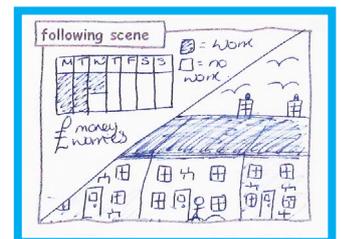
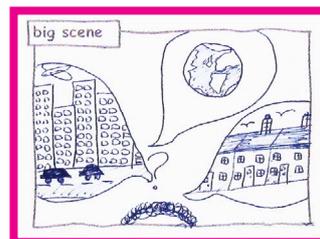


# Exploring the Turning Points in Researchers' Lives

## Using the three-scene storyboarding technique



## Dr Tristram Hooley

Tristram Hooley is Reader in Career Development and Head of the International Centre for Guidance Studies at the University of Derby. He has research interests in the role of technology in career development, the careers of researchers, careers policy and the changing nature of careers work in schools. He also writes the Adventures in Career Development blog at <http://adventuresincareerdevelopment.wordpress.com>

## Dr Bill Law

For twelve years a qualified teacher and guidance counsellor, Bill has for forty years been engaged in research and development in career management. His publication record runs from student-and-client learning material to refereed articles reporting research and developing theory. Much of this output is freely available at <http://www.hihohiho.com>

## Kieran Bentley

Is a Fundraising Business Analyst for the Stroke Association. He was previously a researcher at the International Centre for Guidance Studies, University of Derby where he worked on projects relating to career development, NEETs and researchers' careers.

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# Introduction: New ideas about researchers' careers

This publication sets out an approach to careers work called three-scene storyboarding. Storyboarding aims to help researchers to set down their experiences, to think about their careers and to take action based on this reflection. Storyboarding is a creative technique which asks researchers to think about their lives in narrative terms and to set down their experience in the form of drawings. This is an innovative technique that asks them to think about their careers in an unfamiliar way. It can therefore be a challenging technique for professionals to get started with. However, this report shows that the storyboarding approach can be useful and that it can expand any researcher's career-management repertoire.

## Understanding researchers' careers

In SET for Success, Gareth Roberts identified that there was "little structure" (p.12) to researchers' careers, but argued that they needed to be empowered to "develop individual career paths, reflecting the different career destinations – industrial, academic and research associate" (p.13)<sup>1</sup>. However, since the publication of this report it has become clear that the researcher labour market is even more complex than Roberts suspected.

An analysis of the destinations of doctoral students, three years after they complete their doctorate, revealed six clusters of doctoral employment: HE research; non-HE research; HE teaching; non-HE teaching; other common doctoral occupations; and other occupations.<sup>2</sup> The same research also revealed that career advancement was an important motivator for researchers who undertook a doctorate and who took the first steps into a research career. The Careers in Research Online Survey also reveals that most researchers feel that their institutions actively encourage them to engage in career development and around half describe themselves as having a career plan.<sup>3</sup> So while researchers' careers are complex and varied, many are seeking to manage their careers actively, - and are doing so with help and support from their institutions.

This report discusses an approach that supports researchers in their career development by foregrounding the complexity of career and the way in which it takes place in the social context of their life. Researchers are sophisticated professionals, engaged in an active process of career building in the context of institutions that are major employers. They bring to career conversations a wide range of resources including their work experience, social and professional networks, skills, knowledge and qualifications. Like everyone else, they also bring some weaknesses, areas needing development and concerns about the future. The authors of this report believe that the storyboarding technique offers an innovative and effective way to help researchers to engage in deeper career thinking.

## About the project

This report sets out the findings from an action-research project investigating the use of the storyboarding approach with researchers. The idea of storyboarding as a career-management technique originated with Bill Law (one of the authors of this report)<sup>4</sup>. He developed a technique linking structured drawing activities to ideas about narrative and storytelling, creating an approach that:

- links reflective talk to real-life experience;
- interweaves thought and feeling;
- sets learning in both individual and social contexts;
- enables learning which people can use straight away and
- enriches our understanding of student-and-client process.

The technique comprises a format in which users set down their experience, and a procedure for eliciting from and reflecting on that experience. Another of the report's authors (Tristram Hooley) had worked extensively with researchers around the issue of career development. He felt that the open and discursive approach of storyboarding would lend itself well to working with researchers. An action-research project was therefore proposed and was funded under the Vitae Innovate scheme<sup>5</sup>.

The project involved running an initial training session for careers advisers and other staff supporting researchers, who were interested in exploring and developing the storyboarding approach (hereafter called developers in this report). As part of this workshop the action-research project team reframed the process of storyboarding with researchers in mind. After the workshop five developers were recruited to run storyboarding sessions with researchers in their institutions. At each session researchers were asked to provide feedback and developers were asked to complete a structured reflection. Both developers and researchers who participated were contacted again after a month and asked for further reflections on the storyboarding session that they had attended. The project received feedback from five pilot developers and 15 researchers, as well as informal feedback from developers who chose not to pilot storyboarding or who were unable to do so<sup>6</sup>.

This report sets out the learning from this action-research project. It also explains the storyboarding approach.

<sup>1</sup> Gareth Roberts (2002) SET for Success: the supply of people with science, technology, engineering and mathematic skills. London: HM Treasury.

<sup>2</sup> Vitae (2010) Doctoral graduate destinations and impact three years on. Cambridge: CRAC.

<sup>3</sup> Vitae (2011) Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS) 2011. Cambridge: CRAC.

<sup>4</sup> For further information about Bill Law's thinking on storyboarding visit the Storyboarding Stockroom at <http://www.hihohiho.com/storyboarding/sbstockroom.html> and consult the Rationale and resources section at the end of this publication.

<sup>5</sup> For further information about Vitae Innovate visit <http://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/105263/Vitae-innovate.html>.

<sup>6</sup> In the interests of anonymity researchers are described by letter (e.g. Researcher B) and developers are described by roman numeral (e.g. Developer ii). Because it is not possible to link the initial responses to the follow-up responses one month later researchers A-O cover initial responses and researchers P-W cover follow-up responses. Similarly developers i-iv cover initial responses and developers v-vii cover follow-up responses.

# What is storyboarding? Understanding key concepts

Storyboarding is a narrative technique which enables researchers to explore their careers, to learn from this exploration and to base action upon it. It engages researchers in a narrative process in which they set down a significant episode in their lives and use that as the basis for discussion, reflection and action planning. It is useful in one-to-one discussions and workshops, but is probably best used in the context of a broader researcher development programme in which the storyboarding activity links with other career-learning and skill-development activities.

Storyboarding uses a three-scene technique for setting down a significant episode in a life. It enables people to reflect usefully on that episode. The episode can be any remembered turning point in the person's life. That episode might have been played out in a professional setting, for example, in a laboratory, library, conference or the office of a supervisor. Equally, it might have happened, for example, at home, on the street, or in another informal location. Researchers who take part in this process are working on career in actual interactions with real people in real locations. Career is neither abstract, nor confined to a CV; rather, it is happening all around us even when we are not at work.

The participants hadn't used creative techniques in careers before. They reported being surprised by the use of a creative technique and were surprised at my emphasis on the importance of ongoing career development, reflection and management and on the social context of career development rather than an emphasis on career planning (something they were more familiar with).

Developer vii. One month after running a storyboarding workshop.

At the heart of storyboarding is a reflective process where researchers organise a significant episode from their lives into three scenes. The middle scene is the 'turning point'. In an episode from the researcher's past, this would be the point at which a particular action (either on the part of the researcher themselves or of someone else) led to a change of direction in the researcher's life. Storyboarding can enable them to see how a different action might have led to a different direction, and enables them to consider the different ways in which they might act in imagined future episodes (based on current circumstances) in order to achieve a change of direction of their own choosing. This insight can often come as a surprise.

Researchers use a mixture of text and graphics to set down their experience on the three-scene storyboard. Figure 1 illustrates this and portrays an input, a process and an output in a format which may seem strange to researchers who are more used to writing and reading pieces of extended academic writing. Section 4 will discuss how to engage researchers in the value of the storyboarding

approach. However, first it is useful to examine some of the key ideas that underpin storyboarding and explore what the technique is designed to achieve.

## What do we mean by career?

It is perhaps useful to think briefly about what we mean by career in the context of this report. For the authors of this report, and for many others, thinking about careers is not just about dealing with decision making and getting through recruitment processes. That is career imagined as a competitive race. Career, in the sense that it is addressed in this report, is conceived of as an exploratory journey and refers to the ways in which people make coherent sense of life, learning and work. It is about more than "getting a good job" and includes thinking about the kind of life that you want to lead, where you want it to lead you, who you want to spend it with and what place paid and unpaid work has in all of this. It is these things that storyboarding seeks to act on.

