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Section 4 Storytelling

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Storytelling skills

Personal storytelling: connecting the dots (reflection), curation, interpretation & perspective.

Opportunities for storytelling

Storytelling doesn't come naturally to all learners, however it is a skill that contributes to social learning. Understanding the different ways of telling stories and putting in place opportunities for learners to explore these throughout the learning programme will increase learners' comfort level in storytelling.

Planning storytelling opportunities both personal and co-created narratives are integral to Scaffolded Social Learning. Personal stories are opportunities to interpret information, share a perspective, bring in information that supports or challenges the formal story. Opportunities for co-created stories involve the chance to critique, challenge, support, sense make, and compare with each other's personal stories or the formal story.

CO-CREATION OPPORTUNITY

What additional storytelling tools do you use?

Personal storytelling tools:

Working Out Loud (WOL)
Observable work + Narrating your work
You can choose the method to share your work with others, whether in a blog, video or audio format. The idea is to share your ideas, challenges you encounter and experiments you try. It's similar to a portfolio, however the idea is to encourage others to give feedback or ask questions, helping you to advance and forming relationships along the way.

"Working Out Loud … [is] a practice that combines conventional wisdom about relationships with modern ways to reach and engage people. Instead of networking to get something, you lead with generosity, investing in relationships that give you access to other people, knowledge, and possibilities. Part of the process is learning ways to make your work visible and frame it as a contribution. Combined, these elements form a powerful approach to work and life."

Stepper, J. (2017). About Working Out Loud.
http://bit.ly/WorkingOutLoud1 An overview of the 'Working Out Loud' technique, used to promote collaboration

Bloomfire. (2016). Working Out Loud: What it is, How to Start.
http://bit.ly/WorkingOutLoud2 A rationalle for introducing 'Working Out Loud' in organisations
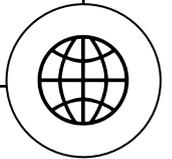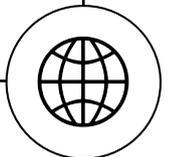
Personal reflection blog
Learners can use personal blogs to reflect on curated information, 'connecting the dots' between different articles, videos or podcasts that they have read and heard. Curation is the act of finding and sharing information about a particular topic. Borrowed from museums, a curator will put different artefacts in context, collecting and reflecting on the link between them. A personal blog is a space where learners can share conclusions that they draw, what ideas or questions do these resources generate? What would they like to explore further?

Learngeek.co. (2017). My Top 10 Tools for Learning.
http://bit.ly/MyTop10Tools A selection of learning tools popular in 2017

Learning log/journal
The offline version of a personal blog, a learning log or journal is a personal record of learning, a tool for reflection and gathering information. Due to it's format, it is more difficult to share, and is more conducive to a personal reflection tool. However, it can form the basis for co-created stories of learning and understanding. For example, learners can be invited to share a reflection or information from their learning log in a smaller group and together learners co-create a story of learning from the programme.

Co-creative storytelling tools:

Working Out Loud circles

Based on WOL, these circles add a collaborative dimension. On his website, John Stepper offers a free guide for facilitators looking to start a WOL circle. They are a way to bring people together around a common way of working, building trust and community among smaller groups. Visit the website for more information and ideas on how you can use these circles in your social learning programme.

> **Working Out Loud. (2017). Working Out Loud Circles.**
>
> http://bit.ly/WorkingOutLoudCircles A step by step guide to implement 'Working Out Loud Circles' in a community
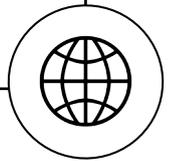
Newsletter

A newsletter can be an on or offline way to share personal stories and storytellers' interpretations. For example, asking learners to contribute a short reflection or learning on each day of a workshop to be collected and shared back to the group is effective as a record of learning and to see how understanding is evolving as the workshop progresses. Learners may also share how they feel, from nervous or confused to excited and curious, making the newsletter effective as a temperature taking tool. Articles can be read and studied together, to provide a basis for further discussion and the newsletters collected for future learning programmes.

Collective 'hack' session

Collective hacks are a way of synchronously collaborating to create a shared set of ideas. For example, as learning designer you might open a wiki with your own ideas about the rules of a learning community. You could then schedule a time when everyone in the learning community has access to the wiki at the same time and 'co-write' the rules, writing and editing each other's words for a specific amount of time and then reviewing the ideas together to validate the result. Check agreement for each rule: is it realistic, does everyone believe it reflects the communities values? This is a way to surface ways of thinking in a low consequence way, that produces a timely starting point to that the community can revisit and revise periodically.

