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Sense-Making and Organizational Change

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ABSTRACT

To establish how sense-making occurs within organizational change, this thesis argues that, although sharing may exist at some level, shared interpretations among organizational members are not always possible within, or necessary to, collective activity during times of change. The qualitative research presented in this thesis focusses upon the communication behaviors of a team undergoing a change initiative to investigate the extent of their shared interpretations. Observation of formal and informal meetings and semi-structured interviews revealed that members under investigation used common structures within their organizational background to make sense of significant events surrounding the change initiative. While members did not share specific interpretations of the change initiative, most did make sense of their organization in terms of communication, culture and change processes and shared an overriding sense of an existence of "process". This conclusion shows the structurational nature of sense-making in times of change, and uncovers the need for further research linking sense-making, structuration theory and organizational change.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Change is incredibly prevalent in today's organizations. Increasing globalization, competition, and technological advances in an organization's external environment necessitate almost constant change and adaptation within the organization.

This necessity for organizations to adapt to their turbulent environment has led to increasing efforts to plan change within organizations. Change consultants designing specific change processes and helping managers and members cope with various levels of change is an event experienced by most present-day organizations. Although planned change, to some extent, is inevitable and expected in present day organizations, research indicates that change still causes tremendous anxiety and emotional upheaval among organizational members. No matter how technically or task-focussed a planned change strategy is, it still must be dealt with, and given meaning by, the people doing the work. This points to the need to address organizational culture and communication as integral parts of any planned change process.

While extensive research has been done on organizational culture and communication processes, very little of this research focusses on how these processes exist *within* planned organizational change. The present study, therefore, investigates the culture and communication processes that happen within change, with a specific focus upon how organizational members "make sense" of their work environment during a planned change initiative.

Given the upheaval that change causes organizational members, how do they cope and continue to accomplish their everyday activities during a change initiative? Does the

accomplishment of these everyday activities during a change initiative require members to share common visions or interpretations of the organization, or does it merely require them to share practices and actions? The present study addresses these questions to gain more understanding of how the cultural process of sense-making happens during planned organizational change initiatives.

Theoretical Framework

This thesis adopts an interpretive approach to organizations and organizational culture in that it focusses upon the "processes and experiences through which people construct organizational reality" (Smircich & Calas, 1987: 231). In this interpretive approach, organizational culture is not a variable that an organization has to varying degrees depending on such factors as the organization's age, socialization processes and leadership; but rather it is a "process of maintaining and creating meaning" as patterns for behavior (Carbaugh, 1985: 34). In this way, organizational culture is "both product and process, the shaper of human interaction and the outcome of it, continually created and recreated by people's ongoing interactions" (Jelinek, Smircich, Hirsch, 1983: 331).

Within this interpretive view of organizational culture as "the collective construction of social reality," sense-making is an important cognitive and communicative activity (Sackmann, 1991: 33). Sense-making is the "ongoing accomplishment" whereby organizational members attribute meaning to events (Weick, 1995: 15). A key question surrounding sense-making is: "How do people make sense of their situation and how does this sense-making facilitate or hinder coordinated action?" (Smircich & Calas, 1987: 240).

Adopting Weick's view that organizing involves the connection of meaning and coordinated action through communication, communicating is central to sense-making, and therefore, to organizing (Weick, 1995: 170). Through communication, this meaning generated by sense-making becomes a system of shared knowledge or meanings among organizational members, which, in turn, creates organizational culture. In this way, communication within organizations "simultaneously creates (and thus maintains) and reflects the sense-making of the organization" (Carbaugh, 1985: 34).

This thesis is concerned with a debate that exists within organizational culture literature about whether shared meaning or shared action is the foundation upon which organizational culture is based. Management-oriented literature operating from a functionalist perspective (Schein, Ott, Bormann, Deal and Kennedy) argue that the key to a "strong" organizational culture is shared values, beliefs and meanings among organizational members. Because this literature does not focus upon members' meanings except at a superficial level, these theorists simply assume that shared meaning is a prerequisite to organizational culture and organized activity.

This thesis adopts a critical perspective towards this management-oriented literature, and challenges its assumption of shared meaning by examining the literature and theories of organizational culture and sense-making, and proposing that shared meaning is not always possible within, or necessary to, organizational culture and organized activity. Eisenberg, for instance, criticizes the functionalist, management-oriented literature as exhibiting a "bias toward homogeneity and managerial control" (Eisenberg, 1986: 91). Eisenberg is one of many theorists discussed in this thesis (Weick, Gray, Donnellon & Bougon, Czarniawska-Joerges) who counters this homogeneous view of meanings within

organizations and suggests that "strong bonds can be created in organizations without shared interpretations" (Eisenberg, 1986: 92). In this view, "coordinated action can often be more important than coordination of beliefs" (Eisenberg, 1990: 145).

Weick's theory of sense-making is useful to the alternative perspective that shared interpretations and beliefs are not required for communicating and organizing. Weick argues that organizations are constantly created and recreated by their members' communication, and that this communication is not dependent upon overarching, shared meanings, but rather interlocked behaviors. Although some level of shared meaning may exist, this is not a prerequisite to coordinated activity. Rather, communication is the central process in organizing and through their communication activity, members create and recreate meaning and coordinate their activity. Weick elaborates upon this notion of interlocked behaviors with his mutual equivalence structures and means-convergence models. Not only does Weick challenge the assumption of shared meaning within organizations, but his models demonstrate that shared action actually occurs *before* shared meaning.

When discussing the "shared action" of organizations, this also points toward communication among organizational members as a key element in organizing. As Argyris, Putnam and McLain-Smith argue, "talk *is* action" because it is meaningful and is a "window on practical reasoning" (Argyris, Putnam, McLain-Smith, 1985: 57, 59). Because communication is integral to sense-making and organizing, this research examines the communication and interaction of organizational members during an organizational change to infer what collective meaning exists, if it exists at all, among these members.

This research applies Giddens' meta-theory of Structuration to sense-making in organizations. Structuration theory's duality of structure explains the processual nature of sense-making and organizational culture, the importance of shared action over shared meaning, the assumption that organizational members are knowledgeable agents who actively enact their own organizational environment, and the use of past structures to make sense of current situations. Structuration theory argues that human action and cognition are continuous processes through which knowledgeable agents constantly monitor, and are reflexive about, their activities. Through communication, members create their organizational culture. This created, or enacted, environment influences their communication and sense-making which further influences their culture and so on.

This thesis focusses the above discussion of organizational culture, communication and sense-making into the phenomenon of organizational change. While the literature on organizational change is wide-ranging, this thesis specifically examines literature on traditional management theories of organizational change, recent critical approaches that discuss change at the level of cultural understandings and beliefs, and cultural theories of change that incorporate sense-making within organizational change.

The traditional typologies of technological, structural, and individual-behavioral approaches to change, although widely accepted for many years, narrowly-define organizational change and ignore cultural processes within it. Management of change literature (D.Klein, Nadler, Beckhard & Harris, Galpin) focusses upon prescriptive, "how-to" directives for managers wishing to accomplish organizational change with as little resistance as possible from employees. This literature, like the management-oriented literature on organizational culture, emphasizes the importance of a strong leader and the

necessity of having, and maintaining, shared vision among members during an organizational change.

More recent critical approaches to change, however, move away from this prescriptive view by describing how cultural processes can affect an organization's adaptability to change (Bartunek & Moch, Emery & Trist, Argyris, Morley, Morgan & Ramirez). An important theoretical basis to these approaches is Emery and Trist's socio-technical theory of organizational environments which discusses how turbulence in the external environment forces organizations to change. As Structuration theory argues, individuals and organizations actively create, and are created by, their environment. In this way, organizations must have "requisite variety" to constantly change to cope with their environment (Trist, 1985: 171). An environment, however, also refers to an organization's internal environment, or its culture. Because organizational environments are given meaning, or enacted, by their members, this points to the relevance of sense-making processes to understanding organizational adaptation, or change.

Action science and action learning incorporate cultural and sense-making processes into methods helping organizations adapt to environmental turbulence. These methods recognize that most organizational change occurs only at the superficial level of espoused theories (what people claim to follow), but that organizations must become aware of the theories-in-use that guide their action in order to fundamentally change and learn to adapt to turbulent environments.

Cultural theories of change put forth that to understand the sense-making that happens within change, one must investigate how organizational members use past schemas and structures to make sense of current ambiguous situations. Sense-making

during change involves members trying to "construct some link between the present situation and 'relevant' prior situations to make sense" of the interruption (Weick, 1995: 46). Weick suggests that ambiguous and equivocal situations, such as organizational change, combine to "produce a shock that engages sense-making" (Weick 1995: 94). This establishes a link between sense-making and change that this research explores.

Focus

Although literature and research on theories of organizational culture and sense-making, and on theories of organizational change exist separately, there exists very little theoretical or practical research into how sense-making actually happens *within* organizational change. The present research, therefore, investigates how cultural and sense-making processes happen within an organization undergoing an internal reorganization.

To focus this investigation, sense-making within organizational change is examined in terms of the level of shared interpretations among members about events surrounding the change initiative. The following question guides this research: To what extent do shared interpretations exist among organizational members undergoing some level of change? For purposes of accuracy in responding to this question, shared interpretations are defined as shared or coincident meanings as put forth by the management-oriented, organizational culture literature discussed earlier. By exploring the extent to which shared interpretations exist within an organization undergoing some level of organizational change, this research seeks to demonstrate that, although sharing may exist at some level,

specific shared interpretations are not a necessary prerequisite to collective activity within organizations.

Research

To investigate organizational members' sense-making during a planned change initiative, this research adopted an interpretive, qualitative approach. A qualitative approach was most appropriate for this investigation because qualitative methods are "similar to the interpretive procedures we make use of as we go about our everyday life" (Van Maanen, 1979: 520-21).

My research focusses upon an environmental Team (Team) of ten members within a large chemical manufacturing organization (Corp) that was undergoing an internally-conducted change process. I obtained permission to observe meetings relevant to the change process and to conduct interviews with members of Team. From the date of the first observed meeting until the final interview, I had access to the research site for a period of six months. In total, I observed seven of the Change Project Team's (Project) meetings, one meeting with Team itself and two periods of informal observation.

These observations gave me some background on the cultures of Corp and Team, Team's situation regarding this change, and Corp's change process itself, which prepared me for conducting individual interviews with five members of Team, two Team leaders and the change leader. The observations allowed me to focus my interview questions to gather as much information as possible within the one-hour time frame of each interview about the member's feelings and interpretations of Team's current situation and its change initiative.

One severe limitation of the research was my inability to attend Team meetings beginning halfway through the research period at the request of one of the Team members. Although I attended one meeting which generated a lot of useful data, one Team member subsequently told the Team leaders that he was uncomfortable with my presence because I was not an employee of Corp. Because the Team leaders depended upon these meetings to inform, and receive feedback from, Team members, I was not invited to any further meetings.

In spite of this limitation, this research generated useful and interesting data regarding members' sense-making of Team's change initiative. Using the qualitative methods of observation and semi-structured interviews, I examined various Team and Project members' communication and interactions during Team's change initiative and discovered that, while members did not share specific interpretations of the change initiative, most members' shared an overriding sense of an existence of "process" as a means of making sense of the change initiative and as a way of sharing their action. The results of this research indicate that Corp members under investigation used common structures of communication, culture and change processes within their organizational background to make sense of significant events surrounding the change initiative.

Outline of the Thesis

Chapter Two reviews relevant organizational culture and sense-making literature and explains some important theories of organizational culture and sense-making, and suggests that Structuration theory is useful as a guiding meta-theory for the above first-order theories. Functionalist, management-oriented literature that assumes that shared

interpretations among organizational members is a prerequisite for organizing is discussed. The literature acknowledging that shared interpretations among members is less important than shared action, however, is presented as the guiding view for this thesis. Weick's enactment-selection-retention model, mutual equivalence structure and means-convergence model are explained to support the theory that communicating and organizing happen without complete sharing of meaning and interpretations among organizational members. Furthermore, Structuration theory is explained as a general social theory that legitimates sense-making's processual nature and the guiding notion that sharing is not required or possible for communication and organization to occur within members of a group.

Chapter Three reviews the literature on organizational change, with a focus upon how cultural processes and sense-making affect change. Traditional and management approaches to change are presented to show that, although they discuss change at a surface-level only, these are the theories that most change facilitators actually follow. Recent critical approaches to change are discussed in detail as they analyze change at the level of belief and cognitive systems and introduce cultural and sense-making processes into organizational change. This includes an explanation of the relation of organizational environments to organizational adaptation, and how action learning's method helps organizations learn and change to cope with turbulent environments. A discussion of cultural theories of change establish schemas, causal maps and structures as links between sense-making and change, as these structures inevitably affect an organization's ability to learn and change. These cultural theories of change show that sense-making within change can be understood as a structurational process in which members' actively use past

schemas or structures to make sense of present, equivocal, organizational change events. The small amount of literature and research conducted about sense-making processes *within* organizational change points to the need for more practical research in this area.

Chapter Four explains the methodology of the research and justifies why the qualitative methods of observation and semi-structured interviews were most appropriate to collect information about the sense-making of change within an organizational group. This chapter describes the practical research including the research site, the groups under investigation, Corp's change process and the design of the research. Finally, limitations encountered during data collection are described, including my lack of access to Team meetings, sampling for interviews, and my role as a researcher.

Chapter Five presents the results obtained from observations of, and interviews with, Corp members affected by Team's change initiative. Firstly, Corp's background is presented in detail as the schemas or structures upon which members draw, to make sense of ambiguous events surrounding the change initiative. Results indicate that the structures that Corp members' rely upon include communication, culture and change processes. Since sense-making is often initiated by the shock caused by ambiguous or equivocal situations, this chapter describes Team's change initiative as a sequence of significant, ambiguous events that happened during the period of data collection. These events are first described from an "outsider's" perspective, then members' communication and interaction in each of these events are analyzed to interpret how, and to what extent, members use the structures of communication, input and change processes to make sense of these events. This analysis revealed that most members do make sense of events surrounding Team's change initiative in terms of these structures and that, while members

do not always share interpretations about specific processes, they share a general structure of the existence of "process", and rely upon this structure to coordinate their action during the change initiative.

Chapter Six summarizes the conclusions put forth by the results and suggests possible implications generated by these conclusions. The conclusion is that most members made sense of their organizational environment during the change initiative in terms of communication, culture and change processes, and shared an overriding sense of an existence of "process" as a means of making sense of their organization and coordinating their actions. This supports this thesis' contention that, although some level of sharing among organizational members is required to coordinate activity, this is most likely to be a sharing of action, rather than an overarching, sharing of interpretations or meaning.

CHAPTER TWO

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURES AND SENSE-MAKING

Although there exists an extensive literature concerning various approaches to organizational culture, this chapter briefly defines the topic and discusses it only as it relates to the more specific cultural process of sense-making. This chapter examines literature on cultural and sense-making processes including a detailed explanation of Karl Weick's sense-making theory, and an application of Anthony Giddens' Structuration Theory to sense-making in organizations. The question that guides the present research is: To what extent do shared interpretations exist among organization members undergoing some level of change? This chapter incorporates this question into its discussion of organizational sense-making with its presentation of the debate about whether the processes of organizing and sense-making are dependent upon shared meanings, or merely upon shared action among organizational members. Therefore, this chapter's presentation of the literature on organizational sense-making and its relevance to the question of the extent of shared meanings required for organizing, provides the basis for the discussion in Chapter Three of the relationship of sense-making and organizational change.

Organizational Culture

An understanding of the term "organizational culture" and its use in organizational and management literature provides the groundwork for the present discussion of sense-making of organizational change. Linda Smircich explains the debate in the literature surrounding the definition of organizational culture. In her view, much management literature treats culture as an independent variable and as being "something an

organization *has*" (Smircich, 1983b: 347). In contrast, organizational theory and related cognitive literature treat culture as a root metaphor for organizations and view culture as "something an organization *is*" (Smircich, 1983b, 347). This research adopts the latter viewpoint.

The following quote from Gareth Morgan's Images of Organization explains one view of the link between organizational culture and sense-making:

> "Shared meaning, shared understanding, and shared sense making are all different ways of describing culture. In talking about culture we are really talking about a process of reality construction that allows people to see and understand particular events, actions, objects, utterances, or situations in distinctive ways. These patterns of understanding also provide a basis for making one's own behavior sensible and meaningful" (Morgan, 1986: 128).

Morgan, therefore, views organizational culture and sense-making as one and the same phenomenon; thus, in his view, culture is something an organization is.

Donal Carbaugh also expresses this view of organizational culture: "An organizational culture is that shared system of symbols and meaning, performed in speech, that constitutes and reveals a sense of work-life" (Carbaugh, 1986: 90). He adds that organizational culture is a "particular way of speaking and meaning, a way of sense making, regarding any activity relevant to a common tasks" (Carbaugh, 1986: 90).[1] Other theorists, as will be described in more detail within the Shared Meaning section of this literature review, view culture as something that an organization has, or does not have, to varying degrees.

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[1] Others who view organizational culture in this way include: Sackmann, Czarniawska-Joerges, Pedersen & Sorensen, and Pacanowsky.

Organizations and Sense-making

Within the dynamic, fluctuating process of organizational culture exists the process of reality construction called sense-making. In this section, we explore the relation between organizations and sense-making in order to situate sense-making in relation to organizational change. Karl Weick suggests that "both organizations and sense-making processes are cut from the same cloth" (Weick, 1995: 82). Organizations are sense-making systems because they are structures in which coordinated action and interpretations are connected through communication (Weick, 1995: 170). Organizations enact and attach meaning to recurring actions to achieve some sort of stability through predictability. As Weick mentions in his discussion of sense-making as confirmation of expectations and mutual prediction, "a sensible event is one that resembles something that has happened before"(Weick, 1995: 170).

Definition of Sense-making

Since much of this thesis is based on the theories and ideas presented by Karl Weick, his definition of sense-making is most appropriate: "To talk about sense-making is to talk about reality as an ongoing accomplishment that takes form when people make retrospective sense of the situations in which they find themselves and their creations" (Weick, 1995: 15). Because sense-making differs among people, "this difference sets the stage for much activity that goes on in organizations: people spending time trying to make their views of the world more similar" (Weick, 1979: 149). Sonja Sackmann also provides a useful, though somewhat more general, definition: "Sense making is a complicated,

holistic process in which perception, existing knowledge, and judgments interact with each other" (Sackmann, 1991: 33). Within Weick's definition of sense-making, the phrase "ongoing accomplishment" suggests one of the most relevant aspects of sense-making for this research. Sense-making is a continual process of "the ways people generate what they interpret" (Weick, 1995: 13).

Although sense-making and interpretation are often used interchangeably, Weick makes an important distinction between the two. Interpreting implies a discovery of a product that already exists. Sense-making, however, is "less about discovery than it is about invention" (Weick, 1995: 13). In this way, sense-making highlights the active process of creation that leads to a product of interpretation (Weick, 1995: 14). Weick criticizes Gareth Morgan's treatment of sense-making as a metaphor for interpretation and suggests, rather, that sense-making "is literally just what it says it is" (Weick, 1995: 16). Weick also defines sense-making as a connection of the frames that summarize past experience and the cues and labels that describe present experience (Weick, 1995: 111). This definition highlights the importance of past frames of reference and actions as a way to make sense of present situations and introduces the relevance of tangible, communicational artifacts such as organizational stories and myths as evidence of sense-making. Smircich acknowledges that this cognitive orientation to organizational culture links thought to action and views organizations as knowledge systems; this opens up new avenues for understanding organized activity which this research will explore (Smircich, 1983b: 350).

Sense-making and Communication

With the link between organizational culture and sense-making established, the

question remains: What role does communication play in the sense-making process in

organizations? The literature responds to this question with assumptions and explanations

describing communication's role in organizing and sense-making. We can study the

process of sense-making by observing communication behavior because "ideas… are

inherently embroiled in what people do, in the texture of the practices of daily life."

(Giddens, 1981: 68, quoted in Eisenberg, 1990: 142). In this way, actions (including

communication), rather than shared beliefs, are integral to sense-making in organizations.

Interpretive approaches to organizational sense-making state that organizing and

sense-making are created through communication. People organize by communicating;

communication helps to evolve some level of shared understanding around common

issues. In this way, "the communicating processes inherent in organizing create an

organizational culture, revealed through its communicating activities…" (Schall, 1983:

560). Gray, Bougon and Donnellon describe this link between communication and sense-

making:

> "Social interactions, and communication in particular, are the
> primary vehicles by which coincident interpretations of reality
> are created, transmitted, and sustained. Through
> communication, concepts come to embody similar meanings
> for two or more individuals, that is, they become coincident".
> (Gray, Bougon & Donnellon, 1985: 85)

The role of communication in organizational culture and sense-making is described

in literature describing communication artifacts as clues to the sense-making process

within organizations (Morgan, 1986; Carbaugh, 1985 & 1986; Brown, 1986: Pacanowsky

& O'Donnell-Trujillo 1982 &1983). The culture approach to organizations is about "coming to understand how organizational life is accomplished communicatively (Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1982: 121). In this way, tangible, visible artifacts such as stories and rituals are shared symbols that communicate an organization's way of making sense of its reality.

Although Edgar Schein's model of culture will be discussed in more detail later, his concept of visible artifacts in organizational culture is relevant to this discussion of communication and sense-making. Schein proposes that one of three "levels" of culture is constituted by visible artifacts; these artifacts are the constructed environments of the organization and include dress codes, organizational charts, office layout and anything externally visible (Schein, 1984: 3). Pedersen and Sorensen describe the "artifacts" in Edgar Schein's model of culture as being "easy to obtain" because they are observable by the outside researcher (Pedersen & Sorensen, 1989: 13). Members of the organization, however, are rarely conscious about these artifacts because they are part of their daily work life (Pedersen & Sorensen, 1989: 13). Schein, therefore, concentrates upon artifacts primarily as a research tool. Morgan takes Schein's artifacts a step further, however, and suggests that the organizational structure, rules, policies, goals, missions, and procedures are "primary points of reference for the way people think about and make sense of the contexts in which they work" (Morgan, 1986: 132). Like Schein, Morgan argues that these surface clues point to deeper values that comprise organizational culture (Morgan, 1986: 133).

Mary Helen Brown emphasizes the importance of shared symbols among organizational members as "...individuals can analyze and evaluate and make sense of the

events of everyday life through a set of symbols shared with the others around them" (Brown, 1986: 72). An organizational story is a "narrative presenting a series of events" that is a "mode of human sense making" and is used as a means of transmitting and organizing information (Brown, 1986: 73-74). In this way, stories not only reveal an organization's values and sense-making processes to an outside researcher, but actually help the organizational member clarify present situations according to past ones. Stories help organizational members to relate present, and possibly unfamiliar, situations to more familiar past events to explain "how things happen" and to describe "what the organization is like" (Brown, 1986: 74, 79). Stories add importance and validity to certain experiences and suggest a way of dealing with possible future scenarios (Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983: 139).

Joanne Martin's suggestion that organizational stories are blueprints that can be used to predict future organizational behavior, reinforces the link among communication artifacts, meaning and action (Martin, 1982: 287). Martin suggests that organizational stories have a cognitive and behavioral impact on members because their "concrete language makes them memorable, and then what is remembered influences attitudes" (Martin, 1982: 299).

Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo suggest that organizational culture is comprised of rituals of communication performance which reveal "the ways of making sense" within this culture (Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983: 145). These rituals help members punctuate their ongoing flow of experience, introduce a sense of regularity and create a level of shared reality (Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983: 135). Types of rituals are personal (performed by one individual), task (the practices for getting the job

done, whether authorized by supervisors or not), social (non-work related activities), and organizational (formal rules, rites and ceremonies) (Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983: 135-137).

These artifacts represent parts or "mini-accomplishments" within the "ongoing accomplishment" of organizational culture (Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983: 126). Communication artifacts such as stories and rituals, therefore, are modes of cultural expression which exemplify how communication activities help people make sense of their organizational environments. In studying the constructs of visible communication artifacts, therefore, researchers can better understand the patterns of meaning in a particular organization. This is one of the aims of this research.

Organizational Culture and Sense-making as Shared Meaning

The previous discussion of organizational culture as the process of collective sense-making anticipates the debate about shared meanings within organizations. Do meanings, interpretations, values and beliefs need to be shared in order for collective, organized action to occur? The following literature reflects the belief that organizational culture is a property or quality of an organization (something an organization *has*, as Smircich says) and that organizational communication creates an organization's shared reality. This shared reality is essential to creating and maintaining a functioning, coordinated organization.

This perspective of shared reality as being a necessary prerequisite to communicating and organizing does not address what sort of process creates this shared reality, but rather assumes that this shared reality exists through various examples of

communication. Although many works give detailed examples of communication (such as stories and rituals) that demonstrate that shared reality exists among members of an organization, they do not explain how this shared reality is created. Thus, this literature tends to ignore the complexity of human cognition and the diversity of educational, social and intellectual factors among members of even closely-knit organizations.

Edgar Schein's model of the levels of culture and their interaction reveals his belief that shared basic assumptions are the basis of organizational culture: "A culture is a set of basic tacit assumptions about how the world is... that is shared by a set of people and determines their perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and... their overt behavior" (Schein, 1996: 3). Schein's three levels of culture are visible artifacts, espoused values, and underlying, basic assumptions. As discussed previously, artifacts represent the constructed environment of the organization (Schein, 1984: 3). Espoused values are "what people *say* is the reason for their behavior" and are their rationalizations of their behavior (Schein, 1984: 3). Basic assumptions are unconscious, but they "actually determine how group members perceive, think, and feel" (Schein, 1984: 3).

Schein's definition of culture does not acknowledge its dynamic and fluctuating nature. He describes culture as serving the function of stabilizing environments rather than viewing culture as a dynamic process of sense-making (Schein, 1984: 10). He suggests that socialization of new members to the ways of the culture is a test of the strength of an organization's culture. "If a group passes on with conviction elements of a way of perceiving, thinking, and feeling, we can assume that that group has had enough stability and has shared enough common experiences to have developed a culture" (Schein, 1984: 7). This ultimately raises the question of what is "enough" and suggests

that culture can be measured in terms of "amount" (Schein, 1984: 7). Schein classifies

cultures according to whether they are strong or weak; he defines the strength of a culture

in terms of the homogeneity and stability of group membership and the length and intensity

of the group's shared experiences (Schein, 1984: 7). What about young organizations

that, by Schein's definition, do not meet the requirements for having a "strong" culture?

Although these young organizations arguably still function, have some discernible culture,

and are involved in sense-making, Schein never explains how they fit into his cultural

model.

J. Steven Ott follows Schein's theories of organizational culture and shared

interpretations. He suggests that "shared beliefs, values, moral and ethical codes, and

ideologies are central to organizational culture" (Ott, 1989: 41), and that basic

assumptions really are the organizational culture because these assumptions are what the

organization as a whole actually believes as opposed to what they say they believe (Ott,

1989: 44). Like Schein, Ott believes that the three levels of culture are linked and that

"beliefs and values provide the justification for organizational action" (Ott, 1989: 40).

Ernest Bormann's discussion of symbolic convergence also emphasizes the

importance of shared meanings or interpretations to organizational culture. Symbolic

convergence happens when portions of private symbolic worlds overlap to create a

common consciousness among group members which then establishes a basis for

communication to occur (Bormann, 1983: 102). Bormann believes that symbolic

convergence theory "explains the communicative process by which sense-making is

accomplished" (Bormann, 1983: 122). Members share experiences or stories that other

members can identify with, and relate to, and these members share emotions and interpret

this experience or story in the same manner (Bormann, 1983: 104). In this way, Bormann suggests that members cooperate with each other *because* they share the same rhetorical vision (Bormann, 1983: 118) ; thus, sharing interpretations precedes coordinated action. He never questions, however, whether this sharing is actually required for coordinated action, but simply assumes that it does. He suggests that symbolic convergence "creates, maintains, and allows people to achieve empathic communion as well as a meeting of the minds" (Bormann, 1983: 102). This loaded statement attributes a great deal of linkage and understanding among potentially diverse members of an organization.

Kotter and Heskett emphasize the functionalist view of culture and sense-making as being leader-driven. They suggest that the common pattern in the emergence of corporate cultures is the creation, and subsequent implementation, of a vision by a top leader in the organization and that this vision guides members and shapes their actions (Kotter & Heskett, 1992: 8). They actually define shared values as "important concerns and goals that are shared by most of the people in a group, that tend to shape group behavior, and that often persist over time..." (Kotter &Heskett, 1992: 5).

Deal and Kennedy's <u>Corporate Cultures</u> also exemplifies this functionalist view of culture and sense-making. In their research on various corporations, they focus their analysis upon how a shared vision among organizational members can increase organizational effectiveness. Successful companies have managers who have created and communicated values that are "known and shared by all the people who work for the company" (Deal & Kennedy, 1982: 22). They suggest that shared values are "a reality in the minds of most people" and that these values are created and maintained as an "informal control system" (Deal & Kennedy, 1982: 23, 33). In this way, culture does not

exist within the minds of the organizational members, but rather is created by "heroes" and "culture-builders" who pursue a "vision" and then communicate this vision to the organization (Deal & Kennedy, 1982: 62, 38). To Deal and Kennedy, therefore, these shared values are a necessary prerequisite for coordinated action within a successful organization. This functionalist view of culture also suggests that a strong culture can be quantified in productivity results: "The stronger the culture, the richer and more complex the value system, the longer the chain of evidence that these values really do produce results" (Deal & Kennedy, 1982: 30).[2]

Reflections about Shared Meaning in Sense-making

Although the present research does not focus upon management theory, the assumption in this literature concerning management's control over organizational sense-making raises an important issue that the present research must address. This thesis acknowledges, to some extent, that managers can "manage" and help create more points of connection among various organizational members' interpretations of organizational reality. However, this thesis does not agree with a functionalist view of organizational sense-making in which managers can follow certain guidelines that will allow them to "control" and "create" a strong, shared reality. While communication is essential to organizing, complete sharing of interpretations and organizational realities is not essential for communication to take place.

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[2] For another example of this management-centered approach to sense-making, see Pfeffer's 1981 article. In this cognitive approach to managerial action, Pfeffer views organizations as "systems of shared meanings, entities in which there exists a shared consensus concerning the social construction of reality" and suggests that "management provides rationalizations... that make sense of and thereby explain the

The views of sense-making and organizational culture contained in the literature above are described as functionalist because they view organizations as existing within an environment which controls its behavior rather than viewing culture and shared interpretations as something created and re-created by the organization itself (Smircich, 1983b: 347). Smircich acknowledges that the concern of literature which treats culture as an organizational variable is "how to mold and shape internal culture in particular ways and how to change culture, consistent with managerial purposes" (Smircich, 1983b: 346). This literature assumes that culture serves the functions of internal integration and coordination, and that if these two functions are not fulfilled, efficiency suffers (Sackmann, 1990, 123). Eisenberg criticizes this strong culture viewpoint because its preoccupation with "consensus on core values and beliefs is an often unrealistic desire to resolve differences, rather than learn to live with them" (Eisenberg, 1990: 142). Although Morgan acknowledges that managers can influence an organization's culture because culture and meaning constantly evolve in the process of organizing, he questions how these "management gurus" can "create" and control culture (Morgan, 1986: 138-39).[3]

Organizational Sense-making as Shared Action

In contrast to the previous view that sense-making is about communication which creates a shared vision of reality, some theorists acknowledge that, although communication is essential to organizing, it does not require sharing of goals, beliefs and values. Rather, most communication in organizations takes place in situations of minimal

organization's activities" (Pfeffer, 1981: 9,5). He shares Kotter & Heskett and Deal & Kennedy's view of managers as controllers and creators of organizational meaning.

sharing of meanings; in this way, shared action or enacting behavior is a prerequisite for organized activity, not shared values and beliefs. The following literature reflects the interpretive view that shared interpretations among diverse members of an organization is unrealistic and not required for coordinated action to occur. This literature operates with the previously described view of organizational culture as being the process of sense-making itself (something an organization *is* rather than something it *has*).

Karl Weick's work describes a theory of sense-making in organizations in which individual members do not need to share values and interpretations of events to coordinate their action. Weick suggests that most coordinated action that takes place in organizations occurs with little or no shared interpretation among members.

Weick stresses the importance of interlocked behaviors, rather than shared meanings, to the process of organizing.[4] Organizing occurs because of shared action since "acts are the raw material for cognitive work in organizations" (Weick, 1979b: 47). He adopts Allport's concept of collective structure in which "people converge first on issues of means rather than on issues of ends" (Weick, 1979: 91). This introduces the supremacy of action in Weick's sense-making theory: "The meaning of the organization and of the actor's participation in it are defined solely in terms of what is done there" (Weick, 1979: 97). In this way, members of a group do not necessarily agree on the goals of the activity or the reasons why the activity is worthwhile, but simply agree that coordination of activity is required. "Partners in a collective structure share space, time, and energy, but

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[3] See also Czarniawska-Joerges (1992: 168) for more criticism of this management-functionalist perspective.

[4] For more information about interlocked behaviors, routinization of actions, and mutual prediction of behavior, see Berger and Luckmann (1966: 56-58).

they need not share visions, aspirations, or intentions. That sharing comes much later, if it ever comes at all" (Weick, 1979: 91).

Gray, Bougon and Donnellon agree with Weick that shared meanings are not a prerequisite for organized action: however, rather than describing the meaning-action relation as action first, then meaning, as Weick does, they describe this as an iterative process (Gray, Bougon &Donnellon, 1985: 90). They suggest that the construction and deconstruction of meanings occurs simultaneously within organizations and that this view of sense-making as a process acknowledges the diversity and multiplicity of meanings present in organizations at any given time (Gray, Bougon & Donnellon, 1985: 93-94). Although they agree that some degree of shared meaning is necessary for organization, they acknowledge the difficulties of achieving shared meaning among organizational members; meaning is constantly reinterpreted based on new experiences causing a constant fluctuation of coincident meanings in organizations (Gray, Bougon & Donnellon, 1985: 84).

Like Weick, Eisenberg proposes that *perceived* agreement is more important (and far more possible) than actual agreement about reality construction (Eisenberg, 1990: 145). "Individual and organizational effectiveness depend more on the conviction that goals or values are shared than on the actual extent of agreement" (Eisenberg, 1990: 144). This perception of agreement (or ambiguity, or equivocality) allows coordinated action to occur. Eisenberg and Goodall also emphasize that "practices are primary in defining organizational culture" and "nothing about the culture metaphor requires that values be shared" (Eisenberg & Goodall, 1993: 152).

Although Pedersen and Sorensen base their research upon Edgar Schein's model of culture, they criticize this model's simplification of organizational culture and its emphasis upon shared values and beliefs within an organization. Schein assumes that values transform into basic assumptions through repeated, mutual agreements: "... he takes for granted that it must happen and it is quite simple and obvious to the participants..." (Pedersen & Sorensen, 1989: 21). Pedersen and Sorensen question how this agreement process takes place because organizations are "highly complex entities" whose processes and modes of functioning are not as simple as Schein suggests (Pedersen & Sorensen, 1989: 21). They believe that organizational values are "not as homogeneous and consistent... as the majority of the culture literature tends to present it to be" (Pedersen & Sorensen, 1989: 21). They argue that Schein's values and basic assumption levels of culture oversimplify organizational culture rather than acknowledge that "inconsistencies and contrasts" exist, and are valid, within organizations (Pedersen & Sorensen, 1989: 117). In this way, they suggest that Schein attempts to "create an orderly world where none is" (Pedersen & Sorensen, 1989: 117).

Czarniawska-Joerges criticizes the functionalist concepts of culture as requiring shared meaning: "Not even in a nuclear family do people share all these assumptions, not to mention in any larger organizations" (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992: 167). She argues that the experience of collective action is shared more than its meaning (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992: 33). Although shared meanings are required to a certain extent, complete sharing of meaning is not necessary to accomplish a collective activity (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992: 33). She echoes Weick's sense-making theory in her explanation that since

reality is socially constructed, organizations and their environments are enacted by human perception and cognition (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992: 33).

Sense-making is Ambiguous

Eisenberg, Donnellon, Gray & Bougon, and Weick use the terms "ambiguity," "equifinal meanings" and "equivocality" to elaborate how shared action or coordinated behavior is more important to organizing than shared meanings. Whereas the previous discussion of shared meanings stresses the importance of a stated, shared vision statement to promote mutual understanding, Eisenberg suggests that these vision statements are deliberately ambiguous because their "equivocal expression allows for multiple interpretations while at the same time promoting a sense of unity" (Eisenberg, 1984: 231). In this way, management promotion of deliberate or strategic ambiguity, rather than a unified shared vision, creates perceived agreement among members while encouraging creativity and an ability to deal with change (Eisenberg, 1984: 231). Eisenberg suggests that "ambiguous communication" is a "rational method used by communicators to orient toward multiple goals" (Eisenberg, 1984: 239). This will be discussed in more detail in the chapter dealing with sense-making and change.

Donnellon, Gray and Bougon elaborate upon communication as a link between meaning and action. They agree with Weick in that although sharing of beliefs is not necessary, members of a group must have a minimal degree of sharing about their relationship and the rules governing communication among members (Donnellon, Gray & Bougon, 1986: 2). In this way, "in the absence of shared meaning, organized action is made possible by the shared repertoire of communication behaviors group members use

while in the process of developing equifinal meanings for their joint experience" (Donnellon, Gray & Bougon, 1986: 2). They define equifinality as "interpretations that are dissimilar but that have similar behavioral implications" (Donnellon, Gray & Bougon, 1986: 2). This directly relates to Eisenberg's ambiguity and Weick's equivocality.

Weick discusses this phenomenon in terms of "equivocality". Equivocality is "the richness and multiplicity of meanings that can be superimposed on a situation," which he considers to be unavoidable in organizations (Weick, 1979: 174). Sense-making is the process through which organizations manage this equivocality. "It is the existence of multiple meanings that attracts attention and sets the stage for sense-making" (Weick, 1995: 94). Eisenberg's discussion of strategic ambiguity echoes Weick's call to "manage equivocality successfully" by assembling "many different, loosely constrained interlocked cycles into a process" (Weick, 1979: 192). Although this process is "untidy" and is seemingly inefficient, this signifies that the process is working, rather than malfunctioning, because the environment that this process is working on is also equivocal and requires an equivocal process to make sense of it (Weick, 1979: 192).

Karl Weick's Theory of Sense-making in Organizations

In an effort to clarify the sense-making process and to expand upon some of Weick's concepts already presented in this chapter, the present discussion now focusses upon Weick's theory of sense-making in organizations. Important components of this theory that help to visualize the sense-making process are the enactment-selection-retention process, causal maps or schemas, mutual equivalence structures and the means convergence model.

Enactment-Selection-Retention Process

A key aspect of Weick's sense-making theory is the enactment, selection and retention process; Weick uses the term "enactment" because it represents the active role of individuals in creating their own organizational environment (Weick, 1979: 130). Enactment is the action of individuals which creates their own environment and "sets the stage for sense-making" (Weick, 1979: 147). This takes place through cognitive bracketing of their flow of experience. Cognitive bracketing refers to creating breaks and imposing categories in the stream of experience to use as the basis for sense-making (Weick, 1995: 35). "When differences occur in the stream of experience, the actor may take some action to isolate those changes for closer attention" (Weick, 1979: 130). Enactment produces the "raw materials" and "episodes" that will be used (or not used) in the selection process of sense-making (Weick, 1979: 130-31). In this way, enactment is the only time in the enact-select-retain process when the individual directly engages their environment (Weick, 1979: 130).

The process of selection takes the equivocal raw information produced in enactment and imposes structures from past experience upon this information to make sense of it. Weick suggests that these structures take the form of "cause maps" or schemas that contain interconnected variables built out of past experience that are initial frames of reference for action and perception (Weick, 1979a: 131 and 1979b: 50). These cause maps are "schemes of interpretation and specific interpretations" of past events which may have been helpful in reducing the equivocality of incoming information in the past and may, or may not, be useful in reducing the equivocality of present information

(Weick, 1979: 131). In this way, selection involves selecting meanings from past experience and imposing them on present equivocalities (Weick, 1979: 175). Selection always works backward, however, because "the only thing that can be selected and preserved is something that is already there" (Weick, 1979: 188).

Retention is the storage of the products of sense-making resulting from enactment and selection (Weick, 1979: 131). Weick refers to these products as "enacted environments" or "cause maps"; enacted environments again suggest the active role that the sense-making process takes in creating meaningful environments (Weick, 1979: 131). "An enacted environment is a historical document, stored in the retention process, usually in the form of a cause map, that can be superimposed on subsequent activities (Weick, 1979: 229). The retention process is the memory of organizing and sense-making. The enacted environments that are retained will be used as a template in subsequent selection processes to measure new equivocal information. In this way, retention keeps the previously produced and defined enacted environments (Weick 1979: 201). Although these three processes of sense-making are treated separately for analytical purposes, they constitute a process and feed back into each other; this processual nature will be discussed in more detail in the Structuration Theory section of this literature review.

Causal Maps and Schemas

An important concept discussed in the sense-making literature is that of structures of knowledge that are used to organize incoming information. Although Weick describes these as "causal maps", these structures are also defined in the literature as schemas and scripts. Poole, Gioia and Gray define these structures as "schemas" which provide a

"cognitive basis for understanding and responding to information and events" (Poole, Gioia & Gray, 1989: 272). These schemas are interpretation systems that maintain shared meanings for organizations by making sense of organizational situations (Poole, Gioia & Gray, 1989: 273). Bartunek and Moch use the term "schemata" in the same way; schemata are "templates" that give meaning to experience and organize incoming information (Bartunek & Moch, 1992: 484). Although Weick discusses causal maps in more complex detail than the above two, his causal maps are essentially the same as these structures of knowledge. [5]

Mutual Equivalence Structures

Weick uses Wallace's concept of mutual equivalence structures to explain the primacy of shared action over shared beliefs or meanings (Weick, 1979: 98). Weick describes the mutual equivalence structure as follows:

> "A mutual equivalence structure comes into existence when my ability to perform my consummatory act depends on *someone else* performing an instrumental act. Furthermore, my performance of my instrumental act has the function of eliciting the other's instrumental act. " (Weick, 1979: 98).

The repetition of this pattern is a mutual equivalence structure; a building block of organized, coordinated action.

Weick suggests that Wallace's model exemplifies the process of coordinated activity within organizations. Mutual prediction, not mutual sharing, is key to the mutual equivalence structure (Weick, 1979: 100). The two individuals do not have to be aware

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[5] See Calder & Schurr (1981: 290), Bormann (1983: 112) and Martin (1982) for more discussion of cognitive schemas and scripts.

of the other's goals, beliefs, desires or motives to create and maintain coordinated activity. As the individuals reflect back on their organized activity (make retrospective sense of it), they do not need to share their views of what is happening. Each person can sustain the social interaction even though they each see it differently (Weick, 1979: 101).

The Means-Convergence Model

Weick elaborates upon his theory that shared goals and interpretations are not required for coordinated action with the means-convergence model. With this model, Weick posits that members of a group with diverse goals first interlock their activities, and through this shared action can actually develop some shared goals (Weick, 1979: 91). Therefore, not only does coordinated action precede shared interpretations, it actually helps to create shared goals among organizational members.

This model consists of four stages: Diverse ends, common means, common ends, and diverse means. In the first stage, members begin with diverse ends. In other words, individual members do not share goals about the activity or event. "In any potential collectivity, members have different interests, capabilities, preferences... They want to accomplish different things" (Weick, 1979: 91).

To accomplish these diverse ends, however, each member requires actions by the other members; this interlocked behavior comprises the model's second stage. Reciprocal actions in which "a member emits some behavior... which is valuable to the other person; in return the member receives a behavior that is valuable" are the "common means" of the second stage (Weick, 1979: 92). These reciprocal actions represent the beginning of

collectively structured behavior. Assuming that organizing is "the fitting together of acts to form joint action," this joining "may take place for any number of reasons... and need not involve, or spring from, the sharing of common values" (Weick, 1995: 43).

The third stage in which members move from common means towards common ends or goals represents the emergence of shared goals in the model. This important shift occurs as the diverse ends become subordinate to the collective structure itself "which has been instrumental in aiding individuals to get what they want" (Weick, 1979: 92). In this way, members share a common goal to maintain this collective structure. He acknowledges that although individuals may have different goals, they eventually share the "aim of stability in the service of sense-making" (Weick, 1995: 154). This stability is a faith and trust in, and maintenance of, the collective structure of behaviorally confirmed expectations. "A socially constructed world is a stable world, made stable by behaviorally confirmed expectations" (Weick, 1995: 154). In this way, individual members think back on their common actions performed in the group and attach meaning to these actions. Because these common actions that took place within the collective structure helped the individual members to achieve what they wanted, they attribute importance to the collective structure; this collective structure then becomes a shared, common end among group members.

The third stage in the model suggests that shared meanings about shared goals are the result of shared actions, rather than the traditional notion that members share common goals, *then* pursue common actions:

> "The common assertion that goal consensus must occur
> prior to action obscures the fact that consensus is impossible
> unless there is something tangible around which it can occur.

And this 'something tangible' may well turn out to be actions
already completed." (Weick, 1979: 18).

Weick directly relates this phenomenon to his theory that sense-making is
retrospective (Weick, 1979: 92). His recipe for sense-making is : "How can I know what
I think until I see what I say" (Weick, 1979: 207). Thus, through talking, one can define
and articulate their cognitions (Weick, 1979: 165).

Unlike the shared meaning perspective in which organizations create (or make
sense of) an abstract vision or goal and then attempt to fit their subsequent actions to this
vision, Weick's sense-making theory assumes that shared action happens first, then some
level of shared meaning develops. Weick asserts that "meaning is always imposed after
the fact and only after elapsed actions are available for review" (Weick, 1979: 188). As an
example of retrospective sense-making, Weick cites an experiment composed of two
groups in which one group is asked to describe a hypothetical accident that *already*
occurred and the other group is asked to describe an accident that *will* occur. The group
asked to describe the accident that already happened wrote much more detailed and
specific descriptions than the group who were asked to describe the accident that will
occur (Weick, 1979: 196-97). In this way, retrospective sense-making's assumption that
action comes first and meanings are attached to it later explains why shared meanings are
not required for organized action to occur.