I realised that there is always someone who gives you an idea or guides you... so networking and good friends play a very important role in your career/education.

Researcher N following a group storyboarding session

This wider sense of career seems particularly important for researchers. By the end of their doctorates they are at least three years down a career path which will have been deeply bound up with their experience of learning, and which will have had a profound impact on every aspect of their lives. When researchers get to the end of a first or second post-doc they are well into what could be described as a career journey, and are already likely to have formed a strong career identity around being a researcher, and to have become part of a professional network based around this occupation. For many, even their social networks coalesce around research and the university. For researchers, then, thinking about a career entails a lot more than evaluating skills and finding a job. It includes exploring how your sense of who you are interacts with what you do and what you get paid for. Storyboarding offers a format and procedure in which some of these deeper issues can be explored and addressed.

It [storyboarding] helped us understand where we all came from – and to think about where we are likely to go on from here (after finishing our various research degrees). For me personally it helped me in further crystallising my thinking around my career progression

Researcher V one month after taking part in a storyboarding session.

Figure 1: A simple example three-scene storyboard



## What is a turning point?

A turning point is a journeying image, suggesting a direction in which to move. By the time researchers reach a university careers service or researcher development workshop they have often reached a personal turning point. For some this is characterised in terms of whether they should leave the university (letting go) or remain as a researcher even when things are challenging (holding on). For others it might be about moving institution, changing discipline or even about an inter-personal conflict that they are having with a colleague, manager or supervisor. Turning points are all different, but what they have in common is that they show moving on to be a mixture of holding on and letting go.

The technique of storyboarding is designed to help people to identify, understand and respond to the turning points that they experience in their lives. This is not to say that it is just for people to whom it is obvious that they are at a turning point. Turning points are ways that we try to understand what is happening to us in our career and lives. Sometimes we can identify a turning point as it is happening, sometimes only as we look back and with the benefit of hindsight. What is more, as the story of our lives unfolds, our turning points are likely to change, as experience shapes and reshapes what we see as important or significant.

Developer iii described how the researcher she was working with

“struggled with the identification of the turning point”.

Developer iii after using storyboarding in a one-to-one session.

She found that she spent most of the session with the researcher thinking about and identifying potential turning points. Even if a researcher can't identify an episode in which she brought about the turning point herself, there is still value in identifying and analysing episodes which became turning points through agencies other than herself since this analysis can help her to consider ways of acting differently, taking more control, being more assertive and purposeful, in the future. Nonetheless, helping researchers to identify turning points is a way of helping them to identify their ability to make changes in their lives and their careers and to use this to be more purposeful in the future. Researchers noted that the identification of turning points had been difficult, but that storyboarding had helped with this.

“turns in career can come in almost any form/manner”,

Researcher V one month after taking part in a storyboarding session.

[storyboarding had been useful] “in thinking of (maybe anticipating) turning points”.

Researcher L following a group storyboarding session.

If researchers can identify episodes in which it is possible to make a change, and better understand how they acted when these opportunities were available in the past, then they may well be able to manage these moments more effectively in the future. They can learn this from their own stories and from other people's.

## Why use stories?

I think that entry-level researchers can learn from the experiences and stories of other researchers. If careers advisers use the success stories of different researchers they may be very useful for other researchers.

Researcher N following a group storyboarding session.

Having to recall how you started (the challenges, those times you almost got discouraged), where you are now and where you hope to be in future, makes you a better-organised person. Sometimes you get encouraged when you think of the obstacles you have overcome in the past and then your mind is open to any challenge without any fear. I think this is enough to keep one focused on the goal you have set.

Researcher W one month after taking part in a group storyboarding session.

Turning points and many other storyboarding concepts are developed from the study of literary theory. However, they may not be as readily recognised in films or literature as in people's lives. As American author Elbert Hubbard famously remarked, “life is just one damned thing after another” - which is literally and undeniably the case. Things happen to us and we act, and then more things happen to us. However, human beings are highly disposed towards attributing meaning to experience and deriving purpose from it. And one of the most prevalent ways that they do this is through the narration of stories.

So, in the quote above, Researcher W describes his experience as the story of a journey. He “started”, overcame “challenges” and “obstacles” and “focused on a goal”. In this sense career is an experience, and experience is best set down as narrative. So Researcher W is constructing a narrative out of his experience by using the metaphor of a journey. Storyboarding builds on this tendency to create narrative by helping learners to externalise their story and to think about the nature of the story that they are telling. It provides a space to ask important questions about how far experiences have been positive or negative and also to examine how the story that is being told influences career and the actions that are taken around it.

I have learnt about the twists and turns that have happened - some of them barely from my own efforts - and how they build up to who I am now and who I am likely to be in the future.

Researcher V one month after taking part in a group storyboarding session.

For Researcher V the experience of storyboarding enabled him to examine his career experience and to gain greater personal insight and utilise this to help develop his approach to his future.

Storyboarding is one genre in which a career story can be told. One way in which storyboarding might tie in with other career-related activities is by making explicit this idea of narrative genre. Other narratives about career are told through CVs, interviews, biographies, personal statements, and lists of publications. If storyboarding helps researchers to think about the career stories that they tell themselves, these other activities can shape the career stories that they tell to others. The concept of career narratives can be a useful way to link a variety of different activities together.

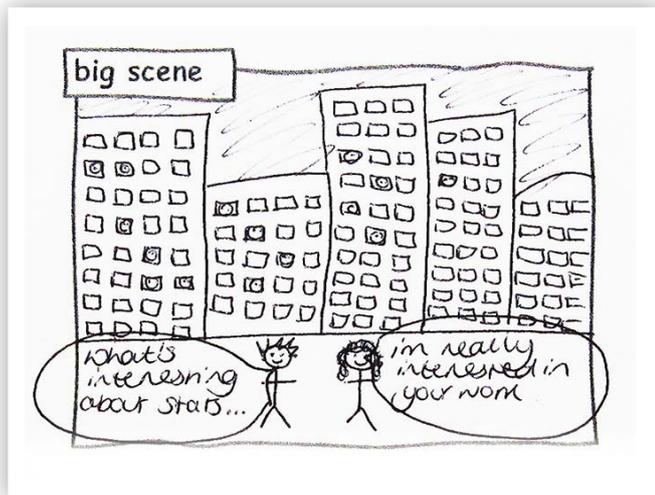
## Why use pictures?

I've also found that visualising an issue helps to simplify the main points and crystallises the stand-out features to be addressed.

Researcher T one month after taking part in a group storyboarding session.

Storyboarding uses graphic, with icons for people, places, speech, and thoughts and feelings. Images can quickly convey things that it is difficult to convey in words. The drawings that people do in storyboarding convey the number of actors, their spatial relationships and their environments. They can also convey atmosphere, mood and feelings in ways that are efficient and engaging. Whereas a conversation with a researcher about their career often moves into abstraction ("I don't know if this is really me?"), drawing a career turning point makes it concrete and allows the researcher to think in terms of the social and physical environment in which their career takes place.

**Figure 2: A storyboarding image**



Working with images also offers a way for researchers to de-familiarise their experience - to be able to look at it in a new way. For researchers who are used to expressing themselves in writing or by speaking, working in a different genre may help to encourage them to address the issue of their career in more creative ways.

Furthermore, when you draw yourself on a storyboard, you are able to look in on the experience as if you are an observer - an audience to your own life. People can find that this critical distancing enables them to identify unforeseen solutions and approaches to the issue.

[storyboarding enabled me] "to analyse my situation more objectively".

Researcher R one month after taking part in a group storyboarding session.

# Getting started with storyboarding

So far this publication has focused on explaining the rationale for storyboarding and identifying some of its key features. However, storyboarding is a very hands-on process and one which is difficult to understand fully without having a go. This section therefore sets out the storyboard and explains how you can go about using it.

It is advisable to try to complete your own storyboard before you encourage others to complete theirs. It may also be valuable to use your storyboard as an example when you work with researchers.

