Title: Troubleshooting Data Storytelling

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Abstract: In data storytelling, if fears are not articulated and confronted, they can be paralyzing. Participants in this workshop will learn to articulate things that can go wrong in data storytelling. We will lead participants in an interactive workshop that will help them to learn (and practice) what you can do to prevent trouble from happening (ideally), reduce the odds of trouble happening, reduce the consequences when troubles do happen, and recover from data storytelling trouble. We call this "troubleshooting data storytelling." Experts typically have a repertoire of such techniques. It is one of the galling aspects of being a novice that as your repertoire is more limited, things are more likely to go wrong and to throw you off. Just knowing that can reduce confidence, making certain problems even more likely to occur. We'll introduce a six-part model of storytelling thinking that can help even the most novice data storyteller to understand how to troubleshoot everyday storytelling problems.

Description:

Inspired by the Data StorySLAM we facilitated at the 2018 iConference, this year we propose: Troubleshooting Data Storytelling.

As with all kinds of storytelling, and indeed all kinds of performance, if fears are not articulated and confronted, they can be paralyzing and lead you to not dare have a go. And if you don't have a go, you can't learn how to get better. Our aim is to address concerns, fears and hesitations people may have about exploring the ideas of data storytelling by taking a "troubleshooting" approach.

One trick is to articulate things that can go wrong in data storytelling. We will lead participants in an interactive workshop that will help them to learn (and practice) what you can do to:
- Prevent trouble from happening (ideally)
- Reduce the odds of trouble happening
- Reduce the consequences when troubles do happen
- Recover from storytelling trouble

We call this "troubleshooting data storytelling." Experts typically have a repertoire of such techniques. It is one of the galling aspects of being a novice that as your repertoire is more limited, things are more likely to go wrong and to throw you off. Just knowing that can reduce confidence, making certain problems even more likely to occur. This is often accompanied by well-meaning people offering the novice the completely true but utterly unhelpful and annoying advice of "Just Relax." By contrast the expert, with her repertoire of prevention, mitigation and recovery techniques, simply by being aware of her possession of these techniques is somewhat less likely to need them.

We think there is a way to resolve this fear of getting started by some troubleshooting techniques. Storytelling troubleshooting can take even the most emotional story-based interactions and offer a systematic approach to understand what can go wrong. We start from a three-part model of storytelling:

- The story
- The teller
- The audience

Once you've internalized the teller-audience-tale triangle, the trick is to think about what part of that triangle could change, and try it out.

However, data storytelling can be quite tricky, because there's more going on that just the interaction of these three elements. Each pair of the three elements is in relationship to each other. We will introduce a Six-Part Storytelling Thinking model that entails analyzing the following in order to troubleshoot:

1. Teller
2. Tale
3. Audience
4. Between the teller and the audience
5. Between the audience and the tale
6. Between the teller and the tale

When you identify a problem, storytelling thinking can help you figure out which one (or more) of these six elements needs to change to improve the data story or your storytelling and, hopefully, connect and communicate. At minimum, storytelling thinking will always help you to get more information and identify possible reasons why the story is not connecting.

Workshop participants will practice telling data stories, telling stories of times when data storytelling went wrong, and analyzing the trouble with this six-part model. We will include a couple of introductory examples and draw on a larger context-dependent repertoire to share as participants contribute examples, problems and challenges.

The agenda for the session will be:

1. Brief intro to data storytelling, with examples from Mike [using some classic historic examples through to contemporary best practices such as talks by Hans Rosling]
2. Small groups: times when data storytelling has gone wrong
3. Discussion of examples
4. Kate's 6-part storytelling thinking model
5. Matt's visualization as storytelling troubleshooting

The six-part storytelling thinking model is particularly useful for technically-minded, logical, or predominantly left-brained-thinking people who may not have a "feel" for storytelling. Such tellers may be able to use this six-part model to troubleshoot their

data storytelling, even if they struggle to gain a more intuitive or emotional grasp of how storytelling works. Those who are more right-brained and have a very strong intuitive feel for storytelling can also benefit from taking a more systematic approach to thinking through the exchange. Sometimes emotionally attuned tellers will be disoriented when a story falls flat with a particular audience, having no intuitions about what went wrong. This model is a way of reorienting yourself to what happened, what could have been improved, and what was beyond your control so that you can learn from a situation that was initially uncomfortable, moving from the paralyzing fears of a novice to much greater ease and creativity in troubleshooting data storytelling.