



Stories that Stick

Influence and Persuade Through Powerful Narratives

The Female Product Lead

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Founder, Sharp Insight

Poll Q: Opening



"When was the last time you told a story at work, intentionally?"

(Choose the one that's most true for you.)

- A) This week, it's part of how I lead
- B) This month, usually in presentations
- C) Not recently, I mostly share facts or data
- D) Wait... I'm not even sure what counts as a story!

How I've used storytelling

About me: Dr Chloe Sharp (Sharp Insight)

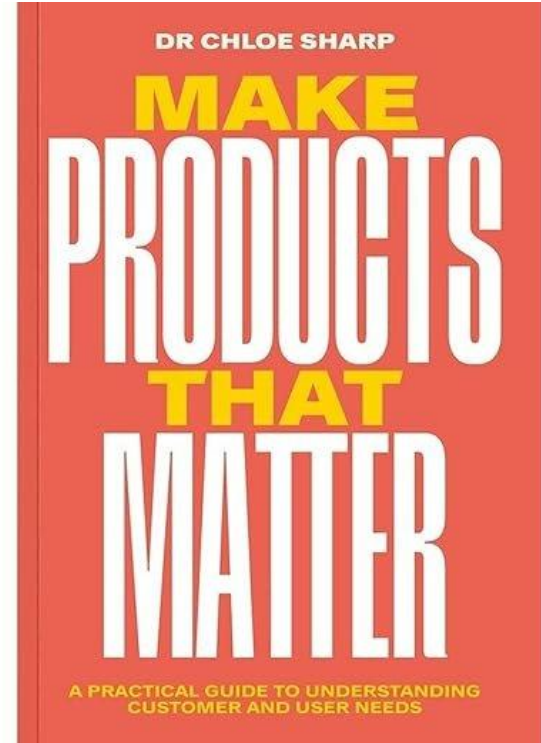
Research: Understanding people's stories

Technical writing: Grants, tenders, reports, papers and business cases as a story as stats and logic don't always land

Author: Make Products That Matter

Musician and songwriter: Stories for songs and minimalist poetry approach

MK:U Professional Skills Conference:
Leadership Skill Workshops



Overview

Intro to storytelling: Stories are everywhere

Why storytelling matters for product leaders

Storytelling frameworks

Crafting your story

Presenting and telling your story





Introduction

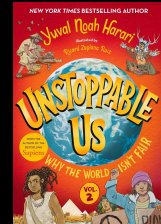
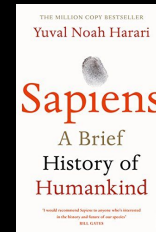


NB: not a real book... yet

"Storytelling is our superpower. We are the only species with the ability to use language - not just to describe things we can see, taste, and touch, but also to invent stories about things that don't exist."

"Stories are the greatest human invention. **People need stories in order to cooperate.** But there's also something else very important: they can change the way they cooperate by changing the stories they believe."

Yuval Noah Harari



"The most powerful person in the world is the storyteller."

Steve Jobs

"People think in stories, not statistics, and marketers need to be master storytellers."

Arianna Huffington

"If we focus on collecting stories in our customer interviews, opportunities will emerge from those stories"

Teresa Torres

"Storytelling is by far the most underrated skill when it comes to business."

Gary Vaynerchuk

"A human tribe with a good story was the most powerful thing in the world."

Yuval Noah Harari

Storytelling for Product Leaders

Think of the last pitch, roadmap or talk you remember.

Odds are, it wasn't the perfect slide deck.

It was the story that stuck with you.

Common Challenges + Storytelling



Not enough impact/clarity

Connect individual efforts to larger business outcomes

Make abstract strategy **tangible** and **actionable**

Create a sense of **shared purpose** that transcends team boundaries

Failure to articulate impact

Document **wins and learnings** in real-time

Frame outcomes in terms of business value, not just feature delivery or technical details, relevant to the audience

Create **simple, memorable narratives** that others can repeat and champion

Peers don't vouch for the impact

Peers need to be able to articulate your impact to others, e.g. 180 feedback.

Story of impact should feel **authentic, clear** and **compelling** enough for peers to internalise and advocate for, or you'll find yourself as the lone voice.

