ABSTRACT

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              DURING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE IN
              MULTINATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN
              CHINA

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Directed By:       Professor Elizabeth L. Toth
              Communication Department

This study explored the role public relations plays in the sensemaking process during planned organizational change within multinational organizations in China. Three areas were examined. First, this study examined the sensemaking process during change within the participating multinationals. Second, this study explored how the multinationals used public relations to communicate about change with their employees. Third, the influence of uncertainty avoidance upon sensemaking during change within the multinationals was probed. Weick's (1995) sensemaking framework was used to explain the individual differences in the way events are understood and how those differences are translated into sensible collective behaviors.

A total of 60 face-to-face interviews were conducted with managerial and non-managerial employees from nine multinational corporations. Several significant findings emerged from the study. First, change management can be viewed as management of meanings. This view helped explain why some change programs are accepted over others. The acceptance of change is both facilitated and constrained by the extent to which management is able to impose a plausible sense of change on events. Second, power plays a major role in creating an environment ready for change as well as resolving disparities of meanings. Top management sort out information and highlight it to employees so that their mental frameworks are framed to see the environment in certain ways. Third, negative expressions or behaviors by employees need not be perceived as acts of rebellion against change. Rather, these negative expressions reflect the difficulty that organizational members have while switching rapidly their sense of the organization during change.

This study also found that the public relations function can facilitate sensemaking during change. Poorly planned communication programs during change can result in confusions from employees regarding change as well as distrust of management. Findings also suggested that cultivating dialogic communication with employees during change can help managers develop a shared understanding with front-line employees about change. Findings also showed that when employees could not reduce their uncertainties, they stopped processing information from the organizations. This study demonstrated the value of public relations to change management. It illustrated how public relations can help members of an organization understand the meaning of change.

PUBLIC RELATIONS AND SENSEMAKING DURING ORGANIZATIONAL
CHANGE IN MULTINATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN CHINA.


By


Yi Luo




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Advisory Committee:
Professor Elizabeth L. Toth, Chair
Dr. Linda Aldoory
Dr. Deborah A. Cai
Dr. Meina Liu
Dr. M. Susan Taylor

# Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents and my sister for their unconditional love and support.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Overview

Change has become prevalent in the life cycle of many organizations as they constantly adapt to various environmental pressures such as the fluctuating economy, institutional regulations, globalization, technological advance, or depletion of resources. Successful change implementation can help organizations grow and gain competitive advantage. Unfortunately, members of organizations often resist change because, in many cases, they are not the initiators of change and they fear unpredictable outcomes (Eisenberg, Andrews, Murphy, & Laine-Timmerman, 1998). How to help members of an organization to adapt to change is a key challenge for many organizations (Piderit, 2000).

Public relations scholars (e.g., Larkin & Sandar, 1994; Stroh, 1999) have recognized the issue of organizational change as an opportunity to advance public relations theories and to demonstrate the value of public relations to organizational effectiveness. L. Grunig, J. Grunig, and Dozier (2002) have advocated more research on what public relations can do to manage organizational change. Public relations, as a management function that aims to manage communication between an organization and its publics (J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p.6), can use communication to foster an understanding among employees involved in change efforts.

Organizational goal achievement depends on the coordinated activities among various members of the organization. This coordination relies on shared cognitive frameworks among the members in core areas such as role expectations, identities, or organizational structure. Members of an organization develop these shared

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frameworks through communication and sensemaking. Eisenberg (1986) underscored that "a primary function of communication in organizations is to facilitate the development of shared meanings, values, and beliefs" (p. 90). The concept of sensemaking depicts the process of structuring information, observing effects of responses, and assigning meaning or significance for these responses (Weick, 1995). Communication penetrates through the sensemaking process by the ways organizations communicate with their members and by the patterns of interactions.

A change may create a discontinuity from existing cognitive frameworks that members of an organization have adopted to explain, interpret, and understand various organizational events (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Dervin, 1980; Poole, Gioia, & Gray, 1989; Starbuck & Milliken, 1988). This discontinuity may vary depending on the magnitude of the change. Once members of an organization perceive this discrepancy, they are prompted to look for ways to explain and create meanings for the surprises. These new meanings then guide their subsequent responses (e.g., participation or sabotage) toward change.

The way an organization communicates with its members can affect the meaning acquired in the sensemaking process. For example, information, based on how it is interpreted, may worsen or relieve uncertainty among organizational members during chaotic times (Heath, 1994). Public relations can facilitate the sensemaking process during change by assisting organizational members to revise or reconstruct their cognitive frameworks for meaning making.

Most studies of organizational change that have adopted a communication perspective, however, have neglected to examine the means and process by which organizational members come to understand change (Lewis & Seibold, 1998). The role of communication has been used to explain resistance to changes (Fairhust, Green, & Courtright, 1995), creation of innovative ideas (Albrecht & Hall, 1981; Cheney, Block, & Gordon, 1986), and formation of attitudes toward changes (Ellis, 1992; Miller & Monge, 1985). What remains unclear is what communication processes (e.g., interaction, feedback) are conducive for change and how organizational members construct meanings of change.

## Purpose of Study

This study explored the role of public relations in the sensemaking process during planned organizational change in multinational organizations in China. The goal was to understand the processes of communication and sensemaking during change. The way an organization communicates with its members during change influences how its members make sense of change. The meanings created for change through sensemaking may ultimately affect how organizational members respond to change, such as participating in or resisting the change. Examining sensemaking can then provide insight on understanding how communication processes influence change.

I chose to study how multinational organizations in China manage change for the following reasons. First, China has become a magnet for multinational companies because of its massive market and phenomenal economical growth. According to a 2008 report by *China's Ministry of Commerce*, nearly 480 of the *Fortune 500*

companies have invested in China. As China is integrating itself with the global economy, a burgeoning public relations industry is drawing ever greater attention from the West (Gray, 2006). How public relations in China manages communication programs amidst a drastic economic, social, and political transformation has attracted attention from public relations scholars (e.g., Chen, 2007; Hung & Chen, 2009; Zhang, Shen, & Jiang, 2009). Therefore, the current study can enrich our understanding of managing public relations in China.

Second, Weick's (1995) sensemaking framework has become a primary tool to analyze organizational events and outcomes. This framework has been mostly conceptualized and developed by Western scholars. Studies that applied Weick's framework have been mostly conducted in Western countries. Applying this sensemaking framework in a non-Western country, such as China, can help to extend its heuristic value in explaining why organizational members think the way they do during change.

To explore the role of public relations in the sensemaking process during change, this study employed face-to-face interviewing to collect data. Each interview lasted from 30 to 90 minutes. Interview participants included top management, middle-level managers, public relations managers, supervisors, and front-line employees. Participating organizations were first identified through *Fortune Global 500* corporations. Interpersonal connections (i.e., friends and relatives) were also used to locate possible participating organizations.

Theoretical frameworks that guided this study included: the sensemaking framework, strategic management in public relations, and cultural dimension of uncertainty avoidance. The following section briefly describes these frameworks.

Theoretical Framework

*Sensemaking as a Theoretical Framework for Understanding Change*

Sensemaking deals with the ongoing retrospective construction of a plausible sense regard what is happening. The focus of sensemaking lies in how people come to understand a situation and how they establish meaning for the current situation based on past experience. Organizational sensemaking involves making sense of events tied to an organization's operation.

Karl Weick's (1969, 1979, 1988, 1995, 2001) writings on sensemaking laid the foundation to study how members come to understand the meaning of various organizational events. He argued that individuals try to make sense of organizational events by extracting cues to make plausible explanations for these events. Weick developed a sensemaking framework as an analytic tool to explain organizational events and outcomes. This framework includes seven properties: identity construction, extracted cues, on-going sensemaking, social sensemaking, retrospection, enactment, and plausibility.

Weick's (1995) framework of sensemaking embodies the process of organizing, assembling interdependent actions into sensible sequences that generate sensible outcomes. Weick (2001) described "organizing as sensemaking" (p. 95). The organizing process involves three key processes: enactment (i.e., creating an environment), selection (i.e., choosing plausible actions to respond to the enacted

environment), and retention (i.e., storing plausible responses as guide for future events). The sensemaking properties (e.g., retrospection, plausibility, enactment, and extracted cues) are embedded within the core component processes in organizing. This study used the sensemaking framework as well as the key processes in organizing as a guide to explain individual differences in the way events are understood and how those differences are transformed into shared understandings that enable coordination.

*Strategic Management in Public Relations*

Sensemaking and communication are inherently tied to each other. The meaning that organizational members develop in sensemaking relies on how the members attend to, select, and interpret information (Heath, 1994). Individuals attribute value to information, which in turn affects how they structure the information to develop meaning. The ways that organizational members deal with information rely on how organizations communicate with their publics (Heath, 1994). Public relations, as a management function for the communication between an organization and its publics, can facilitate the sensemaking process during change when organizational members are prompted to deal with discontinuities associated with change.

Organizational members constitute a strategic public whose behavior can restrain or enhance an organization's ability to achieve its goals. In the case of organizational change, how organizational members respond to change largely determines whether a change will be implemented successfully. In another words, the acceptance and implementation of a change program is contingent upon how

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organizational members make sense of it.  By engaging in strategic management

public relations can help organizational members make sense of change.

According to J. Grunig and Repper (1992, p. 124-125), strategic public

relations operates at both organizational and program levels.  At the program level,

strategic public relations management entails developing and implementing

communication programs by objectives as well as conducting evaluations regarding

the effectiveness of communication programs.

At the organizational level, strategic public relations involves three stages: the

stakeholder stage, the public stage, and the issue stage.   Public relations practitioners

at the stakeholder stage seek to identify what effects an organization has on its

stakeholders and to foster a mutually beneficial relationship with the stakeholders.  At

the second public stage, a primary goal of public relations programs is to segment

active publics from the stakeholder group and to foster dialogue with the active

publics.  At the third issue stage, public relations programs aim at engaging active

publics and activists in dialogue to deal with the issue that publics raise.

When analyzing organizational change, applying strategic management in

public relations has the following implications.  First, when managed strategically,

public relations helps organizations identify which groups of employees are or will be

affected by an organizational change.  Second, through research public relations

practitioners can identify strategic publics (among employees) who are most likely to

facilitate or resist the change.  Third, public relations develops communication

programs to help the strategic publics make meaning of change as well as foster

dialogue between an organization and its active publics.

*Uncertainty Avoidance – A Particular Cultural Dimension*

Organizational members do not construct realities in a vacuum. Culture serves as a guideline for individuals during sensemaking. Specifically, culture helps individuals determine what information is deemed to be valuable (Heath, 1994). Scholars in cultural studies (e.g., Hofstede, 1992) have suggested that a sensible way to study culture is to break it down into manageable pieces. This study thus only examined one dimension in culture: uncertainty avoidance, which has significant implications on sensemaking and organizational change.

This cultural dimension of uncertainty avoidance was developed by Hofstede (1980, 1991, 1992, 2001) based on studies of multinational organizations around the world. Uncertainty avoidance refers to a society's lack of tolerance for ambiguity or unpredictability (Hofstede, 1980). Hofstede's studies found that individuals in Asian countries have a relatively higher level of uncertainty avoidance than those in Western countries.

Organizational change represents a period of strong ambiguity and uncertainty. Organizational members are uncertain about the change process and outcomes because the change conflicts with the existing knowledge and frameworks in explaining organizational events. Due to higher levels of intolerance for ambiguity, members of a high uncertainty avoidance culture, compared to the ones of a low uncertainty avoidance culture, may be more likely to resist changes (Hofstede, 2001). Research (e.g., Hofstede, 1992; Lim, Lang, Sia, & Lee, 2004; Yeh & Lawrence, 1995) on uncertainty avoidance suggests that individuals with a higher

level of uncertainty avoidance may be less willing to seek, process, and accept information inconsistent to their past experiences or existent cognitive frameworks.

## Method and Research Design

This study used an interpretive qualitative approach. An interpretive approach emphasizes the importance of understanding the overall text of a conversation and, more broadly, the importance of seeing meaning in context (Biklen, 1995). Qualitative interviewing was the primary method for gathering data.

Qualitative research is concerned with process than results or products (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). This process-oriented approach was chosen because it has three advantages. First, the use of interpretative research can quickly generate rich, deep descriptions of complex organizational issues such as the process of communication and meaning making (Geertz, 1973; Pacanowsky, 1988; Weick & Browning, 1986; Wilkins, 1984).

Second, many scholars who have studied organizations (e.g., Kreps, 1989a, 1989b; Kreps, Herndon, & Arneson, 1993; Morgan, 1986; Pavlock, 1982) have argued that interpretive methods can enable people in organizations to diagnose specific organizational problems, to design adaptive strategies, to become proactive, and to engage in double-loop learning (i.e., learn to self-question and to correct errors) (Argyris, 1993). Kreps (1989b) pointed out that perceptions generated from interpretative data can provide a clear picture of the reactions that the key constituencies (e.g., employees) have toward communication initiatives implemented by an organization.

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Third, this process-oriented approach is appropriate when studying little-known phenomena (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). How public relations manage communication programs during change remains an underexplored area. Communication with organizational members within multinationals during change has not yet been fully examined (e.g., Shutter & Wiseman, 1993; Teboul, Chen, & Fritz, 1994). Given the above advantages, a qualitative approach was thus used in this study.

This study relied on one primary source of data: employees in multinationals in China. I recruited participants from nine multinationals and conducted 60 face-to-face interviews. Participants included public relations managers, non-managerial employees, supervisors, middle-level managers, CEOs, and human resources personnel.

Following Patton's (1990) suggestion regarding qualitative sampling, three sampling methods were used: theory-based, snowball, and convenience sampling. Theory-based sampling allows qualitative researchers to select events or people based on their own understanding of theoretical constructs. As a result, researchers can explore and elaborate on those constructs. Through snowball sampling, researchers can identify additional participants by asking questions such as, "Do you know whom I should talk to?" or "Who else might be interested in this study?" In convenience sampling, I used my personal connections (e.g., friends and relatives) to help locate participating organizations.

Interviews, as noted earlier, were gathered by face-to-face and audio-recorded. The lenghth of interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 90 minutes. Interviews were conducted in either English or Chinese, depending on the preference of participants.

## Delimitation

This study focused on how public relations managed communication programs during change and how communication programs affected the sensemaking process during change in multinationals. Sensemaking was examined in this study mainly on the individual level. Organizational change considered in this study involved active participation of the organization, groups, or individuals in creating changes in organizations. Multinational organizations in China constituted the context for this study.

This study confined its focus to the theoretical frameworks and concepts (e.g., sensemaking, public relations, and uncertainty avoidance) conceptualized by scholars writing in the West. Furthermore, this study was guided by an interpretive paradigm underlying the process of meaning construction in organizations. Organizational effectiveness discussed in this study was defined from a public relations perspective, focusing on an organization's need to balance its own interest with that of its publics.

## Significance of the Study

This study made both theoretical and practical contributions to the fields of public relations and organizational studies. Theoretically, this study linked public relations with sensemaking in a context of organizational change. Results of this study suggested a mechanism through which public relations strategies can foster sensemaking among organizational members. Cognitive disruptions caused by

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change prompted organizational members to revise their existing frameworks or to form new cognitive systems to understand the need for change and its impact. Furthermore, the linkage between sensemaking and public relations also suggested new directions in public relations research on a much ignored area --employee publics.

The sensemaking approach has been intensively applied by organizational theorists, sociologists, and organizational psychologists. This study might bridge a gap in sensemaking research by examining the meaning making process through a communication perspective. The analysis generated in this study might help enrich our understanding of the sensemaking framework and its value to organizations from a different theoretical angle -- public relations.

Findings from this study also have practical value for both public relations practitioners and management. The role that public relations played during organizational change indicated certain communication interventions that organizations can initiate to cultivate individual and collective sensemaking. This study provided insights on how organizational members perceived and responded to change affects whether an organization can effectively implement change.

This study focused on the sensemaking process at the individual level. An understanding of this concept at the micro level may shed light on how sensemaking operates at the group and organizational level. Results of this study can point directions for more research on collective sensemaking. For example, future studies may focus on how sensemaking in groups resembles or varies from sensemaking at an individual level, how sensemaking at the group and individual level influence each

other, and how organizations can develop public relations programs to facilitate sensemaking in groups during change.

Retrospective understanding of organizational experiences during change can also help construct a useful framework that organizations can use to be better prepared in dealing with such a challenge. Additionally, this study might contribute to our understanding of sensemaking from the viewpoints of both management and employees. Particularly, public relations can help integrate the voices and concerns of organizational members into management decision making.

This study is composed of five parts. The introduction chapter provides a brief preview of the study. The second chapter lays out the theoretical foundation that guides the study. The third chapter on methodological design explains the *hows* of the study, namely the issues concerned with data collection and data analysis. The fourth chapter presents the major findings of the study. Finally, the conclusion and discussion chapter summarizes the significance of findings from both the theoretical and practice perspectives.

The second chapter on conceptualization discusses the theoretical foundation of this study, which includes the following: organizational change, sensemaking, and strategic public relations management. The first part focuses on organizational change. I start by delineating the relationship between an organization and its environment. I then explain the change content and change process in classifying different types of change, followed by the types of planned organizational change that might emerge in the study.

The second part discusses the sensemaking framework. Specifically, this part focuses on the conceptualization of sensemaking, occasions for sensemaking, properties of sensemaking, and organizing. Studies of sensemaking from both fields of organizational theory (e.g., Weick, 1995) and communication (e.g., Dervin, 1999) are examined to obtain a comprehensive view of how this framework has been conceptualized in these two fields.

The third part of conceptualization addresses strategic management in public relations. I start by defining the public relations function. Then I explain the strategic management of public relations in terms of the following aspects: public relations and organizational effectiveness, dimensions of public relations, and the model of strategic management. Organizational members constitute the internal strategic publics of the public relations function. Therefore, following the discussion of strategic management in public relations, I discuss a specific area in public relations—internal/employee communication. This part of discussion includes the history of internal communication practice, conceptualization of employee publics, integrating internal communication under the public relations function, and current research on internal communication in the field of public relations.

Finally, the fourth part in the second chapter addresses one particular cultural influence (i.e., uncertainty avoidance) upon how individuals make sense of change. Particularly, the level of avoiding uncertainties during change might influence how individuals would process and interpret information (Hofstede, 2001). This last part discusses how the concept of uncertainty avoidance has been conceptualized and its link to sensemaking as well as organizational change.

Chapter II: Conceptualization

Overview

This study examined the sensemaking process during planned organizational change in multinational organizations in China. Organizational change creates cognitive disruptions in members. The focus of this study was on two aspects: 1) how individuals make meaning of change in multinational organizations, and 2) what influence public relations exerts upon meaning making regarding change among organizational members. This study highlighted the contribution that public relations can make to change management, which ultimately contributes to organizational effectiveness.

The following aspects comprise the theoretical foundation of this study: sensemaking, strategic public relations, and the dimension of uncertainty avoidance in societal culture. This chapter is organized as follows. I begin by defining what an organization is followed by organizational change. Specifically, I present the definition of planned organizational change, examine the influence of environment on change, explain the change process and change content, and describe different types of organizational change.

Having discussed the definition of organization and organizational change, I proceed to examine sensemaking. I first define everyday sensemaking as well as organizational sensemaking. Next, I describe the occasions that trigger sensemaking. Then, I discuss the seven properties that comprise the sensemaking framework. The last section on sensemaking focuses on linking sensemaking with organizing.

After addressing how the sensemaking framework is developed and its close

affinity with organizing, I then progress to strategic public relations. This section

includes: definitions of strategic management, public relations and organizational

effectiveness, excellence in public relations, the strategic management model of

public relations, and a particular aspect of public relations function—internal

communication. I conclude this section by discussing the need to conduct further

research on internal communication in the field of public relations. Following the

discussion of public relations, I then move to the last part of the conceptualization

chapter: uncertainty avoidance, a particular cultural dimension. I discuss how this

concept relates to sensemaking and public relations. The second chapter ends with a

summary of research questions examined in this study.

Defining Organization

The concept of organization has been defined from various perspectives,

including rational systems (Fayol, 1949; Gulick & Urwick, 1937; Taylor, 1911),

natural systems (Barnard, 1938; Gouldner, 1959, Merton, 1957; Michels, 1949;

Selznick, 1948), and open systems (Aldrich, 1979; Ashby, 1968; Simon, 1962).

Organizational theorist Richard Scott (2003) noted that definitions of organization are

neither true nor false but are only more or less helpful in calling attention to certain

aspects of the phenomenon under study. A primary concern of this study was on the

meaning making process in organization. Therefore, defining organization from a

meaning-centered focus from the interpretive paradigm was an appropriate choice.

The question of how organizational realities are constructed through

interactions among organizational members constitutes a primary concern of the

interpretive approach.  Organizations have been viewed as either the process or the product of shared meanings (Putnam, 1983, p. 51).  These shared meanings give rise to organizational goals, norms, and practices.  An ultimate goal of developing these shared meanings is to create a social reality characterized by consensual meanings among organizational members (Eisenberg, 1986; Putman, 1982).

To be consistent with the process approach, this study defined organizations as "social processes through which members construct and construe social reality" (Thompson, 1980, p. 216).  An individual's action is social when his or her motives take into account another individual's behavior or perceptions (Heath, 1994; Weeks, 1980).  This definition underlines the ongoing interaction processes through which meanings emerge, evolve, and are negotiated among organizational members.

Since this study focused on the role of public relations during sensemaking in organizational change, it is necessary to explain the concept of organizational change prior to discussing how public relations and sensemaking function during change.  In the section below, I first explain why change takes place in organizations.  I do this by examining the interdependency between an organization and its environment.  I then discuss change process, change content, and the types of organizational change.

<center>Organizational Change</center>

The subject of organizational change has been a central concern in both organization science and management (e.g., Beer & Nohria, 2000; Feldman, 2000; Ford & Ford, 1995; Hannan & Freeman, 1977; Lewin, 1951; McKelvey, 1982; Osborne & Gaebler, 1992; Pettigrew, 1992; Stacey, 1996; Thompson, 1967; Weick & Quinn, 1999).  This study examines planned change, which refers to deliberate

managerial action aimed at changing established ways of thinking and acting through implementing particular plans (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002, p. 579).

Change has been viewed as a sensible response toward the environment (Haveman, 1992; Krantz, 1999; McKelvey, 1982; Osborne & Gaebler, 1992; Perrow, 1994; Sashkin & Burke, 1987; Schoonhoven, 1981; Strand, 1983).  Prior to discussing why change occurs, I explain the relationship between an organization and its environment.  This highlighted the necessity of organizational change.

<center>Organizational Change and Environment</center>

The relationship between organizations and their environment provides a solid ground to understand the pervasiveness of change.  As perspectives of understanding organizations have evolved from rational systems, to natural systems, and then to open systems, understanding the relationship between organizations and their environment has also changed.  According to the rational systems perspective, organizations are conceptualized as isolated entities unaffected by the external environment (Gilbreth, 1970; Taylor, 1911; Wren, 1979).  This view evolved to some extent into the natural systems perspective, in particular the institutional approach (Meyer, Scott, & Deal, 1983) and Parson's (Parsons, 1960, 1966) model AGIL[1].  According to the institutional approach, an organization, as a subsystem, is embedded under a more comprehensive societal environment that regulates and sustains the organization (Selznick, 1949).  The role of this subsystem is legitimized within the value system of the overarching societal system.  Organizations survive by

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[1] Parson (1951, 1966) developed this model A (adaptation) G (goal attainment) I (integration) L (Latency) to describe the survival needs of a social system.

conforming to these institutional regulations or norms, which consists of parts of the organization's environment.

The open systems perspective conceives organizations as goal-oriented organisms that try to pursue equilibrium under a changing environment (Ashby, 1968; Beniger, 1986; Buckley, 1967; Pondy & Mitroff, 1979). This conceptualization of organizations shifted focus from internal features (e.g., structure) of an organization to its relationship with the environment (Emery, 1969; Katz & Kahn, 1978; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Quinn, 1980). The interdependency between an organization and its environment suggests that "to survive is to adapt, and to adapt is to change" (Scott, 2003, p. 100). The organization that fails to respond to environmental changes eventually loses synchronization with its environment, ultimately jeopardizing its ability to survive. Organizational survival relies on adaptation either at the structural or operational levels to the external environment.

The loose coupling structure of open systems makes change in organizations possible. The necessity of change can be seen in the two properties of open systems: morphogenesis and requisite variety. Morphogenesis indicates the processes of elaborating or changing the system in response to the variations in the external environment (Buckley, 1967). The concept of requisite variety states that the extent of the variety and complexity in social systems should resemble that in the external environment in order to survive (Weick, 1969, 1979). Any change in the environment (e.g., technological advancement or government regulations) will trigger corresponding changes in organizations.

The above discussion reveals that change is pervasive and inevitable in organizations (Barley, 1986; Barrett, 1998; Marshak, 1993; Prigogine, 2000; Taylor, 1993). Having discussed why change takes place in the life span of organizations, I will now explain two core concepts in organizational change: change process and change content.

Change Process and Change Content

Many organizational scholars have noted the importance of taking a process approach on examining organizational change (Garvin, 1998; Langley, 1999; Pettigrew, 1985, 1987; Purser & Pasmore, 1993; Van de Ven, Polley, Garud, & Venkataraman, 1999; Weick, 1979). Levinthal (1991) noted that studying the process of change directs attention on the decision-making process and implementation of decisions. Change process describes a sequence of events showing how things change over time (Van de Ven, 1992). In particular, Weick and Quinn (1999) defined change processes as sequences of individual and collective events, actions, and activities unfolding over time in context. Their view on change processes emphasizes the characteristic of continuity as opposed to separate stages, which better captures how things emerge during change (Sandelands & Drazin, 1989).

Change can occur at different levels ranging from the broadest, most conceptual level (e.g., organizational culture) to the most concrete or narrowest level (e.g., a specific practice). Furthermore, change can happen in two basic spheres: change in organization (state) and change in strategy (direction) (Mintzberg & Westley, 1992). These aspects of change that organizations may go through from the most conceptual level to the most concrete level are described below.

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At the highest or most conceptual level, organizations can change their culture or corresponding strategic version (Schein, 1985; Drucker, 1974; Firsirotu, 1985; Westley, 1990). Such alternation relates to the overall perception or collective mindset of organizational members. Moving one level down, organizations can alter their structures on the organizational dimension or business position (e.g., business products, markets, or restructuring) (Doz & Prahalad, 1988; Galbraith, 1977; Henderson, 1979; Porter, 1980, 1985). Shifting to a relatively concrete level, change can takes place through redesigning systems and procedures on the organizational dimension, or redesigning particular programs (Mintzberg, 1990; Mintzberg, Brunet, & Waters, 1986; Nonaka, 1988). Lastly, at the most concrete level, organizations can change their people, jobs, and operations at the organizational dimension, and their facilities (Hofer, 1980; Humphrey, 1987; Pascale, 1984).

The contents of change at different levels are interrelated. The more conceptual the change level (e.g., organizational culture) is, the more encompassing the change content (Mintzberg & Westely, 1992). For example, it seems futile to change culture without changing structure, system, and people, or to change vision without adjusting positions, programs, and facilities. Likewise, change of culture at the organizational dimension will be hardly successful without changing correspondingly the vision at the strategy direction level (Westley, 1990). Change conceived at the conceptual level must be accompanied with actions at the concrete level (e.g., operation rules). Yet at the lower level, change (e.g., changing people or facilities) can take place without adjustments (e.g., changing systems) made at the higher conceptual level (Goodstein & Boeker, 1991).

When proceeding from the higher conceptual to the lower concrete levels, change can be conceived as deductive (Mintzberg, 1990). Broad changes in perception are implemented deductively to a relatively tangible, concrete direction. Organizational change can also be inductive when moving from the concrete to the conceptual levels. In inductive changes, implications of concrete changes are generalized into broader perceptions (Westley & Mintzberg, 1989). Both deductive and inductive changes can certainly simultaneously occur in organizations (Nonaka, 1988).

Types of Organizational Change

Having explained the need for organizational change, the next section discusses the types of organizational change. Various perspectives regarding the types of organizational change have developed. Traditionally, change has been categorized in terms of purpose (e.g., Cummings & Huse, 1989), content (e.g., Daft, 1989; Smeltzer, 1991; Witherspoon & Wohlert, 1996), and magnitude or scale of change (e.g., Argyris, 1993; Fisch, Weakland, & Segal, 1982). Other theorists (e.g., Markus & Robey, 1988; Nadler, 1998) have distinguished between top-down and emergent changes. Top-down change is initiated from top down, has deliberate goals and explicit outcome expectations (e.g., Bullock & Batten, 1985). Emergent change is driven from the bottom up and characterized by an open-ended, continuous process of adaptation (e.g., Dawson, 1994).

Different orientations exist regarding the types of change when focusing on the content of change. Daft (2004) identified four types of planned change in areas of technology, products and services, strategy and structure, and culture. Technology

changes affect an organization's production process, including its knowledge and skill base. Product and service changes deal with the changes in the product or serves outputs. Strategy and structural changes pertain to the administrative domain (e.g., supervision) in an organization. Culture changes affect the values, attitudes, expectations, beliefs, abilities, and behavior of organizational members. Daft also mentioned that these types of change are interdependent in that a change in one often leads to a change in another.

Although the magnitude of organizational change varies, changes signify a deviation, and sometimes a shock, to the pre-established cognitive framework that organizational members use to make meaning (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Schein, 1992). These deviations create moments for sensemaking in organizations (Weick, 1995). Faced with these changes, employees seek to restore a sense of stability to organizational life by reconstructing a sensible cognitive framework that allows them to understand change. The next part thus seeks to explain what sensemaking is and how it relates to organizational change.

First, I examine how sensemaking has been conceptualized by both organizational (e.g., Weick, 1995) and communication scholars (e.g., Dervin, 1983a, 1983b, 1999). Next, I explain the occasions that trigger moments for sensemaking. I then move to discuss seven sensemaking properties that constitute Weick's sensemaking framework. This is followed by a discussion on how this sensemaking framework has been used to analyze organizational events. Lastly, I discuss the concept of organizing and how its key component processes reflect the sensemaking properties.

Sensemaking

*Defining Sensemaking*

Sensemaking examines the *hows* of communication, for example, how individuals define a situation or draw inference from past experience and make connections with the current situation. Viewed from this light, communication represents a dynamic process in which individuals understand and respond to a situation.

In a literal sense, everyday sensemaking can be simply described as the making of sense (Weick, 1995) or "meaning making" (Schwantdt, 2005, p. 182). Sense denotes a feeling that we know what is going on (Mills, 2003, p. 53). Scholars have provided different definitions of sensemaking. Starbuck and Milliken (1988) described sensemaking as involving placing stimuli into some kind of framework[2] (i.e., frame of reference). Sackman (1991) viewed sensemaking as mechanisms[3] that organizational members use to attribute meaning to events.

In addition to highlighting the outcome of sensemaking—meaning or senses, other scholars have included interactions in conceptualizing sensemaking. Feldman (1989) viewed sensemaking as an interpretive process necessary for organizational members to understand and to share understandings about the features of the organization in regard to what it is about, what its identity is, what it does well, and how it resolve problems (p. 19). Thomas, Clark, and Gioia (1993) described sensemaking as "the reciprocal interaction of information seeking, meaning

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[2] Equivalent to a frame of reference (Cantril, 1941, p. 40), this framework refers to a generalized point of view that allows people to "comprehend, understand, explain, attribute, extrapolate, and predict" (Starbuck & Milliken, p. 51) any set of events

[3] These mechanisms encompass the rules and standards for "perceiving, interpreting, believing, and acting…typically used in a given cultural setting" (Sackman, 1991, p. 33).

ascription, and action" (p. 240). Weick (1995) defined sensemaking as the process that includes "the construction and bracketing" (p. 8) of the information cues that are examined retrospectively. According to Weick, the revision of those interpretations is based on action and its consequences.

Similar to scholars in organizational theories and social cognition, communication scholars (e.g., Brendlinger, Dervin, Foreman-Wernet, 1999; Bruner, 1990; Conrad, 1985; Craig, 1989; Goodwin, 1989; Levitan, 1980; Madden, 1999; Pearce & Cronen, 1980) also have viewed sensemaking as a constructive process that people use to understand their worlds and experiences. To understand how individuals make sense in their worlds, research on sensemaking from a communication perspective examines the nature of information, the nature of human use of information, and the nature of human communication (Dervin, 2003).

Some communication scholars (e.g., Carter, 1980, 1989b; Dervin, 1980, 1981; Donohue, Tichenor, & Olien, 1975; Galloway, 1977) have gone further to argue that sensemaking centers on how humans make sense of cognitive discontinuity or gaps through communication. Specifically, sensemaking explains how individuals rely on information and interaction to define and bridge cognitive gaps in their daily lives. For instance, Dervin (1980) presented a gap metaphor to study sensemaking. An individual faces a situation from that person's particular experiences, history, and constraints. A cognitive gap emerges when an individual realizes that the senses established previously cannot respond to the current situation. An individual then uses resources or helps to resolve the perceived gap. Dervin's sensemaking triangle thus indicates the following process: how an individual perceives a situation in a

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moment, what gaps this individual sees her/himself encountering, and what ways the individual sees his/herself as assisted by the bridge that he or she has constructed. This notion of coping with discontinuity echoes Meryl Louis's (1980) view of sensemaking as solving discrepancies and surprises.

The above discussion reveals that sensemaking involves the following key aspects: structuring information into frameworks, understanding and redressing surprise, constructing meaning, interacting to seek mutual understanding, and patterning. In essence, sensemaking is the process of building cognitive frameworks to define and understand a situation through communication activities.

Sensemaking is organizational when it occurs and is part of "interlocking routines that are tied together in relatively formal nets of collective action (Weick, 1995, p. 3). Organizational sensemaking varies from everyday sensemaking in that the former is taken for granted to a much less degree (Weick, p. 63). Mills (2003) articulated that organizational sensemaking involves two key aspects. First, organizational sensemaking deals with making sense of events related to the operation of an organization. Second, the set of organizational activities constitutes a framework from which members draw reference in meaning making. For instance, rules and routines affect what member single out as information cues and how they tie those cues to elapsed experience.

*Occasions for Sensemaking*

Sensemaking is on-going, and it "never starts" (Weick, 1995, p. 43). Explicit efforts at sensemaking are activated when the current state of events is thought to vary from what is expected (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obsfeld, 2005). Such difference,

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labeled as "shocks" by Weick (p. 54), breaks the illusion of consistent, sensical reality by calling attention to the rules or routines that govern how we normally live (Weick, p. 61). As such disruption occurs, individuals start to carve out an undifferentiated influx of information streams and turn certain words, events, and experiences into salient categories (Chia, 2000). The once-taken-for-granted routines are thus no longer able to deal with the current situation. Organizational members hence start to question the utility of these routines. Weick argued that these shocks serve as a "trigger for sensemaking" or constitute "occasions for sensemaking" (p. 91-92).

The question of same or different becomes salient for individuals facing shocks. Weick et al. (2005) summarized that the question of same or different usually arise under one of three questions: 1) situations where a dramatic loss of sense occurs, 2) situations where the loss of sense, though trivial, seems troublesome, and 3) situations where sense is uncertainty in unfamiliar contexts. These situations signify that the flow of continuity is breached by the interruption and that the flow of action also turns unintelligible to some extent.

To restore order and sense to the disruption, Weick (1995) argued that individuals first search for ways and reasons that will enable them to resume the interrupted activity. This search involves pulling back and analyzing the established previous experiences, mental models, and frameworks. If resuming the routine actions seems problematic or troublesome, sensemaking efforts are spent on identifying substituting action, revising the current frameworks, or improvising a new framework. The concept of "shocks" addresses an on-going property of sensemaking, which is further explained with other sensemaking properties.

*Properties of Sensemaking*

In an attempt to explain how individuals construct realities in organizations, Weick (1995) categorized various meaning making activities into seven properties. Weick argued that these seven properties serve as a framework for understanding sensemaking in organizations. These seven properties function as "recipe" or a "set of explanatory purpose" (p. ix). In other words, this framework is an analytic tool in organizational analysis, thus used as a primary guideline to explain how organizational members in multinational organizations in China made sense of change. Weick's sensemaking framework involves seven properties: 1) identity construction, 2) ongoing sensemaking, 3) extraction of cues, 4) enactment of sensible environment, 5) retrospection, 6) social sensemaking, and 7) plausibility.

*Identify Construction*

This first property is at the root of sensemaking and affects how other sensemaking properties are understood. Identify construction arises from the need within individuals to create and sustain a sense of identity, a general orientation of who I am. In constructing self identities, individuals typically ask themselves the question of what light this event shines on his or her sense of self and being or what implications these events have for who I will be. The question of who I am dictates how and what an individual thinks and discovers (Weick, 1995, p. 24). Weick added that situation (e.g., conduct of others) can also determine which self an individual chooses to evoke. This implies that an individual's sense of identity is socially constructed.

