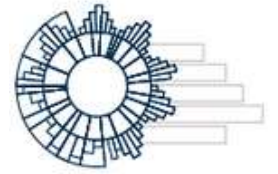
## The *Classic* Story Arc



# The Reality of Organizational Storytelling

In this section:

- The (Lost) Art of Storytelling?
  - Living, Messy Stories
  - The Challenge of Sustainability Storytelling
- 



# Is storytelling a lost art?

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## What scholars are writing:

“The art of storytelling no longer thrives...”

— *Walter Benjamin (1936)*

“Managers and corporate leaders reduce storytelling to tidy beginning, middle, and end narratives for the purposes of branding, speeches and sales.”

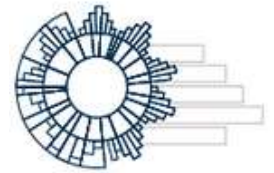
— *David M. Boje (2014)*

“We know that stories work...

but when we get in a business relationship, we forget this.”

— *Keith Quesenberry (2014)*

*John Hopkins University*



## Is storytelling a lost art?

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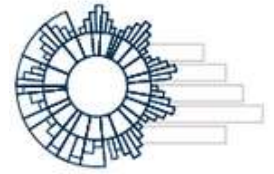
### **A leaked memo by political consultant Frank Luntz to Republican legislators demonstrates pragmatism, persuasion and reductionism.**

FIRST POINT: “Assure your audience that you are committed to ‘preserving and protecting’ the environment, but that ‘it can be done more wisely and effectively.’ Begin by emphasizing your commitment to ‘a balanced approach’ between our national energy needs and maintaining a clean, safe and healthy environment. *Tell a personal story from your own life that demonstrates an interest in a clean environment.* Since many Americans believe Republicans do not care about the environment, you will never convince people to accept your ideas until you confront this suspicion and put it to rest.”

SECOND POINT: “Talk in terms of the future, not the past or present. The environment is an area in which people expect progress, and when they do not see progress being made, they get frustrated.”

THIRD POINT: “The three words Americans are looking for in an environmental policy are ‘safer,’ ‘cleaner,’ and ‘healthier.’ Two words that summarize what Americans expect from regulators and agencies are ‘accountability’ and ‘responsibility’.”

*(Luntz 2002a: 108; italic, my emphasis)*



# Is storytelling a lost art?

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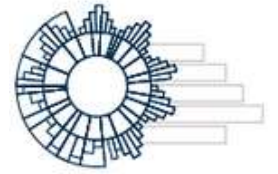
**Luntz went on to outline a polished *sound bite*.**

BEGINNING: “Demand for energy in the United States is outstripping supply, and will continue to grow as our 21st century high-tech economy expands. Higher energy costs are squeezing family budgets, undermining farms and small businesses, jeopardizing jobs, and threatening the long-term health of our economy.”

MIDDLE: “Our energy problems are largely the result of shortsighted domestic policies. The problem has been years in the making, and it will take years to solve. I am committed to the dependable, affordable and environmentally clean production of energy for America’s future. I am committed to an energy policy that enhances national security. I know we can do it. We have the best scientists, the best engineers and the best technicians in the world.”

END: “We will put them to work to develop a 21st century energy program that leads America toward energy self-sufficiency and is the envy of all other nations.”

*(Luntz 2002a: 109)*



# What does organization storytelling look like?

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**Most organizational storytelling is messy. Stories are rarely told in order from beginning, to middle, and then end.**



# Activity: Lasting Impressions

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**Think about a story that you have read, seen, played or experienced that has made an impression on you.**

## **1. What was it about?**

Retell by giving a short summary of what you remember of it.

## **2. Why did it leave an impression?**

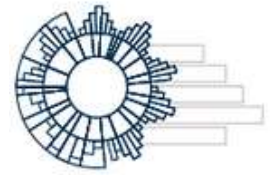
What was it that fascinated you most? It's characters? The plot? The location? Perhaps, the circumstances of how the story was told to you?



# Developing a Story

In this section:

- Story Broadcasting
- Storylistening
- Storytelling & Narrative
- Story Structure

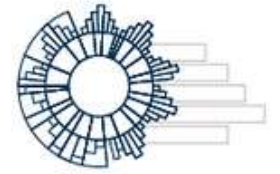


# Story Broadcasting

**Organizations often begin with *story broadcasting*, but story broadcasts may not take hold in your organization – or industry.**

- **Story Broadcasting** occurs when stories are pushed through corporate videos or blog posts.
- A broadcast story is more monologic, positioning the organization as the teller with employees as the passive audience.





# Storylistening

**Listen before you tell.**





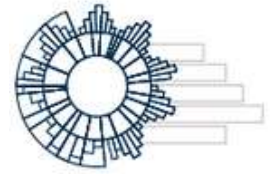
# Storylistening

**Listen your way to leadership.**



“A leader doesn’t start with storytelling. They start with storylistening.”

