

Sensemaking as a Cultural Practice in Managing Communication Ambiguity Organization: An Organizational Ethnographic Study at Prospect Institute

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ABSTRACT

Keywords

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The ability of an organization to interpret ambiguous situations is an important factor in maintaining effective communication and work coordination amidst the increasingly complex dynamics of the organization. The development of the work environment, characterized by the rapid flow of information, cross-functional interactions, and collaboration among organizational members, increases the potential for ambiguity in communication. These conditions require organizations to have interpretation mechanisms that enable each member to understand information more clearly and build a shared understanding in carrying out work activities. In this study, the sensemaking process is important as a collective effort that enables organizational members to interpret information, clarify the meaning of messages, and align their understanding of the work situation they are facing. This study aims to analyze how sensemaking occurs within the organizational culture at Prospect Institute, particularly in addressing potential communication ambiguities that arise in interactions between members and between divisions. This research uses a qualitative approach with organizational ethnography methods to gain a deep understanding of communication experiences that occur in daily work practices. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews with employees who are directly involved in work activities and organizational coordination processes. The research results indicate that the organizational culture at Prospect Institute reflects meaning-making practices supported by relatively clear coordination patterns among the organization's members. When information is considered ambiguous, organizational members actively seek confirmation through discussion and direct clarification to ensure a shared understanding. This practice is also evident in the adaptation process for new members, where the organization does not allow new employees to interpret information speculatively, but rather encourages a process of joint explanation and verification to minimize potential misunderstandings. The findings of this research indicate that sensemaking not only functions as an individual interpretation process but also as an organizational cultural practice that strengthens coordination, maintains clarity of communication, and supports the formation of collective understanding in daily work activities. Practically, the results of this research contribute to the Prospect Institute by strengthening organizational communication practices based on clarification, open coordination, and shared learning among organizational members.

1. Introduction

Organizations today are no longer viewed as static structures, but rather as dynamic and continuous communication processes. An organization is a container that brings together a group of individuals with a common goal, where the members interact with each other (Rusmalinda et al., 2023). The formation of the organization aims to facilitate the fulfillment of its members' needs, the diversity of backgrounds, character, and individual potential within the organization (Siregar & Usriyah, 2021), this understanding requires effective communication to minimize misunderstandings that could potentially develop into internal conflict. Modern organizations operate in increasingly complex, dynamic, and uncertain environments. These conditions make communication a central element that shapes a shared understanding in achieving the organization's goals.

Communication is the process of exchanging information, thoughts, or opinions to achieve mutual understanding, while organizational communication refers to the process of sending and receiving information within the context of a complex organization (Farhanissa & Pebriana, 2024). Communication within an organization does not always occur in a clear and linear manner (Priyono et al., 2025). Messages, instructions, and policies are often conveyed in abstract, concise language or filled with corporate jargon that lacks a single meaning. Communication ambiguity arises as an influence when organizations face time pressure, performance demands, and rapid external changes (Apriyana et al., 2021).

Ambiguity is a linguistic condition that arises in the communication process when thoughts and ideas are conveyed unclearly or contain double meanings, potentially leading to misunderstandings of the spoken words or sentences (Diani et al., 2022). The current work environment shows that ineffective internal communication failures still remain the main cause of low organizational success (Ipa et al., 2024), because it is consistently linked by management and human resource studies to decision-making errors, internal conflicts, and low success rates in new employee adaptation, which emphasizes that communication issues are structural and cultural, not merely technical.

One source of communication ambiguity within organizations is the use of corporate language that evolves from organizational culture (Diani et al., 2022). Terms like "adjusted," "conditioned," "following management directives" are often used without adequate operational explanations. Such language can only be fully understood by members of the organization who have been long involved and internalized in a specific work culture (Swasti & Salendu, 2022). Commands or instructions conveyed are sometimes not always understood literally, but rather contain implicit meanings that can only be grasped through experience and repeated interactions (Apriyana et al., 2021).

That condition poses a unique challenge for new employees. New employees are in a position where they have to "guess the meaning" of the instructions received (Natasya & Pujianto, 2024), which has the potential to cause misunderstanding and inconsistencies in actions. Such communication ambiguity indicates that the main issue does not lie in the absence of a message, but rather in the process of how the message is interpreted (Diani et al., 2022). In this context, meaning is not objective and static, but is formed through social interactions, past experiences, and the position of actors within the organizational structure.