Collaborative case study

A collaborative case study is based on participatory research methodology, where volunteers gather information by learning and practicing the skills of information gathering in their context. In a Scaffolded Social Learning programme, the collaborative case study might be the outcome that can be fed back to serve as an example for future iterations of the programme. For example, learners identify a gap in examples about a topic under study. They gather information to fill that gap from their context, along the way learning to conduct interviews and/or make observations. They may then communicate their interviews and observations to the group for feedback, in small groups draw conclusions from the shared stories and create a story that the learning community identifies with. These co-created stories contribute to a knowledge base about a specific topic.

Critical friendship

'A critical friend is someone who is encouraging and supportive, but who also provides honest and often candid feedback that may be uncomfortable or difficult to hear. In short, a critical friend is someone who agrees to speak truthfully, but constructively, about weaknesses, problems, and emotionally charged issues.'

Pieratt, J. (2015). Critical Friends: Building A Culture of Collaboration Between Teachers.
http://bit.ly/CriticalFriends An introduction to the 'Critical Friend' method of working out load, and useful resources on the topic

The Social Age Journal. (2017). The Social Age Journal.
http://bit.ly/TheSocialAgeJournal A collaborative online and printed journal on the topic of the 'Social Age', created by an open community
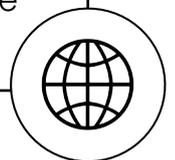
Storytelling Support

The learning community's level of energy and engagement needs to be supported at the beginning of the Learning Journey, when learners are new to the community space and finding their feet. Once the rules of engagement are understood, learners will engage in opportunities for storytelling.

1. Plan how your storytellers will support all levels of the community
Your Running Order should cover key points of the Learning Journey and its' support. Within the Running Order, schedule time for storytellers to engage with and support individual learners. Include detailed briefing notes that communicate when and how to respond to wrong stories or lack of participation. You should clearly identify an assessment rubric, including actions to take in week one, in week two, and so forth. What expectations will you have of learners' participation? Of the quality of their work? Of their knowledge? Expectations might increase over time if necessary, but they should follow a plan, for consistency of response.

2. Ensure highly engaged learners can emerge as storytellers or social leaders.
When learners are invested and engaged in a topic, their enthusiasm and presence can be recognised and rewarded with opportunities to work more closely with formal storytellers, for example, to help co-create a community narrative. Develop opportunities for learners who are engaged storytellers and mechanisms of recognition and reward. Effort here will contribute to a high functioning learning community.

