
Collective sensemaking

How to plan yours to great effect

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Questions we care about

- 01** What is 'collective sensemaking' in M&E?
- 02** What forms can it take?
- 03** Roles of collective sensemaking to navigate the values, needs and understandings of stakeholders
- 04** When can we consider collective sensemaking 'successful' and what conditions are necessary to achieve this?
- 05** Why is collective sensemaking often not (yet) part of evaluative processes? How can we strengthen this part of M&E practice?

Is any of this familiar?

- Conclusions were challenged?
- Findings not used?
- Findings were not nuanced or contextualized enough?
- Findings were... err, umm... a bit wrong?
- And worse...nothing changes

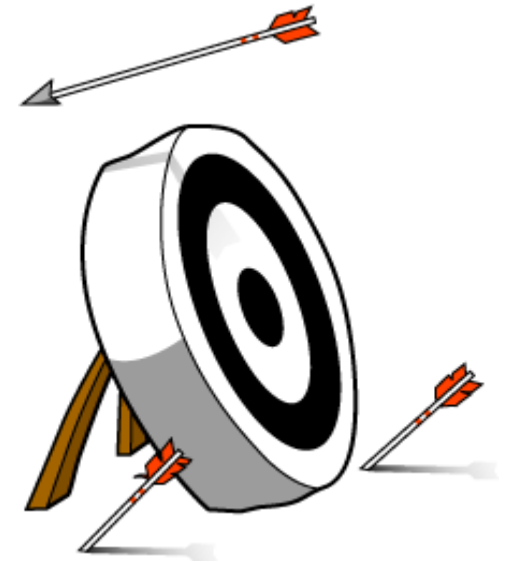
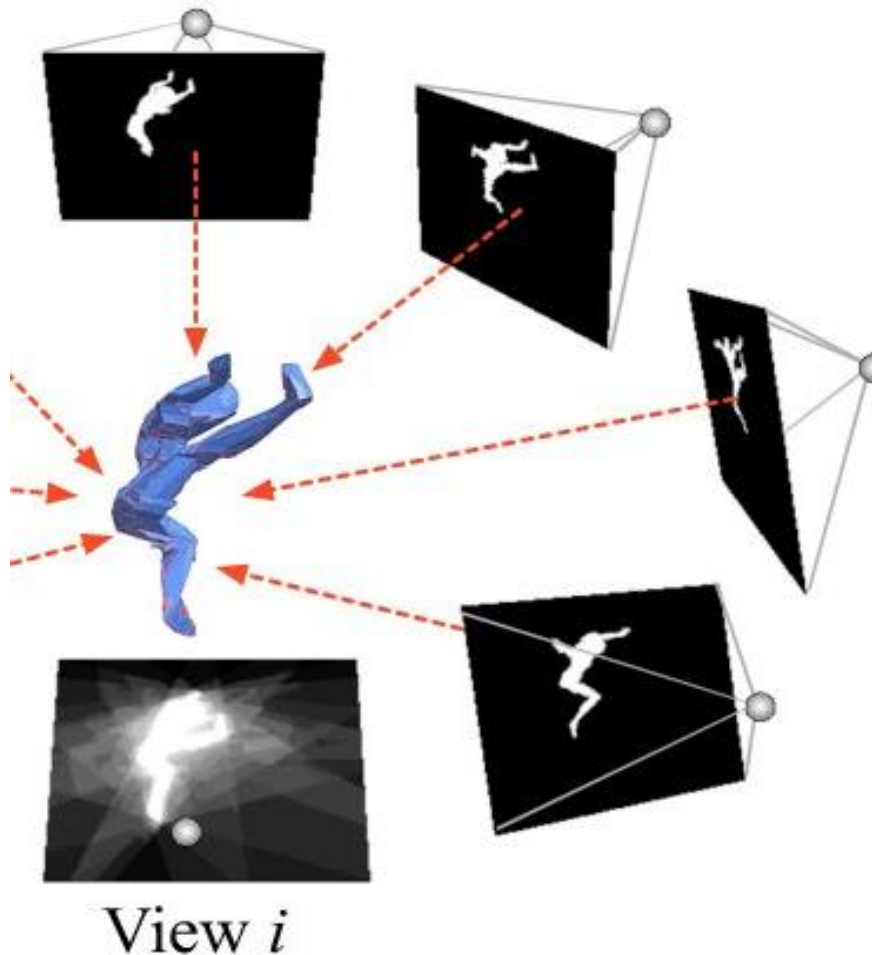


Image credit: <http://glory-company.com/2011/08/>

What is collective sensemaking?

A definition





Giving meaning to data
& emerging knowledge
together
in order to be able to
act on it

What forms can it take?

