The Collaborative and Adaptive Security Initiative (CASI)

May 23 & 24, 2017
George Washington University
Washington, D.C. 20052

Engaging Narratives: The New (Old) Battlefield

On May 23 and 24, 2017, sixty experts from various organizational sectors, representing the Department of Defense, U.S. Government, non-governmental organizations, industry, and academia convened at the Elliott School of International Affairs at The George Washington University in Washington, D.C. to discuss the importance and power of narratives. The accords shown here are the collective understanding of the people who attended the conference.

The ELLIOTT SCHOOL ACCORDS

We are policy makers, mediators, entrepreneurs, marketers, development professionals, information warriors, researchers, and storytellers; we represent 40 different institutions from academia, government, business, and nongovernmental organizations, working at the tactical, operational and strategic levels with local, regional, and international entities; we are leaders, managers, planners, teachers, and scholars.

We all share a passion to understand the power of narratives. We came together to learn from one another, to engage in open inquiry and dialogue together, to tap into unfamiliar areas of research and practice.

After sharing our stories, research and experience, and after engaging each other in active discussions over two days at the Elliott School of International Affairs at George Washington University, we agree upon these guiding principles:

- That we each have critical perspectives to offer, based on our unique experiences, outlooks, and fields of interest.
- That improving the way we tell stories requires a purposeful, dedicated effort informed by the best research, applied science, and lessons from practitioners in the field.
- That our shared stories become stronger through exchange among diverse individuals, functions, sectors, and communities.
- That we must all be advocates at our organizations and in our fields for a sustained commitment to bringing an understanding of narrative to everything we do.
- That communication at and across all levels is key to working together effectively on shared narratives.

Finally, we believe that the continued collaboration of a diverse and engaged Narratives community is essential, and we will strive to nurture this community and the sharing of information and practice as we prepare for the future.

Engaging Narratives Participants

Engaging Narratives Participants
MAY 24, 2017

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This publication was created for its participants, to serve as a record of what was discussed for future reference and to help maintain focus as we work toward common goals within our respective sectors.

The opinions, conclusions, and recommendations expressed or implied herein are those of the conference participants only and do not necessarily reflect the views of U.S. Department of Defense or any other agency or institution.

We have included participants' contact information as available, and encourage continued discussion and collaboration. Various video and electronic versions of the conference presentations are available upon request. Please contact Ms. Beverly Popelka at beverly.a.popelka.civ@mail.mil.

Why Do We Care About Narratives? A Conversation Among the Event Organizers

The two-day Engaging Narratives event began with a discussion among leaders from the organizations that had the original vision to investigate this topic in depth – Frank DiGiovanni, (Department of Defense (DoD)), Melanie Greenberg (Alliance for Peacebuilding), and Matthew Levinger (Elliott School of International Affairs at George Washington University). Each explored why they believed understanding narratives would be critical to overcoming challenges in their respective sectors (government, non-governmental organizations, and academia).

This panel noted how leaders from these different sectors are realizing that narratives are the key to enduring success in their fields. Narratives hold promise as a means of winning hearts and minds, transforming conflict, and avoiding war. While it would be natural to assume that the U.S. would enjoy an advantage in applied narratives based on its storytelling assets (Hollywood and Madison Avenue, for example), we seem to be underperforming rivals such as Russia and ISIS.

Part of our difficulty with narratives stems from advances in communication technology. The world

may not actually be growing more complex, but the multiplication of actors with the power to spread their messages instantly across the globe exacerbates our inability to disseminate a unified message supporting U.S. interests and goals. As a result, our foreign policy seems more defensive and isolationist, and our willingness to engage on human rights or other universal, global issues seems diminished.

Focusing on narratives could help improve our means of influence, while also forcing us to think strategically. In fully embracing the need to shape and employ narratives we would need to identify: What are we trying to achieve in the world, and what is the story we tell the world about our goals and intentions?

The Power of Narratives for Peacebuilding

We are all story tellers. To tell a story is a desire and a universal right. It is a way to effect change in the world.

With these insights, **Kiran Singh Sirah**, Executive Director of the International Storytelling Center,

followed the kick-off event with a short talk about his experiences with the power of narrative. As the son of refugees himself, Kiran spoke of the value of heritage, traditions, culture, and shared stories with those whose lives are disrupted by violence. He witnessed how communities harnessed the power of stories to heal after the massacre at a church in Charleston, SC in 2015. Finally, he urged the participants to share their own stories. Our stories are the most fundamental way in which we connect with others. In these connections lie the promise of a more balanced, free, and peaceful world.

Getting the Questions Right

Engaging Narratives was designed to be an interactive event where the participants direct the conversation. Rather than being divided between experts and audience, every participant was simultaneously both.

The event organizers built in ample space in the schedule for participants to guide and direct the topics that would be discussed, providing formats for discussion, but letting participants develop the content.

The first interactive exercise required the participants to write on post-it notes their ideas prompted by the questions shown in the inset.

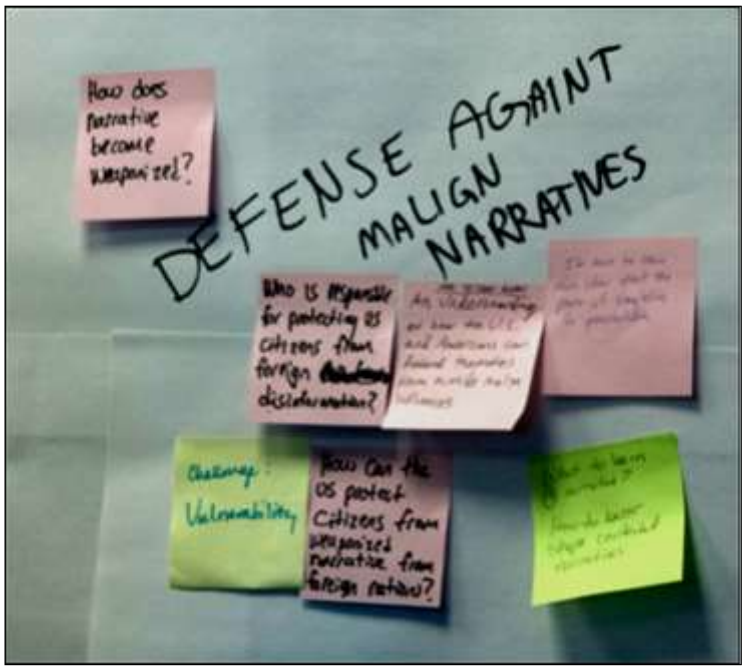
Facilitators placed the post-it notes on a large paper-covered section of wall at the front of the room, available for everyone to review as they passed. Throughout the morning, participants moved the myriad ideas and responses around on the paper wall, in an effort to group, re-group and establish themes, content, and relationships among the post-it notes.

We asked everyone to reply on a post-it note:

- *How did I come to be at this event?*
- *What do I hope to take away from here?*
- *What do we need to learn about narratives that we don't know / can't do today?*
- *What are the major challenges or opportunities?*

The resulting groupings were labeled, and a number of strong themes emerged from the collective comments. These themes would set the scene for the World Café event discussions later in the day.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY NARRATIVE
CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION
LISTEN!


How does narrative become weaponized?
DEFENSE AGAINT MALIGN NARRATIVES
How can the US protect citizens from weaponized narrative from foreign nations?

IGNITE IS A SERIES OF SPEEDY PRESENTATIONS. (www.ignitetalks.io)

Participants were invited to give a five-minute presentation on a topic of their choice. This format emphasizes brevity, engagement, and impact in order to quickly convey the essentials of an idea. We grouped participant presenters into 8 groups of 4 with a moderator to assist in presenting their topics. Each group would then respond to questions as a panel to end their Ignite session.

The Ignite presentations were designed to allow the greatest number of participants to showcase their stories, techniques, knowledge, experience, concepts, and other assets associated with narrative. Each Ignite event included four unique, thematically linked presentations, dealing with how we define narrative, the importance of narrative, or how narrative is related to how we interact or influence the general populace. There were two Ignite events on the morning of the first day.

Ignite Group 1:
The Power of Narrative

Facilitator – DoD's **Frank DiGiovanni** set the stage by telling a story of how America today suffers from "lethargy of mind." We have become too comfortable in our status in the world and our technical superiority in conflict. It was this kind of complacency that led to the defeat of the U.S. fleet at Savo Island during World War II. A Japanese fleet half the size of the U.S. force won a decisive battle because they practiced fighting at night when this was not the accepted practice in U.S. tactics. The post-mortem on the defeat attributed our failure, in part, to "a fatal lethargy of mind which induced confidence without readiness." Today, we are again ceding a strategic capability—mastery of narratives—to a smaller force. Mr. DiGiovanni ended with a question for the group: Do we dismiss the "battle of the narrative" and cyber threats because they are not physical in nature, and therefore do not activate our primordial fight or flight instincts?

Sandra de Castro Buffington

Global Media Center for Social Impact

How Can Washington Work With Hollywood?

Sandra demonstrated that Hollywood can be engaged as a partner in creating desirable narratives that can impact social policy and popular culture.

While there isn't enough funding to pay for all of the narratives the world needs, there is a strategic, sustained and systematic way to inspire Hollywood writers and producers to create storylines of social value in TV and film – at virtually no cost. Sandra provided two examples. The first involved the issue of backlogs of untested rape kits. By engaging Hollywood producers in discussions of the rape kit issue, Sandra inspired the writers to create a story line on the TV show *Law and Order: Special Victims*

Unit (NBC) that highlighted the backlog issue. Coupled with social media, the TV narrative made it a national story that drove policy change and unlocked resources to address the problem. In a similar way, TV storylines raised awareness nationally about the problem of human trafficking. Sandra ended her presentation staying that we need to reach out to Hollywood through trusted intermediaries like her Center with the top three or four issues that we want to see portrayed. Showcasing these issues in special events for writers and producers can result in hundreds narratives that impact viewers' knowledge, attitudes and behavior, and can change popular culture and social policy on the most important issues of our time.

Chris Holshek

Alliance for Peacebuilding

Civil-Military Relations, Consolidating Gains, and the Operational Art of Peacebuilding

Chris, a retired Colonel from U.S. Army Civil Affairs, introduced the audience to the Civil Affairs branch within the military, and characterized it as the 1% of the military that doesn't engage in warfare but is focused instead on ending or preventing conflict.

"The term *engaging narrative* is [appropriate] here because you get narratives through engagement, and you get engagement through narrative – and

those two together give you identity. You find out through engaging other human beings and interaction with them in a process of learning and leadership." Wars are fundamentally people-centric, psychological, and political. Civil Affairs practitioners provide low tech solutions to low tech problems. We invest in peace building. We are losing the battle against Russia, China, and terrorist organizations because we have a very 20th century view of the world that is risk-averse, threat-based, and status quo-biased. We want to maintain the current order instead of moving the world forward. Let's stop talking about threats and instead talk about peace and security goals and objectives. We need a national strategy that achieves future goals.

