

GOETHE-INSTITUT

# Imagining Impacts Toolkit



# Introduction

“It’s extraordinarily hard to measure and quantify an idea like value in relation to culture, because the use of the term raises so many questions – not least, ‘who is asking about value?’, and ‘what does value mean?’. You can’t tick a box marked profundity.”

– ALAN DAVEY<sup>1</sup>

This toolkit is a product of a research study, *Imagining Impacts*, which was conducted from 2021-2023 by the Cultural Programme of the Goethe-Institut’s (GI) Regional Office for the fifteen Goethe-Institutes in Sub-Saharan Africa, in partnership with the University of Cape Town’s African Centre for Cities (ACC).

*Imagining Impacts* investigated the role of culture in sub-Saharan Africa, primarily by drawing on the insights of a purposive cohort comprising art practitioners, collectives, and scholars, who respectively represented a cultural initiative that was awarded Goethe-Institut funding to implement an intervention in Africa at varying stages over a twelve year period.

From the onset, study implementers acknowledged the challenge of implementing a retrospective evaluation of this nature, since eligibility for Goethe-Institut funding is not contingent on an applicant’s fulfilment of stipulated monitoring and evaluation (M&E) requirements. An intentional policy on the Goethe-Institut’s part, this commitment

recognises the paucity of M&E resources and technical capabilities generally available to cultural practitioners/ organisations in the region, thus serving to democratise access to funding.

However, the absence of common assessment frameworks, tracking systems and indicators across projects, foreclosed this study’s deployment of conventional impact measurements. Implementers were thus called upon to give practical expression to the *Imagining* component of the study title, designing creative yet rigorous study methods and processes.

This toolkit distils and synthesises these methods and processes, providing an easy-to-use guide that shies, to the fullest extent possible, away from reliance on technical jargon. Therefore, it is targeted at a diverse audience, including but not restricted to art practitioners, scholars, and institutions, cultural funding agencies, development associations, and non-profit organisations.

# Background

The ACC is committed to conducting co-productive action research; therefore, the point of departure for *Imagining Impacts* was to convene the representatives who received, within a twelve year window (2008-2020), Goethe-Institut funding to implement cultural projects in Africa.

An inception meeting was hosted from 28-29 January 2019, the aim of which was to establish research parameters and eligibility criteria for the selection of participating projects. The meeting also opened up space to start to ideate how to practically assess, in the absence of pre-existing methodological frameworks, the impact of GI's support to Africa's cultural sector.

This initial meeting proved insightful; it was supplemented by a survey administered to all representatives, and semi-structured interviews conducted with those who availed themselves. The motivation for this outreach was to identify the conceptual and methodological possibilities, and to lay the foundation for the intellectual practice that would sustain this effort.

The research team recorded - and maintained documentary journals - of the preparatory and

debrief sessions held before and subsequent to each broader convening, creating a digital repository for their evolving thinking, and sense-making of the ideas advanced by project participants. Facilitation of the internal sessions rotated between the three ACC researchers, who each enjoyed the discretion to host as they wished. This creative freedom coalesced into sessions involving reading (primarily literature to stimulate deliberation on potential modalities and methods), reflection, programme design, and research and experimentation with different facilitation approaches.

Debrief sessions centred largely on identifying what worked - not only in terms of isolated activities, but the combinations/sequences thereof - which was discerned from the research team's observations, what GI reported, and study participants' feedback. The research team also sought to identify successes, missteps and the reasons therefore, as well as participants' perceptions of the various methodological experiments.

*Pictured left: Plotting Goethe-Institut funded projects implemented in Sub-Saharan Africa between 2008 - 2020. Photographed by Vaughn Sadie*



## The total number of Imagining Impacts convenings facilitated by the research team are indicated in the table below:

**28-29 Jan 2019**

Initial Project Meeting to workshop the research process and selection criteria for participating initiatives

**15 September 2020**

Inception Meeting

**Feb - March 2021**

Administration of surveys, individual semi-structured interviews

**04 March 2021**

Debrief & Planning [ACC research team: Rike, Vaughn, Khanya]

**11 March 2021**

Planning [research team]

**21 March 2021**

Facilitated River of Life Workshop [Goethe-Institut representatives]

**24 March 2021**

Debrief & Planning [research team]

**10 May 2021**

Developing Imagining Impacts Methodology [research team]

**21 May 2021**

Planning [research team]

**10 June 2021**

Workshop: Unearthing Stories of Change in the Cultural Landscape [research participants]

**21 June 2021**

Analysis [research team]