"Storytelling is a product leader's superpower"

Aakash Gupta and Roshan Gupta

Storytelling in an 'Attention Economy'



**"Attention is the rarest
and purest form of
generosity."**

*Simone Weil,
Philosopher*

**"The scarcest resource
isn't oil or data—it's
human attention."**

*Satya Nadella,
Microsoft CEO*

**"We're not fighting for
money, we're fighting for
time."**

*Kevin Systrom,
Instagram co-founder*

Storytelling power lies in how it makes us connect:

Co-operate and empathise.

You give

Shared Experience

Chemistry & Empathy

Educate & Inspire

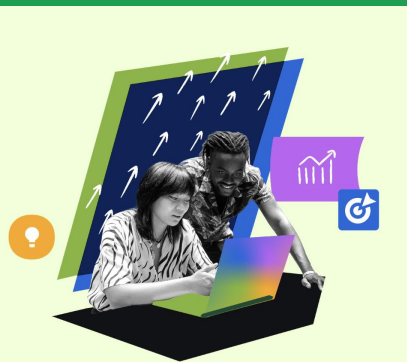
You get

Marketing & Brand

Trust & Rapport

Emotional Recall

Why Storytelling Matters in Product Leadership



▲ ATlassian

State of Product 2026

Product teams under pressure to drive profit and business results



Stories Drive Action:

People don't remember stats, they remember emotions.

Stories Create Alignment:

Stories cut through jargon and align teams quickly.

Stories Build Empathy:

User-centred stories put the customer at the heart, creating buy-in from devs, designers and leaders.

How I've used storytelling in product leadership

Saying less: Show my expertise concisely, without explaining it away

Pitching ideas: From new products to prioritised features

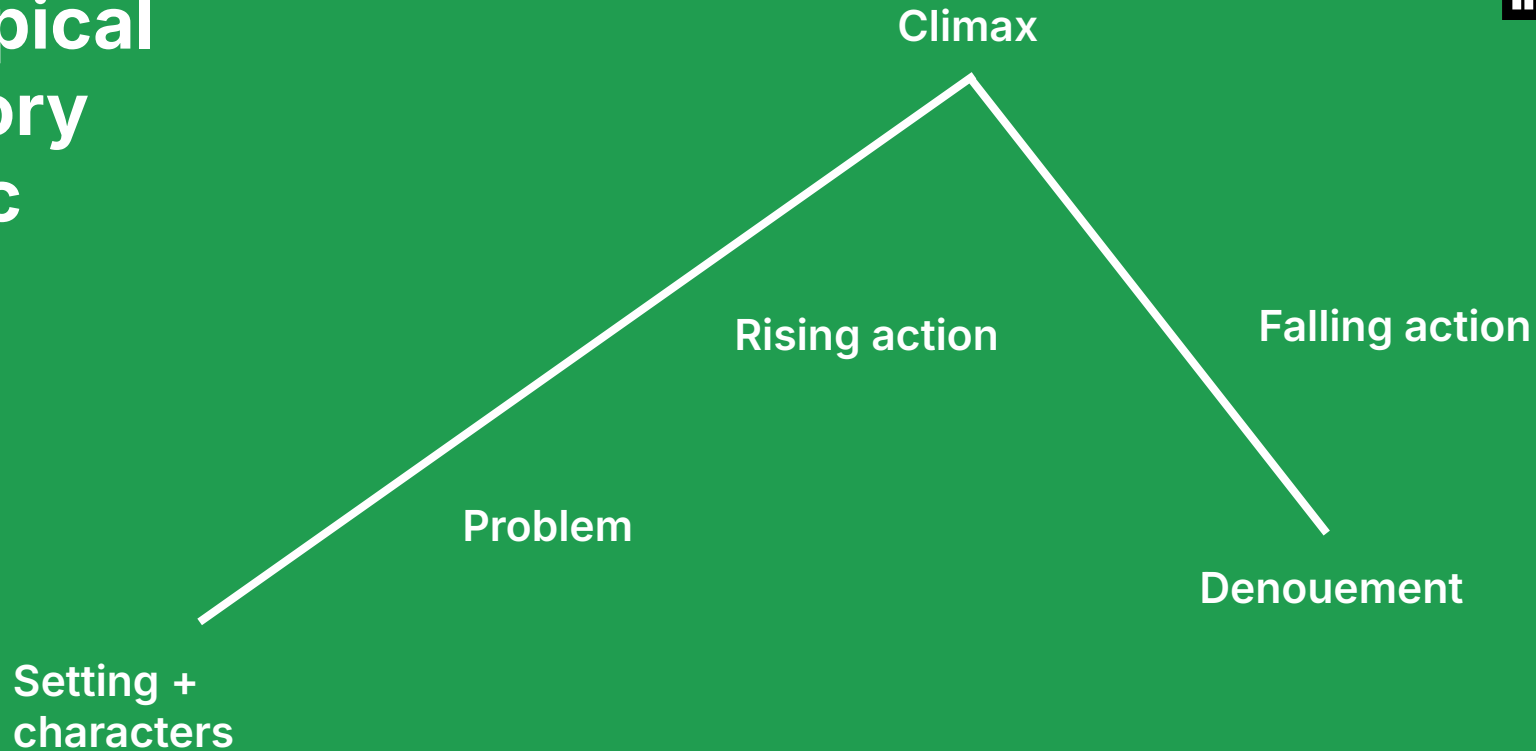
Connect with people: In-person and online within or outside an organisation, to leave an impression of my personal brand (Chloé = user-centred approach)

