



System Change Stories (aka Endgames) by Odin Muehlenbein

Once the intended system change of a Fellow is clear, the next question is: what is the best way to achieve this change? We find it useful to do answer this question in the form of a story.

Stories belong to genres, which follow certain patterns. Romantic comedies have different elements and dramatic arcs than crime stories. The same is true for the System Change Stories of Fellows. This document provides a list of these patterns. It also suggests how these patterns can be broken down into plots and chapters to create a detailed, systemic theory of change. See below for more information about the structure of System Change Stories.

Disclaimer: this list is very much work in progress. The items on the list are neither mutually exclusive, nor collectively exhaustive. Please send any feedback to omuehlenbein@ashoka.org. Thanks!

- **Using market dynamics / competitive advantage:** a new model either creates a new market that benefits all participants, or becomes the new norm by giving adopters a competitive advantage. This can include companies and non-profits and also applies to non-financial markets (information exchanges, marriage markets). Possible plots within these stories include: "sufficient demand for a small but stable market is built", "a marketplace for the product or service is established", "early adopters enjoy the competitive advantages of the new idea" Possible chapters within these plots include: "MOUs of potential buyers of the new product amount to \$5m", "there is a well-known participant in the market that has a competitive advantage through the model, and other participants can see that"
- **Getting a big players on board:** an idea or approach is adopted by the government, big welfare organizations, or the leading player in a market. This can include changes in policies (laws, police training handbooks, sourcing procedures, etc.) or by implementing it in schools, jails, or other government institutions at scale. Possible plots include: "evidence for the feasibility and usefulness of the idea of being gathered", "political support within the big player is mobilized", "the idea is getting institutionalized" Possible chapters include: "a sub-unit (city, department) carries out a pilot project", "there are 20 vocal ambassadors for the idea within the institution", etc.
- **Getting many different players on board:** an approach is shared openly (open source, training, etc.) and happens to be so attractive that it is taken up by many actors. Alternatively, an approach is spread by growing an organization that implements that approach, or via formal partnerships (social licensing, franchise, etc.) Possible plots include: "the model becomes sufficiently cheap, adaptable, and easy to implement for widespread adoption", "the model gets codified" Possible chapter include: "there are professional materials that other organizations can use to implement the model themselves", "there are 10 organizations that have independently

implemented the model and publicly promote it", "there is a way for users of the model to share best practices with each other", etc.

- **Going through a formal policy process:** a proposal is being accepted by somebody who is responsible for defining the rules of the system (ministries, intertrade organizations, standards institutes, etc.) Possible plots include: "the idea is put in the right form for the policy process", "supporting materials are getting produced in accordance with the process requirements", "support from decision makers is getting mobilized" Possible chapters include: "there is a study describing the benefits of the new rule", "a political party included the proposal in its official program", "a board of supervisors has put the proposal on the agenda", etc.
- **Building a field:** either a completely new field, or changes to an existing field or ecosystem, including its practitioners, intermediaries, rules and common practices. Examples: social entrepreneurship, participatory defence, psycho-social therapy, etc. Possible plots include: "members of the field start to self-identify as members ('I'm a Social Entrepreneur!')", "intermediaries are developing (training institutions, consultants, etc.)", "the field is getting recognized (becomes part of university curricula, consults politicians, etc.)" Possible chapters include: "the field was mentioned in 10 articles within 3 months", "there are 20 practitioners who explicitly specialize in the field", "a standard regulates practice X to avoid friction between practitioners", etc.
- **Building a movement:** the support of many people is mobilized to demand and/or implement a particular change. Examples: the social norm of a "designated driver", the civil rights movement, etc. Possible plots include: "a champion for the idea recruited the first follower (turns champion into leader)", "the first followers recruit other followers (turns process into movement)", "the movement is recognized by the establishment"

Less frequent / special twists for other stories

- **Changing a narrative:** A change is made by changing the narrative into a theme. Examples: changing the image of women and LGBTx people through movies and soap operas, changing the understanding of what constitutes sexual harassment via social media campaigns, supporting the peace process between hostile tribes via radio broadcasts, etc.
- **Using a Trojan Horse:** a systemic change is established through the back door, i.e. in a way that the targeted institution doesn't realize and that is difficult to undo. Examples: establishing "learning-through-play" teaching methods in Indian schools by training teachers in these practices in the context of extra-curricular activities; nudging the strategies of CSR departments of big companies in the direction of system change via (social) intrapreneurship programs.
- **Eradication:** a self-reproducing issue is pushed back to such an extent that it cannot reappear. Usually involves well-coordinated efforts by many people. Example: extinguishing diseases, changing the genetic mark-up of species via gene drives.

Stories – literally

Once the genre of the System Change Story is clear, we suggest to break it down into plots and chapters. Plots answer the question: what are the main arcs that unfold in this particular story? What moves the story forward? We suggest to have 2-4 plots per story. Finally, we break the plots down into chapters. We suggest to name the chapters after the milestones that mark significant progress within a plot. We suggest to have 2-4 chapters per plot.

Examples

- House of Cards
 Pattern: rise to power via political intrigue
 Main plots: killing witnesses of past crimes, becoming vice-president, impeaching the current president
 Sample chapters for each plot: cumbersome journalist is dead, party stands behind nomination to become vice-president, setup is in place for current president to make a mistake that can lead to impeachment
- Lord of the Rings
 Pattern: epic journey
 Main plots: the ring and the hobbits are getting to Mordor, armies are rallied to clear the way
 Sample chapters for each plot: the hobbits made it through the Mines of Moria, Riders of Rohan joined the forces against evil