

# Whose Stories Matter?

Using secondary analysis and meta-monitoring to explore power and values in the 'Most Significant Change' process

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# Overview



What is Most Significant Change?



How is the MSC process structured at DRL?



Purpose of this internal meta-research



Overview of secondary analysis and meta-monitoring in the MSC process



Demonstration of data collection and qualitative analysis (Nvivo & MS Office)



What are we learning?  
What are our next steps?

# Research Purpose

Why did we conduct this internal meta-research project?

# Research purpose



Understanding how the  
MSC process is  
conducted by grantees



Exploring whether DRL's  
values differ from those  
of our grantees



Exploring which  
outcomes are valued and  
who determines  
significance



Questioning how power arises  
when a donor organizes a  
story selection panel  
(challenging the status quo)

# What is Most Significant Change?

Davies, R. & Dart, J. (2005). The “Most Significant Change” (MSC) technique: A guide to its use. Retrieved from [www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.pdf](http://www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.pdf).

# Most Significant Change

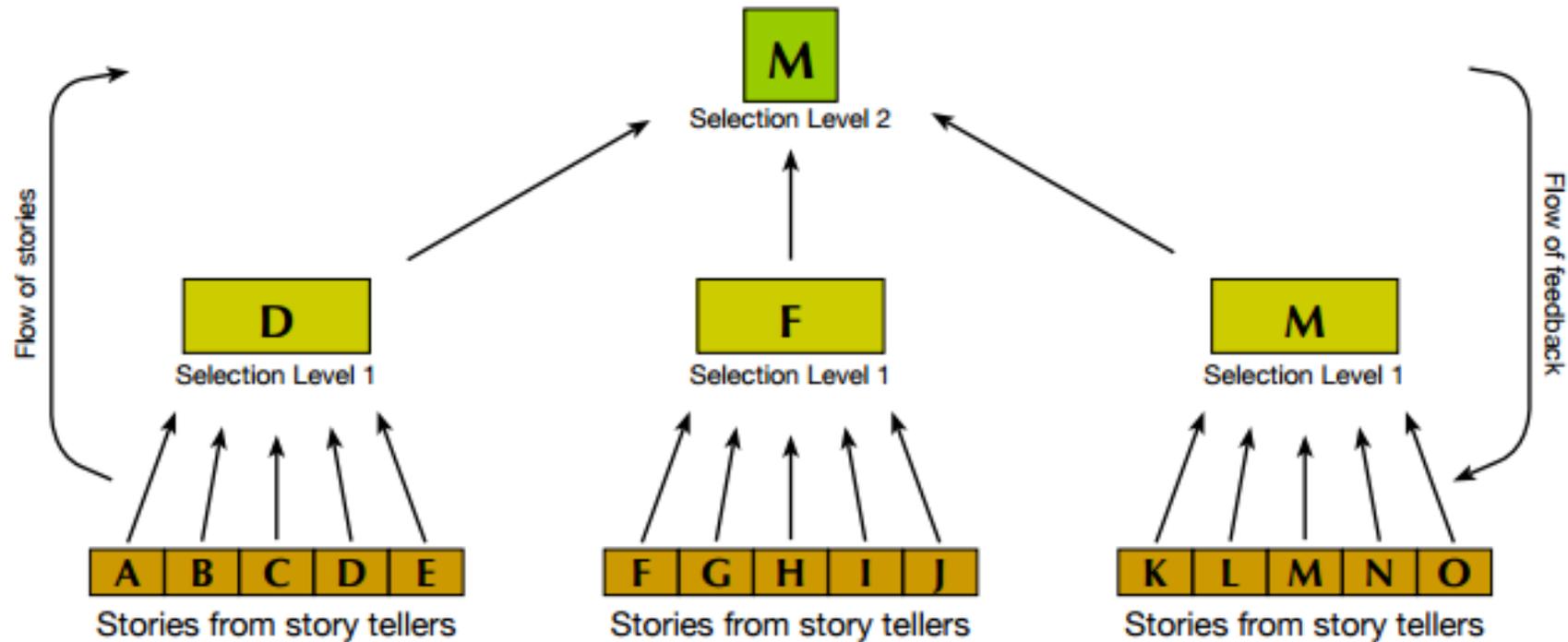
- ▶ Dialogical, story-telling approach to evaluation
- ▶ Analyzing individual, community, or institutional accounts of change
- ▶ Deciding which changes are most significant
- ▶ Clarifying values of stakeholders

The central  
question

What was the  
most significant  
change that  
took place for  
participants in  
the program?