— *John Maeda, Design Partner, Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers*



# Storytelling

## Transition to storytelling by building internal capacity for dialogue and organic, informal sharing of stories.

Storytelling emerges through conversation.

- Invite senior leaders to tell sustainability stories at **training sessions** or at **fire-side chats** with employees.
- Start meetings with **employee anecdotes** about sustainability.
- Engage with employees or stakeholders on **social media** by congratulating them on a job well done.
- **Ask for and integrate input** from others to **foster a culture of teamwork**. Nudge people out of their comfort zones by asking for their ideas on projects to which they may not normally have an opportunity to provide input.



# Story vs. Plot

## How do we design a story?

STORY	VS.	PLOT
A casual, chronological series of events.		The order and duration of events as they are presented.



*Story*



*Plot*



# Story Design

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“An event comes along that we call **the inciting incident** – either by choice, accident or both. Life is thrown out of balance.”



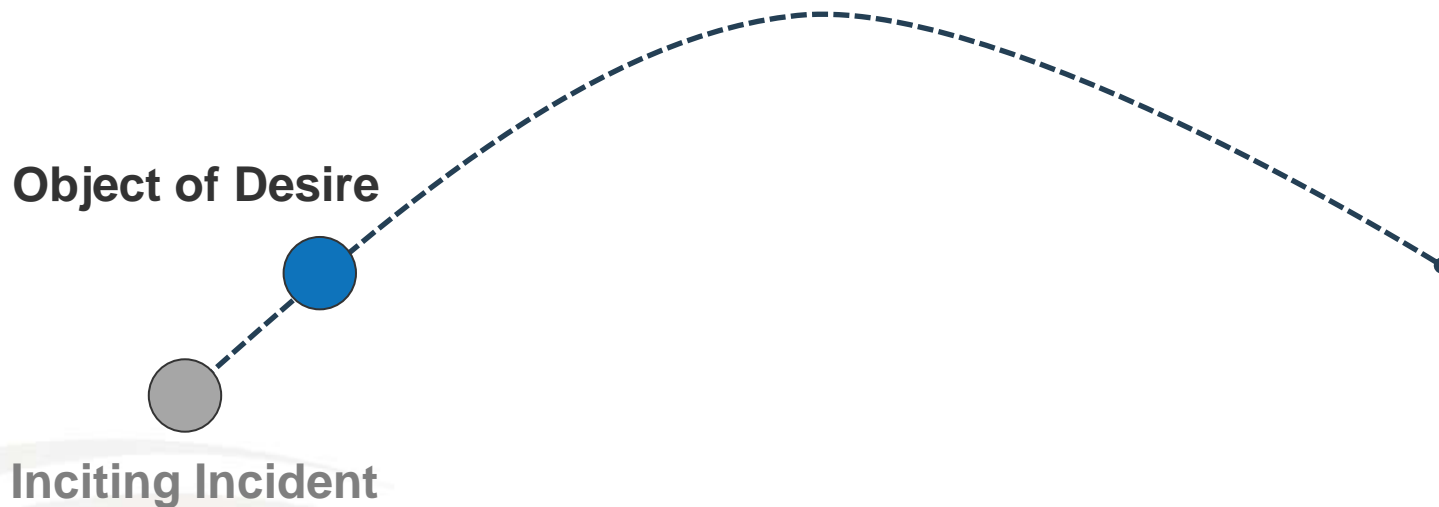
**Inciting Incident**

— Robert McKee, *Screenplay Advisor*, [storylink.com](http://storylink.com)

# Story Design

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“The imbalance arouses a desire to put life back on an even keel. To do that the protagonist conceives of something that they need – an **object of desire**.”



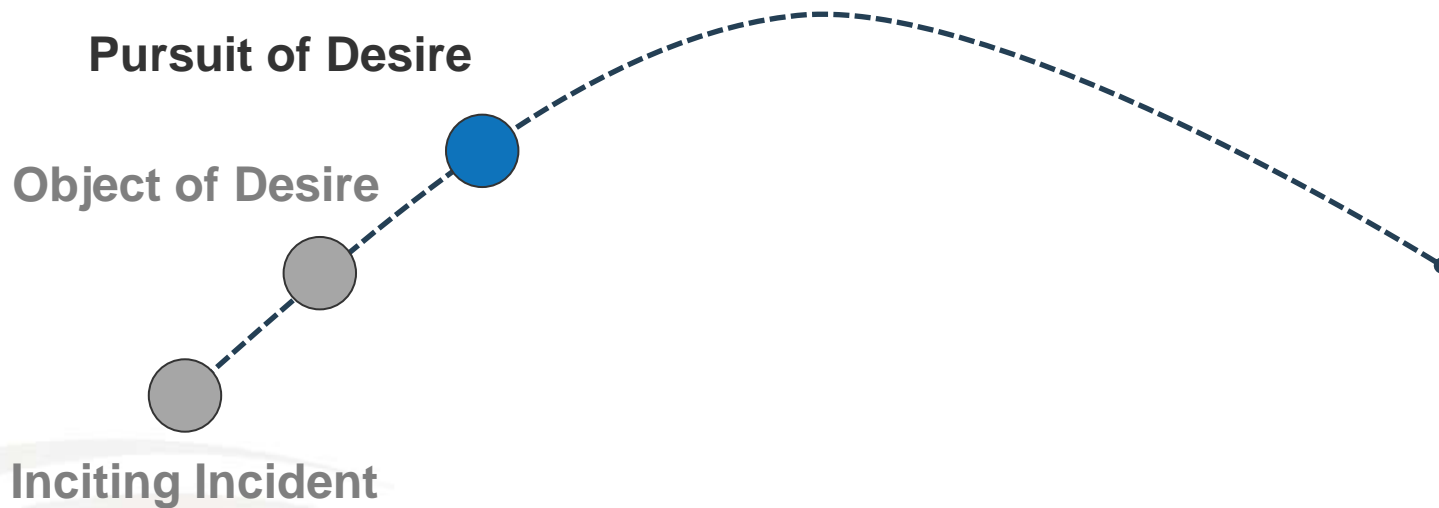
“This object of desire could be justice, it could be putting the bad guy in jail or, as in the film *About Schmidt*, it could be a reason for living.”

