

THE SOCIAL PROCESSES OF ORGANIZATIONAL SENSEMAKING

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A longitudinal study of the social processes of organizational sensemaking suggests that they unfold in four distinct forms: guided, fragmented, restricted, and minimal. These forms result from the degree to which leaders and stakeholders engage in “sensegiving”—attempts to influence others’ understandings of an issue. Each of the four forms of organizational sensemaking is associated with a distinct set of process characteristics that capture the dominant pattern of interaction. They also each result in particular outcomes, specifically, the nature of the accounts and actions generated.

“Sensemaking” is a critical organizational activity (Weick, 1995). For top managers, sensemaking activities such as environmental scanning and issue interpretation are key tasks that significantly influence organizational decisions and strategic change (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Smircich & Stubbart, 1985; Thomas, Clark, & Gioia, 1993). For other stakeholders, sensemaking powerfully affects how they “construct” their identities (Pratt, 2000), preserve their organization’s image (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991), and respond to organizational crises (Gephart, 1993). Sensemaking activities are particularly critical in dynamic and turbulent contexts, where the need to create and maintain coherent understandings that sustain relationships and enable collective action is especially important and challenging (Weick, 1993).

Sensemaking occurs in organizations when members confront events, issues, and actions that are somehow surprising or confusing (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Weick, 1993, 1995). As Weick argued, “The basic idea of sensemaking is that reality is an ongoing accomplishment that emerges from efforts to create order and make retrospective sense of what occurs” (1993: 635). Thus, sensemaking is a process of social construction (Berger & Luckmann, 1967) in which individuals attempt to interpret and explain sets of cues from their environments. This happens through the production of “accounts”—discursive constructions of reality that interpret or explain (Antaki, 1994)—or through the “activation” of existing accounts (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Volkema, Farquhar, & Bergmann, 1996). In either

case, sensemaking allows people to deal with uncertainty and ambiguity by creating rational accounts of the world that enable action. Sensemaking thus both precedes decision making and follows it: sensemaking provides the “clear questions and clear answers” (Weick, 1993: 636) that feed decision making, and decision making often stimulates the surprises and confusion that create occasions for sensemaking.

Organizational sensemaking is a fundamentally social process: organization members interpret their environment in and through interactions with others, constructing accounts that allow them to comprehend the world and act collectively (Isabella, 1990; Sackman, 1991; Sandelands & Stablein, 1987; Starbuck & Milliken, 1988; Weick & Roberts, 1993). Recent sensemaking research, however, has either tended to focus on its cognitive aspects (e.g., Griffith, 1999; Thomas et al., 1993) or has examined social processes that play out in extreme conditions or crisis situations (e.g., Brown, 2000; Gephart, 1993; Weick, 1993; Weick & Roberts, 1993). Less attention has been paid to the sensemaking that occurs among large groups of diverse organizational stakeholders as they address a range of issues (Weick, 1995). Such stakeholders engage in sensemaking from a variety of organizational positions, histories, and personal backgrounds that create divergent frames of reference and lead them to take on different roles in sensemaking processes (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Gephart, 1993; Weick, 1995). Despite the challenges raised by the inherently social nature of sensemaking, the social processes that underpin it at the organizational level remain relatively underexamined (Eden, 1992). The purpose of this article, therefore, is to investigate the social processes of sensemaking among large groups of diverse organizational stakeholders. To do so, I draw on a longitudinal qualitative study of

I would like to thank Jean Bartunek, Chris Clegg, Jane Dutton, Peter Frost, Richard Hackman, Tom Lawrence, Nick Turner, Editor Tom Lee, and the four anonymous reviewers for their support and helpful comments on drafts of this paper.

sensemaking in three organizations, across 27 issue domains.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Research that has addressed the social processes of organizational sensemaking has tended to follow one of two approaches. The first of these investigates how certain groups influence others' understandings of issues. Leaders have received particular attention (Dutton & Jackson, 1987; Smircich & Stubbart, 1985). Gioia and Chittipeddi, for example, argued that a critical leader behavior during strategic change is "sensegiving"—which they defined as "the process of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality" (1991: 442). Building on this work, other studies have examined the varieties of leader sensegiving. Gioia and Thomas (1996), for instance, suggested that leader sensegiving strategies may vary depending upon the strategic or political nature of an issue; Bartunek, Krim, Necochea, and Humphries (1999) identified a range of different leader sensegiving strategies and found, for example, that when leaders felt personally threatened, they were more likely to focus their sensegiving efforts upon opportunities that strategic change presented for stakeholders. All of this research highlights the importance of sensegiving as a fundamental leadership activity within organizational sensemaking.

Other studies have demonstrated how middle managers shape organizational accounts by sensegiving to their leaders. Dutton and colleagues, for example, have examined how middle managers gain top management attention and influence organizational action through "issue selling" (Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Dutton, Ashford, Wierba, O'Neill, & Hayes, 1997). Similarly, Westley (1990) showed how middle managers could shape strategy through their participation in "strategic conversations" with their bosses, influencing the way in which an issue was understood and "enacted." These studies demonstrate that while leaders are uniquely placed to influence how issues are interpreted and understood in organizations, their interpretations can be significantly shaped by the sensegiving efforts of others.

Although this research offers a valuable foundation for appreciating the social dynamics of organizational sensemaking, it largely ignores the interaction of different actors' sensemaking behaviors and how this interaction affects sensemaking processes. While previous studies provide insight into some of the strategies that leaders and stakeholders each

use to shape organizational understandings and accounts of issues, they have primarily focused on the role played by just one party or the other. Thus, relatively little is known about the dynamics of sensemaking when different parties engage simultaneously or reciprocally in such activities, or about the ways in which the accounts they generate are reconciled—or are not reconciled.

A second approach to organizational sensemaking has examined the social processes associated with sensemaking more holistically, but it has tended to do so in contexts that are marked by crisis or extreme circumstances. Weick's (1993) analysis of the Mann Gulch disaster, for instance, suggests a dialectical relationship between social structure and sensemaking: the accounts generated by sensemaking facilitate the formation and reformation of social structure (the social roles and relationships among some group of actors), while social roles and relationships provide a basis for sensemaking. Thus, Weick argued that without social roles and relationships in place, sensemaking can be difficult or impossible, leading to confusion and distress. In a study of sensemaking on aircraft carriers, Weick and Roberts (1993) developed the concepts of "collective mind" and "heedful interrelating" to describe how organization members can generate reliable collective action. Their study moved sensemaking away from a strictly cognitive metaphor by associating collective mind not with a superordinate set of cognitions, but with "a pattern of interrelated activities among many people" and by offering the argument that the intelligence of a collective mind depends upon the heedfulness with which people interrelate.

Organizational disasters and crises have also provided a fruitful context for research into sensemaking among multiple parties (Brown, 2000; Brown & Jones, 2000; Gephart, 1992, 1993). Emerging from studies of organizational inquiries is an image of sensemaking in which participants work to find acceptable grounds for the assignment of responsibility. In Gephart's 1993 study of a disaster inquiry, for instance, participants engaged in a multistage sensemaking process that drew on a range of local organizational and individual attributes: formal organizational schemes were used to identify potentially responsible individuals; these individuals were evaluated with respect to organizational schemes and social norms; the evaluations were then used to construct a subset of individuals with "uniquely problematic or laudable selves" (Gephart, 1993: 1507); and finally, responsibility was assigned on the basis of an emergent sense of interpretations shared by participants, with the exception of those ultimately assigned responsibility,

who held divergent views. This research highlights the importance of attending to the process through which agreement is achieved in sensemaking, and particularly to the ways in which sensemaking processes interact with features of the settings in which they occur (Brown, 2000; Gephart, 1993).

From these studies of sensemaking in crisis situations, three critical issues emerge. First, this research has focused on situations in which there is some pressure (and sometimes immense pressure) to make sense of the world quickly. This type of situation is not necessarily representative of organizational sensemaking more generally, because long spans of time may pass in which organization members remain confused by events and actions without developing sensible accounts. Second, these studies of crises have tended to examine relatively tightly coupled social systems, such as fire crews, flight deck teams, and industrial disasters, where members' interpretations and actions typically have direct and relatively immediate consequences. No such direct consequences may be observable, however, when one considers sensemaking across a diverse set of issues involving larger numbers of organizational stakeholders. Third, high-reliability environments, such as fire fighting and aircraft carrier flight decks, may be somewhat distinct in their demands for sensemaking that provides members with shared accounts that facilitate tightly coordinated collective action. In the more mundane world of most organizations, it may be that social processes of sensemaking occur without resulting in broadly shared accounts.

The two sets of sensemaking research reviewed above led to the research questions that guide this study. The studies that have examined the social processes of sensemaking in large organizations have highlighted the critical roles played by leaders and stakeholders but have tended to focus on the role of only one party at a time. Most of what researchers know about interactive sensemaking among organization members comes from research on sensemaking in crises or under intense pressure, conducted over quite short time periods. Scholars therefore understand relatively little about how heterogeneous sets of sensemaking parties interact in ongoing and quite ordinary sensemaking processes over extended periods of time. Further, although these studies have articulated insightful descriptions of important sensemaking processes, such as heedful interrelating (Weick & Roberts, 1993), they have tended to provide singular descriptions of sensemaking processes. Relatively little attention has been paid to the potential variance in these processes, and especially to the heterogeneous patterns of interaction that might be associ-

ated with sensemaking across a broader range of situations involving a diverse range of stakeholders. Together, these gaps lead to the first research question of this study:

Research Question 1. Are there discernable patterns of interaction that constitute the social processes of sensemaking among diverse stakeholders in complex organizations?

A second important aspect of sensemaking in organizations is what it produces: accounts and the actions that are based on them. As discursive constructions of reality that provide members with ordered representations of previously unordered external cues, accounts describe or explain the world and thus make it meaningful (Antaki, 1994; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). They can take a wide variety of forms, such as descriptions of issues as political or strategic, and explanations of the behavior of forest fires. Accounts are a critical resource that allow individuals to accomplish work and negotiate their day-to-day lives (Antaki, 1994; Boje, 1991; Gergen, 1999), constructing ordered relationships among sets of entities (events, people, actions, things) in ways that enable people to act or at least to decide to act (Sackman, 1991; Starbuck & Milliken, 1988; Weick, 1993). The connection between accounts and action is particularly highlighted in small group studies: a critical part of Weick's explanation of the Mann Gulch disaster was the fire crew's failure to construct an account of the situation that would facilitate collective action. A similar dynamic occurs during organizational change (Bartunek et al., 1999; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), in which accounts are key to facilitating collective transformation. Although a range of studies have highlighted the link between sensemaking and its outcomes, there has been no systematic examination of this link. This gap leads to the present study's second research question:

Research Question 2. Are there patterns of accounts and action associated with the different social processes of sensemaking in organizations?

METHODS

This study used a qualitative methodology to address its two research questions. Qualitative methods are well suited to the study of dynamic processes, especially where these processes are constituted of individuals' interpretations (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Hinings, 1997). Because qualitative research typically examines issues from the perspective of the participant (rather than from that of

the researcher), it is especially appropriate, and therefore frequently used, in the study of organization members' constructions and accounts (e.g., Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Isabella, 1990). Furthermore, because of its sensitivity to organizational context and its potential for focusing upon activity sequences as they unfold, qualitative research is a valuable means of investigating dynamic processes in organizations (Pettigrew, 1992).

The aim of this study was *theory elaboration*, drawing on and extending important ideas from research on organizational sensemaking. Theory elaboration is often used when preexisting ideas can provide the foundation for a new study, obviating the need for theory generation through a purely inductive, grounded analysis (Lee, Mitchell, & Sablinski, 1999). This study used a multiple case design (Lee, 1999; Yin, 1994), in which I traced organizational sensemaking processes in real time, as they unfolded over a two-year period in nine different issue domains for each of three matched organizations. This design offered a strong foundation for elaborating theory: the similarity of the three organizations allowed for meaningful comparisons across the social processes and actors involved, while the diversity of issue domains and the differences between the organizations provided a reasonable basis for generalizability.