**30 June 2021**

Planning [research team]

**01 July 2021**

Validation Workshop: River of Life [Goethe-Institut representatives]

**05 Aug 2021**

Imagining Impacts Discussion [participants, Goethe-Institut, research team]

**Aug-Nov 2021**

Analysis [research team]

**13 Dec 2021**

Presentation of Draft Narratives [Goethe-Institut, research team]

**31 Jan 2022**

Analysis [research team]

**08 Feb 2022**

Analysis [research team]

**09 Feb 2022**

Analysis [research team]

**07 March 2022**

Presentation of initial research findings [Goethe-Institut, research team]

**11 March 2022**

Debrief [Goethe-Institut, research team]

**June '22-Dec '22**

Refinement of analysis, formal documentation and presentation of findings (delayed on account of the commencement of another Goethe-Institut and ACC collaboration, Power Talks)

## General Notes On Facilitation

The success of any collective intellectual endeavour – be it a workshop, focus group, reference committee, etc. – is highly correlative to the skills and experience of the person(s) facilitating it.<sup>2</sup> Group facilitation best practice emphasises the importance of the following:

- **Independence:** there should be no doubt about a facilitator's impartiality, even where they are briefed, or engage with, a designated organisational delegation prior to the broader convening;
- **Transparency:** all participants should be clear about how a process will unfold, and their participation in it should be negotiated to respect their agency;
- **Respect:** participants should at no point perceive themselves to be arbitrarily discriminated against on the basis of race, gender, national origin, age, socio-economic status, etc.;
- **Sound understanding:** facilitator(s) should be well versed on the topic of discussion, to confidently address arising questions and allay any concerns;
- **Deep and empathetic listening:** a facilitator should consistently check-in with participants to confirm that they have properly understood what is said; they should simultaneously inquire to ascertain if anything remains unsaid (to open up space for the inputs of participants who are hesitant/fearful to speak);
- **Clear and concise communication:** both verbal and written, is important to avert misunderstanding and to keep participants on the same page throughout the process;



*Left: Facilitation is strengthened where participants' ideas are documented and displayed to validate the veracity thereof.*

## General Notes On Facilitation

- **Inclusiveness:** to establish a conducive atmosphere for expansive participation and the expression of diverse views, facilitators are encouraged to interact non-judgmentally, to consciously refrain from revealing personal biases, and to skillfully retain focus without shutting down negative feedback;
- **Sound emotional intelligence:** enables a facilitator to maintain their poise, to read the room, gauge participants' temperaments, and exercise a deft hand to diffuse tension/conflict, manage dominating personalities, encourage the input of more reserved persons, and sustain the momentum of the programme (exercising judgement on when to retain, and when to shift, focus);
- **An interactive programme:** group-work generally requires participants to step outside of their comfort zones, to sustain protracted focus, to listen and engage actively, and absorb and synthesise a great deal of information – much of it novel! Recourse to a range of modalities stimulating creative, emotional, analytical, etc. input is more likely to sustain commitment to the process, avert the onset of fatigue, and optimise the achievement of desired outcomes;
- **Setting the scene & debriefing:** setting the scene and re-orienting participants back into plenary after small-group sessions and meal breaks helps to contextualise the purpose of an activity, encouraging engagement even if the activity is not one they particularly enjoy / which engenders discomfort; debriefing before concluding sessions helps the facilitator to ensure consensus in the group regarding what has been observed, experienced, achieved, omitted, etc. and to identify the reasons for outcomes.<sup>4</sup>



*Left: A facilitator is well served by capturing emerging themes e.g on a cue card, to fresh their minds as they guide sessions.*

# Tools

## The River of Life

### Objective

'The River of Life' is an interactive tool designed to guide individuals engaged in a common cause through a process of visually representing, in the form of a river, their institutional memory, professional history or shared experience.<sup>4</sup> Each person's timeframe may not necessarily overlap with the overarching timeline, so their respective inputs will correspond to the duration of their involvement.

The river, topography surrounding it, and details such as still waters, eddies/whirlpools, rapids, waterfalls, dams, boulders, steep inclines, precipices, etc., signify the group's seminal experiences, for example catalytic events, enabling relationships, key challenges, internal and external crises, barriers to progress, success factors, etc. GI's ecosystem was referred to as the "Goethesphere," signifying the

*Left; Materials suggested to workshop The River of Life*

system in which the organisation interacts with and impacts/is impacted by the various cultural role players also present within that system.