— Robert McKee, *Screenplay Advisor*, [storylink.com](http://storylink.com)

# Story Design

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“Whatever the object of desire, the protagonist embarks on a **pursuit of desire.**”

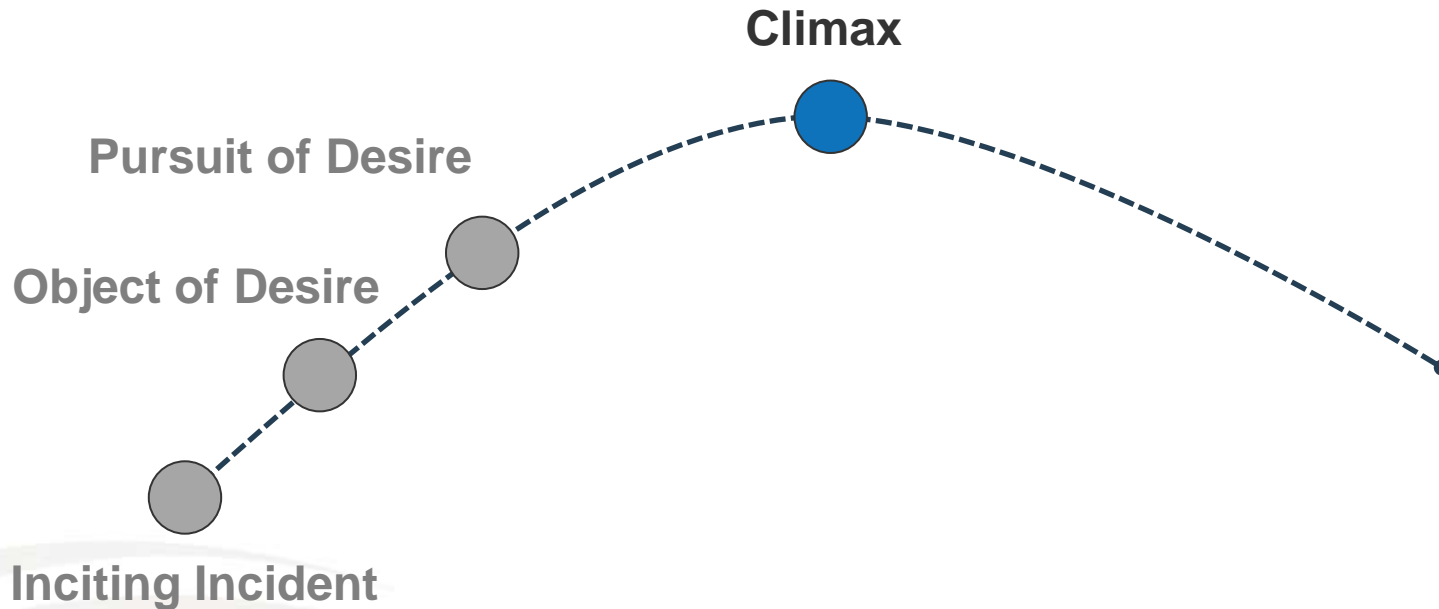


— Robert McKee, *Screenplay Advisor*, [storylink.com](http://storylink.com)

# Story Design

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“The design of the story is built from that inciting incident to the **climax**...”