Ajit Maan, Ph.D.

Narrative Strategies

Distinctions About What Narrative Is and Isn't and How It Operates

Ajit discussed three main points: (1) Narrative is more than just a mode of communication; tweets and talking points are not a narrative. A narrative is a structure that holds events together. Identity and

narrative are symbolic. (2) Narratives are symbiotic. (3) The job of a narrator is not to tell the truth, but to tell the meaning. We are in a battle of the narratives. More Information or a counter narrative is not going to win. The narrative needs to resonate and be embraced by the target audience in a way that is more effective than our adversaries.

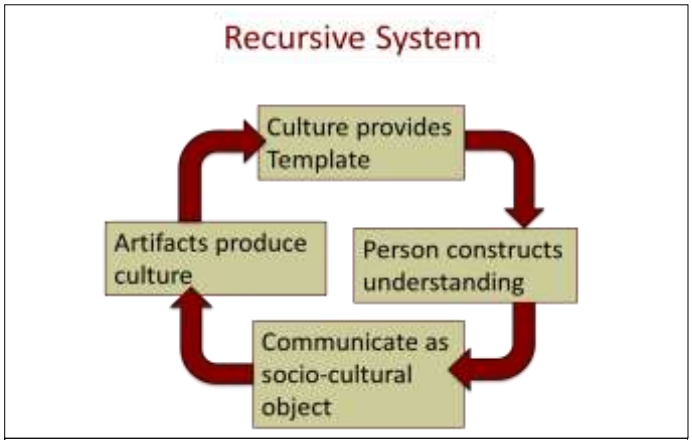
Dr. Scott Ruston

Center for Strategic Communications,
Arizona State University

The Dual Logistics of Narrative: How to Think About Narrative As Distinguished From Story

Scott warned against oversimplification of the concept of the narrative by the U.S. Government. Narrative means two different things. First, it is a social-cultural object—the content of a particular shared story (*Star Wars*, *War and Peace*; the stories of the Boston Tea Party). Secondly, it is a process

of understanding, the way the mind creates sense and meaning out of the information it receives, and attaches significance and values to raw events. Narrative is the union of form and content; the way a story is told can impart very different meanings to



The Recursive System, as described in Dr. Ruston's Ignite Talk.

Questions for Ignite Group 1:

Frank DiGiovanni questioned the audience:

Does the recursive cycle ever end with respect to narrative? Is it an infinite game?

The group agreed that it is an infinite game.

Sandra de Castro Buffington expanded on the idea that narrative can be simple yet complex, that story telling captures complexity, but the narrative needs to be simple to capture and motivate people to understand the world – a process called transportation. If you read a story and are totally immersed, you have succeeded in changing minds. Dr. Ruston expanded on this thought stating that narrative is a process of selection. Some of the story gets thrown out. For example, we all remember the narrative that the Boston Tea party was a political protest on Britain's authority to tax the colonies without parliamentary representation. However, the story that has been mostly disregarded is that the additional taxation of tea imports cut into prominent colonists' tea smuggling operations--but that wasn't the story the colonists wanted to tell.

Why are the terrorists winning the narrative?

Chris Holshek responded that terrorists understand warfare better, while Ms. Buffington stated that they understand the vulnerability of people and groups. They sell the narrative, but when they get into the war, they don't like the truth. Scott Ruston said that extremist groups tell stories of current events that weave into their culture. They understand narrative better than we do. Lena Slachmuijlder, from the audience, proposed that there is a misperception that terrorists don't have an issue they are trying to pursue. We are ignoring their side of the story. Frank DiGiovanni followed with a story that showed how terrorists can't get on the world stage as easily as the U.S., but terrorism works to draw attention to their plight.

the same set of words and context. Narratives are recursive systems that are constantly reinforced on levels of the individual, the community, and the culture. These are systems that are embedded at micro and macro levels. Finally, narratives can be evaluated in terms of both coherence and fidelity. Coherence describes how consistent the internal logic of a story is, while fidelity considers how well a story matches that which is already believed.

Ignite Group 2: Digital Media

Facilitator – **Dr. Garrison LeMasters** of Georgetown University introduced the presenters in the second Ignite series, which focused on the digital narrative landscape.

Judy Shapiro

engageSimply

Winning the Narrative Wars – A Journey Into the Battlefield

Judy focused on the power of advertising technology that has developed within the last seven years to shape the narrative through different media, especially the internet. The

internet terrain is complex, but very effective at distributing content and advertisements to garner

money and promote ideas/narrative. Our adversaries have focused on creating "fake news," impressions, websites, and content that promote their ideology while raking in advertising revenues on the order of $16.4 billion. In this way "we are funding the war against us." There are a few bad actors—about five countries—that have been very successful at gathering web dollars and they are winning. To win, you need to think like a marketer, but act like an advertiser. We need to organize around real-time, topic-based operational campaigns. They can be planned and managed like military campaigns. Topics are like territory, data

> *"Think like a marketer, but act like an advertiser."*
>
> *- Judy Shapiro*

are like guidance systems, impressions are like bullets, and content is like tanks. Fortunately, advertisers and tech giants have begun to fight fraud. We need to disrupt the adversary's distribution model, which has made use of antiquated digital roadways. We need to overwhelm adverse messaging by turning the technology in our favor.

dana boyd

Data and Science Research Institute

Manipulation for the Lulz: How Subcultures Drive Social Polarization, Destabilize Institutions, and Undermine Information Intermediaries

(lulz—A corruption of 'LOL' (laugh out loud)… interesting or funny internet content." - Urban Dictionary.)

Internet subcultures have become increasingly strategic and sophisticated in their hijinks, toying with U.S. elections by playing the media, as in the case of "pizzagate" (a debunked conspiracy theory

during the 2016 presidential campaign that referred to a fabricated human trafficking and child-sex ring at a Washington, DC pizzeria). What was once a fringe culture of online pranksters has discovered that they can push a dark set of political

goals, fueled by hatred and bigotry. Stories are picked up by the media that promote an agenda that would never before have received air time, resulting in a polarization of the nation. The result is an internet hate machine supported anonymously by thousands of individual actors.

Matt Chessen

Foreign Service Science and Technology Policy Fellow

Machine Driven Communications (MADCOMs) : How Artificial Intelligence Chatbots Will Overwhelm Human Speech Online

(chatbot: a computer program designed to simulate conversation with human users, especially over the Internet - Oxford Dictionary)

Artificial Intelligence (AI) will reach a point of sophistication where you will no longer be able to determine if you are talking to a human or a

chatbot online. In the not-too-distant future, most speech and content online will likely be machines talking to machines. Computers will be able to

compile and create content geared toward your particular interests and psychological profile. The AI systems will know us better than we know ourselves. These systems will work at digital speed and are scalable, so that once you create and configure one, you can create thousands. AI systems will know how to manipulate and persuade based on the programmer's intent.

Christy Provines

The 'MPOWER Project

Taking Back the Narrative: Out-branding Extremism Using Brand Marketing and Social Media

The 'MPOWER Project conducts critical research and development on brand marketing in the

context of countering violent extremism. Many messaging efforts fail because designers don't know the audience. The key to impact is determining "identity vulnerability," that is a state of mind in which someone is looking to connect and are vulnerable to radicalization. This is the point at which the correct message can prevent someone from latching on to the extremist narrative. The 'MPOWER Project has developed techniques that identify indicators of the vulnerable state of mind to instill an alternate narrative instead of the violent extremism narrative.

Questions for Ignite Group 2:

How did The 'MPOWER Project team do vulnerability analysis?

Christy Provines responded that 'MPOWER worked with a professor who understood consumer behavior and had a deep understanding of radicalization. They looked at the process and case studies. What was similar? How did one case compare to others? How was the radical message effective? From there, they isolated the different indicators of the profile.

How will internet publishers and advertisers be able to disrupt the weaponized ad tech process in the next 24 months?

Judy Shapiro stated that Google, Microsoft, *etc.* have decided that they are going to clamp down on the fake advertiser problem.

For AI and bots, can we program the bots to promote peace?

Matt Chessen answered that we need to program bots to attack bots with a counter message. Unfortunately, people generally just go into their bubbles and look for similar thoughts and themes – echo chambers. They will go private, not to be visible on twitter. From dana boyd, another issue is sometimes beneficial bots are taken over in order to promote hate or distract the bot.

With the latest presidential election, we saw the promulgation of memes. Are memes the future of political campaigns?

dana boyd noted that it's like throwing spaghetti against the wall to see what sticks. Thousands of memes hit the internet but only a few stick. For a meme, both visual and contextual content is more successful. Memes are becoming more powerful each day, and they are also a function of money. If you have the right combination of factors, it works.

What are the points of entry into a community?

dana boyd replied that we are seeing a form of radicalization where it's for fun and games and one joins and begins to learn the norms of the group. If you make a mistake in a community, you get shamed so people try to find the boundaries. As you learn the boundaries, you tend to become the keeper of the standards/rules. Many communities therefore begin with a game mentality and then morph into a radical effort.

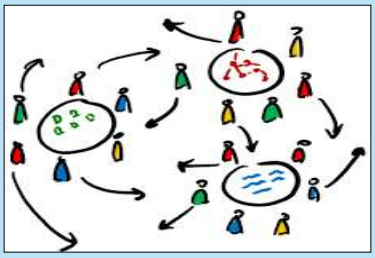
ACT TWO - Developing Action

World Café

The afternoon of Day One started with a World Café discussion. The topics were chosen based on participant suggestions from the "Setting the Stage" event in the morning. Eight small groups discussed eight different topics for 20 minutes, at which point the event facilitators moved each participant to another table to have a different conversation with a different set of people. The facilitator stayed at the table the entire time as the participants changed tables. They were able to keep the conversation going and take notes. The participants moved the last time after another 20 minutes, this time to the table of their choice. After the third 20-minute period ended, the facilitator at each table summarized the conversations that had taken place around their topic. A collection of the salient points discussed at each table is provided below.

TABLE 1 – How do we create a story that works?

- A majority of participants believed this fundamental question to be a central theme of this conference.
- The authenticity of the story must resonate with the audience for it to stick and make an impact.
- One must stay in the zone of the narrative and not get lost



The World Cafe: Shaping Our Futures Through Conversations That Matter (www.theworldcafe.com)

World Café is a structured conversation process in which small groups of people discuss a variety of topics at several tables. After an interval each individual switches to a new table with a different topic and a different set of people. Three or more cycles may be completed before a final summary or plenary discussion culminates the event.

in the zone of a good story.

- Understanding the culture of your audience is critical to the development of the story.
- It's not enough to just create a story. The story must be shared.
- Holding yourself to a hierarchical approach (*i.e.*, bottom to top or top to bottom) approach is not necessary for success.
- There must always be one central theme throughout your narrative.
- It is necessary to analyze the inevitable, unanticipated negative consequences of your story so that you may adjust it to achieve the original desired effect.
- Identification of conversation points will help promote the narrative.