The insights generated through this process can deepen a collective's understanding of the environment in which they operate, the context in which they implement a social intervention, the role players with a notable influence within their ecosystem, the strategy and tactical choices prioritised by the collective, etc. all of which can be leveraged for the collective's planning, strategy formulation/revision, evaluation, informed decision-making, etc.

### Duration

A minimum of 90mins

**15mins** – introduction and explanation

**45mins** – group work

**20mins** – plenary feedback

**10mins** – wrap-up and debrief

### Facilitation Guidelines

The person(s) best equipped to formulate targeted questions for the River of Life workshop are a facilitator who: (i) possesses a sound knowledge of the facilitated group's focus area, and; (ii) is able, through consultation, to ascertain what the group seeks to accomplish with this exercise. A pre-assigned list of questions just simply cannot achieve the level of contextual specificity needed to make this exercise worthwhile.

### Material

Flipchart, newsprint, plain paper, scissors, prestik / glue, post-its, pens, pencils, crayons (multiple colours).







## Process

1. As the facilitator, elaborate the objective of the River of Life activity, and conduct a rapid check-in to gauge participants' expectations and subjective orientations as the process unfolds;
2. Divide participants into small groups – taking care to ensure a balance, both in terms of demographics and years of service – and invite participants to collaboratively formulate a timeline: the starting point can precede the individuals in the group (e.g. critical institutional milestones that have become mythologised), but energy should be focused on fleshing out the periods involving members of the group.
3. Be sure to allow adequate time for the group to visually plot the above mentioned points on their river, using the materials availed. Remind them of the symbols at their disposal, i.e. the river as timeline, as well as the riverine and topographical attributes, e.g. dammed up sections, eddies, precipices, valleys, waterfalls, etc., that they can use to denote the various stages of their joint recollection;

### Prompts can include, for example:

- a. Influential leadership (internal, political, civil society, etc.);
  - b. Key events (internal, external);
  - c. Notable operational, personnel, and policy changes (positive/negative; internal/external)
  - d. pivotal partnerships;
  - e. Periods of stasis, and the reasons to which this is attributed;
  - f. Periods of sustained progress/growth, reasons to which this is attributed;
4. Encourage the groups to engage in a continuous process of validation with one another, to ensure agreement on what is ultimately represented;
  5. Invite nominated group representatives to share their respective Rivers of Life within the plenary, and take notes as the facilitator, so as to discern common features and themes to guide your consolidative analysis, which you can draw on as you facilitate the feedback and debrief session.
  6. Facilitate an interactive reflection process, inviting participants to share their feedback on the Rivers of Life, and how they experienced the process of developing these. Refer to your notes and observations to reflect back to the group the emergent issues and themes you have detected, which the group may wish to unpack in more detail (i.e. what are the implications insofar as the institution's current location, structure, leadership, staffing, partnerships, etc. are concerned?).

*Left: Participants tapping into their creativity as they develop their River of Life ecosystem.*



## Discussion/Reflection/Evaluation/Feedback

Bring the process to a close, allowing participants to weigh-in with their take-aways. As already noted, the facilitator is best positioned to formulate contextually appropriate prompts and questions; the following are thus merely illustrative:

- What organisational insights surfaced by this activity were new/surprised you?
- What aspect of the collaborative development of your organisational River of Life did you most enjoy/struggle with; why?
- What did you observe with respect to how your colleagues communicated, engaged in this group activity? For example, who spoke, who was reserved/restrained, who dominated conversations, who assumed leadership of the break-away sessions, who was distracted, who deviated from assigned tasks?
- How can these insights assist you to delegate/structure future collaborations?
- Was your River of Life process well facilitated (i.e. were instructions clear, comprehensible, and easy to execute)?
- How would you facilitate a River of Life workshop?
- Is there anything else you would like to discuss?



**Above:** It is imperative to allocate adequate time for participants to jointly reflect on the workshop process. This ensures that unresolved issues and emerging questions are addressed, with an aim to land the session with everyone on the same page.

# Most Significant Change

## Background

The Most Significant Change (MSC) Technique was developed by Rick Davies in the mid-1990s to respond to the challenges associated with monitoring and evaluating an expansive and complex rural development programme in Bangladesh.<sup>6</sup>

A participatory data gathering and iterative analytical method 'based on the collection and systematic selection of stories,'<sup>6</sup> MSC generates comprehensive qualitative data that is used, among other things, to track an intervention's progress, and evaluate its outcomes.<sup>7</sup>

## Purpose

The MSC technique was designed to eliminate the need for implementers to possess a professional qualification, or technical proficiency, in monitoring and evaluation (M&E). This is a marked departure from other evaluative methods, which are overwhelmingly conducted in accordance with prescribed norms (e.g. OECD evaluation principles), by evaluators competent in evidence-based approaches, reliant on pre-determined indicators, and

frameworks such as logic models or theories of change, etc.