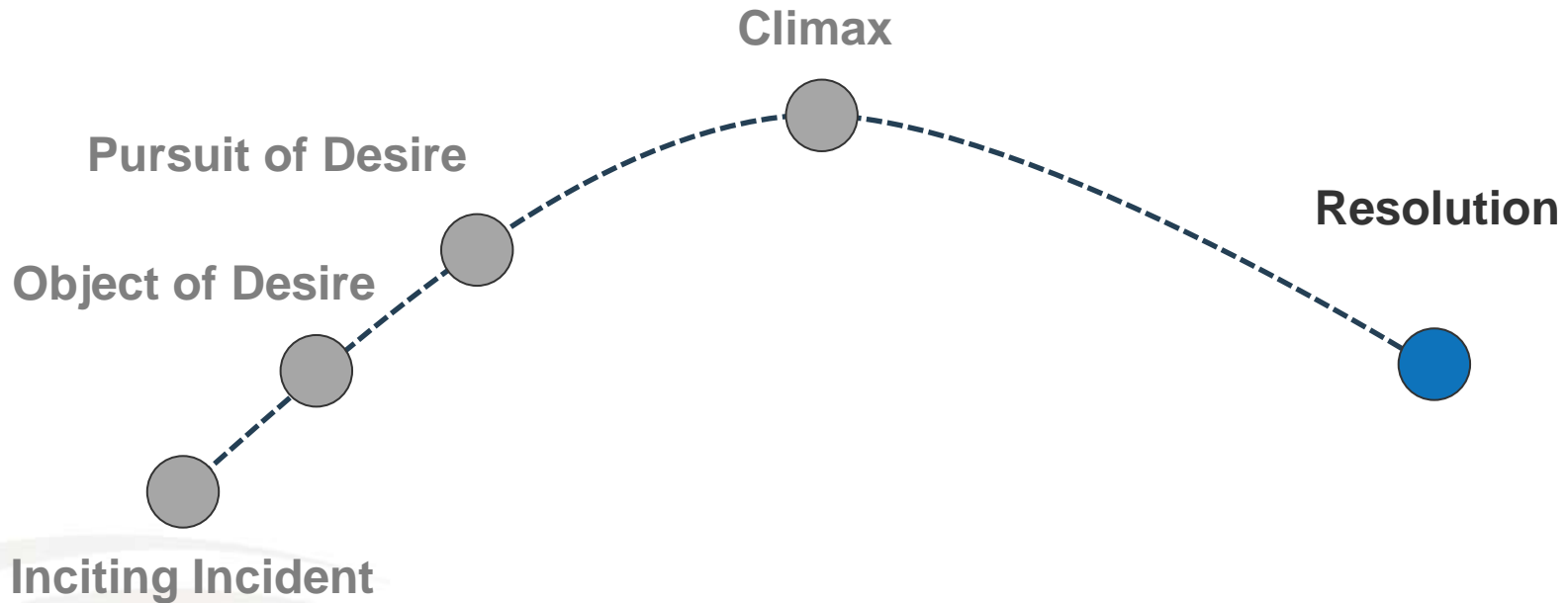
“Events must be shaped in a progressive way to hold the emotional and intellectual interest of the audience for two hours without interruption and deliver them a satisfying experience. Exactly how that works film to film, story to story is infinitely variable.”

— Robert McKee, *Screenplay Advisor*, [storylink.com](http://storylink.com)

# Story Design & *Good* Design

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“The task of a good design is to **hook**, **hold** and **pay off** the audience’s interest.”



“If that works then the story can be in one act or be in ten acts; it can be mono-plot or multi-plot in any genre.”

— Robert McKee, *Screenplay Advisor*, [storylink.com](http://storylink.com)

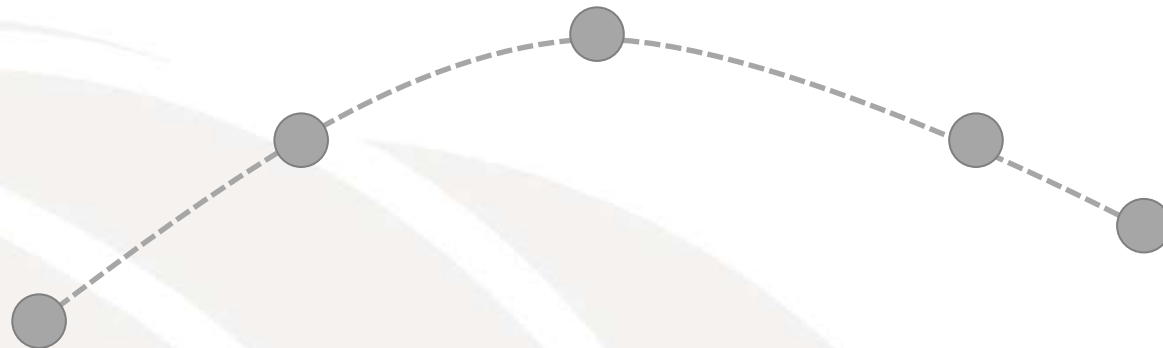
# Disclaimer

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Many creative works, like the film *Memento*, would not have been created if an artist, like Christopher Nolan, had only followed the rules of story design – or the story arc.



Yet, great artists, like Picasso or Dalí, learned how to master already existing rules and perfect classical works first, before becoming famous for their revolutionary and innovative creations.

