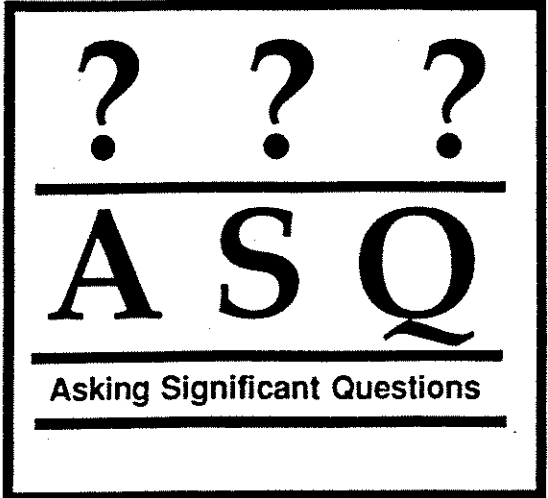


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ASQ:
 ALTERNATIVE TOOLS
 FOR
 INFORMATION NEED
 AND ACCOUNTABILITY
 ASSESSMENTS
 BY LIBRARIES

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by

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A PUBLICATION OF
 THE PENINSULA LIBRARY SYSTEM
 25 TOWER RD.
 BELMONT, CALIFORNIA 94002

FOR
 CALIFORNIA STATE LIBRARY
 SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA

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CHAPTER THREE

THE RESEARCH APPROACH: A SENSE-MAKING PRIMER

THIS CHAPTER PROVIDES THE READER WITH AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SENSE-MAKING APPROACH FOR CONDUCTING RESEARCH AIMED AT ASSESSING INFORMATION NEEDS OR ACCOUNTABILITY IN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CENTERS. AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY (IN APPENDIX H) CONTAINS CITATIONS FOR FURTHER READING.

THE SENSE-MAKING APPROACH STARTS WITH THE ASSUMPTION THAT PREVALENT APPROACHES TO ASSESSING NEEDS AND ACCOUNTABILITY LOOK AT USERS AND POTENTIAL USERS THROUGH THE EYES OF THE SYSTEM. IN THE CASE OF LIBRARIES, WE CALL THIS LOOKING AT THE HUMAN WITH "LIBRARY EYES."

Are you satisfied
with OUR service?

How much do you
know about US?

Which of the things
that WE do, do you
like best?



When did you
use US last?

Do you want
US to stock
more
video
tapes?

How often do you use US?

What kind of
materials did you
check out the last time
you were HERE?

Are WE located close
enough to your home?

**SENSE-MAKING LOOKS AT THE HUMAN BEING,
ON THE OTHER HAND, AS MOVING THROUGH HIS OR
HER LIFE -- GOING ON QUESTS, MEETING BARRIERS,
FACING DILEMMAS, RUNNING INTO CONFUSIONS,
DREAMING DREAMS, ASKING QUESTIONS, DEALING
WITH MUDDLES, PASSING TIME, RESTING AND
REGENERATING, AND/OR SEEKING HAPPINESS.**