MSC involves participants' generating/gathering stories that enumerate an intervention's most significant change. This is a two-fold process that involves documenting the MSC story arc, followed by the progressive narrowing down and isolating, from submitted stories, those perceived to best encapsulate the most significant change within a particular domain.

MSC is thus particularly well-suited to application in contexts where different cultures, linguistic groups, and divergent skill levels are represented. The value of this technique lies in its ability to aggregate vast qualitative data from multiple sources, and its facilitation of collaborative, systematic, and iterative analysis and distillation of this data, which generates surprisingly sophisticated results for such a simple approach.<sup>8</sup>



**Above:** Illustration from Davies, R. & Dart, Jess. (2005). *The 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) Technique: A Guide to its Use*

## Duration

The Most Significant Change Technique comprises several key steps,<sup>9</sup> elaborated in greater detail in the process section. These steps are intensive, and thus best facilitated across several convenings.

## Materials

These are best inferred from the process guide.

## Facilitation Guidelines

It is generally beneficial to institute an awareness campaign ahead of introducing the MSC technique.<sup>10</sup> This allows for potential concerns, e.g. scepticism about the efficacy of a story-oriented evaluation approach, wariness of the added workload and time encroachment, etc.<sup>11</sup>

It is also advisable to initiate a pilot – at a smaller scale, with a group displaying the greatest curiosity or positive inclination towards MSC, e.g. M&E personnel, programme/project officers, etc. – before scaling-up.<sup>12</sup> This provides scope to adapt MSC and its constitutive steps so that it is optimally responsive to context.<sup>13</sup>

---

**Right:** It is beneficial to pilot the Most Significant Change technique with a small group that is positively inclined to M&E.



## Process

The MSC comprises several key steps, notably:

1. Establishing the domains of change;
2. Delineating the reporting period;
3. Collecting stories of change
4. Reviewing stories of change
5. Verifying stories of change

### 1. Establish domains of change:

'domain of change' refers to the "thing" which the implemented intervention seeks to change, e.g., an individual's literacy and/or numeracy proficiency; formulation of legal protections for a community's cultural heritage; improving maternity healthcare outcomes, etc.<sup>14</sup> As these examples demonstrate, domains of change are not restrictive: the locus of intervention can be at the level of the individual, institution, community, partnership, policy, etc.<sup>15</sup> In comparison to indicators, which are pre-determined, concise, and generally formulated to be SMART (i.e. specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound), domains of change are broad and imprecise.<sup>16</sup>

How domains are selected and defined is left to the discretion of those applying the MSC technique. Domains can be identified in a top-down manner (by an organisation's senior staff), or bottom-up (by those whom the intervention targets), or through a wider process that involves organisational representatives, beneficiaries of the intervention, professional collaborators, and other external stakeholders.<sup>17</sup> To keep the process manageable, Davies recommends confining each application of the MSC technique to 3-5 domains.<sup>18</sup>

### 2. Delineate the reporting period:

this calls for a determination of the period to be reviewed. If this is prospective, it additionally requires a decision to be made about the intervals at which the MSC technique will be applied to systematically track domain changes over time. If the period is retrospective, MSC will be applied for evaluative rather than monitoring purposes, which significantly reduces the frequency of implementation.<sup>19</sup> Davies<sup>20</sup> cautions against the excessive use of the MSC technique over a short timespan,<sup>21</sup> due to the laborious demands of this approach, since this is likely to elicit strong criticism, and even resistance,

from participants.

Ultimately (n 5 at pg 22)...

***“Each organisation using MSC has to make its own decision about the most appropriate reporting period, balancing the costs and benefits involved, and taking into account the reporting gaps that any existing M&E systems may be ignoring.”***

### 3. Collect stories:

MSC stories are best collected from people most proximate to an intervention, e.g. the representatives implementing the action, their targeted beneficiaries, funding officers who directly engage implementers, etc.<sup>22</sup>

## Davies recommends the use of open-ended questions to elicit and orient the structure of respondents' stories.<sup>25</sup>

For example:

1. <b>'looking back over the past year'</b> provides a clear timeframe.	2. <b>'what do you think'</b> asks respondent to exercise their own judgement	3. <b>'is the most significant'</b> asks respondent to focus their feedback, instead of commenting on every aspect of the intervention
4. <b>'change'</b> asks respondent to report specifically on observed change	5. <b>'in [specify domain of change]'</b> asks respondents for specificity of change, as opposed to change more broadly	6. <b>'in such-and-such place/ institution /community'</b> provides parameters in terms of the unit of analysis/location