Research Context

The study was carried out in three British symphony orchestras, a context well suited to sensemaking research for several reasons. First, cultural industries offer an environment in which sensemaking is particularly critical. Because their products are experiential, judgments about quality are subjective and shifting, creating an uncertain, dynamic environment in which members must engage in "interpretive enactment" to manage successfully (Hirsch, 1972; Lampel, Lant, & Shamsie, 2000). Murnighan and Conlon (1991), for instance, showed that successful string quartets engaged in complex and subtle sensemaking practices, acknowledging contradictions inherent to their work, but managing them implicitly, rather than trying to resolve them openly. The management of meaning is a central and critical activity in such organizations, where products and processes are ambiguous and highly subjective.

Second, within the cultural industries, orchestras offer an especially powerful site for a study of sensemaking. They represent a very traditional organizational form forced to operate in an increasingly challenging environment (Allmendinger & Hackman, 1996), one that is characterized by a

decline in government subsidy and corporate sponsorship, and by growth in the number and variety of competing leisure activities (Lebrecht, 1996; Robinson, 2000). Allmendinger and Hackman's (1996) study of 78 orchestras in four nations highlights the considerable impact of environmental turbulence on these cultural institutions' internal processes. Examining the effects of the fall of socialism on East German orchestras, they found significant differences in the orchestras' abilities to adapt that were due in part to initiatives taken by both leaders and musicians to deal with the changing environmental conditions.

Third, the presence for orchestras of numerous and powerful stakeholders with frequently opposing interests creates a context in which the social processes of organizational sensemaking are both important and visible (Elsbach, 1994). An orchestra is dependent not only on its musician workforce and administrative team, but also on a wide range of other actors, such as conductors, soloists, trustees, board members, and customers. These parties often have divergent interests, a central tension of the business stemming from conflicts between artistic goals and commercial pressures. Such a stakeholder-rich context makes the social processes of sensemaking particularly significant. Moreover, the relatively small size of orchestras makes leaders and key stakeholders easily identifiable, facilitating the observation of sensemaking processes.

Orchestras also provide a surprisingly high level of generalizability to a broader population of organizations. In many respects, orchestras operate like most medium-sized private enterprises: they have products (concerts and recordings) that must be competitively marketed and sold, and a wide range of customers to satisfy. Thus, as for any business, financial viability is a central issue. Their structure is also quite similar: orchestras are supported by administrative teams that typically include finance, marketing, operations, and human resources functions and are headed by CEOs who are accountable to boards of directors. Board directors' roles are unambiguous—they are not simply well-intentioned volunteers, but representatives of particular community stakeholder groups who are legally accountable for the actions they take vis à vis their orchestra. Key stakeholders include government, customers, employees, unions, and local communities. Because goals, structures, and stakeholder roles are comparable in orchestras and in other, similarly sized, organizations, one would expect to find social processes of organizational sensemaking in orchestras that are similar to those one would find in those other organizations. More-

over, many traditional industries are taking on the qualities of cultural industries as the products and services they provide are increasingly sold on the basis of their symbolic dimensions (Lawrence & Phillips, 2002). Orchestras thus provide a transparent example of an increasingly common set of organizational challenges.

Those in the orchestra sector group the 13 permanent professional British symphony orchestras into three categories: provincial orchestras, BBC orchestras, and London orchestras (BBC/Arts Council of England, 1994). Although all 13 work to similar objectives (concert giving, recording, and education/outreach), they differ in their primary revenue sources and governance structures. *Provincial orchestras* typically give at least three local concerts per week, make occasional CD recordings, and tour overseas every one or two years. Musicians in these orchestras often feel they make an important contribution to the cultural life of their local communities. *BBC orchestras*, in contrast, spend most of their time in the studio, making recordings for radio broadcast. They give fewer live concerts and often play more unusual repertoire, making them much more dependent on public funding than on ticket sales. Musicians in the *London orchestras* are freelance rather than salaried, paid for each session they play with the orchestras. These orchestras tend to be the busiest, performing most frequently, both in London and abroad, and often recording for CD and film. The London orchestras are proudly “self-governing,” each officially run by a musician-dominated board that employs an executive director and a team of administrators as managers.

The specific orchestras were chosen to meet the study’s aims. I sought a balanced sample of organizations in which issues and processes could be compared but in which there would also be some significant heterogeneity. Three orchestras, referred to here as the provincial, broadcasting, and London orchestras, made up the sample; each was taken from one of the three categories of British symphony orchestra. Because the focus of this study was on “ordinary” sensemaking taking place in “normal” organizations, I chose orchestras that were midlevel performers, neither the strongest nor the weakest (artistically or financially) in their categories. Doing this avoided my encountering patterns of sensemaking that might only be associated with unusually high or low performance and thus increased the comparability of the contexts and the generalizability of the findings. In addition, because data collection would be intensive, I chose orchestras that were not geographically remote

from my location in England (e.g., in Scotland or Ireland).

Data Collection

Data collection was intensive over more than two years and involved interviews; observation of meetings, rehearsals, and orchestra tours; and extensive documentary analysis. Studying the organizations part-time, as an overt nonparticipant observer, I gained access to each organization through an interview with its executive director and a subsequent meeting with that individual in which I proposed my research. I then made a presentation to the full orchestra to explain the study’s aim and approach. All members understood me as an organizational researcher and amateur musician with a passion for and fascination with symphony orchestras. The data were largely analyzed after the study period, but I honed my methods during the data collection as I came to understand the issues, people, and contexts. For example, I did not begin by focusing on nine specific issues or ten stakeholder groups, but over many months identified these as critical and common to the three orchestras’ sensemaking.

In total, I conducted 120 formal interviews, carrying out repeat interviews with key informants. Interviewees were selected using formal, snowball, and opportunistic sampling methods. In each orchestra, I interviewed the executive director and every member of the management team, as well as the primary nonmusician “overseer,” and the principal conductor, where one was in post at the time of study (for the broadcasting and provincial orchestras). I also interviewed all musicians who served as representatives on the boards of their orchestras (for the provincial and London orchestras) or on their orchestra committees (for the provincial and broadcasting orchestras). In addition, I used a snowball sampling technique to identify other interviewees; for example, people were suggested to me because they had been in the orchestra a long time or had previously served as representatives on a board or an orchestra committee. As well as using these formal and snowball sampling strategies, I also interviewed any musician who expressed an interest. Because of the amount of time I spent in each organization, and especially traveling on tour, there were many opportunities to talk to a very wide range of musicians.

The interviews were semistructured, and they became increasingly focused over the course of the study. The domains covered in early interviews included the individuals’ organizational roles, the

TABLE 1
Summary of Data Sources^a

Data Source	Orchestra		
	Provincial	Broadcasting	London
Formal interviews			
Executive director	5	8	4
Other managers	10	17	14
Orchestra committee members	6	9	10 ^b
Other players	4	3	10
Player board members	10	n.a.	10 ^b
Nonplayer board members/overseers	4	2	1
Principal conductor	1	2	n.a.
Total	40	41	39
Meetings observed			
Senior management meetings	8	3	n.a.
Orchestra committee meetings	2	2	1
Orchestra committee and management meetings	2	4	n.a.
Full orchestra meetings	4	5	—
Management presentation to full orchestra	4	2	—
Musicians union presentation to full orchestra	1	—	—
Office staff meetings	1	8	n.a.
Board meetings	8	n.a.	7
Board subcommittee meetings	10	n.a.	n.a.
Consultative committee meetings	5	n.a.	n.a.
Consultative committee subcommittee meetings	4	n.a.	n.a.
Management committee meetings	n.a.	n.a.	4
Trustee meetings	n.a.	n.a.	2
Senior management retreat	1	1	n.a.
Board retreat	1	n.a.	n.a.
Team-building and leadership skills workshop	n.a.	1	n.a.
Education sessions	—	2	—
Foreign tours	—	1 (7 days)	1 (4 days)
Annual general meetings	2	n.a.	—
Meetings between orchestras or with other external stakeholders	7	9	1
Total	60	38	16

^a An “n.a.” entry indicates an orchestra did not hold this type of meeting; an underscore, that the author did not attend any meeting of the indicated type for that orchestra.

^b The London Orchestra Committee members were also its player board members; therefore, these ten interviews are only included once in the total.

main issues in which interviewees had been involved and those from which they had felt excluded, and their perceptions of decisions and how they had been made. Later in the study, and particularly in repeat interviews with key informants (individuals who were involved in many of the issues), I modified my interview protocol to focus on sensemaking around specific issues and events that related to each organization. In interviews conducted immediately after a significant meeting, I often asked certain questions relating specifically to the discussions of that meeting, before broadening out the questions to follow up on other matters. Table 1 summarizes types of interviewees and enumerates them.

In addition to the recorded and transcribed interviews, I conducted a large number of informal interviews throughout the study period; these often took place in buses, bars, and restaurants. Although these generally covered the areas listed above, they also provided opportunities to pick up on things that had just occurred (for instance, I might discuss with musicians over lunch what had just happened in a meeting) and to observe groups of people informally talking, which offered insight into certain group dynamics (such as interactions between managers and musicians). At times I had the impression that the informal setting, and possibly the lack of tape recorder, led individuals to talk more candidly than they might otherwise.

As well as conducting interviews, I observed 107¹ meetings, which included meetings of various groups within each organization (e.g., executive team, board meetings), and also meetings between orchestra leaders and those external to their organizations (e.g., funders, collaborating organizations). Discussion at these meetings addressed a wide variety of issues, including key conductor, player, and administration appointments, commercial issues such as ticket pricing and sponsorship, artistic strategy and repertoire for key concerts, as well as more mundane matters, such as the route an orchestra bus should take on its way out of town. Throughout each meeting, I noted verbatim, as far as possible, what was said and by whom. Table 1 also summarizes the types of meetings I observed and enumerates them.

Data Analysis

Data analysis comprised three main stages. First, I developed narratives that described the sense-making processes associated with a set of issues that arose in all three organizations during the study. In stage 2, I sought to answer the first research question: Are there discernable patterns of interaction that constitute the social processes of sensemaking among diverse stakeholders in complex organizations? In stage 3, I addressed the second research question: Are there patterns of accounts and action associated with the different social processes of organizational sensemaking? The analyses are described in detail below, and Table 2 summarizes the stages of analysis.

Stage 1: Creating narratives of the sensemaking processes. The first data analysis stage began with listing every organizational issue that arose in the three orchestras during the study period (150–200 issues in each). I defined an organizational issue as a topic of discussion that involved a question or concern connected in some way to the organization as a whole, rather than to a small subset of its members; for instance, a personal conflict between two players with no broader consequences would not be considered an organizational issue. I then reduced this list of all the issues in every orchestra to a comprehensive set of “typical” issues facing a British orchestra. Four criteria for “typicality” were used. First, an issue had to have arisen in all three organizations. Meeting this criterion relied on a process of data reduction (Strauss & Corbin,

1998) in which I grouped the issues thematically into broader issue domains (for instance, I grouped into one domain the issue of whether or not to renew the contract of the principal conductor, which faced two orchestras, with the issue of appointing a new principal conductor, which faced the third). The second criterion for inclusion in the subset of typical issues was that data for the selected domains should be available from multiple sources and largely gathered as the issues unfolded during the study period, rather than retrospectively. The third criterion was that, together, the domains should cover artistic, financial, and personnel areas, and include both strategy and operations. The fourth criterion was that organization members should consider an issue to be of real significance. After developing a draft set of issues, I refined it through discussions with key respondents in each orchestra. All respondents stated that the final set of nine domains covered the major issues that had arisen during the study period and that they together captured the main categories of issues normally faced by their organizations. The nine issue domains were as follows: (1) programming of repertoire, (2) principal conductor appointment/contract renewal, (3) re-engagement of guest conductors, (4) dealing with unsatisfactory player performance, (5) appointment of key players (e.g., section principals), (6) players’ pay and contract review, (7) identifying areas for cost cutting, (8) increasing income generation, and (9) collaborative ventures (with other organizations).

