CHAPTER 4

Narratives

WHAT IS A NARRATIVE, AND WHAT TYPES OF NARRATIVE DO WE FIND IN SMART GRIDS?

A narrative is a story about events that are connected; it is a particular way of explaining or understanding events (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021). A narrative is always a selective account: within a narrative, some things are left out, and others included. One person might see different connections between events than someone else, so the story they tell is slightly different. Hence, there are always multiple narratives about any situation, including smart grid policy programs and energy innovation more broadly. The terms narrative and story are often used interchangeably. Technically, story is more specific, as narratives are broader, with more open-ended ideas—the overall design. In contrast, stories are about the events, what happened to whom and in what order. The plot is another important variable. There is extensive discussion of narrative, story and plot within literary and cultural theory (see e.g., Herman et al., 2010; Ryan, 2017). In this chapter, I use both terms—narrative and story—but it is worth bearing in mind that there are differences between them.

Narratives demand attention because they affect how specific policies are remembered (see Chap. 5). They can also be quite subtle, emerging and coming to dominate without much attention to their origins and the reasons why that particular narrative is popular, and which others have had less attention. The reason why one energy innovation story of a policy

might come to dominate and have more traction than others is to do with the specifics of what happened but also a host of external factors. These external factors include what has happened previously and peoples' memories of it, the timing of the policy and the stage in the policy process, which political party (or other organisation) is pushing for the policy change to occur, and so on. Every story about a policy is worth examining broadly to assess the context in which it has developed and to better understand why that story is the one being retold or, conversely, why it is being ignored. We see this happening in the State of Victoria's (Australia) Advanced Metering Infrastructure program (AMI) (Case Study 4.2 below), where in the domestic context, the policy failure story dominated, while internationally—in a very different context—the success story gained traction.

CHARACTERISTICS OF NARRATIVES AND THEIR RELEVANCE TO SMART GRIDS

A key characteristic of any popular narrative is a strong plot that does not go down too many side paths; otherwise listeners or readers get distracted and quickly lose interest. With regard to innovation, this means that stories of failure and success are amplified versions of failure or success. In other words, stories of failure do not usually have any discussion about the things that worked well, and stories of success do not mention problems, as in both cases, these would be distractions from the plot. We see this clearly in the AMI Program Case Study 4.2, below, where the dominant story of failure which took hold did not mention any successes. But there were, in fact, several successes, such as the high digital metering implementation rate.

Another characteristic of narratives to consider, which is especially relevant to better understanding energy innovation processes, is that narratives have different geographies. Some stories have strong traction and travel widely, perhaps internationally, whereas others are familiar only to a more contained (often local) group of people. Research shows us that stories about negative policies do not tend to travel far, whereas success stories do (see Lovell, 2017). The reasons for this are not hard to guess. No one likes to air their failures in public, so briefing notes on unsuccessful policies, conference talks about policy collapses and bad news media releases simply do not happen. If a policy does not work out quite as planned, the understandable tendency is not to draw attention to it. In

contrast, successful policies are often promoted in media releases, through feature case studies, among networks of experts nationally and internationally, and in official reports. In the case of smart grids, we see this happening in publications by international organisations such as the International Smart Grid Action Network, publications that almost exclusively showcase successful programs (ISGAN, 2014, 2019).

The problem with stories of policy failure only being circulated locally is that there is a missed opportunity for learning. Evaluating things that went wrong and examining the reasons for this is often more productive than trying to emulate successes. This is because reflections on failures tend to provoke deeper forms of learning, such as a change in the framing of the problem and shifts in guiding values and beliefs.

DIFFERENT WAYS OF THINKING ABOUT NARRATIVES

The discipline areas of English and the Humanities are the natural home of narrative research, where topics range from the methodology of narrative analysis to analysis of different genres of narrative (Andrews et al., 2013; Hyvärinen, 2015). Other disciplines with a clear interest in narratives include social history, communication studies and social linguistics. Multiple definitions of narrative originate from these different areas of research; as the sociologist Riessman (2008) explores, the term narrative is used in different ways across different disciplines and has many meanings. Narratives can comprise spoken (oral), written or visual material, and even within written narratives, there are many different genres: biographies, novels, reports and so on.