24

These stories may be captured in various ways, once formal consent is obtained, for example:

- Implementers documenting their observations as an intervention unfolds;<sup>25</sup>
- Solicitation of beneficiaries' views, either through direct write-up, or recorded/ documented interviews (conducted by nominated organisational representatives or an outsourced consultant/company) – with the latter calling for consistent check-ins with the interviewee to verify the accuracy of what is captured;<sup>26</sup>
- Facilitated group discussions (which can be slotted into existing organisational/ stakeholder meetings, or ad hoc convenings, as small or expansive as can be comfortably facilitated to avail broad input) with care taken to document the stories 'as...told';<sup>27</sup> with the most significant change identified

clearly elucidating 'who was involved, what happened, where...when,<sup>28</sup> and what made this significant in the storyteller's opinion;<sup>29</sup>

In crafting an MSC story, it is important for the narrator to consider: (i) for whom the story of change is intended; (ii) whether it provides adequate contextual information (including some insight into the situation preceding the intervention); (iii) whether the target population is clearly spelled out (who, where, why); (iv) if it conveys the storyteller's perceptions about the intervention, and; (v) if the story is a strong and compelling narrative, and clearly communicates the change sought to be highlighted (i.e. zif the intervention purpose can be inferred from this).<sup>30</sup>

It is also important to include the date on which the story was captured and by whom, to allow for follow-up in the event of arising questions.<sup>31</sup>



#### 4. Review stories:

An iterative review process is recommended to enable the funnelling of MSC stories, until the most representative subset/story is identified. The method for this is not strictly prescribed; however, if an organisation adheres to a vertical hierarchical structure, then the most seamless way of implementing such a review process would be for the review, analysis and filtering of stories to occur at each tier of authority, with the apex making the ultimate decision on the most representative story enumerating change within each respective domain. This also ensures a distribution of responsibility, averting the burdening of any individual or group within the organisation.<sup>32</sup>

To ensure the transparency of this review process, it is important to document the selection criteria used to eliminate/select stories, and to make these accessible to the stakeholders whose involvement in the MSC process contributed to the generation of the stories.<sup>33</sup>

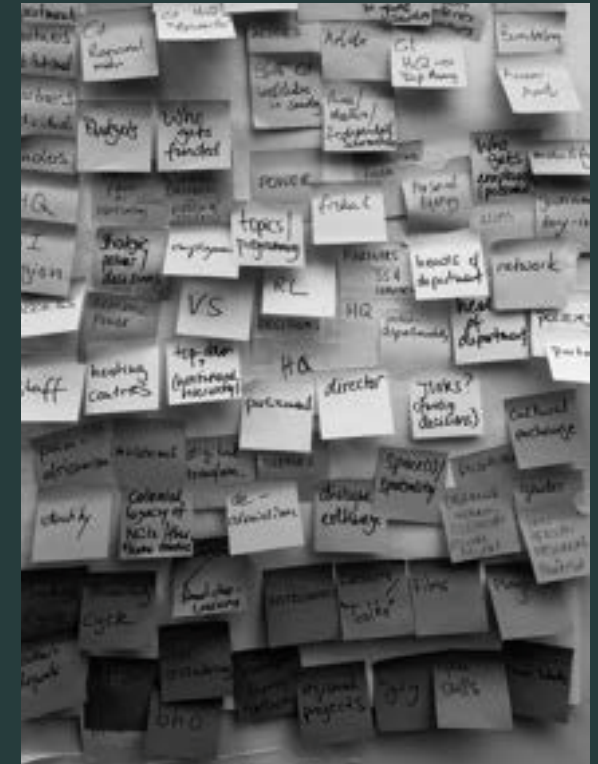
It is imperative that each successive review considers the feedback of the preceding one. Further, the following factors should be considered when designing an MSC process:

how many levels of selection are envisaged above those who initially document the MSC stories;

how many separate selection processes are ideal for the respective tiers (this decision may be influenced by such considerations as the total number of offices/staff at each level, with greater numbers motivating for smaller sessions disaggregated according to e.g. geographic location, focus area/specialisation, etc.);

