

# 8 Communication for Sustainability

## Lesson 03: Narratives & Storytelling

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## Where are we?

Episode 8.1: Key concepts of communication

Episode 8.2: Framing

**Episode 8.3: Narratives & Storytelling**

Episode 8.4: Cultures of Sustainability



## Learning outcomes

### Learning outcome 1:

**Describe** the diverse nature of contemporary practices of sustainability communication on an individual, organizational and societal level, the relationship of strategic communication practices to other public communication practices, the role of stakeholders and publics and the communication practitioners in and outside of organizations (corporate, NGO, political and educational institutions etc.)

### Learning outcome 2:

**Develop** comprehensive and well-founded knowledge in sustainability communication as field of study, an understanding of how other disciplines relate to the field and an international perspective on the field.

### Learning outcome 3:

**Understand** the key elements of communication theories, strategies and tactics, and, thus, the character and operationalization of best practice sustainability communication planning frameworks.

### Learning outcome 4:

**Advance** your understanding of social and civic responsibility and develop an appreciation of the philosophical and social context of sustainability communication. Advance your knowledge and respect of ethics and ethical standards in relation to communication of, about and for sustainability.

### Learning outcome 5:

**Anticipate and Interpret** current issues and challenges of a world in transformation and social change. Develop a deep understanding of and skills to create change, develop advocacy, leadership and authorship in and for sustainability communication.



# Overview

- A. Sense- and meaningmaking
- B. Stories and narratives
- C. Sustainability stories / communication *for* sustainability



## A. Sense- and meaningmaking



**Constructivist perspective on communication** (Schoeneborn, 2011; Putnam & Nicotera, 2008; Taylor & Van Every, 2011)

- Communication is conceptualized as constructing the “social” (like organizations)
- Decision making is conceived as sensemaking
- Key role of “the narrative” (Weick, 1995; Mumby, 1993)
- Whenever we communicate, we organize



# Conversations, Narratives, Framing



## Sensemaking

- sense making = “enactment of the social world, constituting it through text and verbal descriptions that are communicated to and negotiated with others” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966)
- Conversation as “sensemaking in action” – sensemaking as “process of narrativization” (narrative-making)
- Individual = man in action and practice; “a story-telling animal” (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 201)
- “Narratives provide members with accounts of the process of organizing” (Mumby, 1987, p. 113)