Research on narratives has become increasingly popular in political science, and a methodological approach called the narrative policy framework has developed. This approach to researching policy narratives comprises three different levels of analysis—micro, meso, and macro—and examines four key elements of narratives: setting, characters, plot, and morals. Policy narratives are defined as “strategic constructions of a policy reality promoted by policy actors that are seeking to win (or not lose) in public policy battles” (Jones et al., 2014, p. 9). More generally, within political science, narratives are analysed as strategies used by policy actors to persuade others about a particular course of action. The effect of any policy narrative will vary considerably depending on the audience and context (Cairney, 2019; Fischer & Forester, 1993; Hajer, 1995).

Another relevant area of narrative research is from science and technology studies, a branch of sociology. Research here has concentrated mainly on narratives about the future, including narratives about energy futures. For example, Jasanoff and Kim (2009) developed the concept of the sociotechnical imaginary based on their comparative study of nuclear power in the USA and South Korea. They define sociotechnical imaginary as “collectively imagined forms of social life and social order reflected in the design and fulfillment of nation-specific scientific and/or technological projects” (ibid., p. 120). This narrative is about underlying visions of ideal social life, embodied in infrastructure, including smart city infrastructure (see Sadowski & Bendor, 2019). There is overlap here with research into science fiction and the way narratives of modernity and alternative versions of the future are explored through the genre of science fiction (Raven, 2017). A growing interest in energy sector narrative research is demonstrated by the 2017 publication of a dedicated special issue of the Energy Research and Social Science journal on *Narratives and storytelling in energy and climate change research*. The special issue grouped over thirty papers under the categories of stories as data, stories as inquiry and stories as process (Moezzi et al., 2017), illustrating the diverse ways in which narratives are being used to better understand energy sector innovation. A paper in this special issue, on policy narratives in the USA about smart grid interoperability standards, explains:

Crucial for this research is the notion in discourse and narrative approaches that language does not simply mirror the world but it acts to encourage certain ways of thinking and silencing others: policy sets out a dominant conceptualization of the problem which sets limits on what can be said and felt about it. (Muto, 2017, p. 112)

CASE STUDY 4.1 THE WILLING PROSUMER NARRATIVE: HOUSEHOLDERS AND THEIR WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE IN SMART GRIDS

An important distinction between smart grids and previous household energy innovations is that most new smart grid technologies involve a two-way interaction between households and the electricity grid, that is, households are not just consuming electricity but producing it too. A common term for this new role for the household is *prosumer* (i.e., *producer + consumer* of electricity). With a range of new energy technologies

now available to households, such as battery storage, electric vehicles, and rooftop solar, a narrative has emerged about the pleasure these technologies bring to households and how households universally embrace the technologies. In this narrative, a smart energy household is a happy, productive and efficient household with time and money to spare and a strong interest in being an active member of a smart grid (see Strengers, 2013 for an excellent description of the closely related ‘smart utopia’ narrative). Below I briefly summarise this *willing prosumer* narrative and question its origins, including the data on which it is based. The main point I wish to make is that the narrative is not based on much evidence. What is emerging from research is that households have varied, diverse responses to new smart grid technologies, which are mostly less positive than the willing prosumer narrative suggests. There are many industry and government studies about households and smart grid technologies. However, these studies are mostly techno-economic, that is, they focus on the technical feasibility and market appeal of having lots of prosumers connected to the grid (see e.g., Marchment Hill Consulting, 2012). There is little published research that has examined social factors related to prosumers, in particular, how households actually behave in their home with smart grid technologies, including how this changes over time (for exceptions see Capova et al., 2015; Watson et al., 2019). Much of the existing research is based on trials with early adopters—often time-rich technology enthusiasts—who are unlikely to represent the wider population. The International Smart Grid Action Network concludes that, despite smart grid pilots trying to support householder participation, “a consistent and integrated view on how to incentivize end users to change their behavior is still lacking” (ISGAN, 2017, p. 1). And, while there is longstanding social research on energy efficiency, photovoltaics, household demand, energy side management, and feedback more broadly (Boardman, 1994; Darby, 2006; Wade & Leach, 2003), this research is in most cases a bit different because it is not about households actively participating in smart grids, as prosumers.