Weick (1995) maintained that the establishment of self identify is driven by three self needs: the need for self-enhancement, the need for self-efficacy, and the need for self-consistency.  The need for self-enhancement deals with maintaining a positive state of self.  The need for self-efficacy involves the desire to perceive oneself as competent and capable.  The need for self-consistency reflects the desire to sense and experience coherence and continuity (Weick, p. 20).

In addition to establishing a sense of self, identity construction also involves organizational image and organizational identity (Gioia & Thomas, 1996).  Organizational image deals with how members believe others view their organization, a constructed external image (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994).  Organizational identity represents how organizational members perceive their own organization (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991).   An organization member's self identity is affected by how they think others view their organization as well as how they perceive their own organization (Weick, 1995).  Organizational sensemaking allows members with an opportunity to reaffirm, repair, and reconstruct their identities.

The meaning sustained in sensemaking tends to reflect favorably on the organization and to promote self-enhancement, efficacy, and consistency (Weick, 1995, p. 21).  Sensemaking can be instigated by a failure to confirm, reaffirm, or repair one's self, or in the course of maintaining a consistent and positive self.  This activation occurs because as Weick explained individuals learn about their identities by projecting them into an environment and then observing the consequences.  When negative events or images challenge one's perceived self or organizational identities,

Weick argued that individuals may alter the sense they make of those events, even if it means redefining identities.

*Ongoing Sensemaking*

This property of sensemaking addresses the ongoing aspect of the process. Individuals are always in the middle of things (i.e., ongoing projects), constantly making, reaffirming, maintaining, and modifying sense. Maintaining an ongoing sense of a situation reduces levels of ambiguity and uncertainty. Without such sense of stability, social interaction would fall apart (Weick, 1995). As mentioned earlier, shocks and surprises to expectations and routines interrupt the on-going flow of sensemaking. These interruptions signal that important changes have taken place in the environment, prompting individuals to ask the question: is the current situation the same or different? Answers to the question initiate the search for plausible stories or accounts that normalize the breach, restore or revise expectations, and allow projects to resume (Weick, et al., 2005, p. 415).

Interruptions to an ongoing flow oftentimes induce an emotional response, allowing emotions to influence sensemaking in terms of extracting and interpreting cues (Weick, 1995). According to Weick, negative emotions are likely to build up when an interruption is perceived as detrimental, when an organized behavior sequence is interrupted unexpectedly, and when there is lack of means to remove the interruption. The longer the interruption exists, the more intense negative emotions become. Identifying and dealing with these interruptions becomes especially important during organizational change because recall and retrospect tend to be mood congruent (Fiebig & Kramer, 1998; Snyder & White, 1982). As change signifies a

departure from existing expectations and routines, the induced negative emotions can affect to a large extent how organizational members connect the current situation to previous experiences and what information is extracted for interpretation of change.

*Extraction of Cues*

Weick (1995) argued that this property directs attention to the process of meaning making: how individuals notice, bracket, label, and embellish the cues extracted (p.49). Immersed in a flux of events and experience, individuals can only process a limited amount of information, focusing on some and ignoring others. Cues are important because they tie elements together cognitively and are then used to develop a larger sense of what may be happening. Cues extracted by individuals are influenced by other sensemaking properties, such as self identity and emotions induced by interruptions. For instance, a member who strives to maintain an identity focused on self-efficacy is likely to notice any cues that prevents himself or herself from appearing competent.

Starbuck and Milliken (1988) described noticing the activities of filtering, classifying, and comparing, which marks the beginning stage of sensemaking. Noticing determines which information is available for sensemaking. Fiske and Taylor (1992) concluded that individuals generally notice events that are unexpected, extreme, negative, unusual, or relevant to goals. Particularly, examining the activities of noticing addresses the question of how individuals become aware of the signs that vary from the normal routines. Noticing and bracketing these anomalies is in turn influenced by an individual's context (e.g., prior experience), mental model, and a point of reference (Weick, 1995, p. 50). For example, managers comparing to non-

managerial employees tend to notice cues threatening an organization's goals or long-term development.

Cues carved out of the raw experience are then labeled and categorized "so that they can become the common currency for communication exchanges" (Chia, 2000, p. 517). Imposing labels on cues suggests interdependence between events and possible actions, making it possible for organizational members to talk about the events and to enact the environment. Labeling paves the foundation for members' social interaction in organizations.

*Enactment of Sensible Environment*

This property stresses the action aspect of sensemaking, which deals with "the activity of 'making' that which is sensed" (Weick, 1995, p. 30). Enactment indicates a process that creates objects for sensing and imposes order upon a disorderly environment (Weick, p. 36). In organizations, members usually create part of their environments that they confront, and these environments then place constraints on their actions. Individuals are "very much a part of their own environments. They act, and in so doing create the materials that become the constraints and opportunities they face" (p. 31). For instance, the action of saying or talking (a form of enactment) makes it possible for individuals to see what they think. Managers in organizations resemble legislators who construct reality through authoritative acts. Through rules and award systems, managers establish features of an effective environment that casts constraints on the actions of organizational members.

The process of enactment indicates that the environment is not pregiven. Instead, individuals sort out the environment to respond. Actors involved in

enactment thus actively shape, modify, and restructure the environment facing them. In the course of action, individuals think about their action, directing attention of certain cues to the exclusion of others (bracketing), and then storing a sense of the enacted environment (retention).

The issue of power has an influence on how and what gets enacted in the environment. Mills (2003) argued that individuals who are powerful and privileged seem to possess unequal access to roles and positions enabling them to exercise strong influence on constructing the reality. In an organizational context, members of management exercise power in enactment by controlling information cues, who talks to whom, preferred identities, criteria for plausible accounts, accepted identities, and over the appropriate actions (Weick, et al., 2005). Some actors in an organization exert more influence than others regarding objects for sensemaking and deciding which part of the environment gets enacted.

*Retrospection*

Retrospection brings meaning to a lived experience by looking back over previous experience, events, or actions (Weick, 1995). People act first and then reflect on their actions to interpret what they mean. Extracted cues are projected onto past events to draw meaning. Since meaning is constructed at the moment by glancing back, Weick argued that retrospection is influenced by whatever is happening now. Particularly, an event's outcome determines the cues extracted and the meaning of whatever has happened (Weick, p. 26-27). For instance, if an action turns out to be a failure, the backward glance tends to look for inaccurate perceptions or incorrect analyses. What is occurring at present foregrounds an individual's

attention to erase cues and causal sequences contradicting to the final outcome. Once a feeling of order and clarity is reached, retrospective processing stops.

The meaning of a lived experience varies depending on the particular kind of attention dispensed to the past experience as wells on the current goals and projects. Hence, readings of the same events tend to vary (Weick, 1995, p. 27). For instance, managers may interpret a past change as a success by directing attention to the increased productivity. Employees, however, may view the same change as a threat to their job security by focusing on the technological demand placed on them to increase production volume. The contrasting labels of success vs. threat influence what is extracted from past experience.

Clarity is not assured in the backward glancing since individuals are usually immersed in multiple projects and have varying degrees of awareness of these projects (Weick, 1995). Past experience may seem equivocal because it may suggest many different meanings. Some of these meanings may even contradict one another. Weick reasoned that such contradiction is "not surprising given the independence of the diverse projects and the fact that their pursuit in tandem can work at cross-purposes" (p. 27).

Faced with the multiple or even competing meanings of elapsed experience, a challenge for sensemakers in retrospective sensemaking is to deal with equivocality. Particularly, as Weick (1995) pointed out, individuals may need to synthesize many possible meanings emerging through reflection. Such equivocality creates confusion for sensemakers who need to choose which senses to retain and enact upon. To resolve this equivocality, Weick argued that individuals need "values, priorities, and

clarity about preferences" (p. 27) to help them sort out what is important in past experience. Such differentiation in turn provides individuals with some sense of what that past experience means. Mills (2003) concurred that locally shaped values in an organization can explain why some members choose certain meaning for a similar experience with different interpretations.

*Social Sensemaking*

Sense is never created out of a vacuum. Instead, sensemaking is a social activity (Weick, 1995). An individual's thought, feeling, and behavior are influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of others (Allport, 1985, p. 3). What appears to be an internal conduct, such as monologues or thinking, is in fact contingent to some extent on how others react or are thought to be reacting. We build our thoughts around a common langue and various anticipations of how others would react. Such common language and rules for behavior are socially defined and reinforced in everyday social interaction.

According to Weick (1995), the inherent nature of sensemaking as social in an organizational context is reflected in the following two aspects. First, individual sensemaking takes its cues from the arena and the context in which it is located. Organizational sensemaking occurs in the context of organizational routines, symbols, language, and scripts. Members constantly reinforce, update, and negotiate these rules, symbols, and scripts through interaction. These rules and common language established by organizations prime members turn attention to certain cues and make sense of the action of others, which in return help coordinate activities among members.

Second, Weick (1995) argued that sensemaking involves sharing ideas, thoughts, feelings, and meanings among organizational members, which in turn influences how others make sense of events.  Mills (2003) argued that an individual's expression of a sense of situation is partly the outcome of how they see the situation and in part an outcome of how they want their expression to be accepted or received (p. 57).  As Taylor and Van Every (2000) maintained, a situation is talked into existence by organizational members.  The communication act can be perceived as a means for members to test out or try to impose their sense on how others could view a situation.  In other words, organizational members through interaction (e.g., conversations) engage in creating a sense of what is happening, acting as a form of enactment.  While exchanging views on a sense of a situation, members also make sense for others, actively shaping each other's meanings and sensemaking process (Weick, p. 41).

*Plausibility*

Sensemaking does not rely on accuracy (Weick, 1995, p. 57).  It is "about continued redrafting of an emerging story so that it becomes more comprehensive, incorporates more of the observed data, and is more resilient in the face of criticism" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 415).  As Isenberg, 1986) explained, individual reasoning is oftentimes based on incomplete and even conflicting information, and it does not need to be correct, instead it just fits the facts (p. 242-243).  Sensemaking is thus driven by plausibility.  Weick explains plausibility as a feeling that something makes sense, feels right, is somehow sensible, and fits with what is known (p. 60).  According to Weick, a plausible account embodies past experiences and expectations,

resonate with others, can be constructed retrospectively, can be used prospectively, and can be linked to with a more general idea (p. 60-61).

Most organizational action is time sensitive, which places the pursuit of accuracy secondary.  Being reasonable, pragmatic, and coherent is sufficient for individuals to make decisions.   Weick (1995) explained that the cost of close looks is too high under the constraints of speed, risk, and limited capacity imposed by the environment (p. 58).  A speedy response compared to a well deliberated one is more likely to shape events before they settle down on a single meaning, as actions generate new data that help enrich the sense of what is going on (Sutcliffe, 2000).  As Mezias and Starbuck (2003) concluded, organizational members do not need accurate solutions to solve a problem.  Instead, they can deal with the problem effectively simply by making sense of the problem in ways appearing to move toward general long-term goals.

Weick (1995) pointed out that plausibility varies among groups applying different conceptual frames.  What sounds plausible for one group (e.g., managers) may appear as implausible for another group (e.g., employees).  A challenge for management, thus, lies in its ability to translate its management programs into an acceptable, plausible sense for employees so that they can see the same sense as management.  Mills' (2003) study on sensemaking during change found that organizational members perceive a story as plausible when it taps into an ongoing sense of current climate, is consistent with other data, facilitates on-going projects, decreases equivocality, provides an aura of accuracy, and projects a potentially rewarding future (p. 169).

*Viewing Sensemaking Properties as a Framework*

The above discussed seven properties of sensemaking (i.e., identity construction, ongoing, extraction of cues, retrospection, enactment of sensible environment, social sensemaking, and plausibility) constitute the basis of a framework focusing on the processes as well as the social psychological linkages that encourages a sense of organization (Weick, 1995).  According to Weick, this framework represents a sequence of actions.  Individuals concerned with identity in the context of others extract cues from ongoing events and make plausible stories by retrospection, while enacting order into those ongoing events (Weick, p. 18).

Many studies (e.g., Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; O'Connell & Mills, 2003; Tracy, Myers, & Scott, 2006) have used Weick's (1995) sensemaking framework to analyze organizational events and outcomes.  For example, Eddy (2003) used Weick's sensemaking framework to examine the role of college presidents in helping staff members make sense of change.  Murphy (2001) adopted this framework to explore how flight attendants during emergencies made sense when faced with the challenge of knowing when to break their habitual roles that privileged accommodation over authority and reassurance over safety.  Mills, Weatherbee, and Colwell (2006) used Weick's sensemaking framework to find out how and why Canadian business schools and universities have used rankings and performance measures to explain to their stakeholders the selected features and characteristics of their institutions.  Dougherty and Drumheller (2006) used the sensemaking framework to study how employees made sense of disruptive organizational practices (e.g., unfair practice, excess meetings, and improper work).

The sensemaking framework is viewed as "a developing set of ideas with explanatory possibilities" (Weick, 1995, xi), which is useful to explain how events are understood by organizational members and how that understanding is translated into sensible interlocking behaviors (Mills, 2003). Mills used Weick's sensmaking framework as "the basis of a theoretical framework" to study how employees at a Canadian power plant made sense of a series of changes. Following Mills' suite, I used Weick's sensemaking framework as a guide to explain how members in multinational organizations in China made sense during change.

The above discussion established the value of Weick's (1995) sensemaking framework to study organizational events. Weick's framework also serves as a basic recipe for organizing, a particular human form of creating an orderly reality (Magala, 1997, p. 322). Based on the close affinity between organizing and sensemaking, Weick (2001) stated that "it seems more useful to talk about organizing 'as' sensemaking…or organizing 'for' sensemaking" (p. 95). The following section discusses the concept of organizing as sensemaking. First, I explain what organizing is. I then discuss three key processes in organizing: enactment, selection, and retention. I also address how each process in organizing incorporates the sensemaking properties.

<div align="center">Organizing as Sensemaking</div>

*Defining Organizing*

The concept of organizing was first introduced by Weick (1969) in his influential book *The Social Psychology of Organizing*. Weick defined organizing as "the resolving of equivocality in an enacted environment by means of interlocked

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behaviors embedded in conditionally related process" (p. 11).  An underlying

assumption of organizing states that to organize something is to enact order upon and

simplify an equivocal, unstable environment (Gioia, 2006).  Organizing is thus about

resolving equivocality or uncertainty through repetitive and reciprocal behaviors

among organizational members.  Equivocality is reduced in the process of adjusting,

correcting, reaffirming expectations.  Weick (1995) stressed that organization is

enacted through the interpreted meaning of interactions among members.

Weick's concept of organizing focuses on a process-oriented approach, which

shifted away from the traditional approach toward organization that emphasized

structures (e.g., roles, positions, or controls) (Gioia & Mehra, 1996).  Such process

thinking "signifies movement in the sense of flow" (Bakken & Hernes, 2006, p.

1600), which draws attention to the contrast between continuity and discontinuity,

between consistency and change, between entity and flow.  As Taylor and Robichaud

(2004) interpreted, Weick's approach on organizing suggests that organizations come

into being through a continued cycles of interlocking behaviors among organizational

members. What is out there in organizations is what members transform and make it

recognizable through organizing.

Organizing bears a close link with sensemaking.  To explain the close ties,

Weick (2001) argued that the recipe for sensemaking (i.e., How can I know what I

think until I see what I say) can be read as a recipe for organizing as well (p. 97).

When applied on organizing, this recipe indicates the following acts.  When some

unexpected disruption happens, individuals enact the environment by assigning

meaning to information inputs, selecting a reasonable response from different courses

of action, and retaining some meaning from what they have enacted for future events. Organizing and sensemaking rely on one another. Weick concluded that "sense makes organizing possible. And organizing makes sense possible" (p. 97). Weick's articulation suggests that the sensemaking process also discloses the organizing process. Weick et al. (2005) explicitly stated: "To focus on sensemaking is to portray organizing as the experience of being thrown into an ongoing, unknown, unpredictable streaming of experience in search of answers to the question, 'what's the story?'" (p. 410). Sensemaking properties in fact involve the key component processes in organizing, which will be further explained later in this chapter.

For individuals to process and reduce equivocal information, communication resides in the cores of organizing as well as sensemaking (Weick, et al., 2005, p. 413). Gioia, Thomas, Clark, and Chittipeddi (1994) articulated that "organizing itself is embodied in written and spoken texts" (p. 365). Organizing relies on communication cycles that consist of interactive exchanges among members, allowing them to sort out equivocal information. First, a situation is talked into existence, which prompts members to apply rules or scripts in order to assess the extent of equivocality. Then organizational members engage in cycles of interactive exchanges to process as well as reduce equivocal information. The communication cycles enable members to process and interpret information as well make adjustment based on responses to the interpretations. Patterns of organizing are located in the interactive exchanges and in the rules, language, or texts of those activities (Taylor & Van Every, 2000, p. 58). The more equivocal a situation is, the fewer rules are applied due to the uncertainty about what the situation means, vice versa. The higher

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the ambiguity in a situation, the more communication cycles are needed to understand and produce meaning for the situation.

To clearly delineate the processes involved in organizing, Weick (1969, 1979, 1983, 1988, 2001) conceptualized three key component processes: enactment, selection, and retention. Knowledge gained through retention provides feedback loops to both enactment and selection. These three processes explain how individuals deal with an equivocal environment. Weick et al. (2005) stated that the specific activities of sensemaking fit well into this general sequence of organizing (p. 414). The following part thus discusses each of the three major processes in organizing and how each process incorporates neatly into the sensemaking properties.

*Sequence of Organizing*

*Enactment*. Weick (1988) succinctly stated that "enactment is used to preserve the central point that when people act, they bring events and structure into existence and set them in motion" (p. 306). This term represents the active process by which organizational members construct or recreate the environment or a situation by attributing meaning to information inputs that they choose to attend to (Weick, 2001).

The concept of enactment reconceptualizes the link between action and its consequences (Gioia, 2006, p. 1715). Owing to this concept, the way we think about and treat the environment has also changed. The notion of enacted environment disputes the conventional idea that the environment is out there, awaiting to be objectively assessed. Rather, according to Weick (2001), environment is a social invention. Individuals impose meanings upon the environment, and they are the

"action generators" (Starbuck, 1983, p. 91) or "authors of our situation" (Gioia, p. 1715). An essential point underlying the concept of enactment is that individuals by acting alone or collectively produce what they confront. This notion of self-construed environment suggests an active role for organizational members who are indispensably part of the information data they feel equivocal.

During the process of enactment, organizational members become mindful of any anomalies in the environment and start to evaluate the level of information equivocality based on organizational rules and scripts (Magala, 1997). Certain information inputs in exclusion to others are bracketed to be made sensible, which forms the basis of possible responses to deal with the equivocal environment. The enacted environment creates opportunities as well as threats for organizational members because the invention reflects their bias. This concept of enactment focuses on the role of individuals as agents in producing the situations with which they have to cope. Adaptation to the environment thus becomes adapting to the consequences of one's own prior actions that produced that environment (Gioia, 2006, p. 1716).

Enactment and retention, another process in organizing, are closely related. As Weick (2001) put it, doing produces knowing and is informed by prior knowing (p. 176). Knowledge kept during the retention process provides a feedback loop to enactment. How organizational members impose meanings upon the environment is conditioned on their prior history, experience, or interaction with the environment. What members have learned previously serve as a guide on what information to attend to and carve out from the environment.

Taking an enacting lens to examine the patterned activities in organizations also implies the important role that managers play in shaping the environment with which the organization as a whole confronts. Managers become creators or proactors, not adaptors or reactors, of their environment (Colville, Waterman, & Weick, 1999). By providing plausible accounts and stories, management affects the information extraction and interpretation by employees. In other words, managers act as sensemaker and sensegiver, making something meaningful for employees to interpret. Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991), for example, found that university presidents in their study provided their stakeholders a sense of urgency and importance to their organizational cultures. Murphy's (2001) study on flight attendants found that management used various training, policies, and stories to create an environment that stresses flight attendants' roles privileging accommodation over authority and reassurance over safety.

*Linking enactment with sensemaking properties*. As described in the previous section, during enactment individuals as active agents constantly produce the contexts and situations with which they have to confront. Such production represents a proactive way to place into the ongoing circumstances, which fit neatly into a key goal of sensemaking to acquire a sense of order in an equivocal environment. The goal of reducing equivocality and instilling order in the environment embodied in both sensemaking and organizing is reflected by the following remark by Weick et al. (2005): "A central theme in both organizing and sensemaking is that people organize to make sense of equivocal inputs and enact this sense back into the world to make that world more orderly" (p. 410).

The process of enactment in organizing involves the sensemaking properties of enacting sensible environment, plausibility, and extraction of cues (Weick, et al., 2005, p. 414). As Weick (2001) pointed out, "the enacted environment is as much an outcome of sensemaking stored in retention, as it is an input to enactment and selection" (p. 305) in organizing. When individuals try to provide plausible materials that will then be sensed in sensemaking, this activity reflects a core dimension in the enactment process of organizing. Individuals create a plausible environment with which they need to cope. Studies (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1996; Mills, 2003; O'Connell & Mills, 2003) have found that creating an acceptable, credible, and plausible account or story is crucial for top management and media to act as sensegivers.

The sensemaking activities of noticing and bracketing are triggered by recognizing discrepancies and equivocality in ongoing activities or projects. What organizational members notice is the salient information, such as unexpected interruption, extreme information, unpleasant outcomes, or sudden deviation from routines. A situation is then brought to existence by members who start to notice the abnormities within the situation and to categorize the situation for common exchange with others. This self-created situation becomes the environment or context that these members have to deal with to restore a sense of continuity into their ongoing projects, which also reflects the key activities of enactment during organizing.

*Selection*. The process of selection yields an answer to the question: What's the story here? (Weick, 2001, p. 237). The concept of selection focuses on the retrospective interpretation of enacted cues (Weick, p. 238). An answer is obtained by sorting through cues made salient during enactment, labeling them, elaborating

them, connecting them with past experience or actions, and choosing a plausible response good enough to resume the current activities. The interpretation selected during this process then becomes an environment within which individuals need to make decisions and act.

The cues extracted and the categories labeled during enactment constitute crude data that may result in multiplicity of meanings (Weick, 2001). Rules and scripts are then adopted to filter the crude data. If the extracted data are too ambiguous, individuals need to revise or invent conceptual schemes that can be applied to the highly equivocal data (Weick & Daft, 1984). Individuals engage in cycles of communication acts (e.g., talks or sharing stories) to reinforce, modify, or recreate mental models that allow them to reduce ambiguities and to make a reasonable response to the situation. Selection involves a key process— interpretation, reflecting the process of translating extracted cues or events, developing models for understanding, and brining out meaning (Weick & Daft, 1984, p. 286). Each interpretation suggests certain response toward the enacted environment (Magala, 1997, p. 326). The concept of selection thus stresses the active role of individuals as editors of information data, "editing, pruning, winnowing" (Weick, 2001, p. 237).

The feedback loop from retention to selection has an influence on the selection process. While processing equivocal inputs from the environment, individuals draw reference from organizational knowledge and intelligence stored previously to guide their interpretation of information as well as their choice of a sensible response toward the environment (Kreps, 2009, p. 351). In other words,

retained knowledge confines how organizational members determine which interpretations to be applied to the equivocal data and which actions to take thereafter.

*Linking selection with sensemaking properties.* When confronted with multiplicity of meanings, "the number of possible meanings gets reduced in the organizing process of selection" (Weick, et al., 2005, p. 414). Reducing the equivocal meanings during the selection process in organizing involves particularly a series of activities including looking retrospectively, examining mental models, and articulating as well as exchanging senses with others (Weick, et al., p. 414). These activities included in the selection process of organizing correspond closely with an essential goal of sensemaking (i.e., resolving equivocality) and with some sensemaking activities (i.e., retrospection and social interaction).

A key goal of organizational sensemaking is to allow organizational members to reduce the number of "might occur" (Weick, 1995, p. 27). Members have problems moving forward because of too many equivocal meanings, thus they feel confused about which action to take to cope with the current situation. Linking the extracted goals with past experience and drawing reference from rules help members to come up with a manageable range of meanings reasonable enough to resume ongoing projects.

Social interaction plays a crucial role for members to reduce equivocality. Organizational members differ in drawing cues and allocating attention to varying parts of past experience, which result in different readings of the same events. Through interaction with others, members are able to share, bargain, negotiate, and settle on meanings conducive to coordinated actions. By interacting with fellow

members, organizational members are able to notice the common ground as well as differences in their interpretations of a situation. This recognition enables members to view their interpretations in the context of the shared interpretations and consequences of adopting these interpretations. As Weick (1995) pointed out, meanings survive as a result of voting (p. 6). Interactions with others bring to light the organizational rules, values, identities, and priorities that help members clarify and prioritize meanings, thus reducing equivocality.

*Retention.* During the process of retention "meanings of enactment, selected for their fit with previous interpretations, are preserved as organizational memory" (Weick, 2001, p. 305). Particularly, information about the ways organizational members have responded to different situations is gathered and stored. Various rules and communication cycles are evaluated for their utility to cope with similar situations in the future. After narrowing the range of possible responses, some tend to be more useful or practical than others (Kreps, 2009, p. 351). These preferred responses are retained in the form of standards and routines. A repertoire of rules is thus developed as a type of organizational knowledge or intelligence to guide actions. For management, such knowledge provides cause maps and sources of strategies; whereas for individuals, the retained knowledge helps maintain identities and the flow of continuities.

Organizational learning occurs in the retention process (Weick, 2001). This learning process takes place when organizational members attend to some of what was previously ignored and overlook some of what was previously noticed (Weick & Westley, 1996). What members retain is meaningful results of a process where

meanings are imposed upon an equivocal situation and plausible accounts as well as responses are induced to respond to the situation. The responses chosen during the selection process is still provisional and tentative. The retention process solidifies the situational, plausible knowledge by melting it with past experience and by connecting it with significant identities. In other words, individuals during the retention process constantly draw reference from enactment and selection via feedback loops to update their repertoire about information inputs and response strategies (Kreps, 2009, p. 351).

*Linking retention with sensemaking properties.* Interpretations and responses developed during the selection process become solidified when they are retained as knowledge. Individuals assess the utility of these interpretations and responses based on how plausible they are, how closely they are related to significant identities, and on how well they fit into past experience (Weick et al., 2005, p. 414). The process of retention thus involves two sensemaking properties, identity construction and plausibility.

Plausibility functions as the dominant criterion that determines what gets stored as knowledge (Weick, 2001, p. 305). Retention is critical for sensemaking because it specifies plausible maps that provide a sense of the situation. Through the guidance of the stored knowledge, individuals are hence able to create a meaningful environment that serves as an input to subsequent sensemaking.

Sensemaking is instigated to a large extent by discrepancies in identities (e.g., who I think I am), which in return disrupts the ongoing flow of activities. Such disruption prompts individuals to engage in sensemaking activities to reduce

equivocality resulting from discordant identities and to resume ongoing organized actions. The retained interpretations and responses therefore need to be consistent with maintaining and reinforcing the identities significant to organizational members.

The previous discussion of sensemaking, occasions for sensemaking, properties of sensemaking, and organizing as sensemaking suggests that individuals organize to make sense of equivocal information inputs and enact this sense back into the environment to make that environment more orderly. Interruptions (e.g., leadership change) to an ongoing flow create breaks in organizational routines, thus triggering moments for sensemaking. A series of sensemaking activities is categorized into seven properties by Weick (1995), which serves as analytic tools to analyze organizational events and outcomes. Viewed as a "significant process of organizing" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 409), the sequence of activities embedded in the sensemaking properties also unfolds three key processes in organizing: enactment, selection, and retention.

Weick et al. (2005) pointed out that the current empirical work on sensemaking is still "modest" (p. 417). They suggested more empirical studies that apply the sensemaking framework be conducted to enrich our understanding of a largely taken-for-granted social process centering on communication and activity. Following this call, this study adopted the sensemaking framework (Weick, 1995, 2001) to explore how organizational members make sense in multinational organizations in China. The following research question was thus proposed:

**RQ1:** How do organizational members make sense of change in multinational organizations in China?

This research question focused on how organizational members make meaning of change in multinational organizations in China. Specifically, this research question addressed three key questions in the sensemaking process as suggested by Weick et al. (2005): 1) how does something come to be an event for organizational members during change? 2) what does an event mean? 3) now what I do? The first question examines how organizational members notices anomalies during change and what activates sensemaking. The second question deals with enactment and selection processes in organizing. When individuals recognize discrepancies during change and ask "what's the story here?" their question brings an event into being, thus enacting the environment. In developing a sense for change, organizational members also face the challenge of reducing the number of possible meanings. The process of narrowing down multiple meanings embodies the selection process in organizing. The last question addresses the retention process in organizing. Specifically, how the plausible stories of change developed during the selection process are retained for further action and interpretation. Answers to address these three core questions in the sensemaking process (i.e., organizing process) reveal how organizational members in multinational organizations in China make sense during change.

Linking Public Relations and Sensemaking in Organizational Change

Although the magnitude and outcomes of change differ, organizational change represents to some extent a disruption or shock. Such shock or disruption in the organizational system creates ambiguity, uncertainty, and interruption of the flow of work. The once taken-for-granted organizational practices and assumptions are

drawn into question (Weick, 1995). A common recognition in sensemaking is that incongruous events constitute the moments for building sensible, reasonable, and plausible explanations (Jablin & Kramer, 1998; Mandler, 1984; Starbuck & Milliken, 1988). Sensemaking thus provides a means for organizational members to restore a sense of stability to their organizational life (Weick, 1995).

As change agents, organizational members' understanding of a change and subsequent actions determines to a large extent if the change will be successful (Dutton & Duncan, 1987). Examining the sensemaking process during organizational change can enrich our understanding of the following aspects: how organizational members interpret and make meaning of changes around them, how they adjust their thinking and actions accordingly, how their sensemaking is influenced by some factors such as organizational culture and societal culture, and how certain choices hold more weight than others at specific points in time.

Acquiring understanding of organizational events relies on the meanings assigned to the event (Daft & Weick, 1984). Meanings developed for an event are affected by how organizational members attend to, select, and interpret information inputs. How organizational members deal with information is in return dependent on the ways the information is communicated.

Communication functions as a powerful organizing force that affects how organizational members respond to change (Bartunek & Louis, 1988; Stroh, 1999). Differences exist in how the individual reconstructs an appropriate set of sense to bridge the cognitive gap created by change. Communication programs aimed at facilitating sensemaking during organizational change will not be effective unless the

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programs take into account how organizational members define a gap and what they need to resolve the gap. This recognition suggests a crucial role that public relations can play during organizational change. Organizational members constitute strategic publics in organizations (J. Grunig & White, 1992), whose behavior can constrain or help organizations achieve their goals. Based on research on sensemaking and public relations, this study argues that when public relations is managed strategically during change, it helps organizational members understand change through the sensemaking process and by bringing the voices of organizational members into management decision making. The following sections explain the theoretical rationales for this proposition.

This section on public relations is organized as follows. First, I define what the public relations function is. Next, I proceed to elaborate what strategic public relations entails based on a management perspective developed by public relations scholar J. Grunig and his colleagues. To illustrate what strategic management is in public relations, I start by reviewing how strategic management is traditionally defined, followed by a review of definitions of organizational effectiveness. Then, I briefly describe the Excellence study conducted by J. Grunig and his colleagues, which laid the foundation for conceptualizing how public relations contributes to organizational effectiveness and how public relations can be managed strategically to achieve excellence. Following the summary of the Excellence study, I examine how organizational effectiveness has been traditionally defined and how it is defined from a public relations perspective. Next, I explain the situational theory of publics, which is useful to identify strategic publics when managing public relations strategically.

Then, I present the model of strategic management identified by J. Grunig and his colleagues followed by the four dimensions in public relations that can be used to examine public relations practice.

Since organizational members constitute the internal publics for organizations, the last part addresses the internal communication aspect in public relations. A brief review on the history of internal communication is provided first. Employee publics are defined, and I also explain the rationale of integrating internal communication into the public relations function instead of it being subsumed under human resources department or other management functions. Next, I discuss current research on internal communication in the field of public relations and research on internal communication and organizational change. Finally I articulate the research gap in internal communication and why it is necessary to explore how public relations manages internal communication and how public relations influences the sensemaking process during organizational change.

*Defining Public Relations*

Numerous definitions of public relations exist. Those definitions derive from different perspectives, such as social influence (Childs, 1940), image building (Harrington, 1959), persuasion (Bernays, 1955; Stephenson, 1960), communication process (J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984), communication outcome (e.g., Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2002), and so on.

This study adopts the definition provided by J. Grunig and Hunt (1984), who defined public relations as "the management of communication between an organization and its publics" (p. 6). An organization communicates through this

management function with its publics and various categories of stakeholders, such as consumers, government agencies, donors, investors, the media, employees, organizations members, and activist groups. The definition offered by J. Grunig and Hunt highlights the interactive process of communication. Such focus on process is congruent with a primary purpose of this study, which was to explore how public relations manages communication and influences sensemaking during organizational change.

*Defining Strategic Management*

The concept of strategic management comes from business management. The field of strategic management gained its popularity and influence through the publications of three books in the 1960s (Bowman, 1990). These three books included Chandeler's (1965) historical study of how executives' strategic ideas changed the direction of four major corporations, the Harvard textbook (Learned, Christensen, Andrews, & Guth, 1965) on business policy, and Ansoff's (1965) book on the concept of strategy and the business of strategy formulation.

Pearce and Robinson (1982) defined strategic management as balancing the internal activities with strategies for dealing with external factors. According to Pearce and Robinson, mission and environment are critical. Similarly, Steiner, Miner, and Gray (1982) viewed strategic management as balancing the mission of the organization (i.e., what it is, what it wants to be, and what it wants to do) with what the environment will allow or encourage it to do.

Buchholz, Evans, and Wagley (1989) said that strategic management includes "the set of managerial decisions and actions that determines the long-run performance

of the corporation" (p. 38). In particular, strategic management includes stages such as strategy formulation, strategy implementation, as well as evaluation and control. Mintzberg (1994) defined strategic as "an adjective to mean relatively consequential" (p. 27). Taking a postmodern perspective, some scholars (e.g., Knight, 1992; Morgan, 1991) viewed strategic management as a subjective process in which the participants from different management functions (e.g., marketing, finance, human resources, or public relations) assert their disciplinary identities.

After reviewing relevant literature in strategic management, public relations scholars J. Grunig and Repper (1992) defined the term *manage* as "thinking ahead or planning rather than as manipulation and control" (p. 123). A strategy is "an approach, design, scheme, or system" (J. Grunig & Repper, p. 123). Strategic management in public relations occurs at both program and organizational levels (J. Grunig, 1992).

J. Grunig and Repper (1992) viewed strategic management symmetrically. Symmetrical management means that it is in the strategic interest of organizations to modify their behavior as well as to try to change the behavior of environmental stakeholders. In some cases, the critical publics of an organization do not yet have the power to constrain the negative influence from the organization. When this imbalance of power occurs, J. Grunig and Repper argued that organization should feel a moral obligation to modify the behavior that produces these negative consequences.

Having defined strategic management, I then briefly explain the IABC (International Association of Business Communication) Excellence study that contributes to building the framework of strategic management in public relations.

This Excellence study first conceptualized factors and characteristics contributing to public relations effectiveness. Then the Excellence team conducted empirical tests in 327 organizations across several countries including the Unites States, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

*An Overview of the IABC Excellence Study*

Public relations professionals and researchers have been searching to address some fundamental questions, such as when and why public relations practices are effective, and how organizations benefit from effective public relations (J. Grunig, 1992). Answers to these questions help improve public relations practice, enrich the academic discipline, and elevate public relations to a strategic position in organizations. In 1989 the IABC Foundation launched a decade-long research project led by J. Grunig and his colleagues (Dozier, L. Grunig, J. Grunig, 1995; J. Grunig, 1992; L. Grunig, J. Grunig, & Dozier, 2002). The project, labeled the Excellence project, sought to find out "how, why, and to what extent communication affects the achievement of organizational objectives" (J. Grunig, 1992, p. 2). The IABC Foundation hoped this Excellence project would reveal not only the value that public relations does add to an organization but also to explain why it has value and how to organize the communication function to provide such value.

The Excellence theorists (e.g., Dozier et al., 1995; J. Grunig, 1992; L. Grunig et al., 2002) then developed the "Effectiveness Question" and the "Excellence Question" from the original research question asked by IABC. The Effectiveness Question asks: how does public relations make an organization more effective, and how much is that contribution worth economically? The Excellence Question probes:

what are the characteristics of a public relations function that are most likely to make an organization effective?

To establish a theoretical framework to address these two sets of research questions, the Excellence team consulted literature in public relations, communication, management, organizational sociology, organizational psychology, social and cognitive psychology, anthropology, feminist studies, political science, operations research, and culture. Results of this exhaustive review identified characteristics that would explain how excellent public relations contributes to organizational effectiveness, the value of individual public relations programs and the overall value of public relations functions to an organization (Ehling, 1992; L. Grunig , J. Grunig, & Ehling, 1992).