In the fourth stage of the model, the group members move from common ends to
diverse means as group members separate according to specialized tasks needed to
accomplish the common end. In this way, "members are valued more for what they do not
share with others than for what they do share" (Weick, 1979: 93). As the group

diversifies its tasks, individual members become less committed to the common end and more occupied with their own, individual task (Weick, 1979: 93).

The fifth stage moves from diverse means to diverse ends as the process completes. As members act in different, specialized ways, they become more independent and less similar to the other members. Thus, "dissimilar ends become defined, preferences and desires diverge, and the group once again consists of members with *diverse ends*" (Weick, 1979: 94). Karl Weick's sense-making theory is complemented by the following discussion of Anthony Giddens' meta-theory of Structuration.

Structuration Theory and Sense-making in Organizations

While Weick's theory can stand alone as a comprehensive theory of sense-making, the following presentation of the meta-theory of Structuration expands upon Weick's concepts by linking the specific discussion of organizational culture and sense-making with the wider context of social life. Anthony Giddens' Structuration theory is a broad, all-encompassing theory of social life that attempts to synthesize macro-functionalist with micro-interpretivist sociological approaches within a theory explaining the structuring of social relations. Structuration theory is how "systems, grounded in the knowledgeable activities of situated actors who draw upon rules and resources in the diversity of action contexts, are produced and reproduced in interaction" (Giddens, 1984: 25).

There are many reasons why Structuration is applicable to the present discussion of sense-making and organizational change. Structuration's second-order, or meta-theory, status qualifies it to inform and explain a more specific, first-order theory of sense-making in organizations. A structurational approach recognizes the ambiguity and confusion

inherent in sense-making in organizations rather than trying to simplify or resolve these ambiguities by stressing the importance of one shared, overarching meaning among organizational members. Riley links Structuration theory with organizational culture by positing that the theory "embraces the interplay of people and systems as the embodiment of the cultural mechanism--why the organization is what it is" (Riley, 1983: 437). Just as in society, the conflict between the constraining institution and the creative individual has proliferated in organizational theory and has been approached in objectivist or subjectivist extremes. Structuration theory transcends the objectivist view of the "existence of any form of societal totality" and the subjectivist primacy of the "experience of the individual actor" and rather posits that "in and through their activities agents reproduce the conditions that make these activities possible" (Giddens, 1984: 2). Most importantly, Structuration's duality of structure in which knowledgeable human agents continuously produce and reproduce social structures is a model for organizational culture and sense-making as dynamic processes rather than fixed things or states (Bryant & Jary, 1991: 7).

Although Giddens never intended Structuration theory to be a research program, it is useful to this discussion of organizational sense-making. Giddens' advises that the theory's concepts be used as "sensitizing devices" for empirical research (Giddens, 1991: 213). This means that because Structuration is a process relevant to all areas of social life, researchers should be sensitive to, and aware of, structurational concepts when conducting research. However, Giddens does not intend researchers to "import Structuration theory in toto into their given area of study", but rather to use selective concepts from the overall framework of Structuration theory "in a sparing and critical fashion" (Giddens, 1991: 213). This research, therefore, follows Giddens' advice and incorporates the

structurational principles of the knowledgeable human agent and the duality of structure into its discussion of organizational sense-making.

Knowledgeable Human Agency

A key element of Structuration theory is the notion that individuals are aware of and understand how they live their day-to-day lives and have a "continuing theoretical understanding of the grounds of their activity" (Giddens, 1984: 5). Giddens defines knowledgeability as "everything which actors know (believe) about the circumstances of their action and that of others…" (Giddens, 1984: 375). This concept refers to individuals' "capacity to do things in the first place" (Giddens, 1984: 9). The concept of the reflexive monitoring of action is also relevant to sense-making as it involves the intentional character of the agent's behavior (Giddens 1984: 3).

This concept of the individual actor as a knowledgeable human agent appears repeatedly in Weick's sense-making theory. Weick's previous discussion of sense-making as being an active process which "highlights the invention that precedes interpretation" and as implying a "higher level of engagement by the actor" shows Structuration theory's knowledgeable human agency at work (Weick, 1995: 14). "Because people have some control over words, meanings, and actions, they can exert some control over the ways they organize themselves…" (Weick, 1995: 181). Weick's enact-select-retain process highlights the role of the individual agent in their enactment and selection of a piece of the flow of experience with which to consciously make sense of and create their environment. Although agents are not always conscious of the activity of sense-making, they reflexively monitor their own actions and interpretations within the flow of experience in the

enactment-selection-retention process. Retrospective sense-making also focusses on the knowledgeable agent crediting or discrediting previous experience when making sense of present situations.

Duality of Structure

An important link between Structuration theory and organizational sense-making is Structuration's concept of the duality of structure. According to Giddens, the duality of structure is the notion that "the structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize" (Giddens, 1984: 25). Giddens conceives of structures as being constructed by individual human agents, and as the very medium of this construction (Bryant & Jary, 1991: 7). In this concept, Giddens' use of "structure" differs greatly from previous definitions. In functionalist theory, for example, structure is a pattern or skeleton and is external to human action; Giddens' structures, however, are virtual and do not exist in time-space except in the moments of the constitution of social systems (Baber, 1991: 226). Giddens' structures are the "rules and resources" (Giddens, 1984: 25) that knowledgeable agents use in their continuous production and reproduction of society (Bryant & Jary, 1991: 7).

Duality of Structure and Continuous Process

Structuration theory's concept of the reflexive monitoring of action is the intentional self consciousness of human behavior within the ongoing flow of social life (Giddens, 1984: 3). In this way, human action and cognition is a continuous process through which knowledgeable agents constantly monitor, and are reflexive about, their

activities. This directly relates to Weick's retrospective sense-making in which organizations act first, then reflect back on these activities and make sense of them. The continuous process of human action and cognition is also constantly put forth by Weick's theory of sense-making. The enactment process is the device used to "bracket" the continuous flow of experience in order to make sense of it. As Weick explains: "To cope with pure duration, people create breaks in the stream and impose categories on those portions that are set apart" (Weick, 1995: 35).

Structuration's assumption that social action is a continuous process helps to explain the concepts of organizational culture and sense-making as dynamic processes rather than static entities. The organizational culture literature discussed at the beginning of this chapter emphasizes the processual nature of culture, communication and sense-making. Culture is "an active, living phenomenon through which people create and recreate the worlds in which they live" (Morgan, 1986: 131), and organizations are "dynamic, conscious, and subconscious processes through which meanings are constructed and destroyed" (Gray, Bougon & Donnellon, 1985: 83). Because communication creates and recreates meaning within organizational culture, communication "is the process by which organizing occurs, not something which takes place *in* organizations" (Eisenberg, 1984: 228).

This duality of structure is reflected in the communication among various members of an organization which creates some form of shared understanding which is then reproduced in subsequent interactions with others. Weick's enact-select-retain process directly relates to this duality. "The person's idea is extended outward, implanted, and then rediscovered as knowledge. The discovery, however, originated in a prior invention

by the discoverer" (Weick, 1979: 159). "Action, perception and sense-making exist in a circular, tightly-coupled relationship" (Weick, 1977: 288).[6]

Duality of Structure and Creation of Environments

The duality of structure challenges the functionalist assumption that environments (internal organizational environments in this research) impose and constrain individual behavior by proposing that individuals create the environment in which they operate. The sense-making within this interaction, therefore, creates and recreates the environment in which members exist. This happens through the sense-making process described earlier in which people make sense of the present by recalling and utilizing experiences from the past. Weick says that there is not "some kind of monolithic, singular, fixed environment that exists", but rather, that people's actions "create the materials that become the constraints and opportunities they face" (Weick, 1995: 31). "People in organizations repeatedly impose that which they later claim imposes on them" (Weick, 1979: 153). In this way, members' create their own internal environment (the organizational culture) through their communication and interaction with others; this created, or enacted, environment then further influences their communication and sense-making which further influences their environment and so on.

Weick's description of the third stage in the means-convergence model, when common means become shared ends, emphasizes the power of individuals in creating their own social structure or environment, rather than the traditional notion of the structure

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[6] Gray, Bougon and Donnellon (1985: 93) discuss "the dynamic, processual nature of the phenomena we think of as organizations". See also Linda Smircich (1983b) for more discussion of culture and sense-making as a process.

constraining and acting upon individuals (Weick, 1979: 92). This happens when the first thing that the group (who initially pursue diverse ends) shares is the desire to preserve and maintain the collective structure formed by interlocked behaviors that have allowed individuals to achieve their individual, diverse goals.

Weick observes that organizations often do not realize that their own actions constrain "what they see" in their organizational environment. An understanding of members' active creation of their environment in this way, incorporates sense-making as "acting in ways that create an environment that people can then comprehend and manage" (Weick, 1995: 165). Morgan echoes this concept that the environment is an extension of organizational culture because people understand their environment through the rules and resources and belief systems that guide their interpretations and subsequent actions (Morgan, 1986: 136).

Duality of Structure and Shared Action

The duality of structure emphasizes the importance of shared action over shared meanings in sense-making. To make sense of a specific event, people link this with a more general idea; this then clarifies the meaning of the specific event, which then alters the perception of the more general idea and so on. In this way, "the abstract and the concrete inform and construct one another", and "actions create the conditions for further actions" (Weick, 1995: 51).

In Patricia Riley's application of Structuration theory to organizational culture, she counters the notion that organizations work together in a "shared cohesive totality" (Riley,

1983: 414) in favor of a structurationist view which allows for competing systems of

meaning. She clearly describes her structurationist view of sense-making in organizations:

> "Thus the stores of knowledge each individual has about
> interaction in general (a language, grammar rules, social norms
> to guide conversation, etc.), combined with knowledge of a
> specific organization (standard operating procedures, the
> organizational chart, available resources, etc.) can be drawn
> upon strategically by individuals to achieve their own goals."
> (Riley, 1983: 415).

Riley acknowledges Structuration theory's assumption that knowledge of practices is

never completely shared among members of an organization (Riley, 1983: 424). This

notion is found in Structuration's discussion of the rules and resources that are used by the

knowledgeable human agent in creating structures. "Resources enable the concrete

relationships and material conditions that agents draw upon in the instantiation of social

action" (Banks & Riley, 1993: 173). Although all individuals are knowledgeable agents,

because of factors such as social class, gender and education, everyone does not have

equal access to social knowledge as a "resource" for sense-making. In this way, resources

both enable and constrain an individual's ability to enact his or her organizational

environment through sense-making. However, the amount of, and access to, these

resources differ among individuals, and thus varies the bases upon which individuals within

an organization have for interpreting and making sense of experience. This notion,

therefore, questions the assumption of shared meaning among diverse members of an

organization.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed literature relevant to organizational culture, sense-making and Structuration theory. The chapter began by defining organizational culture and sense-making, explaining how these concepts relate to each other, and how actions, in the form of communication behavior, reveal an organization's sense-making processes. To focus the discussion upon the research question, this chapter discussed literature that argues that organizational culture and sense-making are dependent upon the existence of shared meaning among its members and the organization as a whole. The criticism of this argument presented here, as well as Weick's sense-making theory and Giddens' Structuration theory establishes a perspective for the present study in which organizational culture and sense-making do not rely upon shared meanings, but rather shared actions, among its members. In this way, the literature review has shown how cultural and sense-making processes are relevant to the issue of shared meaning or vision within an organization and sheds some light upon the research question under examination.

Although this chapter has explained the concepts of organizational culture and sense-making, a proper examination of this research question still requires some understanding of the context of organizational change. To comprehend organizational change and its relevance to organizational culture, sense-making, and Structuration, the following chapter presents selected literature that relates to existing theories of organizational change, how cultural processes are relevant to change, and the need for further research regarding how sense-making happens during times of organizational change.

CHAPTER THREE

SENSE-MAKING AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

The literature on organizational change embraces a diverse range of topics and draws upon several traditional research disciplines. For present purposes, we can restrict our examination of this literature to materials that shed light on processes of communication and sense-making as these relate to organizational change. In particular, we will focus the present discussion on literature which helps to situate this investigation in relation to existing theories of organizational change, to illustrate the role that cultural processes play with respect to change, and to point toward the need for greater understanding of communication and sense-making as a component of these processes. To help situate the present study, therefore, the present chapter provides a discussion of: existing types of change strategies; recent critical approaches that discuss the role of cultural processes in affecting change; the nature of organizational environments and of organizational learning processes related to organizational adaptation; and specific issues related to sense-making and change.

Types of Change in Organizations

The organizational development literature discusses various typologies of change, as well as various conceptual approaches to change. This section identifies technological or task-based approaches, structural approaches, and individual-behavioral approaches to change, as the strategies that are typically used in planned change initiatives. These help situate the focus of the present study within the spectrum of existing approaches.

Technological Approach to Change

The technological or task approach to change has its roots in the Scientific Management school of thought; both deal with technical methods for solving work problems and separate the planning of problem-solving from the acting out of solutions (Leavitt, 1964: 61). Technological change focusses upon changing methods or tasks of production and the technology itself as a means of increasing productivity and profit. This approach uses, and values, "cleaner, more logical, and more parsimonious solutions" to workplace problems (Leavitt, 1964: 63). Because this strategy assumes that the operational application of improved techniques results in more effective systems or organizations, it is task-oriented (Harvey & Brown, 1982: 228). The change agent, who is a technical expert such as an engineer or a designer rather than a change expert, brings about change using quantitative methods rather than subjective, qualitative ones (Margulies & Raia, 1978: 16). Leavitt acknowledges, however, that the technological approach often fails to realize that "human acceptance is the real carrier of change" by focussing only on technological improvements such as computerization and improved methods of performing tasks (Leavitt, 1964: 62).

Structural Approach to Change

The structural approach looks to the organization's internal and external structure and chain of command as a source of change and assumes that task performance is improved by redefining the separation of tasks and relationships between functions (Harvey & Brown, 1982: 221). In this way, the structural approach involves redefining

areas of responsibility and authority and the chain of command (Leavitt, 1964: 58). This approach puts forth various options for the structure of organizations such as circular organizations, matrix organizations, and job design (Porras & Silvers, 1994: 89; Harvey & Brown, 1982: 222). Structural change can focus on the internal organization by reorganizing the leadership and departmental structure, or on the external structure of the organization in terms of evaluating how the organization as a whole exists within the business environment. Change agents of this approach tend to be managers or leaders (Margulies & Raia, 1978: 18). Most organizational change tends to focus upon structure; restructuring and downsizing are concrete examples of structural changes that aim to improve cost-effectiveness and productivity by examining and redefining individual and departmental roles and responsibilities within the larger organization. Some key elements to structural change are to identify important parts of the system, determine the nature of their interdependence, and find what processes link the parts together (Harvey & Brown, 1982: 224).

Individual - Behavioral Approach to Change

Leavitt defines this as the "people" approach which tries to "change the organizational world by changing the behavior of actors in the organization" (Leavitt, 1964: 63). This approach attempts to alter the attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of organizational members and assumes that structural and technical improvement will follow (Harvey & Brown, 1982: 229). Chin and Benne describe this approach as the "normative re-educative" strategy of changing (Chin & Benne, 1976: 31). This strategy focusses upon people and believes that the "clarification and reconstruction" of values is of primary

importance in any change (Chin & Benne, 1976: 31). Involvement of the individual in organizational decision making during change is an important belief of this approach as this allocates "at least equal power to the changee(s)" and helps the individual to grow (Leavitt, 1964: 66). By increasing individual participation in the change process through methods such as action research and learning, the individual-behavioral approach attempts to improve relationships between individuals and their work, which, in turn, increases organizational effectiveness (Chin & Benne, 1976: 37; Margulies & Raia, 1978: 11). Change agents following this approach are usually change educators or facilitators rather than technical experts or managers; these facilitators rely upon qualitative data such as employee's testimonials about morale and satisfaction (Margulies & Raia, 1978: 20-21). Porras and Silvers sum up this individual approach to change as follows: "…successful planned change efforts must alter… the internal organizational environment such that new signals influence individuals to produce new behaviors" (Porras & Silvers, 1994: 86). [1]

Organizational development theorists emphasize that although it may be conceptually useful to describe these approaches as distinct types, they are actually interdependent as they normally mingle within any organizational change process. A technological change, for instance, could affect the organizational structure which, in turn, could necessitate change at the individual level. "Although a change programme may focus on one 'leverage point', it will have repercussions throughout the system" (Legge, 1984: 24). As Leavitt says, "we have tried to manipulate only one of these variables and discovered that all the others move in unforeseen and often costly directions" (Leavitt,

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[1] See Porras and Silvers (1994: 95) for information about reframing and consciousness raising within the individual-behavioral typology of change.

1964: 70). In this way, each of these typologies is presented in its "pure" form as most practical change initiatives represent a hybrid of these approaches.

For instance, the general change process operating within the organization under investigation, Corp, intermingles the above approaches; although the specific change initiative under investigation in Corp, did adopt a predominantly structural approach. Corp's general change process was not defined according to the above typology. Rather, the change leader sought input from all members affected by a proposed change initiative to actually direct the nature or the type of change itself. Although the final decision regarding the change direction resides with leadership, the input gathered from employees and leaders dictates whether the change itself will focus upon technical, structural or attitudinal aspects, or any combination of these.

The following section continues this presentation of traditional change strategies by reviewing the literature on the management of change. The view of organizational change expressed in that literature, just as in the above typologies, is widely accepted, yet only marginally touches upon cultural and sense-making aspects inherent in change.

Management of Change

In addition to outlining the general types of change processes, the literature also provides a number of prescriptions for the management of change processes. We include a discussion of this literature here because it is the primary theory upon which most change agents and managers base their practical change initiatives. This literature generally represents what is practiced in real organizations, including the strategy reflected in Corp's change process. For instance, Corp's change leader has a general process to

handle change initiatives in the same vein as the "how-to" directives of the management literature about change. Although this process is very participatory and employee-driven, the final decision regarding change initiatives rests with Corp's management or leadership. This thesis takes a critical stance towards this management of change literature because, while it touches upon some cultural elements of change, it treats these elements only superficially and oversimplifies the change process by defining and describing change as if it were simply a directive that management instructs its staff to follow.

Literature on the management of change typically simplifies the change process into "how-to" directives for managers to alter the behavior of their employees. In general, this literature focusses on the importance of strong leaders and managers in the change process and the problem of employee resistance to change. "…Studies of change appear to be taken from the perspective or bias of those who are the change agents seeking to bring about change rather than of the clients they are seeking to influence" (Klein, 1976: 117).

This management of change literature assumes that organizations act and react towards change as a collective whole. This literature predicts and explains the stages that members go through in dealing with change and the steps that managers must take to ensure the change is successful. In doing this, the literature does not account for diversity in members' values, perceptions and interpretations of the organization, the change process and the change itself. The contribution of this literature, while relevant to the present study, is therefore limited in its contribution to a more wholistic, cultural understanding of organizational change.

Nadler describes different types of change and explains how managers can change employee behavior. While he purports to talk about organizational frame bending, his theories do not go beyond the level of management directives and do not incorporate cultural sense-making into theories of change. Nadler discusses the centrality principle in which the change itself must be central to core organizational values in order for members to engage in the change (Nadler, 1988: 75). Managers, therefore, must ensure that the themes of the change are consistent with the core values of the organization (Nadler, 1988: 75). Nadler implies that organizations with great diversity are, therefore, more difficult to change because these organizations lack core organizational values. This contradicts the value placed upon ambiguity and diversity within more culturally-based change theories. Nadler's simplification of the change process into easy steps, and his belief that monolithic organizations are more adaptable to change than diverse ones ignores important evidence of schemas and meaning discussed within the cultural approach to change[2].

Just like the management-oriented organizational culture literature identified in Chapter Two, Beckhard and Harris also acknowledge the importance of leaders and a shared vision to the achievement of change within organizations. These authors present organizational change as being a relatively simple process. They suggest that the first step in organizing a change is to clarify the priorities of the organization's mission. Once this is done, "goals and priorities can be set within a context of agreement about the nature of the organization" (Beckhard & Harris, 1987: 22). This assumes that agreement about the nature of the organization and the reasons for the change can easily be arrived at, and that

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[2] Cultural approaches to change are discussed in detail beginning on Page 73.

this agreement is necessary for the change to occur. They believe that organizational leaders determine the culture and thus can manipulate this culture to be open to change initiatives (Beckhard & Harris, 1987: 26).

Beckhard and Harris suggest that management adopt open systems planning when dealing with change (Beckhard & Harris, 1987: 13). However, they oversimplify this open systems planning into seven easy steps for managers to follow, beginning with determining the "core mission" of the organization and ending with defining cost-effective options (Beckhard & Harris, 1987: 13). They describe three states of change: present, transition and future (Beckhard & Harris, 1987: 30). Although they focus on managerial control over the change, they acknowledge the importance of assessing the present state of the organization by gathering information from all levels of the organization through focus groups or interviews (Beckhard & Harris, 1987: 58). This procedure identifies "what needs to be changed and what does not need to be changed" (Beckhard & Harris, 1987: 58). The transition state involves planning a road map for the change effort, developing new management structures pertinent to the new, transition state, and creating intervention strategies for commitment (Beckhard & Harris, 1987: 72, 75, 95). The future state is the change initiative achieved and implemented within the organization. This views the change process as linear rather than as a continuous, structurational process that operates within a turbulent environment. Although this model involves the participation of employees, it suggests that consensus can be easily reached and that the change process continues. This ignores the complexity and variety of interpretations that exist among members within organizations as put forth in the cultural approach to organizational change that will be described later in this chapter.

Traditional management views of employee resistance to management-driven change initiatives define resistance as negative and as something to suppress. This view of resistance as a negative phenomenon that is destructive to the change process implies that management's interpretation of the change process is the ideal and only interpretation. Beckhard and Harris, for example, acknowledge that resistance exists within any change process and suggest Kurt Lewin's process of unfreezing as a way to overcome this resistance. To unfreeze, the manager must create a neutral situation that clarifies rather than challenges existing attitudes (Beckhard & Harris, 1987: 96). They suggest that managers "analyze the type of resistance... reduce it, and secure the needed commitment from the resistant party" (Beckhard & Harris, 1987: 98).[3] In this way, resistance is eliminated rather than understood and incorporated.

While still maintaining its focus upon management of change, some literature incorporates theories of culture and sense-making to some extent. Timothy Galpin links culture to organizational change, but he still prescribes specific methods for applying "pertinent cultural 'levers'" to implement management change initiatives (Galpin, 1996: 84). He defines organizational culture simply as being comprised of ten components including rules and policies, ceremonies and events, physical environment and training, and suggests that applying these ten components to the change process as a "cultural screen" identifies the components relevant to the desired change (Galpin, 1996: 85-86). In this way, all changes are "screened" to identify the cultural aspects that a company can "leverage" to "reinforce and embed change in day-to-day operations" (Galpin, 1996: 86, 89). Although Galpin claims to incorporate culture into change, his simple definition of

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[3] See also Connor and Lake (1988: 117-128).

culture and his use of manipulative language such as "leverage" and "reinforce" imply that, like other management literature, he simply *prescribes* how managers can use cultural tools to manipulate members' to change according to management vision, rather than *describes* cultural elements within change.[4]

Summary of Management Literature about Change

Management literature concerning change emphasizes the role of a strong leader in implementing change, how to eliminate resistance, and implies that change has a beginning and an end. With its emphasis upon the management of meaning and the manipulation of employees towards change, this literature implies that even though managers and employees view change differently, the manager's "vision" is the ultimate goal of change. Managers recognize the need for change, create a plan, then encourage, or force, employees to adopt the change.