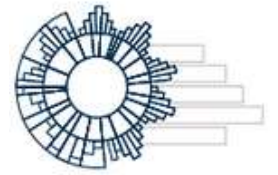


# Research-based Guidance

In this section:

- Consequences of Over-Polishing
- Choice vs. Outcome
- Challenge
- Relatability & Character
- The *Give-Away*
- Sharing Stories & Narrative Development



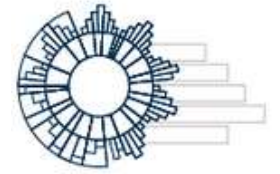


## Embrace challenge.

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**Challenges are inherent in good stories. Resist glossing over a sustainability challenge by making it seem easy or convenient.**





# Highlight the choice.

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**Choices are critical. Don't let them get silenced by outcomes.**





## Let the audience relate.

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**Characters in your stories need to be relatable. Position your organization the facilitator, rather than the hero.**

Begin by considering these basic questions:

1. Who is he/she/it?
2. What does he/she/it want?
3. WHY?

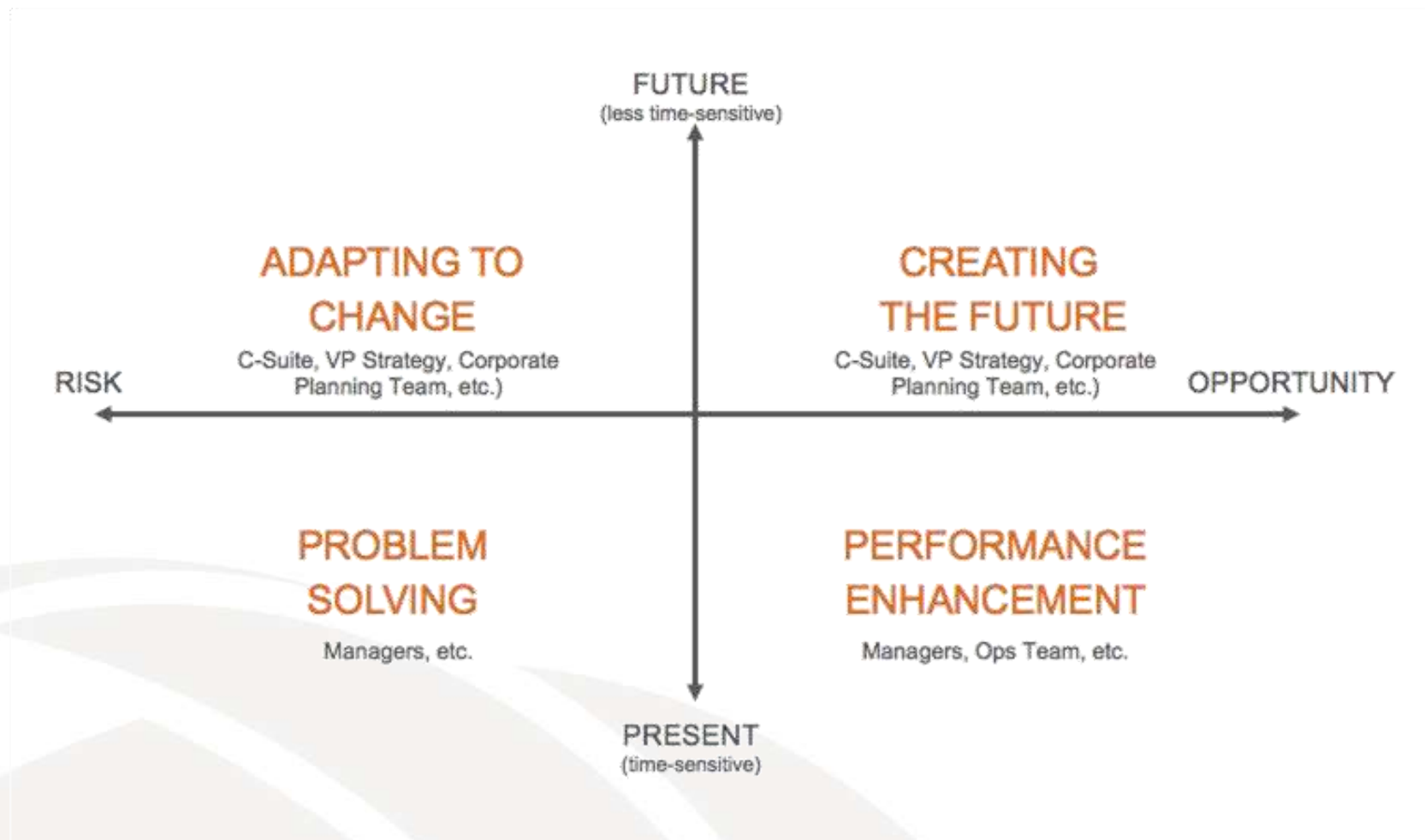
Some writers create the characters first; others create the plot first and then add the characters.

“When it comes to plotting, I never plot my whole book...  
I love to be surprised by my characters. I love to find the story.”



