

# New Narrative Career Clarification System Integrates Digital Tools and Gamification

BY MARK FRANKLIN AND RICH FELLER

Engaging clients in storytelling about their life roles seemed to have a positive effect. However, we were struck by the variability in the stories heard, and unsure how best to use their richness. Building our storylistening skills, we began to see growth in our clients' active engagement and positive affect. A pattern of elements, such as strengths, desires, and personal qualities were easily extracted from client stories. Over time, we realized that a tool was needed to gather and organize these elements, thoughts and feelings. This is how the Career Sketch innovation emerged. A one-page marvelous mosaic could reflect client awareness that emerged from witnessing their stories.

The Career Sketch and its refined version called the Career Statement are central components of the OneLifeTools/ CareerCycles's (OLTCC) evidence-based, narrative assessment system (Franklin, Yanar & Feller, 2015). While engaged in intentional storytelling, career counselors and specialists play a key storylistening role, by identifying important elements from the stories. Elements are Desires, Strengths, Personal Qualities, Natural Interests, Other People, and Assets (see Figure 1).

Generating meaningful career and life possibilities becomes an engaging and collaborative process linked to emotional intelligence, "soft skills" identification, and National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) career readiness competencies. This constructive narrative method aligns with life design principles (Savickas, 2012), and exemplifies qualitative, post-modern career counseling (Franklin & Feller, 2017).

After using the narrative method with thousands of clients and having trained hundreds of practitioners, the narrative framework was poised to scale. In 2013 OneLifeTools.com was founded to address rising career management needs and plunging institutional budgets by creating scalable tools using the collaborative strength of narrative while overcoming its time demands placed on the practitioner (Stebleton, 2010). The result is two scalable tools described below and related training to share this narrative framework broadly. A YouTube introduction is available at <http://tinyurl.com/ybaxj33>.

**Who You Are Matters!** is a fun and social, guided clarification experience at the intersection of meaningful work and personal lifestyle. An energizing, peer-to-peer personal discovery experience disguised as a game, this career intervention

engages participants – from small to large groups over 300 – in meaningful conversations and storytelling relevant to their career and life. It results in a substantive Career Statement takeaway that strengthens participants' voices and self-advocacy.

**Online Storyteller** is a web application that helps users reflect on their stories and experiences in an organized way. The scalable, digital tool guides clients through the OLTCC narrative framework, helping them to define and clarify the six key elements listed earlier. Drawing from these elements, *Online Storyteller* supports generating meaningful future possibilities leading to well-informed choices.

Because everyone has stories, the OLTCC narrative assessment system has demonstrated effectiveness across the lifespan and in diverse populations, for both individuals and groups. *Who You Are Matters!* and *Online Storyteller* are being used in college and university student services and for-credit courses, high schools, private practice, employment services, and organizational applications. In higher education, these narrative tools have widely been applied, in dozens of institutions from engineering to humanities, and from undergraduate to master and doctoral levels.

The tools have been integrated into a career course for the Canadian Medical Association, within a National Science Foundation program for doctoral and post-doc students at Colorado State University, and for masters level coursework at the University of Toronto titled Engineering Careers: Theories and Strategies to Manage your Career for the Future (<http://tinyurl.com/y82p7b8z>).

High school teachers and school counselors have used *Who*



*You Are Matters!* in the classroom especially at the 11th and 12th grade levels, utilizing a youth expansion pack. Alumni career service programs and employers utilize related expansion packs.

In conclusion, in the fast-changing world of work, rather than aiming toward a one-time occupational choice, practitioners and clients are best served by working collaboratively to support clients to successfully navigate a lifetime of transitions. Narrative and collaborative methods and tools are trending in career management, and many practitioners are already informally using narrative methods. However, few scalable, evidence-based systems and tools exist to leverage narrative methods while allowing for integration of other assessments. Digital tools that harness the richness of client stories, and gamified tools that deeply engage, offer promising potential for blended delivery to reach more clients while preserving the role for practitioners' professional judgment.



**Figure 1. Career Sketch from Online Storyteller, gathers and organizes content from stories**

DESIRES what you want and what's important to you	STRENGTHS skills and knowledge you want to use	PERSONAL QUALITIES personality and how others describe you	NATURAL INTERESTS emerging passions, exciting novelty	POSSIBILITIES possibilities you're curious about
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>experiential learning</li> <li>use my expertise</li> <li>Creativity</li> <li>Intellectual Stimulation</li> <li>clearer directions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>hands-on html and css skills</li> <li>Interpersonal</li> <li>spatial visualization (from YouScience)</li> <li>Idea generation (from YouScience)</li> <li>numerical reasoning (from YouScience)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>friendly &amp; hardworking</li> <li>green / blue (from True Colors)</li> <li>ENFP (from MBTI)</li> <li>OTHER PEOPLE other people's influence and your life roles</li> <li>Professor Sille - she believed in me</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>animation</li> <li>Social, Enterprising, Investigative (RIASEC code from Strong Interest Inventory)</li> <li>ASSETS education, credentials, experiences, additional skills and knowledge</li> <li>diploma in web design</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>game animator</li> <li>web developer for hire</li> <li>coding bootcamp</li> <li>travel in SE Asia</li> </ul>