DILEMMAS

BARRIERS

CONFUSIONS

BLOCKS

GOALS

DREAMS



GAPS

QUESTIONS

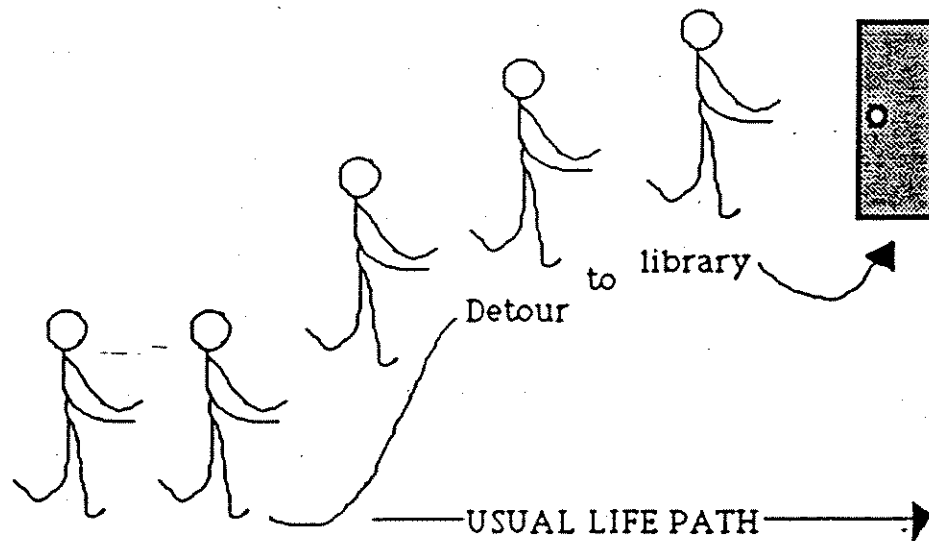
MUDDLES

NEEDS

QUESTS

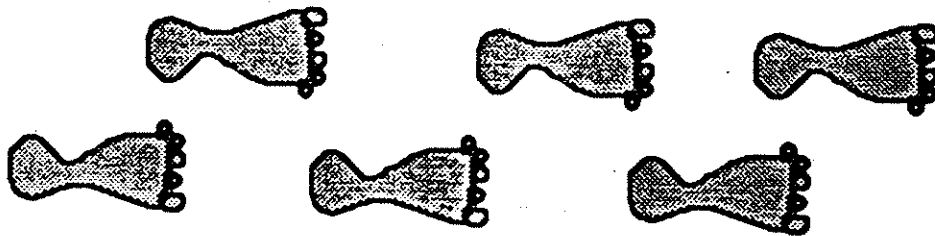
TO THE HUMAN BEING, SENSE-MAKING ASSUMES,
AN INSTITUTIONAL "SYSTEM" (A LIBRARY, A
SCHOOL, A DOCTOR'S OFFICE, A HOSPITAL) IS A PLACE
ONE GOES TO, AT TIMES INVOLUNTARILY
(A JOURNEY THAT WILL BE IGNORED HERE) AND
SOMETIMES VOLUNTARILY. SENSE-MAKING
ASSUMES THE VOLUNTARY JOURNEY TO A "SYSTEM"
IS STARTED TO GET SOME KIND OF HELP IN MOVING
THROUGH LIFE, EVEN WHEN THAT HELP IS FOR
SOMETHING THAT LOOKS LIKE STANDING STILL,
OR GETTING HELP TO PASS TIME.

SENSE-MAKING SEES THE JOURNEY TO A LIBRARY
OR INFORMATION CENTER AS A DETOUR
FROM THE USUAL LIFE PATH.



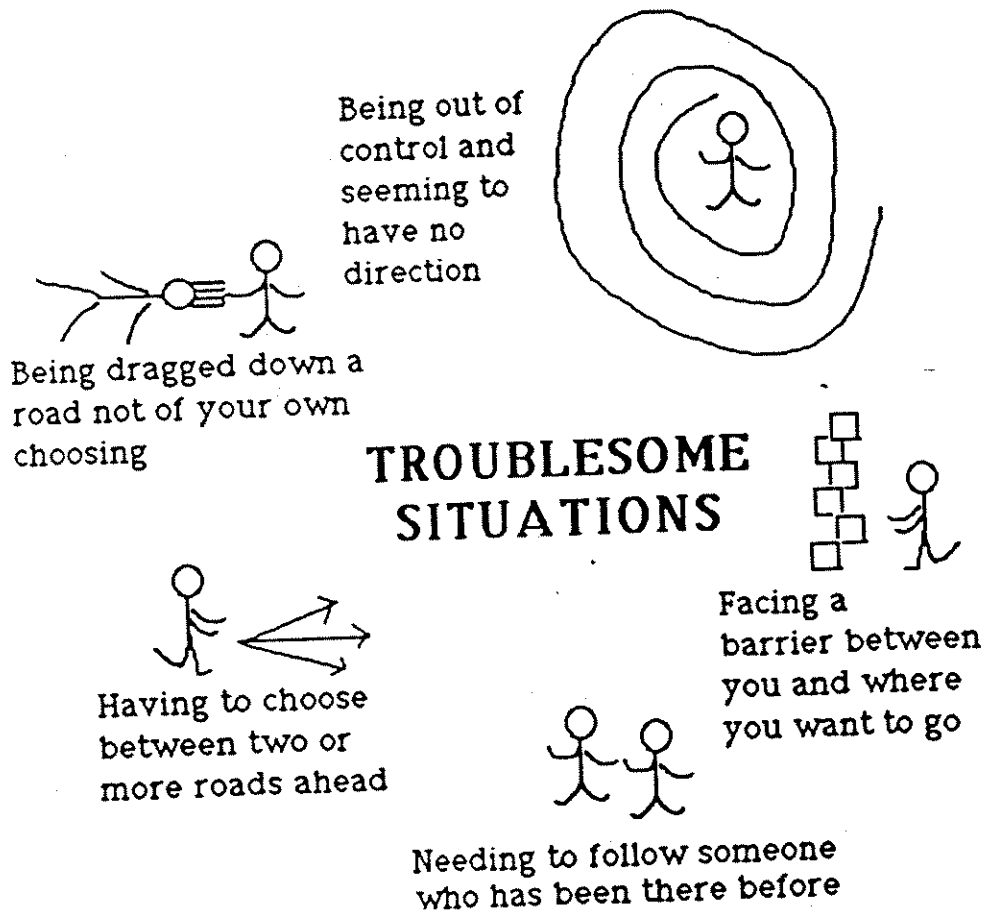
THE PROBLEM THAT THE SENSE-MAKING APPROACH
TRIES TO SOLVE IS HOW CAN YOU ASK PEOPLE ABOUT
THEIR LIFE JOURNEYS AND THEIR DETOURS TO
LIBRARIES WITHOUT BECOMING OVERWHELMED WITH
A MASS OF DATA ABOUT UNIQUE INDIVIDUALS.
MANY ATTEMPTS TO "STEP INTO ANOTHER PERSON'S
SHOES" OR SEE PEOPLE "HUMANLY" FAIL BECAUSE
HUMAN INDIVIDUALITY SEEMS TOO COMPLEX TO
HANDLE. IT SEEMED LIKE A RIDDLE:
HOW TO DEAL WITH PEOPLE ON THEIR TERMS AND
DO IT SYSTEMATICALLY?