Guided by the findings of the literature review, the Excellence team made the following conclusions. First, organizations are effective when they achieve their goals. Second, public relations has value to an organization when it helps the organization adapt and reconcile its goals with its strategic publics, which result in harmonious relationships with its strategic constituencies in the environment (J. Grunig, 1992; J. Grunig & Repper, 1992; L. Grunig et al., 1992).

Based on the results of quantitative and qualitative studies, the Excellence team identified 14 characteristics of excellent public relations programs. Many studies have provided consistent support for the Excellence study across cultures, such as Slovenia (Vercic et al., 1996), Thailand (Ekachai & Komolsevin, 1996), South Korea (Kim & Hon, 1998; Rhee, 1999, 2002), Belgium (Gorpa & Pauwels, 2007), and China (Hung, 2002; Ni, 2006).

These 14 Excellence characteristics are categorized at program, departmental, and organizational level (L. Grunig et al., 2002, p. 9-16).  The Excellence characteristics related to the purpose of this study include the following.  First, at the program level, communication programs should be developed for strategic publics and managed strategically.  Second, the two-way symmetrical model of public relations should be applied.  Third, at the organizational level, the symmetrical system of internal communication is applied (L. Grunig et al., 2002).

L. Grunig et al. (2002) asserted that the core attributes of excellent public relations involve identifying the publics that are most likely to limit or enhance an organization's autonomy and applying symmetrical communication to build stable, open, and trusting relationships with the strategic publics (p. 11).  These three characteristics thus constitute the core elements of strategic management in public relations.  A value of public relations lies in contributing to organizational strategic management, which ultimately increase organizational effectiveness (L. Grunig et al., 2002).  It is thus necessary to specify what organizational effectiveness is meant to Excellence scholars.

In the next section, I first discuss how the Excellence theorists (L. Grunig et al., 2002) conceptualized the contribution that public relations can make to organizational effectiveness.  Then, I present the four dimensions in public relations developed by J. Grunig and his colleague.  Next, I explain the model of strategic management in public relations developed by the Excellence theorists.

*Public Relations & Organizational Effectiveness*

It is important to understand what constitutes organizational effectiveness prior to discussing how public relations contributes to organizational effectiveness. The concept of effectiveness is fundamental to organization theories (Hage, 1980; Pfeffer, 1977). Scholars from different disciplines generate different meanings for the concept. Excellence theorists (L. Grunig, et al., 1992 identified four main schools of thought on effectiveness based on literature from organizational sociology and business management. These four general perspectives include: systems, competing values, strategic constituencies, and goal attainment.

First from the systems perspective, environment is defined as the source of system maintenance, diversity, and variety (Buckly, 1967; Hall & Fagen, 1956; Pondy & Mitroff, 1979; Scott, 1987). Organizations need the environment for resources. Environment in turn also needs organizations for products and services. Subsystems within the organizations are also interrelated. Changes in a subsystem may lead to changes of the organization as a whole. Interdependency thus exists between organizations and their environment and between the subsystems within the organizations.

Applying the systems perspective, Angelopulo (1990) described organizational effectiveness as the ability to obtain desired responses from the environment. Stated simply, organizations achieve effectiveness when they successfully acquire resources from the environment to achieve their goals. But the systems approach is adequate only in addressing the boundary of the environment and

focuses predominantly on the goal of survival. It is thus useful to look beyond the systems perspective (L. Grunig et al., 2002)

The goal attainment perspective represents the second approach in organizational effectiveness, which asserts that effective organizations accomplish their goals (Robbins, 1990). This approach is useful when goals are clear, time bound, and measurable. Organizations, however, sometimes have multiple, even conflicting goals (Cameron, 1984). Particularly from a power-control perspective, those who have power to make decisions may prioritize their personal over organizational, goals (L. Grunig, J. Grunig, & Ehling, 1992). The goal attainment perspective is limited in explaining situations where organizations have multiple goals and where decision makers may give more weight to their personal interests instead of organizational goals.

The third approach in organizational effectiveness is the competing-values perspective, which provides an integrating bridge between strategic constituencies and goals (Hage 1980; Quinn & Hall, 1983). This perspective assumes that organizations need to incorporate the values of strategic constituencies into their organizational goals. Different organizations with different strategic constituencies have different goals, and thus their effectiveness is defined differently (J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 2000). Robbins (1990) noted that multiple criteria for effectiveness and conflicting interests underlie the effort to evaluate the success or ineffectiveness of an organization.

The strategic-constituencies perspective represents the fourth main approach on organizational effectiveness. Similar to the systems perspective, this perspective

focuses on interdependencies within an organization as well as between an organization and its environment.  Particularly, it focuses on environment factors that are most likely to threaten an organization (Freeman, 1984).  This perspective renders meaning to the environment by defining which groups are most critical to the organization in terms of their support or threat.  Such segmentation of environment indicates value of public relations in identifying publics that are most likely to constrain or support an organization.

The above four general perspectives on organizational effectiveness help explain why some organizations are successful and why some are considered unsuccessful.  All four approaches to effectiveness shed insights on the value of public relations, such as helping organizations enact the environment by identifying strategic publics and boundary spanning.

By integrating the four main perspectives (i.e., systems theory, competing values, goal attainment, and strategic constituencies) of organizational effectiveness, the Excellence theorists (L. Grunig et al., 2002) defined an effective organization as one that "balances its goals with the expectations of its strategic constituencies" (p. 96).  The value of public relations thus resides in identifying strategic publics and developing relationships with them (L. Grunig et al., p. 97).

In sum, public relations contributes to organizational effectiveness by fostering mutual understanding through dialogue, helping an organization building long-term quality relationships with its strategic publics, and helping reconcile the interest of the organization with that of its strategic publics (L. Grunig et al., 2002).  At the organizational level, public relations achieves strategic management through

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bringing in the voices of the strategic publics into management decision making. At the program level, public relations engages in strategic management through identifying publics critical to an organization's survival and then through developing appropriate programs to communicate with these publics (J. Grunig & White, 1992).

*Dimensions in Public Relations Practice*

J. Grunig and his colleagues (J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984; J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1992; L. Grunig et al., 2002) conceptualized four dimensions that define the public relations models based on previous research on the four models of public relations. These dimensions help advance the public relations discipline because they identify the theoretical dimensions underlying the typology. These four theoretical dimensions include the following: symmetry and asymmetry, one-way or two-way, mediated or interpersonal forms of communication, and the ethics. Prior to specifying these four dimensions, I first discuss the four models of public relations that these dimensions are built upon.

J. Grunig and his colleagues (J. Grunig, 1976; J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984; J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1992) identified four models to explain how communication is conducted with publics. The press agentry model describes propagandistic public relations that seeks media attention in any way possible. Public relations practitioners practicing the public information model disseminate information that is generally accurate about the organization but do not volunteer negative information (J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1992). Both the press agentry and the public information models represent one-way approaches to public relations.

One-way communication becomes two-way when practitioners use scientific research to seek information from and give information to publics (J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1992).  Two-way models of public relations include the two-way asymmetrical and the two-way symmetrical models.

In the two-way asymmetrical model, practitioners conduct scientific research to determine how to persuade publics to behave in the way the organization desires.  Communication turns two-way when information not only is being disseminated from the organization, but also is being collected by the organization in the forms of research on the habits, attitudes, and values of various publics (J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984).  An important premise of this model states that the organization knows the best (J. Grunig 1989, p. 32).  In this model, public relations is used to help organizations to legitimately shape public thoughts, values, and behaviors (Karlberg, 1996).

In contrast, the two-way symmetrical model makes use of research and other forms of two-way communication (e.g., dialogue) to facilitate mutual understanding and communication rather than identify messages most likely to motivate or persuade publics.  Public relations is essentially seeking mutual changes in the idea, attitudes, and behaviors of both the organization and its publics (L. Grunig et al., 2002).  Studies have found empirical support for the existence of the two-way symmetrical model across cultures (e.g., J. Grunig, 2000; L. Grunig, 1992, 1993; Peterson, 2003; Sriramesh, Lyra, & Huang, 1995; Rhee, 2002; Sriramesh, Kim, & Takasaki, 1999; Gorpa, 2007).

At an earlier stage of their model conceptualization, J. Grunig and Hunt (1984) developed a contingency approach. They asserted that the different models of public relations could each be effective contingent upon organizational structure and the nature of its environment. Later on, J.Grunig and his colleagues (e.g., J. Grunig 1989; J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1989, 1992) dropped this contingency approach. They argued that "the two-way symmetrical model or a combination of the two-way symmetrical and two way asymmetrical models that we then called the mixed-motive model could almost always increase the contribution of public relations to organizational effectiveness" (L. Grunig et al., 2002, p. 309).

J. Grunig and L. Grunig (1992) claimed that Murphy's (1991) mixed-motive model accurately describes the two-way symmetrical model. In a mixed motive model that is based on game theory, an organization tries to satisfy its own interests while at the same time helping publics satisfy their interests. Murphy seems to equate the symmetrical model with games of pure cooperation (L. Grunig et al., 2002). J. Grunig and L. Grunig argued that the two-way symmetrical model is never conceptualized as a pure cooperation or complete accommodation of the interests of publics. Rather, the two-way symmetrical model represents a way of balancing the organization's and the public's interest.

The four models identified by J. Grunig and his colleagues (J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1992; J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984) describe how organizations communicate with their publics. Based on the research on these four models and the Excellence study, J. Grunig and his colleagues (L. Grunig, et al., 2002) went further to develop four theoretical dimensions that together define these models. As L. Grunig et al.

explained, developing these four dimensions is necessary to measure the theoretical dimensions underlying the models.

The first dimension of symmetry versus asymmetry indicates the extent to which collaboration and advocacy describe public relations practices. Purely advocating for either the interest of an organization or that of the publics represents asymmetrical public relations in that the interest of another party is sacrificed. The second dimension, one-way versus two-way, indicates the direction of communication. When an organization conducts publics relations one way, the organization oftentimes seeks to only disseminate information to its publics without seeking information from the publics.

The third dimension of public relations involves the use of mediated or interpersonal forms of communication. Mediated communication describes the application of various media (e.g., internet) to give information to publics. Mediated communication is usually associated with one-way models (e.g., public information model). Interpersonal forms of communication were identified the research that J. Grunig and his colleagues (J. Grunig, L. Grunig, Sriramesh, Huang, & Lyra, 1995) conducted to see how public relations is practiced across culture. When applying interpersonal communication, public relations practitioners often use interpersonal relationships and connections to build trust and facilitate relationship building. Interpersonal communication could be symmetrical as well as asymmetrical. The fourth dimension of public relations is ethics, the extent to which public relations is practiced ethically. In generally, the symmetrical model is inherently ethical because it helps give empower publics and foster mutual understanding (L. Grunig & J.

Grunig, 1992).  Other models, such as public information model, can be ethical

depending on the rules applied to ensure ethical practice (J. Grunig & L. Grunig,

1996).

Based on the four dimensions, the models of public relations can be

categorized along these theoretical dimensions.  For instance, two-way asymmetrical

model can be characterized as two-way and asymmetrical.  This model can practice

either ethically or unethically and through either interpersonal or mediated

communication.  Among these four models, two-way symmetrical model is preferred

when public relations seeks to maximize its contribution to organizational

effectiveness.

Two-way symmetrical communication encourages organizational members to

participate in the decision-making process and incorporates their concerns into

decisions (J. Grunig & Theus, 1986).  This mode of communication underlines a

symmetrical philosophy to balance the interests between an organization and its

publics.  Symmetrical public relations relies on negotiating the interpretations of truth

and on mutual values rather than partisan values (J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1992, p. 26).

Practitioners can serve as what Holtzhausen (2000) called in-house activists,

championing the interests of employees who are less powerful.  Involving strategic

publics into decision making during organizational change helps promote

participatory planning.  When organizational members feel they have opportunity to

participate in the change process, positive outcomes (e.g., increased clarity about

change, less resistance) tend to emerge (McCaffrey, Faerman, & Hart, 1995).

Leana and Van Buren (1999) noted that individuals are more likely to engage in collective actions, such as change implementation, when there is support, trust, or organizational identification. Given its nature, two-way symmetrical communication is characterized by mutual trust and understanding.

Organizations can effectively reduce uncertainty and fear among members by communicating with employees symmetrically and thus reaching a shared understanding about change (e.g., Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999; Miller, Johnson, & Grau, 1994; Wanberg & Banas, 2000). This shared understanding is a negotiated perception that integrates the goals of change desired by the organization with the concerns and interests of organizational members. Involvement about change is likely to be evoked among organizational members as a result of the shared understanding during organizational change. Excellence theorists (L. Grunig et al., 2002) found that publics tend to be satisfied with organizational decisions when a shared understanding is achieved through communication despite that the decisions sometimes had negative consequences on them.

Two-way symmetrical communication helps an organization to strive for other excellence attributes, such as strategic program management, cultivating a participative organizational culture, and contributing to the overall organizational strategic management. More importantly, two-way symmetrical communication is conducive for an organization to establish a trusting relationship with its strategic publics. The value of public relations is demonstrated through its contribution in relationship building and strategic management.

Two-way symmetrical communication is deemed by the Excellence theorists (L. Grunig et al., 2002) as the most effective way to communicate with an organization's publics. Strategic management in public relations provides a program guideline that involves developing appropriate communication programs targeted at the organization's strategic publics and are developed and evaluated by proper standards. The next section discusses a model strategic public relations management at program level.

*Strategic Management Model*

As a management function, public relations brings a different set of problems and solutions into organizational strategic management, which is not likely to be fully recognized by other management functions (J. Grunig & White, 1992). Organizations are interpretative systems (Daft & Weick, 1984). Management must obtain and interpret information about external environments that affect their organizations (Dutton & Duncan, 1987; Dutton & Ottensmeyer, 1987). A monitoring mechanism needs to be established to detect trends, events, or other technical or social developments relevant to organizational sustenance (Heath, 1994; Daft & Weick, 1984). Public relations can thus help interpret environments by recognizing the social and political aspects that may enhance or constrain organizational goal achievement (Vercic & J. Grunig, 1995).

Organizational survival relies on adaptation to the environment. Adaptation, in turn, requires developing a monitoring and feedback mechanism for systematic assessment of the environment. Environment is a construction built from the flow of information into the organization (Duncan, 1972; Heath, 1994). It is impossible and

impractical for organizations to respond to every piece of information flowing from the environment. Rather, organizations respond to a self-constructed subjective environment (Weick, 1969, 1979). Public relations therefore, when included in the dominant coalition, enables organizations to recognize aspects of information in the environment, which are unlikely to be recognize by other departments (L. Grunig et al., 2002). Unlike other management functions, public relations allows organizations to recognize their consequences of actions at different levels, such as the individual level (e.g., stakeholders), the collective level (e.g., strategic publics), and the societal level (e.g., social responsibility) (J. Grunig & Repper, 1992).

At the organizational level, the senior public relations executive should identify stakeholders, publics, and issues caused by the consequences of organizational actions and decisions. At the functional level, communication programs should be developed to target specific strategic publics identified at the organizational level. To be strategic, communication programs should be planned, managed by objectives, and evaluated based on appropriate criteria (J. Grunig & Repper, 1992).

J. Grunig and Repper (1992) developed a model of public relations strategic management at both the organizational and program level. At the organizational level, this model includes three stages: the stakeholder, publics, and issues stages. At the stakeholder stage, public relations practitioners conduct research to scan the environment and the behavior of the organization to identify the consequences on possible stakeholders. Ongoing communication with these stakeholders helps to establish a stable, long-term relationship conducive to conflict management.

At the second public stage, public relations managers segment active, passive, and latent publics from the nonpublics that may be present in the stakeholder stage. Publics emerge when stakeholders recognize the consequences of organizational actions and organize to deal with the problem. Theory of publics and the situational theory of publics are useful instruments to identify these publics. Active publics typically behave in a way that makes issues out of the consequences of organizational decisions.

At the last issue stage, publics make issues out of problems when they cannot stop the harmful consequences or secure beneficial consequences of organizational actions. Their individual or collective behavior can pose great threats to organizational goal achievement. Issues can then become crises when they are not handled properly. Communication at this stage is termed as issue management. Media plays an important role here in terms of creation and expansion of issues. Research needs to be conducted to segment publics and to develop communication programs with media as well as activists to try to resolve the issue through negotiation.

To manage public relations strategically at the program level, J. Grunig and Repper (1992) proposed the following stages. First, public relations should develop formal objectives for its communication program. Second, public relations develop formal programs to accomplish the objectives. Third, communication programs should be implemented according to the identified objectives. Lastly, the effectiveness of communication programs is evaluated in terms of meeting objectives

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and in reducing the conflict produced by the issues that brought about the program (J. Grunig & Repper, p. 124).

The model of strategic public relations management suggests the following implications to deal with organizational change. First, an organization needs to think through the consequences that the change will bring to different groups of organizational members. Second, communication practitioners should conduct research to segment publics based on the levels of problem recognition, involvement, and constraint recognition and find out the communication needs of active publics. Third, different communication programs should be developed to help active publics make sense of the transformational change based on their communication needs. Lastly, proper evaluation of the communication programs needs to be conducted to improve the effectiveness of communication.

Having discussed the model of strategic management in public relations, the following sections focus on a particular aspect in public relations—internal/employee communication. This study considers specifically the internal communication aspect in the public relations function since it seeks to explore how public relations communicates with organizational members while they make meaning of organizational change. It is thus necessary to address this specific aspect of the public relations function.

The subsequent discussions are structured as follows. I first summarize briefly the history of internal communication in organizations from the public relations perspective. Second, I discuss the conceptualization of employee publics. Third, the issue of which management function (e.g., human resources) should be in

charge of internal communication is addressed.  Fourth, I discuss two research areas on internal communication in the field of public relations relevant to the purpose of this study.  In particular, these two areas include a) internal communication and organizational culture and b) internal communication and organizational change.  Finally, I address the need of further research on internal communication in the field of public relations.

## Internal/Employee Communication

Internal or employee communication has traditionally developed its theories from the field of organizational communication.  To understand how internal communication has evolved, I will first discuss the contribution that research on organizational communication has made to internal communication.  Next, a brief history of internal communication will be illustrated.  Third, I will define publics and employee publics.  Fourth, I will explain which management function should manage internal communication.  Fifth, I will discuss current research on internal communication.  Finally, I will state the need for further study in the area of internal communication.

### *Brief History of Internal Communication Research*

Having discussed the academic origin of internal communication, this section will explain a brief practice history of internal communication research.  The function of internal communication has been labeled differently, such as employee relations, industrial relations, or corporate communication (Smith, 2005).

One of the earliest analyses on the history of internal communication practice was offered by Dover (1964).  Dover identified three eras of internal/employee

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communication: entertaining employees, informing employees, and persuading

employees. The era of entertaining employees was popular in the 1940s.

Communication with employees aimed at making employees feel happy and satisfied.

The second era of informing employees prevailed in the 1950s. Organizations used

communication primarily to disclose information favorable to the organizations.

Organizational publications, such as newsletters and memos, became the major media

of communicating with employees. The third era of persuading employees rose to

popularity in the 1960s. Persuasive techniques (e.g., framing, blaming, and spinning)

were favored by organizations in an attempt to gain employee compliance to perform

as organizations desire.

Dover's (1964) three eras of employee communication practice shared some

resemblance with the research traditions identified by Putnam and Cheney (1985).

According to Putnam and Cheney, research that focused on communication channels,

communication climate, superior-subordinate communication, and network analysis

was usually aimed at discovering ways to better assist organizations in accomplish

various goals. Communication is perceived as an instrument for organizations in the

course of pursuing objectives.

J. Grunig and Hunt (1984) argued that these three eras identified by Dover

(1964) were asymmetrical in nature in that they all served to change employees as

organizations wanted. Communication practices were not particularly concerned with

having the voices of employees heard by organizations. As the development of two-

way symmetrical communication (J. Grunig, 1976, 1984, 1989; J. Grunig & L.

Grunig 1989, 1992, 1996; J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984), J. Grunig and Hunt added a

fourth era to Dover's three eras of employee communication. The new era is characterized by open, symmetrical communication. Subsequent audit studies on internal communication (J. Grunig 1985, 1987; J. Grunig & Theus, 1986) did found high correlation between symmetrical communication and communication satisfaction. Recent studies (e.g., Caudron, 1995; Gerstner, 1994; Joinson, 1996; Petronio, 1999; Ward & Aronoff, 1995; Wright, 1995) revealed that it is important to foster trust, openness, credibility, and reciprocity with employees to establish a symmetrical internal communication system in an organization.

Brandon (1997) summarized three major phases of development in internal communication: industrial relations, realistic journalism, and marketing. The first phase, industrial relations, covered the time arrange before 1960s. Industrial relations mainly focused on improving the morale of employees in order to increase productivity. Journalism, the second phase, spanned from mid 1960s to 1980s. Communication practices from a journalistic approach aimed to deliver organizational news, particularly positive news, to employees. Starting from late 1980s, the third phase—marketing was primarily concerned with how to gain compliance from employees to implement organizational strategies. Persuasive techniques (e.g., positive issue framing) were favored by organizations to communicate with employees.

Brandon's (1997) categorization of development in internal communication echoed the three eras of development identified by Dover (1964). The phase of industrial relations from Brandon's categorization was similar to Dover's era of entertaining employees. The phase of journalism from Brandon's identification was

parallel to Dover's era of informing employees. The phase of marketing from

Brandon's categorization was similar to Dover's era of persuading employees.

*Employee Publics*

Internal/employee communication deals with communication with employees.

Many scholars (Freitag & Picherit-Duthler, 2004; J. Grunig, 1992; Jo & Shim, 2005;

Sriramesh, J. Grunig, & Dozier, 1996) have voiced caution against lumping

employees as one general group. L. Grunig (1982) found three types of employee

publics with different communication needs in her study of a university-based

research and development center. The information-seekers described a public that

relied more on oral media and craved news of both research and administrative

interest. The selective-information processors preferred publication and processed

information related to money and position. The third, nonselective information

processor also preferred written media and mainly processed information related to

his/her daily job.

Smith (2005) asserted that greater sensitivity is required to understand the

internal audiences of organizations. As organizations become increasingly complex,

so do employees. Smith argued that employees in modern organizations are

composed of diverse groups: front-line staff, supervisors/line managers, senior/middle

management, board/director, voluntary sector such as trustees, volunteers, and

members.

Applying the concept of strategic publics, J. Grunig and Repper (1992)

identified employees as strategic constituencies of an organization, whose actions can

constrain or enhance organizational goal achievement. From a language-centered

semiotic perspective, Botan and Soto (1998) defined internal publics as "self-actuated and interactive social entities with values and internal dynamics…as complex and important …as is message content" (p. 21).  Employees may perceive messages in different ways than organizations intend.  Organizational members construct meanings of various events.  Meanings, thus, do not reside in the messages sent.  Rather, employees create meanings through interaction.  According to Botan and Soto, public relations programs should replace sender-centered perspective with receiver-centered perspective.  Emphasis should then be placed on message interpretation.

The definition of employee publics provided by J. Grunig and his colleagues (J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984; J. Grunig & Repper, 1992) focuses more on organizational impact.  Botan and Soto's (1998) definition emphasized the process and outcome of social construction.  This current study focuses on meaning making and communication during organizational change.  Therefore, both perspectives are complementary in understanding the communication behavior of organizational members during change.

To integrate these two definitions, employee publics in this study will be defined as strategic constituencies who constantly produce meanings through interaction and whose actions may constrain or enhance organizational goal achievement.  Organizational members constitute a strategic public in the organization in that their behavior can facilitate or impede organizational goal achievement (J. Grunig, 1992; Hall, 1987).  Especially during organizational change, actions by organizational members determine to a large extent the effectiveness of

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change effort.  At the individual level, organizations need to mobilize members in terms of concrete actions taken in the direction of change.  At the macro organizational level, organizations seek to mobilize members rallying and propelling different segments in the organizations to adopt joint actions and to reach change goals (Huy, 1999).

*Integrating Internal Communication into the Public Relations Function*

Internal communication has usually been staffed by communication technicians with trainings in journalistic, business, marketing, or English (Emanuel & York, 1988; Lewton, 1991; Shatshat, 1980; Smith, 1991; Troy, 1989).  Redding and Tompkins (1988) lamented that the dominance of journalists in employee communication has affected the practice of internal communication.  This is because journalist training encouraged "a one-way, downward-oriented approach" (Redding & Tompkins, p. 14).

In a study of the role communication directors in 106 companies, Shatshat (1980) found that most communication directors were responsible for both internal as well as external communication.  Unfortunately, most of the directors engaged in journalistic, technician activities.  Smith (1991) mentioned that a 1989 survey of public relations practitioners reported that about 70% of employee communication programs reported to public relations.  Smith described General Motors' decision to house employee communication under public relations because human resources executives did not understand communication.

Similar to the pattern found in the 1980s, fairly recent studies yielded consistent patterns of placing internal communication under public relations function.

Ashford's (2001) study revealed that larger companies were more likely than smaller companies to place employee communication under public relations. Inglefield's (2002) survey reported that more than half of the participating organizations managed internal communication through public relations or corporate communications.

Smith (2005) observed that housing employee communication under public relations is a result of different management objectives between human resources and public relations. Human resources is mainly specialized in staff training, recruitment, staff retention, staff benefits, career development, labor contracts, and labor disputes. Public relations, instead, is particularly responsible for developing communication programs targeted at various constituencies of organizations. According to Smith, specialization of public relations determines that it is more capable than human resources department to manage employee communication.

J. Grunig and his colleagues (J. Grunig, 1992; J. Grunig & Repper, 1992; L. Grunig et al., 2002) have suggested that internal communication as well as other communication programs (e.g., community relations, investor relations, or marketing communication) be part of an integrated and managed communication function— public relations. Organizations must have an integrated communication function for public relations to be managed strategically and to contribute to the overall strategic management of the organization.

This organization of the public relations function is consistent with the open system perspective. When acting as closed systems, organizations would freely pursue their goals without constraint from their environment. In case of facing strong environmental inputs, organizations react on an ad hoc and nonprogrammed basis

(Argyris, 1964; Katz & Kahn, 1978).  Organizations, nevertheless, cannot afford to ignore environmental influences, for their survival relies on the exchange with the environment.  Changes in environment may pose threats to organizational survival and growth.  In open systems, organizations and environment form an interdependent relationship.  Organizational growth depends on how well organizations detect and adapt to changes in the environment.

Public relations can help the managerial subsystem of the organizations adapt to the environment by scanning and monitoring environment (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2002).  Organizations, thus, can maintain a relatively enduring yet changeable state.  As part of the adaptive subsystem, public relations can be functional and proactive when it interprets and provides feedback from the environment.   This management function helps organizations anticipate emerging problems and opportunities in the environment and work closely with other management functions to maintain flexibility for the organizations (Dozier & L. Grunig, 1992).

Publics become more or less strategic to an organization as situations change (L. Grunig et al., 2002).  Practitioners are more capable than those trained in human resources or journalism to discern and cope with dynamic communication problems and changes in strategic publics (J. Grunig, 1992).  Consequences create publics (J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984).  By thinking through which people are likely to affect or be affected by organizational activities, public relations helps organizations to recognize which groups of people are vital to the organizations at a particular situation.  Subsequent communication programs can then be developed accordingly and

strategically (J. Grunig & Repper, 1992).  Resources can then be moved quickly from one program to another as situations require.  When subsuming public relations function (e.g., employee communication) under a management function other than communication, organizations cannot effectively deal with the strategic public that can affect their survival and growth (L. Grunig et al., 2002).

Public relations contributes to organizational effectiveness by helping organizations reconcile their interests with the expectations and interest of their strategic publics (J. Grunig & Repper, 1992).  Such a contribution is manifested in quality relationships built with strategic publics.  Having an integrated communication function is conducive for public relations to reach its effectiveness (L. Grunig et al., 2002).  Organizations seldom acquire a complete autonomy in striving for their goals.  Instead, they are always constrained more or less by the environment, such as amount of resources, changing societal expectations, technological demands, government regulations, and so son.

Subsuming the public relations function under other management functions hinders the ability of public relations to identify the concerns and voices of strategic publics; and most importantly public relations is dominated by goals other than relationship building, such as product promotion (Dozier & L. Grunig, 1992).  Organizations are thus less likely to deal with the emerging conflict with their strategic public.  Subsequently according to Dozier and L. Grunig, the relationship between the organizations and their strategic publics suffer, which ultimately will stifle the organizations' vitality.

*Internal Communication and Organizational Change in Public Relations*

Scholars (e.g., Botan & Soto, 1998; Kim, 2007; L. Grunig, 1982; Wright, 1995) have advocated that more research be devoted to the theoretical advancement of knowledge about internal/employee communication. Unfortunately, research in the area progressed slowly in public relations comparing to other areas, such as relationships management, strategic management, and crisis communication (Wright, 1995). Such lack of attention on internal communication research may be based on the assumption that organization can always count on employees' loyalty and commitment (J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

Research in organizational studies (Albrecht & Hall, 1981; Cheney, Block, & Gordon, 1986; Dearing & Meyer, 1994; Ellis, 1992; Hoffman & Roman, 1984) has increasingly showed the importance of communication during organizational change. Empirical studies from management have demonstrated that communication assists change implementation in several areas, such as creating vision (e.g., Ebadi & Utterback, 1984; Fairhurst, 1993; J. Johnson, Meyer, Berkowitz, & Ethingon, 1995), facilitating feedback flow (Lewis, 1997), providing social support (Ashford, 1988), adapting changes (e.g., Bach, 1989; B. Johnson & Rice, 1987; Rogers, 1995), and resistance to change programs (e.g., Fairhurst, Green, & Courtright, 1995).

L. Grunig et al. (2002) pointed out that the impact of communication on organizational change did not receive ample attention for public relations scholars. Few studies in public relations have explored in depth how public relations manages communication programs during change. Studies that did considerate the role of public relations during organizational change tended to focus on providing quick,

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practical prescriptions from the management and practitioner-oriented perspective (Quirke, 1995). L. Grunig et al. (2002) suggested that further research needs to address the communication process (e.g., participation in decision making or feedback system) involved in change (p. 557).

Pincus and Acharya (1988) pointed out that communication is generally driven by management's view and demonstrates little understanding of how employees perceive situations and, more importantly, how they respond to and process information during highly stressful times (e.g., crises, changes). Pincus and Acharya (1988) thus recommended that organizations adopt a receiver-oriented approach to communicate with employees during stressful times.

Communication needs usually differ between employees and managers. Employees are usually interested in what is in it for them; whereas leaders or managers oftentimes communicate with employees by sharing the big picture of organizational change, opposite to the needs of employees (Baron, 2006). Kanter, Stein, and Jick (1992) found that in many cases, lower level employees have the most to lose during organizational change and have more uncertainty toward change. Supervisors and managers can usually gain more organizational support, such as informational support, and more access to information (Armstrong-Stassen, 1997).

Luthans and Sommer (1999) noted that the above difference between managers and employees arises because managers are involved in the change process and are provided with timely explanations for certain actions. These managers, therefore, have more information and more time to adjust to change and are more likely than subordinates to understand, accept, and respond positively toward change.

Armstrong-Strassen (1998) found that the ability to have control over changes resulted in positive emotions and attitudes toward change among managers. Following this line of thought, the needs of communication among employees can be satisfied if organizations develop separate communication programs aiming to solve the particular uncertainties that they have. Consequently, their positive support is likely to be cultivated.

In addition to meeting the different communication needs among organizational members, Larkin and Sandar (1994) found that success in communicating change with employees relies on using interpersonal communication, encouraging direct communication with supervisors, and communicating relative performance of the local work areas. Quirke (1995) suggested that communication programs during change address the following issues: the need for change, the complexity of organizational environment, change and organizational core values, organizational visions, and trust in change.

Zimmerman (1995) found that organizations need to create various communication channels to move decisions speedily throughout the organization and ahead of rumors during organizational change. Cole (1996) recommended that open communication should be adopted to remove frustration from employees during change. Guiniven (1999) noted that management should avoid make two mistakes when communicating with employees during change implementation: 1) establishing guilt rather than dealing with grief inherent in change, and 2) emphasizing change rather than transition.

Organizational members usually experience uncertainty, fear, or stress before and during organizational change (Bennett, Martin, Bies, & Brockner, 1995; Gersick, 1991; Jaffe, Scott, & Tobe, 1994). Huy's (1999) study found that the managers at the middle level played an important role in attending to the employees' emotions during the radical change. Such interaction between the managers and the employees could greatly facilitate the progress of change.

Goman (2006) proposed a change communication guideline that includes12 questions. Organizations can then use the responses to these questions to manage communication programs during change. For example, the question--Did you set the stage for change?--focuses on whether internal communication has communicated clearly with employees about the need for change, such as market fluctuation, changes in customer bases, technological innovations, regulations, and so on. Goman's guideline differs from previous ones because he stressed the importance of integrating the voices of employees into management decision making. For instance, Goman recommended management to consider the following question: how will you track employee perceptions? This question helps direct management's attention on the monitoring system that tracks employee perceptions throughout the change process. According to Goman, employee interaction and feedback loop facilitate dialogue with employees.

*Need for Further Study*

As indicated from the above discussion, the area of internal communication in the field of public relations lacks theoretical advancement. Many studies (Freitag & Picherit-Duthler, 2004; Guant, 1998; Jo & Shim, 2005; Larkin & Larkin, 1994;

Morgan & Schiemann, 1994) still focused on the technical aspects (e.g., communication medium) of internal communication. Such focus has prevented internal communication from being engaged in strategic management and hence contributing to the overall strategic management in organizations (Wright, 1995). Few studies (e.g., Kim, 2007) have incorporated theories developed in public relations to internal communication research. Theoretical concepts from public relations, such as the dimensions of public relations, are useful to examine and assess communication conducted with employees, which in turn can contribute to the overall effectiveness of public relations. Therefore, there is a need to incorporate theories of public relations into the research on internal communication.

Additionally, studies examine the function of internal communication in multinational organizations are few (Shuter & Wiseman, 1994). Many studies on multinational organizations have focused on the following topics: managing across cultures (e.g., Adler, 1983), training in multinational organizations (e.g., Tung, 1987), career development (e.g., Black & Mendenhall, 1990), culture shock (e.g., Furnham & Bochner, 1986), negotiation across cultures (e.g., Sullivan, 1981), and leadership style in business settings (e.g., Smith & Peterson, 1988). We know little about the role of internal communication in multinational organizations.

To address these two gaps in research on internal communication, I will incorporate theories from public relations (e.g., strategic management of public relations) and organization theory (i.e., sensemaking) to examine internal communication in multinational organizations during organizational change. This choice of study is also consistent with the research recommendation in studying

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communication and organizational change. For example, Lewis and Seibold (1998) proposed a new research agenda for communication scholars to study organizational change, which includes: 1) interaction surrounding change introduction and implementation and 2) communication-related structures. The focus on interaction during change directs attention to information sharing, vision and motivation, social support, evaluation and feedback.

By examining the role of public relations in the sensemaking process, this study explores both interaction (e.g., information sharing, social support, evaluation, and feedback) and communication-related structures (e.g., participatory structures) during change. To explore how public relations manages internal communication and the relationship between public relations and sensemaking during change, I seek answers to the following research question:

**RQ2:** How do multinationals in China use public relations programs to communicate change with organizational members?

This question examines the role of public relations during organizational change. Attention is focused on 1) how the public relations departments detects the information needs of organizational members during the organizational change, 2) how the public relations departments develops strategic communication programs to meet these information needs during change,  and 3) how the public relations programs help organizational members interpret meanings of change.

*Sensemaking and Societal Culture*

Having discussed the ties between public relations and sensemaking, the next section examines a cultural dimension (i.e., uncertainty avoidance) that may influence

sensemaking during organizational change. Scholars (e.g., Farace, Monge, & Russell, 1977; Hatch, 193; Morgan, 1997; Schein, 1991; Schutz, 1970) have observed that culture provides sets of knowledge that function as a scheme of interpretation and corresponding scripts for action. The concept of sensemaking is conceptualized by Western scholars, and few studies have examined whether the process of sensemaking theorized by Western theorists is applicable to individuals from different culture. Since most of the employees in multinational organizations in China are Chinese, it is necessary to examine whether Chinese culture has any influence on the way organizational members engage in sensemaking during change. Specifically, this study explores a particular aspect of culture--uncertainty avoidance, which indicates the extent of uncertainty people may feel during periods of disruption such as organizational change.

To describe the link among uncertainty avoidance, sensemaking, and organizational change, the next section starts by defining the concept of societal culture. Then, I explain how uncertainty avoidance, a particular cultural dimension, relates to sensemaking during organizational change.

