THE CYNEFIN CO
MAKING SENSE OF COMPLEXITY

The Cynefin® Knowledge Management Programme

Build more resilient knowledge ecosystems and sense-making capabilities for better decision-making, innovation and employee engagement. Our programme is designed to start a KM programme and to re-energise existing knowledge management programmes, respecting what has already been done, as well as being suitable for greenfield sites.

The recent and ongoing turbulence(s) and as we transition beyond, demonstrated that we need to find new and better ways of acting and reacting, of knowing and sense-making, of mobilising knowledge in ambiguity, uncertainty and chaos. We have in many instances (re)-discovered our innate human ability to thrive in complexity and to be resilient, but also our vulnerabilities and the constraints hampering our ability to respond and leverage our knowledge capabilities and flows, and to learn wisely from our recent past and present as we are moving forward.

Consequential issues such as the great resignation, re-figuring of work into virtual or hybrid arrangements and disruptions of business models, markets and societies, has also brought renewed interest in knowledge and the managing of knowledge (or the context for knowledge). There is renewed strategic interest in canonical knowledge management concerns, such as knowledge transfer and retention, the flow of knowledge and peer support, strategic learning, lessons learned and the value of serendipity and diversity. We also see growing interest in building the capabilities to comprehend and respond in novel situations where past practice and experiences cannot help us.

The Cynefin Co's knowledge management work started back in the early formative years of this new discipline during the 1990s, and has grown and developed since then into a widely-adopted collection of tools and methods that is being used across industries in knowledge management, strategy, organisational development, agile and research. The Cynefin Co's Knowledge Management programme provides well-grounded and field-tested methods and tools for enhancing the knowledge capabilities and ecosystems of organisations and institutions. In essence *the ability to make sense of the world so that we can act in it.*

Core themes

Understanding the use of knowledge and how we know in the organisation. Too many programmes start with the assumption that knowledge is a 'good thing' and everyone should jump on the bandwagon with senior executive commitment key. Our programme starts with identifying and mapping the day-to-day experiences and issues of key workers and also the neglected group of middle management. By understanding what keeps them awake at night we can better create programmes that provide practical assistance in the short term using existing tools and technology before we attempt to engage them in a wider programme.

Map your knowledge in order to link it to the said day-to-day needs. This mapping also allows for what the EU Field Guide calls 'radical repurposing' or exaptation. Under conditions of stress it is better to find novel uses for existing capability than to attempt to create it from scratch. The granularity by which you store this is key and narrative databases, decision-information mapping, and the much used ASHEN typology (artifacts, skills, heuristics/habits, experience and natural talent) all form a body of methods for this.

Knowledge Mapping is a core method for the strategic assessment and planning for knowledge management and innovation, and to discover opportunities for radical repurposing of assets. With this approach, organizations follow a structured process to identify strategic knowledge clusters, map these to the executives priorities and issues, and from there build a portfolio of knowledge initiatives. A large part of the failure of KM programmes has come from over-promising on idealistic futures, albeit with the best of possible intentions. This approach is less about the visions of the future, and follows a pragmatic and organic process to understand where we are and where we can realistically go next.

Narrative Methods for knowledge harvesting, transfer and retention. Stories evolve in human systems to spread knowledge, often using fiction. Children's stories worked wide are in effect 'worst practice systems' albeit they have a happy ending. Fiction forms of story allow humans to create might have been and maybe if stories that are often more valuable than lessons learnt.

In Cynefin we also prefer the term lessons learning and have Genba software (powered by SenseMaker) that allows (literally in some cases) capture in the field under fire along with horizontal flow of stories from people like me that are more likely to be used in practice than structured material. In some of our military work we focused on narrative-enhanced doctrine, combining multi-media narrative with more formal documents to provide richer context and wider take up. Working with government bodies we have developed human-mediated games environments that not only build knowledge capability into participants but which also create rich narrative databases of learning and micro-scenarios to be used in the future.