SENSE-MAKING ASSUMES THAT THE ANSWER
TO THIS RIDDLE INVOLVES ISOLATING WHAT IT WAS
ABOUT THE HUMAN JOURNEY THROUGH LIFE THAT IS
KEY TO UNDERSTANDING WHY PEOPLE MIGHT MAKE
DETOURS TO LIBRARIES AND HOW THEY MIGHT SEE
THEMSELVES HELPED BY THESE DETOURS.



PART OF THE ANSWER TO THE RIDDLE IS
TO FOCUS ON PEOPLE MOVING THROUGH THEIR LIVES -
- ONE STEP AFTER THE OTHER.

ANOTHER PART OF THE SOLUTION IS TO PONDER: WHY WOULD SOMEONE MAKE A DETOUR? THE ANSWER IS SIMPLE: BECAUSE FOR SOME REASON THEY CAN'T KEEP MOVING AHEAD. IN ESSENCE, THEY SEE THEMSELVES AS FACING SOME KIND OF SITUATION WHICH IS TROUBLESOME IN SOME WAY.



IN SENSE-MAKING, A TROUBLESOME SITUATION IS ANY SITUATION, BAD OR GOOD, SERIOUS OR FRIVOLOUS, WHERE A PERSON FACES SOME KIND OF GAP PREVENTING MOVEMENT AHEAD.

A DETECTIVE STORY ADDICT WHO HAS RUN OUT OF DETECTIVE STORIES, A WORKER WHO LOSES HIS JOB, A PATIENT FACING A MONTH OF RECUPERATION, A POET TRYING TO MASTER HAIKU, A STUDENT WITH A NEW COMPUTER -- ALL FACE GAPS IN THEIR MOVEMENT. ALL MIGHT POTENTIALLY MAKE A DETOUR TO THE LIBRARY.

SENSE-MAKING ASSUMES THAT HUMAN BEINGS ASK QUESTIONS BECAUSE THEY NEED ANSWERS IN ORDER TO CONTINUE THEIR JOURNEYS.

IF THE ANSWERS WERE ALREADY KNOWN, THEN NO DETOUR WOULD BE NECESSARY.



What's going on in this situation?

How are things related to each other?

What are the ways things should be done, the rules, the laws?

What's my role, how do I fit in?

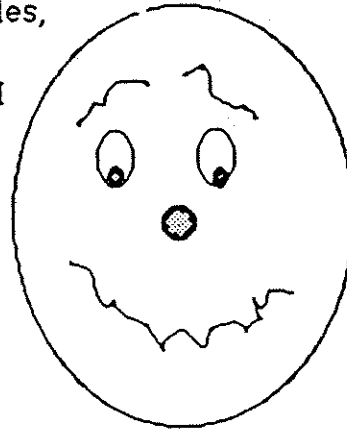
Am I alone, is anyone listening, or agreeing with me?



Can I avoid or get away from bad consequences?
If I do this, what will happen?



What are my motives, reasons, feelings, wants?



How can I get motivated?
What are my options, what's the best thing to do?

How, when, or where can I do something?
How can I get around all the red tape in the bureaucracy?

Are there other ways I can think about this situation?

