

## three-scene storyboarding as a tool for research

We need better to understand background cultural influences on the way people manage their careers. Methodologies which can report only what people immediately say, though fit for some purposes, show little of how talk is rooted in experience.

There are, in any event, methodological issues concerning questions which may - in various senses - be leading questions. What people say can be shaped by what seems immediately obvious, by what people have recently heard said, by what seems to them now to be expected, and by what needs saying in their most readily-defined interests.

In order to understand what is going on in the real-time momentum of career management we need to look deeper than what can be immediately found, and wider than what has been dislocated from its causes.

### methodology

Research which can do that includes ethnography, drawing on a combination of sustained observation and listening. It can, therefore, call upon more levels of disclosure. And that depth-and-range permits the identification of 'multiple correspondences' - giving it both good internal reliability and external validity on the recounting of experience (Bennett, *et al.*, 2010).

But such methods are time consuming, and require high levels of training. Bill Law's three-scene storyboarding\* is a narrative-based technique for setting down career-management experience. Its primary task is usefully to link reflective talk to recalled experience. It is a cost-effective way of achieving depth-and-range in understanding ways-of-seeing career management:

- > through recounted experience;
- > eliciting thought and feeling;
- > using words and images;
- > showing individual and social events; and
- > setting out bases for action.

People set all of this down in a filmic account of what is going on in their lives. They recall an episode in terms of the 'who?', 'what?', 'where?', 'how?', when?, and 'why?' of a narrative. In filmic terms this is 'characters', 'dialogue', 'location', 'plot', 'sequence' and 'motivation' - all key features in career-management (Law, 2008b).

Storyboarding was first developed to enable teachers and advisers to enable students and clients to manage career (Law, 2008a). The method calls on a wider range of thinking styles, and is accessible to more people, than conventional learning methods can accommodate.

The rationale draws on the neurology of learning (e.g. Damasio, 1999; Blakemore & Frith, 2005) as well as on cultural theory (e.g. McKee, 1999; Booker, 2004). It is proving sufficiently well-founded to serve also as a research tool.

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\* for an overview of three-scene storyboarding - [www.hihohiho.com/storyboarding/sboverview.pdf](http://www.hihohiho.com/storyboarding/sboverview.pdf)

## procedure

Storyboarding focuses on 'turning-points' - episodes in a life when a possible change-of-direction comes into view. It therefore asks people to recall a time when:

- > 'you make up your mind about what to do', or
- > 'you change your mind', or
- > 'you know you might change your mind - but don't'.

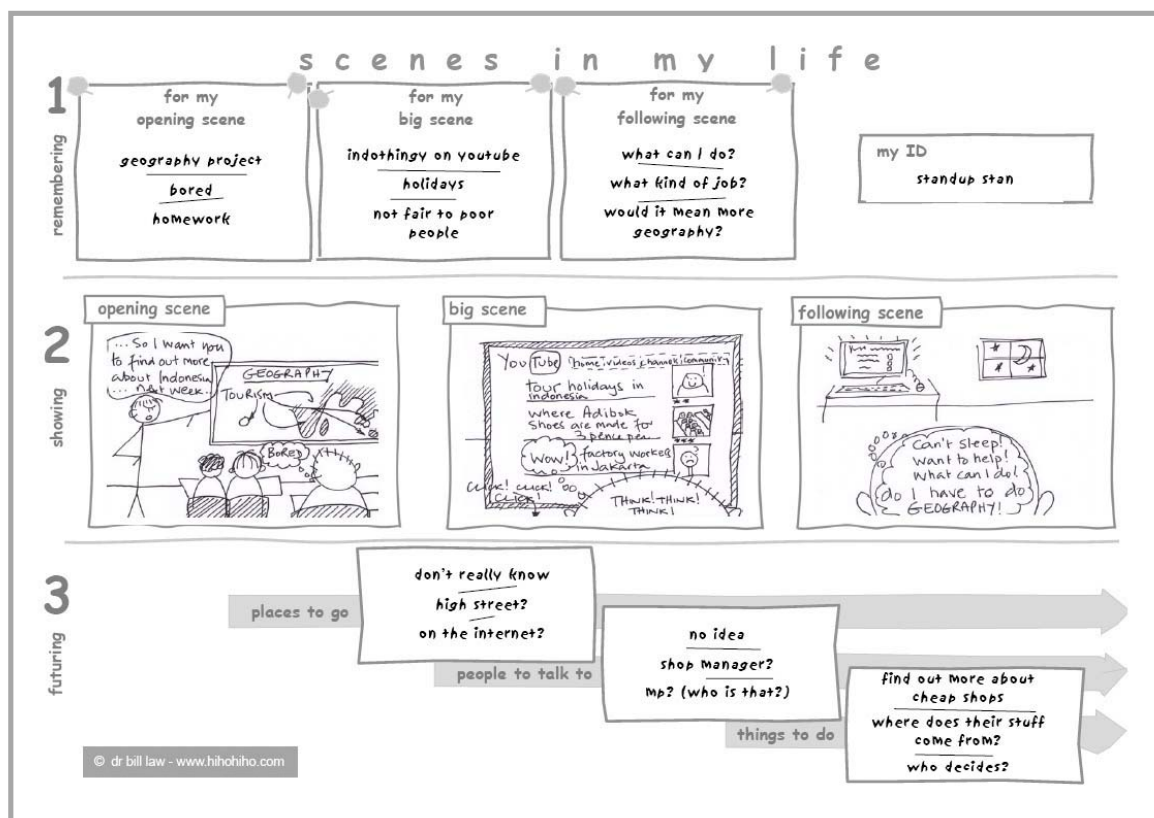
That experience becomes the middle scene in a three-scene episode. It is the 'big scene', and is preceded by an 'opening' scene - which portrays how things were before the turning-point - and is succeeded by a 'following' scene - which shows how things then are. The episode can be of participation in a programme - but it can be of any formal or informal events, in wider life, that the person takes to be significant.