Performance review: Justifying a pay rise by showing my journey and the value I added

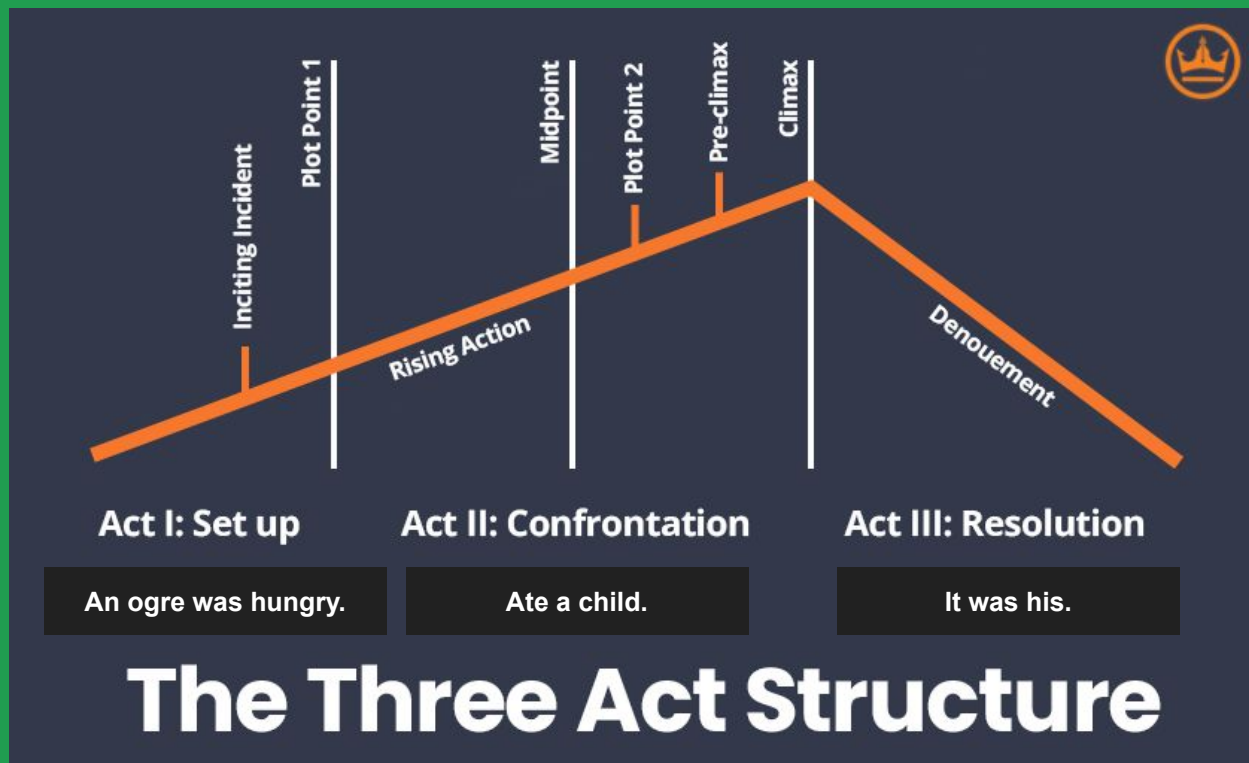


Common Storytelling Frameworks

Typical Story Arc



Three-Act Structure



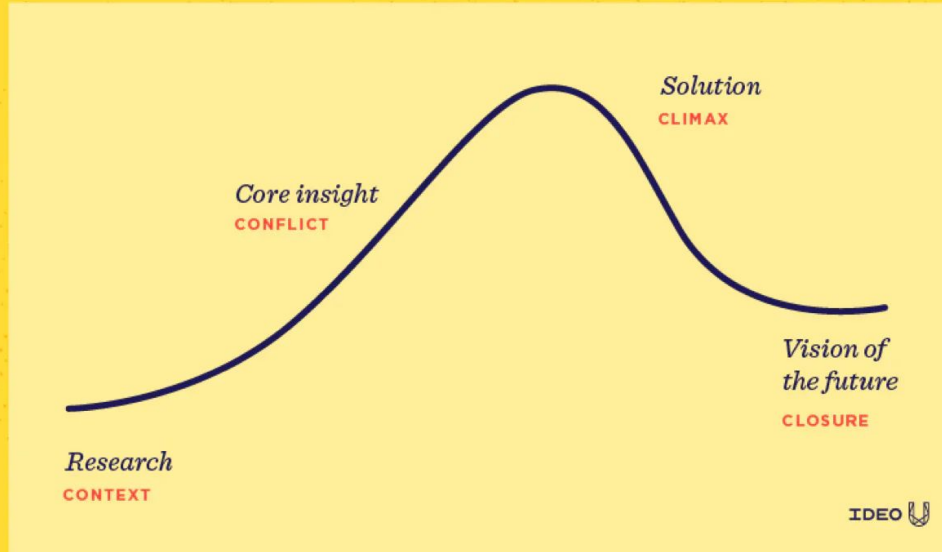
For Sale

Baby Shoes

Never Worn

The 4 C's:

Context, Conflict, Climax, Closure



Character: The user

Conflict: The user pain or problem

Context: The use case or market landscape

Conclusion: Your product's value



Storytelling Frameworks for Persuading and Influencing

