



Words to Change the World: Narrative

Daniel Stanley Creative Director of Cohere and Founder
& CEO of the Future Narratives Lab

WHAT IT IS

One way power is exercised and maintained. Narratives define what is right and wrong, what is valued, what is acceptable and unacceptable, relevant or irrelevant in public discourse. ✓

A way of capturing these common sense cultural understandings (in order to change them). ✓

A format that can distill the essence of your position on an issue in narrative structure, making your communication more effective and strategic. ✓

An agreed agenda for how you want the world to be, as the basis for a diverse coalition. ✓

The starting point for creativity and designing individual messages that appeal to different audiences (while being consistent with your overall narrative). ✓

WHAT IT ISN'T

Just about stories or 'storytelling' - Narratives are the patterns that give common meaning to a variety of different stories and events. ✗

A magic bullet solution that will make people agree with your approach or argument. ✗

Finding a marginally better way of describing what your organisation does, without changing anything fundamental. ✗

Using emotive personal stories to convince people to buy, donate or support your project or cause. ✗

Likely to convince people to change their fundamental political views or values - but it can help them care more about some things than others. ✗

DOs

Be prepared to question your core assumptions about how the world works, and how people think and make decisions. ✓

Move quickly to the point where you can test your assumptions. ✓

Prepare to be challenged, to say things in ways that will feel unusual, incomplete, even uncomfortable. ✓

Understand that people have very different experiences, values and identities that will make what is innocuous to you off-putting to them. ✓

Look to involve people with different values, perspectives and political beliefs in your design process - if you want the results to have broad appeal. ✓

DON'Ts

Just come up with a neat new metaphor and expect it to spread by itself, or only publish pdf reports and expect that to make an impact. ✗

Spend most of your time on research and theory before getting to the design and testing phase. ✗

Think it's always about language, without focussing also on visual and other representations. ✗

Believe that culture and concepts can change everything - there are material realities and barriers. ✗

Undervalue expertise or expect the perfect narrative to emerge organically from a crowd of contributions. It probably would have already. ✗

STIRto New Economy
ACTION Programme
stirtoaction.com/workshops

CHEAT SHEET