Managing resilience by building network capabilities. We need to create the mechanisms by which people can connect, collect and swarm very quickly to solve problems or respond when needed. Informal networks are a primary challenge for trust and knowledge flow in context. Informal systems also keep the formal system operating, especially during times of crises and turbulence and are much neglected. Learn how to be more considerate about informal networks and the entanglement of informal networks with formal networks.

Founder of The Cynefin Co, Dave Snowden was the first to focus on the role of informal networks several decades ago, the results of which were published in one of the top-cited papers in the field. Informal networks are low-cost, high-impact mechanisms to handle uncertainty and they exist in all organisations by accident. We know how to design for their emergence in a way that can be managed and used without loss and with respect for privacy, critical to the development of trust.

Human Sensor Networks is another network capability. These human sensor networks (of your employees, citizens, customers, and so on) provide a key capability for rapid feedback (incl unintended consequences), real-time monitoring, outlier identification and weak signal detection. This then supports what we call MassSense, software designed for mass consultation, distributed scenario planning, and situational assessment.

With Human Sensor Networks we can deliberately introduce variety of expertise and even naiveté to ensure wider scanning and in this way reduce the tendency of conformance of expert bias. Expert bias is an issue where you are dealing with novelty or changed context as this quote from *The invisible gorilla strikes again*.

'What about expert searchers who have spent years honing their ability to detect small abnormalities in specific types of image? We asked 24 radiologists to perform a familiar lung nodule detection task. A gorilla, 48 times larger than the average nodule, was inserted in the last case. 83% of radiologists did not see the gorilla. Eye-tracking revealed that the majority of the those who missed the gorilla looked directly at the location of the gorilla. Even expert searchers, operating in their domain of expertise, are vulnerable to inattentional blindness.'

Human Sensor Networks can help us to include the 17% who did see the gorilla, the potential anomalies and outliers in the environment and the system.

Networks created for ordinary purposes can be deployed in times of extraordinary need. When a natural disaster or a pandemic or an economic crisis hits, a trusted network is available to provide a real-time situational assessment and coordination readily available to deploy or tap into.

A narrative approach to Lessons Learning and Distributed Ideation from harvesting to action planning with the Cynefin framework. Linked is the value and utilisation of narrative repositories as a key asset in institutional memory and sense-making.

Map the knowledge, learning and innovation culture, and design safe-to-fail probes to amplify favourable patterns, and shift or dampen negative patterns.

Build and deploy dynamic capabilities for collective and distributed sense-making with real-time decision support, fast feedback loops, and continuous journaling aggregated into dashboards at various scales, including Human Sensor Networks and MEL (monitoring, learning & evaluation). The Field Guide for managing in complexity (and chaos) in crisis, together with the Hexi Method Kits, provides a practical reference for decision-makers to embed the practices and methods.

Participation projects

The Cynefin Co shares an open invitation for the design of new participation projects. If you are interested in co-developing something that has greater applicability and can be established for others to adopt, please get in touch.

Open invitations for participation projects include, but are not limited to:

- AI and narrative training sets

- Exaptation or radical re-purposing of existing capabilities

- Future of Work & sense-making

- A complexity-informed approach to scaling

- Narrative databases and institutional/organisational memory

Who is it for?

This programme is open to governmental, not for profit, academic institutions, and corporates with a need and desire to improve decisions-making for the knowns and unknowns, innovation and resilient knowledge ecosystems.

Knowledge Management professionals will benefit, as well as those working in strategy, innovation, and organisational development. We also welcome students who are interested in experimenting and gaining experience with our tools.

To get in touch with one of our experienced consultants or researchers, send us a message or click here to learn more about our membership options for individuals and organisations.

Why participate?

