

Your Strategy Thinks It Knows the Road.

It Doesn't.

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| *"The map is not the territory." — Alfred Korzybski, 1931*

We are well-acquainted with that sentence. We quote it in strategy retreats. We nod sagely. And then, almost without exception, we return to our offices and run our organisations as though the map were exactly that.

Consider the situation clearly. Your organisation is on a journey. The territory you are crossing is reality: a landscape of staggering, dynamic complexity. Markets, human behaviours, regulations, cultural undercurrents, technology shifts, competitor moves — none of it is still, none of it is flat, and no single observer can see all of it at once. Yet most leadership teams navigate this terrain with a map that is outdated, two-dimensional, and assembled by a small group of people who share more cognitive habits than they realise.

This is the starting tension that Elixar's discipline of Sensory Leadership was built to resolve.

THE FOUR ELEMENTS OF THE JOURNEY

Let us be precise about the metaphor, because precision here is the point.

The territory is reality — infinite in dimension, constantly changing, only ever partially visible. No executive team has full sight of it. Anyone who believes otherwise is already in danger.

The maps are perceptions. Not one map: many. Every member of your team holds a different map of the same territory — shaped by their function, their history, their senses, their attention, and their blind spots. These maps are not equally accurate, but none is complete. Each carries data the others are missing.

The navigator is your strategy. It takes the maps it is given and proposes a route. The quality of its output depends entirely on the quality and completeness of the cartographic input. Feed

it one map — or several maps that all look suspiciously similar — and the route it proposes will be narrow, conventional, and fragile.

The vehicle is your culture. This is not a short-term asset and it is not substitutable on short notice. Your culture determines which terrain you can cross, at what speed, with what durability. Some tracks are simply not passable in the vehicle you currently drive. Others are well within its range. A strategy that ignores the nature of the vehicle will either stall it, damage it, or push it onto ground it cannot handle — sometimes all three.

Strategy that ignores the vehicle is not bold. It is negligent.

A wise strategy does not try to lock the steering wheel in one direction. Nor does it waste energy exploring every possible track. It navigates — actively, discerningly, in calibrated response to what the terrain is actually showing.

THE MAP PROBLEM MOST ORGANISATIONS REFUSE TO NAME

Here is what happens in practice. A leadership team gathers to set strategic direction. The dominant voice — usually the CEO, sometimes the CFO — opens the navigator application and enters a destination. The navigator, working on its default settings and the most recent data it has been given, proposes the most probable route. The team agrees. The plan is written.

No one questioned what maps were loaded into the system. No one asked whether the maps were current. No one invited the people closest to the ground — those who sense the texture of the terrain daily — to overlay their perception onto the planning surface. The navigator did its job. The maps were the problem.

There is a measurable difference between organisations that navigate with a single, monolithic map and those that deliberately layer multiple, diverse maps before setting a route. The first group produces strategies that resemble their competitors. The second group surfaces the weak signals — those subtle, early, often ambiguous cues that precede significant change — before those signals consolidate into crises or missed opportunities that the first group will explain in hindsight as 'unforeseeable.'

They were not unforeseeable. They were simply not perceived. The data existed. It lived in the minority voices, the operational frontline, the senses of people who were never asked.

The competitive advantage is not a better navigator. It is richer, more diverse cartography.

THE RIGHT SEQUENCE BEFORE YOU ENTER THE ADDRESS

Elixar proposes a specific and disciplined sequence. It is not complicated. But it requires the intellectual honesty to pause before the address is entered.

First: acknowledge the territory's complexity. Reality is not as your last board presentation described it. It is infinitely more textured, more volatile, more surprising. This acknowledgement is not pessimism — it is the precondition for mature leadership.

Second: load the maps. Gather the perceptions that exist within your team. Not opinions — perceptions. The difference is critical. Perceptions are pre-analytical. They surface what people are actually noticing before reasoning filters and editorial anxiety shape it into an acceptable position. Without this step, your strategy is the product of the perceptions of the most powerful voices in the room, which is a dangerously narrow sample of the available sensory data.

Third: understand the vehicle. Before you commit to a route, understand honestly what your culture can and cannot sustain. What is the trust level in this team? Where are the fault lines between declared priorities and lived experience? What transformations have been announced and not yet absorbed? A strategy that your culture cannot metabolise is not ambitious — it is dissonant.

