

# **Dervin's Sense-Making Methodology (SMM)**

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# Talking Points

- **Introduction:** Dervin's sense-making
- **Theory for methodology :** Dervin's sense-making theory
- **Dervin's Sense-Making Methodology**
- **SMM's implementation** in interviewing practice

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## Education:

B.S., Cornell University , 1960

M.A., Michigan State University, 1968

Ph.D., Michigan State University, 1971

Ph.D. (honorary), University of Helsinki, 2000

## Research Focuses:

“Philosophy of communication, communication methodology, dialogic communication, participatory communication, public communication campaigns, user information seeking and use, audience reception, and user sense-making.”



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<http://communication.sbs.ohio-state.edu/sense-making/dervinCVbrief.html>

# Four Research Fields on sensemaking or sense-making

- a. **Human-Computer Interaction** (Russell's sensemaking)
- b. **Cognitive System Engineering** (Llein's sensemaking)
- c. **Organizational Communication** (Weick's sensemaking;  
Snowden's sense-making/sensemaking)
- d. **Library & information Science** (Dervin's sense-making)

**(Dervin & Naumer, 2009)**

# Dervin's sense-making theory: Theory for Methodology

- Theorize human **sense-making and sense-unmaking**
- Focuses on **dialogue and verbings**;
- Exemplifies human information behavior through the **time-space context**;
- Studies human information use from **the perspective of the actor** instead of the observer;
- Conceptualizes human information use as behaviors of a series of **unending (circling) step-takings (gap-bridging)** to construct sense of their world.

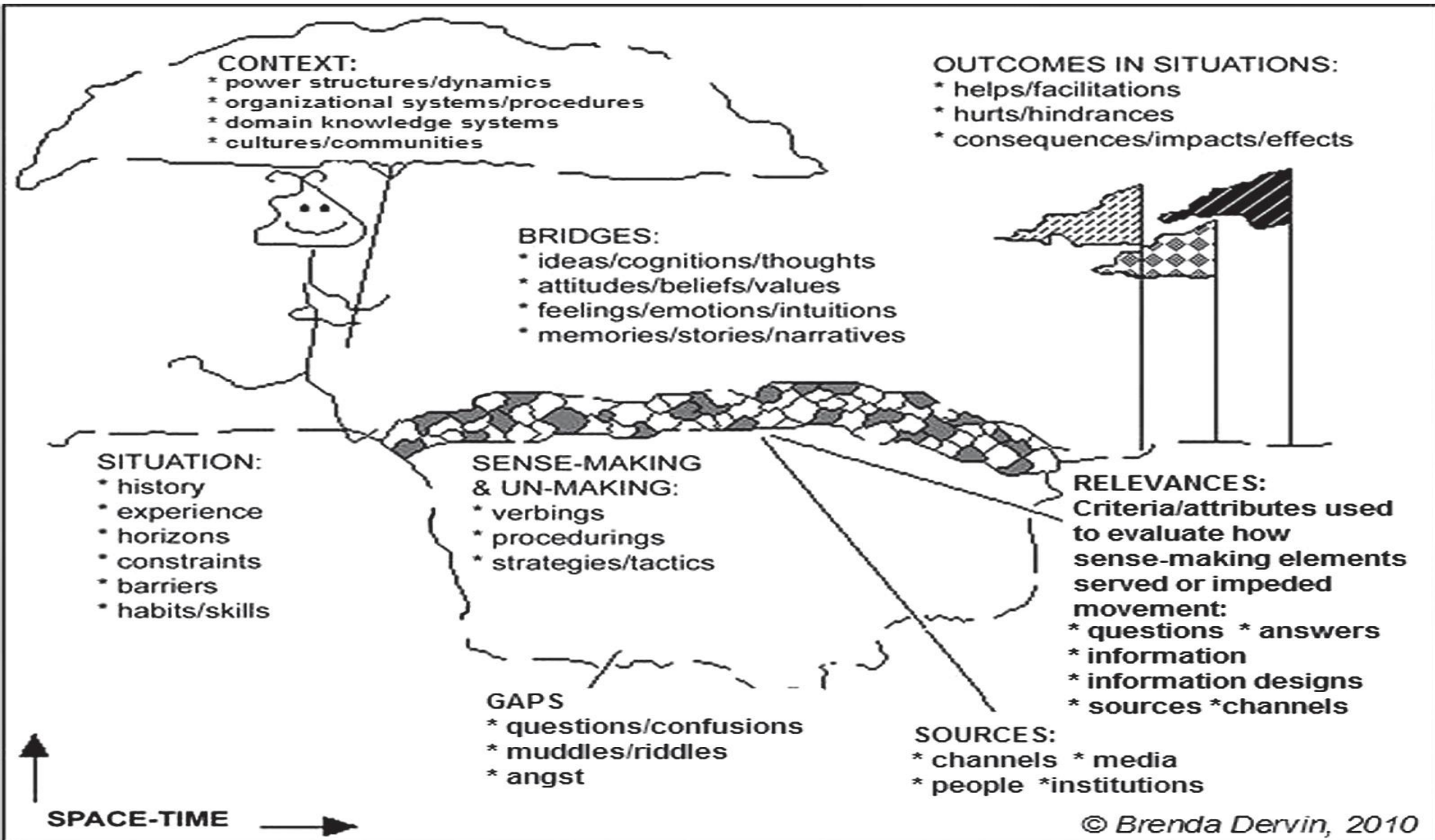
# Dervin's sense-making theory: Philosophical Premises and Assumptions