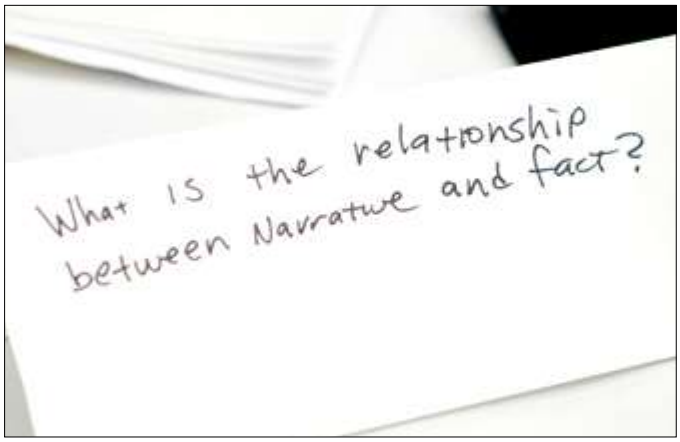
TABLE 2 – How do we promote an appreciation of the power of narratives in our organization and fields?

Participants found this question difficult to respond to, which caused the discussion to focus on identifying some additional questions: Why are narratives important in our sector? From this perspective, the DoD is having trouble at the decision level in quantifying this concept and as a result, does not promulgate lasting narratives.

To what extent does DoD have to worry about narrative? Isn't this more of a Department of State issue? Shouldn't they develop the narrative?

TABLE 3 – What is the relationship between narrative and fact?

Initial observations on how fact relates to the narrative were discussed. Many felt that fake news drives the narrative in our nation and facts should matter. Personal previous experience can significantly affect how facts are presented, and a single narrative may be received differently by two individuals.



The resilience of an idea, (*i.e.*, how deeply it resonates) will often determine if the factualness of the narrative is relevant.

Who is the arbiter of the narrative? Or of the facts? That identity may determine if truth matters.

One must understand that there is no such thing as a completely true story. How do you define the facts? Truth exists in the eyes of the perceiver.

A person's expectations and perception will frequently determine whether they believe the narrative to be truth or fiction.

Unfortunately, the United States' ability to quickly deliver a narrative is frequently outpaced by an enemy such as the Taliban who can get a narrative out almost instantly. The one who is "first to the table" often defines the narrative and how the "truth" is understood by the audience.

TABLE 4 – How does technology (*e.g.,* artificial intelligence (AI)/digital media/ *etc.*) affect narrative?

The growth of the web and the digital world has made a significant impact on the promulgation of narrative, both for good and ill. Members of the group commented on the impact of digital media on narrative.

Within the digital realm, there is a lot of "doom and gloom" that is perpetuated and defines the narrative.

Technology increases narrative power exponentially by providing an "echo chamber" where individuals channel their interaction to what they already relate to. This makes like-minded people happy but results in polarization. Opposing views are screened out and people live within their own bubbles.

Given the "echo chamber" notion leading to polarization, how do we build bridges? The military for example is very effective at ensuring people of different cultures work together and share different perspectives, ideas, *etc*.

There is a culture war on the internet. Why don't we use the same tools to promote a more desirable narrative?

TABLE 5 – How do we coordinate our narrative within United States Government (USG) and between USG and non-USG?

Since this was a DoD-sponsored event attended by many members outside of DoD and USG, members were interested in how to interface and interact with the USG.

Organizations outside the government often find it opaque and impenetrable. Government is so complex and off-putting that outside organizations don't want to engage.

- Create mutual learning and sharing, and develop a common experience when working with U.S. Government. We need to create a new framework with shared expectations of measuring "success."
- Policy needs to support the narratives created.
- Narrative and action, strategy and tactics need to harmonize for success.
- There are not enough forums for interagency planning, communication, and connection.
- How do we get on the same page when there is so much nuance? The interpretative aspect is complex.
- The question of how to measure success makes collaborating on narratives difficult.
- Diverse political motives and/or economic agendas make coordination on long-term policy a major challenge, especially during a transition of administrations.
- Diverse missions among the Department of State, DoD, and USAID make cooperation on messaging complex. Perhaps the government

> *"Government is so complex and off-putting that outside organizations don't want to engage."*
>
> *- Table 5*

isn't the best messenger. Allow other organizations to do messaging for the United States.

- If consistency in narrative is vital, how do we coordinate and not contradict each other?
- Need to agree upon the mission and let the form be diverse.
- Coordinating timelines is extremely difficult. The private sector can jump on a narrative quickly, but government takes significantly more time.

TABLE 6 – How do we defend against malign/adverse narratives?

Participants were interested in how to counter or defend against narratives that vilify the U.S., disrupt its politics, or threaten its interests.

- Diverse cultures can have different and opposing points of view as to what is malign.
- Use local forces to combat the negative narrative since they better understand the culture.
- Need to assess if the malign narrative needs to be addressed. How harmful is it really?
- Creating competing narratives is very effective at addressing a malign narrative.

TABLE 7 – What role does narrative play in transforming conflict?

DoD is currently involved in several conflicts, and participants wanted to know how narrative could prevent conflict or possibly transform current conflict to a peaceful solution.

How one perceives a narrative is very personal. People chose sides based on values, individual beliefs, experiences, *etc.*

Narrative defines the conflict, and thus you need to understand how it will be used by either side in a conflict.

Establishing a narrative that "speaks to" (confirms values of) targeted audiences will help shape the conflict you are trying to resolve/transform.

TABLE 8 – How can U.S. National Security Strategy incorporate narrative?

Strategy is critical to reaching a nation's future goals and direction. Assuming a national strategy exists, the participants wanted to know if narrative

could assist in promulgation of a national strategy.

Should broaden the idea of a national strategy to include more than just security?

A broader, more inclusive approach is ideal, a "whole-of-government" approach.

Beyond that, consider a "whole-of-nation" approach to develop a strategic narrative. We need to develop a national identity.

Ignite presentations resumed after the World Café session. The next set would focus on peacebuilding and extremism (Group 3) and the potential narrative tools that could be used in the field (Group 4).

Ignite Group 3: Peacebuilding and Extremism

Facilitator – **Liz Hume,** the Senior Director for Programs and Strategy at Alliance for Peacebuilding moderated the third Ignite event.

Dr. David Alpher

Saferworld

The Narrative of Fear: How Our Misunderstanding of the Violent Extremism Threat Leads to Bad Decisions

David illustrated how our narratives overseas and domestically differ; how these narratives can define our outlook and how we respond to the perceived threat of violent extremism.

Narrative shapes our understanding of a problem and its viable solutions. Once we begin with a

narrative of fear, the field in which we engage is defined for us. A narrative of fear drives a militarized response. In the case of violent extremism, we have two simultaneous narratives: one for overseas and one for domestic audiences. For example, we use the word "war" to describe our campaign against al-Qaida, which drives a predictable response – kill or capture. In comparison, the Department of Homeland Security describes a narrative of "trust" in our own neighborhoods, which elicits a non-militaristic response. If we use battlefield lenses, we end up

with battlefield solutions, and non-military solutions are dismissed as weak or inappropriate. We need to get out of a fear-based narrative and apply the same narrative overseas as we do domestically.

Sara Lind

The 'MPOWER Project

Welcome to ISIS Land: Why it Failed, and How We Can Do Better

Sara used a State Department example to explain how the government missed the mark with respect to narrative in its attempt to counter ISIS messaging.

"Welcome to ISIS Land" was a video created and distributed by the State Department in 2014. It was a parody of an ISIS recruiting video, produced with the intent to counter the narrative of violent extremist rhetoric as a desirable way of life. The State Department video text included lines such as, "Run, don't walk, to ISIS. You get to kill Muslims, blow up mosques, and plunder state resources…" and, "Travel is cheap, you don't need to buy a return ticket (you won't live to use it)." The video failed for several reasons. First, it was labeled as a product of the U.S. Government, discrediting it because of the source. Second, the approach of mocking an idea has been shown to be counterproductive as a means of dissuading those who are already leaning toward that idea. Third,

the video failed to undermine the supposed righteousness of ISIS, because the Muslims killed are deemed heretics and the states they plunder are deemed illegitimate. Finally, the "one way ticket" is the very martyrdom that ISIS promotes as the ultimate heavenly reward for its recruits. Ultimately, counter-messaging just isn't effective. Instead, we need to give a positive alternative to the life offered by ISIS. ISIS offers a life of belonging, heroism, and meaning. In order for a narrative to compete with this vision, it needs to offer an alternative that satisfies the same human longings.

Lisa Inks

Mercy Corps

Walking the Talk: Putting Substance Behind Narratives to Prevent Recruitment into Boko Haram in Northeast Nigeria

Lisa described a study conducted by Mercy Corps for which they interviewed former fighters from Boko Haram as well as youth who did not join. They found that those who did not join believed Boko Haram to be just as corrupt as the government and therefore hypocritical in its supposed idealism. Follow-on discussions revealed

that local government and community leaders had purposefully told youth that Boko Haram was corrupt and just in it for themselves. Mercy Corps concluded that people were originally drawn to Boko Haram because of frustration with the government for not providing sufficient support,

services, and governance. When Boko Haram proved themselves no better at governance (and were extremely violent), the public turned on them and the corruption narrative began to stick. Additionally, the messenger matters to youth. They trust local leaders whom they could interact with on a daily basis. Mercy Corps found that a lighter touch worked better than big military presence. We can amplify, but can't drive the narrative, and governance must come first before developing a narrative.

Julia Roig

PartnersGlobal

Narratives for Peace – A Partnership Approach

Julia proposed the development of an "ecosystem for narratives." In the context of polarization, there tends to be an "us versus them" mentality which calls for a bridge builder who can work between the two opposite parties as well as the large silent majority. PartnersGlobal is building a platform of collaboration that aims to rebrand "peace" by

building a collective storytelling engine, amplifying voices for peace, and driving collective action. PartnersGlobal found that professional storytellers who are not part of our network give us the most leverage in strategizing an approach with professional peace builders to develop the narrative that we desire. We are also developing a tool box to collect all of the information and learning that we are collecting during our journey.

Questions for Ignite Group 3:

Are there other forms of narratives such as culture, arts, etc.?

David Alpher stated that we are suffering from hypervigilance—an enhanced state of sensory sensitivity accompanied by an exaggerated intensity of behaviors whose purpose is to detect threats. He further stated that we have lost our ability to figure out what is a threat and what is not. As we initially identify everything as a threat we then apply our fear responses. We need to improve our ability to assess threats so as not to just focus on fear.

How do you duplicate the Boko Haram success story?