*Defining Societal Culture*

Multinational organizations operate in a culturally diverse environment. Adler (1991) noticed that in multinationals "employees and managers do bring their ethnicity to the workplace" (p. 58). Robbins (1988) noted that culture can be a "liability" (p. 210) when its associated values hinder organizational effectiveness. Many public relations scholars (Ekachai & Komolsevin, 1996; Sriramesh, 1996; Sriramesh & Vercic, 2001; Sriramesh & White, 1992) have addressed the influence of

culture on public relations theory and practice. Societal culture influences the

practice of public relations through its impacts on organizational structure, employee

value systems, and organizational culture. Cultural is an important moderator in

public relations practice (Sriramesh & White, 1992; Sriramesh & Vercic, 2001; Vercic,

L. Grunig & J. Grunig, 1996).

*Sensemaking and Uncertainty Avoidance*

Cultural dimensions indicate the shared assumptions that vary culture by

culture (Hofstede, 2001). Individuals who grew up in the same culture tend to

acquire similar views about what is acceptable in daily events (e.g., conversation),

according to Hofstede. Scholars (e.g., Hall, 1981; Hofstede, 1984, 1991, 1992;

Tayeb, 1988) have suggested that a sensible way to study culture is to focus on

manageable dimensions since it is a formidable task to study every aspect of culture.

This study seeks to examine one particular cultural dimension--uncertainty avoidance

as it relates to communication and sensemaking.

Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimension of uncertainty avoidance provides an

approach to link sensemaking behaviour and communication patterns during

unpredictable situations in organizations. Uncertainty avoidance reveals the degree

of tolerance for ambiguity or unpredictability (Hofstede, 1980). Hofstede (2001)

defined it as the extent to which individuals feel threatened by situations that they

deem to be unclear, uncertain, or unpredictable (p. 161). Uncertainty induces

measures to avoid ambiguous situations. Low tolerance oftentimes creates relatively

high levels of anxiety, which in turn leads to a greater need for formal rules and for

avoiding deviant views. Individuals who have a high level of uncertainty avoidance

tend to avoid taking risks.  Asian countries (e.g., China, Korea, Japan, Indonesia, etc) in Hofstede's studies tend to exhibit a higher level of uncertainty avoidance than Western countries (p. 162).

Organizational change, especially radical change, exemplifies a period of strong ambiguity and uncertainty.  In particular, Hofstede (2001) argued that members of a high uncertainty avoidance culture tend to resist changes and have higher levels of intolerance for ambiguity.  Organizational members may be less willing to seek, process, and accept information contradicting to their past experiences or existent cognitive framework.

To explore the influence of uncertainty avoidance on sensemaking during organizational change, I seek answers to the following research question:

**RQ3:** How does the meaning that organizational members make for change reflect the cultural dimension of uncertainty avoidance in the Chinese culture?

This question looks at the influence of one particular cultural dimension (i.e., uncertainty avoidance) on sensemaking.  Focus is placed on how uncertainty avoidance affect 1) the way organizational members seek, select, and interpret information during organizational change, and 2) the way organizational members interact with others while making and sharing meaning for change.

*Summary of Research Questions*

In sum, this study seeks to explore the following research questions to understand the role that public relations plays in the sensemaking process during organizational change in multinational organizations in China:

RQ1: How do organizational members make sense of change in multinationals in China?

RQ2: How do multinationals in China use public relations programs to communicate change with organizational members?

RQ3: How does the meaning that organizational members make for change reflect the cultural dimension of uncertainty avoidance in the Chinese culture?

Chapter III:  Operationalization

I have established the conceptual framework of this study in the previous

chapter.  To explore the proposed research questions, a qualitative research approach

will be adopted.  This chapter thus focuses on the following key issues:

appropriateness of qualitative research, the method used for collecting and analyzing

data, some ethical concerns in conducting this study, and evaluation criteria that will

be used to assess validity and reliability of this study.

*Qualitative Interviewing*

Qualitative interviewing was the primary method to gather data.  Qualitative

interviewing represents a way of finding out what others feel and think about their

worlds (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001).  In doing so, researchers can understand

experiences of other people, discover the meaning they make of that experience, and

reconstruct events in which they do not participate.  The depth, detail, and richness

sought in interviews are what Clifford Geertz (1973) has called thick description.

My choice of qualitative interviewing was based on the following.  First,

interviewing can allow researchers to capture the taken-for-granted assumptions of

the interviewees and to understand the experiences that have shaped these

assumptions (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Rubin &

Rubin, 1995).  Even with the same words used, they might carry different

connotations in culture and value.  By being grounded in individual experiences,

researchers can detect these embedded assumptions.

Second, interviewing emphasizes a collaborative relationship between the

interviewer and the interviewee (Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Wolcott, 1995).  Instead

of being a passive research object, an interview participant actively co-constructs

meanings with the interviewer (Elden, 1981; Reason & Rowan, 1981). Responses or

stories elicited in the interview are collaborative accomplishments (Gubrium &

Holstein, 2001; Holstein, 1993). Qualitative interviewing is a process of empowering

research participants.

Third, interviewing provides access to the context of an individual's behavior,

which provides an opportunity for researchers to decipher the meaning of that

behavior (Dey, 1993; Mishler, 1986; Moustakas, 1994). Oftentimes, "observational

understanding" (Seidman, 1993, p. 3) of an individual's action may not be accurate.

In another words, what an observer understands from the observation may be

inconsistent with how an individual views his or her own behavior. Interviewing

allows researchers to gain access to an individual's "subjective understanding"

(Seidman, p. 4) as to how this individual makes meaning out of his or her own

behavior.

As to specific interviewing method, active interviewing emerged as a useful

tool to emphasize a process-oriented approach and to reveal the interaction between

the interviewer and interviewee. Interviewing is viewed as a social occasion where

reality is constructed by participants (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Perceiving the

interview as active suggests a focus on *how* the meaning-making process unfolds and

*what* knowledge is assembled.

In traditional interview approaches, interviewees are perceived as "passive

vessels of answers for experiential questions" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997, p. 116)

posed by interviewers. In the active interview, participants become "a productive

source of knowledge" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 15).  Participants (i.e., the interviewer and interviewee) purposefully and interactively construct versions of reality during interview.  The knowledge production in active interviewing thus relies on the interactions between the interviewer and the interviewee.

My participants and I co-constructed knowledge as to how they made meaning for change.  We constantly provided each other with information cues to focus on as well as creating, interpreting, clarifying, and verifying meaning emerged through each other's responses.  For instance, the interview questions activated the meaning making process when participants examined their experience retrospectively.  The follow-up questions based on the descriptions by participants reflected how I interpreted and understood the meaning embedded in their responses.

Since my participants included participants occupying different organizational positions (e.g., CEOs, vice presidents, directors, managers, and non-management employees), I adjusted my interview style accordingly.  Participants from the top management team (e.g., deputy country manager) could only afford limited amount of time for the interview.  For instance, one CEO participant told me before the interview: "I only have half an hour, so just focus on the questions that you can't get from other managers."  To accommodate the time constraint of this particular group of participants, I shortened the interview questions and skipped the beginning rapport-building or warm-up questions (e.g., What are your job responsibilities?).  Lack of rapport with interviewees might have affected their trust and level of disclosure.  To address this issue, I tried to build trust by demonstrating my knowledge of their

companies and my expertise in this research through the interview questions and the responses based on their answers.

*Strength and Weakness of Qualitative Interviewing*

Interviews have strengths in getting large amounts of data relatively quickly, in capturing the complexities underlying a phenomenon, allowing immediate follow-up and clarification, and in understanding the meanings embedded in individual experience. Despite these particular strengths, Marshall and Rossman (1999) have cautioned qualitative researchers of some limitations in interviewing.

First, because of the interactive nature of interviewing, cooperation is essential. Trust needs to be built in order to ensure cooperation from participants. Interviewees may be unwilling or uncomfortable sharing all of what an investigator attempts to explore, or they may be unaware of recurring patterns in their experience. At times, interviewees may have good reasons not to be truthful to protect their privacy. Second, for some participants (e.g., CEOs) the interview may be shortened because they usually do not have enough time for a lengthy discussion. Lastly, a weakness in interviewing stems from the possibility of misrepresentation because of cultural bias and observer effect (Marshall & Rossman, 1999)

To cope with these limitations, I took the following actions to gain cooperation from my participants. First, I assured my participants their privacy and confidentiality by presenting them the consent form approved by the University of Maryland Institutional Review Board in May 2008. Second, I tried to achieve what McCracken (1988) called a balance between formality and informality. Formality can be gained through proper dress, demeanor, and speech. A certain amount of

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formality helped my participants to perceive me as a scholar who might ask some personal questions out of professional not personal curiosity. Hence, I reassured my participants that I can be trusted. I strove for informality through small talk and through conveying sympathy to my participants when necessary. A certain degree of informality let my participants know that I was not an indifferent, distant creature despite my professional training.

As a coping strategy to gain trust with elite participants, I heeded Marshall and Rossman's (1999) recommendation to demonstrate my professional knowledge through the interview questions. I showed elite participants that I had an excellent understanding in the areas of organizational change, strategic management in public relations and sensemaking.

As for the limitation of possible misinterpretations, all research is inevitably affected by certain bias (Potter, 1996). Interview questions, survey questionnaires, or experimental studies, all reflect the interests of those who construct them. As a means of dealing with such bias, I tried to acknowledge and take into account my own biases, suggested by Potter (1996). In addition to acknowledge my own biases throughout the interviewing process, I cooperated with my participants in interpreting their responses and ensuing findings to reduce misrepresentation. To do so, I asked follow-up questions to my participants during and after interviews in order to clarify my understanding of their responses.

*The Participating Organizations*

*Multinational Organizations in China*

My goal in this study points to examining the role of public relations in the sensemaking process during organizational change in a global setting. I choose multinational organizations in China as the context of this study.

As the barriers of cross-border commerce have fallen, globalization has been continued to flourishing exponentially. Attributed to its open-door policy started in 1979 and economic reform, China has enjoyed over decades such a blistering rate of growth not surpassed by any other developing countries. China has maintained an average of almost 10% economic growth per year since the late 1980, more than Japan or the Asian tigers (e.g., Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea) gained over similar periods. Currently, China is now contributing more to global GDP growth than the United States is, according to a recent briefing by the *Economist* (2007).

In the first three months of 2007, for example, multinational corporations invested over US$15.9 billion into the Chinese economy, an increase of 12 percent over the previous year (*International Herald Tribune*, 2007). A 2006 study found that over 400 of the world's Fortune 500 companies have a base in China where they employ over 26 million people and account for 54 percent of foreign trade (*U.S.-China Business Council, 2007*).

Traditionally, multinationals have been attracted to China because of cheap labor and a legal system that has been keen to protect the interests of foreign investors. However, the majority of contemporary multinational investment in China is now aimed at selling goods and services to Chinese consumers. A study by the investment bank USB AG found that 75 percent of Western and Japanese

multinational corporations are in China to sell to the local market (*US-China Business Council*, 2006).

*Level of Analysis*

This study adopted an individual level of analysis. This micro level of analysis focuses on variations among individual characteristics (e.g., perceptions, attitudes) that affect individual reactions (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). Particularly, an individual level of analysis places emphasis on individual perceptions, experiences, and values (Rousseau & House, 1994). An important assumption under this level of analysis is that there are differences in individual behavior, and that a focus on collectives masks important individual variations meaningful in their own right (Walker, 2005).

Applying this level of analysis is appropriate to study sensemaking. Dervin (1998) asserted that sensemaking assumes that every individual is a social theorist who has the ability to construct ideas and theories about their own world. This type of analysis can allow researchers to explore an individual's struggles, constraints, and barriers when this person assesses a situation at a given period. By employing an individual level of analysis, this study can examine the influence of communication strategies on individual's making of meaning. Communication practices were treated here as a characteristic of organizational context. Examining the impact of organizational characteristics (e.g., reward systems, communication practices, leadership styles, and group structure) upon individual characteristics (e.g., perceptions and attitudes) has become a common practice in organization research (Schneider, Smith, & Sipe, 2000).

The choice of an individual level of analysis had following implications on data sampling and data analysis. First, a participant's organizational status and position were not a major concern in sampling. The focus was placed upon how each participant made sense of change given the influence of communication practices. Every participant's ways of sensemaking was equally valuable. Second, since an individual level of analysis underscores the different individual characteristics, as suggested by Harrison (2005), I took note of divergent view points to avoid giving unnecessary weight to one particular interpretation during data analysis. Third, while noting the similarities of the sensemaking process during the analysis, attention was given to differences that individuals exhibited in the sensemaking process and the reasons that those differences occurred.

*Sampling Participant Organizations*

Qualitative sampling is usually purposive rather than random (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I used a nonprobability sampling strategy in selecting participating multinational organizations. Specifically, I employed theory-based, acquaintance referral, and snowball sampling. Theoretical construct sampling indicates the process of choosing samples according to criteria of key constructs. Existing or evolving theories guide the theoretical sampling (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Since this study examines how public relations or communication programs can affect organizational members' sensemaking process during change, I used the construct of organizational change while sampling. Particularly, I tried to approach multinational national organizations that experienced past or ongoing changes.

It was rather difficult to know the magnitude and nature of an organizational change without a closer examination of the change. As a result, I let the construct of organizational change guided my initial selection. For instance, I asked questions about the contents and types of change through the initial email or phone conversations before going to the site for interviews. There was indeed one instance where I went to the company site for interviews after being roughly informed by a friend that this IT company was going through a change in a human resources policy. After interviewing the human resources manager and a staff, it became clear that this IT company was switching its business travel reimbursement filing to an online electronic format. I did not use the data collected in this company because this change was relatively small and had insignificant impact either on employees or the company's operation.

As discussed in the conceptualization chapter, there are many types of organizational change. Therefore, I tried to include different types of organizational change, such as leadership change, structural change, merger, acquisition, or change in operations. Additionally, I made sure to include interviews with different organizational positions. An individual's cognitive framework helps them make sense of their world as discussed in the conceptualization chapter. In an organizational context, differences in positions may create disparities in how organizational members make sense of various organizational events. Therefore, I tried to recruit interviewees from top management, middle management, and regular rank and file. In so doing, I hoped to see differences in how organizational members make meaning of change.

The specific procedures of recruiting organizations included the following. First, I generated a pool of multinational organizations in China. This pool of multinational organizations was based on the listings of the 2008 *Fortune 500* companies that are multinational and have branches in China. Most of the multinational organizations in China have heavily concentrated in cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou. I found the contact information through these organizations' websites. I initially sent solicitation emails (see appendices) to 40 multinational organizations briefly explain the purpose, procedure, and potential benefits of the research. Unfortunately, I did not receive any responses to my email solicitations.

Then, I made over 60 phone calls directly to the directors of public relations or human resources identified in the pool of multinationals from the 2008 *Fortune 500*. I obtained their contact information from the websites of targeting organizations. Most of the organizations (93%) that I called refused to participate for various reasons. For example, some organizations said that talking about change with their employees might stir controversies or instability within their organizations. Some feared that their sensitive information regarding their organizational strategies could be released through my research.

Acquaintance introduction plays an important role in obtaining access to multinational organizations (Chen, 2005; Hung, 2002; Ni, 2006). I thus used my personal connections (e.g., relatives and friends) to help me locate more organizations. For instance, some of my friends or relatives were working for multinational organizations, or they knew people who work these organizations. I

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was introduced to the head of public relations, corporation communication, or human resources through these personal connections.

Through these acquaintance referrals, I was introduced to a total of 30 multinationals. Finally, nine out of the 30 multinationals finally agreed to participate. Various reasons led to the final recruitment of the nine multinationals. For example, some organizations rejected because the topic was quite sensitive. Some multinationals only allowed me restricted access, such as interviewing one or two managers, so I did not choose them. Some organizations had explicit rules of prohibiting their employees discussing change with outsiders.

The nine participating organizations located in Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu, and Hangzhou. Beijing is the political center of China, similar to Washington, DC, in the U.S. Shanghai, comparable to the New York City, is the financial center of China. Chengdu is the most important commercial center in Western China and has become another favorite global subsidiary site in this region for multinational organizations. Hangzhou, a city 90 miles away from Shanghai, is considered the most important manufacturing base and logistic hub. Multinational organizations are most heavily clustered in Beijing and Shanghai. Chengdu and Hangzhou have gradually been populated with large multinational organizations in recent years.

Once getting my foot in the door in each participating organization, snowball sampling was quite useful to recruit more participants in each organization. I would repeatedly ask my participants questions such as "who should I talk to in order to understand how organizational members in this particular organization engaged in sensemaking during change?" or "Who do you think can provide me insights about

my research from the perspective of regular employees?" I was generally successful in obtaining more interviewees from different organizational positions through snowball sampling. Table 1 shown below lists the types of industry for the nine multinational organizations recruited in the study.

Table 1: Types of Industry for Participating MCNs

Participating MCNs (n = 9)

_____

| Industry Type | Fortune 500 | Non-Fortune 500 |
|---|---|---|
| Auto Manufacture | 1 | |
| Telecommunications | 3 | |
| Semiconductor | 1 | 2 |
| Insurance | 1 | |
| Food & Beverage | 1 | |

_____

**Total: n = 9**

*Recruiting*

My research focused on the influence of communication upon sensemaking during change in multinational organizations. Getting access and adjusting to participants' time constraints posed great challenge in recruiting. To encourage participation, I provided some compensation, such as presenting recent research on change management.

During my initial email solicitation, I did not get much response. The few organizations that did respond replied that their organizational policy prevented them from discussing their organizational change with an outsider. Email solicitation might

be easily ignored by the recipients who were already overwhelmed by a myriad of organizational information.

Shortly before I went back to China for data collection, I only had two initial agreements from multinational organizations in China. After I came back to China, one organization that initially agreed to participate turned me down. This organization told me that its change was related to some core organizational strategies that were not appropriate to be shared nor discussed with an outsider. Although I repeatedly assured the organization that I would not disclose the identities of the organization as well as potential interviews, this organization still refused to participate in my research. While feeling frustrated, I kept making contact with potential organizations through contact information I read from trade magazines and acquaintance referrals.

The breakthrough point came after I arrived in China. A friend said that her friend, a former employee of a large *Fortune 500* multinational food organization in Beijing, was interested in my research. I learned that this employee wanted to participate because she was not satisfied with how her former employer treated her during change. Furthermore, this food multinational organization forbad its employees to discuss its change with any media or outsiders in China. After learning that I would protect the identities of her and this multinational food company, she accepted my interview and felt happy that she can finally tell the story from an employee's perspective. Through her, I was able to locate some other interviewees who left or stayed in this multinational food organization.

Time required to participate in my interview research posed another obstacle in recruiting participants. Most employees at multinational organizations in China work are overwhelmed by workload and by pressing time constraints. A friend of mine who is working at a multinational marketing company in Beijing told me that it is extremely rare for them to work 40 hours a week. My friend's normal work hours range from 60 to 80 hours a week. Participation in my research on average requires about an hour, which placed great demand on participants' busy and unpredictable schedule. To accommodate the schedule changes of my participants, I offered to stay at their company for a whole day.

Given the long time commitment for my interviews, I tried to provide certain reward or compensation that would be respectful of the local culture and would not breach my ethical standards as researcher. Such compensation served as an incentive for potential interviewees. For instance, a friend who helped me connect with the multinational company told me straight out that I needed to give some reward to the interviewees for two reasons. First, compensation would offset partly the time commitment, which took away the dire amount of personal free time for these multinational employees. Second, lack of reward from me would make my friend look bad to her friends who might introduce me to other participants or other MNCs. Relationship is a transferable social capital (Cai, 2001; Gelfand & Cai, 2002; Luo, 2000). When my friend introduced me to her friend, I acquired my friend's friendship to some degree. Lack of proper appreciation from me to some extent reflected disrespect from my friend.

I understood that I was interacting in a Chinese culture that places great emphasis in building and maintaining personal relationships. I thus offered to buy work lunch for all six interviewees from that multinational company. Two interviewees were conducted during lunch with four interviews after lunch.

Another compensation that I offered was some short presentations about recent research on organizational change and change management. For example, an interviewee informed me that I should talk with the human resources manager who was in charge of change management for the global engineering organization. When I approached the human resources manager initially, she refused based on time constraints. I did not give up easily, so I visited her office the next day. After waiting for three hours, I finally was able to meet her in person. I explained to her my research and potential contribution in the area of change management. This manager then asked, "Put aside your contribution in the academic world, what can you really do for us? I mean for our company?" I responded that I would provide her with an executive summary of my research on change in multinational organizations. She replied, "But that's after you complete your dissertation. What about now? What can you do for us now?" I thought a moment and suggested, "What about I do a presentation on the current studies on organizational change and change management. I have done extensive research on that area while working on my dissertation." The human resources manager smiled, "Good. It's a done deal." Upon realizing the "power" of this reward, I offered to make a similar presentation to another global IT company as a reward for participation.

Although I encountered great difficulty during recruiting participating organizations, I successfully obtained access to nine multinational organizations in China. Among them six are Fortune 500 global companies. The other three, though not *Fortune 500*, are listed *Nasdaq* companies. Two companies are located in Chengdu, four in Beijing, two in Shanghai, and one in Hangzhou.

*Participating Interviewees*

Once I obtained access to each participating organization, I located potential interviewees through referrals among people who knew other people who had characteristics fitting with my research interest. I also made contact with potential participants on my own after studying the organizational chart of the participating organizations. Through the referrals of the key persons who introduced me to the multinationals and to the participants, I approached approximately 30 employees in each participating organization to ask for their participation. On average six out of the 30 employees that I initially contacted agreed to participant. In total, I conducted 60 interviews in nine organizations. Among them, four interviews were conducted with expatriates in English, and the rest with the locals in Chinese.

Within each multinational organization, I tried to interview three groups of people: top management, middle management, and regular employees. Unfortunately, I was not able to locate interviewees at the top management level for every participating organization. The CEOs had extremely busy schedules. Some CEOs of my participating organizations only came to the site in China one or two days a week. In total, I interviewed four CEOs from four different organizations. Among them, two were senior vice presidents who were the head of the operation in

China and directly reported to the president in charge of the Asia Pacific region. One CEO was from Switzerland. One CEO was born in Hong Kong but later immigrated to the U.S. The other two CEOs, U.S. citizens, were born in China, pursued advanced degrees in the U.S., and had work experience in the U.S.

Compared with the CEOs, managers at the middle level were much available. For the interviewee group at middle management, I included managers from various functions, such as public relations, corporate communication, human resources, marketing, sales, field service, logistics, procurement, and so on. Interviewing managers from non-communication functions was meant to help inform me how various functions within an organization perceived the effectiveness of the communication programs during change. More importantly, middle level managers as discussed in the conceptualization chapter have an important role in communicating with employees during change. Since public relations management is a key component in this research, I made sure the participants could provide answers to my questions related to public relations programs. While screening the participants, I included participants who might involve in public relations management but might not have the exact title of public relations practitioners. For example, in some organizations, I interviewed directors or managers in human resources departments, corporate communication, and internal communication. In summary, the number of managers at the middle level included in each multinational organization was between 4 and 5. A total of 35 middle level managers were interviewed for the 9 multinational organizations.

Regular employees or staff constituted the third group of participants in my research. Responses from these employees provided a complementary perspective from the management, hopefully providing a check against possible biased managerial perspectives. I recruited these participants through asking the referrals from human resources managers or from the middle level managers. For this group of participants, I included organizational members who worked in various units or functions, such as marketing, product research, field service, supply chain, sales, investment, information technology, and so on. The number of participants in this group varied in each organization, arranging from 2 to 4. The total number of participants in this group was 21 for the nine multinational organizations. All of them were Chinese.

In total, 60 participants were included in the research. Among them, four CEOs participated in the interview; and 35 managers at the middle or senior levels were interviewed. I recruited 21 general employees. The following tables indicate the basic information of the participants.

Table 2: Interview Participants (Gender & Nationality)

_____
Interview Participants (n = 60)
_____

| Gender | Male | Female |
|---|---|---|
| | 43 | 17 |
| | | |
| Nationality | Chinese | Non-Chinese |
| | 54 | 6 |
_____

Table 3: Interview Participants (Managerial Participants: n = 39)

_____

| Position Titles | Number |
|---|---|
| CEO | 1 |
| Senior Vice President | 1 |
| Vice President & General Manager | 1 |
| Deputy Country Manager | 1 |
| Assistant General Manager | 1 |
| Site Manager | 2 |
| Director | 5 |
| Senior Manager | 11 |
| Department Manager | 16 |
| | |
| Total | 39 |

_____

Table 4: Number of Participants from MCNs:

_____

| Company | Number of Participants |
|---|---|
| 1. Japanese Automobile Manufacture | 6 |
| 2. U.S. Semiconductor Company | 4 |
| 3. U.S. Telecommunications Company | 6 |
| 4. U.S. Food & Beverage Company | 6 |
| 5. U.S. Insurance Company | 9 |
| 6. Swedish Telecommunications Company | 7 |
| 7. U.S. Telecommunications Company | 9 |
| 8. U.S. Semiconductor Company | 7 |
| 9. Swedish. Semiconductor Company | 6 |
| | |
| Total | 60 |

_____

All interviews were face-to-face, open-ended, and audio-recorded digitally.

Interviews ranged from a minimum of 30 minutes to a maximum of over one hour

and a half.  The interviews with the CEOs tended to range from 30 minutes to 40

minutes.  The rest of the interviews lasted on average 60 minutes.  Most interviews were conducted in Chinese (i.e., Mandarin) or a mix of Chinese and English as preferred by participants.  Four interviews were conducted in English.

I transcribed 36 of the interviews myself.  The rest of the 24 interviews were transcribed by four students at Peking University.  I showed each student an example of a transcript completed by myself and gave personal instructions before assigning them the files.  Upon receiving the transcribed files from each student, I checked each file while listening to the corresponding recorded interview to ensure the accuracy of each transcript.  Some files were sent back to the students to revise.  Each student received payment for every minute on the tape they transcribed.

*Interview Protocol*

The interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions to allow participants freedom to elaborate their responses.  These interview questions were semi-structured.  Rubin and Rubin (1995) observed that semi-structured questions are useful when interviewers seek specific information.  In semi-structured interviewers, investigators usually introduce a topic and then guide the discussion by asking specific questions.

After some warming up questions, the first part of my interview protocol served to identify the types of organizational change.  I asked questions regarding the content and process of the change.  I constructed interview questions based on the literature of organizational change (e.g., Gersick, 1991; Mintzberg & Westley, 1992; Nadler & Tushman, 1989).  For instance, I asked questions such as, "What aspects do

you think this organization tried to change during this change?" or "Why do you think those aspects needed to be changed?" I asked participants to provide examples.

To explore how organizational members engaged in sensemaking during change, the second part of the interview protocol focused on the following aspects: 1) what information to attend to, 2) how to select information, 3) how to process information conveniently available to them, 4) how to assign meanings to information, and 5) how to communicate the meanings with others. Examples of questions are as follows:

"Please tell me which information sources did you rely on to get information about the recent change?"

"What information do you think you were most likely to pay attention to during the change?" and "How did you decide what information to pay attention to?"

"What information did you expect to receive during change?"

"How could you describe the previous planned change that this organization went through?" and "Why did you describe it this way?"

"How did you talk about change with your peers?" and "How would they describe the change?"

"Do you think there is an agreement about the meaning for the change among your peers?" and "How did you reach the agreement about the meaning for the change?"

The third part of the interview protocol dealt with how multinational organizations use public relations to communicate with employees during change. Questions focused on how communication programs were managed during change

and how those programs influence the way organizational members made meaning of change. Example of questions included:

"Which department in this organization was responsible of communicating with the employees?" and "What about communication with employees during change?"

"Whom do you think are most affected by this change based on its consequences?"

"How did the organization communicate with these groups of employees affected by the change?"

"What communication programs did the organization adopt to communicate with you about change?" and "How effective were the programs?"

The last part of interview questions focused on the influence of culture (i.e., uncertainty avoidance) on sensemaking. For instance, I asked questions such as:

"What were the aspects did you feel uncertain during the change?"

"Why do you think you were uncertain about those aspects of issues during change?"

"What did you to cope with the uncertainties?"

*Pretest*

I conducted three pretests prior to actual data collection, and results of the pretests were not included in the final data analysis. Advantages of pretest include revising interview protocols and helping preparing researchers ready for the fieldwork (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2000). Having a pretest experience allowed me to be

well prepared for what I may expect and how to interact with different types of individuals.

Kaur (1997) suggested that two pretests will be sufficient according to her research experience. In this study, I conducted pretests with three individuals: a public relations manager and two engineers. Pretest interviews helped me clarify meanings and refine the wording. Some interview questions that appear clear to me may seem confusing to an interviewee. For example, the literal translation of the word "impact" in the question "what impact do you think the change had on the organization?" The Chinese word of "impact" often contains a negative meaning. Interviewees may easily interpret it as negative influences caused by change. To avoid this, I took the suggestions from the pretests and translated the world "impact" into Chinese as "change."

Based on the feedback from my pretests, the concept of uncertainty avoidance seemed to be difficult to grasp for interviewees. I thus first explained to participants what it means by "uncertainty tolerance" using organizational examples. For example, I talked about how a relative of mine felt helpless when her company was bought by another state-owned company two years ago. These illustrations helped my participants think through their uncertainties during change.

I also made some adjustments on the order of the interview questions. I originally placed in the end the questions regarding participant's feelings about change and certain stories that remained fresh in their memory. During the pretests, I found that participants were likely to talk about their feelings toward change while answering questions about organizational change in the beginning section. I thus

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moved those questions to the section where I asked participants to describe their recent organizational change.

In summary, through pretests I changed some Chinese translations of certain phrases, added explanations about the concept of uncertainty tolerance, and changed the order of interview questions. According to my observations during interview and the interview responses, these revisions help my participants understand my questions during data collection.

*Language Consideration*

I collected the interview data in China, particular in the cities of Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu, and Hangzhou. Most interviews were in Chinese, some in a mixed of Chinese and English. Four interviews were conducted in English. One acting CEO was from Switzerland, and we had no problem communicating in English. I took the following measures to deal with potential problems that may arise because of language.

First, before going to the field, I translated the participant consent form and interview protocols that were initially designed in English. The translation was revised based on the feedback from my colleague and my friends who were not communication majors. After going back to China, I obtained feedback on my Chinese translations on several engineers. I especially made some changes to the questions addressing uncertainty tolerance during change. I added explanation of this concept and changed some Chinese wordings of the questions.

Second, an important issue to attend to during translation is to make sure the translated version expressed the same meaning as the original English version

(Campbell & Werner, 1970). To achieve this, I first translated the English interview questions into Chinese. Then I translated them into English again to see two versions of interview questions carry the same meaning.

Third, words can be translated differently in different cultures and convey different meanings (Patton, 1990). To cope with this problem, I explained the terms to my participants during the interview so they know what I was asking, besides providing them a copy of the interview protocols.

*Interview Experience*

I went back to China on June 16, 2008, and came back to the United States on August 20, 2008. The data collection process lasted a little over two months. During this period of time, I traveled to four cities (i.e., Chengdu, Beijing, Shanghai, and Hangzhou) depending on the locations of the participating multinational organizations. Most of the interviews took place in the natural organizational setting, at the offices of interviews. Four interviews were conducted during lunch and two at coffee shops. During the data collection in China, obtaining trust and striking a balance between formality and informality were two important issues for me.

Gaining trust from interviewees was a critical yet challenging issue during my data collection in China. Trust is directly related to how comfortable participants would feel about disclosure. I tried to gain each participant's trust by being candid and sincere with them (Wolcott, 2001) and by carefully preparing for each interview (Johnson & Joslyn, 2001). To be candid and sincere with my participants, I always explained at the beginning of each interview the purpose of my research and its potential contribution to understanding how employees make sense of change in

multinational organizations.  Since organizational change can be a sensitive topic, I assured my participants of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses and their organizations.  Participants were free to request any of their responses to be excluded from the research and to stop at any time they prefer.

The issue of trust became pronounced when I first visited to global a semi-conductor company in Shanghai.  I was referred to the human resources manager at this company by the CEO whose company just bought out this semi-conductor company.  Shortly after I came to the office of the semi-conductor company, I felt the tension between the two companies that were undergoing merger.  At the beginning, I felt that I was perceived as a "spy" instead of a researcher.  After meeting with the human resources manager, she asked, "John (the CEO, pseudonym) told me that you want to do some research in our company.  So what do they want to know?  I don't think I can tell you much about us."  I immediately sensed that she viewed me who was affiliated with another company that acquired her company and whose intrusion made her feel uncomfortable.

To defuse the human resources manager's defensiveness, I emphasized my student status and showed her my university picture ID.  Then, I started to tell her some stories of my student life in the U.S. and the dramatic impacts that the unprecedented earthquake in May had created on people near the cities of my hometown.  My rapport building seemed to work.  Though her relaxed facial expression, I could tell that this manager felt less resistant about my visit than when I first arrived.  I thus reiterated that my purpose here was purely to conduct research for my doctoral dissertation and that I would leave if she did not feel comfortable

participating. Fortunately, this manager agreed to participate and volunteered to ask her colleagues if they would be interested in my research. In the end, I was able to interview three managers and two engineers from this semi-conductor company.

Another means to build trust with the participants was to carefully prepare for each interview. I prepared myself by wearing professional attire and learning background information on each organization. As McCracken (1988) suggested certain formality in dress, demeanor, and speech is useful to reassure the participant that the researcher can be trusted to maintain the participant's confidentiality. To help establish my role as a scholar, I usually made sure I had sufficient knowledge about each organization. I studied each company through the websites or the materials gathered through newspapers or trade magazines. Such preparation demonstrated my professionalism and my knowledge on this topic. Knowledge that I acquired before each interview also helped me to understand interview responses and how to ask follow-up questions.

In addition to gaining trust from participants, I had difficulty maintain a delicate balance between a serious, cold scholar and an empathetic individual. Change in organization can create profound impact on its employees. While listening to how much my participants were affected by the change, I sometimes could not help but switching my role from a "distant" scholar to someone who can emphasize with their frustration and pain. For instance, one interviewee's former employer would relocate to Shanghai. She was asked to move to Shanghai with a high promotion. Her move, though quite promising for career, would have caused tremendous stress on her family. Her relocation in Shanghai would leave her sick parents unattended in

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Beijing. To make matter worse, her move would create a "single parent family" for her child because her husband would not give up his promising career in Beijing. While this interviewee was talking about her frustration of making a decision whether to sacrifice her career, I felt an urge to listen and comfort her. I thus stopped the tape recorder and tried to talk with her as someone who cared about how she felt than probing through my research questions. The "click" sound of the recording button on my tape recorder served as a signal to adjust my distance with my participants.

It was a quite exciting yet challenging experience for me during my data collection in China. I have become more seasoned in building rapport and trust with my participants. This intensive interview research experience also helped me to be mindful of when to keep and when to close the distance between me and my participants.

*Researcher as Instrument*

In qualitative inquiry, researchers function as a kind of "instrument" (McCracken, 1988, p. 18) in the process of data collection and analysis (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Sanday, 1979). This metaphor suggests that it is impossible for qualitative researchers to achieve their goals without using a broad range of his or her own experience, imagination, and intellect. To search for patterns in the relatively messy data, researchers need to listen not only with one's cognitive abilities but also with the whole of one's experience and imagination.

The self-as-instrument is in use when researchers search out a match in one's experience for ideas and actions that the interviewee participant has described. It is necessary to point out that there is no clear transfer from the investigator's experience

to that of the participant.  Rather, the investigator's experience serves merely as a bundle of possibilities, pointers, and suggestions that can be used to understand the remarks of participants (McCracken, 1988).

Such imaginative reconstruction requires investigators to treat the participant's new and strange propositions as "simply and utterly true" (McCracken, 1988, p. 20).  Once this process succeeds, the researcher has achieved reconstructing a version of the participant's view by trying on his or her essential assumptions and categories.  McCracken encourages researchers to try to think through from the perspective of the participants, not just relying on his or her own standpoint.

There are actually times when no match can be found in the investigator's own experience.  When these instances occur, McCracken (1988) suggested that researchers proceed by gaining an understanding of what is being said.  I expect these instances to emerge in my research when I could not fully comprehend some concepts or perceptions from the participants.  I will cope with this problem by immersing myself into the viewpoints of the participants, trying to seek meanings from their perspective.

My experience related to multinationals has been accumulated gradually.  My research interest in the management of public relations within an organization stemmed from a research project for a graduate seminar called global public relations. The research project completed for that seminar focused on how multinational public relations firms in China managed communication.  Several participants including CEOs, expatriate as well as local public relations managers mentioned the use of public relations programs to manage the communication that an organization engages

with its members.  From then, I became fascinated by this topic.  Unfortunately, not many studies have focused on such an aspect of communication management, especially during change in multinationals.  Therefore, I developed a strong interest in studying the management of communication during change in multinationals.

Prior to coming to the U.S., I learned about the impact of misunderstanding about change upon MNCs through the experiences of my relatives, friends, and former classmates.  For example, a friend of mine worked for a large electronics multinational company.  Once, this company initiated a change on the health insurance policies for its local employees.  The change was actually beneficial for the employees.  The way the company communicated with its employees about this change was problematic.  Employees were only notified to make certain policy changes by a deadline without clear explanations of the reasons behind the change.  As a result, many employees felt that this company exploited their labor without due respect.  Some employees even threatened to strike.  Although the intended result of this change was beneficial to the employees, the actual planning and implementation of the change was not successful.