The concept of sensemaking provides an analytical framework for understanding how organizational members interpret ambiguous and uncertain situations (Wolbers, 2022). According to Karl Weick in the research by Eklund et al., (2021), sensemaking is a process in which individuals and groups within an organization actively construct and negotiate meaning from ambiguous experiences through actions and social interactions, by reflecting on what has been done to understand what is happening and what should be done next. Thus, sensemaking occurs socially and retrospectively, relying on everyday language and interactions as the primary medium for meaning-making.

Basically, sensemaking does not stand alone as an individual cognitive process, but is integrated within the organizational culture. A strong organizational culture can bind members of the organization in a shared strategy that enhances performance, whereas a weak work culture encourages employees to work individually (Simamarta & Sitepu, 2022). Through the way the organization speaks, gives directions, responds to mistakes, and interprets changes, it reflects

institutionalized patterns of meaning (Sri et al., 2023). Organizational culture not only functions as a formal attribute but also as a practice lived out in the daily lives of organizational members, making the establishment of an inclusive and adaptive communication culture a strategic necessity for work teams, especially in the context of a dynamic sector (Abdullah & Nasvian, 2025).

This phenomenon is relevant to the context of Prospect Institute as an environmental consulting firm operating in the field of research and policy development. As an organization that bridges academic idealism and industrial pragmatism, Prospect Institute faces unique challenges in aligning the organization's vision with daily practices. This organization faces various interpretations of policies, work standards, and client expectations, which require intensive coordination between divisions and continuous adjustments in work practice.

Based on initial observations, differences in the interpretation of work instructions were found, both between old employees and new employees as well as between internal divisions. When the socialization process occurs between senior and junior employees, commands or instructions from seniors to juniors are often not conveyed explicitly, but rather through cultural codes or corporate "heavenly language" (Yanti et al., 2025). The implicit communication patterns demand a high level of interpretive ability from new employees. However, in practice, not all individuals possess adequate adaptive readiness to interpret symbols, unwritten assumptions, and hidden expectations that exist within the organizational culture.

In the work dynamics at Prospect Institute, employee productivity is inseparable from issues of role ambiguity and role conflict inherent in everyday organizational communication practices. Role ambiguity arises when employees do not receive sufficiently clear information regarding task distribution, workflow, and expected work outcomes (Priyono et al., 2025). This situation becomes an even greater obstacle when new employees do not fully understand the informal structure of the organization, leading to confusion in determining priorities and expected performance standards.

The inability to adapt to the organization's communication patterns and work rhythm increases the potential for miscommunication between individuals and departments. The situation becomes even more complex due to role conflicts arising from work pressure, especially when employees have to handle multiple tasks with priorities that are not clearly defined. As a result, ambiguity not only becomes a matter of messaging but also relates to the limitations of employees' adaptation processes to entrenched norms and interaction patterns.

Although role conflict in certain contexts can be functional, preliminary observations at Prospect Institute indicate that such conflict and ambiguity tend to have a dysfunctional impact on work productivity. This is reflected in the quality of work result that do not fully meet organizational standards and low work efficiency, marked by the frequent completion of tasks beyond the established deadlines. The delays are not solely caused by the workload, but also by the misalignment in task interpretation due to internal miscommunication, which ultimately contributes to the overall hindered performance of the organization.

Previous research on organizational communication generally focuses on communication strategies, information flow, or structural communication barriers, while research on sensemaking generally discusses major crisis conditions or very drastic organizational changes. The everyday context of organizations and routine communication practices still receive relatively little in-depth attention. Many organizational communication studies also tend to use quantitative approaches to measure message effectiveness, but fail to capture the deeper meaning of how meaning is collectively constructed in seemingly trivial yet crucial daily interactions.

The gap in previous research lies in the limited exploration of sensemaking as a daily cultural practice within non-profit organizations or specific research institutions in Indonesia. Many ethnographic studies are still centered on the manufacturing industry or large technology companies, so the unique dynamics in institutions like the Prospect Institute, which is knowledge-based, have not been fully captured.