Lisa Inks did not think that it was possible to duplicate the success that Mercy Corps observed in Boko Haram. She believed that success happens naturally and thus is very difficult to duplicate. It's not in a neat or scalable package that you can just apply to any situation. It may or may not work. We are not machines, but it works some of the time so we must not dismiss the approach.

Prompted by a question about "end state mythology," David Alpher said that reaching an end state is always a comforting thought. We don't like to have the battle go on, so we drive for a state in which we have won, and the enemy is defeated as the end state we desire. But this is a psychological and a tactical mistake. If you treat all the members of the group as hardened fighters even though they make up only a few of the individuals in the group, you tend to create more of what you set out to destroy.

Ignite Group 4: Narrative Tools

Facilitator – **Matt Levinger** introduced the panel of the fourth Ignite series, which focused on narrative tools for practitioners.

> *"We should title this session 'Narrative Subjectivities'… empowering people to tell their own stories."*
>
> *-Matt Levinger*

Kara Marston

Storily

Storily: An Editorial Intelligence Platform for Publishers

Kara explored how editorial intelligence platforms such as Storily, along with advanced capabilities and artificial intelligence such as machine learning and natural processing, can augment existing strategies and operations across the U.S. government and NGOs. She used the example of the conflicting narrative between Syria's Christians and the U.S. media. Syria's Christians stand behind President Assad because he provides protection from the Sunni Muslim majority. They believe that

U.S. media outlets are not telling the full story, so they shift to Russian media and other sources. Media intelligence can counter this problem. Kara's team transforms disparate data and empowers storytellers to transform insights into action by predicting and achieving the optimal combination of story topics, audience, technology, experiences, and channels for greater returns for organizations and their readers. They connect first and third party data, define the target audience, and help storytellers hone and define their message and see how they are resonating with the audience. They support the full lifecycle of a story, including identification, creation, distribution, engagement, measurement, and optimization.

Lena Slachmuijlder

Search for Common Ground

Who Am I? A Story of Santri Identity

Lena drew on the field experience of her organization, Search for Common Ground (SFCG), to provide insights from the way Indonesia has nearly eliminated the threat of extremism over the last decade. Her story concerned ten Islamic boarding schools that were located in areas with

high incidents of violent extremism. It was rumored that these boarding schools were breeding grounds for violent extremism. SFCG wanted to present them with a case that they were "not who you define me to be" so they had students put together documentary films that defined who they were in their eyes and show how they are living a Muslim life. This effort debunked the myths and helped students learn how differing viewpoints can coexist. It opened up people's

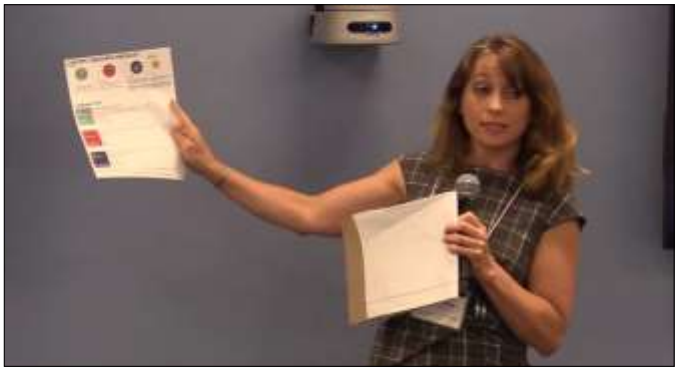
minds that they can live together even with different beliefs and religions. People make a considered choice not to create the message campaign plan themselves, or direct people to say terrorism is bad. People realized that an authentic messenger was much more important than the message.

Deborah Willig

InterAction

The Narrative Project: Measuring and Influencing Attitudes About U.S. Foreign Aid

The Narrative Project was funded by the Gates Foundation to research the question of how the public within the U.S., UK, France, and Germany felt about global development assistance. They



found that, in all four countries, the public held increasingly negative views, including feelings of cynicism, indifference, and a sense of futility. Believing that global development assistance saves lives and makes a big difference in the world, the Gates Foundation worked to counter these negative viewpoints. Based on the research results, they came up with four themes to address the negativity around global development, and developed a tool for the content creator of a

Source: narrativeproject.org

narrative for these themes: independence (not dependence), shared values of potential (not hopelessness), partnership (not charity), and progress (talking about what has worked).

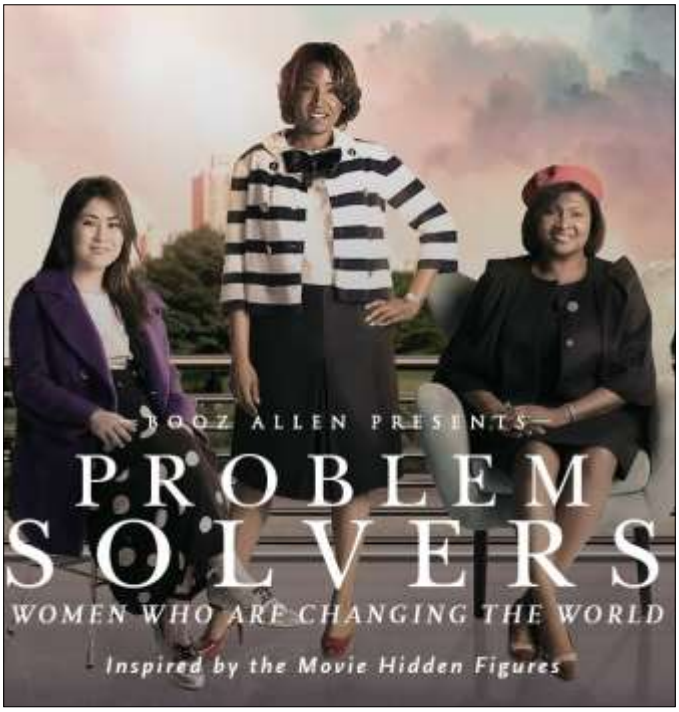
Michael Dumlao

Booz Allen Hamilton

Culture-Jacking and People-Centered Narratives

Michael described a narrative campaign he designed for Booz Allen Hamilton (BAH) to promote

BAH's talented consultants. BAH is a management consulting organization which has become increasingly technology focused. Michael wanted to be sure BAH didn't lose its ability to build strong customer relationships as it made this transition. His idea was to talk about its people, not its technology. People can connect, where technical aspects alone leave people cold. His strategy was to authentically insert BAH consultants into a current conversation to develop interest. For instance, he leveraged positive buzz around the movie *Hidden Figures* by emulating the movie's promotional poster with his own, featuring a diverse group of BAH's own women engineers, under the heading



"Problem Solvers." These engineers promoted the idea within their own networks and sold the program throughout the company. Michael calls this approach of linking your story into a large cultural narrative, "culture-jacking."

Questions for Ignite Group 4:

Matt Levinger started out the question session and suggested that we should title this session as "Narrative Subjectivities" instead of narrative tools. He identified a common theme—empowering people to tell their own stories. This approach promotes trust and authenticity rather than the company line. It also communicates better than statistics or data.

Rules change once you go into a conflict environment. Data is limited, the environment is polarized, etc. How do you use these tools in that environment?

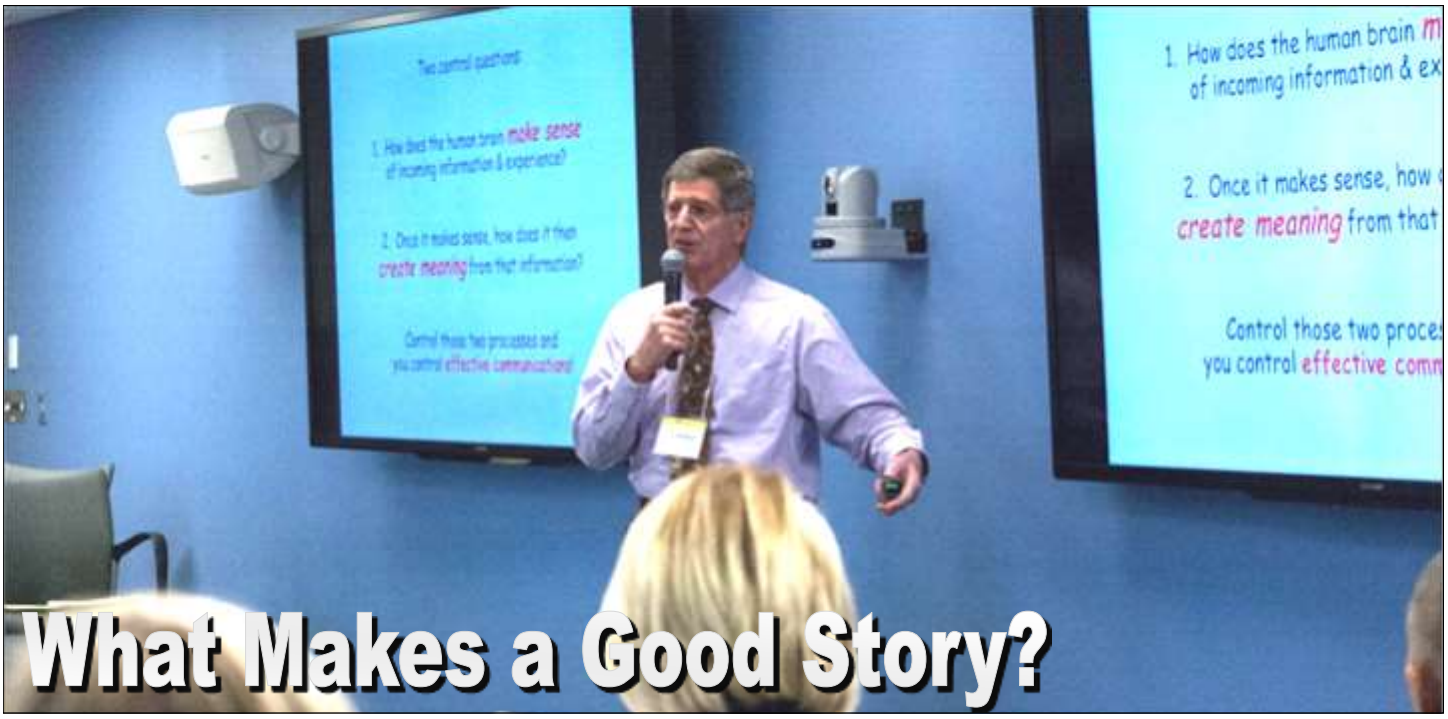
Lena Slachmuijlder emphasized that we need to invest in the education of military and other personnel involved in conflict areas in the art of dialogue and relationship building. This should give them the tools to use proper narrative strategy to shape the battlespace and look for common interest with the goal of resolving issues outside of conflict.

What are the ethics of storytelling? For example, when a British museum puts African artwork in the basement, this defines how Britain feels about Africa.