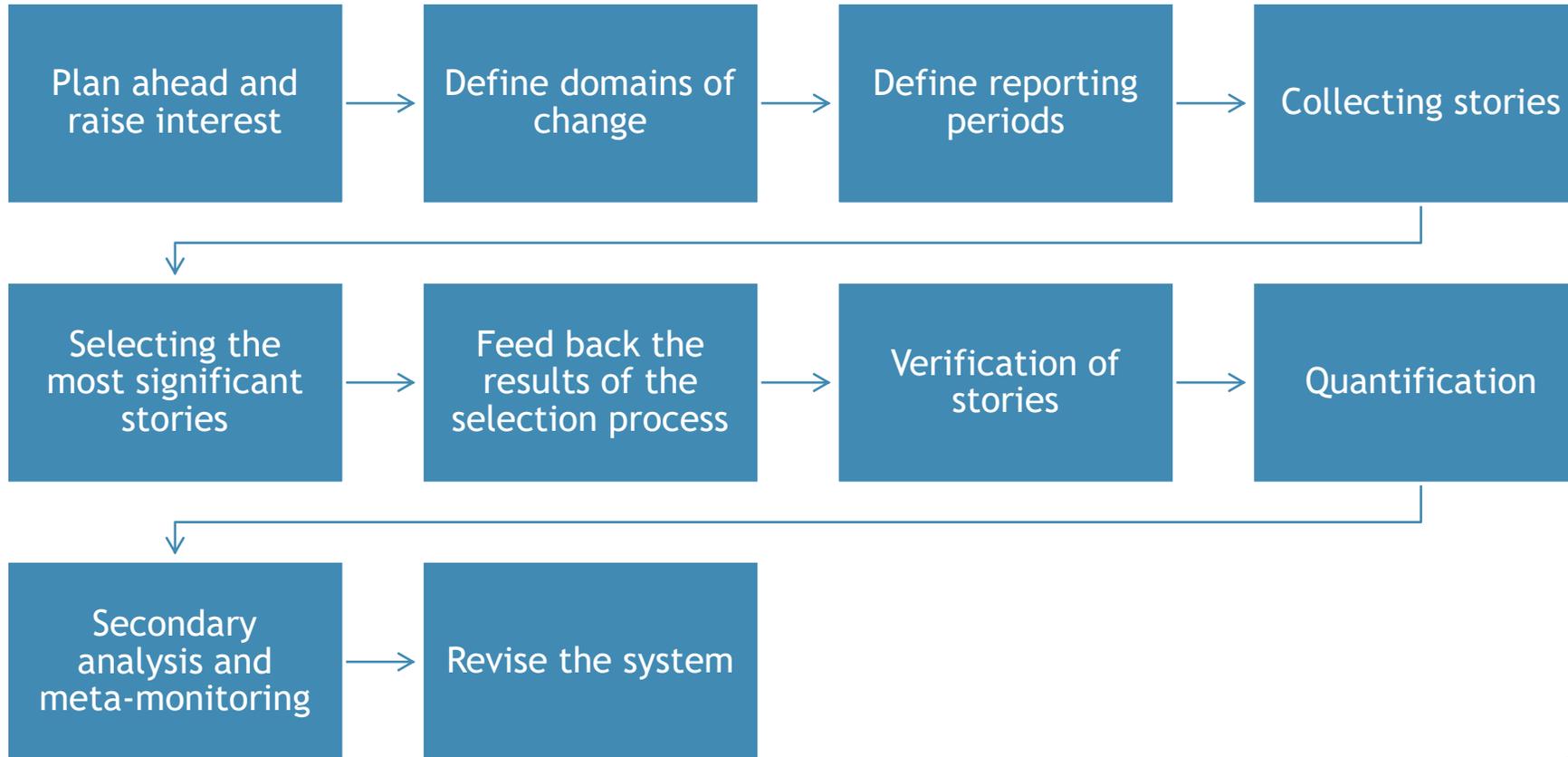
# Selecting and providing feedback

Figure 2. Flow of stories and feedback in MSC



Source: Davies, R. & Dart, J. (2005). The “Most Significant Change” (MSC) technique: A guide to its use.