Although some elements of organizational culture are recognized within the traditional management literature, these are generally treated as variables to be manipulated, and are not grounded in any in-depth understanding of cultural or sense-making processes. Furthermore, very little research has been conducted into how cultural sense-making processes operate *within* each and all of these change strategies. The following discussion of recent critical approaches to change represents a critique of traditional approaches to change by taking change to the deeper level of fundamental behaviors and beliefs.

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[4] See Strebel (1996: 86-92) for another management-oriented, prescriptive approach to change.

Recent Critical Approaches to Change

Rather than merely prescribing how to achieve surface-level organizational change, several recent critical approaches explain how everyday organizational practices and behavior are rooted in cultural and belief systems, and how a deeper understanding of these belief systems can improve an organization's adaptability to change. The present section focusses upon several concepts put forward by these new approaches which help to incorporate this deeper perspective into an understanding of change processes. The following, therefore, represents several new perspectives on organizational change processes which incorporate an attention to members' shared belief structures.

Bartunek and Moch's Orders of Change

Bartunek and Moch discuss the notion of first, second and third-order change as a link between schemata and organizational change. As discussed previously in Chapter Two, schemata are structures or templates of knowledge created from past experience that help to organize, and give meaning to, new information. Because schemata guide members' interpretations and tend to endure even when they are no longer useful to present situations, they have the capacity to constrain or guide change (Bartunek & Moch, 1992: 484-485). These authors suggest that organizational development interventions (planned change) affect, and are affected by, organizational schemata, and that successful change can achieve one or more of the three orders of change: first, second and third order (Bartunek & Moch, 1992: 486). Although schemata guide individual sense-making about change, these schemata become social as they are communicated to the collective organization (Bartunek & Moch, 1992: 486).

First-order change is consistent with schemata already in use and further endorses these schemata (Bartunek & Moch, 1992: 486). This is not a radical change as it still reflects the schemata, or knowledge structures, already in place in the organization. For example, this change might result in increased skill in team building and transactional processes based on an already shared agreement that team process skills are valuable (Bartunek & Moch, 1992: 486).

Second-order change, however, involves a change in the operating schemata themselves. This type of change requires a "phase-in" of new schemata and a "phase-out" of old ones to varying degrees (Bartunek & Moch, 1992: 487). In this type of change, the consultant or change agent decides which schemata are "best" for the group of insiders and helps in the implementation of this schemata (Bartunek & Moch, 1992: 488). For example, if a change agent wants to introduce team building skills to a hierarchical, individualistic organization, he or she must help the organization unlearn the old, individualistic schemata that exist and learn new schemata that suggest that teams are valuable and worthwhile to individual members and to the organization as a whole.

Third-order change takes second-order change one step further in that it helps "organization members develop the capacity to identify and change their own schemata as they see fit" (Bartunek & Moch, 1992: 487). As will be shown later, this third-order change is the same as action learning in that both seek to establish a constant learning process within the organization so that an outside consultant is not required for every change initiative. Rather, consultants help organization members develop the ability to

learn when second-order change is necessary and how to implement it for themselves (Bartunek & Moch, 1992: 487). [5]

Single and Double-loop Learning

Another conceptualization of change that is similar to the above is Chris Argyris' change strategy of "action science". Action science will be explained more fully later; the present discussion focusses upon action science's proposition of single-loop and double-loop as two levels of learning. Single-loop learning is a change in action, but not a change in governing variables (frameworks, schemas, causal maps) that guide the action (Argyris, Putnam, McLain-Smith, 1985: 86). Double-loop learning, however, involves first changing the governing frameworks themselves and then the action strategy changes as a result (Argyris, Putnam, McLain-Smith, 1985: 86).

This distinction between single and double loop learning is similar to Bartunek and Moch's first and second-order change detailed above. Both Argyris' and Bartunek and Moch's models of learning and change account for incremental change (single-loop learning, first and second-order change) and fundamental change (double-loop learning, third-order change) and seek to train organizational members in new ways of thinking to achieve fundamental change (Syvantek & DeShon, 1993: 351).

No matter what type of change an organization is involved in, however, the change is inevitably a reaction to increased turbulence in the internal or external environment. The following section explains theories about the environment's effect upon organizational

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[5] Bartunek and Moch's orders of change are similar to Golembiewski's four types of individual cognitive change: Alpha, Beta, Gamma A, Gamma B. (Porras and Silvers, 1994: 86-87).

change, and how this effect requires further understanding of change at the deeper level of meanings and beliefs.

The Environment, Causal Texture and Change

"Change can be defined as a planned or unplanned response of an organization to pressures" (Dalziel & Schoonover, 1988: 10). External forces such as the turbulent external environment caused by increased globalization, competition, technological advances and government policies cause change within organizations. Emery and Trist focus upon how these external pressures influence change within organizations. When "forces from the contextual field begin to penetrate the organization set," this creates "turbulence for the organization" (Trist, 1985: 171). To deal with this turbulence, an organization must have requisite variety within its own system to match that of the external environment in order to survive (Trist, 1985: 171). Trist quotes Ashby's law of requisite variety: "...when a system's response repertoire cannot match increases in variety emanating from the environment, that system's survival is endangered" (Trist, 1985: 171). To deal with the amount and variety of input that is external to the system, the system must have equal variety internally (Morgan & Ramirez, 1983: 14).

Emery and Trist introduce the concept of "causal texture" to shed some light on the relevance of the turbulent environment to organizational change. They define causal texture as interdependencies within the environment itself (Emery & Trist, 1965: 22). They discuss four types of causal texture or environments: placid, randomized; placid, clustered; disturbed-reactive; and turbulent fields (Emery & Trist, 1965: 24-26). Emery and Trist focus upon the fourth type of environment, turbulent fields, because it is dynamic

and represents continuous change in the environment (Emery & Trist, 1965: 26). An important effect that this turbulent environment has upon organizations is that it increases the level of relative uncertainty within organizations as the environment is not predictable (Emery & Trist, 1965: 28). "...These fields are so complex, so richly textured, that it is difficult to see how individual systems can, by their own efforts, successfully adapt to them" (Emery & Trist, 1973: 53).

In this vein, some theorists argue that the "the sheer rapidity of social change today" reflects our turbulent environment and requires greater organizational adaptability (Terreberry, 1976: 181). Given that a turbulent environment exists, how can organizations adapt to this turbulence? This is the point at which the systems perspective is relevant. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Structuration theory posits that individuals actively create, and are created by, their environment. In this way, organizations must constantly change to cope with, and adapt to, their environment. This, in turn, creates environmental change, which requires the need for more organizational change and so on. This perspective shows how change processes are means of organizational adaptation to turbulent environments.

In such a turbulent environment, surface-level change (discussed in the Types of Change in Organizations section) is completely inadequate. Rather, this turbulence demands new, deeper forms of change that deal with change at the level of organizational, belief structures. Organizational learning is one method of planned change which focusses upon the complete restructuring of organizational belief systems.

<u>Organizational Learning</u>

One method or set of management practices that is linked to this broader theory of organizations adapting to their environment is organizational learning. Organizational learning links theories of managing change and the sense-making that happens within change processes, because it emphasizes the importance of being aware of current cognitive schemas in order to reframe them and learn new ones. In this way, these approaches focus upon the cognitive sense-making that happens during times of change for all members of an organization, and upon proactive ways of learning to recognize the need for change and develop strategies to accomplish it.

Since Kurt Lewin acknowledged the importance of "re-education" in the progression of groups and organizations in the 1940s, other theorists have based their organizational learning theories and methods upon his work (Benne, 1976: 315). Organizational learning theories and methods espoused by Chris Argyris uses organizational culture, sense-making, and structuration theories to explain why and how their methods of learning facilitate an organization's ability to change. These theories of organizational learning suggest that because of turbulent environments, organizations must "learn how to learn" to adapt new "ways of knowing" that facilitate an organization's ability to cope with change (Morley, 1989: 179).

Of the various concepts and methods existing within the larger theoretical perspective of organizational learning, the present review discusses two distinct methods: action science and action learning. Action science (originating with Chris Argyris) focusses upon the learning done by insiders within an organization by outside experts,

while action learning (based upon Emery and Trist's socio-technical theory) focusses upon mutual, and continual, learning and sharing of information by both insiders and outsiders (Morley, 1989: 180). These concepts are relevant to the present study because both address planned change at a deeper level than do traditional management theories, and, in this way, both anticipate the need for cultural theories of change.

Action Science

An approach that has been advanced to address change within a broader theoretical perspective is action science. Action science is a collaborative process of inquiry into problems of social practice by scientists and participants that is designed to "foster learning about one's practice and about alternative ways of constructing it" (Argyris, Putnam, McLain-Smith, 1985: 237). It aims to uncover tacit knowledge so that it can be criticized, discussed and changed if necessary (Argyris, Putnam, McLain-Smith, 1985: 237).

Theories of organizational change put forward by Argyris draw upon the concepts of schemas and causal maps described previously in Chapter Two. Argyris, Putnam and McLain-Smith suggest that agents "learn a repertoire of concepts, schemas, and strategies, and they learn programs for drawing from their repertoire to design representations and actions for unique situations" (Argyris, Putnam and McLain-Smith, 1985: 81). They further classify these theories of action into espoused theories and theories-in-use. Espoused theories are what the agent claims to follow, while theories-in-use are what can be inferred from the agent's action (Argyris, Putnam, McLain-Smith, 1985: 81-82).

These definitions of espoused theories and theories-in-use emphasize that agents are responsible for their actions and that their actions are not accidental (Argyris, Putnam, McLain-Smith, 1985: 82). Action science depends upon the agent's ability to reflect back upon previous action to discover his own theories-in-use as the first step in learning to "design and produce new theories-in-use for reflection and action" (Argyris, Putnam, McLain-Smith, 1985: 83). In this way, action science seeks to help agents "make more informed choices in creating the worlds in which they are embedded" (Argyris, Putnam, McLain-Smith, 1985: 84).

Overcoming Past Schemas To Achieve Change

Like Argyris, some theorists discuss organizational change at the fundamental level of cognitive schemas and belief systems. For instance, Senge uses the term "mental models" to describe theories-in-use, schemas, and schematas (Senge, 1990: 182). Using Argyris' action science as a guide, Senge recognizes that learning new mental models can help organizations "recognize longer-term patterns of change and the underlying structures producing those patterns" (Senge, 1990:, 204). In discussing team learning, Senge acknowledges Argyris' "defensive routines" which are "habitual ways of interacting that protect us and others from threat or embarrassment", but also prevent learning (Senge, 1990: 237)[6]. By bringing these mental models and defensive routines to the

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[6] See Argyris, Putnam & McLain-Smith (1985: 93-98) for information on Model I defensive routines and Model II theories-in use.

surface and becoming aware of how they work, organizations can use them to learn and adapt to change (Senge, 1990: 237).[7]

In Marlowe, Hoffman and Bordelon's examination of the downsizing of a government organization, they discovered that during the change process, managers' had different "cognitive maps of the key issues" facing the organization and that their "cultural assumptions" fragmented (Marlowe, Hoffman, & Bordelon, 1992: 24-25). This fact counters the unified, monolithic view of change espoused by the management perspective. They also discovered that the organizational learning process itself brings out and identifies the organization's schemata (Marlowe, Hoffman, & Bordelon, 1992: 31). This shows that, although learning is essential to organizational change processes, the schemata shift required for organizational change to occur is not automatic nor shared, as management of change literature suggests.

Organizational Learning and Structuration

The assumptions of action science and action learning reveal their relation to sense-making theory and structurational processes. Morgan and Ramirez acknowledge that action science and action learning both reflect the structurational principle of self-reflexive monitoring because they help the organization "to monitor and question the context in which it is operating, and to monitor and question the rules which underlie its own operation" (Morgan & Ramirez, 1983: 6). Action science also views agents' sense-making of their environment as a structurational process in which agents construct meanings which, in turn, guide their action (Argyris, Putnam & Mclain-Smith, 1985: 81).

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[7] Edgar Schein also realizes that culture can limit an organization's ability to understand new concepts

Action learning is structurational in that it assumes that members of an organization are "active partners in producing their reality," and seeks to "enhance the capacities of people in everyday situations to investigate, understand, and if they wish, to change those situations in an ongoing fashion, with a minimum of external help" (Morgan & Ramirez, 1983: 9). Through learning, therefore, organizational members are truly "empowered" because they have the ability to "investigate and understand their own situations" and to act differently if they wish (Morgan & Ramirez, 1983: 10).

Because action learning emphasizes that people learn through action, it directly relates to Weick's sense-making process in which people act first, then think back on those actions and make retrospective sense of them. Seen in this way, action learning is a form of sense-making and "a continuous process of inquiry" in which individuals attempt to overcome the tendency to favor past schemata and are more consciously aware of the assumptions and theories-in-use which guide them (Morgan & Ramirez, 1983: 21). This awareness makes them more adaptable to learn, and therefore, change. In this way, action learning aims to "create a community that can learn to free itself from its experience" (Morgan & Ramirez, 1983: 15-16). Just like sense-making and structuration theory, therefore, action learning creates a proactive stance toward the process of reality construction as it assumes that individuals always actively engage their own environment and are responsible for the way their reality is enacted (Morgan & Ramirez, 1983: 19).[8]

Critique of Organizational Learning as a Management Tool

Although the critical approaches to change discussed above anticipate the need to incorporate a cultural perspective into organizational change, these approaches are

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and ways of doing things (Schein, 1983: 87 and Schein, 1993: 86).

sometimes oversimplified into a manipulative management tool designed to alter members' schemata to fit with management's vision. When this happens, these critical approaches lose their sensitivity to, and their integration of, cultural and sense-making aspects. Poole, Gioia and Gray state, for example, that during a period of change, management can "transform or reconstruct the prevailing organizational schemas in an effort to align organizational beliefs and values with the managers' new vision of the organization" (Poole, Gioia & Gray, 1989: 272). This view implies, therefore, that it is possible for managers to alter other members' schemata through manipulation of the way members perceive, think and behave (Poole, Gioia & Gray, 1989: 273). This view assumes that managers can direct an organization through first and second-order change as "organizational schemas are changed in the direction management chooses, rather than being reinforced or changed as members see fit" (Poole, Gioia & Gray, 1989: 273). The study concludes that "strong, coercive, direct management actions" may be required to break down existing schemas within a deep rooted organizational culture and to create new schemas (Poole, Gioia & Gray 287).

This view makes sense insofar as managers are often agents of change and managers of meaning. However, this view undermines the value of ambiguity, diversity and variety within organizations because rather than encouraging multiple viewpoints and perspectives during the change process, this view advocates the altering of schemata towards one, pre-determined, management point of view. This management perspective puts forth a cognitive approach to change, but assumes (like the management perspective of organizational culture discussed in Chapter Two) that this cognitive approach can be

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[8] See Van de Ven & Poole for more information about Structuration theory and organizational change.

used to achieve one, overarching shared vision within the organization. It uses the cognitive approach to help managers alter members' schemata to fit the managers' vision, rather than helping members examine their own schemata and ways of thinking to help them better adapt to change and to actively learn and create new ideas. The former view may effect a limited, reactive, first-order change, but the latter view seems better able to handle more proactive, third-order change as it sets the stage for continuous, creative learning from all members of the organization.

While organizational learning is a method that deals with environmental turbulence in terms of individual and organizational change, and brings the present study closer to understanding change at a more fundamental level of beliefs and behaviors, it also raises further questions about how cultural sense-making processes exist *within* organizational change? The following section addresses these questions by explaining how cultural and sense-making processes described in Chapter Two relate to organizational change, and brings us closer to understanding how these processes account for, and help create, the extent of shared interpretations among members during organizational change.

Cultural Change Theories

The preceding discussion of management approaches, typologies of change and recent critical approaches to change points to the incompleteness of change approaches that do not incorporate cultural and sense-making processes into their discussion of change. Although the management approach and the typologies of change touch upon some aspects of culture and sense-making, these aspects are not elaborated upon or developed. The recent critical approaches to change take a critical perspective on the

traditional approaches and look at deeper, more fundamental change. To fully understand how change works at this fundamental level of beliefs and values, however, we need a discussion of cultural and sense-making processes *within* change. An understanding of organizational culture and sense-making has been established in Chapter Two and an understanding of organizational change has been established previously in this chapter; this section, therefore, merges these two areas together to show how culture and sense-making processes within organizational change, although relevant, are not well established in literature and require more practical research.

This merger focusses and structures the present research as it provides a theoretical basis for examining sense-making around change and the extent to which shared interpretations are required for organizational change to be successful. These theories show how integral the cultural process of sense-making is to individual and organizational abilities to adapt to internal and external change caused by turbulent environments, and deal with change at the level of assumptions, schemas and meaning. Although cultural literature about change acknowledges that change involves management of meaning, it debates whether or not shared visions or overarching meanings in an organization are necessary to achieve change, and to what extent shared visions actually hinder the ambiguity required to make organizations adaptable to change.

Sense-making, Ambiguity and Change

Recall from Chapter Two that schemas and frames of references are structures of knowledge based on past experience; these schemas play an important role in

understanding how sense-making happens and the extent to which interpretations come to be shared, if at all, among organizational members during change.

By examining various manager's interpretations of change over a period of time, Lynn Isabella's research demonstrates the relevance of sense-making schemas to organizational change. Her research reveals that interpretations go through a four-stage process of anticipation, confirmation, culmination and aftermath (Isabella, 1990: 14). When faced with a new event or change, people first undergo anxiety and use any information they can get to gain understanding of the change. During confirmation, the event is fit into past frames of reference and presumptions are made about what will be, based upon what has been (Isabella, 1990: 17). This confirming stage helps to reduce anxiety because the present, uncertain event is put into the framework of a more certain, past event. The culmination stage amends the view of the event by including new information that is useful to interpreting the new event and eliminating or discounting past information that is not useful or valuable to an interpretation (Isabella 23). In this stage, there is anxiety and confusion because tried and true past frames of reference do not work and people face the anxiety of creating new realities. In this way, individuals actively reconstruct their environment (Isabella, 1990: 25). The aftermath stage is one in which members realize the change has been effected (due in part to their creation of a new reality) and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the change brought about by the new event (Isabella, 1990: 25). This research suggests that "realities constantly change as new facts arise and new questions are asked" and supports the theory that frames of reference are sense-making devices that are used during change (Isabella, 1990: 31, 33).

Because "how things are said or accomplished will influence the amount and variety of interpretations that can be imposed on them," Weick suggests that organizations should encourage complexity and creativity rather than simplicity and commonality to encourage a variety of interpretations and increase the adaptability to change (Weick, 1979b, 65). In this way, shared interpretations among members are not only unrealistic, they are detrimental to the creativity and adaptability of the organization. Weick advocates the "need to understand how people can reverse some of the potential rigidities imposed by schemata" and suggests that "intentional confusion" is one way to encourage creativity and insight in organizational sense-making (Weick, 1979b, 68-69). Weick further suggests that organizations must complicate themselves to adapt to change by being sensitive to the differences between present and past situations and invoking new hypotheses or schemas to deal with different, present situations (Weick, 1979b: 58). [9]

Bartunek and Moch support this view as they suggest that to achieve third-order change, an organization must have structures that allow for members to "operate using different perspectives" (Bartunek & Moch, 1992: 496). Shared overarching values within an organization, therefore, limit the amount of diversity and variety required to overcome ingrained schemata and begin the process of double-loop learning and change.

Some characteristics of unintentionally ambiguous situations include multiple and conflicting interpretations, unclear goals and vague roles and responsibilities (Weick, 1995: 93). Weick suggests that these kind of ambiguous and equivocal situations combine to "produce a shock that engages sense-making" (Weick 1995: 94). "An interruption to a flow typically induces an emotional response, which then paves the way for emotion to

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[9] Eisenberg and Riley suggest a relation between language and change as they argue that change requires

influence sense-making" (Weick, 1995: 45). This shock is emotional because it signals "that one's well being may be at stake" (Weick, 1995: 45). This is certainly the case in most change initiatives in which uncertainty and anxiety exist regarding job description, structuring of work teams and even employment status.

This shock is an interruption of an ongoing flow that does not fit with pre-existing frames of reference; this could be an unexpected event, an expected event that does not happen, or something that has never happened before in an organization's or individual's experience (Weick, 1995: 100). This interrupts the "ongoing cognitive activity" and causes coping, problem solving and learning to take place (Mandler, 1984 in Weick 1995: 100). Thus, equivocality and sense-making are vital sources of change in organizations.[10]

Because an organization's environment is always a reflection of itself and therefore influenced by its schemas and frames of reference, when presented with a opposition or challenge to these schemas (in the form of a change) organizations are faced with a paradox (Ford & Backoff, 1988: 112). In this way, paradoxes such as those between stability and change and collectivity and individuality are important to the concept of change because "they reflect the underlying tensions that generate and energize organizational change" (Ford & Backoff, 1988: 82).

Although individuals have different frames of meaning and schemas, some level of sharing of meaning must occur for individuals to coexist within an organization (Ford & Backoff, 1988: 113). This sharing of meaning happens through interaction and communication; therefore, individuals construct and frame others' constructions of reality

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the development of new concepts which requires new language. (Eisenberg & Riley, 1988: 141).
[10]Tom Peters suggests that "in these turbulent times,... anyone who's not thoroughly confused has no chance of success" (Peters, 1992: 627).

with their own to reach some coincidental meaning (Ford & Backoff, 1988: 114). When faced with a change or a paradox, the same process happens in an effort to reach some consensus that can be institutionalized (Ford & Backoff, 1988: 114). In this way, paradoxes of change can be reconciled through reframing of individual and collective schemas through interaction (Ford & Backoff, 1988: 89).

The value of ambiguity to sense-making within contexts of change is also represented in the cultural approach to resistance to change. Unlike the management perspective on resistance, this culturally-sensitive view of change suggests that resistance is not necessarily a negative phenomenon and raises the question: Are differing views actually resistant or are they simply a different interpretation or perception of the change process from that of management? The cultural approach views resistance as a legitimate expression of different interpretations that should be incorporated into the change process itself. By recognizing that ambiguous and multiple interpretations of a change initiative contribute to the diversity of an organization's culture, and increase its adaptability to change to cope with a turbulent environment, the cultural approach *incorporates* resistance into the change process rather than suppresses it.

Donald Klein, for instance, acknowledges the important role that "the defender" or the resister plays in the change process as this person "usually has something of great value to communicate about the nature of the system which the change agent is seeking to influence" (Klein, 1976: 122). In this way, the change agent or manager of change should incorporate resisters into the change process itself rather than ignoring them or manipulating them to change.

Lynn Isabella suggests that resistance to change is inevitable. However, resistance must not be viewed as something to overcome, but rather as an integral part of the change process (Isabella, 1990: 34). Thus, resistance involves past frames of reference battling with the need for new frames of reference and serves a "crucial function in helping people to understand and come to terms with an event" (Isabella, 1990: 34).