As a doctoral student in public relations, I bear my own assumptions and expectations about how public relations should be practiced.  As a female Chinese, I have long-lived familiarity with the Chinese culture under study.  Based on my master's and Ph.D. education in the United States, I have a multicultural acquaintance of Chinese culture and some aspects of Western culture.  This acquaintance creates an "analytic advantage" (McCracken, 1988, p. 32), a delicacy of insight.  A qualitative researcher serves as an "instrument" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 128) during data

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collection and analysis. Without incorporating the researcher's own experience, the qualitative research objectives cannot be fully achieved (McCracken, 1988).

However, this very acquaintance might lead to biases, which every qualitative researcher should control as much as possible (McCracken, 1988). McCracken argued that examining a researcher's presumptions is also a process of "defamiliarization" (p. 33). Without such defamiliarization process, the investigator is unable to establish any distance from the deeply embedded assumptions. I documented those biases and assumptions through memos and interview summaries after each interview. Therefore, by examining the documented biases I became more vigilant and aware of those biases during data analysis.

My academic and personal experiences in the area of multinationals have helped shape the foci of this study. These experiences have helped me in terms of the process of reconstructing the experiences from my participants. When such reconstruction reached its limits, I tried my best to think from the standpoint of my participants, interpreting the events from how my participants' experiences.

*Data Analysis*

Qualitative scholars (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Wolcott, 1995) have suggested different ways to do data analysis. They viewed data analysis as involving an iterative process of breaking down data into small number of categories and constructs through coding and then developing, synthesizing patterns and themes from these categories.

*General Approaches to Qualitative Data Analysis*

Two general approaches exist in qualitative data analysis: inductive and deductive approaches (Patton, 1990). Lindlof and Meyer (1987) endorsed an inductive approach through thick description aimed at seeking layers of meaning that lend the events their significance. From a ground-theory approach, Glaser and Strauss (1967) advocated a bottom-up inductive orientation in data analysis. Potter (1996) argued that some type of general formulation is inevitable in qualitative research. Researcher's prior expectations or expectations emerged from data collection usually form the basis of formulation. Miles and Huberman (1998) asserted that both inductive and deductive approaches are suitable in qualitative inquiry depending on different situations. Because the researcher seeks to describe and explain certain relationships, it is necessary to develop a set of conceptually specified analytical categories. Letting categories emerge naturally from data or starting with these theoretically specified categories are both valid ways of conducting research (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Miles and Huberman (1994) identified three approaches in qualitative data analysis: social anthropology, interpretivism, and collaborative social research. To apply social anthropology approach, researchers stay close to the natural setting and center on individuals' perspectives and interpretation of their experience. Researchers adopting this approach rely on multiple sources of data to derive their conclusions. A main focus of research using this approach is to refine certain theory. Researchers usually develop a conceptual model and then test it in the field.

The interpretivism approach focuses on interpreting the findings in a natural setting. Human activity is perceived as text, a collection of symbols conveying layers of meaning (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Research is viewed as collaborative efforts between investigators and participants. Phenomenologists adopting this approach usually do not use coding. Instead, they assume that repeated reading of the raw data can lead researchers to capture "the essence of an account" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 8).

In the collaborative social research approach, researchers often use two typical forms: 1) reflexivity, where researches keep ask questions, and 2) dialectics, where researchers and participants may have opposing interpretations of data (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 8). When adopting this approach, researchers join participants at the very beginning in an attempt to transform the social environment through critical inquiry, namely to act on the world rather than being acted on.

I chose both interpretivism and collaborative social research approaches in the data analysis. This study was contextualized in a global setting. Taking an interpretive approach to study sensemaking and communication assumes that participants are theorists and knowledge-makers in their own worlds (Dervin, 1998). Therefore, I involved my participants as thinking and contributing participants in research. Discussions with my participants helped me determine why they behaved in certain ways in sensemaking during organizational change. Furthermore, reflexivity and dialectics were prevalent throughout the research process. I constantly asked questions and acknowledge different interpretations that may emerge. The

interpretive and collaborative social research approaches are hence suitable for my study. The next section discusses the specifics in my data analysis.

*Specific Procedure*

I agree with many qualitative scholars (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Morgan, 1997) that data analysis is an ongoing process starting at the very beginning of a research inquiry. My data analysis in general consisted of three broad stages: in research design, during data collection, and after leaving the field.

First, my data analysis commenced with the research design. Decisions regarding the conceptual framework, research questions, and the sampling process all aimed to narrowing the scope of data collection and facilitating data analysis. Second, data analysis was also present when I entered the field. While collecting data in the field, researchers ought to consider the findings from previous observation (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Field notes, memos, and my observations helped me take into consideration the previous findings, which indeed is a form of data analysis. While visiting the companies to conduct interviews, I also used some organizational documents (e.g., brochures, product promotional materials, company newsletters, company websites, and organizational charts) to familiarize myself with each MCN and to understand the context of the changes.

Finally, after leaving the field I followed the advice by Wolcott (1995) and the framework identified by Miles and Huberman (1994). For this study, I used Wolcott's concept of analysis. In particular, I reduced and organized data into categories in order to identify the essential features and systematic interrelationships

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of these features.  Similarly, Mile and Huberman (1994) introduced a framework for data analysis involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.

*Data reduction*.  Data reduction indicates the process of "selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appears in written-up field notes or transcriptions" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10).  Data reduction even occurs before data are actually gathered through the choices made about the conceptual framework, research questions, and data collection approach.  Data reduction is inherently related to analysis, which forms a basis for drawing conclusions.  Ways of reduction include selection, summary, paraphrase, or clustering categories or patterns.

When I was in the field for data collection, I listened attentively to each participant and took extensive notes.  During the interviews, I asked clarifications from my participants whenever I had problems understanding their responses.  Furthermore, I asked my participants to explain certain issues that I found important to the study.  After each interview, I wrote a short summary noticing the recurring patterns or certain important categories.  As a result, data reduction was achieved through selecting out irrelevant issues and including relevant ones for further probing.

During the data analysis, I read each interview transcript in combination with the field notes and memos that I wrote during data collection in China.  While reading the transcripts, I highlighted the participant's comments related to my research questions.

*Data display*. During data display, researchers try to visually turn raw data into an immediately accessible, compact form, which facilitates detecting what is happening. Miles and Huberman (1994) defined data display as "an organized, compressed assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action" (p. 11). The types of display include matrices, graphs, charts, and network.

To organize my raw data into a manageable size and to display them in a compressed format for systematic examination, I created tables to sort participant's responses into each research question. I also generated tables to categorize participant's comments based on the types of changes that they experienced. For instance, there were four organizations that went through merger, leadership change, and relocation. Based on the research questions, I thereafter clustered into one table the responses from the participants who came from these four organizations.

Such organization was useful in two ways. First, it helped me to identify common patterns from participants who experienced similar changes. Second, sorting responses together based on the types of change was conducive for me to understand what participants really meant in the context of organizational change. Patterns and themes emerged through reading the transcripts, studying the categorized themes, and examining the themes displayed in the tables.

I created a table for each participating organization. Responses from participants were organized based on their correspondence to the research questions. Summaries and phrases were generated to replace the responses in the original transcripts. Then, these summaries or phrases were placed into the tables.

The data were classified into managerial and employee perspectives. By classifying data in this way, I was able to discern the differences between managers and employees. These differences allowed me to explore further the ways to facilitate sensemaking in organizational change.

*Conclusion drawing and verification.* In drawing conclusions, researchers seek to make meanings out of the displayed data and to verify those meanings. Miles and Huberman (1994) noted that conclusions can be drawn through "noting regularities, patterns, explanations, possible configurations, causal flows, and propositions" (p. 11). Verification may occur as a second thought crossed a researcher's mind during writing that prompted him or her to go back to the field notes, or thorough review among colleagues to develop "intersubjective consensus" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 11).

While drawing conclusions from my study, I read interview transcripts, highlighted remarks, and tables. I listened to the interview tapes and check my field notes to reduce the possibility of misinterpreting the meanings provided by my participants. Additionally, I asked for second opinions from my colleagues to help me verify certain conclusions that I have doubts about.

*Ethical Consideration*

Sensitivity to ethical concerns is paramount in qualitative research (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Ethical issues in qualitative research can be boiled down to the question of whether the end of seeking knowledge justifies the scientific means (Homan & Bulmer, 1982). Primary issues in qualitative research include harm, consent, deception, privacy, and confidentiality of data (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998;

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Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Punch, 1998). I took the following actions to address the ethics in my research.

First, I showed my participants the consent form (approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Maryland in May 2008) in which I describe my research objectives and interview process, prior to interview. Participants read and sign the consent form before their participation. Second, I assured my participants that the content of interview would remain completely confidential and be only used in academic research purposes. Third, I stated explicitly to my participants that they would not receive any emotional or physical harm from participating in the interview and they could withdraw any time during the interview. Lastly, I followed Wolcott's (1995) advice to encourage participants to decide their own limit of disclosure through adopting a nondirective style.

*Evaluation Criteria in Qualitative Research*

The issue of evaluating qualitative or naturalistic inquiry has generated vigorous debate among scholars (Potter, 1996). On one end of the debate, scholars (e.g., Smith, 1983) argued that qualitative research should not be judged against any standards. Each individual constructs their own version of reality. These constructions cannot be simply rated as "true" or "false." Any attempt for assessment violates the basic assumption that human beings subjectively construe reality. In contrast, other scholars (J. Anderson, 1987; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1989) argued that it is essential to establish standards for qualitative research. According to pro-standards scholars, qualitative research cannot be properly shared in a scholarly community without commonly recognized criteria.

In bridging these two opposing views, Potter (1996) noted that not all constructions are equally useful. Certain standards are thus necessary. Stake (1995) agreed that different constructions can be assessed in terms of utility and credibility. The question of "is it true?" is replaced by "do we agree it is true?" Another useful evaluation question to ask is whether a study communicates something meaningful about the world.

I took the side of pro-standard scholars. Qualitative research should be evaluated to be shared in a scholarly community. Quantitative criteria of validity and reliability are not applicable or appropriate to assess qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Potter, 1996; Stake, 1995). In so doing, I used the standards of dependability to assess reliability of the study. To evaluate validity, I adopted the standards of credibility and transferability.

*Reliability—Dependability*

Qualitative scholars differ on the concept of reliability. Wolcott (1995) argued that reliability is not needed. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) observed that reliability and validity are equivalent. I think that reliability with modifications suited in qualitative research is needed to assess the research quality.

Kirk and Miller (1986) identified three alternative types of reliability applicable to qualitative studies: quixotic reliability, diachronic reliability, and synchronic reliability. Quixotic reliability is concerned with whether an observation always yields the same measurement. This criterion may be misleading because it may only elicit rehearsed information. Diachronic reliability refers to the stability of

observation over time.  This standard is appropriate for unchanged subjects or objects.

Synchronic reliability deals with the similarity of observations at the same time.

While discussing the issue of reliability, Lunt and Livingstone (1996) argued

that qualitative researchers should focus on the level of interpretation.  The critical

question rests on whether the findings can receive similar interpretations in a reliable

way, instead of focusing on expecting the same findings across different sites.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted that the findings generated in qualitative

research cannot be replicated because reality undergoes constant change.  In

particular, changes arise from two sources: the subject under study and design

problems from researchers.  According to Lincoln and Guba, *dependability* is a better

criterion to assess reliability in qualitative research.  The key issue in dependability

deals with whether the process of the study is consistent, reasonably stable over time

and across researchers (Smith & Robinson, 1984).  This conceptualization of

reliability is suitable in my study.

To assure the dependability of this study, I took the following measures.  First,

during data analysis, I constantly checked and questioned the results.  Second, I

repeatedly went back and forth between the theoretical framework and the interview

transcripts as suggested by Kirk and Miller (1986).  Third, as suggested by Lincoln

and Guba, I kept a journal and field notes recording my thoughts, ideas, observations,

daily schedule, and logistics of the study.  In doing so, an auditor would be able to

confirm the results of the study.

*Validity—Credibility and Transferability*

Qualitative scholars (e.g., Fontana & Frey, 1994; Goffman, 1974) argued that objectivity resides not in a method per se, but in the framing of the research problem and the willingness of the researchers to pursue that problem wherever the data and their hunches may lead. Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted that the traditional definitions of internal validity--true value—and external validity—generaliziblity— are not appropriate indicators of validity in qualitative inquiry. Instead, they advocated replacing internal validity with credibility. The standard of credibility deals with the questions of whether the reconstructions are credible to the people we study and to our audience. The issue of credibility thus answers the questions of 1) whether a researcher has successfully captured the multiple realities construed by participants, and 2) how credible are those reconstructions to the original constructors.

Guba and Lincoln (1981) suggested that instead of striving for objectivity, qualitative scholars should seek to maintain confirmatibility. Confirmatibility is concerned with whether the conclusions depend on the participants and conditions of the inquiry rather than on the inquirer. Miles and Huberman (1994) expressed similar idea when they explained the need to check for researcher effects. They warned qualitative researchers to attend to social behaviors occurring as a response to a researcher's inquiry, which is likely to result in biased observations and inferences.

The criterion of transferability is suggested to replace external validity (i.e., generalizability of findings) (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Wolcott, 1995). Transferability refers to the extent to which the research findings can

be transferred to similar situations or contexts. It relies on the congruence between sending and receiving contexts. Burden of proof falls more on the person who tries to make an application. Lincoln and Guba (1995) recommended that researchers make the descriptive data as complete as possible to ensure that future researchers can assess similarities between studies.

Some other concepts related to transferability are also relevant to assess qualitative studies. For example, some scholars (e.g., Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995) embraced the standard of naturalistic generalization. This criterion assesses whether a description of setting is rich enough for readers to reach conclusions based on their familiarity of the setting or experiences. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) echoed that the key is not to generalize to all settings but to identify to which particular settings the findings can be transferred.

Kvale (1995) identified three alternatives (i.e., quality of craftsmanship, communicative validity, and pragmatic validity) to replace validity used in quantitative studies. Quality of craftsmanship places an emphasis on quality of research. Communicative validity is determined through the dialogue of participants. Pragmatic validity focuses on the application and implied action of the findings.

Admittedly, there are several challenges to validity in qualitative research. For instances, contradictions in the responses of participants may be an issue for internal validity. When viewed as passive vessels of answers in a traditional approach, contradictions compromise the validity of responses from participants. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) reasoned that positional shifts and activation of different aspects in a participant make contradictions a normal phenomenon. These

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contradictions provide an opportunity for researchers to look for the circumstances where the contradictions occur and what meanings they suggest.

Another common challenge to validity in qualitative research relates to the issue of whether participants are telling the truth. Dexter (1970) responded that such question appears to be an inappropriate assumption in qualitative research because it assumes an underlying and unchanging attitude within an individual.

I took the following steps to increase the credibility and transferability of the study, as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). First, I included data from both managerial and non-managerial participants to increase credibility. Second, I sought member validation by consulting with my participants whether the results and interpretation were credible to them to improve credibility. Third, I applied peer debriefing by seeking feedback from my colleagues to raise credibility. Finally, I provided extensive description of the settings to assure transferability. Such detailed description would help future researchers to determine the extent to which my results could be transferred to their research settings.

The above section has explained the research design of the study. Particularly, this study adopted a qualitative approach to answer the research questions posed in the conceptualization chapter. Interviewing was the primary method employed for collecting data. The next chapter reports the findings based on the interviews. I group the results chapter based on the research questions proposed in the conceptualization chapter. Specifically, I first discuss how the employees from the MCNs examined the study engaged in sensemaking during change. I explain how the participants defined and bridged their cognitive gaps. Then, I explain how public

relations functioned during change to communicate change with the employees.  I

found some common patterns shared by most participating organizations and some

unique themes emerged in some organizations.  Lastly, I illustrate the influence of

uncertainty avoidance on sensemaking during change.  I conclude each section with a

summary of the major results on the research questions.

CHAPTER IV: Results and Discussion

A total of 60 interviews were conducted. Participants included top level managers (e.g., CEOs, vice presidents, senior vice presidents, directors, and deputy country managers), middle level managers (e.g., department managers, line managers, and supervisors), and regular employees such as assembly line workers. All interviews were face-to-face, open-ended, and digitally recorded, ranging from 30 minutes to over 90 minutes. Four interviews were conducted in English and the rest in Chinese or a mixture of English and Chinese.

I have sorted the results based on my research questions proposed in the conceptualization chapter: sensemaking during organizational change, the role of public relations programs during change, and the influence of a cultural dimension--uncertainty avoidance on sensemaking. Specifically, to address the first question I organize results around three key questions (Weick, et al., 2005, p. 410) in the sensemaking process: how does something come be an event during change? What does an event mean? and now what should I do? The sensemaking framework from Weick (1995) is applied to explain the results, which also reveals three key recurring processes in organizing: enactment, selection, and retention. I address the second research question by examining the actual public relations programs conducted during change and the impact of these programs as perceived by the participants. The third research question is explored by analyzing whether and how uncertainty avoidance influenced meaning making during change. I conclude each section with a summary of major results for each research question.

Sensemaking during Change

RQ1: How do organizational members make sense of change in multinational organizations in China?

How does something become an event during change?

(Grounded in Identity Construction)

*Disruptions of Identity*

Identify construction is at the root of sensemaking and influences how organizational members define and invent what is out there (Weick, 1995, p. 20). According to Weick, an individual's sense of self is derived from promoting self-enhancement (i.e., a positive state of self), self-efficacy (i.e., a competent self), and self-consistency (i.e., a coherent and consistent self) (p. 20). Results indicated that intentional, explicit efforts at sensemaking were activated by recognizing discrepancies in identities, which could be seen in several change cases.

For example, employees from in a Japanese automobile manufacturer felt that their identity as "responsible family man" was threatened by moving to a distant area due to the relocation change expected to be completed in two years. The identity of being a "responsible family man" was premised on several roles: son, father, and husband. These roles involved specific family duties such as attending to elderly parents, taking care of a child [4], and helping house chores, according to the participants. The relocation change would make it difficult for participants at this Japanese company to fulfill these activities dictated by this "responsible family man" identity. The new plant is an hour's driving distance from the current site. During

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[4] Most families in China have single child due to the one-child family policy enforced by the Chinese government.

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traffic, it would take up to three hours to commute back and forth from the new plant to the city. In the worst cases, some workers may have had to leave their home around five o'clock in the morning and probably return home about nine o'clock at evening.

One participant from the assembly line told me that it has been a bonding time with his son by taking him to school every morning. After the completion of relocation, this participant would no longer be able to do that. By the time he gets home from the new plant, his son would probably have gone to bed already. This change made him to doubt: "whether I am still a responsible father and whether staying with the company would outweigh the lack of care and attention to my son." It was obvious that this participant started to question whether the situation would be same or different after change, signaling a perception of discrepancy between the current and prospective identities. Working in the new plant would make this participant unable to assume the usually roles embedded in his "responsible family man" identity. Particularly, this participant's sense of self-enhancement (i.e., maintaining a positive state), self-efficacy (i.e., perceiving oneself as competent), and self-consistency (i.e., experiencing continuity) was interrupted. The expected continuity in maintaining his usual identity is thus breached. The distance about the new plant suddenly became an issue for this participant. In other words, the location of the new plant became meaningful to participants who perceived the difficulty in keeping their usual identity as "responsible family man."

Another employee from the technology and planning department from this Japanese company exhibited similar confusion in grasping the identity discordance

resulted from relocation.  This employee articulated how the possible increased

absence would prevent him from asserting his personal identity as a "responsible

man":

> My wife is a nurse who has irregular morning and night shifts.  My parents are
> taking care of our child till I get home in the evening.  If the company does
> build an employee dorm for us, staying at the dorm is certainly a better option
> than spending four hours on the road every day.  But then staying away from
> my family will put too much stress on my aging parents.  My daughter has
> always been complaining that she can't see me enough during the week day.
> If I move with the company to the new location, it'd be worse.  I'll be her
> weekend daddy, which I don't want this to happen.

The above responses showed that the prolonged time in work commute due to

relocation created disparity in his identities.  The role as a "weekend daddy"

contradicted with the "responsible family man" identity, which generated discomfort

for this participant.   After the change, he could not perform his usual roles that

defined his identity in the family.  As Weick (1988) pointed out, sensemaking

involves a key question of what implications an event has for "who I will be."  This

Japanese company's change of factory site clearly placed the sense of who this

employee will be regarding his family identity at odds with his expected family

identity.  This identity discrepancy motivated the employee to seek a plausible sense

of what is happening.  According to this employee, he as well as many of his

colleagues had already asked management how they would help employees shorten

the time in commuting to and from the new plant.  Possible solutions brought up by

employees included transporting employees by company buses, providing subsidies for employees to rent or purchase apartments near the new plant, and offering compensation packages for ones who did not want to move that far for work.

The identity associated with self-efficacy for senior engineers was challenged by the relocation change initiated at the Japanese automobile company. As part of the relocation plan, the automobile company would update and restructure its automation systems in production lines. Many manual works would be replaced by automatic machines, which created the need for engineers and assembly line workers to learn new operation skills. This learning, nevertheless, appeared to be problematic for senior engineers who prided themselves for their "excellent manual skills," based on the participant responses. One participant from the technology and planning department explained: "They [senior technicians] felt lost about their new roles in the company and feared that they would lose respect from others because they might respond slowly to machines than those junior engineers." The root of this problem in fact laid in the disruption on the current identity of these senior engineers resulted from the emphasis on automation over manual skills. As some participants mentioned, some senior engineers joked that they did not want to become a "machine man." For these senior engineers, the skills involved to be a "machine man" stood nowhere close to the demand of accuracy, delicacy, and profound knowledge required in manual operations. From the perspective of the senior engineers, the new identity of a "machine man" was insufficient at promoting the self-efficacy need (i.e., being a highly competent engineer) associated with the current identity. This breakdown in identity led this group of engineers to initially view the change negatively and to

resist the change. In other words, learning to operate automatic systems distorted the sense of self for these senior engineers.

My interpretation of the breakdown for these senior engineers found support from the remarks by the manager from the technology and planning department at this Japanese company. This manager offered several reasons why these senior engineers and technicians opposed adding automation systems:

> First, these senior technicians felt less valued under the new operation systems. They were once well respected for their expertise that has been developed in years. Now, their current specialties would soon be replaced by machines. In the relocated plant, employees with one or two months' training could handle their current work. Second, these senior technicians would learn how to operate the new systems from their "disciples." This status shift created psychological discomfort for the senior and experienced engineers and technicians. Third, these technicians had to unlearn those once highly valued skills. The senior technicians have already formed fixed ideas about how things should be operated for years. The unlearning of their once cherished skills stripped away their sense of achievement in this company.

Response from the above manager indicated that learning new operation systems made these senior engineers feel that they were giving up their essential skills and expertise. It was these skills and expertise that comprised the identity of being competent and respected engineers. The disparities noticed by these engineers were grounded in their construction of a sense of self. Interruption to this sense of self as competent engineers broke the ongoing flow of experience. The once clear flow of

action turned to be unintelligible.  These engineers responded to this puzzle by attempting to resume their identity by opposing the change, as Weick (1995) argued that individuals look first to ways that will allow them to resume the interrupted flow of experience.

Another example of how sensemaking is triggered by discrepancies in identity came from a certification program implemented in a Swedish telecommunications company.  This new program required engineers to pass a certification test assessing their technical, business, and human competence.  To management, this new program seemed to be a reasonable strategic move to strengthen its competitiveness in customer service.  "A simple change in evaluation," as one senior director put it, encountered strong resistance from engineers.  This opposition arose from the challenge that this certification program presented to the established identity of the engineers.

Through years of academic as well as work training, engineers had developed a firm engineer identity that centered on technical expertise, as one senior director from this telecommunications company put it, "Their years of engineering training only focused on the technical aspects."  Competence in business and human aspects appeared foreign to these engineers whose core responsibility focused on problem solution.  As one engineer said, "expertise in human interaction and business operation has never been on our plate."  The interruption on the existing engineer identity was evident from the description by another engineer:

> I was surprised to learn that as engineers we will be evaluated upon our
> knowledge about business culture, business operation, and presentation skills.

Especially, the competence of business culture, that area seems so far off from us. For engineers, our job is to fix the problem whenever it emerges. You tell me what's wrong, and I will fix it. I don't think knowing how to do a better presentation will help me solve the problem.

The above comment revealed that the existing engineer identity did not include competence in business operation and human skills. In another words, this participant felt a sense of losing his "real identity" as an engineer by devoting time and energy to develop business and human competence. Following the new program contradicted with the established identity. This engineer's sense of self was thus interrupted. Particularly, the sense of coherence and continuity (i.e., self-consistency) was threatened, which accounted for his unwillingness to participate in the program.

Another engineer who joined this Swedish company a year ago expressed similar sentiment when his established engineer identity was challenged:

Business culture and operation represent areas for managers to develop. I just want to do my engineering work. Since I just started working at this company, most of my time has been spent traveling to different places to fix networks. I can't see knowing business culture will help what I do here. The company seemed to place unnecessary demands on us. To prepare for the certification test, most of my time will be spent on non-engineer related areas.

As indicated from the above observation, the certification program hindered this engineer to promote the self-efficacy and self consistency, two core dimensions in personal identity. The sense of self-efficacy was interrupted because this engineer felt constrained in developing knowledge related to business operation and human

skills.  Furthermore, for this engineer acquiring competence in areas other than technical aspects did not fit with his daily responsibilities, which breached the sense of self-consistency.  The way this engineer described the certification program (e.g., "unnecessary demands") revealed that he focused on the negative aspects of the new program, singling out cues that he wanted to see.  The engineer imposed what he believed of the engineer identity (i.e., fixing problems only) on viewing the new program, which resulted in noticing the threats to existing identity.  By noticing and reflecting on the influence of the certification program on these engineers' existing identity, a problematic situation (i.e., disruption in identity) was constructed into being.

Given the disruption on the established identity for engineers, it was not surprising to see their resistance during the initial phase of implementation at this Swedish telecommunications company.  Some engineers even walked out of the meeting while the managers explained the change.  One senior director recalled that some engineers felt angry that "the skills required in the certification programs are more applicable to managers than to engineers."  One employee, from the unit in charge of the new program training, mentioned that she received many emails and phone calls from senior engineers when the program was first introduced.  These senior engineers viewed the program as a challenge to their abilities already demonstrated through their work.

*Interruptions of Ongoing Projects*

Ongoing sensemaking lays out the occasions for sensemaking.  Sensemaking becomes active when interruptions, cued by past events, bear on current projects

(Weick, 1995). The ongoing flow of interactions and activities is revealed precisely when it is interrupted (Murphy, 2001, p. 46). For instance, a field analysis manager in a U.S. semiconductor company described the interruption that he felt on his ongoing flow of activity. He had worked with his previous boss for three years and was accustomed to the micromanagement style preferred by this on-site regional manager. The company had recently undergone a personnel change. The new regional manager working in Malaysia, however, was a firm believer of delegating responsibilities and giving freedom to his team member. A shock occurred when he realized that he was no longer able to seek immediate assistance from his boss:

> One day we had to run an emergency test on a chip production line and had to submit the test report by the end of day. I usually had it reviewed by my old boss before turning it in. I was not very certain about my conclusion about one test and wanted to get feedback from my boss. I was almost about to step in my boss's office as usual when I realized that my new boss is far away in Malaysia, so I turned it in without having him check it. That's when I realized I don't have anyone to take the risk for me anymore. I'm on my own.

The above manager's ongoing flow of receiving timely assistance was interrupted because his new boss now kept his office in another country. Furthermore, this manager's previous notion of how much risk he should take was not helpful for him to cope with the current situation. In the past, whenever he was not sure about any test results, his boss would step in to help. This participant's ongoing pattern about the responsibility of his boss broke down when he realized that his current manager was not as available as he expected. This breakdown created

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moments for sensemaking.  This participant started to look for plausible accounts to restore the ongoing flow.  For instance, integration of his local units with others in the Asian region made it impossible for his manager to provide timely assistance on specific test reports.  The new manager preferred macro-management style, monitoring loosely during the process of project completion.  Ongoing sensemaking allowed this participant to make adjustments, namely improving his ability in solving problems independently.  Such adjustment helped this participant to gain stability in the ongoing flow of activity.

Another manager from the infrastructure unit at the same telecommunications company experienced similar surprise when his new senior director shifted the team's focus to develop primary and secondary skills.  His previous senior director focused on developing engineers who were the top professionals in their own areas.  With the new senior director, everyone in the team had to learn their peers' skill sets.  If an engineer suddenly left a team project because of emergency or job change, another team member would be able to immediately assume this vacancy without affecting the project's completion.  This notion of developing the "cover-up base" seemed to disrupt this team's ongoing flow.  This manager explained the disruption:

> After this new senior director came, we were required to develop two additional areas of expertise.  We were initially a little shocked by this new initiative because in this industry knowledge updates come out quickly.  It is not easy to stay on top of our own areas let alone learning and becoming an expert on the other areas.  When we first heard the news, the team members

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felt stressed because of the pressure. We were already swamped with our own work.

The above comment suggested that developing expertise in additional areas clearly generated interruptions to the on-going sense of flow. Completing current projects and learning new skills simultaneously proved to be "chaotic" for the team members, as this manager described. Some team members even complained that spending time to develop secondary skills distracted them from focusing on their assigned projects. This interruption or shock prompted engineers to seek out meaning and a solution to address the issue. Recognizing the stress felt by engineers, the senior director helped them make sense of the "problematic situation" by highlighting some cues – excellence and high turn-over rate. To make these cues prominent to engineers, the senior director talked about previous cases where the sudden leave of engineers affected the progress and quality of projects. Engineers thus were able to incorporate the new initiate into the team's ongoing sense of striving for excellence. The senior director also designated time each week for engineers to learn new skills, which reduced pressure from engineers. The on-going sensemaking allows engineers and the senior director to make adjustment so that the dissonance between new initiatives and the team's usual flow was diminished.

Interruptions to an on-going flow usually induce emotional reactions from sensemakers, as Weick (1995) argued. Responses from interviews suggested that negative emotions emerged when organizational members perceived an interruption as harmful and when an organized flow was disrupted suddenly. An example came from the sudden downsizing at a U.S. telecommunications company. The unexpected

layoff occurred less than three months following a series of expansions that still stayed fresh among employees. One engineer from the customer service informed me that a training program in his unit had to pause due to the downsizing. The newly recruited employees felt angry because they were laid off before they even started to work. This engineer recalled:

> Those recently hired engineers were shocked and angry. They just came to our company and then were asked to leave. Some even quit their previous jobs to join the company. Their training was suddenly cancelled, and their career plan was obviously disrupted. At least the company should have given these people some time to look for another job. It came too soon and too suddenly.

It seemed that employees were greatly shocked by the company's abrupt decision to cut people. Less than three months ago, the vice president of the Asia Pacific region just came to celebrate the last expansion and envisioned a bright future for the company. One manager from the sales unit felt especially difficult to confront the confused and bitter new trainees: "I had to tell some new trainees that they were laid off. I can't describe to you how upset and outraged they felt. This was definitely not something they expected when they came here three months ago."

Emotionally aroused individuals typically seek answer to the question, what's up? (Weick, 1995). The anger felt by employees at this company seemed to be aggravated by the company's lack of explanation for the unexpected move. Management only explained that this company was experience some difficult time. Another manager from the networking unit said: "The laid-off employees felt being

treated unfairly. It was irresponsible of this company to hire so many people and then suddenly pushed them out. The reason offered by the company was too general." Many enraged employees vented their anger on some online forums, which damaged the company's reputation and trust from stakeholders, as one senior manager observed. This company could have addressed this ongoing sense of mistreatment by communicating openly the possible reasons for the abnormal move. Unfortunately, management's silence and evasion accentuated the negative emotions felt by employees.

The induced emotions are affected by the possible alternatives to repair the interrupted sequence (Weick, 1995). Fewer solutions for interruptions resulted in more heightened negative arousal. An example can be found from the relocation change at a U.S. food and beverage company. This company suddenly announced a relocation of its headquarters to another city in two months, which completely shocked its employees who had new clue about this change. One employee expressed her strong resentment: "How could it be possible to move our family over in two months? What about my husband's work? My kid's school? I have sick parents here." Another employee was about to be promoted shortly. After hearing this news, this employee fell into despair: "My boss was changed to someone else. I thought I'd have a great career at this company. The promotion was not likely happen with the new boss. My career plan was totally messed up by this change." These responses showed that employees were suddenly thrown into a "chaotic situation" where their ongoing flow of experience was disrupted. The projected career plans and the once normal activities seemed problematic all of a sudden.

What exacerbated the negative feelings by the employees appeared to be the limited options to resolve this unanticipated interruption. The short time notice left employees at two options, either moving with the company or looking for another job. The peak season for job hunting had already passed. Many employees felt outraged that the company could have announced or discussed relocation plan much earlier. It was rather hard to find a comparable position in such limited amount of time. To secure a job, many employees ended up starting a new career that was different from their major fields. One manager from this company showed her frustration and anger:

> We were more enraged about how management treated us than with the change itself. With more time notice, we could have had more options. I have worked in this industry for over ten years, and it took me almost four months to find another job. You can imagine how hard it would be for others who had less experience. A lot of us felt that we were cornered into an either/or situation. Ironically, either option was appealing to us. It was not fair for the company to treat us like this.

It seemed that the few choices resulted from the interruption provoked strong negative emotions by employees. These negative feelings in turn influenced how employees attended to and interpreted information. One employee reasoned that the relocation "was meant to avoid higher taxes by moving to another city with preferable treatment for multinational companies." Another employee concluded: "The company's recent merger, CEO change, and relocation were all related. The purpose of the merger was to give away our biscuit business to another company that had

larger sales revenue than we did.  They never cared about our options.  This kind of business practice was so awful." The negatively aroused feelings seemed to lead employees to recall information congruent with their frustration, disappointment, and anger.  As Weick (1995) argued: "People remember events that have the same emotional tone as what they currently feel" (p. 49).

"What does an event mean?" (Processes of Enactment and Selection)

*Noticing and bracketing (Extracted Cues)*

*Noticing anomalies*.  According to Weick et al. (2005), "the organizing process of enactment incorporates the sensemaking activities of noticing and bracketing" (p. 414).  Triggered by discrepancies and equivocality in ongoing projects, noticing marks the incipient process of sensemaking.  Individuals tend to notice elements that are unusual, unexpected, extreme, and negative (Fiske & Taylor, 1991, p. 265).  Interview results indicated that participants were likely to single out abnormal information at the beginning phase of sensemaking.  Employees from a Japanese automobile company noticed the company's deviance in employee treatment after learning about the change.  Particularly, moving the plant to a fairly distant area contradicted with the company's established image of a caring employer.  The company provides yearly child education subsidies to its employees.  Upon learning that the shoes worn by assembly workers caused feet blisters, the company quickly changed its supplier for shoes.  The complaint about the heat at some assembly workshops led the company to refurnish its heat isolation systems.  "Moving to a distant area that would complicate the transportation for employees does not seem normal for this company," as one participant remarked.   Another

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participant noted: "Not considering the lengthy time in commuting seems odd for a company that always cared about the employee welfare." Employees noticed that the long-distant move was not consistent with the company's normal treatment of employees. The surprise felt by employees about the inconsistency paved the way for them to make sense of the decision.

During the sudden change of downsizing at a U.S. telecommunications company, the anomalies noticed by employees seemed overwhelming and defined sense. This company just finished a large expansion less than three months ago; therefore the abrupt downsizing seemed "unfathomable" to employees. One engineer illustrated such dramatic behavior of this company: "I've never seen any multinational companies underwent such drastic changes as we did. The company had three cuts in less than a year following a large expansion. It seemed crazy!" Another engineer's unit unexpectedly laid off three employees after a service call. Among them, two were just hired three months ago. This engineer described this unusual event:

> We just came back from a service call and were astound to learn that three
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> people had been laid off in our department. Two of the laid-off engineers
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> were added less than three months ago. These people were not slackers. They
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> left their previous jobs because the company touted a great future ahead. The
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> least they could do is to notify them earlier. You don't ask people to join you
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> and then fire them. It was just plain disrespectful.

It seemed extreme for this company to cut the newly hires abruptly. The company's usual behavior seemed to evoke anger as well as fear from employees.

One participant from the marketing department recalled: "It felt stifling to walk into the building because you never knew who will be the next to leave. Sometimes we had lunch together, then several hours later some people were gone." These cues formed the foundation to tie elements together cognitively when interpreting the change. The cues indicating the company's treatment of employees during downsizing were tied with the cues of business performance. For instance, one participant from the networking unit sensed: "This company wasn't like this before. The crash of our products sales might have consumed their attention. Being sensitive to the feelings of employees might not be a priority for a falling company." Another participant from a presale solution center compared how others had treated their employees during downsizing: "I talked with friends working in other multinationals, and they seldom saw such an intensive cut on employees. Management might prepare a significant strategy change in its business in China." Linking these cues together allowed employees to find plausible stories for the company's bizarre behavior.