Following Eisenhardt and Bourgeois (1988), I then developed a narrative of between 5 and 25 single-spaced pages that chronicled the sensemaking activities for each domain in each of the orchestras. I constructed these 27 narratives by tracing through all the chronologically ordered raw data for each orchestra to identify every time a given issue arose, and then describing the organizational sensemaking process through quotations from a combination of interviews, meeting transcripts, archival documentation, and field notes. The narratives were thus composites made up of data from all four sources.

Stage 2: Identifying forms of organizational sensemaking. I next analyzed the 27 narratives in relation to the first research question—ascertaining whether there were discernable patterns of interaction that constituted the social processes of sensemaking across the domains. In searching for patterns of interaction in organizational sensemaking, I was concerned with potential consistencies in, for example, the ways in which stakeholders and leaders talked among themselves and to each other, how often different parties met and under what

¹ Seven of these meetings were attended by members of two orchestras; hence, the total number of meetings observed does not match the sum of the subtotals listed for each orchestra in Table 1.

TABLE 2
Stages of Data Analysis

Data Analysis Stage	Tasks	Outputs
(1) Creating narratives of the sensemaking processes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Listing all issues arising in the three orchestras. 2. Reducing issue lists by applying four criteria. 3. Modifying and refining the list on the basis of discussions with key informants. 4. Constructing narratives for each of the key issue domains from interview, meeting, archival data sources, and field notes. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Set of 9 key issue domains. 2. Set of 27 narratives.
(2) Identifying forms of organizational sensemaking	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identifying all individuals and groups playing a major role in virtually all 9 key issue domains or a very significant role in 2–3 domains. 2. Pooling certain groups and individuals to form a set of ten stakeholders whose activities were comparable across issues and organizations. 3. Refining the list on the basis of discussion with key respondents. 4. Developing a list of stakeholder sensegiving activities, drawing on existing theory. 5. Identifying instances of stakeholder sensegiving in each issue domain. 6. Determining overall level of stakeholder sensegiving in an issue domain by counting the number of stakeholders engaged in sensegiving activities, and through a gestalt analysis of the frequency and intensity of sensegiving activity. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Set of ten key stakeholders. 2. Classification of high or low overall stakeholder sensegiving assigned to each of the 27 issue domains.
(a) Identifying stakeholders and analyzing stakeholder sensegiving	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Building on the stakeholder list to develop a list of leader sensegiving activities. 2. Identifying instances of leader sensegiving in each issue domain. 3. Classifying leaders' roles as predominantly showing high or low sensegiving in an issue domain, on the basis of a qualitative assessment of the frequency and intensity with which the activities were carried out. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Classification of high or low overall leader sensegiving assigned to each of the 27 issue domains.
(b) Analyzing leader sensegiving	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Grouping the 27 issue domains into four categories (<i>forms</i>) representing intersections of leader and stakeholder sensegiving roles. 2. Investigating the nature of leader-stakeholder interaction for each form. 3. Tracing each organizational sensemaking process to determine the process characteristics for each form. 4. Conducting iterative, cross-case analysis to build more abstract process descriptors. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Set of robust process descriptors for each organizational sensemaking form.
(c) Identifying forms and process characteristics of organizational sensemaking	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identifying commonalities in the accounts and actions associated with each form. 2. Conducting iterative, cross-case analysis to build up more abstract descriptions of sensemaking outcomes. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Set of robust process outcomes for each organizational sensemaking form.
(3) Identifying outcomes stemming from each form		

circumstances, and the rhythm of those interactions over time. This stage of the data analysis had three parts.

The first part involved identifying key stakeholders—actors who affected or were affected by one of the three studied organizations (Freeman, 1995)—and examining their contribution to organizational sensemaking in each issue domain. During the fieldwork and analysis of the narratives, various

individuals and groups emerged as prominent, either playing major roles in virtually all issue domains or making critical contributions to two or three. By combining certain groups and individuals (for instance, pooling all of an orchestra's administrators into one "administration" category), it was possible to identify a set of stakeholders that were comparable across issues and organizations. After refining the set on the basis of feedback from key

informants in each orchestra, I had a set of ten stakeholder groups common to all three organizations: orchestra administration, player representatives, section principals, players as a group, principal conductor, overseers, customers, funders, guest artists, and the musicians' union. For each organization, the leaders were the two people with greatest formal authority: in the provincial or broadcasting orchestras, these individuals were the executive director and the next most senior administrator; in the London orchestra, the leaders were the executive director and the chairman of the board.

Each of the 27 sensemaking processes was then analyzed to identify how stakeholders and leaders contributed through various sensegiving activities. Stakeholder groups and leaders were identified as "high sensegiving" in a domain when they predominantly engaged in behaviors that attempted to influence others' sensemaking in that domain, and as "low sensegiving" when they exhibited very few sensegiving behaviors. Included as sensegiving behaviors were statements or activities that involved providing plausible descriptions and explanations of extracted cues and constructing sensible environments for others (Weick, 1995). Drawing on this conceptualization of sensegiving, as well as on a review of sensegiving activities identified in the sensemaking literature (e.g., Bartunek et al., 1999; Dunford & Jones, 2000; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Pratt, 2000), I examined a subset of the sensemaking narratives to develop a list of concrete sensegiving activities in the orchestras, which was then used to identify instances of sensegiving in each issue domain. Examples of sensegiving activities included contesting a proposal, calling a meeting, explaining a situation, issuing a warning, expressing an opinion, writing a report, justifying a view, promoting a position, gossiping, and taking minutes. Some sensegiving activities were unique to leaders, such as presenting an executive director's report to a Board, but the majority were common to leaders and stakeholders. For each sensemaking process, I determined the overall level of stakeholder sensegiving in two ways. The first was by counting the number of stakeholders involved in sensegiving for that process. The second was through a more impressionistic "gestalt analysis" (Gioia & Thomas, 1996) of the frequency and intensity with which stakeholders engaged in the above sensegiving activities, which provided a richer, more holistic assessment than number of stakeholders alone would have done. In a similar way, I determined leaders' degree of sensegiving through a qualitative assessment of the frequency and intensity with which the activities identified in the narratives were carried out.

The final part of stage 2 directly investigated the possibility of identifiable social processes of organizational sensemaking based on the interaction of leaders' and stakeholders' sensegiving behaviors. I first grouped the 27 issue domains into four categories that represented the intersection of leader sensegiving (low or high) and stakeholder sensegiving (low or high). I then examined the *patterns of leader and stakeholder interaction that distinguished each category*, or what I refer to in the rest of the article as *forms* of organizational sensemaking. To do this, I traced through each narrative, developing a set of process descriptors that drew on quotations from interviews, meetings, and field notes. At this first level of analysis, these descriptors included terms such as "duplicitous," "doing deals," and "left out of discussion." Once I had sets of descriptors for all issue domains for a given form of sensemaking, I then engaged in an iterative, cross-case analysis, building up broader, more abstract categories (e.g., private meetings with key parties) that captured the key characteristics of the organizational sensemaking process for that form (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The final part of this analysis involved combining and refining these more abstract categories to develop core dimensions that captured the pattern of sensemaking in each of the 27 instances and distinguished among the four different forms. The end result of stage 2 was thus a set of four forms of organizational sensemaking, each described by core process characteristics.

Stage 3: Identifying the outcomes of each form of organizational sensemaking. In the final data analysis stage, I explored potential patterns in the outcomes associated with each form of organizational sensemaking. My focus was on the accounts and actions generated (including proposals, stories, and decisions) and actors' descriptions of these accounts and actions. I again used the constant comparative method, gradually building up more robust descriptive categories from the data. I began by tracing through the sensemaking narratives for each form to develop a set of descriptors that captured the outcomes for that form. These descriptors were based on quotations or observations from the raw data, such as "First we lay out key pieces of the program plan and then over time we fill in the spaces" and "Contract is renewed for a year to see what alternatives arise for conductor and orchestra." Then, through an iterative, cross-case analysis, I built up more abstract descriptions of the outcomes for each form (e.g., "emergent series of actions").

Tables 3–6, in the Results section, summarize this analysis and show that the strength of evidence varied for each process characteristic and outcome

in each issue domain. Evidence was considered *strong* where strong support (multiple sources, several examples) was found in the narrative for both dimensions of the process or outcome (that is, for sensemaking processes, evidence of how “animated” and controlled the process was). Evidence was considered *moderate* where fewer sources and only a few examples were found in the narrative for both dimensions, or where strong evidence was found for one dimension. Evidence was considered *weak* when only moderate evidence existed for just one dimension of the process or outcome in question. Although it would also have been interesting to examine the antecedents of the sensegiving behaviors, such an analysis lay beyond the scope of this study.

While some researchers argue that the conventional criteria of reliability and validity cannot be applied to interpretive research, it is nevertheless essential to show that the findings of a qualitative study are representative of the phenomenon of interest (Lee, 1999). There are several ways to increase the credibility of a naturalistic study. These include having “prolonged engagement” at one’s data site and undertaking “persistent observation” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985); collecting comprehensive, descriptively rich data, ideally through “triangulation” in data sources and methods (Maxwell, 1996); and conducting “member checking,” a procedure in which “data, analytic categories, interpretations and conclusions are tested with members of those stakeholding groups from whom the data were originally collected” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985: 314). This study used a longitudinal design, which involved my spending several hundred hours at the research sites over a two-year period. Furthermore, the data were gathered from numerous sources through a variety of methods. Data analysis was conducted on 27 cases drawn from three different organizations. The results of this study were not based on a solitary observation or the casual comments of a few individuals, but were developed through a rigorous and iterative procedure that made full use of the wealth and complexity of the data collected. Throughout my analysis, I also sought to identify discrepant cases and sought feedback on my interpretations and conclusions both from the study’s participants and from several individuals external to the study.

RESULTS

Effects of Leader and Stakeholder Sensegiving on the Process Characteristics of Organizational Sensemaking

As described above, the degrees of leader and stakeholder sensegiving emerged as two important

dimensions that differentiated sensemaking across the 27 issue domains. Examining these dimensions led to two important findings. First, each of these dimensions distinctively affected the process characteristics associated with organizational sensemaking. High levels of leader sensegiving led to sensemaking processes that were highly *controlled*. One important aspect of these controlled processes was that sensegiving by both leaders and stakeholders tended to occur in an organized, systematic fashion, rather than ad hoc: controlled sensemaking processes were dominated by scheduled meetings, formal committees, and planned events with restricted attendance, rather than by informal, impromptu meetings of self-organizing groups. Sensemaking occurred in this controlled way both because leaders drew on their formal authority to organize sensegiving occasions in which issues were discussed through formal channels, and because stakeholders responded to leader sensegiving by participating in and supporting these organized opportunities for sensegiving. A second key aspect of controlled processes was that a significant amount of sensegiving occurred in private meetings between stakeholders and leaders, rather than in more public, open forums. Leaders engaging in high levels of sensegiving were able to use key resources available to them, such as time, space, and their personal networks, to create opportunities to meet stakeholders one-on-one so that discussions could take place away from the scrutiny of others.