This research aims to address these limitations by examining sensemaking in organizational communication through the method of organizational ethnography at the Prospect Institute. By observing

communication practices, this research is expected to provide a deeper understanding of how communication ambiguity is culturally managed. Thru direct involvement in the field, this research will observe how symbols, rituals, and everyday language are used to bridge ambiguity. The focus is not only on “what” is communicated, but also on “how” meaning is created and negotiated among the members of the organization.

This effort offers research with mapping of implicit communication patterns that are often overlooked in formal management studies. By examining how instructions from longtime employees are interpreted by new employees, this research provides a new perspective on the organizational socialization process that is more humanistic and based on the cultural wisdom of the organization. Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of organizational communication studies by positioning sensemaking as a cultural practice, not merely a cognitive process. Practically, the findings of this research can serve as a reflection for organizations in understanding the dynamics of internal communication, particularly in the process of meaning transfer between old and new employees as well as in cross-division coordination.

The main objective of this research is to describe and analyze in depth how sensemaking practices are carried out as a cultural strategy by members of the organization in managing communication ambiguity at Prospect Institute, by revealing the hidden realities behind corporate language to gain a more comprehensive understanding of humans as meaning-seeking beings within the complexities of modern organizations, while also providing academic contributions to the development of organizational communication studies and practical benefits for service and consulting-based organizations in improving the quality of understanding and work coordination.

2. Method

This research uses a qualitative approach as described by Creswell & Cresswell (2023) to examine how organizational members construct meaning in response to communication ambiguities in daily work practices. Based on the need to understand the phenomenon in depth, this research uses the organizational ethnography method as proposed by John Van Maanen, which aims to depict the social life of the organization thru rich narratives and detailed descriptions. In organizational ethnography, communication is viewed not merely as a means of conveying messages, but as a practice that shapes organizational reality (Faustyna, 2023).

This research was conducted at the Prospect Institute, focusing on employees from the Training, Certification and Publishing (TCP) and Facilitation and Program Development (FPD) divisions, who were purposively selected based on their high communication intensity and cross-functional coordination roles. Considering the structural positions and the intensity of involvement in the organizational communication process, the interview subjects consisted of 1 TCP supervisor, 1 FPD supervisor, and 2 officers from each of the TCP and FPD divisions. Data were collected thru semi-structured in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis. Interviews were used to capture the informants' interpretative experiences of ambiguous communication, while observations allowed for the identification of naturally occurring interaction patterns and communication practices. Organizational documents are used to contextualize and strengthen field data thru the verification process.

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Penthis study applies methodological and source triangulation by cross-validating findings among data collection techniques and participants with different organizational positions. Data were analyzed using the interactive Miles and Huberman model, which involves a repetitive process of

data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Saleh, 2023). This research focuses on communication and meaning-making practices, allowing for a systematic exploration of how ambiguity is interpreted, negotiated, and actualized as part of organizational culture.

3. Result and Discussion

The research findings are organized based on the patterns of meaning that emerge from the informants' experiences in facing communication ambiguity within the organizational context. Furthermore, each finding is interpreted thru the sensemaking perspective to explain how the process of meaning-making occurs in everyday communication practices.

3.1 Results

The organizational reality marked by cross-divisional work dynamics, diverse member background, and high interaction intensity presents conditions where ambiguity cannot be avoided but must be actively managed. Analytical efforts to understand how members of the organization at Prospect Institute construct, negotiate, and stabilize meaning in communication situations that are not always clear and linear. Communication practices not only serve as a means of conveying information but also as an arena for constructing meaning that determines how work is understood, executed, and evaluated. Based on the sensemaking perspective, the analysis focuses on how organizational members respond to ambiguity thru a process of interpretation that is social, ongoing, and action-bound. Empirical findings show that meaning does not automatically arise from formal instructions, but is formed thru interactions, clarifications, and coordination mechanisms that develop as part of the organizational culture. Therefore, the discussion in this chapter is presented thru the mapping of interview data:

Theme/Subchapter	Core Interview Excerpt	Meaning of the Findings	Category
Member Adaptation	"Ask a lot of questions to adapt to the communication pattern"	Adaptation is carried out thru active interaction.	Communication adaptation process
	"Initially, you need to understand the division's workflow and task delegation"	Adaptation to the organizational structure.	Structural adaptation
	"Casual but clear communication is easier to understand"	Communication style affects meaning.	Communication style
Source of Ambiguity	"Instructions 'coordinated by each team' are confusing: thru chat or which team"	Work instructions are not specific and are open to multiple interpretations.	Ambiguity of instructional language
	"Instructions are sometimes not explained in too much detail"	The instructions are unclear.	Unclear work information
	"terms like review, submit, publish. Publish is often misunderstood by people who are not	There are differences in the interpretation of technical terms between technical	Ambiguity of language/semantics

	familiar with the journal context, thinking it means immediate publication”	experts and administrative personnel, which triggers different expectations of outcomes.	
	"Asked to make a presentation, right? Yeah, maybe more about the treatment. The treatment should be aligned with what? So, matching the goals of the one giving the order"	Although the task is clear (making a PPT), the perspective or presentation style desired by the supervisor is often not included at the beginning.	Strategic ambiguity
	“Monitoring is not clear yet: weekly, monthly, or quarterly”	Unclear standard operating procedures.	Procedural ambiguity
Practical Sensemaking	“If it's ambiguous, ask directly and clarify”	Clarification as an active response to ambiguity.	Direct clarification
	“Seniors explain clearly and don't leave any confusion”	The role of senior actors in shaping meaning.	Guided sensemaking
	“One-on-one becomes an open communication space”	Reflection forum to understand meaning.	Space for social interpretation
Coordination Culture	“There are no written rules, but there is the value of respect”	Implicit culture shapes communication.	Informal cultural norms
	“Mutual respect and understanding of task boundaries”	Role-aware coordination.	Collective work ethic
	“If it's unclear, we can check with each other between divisions”	Cross-divisional coordination as a solution.	Cross-functional collaboration
	“Cross-division coordination is very important”	Dependency between work units.	Interdependence of organizations
Impact of Ambiguity	“Communication is strong and helps with work”	Effective communication improves performance.	The function of organizational communication

	“The supervisor divided tasks from the beginning to avoid conflicts”	Reduction of ambiguity thru role clarity.	Clarity of job descriptions
	“If it's not clear, miscommunication can occur”	Ambiguity has a negative impact.	Communication risk

3.1.1 Adaptation of Organizational Members to Communication Patterns and Work Culture

The adaptation process is an important initial stage for organizational members in understanding the work system, communication patterns, and values that prevail within an organization. Research results indicate that organizational members, especially new employees, need to undergo an adaptation process to understand the working methods and communication patterns that develop within the organization. This adaptation process is not only related to understanding work tasks but also includes understanding interaction methods, coordination mechanisms, and communication norms that apply in the work environment.

Based on the results of interviews with research informants, it is known that new employees tend to learn the organization's work system thru direct interaction with other team members. The forms of interaction include asking colleagues, observing the work methods of more experienced team members, and requesting additional explanations from supervisors when there are things that are not yet understood. This process shows that adaptation to organizational culture occurs thru interpersonal communication mechanisms that enable new members to gradually understand the work context.

These findings indicate that the adaptation process does not occur automatically, but rather thru continuous communication experiences within the organizational environment. In practice, new members often encounter situations that they do not fully understand, especially related to certain work terms, operational procedures, or coordination patterns used within the organization. Therefore, communication interaction becomes the main means for new members to gain an understanding of the prevailing work system.

In the perspective of the sensemaking theory proposed by Karl Weick, the adaptation process can be understood as part of the characteristic of identity construction. This theory explains that the interpretation of a situation is influenced by the individual's identity within the organization. In the context of this research, the position of being a new member encourages individuals to actively seek information that can help them understand the work environment. The identity as a new member also makes individuals more open to learning from communication experiences with other organizational members.

Furthermore, the adaptation process also shows that understanding the organization's communication culture is formed thru social interaction experiences. When new members engage in various communication activities, they gradually understand how messages are conveyed, how coordination is carried out, and how organization members provide feedback on each other's work. This process allows individuals to build a more comprehensive understanding of the communication dynamics occurring within the organization.

Thru this exposure, the results of this study indicate that adapting to organizational communication patterns is an important process in building an understanding of the work system. Thru intensive communication interactions, new members can interpret various work situations they encounter and develop effective ways to participate in organizational activities.

