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Published online: 25 Oct 2015.

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The Critical Role of Moderators in Leader Sensegiving: A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT   *Change initiatives entail a high risk of failure if leaders cannot convey the underlying sense to employees. However, the effectiveness of leader sensegiving depends on external as well as internal factors. Moderators of the leader sensegiving process represent a critical but underexplored factor of sensegiving during organizational change. We derive a theoretical model of contextual factors by reviewing existing sensegiving literature. Drawing on information-processing theory, we highlight the influence of crucial moderators at the organizational and individual levels during two phases of the sensegiving process: in the first phase, moderators affect how leaders set up sensegiving; in the second phase, moderators affect how employees engage in sensemaking. The moderators in the first phase are (a) schema consistency at the organizational level and (b) legitimate power at the individual level. During the second phase, the moderating effect of (c) schema consistency at the organizational level and (d) employee emotions at the individual level is explored. We contribute to literature by demonstrating how moderators affect sensegiving during organizational change at two phases of the process and providing a multi-level perspective by distinguishing between moderators at the organizational and individual levels.*

Organizational change alters 'how an organization functions, who its members and leaders are, what form it takes or how it allocates its resources' (Huber, Sutcliffe, Miller, & Glick, 1993, p. 216). Change causes modifications in the

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frameworks of its members (Bartunek & Moch, 1987), which oftentimes leads to resistance to change as it disrupts their sense of the environment (Furst & Cable, 2008). Thus, change initiatives force employees to actively engage in sensemaking, a process that describes the effort to create order and produce meaning of what occurs in the environment (Weick, 1993, 1995). In order to support the change initiative in their organization, leaders attempt to influence this process by conveying the meaning of the change through purposeful sensegiving, which is defined as the ambition to influence others' sensemaking in a certain direction (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Thus, leaders' sensegiving is an important source for employee sensemaking that enables shared interpretations of change (Mantere, Schildt, & Sillince, 2012) and supportive change behaviour (van den Heuvel, Machteld, Demerouti, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2013).

Previous research has provided important insights in the field of sensegiving, for example on strategies (Bartunek, Balogun, & Do, 2011; Vlaar, van Fenema, & Tiwari, 2008), actors (Balogun, 2003), as well as triggers and enablers (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). However, the study of sensegiving lacks an explicit account of context (Maitlis & Christianson, 2013; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2014; Weber & Glynn, 2006) although giving and 'making sense [. . .] is not an accomplishment in a vacuum, it is not just context-free networking' (Taylor & van Every, 2000, p. 251). The predominantly a-contextual study of sensegiving entails the risk of neglecting relevant factors: indeed, the high number of unsuccessful change initiatives (Burnes & Jackson, 2011) suggests that sensegiving does not always proceed effectively and should be sensitive to the context. Although previous studies have acknowledged the importance of context variables for the sensegiving process (e.g. Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2014), extant literature falls short in systematically explaining the moderating role of context factors in setting up and exerting sensegiving in times of change. As sensemaking and sensegiving 'never take place in isolation but always in specific context' (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2014, p. 10), it is crucial to understand facilitators and boundary conditions of leaders' sensegiving influence on employee sensemaking in times of organizational change. Thus, investigating context factors in the sensegiving–sensemaking relationship is crucial for theory development generally in the literature about sensemaking at work and more specifically in the change management literature.

This paper attempts to tackle this gap in the literature by systematically reviewing the literature on sensegiving in organizational change to identify moderators at two phases of the leader sensegiving–employee sensemaking process: during the first phase, where leader sensemaking affects their sensegiving, and during the second phase, where leader sensegiving affects employee sensemaking. For both phases, we distinguish between moderators at the individual and organizational levels as 'resistance to change can stem both from the individual as well as from the social and organisational context' (George & Jones, 2001, p. 422). This is in line with recent calls to take different levels of analysis into account when investigating organizational change processes (Amis & Aïssaoui, 2013; Scott, 2010; Vakola, 2013). Drawing on information-processing theory, this paper offers a theoretical frame for the impact of the moderators on the leader sensegiving–employee sensemaking relationship. Information-processing theory suggests that individuals engage in automatic processing when environmental

demands are low, for example, under conditions of 'business as usual' (Louis & Sutton, 1991, p. 55), and in conscious information processing when environmental demands are high, for example, disruptions caused by organizational change (Lord & Maher, 1990). Its relevance for organizational change is high: individuals switch between automatic and conscious information processing as they try to make sense of it.

This paper contributes to the literature by (1) reviewing the existing literature on sensegiving during organizational change under the lens of contextual factors, (2) providing a theoretical framework of how moderators affect sensegiving and thus ultimately the success of change initiatives during two phases of the sensegiving process and (3) introducing a multi-level perspective on leader sensegiving by distinguishing between moderators at the individual and organizational levels. Practitioners benefit from this research by understanding how the context affects the success of their sensegiving activities. In the following, we will first introduce the process of leader sensegiving in times of change before discussing how the identified moderators affect this process in two different phases.