– Cornelia Funke, Author  
*‘Inkheart’ and ‘Mirrorworld’*

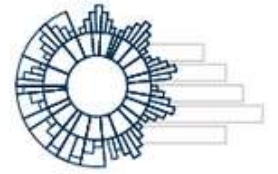
# Audience Domains



*Adapted from Suncor's "Global Opportunities and Risk Diagram" for Innovation*

‘We can listen like we could never listen before.’

– *Toby Barlow, Chief Creative Officer, Team Detroit*



## Resist the temptation to *wrap up*.

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### **Spoon-feeding your audience morals makes stories less sticky.**

“A storyteller will take pieces of information and then control the delivery of them.

**They will withhold some information...**

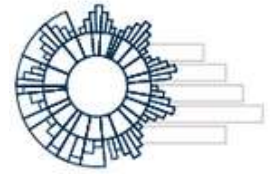
**They will reveal other pieces...**

The best storytellers understand what’s going on in people’s heads – what pieces the audience is trying to connect and what work the audience is doing so that everything is not just laid out as an easy kind of explanation...

**They leave these strategic gaps.**

So we are almost obliged or find ourselves diving deeper into the story, looking for relevance, even when there isn’t any.”


— Robert Pratten, CEO, Conducttr  
Transmedia Storyteller



# Foster the Sharing of Stories

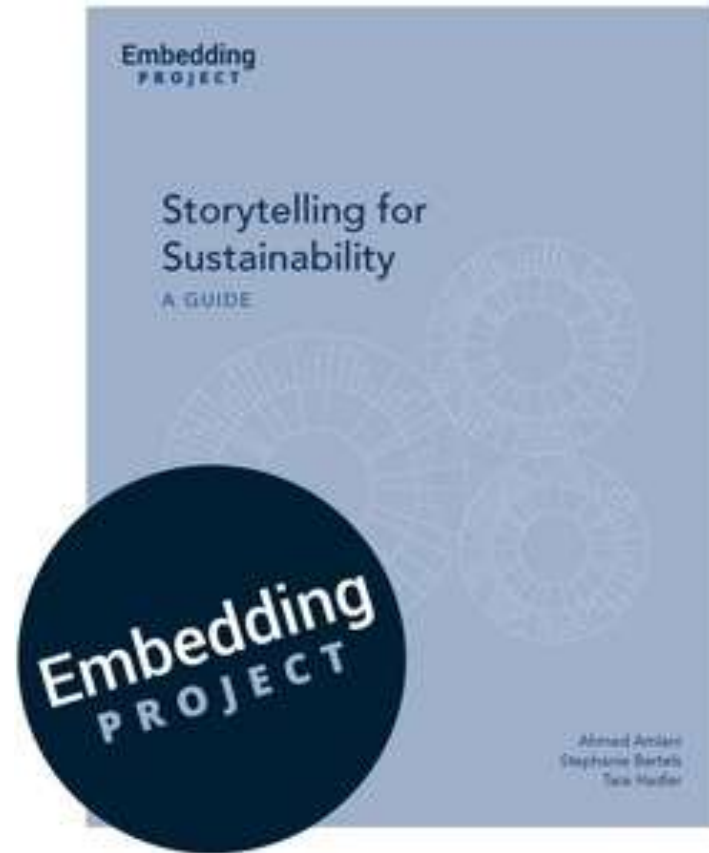
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**To develop a narrative, transition from capturing and broadcasting to facilitating conversation.**

- **Invest in Storytelling:** Help people develop their abilities to tell and interpret stories.
  - **Normalize Storytelling:** Accept and actively integrate stories in organizational processes and operations.
  - **Embrace Failure:** Surface stories of failure to learn from the past and resolve inconsistencies.
- 

Download this  
storytelling guide:

<https://goo.gl/t2wMnw>



# Storytelling in the *Digitonal Era*

In this section:

- Responding to Short Attention Spans
- Exploring, Experimenting with and Embracing Technology
- Discussion: Mobile, Measurement & More

Section Sources:

The Future of Storytelling | [futureofstorytelling.org](http://futureofstorytelling.org)

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCxANyRzvWuk9A5r71joGNNg>

"The Future of Storytelling" MOOC by the University of Applied Sciences Potsdam (FH Potsdam)

# Digital Storytelling

## Coining a new term & charting new territory.

Oral Era	17 <sup>th</sup> Century	18 <sup>th</sup> Century	19 <sup>th</sup> Century	20 <sup>th</sup> Century	Digital Era
Union of fiction & history	Fiction arrives	Individuals & Characters	Diversification & Democratization	Rediscovery of (oral) history (e.g. documentary)	Technology & Digitization
Lack of plot	Structured beginning & end	Physical need for book	Mass Production & Distribution	<i>Storyless</i> Literature	AAA Connectivity
Mnemonic, Serial Structures	Loss of mnemonic structure	Knowledge transfer	Spread of literacy	Integration with personality (50s)	←
Dramatization & Audience Involvement	Introversion & the <i>Invention</i> of the Writer		Censorship	Storytelling for information science	←
Odyssey, Iliad, <i>Canterbury Tales</i>	1 <sup>st</sup> Novel <i>Don Quixote</i>	1 <sup>st</sup> Translation of <i>Arabian Nights</i>	The Times, Harper's Weekly	The Twilight Zone	"The Beauty Inside" Intel & Toshiba