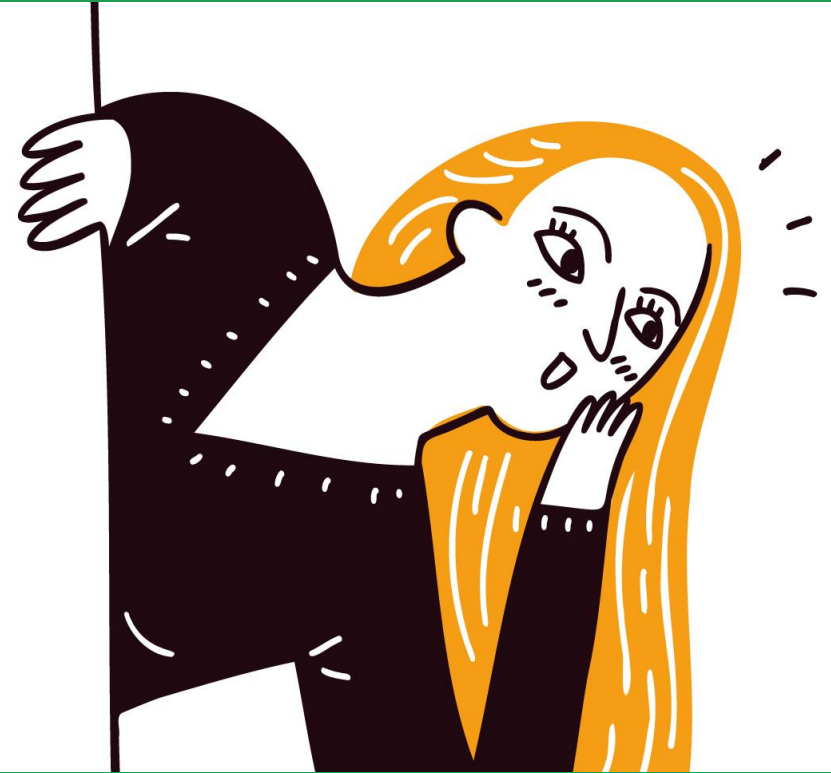


Persuasion and Buy-In For Big Visions

The “Hero’s Journey” by Joseph Campbell

- **Ordinary world:** Set the scene
- **Call to adventure:** Present the challenge or opportunity
- **Obstacles:** Show the struggle or stakes
- **Breakthrough:** The turning point/key action taken
- **Return transformed:** The result and the lesson learned

Listener/reader is the hero, you/your product is the guide



Quick Pitching

The “Problem-Agitate-Solve” (PAS) approach good for pitching.