Leader Sensegiving in Organizational Change

Our model as depicted in Figure 1 outlines a basic process of leader sensegiving as described in previous studies (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Kuntz & Gomes, 2012; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). The reciprocity of the process is demonstrated by the feedback loops from employee sensemaking to leaders' sensemaking and sensegiving. This review focuses on the direction from leader to employees because this is the main focus of the current literature. However, the model points out that sensemaking and sensegiving are reciprocal processes (Vlaar et al., 2008) where individuals often attempt to make and give sense at the same time (Stensaker, Falkenberg, & Gronhaug, 2008). Leader sensemaking is therefore as much
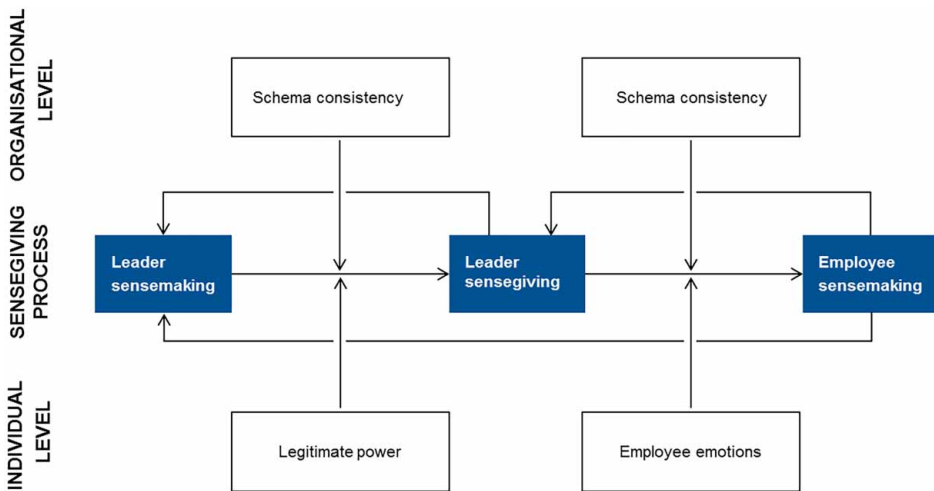

Figure 1. Moderators of leader sensegiving.

affected by own and others' sensegiving attempts as vice versa (Cornelissen, Holt, & Zundel, 2011; Kannan-Narasimhan & Lawrence, 2011).

Sensemaking

Sensemaking describes the effort to establish sense and create order of what happens in one's environment (Weick, 1993). Thus, it comprises the individual attempt to interpret and explain environmental cues in a meaningful way (Maitlis, 2005; Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). During organizational change, which is characterized by high complexity, ambiguity and stress (Volkema, Farquhar, & Bergmann, 1996), organizational members engage in sensemaking to overcome the discrepancy between the old and new organizational identity (Akrivou & Bradbury-Huang, 2011; Louis, 1980; Louis & Sutton, 1991; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). In times of change, sensemaking usually becomes a conscious process (Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Johnson, 1990): individuals rely on internal and external sources to gain information (Bartunek, Rousseau, Rudolph, & DePalma, 2006; Kuntz & Gomes, 2012; Thomas, Clark, & Gioia, 1993). To make sense of their environment, organizational members draw on schemas, the 'knowledge structures that contain categories of information and relationships among them' (Bingham & Kahl, 2013, p. 14). In order to integrate the new information provided through the change, individuals can either alter existing schemas or create new ones (Maitlis, Vogus, & Lawrence, 2013), depending on the discrepancy between the existing schemas and the requirements of the new environment. The bigger the gap between the old and the new, the more important it becomes for individuals to move from 'top-down' information processing, where they rely on past experiences, to 'bottom-up' processing, where they actively deal with the new information (Lord & Maher, 1990; Walsh, 1995).

In this first phase, which describes the relationship between leader sensemaking and sensegiving, the outcome of leader sensemaking is transformed into meaning and becomes tangible through a leader's sensegiving (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Figure 1 depicts the process with its different phases, moving from leader sensemaking to leader sensegiving and employee sensegiving.

Sensegiving

Sensegiving is an interpretive process in which individuals exert mutual influence to affect others' sensemaking (Bartunek, Krim, Neccochea, & Humphries, 1999). Successful sensegiving results in a shared interpretation of the change (Mantere et al., 2012). Sensegiving in organizations is not a one-way process but rather constitutes of ongoing cycles where sensemaking and sensegiving affect each other (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). However, leaders are privileged for sensegiving due to their hierarchical position (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006).

In order to build consensus in interpretation (Narayanan, Zane, & Kemmerer, 2010), leaders have to take into account recipients' current state and needs in sensemaking to adjust their sensegiving activities respectively. The content they offer in their sensegiving activities can thus vary from high-level input, for example, on the vision of a change initiative (Illia, Bonaiuto, Pugliese, & van Rekom, 2011), to

more detailed information on the change process (Chreim, 2006; Stensaker et al., 2008), depending on the needs organizational members experience.

In terms of strategies, recent literature distinguishes between discursive and non-discursive strategies (Smith, Plowman, & Duchon, 2010; Sonenshein, 2006), comprising ' ... statements or activities' (Maitlis, 2005, p. 29). Examples for discursive strategies are meetings (Chaudhry, Wayne, & Chalk, 2009), newsletters (Greenberg, 1995) and memos (Labianca, Gray, & Brass, 2000). Non-discursive strategies are usually considered to be symbolic (Sonenshein, 2006). Examples range from rituals and symbolic objects (Fiss & Zajac, 2006; Gioia, Thomas, Clark, & Chittipeddi, 1994; Latta, 2009; Monin, Noorderhaven, Vaara, & Kroon, 2013; Pitsakis, 2012), workshops and seminars (Kannan-Narasimhan & Lawrence, 2011; Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006; Rousseau, 1996; Thomas, Sargent, & Hardy, 2011) to restructuring measures (Bisel & Barge, 2011; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Hope, 2010; Humphreys, Ucbasaran, & Lockett, 2012).

The second phase describes the relationship between leader sensegiving and recipient sensemaking. During this phase, leader sensegiving affects recipients' sensemaking. Again, employee sensemaking is not only influenced by leader sensegiving, but also affects leaders' sensemaking and sensegiving (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). These reciprocal loops are depicted as feedback loops in Figure 1.

Information Processing in Organizational Change

This paper will draw on information-processing theory to explain the moderating effect of the discussed moderators on leader sensegiving in organizational change. The theory suggests that individuals interpret and make sense of organizational change building on schemas (Hahn, Preuss, Pinske, & figge, 2015), the 'cognitive structure or frameworks by which generic concepts derived from past events and experiences are stored in memory' (Balogun & Johnson, 2004, p. 525).