## Overview of the storyboard

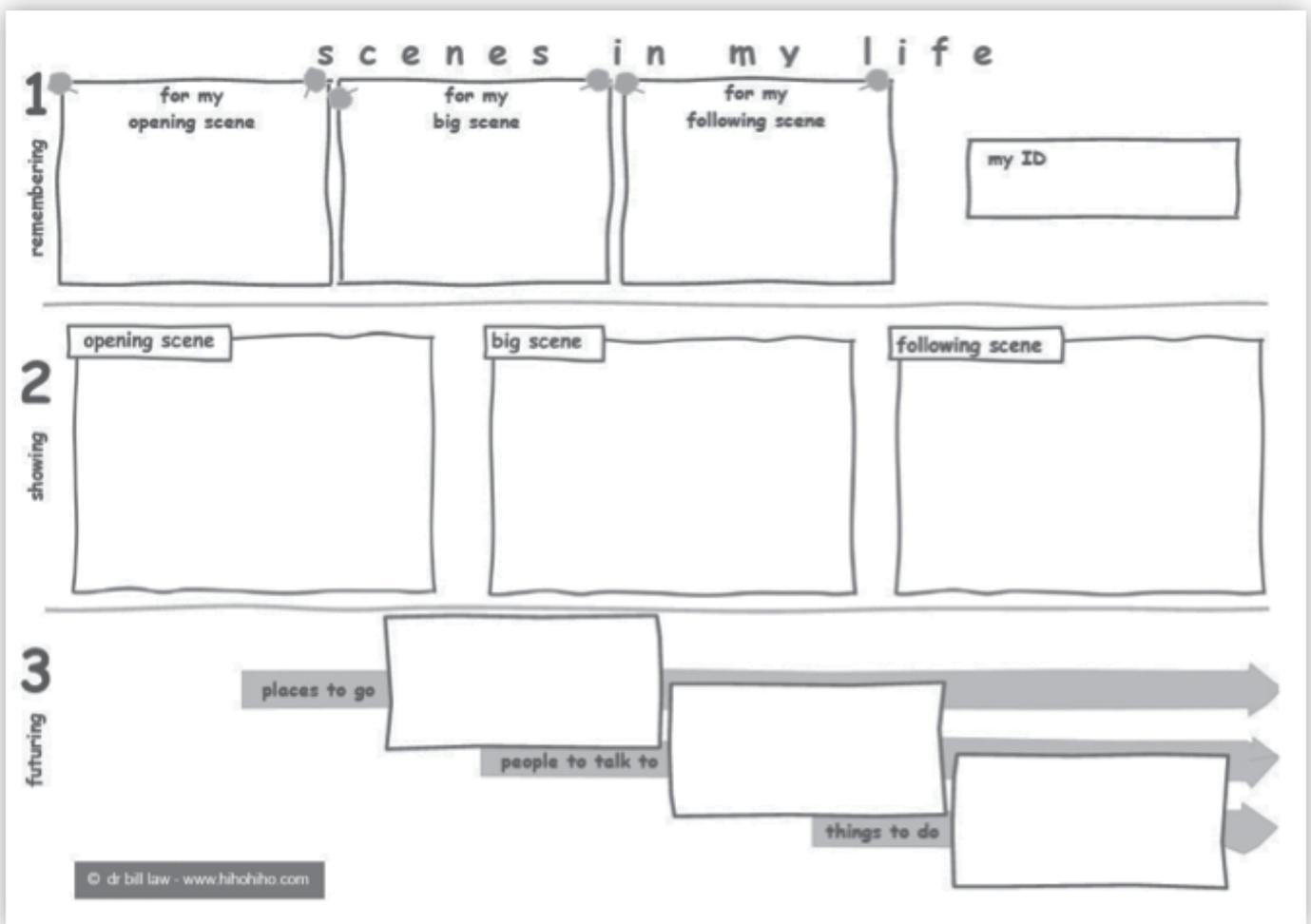
At the centre of the storyboarding approach is the storyboard itself.

During a storyboarding procedure, researchers are encouraged to use the storyboarding format as a structure for the experience that they are setting down. Typically they will be given time to complete each of the three stages in turn.

1. Remembering
2. Showing
3. Futuring

There is no set procedure by which researchers should interact with the storyboard. Some developers chose to provide them with individual time for reflection while others situated storyboarding as a group activity with space between each stage for discussion.

Figure 3: The storyboard



## Moving through the stages

Each of the stages is designed to do something different. Storyboarding is a process of structured reflection. It is important to talk each stage through with researchers who are participating in a storyboarding session.

**Remembering** is about gathering memories and sorting them into what was the turning point (the 'big scene'), and scenes showing what was going on before (the 'opening scene') and what it was like after (the 'following scene').

**Showing** is about assembling the most important thoughts and feelings into a words-and-pictures account of the three scenes: with people, in locations, engaging in talk, and experiencing inner thoughts and feelings.

**Futuring** is about identifying what action can now be taken to move things on.

## Communicating through pictures

I liked writing and drawing to express what was in my mind. I learnt to clarify my ideas.

Researcher K following a one-to-one storyboarding session.

It was a really positive experience. I expected it to be much more difficult to engage researchers in a creative process, but they were open minded and a creative approach generated some really interesting discussion.

Developer vii. One month after running a storyboarding session.

A storyboard is a particular way of telling a story, and may be unfamiliar. Developers who used the approach stressed the importance of giving researchers models and examples of what a storyboard might look like. Developers who are using the approach might want to create their own storyboard as an engaging and relevant example for researchers. Alternatively there are some sample storyboards in the appendix to this publication.

Figure 4: Remembering

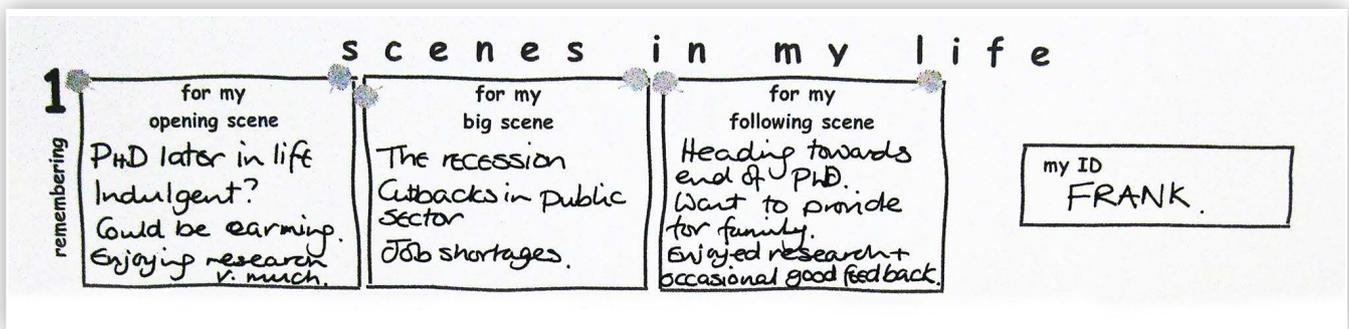


Figure 5: Showing

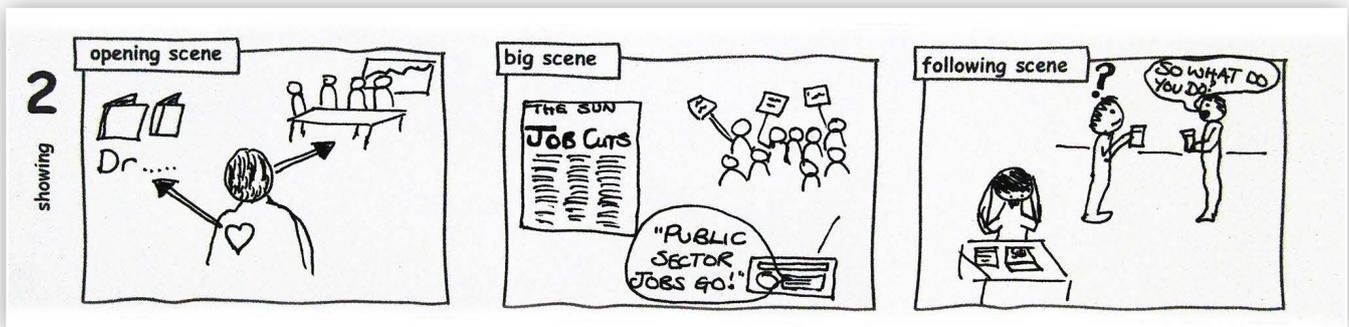
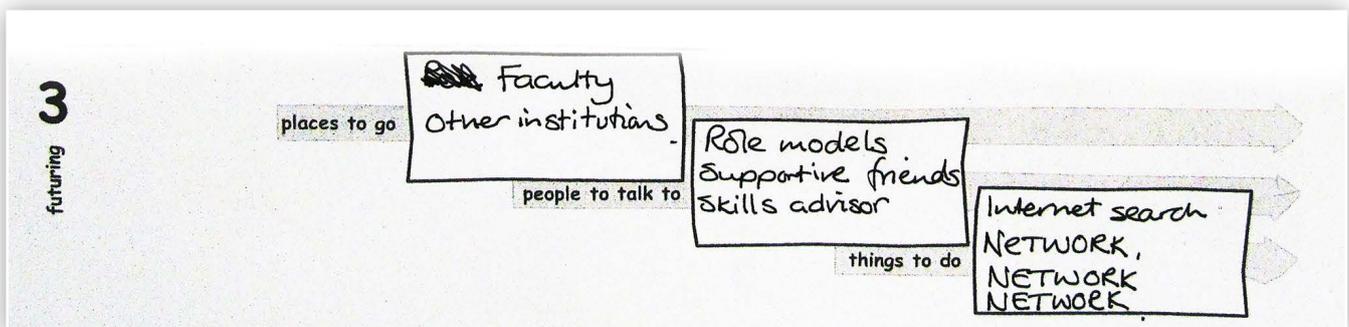


