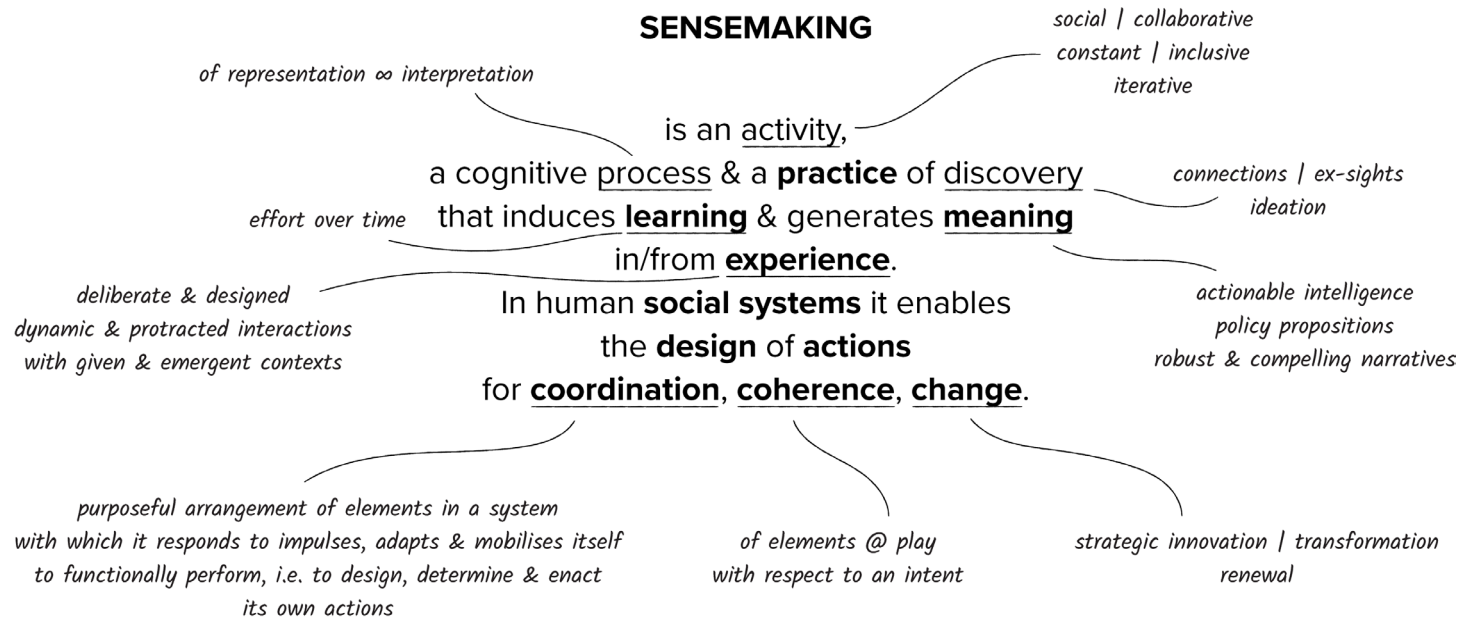


8 Design Principles for generative Sensemaking



Sensemaking

Sensemaking is a process, in which we (an agent) make sense of something (an object) by reference to something else (a Strategic Intent, a purpose, terms of reference, standards, etc.). The output of this process is Intelligence. Intelligence is a particular form of meaning, an asset with which Actions are designed.

Sensemaking is what everyone does, individually or collectively. It can be done more or less well. At its highest level of technique, it is a specialised function that human social systems perform when negotiating the differences inherent to themselves & of the contexts they operate in.

Sensemaking is a constant effort that events trigger & that by design can give structure & rhythm to a processual cadence that toggles from design & preparation, to event running & extraction, to rendering & briefing.

Effective performance of Sensemaking requires a well established set of design principles, & a robust practice aligned with them. Here is the basic processual architecture of those principles:

1. Identity
2. Object
3. Situation
4. Socialisation
5. Extraction
6. Iteration
7. Representation
8. Effect

1. Identity

There always is a human agent, collective or individual, that is sensemaking. In doing so it brings to that activity its own specific agency, & with it the resources it has to engage in that activity. Bundled in that agency is the interest to be served, that peculiar intent or purpose that gives its utility to the engagement. Human agents in the world are perpetually performant of actions, enacted propositions with which they seek effects, the design of which requires them to discover, learn, form & ultimately enact their intent. Their identity is permanently projected forward, across space & in time, pragmatically reconciling aspirations with contingency, a self-affirmation the Sensemaking is in the service of.

