CYNEFIN CENTRE
MAKING SENSE OF COMPLEXITY

2022

CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT & DEMOCRATIC INNOVATION

A CYNEFIN CENTRE PROGRAMME

THE CYNEFIN Co
MAKING SENSE OF COMPLEXITY

SENSEMAKER®   PROGRAMME AREAS   LEARNING & TRAINING   ENGAGE WITH US   CONTACT

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CITIZENS ENGAGEMENT & DEMOCRATIC INNOVATION

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Introduction

The Cynefin Company's Citizen Engagement & Democratic Innovation programme provides powerful, field-tested tools to enhance and enrich decision support, stakeholder engagement and collective sense-making in diverse areas including:

- Community development and youth work
- Civic engagement and citizen participation
- Collaborative service/policy design and evaluation
- Participatory futures and planning processes
- Shared learning and peer to peer knowledge exchange
- Deliberative democratic processes such as citizens' assemblies

By enabling the collection of narratives, collective sensemaking, and insight to action design at scale, our approach creates deeper, more inclusive and more far-reaching engagement, supporting and advancing a new form of democratic process and participation.

Why Citizen Engagement?

Citizen engagement is essential for a more effective, healthy and thriving democracy, underpinned by the principle that citizens should be empowered to influence and contribute to decisions that impact their lives—beyond simply voting for a representative once every few years. Our work is based on the fact that no one has a better understanding of the real needs and concerns of a local community than the community themselves.

> **"[T]here is no way to give us an understanding of any society, including our own, except through the stock of stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources[1]."**
>
> **- Alasdair MacIntyre**

[1] MacIntyre, A. (1984). After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory. ed. Notre Dame, Ind.

The Programme's Principles

ENGAGE

Capturing experiences and stories in real time without mediation, self-indexed with quantitative data, creates contextualised insights into what is happening and why, from country to community level—like tuning in to dinner-table conversations and private perceptions to decode the patterns that truly drive behaviours and attitudes.

EMPOWER

Our approaches empower citizens to make sense of what's happening in their community for themselves; what's working well, and what isn't. Innovation and adaptation are supported through peer-to-peer knowledge sharing, as well as influencing policy development at decision-making levels.

ENACT

Citizens become experts and problem-solvers in their own communities. Together, citizens, communities and decision-makers generate insights into what steps to take next, creating a truly citizen/community-led approach. The impact of interventions can be tracked over time so communities can determine what's working and what's not.

A Deeper Understanding

What if you could harness the power of stories, statistics and suggestions across your communities to make better and more inclusive decisions?

- Engage your citizens to understand their experiences, realities and needs in real time
- Scale the town-hall meeting to an everyday, every citizen wide event
- Strip away the noise and connect to the essence of what communities need you to hear
- Tap into the wisdom of your communities to co-create innovative, locally relevant solutions through real-time engagement
- Understand your citizens' dinner-table conversations, experiences and perceptions
- Support community adaptation and learning through peer-to-peer knowledge-sharing

The benefits of a deeper, more empowering approach to citizen engagement include: [2, 3, 4, 5, 6]

- Citizens can have a real dialogue with decision-makers—sharing information, stories and ideas freely between citizenry, decision-makers and diverse stakeholders.
- Decision-makers can pick up on what citizens are really thinking and feeling before it's too late; avoid expensive mistakes by drawing on their knowledge and experience early on in the planning stage and allow diverse voices to be heard in a practical, scalable way.
- Real-time feedback enables strategic and evidence-informed decision-making, allowing citizens, communities and governments to co-create on a local and national scale.
- Effective public/community interventions and policies depend on the response of citizens and communities. When citizens and communities have been properly consulted and are empowered to influence the decisions that impact their lives, they are more invested in supporting and participating in interventions.