- The fundamental assumption is the “**discontinuity**” (Dervin, 1992, p. 62).
- Individuals experience and observe their world differently and need to create meaning or **make sense of their world** (Dervin, 1992, p.62);

# Dervin's sense-making theory: Philosophical Premises and Assumptions

- “Information is created at a **specific moment in time-space** by one or more humans, but not in a strict constructivist sense” (Dervin, 1992, p 64).
- “Information is not seen as independent of human being but as products of human observation in both physical **time-space** and psychological time-space according to the variation of people's **situations and experiences**” (Foreman-Wernet, 2003, p.6).

# Dervin's Sense-Making Metaphoric Triangulation





# Dervin's Sense-Making Methodology (SMM)

- Develops an explicitly **participatory and dialogic** methodology for interviewing;
- Draws from the theory and implements the theory to the interview practices;
- Can be used in both qualitative and quantitative studies, (e.g., focus groups, surveys, in-depth interviews, guided participant observation);
- Directs varied interviewing approaches.

# The Roster of SMM Questions

## **TO TAP SITUATIONS**

- \*What happened?*
- \*What stood in the way?*
- \*What were you trying to deal with?*
- \*How did that connect with past events?*
- \*How did it connect to forces of power in family, community, society?*

## **TO TAP GAPS**

- \*What were your big questions?*
- \*What were you trying to unconfuse, figure out, learn about?*
- \*What did you struggle with?*

## **TO TAP BRIDGES:**

- \*What conclusions/ideas/ did you come to?*
- \*What emotions/feelings did you come to? .*
- \*What led you to that conclusion/idea/emotion/feeling?*

## **TO TAP OUTCOMES SOUGHT AND/OR OBTAINED**

- \*How did that [name that] help? facilitate? [And, how did that help? And, how did that help?]*
- \*How did that [name that] hinder? [And, how did that hinder? And, how did that hinder?]*
- \*If you could wave a magic wand, what would have helped?*