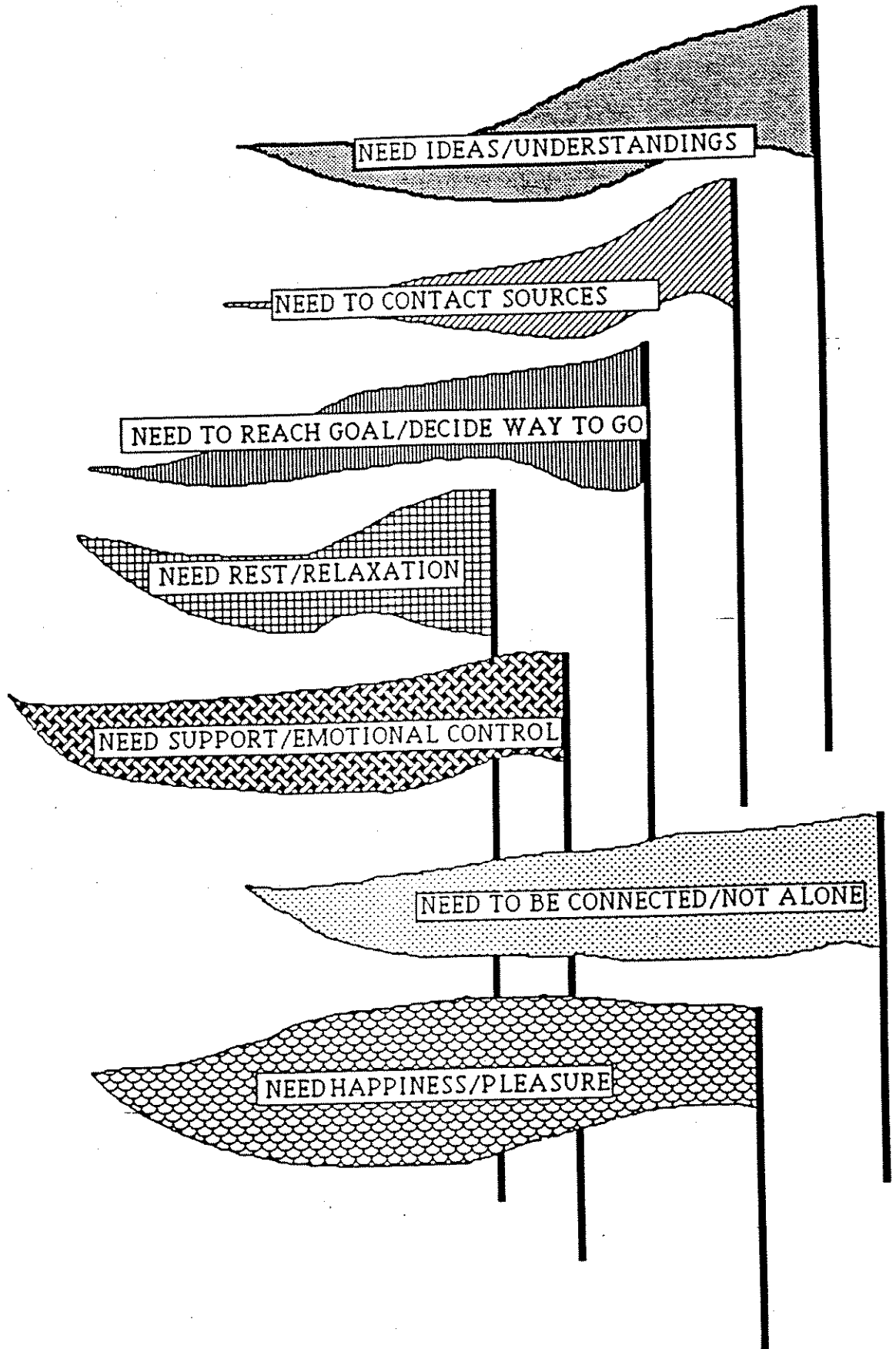



What information is available in this situation?
What services or help are available?



**SENSE-MAKING ALSO ASSUMES THAT PEOPLE HAVE
PURPOSES. PURPOSES ARE DEFINED AS WHATEVER IT
IS THE PERSON HOPES TO GET FROM THE JOURNEY --
MAYBE IDEAS, UNDERSTANDINGS OR SKILLS;
FEELING CONNECTED TO OTHER PEOPLE;
REST AND RELAXATION, HAPPINESS OR PLEASURE;
EMOTIONAL CONTROL, SUPPORT, MOTIVATION;
TO GET SOMEWHERE IN PARTICULAR,
OR TO BE ABLE TO DECIDE WHERE TO GO.**

**SENSE-MAKING ASSUMES THAT
NO OUTSIDER CAN TELL BY LOOKING AT OTHER PEOPLE
OR THEIR EXTERNAL SITUATIONS
HOW THOSE PEOPLE SEE THEMSELVES STOPPED, OR
THE CONFUSIONS THEY FACE,
OR EVEN THE WAYS THEY MIGHT BE HELPED.**





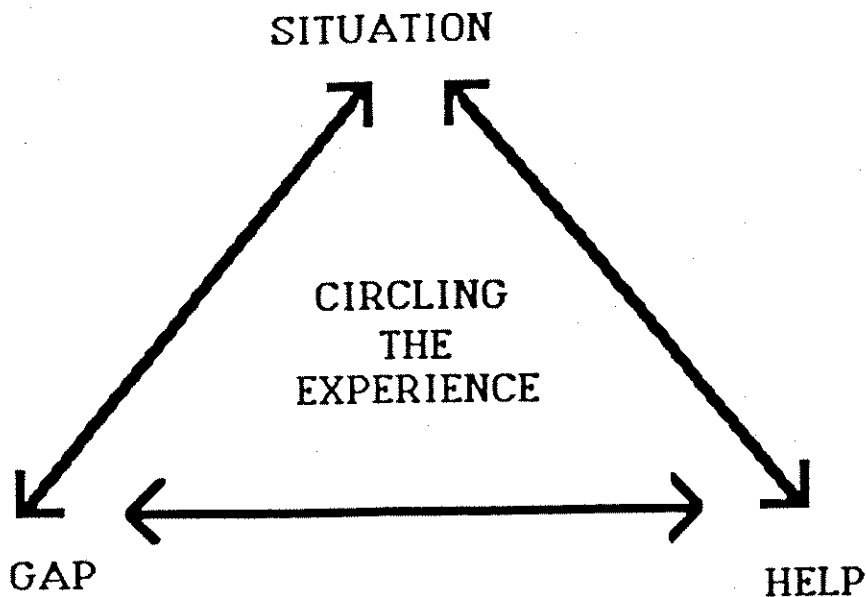
**SENSE-MAKING ASSUMES THAT THERE ARE
BASICALLY THREE KINDS OF SIGNIFICANT QUESTIONS
YOU CAN ASK PEOPLE ABOUT THEIR JOURNEYS
(INCLUDING THEIR DETOURS).**