Smart grid willing prosumer studies tend to use existing quantitative data about trends in household uptake to project and model into the future (CSIRO & Energy Networks Australia, 2017; Fleming et al., 2016). Theirs is an anticipatory approach, identifying trajectories and universally projecting increased future numbers of prosumers: for example, this projection from Australia’s lead science agency and peak energy industry association:

scenario based modelling... identifies the possibility that up to 45% of Australia's electricity supply could be provided by millions of distributed, privately owned generators in 2050. (CSIRO & Energy Networks Australia, 2017, p. 2)

There is an underlying assumption here that households will be willing players in new energy technologies and network sharing. In other words, the studies that promote the willing prosumer narrative are mostly based on assumptions about likely positive household responses rather than actual evidence. For example, consider these statements from the European Commission and then the Council of European Energy Regulators (CEER):

Smart grids enable new market actors, such as aggregators and energy service companies, to offer new types of services to consumers, allowing them to adjust their consumption and reap the benefits of flexibility provided to the grid. (European Commission, 2021b)

The emergence of smart technologies is driving change in energy markets. It is beginning to change the traditional role of the customer, providing them with greater opportunities. (CEER, 2018, p. 7)

What is mostly left out of the willing prosumer narrative is an appreciation of the diversity and complexity of household responses to smart grids. The narrative is based on an ideal type of household. It is a household that remains engaged, and their willingness to participate does not tail off over time, after the novelty of the new energy technology fades.

The context that has allowed the willing prosumer narrative to flourish can be understood by looking at industry and government motivations and interests. On the commercial side, the willing prosumer narrative has been driven by businesses wishing to expand their interests into the growth area of smart grids and the digitalisation of utility infrastructure more broadly. These include large international companies such as IBM and Cisco (see Sadowski & Bendor, 2019), and is not surprising given that investment in smart grids globally per year is as much as US\$275 billion (IEA, 2020). For some smart grid companies, the market is direct to households but for most, their customers are other organisations in the energy sector. So, these companies have a financial interest in promoting the willing prosumer narrative to other businesses and governments. The household is positioned within the narrative as, first and foremost, a compliant household, a household that uses their new smart grid product or

technology efficiently to effectively manage their own electricity and on behalf of the grid. For example, the Director of Sustainable Energy at Cisco, an international internet and digital business, explains the role of consumers like households within smart grids as follows:

A Smart Grid will enable consumers to manage their own energy consumption through dashboards and electronic energy advisories. More accurate and timely information on electricity pricing will encourage consumers to adopt load-shedding and load-shifting solutions that actively monitor and control energy consumed by appliances. (Frye, 2008, p. 7)

And a journalist in the popular trade magazine *RenewEconomy* similarly states:

many customers have begun taking more direct control of the cost, reliability, and green mix of their energy supply. They are enabled on this journey by a convergence of new, widely available technologies that can automate and fully monetise their energy resources. (Mouat, 2016)

Governments too are drivers of the willing prosumer narrative, investing increasing amounts of resources in smart grids. Governments have promoted smart grids as a core element of the new digital economy (see e.g., DECC & Ofgem, 2014; and European Commission, 2021a). There are several pressing policy problems that smart grids have the potential to solve, including rising electricity prices and decarbonisation of the grid, so governments also have an interest in promoting smart grids for these reasons (Mission Innovation, 2019; UNECE, 2015). As the science and technology studies scholar Sachiko Muto (2017) explains, there is a *hero technology* narrative with smart grids, in which smart grids provide a solution to a host of policy problems. In the willing prosumer narrative, the household is the key actor pivotal to the smart grid hero technology working.

CASE STUDY 4.2 THE NARRATIVE OF POLICY FAILURE IN THE STATE OF VICTORIA'S DIGITAL METERING PROGRAM

Digital meters came onto the mass market between 2005 and 2010, offering many more features than the traditional spinning disc accumulation meter (see Case Study 3.1). Countries around the world have struggled to

work out the best way to implement these next generation meters in households and small businesses. The two main implementation options that have been used, to varying degrees of success, are mandatory (government-initiated) and voluntary (customer opt-in/customer choice). There are advantages and disadvantages of each approach. An advantage of a mandatory approach is the efficiency of implementation, as a whole street or neighbourhood can have new meters installed at the same time, reducing travel time and costs. Another plus is the benefit of having real-time customer data from the entire network (so-called digital meter saturation). But, as with all large-scale government infrastructure programs, costs can quickly escalate and promised financial benefits have often not materialised.

Australia is an interesting example internationally because it has done both types of implementation. The State of Victoria adopted a mandatory approach under its Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) program (2009 to 2013). Initially, all the other states were to follow, but, in the end, the Australian National Electricity Market implemented a voluntary customer-led program. Households are not obliged to accept a digital meter unless they are moving house, their existing old-style meter is faulty, or they opt to change tariff. This approach is often referred to as new and replacement digital metering implementation, and in effect, mixes voluntary and mandatory elements. Why was there was a switch from a mandatory to a voluntary mode of implementation in Australia? The decision stems from the strong narrative of failure that emerged from the State of Victoria's AMI program (see also Case Study 2.3).