Designed to be used collaboratively by helping professionals and their clients, or provided to individuals for self-directed narrative assessment, **Online Storyteller** allows for integration of other career assessments. For example, a client who gains new insights into their natural and stable aptitudes through **YouScience** such as 'idea generation,' 'numerical reasoning,' and 'spatial visualization' (see sidebar), could add these to Strengths in their **Career Sketch**. Likewise, **True Colors** results or **Myers-Brigg Type Indicator (MBTI)** results of extravert, intuitive, feeling, or perceiving can be added to Personal Qualities. The **Holland (1985) RIASEC** occupational theme codes can be added to Natural Interests.

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## YouScience App Brings Aptitudes to Storytelling

What if clients used performance-measured natural and stable aptitudes to identify possibilities and make career decisions? What if they powerfully articulated how their talents added value? What if practitioners helped clients see how their “aces” always show up in their experiences to create their competitive advantage? What if aptitudes were used to add richness to storytelling? With this now possible, storytelling can be even more revealing and impactful.

YouScience's patent-pending technology combines matching algorithms with the most reliable and comprehensive career data, providing users with a highly personalized online profile that highlights the intersection of unique talents, interests and opportunities. YouScience's online application employs decades of rigorous scientific research to measure user's aptitudes through a series of engaging “brain games”. Delivering language to any conversation where users want to provide a unique narrative is now available through YouScience's mobile app.

Helping clients to identify possibilities, pick a career pathway, or consider skill development programs is much easier, credible, and cost effective when aptitude language verifies natural strengths. With aptitude assessment able to uncover “hidden talent,” communities offering high demand, high growth industries eagerly value practitioners who can identify talent. As clients embrace their aptitudes better stories are told and practitioners can document richer outcomes as a result of their practice. Such progress is being made in states like Georgia.

The Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) recent report states, “YouScience showed statistically significant impact on students in five areas directly related to career guidance: Self-Awareness, Career Decision-Making, Self-Empowerment, Career Exploration, and Intent to Persist.” The study concluded that YouScience was highly impactful in helping females, minorities and persons of low socioeconomic status improve their outcomes and career decisions. One pilot study found almost two times more users have aptitude for careers in computer technology, and nine times more young women have the aptitude or natural ability for architecture and engineering careers than identified using traditional interest surveys.

In August, The Georgia Department of Education and the Technical College System of Georgia entered into a new partnership with YouScience to strengthen the School-to-Workforce pipeline and identify a larger talent pool. With [www.youscience.com](http://www.youscience.com) storytelling gets much more powerful.

## Try it!

Practitioners wanting to experiment with this narrative approach can ask a client, or friend, to think of an experience or story from work, learning or leisure. Then, ask the client to reflect on the story by asking the questions below, while recording responses in the Career Sketch element shown in square brackets. Continuing in this way with more stories reveals patterns in the elements, facilitates career and life clarification, and easily expands career idea generation.

1. What did you like about this story? What else? What else? [Desire]
2. What's one thing you didn't like? Instead of that, what do you want more of now? [Desire]
3. What skills or knowledge did you enjoy using in this story? [Strength]
4. How would others have described you? [Personal Quality]
5. What fascinated you, or did you feel passionate about? [Natural Interest]
6. Who played a role in this story? How? [Other People]
7. What possibilities for your future crossed your mind then, or now? [Possibilities]



**Mark Franklin, MEd, PEng, CMF** ([mark@careercycles.com](mailto:mark@careercycles.com)) is co-founder of OneLifeTools and the Who You Are Matters! narrative assessment game, and practice leader of CareerCycles.com, a career management social enterprise. Franklin is sessional lecturer at University of Toronto, and host of Career Buzz broadcast radio show and podcast.



**Rich Feller, PhD** ([rich.feller@colostate.edu](mailto:rich.feller@colostate.edu)) is a NCDA Past-President, Colorado State University professor emeritus, and President of Rich Feller & Associates. Co-founder of OneLifeTools and the Who You Are Matters! narrative assessment game, Feller is lead facilitator of the Knowdell Job & Career Transition Coach Certification, co-author of the CDM Career Decision Making System, and Chief Advisor of [www.youscience.com](http://www.youscience.com).



A complete list of references is available upon request from the authors.