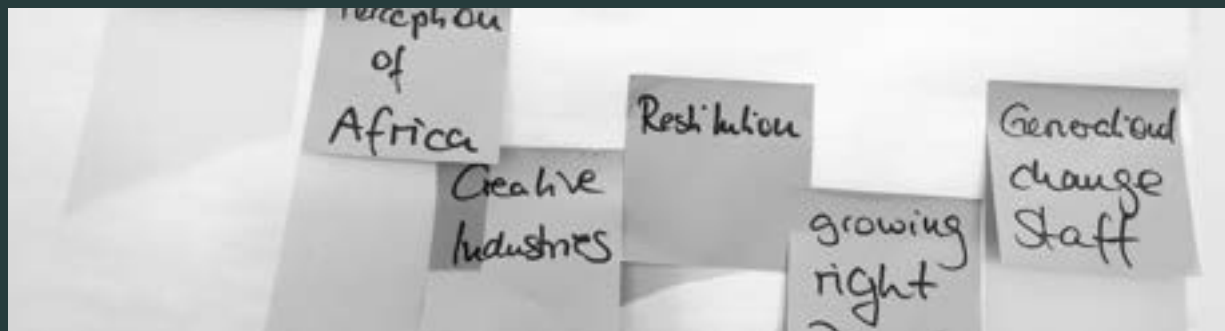
the ratio of MSC stories to personnel numbers (with the aim being to avert over-burdening, and the rule of thumb being an allocation of

a minimum of 30mins per domain of change under review; and a discussion of no more than 6 MSC stories per session).<sup>34</sup>



**Above:** Jointly select from the vast number of submitted stories the six to eight that compellingly narrate The Most Significant Change.

**Left:** Use the most compelling stories to foreground your intervention's impact within a given domain.





### The following are the key ingredients to story selection:

Review participants read the stories (Davies posits that ‘reading the stories aloud brings them to life’);<sup>35</sup>

an in-depth conversation among the review group about which stories best encapsulate change in a given domain;

a collective decision as to which of these represents the most significant change in the respective domains (it is beneficial to agree on the decision-making formula ahead of this process, i.e.: are decisions concluded by a simple majority vote, and if yes, how are deadlocks resolved; or is a weighted scoring system preferred, and how are points allocated, etc.);<sup>36</sup> Documentation of the reasons for the group’s selection.

### Review

Feedback is an important aspect of all M&E and learning processes, including MSC: with the latter, it is essential for people whose inputs contributed to the generation of MSC stories to be apprised of the review process, and the stories ultimately selected (key information should include the selection criteria used, and the appeal of the domain changes communicated by the selected stories).<sup>37</sup> This feedback can be communicated verbally, via video-recorded message, email, company report and/or the organisation’s communication channels (e.g. newsletter, social media channels, etc.).<sup>38</sup>

### 5. Story Verification

Is not imperative, however, it presents the opportunity to identify and eliminate fictional or inflated accounts,<sup>39</sup> and to secure a more nuanced understanding of the context and intervention.<sup>40</sup>

Verification can be achieved through site-visits, and/or deepened (preferably externally facilitated) discussion among project stakeholders, to unearth insights on the process and dynamics of implementation, challenges experienced, persons/groups positively or negatively affected by the intervention, changes identified, the value thereof (at all relevant levels).<sup>41</sup>

Where collective verification is undertaken, the decision-making process is critical: the plenary must be informed why selected stories were singled out over others; they must be afforded the opportunity to weigh-in as to whether or not they agree with the choices made, and they should be afforded the opportunity to motivate for alternative stories if they are of the view that these more effectively illustrative MSC.



**Above:** Story selection is a typically engaged, sometimes contested, process due to selection members negotiating their subjective preferences.

## Discussion/Reflection/ Evaluation/Feedback

The MSC technique is implemented over multiple convenings, with different role players involved at various stages; therefore, it cannot follow the linear or closed-loop logic of a singular workshop, which commences from a place of uncertainty, negotiating participants to a relative/climactic resolution.

Ripples are a helpful, and simple, visual aid to help convey the MSC logic: the convenings follow the outward cascade of ripples, starting small (both in terms of the number of participants and the scale of the convening), incrementally expanding. However, unlike ripples that dissipate, the MSC has an inflexion point at which the expanding concentric circles change course, gradually shrinking back into themselves. This expanding-contracting impulse mediates the feedback loops, requiring strong facilitation to ensure that lines of inquiry are retained across the different convenings, that focus is maintained on the common goal of identifying the MSC in a prescribed domain, ensuring outward-inward communication flows to pertinent stakeholders regarding decisions arrived at, and constantly surfacing and reincorporation into the organisational culture the lessons derived from interventions, partnerships and broader stakeholder engagements.