As mentioned previously in Chapter Two, Eisenberg also discusses the importance of ambiguity and multiple interpretations to an organization's adaptability to change. "How can cohesion and coordination be promoted while at the same time maintaining sufficient individual freedom to ensure flexibility, creativity, and adaptability to environmental change?" (Eisenberg, 1984: 230). While Eisenberg does not presume to answer such a question, he does suggest that "strategic ambiguity" creates the appearance of agreement among members while still ensuring differing interpretations and creativity to adapt to change (Eisenberg, 1984: 231). Organizations must have enough interdependence and sharing to coordinate activity, but enough individual autonomy to maintain creativity and adapt to change. Eisenberg suggests that "organizational goals are expressed ambiguously to allow organizations the freedom to alter operations which have become maladaptive over time" (Eisenberg, 1984: 233).

Self-fulfilling Prophecies and Change

Weick suggests that the assumptions employed in sense-making become "binding" schemas which control what people perceive (Weick, 1979b: 53). In this way, schemas influence an organization's actions and explain "why they persist in conclusions that seem dated" (Weick, 1979b: 53).

"In a socially constructed world, the map creates and labels the territory, which means the map also prefigures action and perception and encourages self-fulfilling prophecies" (Weick, 1989: 245).

According to Weick, self-fulfilling prophecies are a fundamental act of sense-making (Weick, 1995: 148). In times of constant change, instability, and uncertainty, people's desire for stability and predictability outweigh their desire for accuracy (Weick, 1995: 153). Thus, organizations rely on past expectations and seek to confirm these expectations rather than face the uncertainty of the new situation.

"When perceivers act on their expectations, they may enact (Weick 1977) what they predict will be there. And when they see what they have enacted, using their predictions as a lens, they often confirm their prediction. The joint product of this directive action and selective attention is a set of inputs that match expectations and make sense" (Weick, 1995: 152).

Weick, however, does not suggest that these self-fulfilling prophecies are ultimately a hindrance to organizational change. Just as in the mutual equivalence structure discussed in Chapter Two, when the maintenance of the collective structure itself becomes a shared goal among members, self-fulfilling prophecies create the level of stability from which people can develop more accurate sense-making (Weick, 1995: 153). Thus, in spite of individual goals among members during times of change, "they share this aim of stability in the service of sense-making" (Weick, 1995: 154). "When accuracy flourishes, self-fulfilling prophecies recede as a trigger for sense-making, perhaps to be replaced by arguments that preserve the sense that was first created by expectations" (Weick, 1995: 153).

Morley discusses this tendency for organizations to repeat what came before in terms of planning change. He suggests that societal metaphors and internal constraints built into organizations are "powerful limits to the adaptive capacity" of planning systems which must adapt to changing environments (Morley, 1986: 8). In this way, taken-for-granted assumptions built into the organizational structure severely restrict the planning of change because these assumptions define the criteria for defining the targets and the boundaries of the change (Morley, 1986: 7,8).

Morley addresses this issue by focussing upon a "basic paradox" facing the planning of change (Morley, 1986: 11). One aspect of this paradox is the "powerful societal pressures to back off a direct confrontation with the implications of change and to operate in a familiar mode that has been successful in the past" (Morley, 1986: 11). The other aspect is an increasing need for new decision processes that incorporate continuous and new learning to cope with the environment's turbulence (Morley, 1986: 11). He suggests that this "interdependence between existing and emerging paradigms" exists within theories of change and change planning (Morley, 1986: 17).

Building on Schein's definition of culture, Gagliardi suggests that past successes and experiences within organizations are idealized and the rational acceptance of process beliefs becomes emotional identification with values (Gagliardi, 1986: 123). In this way, Gagliardi acknowledges that deeply-held values within an organization are difficult to abandon even when they are no longer applicable because "it is a value, and as such, it is not considered as being open to criticism and discussion" (Gagliardi, 1986: 121).

Gareth Morgan acknowledges the difficulty some organizations have in abandoning ways of thinking that provided past success even though they must adopt new

ways of thinking to survive (Morgan, 1986: 245). Like Weick, he suggests that an organization enacts its own environment based on its understanding of its own identity (Morgan, 1986: 241). Because of this, "if one really wants to understand one's environment, one must begin by understanding oneself, for one's understanding of the environment is always a projection of oneself" (Morgan, 1986: 243). In order to change, therefore, an organization must be aware of its relationship with the environment and recognize that in creating and changing its self-identity, it can influence and change its environment to some extent. Because change happens through this circular pattern of interaction, an organization must think in terms of causal "loops rather than lines" (Morgan, 1986: 247).

This presentation of the literature about the sense-making processes within change reveals that although an abundance of literature and research exists regarding sense-making and organizational change separately, very little has been conducted on the sense-making processes that exist within organizational change. The conclusion summarizes the literature presented in the last two chapters and shows how this literature reveals the need for the practical research conducted in the present study.

Conclusion

This chapter situates Chapter Two's explanation of organizational culture and sense-making within a discussion of organizational change. While this review shows the importance of cultural and sense-making processes in organizations, it also reveals that literature and research linking these two areas is lacking. The oversimplification of the change process put forth by the literature about management of change deflects us from

understanding the complexity of the change process that we know exists from the literature about the cultural approach to change. These existing theories about change need to incorporate the cultural process of sense-making because these commonly used approaches necessarily engage people, and thus, cultural processes. Although these existing theories acknowledge the cultural and sense-making processes that happen during change to a minimal extent, critical approaches to change provide a more fundamental discussion of change with its premise that reframing individual members' beliefs and schemas affects an organization's adaptability to a turbulent environment; in this way, these critical approaches establish and explain the relevance of cultural and sense-making processes to organizational learning and change. Cultural approaches to change extend this discussion, however, with their focus upon the actual sense-making processes that happen within organizational change. This discussion sheds some light on the present study's investigation of the sense-making processes that happen within change and how these processes affect the sharing of interpretations by members undergoing organizational change. The brevity of the discussion about cultural approaches, unfortunately, reveals that more practical research investigating cultural and sense-making processes during organizational change is needed. The following chapters address this need by investigating a change initiative in a central Alberta chemical company. Specifically, this research examines how affected organizational members engage cultural processes in making sense of a specific change initiative and to what extent interpretations about this change are shared.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

As discussed in previous chapters, the goal of this investigation is to examine

sense-making processes related to organizational change and, more specifically, to

respond to the research question: To what extent do shared interpretations exist among

members of an organization undergoing some level of change? To investigate this issue, a

field investigation was undertaken focussing upon a team of environmental engineers at a

large chemical manufacturing organization who underwent an internal change initiative. In

examining the extent of shared interpretations among members, the intent of this research

was to shed some light upon the role of sense-making processes in a specific change

initiative and to extend this discussion to gauge the importance of sense-making within

change initiatives in general. This chapter introduces the research site and the groups

under observation, describes the design of the research and the qualitative methods used,

explains why these methods are most applicable for this particular research, and

acknowledges limitations encountered in the research process.

Research Site

The research was conducted at a large chemical manufacturing site in Central

Alberta (Corp). Corp exists within a larger, international, parent corporation located in

Calgary, Alberta (Head Office) that is an integrated natural gas services and

petrochemicals company. Head Office's three major areas include petrochemical

manufacturing, gas transmission and international gas processing. While the necessary

relationship between Corp and its parent corporation, Head Office is not the focus of this

research, this relationship influences Corp's operations and culture to some extent, and will, therefore, be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.[1]

The Corp site itself produces ethylene, which can be upgraded to make chemical derivatives used in many consumer products, and polyethylene or plastic. Corp was first established in 1979 with the opening of the first ethylene plant. The site expanded significantly in 1984 with the opening of a second ethylene plant and a polyethylene plant. Corp has a permanent workforce of about 600 people, employs about 140 contract personnel and is a major economic contributor to the Alberta economy.

Because of Corp's size and product output, the site occupies a large amount of land within a predominantly agricultural landscape. The numerous and diverse buildings, roads with street signs and lights, traffic signs, and various parking lots, give the impression of the site as an intact, self-sufficient city. Observation of the Team meeting, employee validation and most of the interviews for this research were conducted in one of the many administrative buildings in which the offices of most Team members are located. Most of these offices are next to each other in the same area of the building except for the Team leaders' offices and a few Team members whose offices, although in the same building, are in a different area.

Corp's Change Process

Members that have been at Corp for numerous years have undergone many organizational changes. The most significant and recent change to most members was the company-wide business transformation that took place two years ago. This past

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[1] Corp's culture is discussed beginning on p. 103.

reorganization affected every department in Corp and, according to data collected, appeared to cause a lot of anxiety and uncertainty among most members. This lengthy process was externally-driven by consultants and created the basis for Corp's current change process.

Because of the upheaval caused by business transformation, Corp created the position of change leader to facilitate future reorganizations within Corp and to create some sort of change process that various departments could follow. In this way, Corp's change leader develops processes to help work teams deal with change initiatives. Although the change leader said that he adjusts the process depending upon the situation and the group involved, the process consists of three definite phases, discovery, design and implementation.

Unlike many organizations in which leaders simply impose a change or reorganization upon employees, Corp appears to have a participative process to deal with the need for change as it arises. Members believe that the creation of project teams consisting of affected leaders and members, the validation element of the change process[2], and the fact that any member can discuss any issues that arise from the change with leadership, incorporates employee input into Corp's change process. The existence of a particular process for handling change that incorporates employee input and participation seems to have created certain expectations and interpretations among employees regarding change initiatives which will be examined in subsequent chapters.

This change process usually begins with a sponsor from the leadership level that recognizes that a problem exists within a particular area, or from the team itself which sees

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[2] Corp's "validation" process is explained in more detail beginning on p. 124.

a problem in their area and goes to the leadership level to get sponsorship for a change initiative. The higher-level leader and the Team leaders of the particular area then go to the change leader to plan and design the process to be used. In the discovery phase, a cross-functional project team is put together comprised of leaders and members of the area undergoing the change as well as organizational development facilitators and the change leader. This project team conducts focus groups across the organization and analyzes the data gathered from these sessions. In a process called "validation", this data is posted, in the form of a "brown paper", in a public area so that anyone can read it, and add any concerns or comments to it. The project team then analyzes this revised data to form "opportunities", or problem areas which need fixing. These opportunities are taken to a decision board comprised of high level leadership which approves the change initiative to move ahead into the design phase, or makes changes before approval. The design phase designs solutions to the opportunities and "validates these solutions once again by gathering input from employees; this design is then taken to the decision board once again for approval or changes. In this design phase, leaders relevant to the team undergoing the change initiative "match" people to the available positions. Once the design is approved, implementation executes the new design across affected areas.

Groups Under Investigation

When I approached a Corp representative to use this organization as a source for practical research, I was given permission to observe meetings relevant to a particular change initiative and to conduct interviews with an environmental team (Team) and a

change project team (Project) as long as I agreed to maintain the confidentiality of Corp, Team, and Project, and met all safety requirements while on the site.

The specific focus of my research is the environmental Team. Team's mandate includes responsibility for maintaining environmental standards on site and for monitoring the quality of air, soil, and groundwater waste, providing support to other work teams so that the site complies with environmental regulatory requirements. It also involves continuous, strategic planning on how to improve environmental performance. In this way, Team is a central group that acts as a consultant to other work groups on site. Because of the nature of Team's organization, members' priorities tend to be external to Team, rather than within Team itself. Team's structure is relatively "flat"; the higher-level leader is at the top of the structure, followed by the two team leaders, who are, in turn, followed by many environmental engineers, coordinators and specialists who are all basically at the same level. The Team is comprised of approximately nine members and two team leaders; the nine members are male and the two team leaders are female.

My intent was to observe the Team as they coped with, and made sense of, a change initiative that was begun by the Team leaders. The reason for this change initiative directly related to Team's inability to achieve their desired results because of organizational and process problems. Leadership "set the bar a little higher" in terms of environmental performance and this was the catalyst for the two Team leaders to initiate a change for Team.

This field research was to involve observing regular Team meetings and conducting interviews with Team members and the Team leaders. However, because Corp's change process involved the formation of a Project team which, during my period

of research, met more often than the Team itself, a significant amount of time was spent observing and interviewing this Project team. This Project team was comprised of four "content" people and two "process" people. The content people were the Team's two leaders and a leader from another environmental department directly affected by the Team. The other content person was a member of another environmental department also directly affected and impacted by the Team. It is worthwhile noting that this was the only non-leader member to volunteer to sit on the Project team. The two process people were a change leader for the entire site who was leading the change process itself, and another facilitator. Three of the four "content" people are female, while both "process" people are male.

Design

Observation of formal and informal meetings and semi-structured interviews were the qualitative and interpretive methods selected to investigate the research question: To what extent to shared interpretations exist among members of an organization undergoing some level of change? Observations were conducted within the first two months of Team's change process and captured some formal and informal meetings of Project and Team during the discovery phase of the change process. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight Corp members; five interviews were conducted immediately following the discovery phase of the change process and three were conducted during the implementation phase.

Because this research studies organizational culture, which involves individual and group meanings of their work experience, qualitative methods, such as observation and

interviews, were considered more conducive to revealing these meanings than quantitative methods, for numerous reasons. Van Maanen, for instance, says that qualitative researchers tend to describe "the unfolding of social processes rather than the social structures that are the focus of quantitative researchers," and that qualitative methods are more conducive to studying organizational meaning because "qualitative methods are rather similar to the interpretive procedures we make use of as we go about our everyday life" (Van Maanen, 1979: 520-21).

Linda Smircich also acknowledges that because culture is comprised of meanings, "these meanings should be sought by analyzing the knowledge that individuals possess about their situations and by examining the understandings that the individual has of him or herself, the boss, colleagues, subordinates, and the wider context within which the organization operates" (Smircich, 1983c: 162). She emphasizes the need for qualitative study of organizational culture, as she says "the analysis of an organization as a culture is an interpretive endeavor" (Smircich, 1983c: 164).

Czarniawska-Joerges says that "to understand people's actions, one has to look for the meaning attributed to those actions by the actors themselves, and by the observers" (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992: 124). To examine processes of sense-making of certain events, methodology should focus upon "what these events meant to members as they attempted to make sense of their experience" (Poole, Gioia & Gray, 1989: 275). This research follows this suggestion by asking open ended questions during the interviews that probe the interviewee's feelings and interpretations of Corp and Team's culture or way of doing things, past experiences with change initiatives, and the current change process.

Smircich suggests that "participant observation for significant time periods with interviews conducted after some time in the setting is the favored strategy for data gathering" because by doing this, there is "greater likelihood that the questions ultimately asked in an interview will be relevant because they have emerged from interaction in the setting" (Smircich, 1983c: 171). In preparing interview questions for investigating cultures in organizations, Sackmann argues that the objective is to help interviewees "explore and examine" in greater detail the issues that they indicate to be important (Sackmann, 1991: 190).

The method followed in the present study also takes into account Weick's advice about doing practical research on sense-making. He emphasizes that past events are important to current sense-making as "people remember events that have the same emotional tone as what they currently feel" (Weick, 1995: 49). People look to past experiences that they have similar emotions about to see "what those previous events might suggest about the meaning of present events" (Weick, 1995: 49). This research incorporated this into the interview questions by asking how past experiences, specifically a Corp-wide change initiative that took place two years ago, affected interviewee's perceptions of the present change process. Interviewees often referred to this past change initiative even before this question was formally asked; this reveals that, as Weick says, members look to past, emotional experiences to make sense of present ones.

Observation

In keeping with the rationale stated above, the research design was based upon a combination of observation and interviews with members of Team and of Project. All

observations were conducted within my first two months on the research site; during this time, I observed a total of eight formal meetings. One of these meetings was a focus group in which members of Project facilitated and gathered data from various representatives from the organization who would be affected by any change in the Team. Unfortunately only one of the meetings that I observed was a regular meeting of the members of Team. This lack of access to Team meetings was a severe problem encountered during the observation period and will be discussed later in the limitations section of this chapter. Six of the formal meetings that I observed were of the Project team. These meetings usually involved decision-making regarding the change process being followed and qualitative analysis of data gathered during the many internal focus groups conducted by Project. Many of these Project meetings were full day meetings and were conducted "off-site". These full-day meetings gave me the opportunity to observe the Project team informally as they always invited me to have coffee or lunch with them.

These formal meetings were supplemented by two informal periods of observation in a common meeting place during a process called "validation." Validation is part of Corp's change process in which Project posts their focus group data, a member of Project is present to explain the data, and anyone can add to, or "validate" the existing data with supporting or contradictory comments. Corp members value this validation process because, in addition to the actual focus groups, they believe it allows people affected by the change to contribute directly to the change initiative, and it also serves as a "check" on the Project team's qualitative analysis of the focus group data.

My observations of Project and Team followed a particular process. First, I had to find out where and when the next pertinent meeting would be held and ask permission of

the change leader or of the Team leaders to attend. Although at the first meeting observed, I was worried that I would bother members by sitting among them at the meeting table, the facilitator of this first meeting invited me to sit at the table rather than sitting in a chair in the corner. During all other formal meetings, I continued to sit at the meeting table with the rest of the group as if I was a member myself, and this was accepted by other members.

I recorded field notes that contained factual information such as conversations, behaviors, and the subjects being discussed during meetings; contextual information such as the date, time, purpose of the meeting and the people present; and analytical information including my immediate impressions of observations and preliminary ideas and themes from the data. During the formal meeting, I recorded the factual and contextual information and during a lull in the conversation, a coffee break, or immediately after the meeting, I supplemented this information with my interpretation of the events or behaviors and gave some preliminary analyses and any ideas or themes emerging from the factual and contextual data. During the first few observations of formal meetings, I recorded as much as possible about procedures, language, relationships, and first interpretations that I had. These initial observations pointed out some important themes or commonalities such as the importance of processes of communication, input, and change to members, that helped to focus subsequent observations . This observation of formal and informal meetings was conducted over a period of two months and provided background information and themes upon which the semi-structured interviews were based.

Collinson argues that successful qualitative research relies "heavily upon the information provided by particular informants" (Collinson, 1992: 105). While the term

"informant" often has a negative connotation as someone who reveals more than they should, in qualitative research, informants provide useful information that the researcher may not otherwise have access to. In this research, some members of Project acted as informants about Corp procedures, processes, and jargon because of my familiarity with them through the numerous Project meetings I observed. For instance, members provided me with definitions for important jargon such as "B/T"; this is the "Business Transformation" that Corp underwent two years ago and that still affects members' perception of change processes. This information helped me to make sense of Team's activities within the larger organization and allowed me to use Corp jargon when conducting interviews.

Interviews

The observations of formal and informal interactions of Project and the Team itself provided the necessary background information to design questions for semi-structured interviews. The themes of communication, input and change "processes" derived from the observations raised questions of how individual Team members and leaders felt about, and interpreted, these issues and the extent to which these interpretations were shared among members. To discover members' interpretations and sense-making processes, open-ended questions about Corp and Team's culture, communication and change processes were asked; these questions usually began with: "How do you feel about...?" The questions were designed to make interviewees reveal as much as possible about their interpretations and sense-making in their response to the question.

A total of eight interviews were conducted with members of the Project team and with the Team itself. Five interviews were conducted immediately after all observations of formal and informal meetings were completed, while the additional three interviews were completed within three months after this time. As will be discussed later in the limitations section, I was not permitted to actively solicit interviewees among Team members. Because of this, my interview sample consisted of volunteers who responded to an email message describing my research and my need to interview members regarding the current change process.

My interview procedure began by contacting the list of interested members, supplied to me by the Team leader, by telephone and arranging appointments with each member. Interviewees were informed that the interview would be about an hour in length and asked if they had any objections to my audio-taping of the interview. Times were arranged and no one objected to the taping.

A set list of questions were asked in the first five interviews as the interviewees were all members of Team (see Appendix A). When interviewing the two Team leaders, this list of questions was altered slightly to probe at their interpretations from a leadership perspective (see Appendix B). When interviewing the change leader, a completely different set of questions was used to inquire more specifically into Corp's change process and the change process used in this specific initiative (see Appendix C). Although I had a set list of questions for each interview, if the interviewee was very forthcoming with information and seemed willing and interested to talk to me, I asked more probing questions or expanded upon trains of thought put forth by the interviewees' themselves. In this way, the interviews were semi-structured rather than purely formal.

All interviews were between forty minutes and an hour in length, were conducted in the interviewee's office, and were recorded on audio tape. I transcribed all eight interviews by listening and keying the tape recorded conversations into the computer. These transcribed interviews were then printed out to compare the individual responses with the questions.

Method of Analysis

To analyze both sources of data, I examined field notes from observations and transcribed interviews, and looked for similarities from which I derived common themes. First, I read the observation field notes and recorded significant events and comments in terms of the way members' worked together, and the actual content of their discussion. Any observations or comments relating to how members interpreted or made sense of their current situation were selected for further examination. Then, I examined these condensed notes to find common themes that shed some light upon the extent of shared interpretations among members.

For the interview results, I examined the seven transcribed interviews, question by question. For each question, I wrote summaries, in point form, of each interviewee's response. With the questions organized in this manner, I was able to compare the level of shared interpretations among members on each issue. In analyzing this data, I looked for common themes among all of the responses, and recorded these common themes separately. Finally, I compared the common themes from the observation and interview data and used the results of this comparison as the basis for my conclusions.

Limitations

Lack of Access to Team Meetings

Because this research examines the sense-making of people undergoing a change initiative, most of the data was to come from observation of the Team itself. The most severe limitation encountered in this research was that I was denied access to Team meetings one month into the observations. This denial of access was partially due to miscommunication between Team leaders and myself, and Team leaders and the Team. I was under the impression that when I was given approval to observe the Team, that all members of the team, not just the Team leaders, had been made aware of my research and approved my presence at their meetings. However, at the beginning of the first Team meeting I attended, the Team leader introduced me to all the members and asked them if they had any concerns about my presence. She further said that if anyone had any concerns, that I would leave the meeting immediately. Although this surprised me, no one made any objections and I was able to observe that meeting.

Approximately one week later, however, the Team leader informed me that one member was uncomfortable with my presence at the meetings because I was not an employee of Corp. During the change initiative, these meetings became very emotional testimonials of members' feelings and insecurities. This team member felt that he would not be as open about his feelings or voice his concerns during meetings if I was present. Because the Team leaders depended upon these meetings to inform, and receive feedback from, Team members regarding everyday tasks and about the change initiative, I was not allowed to attend any further meetings. I requested to speak directly to the member concerned to explain my research in more detail, to assure him that I was observing the

Team under a strict confidentiality agreement and that I was not a threat to the Team in any way. However, this request was politely denied by the Team leader.

This limitation is significant to the research because this lack of access to Team meetings changed the entire method of my research from that of participant observation of formal and informal interactions, to that of a situated case study relying upon individual interviews. As Smircich says, "the researcher needs to be close to, not detached from, those social interactions in which meanings are rooted and elaborated" (Smircich, 1983c: 165). Weick, too, argues that in sense-making research, researchers must "preserve action that is situated in context" (Weick, 1995: 172). The lack of access to Team meetings made observing these formal and informal interactions, in which members negotiate meanings of the organization and the change initiative, difficult.