- **Problem:** State the core pain/gap
- **Agitate:** Amplify the consequences of inaction
- **Solve:** How your approach/product solves it

Anticipate questions from your audience such as, Why are you showing me this? What do you need from me? How will we know if it works?



Concise, Persuasive Stories

The “And-But-Therefore” (ABT) Method by Randy Olson

- **And:** Establish the situation (X and Y are true)
- **But:** Present the problem/tension
- **Therefore:** Show the resolution or action to take



Storytelling Frameworks for Getting Sh*t Done

Sprint Reviews + Feature Planning

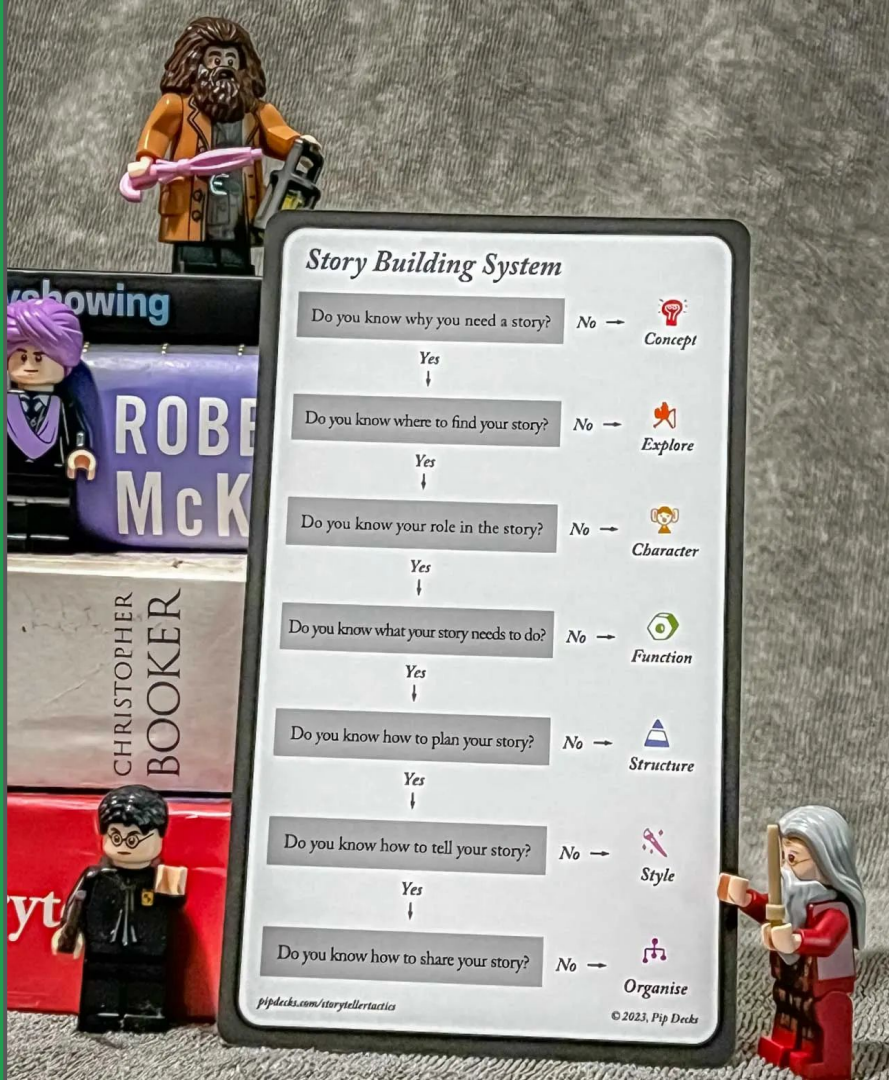
Steve Rawling, creator of Storyteller tactics: Making sprint updates and features discussions easy to understand

Sprint Review

- Start with the mission
- Highlight the journey
- Show the outcome
- Share the learning
- Connect to the bigger picture

Feature Planning

- Describe the problem (pain)
- Introduce the hero (the user)
- Paint the scenario (with and without feature)
- Show the impact (improve life)
- Clarify why now, why this, why it matters