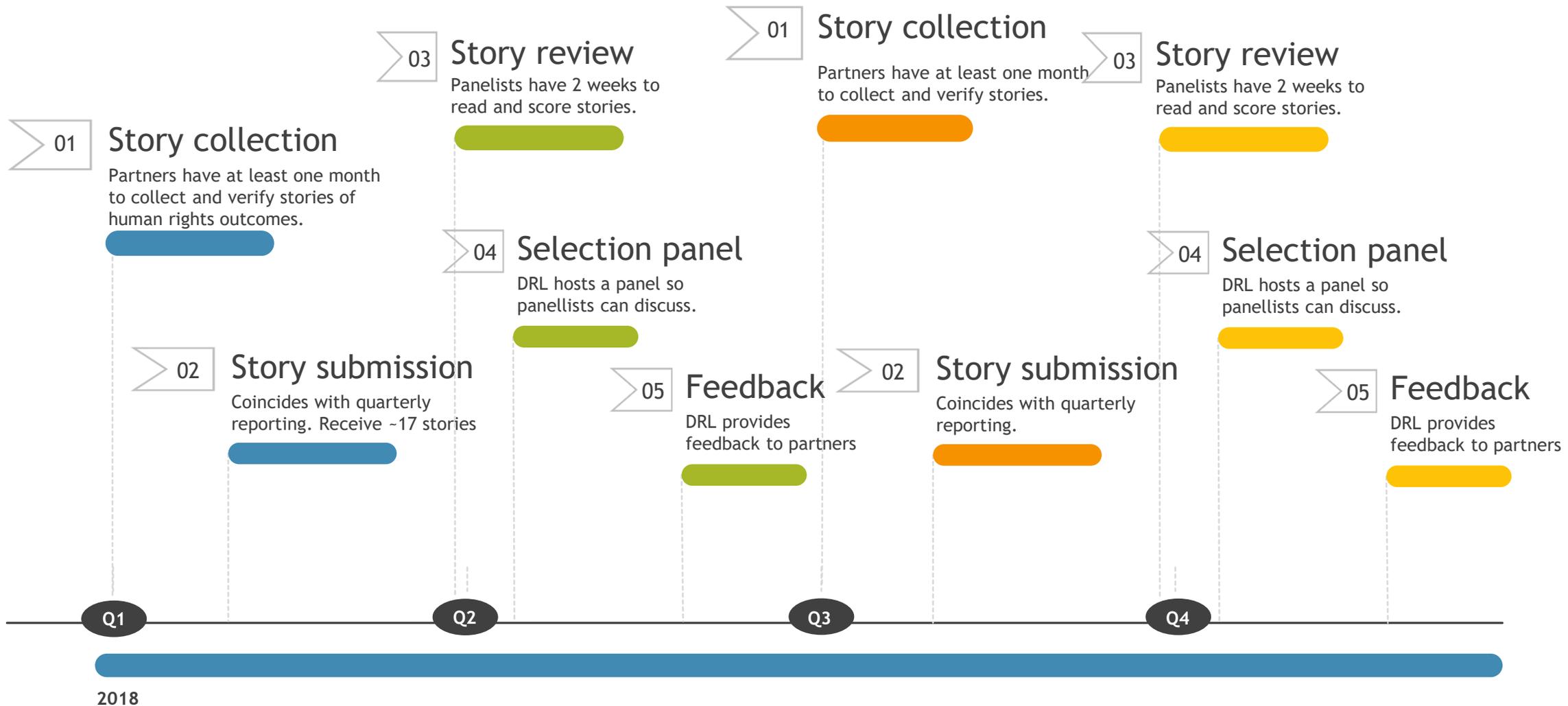
# Ten Steps for MSC



Source: Adapted from Davies, R. & Dart, J. (2005). The “Most Significant Change” (MSC) technique: A guide to its use.