Although I was given nearly unlimited access to the Project team meetings, these meetings were only useful to me insofar as they provided background information required to formulate focussed interview questions and to gather information about the interpretations of the change process of the members of Project whose jobs were directly affected by this change initiative: the two Team leaders, and the only non-leader, content person. Because most of my observations were of this Project team, which was not the focus of my research, my field notes do not contain as much analysis as was originally intended, but rather contain more factual content about Corp, the Project team and Team itself.

Self-Reports

Since this research relies upon individual's self-reports of their own interpretations and actions, the reliability of self-reports must be acknowledged as a limitation. Argyris says, for instance, that self-reports can be unreliable as individuals can "tell more than they know, unknowingly distort cues, and generally cannot say what led them to think or act as they did, even though they think that they can" (Argyris, Putnam, Mclain-Smith, 1985: 242). Erving Goffman's theory that a person's public self is very different from his or her private self must also be acknowledged when discussing self-reports. Goffman argues that "when an individual appears in the presence of others, there will usually be some reason for him to mobilize his activity so that it will convey an impression to others which it is in his interests to convey" (Goffman, 1959: 4).

Although I am aware that this is a limitation in any qualitative research, I do not believe that this was a critical factor in this particular research. While some interviewees were careful about choosing their exact wording when responding to questions, except for one unproductive interview in which the interviewee did not provide anything other than technical information about his job, I rarely felt that they censored their true feelings.

This research acknowledges this difference between espoused theory and theory-in-use (what an individual says they believe and what their actions and behavior show that they believe). In this way, the possibility that the interviewees were unconsciously censoring their interpretations is acknowledged as a limitation of the data collected from their self-reports, but cannot be proven with certainty. In fact, Corp's open and participative culture and its emphasis upon feedback in interpersonal communication does

not indicate that members are hesitant or afraid to reveal their impressions of the organization and its processes.

Sampling for Interviews

Some level of gatekeeping was also a limitation to the sample of interviewees. I originally intended to procure a telephone list of all members of the Team and solicit each member for a private interview. One of the Team leaders, however, was unwilling to have me gather interviewees in this manner and instead made an announcement on Corp's internal electronic mail system that I was seeking volunteers for interviews of approximately one hour in length. If members were interested, they contacted this Team leader who then notified me of this list of members for me to schedule interviews.

Although I understand that the Team leader did not want me to "bother" the members of her team by soliciting them for interviews, I believe that this gatekeeping, combined with my lack of access to Team meetings, affected the sampling of interviewees. Because I had only attended one Team meeting about six weeks prior to conducting the interviews, many of the members were not familiar with me or with the subject of my research. Had I been able to explain my research in more detail to each member individually, or even as a group, I may have been able to gain more of their trust and they would have shared their interpretations with me more willingly than they did. However, some members did approach me personally during the informal period of validation to ask for more explanation of my thesis subject and to volunteer to be interviewed. In terms of this gatekeeping in the selection of interviewees and the fact that I relied on volunteers, Riley acknowledges that "any selection procedure that relies even

partly on volunteers remains biased toward those who either think they are helpful or think

they have something to say" (Riley, 1983: 424). This can create data which represents

only extreme positions about the issue under investigation than actually exists in the

organizational group (Riley, 1983: 424).

Retrospective Sense-making

One possible limitation to this research relates to retrospective sense-making

discussed in Chapter Two. Retrospective sense-making assumes that individuals interpret

actions after they have occurred, not while they are occurring. In this way, Isabella argues

that "interpretive research is often built upon events that have already transpired and

around which a collective viewpoint has had time to emerge" (Isabella, 1990: 10). This is

a limitation to this research because observations and interviews were conducted during

the planning of the change initiative, not after the change initiative was completed. The

first five interviews with members of Team were conducted after a significant event in the

change planning process. After months of gathering and analyzing data from numerous

members of Corp, Project's preliminary design plan was severely altered by management

and the timeline of the change drastically sped up. Because this appeared to violate

Corp's change process and the expectations of Team members, this action caused some

controversy among the Project team and the Team itself. It was in the days following this

event that I conducted my first five interviews with members of the Team. This timing

could be seen as advantageous to data collection as most members seemed more eager to

talk about the change process than they may otherwise have been if this event had not

occurred. Given the theory of retrospective sense-making, however, members may not

have come to a full understanding of the change process at the time of data collection. This research acknowledges this as a possible limitation, therefore, since data collection took place during a preliminary stage of the change process rather than after the change had been implemented.

My Role as Researcher

It is important to acknowledge the influence my presence had on the members being observed and interviewed as this establishes the quality of the data obtained. During most of the formal meetings, my presence was not a serious factor upon the members. After a Team leader formally introduced me at the beginning of the Team meeting, no one questioned me directly, but there were a few comments directed at my presence during some informal time at the beginning of the meeting such as "That's communication, but its bad communication". At the end of the meeting, various members casually asked me about my thesis, said that they would see me again and that it was nice meeting me. When asked about my thesis subject, I usually responded by saying that generally speaking, I was studying organizational culture and change processes; more specifically, I was examining to what extent shared interpretations exist among members of an organization undergoing change.

Because I attended so many lengthy Project meetings, in which the members had a lot of work to accomplish in a short time, my presence there did not directly influence their behavior. These members became familiar with me and my research and usually conducted their qualitative analysis of their data and their decision-making with little concern to my presence. They included me in their informal conversations before and

after the meetings and during breaks and always invited me to join them for coffee and lunch. Although I actively participated in their informal conversations, I never interrupted, or contributed to, their formal, task discussions. Sometimes members would comment upon the amount of writing that I was doing in my notebook, but no one ever asked to see what I had written.

Conclusion

This chapter has explained the research site, its change process, the group under investigation, and the qualitative methods of observation and semi-structured interviews used in this research. Although this methodology's original focus was upon participant observation of the Team's formal and informal activities, a lack of access to Team meetings changed this focus to that of a case study with the main source of data collection being semi-structured interviews with members of the Team and Project. Various methodological limitations including this lack of access to Team meetings, the sampling of interviewees, and the impact of retrospective sense-making were also discussed. The next chapter will discuss the results obtained from the observations and interviews by explaining the common themes, or structures, derived from the data and how Corp members use these structures to make sense of ambiguous events surrounding the change initiative.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the observation and interview data to shed some light upon the research question: To what extent do shared interpretations exist within organizations undergoing some level of organizational change? Initially, this presentation describes, in detail, Corp's background as a historical context of established, shared meanings. Following a structurational model, this historical context is presented as the rules and resources, or structures, that help Corp members make sense of the change initiative. Team's change initiative is then broken down into a timeline of significant events to show how members use these structures to cope with, and make sense of, each event. The chapter then summarizes the sense-making processes of these events to come to some conclusion about members' overall sense-making and the level of shared interpretations during organizational change.

Corp's Background

In an effort to establish the basis for current sense-making surrounding the change process at Corp, this section focusses, in some detail, upon the history or background context which members undergoing the change initiative share. As Kanter says: "The architecture of change... requires an *awareness of foundations*...that make continued construction possible" (Kanter, 1983: 283). In this way, Corp's basic beliefs and cultural understandings are treated as the schemas, causal maps or structures that are used by members' to help them make sense of the current change initiative. Based upon observation and interview data, these structures are described in three contexts:

communication, culture, and change processes. This important information, therefore, establishes the structures that members rely upon in making sense of equivocal events surrounding the change process.

<u>Communication Context</u>

Because all new employees of Corp are required to attend a week-long interpersonal skills development course, these employees share a base of Corp-recommended communication skills and philosophies to use in everyday formal and informal communication. One member of Project mentioned during informal conversation that she believes Corp starts immediately to teach new employees about communication skills so that everyone has the same level of knowledge and is familiar with these processes and skills.

Observation data reveal that the methods taught in this course follow very distinct patterns. Members using these skills in meetings use language such as "working an issue" and "giving feedback," and constantly ask for clarification of what was said to eliminate possible miscommunication. When members had an "issue" with another (members defined "issue" as a disagreement or conflict), they spoke directly and honestly with the other person. When this happened, the processual nature of the communication patterns became evident. For example, during a Project meeting, after one member's comments were continually dismissed by another, this member said calmly and directly to the offending member that she does not like being "shot down" right away, that she views the situation from another perspective and her ideas deserve to be heard. The offending member apologized and agreed that she had not been fair. The facilitator commended

everyone on the resolution of this issue and said that it helped to remind everyone of the guidelines for discussion. Meeting process skills are also evident in interventions made by the "process" people in Project, who intervened in discussions that were "off-task" to try to keep members following the meeting's set agenda or process.

Interview results shed some light upon the communication course's content and members' feelings towards this course. The following question was asked of seven interviewees: How do you feel about what is taught in the interpersonal skills development course and do you work according to the methods taught in this course? Out of the seven interviewees, only one member, a contract employee at Corp, had never actually attended this course. All other interviewees agreed that the course's content included feedback, conflict resolution and meeting process skills.

The large majority of interviewees agreed that they enjoyed taking the course and found the communication process skills taught to be excellent and valuable. Two members both said that the methods of the course are definitely put forth as Corp's "recommended model of communication" and "the way we work here."

Four members agreed that people do not always use the methods from this course, especially the conflict resolution process. One member said, for instance, "There are people who I think would probably have some issues with me.... but they never brought them up." Another member acknowledged that to get people to "express a feeling and to also let that person know what behavior bothered them is really hard". He also said that only about twenty-five percent of the people use these methods, but "if everybody did it and if everybody practices what the concepts were, you wouldn't have hostility among the employees or bad feelings and the stress level would be a lot lower. Its just hard to get

people to use it." One leader acknowledged that, in terms of the conflict resolution, "people need prodding" to use it.

However, some members believed that the meeting process and feedback skills taught in the course are very much in use. One leader said, for instance, that meeting process skills are "eminent everywhere... without exception." The other Team leader said that "you can absolutely see the people, when they're in a meeting they say 'Okay, what's the process, what are our objectives?' and they really try and are aware that when things are off the rail, that's how to get them back."

There were only two negative responses about the communication skills course. The only Team member who had not completed the course thought that the methods taught are too "robotish" and "infantile" because "people don't function like that", but that rather, members of Team "work together and have some type of relationship". Another member valued the methods taught in the course, but not the way the course is taught. She felt that "everyone's so busy learning how to give feedback that no one was really paying attention to whether anyone's feelings were getting seriously stomped on".

Another important factor in the background to Team's change initiative relates with how Team members feel about the actual communication that happens within their group. This information, revealed by interview data, gives some indication of members' level of satisfaction with Team's communication and how this affects their opinion about the need for Team's change initiative and, more importantly, reveals members' underlying value of communication among Team members.

When Team members and leaders were asked how they felt about communication within Team, only one member replied positively by saying that "the informal team

network between these people seems to work pretty well." Everyone else, to some extent, said that communication among Team is not of a good quality or amount and needs improving. Some comments include: "I don't think there's enough communication;" "We have to improve communications;" "...during the last year or so, things haven't been working as well as we wish they would."

Although all members agreed that the monthly Team meeting is an opportunity for communication, some members suggested that this meeting is merely a transmission of task information and is not effective in many ways. One member said, for instance, "Team meetings should have been to share relationships with the team, not to share work." "To me, the topics that we discuss in the meeting again are probably better handled in the hallway... Giving one person two hours of air time with one person paying attention and the other seven falling asleep is not effective communication." Another member agreed with this view, as he said that the meeting involves "sharing what task we're doing" rather than investigating "what kinds of problems you're having and how can I help you?" Another member said that communication within Team is "poor" and "not as good as it should be" and that they "rely on this once a month meeting to accomplish everything that we should be doing on a daily basis...". Even a Team leader acknowledged that the monthly meeting is "a bit hit or miss."

Three members acknowledged that this poor communication is caused by Team's structure since the business transformation that took place two years ago: "We're a very eclectic group...We all do so many different things and we have very little need to talk to each other." Because the team is so "specialized," members do not need to get "co-

workers' consensus on something." One member said that communication is lacking

because they are a "dysfunctional team...[with] no common fibre to put us together."

Culture Context

An important element of Corp's background that members draw upon in making

sense of the current change initiative is Corp's culture. As mentioned in Chapter Four,

Corp's relationship with Head Office influences Corp's everyday operations and its

culture. Interview results reveal that, while Corp operates under Head Office's direction,

Corp members believe that Corp originated a very participative, self-managing team

culture which is distinct from Head Office. One Team member, who has worked at Corp

since its establishment in 1979, recalled that Corp's culture from its inception was sort of a

family-run organization" because "people knew each other and knew their families." He

further remembered:

> "Right from the start, we had what we call the team system
> where small groups or teams would manage their own affairs...
> We really pioneered for the site the whole team concept... and
> I think we became the model for the [Head Office]
> organization..."

Other Corp members proudly emphasized this cultural distinction between Corp

and Head Office: "This site has always been looked at as being special. It has been held

up as the flagship of [Head Office's] fleet of plants. Kind of the ideal. 'We want you guys

to be like [Corp]'." Another member commented that the Corp site itself originated this

participative, team-oriented culture, and that, in the past, this sometimes created conflicts

between Corp and Head Office:

"I think it is a [Corp] culture even more than a [Head Office] culture. The influence is from here *out* in terms of establishing this as a culture. We sometimes experience some desire from [Head Office] to be a little more hierarchical, and when [Head Office] comes [Corp] way, they generally run into some resistance with that approach."

Observation data also reveals that Corp members view their organization and its culture as distinct from Head Office to some extent. For example, during a Project meeting, one member questioned a particular management strategy in the following way: "Is that a [Head Office] thing?" Another Project member who had recently been on a course with employees from Head Office's gas transmission organization, noted the obvious difference between Corp's culture and that of the gas transmission organization. He acknowledged that these gas transmission employees were visibly uncomfortable with practices and concepts that are taken for granted by Corp members, such as talking openly and honestly and a system of empowered, self-managing teams.

While this participative, team-oriented culture was unique to the Corp site early in its history, the most recent corporation-wide reorganizations (including the recent Business Transformation initiated by Head Office) have sought to emulate Corp's successful culture throughout the Head Office. During the data collection period, for instance, the change leader presented the techniques taught in Corp's interpersonal skills course to a South American branch of the corporation in an effort to establish this participative culture throughout Head Office's international corporation.

Members recognize, and take pride in the fact, that Corp's successful culture is now the ideal model for Head Office. One member said, for instance: "This is a [Corp] culture. Only [Corp] had the interpersonal skills course before Business Transformation,

but now everyone does." Another member proudly acknowledged: "We established from [Corp] what the [Head Office] culture should be... because, I think, we pretty well have set the standard."

Interview data reveal more details about Corp's culture which, based upon the results just presented, appears to be highly valued by its members. Corp members define their culture in terms of valuing participation and input from all members, using the skills taught in the interpersonal skills course, and a strong "team" or cooperative mentality. Many interviewees said that Corp's culture is based upon the skills and methods taught in the interpersonal communication course that all new Corp employees are expected to complete. One member said, for instance, that "... there's supposed to be a culture where you work your conflicts" and another said "the model of conflict resolution and facilitation... would be an overriding concept." One leader said that to promote the culture of "people being treated with respect and dignity and getting meaning out of their work..." you teach them process skills such as conflict resolution and feedback so they can facilitate their own work.

Two members also suggested that employee input, collaborative teams and shared leadership are important aspects of the Corp culture. One leader said, for instance, that "there's a built-in requirement that groups find a way to link with other groups and influence with other groups... and if that collaborative relationship is not there, then what I see is that things don't get done." Another leader said that part of Corp's culture is to give people authority "to do things, to challenge authority, to be creative and innovative in the workplace..." In this way, "people are encouraged to challenge leaders if they don't agree with them right up to the vice-president and the president" and "he'll listen to that

feedback and work that issue with you to a solution and not come back and say 'You're fired'."

Although most members agreed that Corp's official culture is one of collaboration, input and empowerment, some members suggested, to varying degrees, that this official culture is not always the way things are done in reality. One leader said, for instance, that the Corp "culture/identity is supposed to be a team system where people are involved and have input into the decisions that affect them." This official culture works to a certain extent, but she mentioned that "... there are some behaviors from some of the leaders on site that are just not in line... they're saying the right things, but their behaviors are different."

Two members also mentioned that leadership affects Corp's official culture of input and collaboration. One member said that Corp tells its members that "you're the person that is empowered... you're going to get to make the decision. But its not true at all. It really isn't." Because of this, the "doers" try to "second-guess a manager's or leader's decision instead of their own because they understand that the culture as written is this, and reality is this, and if I make my own decision its not going to be right, I know." This member also revealed that company policies are "left open to interpretation, maybe purposely, to again, let people *feel* empowered... You don't have to literally give them control, but you can make them *feel* they have control." Another member acknowledged that there is a disconnect between leaders and employees because "everyone thinks they should have input into everything... but, on the other hand, sometimes people here making decisions don't feel like they need everyone's input into everything so there's kind of some disconnect between what we tell people its going to be like and what it is like."

When asked about the culture and mentality that exists within Team specifically, most interviewees described Team's culture as that of a marginalized, dysfunctional team. One member believed that Team has marginalized itself within the company: "We're not important kind of thing is the thought that probably comes up." This view is shared by Team leaders who suggested that Team has had "a history of being thrown around and probably not respected and not appreciated and those kinds of things," and that they "do not really work together very much." Another member said: "We tend to focus on a whole bunch of different things. So there's really not much that pulls us together. We're not in the true sense a really close working relationship team." Thus, the majority of interviewees believed that Team's culture is that of a dysfunctional team because, with the nature of their tasks, they do not work together very much.

Change Context

Interview results reveal Corp members' background about past change initiatives. Although a few members questioned the need for a change process in Team's case, when asked about the change process itself, most interviewees believed in the need for a change process overall. Members that questioned the process suggested that the change process is over complicated. One member believed that members "know intuitively what some of the problems are" and that they could have spent a few months figuring out a restructuring together rather than going through this over complicated process. He felt that Corp gets "caught up in their big company ideas when they're not necessary," and did not understand why members are getting put through the "emotional roller-coaster" of this complicated change process.

The majority of the members interviewed, however, discussed the need for a change process. Two interviewees, a Team leader and the change leader felt satisfied with the general Corp process and how it was used in Team's change initiative. These interviewees described the change process[1] as "a good set of tools" and mentioned that the change process is "growing and evolving" as it is altered to deal with each individual situation because "not every change requires exactly the same process." No matter what the situation, however, the process is a way to "collect information, analyze information, get some input in, get some communication things built into the process."

The majority of members interviewed agreed with the need for a change process, but some believed that in Team's case, the process was not adhered to or allowed to run its course. Another Team leader believed in the process because she felt that the only way "to get buy in by the people involved was to go through the whole process." She believed that this process "will give good results" but only if it is "allowed to run its course." Another member felt that the process used for the Team change did not work because management "changed the process" rather than working within it.

An extremely important aspect of Corp's background in terms of their past experience with change is the organization-wide business transformation that occurred two years prior to Team's current change initiative. As discussed in Chapter Four, this was a lengthy change process that was externally driven by consultants and affected every department of Corp. The significance of this event to Corp's background or history was evident from the beginning of observation. From the very first meeting observed, members constantly referred to this business transformation as "B/T" and used it as a

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[1] Corp's change process is described in more detail beginning on p. 85.

benchmark to judge the current change initiative. For instance, one Project member suggested that the current change process is similar to that of business transformation, and that this current process is "tough" for Team because business transformation was only two years ago and it was not effective for Team's organization. Three members of Team commented upon the timing of the change initiative so soon after business transformation. One member said that "to see it happen again... I didn't have good feelings about it at all." Another member agreed that the "reorganization just happened a year or so ago and now we do it again..." The third member with this view sums up these three members' feelings adequately: "Its change, change, change all the time and I know, personally, I'm having a hard time keeping up with it... The adjustment rate is really high." This same member said that the change that business transformation initiated "has now become sort of a culture in our organization" because of the amount and rapidity of change that has followed it.

The feeling among Team members that business transformation hindered their team more than helped it is also prevalent in the fact that Team leaders (and members) felt the need to undergo another change so soon after business transformation. Team members' dissatisfaction with Team's current situation is evident from their comments gathered from a focus group meeting conducted by Project. Comments include: confusion about job roles and descriptions, a mismatch of people to jobs and a lack of trust and respect for Team since business transformation.

In the interviews, all members cited the recent organization-wide business transformation as the past experience with change that most influenced their interpretations of Team's present change initiative. Only one leader clearly stated that her

past experiences with change were positive influences upon Team's present change. She said that in comparison to past changes in Corp, this one is "not a big thing" and that the past changes "worked out for the best." She views Team's change initiative as "just another change that is going to work out for the best in the long run."

This Team leader's view is not shared, however, as most Team members interviewed suggested that business transformation had a predominantly negative influence upon their view of organizational change. One member said that business transformation "became a kind of template for organizational change" and was "fairly cruel to some people" because its goal was to cut costs; this created a generally negative view of any sort of organizational change in Team. Another member commented that Team's current change initiative coming so soon after business transformation was "change overload for sure... to the point to where its difficult to embrace change in a positive way." Even the change leader agreed that business transformation was "hard on people" to the extent that "whenever you came in and talked about change, people automatically assumed they were going to lose their job."

Analysis of Communication, Culture and Change Contexts

Members' constant reference to *processes* of communication, culture and change were evident from the very beginning of data collection and appears to be an overriding structure or sense-making device. During each Project meeting, there was a set process to analyze the data and to prepare it into a report outlining the "opportunities" for change in the Team. Comments such as "Okay, where are we at in the process?" and "Let's establish the process" indicate this awareness of process even when completing everyday

tasks. The fact that the Project Team was comprised of two process members who reminded the group of the change and communication process to follow seems to suggest the importance of having and following some sort of defined process at Corp.

The interpersonal skills course taken by all new members establishes effective communication within the organization as the result of the processes of conflict resolution, feedback and open and honest communication. Members even see Corp's culture as a set of input processes. Although members acknowledge that these processes are not always used, they still define their culture in terms of these processes. As shown by the distinct phases of discovery, design and implementation of Team's change initiative, this change is not viewed holistically by members, but rather as an orderly sequence of events.

The fact that communication, culture and change are defined in terms of processes seems to indicate that "process" is one of the ways that members of the organization "make sense" of, or define, their work life. This seems to reflect Structuration theory's duality of structure and the creation of environments in that, because Corp is a chemical manufacturer, it depends upon technical, chemical processes to create its final product. This reliance upon the technical, chemical manufacturing process and the fact that most Team members are engineers and work with chemical processes daily, comprise Corp's environment which, in turn, is reflected in other aspects of the organization such as most tasks, change and communication.

This section establishes Corp's background in terms of communication, cultural and change processes that influence most Corp members. Whether or not members hold the same opinions and feelings about these processes, these specific processes appear to function as common "structures" that influence members' sense-making of their

organizational environment. Recall from Chapter Two's discussion of Structuration theory that in the duality of structure concept, individuals create their own environment. Because people understand their organizational environment based upon the rules and resources that guide their interpretations, an examination of these rules and resources reveal a great deal about what members use in making sense of current situations. This section detailing Corp's background context, therefore, can be seen as an account of some of the major rules and resources or structures that members use to make sense of Team's current change initiative.

To further explore the application of these structures in the actual sense-making activities of the group, the following section presents a timeline of the significant or contentious events that happened surrounding Team's change initiative, and shows how members use these structures to help them "make sense" of these events.

