
Sensing And Shaping Our Future: Principles, Guidelines and the Practice

*A breakthrough discipline for understanding and creating change
for leaders and organizations*

By

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By experiencing and experimenting with the following principles and guidelines, we increase our ability to:

- Form partnerships that are creative and deeply satisfying
- Turn promising opportunities into viable innovations
- Evolve ourselves and outmoded belief systems and institutions in need of change
- Sustain agility, flexibility and energy.

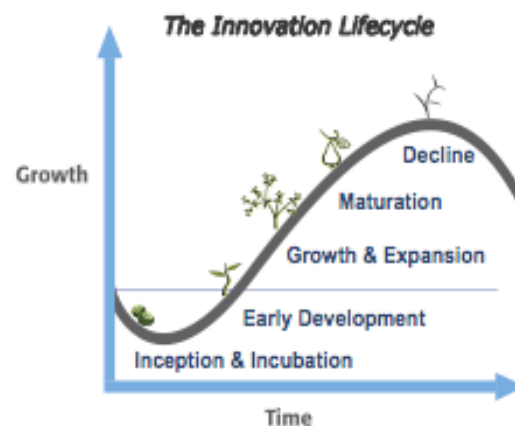
Principles & Guidelines:

Living systems are constantly maturing and adapting, recreating themselves and their environment. Work *with* these inherent instincts instead of searching for problems to fix or trying to impose an ideal.

Every person and organization has a distinctive *way of being* and creating value. Draw upon and leverage this unique genius to evoke creativity, resourcefulness and energy.

Partnership, respect and deep rapport are crucial for supporting a system's dynamic evolution. Come alongside a person or organization the way a midwife joins a pregnant mother and moves in steady rhythm to assist and guide what is already in progress.

The way a person or an organization responds to complex challenges and dilemmas provides important information about what is emerging. These kinds of trials summon a system's adaptive instincts. Consider the organism's response or effort from a developmental perspective (e.g., What might be ending? Beginning? Trying to happen?). Look for what the gesture's pattern conveys about the function or capability that might be missing, only dimly present or needed next. Explore what's already trying to form.



Initial responses to adaptive problems and dilemmas are often exaggerated or insufficient. Therefore, we need a way to help generate feasible alternatives. To do this, return to the original response, and explore variations by shifting its intensity or duration, or by adjusting the shape of the response (e.g., size, permeability, rigidity, use of space). Each new option will exhibit different strengths and weaknesses, along with corresponding behavioral repertoires and mindsets.

As potential options appear, notice the specific purpose or function each would serve if it were to be implemented. For example: reinforcing or redefining a boundary, creating an incubator function, enabling a particular kind of exchange, adding new layers of sophistication, consolidating, and so forth.





A viable response or “solution” supports the system’s unique way of being. It is congruent with the aim of the original instinctive response, and enables system members to resolve tensions that recur in particular situations. The aim is to find or co-create a response that allows the person or organization to realize and benefit from what is trying to emerge.

It is important to validate new responses or “solutions”. When tested, the new response or solution will reveal its efficacy. If it is viable, the system will exhibit increased vitality either during the test, or as a result. Even though some innovations cause massive disruptions and render prior inventions obsolete, viable responses are “sustainable” and do not cause irreparable harm to the larger ecosystem or to future generations.

There is no such thing as one response or “solution” that works under all conditions. Therefore, the longer-term aim of this approach is to cultivate the system’s capacity to develop itself consciously and to be resilient over time. When confronted with fatigue, difficult circumstances or resistance, the person or organization must be able to adapt and invent effective responses in ever-changing conditions.

This approach can be applied to individuals or groups (from a small work team to a community); **the development of innovations;** and **the transformation of background influences** (world view, theories, practices). Often, it is necessary to attend to changes unfolding on multiple levels. When we work with a person or organization, it is helpful to differentiate the level and questions that are in the foreground.