How is the *MSC* process  
structured at DRL?

# As a funding agency, how do we structure MSC?



## Before panel

### 1. Panel preparation

1. **[Program Officer]** sends stories and instruction sheet to panelists, and provides submission deadline
2. **[Program Officer & M&E Specialist]** collect MSC scoresheets.
  - a. **[M&E Specialist]** compiles data in Excel.
3. **[M&E Specialist]** categorizes by domain.
  - a. Use domain list to select programs during panel process (see Day of panel, Step 4: [Panel process steps](#))
  - b. Bring Excel data table to panel.

## Day of panel

### 1. Introductions

### 2. Background information on MSC process [M&E Specialist]

In 2015-2106, this portfolio went through an evaluation and developed a framework that our grantees could report to, in order to more easily aggregate program results. Due to DRL/GP's structure as a grant-making organization, we manage an array of activities implemented by various implementing partners. While these organizations contribute to common outcomes and results mentioned in the framework, the activities themselves produce diverse outcomes which are difficult to capture in standard indicators. For this purpose, we also initiated a Most Significant Change process, which is an alternative monitoring approach.

Most Significant Change (MSC) is a participatory monitoring technique that is focused on documenting the qualitative impact of social change initiatives. MSC bridges monitoring and evaluation (M&E) as it provides ongoing feedback to program managers throughout the implementation period (monitoring), and provides outcome data that can be used to assess the impact of the project (evaluation).

During the MSC process, DRL/GP seeks to understand what beneficiaries and implementing partners consider as the most significant effect that a project may have had in the last six months. The focus of this MSC approach is to learn about events that have produced significant positive or negative results, so we can then replicate what went well and learn about areas for improvement.

This is our third round hosting an MSC panel. The first two included DRL/GP staff. For this round, we were interested in opening the process to policy and program counterparts in other offices. We'd also welcome your feedback on the process, as we're always interested in improving how this is conducted.

### 3. Information on the selection panel [M&E Specialist]

Before today's panel, we sent out the stories and a story scoresheet for your review. We've compiled all of the data you sent back to us, so we could more easily categorize the stories into five domains of change (we can think of these like units of analysis):

- Individual [story focuses on change for an individual]
- Community [focuses on change for an entire community]
- Organizational [focuses on change for local CSO(s)]
- Policy / institutions [focuses on policy change or institutions, usually at national or international level]

- Other area [focuses on internal changes for an implementing partner, not a change story, etc.]

We were also interested in understanding if you felt there was enough information in the story (level of detail) and your understanding of the level of change (from none to significant).

During today's panel, we'll select what we consider the most significant stories. [Program Officer] will provide some background information on each program, before we introduce the story, and then we'll all discuss our opinion of this story.

After we review the stories in each category, we'll vote on the most significant. We'll then take these and vote for the most significant change story overall.

