

Tool: Sensemaking Methodology

So often in our work, we are laser-focused on delivery and meeting deadlines, KPIs and other goals. It can be a struggle to take the time to pause and evaluate our achievements, to truly understand the impact we're generating—both on our own mindset and attitudes, as well as on students' mindsets and relationships. And to decide whether we need to iterate or change course for greater transformative potential with our interventions.

This process becomes even more crucial within intricate, multi-year projects involving diverse stakeholders. In these cases, partners, funders, and other stakeholders may possess differing perspectives, lacking a comprehensive view of the entire endeavor. Sensemaking methodology can help address this challenge.

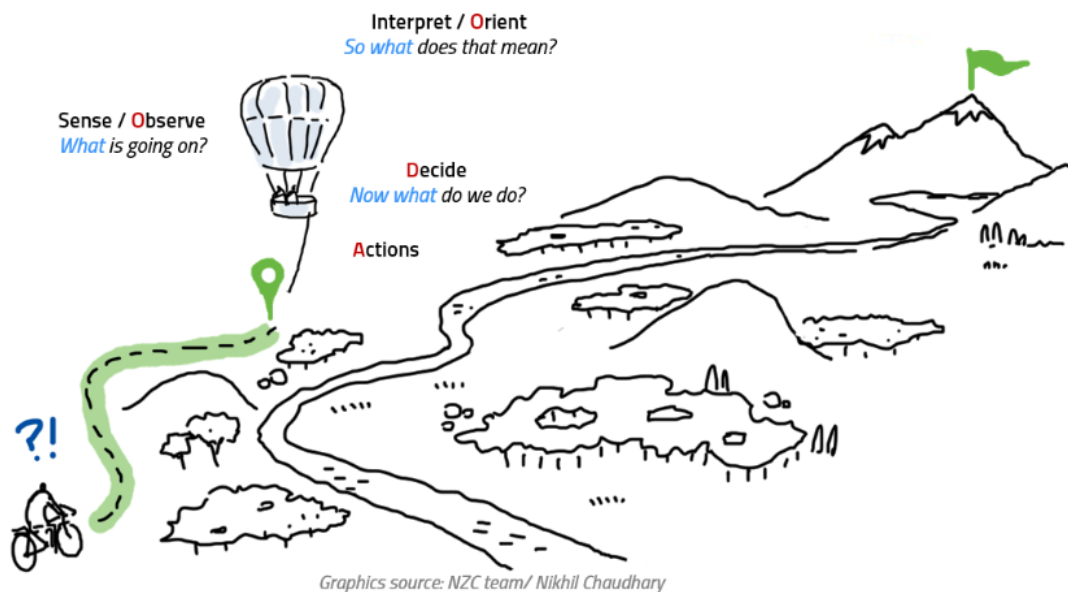
The theoretical roots and inspiration have been taken from Terry Borton's framework of reflective practice[1]. Originally designed for educational contexts, this framework serves as a tool for reflective learning, particularly for students to assess their experiences. **The framework entails a structured approach that enhances awareness (What), assesses information (So What), experiments with new behavior and perspectives (Now What), and integrates new behavior (Do/Act What).** The general framework of the model can be applied to any form of reflective practice. While adaptable to diverse reflective practices, this model, when employed iteratively, empowers peer, focus, or student groups to uncover hidden patterns, such as behaviors, attitudes, and mental models. This process bridges the gap between planned actions and actual experiences, benefiting personal and professional growth for participants and educators alike.

Sensemaking provides a structured space for active and playful learning, where diverse stakeholders (e.g students, educators, deans, project partners) come together to bring those different pieces of the puzzle together, orient themselves in the territory /in the system, pause and reflect.

Sensemaking refers to a structured process of observation, reflection, synthesis, analysis, pattern finding and insight generation in order to produce intelligence that enables decision making and adaptive action.

Methodology

At its simplest, we *make sense* of the world so we can *act in it*.



Sensemaking process is structured according to a “WHAT – SO WHAT – NOW WHAT - DO/ACT WHAT” logic chain.

1. **“WHAT”** (sense and observe) is focused on collecting inputs (data, activities, projects, interventions, games, teaching style etc.) and engaging in a first level of data interpretation and representation from different perspectives, in your case fellow educators and students. The intent of this step is to widen the group's collective awareness and understanding *what* is currently happening across the whole context within which we are operating before drawing conclusions about how to adapt our actions or making decisions about what to do next. It can be a tool to collect evidence about how the designed interventions are perceived by a specific audience (e.g., remember how classes with i5 influence differ from classes without, or think about your personal reflection log results). This step often involves iterative *zooming in* to explore what is happening in details, and then *zooming out* to look at a broader context or system. You can use simple questions for your fellow educators or students within this step like:

What happened during the class?

How were my reactions?

What did feel good?

What did not resonate with me? Why?

2. **“SO WHAT”** (interpret and orient) is about interpreting data or collected input/evidence and opening deeper discussion focused on extracting insights and learnings that can help to better understand the contexts of the system/s in which we are operating. It is time for participants to start orienting themselves in the landscape, zoom out to a hot air balloon view. In the nutshell, during this step we start making sense of the stories and surface patterns, insights and possibilities that emerge from exploring what is happening across the field (time, semester) and then reflecting on the question "Why do these patterns matter?" or "*So what* might that mean for our work?". The output of this step is a collection of insights that can be used to inform decision-making of what to do next to effect change within the system.

So, what did I feel at times of my insights?

Are my feelings now after I have my (new) insights, any different from what I experienced at the time?

Are there any implications arising from my knowledge; what positive/negative aspects surface now from the experience?

Have I/we noticed about my/our behavior in retrospective?

3. **“NOW WHAT”** (define and decide) is focused on enabling participants (e.g. learners) to reflect on the implications of the insights extracted during the ‘so what?’ phase to generate sets of possible actions or recommendations that can be implemented to improve or accelerate the effects of the activities. The sets of actions and recommendations are generated across 3 levels of scale:

- i. individual actions that can be decided on and taken with a defined role connected activity (educators, or student who could support),
- ii. team or organizational actions that are decided and taken with the authority of an organization involved in the project (school, dean, peer teachers,
- iii. project wide actions - actions that apply across the whole initiative/ collective.

Questions supporting this phase are:

Now, What will I do about it as an individual, group, organization or community?

Where is the best leverage point of my actions; what consequences, impact will my actions have?

What difference does it make when I chose not to take any action?

What help do I need to support my “action”, the results of my reflections?

What aspect of the challenge should be tackled first?

4. **“DO/ACT WHAT”** (get into action or act it out) does entail the integration of new knowledge manifested by getting into any sort of action, as a group, an individual, an organization or community. This is the most important step, which makes a difference between living in a sustainable and resilient world or continuing with the status quo.

[1] Borton, T. (1970) *Reach, Touch and Teach*, London, Hutchinson; Jasper, M. (2013) *Beginning Reflective Practice*, Andover, MA, Cengage Learning; Moon, J. A. (2000) *Reflection in Learning and Professional Development: Theory and Practice*, Abingdon, Routledge.

The application of this sense-making tool is encouraged between students to foster conversations. We recommend that it is used several times to help to get inputs beyond self-assessment and self-reflection.