The extent to which organizational change is ambiguous and complex influences the level of engagement that organizational members contribute to this change (Mantere et al., 2012). As complexity increases, individuals can no longer rely on their previous experiences to make sense of the situation (Walsh, 1995). In familiar situations, existing schemas guide the interpretation as they provide 'situational forecasts on which individuals rely' (Louis & Sutton, 1991, p. 61). This top-down processing mode requires only little attention and cognitive attention as people can draw on existing knowledge structures (Narayanan et al., 2010). However, in situations characterized by novelty and discrepancy, these schemas become obsolete and inadequate for top-down information processing. Therefore, existing schemas need to be adapted or changed to facilitate future information processing (Lord & Maher, 1990). Organizational members use existing information to engage in bottom-up information processing, characterized by active sensemaking and resulting in the emergence of new schemas (Narayanan et al., 2010). Although bottom-up processing might often be superior in its results (Louis & Sutton, 1991), it also requires more attention and effort as individuals need to build up new schemas.

Moderators of Leader Sensegiving in Organizational Change

We conducted a systematic literature review to identify relevant moderators of the sensegiving process. Relevant articles were searched in four databases (*Business Source Premier, ERIC, PsycInfo, Social Sciences Citation Index*). As the literature on organizational change is large and fragmented (Weick & Quinn, 1999), we additionally conducted a manual search in ten high-rank journals in management and organizational behaviour as well as the most relevant journals in the field of sensegiving and organizational change (*Academy of Management Journal, Academy of Management Review, Administrative Science Quarterly, Human Relations, Journal of Applied Psychology, Journal of Change Management, Journal of Organizational Change Management, Journal of Organizational Behavior, Organization Science, Leadership Quarterly*). The keywords for our search were 'organizational change' and 'sensemaking' or 'sensegiving'. In total, over 500 articles came up through the literature search. In a first assessment, the abstracts of these articles were scanned to identify papers that dealt explicitly with sensegiving in times of organizational change. Then, the remaining 59 articles were reviewed to assess their relevance in making a contribution to our knowledge on contextual factors of leader sensegiving and identify potential moderators. After this first round of reviewing, we identified 26 papers dealing with seven moderators during sensegiving as depicted in Table 1. In the following, we focused on the moderators which were mentioned most often in the literature, thus excluding three moderators from further elaboration (management style, middle management sensegiving, skill and character). These four moderators were then discussed among the authors and integrated in the basic model of leader sensegiving. As demonstrated in Table 1, the moderators with greatest attention in our literature review came from the fields of power, emotion and organizational culture – all topics considered as 'ways in which present thinking about sensemaking might be enhanced' (Weick et al., 2005, p. 417).

Moderators of the Leader Sensemaking–Leader Sensegiving Relationship

After making sense of the 'why, what, and how of change' (Stensaker et al., 2008, p. 166), leaders attempt to convey their understanding to employees. Thus, they are facing the challenge of setting up their sensegiving in a way that maximizes its desired influence on employee sensemaking. We identified two moderators in the review which affect the way leaders set up their sensegiving.

Organizational level: schema consistency. As depicted in Table 1, five studies describe how organizational schemas affect the translation of leaders' sensemaking into leaders' sensegiving in this first phase. Organizational schemas contain knowledge about the culture and identity of an organization (Maitlis & Christianson, 2013) and determine the '"tool kit" or repertoire from which actors select differing pieces for constructing lines of action' (Swidler, 1986, p. 277). Each individual organizes his or her knowledge about the organization in schemas (Bartunek & Moch, 1987), which guide the interpretation and understanding of events.

Table 1. Outcome of literature search after reviewing articles for moderators

Moderators	Paper
Schema consistency (first phase)	Bisel and Barge (2011)
	Corley and Gioia (2004)
	Drori and Ellis (2011)
	Latta (2009)
	Ravasi and Schultz (2006)
Legitimate power (first phase)	Drori and Ellis (2011)
	Leonardi et al. (2012)
	Lines (2007)
	Sonenshein (2006)
Schema consistency (second phase)	Bisel and Barge (2011)
	Denis et al. (2009)
	Dunford and Jones (2000)
	Humphreys et al. (2012)
	Latta (2009)
	Näslund and Pemer (2012)
	Sonenshein (2010)
	Cornelissen et al. (2011)
Emotions (second phase)	Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991)
	Maitlis and Sonenshein (2010)
	Vuori and Virtaharju (2012)
	Maitlis et al. (2013)
Management style (not included in review)	Greenberg (1995)
	Weber and Manning (2001)
Middle management sensegiving (not included in review)	Balogun (2006)
	Beck and Plowman (2009)
	Hope (2010)
Skill and character (not included in review)	Akrivou and Bradbury-Huang (2011)
	Fisher and Howell (2004)
	Maitlis and Lawrence (2007)

For example, schemas organize knowledge about attitudinal or behavioural aspects of organizational members and roles, for example, the trustworthiness of colleagues which in turn affects the evaluation of their actions based on previous experiences.

The significance of schemas for the setup of leader sensegiving is demonstrated by Bisel and Barge's research (2011) on a planned change effort in a healthcare organization. They identified two major influence factors on change messages. On the one hand, the actual events need to be incorporated, for example, the organizational change that is caused by a budget deficit. On the other hand, these actual events need to be put in line with what is anchored about the organization in employees' schemas, for example, that the organization is incapable of closing this budget deficit. Both factors affect leader sensegiving as they try to create a message that is suitable for their employees' sensemaking needs. The organizational context signals what the leader has to take into account when setting up sensegiving activities.

Similarly, Ravasi and Schultz (2006) describe how aspirations for the future were related to the cultural knowledge about the company during leader

sensegiving in an organizational change at Bang & Olufsen. For example, leaders used the products of the company as a starting point for their understanding of what the core values of the organization were and how they could address the upcoming change drawing on these values. Their research demonstrates that 'organizational culture supplies members with cues [. . .] for "giving sense" of it' (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006, p. 437). Also Drori and Ellis (2011) mention that 'sensegiving is always constrained by its organizational context which provides [. . .] the agenda, rules or style' (p. 4). They demonstrated in their research how leaders reflected the organizational culture in their sensegiving by using power games that were already established as a starting point to design their sensegiving attempts.