An example of sensemaking in which leaders engaged in high levels of sensegiving was the case of programming in the broadcasting orchestra. Here, broadcasting leaders arranged to meet one-on-one with a range of stakeholders, each of whom held views about suitable repertoire. In these private meetings, stakeholders such as the principal conductor and guest conductors, the BBC commissioning manager, local concert promoters, and a recording company each conveyed their preferences and argued for certain pieces of music. These sensemaking processes were thus controlled through leader and stakeholder interaction that took place in scheduled, private, meetings, which allowed each party to more freely express needs and interests and offered them the opportunity to adjust and refine their accounts of the situation away from the public eye.

In contrast, when leaders demonstrated lower levels of sensegiving, sensemaking processes were less controlled. Low levels of leader sensegiving led to fewer mechanisms that might organize sensegiving activities. As well, sensegiving tended not to occur in private conversations between leaders and

stakeholders but instead took place in open forums that included a large number and variety of parties. In the case of the provincial orchestra's principal conductor reappointment issue, for instance, leaders engaged in very little sensegiving: when they did, it primarily occurred in meetings at which there was little attempt to control either attendance or what was discussed. Numerous discussions about the renewal and possible alternatives took place between leaders and the board, the Arts Council of England, and musicians, but leaders did not try to direct either the timing or content of these discussions.

The effect of high levels of stakeholder sensegiving on sensemaking processes was distinctly different from that of leader sensegiving. When stakeholders engaged in extensive sensegiving, they created sensemaking processes that were highly *animated*. A central characteristic of this animation was an intense flow of information: leaders routinely reported back to their boards, executive teams, and other stakeholders, and information was also regularly shared among stakeholder groups. The presence of stakeholders who were actively engaged in shaping the interpretations of events and issues resulted in a greater circulation of information, both directly from those stakeholders and from leaders who were motivated to provide information in response to stakeholder activity. The issue of collaborative ventures in the provincial orchestra, for example, involved a great deal of stakeholder sensegiving and, consequently, high levels of information flow. Sensemaking in this domain revolved around a potential joint venture that was first discussed at both a board subcommittee and a senior management meeting and subsequently conveyed by memo to all board members. Musician representatives, informed at a consultative committee meeting, quickly shared news of the plan among their colleagues. In a short time, all members of the organization and its key stakeholders were aware of the proposal and, at least to some degree, understood it.

The second characteristic of these animated processes was their continuous rhythm: sensemaking around these issues remained active over an extended period. The diversity of interests and perspectives of the various stakeholders engaged in sensegiving led to sensemaking processes that were not resolved quickly or easily, processes in which different stakeholders engaged in the conversation at different times. Thus, sensemaking in animated processes tended to occur in iterative discussions that continued over many months, as numerous stakeholders volunteered their opinions and stated their demands, and leaders worked to articulate

their own accounts of the issues of concern. In the case of income generation in the London orchestra, for instance, stakeholders were highly engaged in sensegiving: throughout the study period there were many discussions between leaders and various stakeholders about income generation schemes, such as overseas tours, U.K. residencies, recordings, and government grants. Approaches to income generation affected different stakeholders in different ways, which engendered significant sensegiving by many groups and led to a sensemaking process that was active and ongoing for many months.

When stakeholders did not engage in significant levels of sensegiving, sensemaking processes were not animated. In these situations, there was a relatively light flow of information, few stakeholders aware of an issue's existence or importance, and still fewer knowing its details. Moreover, low stakeholder sensegiving typically led to sensemaking processes with broken rhythms, rather than the continuity associated with highly animated processes: sensemaking primarily occurred in intermittent leader-stakeholder discussions that took place over an extended period. These discussions were punctuated by occasional bursts of leader sensegiving to key stakeholder groups; most stakeholders, however, received leaders' accounts only as sensemaking processes neared resolution. The area of collaborative ventures in the London orchestra typified such sensemaking processes. Sensemaking in this domain focused on the issue of winning a government grant for innovative new ventures. The grant proposal was largely developed by the London orchestra's executive director, with little input from the collaborating partners; discussions were kept quiet, with only those directly involved aware of the confidential plans. Only at key points in the unfolding process did the executive director relay updates and put forward his analysis of the situation to the orchestra's board and other key stakeholder groups.

Leader and stakeholder sensegiving each fueled sensemaking processes with a particular form of social energy: leader sensegiving produced controlled sensemaking with highly organized, systematic processes in which there tended to be numerous private, one-on-one interactions between leaders and stakeholders; stakeholder sensegiving animated sensemaking processes so that information flowed among participants and the process remained continuously active over the life of the issues.

Four Forms of Organizational Sensemaking

The second important finding of this study concerned the interaction of the dimensions of anima-

tion and control. In each of the 27 issue domains, sensemaking processes were associated with a combination of animation and control that resulted in the emergence of four distinct *forms* of organizational sensemaking. When a sensemaking process was controlled and animated, organizational sensemaking took on a *guided* form. Organizational sensemaking was *fragmented* when the process was animated but not controlled. When the process was controlled but not animated, sensemaking emerged in a *restricted* form. Processes that were neither controlled nor animated produced a *minimal* form of sensemaking. The four forms were qualitatively different not only in their processual characteristics (research question 1) but also in their outcomes (research question 2).

The outcomes of the four forms were found to vary in the kinds of accounts and actions that were

generated. The accounts constituted descriptions of an issue and its context and varied as to whether they were: (1) *unitary* or *multiple* and (2) *rich* or *narrow*. The actions associated with these processes primarily involved organizational decisions and varied in the degree to which they were: (1) enacted in *emergent* series or took the form of *one-time* actions (or planned sets of actions) and (2) consistent or inconsistent with other actions connected to the issue. Figure 1 summarizes the process characteristics and outcomes of each of the four forms of sensemaking. In the remainder of this section, I describe each of the four forms of organizational sensemaking, in each case first providing an example from the data and then discussing the form's process characteristics and outcomes. Tables 3–6 fully summarize process characteristics and outcomes for each form by issue domain.

FIGURE 1
Four Forms of Organizational Sensemaking

	<i>Guided Organizational Sensemaking</i>	<i>Restricted Organizational Sensemaking</i>
High Sensegiving	Process Characteristics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High animation • High control Outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unitary, rich account • Emergent series of consistent actions 	Process Characteristics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low animation • High control Outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unitary, narrow account • One-time action or planned set of consistent actions
Leader Sensegiving		
	<i>Fragmented Organizational Sensemaking</i>	<i>Minimal Organizational Sensemaking</i>
Low Sensegiving	Process Characteristics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High animation • Low control Outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple, narrow accounts • Emergent series of inconsistent actions 	Process Characteristics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low animation • Low control Outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nominal account • One-time, compromise action
	High Sensegiving	Low Sensegiving
	Stakeholder Sensegiving	

TABLE 3
Guided Organizational Sensemaking^a

Orchestra and Issue Domain	Process: Animated and Controlled	Accounts: Unitary and Rich	Actions: Emergent and Consistent
1. Provincial: Income generation	*** Numerous private meetings between the executive director and stakeholders to discuss income generation, including meetings with local funders (e.g., city council and corporate sponsors) to lobby for increased funding and convey the orchestra's opportunities/challenges. Stakeholders responded by explaining their financial and philanthropic positions. Musicians also contributed views in a large number of meetings. The executive director held meeting with an Arts Council representative to establish why the orchestra was not receiving additional funding. The executive director called a meeting with the Board to give his account of the discussion.	*** All parties came to understand that the orchestra was in dire need of additional income and supported the proposal to draw funding from as many sources as possible. The account of the situation that emerged from the process emphasized the orchestra's financial needs and the roles that different funders could play in meeting those needs.	*** Over time, the executive director worked with different stakeholders to carry out a stream of income generation activities (e.g., corporate sponsorship, fund-raisers, increasing public funding, and building up the number of the orchestra's out of town engagements). Each action was introduced separately but was congruent with the others and the overall aim of income generation.
2. Provincial: Collaborative venture	** Provincial leaders organized a series of separate meetings with their partner orchestra, subcommittees, and executive team to formulate, evaluate, and modify proposals. After the story was leaked to the press, the executive director sent a memo to inform board members of a proposal. Musicians were told of plans at a meeting of the Consultative Committee.	*** Leaders and stakeholders developed a shared understanding of the nature of the collaboration and the reasons supporting it: the collaboration would first include shared accommodation and joint marketing, and over time, perhaps more significant projects. It was understood as advantageous to the orchestras, with the potential to spawn additional types of work for both.	*** Initially, the Provincial shared its accommodation with the partner orchestra. Then some joint marketing initiatives were started. Subsequently, discussions took place in which a proposal for joint music-making activities were considered. Actors evaluated the impact of each decision before venturing toward still greater collaboration.
3. Broadcasting: Programming	*** Information about programming issues was shared with a wide range of stakeholders: the commissioning controller of Radio 3, orchestra administration, concert promoters, and conductors. The senior producer set up separate meetings with each party as he built up the program. His vision guided discussions with the principal conductor and guest conductors, who proposed possible repertoire, and with local concert promoters and the orchestra's main commercial recording company, who explained their repertoire preferences.	*** Leaders and stakeholders together came to an understanding of the orchestra's programming needs and opportunities. This incorporated the BBC's demands for contemporary music, as well as the repertoire suggestions of guest conductors and soloists, and the need to include some "popular" pieces for the orchestra's public performances.	*** First an outline of major projects was developed, but the program continued to be modified until a year before it was played. The senior producer described the program as "constantly evolving": it included a wide variety of recordings, concerts, tours, and activities, all consistent with the vision of a national orchestra that specialized in contemporary repertoire and contributed to the community.
4. Broadcasting: Principal conductor renewal	*** In the year leading up to the contract renewal date, discussions about the principal conductor took place regularly, as leaders considered their view of his performance and fit, and sounded out the opinions of others. Leaders evaluated the conductor's performance and discussed reappointment with administration team and BBC overseers. In regular management team meetings, leaders discussed how the conductor's recent concerts went. The senior producer gathered musicians' views on the conductor.	*** Over time, a shared account developed of the existing principal conductor as a good candidate for reappointment. Musicians, managers and other stakeholders perceived him as musically powerful, and someone who related well to those with whom he worked. He was widely understood to be the best choice for the time.	*The orchestra offered the principal conductor a reappointment contract for another three years.