**SIGNIFICANT QUESTION TYPE #1:
WHAT IN YOUR SITUATION IS STOPPING YOU?
WHAT'S MISSING IN YOUR SITUATION?**

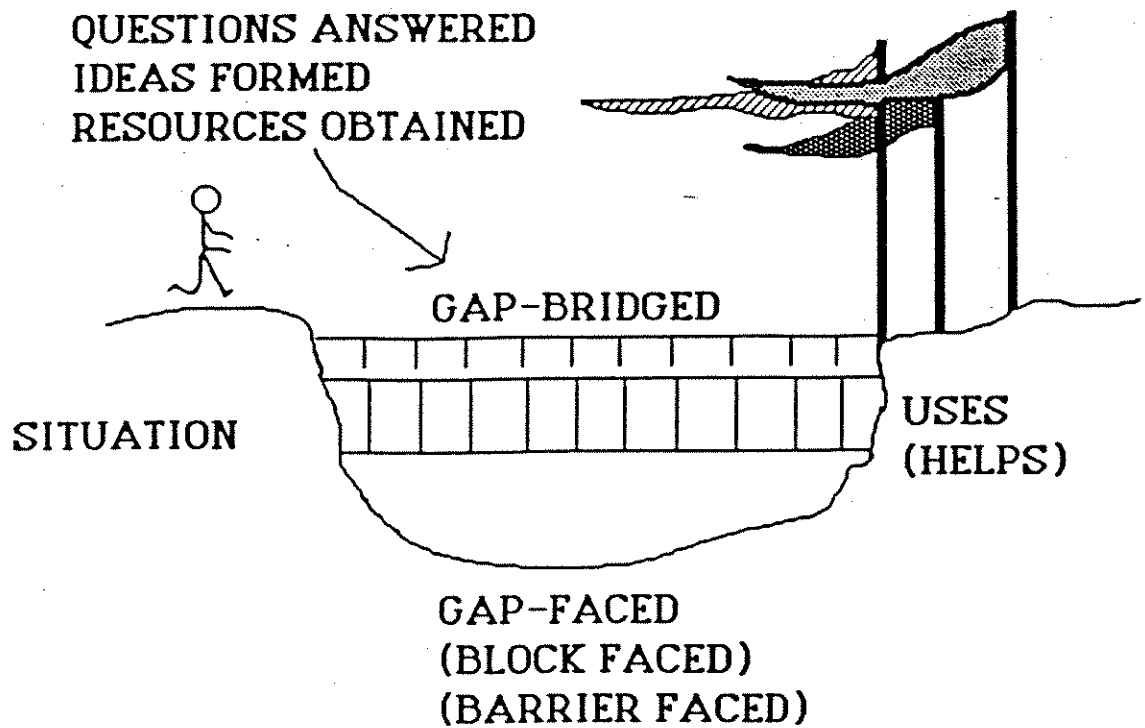
**SIGNIFICANT QUESTION TYPE #2
WHAT QUESTIONS OR CONFUSIONS DO YOU HAVE?**

**SIGNIFICANT QUESTION TYPE #3
WHAT KIND OF HELP DO YOU HOPE TO GET?**

**THESE QUESTIONS FORM
THE SENSE-MAKING TRIANGLE.**



SENSE-MAKING ASSUMES THAT IDENTIFYING PEOPLE'S INFORMATION NEEDS AND DETERMINING WHETHER THEIR NEEDS WERE MET INVOLVES CIRCLING THEIR EXPERIENCES. THIS IS DONE BY ASKING THEM THESE THREE KINDS OF QUESTIONS AND LISTENING CAREFULLY TO THE ANSWERS. THIS PROCESS OF TRACKING THE JOURNEY, AND DETERMINING HOW IT IS STOPPED, AND HOW TO GET IT GOING AGAIN IS WHAT SENSE-MAKING ASSUMES MAKES DEALING WITH "HUMAN INTERESTS" SYSTEMATICALLY AND HUMANLY MANAGEABLE.



ANOTHER WAY TO THINK ABOUT ALL THIS IS TO
 VISUALIZE A HUMAN WALKING THROUGH LIFE.
 IN A PARTICULAR SITUATION, THE HUMAN MEETS A
 GAP OF SOME KIND (SOMETHING BLOCKING THE ROAD,
 PERHAPS, A BARRIER OF SOME KIND).
 IT IS THIS GAP SITUATION WHICH MAY PRECIPITATE
 A DETOUR TO THE LIBRARY.