Aligning Stakeholders

Ryan Bigge and Andy Healey's approach is:

- **Collect micro-stories:** Short, recent customer/user anecdotes with clear before/after result.
- **Choose relevance:** Use one that connects with discussion.
- **Frame the story:** Use "Last week...here's what success looked like for them" structure
- **Link to action:** Tie story to decision: "That's why we should..."
- **Invite reflection:** Ask stakeholders for their takeaways to encourage buy-in



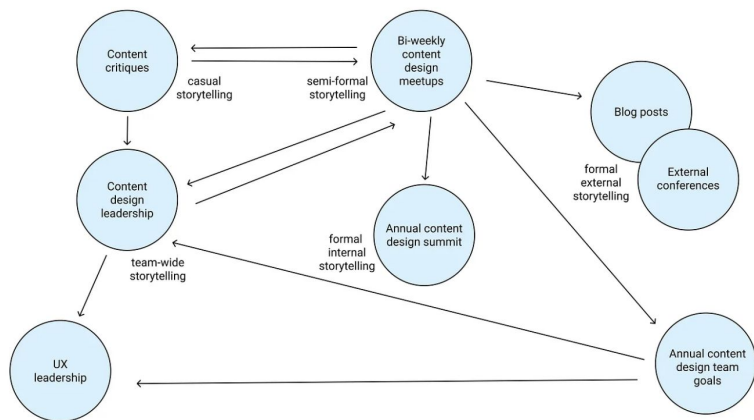


Diagram showing how stories can interconnect in a content design team.

Storytelling for Design/UX

Anna Dahlström's approach is start with the story and then build.

- Define your protagonist
- Outline their world
- Describe the trigger
- Map the journey
- Identify the turning points
- Design to serve the story

Whitney Quesenbery's approach turns UX research into human-centred stories that guide product decisions.

"There are individual stories, project stories, stories about what it's like to be a content designer, stories about the content team as a whole. Internal stories, external stories. Stories about how content design fits within UX. Stories within stories within stories. And the wonderful thing? These stories often reinforce each other." (Ryan Bigge)

Poll Q: Midway



"Which storytelling structure are you most excited to try in your product work?"

- A) Popular Storytelling Frameworks
- B) Stories for persuading your audience
- C) Storytelling for getting things done
- D) I'm not sure yet, I'm still thinking on it

What's Your Story?

What is your STAR moment?

Something They'll Always Remember

- Make it engaging
- Put your audience first: What's important to them and the language they use so it makes sense to them
- Take people on an emotional journey
- Use humour
- Limit to one idea
- Use personal stories: analogies, quotations and dramatisations

Apply these not only to meetings and talks but reports to make these engaging.



Building your story library

Moments that capture your journey

Define your values and passions

Mistakes you learned from

Triumphs against adversity

Human connections and victories

Cautionary tales



What's the Story?

"I felt..." (strong emotion)

"When..." (something changed)

"Because I wanted..." (motivation)

"And so I..." (lesson learned)

Finding your story:

What are the core concepts of your story?

What is the lesson or message?

Who is the audience?

How is it relatable, relevant and re-tellable?

What impact will it have on the listener?

Presenting your story

PRESENCE



ORIGINALITY



INCLUSION



NARRATIVE



TRANSFORMATION



Quick Exercise

What is *one storytelling technique* you'll use in your next roadmap, leadership pitch, or sprint planning session?

Share with the group in the chat.

Key Takeaways + Tips

Practice using storytelling and consider if you're getting the outcomes you're hoping for

Bringing the audience into the journey, involving stakeholders rather than telling

Help your colleagues use storytelling techniques so it becomes the **norm**

Adapt your storytelling style to the situation and audience

Get **feedback** on your storytelling approach



**Free Storytelling
Workbook**

How we can help



Take the The
Leader's
Storytelling
Scorecard



sharp-storytelling.scoreapp.com

30-minute storytelling clinic

Review your report, roadmap or business case that isn't landing.

Customer Insight Sprint

Get evidence for your stories. We offer research, experiments for insight consultancy & training.

Storytelling Coaching

Work with me over a series of 6-8 sessions to improve your storytelling techniques for improved buy-in.



Book time with me

Connect with me
on LinkedIn
[/drchloesharp](#)



Close + Q&A

How we can help



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Presenting your story

