MAKING SENSE

An extract from Lynne Cazaly's book
'Making Sense: A Handbook for the Future of Work'

# New times call for new decisions

*Those critical choices you made then, they were based on what you knew about the world as it was.*

*But now, you know more and the world is different. So why spend so much time defending those choices?*

*We don't re-decide very often, which means that most of our time is spent doing, not choosing. And if the world isn't changing (if you're not changing) that doing makes a lot of sense.*

*The pain comes from falling in love with your status quo and living in fear of making another choice, a choice that might not work.*

*You might have been right then, but now isn't then, it's now.*
*If the world isn't different, no need to make a new decision.*

*The only question, then, "is the world different now"?*

**- Seth Godin**

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# The Challenges of Uncertainty

It's pretty scary out there in the wide world… actually it's scary in here, in the workplace too! There is this **VUCA** thing. Volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity.

**Volatility**… it's when you just don't know what's coming next. Think shifting sands in the desert. One day it looks like this, the next day it's a different landscape. It may be tricky to understand and it keeps changing.

**Uncertainty**…. It's when there's ummm. Despite business modeling, futurist thinking, projections and extrapolations, we still aren't totally certain what's ahead, what will happen next and what it means for us.

**Complexity** stems from four main areas: Us. You. Me. Them
Yes we humans are contributing to higher levels of complexity than ever before.

**Ambiguity** is when you don't know what is impacting or affecting what. What do you do? What plan do you follow? What do you do next… and then what do you do after that?

# The Need for Sense

The world is VUCA - and it's not slowing down anytime soon. In fact it's getting worse, more volatile, complex, uncertain, ambiguous. Some of it we control, other parts we create.

## We're working with people

We're just humans living with other humans. We work with them, speak with them, problem solve with them and create wondrous things with them. I think too often we forget we're working with humans. We get so used to looking at the screen in our hand, the screen on our desk and the big screen on the wall unit at home that we forget how to think, listen and deliver sensible, clear and impactful information to other humans.

## Information is dense

The information we read, work with and need to digest is thick, dense and detailed. We need to wade through it. While many people work in the field of knowledge work creating and crafting information, we still need to sort through what we want, avoid what we don't. That takes time, energy, bandwidth, and brain space.

## Big data is growing

Big data is cool, it's hip and happening and now. But only those working with it really know what to do with it. The rest of us are looking at it from a distance trying to work out how to work with it. Who can help us? What do we look at? Which bits are relevant? How do we digest just a slice of it? How is it all connected?

## We're turning on a torrent

The firehose of complexity and the downloading of data are coming at a great rate. Not just a firehose, a veritable torrent. Flowing rapidly, hard to stop or sip from. Who's synthesising all of this information? How do we make sense of it all?

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# The Changing Face of Leadership

In the lyrics of the funk band 'Brand New Heavies', they sing 'the world, the world, the world keeps on spinning… yeah'. Change isn't slowing, transformation is constant and leaders too, need to change and adapt. The face of leadership is changing …

| THEN | NOW | NEXT |
|---|---|---|
| 1.0 | 2.0 | 3.0 |
| Directive | Consultative | Facilitative |
| Tell | Share | Elicit |
| Information | Knowledge | Meaning |
| History | Data | Sense |
| Teamwork | Collaboration | Co-creation |
| Collate | Create | Curate |
| Play | Game | Improvise |

# The Future of Work is Sense Making

So what will work in the future look like? What capabilities will we need to handle the ongoing changes and shifts?

*The Institute for the Future*'s *Future Work Skills 2020 report says* the top ten skills for the year 2020 are:

1. **Sense making**
2. Novel thinking
3. Social intelligence
4. Trans disciplinary
5. New media literacy
6. Computational thinking
7. Cognitive load coping
8. Cross cultural competency
9. Design mindset
10. Virtual collaboration

**What is this #1 capability... sense making?**

*"Sensemaking: the ability to determine the deeper meaning or significance of what is being expressed".*
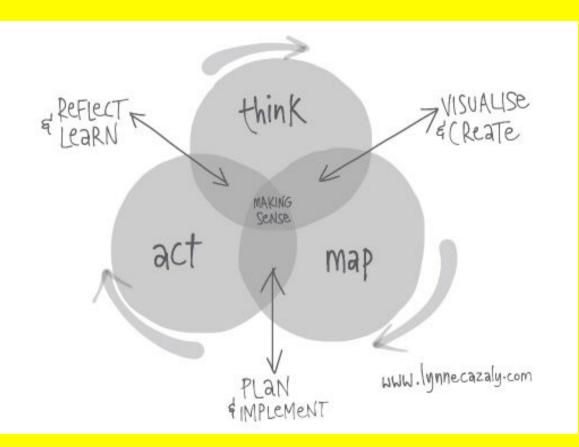
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# How do you make sense?

To determine this deeper meaning, there are three steps:

First there is **thinking**. We have the opportunity to **visualize and create** what we are thinking about.

Next we **map** our thinking and ideas. This helps us *make sense*. It helps us prepare to **plan and implement**.

And then we are able to **act**. Based on our actions, we can **reflect and learn** from what what happened. We now know more, so we can **think** some more.