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# Understand the Short Attention Span

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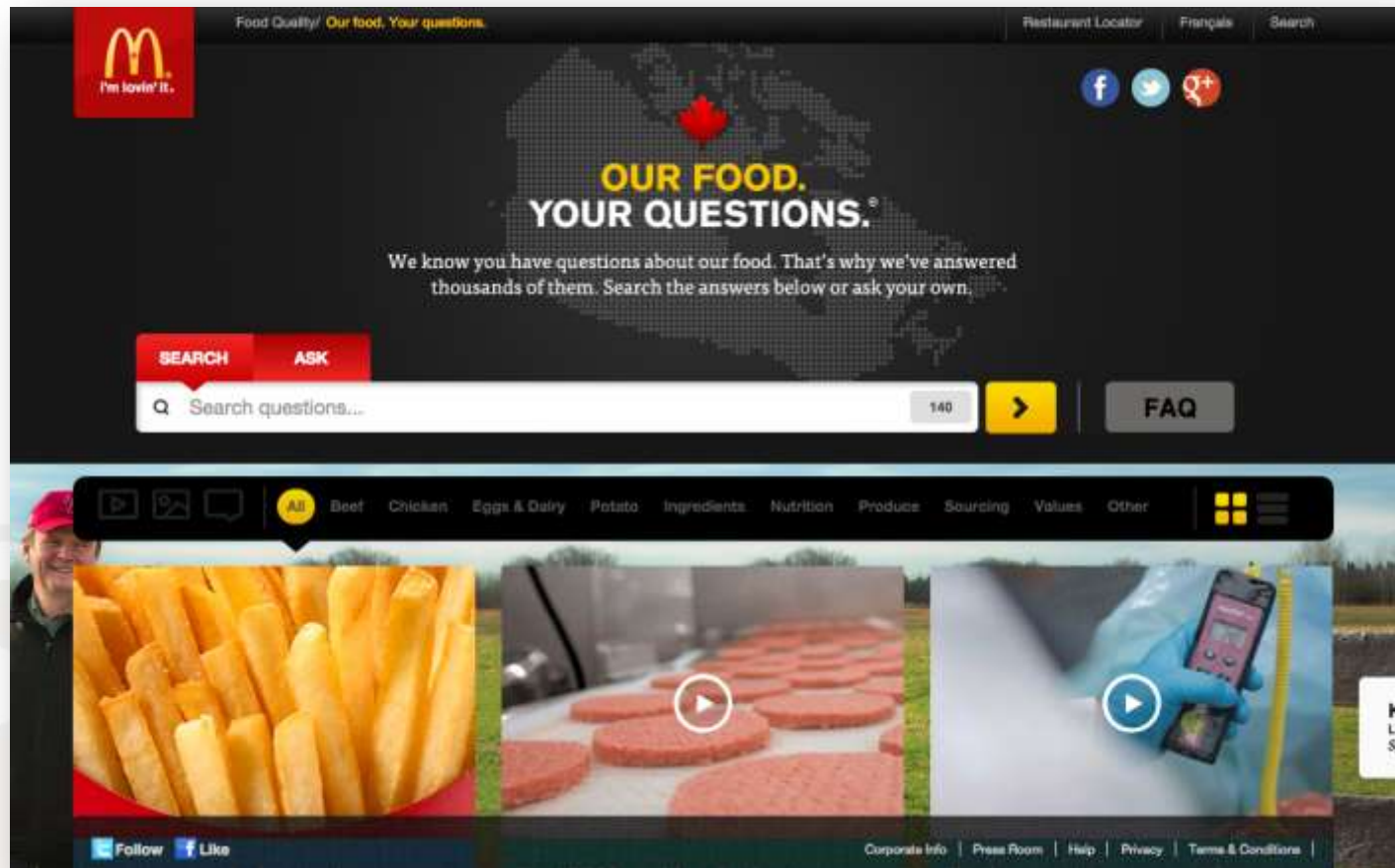
**There is a fear of the short attention span – but understanding this phenomenon will help minimize the fear.**

- YouTube was only founded in 2005.
- Consumer behaviour studies indicated that web video was watched only when it was short enough at **2 minutes per video**.
- Studies were based on video reception results from videos like cats doing funny stuff or people injuring themselves.
- Keep in mind that in 2008 (until 2011), uploaded YouTube videos were still limited to a total length of 15 minutes.
- **Restricting the length, strongly influences the narrative.**



# How can technology help engage audiences?

**Meet their challenge. Invite audience members to participate.**



# How can technology help engage audiences?

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**Invite your audience in – and even transfer ownership...**