2. Object

Most typically, we are always making sense of “something”, & that something can be the material instances & elements that we engage with in order to make sense of them, &/or the object of our actions. Our interpretive effort here is directed to the “things” that give us an experience of the world & its dynamics, of the situation within which we can craft a relevant step forward, the contexts & their events from which real data flows, that carry information, that give us material, such as projects, activities, presences, relations. What we make sense of is, as much as what we make sense for, an act of choice, the effect of a design effort, best served when an optimal ratio of elements is brought to our Sensemaking attention.

3. Situation

Sensemaking is always situated. There is a where it is happening in, & a when so. The conditions of the happening are material influences on the nature, dynamics & outcomes of the Sensemaking instance. The extension of a situation is potentially infinite, stretching from the room where some Sensemaking event is happening to the place that room is with its every enlarging circles of relevance. The time of the day, the institutional calendar, the social events in its surround, the season, the food or the colour of the curtains, the incoming news: there is never a situation that can be said to be immaterial, that can be observed to not interfere: interference is not merely inevitable, it is necessary for the meaning that will emerge is a function of the complex rational effects that interactions happening in that situation will induce.

4. Socialisation

There always is a “we” involved: the composite arrangement of agencies engaged in the Sensemaking &/or recipients of its outputs. These are the voices that are present, that are recorded or brought into play, that carry the information, relay the experiences, represent the interests, narrate the outcomes of research, generate insights. A social body, in fact a sequence of diverse social bodies, comes together, is convened, constitutes itself & contributes to the Sensemaking process the diverse range of capabilities that they carry. When intense & well facilitated a Sensemaking event is experienced as the emergence of a social intelligence that is distinct from that which is given by each of the agents involved.

5. Extraction

Data & information are the Object of a Sensemaking process that constitutes & engages a social brain, the main cognitive function of which is to extract value from the materiality presented in the form of initial raw elements. The way this happens is by the identification of connections between elements as they have been materially conveyed, & the attribution to those elements of meaning, the effect of a situated relevance & of coherence with the Sensemaking intent. This is where the process delivers a difference, elements of significance that are not “in” the materials, but derived from them, not initially there, but there now. A specialised function that needs intervening here is the technical capability to transform the new “sense” into action briefs with which to make anything happen, & perpetually feed those briefs into the agent’s own functional system & its environment, so as to probe & adapt to difference as contextual differences occur.