Timeline and Sense-making of Events

To understand members' sense-making processes and the extent of shared interpretations within this sense-making, this section describes a timeline of significant events within the period of data collection. Significant events are events that took place during the change initiative which can be considered opportunities or indicators of sense-making. Recall Chapter Three's discussion of how ambiguous and equivocal situations create a shock that induces an emotional response and triggers sense-making. Although the initiation of a change process itself creates a significant level of ambiguity and uncertainty and paves the way for sense-making, smaller, ambiguous events within the larger change initiative are also opportunities for sense-making. This analysis now

describes the ambiguous events surrounding Team's change initiative that occurred during the period of data collection and explains how and why these events are triggers for sense-making.

This timeline focusses upon the following events: the first Project meeting observed, the only Team meeting observed, a Project member's questioning of process, validation, and the alteration of Project's design plan by leadership. The first Project meeting was observed during the first week of my data collection, and occurred in a meeting room on the Corp site. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the past focus groups and arrange scheduling for future focus groups and Project meetings.

The Team meeting occurred in a meeting room on the Corp site approximately five days after the first Project meeting observed. This was an information meeting, comprised of Team members and the change leader, designed to inform Team members about Project's progress on the change initiative and to gather member feelings and feedback about the change initiative.

The Project member's questioning of process was a five-minute-incident that occurred in a regularly-scheduled Project meeting, one month after the beginning of my data collection. This timeline does not focus upon the entire meeting in which this incident occurred, but rather upon this brief incident itself.

As mentioned in Chapter Four, validation is a process (within Corp's existing change process) whereby Corp employees add their comments and concerns to the data gathered from Project's focus groups. I observed this process for two consecutive mornings in the fifth week of my data collection. Validation occurred in the building which contained the offices of most Team members.

Leadership's alteration of the design plan was the most drastic event surrounding the change initiative. This event occurred two months after I began data collection, when Project members presented the results of their design plan to higher-level leadership. Because I was able to observe a Project meeting subsequent to this event and because this event occurred immediately prior to the first five interviews conducted, the sense-making processes of this event are presented with the most in-depth insight while the sense-making processes of the other events required more extrapolation from observation data only.

Project Meeting

This event is significant as an opportunity for sense-making because it represents the first time in data collection that there were ambiguities surrounding the group responsible for directing Team's change process. Because a significant amount of time was spent observing Project, and some members of Project were also members of Team, the ambiguities revealed by this Project meeting are relevant to understanding the processes of communication and interaction surrounding Team's change initiative.

This Project meeting was conducted within my first week of observation. All members of the Project team were in attendance except for one of the three "process" people. The meeting began with some general discussion about how the focus groups had been progressing. At this point, it was mentioned that there had been some confusion and miscommunication between members of Project facilitating the focus groups and the people within the focus groups resulting in some missed meetings which had to be rescheduled. This raised the issue of who was responsible for coordinating and facilitating

the focus groups and the importance to keep the secretary informed of all changes so that the entire Project group can be aware of these changes. This created a lot of informal cross-talking and some embarrassed laughter about the scheduling "mess" of focus groups and the fact that at one focus group the actual Project members responsible for facilitating the group did not attend, leaving the focus group members in the room alone and confused.

One Team leader exhibited a lot of stress regarding the scheduling of the upcoming focus groups and Project meetings because she said that she sees the anxiety that this lengthy change process causes in the members of her Team and wants to work as quickly as possible to minimize this anxiety. To this end, she pleaded with other Project members to take the time to spend three to five full days together as a group to process the focus group data to move the process along quickly. The ensuing conversation about conflicting individual schedules increased the confusion regarding scheduling of future meetings and seemed to raise the meeting's stress level. This anxiety escalated until most Project members were talking simultaneously about their busy schedules, having to sacrifice holidays, confusion about the change process and about completing their task in a proper amount of time. Finally, one process member loudly said that he felt that although the group had a lot of "energy," each person should speak individually without being interrupted in order to clarify these issues. This immediately and visibly eased the group's anxiety and allowed them to operate once again as a coherent group.

This meeting's display of internal ambiguity or stress revealed, not only the anxieties of the Project team surrounding the timeline of Team's change initiative, but also some of the communication processes practiced by Project members. The Team leader

expressed her concern about one of the three process members of Project who hadn't made a single Project meeting and who was absent from the present meeting. The rest of the group agreed that because of this member's inability to attend meetings, they would inform her that it would be beneficial to Project if she resigned. Although this was a seemingly stressful decision, it was mutually arrived at by all Project members calmly and rationally using open and honest communication and feedback processes to express their feelings and concerns.

This Team leader also expressed her concerns about the change leader missing meetings by saying that although he is a part of this group, he has missed many meetings and she does not expect him to continually schedule other meetings at the same time as Project meetings. To this, the change leader explained that he is merely a process facilitator rather than "content" facilitators like most of the group and, therefore, his presence was not as essential as that of the other content members. He also explained that the reason why he missed the meetings was because his schedule was so compressed. He acknowledged the validity of the Team Leader's concern by saying "I hear your feedback." Later in the same meeting, the Team leader noticed that the change leader "reacted" when she wanted to speed-up and compress the schedule, and asked him directly "Is there another issue with you?" To this blunt question, he calmly responded that his schedule was very busy but that he would attend all the meetings he can.

Another confusion or ambiguity in this meeting was the change process itself. The content members of Project expressed concern that they were not as familiar with the actual sequence of events they would follow in Team's change initiative. One member directly asked the change leader to "help us get through this process." The change leader

promptly outlined the process the group would follow and answered any questions that members had. Throughout, Project members seemed concerned that the change leader would only be at meetings sporadically after the analysis of the focus groups was completed. They repeatedly asked the change leader to clarify the process and seemed dependent upon him for his knowledge of this process.

Analysis of Project Meeting

Project members utilize certain structures from Corp's background in their attempt to make sense of the anxiety and confusion surrounding the Project meeting. This was the only Project meeting observed when members interrupted each other and exhibited a lot of anxiety and stress. The scheduling confusion and the mistakes made in conducting the focus groups was the cause of this anxiety which seems to indicate that members rely upon a set process in conducting focus groups, gathering data, and for communicating changes to focus groups and schedules; when these processes were not followed, confusion and ambiguity was the result.

Project members' dependence upon the change leader to remind them of the actual change process and upon process members to keep them on-task and following communication processes also emphasizes members' reliance upon process. The member pleading for help through this process seems to show that these members define their task in terms of the change process itself. Although they may have various ideas about how to accomplish their goal of directing Team's change initiative, they keep this input within the frame of the change process itself.

Although the lack of some members' attendance at the Project meetings indicated some ambiguity, this was resolved calmly and rationally by members' reliance upon and

use of the communication and cultural processes taught in the interpersonal skills course. Language such as "I hear your feedback," and "Is there another issue with you?" indicate that members of Corp actually use the communication methods and skills that they learn in the interpersonal skills course, and that these skills represent an important aspect of Corp's culture. In this way, Corp's espoused theory (the advocated method of communicating) is actually a theory-in-use as members appear to use these methods in everyday communication.

Project members' use of these communication process reveals something about how they make sense of Corp's organizational culture. Although these patterns of communication and a specific culture are not one in the same, communication is clearly a link to an organization's culture. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Donnellon, Gray and Bougon suggest that communication is a link between meaning and action and that organized action is made possible by the shared repertoire of communication behaviors group members use while developing meanings for their joint experience (Donnellon, Gray & Bougon, 1986: 2). In addition, communication is integral to sense-making, and sense-making, in turn, is part of organizational culture. In this way, the shared action of established communication patterns and skills such as those demonstrated by Project members, helps to create some level of shared action and understanding which, in turn, helps members organize. Furthermore, when these methods are in use, they seem to create a sense that everything is "okay" among members, because everything is being dealt with in the proper way. Thus, Project members' communication reveals, to some extent, their way of making sense of their organizational reality or their culture.

Team Meeting

The only Team meeting that I was allowed to observe reflected a certain amount of ambiguity as it represented a coming together of some members from two different groups, Project and Team. This meeting was not only an opportunity for Team members to provide feedback about the change initiative, but also involved the change leader and a Team leader from Project explaining the change process to Team.

The Team meeting, intended to gather information about members' feelings during the change process, showed, like the Project meeting discussed earlier, Team members' anxiety regarding the change process. Although some Team members did not contribute to the discussion at all, others spoke openly about their feelings. These members' comments revealed their uncertainty and anxiety caused by the change initiative. One member, for instance, admitted that the change initiative has shaken him up; another said that he feels like he's in limbo and resents feeling this way. In response to the Team leader's comment that it seems like the stress level is down, one member said that "the stress level *isn't* down" and he is not "a little ra-ra camper" and that because of this change initiative, his opinion of Corp has "gone down."

Although some members felt anxious and uncertain, and wished the process were shorter, they still expressed "a real need to go through this process" and understood the value of a change process to resolve their problems. One member, however, mentioned that this was the third change process he has gone through and he is tired of it. Another member felt that although "this move is positive" (the change process), it was of "no great

comfort" to him knowing there was this plan because he felt it probably wouldn't fix the problems.

Throughout the meeting, the change leader informed Team members about the change process that was to be followed in Team's change initiative and addressed the members' concerns about the level of employee input into the process. For instance, one member of Team expressed his worry that because Project did not contain a member who knew the overall history of Team and who had enough experience to be able to ask certain questions, that some important input, in the form of acknowledging and documenting the "activities that people do," to the change initiative was missing. Another member indicated that he would like a "chance" to input his ideas about Team's change. The change leader repeatedly assured members that, in addition to the focus group data they had already contributed, Team members would have many opportunities to input their opinions into the change process. Although members would have further opportunities to contribute during the "validation" process, members' input would be more crucial at the later design phase when the structure of the new Team is being designed.

A contradiction to members' concern for input into the change process exists in the fact that, in spite of being invited, no Team members had ever attended a Project meeting. When asked why, members responded that these meetings were inaccessible to them for all intents and purposes because they were "all day affairs" often conducted off-site, and agendas for the meetings were not distributed ahead of time. As one member said "If I don't know what's going on, that's less incentive to go..."

<u>Analysis of Team Meeting</u>

This Team meeting seems to show that not all members interpret the change

process in the same way. Some members feel stressed and vocalize this stress such as the

member who resents feeling in "limbo." The one member's lack of trust in the process's

ability to solve Team's problems could reflect the influence of members' past negative

experiences with change as a structure for sense-making of Team's present change

initiative. Perhaps this member did not believe the present change process would actually

solve Team's problems because of its similarity to the recent business transformation

which was ineffective for Team.

Most members, however, expressed a confidence in knowing there was a

"process" that was being followed in this change initiative. One member, for instance,

acknowledged that he is "carrying on as usual" since the initiation of this change process

and feels that he can set aside his worries about the change because they "are being taken

care of" by Project. Even the member who felt disillusioned about the amount of change

taking place, for instance, still claimed to understand "the value of this process."

Although meeting processes were not used in the Team meeting like they were in

the Project meeting, this could be because the nature of this meeting was merely for giving

information and receiving immediate feedback rather than completing a specific task.

Team members, however, did use the structure of open and honest feedback. Most

members openly expressed their feelings to their immediate leader without reservations.

This shows that most Team members value these communication processes and believe

that they are the key to effective meetings. Some members' silence and lack of

participation reflects interview results describing Team communication as poor because

members do not use the communication processes as often as they should to ensure effective communication and meetings. This seems to indicate that, while most members value some sort of communication process, not all members share the same interpretations about Corp's specific communication processes.

This use of "process" as a structure to cope with Team's change initiative is further shown by members' concern about the amount and type of input that was incorporated into the change process. Members' concern for the incorporation of Team member input in change process shows the use of the structures of input and process.

Members' lack of attendance at Project meetings, however, contradicts this apparent concern for input. This could reflect an acknowledgment by Team, on an abstract level, that although they value the need for employee input, they recognize, based upon past experience with business transformation, that leadership does not utilize employee input or make efforts to put this input and feedback into practice. As described in Corp's Background section, most members interviewed suggested that although Corp espouses an open, participative culture and incorporates this into communication and change processes, this culture rarely works in reality because leadership often does not follow through by utilizing and implementing this input. So, although Team members' comments show that they value Corp's culture of input and believe that their ideas about Team's change are worthy, they do not seem willing to sacrifice too much of their time for this purpose; on some abstract level, these members realize that, based upon past change experiences, their input will be overridden by leadership's own vision. This issue is raised again in the discussion about members' sense-making of leadership's alteration of the change process and will be discussed more fully there.

Questioning of Process in Project

In one Project meeting, members' shared sense of the existence of "process" was questioned by one Project member. This member became visibly frustrated with the group's constant suggestions to create processes to deal with various issues in the Team, and suggested that no matter how much these issues are "processed," they still depend on the "values" surrounding the Team because how the Team is valued will show in the work. This questioning seemed to raise anxiety, discomfort, and defensive behavior in the other members. For instance, other members argued that the only way to resolve issues between Team and other departments, and to prioritize and manage Team issues was to create specific processes. And while there already existed a skeletal process, this was not strong enough to manage these problems. In response to the group's overwhelming reaction to her questioning of process, this member immediately said that she was merely trying to point out the importance of values, but realized that they still need set processes for dealing with these issues. Other members readily agreed with her statement and the group's emotions appeared to stabilize.

Analysis of Questioning of Process in Project

Once again, this event shows a definite collective adherence to a structure of "process." When a member questioned the process, other members rallied around the process and explained its benefits. Although the details of a specific process may be questioned, the value of having a set process of some kind never was. Although Project members may alter their day-to-day processes slightly, as long as they are following some

sort of logical sequence of events, all seem more calm and better able to perform their required tasks.

<u>Validation</u>

Members believe that this core "structure" of input and empowerment are built into their change process in the "validation" process discussed earlier. One Project member commented how the validation of Team's change initiative followed the same process as the validation in business transformation. This process involved posting a large "brown paper" with the organized results of the focus groups prepared by Project in a public area for Corp members to read and add comments to. This phase of the change process is highly valued by Project members as the Project facilitators present at validation were extremely active in asking for detailed input from employees in terms of concerns, comments and strengths about the results of their data collection and their tentative interpretations. Project facilitators gave passers-by a "tour" of the paper and guided their comments: "That concern of yours seems to fit into this specific area of the 'brown paper'." They also agreed upon the importance of communicating the new design to members of Team and allowing them to input into the design process.

While doughnuts and coffee were provided as an incentive for all passers-by to contribute to the "brown paper," employees did not appear to require any encouragement to participate in the validation process. Most employees walking by the "brown paper" spent up to one hour of time reading the entire paper and writing detailed comments. The brown paper generated much interest and discussion among Corp members regarding the results and "opportunities" generated by the data. While Project facilitators actively

discussed issues raised by the employees, they encouraged members to record their feelings in writing by adding them to the "brown paper."

<u>Analysis of Validation</u>

This event is an indicator of sense-making because it reveals the structures of input and, like the events described earlier, raises the importance of "process" as a possible structure of sense-making. Project facilitators' active encouragement of input from passers-by, their willingness to explain the change initiative, as well as their visible excitement about the large amount of interest and input generated by the brown paper, show the structures of input and process in use. Corp members' active participation in this validation process is somewhat surprising, since this is the same process used in the recent business transformation which most members agree was not effective for Team. This suggests that perhaps members' belief in, and adherence to, a general sense of "process" and employee input is stronger than their past experiences with specific permutations of the change process in which their input was not utilized. In this way, members' adherence to a larger "process" or some orderly sequence of activities is a structure that most members appear to use, even if they do not agree with specific aspects of the process. This is a significant, and recurring, finding of these results that will be discussed in more detail in the following section discussing the alteration of the change process by leadership.

<u>Alteration by Leadership</u>

When Project's "brown paper" that had been validated by the employees was taken to the high level leaders for approval, these leaders significantly altered the timeline and

the focus of the change initiative. From this point, the change focussed upon organizational issues only and the design phase was completed within a matter of three weeks rather than three months as originally planned. Although I did not observe this event directly, I heard about it through accounts by Project and Team members in observations and interviews. This alteration represented a significant level of ambiguity and equivocality for everyone involved in the change initiative because it was not only an alteration in the already anxious change process, but it also compromised employee input to some extent.

In a Project meeting observed subsequent to this alteration or "speed-up" by leadership, the change leader put a positive spin on leadership's alteration by assuring other Project members that he was "okay" with this alteration. He said that although leadership had their own vision of what the organizational design of Team should look like they "appreciated the input of Project." At this same meeting, however, some Project members worried about this alteration to the change process and how it affected the level of input from employees towards the change initiative. For instance, one member (who was also a Team member) worried that this speed-up runs counter to Corp's high value upon employee input "from the bottom-up," because there would be no time for a comprehensive validation of the design phase by employees, as there will only be time for them to add their "killer concerns." Although Team had been assured that their input would be most beneficial and welcomed during the design phase, because of this speed-up the design would be created in a few days with very little time for input from affected members. This same member was also worried that this "rushing" of the process will have the same effect as the rushing of business transformation had in terms of creating an

ineffective organization for Team itself. In a Project meeting discussing the recent speed-up, one Team leader worried that, just as in business transformation, Team members were most likely "completely paralyzed" by this alteration while they waited to be "matched" to new positions.

Interview data detailing members' responses to a question about Corp's change process and this alteration to it raises implications regarding members' sense-making of this event. In terms of the "speed-up" of Team's change initiative, most members felt relieved to know the results sooner, but did not like the surprise and shock caused by the alteration and felt that this alteration affected employee input into the process.

Five members mentioned that they were relieved that leadership intervened because this meant that members affected would know the results of the change initiative much sooner than originally planned. Comments such as "Its good to get it over with," "The timing has speeded up... let's get it over with," and "I was kind of pleased to see that it picked up the pace" indicate this feeling.

Two interviewees, both leaders, were not concerned about the process to the same extent as the five members mentioned above. One leader mentioned that although she thinks members of Project "would have felt a little better about the process if we'd have been allowed to get to the end on our own," she did not feel that the alteration of the process was "necessarily a bad thing." Another leader said that the process "wasn't compromised, it just changed." He believed that the intervention was a matter of each party (leadership and Project) not being aware of the expectations of the other and that this was eventually clarified and they "got the process back on line."

Three members, however, indicated that although they may be relieved, they were also shocked because they were already used to the original timeline set out by Project and were operating with this timeline in the back of their minds. One member said that "everybody who was going to be affected by this had this timeline mapped out in their minds... and then, all of a sudden... it was done." Another member mentioned that the constantly changing timelines that were communicated from leaders to members during this speed-up has increased stress, and made him feel like he is on "death row" waiting to hear if he has a job or not in the new organization. Because the process and the timelines kept changing, members constantly faced new surprises and uncertainties: "I know the company policy is to be open with people, but when you're working on a change, maybe unsure things are better left unsaid." One Team leader acknowledged that "we hit them really quickly with a lot of stuff... and things changed from one day to the next," and that this situation created a high level of stress in Team members because people need "time to think on it, to ponder it, to soak on it... and to get used to that idea."

Another Team member summed up the situation very matter-of-factly:

> "So they thought they had real control of the project with this
> Project group, but it was taken away you know... it just shows
> the different perspectives on these change initiatives."

A significant reaction to the speed-up was that it hindered employee input, and, to some extent, compromised the change process. One member expected that members would have time to "see the new organization, maybe give some comments, maybe modify the change a little bit...," but this was not possible with the alteration of the process. One member criticized management's decision to intervene in the change process: "Don't lead

people to believe they are empowered, they're in control, they're going to make their own decisions when they're not." One Team member who was also a member of Project felt that "no matter how much work they put into the processes, at the end they were left with leaders and a large list of people." One Team leader, who was distressed enough at management's intervention to actively discuss and "work the issue" with leadership, felt that this alteration really damaged the credibility of the change process among people affected by the change:

> "I think that what we've seen in a few change initiatives is that [managers] get to that point and they don't really like the answer, so they change the course or they sort of intervene which shows me that they weren't ready to accept a different answer... I think that when you sabotage [the process] at that point, that you do more damage than not even allowing people to make the decision in the first place... So my concern now is the future of the change process, I think that it has lost credibility..."

Two members mentioned that the difficulty and uncertainty of the change process was uncomfortable both in business transformation and in Team's present change. One member said that although the outcomes may be an improvement, "you just don't enjoy some of the processes that it takes to get there." Another member said that he has not seen any results from these change processes "to really say the turmoil is worth it," and that, in fact, these changes hurt morale and lower the work ethic.

Three members mentioned how Team's current change is similar to business transformation in method because in both initiatives, members spent an inordinate amount of time doing the discovery phase in which people's opinions and input were gathered, and then rushed the design and implementation phases, sacrificing employee input. One

member said, for instance, that this change "followed the same style" as business transformation in that they spent "oodles of time seeing how the organization is set up" but then ran out of time and sped up "the second half and cram it into two weeks or a month."

One member vocalized a feeling that was intimated by other members in their discussion of the similarity of Team's change initiative to past change initiatives:

"I and several others knew at the onset of this thing that [Project] was *not* going to make the final decision. We just didn't have a lottery going on what day someone would step in and say 'That's enough, I'm making the decision.' We knew it would happen, we just weren't sure when."

These members' concern about management's intervention in the change process reinforces a reliance or dependence upon a structure of "process" to guide members through a change. Although some of these same members expressed relief at ending the uncertainty of the change initiative sooner, they were concerned that the original change process was not followed through to completion and that they did not have the level of input that they expected to have in the process.

Some members of Team, as shown above, believed that Project had the authority or is empowered to make the decision regarding Team's change and that leadership's alteration of the change process contradicted this official culture of empowerment of employees. The change leader, however, mentioned that Project is only a "doer" in terms of gathering input from employees and making recommendations, but does not have the "accountability" to make decisions. He acknowledged that this sometimes causes

problems within various project teams: "The confusion is sometimes they think they make decisions. They don't."

<u>Analysis of Alteration by Leadership</u>

As mentioned in the Background section, employee input and empowerment is an important aspect of Corp's official culture. The ambiguity surrounding the definition of input and empowerment and the conflict between leaders and members caused by leadership's disregard of Project and Team members' input into the change initiative, suggests that employee empowerment is merely an espoused theory, but is not a theory-in-use. Although leaders and members have different interpretations of input and empowerment, they agree upon it as a structure or a sense-making device.

This difference in interpretation of empowerment reflects the importance of ambiguity in sense-making and in adapting to change discussed in Chapters Two and Three. Recall that in Chapter Two, Eisenberg suggests that supposedly shared visions statements are deliberately ambiguous because this allows for creativity and multiple interpretations while still maintaining a sense of sharing or unity among members (Eisenberg, 1984: 231). In Corp, this ambiguity caused a difference in interpretation which was brought to light only when leadership altered the process.

In this way, this speed-up of the change process also seems to represent another shock within the shock already experienced by the change itself. As mentioned in Chapter Three, sense-making is caused by a shock that does not fit with previous schemas or frames of reference. Members were already dealing with the shock of the change initiative and seemed to rely on the familiarity of the change process for some level of comfort.

With the speed-up, they had to cope with a change to the very process that they relied upon for stability.