### 4. Panel process steps

1. **[M&E Specialist]** picks a domain and then selects a program to start
2. **[Program Officer]** introduces program concept and background information
3. Ask participants about their opinion of each story (*note: they shouldn't select the most significant yet*)
  - o **[M&E Specialist or Program Specialist]** takes notes on participants' comments. This will be used during analysis.
  - o What is your opinion of this story?
4. After all opinions are noted, facilitator asks participants to choose the most significant by domain
  - o If there are differences, ask the participant(s) why they voted for this particular story
  - o Why did you choose this story over the others?
  - o (If disagreement on the most significant): Can you explain why you didn't choose this story?
  - o What do you think of the stories in general?
  - o Ask if any participants would like to change their vote, based on explanations
5. Move to the next domain. Repeat previous steps until all stories are reviewed for each domain.
6. Re-introduce most significant by domain and vote for most significant overall. Use questions from 4.4.
7. Once most significant stories are chosen, explain the after-panel process to participants.
  - o After the panel, we'll be providing feedback to grantees on the quality of the stories and how they ranked in terms of significance. This is usually done to improve the stories we receive.
  - o We'll also be taking all of the comments and feedback from today's panel and synthesizing that data to better understand the types of impact or change that we're interested in seeing (meta-analysis).

## After the panel

### 1. Share information

1. Prepare feedback for grantees (storytellers)
  - a. [Program Officer] sends constructive feedback on story quality to grantees
    - i. This is done to improve stories for the next reporting period
    - ii. **During implementer workshop, announce most significant?**
2. [Program Officer] shares information with DRL/GP management.
  - a. Data will have been compiled from panel process (below, done by M&E Specialist) to facilitate data sharing process with management.

### 2. Data preparation

3. Upload data (from panel) into qualitative data analysis platform (e.g. [Dedoose](#))
4. Group stories by domain, program theme, and type of change

### Background

DRL's Office of Global Programming (DRL/GP) is interested in capturing stories of significant change that may have resulted from funded projects in this region. In order to do so, we initiated a process called Most Significant Change (MSC) in 2016, which is a form of participatory monitoring and evaluation. During the MSC process, DRL/GP seeks to understand what beneficiaries and implementing partners consider as the most significant (positive or negative) effect that a project may have had in the last six months. The focus of this MSC approach is to learn about events that have produced significant positive or negative results, so we can then replicate what went well and learn about areas for improvement.

After collecting data, implementing partners write and submit 'significant change stories' to DRL. The purpose of this panel is to select the most significant (positive or negative) of these stories across a several domains.

### Reviewing stories

As part of the selection committee, please read each story and select what you would consider to be the most significant in each domain. The domains should be determined by the level of impact in each story:

- Individual [story focuses on change for an individual]
- Community [focuses on change for an entire community]
- Organizational [focuses on change for local CSO(s)]
- Policy / institutions [focuses on policy change or institutions, usually at national or international level]
- Other area [focuses on internal changes for an implementing partner, not a change story, etc.]

In the scoresheet (next page), choose the domain for each story by using the drop-down list in the table.

### Scoring stories

The following criteria will be used to determine scores for each story:

Level of detail	
1	Does not include enough information to assess what happened (if there was change, if change was significant or not, or if the project contributed to change).
2	Able to assess what happened, but additional information would be helpful (to determine if change was significant or not, or if the project contributed to change).
3	Includes sufficient information to judge what happened (that there was change, that change was significant or not, or that the project contributed to this change).

For each story, please provide comments in the scoresheet (next page), on the reason you chose this score.

Is the change significant?	
1	The story does not mention any change.
2	The story mentions a small change.
3	The story mentions a moderate change.
4	The story mentions a significant change.

For each story, please provide comments in the scoresheet (next page), on the reason you chose this score.

### During the panel

During the selection committee panel, panelists will be invited to provide their comments about each story. We will then vote on the most significant change story in each domain, after hearing comments from all panelists.

Panelists are provided guidance and a scoresheet

Does the level of detail affect whether a significant change is identified?

Do we value the good storytelling more than we value actual change?



Moderate a panel

Panelists discuss stories

Panelists discuss story scores

Clarify values about programming





# Secondary analysis and meta-monitoring

Step 9 in the MSC process (considered optional)

Reviewed themes across approximately 50 stories

Reviewed panelists' remarks across three story selection panels

# Methods and meta-research findings

Qualitative coding of MSC stories

Qualitative coding of panelist remarks

Interviews with partners (extreme case sampling)

# Coding stories submitted by partners

## Understanding themes across stories

01

Who is telling the story? Whose voice is included?