6. Iteration

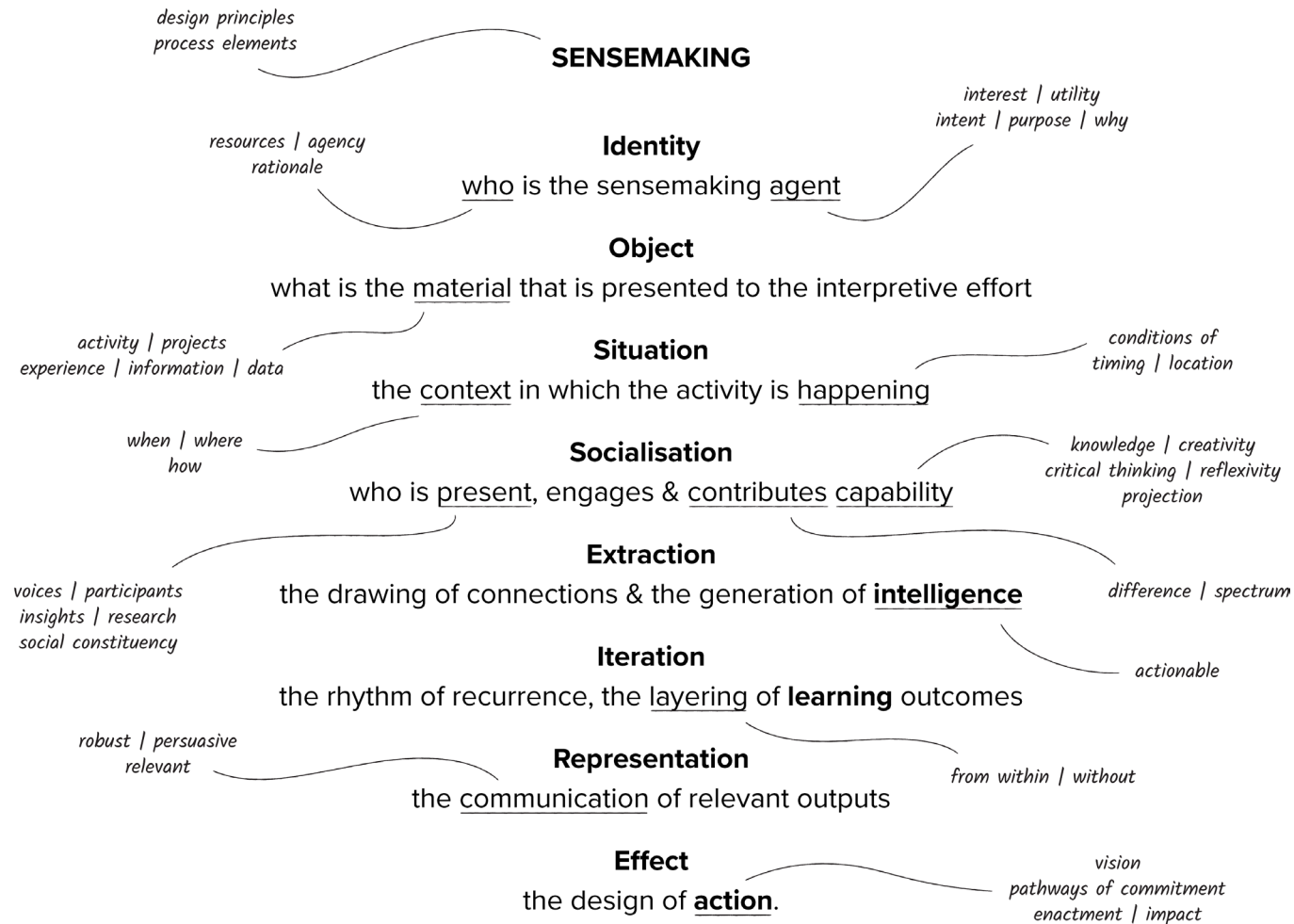
Extremely valuable, inherent to human systems & their performance & resilience, Sensemaking should be neither casual nor single. The ritualistic repetition of its iterative events has a material efficiency that supports the synchrony of “coming together”. As Sensemaking serves the twin purpose of moving “in” the world, & learning there of its nature & dynamics from our experience of it, Its value grows exponentially as a processual activity iterated over-time. Making sense is a rhythm of recurrence, generating knowledge assets to perpetually enrich the system with layered learnings for socially relevant outcomes & effects. Sensemaking enables the framing, re-framing, re-re-framing, that world dynamics induce & demand. The value of iteration couples with adaptability, ensuring that our understandings, decisions & actions evolve with the context that is constantly changing.

7. Representation

Sensemaking is the process that is generative of a special form of meaning, Actionable Intelligence. It toggles between representation of the world & interpretation of its relevance to our presence in it. Convenient though it is to think of, & perform, those functions as separate & somehow sequential, they are really inextricably co-implicated, one happening as the other one is too, encroaching on each other, feeding into each other, blending in a spiralling of significance, vitally necessary & frustratingly impermanent. How effective our imaging of outcomes, our representation of them to ourselves & beyond, is very practically dependent on how well they can be articulated, packaged & communicated back to partners & stakeholders who have been key to the process. Representing outcomes in a relevant, robust & persuasive way is more likely to attract resources, build compelling arguments for their allocation & foster a deeper fabric of relationships in the world of our intended action.

8. Effect

Sensemaking effects are multiple, constantly & exponentially accruing, ultimately directed to the design of our actions. The image of a possibility & its effectuation produce material instances of distributed value: when arranged as design briefs, those effects are instructing & re-forming the functions of a system & its relational fabric of engagements with the world. All that is generative of effects, of instructions that provide an agent with the terms of reference (live principles that emerge from & evolve with iterative Sensemaking), models & resources required for its enactment.



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