Caritas Austria

Evidence Narrative Worksheet

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Evidence Narratives at the Center for Information & Society

Evidence Narratives are a Center for Information and Society project designed to broaden and deepen our understanding of the impact of Information and Communication Technologies and Development (ICTD).

Our intention is to choose examples of ICTD implementations carefully and to write about them in such a way that each one, individually, illustrates important aspects of the featured settings and so that, taken together, the examples describe and reveal larger themes about core aspects of ICTD. It is our hope that by being systematic at every stage in the research process we are able to expedite the accumulation of credible and accessible information about the impact of ICTD on individuals and communities.

The ICTD field is filled with success stories extolling the benefits of access to Information Technology. As these often rhetorically powerful and memorable stories describe what can be achieved under the best of conditions, they may distort our understanding of what is achieved more typically, or may fail to describe aspects of their settings or strategies that were crucial to success.

Each setting in which ICTD projects are implemented is unique, but our experience is that with careful attention to the idiosyncrasies and commonalities across settings, patterns soon emerge which reveal more general themes about the qualities of settings, people, and programs that make a difference.

While tension may exist between an organization's desire to feature certain cases and the critical researcher's commitment to rigor, we believe that a methodology built on intensive questioning and attention to detail can yield stories that uncover and communicate an accumulation of credible evidence about why individual programs and larger strategies succeed and fail.

By crafting exemplary stories, by developing and disseminating useful methodological tools, and by promoting these techniques among NGO managers and grant makers, CIS aims to shape a research framework that can fulfill the needs of NGOs and donors, with stories that accurately represent realities in underserved communities, accumulating evidence that serves the ends of rigorous analysis while publicizing good work.

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This worksheet is a template to structure evidence gathering for CIS Evidence Narratives. This sheet will be useful for complete stories. It is also a vehicle to pass the "raw elements" of an evidence-based success story to another writer, such as a Microsoft PR representative.   Researchers should use an appropriate mix of narrative, bullets, and quotations to complete the worksheet. Special attention should be paid to standards of evidence (explained in the methodology document), attribution and concise yet and rich description. The cells on the right should attribute the data to a particular source.

A. Encapsulating Quotes

"When they arrive they are intimidated by 'the learning thing.' They think: I failed at my work, my family, and at school, so I will fail at this too. Then they slowly begin to interact with the computers, and ask questions. 'Do you need that in your work?' they ask me. Then they realize, "So I don't have to be a technician to work a computer.' And the fear begins to go away."
-- Trainer Sophie Wogenstein

"The ECDL test administrator from our contractor BIT [Best in Training] was impressed with the difference between the Caritas women and the referrals they get from the labor office. He was astonished at how motivated our students are. It's the quality of the program that matters."
-- Project Director Elisabeth Miltner

"Society is too fast for them. They need time, not just a year. It's more than the IT skills, it's a complete approach, a step out of exclusion. For employment, like many things, they felt they were really in the dark. And then they discover the Internet: 'Finally, I know where I can look for jobs.'"
-- Trainer Sophie Wogenstein

"The next five billion include many people living at the margins of society. They may not snap right back to work after receiving ICT training, but their lives are really changed. These women now relate with their adolescent children – for the first time in years – by connecting through computing. Many are refugees, no longer lost in Austrian society, now able to read newspapers from their home lands and communicating with their old social networks. This is the spark of hope."
-- CIS researcher Mark West

"Eight of these 'hidden homeless' women actually completed the entire program and passed the ECDL exam. Considering what they are up against, and the child care demands, their fragile confidence, and fear of formal education, the results are pretty incredible."
-- CIS researcher Mark West

B. A particular trainee

1. Personal Story (home, family, education, etc.)

8 students passed the ECDL and are now certified to work with their e-skills.

Interviews

2. Work, job, business, or means of economic Support

None got jobs yet.