In the late 1990s, Victoria became the first state in Australia to privatise its electricity sector. Partly because of this, it was keen to go ahead with digital metering so that its newly privatised market could function better, as digital meters allow greater choice of tariffs and easier switching of electricity company provider. In 2004 state government approval was given in Victoria to proceed with an interval metering program. Interval meters are basic digital meters that collect consumption data in a digital form but do not transmit or communicate the data remotely. As technology choice rapidly improved in the mid-2000s, the approval in Victoria was changed to advanced meters in 2006. Advanced meters have communications embedded and so can transmit data remotely, without having to be manually read. The AMI program ran from 2009 to 2013 and resulted in 2.3 million digital meters being installed in 93% of homes and small businesses in Victoria.

On the face of it, Victoria's AMI program sounds like a wonderful success story with a really high implementation rate and delivery of modern utility infrastructure across the whole of the state. This story or narrative is certainly one that could be told about the AMI program. In my research, I found that there were many stories about the AMI program and that stories were a significant feature of how people sought to understand what happened and how to move forward.

The local story of failure: This is the dominant narrative that emerged about the Victorian AMI program. The program was a failure from start to finish: it was expensive, households and small businesses bore the costs, the government and utilities mismanaged it, the government did not take full responsibility for the program, the advantages of digital metering were overstated and the disadvantages overlooked. These criticisms were widely reported in the media and also through official reviews. For example, the Victorian Auditor-General reviewed the program twice (2009, 2015), and both times it was heavily criticised. Under this narrative, there is no room for successes. Although there was a high implementation rate (93%), the program was costly. Part way through the program, the state government ruled out some planned benefits of the meters in terms of tariff changes (to time-of-use tariffs). Utilities were unhappy about this, as this was a key part of their business case for investment. In this story, the AMI program was a dismal failure that meant there was no possibility of other Australian states implementing mandatory digital metering programs, as had been initially planned. Digital metering had become politically sensitive.

The international story of success: In stark contrast to the story of failure outlined above, there is an alternative story about how successful the AMI program was. This story was harder to locate, but it became apparent to me while undertaking interviews with key AMI program decision-makers in the Victorian government. There were several passing references to the high numbers of international delegations coming to Victoria to learn about the AMI program. It transpired that, at least in some countries, the story of failure was not the dominant story about the AMI program. Instead, international governments and utilities were eager to find out how Victoria had managed to achieve such success in its digital metering implementation. Many international delegations visited Victoria to hear about and learn from the AMI program, so they could repeat its success back at home, as one interviewee in the Victorian government commented: "last week we had a group from Malaysia and you know they were really engaged... and interested in our experience... So we get a lot of

people coming to see what we've done" (Interview, September 2015). I also witnessed this first-hand on a research visit to London in 2019, when the organisation overseeing the implementation of the UK's voluntary digital metering program wanted to meet with me to discuss Victoria's AMI program. It was considering transitioning to a mandatory digital metering program and saw what had been done in Victoria as highly successful and as a possible model for the UK.

These contrasting stories of success and failure are the two main stories in circulation. But there are other ones too. For example, there is a story of *wasted learning* about how there was lots of useful learning from Victoria, but this learning could not be applied because of the political reaction to the things that went wrong and the bad press around them. Because of the subsequent decision to go ahead with a voluntary program in other states, the AMI program was not able to be learnt from. If mandatory metering implementation had progressed as planned in other states, it could have been much better and run much more smoothly than in Victoria. In other words, positive changes could have been made based on what happened in Victoria, as a general manager at a Victorian distribution utility described:

on our calculation they [the other Australian States] could probably rollout the program for 30 to 40 percent of the cost Victoria did because we've learnt all the lessons and all the technology is off the shelf now... we have actually had all the problems and solved them. (Interview, May 2017)

Another story is about *rapid technology change and the timing of policy interventions*. This tale is of how the Victorian government moved too early, at a time when digital meters were only evolving rapidly as a technology, and were not well tested. Many of the problems that arose in Victoria were due to the early type of digital meters that were implemented. There was no mass production of advanced (communications-enabled) digital meters when the Victorian government committed to the AMI program in 2006. Victoria gave digital meters a bad reputation, but metering technology has considerably improved since then. A sub-plot of this story is about the communications technology used to support the meters in Victoria. Most utilities decided to go with one type of communications technology (mesh), but one utility—AusNet—opted to try something different (WiMax). Despite repeated attempts to encourage the WiMax communications technology to work, and with much money spent, AusNet

eventually admitted defeat and switched to the mesh technology used by the other utilities.