**Above:** The MSC technique involves extensive consultation and collaboration: as such, it is important to clearly elaborate and communicate the selection criteria used to external stakeholders, especially the story originators.

# Impact Narrating

## Background

The ACC research team coined the term “Narrating” to describe not only the method used to analyse the Most Significant Change (MSC) stories collated through the Imagining Impacts project; but also, the results generated thereby. By the end of the project, ‘Narrating’ (mode of analysis) was distinguished from ‘Impact Narratives / Narrative Strands’ (analytical output).

## Facilitation Guidelines

The research team from the African Centre for Cities (ACC) worked collaboratively for the entirety of the Imagining Impacts process. This involved jointly – together with representatives from the Goethe-Institut (GI) – conceptualising, designing, planning for and implementing the different components of the research

study; facilitating participants through the data collection phase; conducting the analysis; regularly engaging each other to share emerging observations, questions, concerns; and ultimately validating and presenting the research findings, initially to participants, and ultimately to the public.

An important insight to share with anyone wishing to facilitate elements, or the entirety, of the Imagining Impacts process, is the critical importance of assembling a coherent, dedicated, and intellectually nimble core research team that journeys together from the start to the conclusion of the study. It is equally imperative to resist dispensing with, reducing, or compromising the quantity and quality of regular, self-directed, strategic meetings for this team, since these enable sustained planning, experimentation, reflection and trouble-shooting throughout the research process. This is crucial in light of the volume of data generated through the multiple and iterative participant engagements, and

the insights accumulated through the team’s consistent journalling and reflective practice, which greatly enhanced the efficiency of their joint analysis.

## Objective

Narrating draws on various qualitative analytical approaches to facilitate an open-ended review of significant volumes of data, with an aim to isolate the key thematic insights responding to the research questions, as well as information offering novel, unexpected, etc. insights.

## Duration

Not prescribed - this will depend on several considerations, including how the research teams choose to share responsibilities.

## Material

Not prescribed. More proficient researchers may choose to use their preferred qualitative analysis software, e.g. NVivo. The Imagining Impacts research team preferred to manually and creatively sort, code and analyse data, using newsprint, plain paper, scissors, prestik/glue, post-its, pens, pencils, crayons (multiple colours), and journals.

## Process

As a method, Narrating incorporates several existing qualitative analysis approaches, notably inductive content analysis,<sup>42</sup> and secondary analysis.<sup>43</sup> Inductive content analysis does not pre-stipulate the themes researchers are to look for in the data; instead, researchers must engage in a repetitive review of the data, paying close attention to identify recurrent concepts and ideas. Judgement must then be exercised to decide which of these merit inclusion, and where it makes sense, their ranking, so as to ensure greater prominence for those which the researcher wishes to foreground.<sup>44</sup>

Once themes are isolated and documented, the researcher can turn their attention to breaking these down into more

granular composite parts, systematically organising themes into overarching- and/or sub-categories. The researcher should ensure that they capture their perceptions, initial and arising thoughts on how to systematically proceed with the analysis, any emerging questions, etc. Further, they should start to think about how to define the themes, categories, sub-categories and the codes linking these. The researcher should also document notable phrases, excerpts and quotations, which in their view succinctly communicate elements of the process, describe the themes, etc. as this helps to make the reported findings more relatable.<sup>45</sup>

Secondary analysis is the method by which the contents of a full set of MSC (including those discarded during the selection process) is systematically examined, classified, and analysed to identify the common themes relating specifically to the common domain changes enumerated.<sup>46</sup> In contrast to the MSC story selection phase, secondary analysis is not conducted in a participatory manner; it is more generally undertaken by the primary facilitator(s) of the MSC process.<sup>47</sup>

Creative methods were also used for the secondary analysis. For example, colours (pens, post-its, strips of coloured paper) were used to distinguish themes,



**Above:** A greater number of role players will be involved in the MSC process where an intervention is implemented in multiple locations.

categories and sub-categories. It is possible to distribute these different themes, etc. - laying them on the floor, or sticking them up on a wall - and visually demonstrate the linkages between them using different coloured yarn. Wordclouds are another helpful visual aid for researchers, as they illustrate the words occurring most frequently in the documents analysed, and the scope between these and words used more sparingly, which can create a helpful entry point for deeper analysis.