Figure 6: Futuring

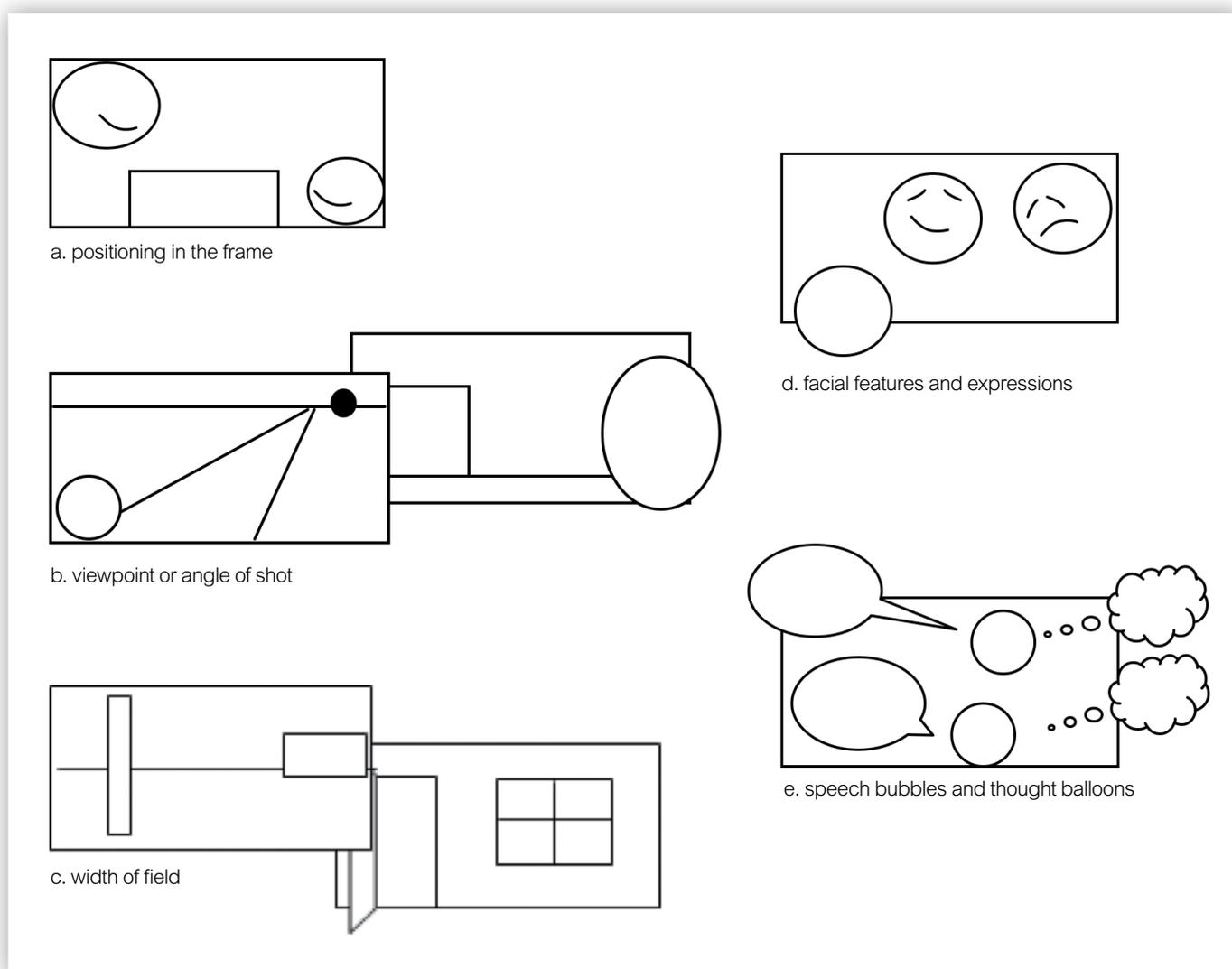


It is useful to explain some of the techniques used in working with storyboards. It is important to stress to researchers that they are not being asked to create a work of art, but rather to use simple images to set down their experience. Useful elements to show to researchers include:

- a. The position of objects in the frame
- b. The viewpoint or angle of shot
- c. Width of field / zooming in and out
- d. The use of simple facial features and expressions
- e. Speech bubbles and thought balloons

Storyboarding draws on the visual framing of both comics and films. Depending on the experience of the researchers you are working with, providing examples using either of these frames may help them to conceive what they are doing more clearly.

**Figure 7: Visual techniques**



# Using storyboarding with researchers

The range of things people valued and the range of difficulties they encountered in the storyboarding procedure was revealed by the feedback received from both researchers and developers.

While much of it was positive, there were many suggestions for developments, and some concerns about the appropriateness of the technique for the researcher group.

I was nervous about how storyboarding would be received. However the feedback was much more positive than I expected and it was much easier to deliver than I expected. Something 'different' from normal and 'boring' careers work, was really appreciated by the students. Although it took me out of my comfort zone I think we have to be willing to take these chances with our students in order to help them most effectively.

Developer iv. After running a storyboarding workshop.

The storyboarding technique was not originally developed with researchers in mind. At first glance it might appear that there are challenges inherent in asking a professional group, highly committed to rationality, empiricism and the written word, to use a technique that involves drawing, creativity and a large degree of personal reflection.

Given this possible tension, it is worth restating the rationale for using the technique with researchers. The project proceeded from the perspective that researchers face complex career choices and that their identities are often bound up with what they do for paid work. Working with researchers around career issues is therefore a challenging process, and it can reasonably be expected that storyboarding will provide a useful way to address some of these deeper career issues.

As might be expected given the expectation of tension, it proved difficult to engage developers in undertaking pilots. Developers were frequently interested in the approach but found it difficult to grasp both the concept and how to apply it. Furthermore some felt that it was risky and likely to go wrong. One (non-participating) careers advisor put it succinctly:

Many advisers/trainers will be worried that they're just going to end up wasting time in a session on something that's not going to lead anywhere and it will make them look incompetent.

Careers advisor who was approached to take part in the pilot.

Storyboarding can be difficult to convey in terms of conventional learning outcomes. Each person is likely to get something different out of it. For some it might focus on making a career decision, while for others it might engage them in reflection about their relationships or their ability to deal with stressful situations. Furthermore, it is clear from the pilots that some researchers are uncomfortable undertaking activities that involve drawing and reflection. However, others identified clear benefits from their participation in storyboarding sessions.

An excellent technique to help career reflection and progression.

Researcher L following a group storyboarding session.

Not sure if specifically related to the exercise but since I've been doing more thinking about career options. I think I've been able to better identify the things that make me tick and realise that there is a place for those skills.

Researcher P One month after taking part in a storyboarding session.

I gained further confirmation about my decision-making process.

Researcher A following a group storyboarding session.

Researchers expressed benefits which fit into the following areas:

1. Confidence in decisions taken. The reflection reaffirmed that they had made the right decisions
2. Planning for the future. In particular, considering how they would like an interaction to play out: the outcome they wish for and the preparation that they need to do in order to achieve it.

Developer ii. Comments following running a storyboarding workshop.

Storyboarding is clearly not a magic bullet that developers can aim at researchers in the certain knowledge of a perfect outcome.

Rather, it is an approach that needs to be handled carefully in order to maximise what it can do for some people, in some situations and working on some issues. The rest of this section shows how storyboarding can be used most effectively with researchers.

## Setting the scene and overcoming reservations

Many of the researchers who engaged with storyboarding during the pilot expressed reservations about its applicability to them or their colleagues.

