



Faculty of Design

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Sensemaking Workshop: Applying systemic design practice to generate new insights

Belle, Gina, Lischke, Emilia and Stewart, Cara

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Relating Systems Thinking and Design
2022 Symposium
University of Brighton, Brighton, UK,
October 13-16, 2022

Sensemaking Workshop

Applying Systemic Design Practice To Generate New Insights And Reflect On The Implications Of Relating Systems Thinking And Design

Gina Belle, Emilia Lischke, Cara Stewart

CHÔRA Foundation

The RSD Conference attracts a diverse constituency of systems thinkers, designers, academics, and multi-disciplinary leaders and practitioners from across the world. They join RSD to experience and make sense of emerging areas of interest to systemic design and the world at large, engaging with its complexity and looking at the big picture and its implications for their own organisations, operating contexts and practice.

Our Sensemaking process is an engaging, situated, and socialised experience that accelerates collective learning and helps to make sense of experience collectively. It is a proven and tested facilitated process which engages people, extracts insights, maps connections, and forms intelligence as the source of impact and action. Robust and effective sensemaking is the key to social system transformation, organisational learning and to strategic leadership in complex problem spaces.

This workshop will apply our Sensemaking Protocol as a structured and facilitated approach to making sense across the panels, conversations and events of RSD11. It is designed to create a collective learning experience. Participants will collaborate to share, layer, connect and combine various expertise, and experiences they have gained from the event to actively

generate contextual and emergent collective intelligence. It will enable open and curiosity-driven conversations building a shared sense of emerging opportunities, shifting paradigms and disruptions.

Our unique approach to Sensemaking lends itself to be situated in a conference context. The Protocol that we draw on has been developed and has been tested across multiple problems and sectors including social development, climate, innovation, urban resilience and renewal, financial services, governance and public and private sector organisations for over 2 decades and is currently deployed globally by the UNDP (United Nations Development Program).

KEYWORDS: system transformation, strategic design, systemic design, portfolios of strategic innovation options, complexity, uncertainty, organisational learning.

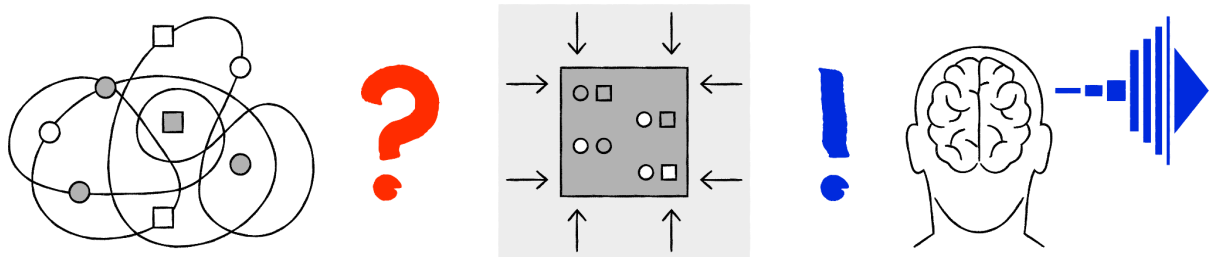
RSD TOPIC(S): Possibilities and Practices of Systemic Design: projects and case studies & transdisciplinary theory building, Methods and the worlds they make, Different stories in design: Provocations from the work of Gregory Bateson, Design over time.

Sensemaking Protocol Overview

Organisations and institutions are witnessing a widening gap between the solutions they can deliver and the complexity of the challenges faced by the contexts in which they operate. To move to a more strategic position in helping governments, partners and communities tackle complex challenges, practitioners, researchers, leaders and teams need to invest in developing new core capabilities. One crucial capability within this larger frame is the organisational ability to learn rapidly and extract insights from current activities to accelerate impact effects and induce systems transformation. The Portfolio Sensemaking and Accelerating Protocol is one element of a set of Portfolio Design and Dynamic Management Protocols designed to develop and embed this capability within organisations. The Protocol provides any social system with an added value of procedures and tools to structure and support the generation of new learning and decision-making capabilities to enhance the impact and contribution to systems change of any portfolio.

The Protocol is a user-friendly social technology that offers a distinctive capability that social systems can use to accelerate the impact and effects of any Portfolio of projects, activities, innovations or initiatives. The Protocol can be used to engage internal and external, local, regional and country stakeholders in a robust and iterative learning and reflection process. This process helps them establish a shared understanding of the strategic relevance of their activities, ensure program coherence, reflect on changes in the local context, generate network effects and accelerate system-wide impact. The Protocol can be adapted to make sense of a select set of programs or activities (Portfolio) at the country, regional or other cross-cutting levels where impact and system effects could be accelerated by layering learning to produce actionable intelligence.

