

# Tool: Sensing Journey

## Overview

Sensing Journeys pull participants out of their daily routine and allow them to experience the organization, challenge, or system through the lens of different stakeholders. Sensing journeys bring participants to places, people, and experiences that are most relevant for the respective question they are working on.

These Learning Journeys allow participants to:

- Move into unfamiliar environments
- Immerse themselves in different contexts
- Step into relevant experiences

During social distancing, Sensing Journeys will be a more complex tool to adapt to the web. Be creative about the kinds of conversations that you're able to structure through videoconferencing, and what in-person observation is safe to arrange, (if any) given local distancing guidelines. Can you prepare a journey that is entirely outdoors, with activities that permit distancing? Can you prepare a combination of in-person and online conversations? You'll find examples of learning journeys conducted online in the [Global Forum 2020 archive](#) (below *Signs and Seeds of the Future, Block Three*).

Stakeholder interviews and other tools listed in this Sourcebook may be less complicated to host online, but if you feel ready, we invite you to get creative with this powerful, multifaceted experience.

## Purpose

To allow participants to break-through patterns of seeing and listening by stepping into a different and relevant perspective and experience. Sensing Journeys can also help build relationships with key stakeholders, and gain a system perspective.

## Principles

A deep-dive sensing journey requires engaging in three types of listening:

1. Listening to others: to what the people you meet are offering to you.
2. Listening to yourself: to what you feel emerging from within.
3. Listening to the emerging whole: to what emerges from the collective and community settings that you have connected with.

Go to the places of most potential. Meet your interviewees in their context: in their workplace or where they live, not in a hotel or conference room. This is made natural when meeting people through Zoom; make sure to gently ask them to keep their webcam on, if they feel comfortable. When you meet people in their own context you learn a lot by simply observing what is going on. Take whatever you observe as a starting point to improvise questions that allow you to learn more about the real-life context of your interviewee.

Observe, observe, observe: Suspend your voices of judgment (VOJ) and cynicism (VOC) and connect with your sense of appreciation and wonder.

Without the capacity to suspend judgment and cynicism, all efforts to conduct an effective inquiry process will be in vain. Suspending your VOJ means shutting down the habit of judging and opening up a new space of exploration, inquiry, and wonder.

## Uses & Outcomes

- Increased awareness of the different aspects of a system and their relationships
- Enhanced awareness of the different perspectives of the stakeholders and participants in the system
- Connections between stakeholders and participants
- Ideas for prototypes
- Use with... Listening tools

## Example

An automobile manufacturing firm's product development team decided to use Sensing Journeys to broaden their thinking and to generate new ideas. Their task was to build the self-repair capacity of their cars' engines. The team visited a broad selection of other companies, research centers, and even experts in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). As it turned out, the visits with TCM experts generated the most innovative ideas for this project (including the idea to design self-repair functions for the "dream state" of the car--that is, for those periods when the car is not in use).

## Process

### Set Up

#### People & Place

The group splits up into sub-teams of about 5 participants. The group composition matters because a mix of perspectives enhances the impact of the sensing journeys.

Define places of high potential for the sensing journeys. The whole group of participants should go to several places (through virtual 'meetings' or in person) that can provide insights into:

- The different perspectives of the system's key stakeholders
- The different aspects of that system
- The 'voiceless': people in the system, those who usually are not heard or seen.

A good way to get a sense of the system is to take the perspective of its "extreme users": these can be people with a strong or specific need for the work or products of the organization, who may be at a particular disadvantage or on the margins - for instance, a person living in a remote area needing access to a health system.

#### Time

The length of a sensing journey depends on the size of the geographic area being covered, or the number of conversations being had. It is recommended to allocate at least 1 day to sensing journeys in a workshop context and several days or weeks (sometimes spread over a period of months) in a larger project setting.

#### Materials

If the hosts agree, it is advised to take pictures and/or videos during the journey, or to record portions of the online conversation. These can be useful during reviews with the other groups and as a reminder for the participants.

If in person, other materials may be collected as well, after seeking permission from the hosts. A pen and journal are required for taking notes during and after the journey.

## Sequence

### Step 1

Identify Learning Journeys: find places, individuals, organizations that provide you and the group with new perspectives.

### Step 2

Prepare as a group by discussing:

- What is the context that we will experience?
- Who are the key players that we will talk to?
- What questions do we want to explore?
- What assumptions do I bring with me? What do I expect?
- Share your most eye-opening sensing experience to date

Start by developing a short questionnaire (7-10 questions) that guides your inquiry process. Keep updating your questionnaire as your inquiry process unfolds.

Prepare the host: Share the purpose and intent of the visit. Communicate that it would be most helpful for the group to gain some insight into their "normal" daily operations, rather than a staged presentation. Try to avoid "show and tell" situations.

### Step 3

Small groups travel to the host's location, or meet with the host virtually.

While meeting: Trust your intuition and ask authentic questions raised by the conversation. Asking simple and authentic questions is an important leverage point in shifting or refocusing the attention to some of the deeper systemic forces at play.

Use deep listening as a tool to hold the space of conversation. When your interviewee has finished responding to one of your questions, don't jump in automatically with the next question. Attend to what is emerging from the now.

Example questions for sensing journeys:

- What personal experience or journey brought you into your current role?
- What issues or challenges are you confronted with?
- Why do these challenges exist?
- What challenges exist in the larger system?
- What are the blockages?
- What are your most important sources of success and change?
- What would a better system look like for you?
- What initiative, if implemented, would have the greatest impact for you? For the system as a whole?
- If you could change just a few elements of the system, what would you change?
- Who else do we need to talk to?

### Step 4

After the visit, reflect and debrief: To capture and leverage the findings of your inquiry process, conduct a disciplined debriefing process right after each visit. (Remain focused on the activity: don't switch on cell phones until the debriefing is complete.)

Here are a few sample questions for the debriefing:

- What was most surprising or unexpected?
- What touched me? What connected with me personally?
- If the social field (or the living system) of the visited organization or community were a living being, what would it look and feel like?
- If that being could talk: what would it say (to us)?
- If that being could develop—what would it want to morph into next?
- What is the generative source that allows this social field to develop and thrive?
- What limiting factors prevent this field/system from developing further?
- Moving in and out of this field, what did you notice about yourself?
- What ideas does this experience spark for possible prototyping initiatives you may want to take on?

#### Step 5

Close the feedback loop with your hosts: Send an email (or other follow-up note) expressing a key insight you took away from the meeting (one or two sentences), and your appreciation.

#### Step 6

Debrief as a whole group: After a one-day learning journey this debriefing would take place in the next meeting with the whole group. In the case of a multi-days learning journey you plan to meet between the individual days if logistics allow.

Structure of the whole group debrief meeting:

- Get everyone on the same page by sharing concrete information about the Journeys: Where did you go, who did you talk to, what did you do?
- Talk about your findings and generate new ideas.