Science graduates/researchers might need more convincing of the benefits.

Researcher I following a one-to one storyboarding session.

Another agreed with this, saying that the visualisation element of the technique was not something that he found particularly useful. He also pointed out that

"researchers are a diverse bunch" [and storyboarding] "must be great for some people".

Researcher C following a group storyboarding session.

Researchers' responses to the process as they actually experienced it were also mixed.

[storyboarding was] a "useful process" [that encouraged] "reflexivity" [but the drawing elements were] "window dressing".

Researcher B following a group storyboarding session.

"I enjoyed drawing and using an alternative to written language" [but]... "some people might not feel comfortable doing it."

Researcher R one month after a group storyboarding session.

Some researchers felt that of drawing was an inappropriate mode in which to express themselves. It is possible that storyboarding might not be the best technique for these researchers. However, it is also possible that spending more time establishing the rationale for the visual approach might be useful in engaging them. There was another group who found drawing to be an intimidating activity. These researchers felt that they were not good at drawing and therefore did not enjoy exposing their weakness in public. As discussed earlier the storyboarding technique is not really about drawing, and being able to draw well is no great advantage. However, trainers and advisers probably need to spend some time putting people at ease, explaining that very basic stick drawings are sufficient and demonstrating some basic techniques, especially in setting down position, posture and facial expression, as illustrated in Figure 7.

“not quite sure how you can draw the angst going on in your mind!”

Researcher N following a group storyboarding session.

“it would have been good to have some more ideas about how to actually capture our thoughts as scenes, we needed more ideas about technique.”

Researcher G following a group storyboarding session.

When developers use storyboarding with researchers, they are asking those researchers to express themselves in a new genre. Time spent on training and feedback may be valuable in helping them to do this.

## Using storyboarding one to one

One way to use the storyboarding technique is as a format for a one-to-one discussion. There are two main ways in which it can be employed in a one-to-one session.

- In-session storyboarding
- Inter-session storyboarding

In storyboarding the developer works with the researcher to complete the storyboard during a one-to-one session. The storyboard therefore effectively structures that session. It is likely to take a full hour to complete a storyboard, but the act of collaborating to complete the storyboard provides a series of hooks for the developer to engage with the researcher, to probe for meaning and purpose and so on.

In **inter-session storyboarding** the developer suggests the storyboarding procedure and format as an activity to take away and use between sessions. The researcher completes a structured reflection using the storyboard in his/her own time. The storyboard then forms the basis for discussion at the next one-to-one session.

## Storyboarding with groups

Storyboarding is also used effectively with groups as part of career workshop sessions. Developers found that providing the appropriate career-management context for participants is essential. Where participants had no context in which to place the storyboarding activity, they struggled to see its purpose.

The activity of storyboarding did not constitute a workshop in and of itself, but rather contributed to wider learning aims and enabled

workshop participants to explore issues in new and possibly deeper ways.

Two of the pilots produced brief lesson plans, which it is useful to reproduce here as they demonstrate the kinds of contexts in which people can set their storyboarding activity.

I found that I added some career theory to my presentation to explain why looking at career stories is important, before introducing the idea of storyboarding. I also spent some time at the end of the session to share experiences and for discussion. This was very productive as it enabled students to identify common themes around how to develop career ideas, and in particular highlighted the importance about networking.

Developer iv. Reflecting after running a group storyboarding session.

### Developer iv lesson plan

This session ran for an hour

1. Began by going through some typical career destinations of doctoral students highlighting the different potential career progression routes.
2. Introduced a small amount of career theory, in particular talking about the Chaos Theory of Careers<sup>7</sup> to emphasise that precise career planning is impossible as so many factors (including the existence of opportunities) are outside of our control. Instead we looked at the importance of ongoing reflection and development in order to allow a career to ‘emerge’, and at the role of social and cultural factors, with particular reference to the importance of using networks.
3. Introduction of the idea of a career as a ‘story’ that develops and changes through time and involves a range of characters and events, and introduction of storyboarding as a practical tool developed from this approach. Showing and discussing of example storyboards.
4. Creation of own storyboard, with the presenter also drawing her own storyboard (with the intention of engendering a collaborative working environment).
5. Presentation of each storyboard and discussion.

### Developer viii lesson plan

This session ran for two hours

1. Ask participants to generate ideas about researcher career destinations. Follow this by showing some destination data to demonstrate the diversity of destinations.
2. Discuss what we mean by a career turning point.
3. Show some of the Vitae Career Stories on Film<sup>8</sup> and ask participants to identify and discuss turning points in them.
4. Introduce the storyboarding idea and provide each participant with a storyboard. Get the participants to work through the Remembering and Showing stages of the storyboard.
5. Discuss the storyboards as a group leading towards a discussion of what has been learnt and future actions.
6. Use the Futuring section to define actions to be taken in the light of discussions.

<sup>7</sup> See for example Pryor, R., & Bright, J. (2011) *The Chaos Theory of Careers: A New Perspective on Working in the Twenty-First Century*. Abingdon: Routledge.

<sup>8</sup> Vitae Career Stories on Film <http://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers/136961/Career-stories-on-film.html>.

One of the main themes that emerged from in the pilot was the importance of using the storyboard as the basis of a conversation, rather than as an activity in its own right. The purpose of storyboarding is not the creation of the storyboard as such, but rather the creation of a format and procedure for reflective enquiry and a vehicle through which enquiry can be shared with others in discussion. Storyboarding consequently seemed to work best when developers built other kinds of group learning activities into a session using storyboarding.

In group work, as in one-to-one sessions, one can adopt either an in-session or an inter-session approach to storyboarding. If an inter-session approach is adopted the storyboarding activity in the session will be focused on sharing and discussion. The developer will need to decide exactly what format that discussion should take. There are a number of possibilities such as:

- paired discussions;
- small group discussions;
- presentation to the whole group; and
- poster session style interactions

Each of these different approaches has advantages and disadvantages and there is likely to be value in combining them, for example by using paired discussions to facilitate reflection and disclosure, and presentations to the whole group to encourage participants to commit publicly to future actions.

If an in-session approach is taken, there are yet further decisions to be made about how to structure the interplay between the storyboarding activity and the discussion that sits around it.

[I would have liked] “a little more interaction during the actual creation of the storyboard, rather than limiting it to before and after.”

Researcher A following a group storyboarding session.

[The storyboard should be] “created early on and then used as a prompt in more detailed and directed discussion.”

Researcher T one month after a storyboarding session.

Researchers tended to stress the importance of feedback and discussion in getting the most out of a storyboarding session.

Other researchers noted that it was important to take time to discuss the reflection that was taking place in storyboarding. Drawing and reflecting constitute an important part of the technique but they are not ends in themselves rather, they offer a useful stimulus for a career conversation.

[The pictures are a] “jumping off point for conversations”.

Researcher G following a group storyboarding session.

“talking someone else through it [the storyboard] would force objectivity.”

Researcher B following a group storyboarding session.

Storyboarding can be a flexible component of a career workshop. If used well it can help workshop participants to reflect carefully on their experience and their circumstances. However, the pilots suggest that this is best achieved where the storyboarding activity is clearly placed in the broader context of career planning and development activity and the workshop then uses the individual storyboards as a catalyst for discussion and peer support around the issues that are identified.

## Fitting storyboarding into a researcher development programme

Storyboarding moves careers work away from the development of the technical skills for navigating recruitment processes, and re-situates it as a broader educational intervention. Using a two-hour workshop to address the technical aspects of creating a CV, though undoubtedly useful, is in some respects limiting. Two hours spent on storyboarding, whilst perhaps having a less obvious immediate practical application, is useful in repositioning career thinking in a wider context.

It would therefore be possible to use storyboarding to explore almost every domain and skill covered by the Researcher Development Framework (RDF).

This relocation of the discourse means that it is possible to use storyboarding as a way of opening up discussions about researchers professional conduct, about working with others, about approaches to problem solving, and, of course, about issues of professional and career development.

However, storyboarding is an integrative approach: it tends to highlight the relationships and intersections between these different skills. In reality it is usually difficult to separate out when we are using our knowledge and intellectual abilities, when we are working on our personal effectiveness, when we are concerned with research governance, and when we are engaging, influencing and impacting. Because storyboarding focuses on concrete experiences that have been lived by people, and because it asks those people to analyse and learn from them, it provides an ideal process for examining how these various skills and attributes are inter-related.