Responses by participants from a U.S. insurance company provided another set of examples about noticing unusual cues. Participants singled out the new CEO's irregular communication behavior. This top management change occurred in the midst of a pending merger. The previous CEO left without completing his second turn, which let employees to speculate about possible drastic change in business operations. Employees thus expected this new leader to update them about the company's future direction and the merging process. To their great surprise, this new CEO did not engage in active communication with managers nor employees. One

manager from product research unit recalled: "After we first met him during the town hall meeting where he was introduced to us, we haven't met him directly in two months since then.  He seemed to have disappeared. Employees wanted to hear from him about the merger because it may involve headquarters relocation."  This new CEO's communication style seemed more unusual when comparing with his predecessor.  The previous CEO was an "active communicator" in terms of keeping employees informed about the company's performance and directions, as described by participants.  The old CEO constantly initiated dialogue with managers in various units.  One manager from the investment unit commented that the new leader placed a lot of guess work on employees about where this company is heading, especially in the middle of merger.  The previous leader was open about sharing information with employees about the merging progress.  The old CEO's communication styles formed a context that guided employees to differentiate relevant cues from others.

Attention to abnormal cues could also be seen from employees at an Austrian semiconductor company.  This company had recently been merged by another U.S. semiconductor company.  This Austrian company grew from a family business, which focused on treating employees with care and respect.  After being merged, employees at the Austrian company experienced a sharp difference in company cultures.  The U.S. company held several presentations at the Austrian company about the merger.  To employees at the Austrian company, those almost perfect presentations went quickly and did not allow much time for them to think before responding.  Questions were required to be asked in English, which also proved problematic.  As one engineer commented, "Those presentations seemed to be

prepared with lawyers, very long and difficult to understand.  It was hard to respond

right away with questions even in Chinese let alone in a different language.  It felt as

if they did for procedure not really want to hear from us."  Another senior engineer

noted that the Austrian company focused on getting things done and allowed great

flexibility for engineers in solving the problems.  In contrast, this U.S. company cared

more about formality and procedures.

What really shocked the employees at the Austrian company was how the

U.S. company dealt with laid-off employees.  The U.S. company had earlier defused

worries for a layoff.  However shortly after the merger was completed, the U.S.

company decided to initiated a global cut on employees.  Great surprise came when

an employee who had just worked overtime a night before was laid off the next day

morning.  One laid-off employee only had several hours to pack and leave.  The

human resources manager described this usual incident:

> It was such a shock to us because our company never laid off people like this.
> We would at least give two months notice to the employees and would
> provide legitimate reasons for those employees.  It was really unfair to layoff
> someone who just worked overtime the day before.  This U.S. company only
> gave us the explanation of declining business.

Comparing to its previous practice, the layoff policy at the U.S. company seemed

disrespectful, unfair, and insensitive, which was hard for employees at the Austrian

company to accept.  This incident made engineers from the Austrian company stay

alert and prepare an exit plan.  As one engineer put it, "I am now keeping my options

open about other opportunities.  If there's anything suspicious, I can leave quickly."

*Noticing primed cues*. According to Weick (1995), cues extracted by individuals are influenced by context (local contingencies). Noticing helps organizational members pick up events and trends, which become the materials for sensemaking. Results indicated that participants noticed cues that were situationally and personally primed. Management sometimes highlighted cues for employees to make sense of during change. For instance, management from a Japanese automobile manufacturer explained its reason for relocation as out of environmental concerns. To make this cue salient to employees, articles about environmental protection appeared on the front page of the monthly newsletters. Additionally, management encouraged directors and line managers to emphasize the concerns of reducing pollutants while communicating with employees about change. An employee from the assembly line described how he noticed the cues related to environmental protection:

> When I first read the stories on our newsletter that the company decided to relocate due to environmental concerns. I felt surprised. This seldom occurred to me that our company caused great harm to the nearby communities. I then went on the internet to search for more information. I even found out that our company paid a lot of money to nearby residents for the noises from production. Later I found during lunch chat that some other colleagues were also searching for evidence about why our company created pollutants.

The above comment showed that the cues associated with environmental concerns were not attended to by employees prior to change. Management's emphasis on these

cues seemed surprising to employees, which prompted them to seek more information about how this company affected the environment.  Without highlighting these cues, employees were not likely to pick up on the information related to environmental protection.  Attending to and interpreting these cues helped employees understand the reasons behind the change, which would likely project the company in a favorable light.  Another participant from the sourcing department launched his own research after hearing from his manager about the issue of waste emissions.  This participant learned that the company would soon violate the new city regulation on waste emissions in residential areas.  The new plant location has less stringent standards because it is far from residential communities.  This participant "felt glad that the company made the issue [environmental concerns] noticeable because it showed how socially responsible this company is."  Noticing to these cues related to environmental protection seemed to foster support from employees about the change because "this company made a right decision to move, which made us proud," as one participant commented.

Another example came from a new program implementation occurring at a Swedish telecommunications company.  To counter employee opposition against a new certification program, the company's top management made prominent the program's personal benefits to engineers.  Particularly, this certification program laid out clearly the career advancement levels for engineers.  Engineers would receive promotion as long as they pass certain certification tests.  Management organized video conferences with engineers in other countries.  During these video conferences, engineers could directly exchange views with engineers who had passed the tests.  As

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one senior director put it, "Talking to those engineers helped our branch's engineers better understand the test procedures, and more importantly they heard directly the specific benefits related to this program." To stress the new program's personal benefits to engineers, the company's top management provided several workshops with line managers to help them communicate such messages to their team members. One manager from the network service center said that he drew the career model with each member and pointed out the potential path of professional development based on their individual circumstances.

These primed cues by management from the Swedish telecommunications company helped engineers to single out information consistent with these cues. By talking with his manager and fellow engineers, one participant found out that he could broaden his career choice. This participant described the personal benefits he learned about this certification program:

> I found out that I actually have potential at the managerial level. While advancing to more senior levels as an engineer, I can also develop my career as a consultant. After learning about the standards in the certification program, it does not seem that difficult to reach the level of consultant. I always like the interaction with customers. This program helped me see how far I can reach in my career, so I didn't see why I wouldn't take it.

Another engineer echoed:

> I learned from some senior engineers that it was difficult for us to move ahead once we reach the level of experienced engineers under the old system. Advancement then relies on vacancy or special promotions. With this

certification program, there's no limit of how far I can go. Our future seems

more promising.

Learning the personal benefits of the new program seemed to let the above

participants make positive sense on this program. Engineers made sense of the

program through their personal relations with the program, namely how this program

helped them develop professionally. These primed cues stressed a key aspect of self-

enhance in identity construction. Attending to these cues was conducive for

engineers to see a positive outcome, which reinforced the notion that sensemaking is

grounded in identity construction.

Another example of how organizational members carved out primed cues

came from participants from a U.S. telecommunications company. This company

was undergoing a re-structural change. Some employees would be laid off after the

completion of change since several functions (e.g., sourcing, purchasing, and

manufacturing) would be eventually outsourced. Management of this company had

anticipated opposition and negative emotions from the employees who would be laid

off. To address this issue, management tried to prime this group of employees to the

cues showing they were still valued by the company. For instance, feature stories that

applauded the contribution of senior technicians and engineers appeared continuously

in the company's e-newsletters. Managers constantly communicated with their team

members during meetings that their skills and knowledge were still valued and

needed. The human resources department stressed during their meetings with line

managers and employee representatives that the company would recommend the laid-

off employees to its partner companies. The key was to "let these employees know

that the company appreciates their contribution and will treat them fairly," as the senior director of the human resources department commented.

Employees seemed to respond well to the cues primed by management at this telecommunications company. After learning the news at the beginning, some employees showed resentment of change by slowing down work progression, complaining openly during unit meetings, or wanting to quit immediately. Such opposition faded after management made clear that these employees were still valued. Noticing the cues highlighted by management reminded this group of employees of other occasions that demonstrated the company's appreciation. For instance, several engineers told their line manager that reading the stories from their peers refreshed their memories about how this company kept crediting a former engineer's proposed changes on the broadband system. Another manger from the global procurement unit recalled:

> At first, it was hard for them to accept it. I could tell by their work quality and their emotional reactions during the conversations with them. I constantly reassured them that we will recommend them to other companies and still keep them if their skills matched with our new operation system. Gradually they realized that we still care about them. Some team members appreciated that the company sponsored training that was not directly related with their work, but that training made them competitive on the job market.

It was clear from the above responses that employees extracted information consistent with the cues made salient by management. The stories highlighting the contribution from their peers and communication with their managers primed employees at this

company to seek information signaling the company's appreciation of their value. As Weick (1995) argued, extracted cues acted as seeds from which individuals develop a larger sense of a situation (p. 50). The positive cues carved out by employees thus induced their positive interpretations, even though the change might have negative impact on them.

*Enactment through Plausible Accounts by Management (Plausibility)*

     *Consistent with ongoing sense*. Enactment concerns imposing sense, meaning on a situation (Weick, 1995). The success or failure of change depends on whether a strong sense associated with a particular change has been instilled on sensemakers (Mills, 2003). In managing change, responses from this study suggested that management enacted the environment by building a plausible sense of change consistent with an ongoing sense, tying enactment closely with plausibility.

     One example came from the routine personnel change at a U.S. semiconductor company. Every three or four years, managers of this company will rotate to different locations worldwide. Management tried to blend this change with the company's deeply enriched culture of "being data driven." The change of managerial personnel was touted by management as a means for local managers to receive fair promotion. Local managers would be assessed with expatriate managers when the terms of current managers end. The evaluation is of course based on candidates' performance data. As the factory general manager put it: "Let the data speaks for itself. A history of strong performance certainly assures an opportunity for promotion. We have many local managers taking the positions of their expatriates due to managerial rotations." Local managers were given opportunities to advance their career as a result of these

rotations.  This kind of change was not something that the global office tried to use to tighten its control, demonstrated management's dissatisfaction with the performance by the managers who left, or that indicated a company's strategy change. Management was able to infuse the change with the company's ongoing sense of organizational culture.  Employees were thus able to link the change with an organizational constant—a "data-driven culture," which reduced uncertainty and equivocality inherent in change.  Top management reinforced the sense that these routine personnel rotations were normal at this company.

The success of enacting a change environment aligned with an ongoing sense was evident in a Swedish telecommunications company.  To create an environment that seemed normal to certify the competence of engineers, management related this certification program with this telecommunications company's ongoing sense of providing standardized top service to its customers.  Top managers tried to give the sense that its engineers regardless of their locations reached the same excellence in their service.  In other words, when customers choose this company, they already were ensured about the service quality available to them.  The company created this sense through managers and training workshops.  As one senior director described:

> We tried to explain to our engineers that our company had problems selecting which engineers to dispatch to serve the customers.  It sometimes took days to locate the right person who could fix a specific problem.  Once the engineers are certified, the tiles are sufficient enough to assure that we are providing the best service we can to our clients.

It was clear from the above comment that this company portrayed an environment that needed service standardization. This notion of standardization was made known to engineers who did not think it was an issue before. Management of this telecommunications company invented an environment that its engineers had to respond to by participating in the certification program.

Engineers at this telecommunications company reacted to this enactment environment of standardization by linking it with past experience. For instance, one engineer recalled that he flew to a client site only to find out that he was not the right engineer to fix the problem. Another engineer mentioned the lengthy time involved in calling different branch offices to locate engineers to form a service team, which was a typical complaint from the customers. Another manager of the network unit remembered how the gaps in engineers' service brought additional costs to some clients. The above instances suggested that employees sought and interpreted information consistent with the environment enacted by top management. The invented environment of standardization guided employees to sort and interpret which data would be meaningful in making sense of the change.

While creating a sense of environment conducive to certifying engineers, the company also likely created constraints, according to Weick (1995). The certification program would help this company develop engineers with standardized quality of services. On the other hand, this program may discourage engineers to excel at each level. Meeting the basic standards is adequate for engineers to move up and keep their job security because reaching competence above the prescribed standards at each level would not affect their career development. As one senior director

illustrated, "I'm afraid that we won't have the top engineers at each level with the implementation of the program because the program does not provide enough incentive. We may not have the best engineers in this industry but we have qualified engineers." There seemed to a tradeoff between the benefits and constraints of creating an environment that an organization has to deal with.

The change unfolding at a Japanese automobile company exhibited another example of instilling a sense of change with an ongoing sense. This automobile company portrayed to its employees an environment that required a relocation of the plant. Particularly, top management used an organizational goal of "providing what our customers need" to shape the change environment. From its internal design, choice of production materials, to delivery time of products, this company has committed itself to satisfy the needs of its clients. The current production volume of 20,000 cars could not satisfy the increasing products demands of buyers. With the existing conditions (e.g., space and technology) of the current plant, this company would not be able to maximally meet its customers' needs. Relocating to a larger place and updating production lines thus seemed a reasonable adjustment. Management of this company thus provided its employees (i.e., sense receivers) with a plausible sense consistent with its ongoing sense of satisfying the needs of customers.

*Facilitating ongoing projects*. To shape an environment conducive to a particular change, interview results suggested that organizations tended to impose a plausible sense that facilitated ongoing projects. Infusing a change environment with ongoing projects downplayed the disruption or discontinuity that a change brought.

One example came from a U.S. telecommunications company. This company's profits surged from 2005 to 2006 by introducing a new trendy product, making it one of the top three most popular mobile devices worldwide. The global management team explained the promising sales as an indicator of its efforts to expand global markets. The global CEO of this company was recognized in 2005 as one of the top corporate CEOs around the world. At the annual meeting in 2005, the CEO announced an ambitious plan to beat the revenue of its largest competitor in one thousand days. Several months after this annual meeting, this company started its global expansion. The global management team asserted that this massive expansion was a natural extension of its efforts to enlarge its market shares. An initial decline of product sales in China appeared in the middle of 2006 and then sales went back to normal, which was interpreted by the global management team as a sign that work force expansion was necessary to maintain the market lead.

A sequence of actions seemed to be present in this telecommunications company's enactment: setting up the goal, committing to a course of action, and making change (i.e., global expansion) to sustain its action. To management imposed an environment that needed greater sales and customer service forces. In less than half a year, the company's China branch recruited several thousands of new hires, with an estimated total workforce of over 10,000.

Such a fast and large expansion in return casts great constraints upon this telecommunications company. To reach a high recruitment goal, the company was not able to screen and test how qualified the candidates were. Many applicants were recommended to various units without being first interviewed by the human resources

department.  One manager from the networking department recalled that he "was pressured by the human resources department to make hiring decisions without enough time to carefully compare those candidates."  As a result, many new hires might not be as qualified and competent as the employees hired before.  A serious self-imposed constraint that this enacted environment generated was its highly restrained response to the escalating decline in product sales, which inevitably made its revenue and profits plunge.  In less than three months after the company completed its largest expansion, the plummeting sales of its products left this company no other choice but to drastically cut its workforce multiple times.  Instead of being a response to the external market, the series of changes (i.e., expansions and downsizings) initiated by this telecommunications company were actually the reactions to its own creation of the environment.

Another example of how top management enacted environment by giving a plausible sense tied to ongoing projects could be found at the change implemented by a Japanese automobile manufacturer.  This automobile company started an initiative to diversity its products from sedans and trucks to include minibuses and sport utility vehicles (SUVs).  A production line for a newer model of SUV was in the process of being added to the Chinese market, which would require installing several new operation systems.  However, the current plant could no longer accommodate such a change given its limited space and outdated technical equipments, which made the change of plant site imperative.  Top management of this company then introduced the idea of relocation as a result of the ongoing projects—diversifying its products.

To make the cues for the enacted environment for relocation salient for employees, this automobile company sent several teams to its headquarters company in Japan for training on how to operate the production lines for this new car model. Information about the potential market for this model continuously appeared in the company's newsletters. The marketing department had already started its plan to launch a marketing campaign for introducing this model in local markets. These actions served to confirm the company's imposed sense upon the environment that relocation was a strategic response toward the ongoing projects of diversifying its products.

*Providing hope or potential reward.* Management oftentimes imposed a sense of hope or future reward to a situation that made change possible, plausible, and acceptable. Raw information is sorted, organized, and given meaning by management. Such enactment influenced the way that employees interpret change. For instance, top management from a Swedish telecommunications company instilled a meaning of personal reward (e.g., opportunity to develop multi-competencies) into the new certification program. This certification was used as a career model that laid out a specific degree of proficiency for different career paths. After taking the test, engineers would receive feedback on how they could acquire multi-competencies in technical, human, business areas. The following comment from the acting CEO illustrated how this company offered personal reward for engineers in order to encourage their participation in change:

The company's certification program serves as a career model for engineers and actually helps engineers to develop their multi-competence. In our

industry, the engineering work is very specific. The longer you work in a company, the harder it is for engineers to have other options because their expertise only focuses on a specific area. So we tell engineers that this program broadens their career choice. The human competence developed in this program may help them to move to managerial positions.

Employees seemed to respond well to the meaning of personal reward enacted by management. One support engineer who just passed a certification test stated that judges provided him feedback that he would not have learned otherwise. Through preparing the test, he recognized his work efficiency could be improved by knowing the company's structure and operation processes. This engineer felt motivated to work on these areas to pass the certification for a higher level. After attending several training workshops of the certification program, another engineer realized that he could develop his career as a consultant because of his skills in communication. This engineer described the potential benefits of the program: "As an onsite engineer, you have to travel a lot to fix problems for customers located in different careers. Being a consult does not require much travel, which involves managerial work. That may be good for my family. I'd have more time to be with them." The above examples showed that the meaning imposed by management affected how employees carved out and interpreted information cues.

Evidence of how management enacted the idea of change through providing a sense of hope was also evident in the relocation change at a Japanese automobile company. Top management invented the environment ready for relocation by illustrating the impact of this enactment on employees' workload and career

development.  The assembly lines at this company already operated on three shifts around the clock.  The production volume still lagged behind the demands of the customers.  Top management made it clear that this kind of working style was problematic for the health of assembly line workers.  Relocation would allow the company to expand the sizes of its various workshops, hire more employees, and to improve efficiency by updating automatic operation systems.  Additionally, the expansion of workshops would provide opportunities for managerial positions, which offered career advancement for qualified employees.  The company enacted a sense that relocation would promise various hopes (e.g., promotion opportunities, work load reduction, and increased efficiency) for employees.

Employees at this automobile company responded well to the enacted environment of assured hope in work conditions and career development.  Particularly, employees attended to information related to the meaning offered by management.  Positive reactions emerged among employees.  One participant commented that "there would be room for his career advancement either through inner rotation or upward promotion."  Especially, employees from the assembly lines felt hopeful about the change, as evidenced by the remark from an engineer:

> The relocation may be good for us.  Currently, many employees are working on extra shifts to meet the production demand.  After moving to a larger place and recruiting more employees, the situation will be much better.  The over-time shifts will be largely reduced.  It would be less stressful for us.

*Enactment by Collective Actions from Employees*

The previous patterns related to enactment primarily came from management, which accounted for most of the changes examined in the study. Employees did, however, enact an environment that required management's response, as indicated by results. Such enactment by employees occurred in two organizations. One example came from a U.S. food and beverage company. Employees at this company rallied together to create an environment of "being unfairly treated". This U.S. company surprised its employees at a town hall meeting by announcing the news of its relocation in two months. Stricken by the shock that came so suddenly, only a few standard questions (e.g., timeline of relocation) were posed to management during the town hall meeting. It was during the bus ride on the way back that the astounded employees started to put pieces together to create an environment in attempt to restore order in their lives.

Employees at this U.S. company enacted the environment through diffusing organizational stories and organizing the labor union. In the process of enactment, senior employees played a key role in imposing meaning to this change and forming a coalition. Particularly, meaning was enacted through organizational stories. On the buses back from the town hall meeting, senior employees started to create stories that characterized this change as being unfair and irresponsible. These emotionally charged stories highlighted the inconsistent behavior of the organization after its CEO change, severe impact of the change on families, and the new CEO's aggressive behavior. For instance, one participant recalled:

We felt like being suddenly hit hard on the head and lost consciousness till one senior employee woke us up. He told us that this company has always been people-centered. Several years ago this company moved to the current location because employees complained about inconvenience in commuting. Such a company wouldn't move to another city without discussing with its employees first. Now it's not about inconvenience. Instead, it's about losing our jobs. The company has totally changed since the new CEO took over. After hearing this, the whole bus was boiling.

The above story made the company's relocation seem extremely deviant of its normal behavioral range. This contrast helped employees to resolve their dissonance about the company. The previous caring image was shattered due to the CEO change. Furthermore, the sharp inconsistency embedded in the story was conducive to breaking the favorable impression that employees had developed over the years of this company's caring behavior.

Later on, stories about this new CEO's rude and aggressive treatment of her former employees were quickly circulated among employees. To rally middle level managers, employees created stories that stressed a similar tough situation that would be faced by managers as well as employees. One participant told me the following story: "I heard from a senior employee about this manager, a single parent, taking care of a child with cancer. Moving away in two months was not an option for her because it would interrupt her child's treatment. We were cornered in the same situation." The pronoun "we" used in the story accentuated a sense of in-group membership, while downplaying the difference in organizational status. Stories like

this seem to caste employees as victims of this change, which helped consolidate a counterbalance against the company.

Upon creating the sense of being treated unfairly by management, employees self-organized a labor union to counterbalance the powerful management. The leaders of the employees played a major role in instituting the notion that uniting together was imperative for employees to defend their own rights. The next day after the town hall meeting where the CEO announced the change, a small group of employee representatives was quickly formed and drafted the core questions that employees wanted to know about the change, such as the detailed time line and compensation packages. After getting no response from management, these leaders rapidly sent out emails to employees to ask their support to organize a labor union. One participant recalled: "Those leaders sent us email telling us that we can't keep waiting. The people-centered company that we used to know has gone. It was a deal in which we either get nothing or we can fight to get what we deserve." Another participant said: "Some people savvy with laws found that it is against the law for this company to make such a crucial decision without consulting with us. Some senior employees constantly encouraged us that we could win this fight because we have the law favoring us." The above responses revealed that leaders of employee representatives instilled a sense of urgency and efficacy upon employees, which reduced the constraints that employees had about fighting against a powerful organization.

The establishment of a labor union marked a success that employees at this company had in actively creating an environment. To exert public pressure upon the

company and to reinforce their unfair treatment, the labor union turned to media. Leaders of the labor union used various media outlets (e.g., television stations) to represent the voice of employees. Media were invited to join the first employee meeting where a union official announced its official start and denounced how his company had treated its employees during change. Such publicity forced top management to quickly open dialogue with the union and to start rounds of negotiation. Through the union, employees at this company thus created an environment to which top management had to respond.

*Selection of Meaning*

> *Retrospection influenced by the current situation/outcome.* Meaning is created by directing attention to what has already happened (Weick, 1995, p. 26). Whatever is occurring at present will influence what is discovered when individuals look back. An unexpected series of downsizing events took place shortly after a massive expansion at a U.S. telecommunications company. The vice president of this company defined the series of changes as "disaster because the company suffered huge losses from the downsizing and lost the confidence of its customers and employees." This negative definition of the changes led this participant to discover causal factors and relationships. As reasoned by this participant, the global management team overestimated the market in China. The unusual surge of the sales from 2005 to 2006 was misread by the global management team as a signal for a vast internal expansion to sustain the growth. Expansion was viewed as a form of investment, which would typically take five to six months for the newly hired to start contributing to the company. Initiating a drastic cut in less than three months yielded

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double costs. As this vice president stated: "The company had not even recovered from the lump cost spent on expansion but was forced to pay an enormous cost associated with downsizing." The top management created an environment that overestimated the market's absorption of its products, which led to the decision of changing its internal environment (i.e., workforce) to match the trend in the market. The plunge of sales made it impossible for the company to sustain a massive workforce anymore, which caused a series of downsizing. This reasoning was informed and dominated by the dire outcome of the changes.

Responses from a Japanese automobile manufacturer also showed the influence of the current situation on retrospection. The change of relocation was generally welcomed by employees at the automobile company. The construction of the new plant would be finished by the end of another year. All units were making various preparations for this move. These change promoting actions guided the attention of employees to cues that supported the relocation. For instance, one participant from the sourcing department looked back on the problems of preparing production materials during peak season. This participant explained: "The suppliers are limited. Sometimes the production was delayed because we couldn't get materials in time. With the relocation, we can build an inventory to better manage production materials." The current project of building the inventory for production materials directed this participant's attention backward to look for causal antecedents (problems in preparing production materials) that could explain the current event— relocation—plausibly. Another participant observed: "We started a new model a year ago, but the current assembly lines couldn't meet some technical standards of this

model.  We had to import parts from Japan, which increased the cost.  New lines will be installed in the relocated plant, so the change makes sense."

How change outcomes influenced the backward glancing is illustrated in the change that occurred at a Swedish telecommunications company.  The company initiated a certification program previously to evaluate the competence of its engineers in technical, business, and human aspects.  Positive outcomes of the new program affected the way employees reconstructed antecedents to stress the positive aspects of change.  For example, one engineer just passed his certification program.  This encouraging outcome made this participant aware of the benefits he gained from attending the training workshops.  This engineer was initially forced to attend the workshop by his manager.  A particular discussion on business processes at one workshop got his attention because it reminded him of how difficult he was kicked back and forth among many units to team up with the right engineers to solve a problem.  This discussion led him recognize that the program would benefit him in his work, which made the certification program seemed less daunting.  The knowledge learned through preparing the certification program reinforced for the engineer that this program would help him grow professionally.

Similarly, a manager from this Swedish telecommunications company recalled that great gaps existed in the quality of engineers on his team.  As a result, the decision of selecting the appropriate engineers for certain projects had been problematic.  After sending his team members to the training workshops for the certification program, this manager already had witnessed an improvement in the services of the engineers.  This manager concluded: "the certification program was a

reasonable decision from the top." It was clear from the above examples in this telecommunications company that employees singled pieces out their past experience and reconstructed these pieces to reinforce the decision of the change as reasonable.

Retrospection changes its course as ongoing situation changes, according to Weick (1995). Shifts or interruptions of current situations open up new ways of distributing attention to elapsed experience, which results in the creation of new meanings. An example came from the change that occurred at an Austrian semiconductor company. This company was bought by a U.S. semiconductor company. When the merger was completed, employees at the Austrian company thought the change might be inevitable for this company. Their interpretation of change was based on reflecting on the previous problematic aspects of this company. These singled-out past incidents included inconsistent financial management, mistrust of local management, and weak development of local engineers. For instance, one participant mentioned that the company was not strict in monitoring its finances. One expatriate manager received reimbursement of boundary fees of over 10,000 U.S. dollars for his three-night stay very easily. Some employees even filed over 100 hours of over-time work and received approval. Top management of this company did not seem to trust the local managers. As a result, most of the senior managers were expatriates, which increased operational costs. These troublesome areas were carved out by employees from the past to account for the merger. As one account manager stated: "I'm not at all surprised by the merger. Just look at how this company has been managed, it's a matter of time." Another senior engineer explained:

The merger may actually help the technology first invented by the Austrian company to be further developed.  This Austrian company didn't seem to care about it because after all they thrived from a family business and may not have enough resources for product research and development.

The occurrence of the merger alerted employees at this Austrian company to discover problematic antecedents that led to its fall.  Employees from this company did not oppose, but welcomed, this merger.  They made sense of the merger by directing their attention on the company's troubled areas.

As the process of merging two companies unfolded, I detected a change on how employees at the Austrian company reflected on past experience.  This retrospection occurred as a response to ongoing events.  For instance, the U.S. semiconductor company that merged this Austrian company started a global downsizing, breaking its promise of keeping the current workforce.  Management from the U.S. company was viewed as insensitive and uncaring compared to the Austrian company.  Most importantly, management from the U.S. company never responded to the questions that concerned most employees from the Austrian company, such as benefits change and internal structural change.

These emerging changes served as catalysts for employees at the Austrian company to reconstruct their meanings of change by focusing on different antecedents.  Employees started to carve out cues that built up their doubts about the merger.  For example, one engineer recalled: "The Austrian company would never ignore our questions or concerns.  Even when they couldn't give us immediate answers, they'd keep the process transparent to us.  The U.S. company was totally

different.  I don't want to work for a company that mistreats its employees."  Another

senior engineer concurred: "We kept asking them about how they would restructure

our units since we would move in together in a month.  Wet got nothing back.  The

Austrian company had several changes before, and it always kept us well informed

about the process."  Another engineer noted: "The Austrian company never cut

people suddenly.  They usually gave two months notice.  The U.S company only gave

several hours' notice, which was not fair."  The above responses indicated that

employees shifted their cues on the ones that characterized the Austrian company as

humanistic, prompted by unexpected interruptions in the current situation.  The

contrast of how these two companies treated their employees became prominent.

As a result of this shift in cues of past experiences, employees at the Austrian

company started to reconstruct causal factors to explain the merger.  These

reconstructed causal antecedents included the aging of the global CEO, the relatively

small scale of the company, lack of business shrewdness of a top management

consisting of engineers, and the aggression of the U.S. company.  For example, one

account manager explained: "Since it started out as a family business, most of the top

management team members were engineers.  The top leaders at the U.S. company are

calculated businessmen.  No wonder they would annex us."  Another engineer stated:

"We're a small global company and did not have a large produce development team.

It's not odd for that U.S. company to eat us up."  Examples of these reconstructions

seemed to cast the merger negatively.  The merger seemed to be forced upon on the

Austrian company, which varied from the earlier reconstruction that the management

troubles lead to its own demise.

Meaning about the merger also underwent a change as employees at the Austrian company reconstructed the elapsed experience. Employees at this company exhibited doubts and resentment against the change, compared to the earlier period after the merger. For instance, one engineer concluded: "I don't think this change will go well just based on how they [the U.S. company] treated us. I wish the merger didn't happen." One manager observed: "The merger is bad for the company. The U.S. company didn't seem to care about the products nor about us. They probably bought us just to demonstrate to their stakeholders their strong financial base." Another manager commented: "It's not right for them [the U.S. company] to buy us and then leave us alone, which may stiffen the development of our products that we worked hard on. It's sad to see this happen." The above responses revealed a negative interpretation of the merger. New meaning emerged as employees reconstructed which antecedents to represent causal relationships that bear on the current situations. A sense of situation, therefore, relies on the attention directed to what has already happened.

*Disparity between managerial and employee retrospection.* Weick (1995) suggested that the same event can induce different readings. Disparity is likely to emerge between the thinking of those close to the top and that of those closer with the daily operation of an organization. Top management can impose a sense of meaning to a situation, which does not promise that others will share their sense of the situation, no matter how strongly top management tries to impose their sense. In other words, employees may not interpret nor accept the sense given by management

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during change.  Results from this study reveal that some employees did interpret change differently from the managers.

One example came from the relocation change at a U.S. food & beverage company.  The management framed the relocation as a strategic move to operate closer to large clusters of clients and as a reasonable way to enjoy the tax privilege available in another city.  In sharp contrast to management's framing, employees viewed the change as management's manipulation and unfair treatment.  Cues related to increasing the client base and tax privileges were ignored by employees.  One participant defined the change as "absolutely irresponsible and manipulative." Another participant described the change as "an exploitation because it [management] wanted to save labor cost."  Not only decrying the change, employees also denounced the reasons for relocation provided by management.  The gap in "the tax fees between the two cities were only the difference of digits," as one participant pointed out.  The largest retail client of this company was actually not located in the city of the relocation.  Outraged employees asked the company for detailed compensation packages for the ones who did not want to relocate, which only met with "no-response" treatment.  Frustrated employees pressured again for management's response but were warned of possible punishments (e.g., being fired) for their "rebellion."  Management's irresponsiveness to the concerns of employees left them "no choice but to self-organize a labor union to fight against the company," as one participant articulated.

On the surface, the conflict between management and employees at the food and beverage company lay in the contrast between management's interpreting the

reactions by employees toward change as rebellious acts and employees' perception of management's responses toward their "fair and normal requests" as unfair and disrespectful. The root of this clash actually rested on management's failure to recognize the significance of retrospection in sensemaking. Specifically, management at the food and beverage company missed that past experience guides the extraction of particular cues to make sense of a current event.

In this particular case, employees at the company had been socialized that the company has been humanistic and people-centered. The company moved its headquarters location to allow convenience for its employees in their work commute. Job security was almost ensured if they did not make serious mistakes. Employees had great career opportunities through internal promotions. Small gifts were offered to employees on some national holidays each year. Employees received subsidies for their children's education. Given this company's history of humanistic practices, expectations of fair and humane treatment had been deeply entrenched in the mentality of employees. The relocation in two months completely disrupted employees' firm expectations. Employees felt they were victimized by this relocation. First, the short notice did not provide ample time for employees to make a decision critical to their careers and families. Second, the peak seasons for job hunting had passed several months ago. The financial burden of being jobless was overwhelming for employees who could not relocate because of family reasons. Third, employees felt that it was unfair for them to be deserted by their company. The U.S. company had merged with an European food company and replaced its old CEO in China with the CEO from the European company. The CEO change and the

announcement of relocation were only two months apart. Employees sensed that the U.S. company had "dumped" them to the European company because the latter had higher revenue.

It was retrospective sensemaking that led employees to extract cues related to the established patterns of humane treatment by their company. Interpretations (e.g., unfair treatment) resulted from such retrospection prompted employees to seek proper compensation from the company's inhumane treatment. The root cause of the long and bitter stand-off between the union and management rested on the difficulties that employees were forced to shift very quickly their sense of the company. The "rebellious acts" perceived by management indeed reflected a dominant role that retrospection plays in the process of sensemaking. Had top management of this food and beverage company realized this cause, they could have changed employee resentment through providing alternative values and priorities to help employees switch or revise their expectations and mental frameworks about the company.

Similar examples can be found in other organizational changes where different readings of change emerged because of retrospection. For instance, management from a Swedish telecommunications company interpreted a new certification program as an effective means to standardize its services and broaden the career scope of its engineers. Engineers, on the other hand, read this change as unnecessary and unreasonable because their established engineer identity was only expected to fix problems. The certification on their business and human competence contradicted their existing identity during retrospective sensemaking. After witnessing the resentment by engineers, top management of this telecommunications

company provided information cues to help engineers revise the framework of their identity. Engineers were able to integrate the notion of multi-competence into their establish identity, which helped them interpret the change as a plausible move to render benefits to the company as well as themselves.

Another example came from a U.S. insurance company. The company's CEO was changed unexpectedly. Unlike his predecessor, the new CEO did not keep employees updated about the pending process of merger nor address the doubts that employees had about the company's future directions. For management, this CEO shift was a normal "internal adjustment." But for employees, this change disrupted their previous expectations of top management to keep open and clear communication about the company's recent and future plans. Previously constructed expectations about the company's leader influenced how employees responded to this change. Consequently, different from the sense given by top management, employees made a multitude of meanings regarding this CEO shift. For example, some sensed that the sudden leave of the CEO signified the company's efforts to save its declining business. Some said that the change implied a drastic change in the company's direction in the near future. These different meanings in interpreting the change reflected the impact of past experience on how employees responded to change.

*Negotiating Meanings among Peers*. The same experience or event can be read differently. Employees negotiated with each other through interactions, the meanings made about a change, which demonstrated the social nature of sensemaking. How an individual makes sense of a situation relies to some extent on how others respond or are thought to be reacting (Weick, 1995). During the process

of negotiating meaning, shared understandings were built by focusing on agreed-upon rules and the benefits of attaching to certain meanings. One example came from employees at a Japanese automobile manufacturer. The incoming relocation to a distant area hindered employees in keeping their identity as a "responsible family man." Such disruption affected employees to develop reservations and doubts associated with the change that was supposed to boost the company's long-term development. Some employees viewed the change as a means by which management could expand business while ignoring the price that employees had to pay. Some thought that projected career advancement might outweigh the disruption brought to their families. Some deemed the interruption on their family life caused by relocation as unacceptable and wanted to quit. Different interpretations regarding the change were exchanged, debated, and negotiated.

One participant from the automobile company recalled: "the impact of the change on our families and our reactions dominated our socials at breaks and lunch hours during the first few months after hearing the news." Employees repeatedly compared the benefits and harms of relocating with the company. Members switched sides in their minds as their situation changed. For instance, one employee started to oppose the idea of relocation after learning that his wife would have a hard time locating a job near the new plant area. The shifting of ideas regarding their views toward relocation reflected the social constraints (e.g., responsibilities for family) that employees faced while making sense of change.

The senior employees as well as the ones well-respected acted as arbitrators of resolving these different readings of change. This group of employees played an

important role in making certain cues salient to the peers and weighing the value of different interpretations. The importance of job stability was made prominent by the senior employees. For example, the senior employees circulated stories about how jobs had been stable over the last 10 years and how the job prospects were projected compared to other companies in the same industry. One participant told me:

I heard from a senior engineer that this company hadn't had any large cuts of people in the past 10 years. The only one happened several years ago. People were laid off because after training they were not qualified to operate some new systems. The job stability is a very attractive factor for us in terms of making employment decisions.

The story recalled by the above participant projected the employment trends at this company as stable. Stories like this directed employee attention to something crucial to them: job security. Another participant observed:

Many of my friends' companies are now cutting down people. Some folks at other units told me that another big company in our industry is downsizing. Our plant expansion shows that we're doing really well. I probably will relocate my family to an area close to the new plant. Better career opportunity would worth the price of being absent in family life.

