

What is this plan about?

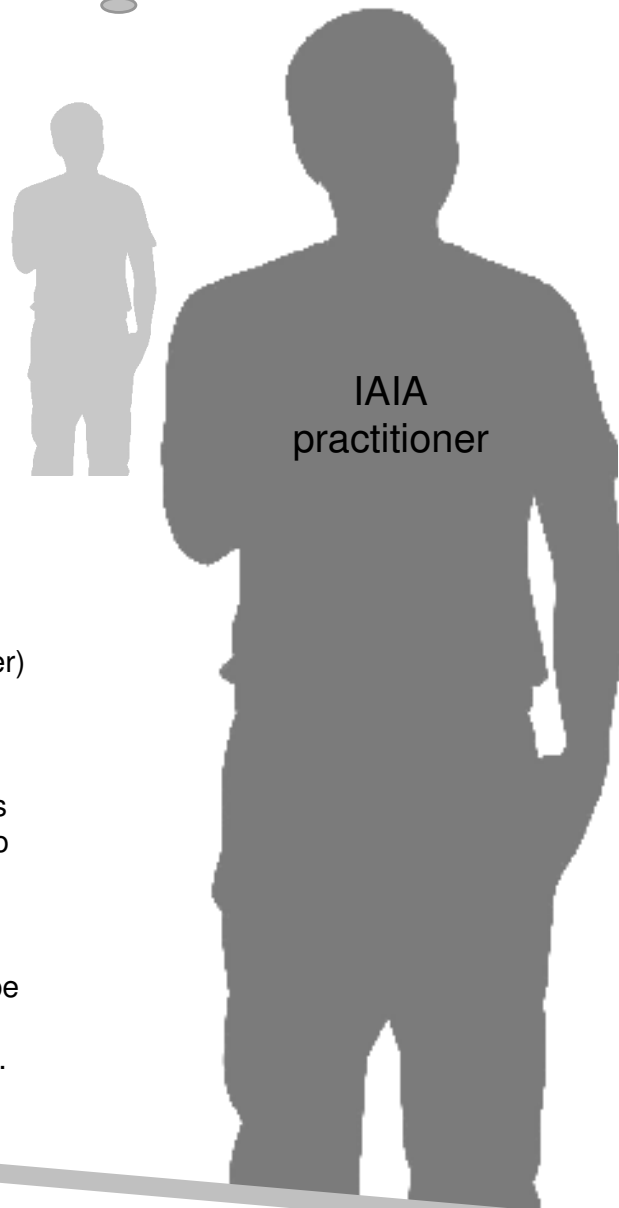
How do we predict these impacts?

Will these measures be sufficient?

Making sense of impact assessments

From a sense-making perspective

- **IA is a process of creating sense** of the flux of input that we face! Sense-making may explain the **mental scoping** of how we as impact assessors notice certain elements and unknowingly ignore others (both action to assess and impacts to consider)
- **IA is about labelling!** Sense-making theory explains the basis of action as a process of labelling events that are difficult to grasp. The labelling makes it possible to discuss and act on situations in order to reduce ambiguity.
- **IA consultations are sense-contests!** Sense-making is related to identity, and consultations can be explained as a contest between different 'senses' made among different persons of the same situation.



Impact assessments as sense-making

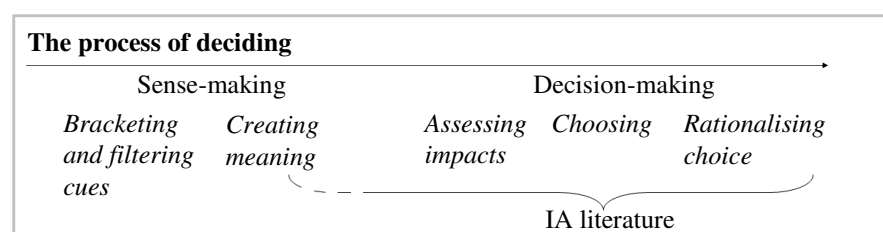
By acknowledging sense-making as important social processes, IA may enhance awareness on

- **How cues are 'read':** Cues may have strategic importance and the 'reading' of these is affecting uncertainty and ambiguity in an organisation. Awareness of the 'reading' may help us to avoid missing important impacts in IA.
- **How problems/opportunities are framed:** A deep understanding of how we go about making sense of what is happening and what will happen may improve our framing and communication of IA. This concerns both impacts, measures and alternatives in the IA process.
- **How users are making sense of IA:** Sense-making theory may improve our understanding of how decision-makers and other users are making sense of IA. It may be possible to use this knowledge for targeting our communication to the users.

The project has point of departure in complex decision-making processes and considerations on communication on basis for decision-making. With focus on SEA implementation in the Danish energy sector, the project aims at contributing to SEA methodology and facilitating change towards a decent SEA practice in the sector.

The research combines theory on sense-making with theory on decision-making. It is based on the hypothesis that expanding the awareness of the pre-decision stages (see figure below) and integrating sense-making experiences in SEA methodology may enhance the benefit of SEA practice!

Sense-making is investigated through participation in impact assessments and observations at public meetings added interviews and document analysis.



Karl Weick on sense-making

Sense-making is when agents "**structure the unknown**" (Weick 1995, p. 4)

"It is not interpretation as it encompasses more than how cues, information is interpreted, but is concerned with how the cues were internalized in the first instance and **how individuals decide to focus on specific cues**. (Weick 1995, pp. 7-9)

"... the more general point is that **organizations can be good at decision making and still falter**. They falter because of deficient sensemaking. The world of decision making is about strategic rationality. It is built from clear questions and clear answers that attempt to remove ignorance (Daft and MacIntosh, 1981). The world of sensemaking is different. Sensemaking is about contextual rationality. **It is built out of vague questions, muddy answers, and negotiated agreements that attempt to reduce confusion.**" (Weick 1993, p. 636)

"Identity construction is seen by many to be one of the **two basic properties that differentiate sensemaking** from basic cognitive psychology [...]. The other property is the use of plausibility as the fundamental criterion of sensemaking." (Weick et al. 2001, p. 416)

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or business card if you want to discuss sense-making & IA and be updated on this research

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