Developers who used storyboarding in the pilots all found that the approach raised a number of different issues among the researchers they had worked with. One common theme was the way in which storyboarding seemed to encourage researchers to think of their career in social terms and to consider how they could work most effectively with the people around them to advance their career aims. In RDF terms this is bringing together the ‘Working with Others’ and the ‘Professional and Career Development’ areas.

It appeared to be a useful tool for consolidating their ideas and develop their understanding of the social-situatedness of their careers.

Developer vii. One month after running a storyboarding workshop.

The researchers’ career plans were not altered; however they appeared to gain a great deal from thinking about career decisions in a more rounded way, and the discussion after the session highlighted the importance of networking (through looking at their personal stories) in a way that was much more effective than being ‘told’ that networking is a good thing to do.

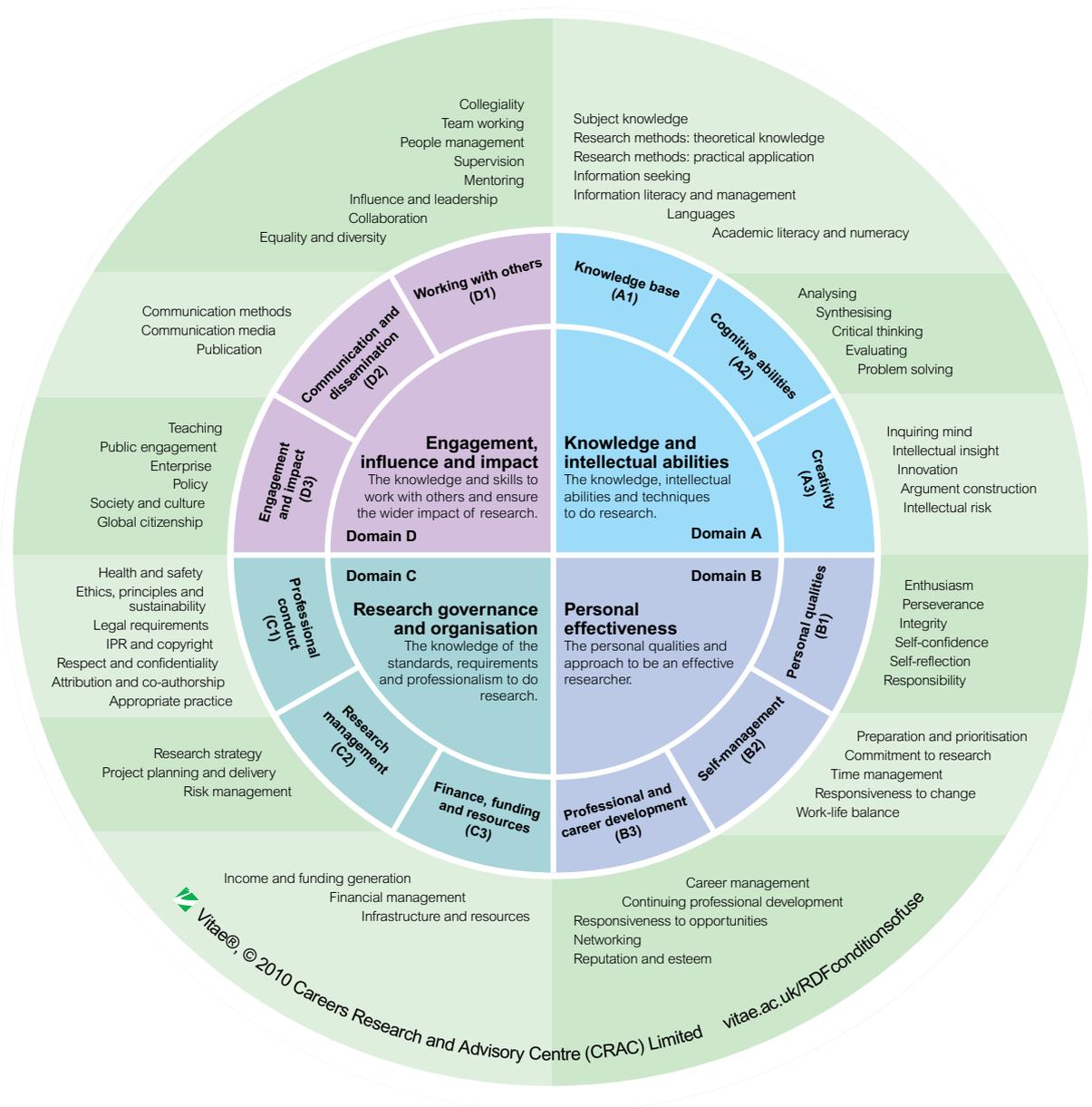
Developer iv. Reflecting on running a storyboarding workshop.

A number of developers felt that storyboarding activities helped researchers to identify the areas they wished to work on, perhaps suggesting that the technique might provide a useful addition to training-needs analysis activities, by providing researchers and developers with further insights about what elements need to be included in researcher development programmes.

I think it might have been useful to follow up the session with some more careers education input. Perhaps some more practical exercises on developing networking skills and generating opportunities.

Developer vii. One month after running a storyboarding session.

**Figure 8: The Researcher Development Framework (RDF)**



Storyboarding can clearly be an effective tool in helping to identify researchers' training needs and in integrating learning that has been developed through skills sessions. Developer vii speculated on whether storyboarding could be used as a "kind of visual career diary" which could provide a reflective space for learning across a

course. However, we should probably not assume that storyboarding is something that most researchers would have an appetite for every week. It might, however, be valuable to return to the technique twice or more during a programme to provide a tool for integrative and reflective thinking.

# Reflections and developments

Researchers are mid-career professionals. Many of those who attended the pilot sessions described how they were in the middle of a career turning point. For many of these participants storyboarding was an extension of their current reflections on their career.

I think it helped to reinforce ideas in your head - I've been facing the prospect of redundancy for almost a year now (I know - slow process) so had been thinking about things a lot.

Researcher P one month after attending a storyboarding session.

As we have seen already, for some researchers, storyboarding provided a useful tool in helping "crystallise" their career thinking. For others however, it simply allowed them to confirm what they already knew.

[One researcher who] "had spent a lot of time reflecting and analysing his decisions and career planning... felt that he had nothing to apply it to that had not already been dealt with."

Developer i. after running a group storyboarding session.

Storyboarding is clearly not the only technique that can facilitate career thinking, and so it is likely to be most effective when it is used as part of a series of planned interventions.

## Is drawing too strange?

It is also important to recognise that for some developers and researchers, storyboarding may seem to be a strange and unfamiliar technique. As has been discussed, some developers expressed concerns about using the technique and concerns about how it would be perceived by sceptical researchers. The pilot demonstrated that in respect of some researchers at least this concern was justified. Storyboarding as implemented in the pilots was clearly not for everyone.

I imagine it may be of use to people who are completely lost and uncertain about their career direction, but can't really see a use for it in other cases.

Researcher Q one month after attending a storyboarding session.

In particular, the focus on drawing seems to have caused concern among some researchers who felt that it was either an inappropriate or a challenging activity for them.

"I really like the overall idea of breaking down the problem/issue into sections, this makes it a great deal more manageable to contemplate and encourages a greater depth of consideration... I also found the picture drawing fun and a good novel way of tapping into creativity and bypassing 'writers block'. However, I like drawing and did overhear a few 'oh no!'s when the pencils came out, so I'm not sure if everyone would feel this way. I still feel that the 'storyboarding' concept was a little convoluted; I'm not sure if it's necessary to dress up the technique in such a way and it felt a little bit gimmicky - and so made it less likely I would repeat the exercise. If the method (chunking the task into sections) could be given prominence, and the mode (drawing, writing, whatever) could be more 'free choice' I think this would have a far greater chance of longevity.

Researcher T one month after taking part in a storyboarding session.

So Researcher T feels that the core idea of structuring career stories was useful, but wonders whether this might be achieved using structures other than the storyboard. Some developers chose to encourage researchers to express themselves with greater freedom, using text to construct the narrative if appropriate. Other storyboarding pilots have used collage or computer-based techniques to construct the storyboard. The purpose of the storyboard is to provide a starting point for developers rather than a constraining framework. However, it is also worth restating that there are clear advantages in the way that the graphic rendering of the storyboards encourages researchers to consider their turning points in concrete and social forms. It may be the case that text-based approaches are more immediately palatable to researchers, but care needs to be taken in shaping the activities to ensure that the elements of person in place, time and social situation are not lost.

## Developing the technique

Many developers saw value in storyboarding and resolved to use the technique further in the future.

