

My name is Nancy Bringing the right people together to engage in activities designed to evoke innovative solutions to complex issues. I'm here to tell you that the next step in KM is to make use of the knowledge and capability of KW address the difficult organizational problems. The oscillation between independent work and collective sensemaking is the heartbeat of the organization. I know collective sensemaking may be a new term – so I will explain that. But first I want say what the problem is and why we need a new a very simple solution. I will give you a couple of examples of organizations who do this kind of oscillation. Where ever I talk about this oscillation – this heartbeat, people nod their heads and say, "that makes sense" let's try it.



We are in the age of the knowledge worker

Drucker defines a knowledge worker as people who know more about what they do than their bosses – why? Because the half life of knowledge for most fields is now 3-5 years, even less for technical fields like software, medicine. But K workers have the advantage of learning all the time. Theirs are jobs that call for judgment, not following prescribed steps – a physical therapist, an intelligence analyst, a software engineer, – they constantly make a decision and see the results and learn from those results.. When you constantly have to use your judgment –to figure out the next step, you learn.

The rise of the knowledge worker

In 1900 90% of workers could not do their jobs as well as their managers could -Our management system our management system has not changed since the 1900s. I am paid to think , you are paid to carry out my orders”

Education level 3 years, barely literate

Today 90% of the people employed can do their jobs better than their bosses – and we still have the same system of management -

We are all smarter than anyone of us



But now we have figured out that - We are all smarter than anyone of us - We know that is true, but we don't have a way to act on it.

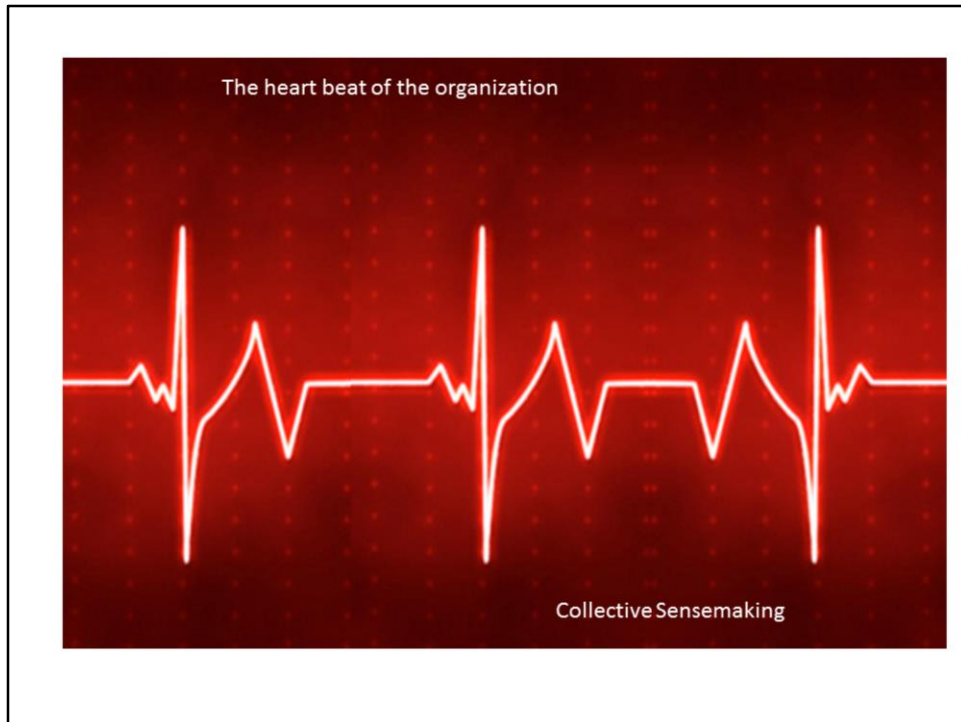
The question is How to bring together in a way that really works to find innovative answers

We've tried, town halls, surveys, tiger teams

With Very little results

They gather data, but the people who make sense are still the top – it is it K workers that need to make sense

Collective sensemaking turns that around



Answer

Collective sensemaking

what is sensemaking – story about neighbor

Yet it is remarkable that we can weave together disparate inputs into a “story” that has meaning to us. It is only when events or data are ambiguous or contradictory that individuals become aware of themselves as actively struggling to make sense. In such situations, we say to ourselves, “It just doesn’t make sense to me that” and we worry the situation over in our minds until we can find some way to weave a plausible story out of the cues that we are able to recall. “In the sensemaking process, individuals scan the environment for relevant information, interpret that information to give it meaning, and then base their actions on these interpretations.”