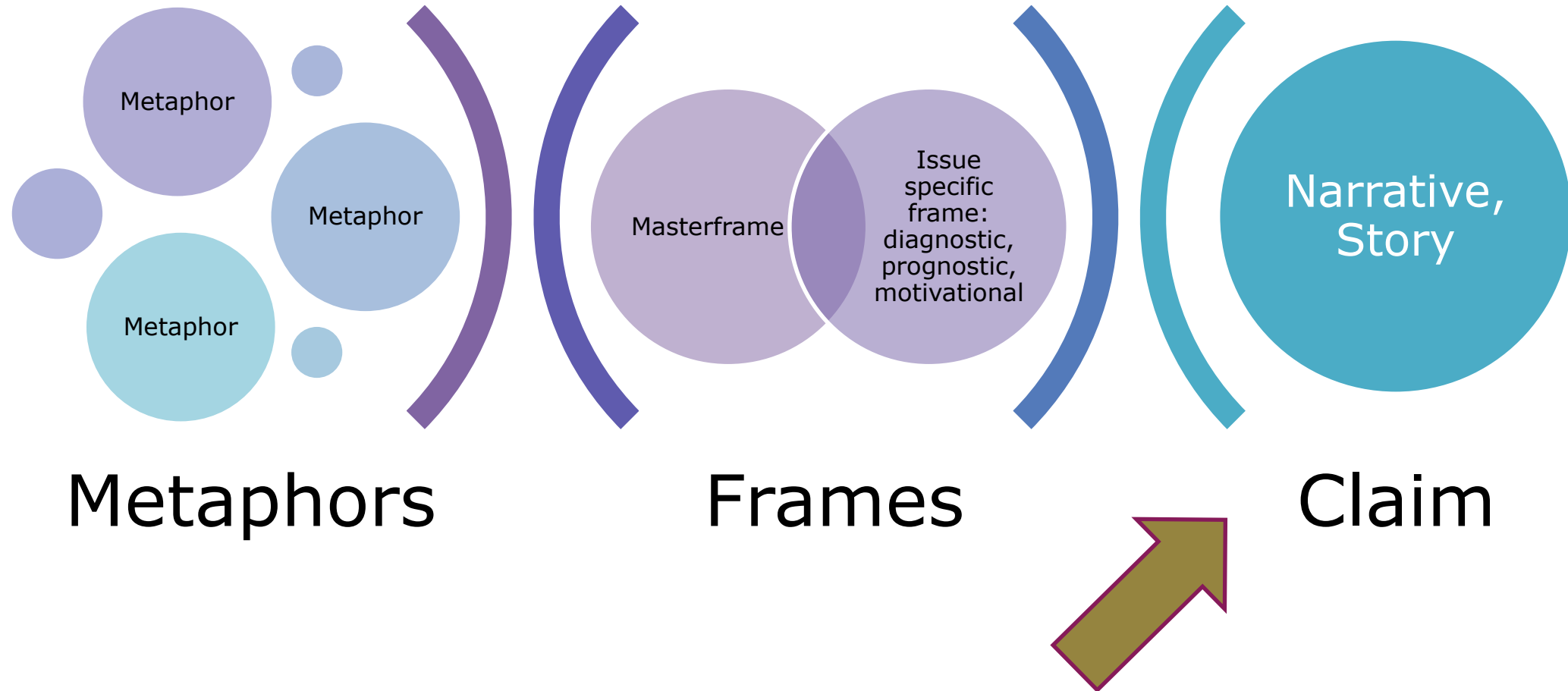
## A. Sense- and meaningmaking

### “Organizing patterns in communication”

- Communication: polyphone narrative character
- “what is necessary in sensemaking is a good **story**”
- “hidden patterns” in conversations – a pattern is the “organization” of a conversation (Taylor & Van Every, 2011, p. 21)



## A. Sense- and meaningmaking







## B. Stories and narratives

1. Story form

2. Story function

3. Story phenomenon



## B. Stories and narratives

### **Story form**

- theme,
  - setting,
  - plot,
  - characters/personalization,
  - problem & solution,
  - tonality;
- = the communicative structures and meaning



## B. Stories and narratives

### Story form

**Content analysis:**

**EMPLOTMENT**

**Problem definition**

Issue, situation, point of reference

**Causal analysis**

Reasoning, argumentation, responsibilities

**Moral evaluation**

Attributes, reflection

**Remedy promotion**

Action

**Formal analysis:**

Plot, personalization, dramaturgy, chronology, context, stylistics, tonality, modality

Sources:

- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Towards clarification of a fractured paradigm. *McQuail's reader in mass communication theory*, 390, 397.
- Hallahan, K. (1999). Seven models of framing: Implications for public relations. *Journal of public relations research*, 11(3), 205-242.





## B. Stories and narratives

### **Story function**

- expectations,
- lesson learned,
- morality;  
= the story's utility to thought, decisions, and action:  
-> a story helps to understand something useful; reminds us of something we need to know/use



## B. Stories and narratives

### **Story function**

- > key role of connections
- between characters and their plans, goals, and actions
- between cause and effect
- between the story and other stories that explore related issues and teach complementary lessons
- between situations in the story and analogous situations in our lives



## B. Stories and narratives

### **Story phenomena**

-> interpretation = the story's life history as it moves through time and society



## B. Stories and narratives

### Story phenomena

-> Story as packages of meaning:

- We use stories to build maps of the world we experience so we can make decisions about how to act
- The edges of experience are particularly important to map, at the edges exceptional things happen for which we may not be prepared
- We use stories to make decisions about what to believe in what we see and hear
- We judge a stories constancy, completeness, and veracity
- We use stories to playfully simulate possible outcomes before we commit to a course of action
- We use stories to *condense experience into packages that re-expand in the minds of listeners -> "Stories are like communicative suitcases: wrapping that protect experiences, feelings, and beliefs so that they can connect people through time and space"*