This above participant's reaction toward change was affected by the interaction with his friends and peers. Stories generated through interaction with others made him neutralize the negative impact of relocation upon his personal life. His decision to stay was shaped by comparisons with other companies. Another participant explicitly pointed out: "We trusted what those senior engineers thought about the change

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because they've been here longer enough to see the stakes behind it. As they said, this change may be great for our career. Therefore, most of us will stay." This observation suggested that the sense made of change by employees was contingent upon the reactions of the senior employees who helped prioritize information cues and meanings for others, which paved the foundation for a shared understanding about the change.

Another instance of negotiating meanings among peers could be found among managers at a U.S. insurance company. This insurance company recently changed its CEO who apparently had a different management style than his predecessor. The existing patterns about working with top management suffered great challenges, which prompted managers to make sense of the difference in management styles. For instance, one manager started working on a proposal after "the CEO said the proposal was ok." However, when this manager briefed the CEO about the project's progress, the CEO felt surprised that the manager had started it. Also taken by the CEO's reaction, this manager made several meanings for this incident: "He [the CEO] didn't like the results on the project, or he changed his mind about it, or I had a misunderstanding about what he meant by 'ok.'" It seemed that this situation resulted in equivocal meanings.

Exchanging views with peers appeared to be helpful for managers at the insurance company to resolve their equivocality over the management styles of the new CEO. One manager articulated: "I was puzzled by the way the new CEO manages us. He didn't provide us as much feedback as the previous CEO. Talking with other managers helped us figure out how to work with the new CEO." After

sharing experiences of working with the new CEO, managers found out that this CEO would not directly stop a project. Several managers had similar experiences where the seemingly lukewarm approval did not really indicate the CEO's agreement. Again, some senior managers helped junior managers resolve the equivocality. The rich experience of working with various leaders led these senior managers to come up with a plausible explanation. As one manager described:

> It really bothered us that the new CEO seemed to agree with our projects and then didn't think we were going the right direction. Sharing with some senior managers really helped clear out the fog. They said that this new CEO might not want to confront us or threaten our face by directly saying no to us. We need to be active to check his real thoughts about our projects. Knowing this was really reassuring because the CEO's reaction was not about doubting our competence or disapproval of what we did.

By interacting with senior managers and peers, managers at this insurance company were able to reduce their equivocal meanings about the management styles of the new CEO. Various meanings that managers held about working with the new CEO were tested, ruled out, and selected through peer interaction. Talking about their individual interpretations represented a way for managers to test their readings of the situation, evaluating their acceptability among peers. The senior managers seemed to have more influence on selecting which interpretation sounds more plausible than others to explain the situation. The power attached to the senior managers derived from their experience, which gave them an authoritative voice.

Therefore, power seemed to be embedded in the process of reducing equivocal meanings.

*Sensegiving by Managers.* The way employees made sense of change is also influenced by the sense given from their managers. Managers affect the meaning making of employees, imposing meaning of a situation by instilling a sense of stability and relating change with the identities of employees. One example came from a re-structural change at a U.S. semiconductor company. After learning the news of the change, employees at this company felt that the restructuring "completely disrupted how they have been doing things for years." Based on this understanding, employees thus were reluctant to learn new processes involved in change as well as attending training workshops. To deal with the reluctance from the employees, managers tried to explain to employees how this change would reduce the delay in production and disputes with customers. As one senior manager put it: "We tried to tell them how hard it has been under the old system to solve the disputes with customers about product deliveries due to the lack of coordination and monitoring systems between ordering, sales, and production units. Many times it was even not possible to locate which unit was responsible for the problem." As indicated by the above comment, this manager sought to impose a meaning that the change was necessary to sustain the company's normal operation. To foster a sense of stability amidst the change, managers stressed the cues that remained relatively stable during change. One line manager revealed how he created a sense of stability during change to his team members:

I emphasized at every meeting that their core responsibilities in my unit would stay the same at present and that learning the new processes was aimed at better coordination with other units in an integrate system. I also used the graph of the new system to explain how their new role would fit in the system. Such emphasis on the stable aspects in change helped employees link the change with the on-going projects. As Weick et al. (2005) argued, individuals look first to find ways that will allow them to continue their interrupted activities. Linking the change with the usual activities of employees thus helped lessen their resistance toward the restructuring.

The role of managers as sensegivers was especially critical in chaotic situations during change, which was obvious at the change occurring in a U.S. insurance company. This company had just changed its CEO. Because the change of the CEO was unexpected, especially during a pending merger, employees felt overwhelmed by this disruption. Employees generated a multitude of meanings to explain the change. For instance, some employees interpreted that the sudden top management change projected a major strategy change. Some sensed that the previous CEO left suddenly because the merger had failed. Some read the CEO change as an aggressive way for the global management to stop its business decline in Asian market. These various meanings about change evoked uncertainty and fear among employees, which was aggravated by the negative media reports about the company.

As a result of the internal confusion about the change coupled with the media's hostile reports, many employees left this insurance company during the first

several months after the new CEO took over.  Upon recognizing the doubts among employees about the company's future, managers felt that they had to respond to this situation.  One manager said: "We had to let our team members know that the CEO change did not affect the company's direction nor reflect an unsatisfying business performance."  To impose a sense of stability upon employees, managers took the following measures.  First, managers showed employees some statistics that demonstrated the company's stable performance over the past five years.  Second, managers constantly reminded employees that employees would have great career opportunities because the company was expanding its local markets, which was evident from the introduction of a series of new insurance products.  Third, managers explained to employees that the new CEO's different communication style did not indicate the company's intent to hide anything from employees.  A focus on the stable development of this insurance company helped employees to simplify the perceived problem resulted from the CEO change.

Confronted with multiple meanings made out of the change, such assurance from managers provided a guide for employees while choosing a plausible explanation for the change.  Specifically, meanings given from managers controlled cues deemed as important by employees.  Evidence (e.g., the company's performance history) presented by managers established criteria for employees in assessing which stories were plausible.  To apply Mills' (2003) conclusion here, managers who are powerful and advantaged by unequal access to information, giving them an unequally strong position to influence the construction of social reality by employees.  These

managers expressed their power through their actions directed toward shaping the making of meanings by employees.

In addition to providing a sense of stability, managers impose meanings upon employees by encouraging certain identities associated with change. As Weick (1995) noted, meanings made by sensemakers are consistent with their identities. Examples could be found from two companies: a Swedish telecommunications company and a Japanese automobile manufacturer. The Swedish company implemented a certification program to assess the quality of its engineers. This program, however, contradicted the engineers' existing identity of problem solvers. With this new program, engineers would be evaluated not only for technical expertise but also for business and human competence. Such identity inconsistence led engineers to resist this program initially.

To deal with the resentment from engineers, managers at this telecommunications company sought to revise the engineers' established identity by linking the change with the need for self-enhancement. Emphasis was placed on how this new program would help engineers diversify their competence, making them highly competitive on the job market even if they decided to leave. Acquiring multi-competencies would also allow engineers to broaden their career path by having the options of taking both technical as well as managerial positions. Managers tried to impose this revised identity of engineers with multi-competencies through conversations, meetings, and workshops. For instance, one engineer described how he revised his identity:

At the beginning, I resisted the program because it was conflicting to what I had always been doing. Our manager and senior director pointed to us that the career path for engineers has become quite narrow. The market will reach its saturation point some day. I want to have more options and become someone who has the competence to choose which company to work for. So I think this certification program is indeed beneficial to me.

The above engineer's comment indicated that he revised the framework of his identity to be consistent with the new program. The notion of greater career options was conducive to promoting the need of self-enhancement, thus leading this engineer to embrace the certification program.

Managers' influence upon the identity construction of employees was also evident at the Japanese automobile company. To accommodate the increased production demand after relocation, this automobile company needed to switch many manual operation systems into automation systems. This switch interrupted the established identity of the senior engineers who viewed themselves as being the leaders of their team and valued by their well-developed manual skills. To gain support from them, the line managers stressed the consistency in the identity of these engineers. Specifically, managers underscored that these engineers were still perceived as the leaders and were expected by management to lead their team members through this transitional period. Changing to automatic systems would not reduce their value. Rather, the skills and knowledge developed by these engineers would be crucial to integrate the new systems. Such emphasis on self-consistency directed these engineers to focus on cues useful to maintain a consistent identity as

the leaders. The way these engineers constructed their identity thus was affected by the meanings that their managers imposed on their identity. This reinforced identity in return fostered these engineers' endorsement for the change.

<center>"Now what should I do?" (Retention)</center>

Meanings or stories chosen during the selection stage are tentative. It is during the process of retention meanings of enactment, selected for their fit with past experience, that are then preserved as organizational memory, intelligence, wisdom, and knowledge (Weick, 2001). Successful sensemaking results in meanings that fit present situations into the context of elapsed experience. This is where learning occurs for individuals who notice some of what was previously ignored and overlook some of what was previously attended to. Knowledge stored thereafter is plausible and reasonable to account for current situation in the context of past experience and is consistent with the identities of individuals.

*Retaining Meanings Consistent with Identity*

Meanings become fixed when they are retained as knowledge for future use. The once provisional meanings emerging during the selection process now become substantial during retention. In addition to being plausible, results indicated that meanings retained tended to reflect, sustain, and reinforce the identity of employees. This is because identity shapes what we enact and how we interpret (Weick, 1995).

One example came from the meanings retained by employees from a Japanese automobile company. Their identity of being a "responsible family man" was interrupted by the company's relocation, because the change prevented them from fulfilling the role (e.g., caring father). Through exchanging and negotiating meanings

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with their peers, employees were able to come up with meanings that allowed them

maintain their identity in the family. For instance, one employee stated: "The

apartments near the new plant are cheaper than those in the City. We may move over

there. So I'd have no problem taking care of my family. Plus, I may earn more after

relocation." Another participant commented: "I may apply for night shifts in every

other week. I could thus take care of family stuff during the day such as taking my kid

to school and help house chores. The relocation isn't too bad for us." Another

employee talked about his sense of change in relation to maintain his family identity:

> I have a stable job and promising career here at the company, which will
>
> allow me to provide more support to the family. I can afford a better piano
>
> coach for my son and save more for a nicer apartment. I may spend less time
>
> with my son during week day, but that will make our bonding time during
>
> weekends more meaningful.

Responses from the above participants suggested that employees made various

adjustments (e.g., change work schedule or relocating families) to help them repair

the disruptions caused by the change of relocation. These adjustments allowed them

to still perform the roles dictated by their family identity. Employees sensed this

change (i.e., relocation) through the lens of what was important to them. In this case,

what mattered to these employees was whether they could still resume their identity

as a "responsible family man."

Another example came from the employees at a Swedish telecommunications

company. In addition to the technical competence, the new certification program

implemented by management required engineers to develop competence in business

and human areas.  This new program was perceived as a threat to the established identity for engineers as problem solvers.  After realizing this, management of this company tried to highlight cues (e.g., multi-competence) and to impose meanings that were conducive to revising the framework of the identity for engineers.  The goal was to help engineers revise their framework of identity to include contents (e.g., broader career scope) related to the change.  Engineers responded well to management's efforts at giving sense.  For instance, one engineer talked about his view regarding the certification program: "I didn't realize before that our progress was delayed because we were not familiar with the business processes, not knowing how to find proper units to work together in resolving the problem.  So I think the new program helped me to develop my competence."  Comments from a senior engineer revealed the change of his framework in identity:

> This program is great, which is what I often tell those junior engineers who still have doubts about it.  Implementing the program will help the company standardize its services, reduce complaints from clients, improve efficiency, and help us grow professionally.  When it comes down what I really care about the program, I think it helps me to be a more capable and efficient engineer.  I have started to constantly seek projects that would enable me to develop in those areas evaluated in the program.

The above response revealed that for this senior engineer a significant meaning about the change resided in its alignment with his identity.  Particularly, this new program helped him promote his needs for self-enhancement and self-efficacy rooted in

identity construction. Among various meanings created about the change, this participant gave more weight to the one connected with his identity.

*Retaining Plausible Meanings*

Plausible accounts are stored in individuals as repertoire of responses that could deal with similar situations in the future, i.e., prospective sensemaking. Stored knowledge then informs and guides enactment as well as selection when the next round of sensemaking is activated. Results from the study contained ample instances where employees preserved plausible meanings as the basis for future use. For instance, one participant at a Japanese automobile manufacturer explained the meanings he made of the relocation: "Our company is growing so fast, so it's normal for us to relocate to a larger place that we can install new operation systems and increase production efficiency." Another participant at this company stated his sense of the relocation: "During peak season, we used to work seven days a week. After relocation, our over load can be reduced because of the increased employees." One participant from a U.S. telecommunications company talked about his sense of change: "The managerial rotations every three years are beneficial for our career because it encourages us to compete with expatriates. The qualification is based on our performance, which serves as a good motivation." Another participant from a U.S. telecommunications company discussed the meaning he made of the re-structural change: "Various functions in the global supply unit were streamlined, which made the process of product design, test, production, and delivery more smoothly than before. It used to be a mess whenever a problem occurred, but now it's easy to detect and fix the problem."

The above examples indicated a causal relationship in the meanings made of change.  The causal relationships contained in the meanings provided a sense of stability for employees in their ongoing sense-making.  The consequences beneficial to the company or the employees were retained, which would become input to enactment and selection.  These positive results from change constituted contents of expectations that employees had about change.  These expectations would then guide the retrospections of future sensemaking just as the old expectations directed attention to particular aspects of past experience.  Previously formed expectations of how things should be usually influence how individuals extract cues and reflect on past to make sense of current situation.

As mentioned earlier, what is retained by sensemakers involves contents that are ignored or overlooked before, which marks the activation of learning.  Integrating learning into meanings of change was prevalent in results of the study.  For instance, the vice president of a U.S. telecommunications company realized that management made mistakes in initiating a series of downsizing, which lowered to a large extent the morale and confidence of employees.  Speaking of his learning from the changes, this vice president mentioned

We had cut our employees three times, which created extremely uncertain and chaotic periods for our employees. Everyone was asking: What's wrong with the company? Is it going to file for bankruptcy?  Out learning is to shorten as much as possible the duration between starting official communication of downsizing and the completion of personnel.  The company has to be very decisive about which units will undergo change and about its communication,

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which would lessen the confusion felt by employees. The longer the interval

is, the more serious psychological damages to our employers.

Through learning, this vice president noticed the role of time duration in initiating

unpleasant change, which was overlooked before. The series of layoffs seemed to

imply confusion by its management of not knowing the proper strategy to cope with

the current situation, which was easily picked up by employees. The confusion and

reduced productivity occurred during this series of downsizing also led the human

resources director to stress the importance of including the human resources unit into

company's decision making process. This director was in charge of a different unit

during downsizing. By talking to employees and witnessing their frustration during

change, this direction summarized her learning: "It is critical for us to be involved in

top management's decision making, as an advisor, to prevent extreme decisions like

the downsizings we had. Especially when it comes to changes with large impact on

employees, we can help management project possible reactions from employees.

Another example of learning took place in a U.S. insurance company. The

new CEO who unexpectedly took over from his predecessor, had a reticent

communication style, which created confusion among employees about the

company's current and future directions. This unresolved confusion led to a high

turn-over rate, which alerted the senior management to ask the new CEO to initiate a

series of open communication meetings with management and employees. One

senior director commented: "We felt that the CEO had to do something because some

units had a large number of people who quit. We can assure employees, but our

assurance won't be credible without the support from top management." The senior

director of the marketing and corporate communication explained what he learned:

> Next time when we change a CEO, we would definitely have this new leader
>
> meet with managers and open a line of dialogue between him and employees.
>
> Without a clear communication about the change, employees often speculate,
>
> which may be far from what is really going on. It's a bloody lesson for us
>
> because we lost a lot of agents shortly after the change.

The influence of the CEO's communication style became important to how

employees made meaning of the change. Lack of communication from top

management after the CEO switch failed to help employees resolve their equivocality.

Employees were left alone to make sense relying on their personal frameworks,

which usually resulted in a multitude of meanings. According to Weick (1995), when

individuals are overwhelmed with equivocal meanings, values, priorities, clarity

about preferences should be provided to them to sort out which interpretation or

projects matter under this particular situation. Management of the insurance company

could have offered cues and priorities to help employees be clear about the impact of

this CEO change on the company's current and future projects. In so doing, top

management would have prevented the surge in the turn-over rate.

*Summary of RQ1*

I used Weick's (1995) sensemaking framework to analyze how events during

change at the participating multinational organizations came to be understood in

certain ways. Since Weick (1979, 2001) viewed organizing as sensemkaing, I

incorporated the sensemaking framework with the three key component processes in

organizing: enactment, selection, and retention. The sensemaking process was activated by the perceived disruptions on existing expectations. Particularly, identity disruptions and interruptions in ongoing events resulting from planned change appeared to be a major trigger in sensemaking. These interruptions prompted organizational members to explore whether the current condition was the same or different.

Meanings were created and selected during the organizing processes of enactment and selection. Enactment started with noticing discrepant cues and those primed by management, which reflected the sensemaking property of extracting cues. This acting of noticing commenced the process to change the flux of information streams into the orderliness of situations. Results indicated that the change environment was primarily enacted by management. Employees, did, however, enact environment through collective actions that created counterbalance against the power of management. Successful enactment by top management involved imposing a sense of change upon employees through plausible accounts that 1) were consistent with ongoing events, 2) facilitated ongoing projects, and 3) promised potential reward or hope.

The process of selection in organizing involved the creation of a particular understanding of events by directing attention backward to past experience and choosing a locally plausible story to account for current situations, which then allowed organizational members to respond to change. This process embodied the sensemaking properties of retrospection and sensemaking. The current situations faced by employees directed the attention that they assigned to particular elapsed

events. Disparities of meanings emerged between management and employees. Management usually interpreted the negative expressions of these discrepancies by employees as acts of rebellion. These disparities, however, indicated management's failure to recognize the influence of retrospection. Employees sensed the change differently because they had problems switching rapidly their existing expectations of how things should be. The differences thus stemmed from the ways of how previously established expectations guided the retrospection of employees, which in turn influenced their responses toward change. A multitude of meanings were reduced by the articulations of values and priorities given by peers and managers. These articulations helped employees evaluate which projects or accounts mattered more than others. As a result of the reduction in equivocal meanings, employees were able to acquire a feeling of order, clarity, and rationality of certain events of change.

The retention process solidifies the provisional meanings made during selection. These retained meanings become substantial in that they help organizational members link current events to past experience, maintain their significant identities, and use them as a source of guidance for further action and interpretation. The knowledge, memory, and intelligence retained thus become an input to enactment and selection for future sensemaking. Results indicated that organizational members tended to retain meanings that were consistent with their identity and sounded plausible.

Through applying Weick's (1995) sensemaking framework in this study, it was clear that sensemaking acts as a significant process of organizing that consists of

a sequence of activities. Particularly, organizational members engaged in efforts of sensemaking when their current framework of expectations was breached by the events during change. Cues were then extracted to be projected into past experience. Plausible accounts were made to explain change, which were later selected through interaction with peers and managers who made priorities and values prominent to reduce equivocality. Meanings that were plausible and instrumental in promoting the identity of employees were retained as organizational knowledge, which were then enacted back to the ongoing events.

## Public Relations Function during Change

RQ 2. How do multinational organizations in China use public relations programs to communicate change with organizational members?

Change places a challenge on how organizations communicate with their employees about change. Particularly, the challenge on public relations during change involves "using communication to develop an understanding of, and by, all parties involved in the impending change" (L. Grunig et al., 2002, p. 557). The second research question explores particularly how the nine multinational organizations used public relations to communicate change with their employees. I organize my findings to this research question in the following manner: 1) general information describing the public relations function in participating organizations; 2) common patterns of communication programs used across all changes, and 3) unique patterns of communication programs in some organizations during change.

Findings from the interviews suggested that the public relations function primarily focused on managing external publics. Departments such as the human

resources department or the corporate and marketing communication unit managed the internal communication.  The following part elaborates on how the participating organizations used the public relations function and organized their internal communication function.

*Organization of Public Relations Function*

A total of nine multinational organizations participated in this study.  Among them, one U.S. telecommunications company and one U.S. food and beverage company have set up a public relations unit.  As for the rest, the communication function was spread out through the following departments: human resources, corporate and marketing communication, and labor unions.  According to J. Grunig (1992), an excellence characteristic of public relations involves integrating various communication functions into one unit or department, managing both internal and external publics.  I found, however, the internal aspect of public relations was managed by either the human resources department or a combination of the human resources department with other units such as corporate and marketing communication.

*Managing External Publics by the Public Relations Unit*

Two organizations that have public relations functions focused primarily on external publics.  Participants from a U.S. food and beverage company said that their public relations function primarily targeted media and customers.  For instance, many company promotional events were planned and executed by the company's public relations department.  As for internal communication, the human resources

department seemed to be in charge. One participant talked about her impression of what her company's public relations department did as follows:

> That department [public relations department] mainly deals with media and promotions. When we have new products or some events, the public relations department is in charge of promoting them to the media. If there's any bad news about our company, their staff will write articles to defend us. Usually the information we want to know about the company comes from the human resources department. I think they are responsible for dealing with us. Like the change I just talk about, all communication came from the human resources department. I remembered that when our union was negotiating with the top management, the head of public relations department was the translator between the union and top management.

Another participant from this food and beverage company offered similar observations. This participant said that the company's internal communication was managed by the human resources department: "If there were any news about the company such as business performance that we need to know, they all came from the human resources department." The public relations department was affiliated with the marketing department, according to the participant.

I was not able to interview the public relations manager from the U.S. food and beverage company. Information about this company's public relations function came from the managerial and non-managerial participants.

Similar to the above U.S. food and beverage company, another U.S. telecommunications company that has set up a public relations department also used

it to communicate essentially with the media.  The public relations manager in this company described her unit's function:

> Public relations was essentially embedded within the marketing department. We originally reported to the senior vice president of the marketing department.  Now we are a single unit.  What I mainly do is to communicate externally, promote our company, and deal with some government relations.

When asked which unit would be in charge of communicating with the internal employees, this public relations manager answered that "it is mainly through the human resources department."

The response from the public relations manager was confirmed by the human resources manager.  She told me that "internal communication is under the umbrella of human resources department."  According to her, it was natural to place internal communication within the human resources department because it mainly deals with the internal employees.

*Reliance on the Human Resources Department*

The other seven multinational organizations managed their internal public relations function through either the human resources department or a combination of the human resources department with other units.  For instance, the internal communication at a U.S. insurance company was managed by both the human resources and the corporate and marketing communication departments.  The manager of the corporate and marketing department said that her responsibility included three aspects: product promotion, internal communication, and communication with the global headquarters office and the regional Asia Pacific

office.  When asked about the specifics of internal communication, this manager provided the following response: "My aspect of internal communication involves producing company newsletters, coordinating with other local branches in China, as well as editing, translating, and sending out information from the global office."

The human resources manager from the U.S. insurance company provided further evidence.  She described her function: "Our human resources department is equivalent to people management. Anything that deals with our employees is under our responsibility."   The human resources manager differentiated her unit from the corporate and marketing communication as follows: "The human resources department mainly focuses on employees.  The corporate and marketing communication department also focuses on our external stakeholders, more of a marketing function."

Similar to this co-management of internal communication, a Japanese automobile company examined in this study had the human resources department and the labor union co-manage its internal communication function.   A Chinese labor law stipulates that joint venture companies are required to establish a labor union.  The director said: "my unit acts as a bridge between the company and its employees.  The union gathered feedback from the employees and reported this feedback to top management."  The union took on the role of a monitor to make sure that the voices of employees are heard by the management.  In addition to recruitment and training, the human resources department was used to "communicate the company's policies and decisions with employees," as the human resources manager put it.

The data from this study revealed a variation from what the Excellence scholars in public relations (e.g., L. Grunig, et al., 2002) suggested integrating both internal as well as external communication function within the public relations unit. It is important here to stress that such difference, instead of contradicting with the Excellence theory, may emerge from various reasons. For example, using the human resources department to manage internal communication may stem from the concerns for practicality and cost. A primary goal of the multinationals in China is to enlarge market share for their products. Multinationals in China my experience a progressive stage to integrate all communication functions within the public relations function. Aligning with local management styles may be another reason to account for this difference. Internal communication has been traditionally managed by the human resources department in Chinese companies. Housing internal communication under the human resources department may well reflect a local adjustment that these multinationals made when entering the Chinese market.

Common Patterns in Communication of Change

I found two common patterns of communicating change with employees. These two common patterns included the reliance on traditional communication programs and the reliance on communication with managers. Most of the participating organizations demonstrated these patterns. Specifically, the first pattern was salient across all organizations. The second pattern emerged strongly in seven organizations.

*Reliance on Traditional Communication Programs*

The first pattern of reliance on traditional communication program included the following aspects: communication via company intranet, town hall meeting, internal publications, and internal feedback system. Among them, the term "town hall meeting" was taken directly from the comments by most participants who mentioned this term in English. I discuss each of these aspects below.

*Communication via company intranet.* Communication via company intranet became a primary way of communicating change with employees among the participating organizations. Such communication included various forms, such as emails and newsletter. Based on the responses of my participants, this type of communication was preferred because of its fast delivery, accuracy, and convenience in setting the tone before change.

First, intranet communication helped the participating organizations reach the targeted audience quickly. An example came from a Japanese automobile manufacturer. After learning the news of relocation, many employees emailed the labor union director about why the company had to relocate to a far and inconvenient area. The director of the labor union along with the human resources manager quickly met with top management and then sent out an email the next day to address the reasons for relocation. The human resources manager explained their choice of such communication as follows:

> We realized that if we wait to inform the managers on how to address this
> question, our employees would start to speculate on the reasons. We finalized
> the answer with top management and sent out emails the next morning to all

unit directors, managers, and supervisors.  It will take too long to set up meetings to meet with all managers.  More importantly, putting the response in words helped managers to communicate the same message.

An employee from a U.S. food and beverage company told me that emails effectively kept everyone in the company informed about the negotiation process between the labor union and top management.  According to this participant, whenever the meeting ended, an email would soon be sent to everyone about the progress and then gather feedback from employees to prepare for the next round of negotiation.  Waiting for meetings or communication from managers was too slow because the negotiation sometimes ended late at night.

Second, communicating via intranet ensured the accuracy of communication content based on the comments from the participants.  The CEO of a U.S. insurance company was changed during the middle of his reassignment.  At the beginning, top management was divided whether an email to inform the employees was necessary before the town hall meeting.  The human resources manager suggested that such an email was vital because it could stop rumors and speculations about the leader's sudden leave.  A well-stated email could help the company's employees know what really happened.  This human resources manager explained:

It was a short email to send out to everyone telling them that a new CEO has been appointed to our branch.  We spent a lot of time on the wording of the email.  We didn't want the employees to have the wrong impression that the former CEO left because the business of our company declined, which will

affect our morale. In our industry, the turnover rate is already very high.

Therefore we used the email to communicate an official and unified message.

The human resources manager of an Austrian semiconductor company provided another example to demonstrate the advantage of accuracy in using electronic communication such as email. When her company's headquarter office informed her that another U.S. semiconductor company has finalized acquiring their company. She and the branch vice president decided to send out an email to everyone immediately about what happened. According to this manager, "a formal email about what happened and will happen is critical at that time because our employees may read or hear incorrect news. Being acquired does not mean that they are all fired. We want to assure them about this."

Third, communication through the intranet was conducive to setting up a tone for impending change. One example came from the human resources manager, from a U.S. semiconductor company, who sent out an e-newsletter during the transitional period of the personnel change in his company. The manager explained below why such communication was adopted:

We always include the basic information about the incoming managers in our e-newsletters two or three months before the change happens. Employees may have already been notified about the change. But the incoming person still seems vague to them. There's always a bit uncertainty among employees even for such routine changes. So we'd put the picture of the incoming person along with some personal story about this person in the e-newsletter

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sent to everyone.  So our employees will have some idea about this new

person.

From the above response, it seemed that the e-newsletter could help the company's

employees reduce uncertainties about new managers.  When the new managers finally

came, the employees might feel that they have already met them before.  This pre-

change introduction allowed time for employees to adjust to the new managers, which

may have eased the tension when the change actually came.

Another example of how intranet communication helped employees prepare

for the change was evident in a Japanese automobile manufacturer's change.

Although the actual move was estimated to launch at the end of 2010, the company

had already started to mentally prepare employees for this relocation.  According to

the human resources manager, the company sent out monthly e-newsletters to

everyone about the new plant relocation progress.  The e-newsletters included various

contents such as the projected outlook of the new plant, the community life in the new

area, the neighboring companies, possible changes in each production room, the

technological improvements, and so on.  The e-newsletters also provided a channel

for employees to take ownership of the change.  For every issue, the e-newsletter

featured a change or improvement for the new plant recommended by employees

themselves.  For instance, the human resources manager illustrated that their recent e-

newsletter featured the improvement some employees suggested about the dining

hall.  The new dining hall would have more windows to enhance the lighting and

restructure its table layout to make the room more welcoming.  "By participating in

the planning process, employees were more likely to accept it when it comes," as the human resources manager stated.

Despite the above advantages in using company intranet to communicate change with employees, I also observed that some of my participants felt the intranet communication was impersonal and conveyed a feeling of disconnection with the organizations. One employee from a U.S. telecommunications company said that he first learned of this company's large downsizing through an email sent out by the human resources department. This participant expressed how he felt about such communication: "I felt shocked and disrespected when I read the short email about downsizing. As such a massive layoff, we should have at least had a town hall meeting. That was not a layoff of several people. We had people laid off in almost every unit. " Another employee from a U.S. insurance company complained that the company updated them about the possible relocation process mainly through email, which did not leave much room to gather feedback from the employees. The participant said that "it felt that the company just wanted to force its decisions upon us."

*"Town hall meeting."* It is necessary to note that the use of the town hall meeting found in this study is different from its traditional use to engage civil participants from community members. Almost all participants mentioned in English literally the exact term when talking about how company introduced change at the beginning. I suspect that employees picked up the term from management that wanted to encourage participation from employees. Usually such a meeting was led by a member of top management, such as CEO, senior vice president, or deputy

country manager.  The face-to-face form of interaction seemed to show respect to the employees and invite open communication.  One manager from the Japanese automobile manufacturer said that the vice president of the company formally announced the change at a town hall meeting, which showed that "the company was at least willing to hear what you have to say about the change."  Another employee from a U.S. telecommunications company commented that announcing the change in a town hall meeting made him feel that he could "speak out openly his opinion about the change."

For leadership change, such a kind of meeting seemed to provide an opportunity to initiate a direct dialogue between management and employees.   One manager from a U.S. insurance company said that the company's new CEO was introduced to the employees during a town hall meeting.  He talked about this meeting as follows: "Although only a handful of questions were asked during the meeting, at least it allowed us to interact with the new CEO directly and we hardly get to talk face-to-face with the CEO like this."

Although the town hall meeting seemed to be useful to announce change to employees, this type of meeting often fell short at initiating a two-way communication between management and employees.  One employee from a U.S. food and beverage company recalled the last town hall meeting this company held to announce the news of relocating the headquarter office to another city:

> We gathered at a theatre for the [town hall] meeting.  Before going there, we
> didn't know what was happening.   Then the CEO read a letter saying that our
> headquarters will be relocated to Shanghai.   Lastly he announced that three

new directors from the company that we merged have been appointed to our

company's marketing, operation, and finance departments. We were

completely blown away by the relocation news and having our three key

departments being taken over by the managers from the merged company.

Only a few questions were asked. The CEO's answers seemed very

perfunctory. It was totally a shock to us. We didn't have enough time to react

to the news during the meeting. Then less than half an hour, the meeting was

over.

Another participant from the same food and beverage company expressed a similar

view:

Apart from being startled by the CEO's relocation announcement. I didn't

feel comfortable at all at that meeting. It was held at a theatre, an awkward

place to have a meeting. I felt that we were enclosed in an isolated area.

From where I was sitting I couldn't even see the face of the CEO. We didn't

ask many questions, probably only three or four.

It seemed from the above illustration that the location and the nature of the

announcement made it rather hard for the employees of this food and beverage

company to respond very well with questions. Another participant from this

company said that "Maybe top management didn't want to answer any questions from

us at all, so they chose that theatre location for this meeting."

The human resources director for the Austrian semiconductor company also

showed her doubt about whether town hall meeting could be an effective way to

generate feedback. Her company was bought out by a U.S. semiconductor company.

The Austrian company's employees were thus all invited to a town hall meeting held

at the U.S. semiconductor company. This participant described the meeting:

> We were invited to attend the town hall meeting at their place. We first
>
> introduced our management team. Then their deputy country manager did a
>
> presentation in English to introduce their company. Flawless presentation! At
>
> the end of the presentation, they asked: "do you have any questions?"
>
> Silence. Then again, "Do you have any questions?" No questions. I don't
>
> think our employees could ask any questions in that situation. I don't think
>
> our engineers feel comfortable standing up and asking questions in English in
>
> front of everyone. Remember, we were the ones who were merged. I think
>
> the information exchange was pretty one-way.

It seemed that from a company that was just merged by another, employees might not

feel confident enough to ask question. The human resources manager suggested that

collecting anonymous questions in Chinese might have been a better way to initiate

two-way communication.

*Internal publications*. I found that most participating organizations used

internal publications such as periodicals to communicate change with their

employees. These publications were often used to communicate detailed, specific

information. For instance, a U.S. insurance company used the company periodicals to

introduce company history and the new CEO to its employees located in different

branches. The corporate and marketing manager was in charge of producing the

periodicals. After the new CEO took the position, the corporate and marketing

manager decided to use a periodical to further introduce the CEO to employees

located across the country.  According to this manager, the insurance industry has a high turnover rate, especially for sales agents.  Only introducing the new CEO was not sufficient enough for the company's new employees to fully understand this change and their company.  This manager explained the reasons:

> We think it would be a good time for us to have a periodical about our company's rich history and its global development as well as some basic information about our new CEO.  Our company has over a hundred years' history, and a lot of our new employees may not know that.  This description could also serve as a background for our employees to learn about the recent CEO change.

Another example of using internal publication to further explain change came from a Swedish telecommunications company.  According to one employee from the operational excellence department, soon after the company announced the implementation of the certification program for engineers, her unit developed a detailed booklet about this certification program.  This booklet included detailed information about the standards and procedures of the new program.  This participant commented that: "When they can read the specific criteria of this program, they will have a better idea of what this is about and how it is related to them."

*Internal feedback system.*  Over half of the participating organizations gather feedback from employees by using various feedback forms, such as direct mail to top management, employee surveys, meetings with top management, and an open reporting system.  These types of communication activities helped the organizations understand how the employees perceived the change.  The employee survey

conducted at the Japanese automobile company exemplified such a kind of communication. After learning that employees were very concerned about commuting to work after the relocation, the labor union conducted a survey to find out about their opinions. The survey gathered information regarding employees' preference of renting, purchasing apartment, living in the company dorm, or housing compensation. "Results of the survey will be shared with top management and will be used in considering how we can help employees on this issue," the director of labor union stated. The above example indicated that this company responded to the concerns of its employees and was willing to listen to their suggestions. The labor union thus helped bridge the communication between these two parties.

Another example of collecting feedback from employees during change was revealed by a manager from a U.S. semiconductor company. According to this manager, his company encouraged employees to freely talk about any problems that they had with their new managers. This manager called it "open report system." As this participant illustrated, if one employee feels uncomfortable or is having a difficult time working with a new manager, this employee can come to see any senior managers or directors to discuss this problem. The identity of the reporting employee would be protected. If this employee feels uncomfortable speaking face-to-face with a senior manager, this employee can write a letter to either the CEO or any senior manager. However, this participant stressed that "the employee who wants to discuss a problem about a new manager must have evidence since their company is characterized with a culture of being data driven." Such an "open report system" initiated a two-way communication between management and employees.

Some organizations also used regular meetings with top management to hear feedback from the employees during change. For instance, a U.S. telecommunications company regularly organized lunch meetings between the senior vice presidents and employees while going through a re-structural change, according to a manager from the human resources department. Employees volunteered to have lunch with top management. The human resources department usually helped employees to generate and organize their questions. As this human resources manager described: "We wanted the employees and the senior vice presidents to spend the time efficiently. So we oftentimes helped the employees to prioritize their questions." These meetings helped top management hear the voices from the front-line employees and give direct feedback. The human resources manager commented the usefulness of such type of feedback system:

> Sometimes indirect communication may create confusion during change. So through such direct exchange employees can have a better idea about the change. It was not uncommon that some employees rejected change because they don't know what the change was really about. For top management, it was a great chance for them to hear directly from our employees. There was no filter, just direct communication.

This human resources manager's response attested that this feedback system with top management created two-way communication directly between management and its employees during change. Such communication helped bring the voice of employees into the management's decision making.