Rest of the Story

My neighbor returns

Sensemaking is not true, it is the best answer we can find in complex situation. When we get new information we modify the story we have created. That is why Dave Snowden says to try many experiments.

Collective Sensemaking

everyone in your org is independently making sense of what is going on

the Poor collaboration between research and production

other companies getting to market faster than you

Nancy Bringing the right people together to engage in activities designed to evoke innovative solutions to complex issues.

Bring together – not to provide information, not to make decisions, but to make sense – to bring understanding and new perspective to an issue

Organizations have within them, the knowledge to address even the most complex problems they face

That knowledge and insight is widely distributed across the members of an organization

Figuring out what is going on – making sense of it is the trick –not more data

It is not a new methodology – we have enough of those – rather it is a set of principles based on how people make sense together

The problem is we don’t bring the right people together to make sense of what is happening – those who know what is happening are on the front line

When faced with difficult issues – we don’t need more data, what we need is a way to bring people together to use their multiple perspectives to create a new way to think about the issue – a new perspective, that takes in to account all that is known about the issue

Changing the Culture through Changing the Conversation

Utrecht Government—The Netherlands

The Problem:

- The city government of Utrecht is increasingly facing issues that require the eight city policy departments to work together – but the departments have always been siloed.
- Endless discussions - Government officials hold many discussions but with few, if any, resulting changes



I am trying to give you very different examples. But I want to note that each starts with a problem. None are doing collective Sensemaking for the sake of doing it.

“Problem was, there were issues in the organization that didn’t get solved. We noticed that it was not the issue itself, but it was the way people talked about it. People attributed the problems to the way the other was talking. It’s easy to talk about the topic, but it’s difficult talking about the way others are talking. We wanted to talk about the whole issue, to talk deeper, do the whole talk, and not just do it the way we usually talk.”



Hans van Soelen, Program Manager, Organizational Change

He speaks Dutch so you can see reflected in his choice of words and phrases

2 years ago the City government of Utrecht in the Netherlands turned to collective sensemaking to address a multitude of problems they had not been able to solve. An example – The government had been trying for 8 years to put into place a development plan for the west side of the –hold a town hall outline a plan and then 6 months later they were blocked by the business in the area or the citizens- The large bank in the area wanted more access for cars and the citizens wanted to maintain a quiet area. Then they began to hold meetings based on collective sensemaking.

Westplein



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Let's walk in on a collective sensemaking meeting in Utrecht. This meeting, however, seems different, even from the beginning. Most strikingly there are no rows of chairs facing a podium, rather the 40 attendees sit in a large circle. The meeting starts not with a speech, but with everyone in the circle speaking about their interest. There is the usual presentation of a redevelopment plan by the Director, but then the group quickly divides into small groups to discuss the plan. Perhaps what is most unusual about this meeting is the shift in content. Half way through the meeting, the coach (having a coach is certainly different) asks the group to spend some time addressing the issue of trust. The time spent talking about trust changes the outcome. After several meetings they had a plan that worked for everyone – it had elements in it that no one had thought of before. It was not a compromise but an innovation new way to address the issue.

In a year Utrecht government has held over 50 collective sensemaking meetings – some involving citizen some internal problems between department or within a department

Each gathering brings together 10-40 people from different departments as well as external stakeholders to talk about a city problem that needs to be solved. There is:

- a problem owner who frames the issue
- a chair person who is a high level official, but who is not involved in the issue
- a coach or facilitator who helps the interaction and reflects on what is happening

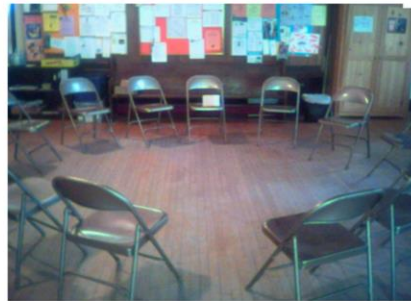


The city government of Utrecht has been experimenting with how to hold a Plein for over a year. They have held 55 Pleinen over the last year and a half.