02

What is the reported change? Which stories matter?

03

If stories are mapped against theories of change, are partners reporting unanticipated or anticipated changes? Are stories positive or negative?

Beneficiary group

Civil Society Organization	Women	Ethnic minority	Professionals	Persons with disabili...	
	LGBTI		Journalists-Media	Youth	Religious figu...
			Workers		

Change									
Intermediary		Sharing materials	Spurring public discourse	Referral services		Legal win	Training ot...		
Communications uptake	Government interacti...			Medical	Ps...				
Improving organizational practices		Communication skills	Government action	Understanding rights		Digital securi...	Building inclu...		
Nurturing activists		Building coalitions		Social acceptance					
			Building relationships	Private sector support		High-le...	Establis...	Eliminat...	
Policy win		Banking		Damages paid					Crowdsourc...

# Coding panelists' remarks

## Understanding how stories are valued

01

What do panelists value within MSC stories?

02

How do panelists respond to stories?

03

How do panelists determine what is significant?

## Critical discourse analysis

“CDA often chooses the perspective of those who suffer and critically analyses the language use of those in power; those who are responsible for the existence of inequalities and who also have the means and the opportunity to improve conditions”

(Weiss & Wodak, 2003)

<b>Panelist 3 (Policy officer: does not directly manage program, but very familiar)</b>	<p><i>Would have been nice to have how this actually helped in refugee groups. Great example of capacity building, but what does that mean?</i></p> <p><i>Clearly they're doing great work. They just didn't tell you where it was after the training.</i></p>
<b>Moderator:</b>	<p><i>What drew you in about the story?</i></p>
<b>Panelist 3 (Policy officer: does not directly manage program, but very familiar)</b>	<p><i>I am always curious about what they are doing in [country]... and they had direct quotes.</i></p> <p><i>Main reason I gave it a 2 [RN: in reference to the score the panelist gave the story, in terms of its significance], and it could have been lower, was the high expectation that I have for the grantee.</i></p>

 **Dazzo, Giovanni P**  
Level of detail/ More detail needed/ How did this help participants?

 **Dazzo, Giovanni P**  
Level of detail / More detail needed/ Unclear what the change was

 **Dazzo, Giovanni P**  
Attribution-Contribution/ How did the activity cause change?

 **Dazzo, Giovanni P**  
Memo: Value of participant voice

Panelists seem to value direct quotes, especially if the story is not told completely from the perspective of the participant (i.e., the participant is not the story contributor).

 **Dazzo, Giovanni P**  
Memo: Panelist expectations of grantee

Does a panelist's expectations of a grantee affect how they score a story on level of significance? If so, what does this say on who is succeeding? Who is allowed to fail?

## Steps: Qualitative coding in Microsoft Word

- ▶ Select text from interview or observation transcription
- ▶ Click Review → Click New Comment → Input code for theme
- ▶ Highlight comments related to memos [used to think through the data]. Include comments.
- ▶ To make all highlighting visible: Click **Review** > Click the box with **All Markup** > Change to **Simple Markup**.

<b>Panelist 3 (Policy officer: does not directly manage program, but very familiar)</b>	<p><i>Would have been nice to have how this actually helped in refugee groups. Great example of capacity building, but what does that <u>mean</u>?</i></p> <p><i><u>Clearly</u> they're doing great work. They just <u>didn't</u> tell you where it was after the training.</i></p>
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### Steps: Qualitative coding consolidation in Microsoft Word

- ▶ To consolidate themes: Click Review > Click Show Markup > Select only Comments
- ▶ Under **Settings**, the default is **Print all pages**. Click the drop-down next to those words.
- ▶ Select **List of Markup**. Select the **Print Markup** option at the bottom of the list. For Printer: Select Print as PDF. Print.