3. Create a safe space for authentic storytelling.
How can stories contribute to safe spaces, and safe spaces impact stories told? Authenticity is the quality that allows a story to be heard. In a learning community, a story's impact is more widely felt when the storyteller is trusted and their description of experience genuine. Within social communities, highly authentic stories tend to be amplified further and trusted more strongly, therefore more likely to result in knowledge transfer, further reflection and localisation. However, opening up space for learners to be vulnerable carries responsibility. While vulnerability is an indicator that the learning community is considered safe, ensuring that those stories are shared for a purpose and treated with respect is important to preserving trust in the community. Ensure that when you ask for stories, there is a reason for them that contributes to the Learner Journey and how you and/or your support roles will respond.
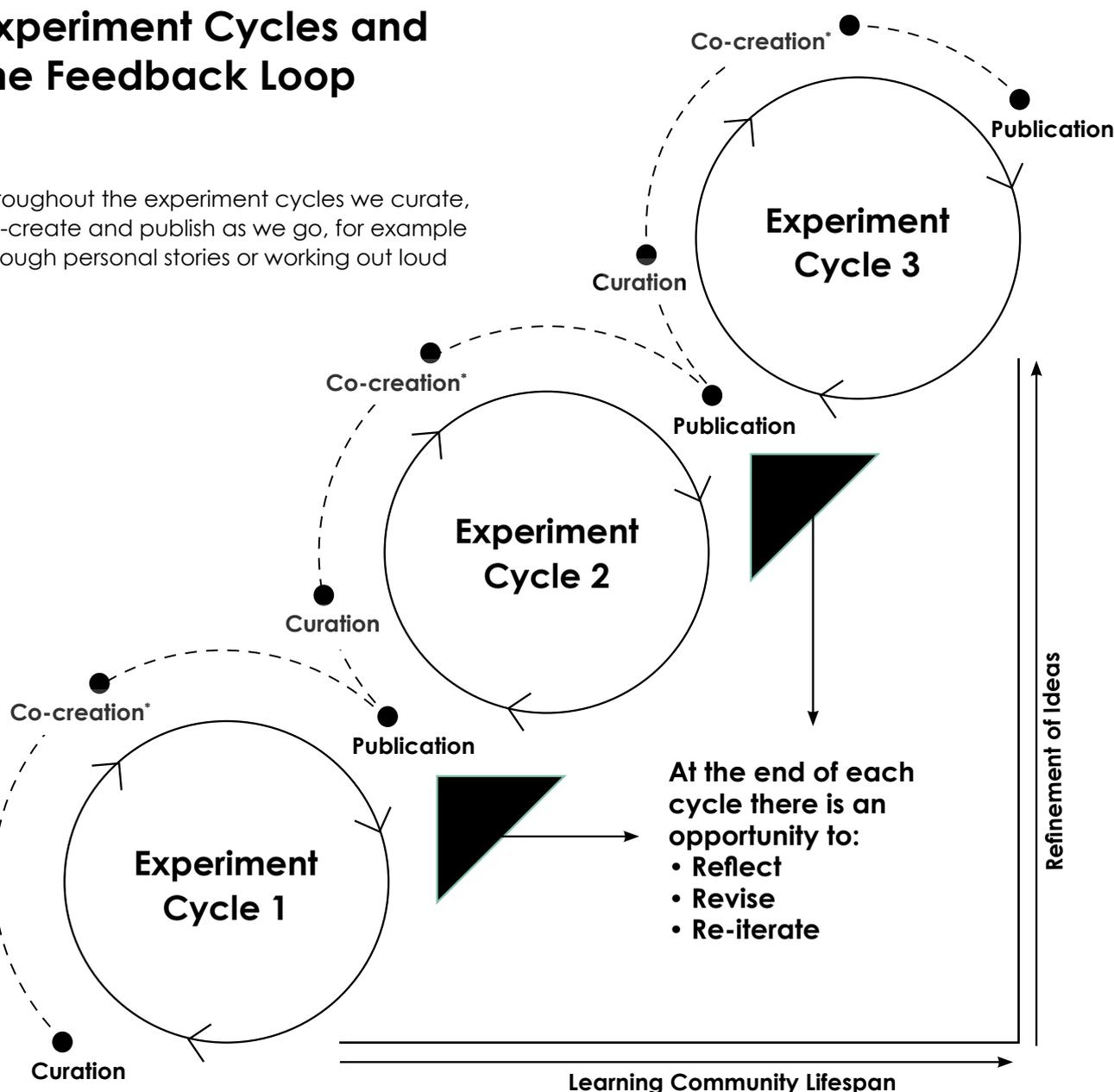
4. Respond appropriately to stories that are 'wrong'
In addition to appropriate When there is opportunity for people to give their view on something that the organisation knows about, they may come back with the wrong answer: depending on how you have structured the learning, we may have to respond to the stories. It comes down to whether we are looking for engagement, adherence, or exploration. If we want adherence and compliance that we need to respond to wrong stories. If we are looking for engagement, these wrong stories may simply be the locally held understanding of that area. If we are looking for innovation and capability, we simply may not know if a story is wrong or not: we will be looking to hear every view as we build a tacit understanding and access the unheard wisdom of the community.

Tuning in to local knowledge

The key to social learning is recognising and learning from local tacit knowledge. Building capacity to tell stories encourages learners to share stories so others may learn from their experience, creating a feedback loop. Personal and co-created stories can be collected, with permission, to contribute to a knowledge base about the learning programme topic; this can in turn become a resource for future programmes to learn from and build on. Part of a Scaffolded Social Learning programme is a programme outcome that can contribute to the formal story.

Experiment Cycles and the Feedback Loop

Throughout the experiment cycles we curate, co-create and publish as we go, for example through personal stories or working out loud

Co-creation*

Publication

Experiment Cycle 3

Curation

Co-creation*

Publication

Experiment Cycle 2

Curation

Co-creation*

Publication

Experiment Cycle 1

Curation

At the end of each cycle there is an opportunity to:
• **Reflect**
• **Revise**
• **Re-iterate**

Refinement of Ideas

Learning Community Lifespan

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How will personal stories be shared?
How will learners refine stories?
What opportunities will learners have to co-create the community story?
How will you obtain permission to share stories outside the learning community?