

Narratives, Narratives, Narratives

By Mik Moore, CEO, [Moore+Associates](#)

What are narratives?

Narratives are found across collections of stories; stories we have heard so often that they are ingrained in our subconscious. For example, in the United States there are thousands of stories about pioneers settling the frontier or computer programmers inventing tech companies in their garages or dorm rooms. Seen in isolation, each story is unique. Taken collectively those stories create, shape, and reinforce a narrative about rugged individualism. This narrative is then used to generate support for policies that reward individual achievement and shortchange the collective's welfare.

What is narrative change?

The power of narratives is in their ubiquity and invisibility. They are so common we don't notice them. And because we don't notice them, we discount the role they play in shaping our beliefs and behaviors. When narratives change, or shift, our perspective or beliefs may shift too. This can open up new possibilities for political, social, economic, or other kinds of change. For example, before the marriage equality movement, the dominant narrative about LGBTQ people portrayed them as sexual deviants. Then a new narrative became dominant that portrayed LGBTQ people as family-oriented. This is narrative change.

What is a narrative strategy?

To create narrative change, it helps to be intentional. This is where narrative strategy comes into play. Since narratives are often invisible, we need to start by identifying them. Because narratives manifest across collections of stories, to counter a narrative we need to tell different stories, stories that share a common alternative narrative. To create a narrative shift, we must tell these stories enough times, to enough people, to seep into their consciousness. Telling stories at scale requires access to mass media, mass movements, and mass culture. A narrative strategy provides a roadmap for how to do these things.

What is a narrative audit?

Before you can develop a narrative strategy, you need to understand what narratives you are up against, and what counter narratives you can access. You need to know whether your own communications, across all of your approaches to creating change (organizing, advocacy, legal, cultural, etc), are reinforcing harmful narratives or advancing helpful narratives. You need to know what stories are being told, what stories you could be telling, and both who is and who should be telling these stories.

A narrative audit answers these questions by reviewing the marketing materials, communications, and media coverage about the campaign, issue, or organization, identifying the key narratives, and then summarizing the narratives challenges and opportunities. This can then be used to shape future communications, creating narrative alignment and starting the narrative change process. A narrative audit can also be the first section of a more comprehensive narrative strategy plan.

[Moore+Associates](#) performs narrative audits, develops narrative strategy, and provides training and ongoing guidance to organizations seeking to create narrative change.