3.1.2 Sources of Ambiguity in Organizational Communication

Organizational communication does not always occur clearly and free from ambiguity. In practice, organizational members often encounter communication situations that contain ambiguity in meaning, especially when the conveyed message does not provide sufficiently detailed information regarding a specific intent or purpose. Research findings indicate that ambiguity in organizational communication can arise from several factors related to the manner of information delivery and the evolving communication context within the organization.

Based on information from research informants, one of the frequent sources of ambiguity is work instructions conveyed briefly without detailed explanations. In certain situations, organization members receive messages that only contain general instructions regarding the tasks that need to be performed. This condition can lead to various different interpretations, especially for organization members who do not fully understand the context of the work in question.

In addition, the use of internal organizational terms or language can also be a factor that causes communication ambiguity. These terms are usually understood by long-serving members of the organization, but for new members, these terms can cause confusion if not explained in more detail. This situation shows that differences in work experience levels can affect how individuals understand communication messages within the organization.

Ambiguity in communication can also arise due to differences in interpretation among organizational members. Although the message conveyed is the same, each individual can interpret the message based on their experience, knowledge, and understanding of the organizational context. As a result, there is a possibility that members of the organization have different understandings of the meaning of a work instruction.

In the framework of sensemaking theory, this ambiguous situation is a condition that encourages individuals to engage in the process of making sense of the information received. Karl Weick explains that sensemaking usually occurs when individuals face situations that are not entirely clear and require further interpretation. Communication ambiguity within an organization serve as a trigger for members to seek clearer meaning through communication interactions with others.

The findings of this study indicate that communication ambiguity is not entirely a negative condition, but can be part of the dynamics of organizational communication that encourages the process of shared meaning-making. When members of the organization become aware of the ambiguity in the received message, they tend to make various efforts to gain a clearer understanding of the message's intent.

Thus, communication ambiguity can be understood as part of the reality of organizational communication that requires mechanisms for interpretation and clarification. This process enables organizational members to build a more accurate understanding of communication messages and minimize the potential for misunderstandings in the execution of work.

3.1.3 Sensemaking Practices in Understanding Work Instructions

Research findings indicate that the practice of sensemaking in understanding work instructions at Prospect Institute occurs through three main stages as formulated by Karl Weick, namely enactment, selection, and retention. These three processes do not operate linearly, but rather intertwine within the ongoing dynamics of organizational communication. Furthermore, these practices also reflect the characteristics of sensemaking that are social, ongoing, and enactive, which empirically manifest in patterns of coordination, re-confirmation, and open communication among organizational members. Explained as follows:

Enactment, the process of enactment, becomes apparent when members of the organization begin to "instantiate" the work reality through the communication actions they undertake. Work instruction

that are initially ambiguous are not understood as static information, but as something that must be responded to thru interaction. When members receive instruction that are not entirely clear, they do not immediately interpret them individually, but instead take action by asking questions, discussing, or coordinating.

The enactive characteristic is clearly visible at this stage, where the organization's reality is not seen as something that already exists, but rather as being formed thru the communication practices themselves. In other words, the meaning of work instructions is not inherent in the message. Thus, the enactment at Prospect Institute shows that communication is not merely a tool for conveying information, but a process of constructing work reality.

Selection, the selection stage occurs when various possible interpretations of work instructions begin to be filtered thru social interaction. Based on the interview results, organizational members actively reconfirm to ensure that the meanings they construct align with the intended purpose. Discussion among members becomes the main mechanism in selecting the interpretation deemed most appropriate.

This process directly reflects the social characteristics in sensemaking. Meaning is not determined individually, but negotiated thru communication with other members. In this context, the organization functions as an intersubjective space where interpretations are tested, compared, and agreed upon. The practice of not letting new employees "guess" is a form of control over the selection process, ensuring that the meanings formed remain consistent and do not deviate.

Analytically, the selection stage shows that ambiguity is not eliminated but managed thru a collective meaning-making process. This emphasizes that clarity in an organization does not come from perfect instructions, but from an effective meaning negotiation process.

Retention, the retention stage is evident when the agreed-upon meaning patterns are repeated and become part of daily work practices. The research results show that the way organizational members confirm, coordinate, and avoid speculative interpretations is no longer incidental but has become an internalized habit within the organizational culture.