TABLE 3 Continued

Orchestra and Issue Domain	Process: Animated and Controlled	Accounts: Unitary and Rich	Actions: Emergent and Consistent
5. Broadcasting: Players' pay	*** Contract negotiations occurred jointly with other BBC orchestras: the process involved regular meetings between Broadcasting leadership and other parties: the musicians' union, BBC senior management, and musician representatives. The content of unfolding negotiations was reported back to musicians by union representatives, with much discussion among musicians. Broadcasting's leaders addressed its musicians several times in order to articulate their position and express their strong desire for a resolution. Leaders asked the Orchestra Committee to design/distribute a confidential questionnaire to gather musician views.	*** A unitary account emerged slowly, as the multiparty negotiations and related discussions reached convergence. Musicians and leaders agreed that certain changes to the contract would be necessary; negotiation focused on the appropriate value of various rights and conditions.	*** Elements of the new contract were implemented over time. For instance, an agreement was reached to increase the BBC's acquisition of recording rights in exchange for a salary increase. Subsequent contract modifications were implemented over the following year.
6. London: Programming	*** Information about programming was shared among a wide range of stakeholders: recording companies, the orchestra's resident concert hall, musicians, orchestra administration, concert promoters, and conductors. The executive director arranged ongoing individual in-person and telephone meetings to hear stakeholders' demands and requests. In these private meetings, stakeholders expressed their positions and interests, and the executive director pressed for repertoire he believed would be good for the orchestra. The executive director described the process as "juggling."	*** A shared understanding of the orchestra's programming needs evolved as the season plan was composed. Included was the idea of the orchestra as performing high-profile concerts with big name conductors and soloists, and as having good recording opportunities, as well as good player income generation opportunities.	*** The program plan served as the season's framework, and additions and adaptations were made to it throughout the year. These changes were not predictable, but leaders worked to ensure that they were consistent with the orchestra's artistic and financial goals.
7. London: Principal conductor appointment	*** The executive director sought out the prospective principal conductor and his agent to express the orchestra's interest and hear musicians' feelings about the position and conditions. This process continued over several months through parallel discussions between the conductor and various stakeholders. The executive director organized a variety of private meetings with the Arts Council, sponsors, and other important groups; here, these parties indicated their preferences and concerns about the appointment. As discussions unfolded, the chairman kept Board members, musicians, and other stakeholders informed.	*** Parties gradually developed a construction of the proposed individual as a strong candidate for the position. A significant figure in the international music scene, he was both a great artist and able to bring the orchestra valuable contacts and reputation. All parties were aware of his strengths, but also of concerns relating to the financial side of the contract.	** The conductor was invited to conduct several engagements with the orchestra. Over time, as the contract was finalized and eventually agreed on, he accepted the position of principal conductor.
8. London: Cost cutting	*** Cost cutting was discussed in regular meetings of musicians and of the Board. These issues were also discussed in private management committee meetings with leaders; the purpose was to solicit the "objective view" of business people. Public cost-cutting documents were made available to broader orchestra stakeholder groups. Musicians engaged in a private ballot to indicate their preferences on extras' pay cut.	*** Leaders and stakeholders developed a shared, rich construction of the orchestra's financial position: cost control had always been an issue and remained so. All parties appreciated that there were numerous ways to reduce spending.	*** Many cost-cutting measures had been carried out prior to the study period, but these continued to be implemented periodically, each consistent with the orchestra's overall goal of minimizing unnecessary expenditure.

TABLE 3 Continued

Orchestra and Issue Domain	Process: Animated and Controlled	Accounts: Unitary and Rich	Actions: Emergent and Consistent
9. London: Income generation	*** Discussions concerning income generation schemes and projects continued throughout the study period. The executive director engaged a wide variety of stakeholders (private sponsors, corporate sponsors, concert promoters, festival organizers, public granting agencies) in private one-on-one meetings. Each was often unaware of what the others were proposing. Leaders were proud of their successes in income generation and took opportunities to tell the Board, musicians, and external stakeholders about new engagements, sponsors, and grants.	*** A shared, rich account of the orchestra's needs and activities emerged that encompassed many stakeholders' understandings of how income could be made. Fundamental to leaders' and all stakeholders' constructions of the London orchestra was the belief that its success rested on successful income generation activities.	*** Income generation activities involved distinct, discrete projects that were led by the executive director and moved gradually in a consistent direction. These activities created a coherent portfolio of recording and performance work that generated sufficient income for the orchestra's continued survival.

^a The asterisks show the strength of evidence.

*** Strong—Strong evidence for both dimensions of the process or outcome in this domain.

** Moderate—Moderate evidence for both dimensions of the process or outcome, or strong evidence for one dimension in this domain.

* Weak—Moderate evidence for one dimension of the process or outcome in this domain.

Guided Organizational Sensemaking

The first form of organizational sensemaking comprised processes that were both highly controlled and highly animated. This type of sensemaking was found in 9 of the 27 issue domains and occurred in each of the three orchestras at least twice (see Table 3). In each instance, leaders were very active as “sensegivers,” constructing and promoting understandings and explanations of events and of the process. At the same time, stakeholders were also actively engaged in sensegiving, attempting to shape beliefs about certain elements of the issues and their significance. These sensemaking processes were guided in that leaders, through the systematic and confidential approach they brought to their stakeholder interactions, were able to gather, coordinate, and shape stakeholder contributions.

Processes of guided sensemaking. The principal conductor appointment in the London orchestra offers a clear example of how guided organizational sensemaking unfolds. Leaders carried out extensive sensegiving activities in private meetings with different stakeholder groups, organized systematically, and typically planned in advance. At the same time, the process was highly animated as a result of stakeholders who actively engaged in sensegiving, pressing to take part in discussions about the issue and its resolution. Because of the level of stakeholder engagement, knowledge of the issue was widespread and discussed over an extended period. The London leaders were keen to appoint a certain individual as principal conductor and worked hard, over several months, to convey to

different parties that the appointment could only happen if the orchestra received sufficient funding to support his salary. In a meeting with the London's trustees, the chairman emphasized that “the orchestra could only proceed with this appointment if adequate subsidy was available,” and on another occasion, the executive director explained to the board of directors that he would be meeting with the Arts Council music director “to determine the level of subsidy required.” In parallel, the executive director explained privately to the currently U.S.-based prospective principal conductor that “the orchestra could not afford” to pay the kind of salary common in the USA. While leaders worked to shape stakeholder understandings, stakeholders constructed their own accounts of the situation, speaking openly and with conviction. The Arts Council explained that “its support was directed towards the Orchestra's overall program of work rather than to any one conductor” and argued that this appointment did not “merit special financial assistance.” Directors in a board meeting claimed that “orchestras in Britain go wrong when they enter into financial commitments that they can't afford.” In the face of these vehement arguments regarding the appointment's financial viability, musicians spoke out regarding the conductor's artistic strength. Overall, both the continuous rhythm and free information flow of highly animated sensemaking and the systematic, organized approach of a highly controlled process characterized this guided form of sensemaking.

Outcomes of guided organizational sensemaking. Distinctive kinds of accounts and actions were associated with each form of sensemaking. Guided sensemaking led to the production of accounts that were unitary and rich. Unitary accounts resulted from the systematic and controlled approach leaders adopted to give and gather constructions of the issue, which allowed them to guide the numerous and varied views of multiple stakeholders into a new, single, collective account. These accounts were rich because they incorporated the constructions of the many different parties engaged in sensegiving: the new accounts generated through these processes tended to be cumulative and dense, as leaders built upon, rather than tore down, the accounts and partial accounts generated by stakeholders along the way. While the issue of income generation in the provincial orchestra, for instance, involved a wide range of internal and external stakeholders, the executive director worked to produce a single, coherent understanding of the orchestra's financial needs and of funders' potential roles in meeting those needs. He did so by drawing on stakeholders' various accounts to construct a rich, unitary understanding that took these multiple perspectives into consideration. The nature of the accounts arising from guided organizational sensemaking processes is summarized in the following proposition:

Proposition 1a. Organizational sensemaking in which both leaders and stakeholders are engaged in high levels of sensegiving will tend to produce a unitary account (rather than multiple accounts) that is rich (rather than narrow).

An important effect of the production of accounts in sensemaking processes is that they facilitate action on the part of those involved (Weick, 1993, 1995). An interesting finding in this study concerns the impact of the type of account produced on the nature of subsequent actions. In guided sensemaking processes, the unitary, rich accounts enabled the emergence of series of actions with consistent foci. These accounts provided a common foundation for action, so that people's activities were based on accounts that captured a common understanding of the situation and their goals. The presence of multiple perspectives created accounts that offered a rich and enduring resource for the embryonic emergence of a series of actions over time, while their unitary nature ensured a consistency in the actions that emerged. For example, in the provincial orchestra's collaborative venture, the two orchestras undertook a series of steps that cumulatively contributed to the development of a partnership arrangement. Initially, the administration

team of a local chamber orchestra took up accommodation in the provincial orchestra's offices, and then, over a period of months, the organizations embarked on various joint fund-raising, marketing, and education initiatives. These activities were based on a shared account of their competitive context and the value of collaboration, which facilitated the consistency of their actions over time. The following proposition summarizes the nature of the actions associated with guided organizational sensemaking.

Proposition 1b. Organizational sensemaking in which both leaders and stakeholders engage in high levels of sensegiving will tend to lead to an emergent series of actions (rather than a one-time action), that is internally consistent (rather than inconsistent).

Fragmented Organizational Sensemaking

The second form of organizational sensemaking resulted when processes were animated but not controlled. This form characterized sensemaking in 7 of the 27 issue domains, occurring several times in both the provincial and broadcasting orchestras (see Table 4). Stakeholders animated these fragmented sensemaking processes by raising issues, generating and shaping accounts of the situations, and arguing for potential solutions. Leaders often sought the views of stakeholders, but they did not attempt to organize or control discussions, nor did they typically integrate stakeholder constructions into coherent collective accounts. This combination of high stakeholder sensegiving and low leader sensegiving produced organizational sensemaking processes that were highly animated but uncontrolled.

Processes of fragmented sensemaking. A striking example of fragmented sensemaking occurred in programming in the provincial orchestra. The executive director described the plethora of parties that engaged in sensegiving on an ongoing basis:

[The principal conductor] sort of produced repertoire by sparking off [the artistic advisor, the deputy chief executive, and an external consultant]. . . . Emerging out of that process . . . is ultimately [the artistic advisor] producing rolling drafts of the repertoire that responds to a strategy that was not well articulated, and now, we still don't have a properly articulated artistic strategy and I'd like to see [the new artistic director] looking at the one that [the marketing director] wrote when she arrived, and try and get that fleshed out better.

In contrast to this abundant stakeholder sensegiving, sensegiving from the provincial orchestra's leaders was minimal; these leaders neither pro-

TABLE 4
Fragmented Organizational Sensemaking^a

Orchestra and Issue Domain	Process: Animated and Uncontrolled	Account: Multiple and Narrow	Actions: Emergent and Inconsistent
10. Provincial: Programming	*** Numerous multiparty meetings were held in which a variety of stakeholders, many times uninvited, put forward their understandings of the issue and proposed ideas to shape its direction. Stakeholders outside the orchestra, such as the Arts Council, criticized its poor artistic and financial performance, which they partly attributed to its programming.	*** Leaders and stakeholders struggled to construct a unified account of the orchestra's musical identity. Failing to do this, they worked with numerous partial and often conflicting accounts of who the orchestra was and the repertoire in which it specialized.	*** Throughout the period programming plans and proposals were made and then changed. Different parties expressed confusion and frustration at the unclear and shifting plans.
11. Provincial: Principal conductor renewal	*** Numerous ongoing discussions took place between leaders and the Board, among players, and between leaders and the Arts Council about the renewal and possible options. Stakeholders engaged in open exchange with each other, and with leaders, about the strengths and weaknesses of the existing conductor. Leaders tried to direct or restrict these discussions. Discussions continued for more than a year, intensifying at certain points as action was required.	*** Accounts of the issue shifted from one position to another, as leaders and stakeholders sought resolution. Throughout the life of the issue, there remained a lack of agreement regarding the best way to understand the situation and the "right" way to deal with it.	** As the contract deadline drew near, the chairman met with the conductor to ascertain his wishes. The conductor was unwilling to commit without hearing the views of the musicians. The chairman then offered him a short renewal while they tried to decide what to do.
12. Provincial: Guest conductors	*** The quality and style of different conductors, as well as plans for developing a "family" of guest conductors, were openly discussed in a variety of different meetings attended by the leaders, Board, artistic advisory committee, and consultative committee, and at the Board retreat. Musicians discussed the suitability of guest conductors in orchestra meetings. Musicians and board members put forward views about members of the family of conductors for more than a year, as the leaders tried to specify its composition.	*** Multiple views of the issue and approaches to it prevailed throughout the study period. While one account suggested the need to develop a family of conductors, the principal conductor, musicians, and other stakeholders made suggestions for possible visiting conductors that were inconsistent with this idea.	*** The artistic director reduced the number of different guest conductors, in discussion with the principal conductor. At the same time, commitments to conductors who had already been booked were maintained. It was hard to detect a coherent strategy behind the conductor roster.
13. Provincial: Players' pay	*** The leaders' plan to introduce a more flexible players' contract was widely discussed among musicians, board members, and the musicians' union. This proposal was discussed in meetings with management and union representatives, and was also raised in full orchestra meetings and Board meetings. Discussions continued over several months. Players, their chairman, and their Board representatives expressed their views vehemently to leaders. The executive director listened to stakeholders but was not forthcoming in his own view. The intensity of discussions varied, but were ongoing, especially between musicians and the artistic director.	*** While there was a shared understanding of the financial difficulties, much disagreement and confusion remained throughout about how to address the problem. The executive director first argued for a contractual change, and then later for a pay freeze, pointing to the principal conductor's and management team's salaries and expenses.	** Following his initial proposal for contractual change, the executive director offered a pay freeze. Players and others expressed surprise at this change of direction and voted against the freeze. Despite this, the freeze was imposed as a temporary measure.

