TRIGGERS AND ENABLERS OF SENSEGIVING IN ORGANIZATIONS

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Drawing on a longitudinal study of sensegiving in organizations, we investigate the conditions associated with sensegiving by stakeholders and by leaders. For each group, we identify conditions that trigger sensegiving and conditions that enable it. Integrating these analyses across organizational actors, we show that, generally: (1) the perception or anticipation of a gap in organizational sensemaking processes triggers sensemaking and (2) both discursive ability, which allows leaders and stakeholders to construct and articulate persuasive accounts, and process facilitators—routines, practices, and structures that give organizational actors time and opportunity to engage in sensegiving—enable sensegiving.

Organizational life is full of attempts to affect how others perceive and understand the world. Gioia and Chittipeddi coined the term "sensegiving" to describe this "process of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality" (1991: 442). Sensegiving is an interpretive process (Bartunek, Krim, Nocochea, & Humphries, 1999; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) in which actors influence each other through persuasive or evocative language (Dunford & Jones, 2000; Snell, 2002), and it is used both by organizational leaders (Bartunek et al., 1999; Corley & Gioia, 2004; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) and other stakeholders, including middle managers (Balogun, 2003; Westley, 1990), directors (McNulty & Pettigrew, 1999), and other employees (Maitlis, 2005).

Sensegiving is not only a prevalent activity in organizations, but also a critically important one. Gioia and Chittipeddi's (1991) study, for instance, reveals the significant role that leader sensegiving can play in effecting major change, a finding echoed in several other studies (Bartunek et al., 1999; Corley & Gioia, 2004; Dunford & Jones, 2000; Gioia & Thomas, 1996). More broadly, research on the symbolic aspects of leadership (Pfeffer, 1981; Pondy, 1978; Smircich & Morgan, 1982) has highlighted sensegiving as a key leadership activity in times of both change and stability. Sensegiving by stakeholders can also have profound consequences, affecting strategic decision making, and stakeholders' integration into or exclusion from a range of important organizational processes (Balogun, 2003; Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Westley, 1990). More broadly, the pattern of leader and stakeholder sensegiving in combination has been shown to shape the processes and outcomes of organizational "sensemaking," or the process of social construction in which individuals attempt to interpret and explain sets of cues from their environments (Maitlis, 2005).

In general, previous studies of sensegiving have focused on exploring the who and the what: who the actors engaging in sensegiving are, and what strategies they are using to do so. We know little, however, about the conditions associated with sensegiving in organizations—where, when, or why it occurs—despite the fundamental nature of these issues. Research has shown, for instance, that stakeholders and leaders do not always engage in sensegiving, even around issues that matter to them (Dutton, Ashford, Lawrence, & Miner-Rubino, 2002; Maitlis, 2005), but scholars lack a good understanding of why this is so. Most studies of sensegiving have either ignored this question, or relied on single case studies that have made it difficult to identify a broad range of motivators for sensegiving. Even less is known about the conditions that might facilitate sensegiving by those stakeholders and leaders motivated to engage in it. These are the issues we begin to address in this paper: drawing on a longitudinal, qualitative study of sensemaking in 27 issue domains across three organizations, we investigate the triggers and enablers associated

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