CASE STUDY 4.3 NARRATIVES THAT COMPETE WITH SMART GRIDS: THE HYDROGEN ECONOMY AND OFF-GRID

The policy narrative of smart grids has declined in popularity in recent years. Its heyday was around 2010, when there were lots of smart grid initiatives world-wide, with government funding, trials, standards development and so on. The graph below (Fig. 4.1), showing Google searches for “smart grid”, illustrates this drop-off in interest.

More specifically, it is possible to see this trend in the way Australian smart grid initiatives have been referenced within international policy documents, with a peak in 2012 and a decline since then (see Fig. 2.2, Chap. 2). Like most other things in our lives, there are fashion cycles with policies, and ideas fall in and out of favour. Smart grids are no different. It is often that a few things do not go as well as hoped during implementation, and then it suddenly begins to look like a less exciting policy option. As an energy consultant and a regulator explained to me:

Why are you doing a research project on smart grids? No-one talks about smart grids any more. If I were you I would research something else. (Interview, Energy Consultant, April 2015)

We don’t talk about smart grids at all now really....it all seemed a little bit gimmicky, it seemed like a marketing idea rather than a wholesale change in mindset. (Interview, Californian Regulator, March 2016)

Research on policy fashions seeks to distinguish between the narrative and what is happening on the ground, that is, between rhetoric and practice (also Naim, 2000; see for example Peck & Theodore, 2015 who analyse the speed at which new policy fashions circulate internationally; Pollitt et al., 2001). There is mixed evidence about whether the implementation of smart grids still continues as before—and it is just the policy narrative that has tailed off and become less popular—or whether there has been a wholesale shift away from smart grids, both in rhetoric and practice (Lovell, 2019).

Usually as part of the policy cycle—during the waning phase—a new policy idea comes along with a shiny new narrative that has strong appeal. In Australia, two such narratives that have taken some of the attention

Fig. 4.1 The changing level of interest in smart grids over time. (Source: Google Trends)

previously directed to smart grids are the hydrogen economy and off-grid initiatives. The rise of these two competing narratives in Australia is reflective of wider global trends. For example, in relation to hydrogen, in the last few years, the industry-led international Hydrogen Council was established (2017), the first World Hydrogen Congress took place (2020), and the International Energy Agency produced a landmark report, *The Future of Hydrogen* (IEA, 2019).

The Hydrogen Economy

There is growing interest internationally in using hydrogen as an energy fuel, a narrative and policy agenda that to some extent competes with smart grids. Hydrogen can be produced from water with electricity using electrolysis. This process is very energy-intensive, but the technology has been tried and tested over several decades and is improving. The interest in hydrogen as a fuel is in large part driven by the problem of climate change, as well as local air pollution. When hydrogen is burned, the only waste product is water. However, we must also think about how hydrogen is produced in the first place: if it is made using electricity produced by fossil fuels, then it still contributes to climate change. There are lots of aspects of the hydrogen economy still to be worked out. However, some countries are starting to invest significantly in hydrogen and with long term plans. Japan and South Korea, for instance, wish to mass import hydrogen produced using renewable electricity, including from Australia (Japanese Hydrogen and Fuel Cell Strategy Council, 2019; South Korean Government, 2019).

The hydrogen economy narrative stands in strong contrast to the smart grids narrative. There is no smart digitalisation, network efficiency or

information and communications technology meets utility sector expertise in this narrative. Nevertheless, it is a competitor of the smart grids narrative, because the end product—improved energy services to consumers—is the same. It is just a different way of getting there. Instead of real-time feedback and big data, the narrative of the hydrogen economy is populated by quite different things: shipping container transport, large-scale manufacturing, fertilisers, and pipelines. In many ways, it is back to the old school energy sector of large industrial sites and engineering.