For a more detailed description of our **Citizen Engagement & Democratic Innovation Programme**, check out our **white paper here.**
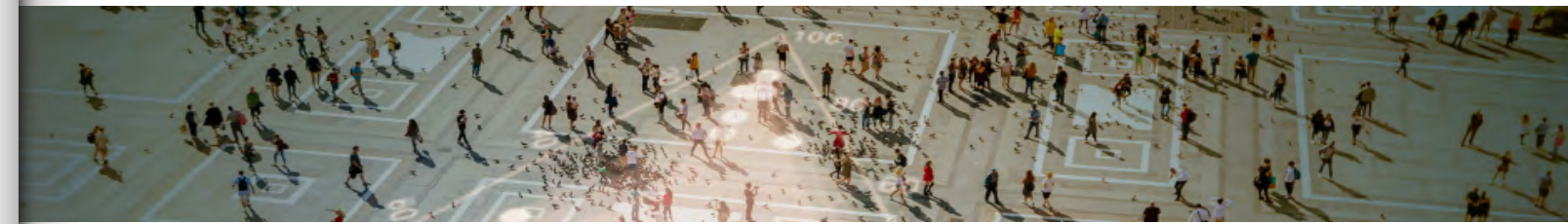
[2] Nabatchi, T., & Leighninger, M. (2015). Public participation for 21st century democracy. John Wiley & Sons
[3] Fisher, G. S., & Hotchkiss, A. (2008). A model of occupational empowerment for marginalized populations in community environments. Occupational Therapy in Health Care, 22(1), 55-71.
[4] Uomoto, J. M. (1986). Examination of psychological distress in ethnic minorities from a learned helplessness framework. Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 17(5), 448.
[5] Gaventa, J., & Barrett, G. (2012). Mapping the outcomes of citizen engagement. World development, 40(12), 2399-2410.
[6] Jagosh, J., Macaulay, A. C., Pluye, P., Salsberg, J. O. N., Bush, P. L., Henderson, J. I. M., ... & Greenhalgh, T. (2012). Uncovering the benefits of participatory research: implications of a realist review for health research and practice. The Milbank Quarterly, 90(2), 311-346.

SENSEMAKER®

SenseMaker® - A Key Enabler

SenseMaker® is **the first scalable distributed ethnographic research tool**, utilising the possibilities of software to circumvent issues of geography, logistics, literacy, language and dialect to gather stories across a greater **diversity of people and perspectives**, bringing blended qualitative and quantitative data to a field normally dependent on qualitative and in-person research. The stories are collected anonymously and are directly uploaded to a secure, encrypted database. Find out more about **SenseMaker® here**.

SenseMaker® is a flexible tool that can be used for a variety of purposes and approaches to collecting data, in a variety of contexts, which in turn feed into a wide range of applications and ways to use SenseMaker® outputs, for example:

- As a channel for citizens' voice, advocacy and co-creation in policymaking
- Interviewing, story collection and citizen journalism
- Creating citizen sensor networks for real-time feedback
- Real-time engagements/polling, e.g. conferences and events
- Exploring new ideas and crowdsourcing ideas from communities
- Integrating into citizens' assemblies/juries
- Participatory agenda setting and testing conclusions with wider audiences
- Bespoke academic research tools
- Participatory evaluation
- Monitoring, evaluating and measuring social impact
- Participatory budgeting
- Knowledge exchange and peer learning networks

SenseMaker® can be adapted to serve a wide range of purposes, some we have not even dreamed up yet—your project could be the first of its kind!

SenseMaker® offers a number of different frameworks or ways to engage citizens in a single application. You can engage citizens through Pulses (one-off collections on a specific topic), **MassSense**, and Genba (journal keeping). SenseMaker® also has an open API structure so it can be integrated with other tools. Find more **here**.

Capacity Building: The Cynefin Co offer a series of virtual learning and mentoring to support new SenseMaker users, including our Narrative BaseCamp to explore the principles and practises underpinning our approach, and our Virtual Quick Start programme to guide you in creating your own SenseMaker® framework, along with many other training sessions.

Engaging Communities & Networks

Citizen engagement can take many forms, including direct outreach to citizens; public meetings and consultation; deliberative processes such as citizens' assemblies and citizens' juries; utilising specific citizen engagement processes and methods; and various SenseMaker® applications to engage with citizens and to receive their feedback[7].

1. Building Citizen Sensor Networks

This approach is built on the premise of a scalable ethnography that makes sure everyone's voice counts - not just those who shout the loudest. A citizen sensor network, supported by SenseMaker®, allows for the collection of data from citizens on an ongoing basis. Altong with real-time analytical tools, decision-makers can tap into the wisdom of their communities as events unfold. Rather than just capturing a snapshot in time, we enable continuous story collection over long periods of time, much like a virtual journal.

