

Storytelling Guide

1 Why Do We Do Storytelling for Family Businesses?

Because:

- it includes many aspects and is a holistic approach
- is a more informal, personal approach, where people show more emotions and show/talk about things ("secrets") that could remain hidden otherwise
- people open up and let you in because they realise your interest
- it helps to find out underlying issues, relationships between each business member
- it gives insight to personality of people and therefore to their business approach, which leads to identification of business needs
- people share experiences, alternative ways of how to do things, and how to solve problems
- project partners have interest in using the form of storytelling and build a personal relationship
- it gives hope and trust in someone that wants to change something for the better and help them
- telling the story of the family business builds trust and may attract new customers/clientèle
- stories can be way for training students, used as case studies
- it can be used to valorise a region when showing/publishing stories, used to keep a region alive
- stories can be used as "best practices" to be shown to policy makers within the region

2 How to Start?

Capturing stories is not just a matter of recording them :

- start by building trust and a relationship
- get to know the people first before interviewing them (drink tea/coffee, visit them)
- explain the project well, so it makes sense to our family businesses
- reassure the businesses that the ownership of the story remains with them (see point 4) and that it can be used by them in their business processes for motivating family members/workers, marketing etc).
- explain though that it will be used within the project, for others to see and learn from

that in the international meetings and on-line, so we can compare barriers / lessons etc to guide future actions for family businesses, influence policy locally/regionally/nationally and internationally.

If it is the wish of the business representatives, they can remain anonymous.

2.1 Ice breakers

The beginnings of stories need to be explored, use a photo, an artefact, a joke, it can be many things that begin the process of remembering, creating, analysing family business stories

- let draw a family tree or a timeline
- photos from the past
- artefacts (look for things connected to the business)
- research the business to have a conversation starter
- bring a little present (wine, cake etc.) as an icebreaker

3 The Interview

Interviewing can take many forms and the likely best form to uncover family business processes is a semi structured / informal method. To do this, you need to be prepared for the expected and unexpected!

3.1 Location

It depends on the type of business, the age of the person(s), their preferences and contexts, the time.

Some examples:

- farmers: at their house, where they feel comfortable, it is probably their headquarter
- shops: away from the shops, choose a café
- change the meeting place to the usual work place to avoid distractions: other attractive places to inspire and motivate them as this is important for the reflection tprocess

3.2 Tools

Multimedia can be used – short videos, podcasts, slides, photos and texts, posters (with visuals of the family/business tree, showing branches of both, relationships and so on).

Use appropriate tool(s) for the people you work with. You will be able to judge which tool is best after having gotten to know them.

Use one of or a mix of the following:

- Voice recordings
- Video

- informal conversations, take notes

3.3 Time and frequency

How long should the interview be and how many times should they take place?

- it depends on the business and how easy it is to get the story
- calculate roughly 2-5 hours per family business

3.4 The questions

These questions serve as a guideline, to get the "right" information.

Have the questions in mind, memorise them so you can sustain eye contact throughout the interview.

1. Who started it all / how did it all begin?
2. Why was a business such as this one started?
3. Did it stay like this or did it change along the way? Why?
4. What were the key turning points for the business / for you / for your family?
5. What helped you/your family to do the business?
6. What were /are the main barriers/hindrances to your business?
7. What do you think the challenges / barriers are in the future?
8. How has the family business solved barriers/hindrances?
9. What do you love/dislike about the family business?
10. Would you start such a business again?
11. What advice would you give to someone starting off a family business?
12. What's really going on in your organisation?
13. What are the touch points where small changes can transform behaviour and morale?
14. How can you develop a common understanding of what needs to be done and generate the resolve to do it?
15. What is/was easy and what is/was difficult for you having both at the same time, family business & personal life?

- Let the interviewee finish their thoughts. Interruptions can cause that people lose their train of thought. Let them tell you when they are finished.
- Be flexible. As you are listening/recording other questions may arise. Feel free to ask different questions than those researched and prepared. Ask for more details from the interviewee.
- Be respectful of the interviewees. There may be painful memories related to a family break up, business failure etc. Allow them to decide how much information they would like to give. If they trust you, they may give you more information later.
- Family business stories will be related to personal and community/regional/national stories and histories – keep notes and research further where necessary.

4 The Reflective Process

Reflecting helps to keep thoughts organised and the focus, despite the stories may change in the process of telling and re-telling. The teller can think about the meaning of their memories and where they fit into their own history. It is recreating and restructuring one's memory to express this meaning.

In one sense its length does not matter in the first instance, it can be edited down after reflection, parts can be highlighted after reflection.

In the end, the longer the story, the more likely you are losing the path, details are good, but only if they somehow add to the morale of the story or if you use them to spin and surprise the reader/listener from time to time.

While creating and reflecting upon your stories, never lose sight of the most important part of the story: yourself/your family business.

4.1 The Interviewer (you)

- listen, listen, listen!
- draw out key points, that are important for the family business to come back to for the reflective process of the interviewee
- analyse key needs and other conclusions for the family business
- transcribe/write down what was said in interview on paper/printed to make it more accessible for the interviewee

4.2 Analyse the story

Begin to think about the business, how it was begun, how it progressed, the struggles it has faced, what were the desires within the business and in life, did they fit with the family business, were they in tension, how did you resolve them

- Think of the overall story – main lessons, draw them out, reflect again
- Think of parts of the story – main lessons, draw them out, reflect again
- Relate whole / parts of story to surrounding contexts (local, regional etc e.g war /

- crisis / changing needs)
- Relate whole / parts of story to key family characters (charismatic ones, leaders, supporters, workers etc)
- Create categories for overall analysis
- undertake comparative studies (within our groups and across our groups)
- undertake a comparative analyse in our country/region and across the partnership)

4.3 The Interviewee

Watch or listen again to recording/video (or read), reflect.

5 Post-Interview

It is important to give family businesses the opportunity to continue to document their stories, to reflect and to communicate with the interviewer as well as with other businesses.

- organize community seminars or regular meetings
- prepare a follow up:
 - What did you learn from the interviews?
 - What did you learn from other businesses?

Support them to build their own network regionally and internationally with the other family businesses in this project:

- matching the businesses amongst the partnership (share contact info with all businesses)
- reflective process: write continuously about personal thoughts/reflection on business. e.g. [750 words](#) (remains private)