3. How ICT training has changed this person's economic standing.

Sophie Wogenstein starts lessons by simply introducing students to the elements of computers and the Internet: touching the mouse, playing card games, surfing the web, and building their comfort zone within the classroom setting itself – four walls that carry with them a major psychological barrier. Slowly the students realize "I don't have to be a technician to work a computer," Sophie says of this "encountering" process. "Do you need that in your work?" they begin to ask her.

Researcher's field notes

4. How this person's experience is typical of other trainees.

The training provider for the ECDL – BIT, or Best in Training, was "impressed and astonished at how motivated the students are."

Sophie Wogenstein, Caritas trainer

5. What the change has meant for the person and their community.

"Society is too fast for them. They need time, not just a year."

Elizabeth Miltner, project director

6. Anything else we should know?

This is a pilot program, and needs another year to demonstrate jobs results. Also, the ultimate employability results – 5% passed the ECDL exam – are typical of other ICT training programs with extremely marginalized persons. This 5% first-year success rate is the same rate cited for persons with disabilities trained in Bulgaria by the iCentres, and the elderly/single mothers/persons with disabilities trained together by the Czech Republic's Nova Paka training center.

These programs are an important part of UP, in addition to the stronger employment programs. If UP does not reach out to the extremely marginalized, as well as the more employable people who happen to be out of a job, then who will?

Caritas Austria Trainer Sophie Wogenstein, left, takes a breather with Elisabeth Miltner, the Computer ABC Programme project coordinator. Sophie and Elizabeth, and their team at Caritas, have just completed the first year of their pilot program to deliver ICT skills to Viennese women on the brink of homelessness.

C. About the Organization

1. Please describe or illustrate the sights, smells, sounds, etc. of the NGO and the community's physical surroundings.

In the center of urban Vienna, a secure facility for women in need. A reception desk behind thick glass greets the visitor ("inspects" is a more appropriate word for a young man entering – even though expected for a 10am appointment). It is a safe place, a place for women who are on the verge of homelessness, or returning from it. A safe place from drugs and alcohol and violence and the streets. A place to rest, it seems.

Researcher Field Experience

2. Please describe or illustrate the community development(?) context: cultural, political, economic, historical.

Many of the clients at Caritas are immigrant women, many do not speak the national language of German. Caritas is a well-respected national organization with many centers serving different needs.

Organization's literature

3. Please describe or illustrate the distinguishing characteristics of individuals in the underserved population the NGO targets. How is their situation affected by their gender, ethnicity, religion, race, caste, physical mobility, age, wealth, language, migrant status, political affiliation, or literacy?

- Women
- Single mothers
- Immigrants
- At risk of homelessness
- Possible chemical dependence
- Little formal education
- Ages vary

Mix of interviews and MSF literature

4. Please describe or illustrate the ICT ecosystem. Where else do people access the internet & computers? How prevalent are cybercafés, mobile phones, public libraries, home access, etc.? Why does access matter?

The clients have cell phones, but little else. Very little money, so cybercafés – though abundant in Vienna – are not an option for most. Public library computing is an option, though they don't know about it or resent having to wait in line. No home access (no home).

Besides money, time is a barrier. Many of these women are raising children alone, and dealing with housing uncertainty and making ends meet is a full time pre-occupation. For immigrant women,

language is also a barrier and concern about residency.

Interviews with MSF CAM, project director, and trainer

5. Please describe or illustrate the NGO: name, mission, history, target populations, partners.

- Caritas
- Serving underprivileged women
- Long, credible history in Austria
- Many partners including the state, MSF, and public donations especially over the holiday season.

Phone conversation with MSF CAM

6. Please describe or illustrate the programs, outreach and other organizational characteristics that fit the needs of underserved populations? Why are they credible with the groups they serve? What is most remarkable about this organization?

The most remarkable thing about the organization is the care they provide to their clients: these "hidden homeless" need child care, a place to sleep, assistance with welfare paperwork, and ICT training. The ICT training itself is very carefully delivered to address the specific challenges of this group.

Interviews with trainer and project director

7. Please describe or illustrate the NGO countables. (Number of students, graduates, computers, years, any statistics or numbers that the organization can provide.)