TABLE 4 Continued

Orchestra and Issue Domain	Process: Animated and Uncontrolled	Account: Multiple and Narrow	Actions: Emergent and Inconsistent
14. Provincial: Cost cutting	*** The need to cut costs was a salient issue for two years. Leaders and stakeholders discussed numerous approaches, serially and in parallel. For example, the executive director's main idea—reducing the orchestra's size—was widely discussed by players, Board members, the artistic director, the orchestra manager, and the Arts Council. Section principals met to appraise the plan. Musicians, outraged by the proposal, met several times to discuss an action plan and subsequently presented alternative proposals to the Board. The leaders made few efforts to curtail these exchanges, nor did they attempt to shape the musicians' opinions.	*** Although the leaders were consistent in their account of the need to cut costs, they did not present a coherent plan. Different parties' proposals were offered up and discussed, each group maintaining its construction of the sources of the problem and workable solutions.	*** Different proposals were advocated and withdrawn in reaction to others' responses. Over time, a variety of cost-cutting measures were introduced, but these failed to fit clearly into an overall business plan.
15. Broadcasting: Player performance	** The concert master's performance and future employment were discussed widely over a period of several months, first among leaders and the management team, and then more openly and with greater intensity and urgency as the deadline for contract renewal approached. Section principals met with management to express their feelings. The principal conductor shared his opinion in meetings with leaders. The Players' Committee discussed the issue among themselves and forwarded their views to leaders. Leaders gathered views but hesitated to present their own positions.	*** A wide variety of often conflicting accounts of the situation circulated among stakeholders. These accounts variously addressed the concert master's performance ability, leadership qualities, commitment to the orchestra, the financial costs of the contract, the legal obligations, and alternative individuals for the position.	** Players told the executive director that they believed the concert master's contract should not be renewed. After the leaders informed the concert master, these same musicians expressed their sorrow and regret at the decision to her.
16. Broadcasting: Player appointments	*** A number of different musicians came to try out for the position of second concert master, and their qualities were discussed for several months. Players openly expressed their views of different candidates in musician meetings and to leaders. Over time, musicians became increasingly impatient and demanded to hear leaders' views and to see some action.	*** Disparate, conflicting accounts were generated regarding the position and the candidates. Some accounts suggested the musicians preferred candidate was not interested; others suggested he was but leaders had been clear enough in expressing interest. Differing accounts also emerged regarding whether the position regarding whether the position was for a "second" or a "first" concert master.	** As the leaders decided not to renew the contract of their existing concert master, a "first" concert master position became available and was offered to the preferred candidate.

^a The asterisks show the strength of evidence.

*** Strong—Strong evidence for both dimensions of the process or outcome in the domain.

** Moderate—Moderate evidence for both dimensions of the process or outcome, or strong evidence for one dimension in the domain.

* Weak—Moderate evidence for one dimension of the process or outcome in the domain.

vided an overarching artistic vision, nor articulated a systematic process through which a long-term plan might be developed.

Outcomes of fragmented sensemaking. Sense-making processes that were both highly animated and highly uncontrolled tended to produce multiple individualistic accounts. A high level of animation ensured the discursive production of a variety of stakeholder perspectives, but because control

was absent, these accounts were rarely integrated or reconciled. Stakeholders' accounts thus tended to accumulate over time: fragmented sensemaking processes remained active over the lives of issues as stakeholders put forth more, diverse accounts of situations, accounts that no one worked to integrate. While, in principle, the integration of accounts might have been carried out not only by the leaders but also by key stakeholders or through a

collective stakeholder effort, such stakeholder-driven integration was not evident in the present study. Instead, these fragmented processes produced multiple new accounts, each of which tended to be quite narrow, representing the construction of a single individual or group. In the case of the provincial's players' pay and contract issue, various members of the board, the orchestra committee, the administration, and the musicians' union representative each put forward quite different and often contradictory arguments about the situation and what should be done. At the end of this process, these accounts had failed to coalesce. The nature of the accounts produced through fragmented organizational sensemaking processes leads to the following proposition:

Proposition 2a. Organizational sensemaking in which leaders are engaged in low levels of sensegiving and stakeholders are engaged in high levels of sensegiving will tend to produce multiple (rather than unitary) accounts that are narrow (rather than rich).

The proliferation of individualistic accounts associated with fragmented sensemaking had a significant impact on the forms of action produced. The existence of multiple, distinctive accounts tended to generate series of inconsistent and contradictory actions. This was because the various accounts of the situation that were available to actors often differed so significantly that, over the life of these issues, different groups and individuals engaged in divergent actions based on their own idiosyncratic interpretations of events. For example, in the provincial orchestra's pay and contract issue discussed above, the leader first decided to introduce a contractual change concerning the number of hours that musicians worked. In the face of negative reaction from musicians and some members of his management team and board, he instead offered the orchestra a pay freeze. Amidst surprise and confusion at the unexpected change of plan, the musicians, led by a union representative, rejected the pay freeze proposal. The executive director ignored this rejection, imposing a temporary pay freeze without discussing it further. Musicians, although disgruntled, continued to work. The unreconciled multiple accounts constructed in fragmented processes resulted in actions that were rarely in harmony.

Fragmented sensemaking, where animated and uncontrolled processes lead to individualistic accounts and inconsistent actions, resembles "collapse of sensemaking" (Weick, 1993), in which actors experience the disintegration of shared meaning. In both cases, we see individuals going

their own way to the detriment of collective sensemaking processes and action. Weick associated the collapse of sensemaking with crises that throw actors into unfamiliar roles and discredit an existing role system. The current study suggests, however, that less extraordinary circumstances can prevent collective meaning making. In the fragmented processes seen here, there was no precipitating crisis: instead, simple lack of control in sensemaking processes led to situations in which multiple accounts of issues were propagated and led to inconsistent actions. Moreover, whereas Weick described the rapid collapse of sensemaking in a small team, here one sees collapse occurring over extended periods of time and across large, diverse groups of stakeholders. The following summarizes the nature of the action associated with fragmented organizational sensemaking:

Proposition 2b. Organizational sensemaking in which leaders engage in low levels of sensegiving and stakeholders engage in high levels of sensegiving will tend to lead to an emergent series of actions (rather than a one-time action) that is internally inconsistent (rather than consistent).

Restricted Organizational Sensemaking

The third form of organizational sensemaking, the restricted form, occurred when processes were highly controlled but not very animated. This form typified sensemaking in 7 of the 27 issue domains, and it was found several times in the broadcasting and London orchestras (see Table 5). In each of these cases, leaders who engaged in high levels of sensegiving promulgated overarching accounts of issues they encountered, which stakeholders tended to accept with relatively few attempts to provide alternative understandings. Leaders did, however, identify certain stakeholders as valuable to the process and sought them out to draw on their constructions of the issues at key points—largely through the careful, advanced scheduling of private meetings with individual groups.

Processes of restricted sensemaking. One example of restricted sensemaking was seen in the broadcasting orchestra's income generation area. In an internal report to the BBC, the executive director identified several ways of "increasing the orchestra's income-earning potential." Both in this report and in private stakeholder meetings, he described possible ways in which the orchestra could generate more revenue. Although every one of these, from making changes to the players' contract, introducing a strand of lighter music to the orches-

TABLE 5
Restricted Organizational Sensemaking

Orchestra and Issue Domain	Process: Unanimated and Controlled	Accounts: Unitary and Narrow	Actions: One-Time or Planned and Consistent
17. Broadcasting: Guest conductors	*** Few stakeholders were involved in discussions of the issue. Main information exchanges took place between the senior producer and potential guest conductors. The senior producer initiated meetings in which potential guest conductors individually talked with him about their abilities, schedules, and preferences. The senior producer also informally gathered musicians' preferences. Over time, he integrated the proposals gathered.	*** The account that emerged was an unambiguous description of the guest conductor roster for the coming period and the senior producer's rationale for it: the roster included known individuals as well as new and upcoming conductors that the orchestra was interested in trying out.	*** Once the engagements were finalized, the orchestra was informed of the roster and guest conductors came as scheduled.
18. Broadcasting: Cost cutting	*** Information was contained largely within the management team. Discussions took place in the management team intermittently, as budget constraints were announced. Little input from stakeholders; a few proposals for cutbacks were relayed privately in closed discussions with leaders. The executive director informed musicians of key changes once decisions had been made.	*** Leaders developed an account that built on the existing BBC-wide narrative about the budget cuts and cost control. Their description of the need for cost cutting in the orchestra was clear and understood by all.	*** The executive director drew up a set of cost-cutting initiatives, which he implemented in succession.
19. Broadcasting: Income generation	*** Leaders worked to keep issues in this arena quiet; they saw it as having political consequences and did not want other orchestras to hear about their plans or discussions. A few key stakeholders—concert promoters and one recording company—expressed their interests and ideas in private talks with leaders. Musicians and other internal stakeholders knew little about the issue. As plans were developed, leaders periodically made announcements, both internally and to the general public.	*** Compared with the other orchestras, the Broadcasting's account of its income generation was quite narrow, and understood by most stakeholders: the orchestra's primary source of funding remained the BBC.	*** A set of new income generation activities was implemented as part of the Broadcasting's overall mission; these were consistent with its identity.
20. Broadcasting: Collaborative ventures	*** Discussions around the issue took place sporadically, depending on the prevailing political and financial climate and on the leadership of the potential collaborators. Broadcasting leaders considered collaboration extremely sensitive and so kept information on the issue and related discussions confidential. Private meetings were held with a few key stakeholders: leaders of the other orchestra, the BBC, and local community figures.	*** The account, largely developed and propagated by the executive director, described the concept of a "superorchestra," but with few details as to how it would be created, managed, or funded.	* Although not enacted during the study period, the executive director's vision was for overnight creation of a superorchestra.
21. London: Guest conductors	*** The executive director talked individually with potential guest conductors and agents about their abilities, schedules, and demands, integrating these discussions into his construction of the overall shape of the season. Few other stakeholders were focused on the issue, although some suggestions were put forward from individual musicians.	** A shared understanding of the guest conductor roster for the coming period emerged. The reasons behind each engagement were not always clear to each stakeholder, but there was general acknowledgement that the executive director hired the best set of people possible, given constraints.	** The executive director made arrangements and informed the orchestra periodically as they were confirmed. The roster was consistent with the orchestra's artistic/financial aims and desired image. Small changes occurred: cancellations and changes in dates, rehearsals, and repertoire.