Deborah Willig pointed out that the further you get away from the field, the more the story becomes biased and you need to be cognizant of that bias and not play into fear. The ethics of the mission and ethics of how you accomplish the mission are different and one must not mingle the two. DoD doesn't have a choice of where it engages.

What are the ethics of telling the people what they want compared to telling them what they should know?

Kara Marston said that pushing a story about the Kardashians is easy and lucrative compared to real news that educates and enlightens. What our research is telling us is that publishers should move away from the easy sell, shallow message, and move to more in-depth content. The public is interested in high value, in-depth content.



The Science Behind the Startling Power of Story

Dr. Kendall Haven is a pioneer in researching the neuroscience behind storytelling and has performed as a master storyteller for over 30 years. Kendall led a discussion of practical ways to make our stories more effective. His 80-minute presentation was interlaced with stories and examples of how a story is developed and how the meaning can be very different depending upon one's perspective and experience.

> *Storytelling has two halves:*
> - *story (noun)*
> - *telling (verb)*
>
> *- Dr. Kendall Haven*

Storytelling has two halves: story (noun) and telling (verb). Kendall observed that we spend most of our time thinking about the telling part, with not enough focus on the story itself. Two central concepts must be understood about story. First, how does the human brain make sense of incoming information and experiences to assemble it into a story? Second, how does it then create meaning from the story it perceives? To have an effective narrative, one must control these two processes.

As a storyteller, your real job is to influence the audience (change attitudes, beliefs, values, knowledge, and behavior). Engagement with the audience is the essential gateway to influence. Through deliberate design of story structure, one can activate an emotional response and hold the attention of the audience.

The information must make sense. When you hear a story, you turn incoming information into a story before it reaches your conscious mind, based on your own prior experiences, assumptions, and beliefs. We measure truth by what ultimately resides in your conscious mind, after it has passed through unconscious filters.

The brain operates under a "make sense mandate;" if the brain can't make sense of something, it won't pay attention to it. In order to make sense of what they perceive, listeners will routinely change (even reverse) the content of information that is told to them. Your audience is therefore likely to hear a

The Required Eight Essential Elements of a Story

1. ***Characters*** are required that hold essential positions in the story.
2. The characters need ***traits*** that you can identify them by.
3. A ***goal*** is required. Without it, listeners will infer or imagine one, and you will lose control of the impact of your story.
4. ***Motive*** is the most important trait. Motive creates suspense and without it, the audience tends to be against the character instead of for him or her.
5. There need to be ***conflicts and problems*** within the story to maintain interest.
6. ***Risk and danger*** should be included to create excitement and emotion.
7. Your character should be involved in a ***struggle***. Without a struggle, the story takes on a tone of bragging.
8. ***Details*** are required since this is how you get information about the world. This is how the audience envisions the story.

- Dr. Kendall Haven

very different story from the one you think you told. Applying effective story structure to your information minimizes the audience distortion. Prior knowledge creates context, and story structures provides relevance. Information alone rarely changes reluctant minds.

An effective story must have eight essential elements (noted in the box above) or your audience will fill in the gaps themselves and you lose your desired intent/effect. From these eight elements of a story, one can create an effective narrative that has significant influence potential.

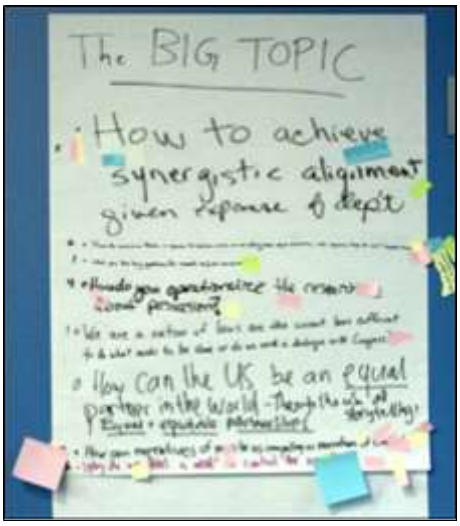
There are four questions that define a story's *influence potential*.

- Who is the character in the story I care about the most?
- How good or bad is the ending of the story for that character?
- Who can I blame for it?
- Who has the power to change the ending if it was bad, or who gets credit if it was good?

How you manipulate the eight essential elements will define the success of your narrative.

Plans for Day 2

Earlier in the day, participants wrote questions that came up during the conference which they thought required a more in depth discussion. Numerous questions were provided and as the members departed at the end of the day, they were asked to leave a colored sticky-note casting their vote as to which "big topic" they would like to explore the following day. In this way the participants developed the content for discussion and exploration.



Reflections on Yesterday

Day Two began with an invitation to reflect upon and discuss the previous day. Many said they were humbled by the knowledge in the room and how much there was to learn from each other. One participant appreciated the opportunity to speak openly and find common ground among the group. Another praised the Ignite events and wished they could last longer. Some noted the Ignite format was sufficient to give the essence of a topic.

> *"We can all have our own perception of what happened, and we can all be right as well as wrong."*
>
> *-Dr. Kendall Haven*

Participants enjoyed Dr. Haven's presentation dealing with how we make assumptions and fill in the blanks or even mentally change the facts in the stories we hear. We can all have our own perception of what happened and we can all be right as well as wrong.

Controversies

After discussing thoughts from the previous day's events, the participants held a second round of small group discussions focused on **Dialogue and Debate** of the thorniest questions and concerns surrounding our collective work on narrative. During day one, participants had written their suggestions for controversial discussion topics on a large sheet of paper on the wall. The event facilitators selected eight questions from this list for discussion, each of which was assigned to a different table. There were two rounds of discussion. During the first round, participants discussed and debated the topic that had been assigned to their table. For the second session, they were invited to move about freely to whichever table topic interested them the most. At the end of two rounds, a spokesperson from each table shared the table's response to each controversial question in terms of the pros and cons of each side.

Does the U.S. Government necessarily delegitimize any narrative it tries to promote?

YES: The U.S. Government frequently delegitimizes its own narratives, because it does not understand the local history or recent past of the target audience. This leads to poor results since we do not understand the complex relationships.

NO: When we truly try to help our friends and do not have an agenda, we tend not to delegitimize the narrative.

NUANCES: The government frequently delegitimizes its narrative, because its words and actions do not match. Its actions either do not follow or serve to undermine the narrative. The U.S. does not have a unified message to the world amongst the President, Congress, the civil and foreign service, *etc.*

Is it possible to agree on a set of core U.S. Narratives?

YES: It is possible if you focus on the Constitution, human rights, rule of law, *etc.*

NO: Application of these core values can be problematic as individuals disagree even on core values.

NUANCES: Not everyone agrees with all aspects of rights such as free speech and burning flags. In essence, an individual or group will agree on core values when it is convenient or when the outcome is desirable, but agreement is difficult if outcomes are undesirable (*e.g.,* allowing hate speech).

Which has more impact on narratives, words or actions?

NUANCES: It depends on whether one is countering, supporting, or ignoring a narrative. If one's actions and narratives are in sync, the effect can be powerful. If the actions and narrative are out of sync, then significant conflict ensues.

When employing narrative to prevent violent conflict, can irresponsible use of narrative cause more harm than good?

NUANCES – For narrative to cause good, it depends on four qualities.

- Do we care about all harms equally or are we biased to one side of the discussion?
- Do we truly understand the nature of harm and risk or are we inflating the actual risk?
- Do we understand probabilities and problematic thinking when assessing the narrative?
- How do we account for time in our equation when developing and delivering the narrative?

All four of these questions must be taken into account when developing the narrative approach.

If all narratives have perceived truth, do facts matter?

YES: Facts do matter, however…

NO: Truth is subjective based on life experience, and thus facts may not matter to the individual at all.

NUANCES: The differences between truth and facts are that facts are evidence based, but truth is based on your subjective experience. However, we believe that truth will eventually come out if initially it is hidden by believed truth.

Is U.S. promotion of certain narrative any different than propaganda?

YES: When a narrative is based on values like diversity, for example, it works.

NO: If the narrative is based on a simplistic black/white, good/evil perspective, than the narrative is just propaganda.

NUANCES: Narrative can frequently be confused with propaganda and it depends on what your objectives are when developing the narrative or what you are trying to accomplish within your narrative.

Should the U.S. stop trying to control narrative?

YES: The U.S. does not have a legitimate voice and thus promoting a narrative with no authority works against the U.S.

NO: If the U.S. has an outcome that it desires, then the U.S. must engage in the narrative in order to shape and achieve the desired outcome.

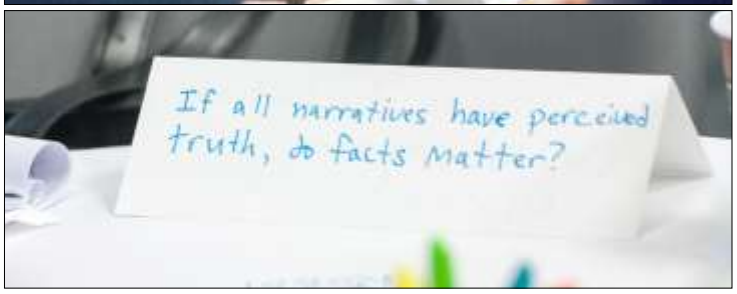
NUANCES: "Control" is too strong a word to be realistic. "Shape" is better. Narrative is very important and one must participate to shape the outcome.

Which framing is right, "Battle of Narratives" or "Conflict Resolution?"

Battle of Narratives is correct if the use of force is appropriate.

Conflict Resolution is correct if you want consensus, but you may not achieve exactly what you desire.

NUANCES: One must decide on objectives and approach first; narrative is just a means to an end.


If all narratives have perceived truth, do facts matter?

Day Two Ignite events focused on the science of narratives (Group 5) and on narrative case studies from practitioners in the field (Group 6).

Ignite Group 5: Science of Narratives

Facilitator – **Jonathan Weiss** from the event planning and support team moderated the fifth Ignite event of the conference.

Casey Miner

United States Agency for international Development (USAID)

Messaging and Changing Narratives in Fluid Political Conditions

Casey presented two examples from his work as a strategic communicator with USAID working with youth in Central Asia.

Central Asia presents the U.S. with many challenges, including an aggressive and well-funded Russian media and an increasingly engaged China. The challenge for U.S. interests is not just how to create a helpful narrative, but which methods to choose for strategic communication. Through adaptive messaging the U.S. aims to counter violent extremism and promote human rights.

The world currently has the largest population of

youth in global history. Storytelling resonates with young people, providing a means to dampen violence. Effective messaging requires understanding of the local, district, and national contexts. It also requires a focus on long-term strategic goals.