Collective Sensemaking has become the heartbeat of the Utrecht Government – it is changing the organization – one conversation at a time

What is critical, even more than the fact that such organizations convene, is what happens when the group is convened.



Not presentations or the leader laying out next year's strategy.

Not a methodology but a set of guiding principles based on a deep understanding about how people collectively make sense of their world

Like the Utrecht government they are used to address difficult issues

I have researched a number of companies like the Utrecht Government and ProQuest as well as having delved deeply in to the literature on how groups make sense of what they are facing.

1. Knowledge is created in conversation



Bring knowledge workers together in conversation, not to listen to presentations

2. Cognitive diversity increases a group's ability to innovate



Draw in diverse perspectives from internal and external

EcoPetrol – 3 days to create a KM strategy – 400 of the top leaders -
15 MAKE award winners – each for 15 min

Day 2 spent the day in small group – changing group every 40 min to answer the question “What is the critical knowledge EcoPetrol needs to manage and “What methodologies have we learned about that would fit here at Ecopetrol

Day 3 was groups creating action plans for the items that came out of day 2

After 3 days they had KM strategy – that they did not need to sell because the people who needed to support it developed it

3. We know more than we can say, and we can say more than we can write

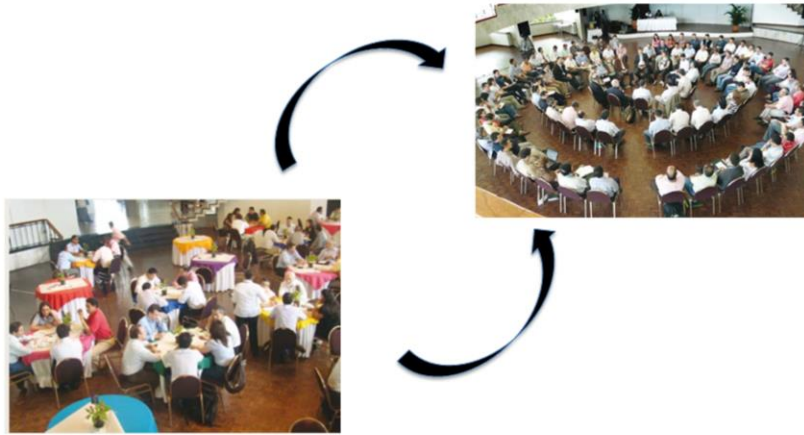
Each step involves a loss of content and context



Bring people together Face-to-Face – you can't do
Collective Sensemaking through social media

You can do this over technology because we each learn

4. The Unit of Learning is the Small Group



Design meetings to alternate between small groups to learn and large groups to integrate the ideas

Conversation in small groups (5-7) produces the richest and most in-depth thinking. People have the opportunity to question the reasoning of the other. To probe for understanding.

Oscillate between small groups and integrating what they have learned in the full group

5. Connection before Content



Start with exchanges where people come to know each other as human beings

Not just saying their names – – have a dinner the night before – put them in small groups to tell stories about themselves “What I have done at this org that I am most proud of”

If a group is going to work on a difficult issue, they first need to experience who others are, the skills they bring, the experience they represent, and how they interact with others.

More than name an organization.

Study of pilot exhaustion

Put together airplane crews in a simulator – pilot, co-pilot and navigator; Then threw difficult situations at them – kept it up for 8 hours to see at what point exhaustion would interfere with their decision making.