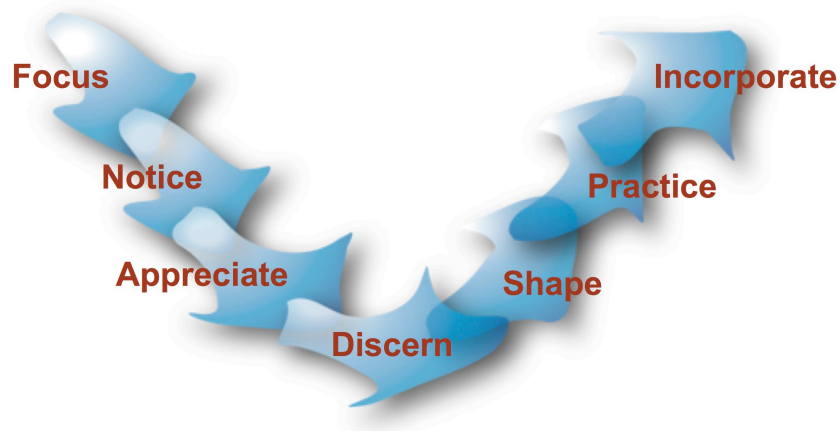
Essence → Implementation

Key Individuals: 	Unique Way Of Being	Yours To Do Partnerships Agreements
Groups & Organizations: 	Founding Genius	Offering and Org. Architecture Culture
Innovation: 	Breakthrough Insight	Product, Service or Experience Adoption Strategy
Background Influences: 	World View	Theory Of Change Practices

Over time, working with people in this way teaches them how to use the wisdom found in their own impulses to form what’s needed and to evolve. Individuals and organizations learn how to become more agile and innovative. They learn how to sense and shape the future.

The Practice Model:

When viewed as a practice over time, we refer to this co-creative approach as the “Sensing and Shaping Process.” In a sequence of steps, with indicators of progress, we work with the system’s instinctive efforts to form and differentiate new behavior. We represent this process as a series of seven, overlapping stages:



Although the process unfolds in an order that appears sequential, actual progress often involves iterations, discovering what’s not quite a good fit en route to forming a viable shape or way forward.

This process can be utilized in a wide variety of ways. Some examples include: coaching individuals and teams; design of products, services or experiences; process improvement; and large systems change. More specifically, the Sensing and Shaping Process can be used to:

- **Discover what’s happening and needed next** amidst a high stakes transition, or when facing a situation where no one really knows which path to take.
- **Develop innovations and responses that work**; also new offerings, processes, roles, or even a new culture.
- **Prepare for a radical change** by simulating what it will take to thrive following the introduction of a new technology, strategy, product, process, or organizational design.
- **Practice new behavior** so you can be effective when the going gets rough.

The Sensing and Shaping Process is counter-intuitive. It requires participants to move out of their comfort zone and develop a new perspective. The discipline’s method leads to a greater awareness and understanding of how complex systems work. But this is not idle theory. The bottom-line result is a sharpened focus on what matters; and repeatable behavior that leads to effective decision-making, viable responses and solutions, and the capacity to reinvent oneself and organization as conditions change over time.

Putting It All Together:

The principles and practices described above combine to form a reliable and repeatable process:

I. Where on the Lifecycle?

- Where is this person or organization in terms of development?
- What's ending, beginning or trying to mature?

II. What Needs Attention?

- Which levels of system are facing major challenges?
- What's needed on each level? How would you characterize the challenges, questions or dilemmas?
- For each issue or challenge, is the need more about:
 - Discovery (clarifying the "what"), or
 - Implementation (determining the "how")?
- If there was one question or dilemma underlying all the others, what would that be?

III. Which Responses to Work With?

- How is the person or organization already trying to address the issue, question or dilemma at hand? What kinds of patterns of response are already in progress?
- Which issue/s, if addressed, are likely to create the most leverage or (positive) ripple effects?
- Which inquiry does the person/organization seem most open to or ready for now?

IV. Which Methods To Employ?

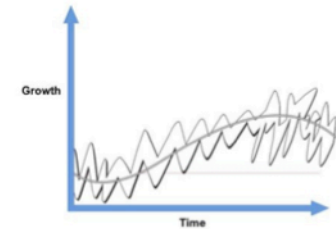
- Which approaches and tools to use to assist the person or organization through the Sensing and Shaping Process?
- How will you enable learning from experience? Where/how can you employ visual aids or dramatizations?
- Where and how could other facilitation methods and tools be utilized to accelerate or deepen the inquiry?

V. How To Leverage Unique Genius?

- How does this person or organization create value? What's this system's distinctive way of being in the world?
- How can this innate creativity and resourcefulness inform what takes shape in the next phase?
- How can this help us recognize unsustainable ideals or solutions?

VI. Indicators Of Success Or Progress?

- **Viability**—Design, response or solution that works
- **Self-Regulation**—Ability to adapt as conditions change & the going gets rough
- **Self-Generation**—Capacity to invent new forms and behaviors; and influence one's own evolution



	Discovery	Implementation
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