## B. Stories and narratives

### Summary

1. **Story form:** A story is structure; the section of events; composed into a strategic, sequence to arouse specific emotions
2. **Story function:** We can call prior experiences to mind to help us understand a current situation
3. **Story phenomenon:** If a story as been swimming in the vast ocean of human consciousness for decades or centuries or even millennia, it has earned its place

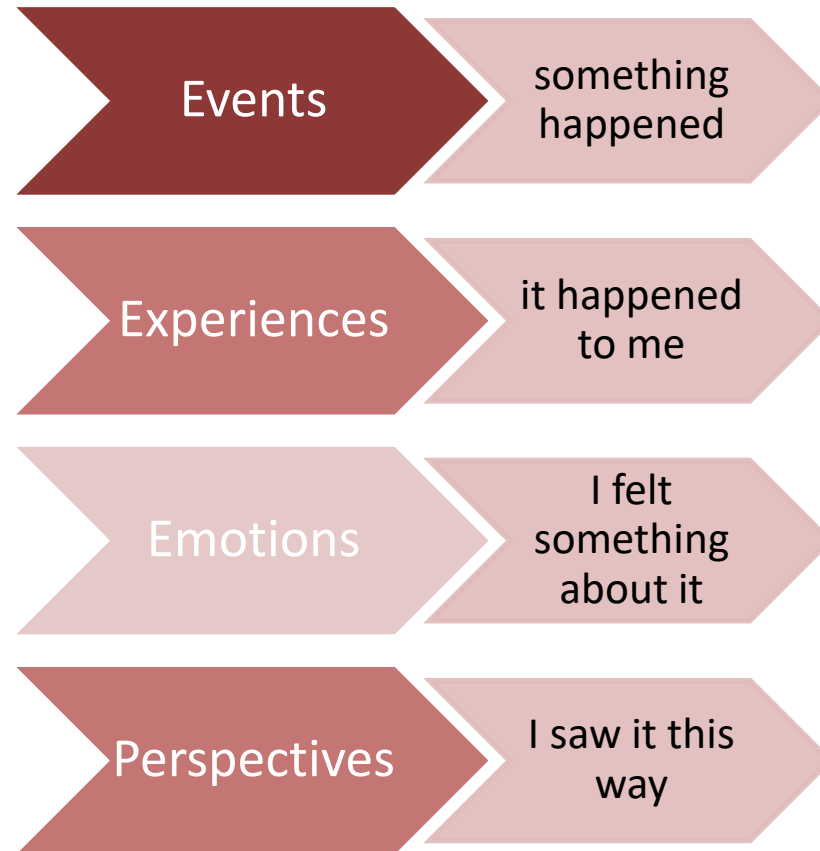
*A story is a recounting of events based on emotional experience from a certain perspective*





## B. Stories and narratives

### Storytelling





## B. Stories and narratives

### **Storytelling as method of analysis**

- focuses on the ways in which people make and use stories to interpret the world
- does NOT treat narratives as stories that transmit a set of facts about the world, and is not primarily interested in whether stories are true or not (so is closer to social constructionism than positivist approach)
- views narratives as social products that are produced by people in the context of specific social, historical and cultural locations
- views narratives as interpretive devices through which people represent themselves and their worlds to themselves and to others



## C. Sustainability Stories / Communication for S.

### **Narrative theory**

- people produce accounts of themselves that are „storied“ (ie. that are in the form of stories/narratives)
- the social world is itself „storied“ (ie. „public“ stories circulate in popular culture, providing means people can use to construct personal identities and personal narratives). Ricoeur argues that narrative is a key means through which people produced an identity.
- Some of most interview accounts are likely to be „storied“ (ie. in narrative form)
- Narratives link the past to the present
- But: there is no „unbiased“ account of the past



## Reflection

1. Why are we “storytelling animals” – where do you experience “storytelling” in your everyday life?
2. What are the stories that make / made you the person you are?
3. What are sustainability-related stories that come to your mind?
  - Who is telling these stories?
  - Where / in which communication channel?
4. What are the main narratives in which sustainability is talked about? What are “frames” used to create the narrative?
5. What are the issues and discourses, where certain frames are used predominantly?
6. What are other possible frames?