TABLE 5 Continued

Orchestra and Issue Domain	Process: Unanimated and Controlled	Accounts: Unitary and Narrow	Actions: One-Time or Planned and Consistent
22. London: Players' pay	*** Leaders kept this sensitive issue quiet until it was necessary to inform the orchestra at large. Discussions first took place only among leaders; the issue was then discussed with the Board in a series of private, impromptu meetings. Discussions around the issue did not continue long; a decision was made within a few weeks.	*** Leaders and directors constructed an account that they felt was likely to be acceptable to the majority of stakeholders: fees should be reduced in a way that affected the fewest musicians.	*** Pay was cut for a few key positions, rather than across the entire orchestra; the pay cut was implemented and received with minimal resistance.
23. London: Collaborative venture	*** In general, information on the issue and related discussions were kept confidential. Discussions between the executive director and key stakeholders, such as the collaborating orchestra and the collaborating concert hall, were held sporadically. An Arts Council representative was invited to attend a Board meeting to give her perspective. The venture plans progressed fitfully, when the executive director was able to spend time on them.	*** The account of the situation was dominated by the perspectives of the executive director and the Arts Council: the proposal had to be innovative and clearly look like a collaboration.	*** A proposal for a collaboration between the London orchestra, the collaborating orchestra, and the concert hall was submitted to the Arts Council.

^a The asterisks show the strength of evidence.

*** Strong—Strong evidence for both dimensions of the process or outcome in the domain.

** Moderate—Moderate evidence for both dimensions of the process or outcome, or strong evidence for one dimension in the domain.

* Weak—Moderate evidence for one dimension of the process or outcome in the domain.

tra's repertoire, and repeating the same program in a number of different venues, would significantly affect the musicians, the director did not seek out players' opinions. Indeed, he largely considered doing so a waste of time, explaining: "I'm trying to save the orchestra, and all they can talk about is whether they get a 20-minute tea-break." Musicians were no more interested in discussing these financial matters than the leader was in hearing their views. They did not talk about them much amongst themselves, nor did they often come forward with their ideas or interpretations. A few key stakeholders, however—concert promoters and certain senior BBC executives—engaged in private meetings with leaders through which they shaped the income generation issue and possible ways of addressing it.

Outcomes of restricted organizational sense-making. From highly controlled and unanimated sensemaking processes emerged accounts that were distinct from those produced in guided and fragmented sensemaking processes. As in the guided processes, the controlled nature of restricted sense-making produced unitary accounts: a primary product of sensemaking was a single, dominant interpretation of the issue. In restricted sensemaking processes, however, this dominance resulted not from leaders working to integrate and synthesize multiple perspectives, but from there being a lack of alternatives to leaders' constructions. Thus,

unlike the rich accounts produced in guided sense-making, the accounts emerging from restricted processes were relatively narrow, incorporating only the leaders' perspectives. Although leaders may generally have broader understandings of some issues than do individual stakeholders (Hambrick & Mason, 1984), their perspectives cannot include the variety of perspectives that exist across a range of interested stakeholders. In the case of the London orchestra's players' pay and contract issue, the leaders' account of the situation was simple; the executive director told the orchestra, "We've done all of this, we're still not able to make the £150,000 surplus we wanted; we're doing this, and asking you to do this." He had chosen not to consult widely, preferring to minimize discussion on the matter and believing there to be only one workable solution. He knew that this account did not take into consideration each party's interests, commenting in an interview, "We knew that it wasn't going to be unanimously approved," but he defended it to the musicians, board, and executive committee as the only viable option. The nature of the accounts produced through restricted sensemaking processes leads to the following:

Proposition 3a. Organizational sensemaking in which leaders engage in high levels of sense-giving and stakeholders engage in low levels of sense-giving will tend to produce unitary

(rather than multiple) accounts that are narrow (rather than rich).

Typically comprising just single interpretations of issues and single means of resolving them, these narrow, unitary accounts tended to lead to one-time actions to deal with the issues. On other occasions, when the issues could not be addressed by single actions, the accounts spawned planned sets of consistent actions intended to together tackle the issues. The narrowness of the accounts produced in restricted sensemaking processes meant that they provided highly specific foundations for action: much like a play written around a linear plot that can lead to only one conclusion, an account produced by restricted sensemaking processes does not provide the discursive resources necessary for organization members to engage in any significant improvisation or extension. For example, in the broadcasting orchestra's cost-cutting arena, the executive director identified and prioritized a set of related areas in which cutbacks could be made. Once this plan was laid out, leaders worked to ensure each step was effectively enacted; neither leaders nor stakeholders were driven to identify alternative cost reduction models. These outcomes of restricted sensemaking processes lead to the following:

Proposition 3b. Organizational sensemaking in which leaders engage in high levels of sensegiving and stakeholders engage in low levels of sensegiving will tend to lead to a one-time action or a planned set of consistent actions (rather than an emergent series).

Minimal Organizational Sensemaking

The last form of organizational sensemaking observed in this study resulted from processes that were neither animated nor controlled. This minimal sensemaking was found in 4 of the 27 issue domains, occurring twice each in the provincial and the London orchestras (see Table 6). In these minimal sensemaking processes, each party tended to await others' interpretations of an issue, which typically came in response to some external trigger. Animation was low, with few stakeholders discussing the issue or seeking to offer their constructions of it. At the same time, leaders made little attempt to organize ways of promoting their interpretations of it or to gather the views of their stakeholder groups in any systematic way.

Processes of minimal sensemaking. In the area of the London orchestra's player appointments, for example, leaders and orchestra members looked primarily to the relevant section principal for an

opinion about a job candidate. Few other stakeholders volunteered a view, and when other section principals were asked for theirs, they rarely put forward alternative perspectives. As one board member explained, "Most of the principals are more than happy to sit on the fence—they've got a hard enough job—they don't want to put their oar in and stir things up." Stakeholders did not discuss the issue widely, and months passed when no one pressed to address it. At the same time, leaders made little attempt to shape understandings of an appropriate appointment or to influence how others saw a particular candidate. Nor did they try to organize systematic ways of drawing out stakeholder opinion, or make any clear effort to encourage leader-stakeholder discussion of the matter. Overall, this minimal form was characterized by low levels of animation and discussion and by very little attempt to drive or organize the sensemaking process.

Outcomes of minimal sensemaking. Instances of minimal sensemaking led to accounts and actions that reflected the low levels of animation and control associated with the process. As stakeholders failed to offer spontaneous constructions of issues, and as leaders neither encouraged them to do so nor put forward their own interpretations, sensemaking in the minimal form produced only nominal accounts of issues. Nominal accounts—ones that provided only token understanding or interpretation—emerged as leaders and stakeholders grasped at any construction of issues that might provide some basis for resolution. Provincial orchestra leaders and stakeholders, for example, struggled with the issue of a musician whose performance was in question; rather than actively engage in sensegiving with respect to the issue, however, all parties avoided dealing with it. After months of uncertainty and procrastination, the orchestra's leaders suggested a "flexible arrangement" that would avoid terminating the player's employment:

Maybe the right solution for him [the musician] is to do a much smaller percentage of the work, not sever his links entirely with the [provincial orchestra], but be somebody who is brought in on a different contract. . . . Maybe that's a solution.

I describe this interpretation of the situation as a nominal account because it neither synthesizes the perspectives of multiple stakeholders, as do the rich accounts described in the guided form of sensemaking, nor does it articulate a well-developed interpretation based on a single perspective, as was seen in the restricted form. The following proposi-

TABLE 6
Minimal Organizational Sensemaking

Orchestra and Issue Domain	Process: Unanimated and Uncontrolled	Account: Nominal	Action: One-Time Compromise
24. Provincial: Player performance	*** The principal conductor was unhappy with the performance of a certain player, but this was not publicly discussed. Very little information was exchanged about the issue for several months. When the issue became known, musicians forcefully expressed their views about the ability of their colleague in various meetings, and informal discussions.	*** For a long time, no account existed of the situation or of appropriate ways of dealing with it. Over time, a tentative account both of the player's ability and of a workable solution emerged.	*** The executive director proposed a compromise solution: the player should not be reauditioned or fired but asked to do less work with the orchestra.
25. Provincial: Player appointments	*** Despite key positions remaining open, little information was exchanged regarding player appointments. Although musicians were brought in on trial, for long periods there was little discussion of who should be offered a job. When the issue was discussed, it was by Board members and players, who brought it up in larger meetings and demanded some explanation and action.	*** Accounts of the issue were occasionally exchanged, but no one account stuck. There was little agreement about the urgency of the need to hire or about the best candidates for the positions.	** When it was understood that there was a threat of losing a candidate for one key position to a competitor, the artistic director compelled the principal conductor to agree to make the appointment.
26. London: Player performance	*** Although some musicians expressed discomfort with one player's performance, there was little open discussion about it for several months. People avoided talking about the issue because it involved colleagues and friends. When repeated performance problems made the issue very pressing, it was raised between the section principal and the chairman, and then discussed in Board meetings. Section principals also met to discuss the player's performance.	*** As constructions of the issue emerged, they differed considerably, depending on people's positions and relationship with the target musician. There was no shared account of the musician's problem or of the best way to approach it.	*** After much delay and hesitation, the player was approached and asked to take some time off. This compromise bought time for all parties.
27. London: Player appointments	*** Sensemaking lay largely with the section principal. Although musicians came in on trial, long periods passed with little discussion of whom to appoint. After a long time and several trials, the section principal identified a candidate for appointment and gathered views from the section and section principals. At a meeting between section principals and the Board, a case was made to appoint the musician.	** When an account emerged about the candidate, it was quite narrow in its description and put forward by just a few interested individuals.	** After a period of years, the appointment was made when the section principal deemed a candidate good for the position. This view was endorsed by fellow principals.

^a The asterisks show the strength of evidence.

*** Strong—Strong evidence for both dimensions of the process or outcome in the domain.

** Moderate—Moderate evidence for both dimensions of the process or outcome, or strong evidence for one dimension in the domain.

* Weak—Moderate evidence for one dimension of the process or outcome in the domain.

tion summarizes the nature of the new accounts arising from minimal organizational sensemaking:

Proposition 4a. Organizational sensemaking in which both leaders and stakeholders engage in low levels of sensegiving will tend to produce nominal accounts.

The nominal accounts produced in these processes provided very weak foundations for action. Accounts act as discursive resources for members as they attempt to respond to an issue (Weick,

1993): a nominal account will thus do little to foster either motivation (reasons for action) or imagination (ways forward). Nevertheless, the nominal accounts produced in minimal sensemaking processes, while lacking richness and failing to incorporate multiple perspectives, seemed to free leaders and stakeholders from their paralysis by allowing single compromise actions that provided temporary relief. Issues that were associated with minimal sensemaking were not “nonissues”: they were nonurgent matters of some concern for which

both leaders and stakeholders failed to engage in active sensegiving. Although these issues often went untackled for extended periods of time, they ultimately required some, at least temporary, resolution. With the provincial's player performance issue, a decision was made that was acceptable for the time being but did not provide a workable long-term solution. Decreasing the musician's amount of time with the orchestra temporarily satisfied the principal conductor and his concerns for the orchestra's performance standard, but doing this also meant that the issue of the player's performance would not completely disappear. The following proposition summarizes the nature of actions generated through minimal organizational sensemaking processes:

Proposition 4b. Organizational sensemaking in which both leaders and stakeholders engage in low levels of sensegiving will tend to lead to one-time, compromise actions.

CONCLUSIONS

Two research questions guided this study: (1) Are there discernable patterns of interaction that constitute the social processes of sensemaking among diverse stakeholders in complex organizations? and (2) Are there patterns of accounts and action associated with the different social processes of sensemaking in organizations? I have shown that different combinations of leader and stakeholder sensegiving produce four different forms of organizational sensemaking—guided, fragmented, restricted, and minimal—each with distinctive processual characteristics. I have also shown that each form produces a distinct set of outcomes in the kinds of accounts and actions generated.