The ongoing characteristic is very relevant at this stage, because the meaning that has been formed is not final, but continues to be updated thru subsequent communication experiences. Retention does not mean that meaning is stored statically, but rather becomes a reference for the subsequent sensemaking process. In other words, past experiences are used to interpret similar new situations. In the perspective of Karl Weick's sensemaking theory, these practices demonstrate that the interpretation of information is an active and reflective process. Individuals do not only rely on the information available directly, but also reinterpret past communication experiences.

This process also shows retrospective characteristics, where individuals understand a situation by looking back at past experiences. By reflecting on the messages received, members of the organization can build a clearer understanding of the intent behind the work instructions.

According to the explanation above, the sensemaking practices carried out by organizational members show that organizational communication not only serves as a means of conveying information but also as a social process that allows individuals to build shared meaning regarding the work situations they face.

3.1.4 Coordination Culture as a Mechanism for Collective Meaning-Making

The result of this study aims to intervene that coordination is one of the communication practices that plays an important role in building a shared understanding within the organization. Coordination not only functions to arrange the division of tasks but also serves as a mechanism that allows organizational members to align their understanding of the goals and methods of task execution.

Interview data with research informants provide an overview that organization members often coordinate before carrying out specific tasks. This coordination usually takes the form of brief

discussions among team members to ensure that each individual understands the tasks to be performed and how these tasks relate to the work of other team members.

This coordination practice demonstrates that the organization has a communication culture that emphasizes the importance of shared understanding in job execution. By conducting regular coordination, organization members can reduce the likelihood of misunderstandings that could affect work outcomes.

In the perspective of sensemaking theory, coordination can be understood as a social process that allows individuals to build a shared meaning regarding organizational situations. Karl Weick explains that sensemaking is a social process that occurs thru communication interactions among individuals. In this context, coordination becomes a communication space that enables organizational members to collectively interpret work situations.

The coordination culture that develops within the organization also shows that the process of meaning-making is not done individually, but thru dialog and information exchange among organizational members. Thru these interactions, individuals can understand how their tasks contribute to the overall goals of the organization.

Therefore, coordination not only functions as a managerial mechanism but also as a communication process that enables the formation of collective understanding within the organization.

3.1.5 The Impact of Ambiguity on Coordination and Organizational Performance

Communication ambiguity within an organization can have various impact on the coordination process and the overall performance of the organization. Research results show that when communication messages are not clearly understood, there is a possibility of errors occurring in the execution of tasks. These errors can manifest as discrepancies between work result and organizational expectations or delays in task completion.

Several research informants explained that misinterpretation of work instructions can lead to the need for works to be corrected or redone. This condition can certainly affect work efficiency and slow down the completion process. Therefore, organizational members strive to minimize the potential for such errors thru various communication practices such as clarification and coordination.

However, the research results also show that the organization as a fairly effective communication mechanism to address that ambiguity. When members of the organization feel uncertain about the meaning of a message, they tend to seek confirmation from the person who gave the instruction. In addition, discussions among team members also serve as an important means to align understanding of the work.

In the perspective of sensemaking theory, this situation shwos that communication ambiguity can trigger a more active meaning-making process within the organization. When indivduals face unclear situations, they are driven to seek additional information that can help them understand the situation more accurately.

Therefore, communication ambiguity is not only understood as an obstacle in organizational communication but also as a condition that can encourage organizational members to engage in a more intensive sensemaking process. Thru this process, organizational members can build a clearer understanding of the work situation and improve coordination effectiveness within the organization.

3.2. Discussion

3.2.1 Adaptation of Organizational Members to Communication Patterns and Work Culture

The adaptation process of organizational members at Prospect Institute shows that understanding communication patterns does not happen instantly, but rather thru repeated interactions and active involvement in daily work practices. New members not only learn the formal structure of the organization but also must understand the “unwritten rules” that govern how messages are conveyed and interpreted. This indicates that organizational communication operates in both explicit and implicit dimensions simultaneously.

This empirical evidence aligns with previous research that states organizational culture influences how members understand and respond to messages. However, this study reveals a different depth, where adaptation is not merely a process of adjustment to culture, but rather a part of the sensemaking process itself. In Weick's perspective, this process is ongoing and social, as meaning is formed thru continuous social interaction. Thus, adaptation can be understood as the initial phase in which members begin to construct an interpretive framework for the organization's reality.