As a membership-focused organisation, The Cynefin Co aims to provide practical and methodological scaffolding for practitioners in knowledge management, strategy and innovation looking to make use of complexity-informed approaches and sense-making in their organisations and beyond. By joining our Knowledge Management programme, you will be connecting to a wide and diverse community of practice, a movement of practitioners and organisations looking to make meaningful change for social good and a thriving, prosperous and humane world and society. Due to the varied work we have built in the area of knowledge management, we can offer levels of service varying from tailor-made bespoke projects, to pre-designed Pulses with SenseMaker® around applications such as Lessons Learning, Distributed Ideation and Knowledge & Innovation Culture.

Getting started

To get in touch with one of our experienced consultants or researchers, send us a message or click here to learn more about our membership options for individuals and organisations.

We have a collection of curated processes, workshops and training to get started, and where we can work with you more closely to run in your organisation.

Knowledge Mapping & Strategy Quickstart

In this Quickstart, you will be guided in conducting a successful Knowledge Mapping & Strategy process that will bring renewed vitality and resilience for knowledge in your organisation. This Quickstart is based on one of the most successful Masterclasses at the annual KM World event in Washington. We will take you through a step-by-step approach to gain new understanding of the use of knowledge and to rethink the role of knowledge management in your context. Our programme is designed to re-energise existing knowledge management programmes, respecting what has already been done, as well as being suitable for greenfield sites.

READ MORE

Assessment for managing in complexity (and crisis)

Do you know where you should go whilst transitioning from a crisis or major shift? How ready is your organisation for the next disruption and cycle? How resilient and responsive are you? Do you want to be in a better position to assess the situation, adapt to the context, leverage capability, and ultimately transcend? The Cynefin Company's Assessment for Managing in Complexity (and Chaos) is a structured assessment and participative sense-making process, developed to address the increasing scale and shorter cycles in shifts, effected by continuous change and uncertainty. It enables the development of action plans that put organisations in better positions to respond and adapt. Because there will certainly be a "next time".
Incorporates: Lessons Learning, Feedback loops, Ideation, Distributed participation

READ MORE

Covid in Transition, also available for other applications beyond Covid, such as lessons learned for projects and change/transformation initiatives.

Knowledge Pulses & Genba, powered by SenseMaker®

Pulses give you the opportunity to tap into a human sensor network in your organisation, community or area of work. Knowledge Pulses make it easy and quick to engage in authentic data collection and analysis for whoever and wherever you are. Activate a human sensor network to tap into the diversity of perspectives and experiences of your workforce or constituency, and garner rich situational awareness with real-time feedback. Pulses & Genba are suitable for lessons learning, cultural and attitudinal (un)surveys, and ideation.

RetroSense Pulse

RetroSense is a virtual retrospective platform for teams looking for an innovative way to collect and make sense of on-going lessons, insights and ideas.

FutureScan Pulse

We are in uncharted territory, and our existing maps and plans will no longer work. Instead of making big moves towards a defined future state, we need to identify adjacent possibilities and take small safe-to-fail steps in directions that might offer the most potential. Picture the metaphor of crossing a river on stepping stones. FutureScan is designed to tap into the diversity of perspectives and wisdom that reside in the people around us: our staff, suppliers, partners, experts.

Genba Journalling

Originally developed in Toyota, around the idea of 'Go-Look-See', the idea of Genba in manufacturing and quality management is to focus management on what is actually happening on the ground. With Genba Journalling, and applying it through SenseMaker, we are enabling real-time and continuous feedback and insight into experiences from 'the place(s) where it actually happens'. Genba also facilitates peer-to-peer learning and agency within organisational learning. The Genba platform can be used for lessons learning programmes in real time, rather than solely in retrospect; to generate distributed and cross silo knowledge exchange without central mediation. Genba Journalling can also be used to gather understanding of the day-to-day use of knowledge and knowledge behaviours in the organisation, and how the issues and concerns at various levels links with knowledge management.

WORKSHOPS

Timings are indicated for virtual workshops, however we can deliver in-house or hybrid if required.