- ▶ Now you have a code list.
- ▶ Copy and paste to Microsoft Excel. Format data as a table.
- ▶ Clean up the non-essential data (“Page 1...”) by deleting or selecting Ctrl+H [for Find + Replace]. In the text box for Replace, leave it blank. Click OK. Non-essential data disappears.
- ▶ Create a pivot table with the raw data table. This will make it easier to count and group themes.

## Main document changes and comments

**Page 1: Commented [DGP1]** **Dazzo, Giovanni P** **10/25/2018 9:47:00 AM**

Level of detail/ More detail needed/ How did this help participants?

**Page 1: Commented [DGP2]** **Dazzo, Giovanni P** **10/25/2018 9:47:00 AM**

Level of detail / More detail needed/ Unclear what the change was

**Page 1: Commented [DGP3]** **Dazzo, Giovanni P** **10/25/2018 9:47:00 AM**

Attribution-Contribution/ How did the activity cause change?

**Page 1: Commented [DGP4]** **Dazzo, Giovanni P** **10/25/2018 9:50:00 AM**

Memo: Value of participant voice

Panelists seem to value direct quotes, especially if the story is not told completely from the perspective of the participant (i.e., the participant is not the story contributor).

**Page 1: Commented [DGP5]** **Dazzo, Giovanni P** **10/25/2018 1:11:00 PM**

Memo: Panelist expectations of grantee

Does a panelist’s expectations of a grantee affect how they score a story on level of significance? If so, what does this say on who is succeeding? Who is allowed to fail?

[Org name]	[Domain]	1	1	[Project name]: Discusses methodology of workshops in very general terms. Unclear what change took place. Not a story.	[Panelist]	beneficiary perspectives. "would have been nice to have how this actually helped in refugee groups. Great example of capacity building, but what does that mean? Clearly, they're doing great work. They just didn't tell you where it was after the training." Alt+0010What draw you in about the story: "I am always curious about what they are doing in [country]... and they had direct quotes." "Main reason I gave it a 2, and it could have been lower, was the high expectation that I have for the grantee". "The change was no more than what should
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Panelist changed score: 2 to 1

Moderate  
 Grantee should help us understand  
 Expectation  
 Panelist expectations of grantee  
 Shows how the activity led to change  
 How did it help participants  
 Significant  
 More detail needed  
 Unclear what the change was  
 This is a compelling story  
 Includes participant voices  
 How did the activity cause change  
 Coding Density

See Also Links

Item	To Name	To Folder
2	Value of participant voice	Memos
3	Panelist expectations of grantee	Memos

- ▶ Creating nodes [thematic codes] in Nvivo.
- ▶ During the process, memos and “see also links” were attached. “See also links” were used as certain memos were found across the dataset (memos can only be used once).
- ▶ The “see also links” were used for: (i) regrouping / revising codes; noting broader themes across sources.

Level of detail

More detail needed

Good detail

Unclear what the change was

Shows how this is signi...

How did it help participants

How the story was...

Unclear...

Shows how it helped participants

Explains how story was c...

# Finding: Lesson from discourse analysis

What panelists say

What panelists mean

“This story  
has a good  
level of  
detail”



“This story  
makes a  
causal  
claim”

Voice

Third person

Rationale for significance

Needy beneficiary language

First person

Quarterly r...

Storytellers

Grantee

Beneficiary

Medical professio...

Per...

Educ...