Examples

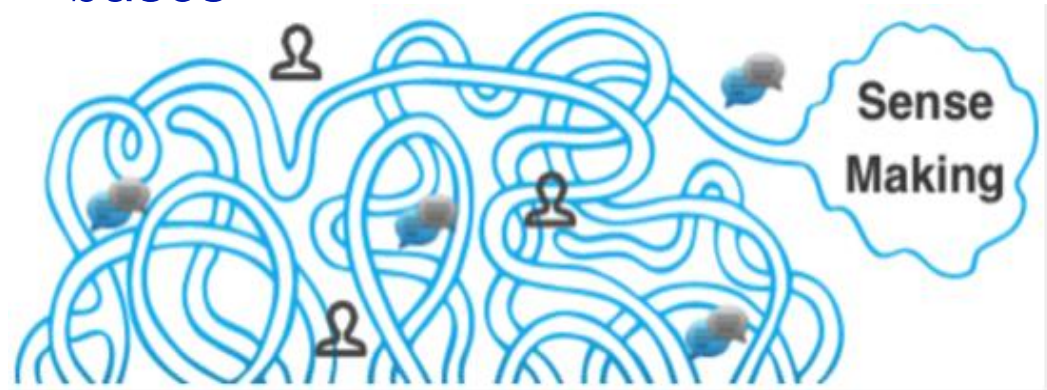


Route 1. Embedded in organisational learning

“We need to get people to engage with data. Every time data is collected and passed on, we need to encourage sensemaking, for example by each person a set of simple prompt questions to ask themselves.”

Guy Sharrock, CRS

- Building individual and organisational culture and capability to do evaluative thinking
- Regular reviews using diverse evidence bases



Route 2. Collaborative evaluation



Collectively discuss & decide on:

- Values (rubrics), which questions matter
- Revise/develop a Theory of Change
- Design choices - what processes would be optimal
- ***Synthesis - what the data means & translate into implications for action***

Range of fit for purpose options



From

- *Small and focused*
- 3 hour validation of unclear areas with key anticipated users
- Existing data

To

- *Extensive and inclusive*
- Full/multi-day to validate all findings and generate conclusions and recommendations
- New data

Role of collective sensemaking is to navigate the values, needs and understandings of stakeholders



Collective sensemaking 101

When we shift from I
to WE, we become
open to the areas of
agreement and
intentionality

Types of questions we typically ask...

Generalisation	In general † we noticed ...
Exception	In general...except...
Contradiction	On the one hand...but on the other hand...
Surprise	I was We were surprised by...
Puzzle	I wonder We wonder...

Adaptation of Pattern Spotters from HSD Wiki http://wiki.hsdinstitute.org/pattern_spotters

Also see: Capper, P. & Williams, B. (2004) Enhancing evaluation using systems concepts CHAT. Presented at the American Evaluation Association Conference, November, 2004, City http://www.bobwilliams.co.nz/Systems_Resources_files/activity.pdf

To navigate diverse values, needs and understandings of stakeholders

- Collective...not just one person's view
- Identify areas of agreement AND disagreement
- Reflective energy produces attention and clarity

When can we consider
collective sensemaking
'successful'?

What constitutes success?



Success at process and outcome levels

Process

- Personal realisations/ assumptions surfaced
- People who aren't normally heard get voice

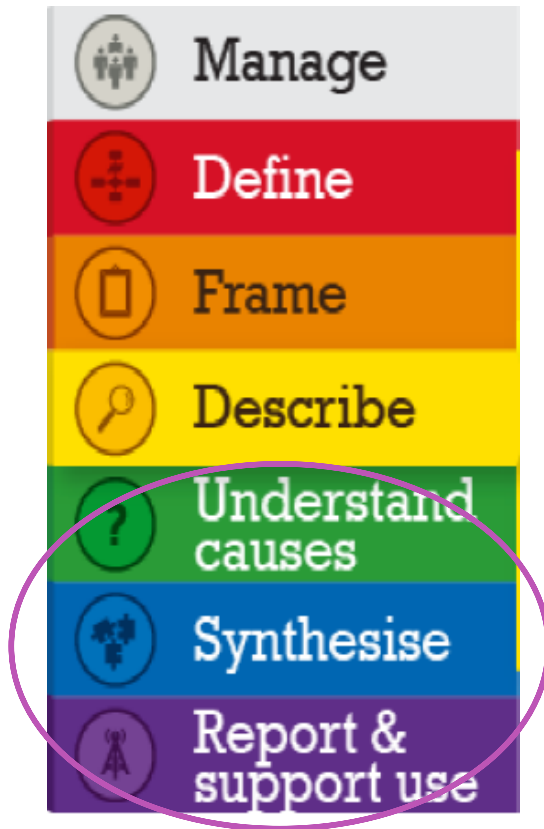
**“I didn't realise that”
“Good point...I never thought about it in that way before”**

Outcomes

- Thoughtful use of evidence
- Early signs of action
- Coherence of action

**“We can see what to do now”
“This is really exciting... we are making progress”**

Success = when our focus is on collaborative synthesis and use



Giving meaning together to data and emerging knowledge in order to be able to act on it

- Making sense of evaluation findings with multiple perspectives
- More systematic critical thinking together - different levels and types of thinking

Why is collective sensemaking often not (yet) part of the evaluative processes?

Further thinking



Reflections for us all



- Is collective sensemaking a new field ... or a field that needs more attention?
- Is this happening more than we think? If not, why not?
- Why don't we make greater investments in collective sensemaking from:
 - an organisational readiness perspective?
 - an evaluation ecosystem readiness perspective?

Summary

Collective sensemaking

- Is a vital part of the evaluation process and worth investing in
- Is not that hard to do...but needs the right people in the room
- Is a useful way to transfer ownership to evaluation users – important – have range of stakeholders present
- Allows for change in focus as result of context shifting
- Helps ensure reporting is useful/on target

Thank you



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Next steps in your organisation



Things to think about when you leave

- Can you imagine doing collective sensemaking in your context and why?
- What could go wrong?
- What would make you hesitate?
- What else might you need to know before you tried this?

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