Dr. Matthew Levinger

George Washington University Elliott School of International Affairs

The Power of Mythic Histories

Myths of the past can drive compelling narratives. In President Donald Trump's campaign slogan,

Make America Great Again, the word "again" is the vital link back to a mythic history. A mythic history is a narrative in three parts. First, there is idea of the *glorious past*, which defines the membership and attributes of the community as they existed in

the idealized good old days. Second is the story of a *degraded present* which has caused conflict among the people. The storyteller diagnoses the trauma that lead to this intolerable present state. This leads to a prescription which will mobilize the community into action to restore the pre-trauma ideal state. The result is the *utopian future* which is the third element of the narrative. In this way words can drive action using a very simple formula.

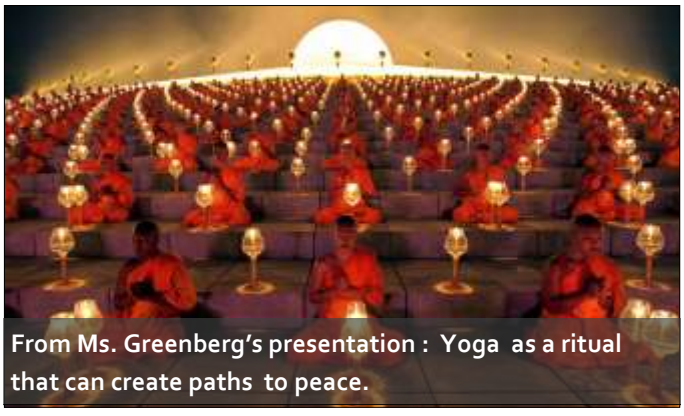
Melanie Greenberg

Alliance for Peacebuilding

Theories of Peacekeeping: How Neuroscience and Spirituality Can Inform New Peacebuilding Practices

Social neuroscientists are trying to understand

what goes on in our brain when we make peace. Alliance for Peacebuilding is contributing with research on how the spiritual rituals, values and practices of different cultures around the world: (1) affect emotional and cognitive processes; (2) contribute to transforming behaviors, attitudes, and relationships; and (3) facilitate peacebuilding processes, from violence prevention to reconciliation. Alliance for Peacebuilding is now



From Ms. Greenberg's presentation : Yoga as a ritual that can create paths to peace.

testing several hypotheses which have emerged from the research to address these three questions. For one, ritual helps to calm fear responses and provide an opening for new information. Rituals create safe spaces where there can be a transmission of values. Spirituality

also offers the prospect of transcendence, and thereby ways to find new paths to peace.

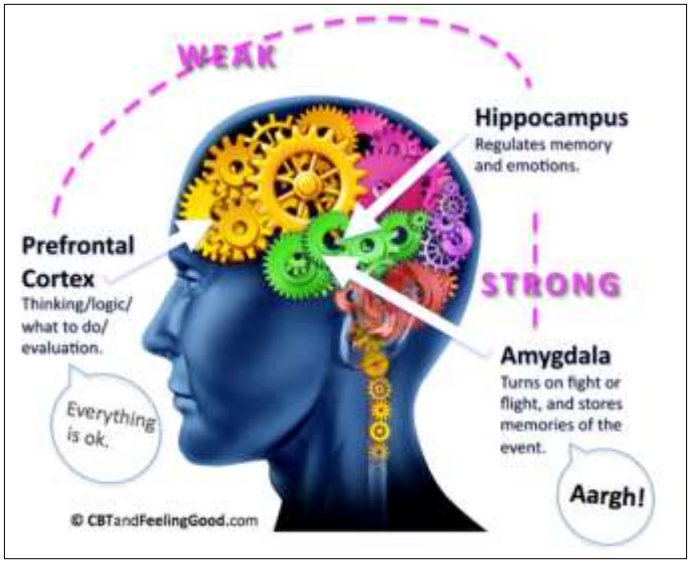
Dr. Gregory Seese

John Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory

The Neuroscience of Propaganda and the Exploitation of Cognitive Biases to Perpetuate Disinformation

Greg discussed the proliferation of fake news from a neuroscience perspective. His key insight is that

consumption of information activates fight or flight response, the biochemical reaction prompted by perceived threat or danger. This evolutionary



From Dr. Seese's presentation, how the brain responds to physical and psychological threats.

response is triggered by not just physical threats, but by psychological ones as well. Humans have evolved to push threatening information away in favor of information that conforms to their own beliefs. Though we may think we are using our reason to consider new information, more often we are mentally making a case to reach a predetermined end. Our natural biases include *confirmation bias*, which causes us to give greater weight to evidence and arguments that bolster our beliefs, and *disconfirmation bias*, which drives us to devote extra energy to refuting views and arguments that we find incompatible. Propaganda leverages and manipulates the drive for confirmation that is evolutionarily hard-wired in the human brain.

Questions for Ignite Group 5:

Can you give an example of a conflict where spirituality has been used as a method to resolve a conflict?

Melanie Greenberg responded that spiritual solutions tend to be small scale, not large scale such as in Bogotá, Colombia, where she talked with a Jesuit priest who worked with his people to resolve conflict through spiritual means.

Is there a way to bridge gaps caused by confirmation bias?

Dr. Gregory Seese answered that one needs to try and understand what is important to a particular individual and use that to develop the desired message. Simply saying "violent extremism is bad" is not as effective as, for example, showing how it threatens tribal knowledge, history, and beliefs. To build a bridge you need to find similarities with the opposing side and know that you also see the world through your own lens.

Ignite Group 6: Case Studies

Facilitator – **Kiran Singh Sirah** from The International Storytelling Center moderated the sixth Ignite event of the conference, focusing on case studies.

John DeRosa

George Mason University

Mapping Russian Nuclear Narratives: Narrative Frame Analysis to Highlight Strategic Choices in Nuclear Strategy.

President Putin has threatened to use the Russian nuclear arsenal on many occasions: after the invasion of Crimea, upon Sweden considering joining NATO, and after the deployment of the Romanian missile defense system. There is a risk

that these narratives could serve as the basis for aggressive nuclear policy. Narrative analysis of this tendency shows that that there is a tremendous sense of insecurity in Russian narratives. Interestingly, most of the narratives around nuclear weapons are not perpetuated by Russia, but by the U.S. Russian narratives also consistently offered a path to conflict management or resolution.

Alicia Johnson

Field Innovation Team

Storytelling and Disaster: Gathering Personal Experiences

Field Innovation Team (FIT) has been trying to address the lack of survivor focus in emergency response and recovery that results from a failure to understand survivor stories.

Alicia interviewed several disaster survivors to capture their perspectives and experiences during and after disaster. She found that survivors want the interaction and have a desire to connect. They appreciate being engaged on a human level and treated like they are a neighbor. As a result, FIT has

expanded this effort to both national and international collection of survivor stories.

Elayne Saejung

Center for Preparedness Education, University of Nebraska Medical Center

Storytelling in the Field With Responders

Stories can help educate emergency responders prior to disaster. Elayne told the story about an Oklahoma man whose house was destroyed by a tornado at age 13. This experience led him to pursue a career in emergency management. Later in life, an F5 tornado destroyed his house for a second time. This second experience drove him into new work promoting the construction of storm shelters in Oklahoma. By incorporating stories like these, the Field Innovation Team educates disaster planners and response teams to better work with victims. Using a storytelling method provides a means of transmitting lessons learned and improving impact.

Ned Lazarus

George Washington University

Evaluating Israeli-Palestinian Encounters Through a Narrative Lens

Narrative plays a strong role in the Israeli and Palestinian conflict, which has been an enduring challenge for conflict resolution. It is the "poster child" of narrative stalemate. Ned worked as a counselor with a peace camp in the region, which sought to bring teenagers together to build relationships. While he was there, he found a Palestinian boy in tears and was told that one of the Israelis had spit on him. Upon investigation, he found that the young Palestinian had told the Israeli boy in question that the Holocaust was a lie. Ned drew the conclusion that while dialogue is necessary, the power of narratives makes the process like a minefield. Successfully navigating this minefield of narrative requires a series of controlled explosions in a supportive setting.

Questions for Ignite Group 6:

For the Russian narrative, are we building Russia up to be a monster that it truly isn't?

John DeRosa thought that the hysteria is here in Washington, not in Europe or Russia. Russia's sense of insecurity is legitimate and we must ask, how do we resolve the insecurity?

What role does narrative play with the individual vs. with society?

Ned Lazarus proposed that narrative is the means by which the individual is programmed by society. For example, he witnessed peace discussion preparation sessions in which the participating individuals were prepared with canned narrative responses. It takes time for individuals to develop their own narrative.

How can we help people to shift from the fight-or-flight response to a mindset of openness to an opposing narrative?

Ned Lazarus answered that prolonged exposure, dialogue, and relationships can help. Where Palestinians and Israelis interact through schools, camps, *etc*., they are able to make this shift.

Slam Poetry - There is No Such Thing As Fair Trade Cocaine

Kiran Singh Sirah shared a story that ended with an example of "slam poetry" that he had presented in England. He said that he didn't know much about Colombia when he went there to work with the population and hear their stories. When he returned to England, it struck him that cocaine users there didn't understand that they were financing the war back in Colombia. Kiran then ended his story with an original composition about his compatriots' ignorance of the harm they were causing to those back in Colombia. The poem states, "There is no such thing as fair trade cocaine" – stating succinctly that for what the British were receiving on their end was not fair for what the Colombian community was receiving on their end. Kiran wrote this poem to champion a cause because he knew this forum would have an impact on young people. His slam poetry piece is available on YouTube and Vimeo using the key words: Fair Trade , Cocaine, Sirah.

Reflections

Just prior to the final Ignite sessions, facilitators asked the audience for their reflections on the conference: "What did you glean or come away with after the last two days of presentations and discussion?"

Several participants commented on the "Worlds Apart" Heineken commercial – which the group had watched together that morning. The commercial demonstrates that shared goals (for example, assembling a bar and bar stools together) can help individuals overcome differences in the social narratives they subscribe to. This concept

highlighted how there is always common ground (being a father, for example) that can be basis for bridging gaps. A participant noted that Heineken is funding a study on how we find common ground to address conflict.

"How do you rebrand peace?" was the question posed by an individual who spends time trying to explain in national security terms the value of peace. Is peace nothing more than the successful outcome of conflict?

Another participant reflected that when we built the internet, we thought it would unite people through the increased speed of information flow, yet we find it has done the opposite. It has tended to result in polarization and echo chambers. No one has ever one won an argument over the internet, added someone else. We have to be aware of other peoples' lenses and know their history. A book by Mark Goulston, *Talking to Crazy*, discusses how to communicate across the barrier of irrationality. Should our educational system's curriculum on civics include the effect of the internet?

> *"People don't know what they don't know. There is an assumption that DoD has a narrative, but we don't. Talking points in PowerPoint is not a narrative."*
> *-Paul Cobaugh*

There was also discussion of the President's budget proposal. A budget is a kind of priority list, and proposed budget zeroes out several programs that help with narrative in order to build up the military. How do we deal with that in promoting a peace narrative?

Nominated Topic: "Can a Narrative of Peace Be As Powerful As a Narrative of War?"

