

A Reasoning-based Theory of Organizational Sensemaking

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Abstract

Organizational sensemaking has emerged as the central concept for describing the formation of shared meanings in organizations. Yet, we have neither an explicit definition of 'meanings' nor a clear understanding of the processes through which individuals and groups create meaning. This paper theorizes the essence of organizational sensemaking as reasoning – the relating of beliefs as reasons for one other. Building on recent developments in cognitive science and philosophy of language, I define meanings as commitments to inferences across beliefs and develop a tripartite category of organizational sensemaking as automated, reflexive, and discursive. I theorize how shifts between different modes of reasoning can predict the outcomes of sensemaking episodes. The view elaborates the central core of organizational sensemaking as reasoning, and helps disentangle the various aspects of sensemaking, including the roles of language and cognition.

Keywords: Reasoning, Inferentialism, Informal logic, Meanings, Sensemaking