The changed organizational identity also creates a sensegiving imperative for leaders. Corley and Gioia's (2004) research shows how leaders used the tensions between the current and the new identity in order to deduce appropriate sensegiving strategies, for example, modelling behaviours. This gap between the old and the new is also mentioned by Latta's (2009) study in a public research university undergoing change: leaders took into account the current organizational meaning to frame an appropriate vision for the future 'that catalyzes cultural elements [. . .] [creating] a powerful means of galvanizing support among followers' (Latta, 2009, p. 26). They depend on their tacit knowledge about the organizational culture, represented in their schemas, to align the change with what employees already know about the organization.

The review demonstrated the current understanding of the importance of organizational schemas for leader sensegiving. In order to elaborate how schemas moderate the relationship between leader sensemaking and sensegiving, the following section will draw on information-processing theory. The theory suggests that a high consistency between new information and existing schemas only requires individuals to alter those parts of the schemas that are not yet in line with this new information. However, if existing schemas are not suitable to understand the new information, organizational members need to engage in the full schema emergence process to create new and appropriate schemas (Bingham & Kahl, 2013). This results in different levels of intensity for the own sensemaking process as creating new schemas is more demanding and effortful than altering existing ones (Maitlis et al., 2013).

When leaders experience high sensemaking intensity, they will consider the change as challenging to understand and embrace (Weick et al., 2005). This will trigger more intensive sensegiving efforts as leaders want to ensure employee sensemaking results in a shared understanding of the change. Previous research has demonstrated that high leader sensegiving results in controlled sensemaking processes and unitary accounts among employees (Maitlis, 2005). Thus, leader sensemaking directly affects the intensity of sensegiving activities as they evaluate various relevant criteria, for example, how much time they can and want to invest, how important their sensegiving will be to achieve a shared understanding, whether other leaders engage in sensegiving or not, or how important this change is for them. However, this direct relationship will be moderated by the degree of experienced consistency between own schemas as a result of their sensemaking (which might have been altered or newly created) and the existing organizational schemas. An experienced low consistency with existing schemas will increase the

felt need to engage in high levels of sensegiving even more, whereas high consistency will decrease the intensity of their sensegiving as it affects their perception of organizational and individual schemas already being in accordance.

> Proposition 1. Schema consistency moderates the relationship between leader sensemaking and sensegiving such that the positive relationship between sensemaking and sensegiving intensity will be stronger at low levels of schema consistency than at high levels of schema consistency.

For example, leaders' high sensemaking engagement, expressed for example by an active search for information and continuous discussions with other organizational members, is very likely to lead to high levels of sensegiving as they experience the sensemaking as effortful and thus wish to support their subordinates' sensemaking in a meaningful manner. However, if their sensemaking ultimately only results in an adaptation of existing schemas, for example because an acquired company turns out to be highly similar in terms of its culture during the post-merger phase, this will lead to lower sensegiving intensity. By contrast, if they experience the new company as very different and thus need to alter their understanding of their own organization with respect to these changes, this inconsistency between their previous and new organizational schema will increase their sensegiving intensity even more. This means that radical changes – transformations that change the existing orientation of an organization (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996; Miller, 1982) – are especially likely to lead to low levels of schema consistency, thus increasing the positive relationship between leader sensemaking and sensegiving intensity.

Individual level: legitimate power.   Legitimate power (French & Raven, 1959) is derived from formal authority stemming from the position in the organization. It is anchored in policies, rules and laws (Milliken, Magee, Lam, & Menezes, 2008) and can be expressed for example by determining the salary of a subordinate. A high level of legitimate power is usually related to a high status in an organization, such as a board member who can determine the job-related future of thousands of employees by downsizing the company, whereas a low level of legitimate power is associated with a lower-ranking position and related rights, such as a team leader overseeing four employees with only limited voice in determining these employees' future within the organization. A leader's level of legitimate power is found to moderate both the choice of strategies and language in sensegiving. Four studies were identified through our review for the moderating effect of legitimate power (Table 1).

Drori and Ellis (2011) demonstrated in their studies on power games and sensegiving how managers with high positional power used confrontation, for example, discrediting field offices, as a strategy to give sense to others during organizational change, thus displaying their power in their sensegiving attempt. As demonstrated by Leonardi, Neeley, and Gerber (2012), leaders with low legitimate power often pay more attention to how and what to communicate in order to increase receptiveness as they are more aware of differing perceptions among employees. They often turn to instant media (e.g. forums with real-time feedback) whereas

leaders with higher levels of legitimate power tend to focus on message trans-
mission and therefore often prefer one-directional media (Leonardi et al., 2012).
Legitimate power is also related to the use of more direct sensegiving techniques
(Sonenshein, 2006). For example, Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) mention the use of
resource allocations and personnel changes as sensegiving strategies in their study
on a university undergoing organizational change. However, one study could not
find an influence of legitimate power on sensegiving (Lines, 2007). This finding
was explained by the impact of institutional norms, recipient expectations and
the operationalization of legitimate power.