Sense making is cyclical.



& REFLECT & LEARN

think

VISUALISE & CREATE

MAKING SENSE

act

map

PLAN & IMPLEMENT

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# What's the story? What should I do?

Karl E Weick is considered by many to be the grandfather on sense making. His writing and research is certainly compelling. His book *'Sensemaking in Organisations'* is comprehensive. Weick says that meanings materialise - not like magic, but through language, talk and communication.

***We need to take some sort of action to make sense. Sense is made in hindsight, in retrospect.***

Making sense needs to be a deliberate act, a planned part of the strategy, of everyday work, of team collaboration and project work.

We need to ask: **'What's the story here? Now what should I do?'** This helps bring meaning into existence and makes uncertainty clearer.

The information you're looking at or thinking about can yield **'clusters'** or hints, hunches and cues that compete for your attention. You may not be able to put your finger on it but there will be pieces of information that just connect or 'make sense'.

Sense making often starts with **chaos**. That's a relief! That's the time we need it most, when things are a tad crazy. From the chaos we need to draw out and extract cues.

# When you see it...

Start by noticing... noticing what's normal. And then notice what doesn't fit? From this you can begin to find a new meaning, invent a new meaning, via interpretation.

Sensemaking follows action. In sense making we're trying to connect that indefinable abstract up there, to the deep details that are concrete.

Above all sense making is about action. **What's going on here? What do I do next?**
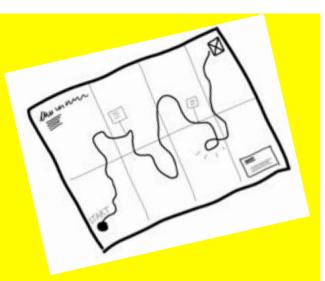
Talking and action. When we're sense making we are constantly iterating, changing, building, developing, growing and shifting that understanding. Our understanding can't help but be shaped and shifted when we talk about it.

Sensemaking is proving to be a key leadership capability at all levels. The MIT Sloan School of Management and their 4Cap model of contemporary leadership capabilities says it's all about: sense making, relating, visioning and inventing.

*Think it, speak it, hear yourself saying it.*
*Then you'll know just how much you understand it.*
*This is making sense.*

# The Power of a Map



Making sense in uncertainty gives us something to hold onto which in turn keeps fear at a distance.

An illustration of this comes from an incident involving a group of soldiers lost in the Swiss Alps … they didn't know where they were when it began snowing. Later one of them found a map in their pocket and they worked their way through the map and found themselves out of the snow they were in.

It turns out the map was of the Pyrenees, not the Alps! And it shows that, as sensemaking elder Karl Weick says, 'any old map will do'.

The soldiers had purpose, focus and they were heading somewhere.

The map was a start. And a start for focus relieves and reduces anxiety. Map out uncertainty and you'll be on your way to making sense.
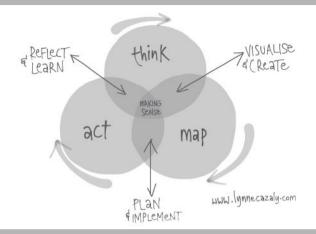
# What now...

## Think

1. Get your information together – what do you think about it?
2. Talk with others.
3. Ask the questions: What's the story here? What's going on?
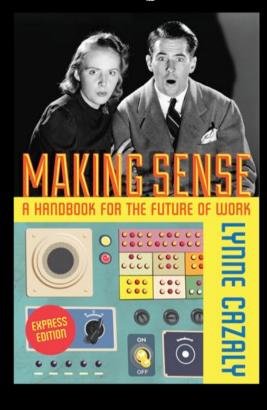4. Connect some dots.



## Map

1. Create a visual map of what you know, what you're thinking about and the dots you're connecting.
2. You'll be able to share it with others, shape it, edit it, refine it and plan for action.
3. Remember that 'any old map will do'. Go low fidelity, a quick sketch, scribe or 'scratch' on a page, chart, tablet or whiteboard.
4. It's not until you see it that you'll know what it is.

## Act

1. Do something. Anything. Making sense occurs in retrospect.
2. We need to see what happens to make sense of it.
3. Get the team into action. Small steps are still steps. Based on your actions, experiments, tests or pilots, you'll have more information. You can 'go around' again.
4. Think some more. Map again. Act again. That's making sense.
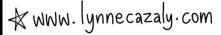
# Making Sense: Book, Keynotes & Workshops



Making Sense:
A Handbook for the
Future of Work

Lynne Cazaly
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# About the Author

Lynne Cazaly is a keynote speaker and the author of:

- *Visual Mojo: How to capture thinking, convey information and collaborate using visuals*

- *Create Change: How to apply innovation in an era of uncertainty*

- *Doo-Doos: The Sh\*t that gets in the way of doing good work*

She is obsessed with: leadership, teams and change.

Lynne helps people with change leadership, thought leadership, team engagement & communication, agile project communication & collaboration

She is a Mentor and on the Faculty of Thought Leaders Business School and her book 'Making Sense: A Handbook for the Future of Work' is out now.

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