I think it was a really interesting thing to try out and I really appreciated being part of the project. My feeling is that this is one of potentially a series of techniques - and that we are only scratching the surface in terms of the potential for creative approaches in careers. Creative approaches have been much more widely explored in counselling circles and I am hoping to draw on some of my counselling experience to develop storyboarding and creative techniques in a careers setting.

Developer vii. one month after running a storyboarding workshop.

Developers felt that it would be useful if the technique could be developed further through the provision of more examples, case studies and advice on how to use the approach. It is hoped that this report goes some way towards addressing this, but it is also important to stress the value of using the Vitae Database of Practice<sup>9</sup> and other outlets to share further innovations and developments around the storyboarding technique.

## The challenge of futuring

One issue that was raised through the pilot was the way in which the reflections on the past that are encouraged by storyboarding can be translated into future action.

"it was harder for them [the researchers participating in the workshop] to consider a future situation".

Developer v. one month after running a group storyboarding session

"it was difficult to move to action from what felt like a fundamentally reflective approach."

Developer vii. one month after running a group storyboarding session.

In other words, while the researchers may have learnt from their reflective examination of the past, in some cases they may now be unclear as to what to do with this learning and how to apply it.

<sup>9</sup> Vitae, Database of Practice <http://www.vitae.ac.uk/dop>

One response to this concern about the disconnection between past and present is to encourage researchers to focus on a current dilemma, decision or turning point. Where the turning point is something that has already been resolved (even if that resolution was unsatisfactory) it can be difficult to develop actions that translate that learning to new turning points. Where a turning point is current, storyboarding can be used to review the situation, take stock of resources and options and move to action far more easily. However, a turning point is not always evident from the perspective of someone going through it. Labelling something as a turning point is a narrative act, which is, in and of itself, a key part of decision making. So, for example, an argument with a supervisor only becomes a turning-point when it when it involves, results in, or is prompted by a resolution to either leave the doctorate or to manage the relationship in a different way. While it remains just another example of a frequent behaviour it cannot be seen as a turning point. Identifying turning points in the moment therefore offers people a way to take control of their career, but may not always be possible at the start of a career intervention.

While identifying current turning points is useful, it is important not to diminish the learning that can be gained by examining turning points from a person's past. How we handled situations, related to people and acted on previous turning points is likely to influence how we address similar situations in the present or the future. Storyboarding invites us to consider the relationship between the places in which we live our lives, the people who we live them with, and our own actions.

In an earlier publication the storyboarding designer Bill Law (2006) illustrates how the procedure and formats can set down both remembered and anticipated experience. They can do so to the point where what we call action planning can usefully be set down in narrative form. An alternative storyboard might therefore reconceive the final (Futuring) stage of the process as Learning. The three boxes could then ask the individual to use this learning to connect their past and present narratives by reflecting on

- What I can now see to do about my situation and how I live in it
- What I can now see to do about the people around me and how I relate to them
- What I can now see to do about the actions I take and how they move me forward

The appendices at the end of this report provide blank versions of both storyboards to encourage developers to experiment with different approaches. We would also encourage developers to experiment and adapt with the storyboards to ensure that they meet your needs and those of your clients.

## The future use of storyboarding

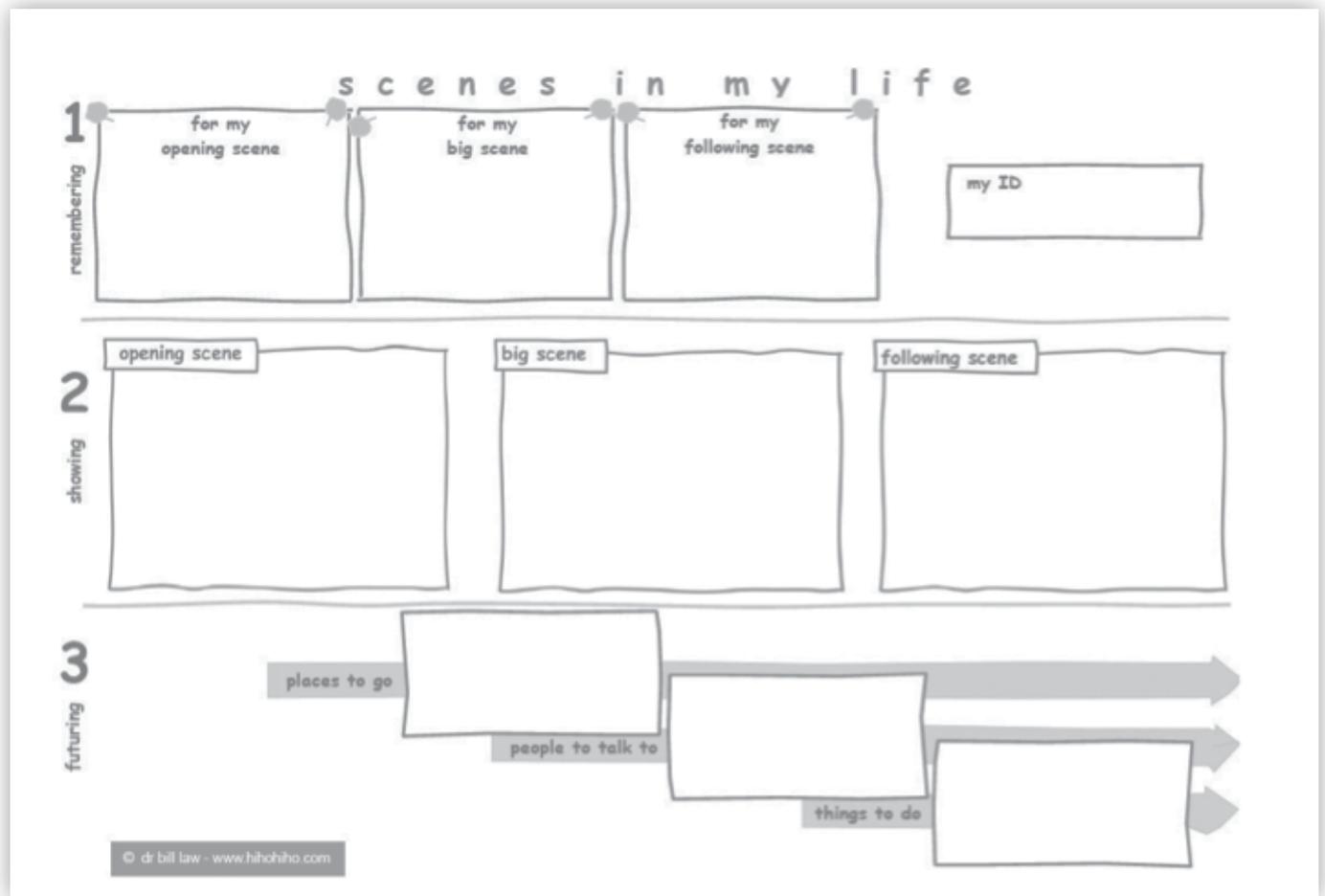
This report has set out the learning that has been gained from this action research project. The project began from the premise that storyboarding would be a useful technique for researchers in thinking about their careers. The findings of the project are presented here in a "warts and all" style. The aim is not to suggest that storyboarding can solve all of the career issues that researchers face. Rather, the finding of this project is that storyboarding provides a new approach which may open up different kinds of career and personal-development issues for researchers.

The project has suggested that storyboarding is a flexible approach that can be used in a wide range of ways, but that it is most effective where it is placed in a meaningful context and delivered as part of a holistic career development intervention. On its own, storyboarding can seem strange, but within an appropriate context it provides space for researchers to identify their development needs, reflect on the turning points in their lives and take purposeful action in their career. Reflections on the approach by the authors of this report and the developers who participated also suggested that storyboarding could be most effective:

- when there are indications that conventional careers-work expertise and approaches will not serve;
- alongside, rather than instead of, conventional careers work;
- when it encourages and enables the re-drafting of storyboards and the re-examination of experience over time;
- when it is supported with worked examples of other peoples' stories as models and catalysts;
- as a technique for attributing meaning and purpose and for detailing action planning;
- when storyboards are used to facilitate conversations with the other people in the researcher's life; and
- when it is connected to other personal development and portfolio learning processes.