Only then — once the territory has been acknowledged, the maps loaded, and the vehicle assessed — should the navigator be given an address.

This is precisely why Elixar says: Perception Before Strategy.

This sequence is not a philosophical stance. It is an operational discipline. It is the difference between strategy built on assumption and strategy built on reality.

WHY THE SENSORY DIMENSION IS NOT OPTIONAL

A logical question arises: why sensory? Why not simply gather more data, run more surveys, commission better analysis?

Because the maps we are describing are not cognitive products. They are pre-cognitive. They are what your team members notice before analysis begins — the friction they feel in a client interaction, the atmospheric tension in a project review, the faint signal of something changing in a supplier's tone. These perceptions live in the body before they live in a spreadsheet, and

they are systematically excluded from most strategy processes precisely because the processes are designed to receive only what is already structured and articulable.

The neuroscience is unambiguous: sensory activation bypasses rational resistance and engages the emotional and social systems that govern trust, memory, and motivation. This is not an invitation to make leadership experiential for its own sake. It is a recognition that the deepest and most reliable perception — the kind that surfaces what is usually implicit, that catches what the analytical filter would discard — requires a different entry point.

Elixar's programmes begin every module with the human senses for exactly this reason. The Sensagy™ and OlfaTeam™ programmes use structured sensory experiences not as warm-up exercises but as a deliberate method to expand the perceptual field before management frameworks are applied. The senses open what cognition alone would keep closed.

Starting each session this way is not a creative preference. It is a business survival ritual.

FROM DIVERGENCE TO GROUPFLOW — WITHOUT LOSING THE ROAD

The concern that executives raise at this point is legitimate: if we open up diverse perceptions, will we lose coherence? Will we produce endless debate and no decisions?

The Sensory Leadership framework answers this directly. Perceptual diversity is not preserved indefinitely — it is preserved up to the point of decision. The sequence moves deliberately from sensory divergence (surfacing different maps without pressure to converge) through structured sense-making (using management frameworks to organise what has been surfaced) to strategic convergence (alignment on decisions, not on uniform perceptions).

The outcome, when the sequence is executed well, is what we call Groupflow. Unlike groupthink — which produces the illusion of alignment at the cost of critical intelligence — Groupflow translates perceptual diversity into coordinated performance. The team acts with speed and coherence while each member retains the perceptual richness that will generate the next cycle of insight.

The navigator has been given better maps. The vehicle has been understood. The route is committed and owned by the team that built it together.

AN INVITATION, NOT A CONCLUSION

The organisations that will lead through the next decade of disruption will not be those with the most sophisticated analytical tools. They will be those whose leaders have cultivated the

discipline of perceiving more, together — and who build their strategy on the richness of that collective perception rather than on the confidence of a single, well-formatted slide.

Sensory Leadership is that discipline. It is the structured, reproducible, scientifically grounded practice of expanding the perceptual field before engaging the strategic mind. It does not replace frameworks. It creates the conditions under which frameworks become genuinely useful.

If you recognise your organisation in any of these elements — the next step is a conversation.

Discover the full framework at sensoryleadership.org · Contact Elixar at projects@elixar.eu

#SensoryLeadership #PerceptionBeforeStrategy #CollectiveDecisionMaking #FutureOfWork #Leadership

About the Elixar services

Elixar is the sole provider of comprehensive Sensory Leadership programmes — delivered in-person, anywhere in the world, in English, French, and Italian. Programmes range from the full Sensagy™ journey (24 hours, six modules, from sensory awareness to strategic direction) to the focused OlfaTeam™ format (10 hours, five modules, anchored in olfactory practice and project management application) to keynotes and half-day interventions in retreats and seminars.

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About the Founder of Elixar

Jeremy Leroux is a Managing Director and strategic advisor (Cert. MCI, California) with more than twenty years of international leadership experience in B2B industries spanning beverages, food ingredients, and pharmaceutical applications to then delve into the world of perfumes (Cert. Olfactive Design, Politecnico di Milano). Having lived and worked across France, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, the United States, and Italy, he graduated in France as an Engineer and MSc in Food Processes and obtained an MBA in California. He founded Elixar on the conviction that sensory experience is and will be a foundation for the performance of humans and businesses.

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