Narratives

What is it? When is used?

Narrative evaluation methods are a form of storytelling. They collect qualitative information in a structured format. Narratives can be used for event evaluation, however, they can also be used to illustrate and evaluate activities, processes, outputs, outcomes and impact. They can be a powerful method of illustrating the benefits or weakness, successes or failures, of a program or an event or for describing learnings that have occurred in the course of a project. It is appropriate to keep narratives relatively brief and to the point – one paragraph to one page is an ideal length. Narrative methods represent a form of inquiry that has promise for integrating evaluation and organization development. They are useful for engaging the audience, for adding meaning and colour, in the illustration of achievements, change and impact. Narrative methods have many important attributes with regard to linking inquiry and change goals:

1. Storytelling lends itself to participatory change processes because it relies on people to make sense of their own experiences and environments.

2. Stories can be used to focus on particular interventions while also reflecting on the array of contextual factors that influence outcomes.

3. Stories can be systematically gathered and claims verified from independent sources or methods.

4. Narrative data can be analysed using existing conceptual frameworks or assessed for emergent themes.

5. Narrative methods can be integrated into ongoing organizational processes to aid in program planning, decision making, and strategic management.

Source: McClintock, C. (2004). *Using Narrative methods to link programme evaluation and organisational development*. *The Evaluation Exchange, volume IX, Number 4*, Winter 2003/2004

How is it used?

Narratives can be structured in a number of ways. To describe benefits or weakness, successes or failures regarding actions or activities the following structure can help.

- **Situation:** Contextualisation of the action or activity i.e., describe the circumstances and issues of the situation.

- **Activities/actions/behaviour:** Describe the activities/actions/or behaviours that were initiated as a response to the situation.

- **Outcome/result:** Describe the outcomes or results of the activities/actions/behaviours in terms of what happened and how well the actions addressed the situation and its issues.

In order to document lessons learned the following format may be useful:

- Theme of 'lessons learned'
- What was our original understanding or assumption?
- What is our revised understanding or assumption?
- One or two examples that substantiate the new understanding
- How did the project/process come to this insight?

Source: Brouwer, H. Woodhill, J., Hemmati, M., Verhoosel, K., and Van Vugt, S. (2015). *The MSP (Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships) Guide. Centre for Development Innovation*. Wageningen UR.