## Conclusion

While Imagining Impacts squarely acknowledges the difficulty inherent in undertaking a retrospective cultural impact evaluation, it opted not to shy away from this challenge. At its conclusion, the project affirms that a co-productive, action-oriented, mixed methods - with a bias towards qualitative and creative approaches - is able to provide an evaluative framework that reveals compelling insights. While these are acknowledged not to offer the precision of other methods, the Imagining Impacts research team would argue that they are more fit for purpose to systematically make sense of social phenomena, which themselves are complex, unpredictable, and not as readily reducible to neat taxonomy. Critique of the “imprecision” of the methods and tools shared here is susceptible to miss the point that it need not be either or: the qualitative insights surfaced through the methodologies elaborated in this Toolkit can be supplemented by prospective, quantitative, M&E methods, which would invariably enhance the insights obtained via both approaches.



*Left: The MSC technique lends itself to participatory prospective and retrospective assessment of collective action.*

## References

1. Chief Executive: Arts Council England in the foreword to Understanding the value and impacts of cultural expression: a literature review. Prepared by John D. Carnwath and Alan S. Brown
2. See Nancy K. Franz. (2011). The unfocused focus group: benefit or bane? in The Qualitative Report Vol. 16 (No. 5) pp 1380-1388
3. Serrat, O. (2017). 'The Most Significant Change Technique' in Knowledge Solutions (Springer)
4. See Sarah Carmody (2023). 'River of Life Storytelling' in eds. Ayton et al Qualitative Research – A Practical Guide for Health and Social Care Researchers and Practitioners (Monash University) Chapter 18 [https://oercollective.caul.edu.au/qualitative-research/chapter/\\_\\_\\_unknown\\_\\_\\_-18/](https://oercollective.caul.edu.au/qualitative-research/chapter/___unknown___-18/) (accessed 28 January 2024)
5. See Davies, R. & Dart, Jess. (2005). The 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) Technique: A Guide to its Use
6. (n 3) at p 36
7. (n 7) at p 8
8. (n 7) at p 12
9. (n 5) at p 138
10. (n 7) at p 15
11. Ibid
12. (n 7) at 16
13. Ibid
14. (n 7) at p 17
15. (n 7) at p 19
16. Ibid
17. Ibid
18. Ibid
19. (n 7) at p 10
20. (n 7) at p 22
21. With the caveat that this is appropriate when the technique is introduced into an organisation to bolster staff familiarity – see further supra (n 7) at p 22
22. (n 7) at p 23
23. (n 7) at p 23
24. Ibid
25. (n 7) at p 24
26. Ibid
27. (n 7) at p 25
28. Ibid
29. (n 7) at p 26
30. (n 7)
31. Ibid
32. See further (n 1) at p 10 and pp 28-30
33. (n 1) at p 10
34. (n 1) at pp 29-30
35. (n 1) at p 31
36. (n 1) at p 34
37. Ibid
38. (n 1) at p 35
39. (n 1) at p 36
40. Ibid
41. Ibid
42. See further Danielle Berkovic 'Content Analysis' in Qualitative Research – a practical guide for health and social care researchers and practitioners (eds.) A. Darshini, T. Tsindos & D. Berkovic (Monash: 2023)
43. (n 1) at p 39
44. (n 46)
45. Ibid
46. (n 1) at p 41
47. Ibid



## Additional Resources

### The River of Life:

Engage for Equity, Partnership River of Life Activity. Accessed 28 January 2023. [https://engageforequity.org/tool\\_kit/river-of-life/](https://engageforequity.org/tool_kit/river-of-life/)

Kipp B. Using the River of Life as a Tool. Centre for Participatory Research, University of New Mexico. 2017. Accessed 28 January 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxCOky8EJ5o>

Moussa Z. Tips for trainers: rivers of life. Participatory Learning and Action 60: Community-based adaptation to climate. New Mexico Department of Health, Public Health Division; 2009:183-186. Accessed 28 January 2023. <https://www.iied.org/g02828>

### Most Significant Change:

Dart, J. J. (2000b), 'Stories for Change: A systematic approach to participatory monitoring', Proceedings of Action Research & Process Management (ALARPM) and Participatory Action-Research (PAR) World Congress, Ballarat, Australia

Kelly, L., Kilby, P., and Kasynathan, N., (2004), 'Impact Measurement for NGOs: Experiences From India And Sri Lanka', Development in Practice, Vol. 14, No. 5, pp. 696-701

Winterford, K. (2003), Sharing Stories – A Participatory Approach To Monitoring And Evaluation In The Pacific. Pacific Children's Program. International Development Support Services, Melbourne, Australia

### Impact Narrating:

P. Leavy (2015) Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice (Guildford Press)



**Above:** Creative methods provide scope for fun and flexibility, and ensure processes that are contextually fit-for-purpose