Is it after 3 hours? Can they go 5 hours? What they found was a surprise – decisions did not get worse as they got more tired - it was the opposite

After 8 hours they made better decisions than in the first 3 hours

In facing the challenges they had learned about each other, strengths and weaknesses, learned to read each others signals, come to trust each other, laughed together, faced disappointments, ate together

As they deepened their connections they were better able to learn from each other and invent solutions

6. Circles Connect



Start and end meetings in a circle to create a sense of unity
and the whole

It is amazing what a different it makes if

7. We learn When We Talk



Enable every voice to be heard

Get every voice in the room – do go rounds, put their ideas on stickies on the wall and then discuss the themes that emerge

Problem Solver → Conversation Architect



Assist managers to shift their role from problem solver to conversation architect

Collective sensemaking requires a shift in how managers think about their role – from problem solver to conversation architect

That is not an easy shift to make. Management Schools, 100s of books and training courses teach managers how to solve problems – but leading edge CEOs like John Chambers at Cisco has made the switch. He says “I was a command and control guy”. He would go into a meeting, listen for about 10 minutes and then tell the group what they needed to do. He says “But it’s not possible for an organization to scale and take on more when only one person is driving all the strategy.” He talks about his learning curve and how he learned that if he gave a group time they could come up with a better solution than he could have thought of and of course were more interested in implementing it.

1. The first leadership task is to **recognize the challenges the organization : or unit is facing**. That can be difficult, because some adaptive challenges have become so much a part of the organizational culture that leaders and employees alike have resigned themselves to, “that’s just the way it is.” The task is to see with fresh eyes, the issues the organization is facing.
2. **Framing the conversation** also involves **posing the question in a way that gets to the heart of the issue**, not just a symptom. Without care, the question can limit the scope of possibilities that could be discovered. – not how do we reduce turnover = but how do we understand the issues of turnover which is now at 20%
3. **Identifying who needs to be in the conversation** - Those that do the work and those that are impacted by the work have insights and knowledge to bring to bear on the challenge. It may be that customers or stakeholders can also provide a necessary perspective. **Our inclination is to think too narrowly about inclusion** so it is useful to ask what voices haven’t been heard.
4. **Transparency – political, strategic, financial -**
5. **Design for interaction not for speeches and presentation**
6. Give the work to the group - **Participate As a member of a small group**, you do not inhibit other small groups and your voice can be included



- **Technical problems** - predictable and solvable; there are known methods and tools
- **Adaptive challenges** - complex and unpredictable; they have no known answers.

Ron Heifetz
Leadership Without Easy Answers

Not all issues require convening. As we saw with ProQuest and the Utrecht government
Heifetz -

Leader as Conversational Architect

1. Identify complex challenges the organization is facing – “adaptive challenges”
2. Frame the conversation
3. Identify who needs to be in the conversation – ensure diversity
4. Provide Transparency - make all information on the issue available
5. Design for interaction – facilitation
6. Give the work to the group – participate as



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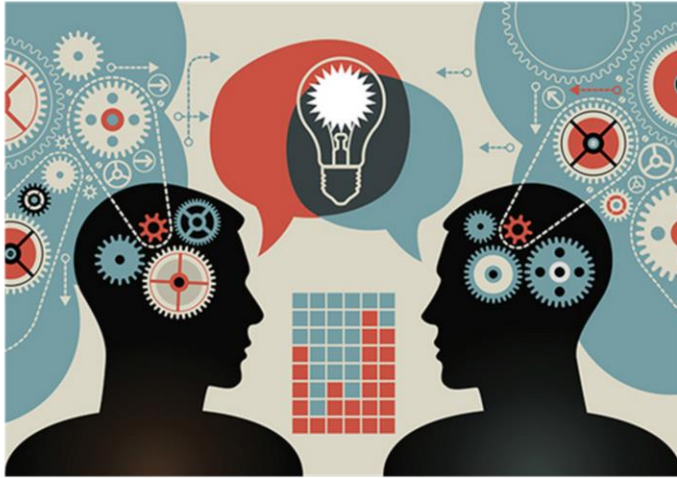
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5. Design

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Age of Sensemaking



We are in the age of sensemaking ***knowledge itself is no longer power***: rather it is the collective's ability to develop meaning out of multiple sources of knowledge

Question: What are the issues in your organization that need collective Sensemaking to address?

The heartbeat of the organization



What are the issues in your organization that require Collective Sensemaking to address?

Like the heartbeat that circulates the blood in our bodies, collective sensemaking draws on the knowledge that circulates within the organization. Knowledge is the life blood of an organization and the periods of collective sensemaking are the heartbeat that interprets the events and actions and then re-circulates the “consensually constructed, coordinated system of action”¹ that emerges.

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