**THE HUMAN MAKES THE DETOUR BECAUSE HE/SHE
SEES THE LIBRARY AS SOMEHOW ASSISTING IN
BRIDGING THE GAP -- PERHAPS BY PROVIDING HELP
SO THE HUMAN CAN ANSWER QUESTIONS OR CREATE
NEW IDEAS NEEDED TO GET THE JOURNEY GOING
AGAIN, OR BY DIRECTING THE HUMAN TO THE
RESOURCES NEEDED FOR THE JOURNEY.**

**BUT ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS, CREATING IDEAS, OR
EVEN GETTING RESOURCES ARE RARELY ENDS IN
THEMSELVES. RATHER, THE HUMAN SEEKS THEM
BECAUSE HE/SHE SEES THEM AS HELPING IN THE
PARTICULAR WAY THE HUMAN WANTS TO BE HELPED.**

**THIS EMPHASIS ON THE TRIANGLE OF
SITUATIONS-GAPS-HELPS IS THE PRIMARY FOCUS OF
ALL SENSE-MAKING STUDIES,
NO MATTER WHAT THE SPECIFIC PURPOSE.**

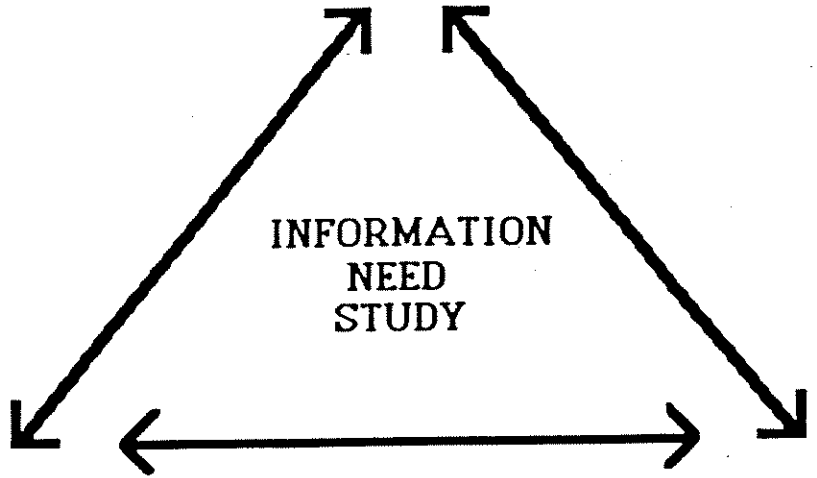
**IN AN INFORMATION NEEDS STUDY, FOR EXAMPLE, THE
CIRCLING OF THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE FOCUSES ON**

- * IDENTIFYING WHAT HAPPENED
IN THE GAP SITUATION**
- * DETERMINING WHAT QUESTIONS
THE PERSON HAD**
- * LEARNING WHAT KIND OF HELP
THE PERSON SOUGHT**

What happened?
What led up to this
situation?



SITUATION



INFORMATION
NEED
STUDY

GAP

USE (HELP)



Did you have questions?
Did anything block you?



What help did you want?
What help did you get?

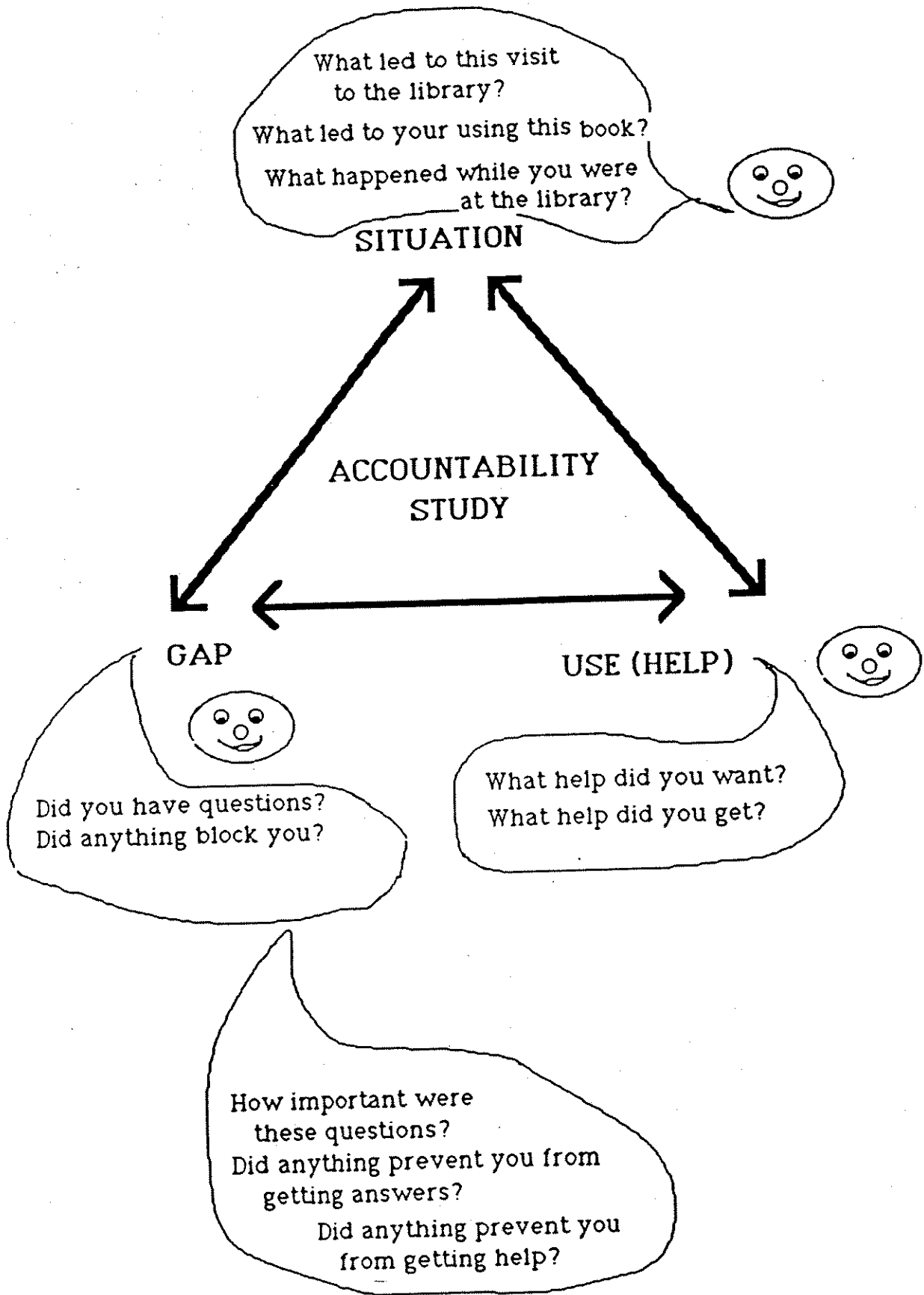
How important were
these questions?
Did anything prevent you from
getting answers?