The process has three distinct phases of work, each of which produces value and builds toward the overall effect: Portfolio, Sensemaking and Intelligence.



1. **PORTFOLIO:** A Portfolio is a learning and sensemaking system leveraged to accelerate effects and induce system transformation. This phase establishes the identity (WHO) and intent (WHY) of the sensemaking effort and identifies and represents the program, projects and activities that will be the object of the sensemaking protocol (WHAT).
2. **SENSEMAKING:** Sensemaking is an activity that extracts insights, induces learning and creates meaning from experience. This phase deeply engages stakeholders in a socialised reflective workshop process that extracts relevant connections and insights from the selected portfolio that could create the conditions for greater impact across a local, national or global spectrum.
3. **INTELLIGENCE:** Intelligence is the formalised and generative outcome of sensemaking that is used to accelerate effects or induce system transformation.

This phase generates actionable intelligence and portfolio briefs that enhance and support decision making and commitment to action. These are structured to engage stakeholders; to identify and design policy and projects, as well as find solutions and produce acceleration effects.

Learning and Change

Humans and human systems change as a function of learning. Learning demands a difference in how we understand where we are (our context), who we are (identity), why we are there (intent) and the evolving relationship between these elements. This is how human beings and human systems develop relevant knowledge about the world and re-conceptualise their situation. This might appear obvious; however, organisations rarely structure themselves to optimise their learning capabilities and leverage them effectively to engender a new sense of self and make change happen.

Learning in human systems occurs as a cycle of phases. These phases progress from a concept (the representation of reality or a problem) to an action (a decision to move into reality, a determination to do), to experience (an observation of reality, first-hand engagement), to reflection (the interpretation of effects and significance) and back to the concept (re-articulation of the original understanding, innovation). Theory without action cannot induce transformation. Action without reflection produces ineffective and sometimes counter-productive change. CHÔRA approaches innovation and learning as an iterative cycle that builds capability and generates intelligence over time.

Because of the power that learning has in developing new models, solutions, and concepts, these reflective and generative capabilities need to be fully appreciated and developed to support organisations in applying Portfolio approaches to managing complexity and creating system transformation effects. By developing practices that can negotiate changes in context, an organisation develops the capabilities it needs to evolve, increase agility, and maintain coherence and relevance.

Workshop Structure

This workshop will apply our Sensemaking Protocol as a structured and facilitated approach to making sense across the panels, conversations and events of RSD11. It is designed to create a collective learning experience. Participants will collaborate to share, layer, connect and combine various expertise, and experiences they have gained from the event to actively generate contextual and emergent collective intelligence and a budget of possibilities (Bateson, 1972) that could be invested in future action for evolving the practice of systemic design. It will enable open and curiosity-driven conversations that support a transition from a state of concern and query to one of activation and enactment (Weick, 1988), building a shared sense of emerging opportunities, shifting paradigms and disruptions.

What is it: A 2 hour collective sensemaking approach applied to a selected conference experience or theme drawing on engaging, in-person and online facilitation. The Sensemaking approach will connect expertise, information and stories from and across workshop participants to weave a rich sense of emerging collective intelligence that can be curated digitally and/or in person layering a multitude of contributions, stories and insights. Workshop can be standalone or integrated with the RSD11 program, focused on a single day/theme or the entire conference. *This can be delivered in person or digitally, once or multiple times during the event.*

Participants & Roles: Up to 25 RSD participants per session. Different Participants will be assigned roles to play

- The CHÔRA **Facilitator** will guide the team through this workshop and act as a timekeeper to maintain rhythm and support insight generation.
- Participant **Presenters** will have 5 minutes each sharing an experience that is relevant to the intent of the workshop. (6 people)
- Participant **Explorers** will be actively listening to presentations and asking discovery questions to make new connections with reference to the context and intent of the workshop
- **Insight Stewards** will be capturing the relevant information and emerging insights using pre-prepared *Insight Windows*.

Agenda:

RSD11 SUBMISSION FOR REVIEW

- **10 mins** Conceptual and Process introduction, assigning participant roles
- **40 mins Sensemaking Round 1**
 - **Dancefloor:** Selected Participants share relevant experiences from RSD11: 5 mins Presentation 1, 5 mins Audience Questions 1, 5 mins Presentation 2, 5 mins Audience Questions 2, 5 mins Presentation 3, 5 mins Audience Questions 2
 - **Balcony:** Selected Participants capture the conversation through insight windows that start to connect and layer cross-cutting themes, information and insights
- **40 mins Sensemaking round 2**
- **30 mins** Generating Insights, Implications & Actions for applying conference learnings.

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