3.2.2 Sources of Ambiguity in Organizational Communication

The ambiguity of communication within this organization primarily stems from unclear work instructions, the use of ambiguous language, and the absence of fully explicit operational standards. Instructions conveyed briefly or thru internal organizational terms often open up different interpretations among members or between divisions.

This finding reinforces previous research that message ambiguity is the main trigger for differences in interpretation in organizational communication. However, this study expands on those findings by showing that ambiguity does not only stem from the message itself but also from the dynamic organizational context and high work pressure. In other words, ambiguity is both a structural and situational condition.

In the framework of sensemaking, ambiguity becomes the starting point (enactment) where individuals begin to recognize the need to interpret the unclear. Therefore, ambiguity cannot be positioned merely as a communication problem, but rather as a prerequisite for the process of meaning-making within an organization.

3.2.3 Sensemaking Practices in Understanding Work Instructions

Research findings indicate that organizational members actively engage in the sensemaking process when faced with ambiguous work instructions, thru practices such as asking questions directly, re-confirming, and discussing with colleagues or supervisors. This process reflects the three main stages of sensemaking according to weick, namely enactment, selection, and retention.

At the enactment stage, members of the organization identify ambiguities in work instructions. The selection stage is evident when they choose information sources or seek clarification to determine the most relevant meaning. Meanwhile, retention is reflected in the formation of a collective habit of not letting ambiguity linger, but rather confirming it immediately thru open communication.

These results reinforce previous research that emphasizes that meaning is constructed thru social interaction, but this study provides an additional contribution by showing that the process has been structured within organizational practices. Furthermore, the characteristics of sensemaking as a social, ongoing, and enactive process are also clearly evident, where meaning is not only interpreted but also generated thru the act of communication itself.

3.2.4 Coordination Culture as a Mechanism for Collective Meaning-Making

The culture of coordination that has developed at Prospect Institute serves as the primary mechanism for stabilizing meaning collectively. Coordination not only functions as a tool for synchronizing work but also as a discursive space where organizational members align perceptions and clarify the meaning of instructions.

Field fact align with previous research that places culture as a factor influencing organizational communication. However, this research shows a more complex relationship, where culture not only shapes communication but is also shaped thru sensemaking practices. Thus, coordination culture can be understood as both the result and the medium of the collective sensemaking process.

In a theoretical perspective, this condition shows that sensemaking has been institutionalized into a cultural practice. Cross-divisional coordination, open communication, and mutual respect values become elements that strengthen the stability of meaning within the organization. This also shows that the organization is actively building mechanisms to reduce uncertainty without having to eliminate ambiguity entirely.

3.2.5 The Impact of Ambiguity on Coordination and Organizational Performance

Communication ambiguity has the potential for dualistic impacts, meaning it can either hinder or enhance organizational performance, depending on how the ambiguity is managed. In the context of the Prospect Institute, findings indicate that ambiguity tends not to develop into dysfunctional conflict due to the presence of effective sensemaking mechanisms.

This reinforces previous research findings that unclear communication can trigger miscommunication, but this study shows that the impact can be minimized thru intensive clarification and coordination practices. In other words, the negative impact of ambiguity is not deterministic, but rather depends on the organization's capacity to process it.

Furthermore, open communication practices and the habit of confirmation have proven to enhance task clarity, accelerate work processes, and reduce interpretive errors. This shows that sensemaking functions as an adaptive mechanism that maintains organizational effectiveness amidst uncertainty. Thus, ambiguity is not always an obstacle, but can be a source of collective learning if managed thru appropriate cultural practices.

4. Conclusion

This research shows that communication ambiguity within organizations is not merely a disruption in message delivery, but rather an inherent condition that triggers the process of meaning-making among organizational members. The sensemaking process as an organizational culture practice actively constructs, negotiates, and stabilizes meaning thru daily interactions. The findings indicate that this process is not merely individual but rather collective and institutionalized thru practices such as direct clarification, discussion, and cross-divisional coordination, which reflect the stages of enactment, selection, and retention in explaining how meaning is produced and maintained. Thus, organizational clarity is not solely determined by formal structures, but by the effectiveness of interpretative processes that occur socially. Theoretically, this research reinforces the position of sensemaking as a key mechanism in knowledge-based organizational communication, while also contributing to the development of organizational communication studies in the local context. However, the limitation to a single context indicates the need for further research that examines the dynamics of sensemaking across different organizations and broader structural factors.

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