



Identifying Your “Signature” Research Stories

2022

“Stories don’t happen. They’re found. The story is not what happened but what it meant.” —Lea Thau

A signature story is...

“...**an intriguing, authentic, involving narrative** with a strategic message that enables a firm to grow by clarifying or enhancing its brand, customer relationships, organization, and/or the business strategy.

Signature stories represent a **critical asset** that can be leveraged over time and which can provide inspiration and direction both inside and outside the firm. The challenges are to **find, evaluate, gain exposure for, and give legs to signature stories.**”

—David Aaker (Berkeley) and Jennifer L. Aaker (Stanford), "What are your signature stories?." *California Management Review* 58, no. 3 (2016): 49-65.

What is the basic story “molecule”?



Traditional 3- or 5-act structures are mainly helpful for analyzing stories *after* they have been told.

But microstories show the elements more clearly:

- “For Sale. Baby shoes. Never worn.”
- Someone comes to town.
- Someone goes on a trip.
- The Humpty Dumpty story

Stability



“What is at stake?”

(This is not the same as the study’s research question or hypothesis!)

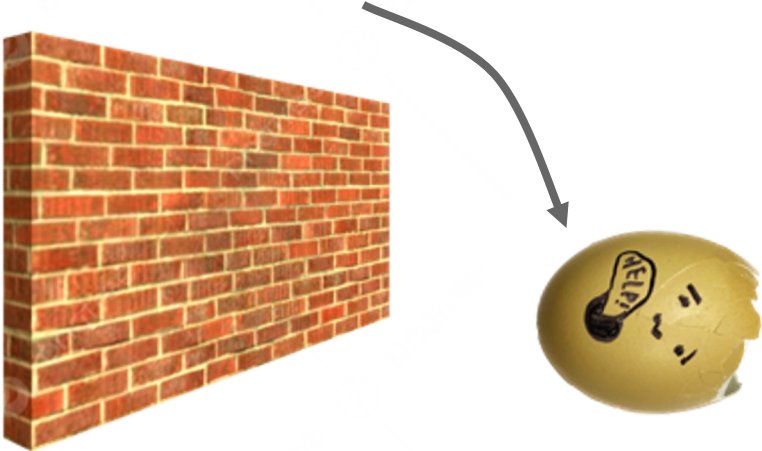
Change



“What was the point of no return?”

(Look for what makes this research more than an incremental advance.)

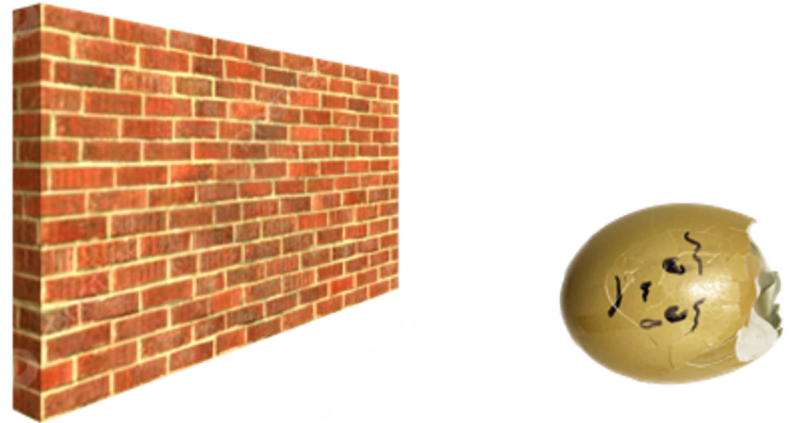
Helpers



“Who or what made the difference?”

(Look for the small things that mattered, not just the obvious materials and methods.)

Result



“How far have we come from the beginning?”

(Look for how the world is different, which is not the same as a study’s findings!)