# The Roster of SMM Questions

## TO DIG DEEPER INTO GAPS AND STRUGGLES:

*\*What was missing?*

*\*How did that stand in the way?*

*\*And, how did that prevent you getting more help?*

## TO DIG DEEPER INTO WHAT LED TO AN EVALUATION:

*\*What led you to that assessment?*

*\*How did that evaluation connect with your situation?*

*\*What was limited or incomplete about that?*

## TO DIG DEEPER INTO HOW THINGS HELP:

*\*And, how did that help?*

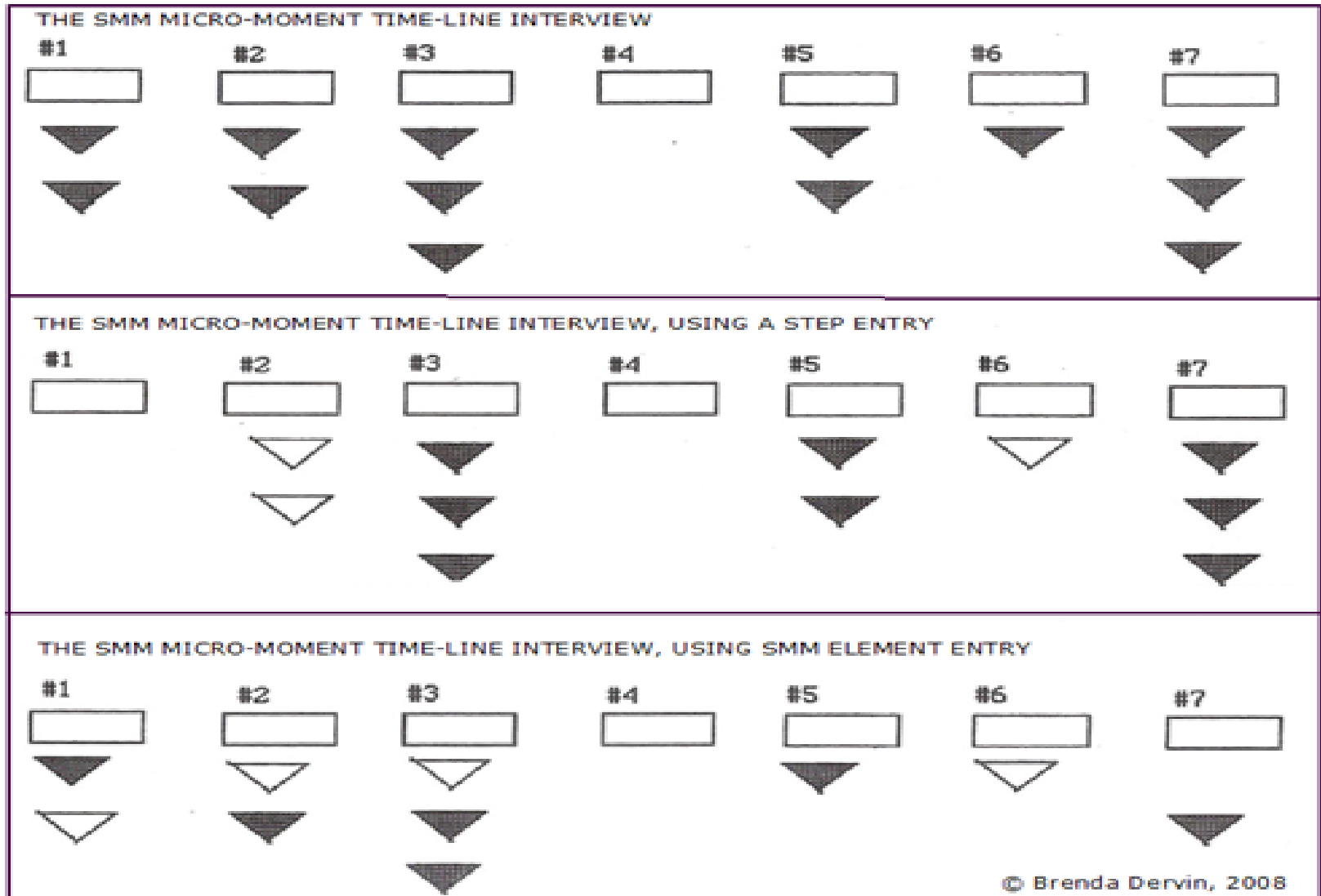
*\*What did that allow you to do/achieve/think?*

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# SMM Interviewing Approaches

- SMM micro-moment time-line interview
- SMM life-time interview
- SMM micro-element interview
- SMM outcome chaining interview
- SMM Q/ing interview
- SMM focus group interview (Dervin, 2008)

# Variations of SMM Micro-moment Time-line Interview



# Fundamental Mandates of SMM Interviewing

- “Minimal intrusion by researchers of their credentials and expertise.
- Giving informants permission to not be representatives of collectivities but to be aware observers of collectivities.
- Understanding that informants do not come to interviews with answers on the tips of their tongues, or even well-articulated in their minds.
- Having informants talk only about situations real to them, that they have experienced.
- Understanding that "real" to informants does not mean objectively real. Observations of how brutally imposed power hurts is "real" to informants but so are informants' dreams of what would have helped and explanations of causes and consequences”.

(Dervin, 2008, pp. 15-16)

# Fundamental Mandates of SMM Interviewing

- “Interviewing to build trust and willingness to disclose by implementing an interviewing approach focusing on the verbs of communicating in order to reach for an understanding of the elusive noun worlds of informants as seen by informants.
- Allowing informants to be the same and/or different as they move across time- space.
- Allowing informants to be confused and muddled; and at the same time intelligent and strategic.
- Allowing informants to see situations outside the boxes of our frameworks.
- Using SMM questions to channel informant talk to the "essences" of SMM, to the verbing universals of communicating.

(Dervin, 2008, pp. 15-16)

# Fundamental Mandates of SMM Interviewing

- Allowing informants to be aware creators of their worlds.
- Understanding that precision in question-asking may be less important than trust building and treating informants as individual sense-makers.
- Using redundancy during interviewing as an important communication tool for building the bridge between informant stories and researcher understandings.
- Inviting informants to talk about their situations in terms of how they are constrained and free of and freed by multiple forces -- their own, those from others, those from structures.

(Dervin, 2008, pp. 15-16)



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**Q&A**

**Thanks !**