IN AN ACCOUNTABILITY STUDY, THE FOCUS IS ON:

*** DETERMINING WHAT GAPS LED TO
THE LIBRARY CONTACT AND WHETHER THE LIBRARY
ADDED ANY ADDITIONAL GAPS**

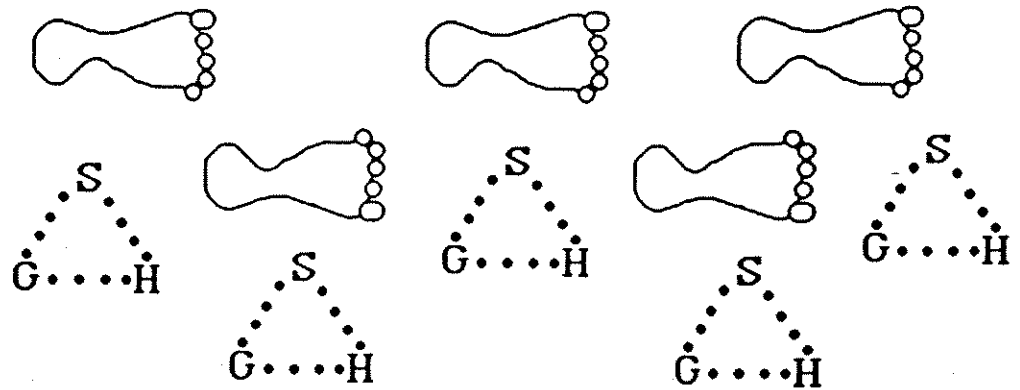
*** LEARNING WHAT QUESTIONS
THE HUMAN BROUGHT TO THE LIBRARY AND
IF ANY OTHERS WERE ADDED AT THE LIBRARY**

*** FINDING OUT WHAT HELPS
THE HUMAN SOUGHT BY THE DETOUR AND
WHAT HELPS, IF ANY, WERE OBTAINED.**



**SENSE-MAKING STUDIES IMPLEMENT THE
TRIANGULAR CIRCLING OF EXPERIENCE
IN A VARIETY OF WAYS. THE CORE RESEARCH
APPROACH IS CALLED THE "TIME-LINE INTERVIEW."**