   These examples show how the level of legitimate power moderates the relation-
ship between leader sensemaking and sensegiving through affecting a leader's
perception of his or her legitimization to exert sensegiving. Leader sensemaking
directly affects their choice of sensegiving strategies as it provides them with a
sense o\f what is appropriate for this change. The findings from the review can
be supplemented by drawing on construal level theory which states that the dis-
tance experienced by an individual leads to more or less abstract interpretations
of persons or objects (Trope & Liberman, 2003, 2010). If leaders experience a
high level of legitimate power, this will also increase their sense of psychological
distance and lead to a more abstract way of processing information: 'The ability to
see the bigger picture, to plan ahead, to keep an eye on higher goals, may be pre-
requisites for obtaining power as well as requirements for maintaining it' (Smith &
Trope, 2006, p. 579). This holds especially true for social distance, the distance
one feels from others (Lammers, Galinsky, Gordijn, & Otten, 2012). For
example, previous studies have shown that leaders with high legitimate power
will experience their followers as being very different from themselves (high
social distance) whereas leaders with low legitimate power will experience
them as being similar to themselves (low social distance) (Lammers et al.,
2012). Thus, the relationship between leader sensemaking and sensegiving is
moderated by legitimate power such that a leader's tendency to choose direct, uni-
lateral strategies will be reinforced if their level of legitimate power is high. High-
power leaders experience their sense of power as a mandate to support subordi-
nates' sensemaking via sensegiving. As they process information more abstractly
than low-power leaders (Smith & Trope, 2006), they do not reflect on individual
employee needs to tailor their sensegiving. By contrast, leaders with a preference
for indirect, multilateral strategies after engaging in sensemaking will be even
more likely to do so if their level of legitimate power is low, as they will
engage in concrete information processing (Smith & Trope, 2006) and thus com-
prehend sensegiving as an offer for employees which has to be tailored to individ-
uals' needs. This is reflected in the sensegiving strategies leaders choose.

   Proposition 2. The level of legitimate power moderates the relationship between
   leader sensemaking and sensegiving such that:
   (a) Leaders are more likely to use direct, unilateral sensegiving strategies if their
   level of legitimate power is high.
   (b) Leaders are more likely to use indirect, multilateral sensegiving strategies if their
   level of legitimate power is low.

The papers identified through the review also revealed that the level of legitimate power not only moderates leaders' selection of sensegiving strategies, but also their language. There are two ways how the level of legitimate power moderates a leaders' sensegiving language. First, Sonenshein (2006) found that individuals with low legitimate power use more economic justifications (e.g. referring to the financial consequences of an initiative) than leaders with significant legitimate power. The latter also use a softer, more normative language, which is explained by their hierarchical position and the ascribed power (Sonenshein, 2006). Beyond the review findings, this is supported by a study executed by Yukl and Tracey (1992) who demonstrated that in the absence of legitimate power, individuals will attempt to increase their perceived legitimacy by using rational arguments.

Furthermore, the level of power and the associated differences in the abstractness of information processing will also affect leaders' choice of sensegiving language. High levels of psychological distance have significant effects on the language as the experienced abstractness is translated into an abstract language (Magee, Milliken, & Lurie, 2009; Milliken et al., 2008; Milliken et al., 2008) and increases the likelihood of ignoring negative aspects (Magee et al., 2009).

> Proposition 3: Legitimate power moderates the relationship between leader sense-making and sensegiving such that:
> (a) Leaders are more likely to use abstract, positive and normative language if their level of legitimate power is high.
> (b) Leaders are more likely to use concrete, negative and rational language if their level of legitimate power is low.

Although the review was not restricted to legitimate power, the articles on the role of power almost exclusively dealt with this power base. Only one study came up in the literature review that described the effect of another form of power on leader sensegiving. Lines (2007) provides insights on the influence of expert power on change agents' engagement regarding sensegiving activities. Expert power is defined as the extent of knowledge that a person has in a given area (French & Raven, 1959). According to their study, expert power seems to increase the amount of sensegiving used by leaders, especially with regards to strategies that allow organizational members to participate in the change (Lines, 2007). However, as no other study on expert power was identified through the literature search, this power base was excluded from further discussion.

Moderators of the Leader Sensegiving–Employee Sensemaking Relationship

How sensegiving is received and incorporated in employee sensemaking is affected by the social context within which it occurs. External factors become even more important as the reception of leader sensegiving occurs in a social context where leaders have limited impact on the surroundings. We identified two moderators which affect how effective leader sensemaking influences employee sensemaking in this phase.

Organizational level: schema consistency.   At the organizational level, schema consistency is also a relevant moderator for the relationship between leader sensegiving and employee sensemaking. We reviewed eight papers showing that 'the relationship between the framing of a strategic change and its perceived legitimacy is moderated by the cultural familiarity of the frame' (Cornelissen et al., 2011, p. 1709).

Näslund and Pemer (2012) describe how the dominant scheme of the company – having authoritative, independent leaders who are capable of mastering any challenge – collided with the assignment of external consultants. Consequently, the leaders engaged in the consulting project were seen as weak and inconsistent with the company's values, causing a decrease in trustworthiness. Sensegiving was impeded in this context as leader behaviour lacked fit with the dominant scheme. Dunford and Jones (2000) describe the case of a telecommunications company where leaders' stories centered around the theme of continuous change, in line with the prevalent story of radical industrial change and the need for each company to follow this journey. Another study by Denis and his colleagues (2009) encountered an example for the negative consequences of sensegiving which was conflicting to existing schemas. In a hospital undergoing significant change, the affirmative style of a leader caused disjointed sensemaking among employees. In turn, effective sensegiving was hindered due to the detachment from the prevalent narrative, for example, being the dominant hospital in a network of health and social service centres. This is in line with Humphreys and colleagues' (2012) findings on sensegiving stories among jazz musicians. Although a prominent and influential musician actively took over the role of sensegiver in order to shape the future of jazz music, his activities were refused as they were countering the dominant schemas. Similarly, Latta (2009) describes how change can be accelerated by aligning the strategies with the cultural principles in the organization. Also Bisel and Barge (2011) relate the potential success of change programs with change agents' ability to relate to an organization's discursive context.