Focus on a turning-point is useful because it seeks out emotional-and-social as well as rational and planful influences on career management. And this is important because it highlights anything that might bring readiness for a change-of-direction - a requirement for flexibility.

People work with a loose-and-inviting A3 paper-based format. Most people probably need to make more than one draft before getting it into an order that makes sense to them. The format has three areas, so that a single narrative is set down and reviewed in three stages:

- area 1. remembering** - recollections the person gathers, enabling the assembly of what might be jumbled memories into useful sequence;
- area 2. showing** - how the person wants to set down what needs to be understood by anybody who is going to understand why this person acts in this way;
- area 3. futuring** - what that episode, on reflection, means for new action to be taken, now and soon, by the person.

### format



## evidence

What is remembered, shown and anticipated is evidence. The filmic technique sets in motion a process of assembling the evidence into a layered, dynamic and significant narrative-over-time.

This is not a representation of some objective 'truth', but is 'personalised' - calling up a subjective 'voice'. Its 'truth' is in showing this way-of-seeing as a basis-for-action. It assembles recollections into a flowing sequence; which portrays people, locations and events in ways which are capable of evoking thoughts-and-feelings of both disappointment and hope (Thrift, 2008).

The whole process - from introduction to a completed version of the portrayal - might need less than ninety minutes with a group of six people.

Further evidence can be elicited from this basic process. It supports a questioning review of the portrayal with each person. It also supports a cross-comparing focus group with the six. The primary filmic task establishes for each person an untrammelled statement - countering the effects of leading questions and group compliance in subsequent enquiry.

A full output - including storyboards, review and focus - from a group of six might need less than eight hours of contact time - considerably less than an ethnography covering a similar range of events. Compacted configurations of storyboarding, review and focus group need not lead to disastrous loss of coverage.

## process, outcomes and ethics

In producing a storyboard, and taking part in review and focus, people are asked to work on:

- > sorting out the inevitable muddle and inescapable dynamics in their own lives;
- > facing up to the uncertainties that this brings;
- > opening-up their own questions - 'why this?', 'why then?', 'what now?';
- > recognising new possibilities - in encounters, locations and events;
- > wondering what might happen if they were to recount the story another way.

All of this calls up more than tick-box responses or pre-structured interview schedules will find. Such discursive disclosure is necessary to any useful understanding of what people think, feel and do about career:

- > a move already made;
- > a move in mind;
- > the influences of inner-life and other people;
- > options that are against-the-grain of family, friends and background expectations;
- > what people think important to say to friends and family about making their own move;
- > what they think important to say to recruitment people;
- > what these ways-of-seeing mean for future planning.

The process is designed to be helpful to participants. There may be change-of-mind - which then becomes part of the enquiry process.

All of this requires the disclosure of storyboards to the researcher - posing ethical issues. There are parallel issues in ethnography - except for our participants' production of disclosing documents. They need not show their storyboards to each other in the group - unless they agree to do so. But they may want, later on, to show them to other people. The sensible management of those uses needs to be discussed. The storyboarding overview (page 1, note) contains guidance on these matters.

## importance

Work at this breadth-and-depth matters most when home-and-neighbourhood influences suggest what seem like 'natural' moves - carrying people along in a way that may not be clearly brought into focus. It can take account of how people move-on in both rational and other-than-rational ways. Intuition, impulse, instinct, habit, encounter, luck and accident can all feature in storyboarding. Storyboarding can therefore bridge what other methods arbitrarily separate. It is capable of showing links...

- > thinking to feeling,
- > personal to social,
- > teaching to learning,
- > planning to impulse, and
- > learning to action.

Being able to locate such links is necessary to any understanding what is going on in the lives of the excluded, the disabled and the poor. It is also to appreciate how 'bright' people sometimes settle for 'dull' jobs, and how 'good' people somehow get caught up in 'bad' moves. We will reach no useful understanding of how to help in any of these situations until we appreciate, in their terms, how people see these things.

Our grasp of all this is a requirement for any hope of raising aspirations.

## selected references

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