These citizen sensor networks are flexible tools that, once established within a specific community can be adapted for multiple purposes, for example, officials engaging a particular group of citizens during a time of high activism or resistance to policy change might send out options or questions to the network in order to hear their thoughts. Find our Guide to Creating a Citizen Sensor Network here, along with the wiki page here.
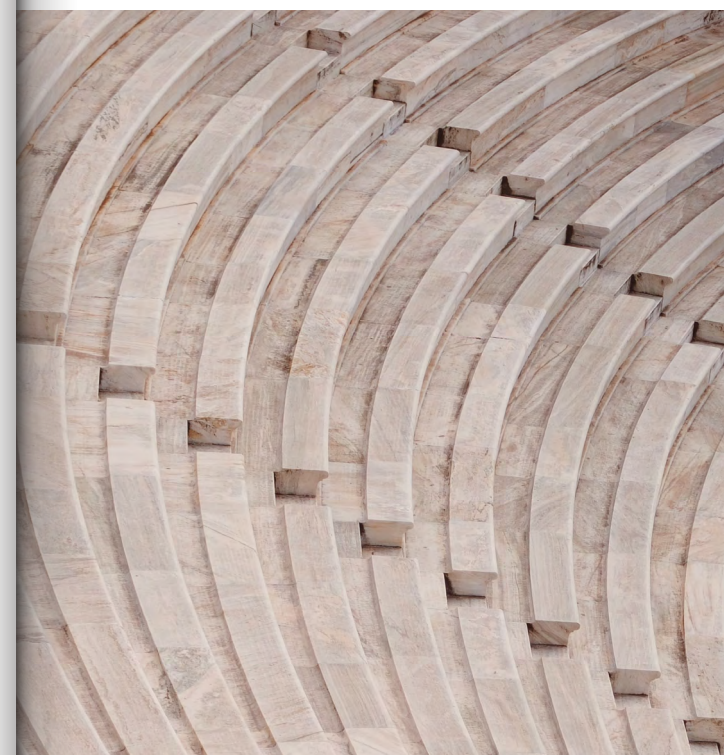
2. Developing Story Collector Networks

In a globalised world, how do we gain nuanced, localised understanding? SenseMaker® empowers citizens to become ethnographers in their own communities by collecting the stories of friends, family, or other community members. Equipped with a smartphone (or other device), story collectors enable this scalable, sustainable, distributed ethnographic approach.

Anyone in a social community can become a story collector. Community members have privileged access and often unearth stories which would not be shared with outsiders. They extend the citizen sensor network to include those who wouldn't normally take part in citizen engagement activities. Young people can engage those who are less technologically literate (such as grandparents) as well as benefiting from being engaged in decision-making and peer-to-peer knowledge-sharing. The Cynefin Centre can provide training and/or materials for story collectors.

Sense-making in Context

For Governments, Institutions & Organisations

Our approaches and tools support institutions in their efforts to engage with their citizens and communities more deeply and sustainably. SenseMaker® offers a new form of engagement; tapping into the real-life experiences and wisdom of citizens to provide contextual insights to decision- and policy-makers.

Case Studies: Malmö City, The People's Platform, Measuring the Mountain, Corona Stories

For Citizens, Community Groups & Activists

Our approaches and tools support community and citizen groups, activists and NPOs in their efforts to engage and coordinate across diverse groupings. Community sense-making processes, supported by SenseMaker®, allow for unprecedented sharing of knowledge and decision-making—unlocking the ability to create systemic shifts on fundamental social issues.

Case Studies: Community Capacity Building in Cape Town, Valley Stories, Citizens Take Over Europe, Extinction Rebellion UK's Systems Realignment Project

For a deeper dive into all this programme has to offer, please check out our Citizen Engagement & Democratic Innovation White Paper.

[7] Arnstein, S. R. (1969). A ladder of citizen participation. Journal of the American Institute of planners, 35(4), 216-224.

Programme Membership

The Cynefin Company has collected our Citizen Engagement and Democratic Innovation tools, methods and techniques into a curated programme, which also connects the community of practice in this field across geographies.

Your Cynefin Centre membership includes access to this programme, including a licence to use SenseMaker® and support around all associated workshop methods. This programme membership also includes in-depth bespoke resources (such as white papers, shared research projects and citizen engagement signifier libraries) and a lively community of practice so that you can learn from an exciting network of change makers. Find out more about **becoming a member here**.

DO YOU WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Thirsty for more knowledge? Write to us and access a copy of our more comprehensive whitepaper covering some of the background of this research **here**.

If you are interested to learn more...

ARE YOU THINKING OF GETTING INVOLVED? - CONTACT US

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Who Is This For?	Why Participate?	What Does This Programme Include?	More Information
The Citizen Engagement & Democratic Innovation programme is for governments, public institutions, organisations, local communities and NGOs wishing to foster a robust democracy through...	It gives citizens a chance to raise their voices and be heard by each other and those who serve them. This can be an immensely empowering experience in and of itself and sets citizens/community members up to continue...	Like all our programmes, members of the citizen engagement programme have access to the following support: A network of practitioners in their area of expertise and beyond...	OUR VISION With SenseMaker®, we can create deeper, more inclusive, and more far-reaching engagement to advance our democracies. We use real-time feedback to create more strategic...