This study makes three important contributions to the sensemaking literature. First, it identifies two key dimensions that describe the social processes of organizational sensemaking—*animation* and *control*. These dimensions provide an important and missing element in sensemaking research: a language with which a variety of everyday sensemaking processes can be described, compared, and contrasted. Together, the concepts of animation and control can describe the different ways in which heterogeneous parties interact in ongoing, “ordinary” sensemaking processes over extended periods of time. This study thus complements those that have articulated dimensions of sensemaking that, though rich and evocative, have been less amenable to use in a wide range of sensemaking contexts. Second, this study identifies four dis-

tinct forms of organizational sensemaking that capture the variance that exists when sensemaking occurs among a pool of diverse actors addressing a range of organizational issues. This contribution is important for sensemaking research because it demonstrates that sensemaking is neither a singular, homogeneous process, nor a random, heterogeneous set of processes. Moreover, these four forms constitute an empirically grounded typology of sensemaking processes upon which future research can be based. Third, this study contributes to the sensemaking literature by showing how these four forms of sensemaking processes connect to different types of accounts and actions. For each form, I have developed propositions that relate the social processes of sensemaking to specific types of accounts and action. These propositions go beyond previous sensemaking research that has shown that sensemaking is key to organizational accounts and action but failed to examine heterogeneous forms of sensemaking and to specify their relationships to different outcomes.

The study described in this article of course has its limitations. One consideration is that it was conducted in symphony orchestras. Orchestras have goals, structures, and stakeholder roles similar to those of many medium-sized private companies, which is likely to mean that orchestras' sensemaking processes will be comparable to those in such organizations. At the same time, orchestras clearly also differ from private companies in the specific products and services they provide and the environment in which they operate. Although it is unlikely that sensemaking processes in orchestras differ fundamentally from those in other kinds of organizations, the generalizability of the theory presented here therefore remains to be tested.

It is also possible that the four forms of organizational sensemaking identified here may not be exhaustive: the forms could be supplemented by the discovery of subtypes, perhaps through data collected from a larger and more heterogeneous set of organizations. For the current study, however, I argue that it would have been working beyond the point of diminishing analytic returns to seek such subtypes.

A further limitation here concerns the simple bifurcation of leader sensegiving and stakeholder sensegiving into predominantly high or low within each issue domain. Because of the extensive data set analyzed, it was necessary to synthesize an enormous amount of material to develop a coherent picture of organizational sensemaking across issue domains and organizations. Although previous research has shown that a party's sensegiving behavior can vary at different points in a sensemaking

process (Bartunek et al., 1999; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), it lay outside the scope of this study to address the issue at this level of analysis. Despite these limitations, this study has significant implications for both research and practice.

Implications for Research

This study raises important questions for future research on organizational sensemaking. The first concerns the antecedents of organizational sensemaking, in particular, the role of the particular issue and organization involved in determining the form (the distinct pattern of leader-stakeholder interaction) of sensemaking enacted. Although in this study neither issue nor organization alone determined the form of sensemaking, each appeared to have some impact. For instance, looking at the pattern of sensemaking across issues reveals that in most cases two of the studied organizations shared a common form for a given issue. This pattern suggests that issue may affect the degree of sensegiving both leaders and stakeholders engage in and consequently may affect the ensuing form of organizational sensemaking. With regard to the impact of organization on sensemaking processes, we can see that each orchestra in this study demonstrated only three of the four possible forms. This finding suggests that there may be organizations in which leaders inevitably become involved in sensegiving around any active issue, and others in which there are dynamic sets of stakeholders who almost always seek to contribute to the formation of accounts, irrespective of the issue. There may also be organizations in which both leaders and stakeholders are reluctant to let issues lie, so that one or both parties will inevitably pick them up and attempt to construct accounts about them. The small number of organizations in the present study precludes us from drawing stronger conclusions about organizational antecedents of sensemaking, but it nevertheless highlights interesting questions for future research.

Another question concerns the distribution of the four sensemaking forms that might be likely to be seen in different kinds of organizations and industries. I might speculate, for example, that in high-velocity industries, where efficient organizational processes are critical (Eisenhardt & Bourgeois, 1988), there would be more instances of restricted and fewer instances of guided sensemaking. Similarly, relatively few cases of fragmented or minimal organizational sensemaking would seem likely in new start-ups, where highly energetic entrepreneurs dominate sensemaking processes. In order to develop understanding of organizational sense-

making, researchers need to acknowledge the different forms it can take and examine the contexts most conducive to each one.

A third question raised by the present research involves the stability of the organizational sensemaking forms and the ways in which they relate to one another. Although these dynamics were not a focus of this study, an interesting area for future research would be to examine patterns of change in the forms over time. The restricted form, for example, may be self-perpetuating, as the containment and concealment of information become routinized and formalized, and stakeholders become increasingly silenced (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). In contrast, the fragmented form may be inherently unstable because such frenetic activity is sustainable only for a time and produces little unified action. Connected to the issue of stability is the question of how different forms of organizational sensemaking and their outcomes relate to one another over time. For instance, faced with a temporary solution of the kind generated through minimal organizational sensemaking, do leaders, stakeholders, or both increase their sensegiving, perhaps achieving a more durable outcome? Similarly, is fragmented sensemaking, in which the process may exhaust those involved, typically followed by minimal sensemaking, or are leaders driven by the uncertainty to engage in more vigorous sensegiving activities?

A fourth research question concerns the relationship between the forms of organizational sensemaking and important performance-related outcomes. Although this study examined certain outcomes, it would be valuable to consider whether particular forms of organizational sensemaking are likely to produce organizational results such as innovation, efficiency, or financial performance. For example, the guided form, in which leaders draw on and integrate stakeholders' accounts, may be more likely to produce innovative proposals than the restricted form of organizational sensemaking, which relies primarily on leader sensegiving. The restricted form, however, may be tied to fast, efficient action, and so might be most appropriate when there is a pressing need to respond to an issue. Equally, the fragmented form, which in this study led to very little consistent action, may generate large numbers of valuable ideas. Although these relationships are speculative, they suggest that the forms of organizational sensemaking found in this study may have important effects on wider organizational performance outcomes.

This study also connects and contributes to a number of scholarly literatures not usually associated with sensemaking research. One of these is research on multiparty stakeholder negotiation. Al-

though prior sensemaking research has noted the potential for conflict among participants (Volkema et al., 1996), the tendency to focus on single stakeholders (Westley, 1990), relatively small, homogeneous groups (Weick, 1993), and tightly coupled systems (Weick & Roberts, 1993) has resulted in relatively little examination of the connections that exist between negotiation processes and organizational sensemaking. This study illustrates their interpenetration: sensemaking in organizations demands the negotiation of interpretations and explanations among diverse actors; at the same time, sensemaking and sensegiving processes are integral to multiparty negotiations. An important contribution that the negotiation literature can make to sensemaking research is highlighting the importance of coalitions when parties anticipate an ongoing relationship with each other (Polzer, Manix, & Neale, 1998). These dynamics were evidenced in guided and restricted processes in which leaders established coalitions with stakeholders in order to construct common interests and, therefore, unitary accounts. In contrast, the fragmented form of sensemaking represented a process in which coalitions—where they did exist—were typically too unstable to permit the construction of any shared understanding.

This study also highlights the potential for sensemaking research to contribute to the study of multiparty negotiations. For instance, the multiparty negotiation literature discusses the common occurrence of resolutions that are unstable (because it is always in someone's interest to shift alliances and "re-form" a proposed solution) or that involve deceit (where participants attempt to conceal their preferences in order to cast a deciding vote) (Gray & Clyman, 2003). The study described here identifies two ways in which sensemaking processes may lead to a resolution of such situations. First, guided sensemaking may facilitate the construction of overarching accounts that help to integrate stakeholders' views, potentially avoiding both unstable solutions and necessary deceit. Alternatively, through fragmented sensemaking, stakeholders may resolve an impasse associated with an unstable resolution by engaging in actions based on their temporarily acquiring the power or authority to act. Both possibilities point to the importance of considering sensemaking processes when examining multiparty negotiations.

Together, these connections highlight the potential for the development of theory and research that integrate research on negotiation and sensemaking. Although sensemaking and negotiation are distinct concepts, this study illustrates the ways in which the two are interconnected in empirical contexts:

the social processes of organizational sensemaking observed in the orchestras often included leaders and stakeholders engaging in negotiations that determined how accounts were produced and the kinds of decisions that flowed from those accounts. A potentially powerful framework for understanding the generation of collective action in organizations might therefore be based on the relationships among sensemaking, negotiation, and decision making.

Another area connected to the present study is the literature on procedural justice and deference to authority. A central finding in this area is that people are more willing to accept explanations and decisions when they perceive the processes through which they were reached as fair (Pruitt, Peirce, McGillicuddy, Welton, & Castrianno, 1993; Tyler, 2002). This idea is consistent with the outcomes of guided sensemaking processes: the unitary accounts and consistent actions guided sensemaking produced were likely due at least in part to stakeholders' perceptions that leaders were behaving in a procedurally fair manner, gathering and taking into account many parties' views about issues. This view does not explain, however, the unitary accounts and consistent actions associated with restricted sensemaking processes in which leaders dominated sensegiving and often intentionally excluded stakeholders. In these processes, it seems that stakeholders showed deference to leaders' authority (Tyler, 2002; Tyler & Blader, 2000), perceiving leaders as legitimate and therefore buying into their constructions of the issue and following their guidance. Thus, research on procedural justice and deference to authority may be useful in understanding sensemaking processes, and especially their antecedents. Stakeholders may have deferred to leaders in the orchestras, for instance, because of the leaders' evident expertise in certain domains, which varied by orchestra (for instance, cost cutting in the broadcasting orchestra and collaboration in the London orchestra). More generally, this study highlights previously overlooked connections between these literatures and organizational sensemaking by giving attention to a diverse range of issues and stakeholders.

Implications for Practice

This study also has several important practical implications. The first stems from the connection between sensemaking processes and outcomes. Each of the four forms is associated with distinct types of accounts and actions; the optimal form of sensemaking for an organization may therefore vary with the kind of outcome sought. For instance,

guided sensemaking processes may be particularly valuable in situations that require the development of a rich, multifaceted account that can be used as a resource for ongoing and spontaneous actions, such as establishing an organization's core values. In contrast, restricted sensemaking processes might be advantageous when an issue (or its context) demands a narrowly defined account and is best addressed by a single, decisive action. Fragmented sensemaking processes may prove fruitful when an organization would benefit from the construction of a wide range of disparate accounts; such benefits might be associated with highly complex issues in which individual experimentation is needed. Although guided organizational sensemaking might be considered the most effective form, this study suggests that leaders and stakeholders should try to engage in the form most closely aligned to the kinds of outcomes they hope to achieve.

A second practical implication of the study is for managers seeking to encourage empowerment in their organizations. The findings presented here suggest a tension between the forces of animation and control in organizational sensemaking: animation is a powerful element that brings diverse understandings of an issue into discussion, but it is most likely to result in consistent actions when the sensemaking processes are also relatively controlled. Thus, if consistent action is an important goal, organizations seeking employee empowerment should take note of the importance of private and systematically organized opportunities for employees to contribute their views, as well as the importance of leader sensegiving that provides stakeholders with an overarching framework for their empowered activities.

The third practical implication concerns the nature of animation in organizational sensemaking. The results of this study clearly show that in an animated sensemaking process that involves numerous stakeholders in sensegiving roles, all parties need not be engaged simultaneously in the issue of concern. In the guided form of organizational sensemaking, for example, the high level of animation resulted from the serial engagement of stakeholders with an issue over time. This scenario contrasts with some dominant images of stakeholder sensegiving that point to large-scale forums, such as multiparty retreats and conferences, as key vehicles for increasing animation. This study shows that organizations can achieve highly animated sensemaking while reducing the cognitive complexity of the process when leaders connect sequentially with stakeholders in dyadic sensegiving exchanges.

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