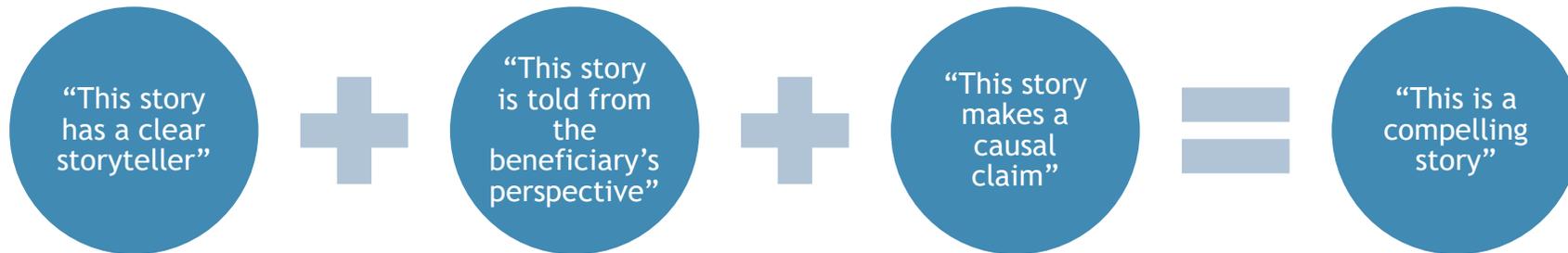
Journalist

Artist-Activist

# Finding: Linking discourse analysis to story analysis

Stories that were ranked highly

What makes a good story



## Critical ethnographic interviews

“As a facilitator, construct a supportive and safe normative environment with your subjects and **help them explore issues with their own vocabulary, their own metaphors, and their own ideas**”

(Carspecken, 1996, p. 155)

# Why use a critical ethnographic interview to explore perceptions around MSC?

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**Background** MSC is a dialogical, story-based approach

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Intentionally chose an interview approach that would match the theory behind MSC

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**Practice** Asked partners to tell their stories of using MSC (an MSC about MSC)

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Used a semi-structured protocol, with open-ended questions (similar to MSC)

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# Topic Domain: Learning about the MSC process - becoming a storyteller

“I’m interested in hearing all of the details about how you go through the MSC process. Imagine that you’re writing a guide and other implementing partners are interested in how you work through the MSC process. Could you tell me more about your process?”

[Covert categories: How do implementing partners collect stories? Do they feel like storytellers?]

- ▶ How do you typically conduct the MSC process, from start to finish? Could you walk me through the typical process when you are working through the MSC process?
- ▶ When you were going through the MSC process for the first time, did you experience any barriers? Can you think back to this time and tell me about an experience you had that represents some of the challenges in getting started?
- ▶ Now that you’ve been doing this for some time—if you were putting together an MSC guide, what type of lessons would you give to someone that is interested in collecting and selecting stories?

# Topic Domain: Creating significance - value claims

“I’m interested in learning more about how you select the most significant stories. To you, what represents the most significant story?”

[Covert categories: How does the respondent value significance? What do partners think that the donor values? How do implementing partners identify significance? What is the respondent’s perception of significance? Are there differences between the stories valued by partners versus funders?]

- ▶ Let’s say we go through the typical MSC process that you identified earlier. How would you describe what makes up a significant story? How do you know when you have spotted a significant story?
- ▶ Do you ever experience challenges in trying to pick a story that is significant?
- ▶ As you’ve gone through the process, have you seen differences in what you select as a significant story?
- ▶ Are there differences in the types of stories that you now send to DRL, compared to the ones you might have shared with DRL earlier?

# What we heard...

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**Difference between quarterly reports and MSC**

“It has more to do about how it makes you feel.” / “It’s nice because it’s often a voice you don’t hear... it’s an authentic voice.”

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**How do you know when you’ve spotted a significant story**

“It’s beautiful.” / “It’s a gut reaction.” / “[Stories] touch me personally” / “At some point, it clicks.”

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**Incorporating donor feedback in selecting stories (difference in the types of stories you now select)**

“Before, we included what we thought was significant, now it’s what they [participants] think.” / “After we got the feedback, we tell stories from [participant] perspectives.”

“I think we really value their personal stories.” / “Now we know what to look for.”

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Next steps...

...more meta-research

# Next steps

From interviews, it seems that grantees are valuing stories differently, but also taking our feedback to improve quality and voice. **To do: more interviews.**

Can we improve critical consciousness of our implementing partners, sub-grantees, and project participants? **To do: researching how MSC processes affect engagement among these groups.**

As a funder, how do we ensure that we are addressing power imbalances if we continue to use this method? **To do: continue secondary analysis and meta-monitoring to continuously question the rationale and intentionality behind the method.**

# References

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