TIME LINE INTERVIEW

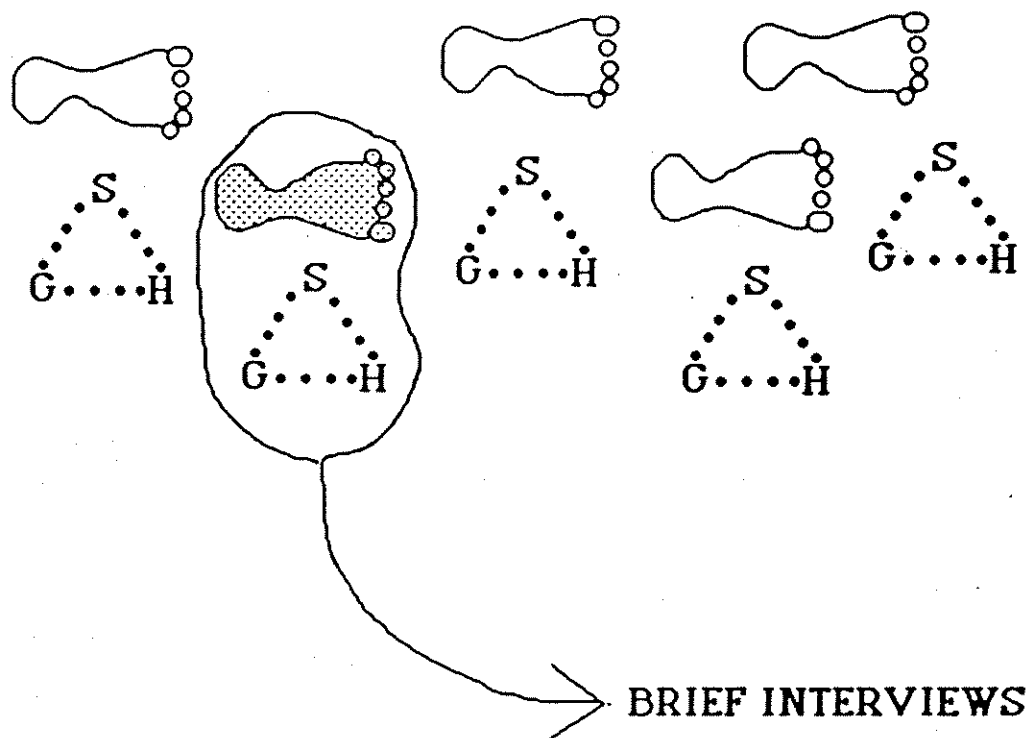


**THE TIME-LINE INTERVIEW ASKS THE HUMAN TO
RECONSTRUCT EACH EVENT IN AN OVERALL
SITUATION STEP-BY-STEP -- THE NATURE OF THE
SITUATION, GAPS, AND HELPS SOUGHT
AT EACH PARTICULAR MOMENT.**

THE TYPICAL TIME-LINE INTERVIEW IS VERY DETAILED AND TAKES CONSIDERABLE TIME. AS A RESEARCH APPROACH IT IS MOST RELEVANT FOR SIGNIFICANT LIFE EXPERIENCES, OR PARTICULARLY TROUBLESOME EVENTS.

BECAUSE OF THIS, THE CORE APPROACH HAS BEEN SIMPLIFIED TO PRODUCE A VARIETY OF BRIEFER APPROACHES. THEY ZERO IN ON PARTICULAR MOMENTS OR ASPECTS OF THE SITUATION.

NO MATTER HOW BRIEF, HOWEVER, ALL SENSE-MAKING METHODS FOCUS ON THE SENSE-MAKING TRIANGLE OF SITUATIONS-GAPS-HELPS.



THE SENSE-MAKING APPROACH ALSO MAKES SOME BASIC ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THE NATURE OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS AS IT IS USED IN HUMAN SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS THAT WANT TO DETERMINE NEEDS AND IF NEEDS HAVE BEEN MET.

FIRST, SENSE-MAKING ASSUMES THAT RESEARCH SHOULD BE PART OF THE EVERYDAY PROCESS OF PROVIDING SERVICE. FOR EXAMPLE, EVERY USER MIGHT BE ASKED HOW DID THE BOOK BEING RETURNED HELP? ONCE A MONTH, EVERY LIBRARIAN MIGHT DO AN IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW WITH A USER...OR A NON-USER. EVERY STAFF MEMBER MIGHT BE TRAINED TO TALK WITH PEOPLE IN WAYS THAT GET TO THE CORE OF THEIR NEEDS. SENSE-MAKING ASSUMES THAT CONDUCTING RESEARCH IS A NECESSARY PART OF THE EBB AND FLOW OF DAILY PRACTICE FOR THOSE WHO WANT TRULY RESPONSIVE SYSTEM OPERATION AND DESIGN. USERS AND POTENTIAL USERS ARE ALL PLACED AT THE CENTER OF THE SYSTEM.

SECOND, SENSE-MAKING ASSUMES THAT GETTING TO THE HEART OF PEOPLE'S NEEDS DOES NOT INVADE PEOPLE'S PRIVACY. RATHER, IT ASSUMES GOOD SERVICE REQUIRES EFFECTIVE NEED CLARIFICATION.

THIRD, SENSE-MAKING ASSUMES THAT EFFECTIVE RESEARCH DOES NOT HAVE TO ALWAYS INVOLVE LARGE SAMPLES. SOMETIMES IT IS NECESSARY (THE CONDITIONS ARE DISCUSSED IN APPENDIX D). BUT, THE ACCUMULATION OF UNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT USERS AND POTENTIAL USERS SYSTEMATICALLY COLLECTED OVER TIME BY A LARGE NUMBER OF LIBRARY PERSONNEL ARE CONSIDERED MORE USEFUL IN THE LONG RUN.

FINALLY, SENSE-MAKING ASSUMES THAT PEOPLE'S STORIES, TOLD IN THEIR OWN WORDS, ARE AS USEFUL RESULTS OF SYSTEMATIC RESEARCH AS COUNTS OF THIS AND THAT. STATISTICS INDICATE THE MAGNITUDE OF ACHIEVEMENTS OR PROBLEMS -- HOW MANY DID THIS? HOW MANY FAILED TO DO THAT? THE STORIES BEHIND THESE COUNTS MAKE THE NUMBERS LIVE AND GIVE THEM A REALITY THAT SPEAKS ELOQUENTLY TO USERS, POTENTIAL USERS, VOTERS.....AND LEGISLATORS