- 9 offices nationwide
- Pilot program for ICT training at Vienna office
- 130 students in the first year
- Low student-to-teacher ratio of 8-1
- 12 students took the ECDL course, 8 passed
- 10 laptops

Interviews

8. Please describe or illustrate the ICT training program: courses, sequence, length, technology profile, etc.

- Called the "Computer ABC Programme"
- Three progressively more advanced sections: Coaching, Training I, Training II
- Each section about one month
- Begin with games, move on to Word, Excel, PowerPoint, email, and Internet

Interviews

9. Please describe or illustrate the ICT curricula. Is MSUP curriculum used? How has the NGO customized or adapted particular lessons?

Unclear which curriculum is used for Training I & II.
Special ECDL test preparation curriculum offered by local company, "BIT."

Interviews

10. Please describe or illustrate the benefits of training on Microsoft software for typical trainees. Why does Word or Windows familiarity (or mastery) matter? What doors are opened? Are these useful building blocks?

*   Helps with secretarial skills, one of the students' main objectives
*   Helps to prepare for the ECDL

Interviews

11. Please describe or illustrate the organization's relationships with employers. Does the organization coordinate job placement programs? How do employers feel about workers that are trained by the NGO?

*   No evidence of coordination with employers
*   No employers yet, pilot program, no jobs yet

Interviews

12. Please describe or illustrate the economic benefits (jobs, employ-ability, small business development, etc.) of ICT training on a particular person with similar circumstances as most other members of the under-served population the NGO targets.

*   Future employability through passage of ECDL
*   Knowledge of where to look for work: "Finally, I know where I can look for jobs"

Quote from an unnamed student, recounted by trainer Sophie Wogenstein

13. Please describe or illustrate the social benefits of ICT training on a particular person with similar circumstances as most other members of the underserved population the NGO targets. Use vivid examples and rich detail. Help the reader understand the importance of this social impact?

When twelve of her students enrolled in the final stage of the Caritas Austria "Computer ABC Programme" in Vienna, their trainer Sophie Wogenstein was nervous. These women had overcome great odds to make it this far, and now they were facing the ultimate test: a final training course for

certification in the European Computer Driver's License (ECDL), and then the actual examination for the license.

"I failed at my work, my family, and at school, so I will fail at this too," Sophie recalls one student lamenting.

Many of the women served by Caritas come from the ranks of what Austrians call "the hidden homeless." These are urban women in need, and they have a long road home. They either live in Caritas housing facilities, or they are in severe financial straits and at risk of homelessness. Many are immigrant women who also face a language barrier and cultural separation. Many others have little formal education, come from broken homes or violence, and have children but not the means to care for them. They have fallen through the cracks, and Caritas facilities are their link back into society.

Excerpt from field notes by the researcher

14. Please describe or illustrate theunanticipated, indirect or surprising benefits or ICT training.

- Increased self-confidence
- Ability to read newspapers from home country online
- Ability to better connect/relate with children who use IT.

15. Please describe or illustrate the disadvantages, bottlenecks or short-comings of ICT training.

- So many other social burdens it's difficult to find work
- Slow process, need to build self-confidence in "the learning thing"

AUTHOR

Mark West is an ethnographer whose international research and work in the development field is based in South Asia and in Central and Eastern Europe. Mark's fieldwork has centered on the use of critical ethnography to bring a more participatory connection between local communities and international development projects.

In South Asia, Mark's research and work focus on the resistance networks of rural Dalits, or "untouchables," with a particular interest in the grassroots campaigns of barefoot lawyers. In Central and Eastern Europe he has worked to improve the transparency and communications of newly developing court systems. Since 2007, Mark has begun conducting fieldwork with the CIS on the economic and social impact of ICT programs in marginalized communities around the world.

Mark has served as a rule of law consultant with the United States Agency for International Development in Eastern Europe, and as a Human Rights Field Mentor with Stanford LawSchool. He holds a J.D. from the University of Washington, and is a Ph.D. Candidate in the School of Communication and Department of Anthropology at Northwestern University.