Using Story Mapping To Inform Child Abuse and Neglect Planning Efforts

On March 21st, 2018, CANTASD (the National Child Abuse and Neglect Technical Assistance and Strategic Dissemination Center) hosted a Digital Dialogue with Jacqueline Counts, Director, and Amy Smith, Assistant Director, of the Center for Public Partnerships and Research at the University of Kansas. This document summarizes the conversation with the nearly 100 individuals from around the country who joined the call.

SETTING THE CONTEXT: PREVENTION PLANNING

How can stories help individuals develop more effective and targeted prevention services? Counts and Smith introduced participants to the story mapping tools and methods the Center for Public Partnerships and Research at the University of Kansas uses to gain a better understanding of what every child and family needs to thrive. The conversation focused on two key tools:

- Cynefin: A framework for understanding and categorizing problems to better understand how to begin framing solutions.
- SenseMaker: A new approach to narrative reserach that helps gather, analyze, and make meaning of stories from diverse sources.

At the end of the Digital Dialogue, the presenters invited the audience to participate in Our Tomorrows, a study that is collecting stories from hundreds of individuals about their experiences raising a family. The goal of the project is to inform and improve current and future support systems and child maltreatment prevention efforts.

CYNEFIN: A FRAMEWORK FOR CHARACTERIZING PROBLEMS

Counts and Smith introduced the Cynefin Framework, an approach to decision making that characterizesproblems as simple, complicated, complex, or chaotic (See Figure 1). They discussed how different types of solutions are needed for each type of problem.

Participants were asked to offer examples of each of the different types of problems (Table 1) with the help of the Cynefin Framework Worksheet.

Find Related Resources:

- **Access the Digital Dialogue** recording and handouts.
- **Go to CANTASD's page on** Prevention Planning.
- **Take the** Our Tomorrows survey.
- Stay connected **to our ongoing work in this area.**

"Not all situations are created equal, and different problems— or different situations—require different solutions. Innovation and ideas work best when we're all clear about the types of problems that we're trying to solve."

- Jackie Counts

Children's Bureau

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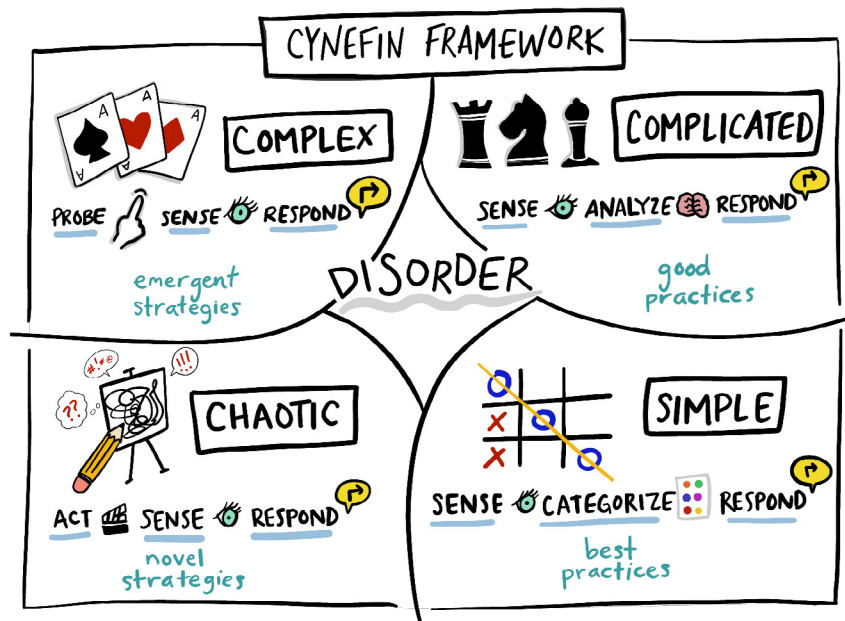A service of the Children's Bureau

Figure 1

The Cynefin (pronounced kuh-nev-in) Framework is a tool to aid in decision making. Problems are categorized into four types: simple, complicated, complex, or chaotic.

Source: Adapted with permission from Dave Snowden's Cynefin Framework.

Table 1. Categorizing Problems Using the Cynefin Framework

Type of Problem	Participant Example
A simple problem: The parameters are understood, and the solution is straightforward.	"Parents served by our CBCAP program were having a difficult time attending parent support classes due to unavailable child care and reliable transportation."
A complicated problem: Has more variables and parameters, but cause and effect are discoverable. The questions to ask and answers are readily available. Experts and practitioners help address the problem with their expertise.	"Working with a family where the parents are divorcing, and since the mom is using methamphetamine, the father has the children in his care. Their safety network support groups are complicating visitation with the mom due to their views on her actions, but they are not considering how that is impacting her children who are under 4 years old."
A complex problem: Has many layers of connections, some of which can be understood easily and some of which cannot. We don't know what we don't know—but we can make progress toward the desired outcome through small, safe-to-fail experiments.	"Providing home visiting services for a mother with a history of trauma (most of which is unknown) who is having trouble connecting with her kids."
A chaotic problem: Something must be done quickly to contain the situation, even though you might not have all of the information to make the best decision. After stabilizing the problem, you can take the time to make sense of what's going on and make adjustments.	"The mother of a family that you're are working with calls you in the middle of the night because her son has become seriously ill. She doesn't have access to transportation and begs for your help."