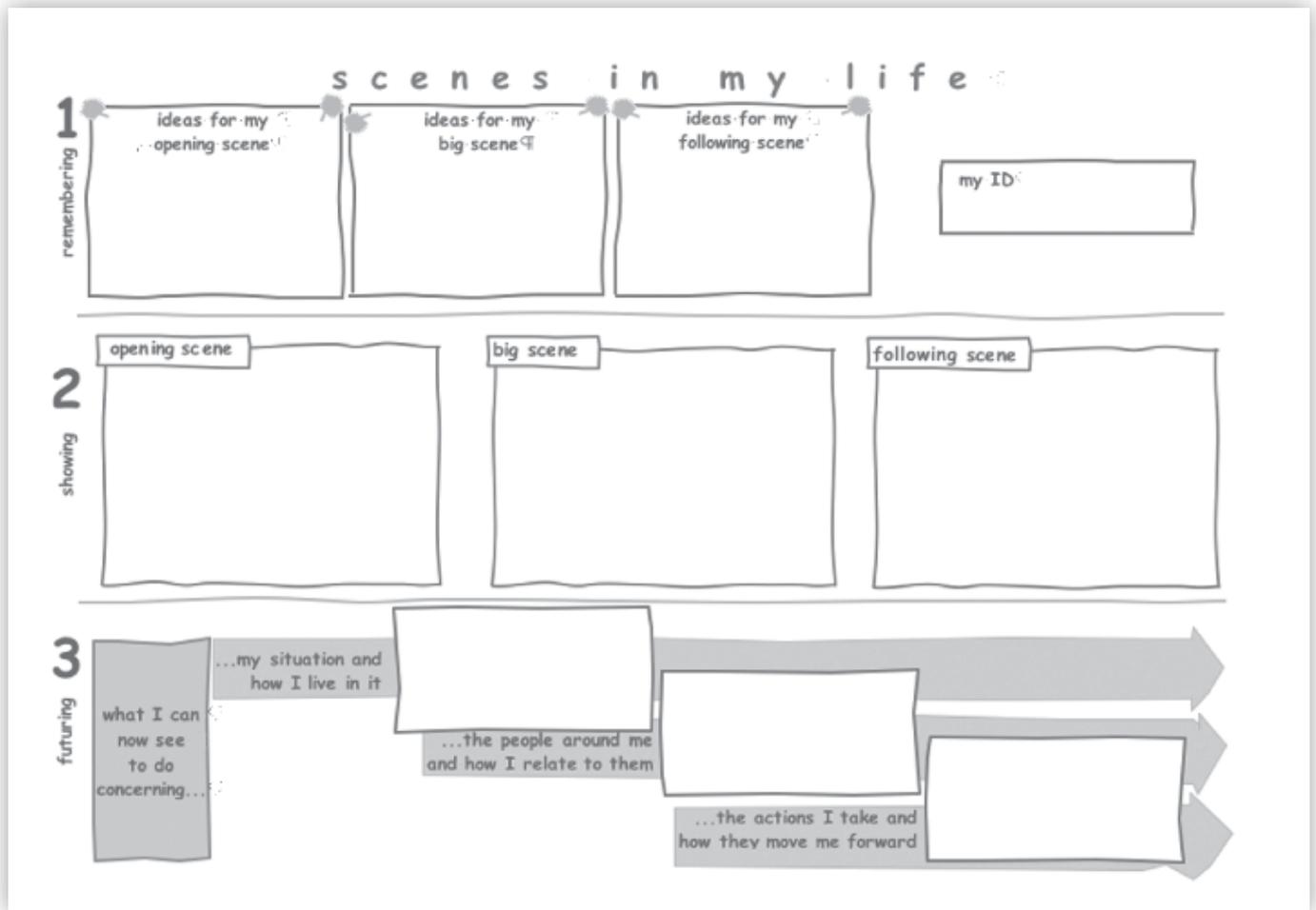
# Appendices

## Original storyboard



# Appendices

## Revised storyboard



# Sample storyboards

*then* **scenes in my life** *now*

**1** remembering

- for my opening scene: University in USA, board - nothing else around to do.
- for my big scene: Exchange in Manchester - needs her stats lecturer.
- for my following scene: Back in the US securing a school to return to, want to reply with him.
- my ID: Elizabeth

**2** showing

- opening scene: A desk with a window, "I'm so bored".
- big scene: A person at a desk, "I don't understand about stats...".
- following scene: An airplane flying, "To the USA", "To the UK".

**3** futuring

- places to go: (University?) to sort our Scholarship.
- people to talk to: Lecturer in England, Family in USA.
- things to do: Logistics of moving to England, more permanently, Prep for PhD research.

**scenes in my life**

**1** remembering

- for my opening scene: Wanting a maximum my life opportunities, Embark on new career, "Expecting life!!", University life & so.
- for my big scene: Lots of scenes out, Rejection, Closed doors, Confused in various way.
- for my following scene: Is there a problem?, What do I want to do?, I may be forced to look for work as funding ends.
- my ID: SITA

**2** showing

- opening scene: A person thinking, "I'm a producer".
- big scene: Planning, taking action, being rejected, changing life now.
- following scene: Happy enough, future uncertain, was opportunity?

**3** futuring

- places to go: "sites.ac.uk", "Buen places?".
- people to talk to: "Buen & open in law".
- things to do: "What are these kinds of jobs advertised?", "What range of jobs?".

**scenes in my life**

**1** remembering

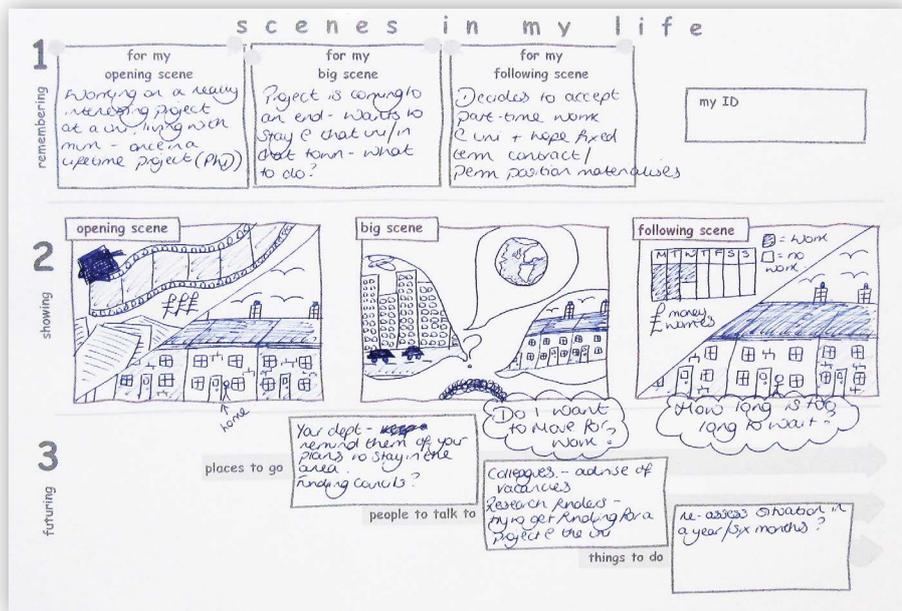
- for my opening scene: PhD later in life, Indulgent? Could be earning, Enjoying research v. much.
- for my big scene: The recession, Cutbacks in public sector, Job shortages.
- for my following scene: Heading towards end of PhD, Want to provide for family, Enjoyed research + occasional good feedback.
- my ID: FRANK

**2** showing

- opening scene: A person at a desk, "Dr....".
- big scene: "THE SUN Jobs Cuts", "PUBLIC SECTOR JOBS GO!".
- following scene: A person at a desk, "SO WHAT DO YOU DO?".

**3** futuring

- places to go: Faculty, Other institutions.
- people to talk to: Role models, Supportive friends, Skills advisor.
- things to do: Internet search, NETWORK, NETWORK, NETWORK.



## Rationale and resources

In a recent article, the designer of three-scene storyboarding, Bill Law (2012), probes the possibilities and problems of the uses of narrative in careers work and situates the technique within the wider literature. The article examines sources on the epistemology of narrative (e.g. Ricoeur, 1988). There is an examination of evidence concerning the interaction between neurological states and cultural experience (e.g. in McGilchrist, 2009), suggesting a distinctive validity in the uses of remembered experience set down in narrative. Law also examines cultural theory (e.g. Booker, 2005) and suggests ways in which the portrayal of a well-rounded story can draw a person into attributing meaning to experience, and basing purpose on that meaning.

The article is critical of the idea that it is possible to organise people's careers on the basis of psychometric testing and expert advice. Rather it suggests that narrative approaches to career allow people to acknowledge the unforeseen and spontaneous realities of what is sometimes characterised as 'chaotic' career development. Storyboarding also speaks to the human need to formulate meaning and purpose in response to experience (see Boyd, 2009).

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