On Day One the participants had nominated and voted on a plenary discussion question for the afternoon of Day Two. The winning question was, "Can a narrative of peace be as powerful as a narrative of war?"

Discussion centered on shaping military actions to respect and respond to the importance of narratives. Some asked whether the DoD could begin to adopt narratives of peace. Some military members said they expect difficulty in convincing leadership that narrative is important:

- "We try to convince leadership that it is important, but they just want more weapons and brigades."
- "People don't know what they don't know. There is an assumption that DoD has a narrative, but we don't. Talking points in PowerPoint is not a narrative."
- "Within our group of professionals we can't even define narrative, how do we expect our leaders to agree on what narrative is?"

Another military member noted that trying to execute a strategy towards narratives would be difficult to execute:

- "We don't even get introduced to strategy until we are at the very senior officer level."
- "Peace building is difficult and we try to avoid it. Killing the enemy is easy. A long term strategy is hard."

- "Do we know the definition of war? Is it kinetic? It is a conflict of wills? Russia is waging war in the cyber world, for example, and they are very effective at it."

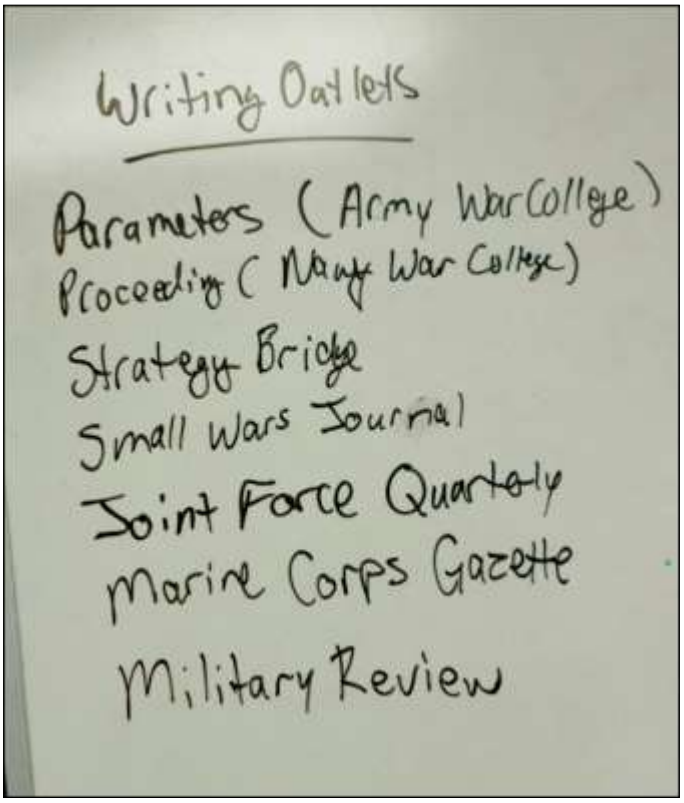
Others mentioned that people may get very defensive when others try defining their narratives for them:

- For example, what is the definition of 'Storytelling?' I tried to solidify it and found it to be very difficult. People resented being pigeonholed within my definition of the term. So, I chose to shift to opportunities and challenges instead of defining a problem. Is it important to have a definition?
- The challenge is rebranding peace by investing in peacebuilding rather than a war machine. How do you open your heart to this approach?

A non-military participant said, "We work with the military because they have the resources. We (non-military) need to help them find alternative ways to do their job instead of being kinetic. Kinetic operations are expensive; you can do advertising with proven impact for so much less."

Strategic communications assets in the military have been downsized due to sequestration and the Budget Control Act. Psychological Operations (PSYOPs) lost its glimmer after our efforts to "win hearts and minds" in Afghanistan and Iraq failed to consolidate our military gains.

The DoD will soon update military doctrine to include a new joint function called "information," to join other functions such as maneuver, fires, intelligence, sustainment, *etc*. This change within the military is an opportunity to push for a recognition of the importance of narrative. Attendees at the conference were encouraged to submit articles to writing outlets (shown in the photo below) and security-focused websites promoting the incorporation of narrative into military strategy, plans, and operations.



The session ended with a statement of the hope that at least some of the connections made and ideas heard at this event will stick with the participants and aid them in their future endeavors.

Participants came to Engaging Narratives ready to share their knowledge and experience in the field of narratives. But they also have stories to tell. Participants were invited to share their personal stories in the setting of one-on-one conversations, which were captured on audio in a format inspired by StoryCorps.

Participants signed up in pairs for 10-15 minute recorded conversations in a quiet room adjacent to the main conference space. These intimate conversations focused on how they became involved in narrative, what their passion is in this field, and what the future holds. With this starting place, the conversations often evolved into other areas of interest.

Participation was completely voluntary, but those who contributed their stories reported how powerful and enlightening it was for them.

During the conference we ran a version of ***StoryCorps***, an intimate conversation between two people. StoryCorps is a program founded by Dave Isay and can be found at www.storycorps.org.

We were interested in the stories of how and why our participants developed an interest in narratives, and their vision of the future of narratives in their work.

Comments about StoryCorps

"I found it extraordinarily helpful and enhanced my ability to understand the full context of the problem."

"Really enjoyed it."

"I am an avid listener to the NPR version and was understandably thrilled to participate in a similar experience. Thank you!"

"Liked it much more than I expected to!"

"I liked the opportunity to record the conversation, and just having the opportunity brought me closer to an unlikely ally. Curious to see how it sounds and how we might make use of it."

The final set of Ignite presentations (Groups 7 and 8) dealt with narrative within military operations. The presenters gave perspectives from both inside and outside of the military.

Ignite Group 7: Military Operations in the Context of Narrative

Facilitator – **LTC Scott Thompson** from the Office of the Secretary of Defense served as the moderator for the seventh Ignite event.

Paul Cobaugh

Narrative Strategies

Narrative in Practice: Information Operations Campaigns in Afghanistan

Paul provided examples from his experience in Afghanistan to show how narrative works on the battlefield. As a professional Information

Operations (IO) officer, he prepared for his first tour in Afghanistan by studying traditional IO methods and doctrine. He had some success on his first tour, but was not ultimately satisfied with his results. He prepared for his next tour with intensive study of Afghanistan, which introduced him to the concept of Pashtunwali, the traditional

customs and ethical code of the Pashtun people. This knowledge allowed Paul to communicate and connect more effectively with the locals, and to help them take back their territory and the minds of their youth from the Taliban.

Counterinsurgency is a battle of influence. The ability to tell stories attuned to the local mindset and ideals, and listen to and understand local stories in turn, gave Paul a means of influence.

Tricia DeGennaro

U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command

Expanding Engagement in Information Operations

Tricia provided her viewpoint on the military's role in narratives as a senior geopolitical risk analyst on contract with the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC). She and her colleagues are funded by the Joint Staff to research and

recommend ways to improve how the military operates in the information environment.

Essentially, she focuses on how to influence people and get things done through social networking. Engaging with people is essential for success in accomplishing military objectives.

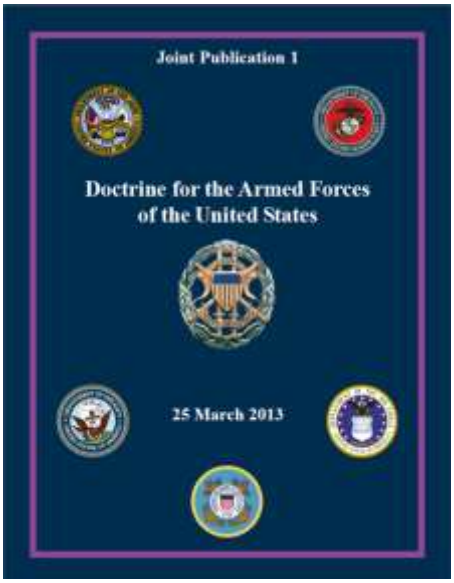
Mary Shultz

Joint Information Operations Warfare Center

Joint Concept for Operating in the Information Environment

The Joint Concept for Operating in the Information Environment (JCOIE) is a new piece of military doctrine providing guidance for how the military should understand the effect of its activities on information, including local narratives. In Mary's estimation, we are failing to achieve lasting outcomes in the information environment, which prompted the development of JCOIE.

In order to be able to use information to achieve our goals, we need to institutionalize and operationalize the integration of physical and information power. We need to be able to detect changes in the information environment, anticipate



their likely impact, and determine how to leverage them to our advantage. Thus our goal should be to execute, assess, and modify activities in order to reinforce a deliberate psychological effect. You cannot defeat someone until they decide they are defeated.

Question for Ignite Group 7:

What does a "non-military space" look like?

Scott Thomson noted that more and more territory is just becoming military space. The military is no longer restricted to acting in "areas of hostilities." We need to move away from binary thinking between military and diplomacy, victory and defeat, *etc*. Additionally, a complexity of defining a non-military space is that lawyers are heavily involved with defining of the rules by which the military operate. How do we ensure the military focuses on information warfare when there is no kinetic component? There will not be a paradigm shift until it is reflected in the DoD budget. Information will become a priority and not an add-on when and only when it is reflected in the budget and has resources applied to it. The concepts required for information warfare have been identified and approved; now DoD begins the process of building it into budget planning.

CDR Daryk Zirkle

Navy Staff, Information Warfare

Joint Concepts Under Development: JC-HAMO / JCIC / JCOIE

Daryk introduced three recently published examples of joint military doctrine that pertain to the discussion of narratives: the Joint Concept for Human Aspects of Military Operations (JC-HAMO), the Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning (JCIC), and the Joint Concept for Operating in the Information Environment (JCOIE). These three

concepts together describe how military leaders are to understand, visualize, describe, direct, and align aspects of informational power in the context of war to achieve enduring strategic outcomes.

Ignite Group 8: Integrated Operations

Facilitator – **John DeRosa,** who is a fellow at the Center for Narratives and Conflict Resolution at George Mason University, moderated the final Ignite event.

Dr. David A. Broniatowski

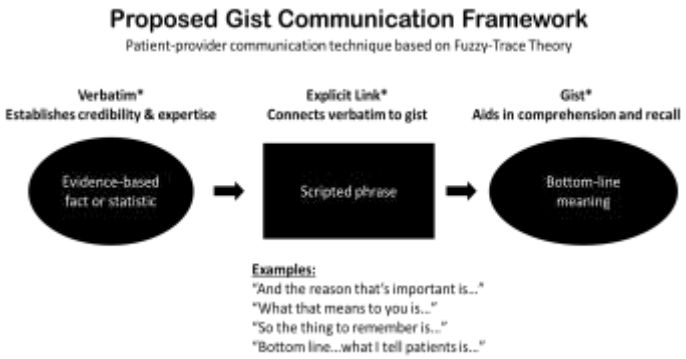
George Washington University

Effective Vaccine Communication During the Disneyland Measles Outbreak

David's discussion focused on how social media is

affecting the narrative associated with vaccines. A large portion of the population looks to the

internet for medical information, so countering fake news online is a serious matter. The most common form of false medical information is spurious correlation. For example, because autism is diagnosed in children during the same age range in which they are vaccinated, a popular theory emerges that the two are related.