There is a good example of the role of narrative in technology development in the Australian 2019 *National Hydrogen Strategy*, which commences with a quote from Jules Verne’s 1874 novel *The Mysterious Island*:

In 1874, science fiction author Jules Verne envisioned a future in which ‘water will one day be employed as fuel, that hydrogen and oxygen which constitute it, used singly or together, will furnish an inexhaustible source of heat and light, of an intensity of which coal is not capable. Someday the coal-rooms of steamers and the tenders of locomotives will, instead of coal, be stored with these two condensed gases, which will burn in the furnaces with enormous calorific power.’ Verne’s prescient vision has inspired governments and entrepreneurs in the 145 years since. (COAG Energy Council, 2019, p. v)

It is a useful reminder of how policy decisions are guided by a mix of cultural, social, political, and economic factors. In other words, any decision about whether to invest in hydrogen in Australia, or elsewhere, is not just about economics, despite the widespread use of the term *hydrogen economy*. For Australia, it is also about its vision for the future and its position in the world. As the Council of Australian Governments states: “Australia has the resources, and the experience, to take advantage of increasing global momentum for clean hydrogen and make it our next energy export.” (COAG Energy Council, 2019, p. viii)

Off-grid

Another narrative that has emerged that has taken some attention from the smart grids narrative is *off-grid*, also referred to as micro-grids or decentralised energy. This narrative is in strong contrast to the idea of a large seamless, efficient smart grid. At its heart, it is about the fragmentation and break down of the existing grid into isolated pockets of

electricity generation and consumption. These pockets could be at the household (off-grid) or community (micro-grid) level. This off-grid narrative has been made possible in part by the development of new technologies as well as the refinement of existing technologies, particularly electricity storage technologies such as household-level batteries. Key terms that populate this narrative are self-sufficiency, distrust in utilities, rural and remote, resilience, and battery health. So, like the hydrogen economy narrative, it is quite a different narrative from smart grids.

In Australia, the off-grid narrative has become more prominent since the 2019/2020 bushfires. As many remote communities lost their electricity transmission lines during the bushfires, discussion has grown about the benefits of rebuilding the electricity infrastructure as isolated grids—off-grid communities—rather than reconnecting these communities to the main grid. In this way, we see how off-grid has become a more mainstream policy option. The more general situation in Australia is one where off-grid makes sense because of the *stringyness* of Australia's electricity grid. Australia's east coast has the longest interconnected transmission network in the world (ENA, [n.d.](#)), with long feeder lines supplying electricity to often just a handful of rural customers. Not surprisingly perhaps, electricity supply to remote communities from the main grid is not always reliable (see also Case Study [2.2](#)). So, an element of the off-grid narrative in Australia is about greater security and reliability of supply.

In terms of translating the off-grid narrative into a reality, that is, the actual implementation of off-grid infrastructure, surprisingly little data is being collected (see Case Study [5.2](#)). For off-grid households, in particular, much of this activity is off the radar of governments and utilities. The emphasis of analysis has tended to be on modelling future scenarios that use projections based on assumptions—rather than actual data—about the number of off-grid households (see e.g., Brinsmead et al., [2015](#); Clean Energy Council, [2015](#); CSIRO, [2013](#); Graham et al., [2015](#); Szatow & Moyse, [2014](#)). So, despite the increasing use of the off-grid narrative, data collection in Australia remains centred on the existing utilities and large-scale centralised energy infrastructure.

LEARNING FROM SMART GRID NARRATIVES

Stories have played an important role in helping us to simplify and make sense of new energy innovations such as smart grids. The handful of smart grid narratives that I have presented in this chapter show how contradictory narratives co-exist and compete for our attention, how they travel across time and place, and how a successful narrative can influence the future of energy innovation. In the table below, I summarise the key learnings from these smart grid narrative case studies and suggest how they might guide future practice.

<i>Key learning</i>	<i>Recommendation for energy practitioners</i>
Narratives are useful to study not only because of the things, people, and organisations that they speak to but also because of the things that get left out of them, the gaps or silences.	It is important to notice the things excluded or unsaid within a particular narrative and to pay attention to the cohesiveness of narratives and their particular framings of the problem and its solutions.
Evidence that runs counter to a popular policy narrative tends to be ignored.	The evidence base behind a particular narrative needs to be carefully considered: some narratives become very popular because they are a good strategic fit, and organisations with vested interests are driving the narrative, but there may actually be little empirical data to substantiate the narrative (e.g., the willing prosumer narrative).
Learning from energy sector failure is more difficult than learning from success because there is much less information circulating about failures.	Publishing detailed information about things that did not work well with an energy policy or new initiative, and not only publicising the success stories, supports successful energy innovation. Publication could be several years later, without the pressure of heightened media attention, and once there is more data on the longer-term benefits and disadvantages.

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