Again, we can draw on information-processing theory to provide an explanation for the positive effect of schema consistency on the relationship between leader sensegiving and employee sensemaking. If leaders provide sensegiving consistent with existing knowledge structures, recipients need only little attention and information-processing capabilities (Walsh, 1995). Thus, new information is processed more easily if it fits within existing knowledge structures (Bingham & Kahl, 2013). If leader sensegiving is consistent with existing organizational schemas, employees can build on these schemas to guide their interpretation as they provide 'situational forecasts on which individuals rely' (Louis & Sutton, 1991, p. 61). Here, employees will only alter existing schemas to adopt them to the new circumstances. They engage in top-down processing, the dominant response to new information (Lord, Diefendorff, Schmidt, & Hall, 2010). Thus, sensegiving consistent with existing schemas is more likely to trigger top-down processing that does not aim to create new schemas but rather alters the existing ones. Furthermore, sensegiving consistent with existing schemas secures a leader's political positioning and existing power structures (Dawson & Buchanan, 2005; Greenwood & Hinings, 1996; Murgia & Poggio, 2009). However, novel situations often require bottom-up cognitive processing as existing schemas are no longer

adequate (Lord & Maher, 1990). Thus, in times of change leaders often need to frame their sensegiving in a way that is inconsistent with existing schemas. This entails the risk of preventing instead of fostering change (Murgia & Poggio, 2009) as consistency serves as an anchor for organizational members (Dailey & Browning, 2014). Therefore, sensegiving showing a high inconsistency to existing organizational schemas requires employees to engage in bottom-up processing as they need to understand and integrate these new schemas. Here, an alteration of existing schemas does not suffice and employees need to engage in the schema emergence process to establish new ones that are adequate for the changed environment (Bingham & Kahl, 2013). However, even though organizational change often requires leaders to break with established schemas in their sensegiving (Monin et al., 2013), they can still emphasize consistency with existing schemas by simultaneously preserving and changing organizational meaning to avoid a radical and immediate schema change (Sonenshein, 2010).

Proposition 4: The relationship between leader sensegiving and employee sense-making is moderated by schema consistency:
(a) Leader sensegiving is more likely to trigger an alteration of existing schemas in employee sensemaking if it shows high consistency with existing schemas.
(b) Leader sensegiving is more likely to trigger an emergence of new schemas in employee sensemaking if it shows low consistency with existing schemas.

Individual level: employee emotions.   At the individual level, the reviewed studies suggest that emotions, which we define as a 'transient feeling state with an identified cause or target that can be expressed verbally or nonverbally' (Maitlis et al., 2013, p. 223), moderate the relationship between leader sensegiving and employee sensemaking such that positive emotions lead to a stronger tendency to alter existing instead of creating new schemas. Emotions are distinguished according to their valence (positive or negative) and their activation (high or low activation) (Russell & Barrett, 1999). For example, sadness is a negative, deactivating emotion whereas excitement is a positive, activating emotion (Russell, 2003).

Organizational change is usually associated with negative emotions, such as 'ambiguity, confusion, and feelings of disorientation' (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010, p. 552). Here, emotions serve as a complementary form of establishing sense (Myers, 2007) by serving as 'judgment-simplifying heuristic devices' (Bartunek et al., 2006, p. 189). Emotions influence sensemaking throughout the whole process (Maitlis et al., 2013; Weick et al., 2005) and can be more or less beneficial for the process. On the positive side, emotions influence the meaning of issues (Sonenshein, 2009) and increase the robustness of newly established schemas (Vuori & Virtaharju, 2012). On the negative side, emotions can derail sensemaking by decreasing the processing capacity (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010).

In our review, we found four papers referring to the expression of positive emotions. On the one hand, leaders' expression of positive emotions has been found to have positive effects on employee sensemaking. Maitlis and Sonenshein (2010) describe leaders' expression of excitement and enthusiasm as a way to 'influence employees' understandings of the value of the change' (p. 568). Also Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) refer to the positive effect of emotions when they

mention a university president's 'cheerleading quality' (p. 440) during a change initiative on campus. On the other hand, employees' positive emotions also increase their receptiveness for sensegiving messages. Vuori and Virtaharju (2012) investigated the role of emotional arousal in sensegiving and demonstrated that sensegiving produces more robust beliefs if receivers experience emotional arousal when incorporating the sensegiving message. Maitlis et al. (2013) demonstrated that the valence of a sensemaker's emotions leads to different sensemaking processes that can be more or less flexible and creative. Neither process is better or worse than the other; their appropriateness rather depends on the context.

The rationale behind the moderating effect of emotions on the effectiveness of sensegiving can be explained by information-processing theory. According to this theory, emotions have an informative function (Schwarz & Clore, 1983) by implying information about the state of the environment which contributes to individuals' understanding and evaluation of the surroundings (Schwarz & Clore, 2003). For example, negative feelings can signal a problematic situation, whereas positive emotions can lead to a positive judgement of a situation. This information about the environment is then included in one's thought processes. As human cognition strives to meet the demands posed by the environments, positive and negative emotions can lead to different information-processing strategies (Schwarz & Clore, 2003). Whereas negative emotions promote a systematic, bottom-up processing style, positive emotions foster top-down processing (Schwarz & Clore, 2003). Individuals experiencing positive feelings will evaluate their environment as benign and rely strongly on existing knowledge structures (Bless et al., 1996). They will have a stronger tendency to alter existing schemas as opposed to creating new ones. Thus, the likelihood of leader sensegiving triggering bottom-up processing and the emergence of new schemas is lower under conditions of positive emotions as these foster a stronger tendency to build on existing schemas as opposed to creating new ones (Maitlis et al., 2013). This is supported by research demonstrating that positive feelings limit the processing capacity (Mackie & Worth, 1989) and lead to a demotivation to invest in cognitive efforts (Isen, 1987). Individuals experiencing positive emotions will have a stronger tendency to rely on existing schemas during their sensemaking, thus engaging in a top-down processing mode that leads to an alteration of existing schemas (Schwarz & Clore, 2003). By contrast, individuals having negative feelings often evaluate their environment as problematic or dangerous. This cues a detail-oriented bottom-up style for information processing, which is usually adequate to master difficult situations (Bless et al., 1996). They will attempt to develop new schemas that help to explain the environment as well as their emotions. Emotions influence the information-processing style by directing individuals' attention to the allegedly most adequate information at hand: existing knowledge structures versus new data (Bless et al., 1996). As bottom-up processing is more demanding for individuals, negative emotions will decelerate the sensemaking process of individuals as they increase the tendency to engage in effortful, bottom-up processing, resulting in the creation of new schemas. In summary, the stronger reliance on existing schema as well as the increased capacity to absorb new information lead to the final proposition.

