Chapter 4
Sensemaking Theory

ABSTRACT

The social activity of decoding messages by drawing upon a common language and managing the actions in which we engage is the focus of sensemaking theory (Brown, 2017). A social context of sharing ideas and influencing how others make sense of events is enhanced by creating trusting relationships. Leaders apply this theory through connected communications and structured reinforcement. Connected communications are face-to-face, routine discussions with your team members dealing with what they are doing, why they are doing it, and how they decided on their activity. On-demand training, real-time results, ongoing recognition, and reinforcement tied to specific actions form the basis of structured reinforcement. Success lies in determining whether a person's right-now actions are value-plus or value-minus.

INTRODUCTION

- **Emerging Research:** People attach meaning to their world based on sensemaking. When faced with ambiguity and complexity, they work to find social context to their experiences. This is important because social dilemmas and tension are created when organizations participate in corporate social responsibility (CSR). CSR is when companies take measures to be accountable for their effects on social and environmental well-being. CSR activities are felt inside and outside of the organization, bringing new experiences to employees based on their role in the community and in the world at large (Aguinis and Glavas 2017). The leader should take all possible actions to assist in the sensemaking process. *SOURCE: On Corporate Social Responsibility, Sensemaking, and the Search for Meaningfulness Through Work (Aguinis and Glavas 2017).*

UNDERSTANDING TEAM COMMUNICATION

Sensemaking theory is important in establishing common ground for effective communications. The team can improve its performance and individuals can work on their personal skills using three keys. The keys to improving team communication are creating a common language that drives understanding, establishing connected communications that emphasize the how and why of interacting, and structuring reinforcement to seek out and nurture value-plus actions.

Effective team communication starts with the basics. When we decode messages in order to use a common language that drives understanding and colors the actions we engage in, we have discovered sensemaking. This social activity allows us to share ideas and influence how everyone involved makes sense of an event.

Sensemaking is important for leadership, with seven properties that provide tools to understand the communication process (Mills and Mills 2000). A list of the properties is in Table 1.

The theory begins with social context, allowing leaders to create meaning from relationships and conversations. Personal identity defines each person's

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