Dr. Broniatowski describes the Gist Framework.

David outlined a concept called *fuzzy trace theory*, which postulates that websites that produce a more coherent and meaningful "gist" will be more influential, regardless of factual accuracy. He defines gist as the basic surface-level meaning, without nuance or precise details. The upshot of fuzzy trace theory is that countering false medical stories with facts will not be as effective as providing stories with a strong alternative gist.

LTC Scott Thomson

Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Combating Terrorism

What is the Role and Context of Narrative?

Scott explored the question of what the role of narrative is for the U.S. military, and how narrative should shape our strategy. Strategists need to start by defining the problem. The purpose of military is to meet our strategic aims, but what is our strategy? Strategy describes how we will cause relevant actors to support our aims. It is a plan for

guiding someone else's behavior. Power is not just physical force but a way to influence.

Our difficulty applying this approach stems from the fact that the military is built to fight, not to influence. Our system as it is, is designed to succeed tactically but fail strategically.

Dr. Jeff Kubiak

School of Politics and Global Studies, Arizona State University

Arizona State University's Center on the Future of War's Weaponized Narrative

Jeff gave an overview of the Center of the Future of War's recent paper, *What is Weaponized Narrative*? It posits that weaponized narrative is the new battlespace**.** "Weaponized narrative is an attack that seeks to undermine an opponent's civilization, identity, and will. By generating confusion, complexity, and political and social

schisms, it confounds response on the part of the defender." As a result it causes a loss of trust in traditional institutions.

Dr. Rebecca Goolsby

Office of Naval Research

The NATO Digital Working Group: Red Team Methods for Information Operations

In military war gaming, the *red team* plays the part of the adversary. In a wider context, a red team is an independent group that challenges an

organization to improve its effectiveness. Rebecca managed a red team effort designed to improve NATO's ability to counter the Russian narrative threat. NATO learned to better monitor the environment, fill the digital space with helpful

messages, counter rumors, and avoid engaging trolls. They learned to seek out friends and allies, and fill the space to counter Russian narrative.

Questions for Ignite Group 8:

Can you comment on weaponized narratives coming out of the U.S.?

Dr. Jeff Kubiak thought that this is a product of the explosion of information in our society of today and a threat to us being able to create a U.S. national narrative.

Dr. David Broniatowski followed with his thought that there are many groups looking at how to counter the narratives of anti-vaccine campaigners.

Our enduring strategy outcome is peace, yet we fail to achieve this goal. Are we opposed to identifying peace as a strategy outcome?

Scott Thomson stated that the generals are asking this question, but we are fundamentally confused on how we define peace. It isn't always signing a declaration on a battleship. Under that definition, it seems that whenever we go to war in the current context, we fail. From a "gist" perspective, maybe we should relate our narratives to morality. Then maybe we can succeed.

Closing Comments by Frank DiGiovanni

To close out the Engaging Narratives Conference, Mr. Frank DiGiovanni asked each participant to give a short answer to the same question:

If you were king or queen for a day, what would you tell the Secretary of Defense or the President about narratives?

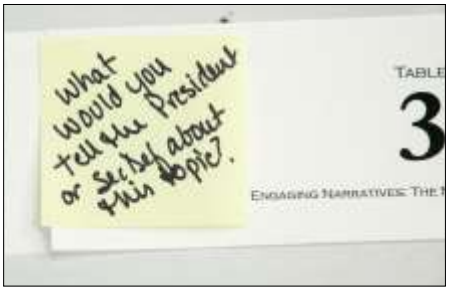
He also asked the group to consider a related question:

What Federal agency is responsible for the U.S. narrative in the world?

Mr. DiGiovanni's answer to the second question was that the executive branch, and specifically the U.S. Department of State, is responsible for the U.S. narrative. DoD is necessarily engaged in narratives, but tends to defer to State to own the mission and lead the effort.

What would you do if you were King or Queen for a day?

A majority of participant responses to the first question above were focused on what they would tell the President. Examples are provided below:



- Strategic narratives can save our Service members' lives.
- We need to define what our national narrative is.
- There is a lack of understanding of what narrative is and why it matters.
- We need to understand that people are wired to think in terms of narrative.
- We need to better integrate plans with strategy.
- We need to unite our community to do our task, but as a nation we are risk adverse.
- What story do you think your twitter feed is telling, and what is your legacy?

- Calling people "losers" is not a grand insightful narrative; labeling people is dangerous.
- We need to tell a story about national peace strategy.
- We need to create a national information strategy.
- Technology and innovation define the national narrative.
- Narratives are incredibly important and we can't undermine our narrative.
- Authorize a U.S. agency that develops a national strategic narrative.
- We need to stabilize the homeland first.
- I don't understand your (President's) narrative.
- Understand that the crisis we are at is also an opportunity.

- Convene a meeting with all the people in this room about narrative.
- Give us the resources to address this problem.
- Tell our story, not your story.
- Congress has driven us to a military state.
- Narrative should be coming from the American people; how do you give them a voice?
- Conflict is an opportunity for change.
- No one is born a terrorist.
- Reassess the planning process within DoD to incorporate narrative.
- The messenger really matters.

After everyone had provided an answer to his question, Mr. DiGiovanni had the definite impression that many in the room were not enthralled by the President's narrative. He flipped this thought to ask, what makes you think he is not speaking for a large segment of the population? As long as we stay divided, we are missing the power of the narrative. How do we modify the narrative to make it more universal? What we should have learned over the past two days is that there is no such thing as objective truth. Truth is defined by the values of our society. Those who are opposed to us, think their truth is the absolute truth. So how do we use the narrative to appeal to more of the people we are trying to talk to?

Another thought that he presented was that there are two audiences for messaging – domestic and foreign. Our messages will differ between the two, but this is not understood by many. A narrative can have unintended consequence when it reaches the audience it was not designed for.

What are people doing to teach cognition, *i.e.,* the mental action or process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and the senses? Mr. DiGiovanni had one potential answer to this question: Cognitive Apprenticeship. Cognitive Apprenticeship is a theory that attempts to bring tacit processes out in the open. It assumes that people learn from one another, through observation, imitation, and modeling.

> *"What is the major difference between humans and animals? The answer is language."*
> *- Frank DiGiovanni*

What is the major difference between humans and animals? The answer is language. With language, humans can learn from generations past, while animals must start building knowledge anew with each new generation. As humans, we can build upon the knowledge captured in stories that we pass from generation to generation. That is why stories are powerful.

Mr. DiGiovanni said that if he were king for a day, he would talk to the President about culture. We need to charge our core culture with regard to the value of narrative.

To end the conference, he proposed that the group should work on the following:

- What is next?
- What should we do?
- How do we sustain this effort? Do we develop an accord, *i.e*., "The Elliott School Accord?"

Other participants provided additional thoughts:

- Alliance for Peacebuilding and PartnersGlobal have seed money for promoting narratives. Melanie Greenberg offered that she would be reaching out to everyone to invite them to participate in future efforts.
- We each need to commit to one micro-action to start the process.
- Should we set up a Slack Channel? (https://slack.com/)
- Can we set up a follow-on workshop and resources?
- Need to institutionalize this effort.

Ms. Beverly Popelka provided a few closing comments:

- We will report out to you and send a survey. We are looking for your feedback and additional resources.
- We will put out a summary report for this event and look for quick wins.

Finally, the event ended with a story narrated by Keya Guimarães from the Storybook Theatre of Hawaii. As she moved around the conference room, she unfolded a tale derived from Native American tradition. The ending revealed the key to driving forward important changes: courage, time, cooperation, and the word of the story.

The Story Continues

After the conference we sent out a survey for feedback. One of the most important questions we asked was, *"What can your sector (government, academia, NGO, industry, etc.) do to carry forward the momentum from this event and put new insights into practice?"*

These were some of your responses:

- "Stay engaged in the community."
- "I'm working with the Defense Information School to bring some of the speakers in to speak to their instructors and local PAOs."
- "This is the hardest point. Not sure how to move from conversation to action."
- "Advocate for development of narrative training/education for users."
- "We are currently developing new curricula and growing our partner and alliance base in this area."
- "Working on integrating the issues of narrative into the Army Strategy for Operations in the Information Environment."
- "Continue lines of connection/discussion."
- "I'm at the stage where I have to create a Fleet demand signal for this kind of work. It's a longer row to hoe than most."
- "Update and enact policy that relates to narratives."

"What can your sector (government, academia, NGO, industry, etc.) do to carry forward the momentum from this event and put new insights into practice?"

- "Spread the word about what was learned at the event using the deliverables from it."
- "We can continue to collaborate as a large group and smaller group collaborations (I am collaborating with some of the folks I met at the conference). We can "brand" this working conference with Accord and interviews, pics *etc.* Perhaps a Facebook page dedicated to the conference and on-going communications."
- "Our NGO sector is committed to continuing to convene, network, share resources, develop training and disseminate thought pieces."
- "I'm working on this every second of every day. The question is: what can the USG and, specifically, the DoD do? The answer is: resources— time, money, attention, access."
- "Academia's job is to create knowledge and explain phenomena. Academia has been working on narrative for decades, and focused on narrative in security contexts and DoD applications specifically for the last decade; we could probably stand to publish more in DoD professional journals."
- "Government needs to have follow-up discussions."
- "I would be very interested in doing joint advocacy and outreach across academic, peacebuilding and military lines. I'd be happy to aid in whatever way I could within the DoD to bring resonance and new ideas to a more effective way to transform conflict. I'd like to be part of more such conversations with a similarly multi-disciplinary group."

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Participant Feedback

"I'm convinced that out of shared understanding, will emerge shared ideas, and joint action."

"What a great event! Even though I was only able to come for one day, I found it extremely valuable."

"Thank you for an inspiring 2-day gathering! Our collective narrative was being written every minute of our time together...."

"Thank you for the most excellent conference. I learned much and met some extremely intelligent and informed people."

"Such a great two days with everyone. Thank you. Look forward to continuing this collaboration."

"Thanks y'all for an invigorating two days!"

"Thank you [to] the entire team for so expertly hosting and cultivating through your interactive activities, a very good collaborative brainstorming."

"... SPECTACULAR final product! You gathered such a diverse and thoughtful group, the format lent itself to transformational thinking, and you created an environment where people felt safe to share their views and create new frameworks together."

"You have an excellent team and put on an incredible event."

"What a fruitful and fulfilling two days. I am so very grateful for the thoughtful design of this symposium and seamless execution provided by Beverly and your entire team."

"Really well organized, thoughtful events and methods of engagement."

These additional resources were provided by a few of the participants.

danah boyd

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