Proposition 5: The relationship between leader sensegiving and employee sense-making is moderated by employees' emotional state:

(a) Leader sensegiving is more likely to trigger an alteration of existing schemas in employee sensemaking if employees experience positive emotions during sense-receiving.

(b) Leader sensegiving is more likely to trigger an emergence of new schemas in employee sensemaking if employees experience negative emotions during sense-receiving.

Discussion

In order to embrace change, organizational members need to believe in the necessity and appropriateness of a change initiative (Armenakis & Harris, 2009). Leaders attempt to influence employees' beliefs by conveying the change meaning through sensegiving. However, context variables need to be considered in order to fully understand sensegiving in organizational change. This paper contributes to the literature in reviewing sensegiving literature with regard to four moderators at the organizational and individual levels as depicted in Figure 1 and integrating them into the basis model of leader sensegiving based on information-processing theory.

Thus, by drawing on information-processing theory we outline how contextual factors affect the relationship between sensemaking and sensegiving in two phases of the sensegiving process. The distinction between the two phases highlights the different effect of moderators: whereas moderators in the first phase affect sensegiving intensity and content, those of the second phase affect the extent of schema change leader sensegiving evokes.

In the first phase, schema consistency at the organizational level moderates the relationship between leader sensemaking and sensegiving such that the positive relationship between the intensity of both processes will be even stronger at high levels of schema consistency. At the individual level, the level of legitimate power moderates the relationship between leader sensemaking and sensegiving such that high levels of power lead to a stronger preference of direct, unilateral strategies and abstract, positive and normative language in sensegiving, whereas low levels of power lead to a stronger preference of indirect, multilateral strategies and concrete, negative and rational language.

During the second phase, schema consistency at the organizational level moderates the relationship between leader sensegiving and employee sensemaking such that leader sensegiving will be more likely to trigger a schema alteration in employee sensemaking whereas a low consistency will be more likely to evoke the emergence of new schemas in employee sensemaking. At the individual level, leader sensegiving is more likely to trigger an alteration of existing schemas in employee sensemaking if employees experience positive emotions during sense-receiving, whereas sensegiving is more likely to lead to the emergence of new schemas if employees experience negative emotions.

All four moderators affect the way information about the change is being processed by leaders or employees. At the organizational level, schema consistency has a moderating effect on the level of engagement organizational members

contribute to their sensemaking and sensegiving activities. It will not only moderate the level of intensity leaders contribute to sensegiving efforts, but also have a moderating impact on the level of engagement employees have for their sensemaking. At the individual level, both power and emotions affect the information processing by having a moderating effect on its level of abstractness. Whereas power leads to a more abstract way of processing information (Lammers et al., 2012) that is in consequence also translated into a more abstract sensegiving language, emotions will moderate the likelihood of leader sensegiving leading to top-down versus bottom-up processing.

Limitations and Future Research

General limitations.   Although this review sheds light on the role of moderators in leader sensegiving, this paper has some general limitations related to its underlying assumptions and structure that should be addressed in future research efforts. First, due to the limited focus of the current literature the model used in this paper represents only a snapshot of the sensegiving process which is characterized by dialogical dynamics between sensemaking and sensegiving (Monin et al., 2013). However, both processes are not distinctive concepts but rather 'two sides of the same coin – one implies the other and cannot exist without it' (Rouleau, 2005, p. 1415). On the one hand, the reciprocal character of both processes (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) implies an inference from leaders' sensegiving to their own sensemaking: 'the leaders [. . .] seemed to be involved in a dialogue with themselves' (Dunford & Jones, 2000, p. 1223). On the other hand, employees are not only mere recipients of sensegiving attempts; they rather act as sensegivers themselves and attempt to influence their leaders (Stensaker et al., 2008). Future research should therefore explore how one's own sensemaking and sensegiving interact and affect each other as well as the effect of employees' sensegiving attempts on leaders' sensemaking. This would enrich our understanding of sensegiving by demonstrating the interrelatedness of both processes within and between persons.

Second, this paper makes the implicit managerialist assumption that 'a key aspect of leadership is to structure the way that the inputs of others are combined to produce organizational outputs' (Dinh et al., 2014, p. 37). Although this view is in line with extant research describing leadership as the attempt to evoke follower attitudes and actions in pursuit of collective goals (van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013), this assumption is a limitation as leaders do not always have their followers' best interests at heart but can also be motivated strongly by their own needs (Conger, 1990). This holds especially true for organizational change when leaders often fear for their own status and position. Thus, organizational change may not always motivate leaders to engage in meaningful sensegiving that fosters a collective understanding within the organization but force their self-interest upon followers, leading to demotivation and dissatisfaction among employees (Liu, Liao, & Loi, 2012). Future research could investigate leader sensegiving from a different angle and examine the real intentions of leaders when engaging in sensegiving for their employees. Here, it would be interesting to understand under which conditions leaders are especially likely to follow their

own as opposed to the organization's best interests and how this 'negative sense-giving' affects employee sensemaking.

Third, this review was limited to literature in the field of sensegiving. However, sensegiving can also be understood as a form of communication (e.g. Balogun, 2006; Illia et al., 2011; Mantere et al., 2012). Therefore, the search criteria used for identifying articles might have excluded relevant literature from adjacent fields that deal with sensegiving from a different perspective. This is partially caused by the fact that sensegiving is not in all facets clearly distinguished from related concepts such as communication and power. For example, some articles treat power as a form of exerting sensegiving (Drori & Ellis, 2011), whereas others consider power and sensegiving as different domains (Balogun, Jacobs, Jarzabkowski, Mantere, & Vaara, 2014). Here, a clear conceptualization of these related constructs is needed in order to fully embrace their meaning in the organizational context as well as the interrelations among each other.