The Team leader who "worked" the issue of the alteration of the change process with high-level leadership used the "structure" of the communication and input processes discussed in the Corp's Background section of this chapter, in which anyone is free to work issues with higher level leaders using feedback and conflict resolution communication processes. These structures helped the Team leader to make sense of, and cope with, the alteration to the change process. However, this raises the question of the purpose of this aspect of Corp's culture. Is it a way to encourage input from all employees in an attempt to utilize the diversity of organizational members as put forth by action learning, or is it merely a way for employees to "blow off steam" and continue with their jobs without being reprimanded or without leadership having any intention of using these ideas?

This situation reinforces the relevance of Weick's mutual equivalence structure and means-convergence model and emphasizes the importance of shared action over shared meanings to organized action. As discussed in Chapter Two, Weick says that although members may have different goals, members often share the desire to maintain some "stability in the service of sense-making" (Weick, 1995: 154). By maintaining this "collective structure of behaviorally confirmed expectations", members are able to achieve their desired goals, and thus, this structure becomes a shared common end among members (Weick, 1995: 154). Although the Team leader (and other members) and higher level leadership appear to have different interpretations of input and empowerment, the communication feedback process, and the value of input inherent in that process, is the

"collective structure" that is common between these two parties; this common structure allows them to "sustain interaction" and to continue to organize themselves.

Interview comments in which members said that they had a "feeling" that leadership would alter the process, and the fact that members saw many similarities between Team's change process and the past business transformation, seem to reflect members' structure of a "disconnect" between leaders and members as part of Corp's culture. In this way, members used their past experience of the rushing of the second half of business transformation and leaders' dismissal of employee input as a structure or schema with which to make sense of the leadership's alteration of Team's change process. This suggests, to some extent, that leadership alteration of change initiatives is an implicit part of the change process itself. In this context, "implicit" means that an alteration of the change process is not widely, or officially, acknowledged as a part of the process itself. Although members' anxiety at this alteration shows that they do not consciously recognize, and may not be able to vocalize, this as a legitimate part of the change process, their use of past structures to make sense of the present alteration suggests that this alteration is accepted by them, on a subconscious level, as a part of the process itself.

Based upon themes gathered from the observation and interview data, this analysis has described the structures or rules and resources that exist among members and shown how members use these structures to make sense of events surrounding Team's change initiative. In more structurational terms, knowledgeable agents affected by Team's change initiative used past structures of communication, change and input processes to help them make sense of, and enact, their current ambiguous environment. The following section

summarizes members' overall sense-making of the events surrounding Team's change initiative and discusses the relation of this sense-making to the present research's focus upon sharing of interpretations in times of organizational change.

Summary

The Project and Team meetings and leadership's alteration of the change process showed members' anxiety and ambiguity regarding Team's change initiative. While this anxiety is natural in any organizational change, it was influenced by members' mostly negative experience with the recent business transformation. To cope with, and make sense of, this anxiety and ambiguity, members used the structures of communication, input and change processes.

The Project and Team meeting and the alteration of the change process show members' general belief in, and adherence to, the communication processes learned in the interpersonal skills course. Most members said that these communication processes are not used like they could be; this implies that these members adhere to these communication processes and believe in them. Although these skills are not used by all members all of the time, most members define communication and interaction among Corp members in terms of these processes and use these communication processes as a common, collective structure with which to maintain interaction even when interpretations are not shared.

Team member concerns about their input into the change process, validation, and most members' concern about leadership's dismissal of the input gathered in the change initiative, emphasizes members' use of Corp's culture of input and empowerment as a

sense-making device or structure. The alteration of the change process, however, shows that different definitions of "input" exist within Corp, especially between members and higher level leaders. However, input, in communication processes (through feedback and working issues with leadership) and in change processes (through validation and cross-functional change project teams), is still a common structure among all members interviewed.

While members' use of structures of their negative past experience with business transformation created some visible anxiety and stress, members' behavior and dismay at the alteration of the process itself throughout the change initiative expressed their predominant reliance upon a change process. Members' stress of leadership's alteration of the change was offset, however, by their expectation that leadership would eventually alter the process. This suggests that on some abstract level, members believe that leadership alteration of the change process is integral to the process itself.

Because members have different levels of access to these structures or rules and resources depending upon their individual background and their level and position in Corp, however, suggests that members' surface-level interpretation of events surrounding the change initiative are not necessarily shared. The only member who did not take the interpersonal skills course, for instance, was the only one who did not value its methods. Members' comments and behavior also expressed different feelings and opinions about Corp's communication processes and Team's specific change process; some liked these processes and thought they were effective, while others thought they were a waste of time.

This analysis shows that while individuals had various opinions and interpretations surrounding Team's change initiative, many members seemed to rely upon similar schemas or structures to make sense of events during this change. Whether members liked or disliked the specific communication and change processes, and whether or not they were aware of it, most members defined the events surrounding the change in terms of a "process". This faith in, and adherence to, "process" linked members together to retain enough of a collective structure to sustain their interactions and continue to cope and work during the change initiative. These results, therefore, do not support the view, common in the management literature, that shared vision and beliefs must exist among members of an organization for the organization to be effective. This analysis shows, rather, that members defined Corp's official culture of employee input and empowerment inherent in the advocated communication and change processes differently, but that members shared the common sense-making structure of "process". Adherence to a given process, in turn, provides a basis for shared action, even in the absence of shared meanings. In this way, whether it is a communication or change process, the mere existence of a sequence of events to follow gives members a sense of security and comfort. Therefore, "process" represents a shared structure or schema used by members to make sense of their ambiguous organizational environment during the change initiative.

The conclusions section in the following, final chapter, summarizes this analysis and relates it back to the research question: To what extent do shared interpretations exist among members undergoing some level of organizational change? The implications section extrapolates from this research question to discuss what the conclusions imply for further research of organizational sense-making and change.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Using the information from the literature review and the results from the field study, the first section of this chapter draws a general conclusion regarding the research question addressed in this study. The second section discusses some implications that this conclusion raises in terms of Team members' ability to adapt to change, for members of Corp's leadership, for facilitators of organizational change, and for organizational theory.

Conclusions

The results of this research indicate that Corp members under investigation used common structures within their organizational background to make sense of significant events surrounding the change initiative. Most members made sense of their organizational environment during the change initiative in terms of communication, culture and change processes, and share an overriding sense of an existence of "process" as a means of making sense of their organization and as a way of sharing their action. Because this research defines "shared interpretations" as shared meaning, values and beliefs, Corp members can be said not to share specific interpretations concerning Team's change initiative, but rather share a more general, overriding structure, or sense that "process" exists; this helps them to share their action and organize themselves. The following discussion explains how this conclusion was arrived at by summarizing the structures that members used to make sense of ambiguous events surrounding the change process, relating these structures to theories discussed in the literature review, and relating these results back to the research question.

Communication Process

Most members define their communication in terms of the processes of feedback and conflict resolution, learned in Corp's interpersonal skills course. These processes of communication are the standards by which members judge all of their communication and represent the shared action or coordinated activity by which they organize themselves. Although most members define their organization in terms of these processes of communication, members' interpretations do not always agree upon the specific processes practiced in Corp. Some members, for instance, believe the communication processes are infantile, while most others believe that these methods are effective and should be used more often.

Even with differences of interpretation, however, a sense of "process" in communication activities is still a basis for shared action. For instance, although one Team leader's interpretations and feelings about the alteration of the change process conflicted with leadership's interpretation and eventual actions, both parties' shared this implicit agreement with, and adherence to, the communication process of conflict resolution and depended upon this process to maintain enough shared action to be able to continue organizing. This supports Weick's theory that "acts are the raw material for cognitive work in organizations" (Weick, 1979b, 47), and shows that shared action or enacting behavior is a prerequisite for sense-making and organizing rather than shared values or beliefs.

Cultural Process

Members define Corp's culture in terms of its espoused value of employee input. Corp's communication and change processes incorporate employee input through the feedback and conflict resolution of the communication process and in the focus groups, validation, and cross-functional Project team of the change process. The mere existence of the employee input evident in Corp's communication and change processes acknowledges that an overarching shared interpretation does not exist among all Corp members. If this shared vision or interpretation did exist, there would be no need to incorporate members' opinions and "feedback" into the communication and change processes because members' values would all be the same to begin with. Leadership's dismissal of employee input gathered by Project, emphasizes the ambiguity, and difference of interpretation, of Corp's espoused value of "input and empowerment".

Change Process

Members define the change initiative according to this shared sense of "process". A fixed change process is what most members cling to for familiarity and security when facing the ambiguity and equivocality of this organizational reorganization, whether or not they share interpretations and feelings of the specific change initiative. Even the members who label Team's specific change process as being overly complicated still define the change in terms of "process" and propose more simpler processes, such as team-building, as an alternative.

Members' definition of the present Team change initiative in terms of the process used in the business transformation and most members' dislike the alteration of the change

process even if they were not completely confident in the process in the first place, also shows this reliance upon "process".

Even though some members were relieved by the "speed-up" of the process by management, many still felt uneasy about this alteration because it violated their expectations of what the change process would be, and hindered their input into the change initiative. However, some members' comments that this alteration was not a total surprise, and their acknowledgment of the similarity of this change initiative to the recent business transformation, shows that, on some level, members define leadership overriding of the change process as a legitimate part of the process itself. While this alteration is still upsetting to most members, they ultimately accept it as part of the process.

Relation of Results to Literature Review

To add to the debate about whether shared meanings or shared actions are required for communicating and organizing, Chapter Two put forth, following Weick's theories, that while some sharing among organizational members is necessary, this sharing exists in the form of shared action or behavior, rather than shared interpretations or meanings. Chapter Two presented this argument by explaining Weick's various sense-making models and theories and by describing the relevance of Structuration theory's duality of structure to sense-making in organizations.

Chapter Three introduced the literature on organizational change, focussed upon how cultural processes affect change, and discussed how sense-making happens within change. Schemas, causal maps and structures were established as links between sense-making and change as they inevitably affect an organization's ability to adapt to its

turbulent environment. The influence of these past structures upon present change established that sense-making and change can be understood as a Structurational process in which members' active use of past schemas or structures to make sense of present, equivocal events creates their organizational environment, which further influences their sense-making and so on.

This analysis of the results sheds some light on these theories presented in the literature review. Members' shared reliance upon, and use of, "process" as a sense-making structure to coordinate their action and sustain interaction, exemplifies Weick's sense-making models, and supports this study's argument that shared action, not shared meaning, is required for organizing. The presentation of members' sense-making as a Structurational process in which members actively use past schemas or structures to make sense of the ambiguous "shock" of an organizational change, shows the relevance of Structuration and sense-making theories to the study of organizational change.

The results point to the structurational nature of sense-making in that the previously established structures of the communication, cultural and change processes are a set of resources that members used for making sense of equivocal events surrounding the change initiative and for coordinating organized action. While members may have different interpretations or feelings of the specific processes of communication, input and change, their shared sense of the existence of "process" allows them to share enough action to be able to coordinate their activity and continue to organize themselves.

Various factors including Corp's recommended communication processes, its emphasis upon input processes, definitive change processes, and Corp members' technical, processual environment, create an overriding, shared sense of the existence of "process"

among most members. When faced with ambiguity, in the form of a change initiative, members actively utilize this sense of "process" to make sense of this ambiguity and to sustain interactions and coordinate actions. Through this shared action, members actively create Corp's internal environment (communication, input and change processes), which in turn, further influences their communication and sense-making of change (the need for an existence of "process") which further influences their environment, or culture, and so on.

This shared sense of "process" among members, however, does not suggest that members share their interpretations or "vision" of Corp as put forth by the management literature in Chapter Two and Three. The management perspective suggests that a shared vision of the organization provided by management and strong management influence is required for organizational change to be successful. Although members share "process" as a common structure or sense-making device, they do not all have the same feelings and opinions about how to define "process," nor do they adhere to "process" simply because it is a directive or vision originating with management.

In terms of the traditional perspective on management influence, leadership's alteration of the change process and Team members' strong reactions to this shows different interpretations of process and of empowerment between leadership and members. This suggests that members' shared sense-making of "process" is not simply the result of a pre-set management vision statement, but rather a shared structure created by members' own active enactment of their organizational environment which allows them to coordinate their action to accomplish tasks and continue organizing.

Implications

What do the above conclusions imply for further research in organizations? This section discusses the broader significance of the above conclusions in terms of the following: Team members' adaptability to change, Corp's leadership, facilitators of organizational change, and organizational theory.

Team Members' Adaptability to Change

Most theories of change described in Chapter Three argued, in various ways, that to learn and change, organizations must be aware of their own theories-in-use and free themselves from past schemata. Members' sharing of a sense of "process" and their trust in some sequence of events to follow does not necessarily reveal that these members are more adaptable to change than if they did not share this sense of "process". Although most members admitted that their past experiences with change were predominantly negative and that this affected their perception of Team's change initiative, these members still displayed trust in the communication, input and change processes relevant to this change. While this adherence to the shared structure of "process" allows members to share their action and make sense of Team's change, it also hinders their ability to shed past schemas or structures. The results suggest that some members' lack of surprise at leadership's alteration of the change process implies that they accept leadership's ability to override the change process as part of the process itself in order to cope with this alteration. This suggests that perhaps members are only permitted to affect change within certain frames or boundaries set by leadership. In this way, members' adherence to past

schemas could be a reflection of Corp's leadership or policies rather than upon Team members' ability to adapt to change.

Corp's Leadership

Although a focus upon leadership in times of change was beyond the scope of this research, the results raise some questions relating to this issue. The discomfort and anxiety caused by leadership's alteration of the change process suggests the importance of leader behavior in the maintenance of members' sense-making. As mentioned by one interviewee, some Corp leaders do not "walk the talk". According to the results, leadership appears to interpret "process" and employee input and empowerment differently than do Team members. Leadership's definition of input and empowerment cannot be proven with any certainty, however, because members of higher-level leadership were not observed or interviewed in this research.

Although Corp's change process follows certain aspects of an action learning model for change and learning, leadership's alteration of Team's change process contradicts the principles of action learning. Corp's processes seem to be based upon an action learning model as shown by the desire to gather as much input as possible from various stakeholders and the formation of work teams comprised of affected members to carry out the change process. The fact that most members' believe in a process for employee input and empowerment, are aware of the importance of past events upon their present interpretations, and are acknowledge the difference between Corp's official culture and its reality, suggest that this incorporation of action learning into Corp's everyday reality is not unrealistic. Although members already demonstrate awareness of their own

schemas and sense-making, action learning depends upon members' ability to have some control over, and input into, the decision-making process. As discussed in Chapter Three, action learning puts forth that, to adapt to the turbulent environment, organizations must incorporate as many people as possible in learning and change processes to gather and generate many diverse perspectives. Leadership's alteration of Team's change process and dismissal of employee input gathered within this process contradict Corp's espoused value of input, negates any possibility of Corp following an action learning model of change, and could affect leadership's credibility in future change initiatives. The impact of leadership's behavior to Team members' interpretations imply that leadership's sense-making, or their influence upon employees' sense-making, requires further study.

Change Facilitators

Just as action learning proposes, this research suggests that employee input is important to promote learning and adaptation to organizational change. Team members' sharing focussed, to some extent, upon input processes. In this way, change facilitators should be aware of the importance of not only espousing a value of employee input, but also ensuring that this input is actually asked for, respected, and put to use in organizational change initiatives.

The present emphasis upon the relevance of sense-making to organizational change initiatives can help practitioners of change in organizations better understand the cultural and cognitive implications of change and, in turn, manage planned change more smoothly. A change facilitator who is aware of the importance of past schemas and structures to members' present view of change, could actively investigate a particular group's level of

sharing to shed some light on possible sense-making structures used by the group. In this way, change facilitators could use this information to maintain the group's emotional stability and their ability to learn and, therefore, change.

This research has implications for change facilitators working within Corp. Whether or not the members investigated in the present study are aware of their dependence upon process as a sense-making structure, this importance of "process" to Team members is significant for future Corp change initiatives. The fact that most of the Team members interviewed are engineers working in chemical manufacturing could be a reason why most of these members depend upon "process". As mentioned before, the technical, processual nature of the work done at Corp is particularly influential upon engineers, who tend to view things and events in a logical, systemic fashion. In this way, the shared sense-making of members interviewed represents the shared sense-making of Team only, and is not necessarily representative of other work teams at Corp.

However, this knowledge of Team's dependence upon process for stability and familiarity gives change facilitators and leaders initiating future change initiatives within Team the opportunity to reduce the anxiety of change upon members by making all members affected by change completely aware of the change process to be followed and ensuring that this process is adhered to by everyone involved. Staying true to "process" would help to reduce the ambiguity and equivocality inherent in organizational change by maintaining the stability of Team members' shared structure and action of process.

<u>Theory</u>

The conclusions of this research show that theories of organizational sense-making and Structuration theory are helpful to understanding organizational change and can be incorporated into theories and methods of organizational change; this has implications for future theoretical work surrounding organizational sense-making and change. This study's presentation of sense-making as a structurational process in which members use past schemas or structures to actively make sense of the ambiguity surrounding an organizational change initiative, establishes Structuration theory's relevance as way to explain the sense-making that occurs within organizational change. This does not suggest that Structuration theory in its entirety should be applied directly to sense-making within change; as described in Chapter Two, Giddens himself warns against importing Structuration theory "in toto" into a given area of study (Giddens, 1991: 213). The present research shows, rather, that selective concepts from Structuration theory, such as the principles of the knowledgeable human agent and the duality of structure, can be used to expand upon the phenomenon of sense-making within change. While the results and conclusions of the present research merely show the utility of these structurational principles to sense-making and change, further research applying a structurational model to organizational change initiatives could progress towards the development of a structurational theory of change that would definitively establish the existence of cultural and cognitive processes within change.

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TEAM MEMBERS

1. What is your job description within Team and what is your history with Corp?

2. What kind of work is done in Team? What kind of day-to-day processes are involved? How are you managed?

3. How do you do things here at Corp? In other words, what is the Corp culture/mentality? What is the Team culture/mentality?

4. Is this culture just the "official" culture or do people actually work this way? How do they work this way? Any specific, concrete examples of this?

5. What sort of things are taught in the interpersonal skills course? How do you feel about what is taught in that course? Do you work according to the methods taught in the course? Do others? What are some specific, concrete examples of this?

6. How do you feel about communication among members of Team and between Team and Team leaders or other Teams? Any specific, concrete examples of this? Do you think others in Team share this view?

7. How do you do most of your "communicating" with others in Team?

8. How do you feel about the Corp change process in general, and the current change process in Team specifically? Did you think that Team needed "changing" and that this change is necessary?

9. What do you feel were the reasons this change was initiated?

10. How do you feel about the change process being sped up?

11. What past experiences do you have that shed some light on this current change situation?

12. How does the recent B/T (1.5 years ago) affect your perception of this current change process?

13. How has this current change process changed the way you do things around here (your culture)? How have you and other members of Team managed this change process?

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TEAM LEADERS

1. What is your job description within Team and what is your history with Corp?

2. What kind of work is done in Team? What kind of day-to-day processes are involved? How are you managed?

3. How do you do things here at Corp? In other words, what is the Corp culture/mentality? What is the Team culture/mentality?

4. Is this culture just the "official" culture or do people actually work this way? How do they work this way? Any specific, concrete examples of this?

5. What sort of things are taught in the interpersonal skills course? How do you feel about what is taught in that course? Do you work according to the methods taught in the course? Do others? What are some specific, concrete examples of this?

6. How do you feel about communication among members of Team and between Team and Team leaders or other Teams? Any specific, concrete examples of this? Do you think others in Team share this view?

7. How do you do most of your "communicating" with others in Team?

8. How do you feel about the Corp change process in general, and the current change process in Team specifically? Did you think that Team needed "changing" and that this change is necessary?

9. What do you feel were the reasons this change was initiated?

10. How do you feel about the change process being sped up?

11. What past experiences do you have that shed some light on this current change situation?

12. How does the recent B/T (1.5 years ago) affect your perception of this current change process?

13. How has this current change process changed the way you do things around here (your culture)? How have you and other members of Team managed this change process?

14. Do you think there are different levels of confidence or different opinions about the change process and the change itself among leaders and members of Team?
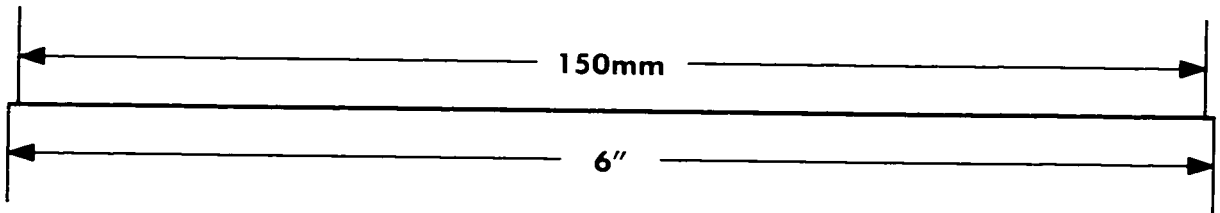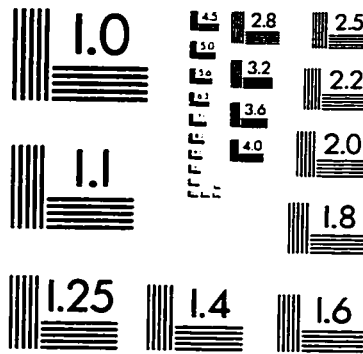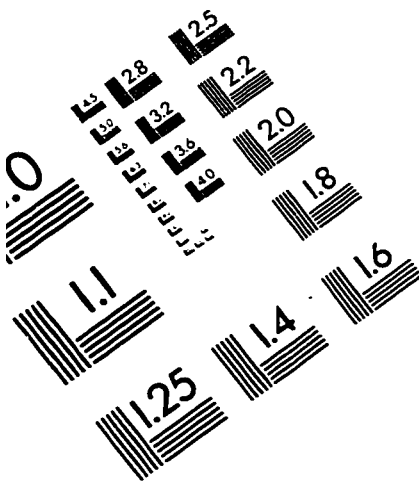
15. What specifically is the change and how is it being communicated to Team? How do you feel about the change itself?

16. How is the implementation process being handled and how is it going? How do you feel about the implementation? How do you think others feel about the implementation?

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR CHANGE LEADER

1. Describe what you do here at Corp (job description)?

2. How would you describe Corp's culture or the way things are done around Corp?

3. Tell me about Corp's change process or the change process that you use. Any difference here?

4. How do you feel about the change process that you follow?

5. How do you feel about some of your past experiences using this change process and working with change initiatives? Specific examples?

6. Does this change process differ depending upon the group that you deal with? Do you alter it ?

7. To what extent does the change process account for the feelings and emotions of individuals undergoing the change?

8. What if people couldn't agree or if people had different ideas from management within a change process?

9. How do you feel about the change process undergone in Team? Do you feel it was successful? Was it similar or different from other change initiatives? How so?

10. How would you describe your role in the change process?

11. How does implementation work and what is your role in implementation?

12. Do you feel the change process that you use is similar to action science/research/learning described in Peter Senge's The Fifth Discipline? How does your change process compare with Action Science/ Learning?

IMAGE EVALUATION
TEST TARGET (QA-3)

150mm

6"