# How can technology help engage audiences?

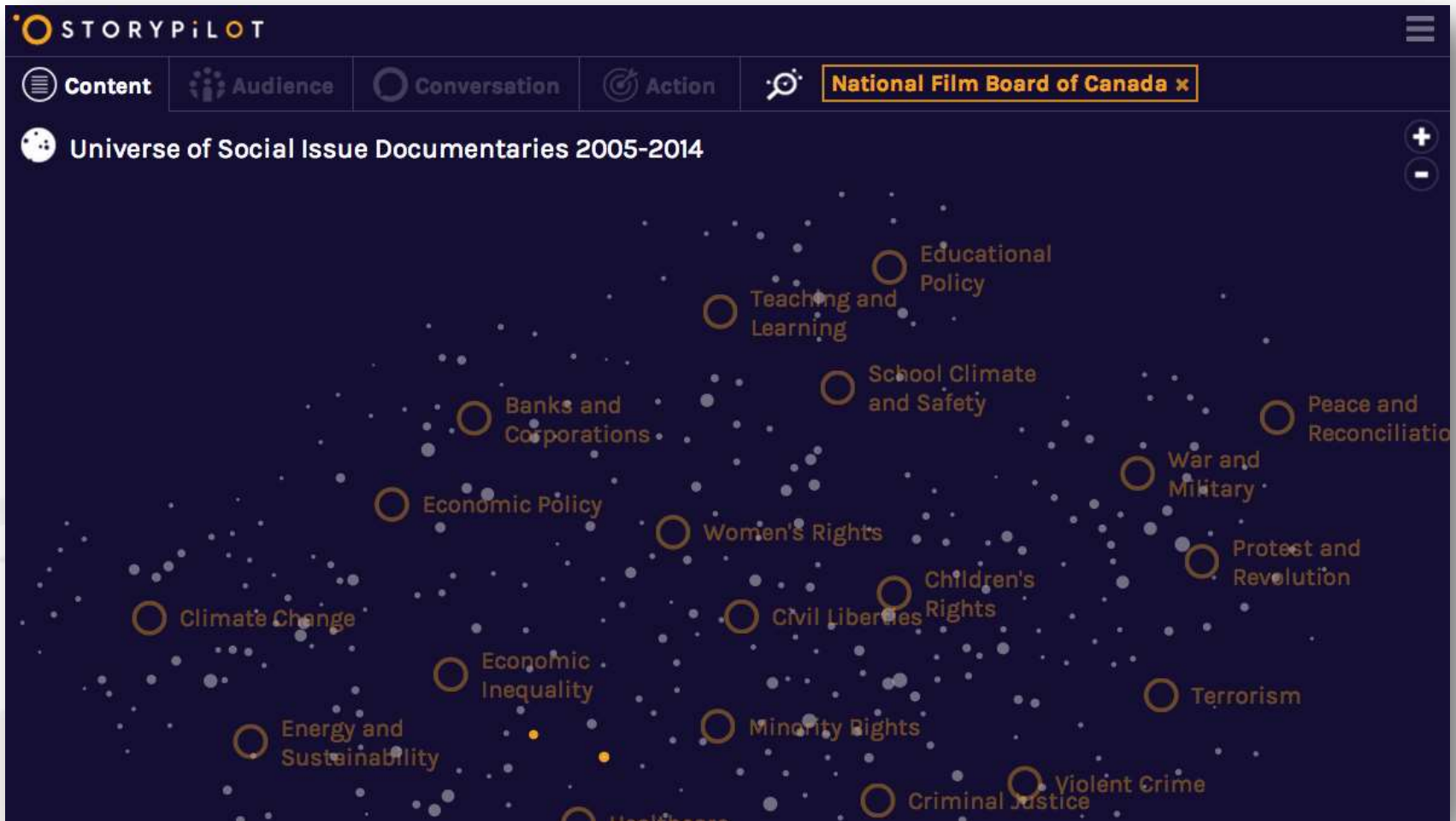
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**Invite them to be the hero, while you mentor them.**



# A New World of Demos & Discovery


## Harmony Institute's StoryPilot



# Activity: Audience Perspectives

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**Consider the challenges and choices facing your target audience, and how your organization might facilitate their journey.**

1. What challenges does your audience face?
  2. In what ways can your target audience respond?
  3. Which character are they in your story?
  4. How can your organization might facilitate their journey?
- 

# What does storytelling mean for your industry?

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## **You have the opportunity to tell the story of your industry.**

- Use the tools and rules of storytelling to tell stories more effectively.
  - Practice storytelling.
  - Ask for feedback.
  - Raise your own awareness by listening to related stories and conversation around you.
  - Experiment with and embrace technology to bring people into your stories.
  - Experiment with and embrace technology to measure the effectiveness of your stories.
  - Understand how our stories fit into a larger narrative.
- 

# Thank you!

I welcome your feedback to help me improve future presentations:  
[thadler@nbs.net](mailto:thadler@nbs.net) | @TaraHadler

For sustainability resources, visit [nbs.net](https://nbs.net)

Feeling adventurous? Check out our beta: [beta.nbs.net](https://beta.nbs.net)