Limitations of extant consideration of sensegiving moderators.   The absence of an explicit account of moderators in extant sensegiving literature is striking. As this review only deals with four moderators despite references to further moderators, its explanatory power is also limited to the discussed moderators and does not fully elaborate the role of moderators in leader sensegiving. Therefore, future research should extend theory in the field of moderators in order to allow a full understanding of the role of context for leader sensegiving and to contribute to a clear conceptualization of sensegiving. On the one hand, a further investigation of different power bases seems very promising in this regard. According to the study performed by Lines (2007), expert power seems to have a significant effect on leader sensegiving. This could be used as a starting point to examine the moderating effect of different power bases, such as expert, coercive, referent or reward power (French & Raven, 1959). As power is considered a major influence on sensemaking and sensegiving (Maitlis & Christianson, 2013; Weick et al., 2005), contrasting and comparing these different power bases would enrich our understanding of the interplay between power and sensegiving. On the other hand, future research should draw on moderators from adjacent research fields. Oreg, Vakola, and Armenakis (2011) examined different antecedents that also have moderating influences on employees' attitude towards change. Their framework could serve as a valuable starting point to investigate the impact of these factors on the sensegiving–sensemaking relationship in times of change. For example, they mention the role of recipient characteristics as a moderator between known antecedents (e.g. leader information and communication) to their change attitude. Furthermore, organizational commitment has been identified as a relevant moderator for the relationship between attitude towards change and change behaviour (Peccei, Giangreco, & Sebastiano, 2011) – for example, when the outcome of an employees' sensemaking turns into action. However, the role of organizational commitment has not been investigated yet from a sensegiving perspective. Another promising avenue would be the role of uncertainty as a moderating factor for the relationship between leader sensegiving and employee sensemaking. Uncertainty has been identified as a major factor for employees' satisfaction and performance (Cullen, Edwards, Casper, & Gue, 2014). Future

research could investigate how the level of employee uncertainty and different sources of uncertainty (Milliken, 1987), such as job-related versus strategic uncertainty (Bordia, Hobman, Gallois, & Callan, 2004) moderate the effect of leader sensegiving on employee sensemaking. For example, it seems reasonable that employees experiencing high uncertainty are more attentive to sensegiving and thus adapt their own sensemaking more in line with leaders' intended sensegiving effort than employees experiencing low uncertainty.

Implications for Practice

The model and the deduced propositions also have implications for practice. First, leaders need to challenge their instinct when setting up sensegiving in times of organizational change. Their position in the organization and the associated legitimate power affect the choice of sensegiving strategies as well as the choice of language used in sensegiving. Therefore, organizations should account for these factors when setting up change management programmes by challenging their leaders' sensegiving approach. On the one hand, communication departments could support individual managers with preparatory material that addresses potential weaknesses of managers at different hierarchical levels, for example, by providing leaders with high legitimate power with information on how to adapt their sensegiving according to their employee needs by using a variety of different media including face-to-face communication (Klein, 1996). On the other hand, organizations could encourage or even enforce collaboration between managers of different hierarchical levels for the communication of change in order to compensate for each other's potential sensegiving pitfalls and increase the total amount of information within the organization (Kotter, 1995). As leader communication aims at both informing employees and building a community (Elving, 2005), leaders should balance their communication in terms of what channels and media they use and what they communicate. Employees' sense of belonging depends on their appreciation of leaders' communication (Postmes, Tanis, & Wit, 2001) – as individuals are more likely to feel engaged by face-to-face communication, organizations and leaders should challenge their intuition when setting up sensegiving to ensure that no unconscious factors affect their choices but rather their active reflection about employees' needs and how best to address them.

Second, leaders should be aware that their sensegiving attempts can fail even though they were set up adequately in terms of strategies and language. The effect of leader sensegiving on employee sensemaking is moderated by factors which are mainly out of reach for leaders. During this phase, leaders need to closely monitor the effect of their sensegiving on employees in order to eventually carry out adjustments. For example, if leaders experience their sensegiving to become inadequate as subordinates proceed in their sensemaking, they should tailor their sensegiving accordingly. Organizations can support leaders in monitoring the effectiveness of their sensegiving, for example, by implementing regular peer meetings for leaders to facilitate the exchange of sensegiving best practices. Here, the interrelatedness of employee and leader sensemaking becomes visible (Cornelissen & Clarke, 2010).

Third, this paper emphasizes the importance of creating a 'sense of urgency' (Kotter, 1995, p. 60) at the very start of radical change initiatives by drawing on an emotion-based perspective to explain its relevance. If organizational members do not experience the change as significant and divergent, they will engage in less effortful top-down information processing (Schwarz & Clore, 2003). This mode is enforced by positive feelings, as individuals experiencing positive emotions have a stronger tendency to rely on existing schemas instead of creating new ones. Thus, establishing a sense of urgency can be achieved by stressing the radicalness of the change initiative and its vast effects on the organization. This pictures a rather problematic status quo that encourages individuals to engage in the more effortful bottom-up information-processing style.

Conclusion

Sensegiving does not occur in a vacuum without influences from the external world but is embedded in a social and organizational context (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). It is related to the socio-cultural context (Rouleau, 2005) and affected by a variety of organizational and individual factors. However, the prevalent view still suggests that sensegivers have deliberate control of the sensegiving process. Although research has acknowledged the active role of employees in shaping others' sensemaking as well as in accepting or resisting sensegiving efforts (Maitlis & Christianson, 2013), contextual factors have been previously neglected. By building on a literature review and enriching the discussion with information-processing theory, this paper demonstrates how moderators affect the relationship between leader sensemaking and sensegiving as well as the effect of leader sensegiving on employee sensemaking. The paper reflects sensegiving moderators and suggests a stronger contextual perspective when investigating this process.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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