Rewilding knowledge: resilience and sense-making in a world of uncertainty

(3x 3 hours)

Complexity and sense-making can be a bit of buzzwords at the moment, and there are lots of tools, models and frameworks out there to navigate. This comprehensive series of 3 half-day workshops will introduce your team to our ecosystem of methods and Hexi method kits; an opportunity to create a unique composition of methods and capabilities that fits your own context building on principles of anthro-complexity and naturalising sense-making.

Introduction to sense-making and Cynefin (3 hours)

This short half-day introduction to Cynefin workshop has been put together to introduce small teams to the framework, encompassing a mixture of theory and practice to get you started on your journey with sense-making. It is designed to be held both as a one-off and as a precursor to a longer-term engagement. If you are interested, please get in touch for a call where we can give you more information and ask a few questions about your context-specific objectives for this workshop.

Learning, Measuring and Monitoring in Complex Adaptive Systems (3x3 hours)

This series of workshops is designed to equip you with the skills and know-how to co-design safe-to-fail interventions or probes in your organization and/or across your network. We will walk you through the theory behind vector-based change and targets, and use the principles from the Cynefin framework and other methods in our toolkit to help you to identify the situations where this type of approach is best put to use, and where you might wish to use more traditional linear methods.

Assess, plan & monitor with the 2-1-2 process

In a complex system, we have to assess, learn and plan differently. This document outlines an approach which allows organisations to assess and then pilot a range of applications at the level of investment akin to developing rapid prototypes of applications prior to scaling across business units and/or the enterprise. An experienced consultant works with the client to define, deploy and review a portfolio of probes to respond to intractable and complex challenges. The 2-1-2 builds the organisational capability to manage in complexity and to be more resilient and better prepared to respond to uncertainty and turbulence. It follows a structure based on the field guide for Managing complexity (and chaos) in times of crisis: A field guide for decision makers inspired by the Cynefin framework that has been tested with both government bodies as well as other commercial organisations for over two decades. Examples of 2-1-2 engagements include working on intractable problems where conventional solutions have led to no results, a complexity-informed and narrative-enhanced process for scaling, strategic planning for nurturing the conditions for innovation.

THE 2-1-2 STRUCTURE: WHAT TO EXPECT

2: DEFINE YOUR PORTFOLIO

- Launch with a 2-day workshop to define a portfolio of probes
- Definition of probes is accompanied by training on Cynefin Co methods and approaches that allow the team to create a unique assembly that corresponds to their unique challenges
- Identification of key concepts and approaches for monitoring. If using software support, this will feed into the initial design of SenseMaker journals to allow live monitoring and data capture on experiment progress, following the Genba approach

1: ANALYSE THE LIVE PICTURE

- Review of lessons learning
- Interim review of progress using signals and objectives agreed in first workshop
- Fine-tuning and adaptation of probes

2: REFINE, MONITOR, PROGRESS

- A 2-day workshop at the end of the initial monitoring phase, using collected observations and the ongoing live monitoring to return to the portfolio of probes and determine how they should be scaled up or down.
- Selection of appropriate tools and methods from
- Emphasise tools and methods
- Continuing use of SenseMaker for live monitoring available for 6 or more further months

The 2-1-2 process includes a series of 3 workshops spread over 2 days - 1 day - 2 days.

What does this programme include?

Like all our programmes, members of the Cynefin® Knowledge Management programme have access to the following:

- SenseMaker® license and support, with a Signifier Library curated for KM applications.

- Training and mentoring in conducting Cynefin Knowledge Mapping & Strategy, or bespoke SenseMaker® projects. Pre-designed and literature-supported material for SenseMaker® engagements.

- Invitation to join our growing global network of Cynefin Knowledge Management, complexity, and SenseMaker practitioners and researchers, with access to regular meet-ups and additional resources.

- Support in developing new methods, themes and areas of research that are consistent with the aims and direction of the Cynefin Knowledge Management programme.

Options & Pricing

Pricing available on enquiry.

To get in touch with one of our experienced consultants or researchers, send us a message or click here to learn more about our membership options for individuals and organisations.

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