SENSEMAKER

SenseMaker is a narrative-based research methodology that helps practitioners understand the factors that make up complex problems. Participants in a SenseMaker survey share an experience in response to a prompting question and answer several questions related to what's working and what's not working, how people feel, and who they rely on. SenseMaker allows researchers to be inclusive of many voices and see reality through community members' eyes while identifying patterns and emerging trends. The methodology follows these steps:

Design: The SenseMaker tool is adapted to the context that is being explored. This process ensures that the instrument is both relevant and easy for respondents to understand.

Gathering stories: Individuals are prompted to tell either a positive or a negative story about an experience that aligns to the project topic area. Respondents answer a series of questions to signify or give meaning to their story. Instead of researchers applying their own lens or bias, participants code their own data.

> "We want to gather the successes and the challenges that families experience every day to find ways to create more of the good ones and understand better how to minimize the bad ones."
>
> – Jackie Counts

Identifying patterns: The data is analyzed and mapped at a high level to identify patterns. Perspectives—whether shared or unique—become evident, and trends emerge. Stories can be sorted by the role of the respondent in the story and filtered by demographics and other factors.

Community sense-making: In community sense-making sessions, data patterns and narratives from the stories collected are shared with participants. They are asked to reflect on what rings true for them and what seems surprising. Participants are led through a series of exercises to identify which positive experiences would they like to replicate and which negative experiences they would like to reduce in their community.

Moving from research to practice: The SenseMaker methodology produces data that can be used to engage people in identifying solutions for the problems they are experiencing. Participants can test interventions and continue to share and interpret their day-to-day experience to determine whether changes are occurring.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

WHAT TYPE OF DATA IS CREATED IN SENSEMAKER, AND WHAT ANALYSES CAN BE DONE?

Counts and Smith: The SenseMaker Collector tool collects data submitted by participants using an online survey tool or a dedicated app. The data are analyzed using the SenseMaker Analyst tool and results can be exported as a CSV file that can be used in other analysis applications.

HOW IS SENSEMAKER DATA SHARED WITH PARTICIPANTS?

Counts and Smith: The best way to realize the power of the SenseMaker data is to get it into the community members' hands to hear what rings true for them and what contradicts their own experience. Data from a particular community, identified using ZIP codes, can be shared back with community members who can reflect on the meaning of their own data. If there is a strong survey response from a community, the researchers will share data and create emergent pattern reports to lead community discussions. Resources, trainings, and community sense-making sessions are also provided.

HOW IS CONFIDENTIALITY PROTECTED?

Counts and Smith: The instrument does not request personally identifiable information, and a confidentiality statement appears at the top of the instrument reminding respondents to refrain from using names or identifying information for themselves or anyone involved in the story they share. Before any data is shared with the public, researchers ensure that no identifying information is present.

CAN THIS PROCESS BE USED TO INFORM CASE PRACTICE?

Counts and Smith: Yes. The Center for Public Partnerships & Research has three projects going right now to inform case practices. One project is looking at home visiting and family support programs to better understand family engagement in home visitation. Stories from family support workers, home visitors, and parents are collected, along with journals and experiences from participants to see how the stories are changing over time.

IS SENSEMAKER BEING USED WITH CHILDREN OR ADOLESCENTS?

Counts and Smith: There are SenseMaker projects in other countries, like the GirlHub project in Rwanda, that are using it in that way. There are also tools like voice-to-text that can help make SenseMaker accessible for populations with low literacy skills. There will be more requirements for getting a study through an internal review board, however, if it involves research with children.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

KU Center for Public Partnerships & Research

Dave Snowden's Cynefin Framework Video

The Our Tomorrows Project

Our Tomorrows SenseMaker Survey

Group SenseMaking

Girl Hub Case Study

Changing Practice with Sensemaker: A Case Example

As an example of SenseMaker in action, Counts and Smith described a recent workshop called Mass Sense that they conducted with a group in Oklahoma.

They provided the participants with a story about a family in poverty and asked them to make meaning of that story. Participants explored what might have been different if the person in poverty had talked to her case worker about the competing demands of her job, her child's care, and difficulty getting to meetings with the case worker.

The exercise helped the participants, primarily case workers, explore how to help clients navigate different demands and understand what pressures they experience. They immediately started talking about how this could inform their work and what could be done differently.

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