*Reliance on Communication with Managers*

Managers, especially middle level managers, were critical in communicating with employees during change based on the responses from my participants. Such communication helped employees resolve gaps in understanding change and helped the organizations to get feedback from employees regarding change. Trust became an important factor in terms of seeking help in figuring out change for employees. Managers established such trust with their team members through working together. As one manager from a Swedish telecommunications company put it: "When my team members had questions about our recent change, they usually came to me. They knew that I will tell them what I know and what I can tell them. I think the trust has been built through helping them solve problems in their daily work." Another manager from a U.S. telecommunications company explained why his team members trusted him:

> I always try to be straightforward with my team members. As long as I have
> the information and the information can be shared, I'd tell them that. But if
> the information cannot be shared at a certain time because of the company's
> business development, I'd tell them that the unknown information will not
> threaten their job security and it's for the company's benefit. Through the
> years, my folks know that we will not hide anything crucial to them. During
> our last management rotation, when I told my team members that the new unit
> director would not make changes to our current operation, they trusted me on
> that.

Another manager from a U.S. semiconductor company offered a similar observation. This manager told me that during the re-structural change his team members felt more comfortable asking him questions than posing the questions during the town hall meeting. As this participant explained:

I know what they care about during change. For instance, when they asked about the specifics of change, they actually wanted to know if the change would affect their daily work. If you ask that question during the town hall meeting with top management, you will probably hear more often top management talk about the procedures or process of change. At that point, they just wanted to know the consequences of change on them personally.

Responses from participants suggested that most participating organizations recognized the important role that managers could play during change. Managers were oftentimes trained by the organizations to communicate with their employees during change. One human resources manager from a U.S. telecommunications company provided an example. Before initiating re-structural change on a key unit of her company, various managers of this unit spent a lot time talking with some senior employees who came when the company started their branch in China. As explained by top management, the re-structural change seemed inevitable based on the general tendency of the business development in this industry. But the existing operation patterns were deeply entrenched in the mindset of these senior employees. It was critical for them to understand why the change was necessary. This human resources manager articulated:

Our department held several workshops with the managers on how to communicate with those senior employees. Those senior people were well respected among the employees. If the senior people resist the change, other employees were then easily affected by their resistance. We've seen this before. That carry-over effect cannot be ignored. So we asked the managers to first listen to those senior people, just to hear what they had to say, and then try to talk about change from the view of the company's long-term development. Those senior employees also gave us important suggestions on how to restructure this unit based on their experience, which were adopted by top management. If you sent HR persons to talk to those senior employees, they won't be as open as with their line managers because the trust is not there.

The communication mentioned above seemed to help hear the voices from the employees. The above comment indicated two-way communication in that the senior employees had an opportunity to express their concerns. The characteristic of symmetrical communication was also present from the above illustration. Feedback and suggestions were recognized and incorporated into the planning of change. This company did not forcefully pressure the change on its employees. Instead, it tried to gain the trust and support from these potential opponents by relying on the managers to carry out two-way symmetrical communication. This finding is aligned with D'Aprix's (1988) suggestions that communication training for managers is vital to achieve symmetrical communication.

Another example of training managers to communicate with employees came from a Swedish telecommunications company. According to the acting CEO, the company quickly held several meetings with the managers once these managers informed top management that many engineers showed strong resistance toward implementing the certification program. This CEO said: "We realized immediately that we needed to work with these managers on how to communicate with our engineers to reduce their resistance. We then specifically trained our managers on how to talk with the engineers." The comment from the CEO was corroborated by a senior director from the company: "The message from their line managers will carry more weight than from top management because the engineers trust them more. We even planned several scenarios on how our managers could talk with some senior engineers who seemed to feel strongly opposed of this program."

Multinational organizations examined in study not only used managerial communication help employees understand change but also adopted it to deal with negative emotions from employees during change. One example could be found from the case of a U.S. insurance company. This company experienced a leadership change in the midst of merging with another insurance company in another city. During the first couple of months after the new CEO came, many employees left the company. As one participant recalled, "The worst time came when two or three units had only few people left." After realizing the severity of this issue, the chief actuary and assistant to the CEO told me that the insurance company quickly asked a consulting company to conduct a workshop on crisis communication with all unit managers. This chief actuary and assistant to the CEO told me: "At the beginning,

we didn't do a good job to pay attention to the morale of our employees. Then after realizing the high turn-over rate during that period, we hired a consulting company to train our managers on how to manage the emotions of their team members."

I found support for the above top manager's comment from several managers of the insurance company. One sales manager told me that many employees left the company shortly after the new CEO took over. "Top management probably recognized that we cannot ignore this anymore, so they organized a workshop on how to manage employees' negative reactions during change," as explained by this manager. When asked how he communicated with his team members afterwards, this manager illustrated:

> I learned from the workshop that it's important to communicate a sense of stability to employees during uncertain times. So I told my team members that your expertise has already developed through your experience. You still need to do similar kind of work regardless of where you work. But at our company, with the established team asset, we can achieve more by working together. If you ask me when the two companies will merge, where they will set the headquarters, or how they will adjust overlapping positions, I don't have such information. But I do know that we are a great team and we can collectively accomplish great goals. If it does reach to a point where you decide to leave because of relocation, your performance here will make you a very competitive candidate in the market.

The above response indicated that this manager tried to highlight what could be achieved at present helped link the present status to his team members' future

development.  This type of communication helped employees manage their doubt and uncertainty about change.  This manager explained: "Our turn-over rate was largely reduced three months after the company asked us to carry out such communication.  I guess it did help reduce their worry about the future of the company and their own career development."

Another manager of the corporate planning unit from the same insurance company advised me about how the training helped him communicate with his employees.  One key point this manager learned from the workshop was to empathize with the feelings of employees by taking their perspectives.  "As for our unit, the primary concern was the possible layoffs because after merging, the company would streamline the two units of corporate planning," as this manager explained.  When communicating with his team members, this manager informed me that he laid out the possible options as if he were a non-management employee himself.  Here was how he communicated with his fellow team members:

> I told them that if I were in their shoes my options would be look for another job or stay for now and see how things would turn out as the change evolves. But I also pointed out to them that starting a new career at another company takes time.  Now we have a big project on our table.  If we get it done together, this experience will make you stand out among other candidates if you decide to leave later.  Talking in that way made my team members feel that I do care about them.  The choice of staying was also beneficial to them.

This manager told me that after communicating with his team, he only lost one member.  The ones who stayed maintained their work performance.  The direct

communication between managers and their team members in this insurance company

helped employees reduce their worries over their job and future career development.

Findings from this study seemed to be in accordance with the results of Cameron and

McCollum (1993)'s study.  These two researchers found that employees preferred

direct interpersonal communication for information that affected their jobs and related

to the future of the company.

<div align="center">Unique Communication Patterns in Communication of Change</div>

The above illustration discussed the common patterns occurring across most

of the multinational organizations examined in this study.  Some communication

patterns that were not shared among most of the participating organizations also merit

attention because they had an important impact on how organizational members

understood change.  Particularly, these unique communication patterns either helped

or hindered the meaning making process during change.  These unique

communication patterns include: leadership communication and strategic

communication.

*Leadership Communication*

The importance how a leader communicated with their employees during

change was particularly emphasized in two multinational organizations.  Both

organizations were undergoing relocation changes after a merger and change of

CEOs.  I discuss below how each CEO in these two companies communicated with

employees during change.

One U.S. food and beverage company merged with a European food

company.   This new CEO came from the merged European food company, thus

many participants from the U.S. company suspected it was a move to align the company's culture with that of the European company. During the town hall meeting where the new CEO was introduced to the employees, one participant commented on her first impression about the new CEO:

> She was very tall and serious. She didn't say much at the meeting. Someone asked her the possibility of changing our company's culture to the culture of her European company. Her answer was fairly short, just saying it would be neither of the two companies but a combination of the best parts from the two. The meeting ended up very quickly.

Another employee from this company echoed the above observation: "Her [the new CEO's] facial expression was very stiff when she was talking. It felt as if she didn't really want to talk to us. She was really different from our last CEO who was warm and welcoming when you saw him or talked with him."

The new CEO's communication style became one target of criticism from the employees. In less than two months after this new CEO took her position, she shocked her employees by announcing the relocating of the headquarters to another city in two months. Employees were outraged that such a big decision was made without any prior notice or consulting employees at all. One participant expressed her anger:

> We were absolutely shocked by the news and the way she announced it. She read the letter from the global office very quickly and then looked like she didn't want to be bothered with any questions. One employee asked about

relocation and compensation packages.  She said the company hasn't made any decision yet.  We felt very disappointed and angry after the meeting.

Another participant from this company said that "the way the CEO and the company made the decision showed that they didn't care about the employees."  Later on, these outraged employees self-organized a union to negotiate with the company. Three participants from this company literally described that the new CEO was "very rude and aggressive during the negotiation."  One manager recalled:

She didn't even show up at the first scheduled meeting.  At the second meeting, she left after 10 minutes claiming that she had a doctoral appointment, very disrespectful!  Later she appointed the HR manager to represent her.  But she then rejected the agreements reached by HR and the union.  So the negotiation had to start over again.  Her behavior really made us angry.  We contacted the media.  The company was then swamped with negative reports, which pressured her back on the negotiation table. Afterwards, she quickly announced the policy that no one in the company should talk to the media except HR and the union.

The above responses indicated that this CEO did not initiate any open communication with the employees about relocation and the subsequent negotiation. This leader's closed communication behavior forced employees to resort to media to pressure her to open the line of communication.   As a result, employees lost trust toward the organization and carried this resentful sentiment into their interpretation of the change.  One participant from the company said: "Most employees were against the relocation.  It's a decision that only benefited the company to save tax.  We didn't

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trust the company at all.  We only trust the union and the information we found ourselves."  Another manager expressed her grudge: "The more the company withheld information from us, the more we wanted to speculate.  During that time period, we were not concentrated on work at all.  That was actually counterproductive for the company."  Another employee even described the change as "an invasion from the European food company because its headquarters was in the city of the U.S. company's new headquarters."

It seemed from the above responses that the way the CEO and the company communicated with the employees made them felt rejected and disrespected.  Such negative messages conveyed through the CEO's communication behavior forged animosity between the employees and management.  In return, this feeling of cynicism led employees to negatively interpret the change.  As one participant put it:

The new CEO just wanted to force the company's decisions upon us.  The way she answered our questions at the town hall meetings seemed that she was annoyed by us.  There was no discussion to involve us before announcing the decision of relocation.  Our career plans were completely interrupted because of the change.  I think the U.S. company might give up its biscuits and beverage business to the European company, which may explain why we were treated unfairly during change.  I'm glad that I got out because I didn't want to work for a company like that.

The closed communication style exhibited by the new CEO resulted in strong opposition against the company, as the above responses indicated.  Another U.S. insurance company's CEO demonstrated similar communication styles yet with much

tempered consequences.  This U.S. insurance company changed its CEO in the midst of planning to merge with another insurance company in Shanghai.  Unfortunately, this new CEO's style of "silent communication," as one participant characterized, aggravated the uncertainties that employees felt about their job and the company's future.

One manager from this insurance company said that the CEO "became disappeared" after the town hall meeting where he was first introduced to the company.  Employees were eager to know the direction of the incoming merger.  This manager told me: "Employees generally wanted to know if the merger was still in process and possible time line.  My team members asked me this question, but I didn't know either."  Another manager echoed: "It's normal for employees to want to find out the information about relocation and merger because many feared that they may lose their jobs after relocation.  We told our senior directors about the concerns of our employees but never got any response from the CEO."

As a result of this "no-response" style of communication, many employees felt uncertain about their career prospects and started leaving the company.  One manager told me: "The turn-over rate was already high in this industry.  Not enough information from the top made employees nervous and worried.  I have several employees left because they didn't want to take the risk of being laid off later."

One corporate and marketing communication manger from this insurance company provided further evidence about the impact of the CEO's communication on the moral of employees during that uncertain period:

After he [the new CEO] took over, I got a lot of calls from the media about whether our company would continue merging another or where our headquarters would be located. During that time, the news about us was generally negative. Then it was not surprising for our employees to be negatively affected because the information surrounding them was negative and the official communication from top management was absent. I overheard some employees saying that no need to work hard any more since the name of the company would be changed soon. Our turnover rate was extremely high during that time. So we organized an emergent workshop for our managers on how to communicate with their employees during crisis like this. If you want to assure employees, managers should be the first to be assured. I thus suggested the CEO that he can't keep silent anymore. People are leaving, and he needs to step out to set up a reassuring stone. The CEO then agreed to meet with these managers.

Different from the CEO at the previously mentioned U.S. food and beverage company, the CEO in this insurance company was willing to take the suggestion and to start communicating with the employees. Another manger in this insurance company felt satisfied with the CEO's adjustment in his communication style:

Our senior managers told us during the workshop that the company would continue to operate normally and new information about the merger would be available soon. Upon hearing this, we still felt skeptical because this message should be communicated through top management. To our surprise, the CEO came at the end of the workshop and answered our questions. We told him

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that employees felt very frustrated about not knowing the company's new direction. The CEO said he would consider a way to communicate with the employees. Later, he did send an electronic video message to the employees, which really helped reinforce our communication.

Another manager also commented on the importance of maintaining open communication with employees during change:

The amount of information that employees have is definitely asymmetrical compared to the company. The company should realize this and try to inform employees as best as it can, especially during change. Without credible and adequate information, employees will start to come up with their own speculations, which oftentimes may be far from what really has happened. Most importantly, these speculations can easily dampen the morale. That's what happened to our turn-over rate during that time.

The above two cases demonstrated how a leader communicated with employees during change had a large impact on how employees understood and then responded to the change. The CEO in the U.S. food and beverage company did not engage in open communication with its employees, which generated a sharp resentment from the employees and strong resistance against the change. The CEO in the U.S. insurance company took the advice and initiated open and direct communication with the managers, which helped managers stabilize the declining morale of the workforce. This finding reflected Jo, Shim, and Kim's (2002) study that top management's communication styles were related to the trust and meaning

made by employees.  A leader's symmetrical communication style seemed to be

crucial for employees in constructing the meaning of change.

*Strategic Communication*

A systematic strategic communication was applied in the change occurred in a

U.S. telecommunications company.  Its strategic communication was reflected in two

aspects: strategic planning and change management training.  This company initiated

a re-structural change on its global supply chain (GSC) unit, a core function in the

company.  Prior to the change, the functions of purchasing, sourcing, logistics, and

manufacturing were spread out in different units.  When a problem occurred, it was

time consuming to locate the causes and to delegate responsibilities in solving the

problem.  Top management of this company thus decided to integrate various

functions into one GSC unit and to outsource most of its sourcing, purchasing, and

manufacturing functions.  The goal of this re-structure was to build an end-to-end unit

that would manage sales order, planning, production and shipping, according to a

senior vice president.  The following part discusses how this company strategically

planned its communication programs and trained its managers on how to manage and

communicate change.

*Strategic planning*.   According to the senior director of the human resources

department, her unit was involved with top management in planning this re-structural

change from the very beginning.   What the human resources department considered

first was which functions and units would be affected by the change.  The human

resources director stated: "We first worked with top management to decide which

functions were the core abilities of the GSC unit and which were the non-core

functions. We spent a lot time discussing with the senior vice presidents about which functions would be outsourced."

After the functions that needed to be outsourced were decided, the human resources department began identifying which groups of people would likely be affected by the change. Based on the impact of this change, three groups of employees were segmented as being most affected by the change, which included mangers as well as group leaders, employees who would stay, and employees who would leave. The senior director of the human resources department called this analysis "stakeholder analysis."

The stakeholder analysis mentioned above resembled the stakeholder stage in the strategic management model of public relations proposed by J. Grunig and Repper (1992). At this stage, public relations practitioners conduct environment scanning to identify the organizational consequences on possible stakeholders. In this case, the human resources department conducted environmental scanning to identify employees who would be mostly affected by the change.

Once these three groups of people were identified, the human resources department trained various unit managers to communicate with the key senior employees to gather their feedback on this re-structural change. According to this senior director, those key senior employees were influential in change because "they were well respected among junior employees. Gaining approval and support from this group can greatly expedite the implementation of the change to various units." This senior director also pointed out that a key purpose of communicating with these senior employees was to inform them that the company was willing to listen to their

suggestions about the change.  Such purpose was found from the responses from several managers.  For instance, one manager from the planning unit said:

> While planning this change, we were trained to talk with the senior engineers to get their thoughts about the change.  It was a new idea to them.  At the beginning, they opposed it because the new system was totally different from what they've been doing for years.  We treated them as experts and just listened and asked their feedback.  When they realized that their feedback mattered to top management, they gradually accept the new structure and were willing to implement it.

Such communication conducted between mangers and the senior employees exemplified the two-way symmetrical communication model (J. Grunig, 2000).  The communication was two-way because it involved dialogic exchange of views.  The feature of symmetrical communication was reflected in the willingness of top management to incorporate the voices and feedback from these employees into its change plan.  This type of two-way symmetrical communication fostered mutual understanding between top management and employees.  As a result, employees were likely to embrace and adopt the change.

Once identifying these groups of employees affected by the change, the human resources department planned different programs to communicate with these groups of employees, according to the senior director of the human resources department.  The goal of communicating with managers and group leaders was to involve them into change by seeking their understanding and feedback of the change.  For employees who would stay, a central goal of the communication programs was to

let them realize their value and contribution to the company. The difficult part of the communication program was to communication with employees who would be laid off. The senior director described how her unit dealt with such group of employee:

> We didn't want to create the impression to those employees that we don't want you so you will leave tomorrow. The re-structural change will take two to three years to reach its final state. During that transitional period, we will need these people. So we tried to communicate with them that the company still values their contribution. The decision was made based on the company's long-term development plan. The company would recommend these employees to its partner companies and had already made plans about their compensation packages. If we didn't communicate with them clearly and address their concerns, it would affect our production efficiency and delay the change implementation. We also let them know that if they had outstanding performance during the transitional period, we would still keep them.

The above response demonstrated care and respect for the employees who might be laid off, which mitigated their opposition against the change. One manager from the supply chain operation unit provided evidence about the effectiveness of such communication program. According to this manager, the human resources department held several workshops to train them how to communicate with these potentially problematic employees who would be laid off. As he put it:

> At the beginning, those employees had strong opposition of the change because their job security was gone. As we kept communicating with them,

they started to understand the reasons for change and realized that the company had made plans of compensation packages based on their experience and the law. They started slowly to accept it. I can't expect them to fully support it. But at least they did not sabotage or delay the change implementation.

*Change management training*. After identifying the groups of employees affected by the change and planning different communication programs for these groups, the U.S. telecommunications company launched a series of change management training for various unit managers. The senior director of the human resources department advised me that the purpose of these trainings was to involve these leaders into change process and help manage change.

The company invited a consulting company to conduct regular workshops for the managers on topics of emotions management, dealing with resistant employees, and crisis communication. This senior director informed me that "during training the company also worked with these managers to come up with strategies for restructuring the GSC unit and for communicating with different employees." These workshops helped managers take the change ownership. One manager from the purchasing unit told me that those trainings helped her deal with difficult employees during change. This purchasing manager described what she learned from these trainings:

> My unit was integrated with the larger supply chain unit. Some employees
> didn't feel comfortable at first because they had to report to different persons
> and to follow different operation processes. We tried to communicate with

them that companies have different priorities at various stages. At this point it was an opportunity to streamline our structure to make our company more competitive. The sustained development of this company is also closely related to their career development. The knowledge and skills learned during the change will be an asset even if they don't agree with the change and choose to leave. The key was to help the employees realize the link between them and the change as well as possible options available for them.

Another product manager illustrated one example of how he benefited from the trainings to deal with emotional employees. The critical point that this manager learned from the trainings was to empathize with the feelings of employees and help them see their roles in the change. This manager's unit had one supervisor who was not happy about the change because after integration he would report to another person who held the same title as he was. This employee felt that this re-structural change demoted his organizational status. This manager described how he communicated with this particular employee:

He said he wanted to quit the job because he didn't feel comfortable about the change. I told him that I understood how he felt because I had the same situation after integration. What matters here was that our company would be able to deliver products and serve our customers more efficiently with this new structure. The company had a great growth potential from this change, which would be beneficial to all of us personally and career wise. I sat down with him and mapped out his career path in relation with the change.

Gradually, he started to understand the reasons of change and accepted it. I think this worked.

*Summary of RQ2*

The public relations function was not found to be centralized in any of the organizations studied. Instead, this function was assumed by either the human resources department alone or a combination of the human resources department and other units such as the corporate and marketing communication unit. Only two multinational organizations had a public relations function, but the public relations function was mainly set up to deal with the media relations and product promotion.

While communicating with employees during change, two common patterns were found. These two patterns included reliance on traditional communication programs and reliance on communication with managers. Traditional communication patterns included: communication via company intranet, town hall meeting, internal publication, and internal feedback systems. In general, these types of communication programs were one-way. Company usually employed these communication programs to formally and quickly communicate with their employees during change. Two-way symmetrical communication strategies did emerge from these traditional programs. For example, some organizations used research such as survey to find out about the concerns of employees and took their concerns into management decision making.

Communication with managers was used intensively in most organizations to communicate change with employees. Such mode of communication was preferred because employees trusted managers as credible information source during change. Organizations trained managers to communicate with employees. This type of

communication helped organizations hear the voices and concerns from the employees. Two-way symmetrical communication was present when these managers used dialogical communication to help the organization reach a mutual understanding with the employees about change.

Two unique communication patterns were also noteworthy to explore, which included the communication styles of leadership and strategic program management. In two multinational organizations that experienced leadership change, the way the leader (e.g., CEO) communicated with their employees during change appeared to affect how employees interpret the change and uncertainties. When a leader exhibited closed communication styles, employees tended to interpret change negatively. An open communication style seemed to help employees reduce uncertainty and to encourage employees to seek information about change. Examples of strategic management of internal communication programs were present where the human resources department was involved in planning and implementing change. Specifically, the human resources department engaged in strategic management by identifying employees affected by change, training managers to communicate with employees, and by including the voices of employees in top management's change planning.

<center>Uncertainty Avoidance and Sensemaking</center>

RQ 3. How does the meaning that organizational members make for change reflect the cultural dimension of uncertainty avoidance in the Chinese culture?

This section addresses the link between sensemaking and uncertainty avoidance. As a cultural dimension, the concept of uncertainty avoidance refers to a

society's level of tolerance for ambiguity or unpredictability (Hofstede, 2001). In another words, uncertainty avoidance indicates the degree to which an individual feels threatened or comfortable by certain unknown factors or situations. Uncertainty is inevitable during organizational change due to its disruptions of existing patterns and routines in the organization. In the context of change, uncertainty thus represents information that organizational members do not know. Stated differently, individuals feel uncertain when they do not know or cannot predict how things will turn out during and after change.

To understand the influence of uncertainty avoidance on sensemaking, I examine first the perceived uncertainty tolerance among the participating organizations during change. Second, I discuss the identified key dimensions of uncertainties among my participants during change. Third, I probe the effects of uncertainty reduction upon sensemaking during change.

## Perceived Uncertainty Tolerance

Generally speaking, my participants did not perceive a higher level of uncertainty avoidance comparing to their expatriates or international employees. Participants seemed to concur that the level of uncertainty was associated with certain individual characteristics, such as dispositions and working experience. Responses from my participants also suggested that difference may exist for the duration of uncertainties that they experienced as opposed to those felt by their international colleagues. I discuss these themes found from the interviews in the following part.

*Perceived Low level in Uncertainty Avoidance*

When asked if they perceived any difference of uncertainty avoidance between themselves and their international colleagues, my participants did not think such difference was pronounced. A human resources manager from a U.S. semiconductor company said: "I don't think there's an apparent difference of uncertainty avoidance between the locals and the expatriates. To me, when it comes down to change, their primary worry focuses on job security." When I summarized Hosftede's (2001) conclusion on the level of uncertainty avoidance based on cultures, the human resources manager from an Austrian semiconductor company showed her doubt: "Really? Do they still find such difference now?" This human resources manger continued that "Maybe China opened to the world late. As far as I have seen from our company and the ones that my friends are working for, the difference is not noticeable, if there's any." Another manager from a U.S. insurance company agreed that the difference might already be bridged because of globalization: "As China becomes more integrated with the world, the gap of uncertainty tolerance also becomes smaller."

Another manager from a U.S. food and beverage company concurred with the above responses: "From my observation of my boss who is an American, I don't think he felt less uncertain than we were during change. He seemed anxious too. His boss, a senior vice president, was replaced by a vice president from a European company, which implied that our unit would follow different ways of doing things." Another manager in a U.S. insurance company offered a similar view as follows:

I have worked and lived in many countries. I don't think the Westerners would have a higher tolerance of uncertainty than the Chinese. When a goal or direction is vague, most people will feel lost or confused. I've seen some employees from the Western countries seemed more uncertain than the Chinese here during change. It may be an individual difference than a cultural difference.

From analyzing my participants' responses, it seemed to me that individuals who chose to work for a multinational company had already formed a buffer zone against uncertainty. A marketing manager from a U.S. food and Beverage company commented in the following manner:

We're in the marketing department. Uncertainty is almost there every day. Westerns have a low tolerance of uncertainty probably because they grew up in an independent environment. Chinese are a little different. They were told to do this and that all the time at school and at home. But this trend has changed a lot now. I think generally people who chose to work in a multinational company are already able to sustain constant uncertainties in their environment. If they can't, then the multinational companies usually won't hire them.

The above response suggested that the nature of the working environment might have selectively drawn individuals who could tolerate uncertainty better than others.

One employee from a Swedish telecommunications company voiced similar observation: "People who work at the multinational companies constantly switch their jobs, maybe every two or three years. They already got used to this less

predictable environment than government agencies or the state-owned companies."
Another employee from a U.S. semiconductor company told me that "The IT industry
changes so fast that we change companies pretty quickly. You have to learn to live
with the uncertainties." One sourcing manager from a U.S. telecommunications
company provided his view about tolerating uncertainties:

> The first day when I came to the multinational company that I first worked
> with, my boss told me that the only thing that is constant is change. That's
> what I've been telling my team members all the time. I think they have taken
> it well. They've already been in several multinational companies, so they
> know how things can change quickly.

In sum, participants in this study observed little difference in uncertainty
avoidance between local employees and their international colleagues. Several
factors might have contributed to this finding. First, only a few expatriates were
included in this study, which cannot adequately reflect how employees from non-
Asian cultures viewed uncertainty avoidance. Second, my participants might not
want to admit their level of uncertainty avoidance for various reasons, such as fear of
being perceived negatively or afraid of being compared with their colleagues. Third,
the unpredictable nature of the multinational organizations may filter out individuals
with low tolerance in uncertainties. Local participants interviewed in this study, thus,
cannot serve as a representative sample of individuals from the Asian culture. Fourth,
China has undergone tremendous economic and political changes in the last two
decades, which might alter how Chinese people view uncertainties. Therefore,
cautions needs to be applied when comparing results of this study to Hofstede's

(2001) findings. The following section explains that participants of this study viewed uncertainty avoidance to be closely related to individual characteristics, such as personality, education, and work experience.

*Uncertainty Avoidance & Individual Characteristics*

Based on the responses from my participants, they seemed to agree that the difference in uncertainty avoidance may stem from individual characteristics, such as working experience, personality, or education background. One manager from the sales support in a U.S. insurance company explained:

> The difference in uncertainty avoidance may not be related to cultures. I think what matters is your professional experience. You've been there and done that, so you know how business is operated. In times of change, you would look for solutions and answers. Sometimes, the companies don't even have a clear map of where the change is heading. But for junior employees who just graduated fresh from college, they may felt uncomfortable because they have always had clear directions about the future.

This above manager's comment suggested that being involved in an uncertain environment such as a multinational company may have altered the local employees' tolerance level of uncertainty.

One employee from the U.S. telecommunications company explained that an individual's personality may affect his or her level of uncertainty tolerance. A colleague of this participant left the company during change because the future was too uncertain for him. This participant recalled:

One of my co-workers left during the middle of our last structural change. He just had a new boss, and he was merged to another unit. He told me that he didn't want to stay in a new unit during a re-structural change, just too many things out of control. He came to our company because his previous company had a re-structural change. I guess he just does not like change.

One engineer from an Austrian semiconductor company provided another example. This engineer's company was bought by another U.S. semiconductor company. He told me that his company originally planned to hire more engineers because of the increasing customer service workload. But the U.S. semiconductor company that merged his company decided not to add more engineers. As a result, this participant and his colleagues might need to work overloads for a considerable time. This engineer told me how he felt about the uncertainties:

After merging together, our workload will definitely increase because they decided not to hire more engineers and we're sort of overwhelmed now. Their engineers still need time to learn our equipment and technologies. Once their engineers are familiar with our products and technologies, I highly doubt that they would need that many engineers because you don't need two or three engineers to operate one machine. Two of my fellows already started to look for someplace else. I am open to whatever happens. If that day comes, I will look for a new job. I could have started job hunting now. But I will wait and see.

This participant seemed to exhibit a high level of tolerance toward the unforeseen future of job security. Instead of looking for new job opportunities, this participant

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decided to stay and let his job future unfold by itself.  Such high tolerance of uncertainty may be attributed to his open and laid-back personality.

The influence of personality on uncertainty avoidance could be shown from another example from a manager in a U.S. telecommunications company.  This manager told me that during the chaotic downsizing periods "some team members sustained that uncertain and tried very hard to improve their work performance, whereas some became pessimistic and totally gave up trying."

It is important to emphasize again that this study was primarily explorative and did not aim to confirm Hofstede's (1989, 2001) findings on the differences of uncertainty avoidance due to cultural differences.  This lack of difference in uncertainty avoidance noted in this study may well suggest that future studies investigate whether uncertainty avoidance is culturally bounded or determined by situational factors (e.g., personalities, education, or work experience).

Key Dimensions of Uncertainties

I found four key dimensions of uncertainties that my participants seemed to be most concerned about during change.  These dimensions represented the areas that my participants needed the information most.  These four dimensions include: "job security," "employee benefits," time, and "immediate managers."  Among them, the three dimensions (i.e., "job security," "employee benefits," and "immediate managers") were drawn directly from the comments of participants.  I discuss each of these dimensions in the following part.

*"Job Security."*  Job security refers to the extent to which one can keep a job. One human resources manager from the Japanese automobile manufacturer said that

"Job security is the No. 1 aspect that employees feel uncertain about during change."
For instance, after learning the impending shift from manual to automatic systems,
many employees started to wonder whether the company would hire new people to
operate the machine and lay them off afterwards. The human resources manager
recalled:

> After we informed them that our new plant will have more automation
> systems and upgrade the current operation technologies, we heard that many
> employees started to worry whether their jobs were safe. When employees
> become worried about their jobs, they will not be focused on their work,
> which would ultimately affect our production volume. We therefore
> repeatedly communicated with employees and instructed our managers to
> communicate with them that their jobs will be secure, we will still need them,
> and we will train them for the new operation systems.

Another example came from the human resources manager of a U.S.
telecommunications company. She said during the company's periods of downsizing,
the dominant void that employees wanted to fill was "Would the next one being laid
off be me?" Employees were very uncertain about whether their jobs were still
stable. One employee from this company supported this human resources manager's
comment. This employee told me that "he and his colleagues felt very uncertain
about their jobs especially after three team members were laid off. What's worse was
that the company downsized three times. It felt like we were thrown into a black hole
several times."

Another employee from an Austrian semiconductor company expressed a similar threat felt during his company's recent merger. After the merger they were told that no immediate downsizing would happen. But after a month, the new company announced that the Austrian company would have a 20 percent cut worldwide in its workforce. This participant described to me how he felt:

When the layoff news was announced, the first thing came to my mind was whether and when it would be our office. The company did not tell us the specific percentage for each region. It was a tough time for us because top management of the merging company did not tell us whether the cut would be on the administration personnel or on the engineers.

The fear of losing job was especially acute for employees during a relocation change. One example came from an employee from the U.S. food and beverage company that suddenly decided to relocate its headquarters to another city. This participant described her reaction after hearing the announcement of the relocation:

After the CEO announced the news of relocation, we were astounded. We didn't ask many questions because it all happened too fast. Then on the way back to office, the feeling of shock hit us really hard because we will immediately lose our job if we don't want to relocate with the company. Some senior employees asked the HR about the specific time frame of the relocation so we can start looking for a job. But the company didn't give us any information about that. We felt furious at the company because it didn't give us any information about what we wanted to know the most.

Another employee from a U.S. insurance company exhibited similar worry about job security about her company's upcoming merger. This participant told me that the location of the new headquarters was less of a concern than the looming cut on personnel. She told me that "Upon hearing the merging news, I worried that they would cut people with overlapping positions. It's of course unnecessary to have two managers managing the same department. I wanted to know how the company would deal with it at that time."

To many participants, job security was also related to career development. One employee in a U.S. food and beverage company explained the impact of the relocation change on career development:

> The time of this relocation could quite possibly occur at someone's critical stage in career advancement. Looking for a new job sometimes meant restarting a career. You need to rebuild your reputation as well as adjust to a new environment and a new organizational culture. For example, I knew people who have worked at the R&D department for over 10 years. It's very hard for people in that area to look for another job in such a short time notice. Those people usually have families and kids, which made it even harder for them.

*"Employee Benefits."* Employee benefits emerged as the second most concerned area that my participants felt during change. One manager from a U.S. telecommunications company stressed that "It all boils down to job security and employee benefits during change. Those two areas are the ones employees felt most uncertain during change." Another manager from a Swedish telecommunications

company echoed: "Regular employees usually notice first if they can still keep their job and if their benefits will change. The impact of change on the company as a whole is not their primary concern."

Another example came from one employee from a Japanese automobile manufacturer. His company would be relocated to a distant area. Taking the public transportation to work would take over one hour and a half to get there. This participant commented that "this relocation added additional stress and inconvenience for the employees. Providing certain transportation compensation will show the company's respect and care for people who work here."

The concern about benefits was especially pronounced during downsizing and merging. Such information was helpful for employees to decide whether to stay or leave a company. For instance, in the case of a U.S. semiconductor company merging an Austrian semiconductor company, the information about the impending wage adjustment became crucial in decision making. One engineer from the Austrian company complained: "The fall is usually a good season for job hunting. The U.S. company hasn't told us the policy on our benefits. Not knowing this information made it hard for me to weigh the decision." Another engineer from the same Austrian company voiced similar dissatisfaction: "For us, non-managerial employees, we care most about whether we can keep the job and whether our benefits will be changed. It is frustrating to see this no-response treatment."

*Time*. The dimension of time uncertainty was mainly concerned with the time line of change. Acquiring such information was useful in coping with change. One manager from an Austrian company told me about his frustration of not getting

adequate information about the schedule of change process. His company was

bought by a U.S. semiconductor company. This participant explained his uncertainty:

> We will move into their new building at the end of next month. At this point,
> however, we have no idea of how they will combine the two systems of
> organizational structure. For instance, our logistics unit is a single unit;
> whereas theirs is placed under sales department. When will they merge these
> two functions? When do we start following their structure? I really hope they
> will give a schedule of how things will merge together.

The above response demonstrated that the uncertainty about the time line of change

made it difficult for this participant and their colleagues to prepare for the merger.

Such frustration was echoed from another employee in a U.S. food and

beverage company. This participant told me that rumors had circulated three months

before about considering moving the headquarters. But there was no discussion of

where to relocate, and the rumor died down quickly. Not surprisingly this participant

and her colleagues thought the relocation was on the agenda of the company's

planning. Three months later, the next time she heard the news was when the CEO

announced that the headquarters would move to another city in two months. This

participant expressed her disappointment:

> The news was announced in January. They should have told us at least three
> or four months ahead. The time during fall and near the end of a year was the
> golden time to look for a job. If we had known this, we would have started
> looking for a job since we don't want to move to another city. I don't think
> the company made the decision all in a sudden. What they did to us was

really unfair because it left all of us in the dark. Most importantly, it was not a good season to look for a job in January, and the two months notice was by no means enough for us to decide whether to relocate to another city. We all have families.

"*Immediate Manager.*" Based on my participants' responses, the relationship between an employee and his or her immediate manager was an important dimension during change. The change of an immediate manager projected the change of working style and career development. As one manager from a Swedish telecommunications company put it: "Chinese culture puts a great emphasis on relationships. It is the same at workplace. Employees don't just see themselves as one function of a unit. They also tend to care about how they would develop their relationships with their immediate boss. A good relationship helps them perform well."

One participant from an Austrian semiconductor company that was bought by a U.S. semiconductor company described his frustration over being uncertain about his new manager:

Since we were merged by them, we will definitely report to them. But at this point, a month away from working together, I still don't know anything about whom I will report to. I wish they could have already informed us. Every manager has different styles. How will they think of our current working style? How will they monitor us? Two companies have different technologies. How will their managers evaluate our work if they don't even know our procedure?

As indicated by the above response, the uncertainties regarding his new manager made it difficult for this participant to prepare for the transition. Unfortunately, this information was not available to him.

One manager from another U.S. semiconductor company pointed out that the routine personnel change in his company sill created uncertainties among employees. This manager explained that it was difficult for employees to deal with the transitional period because "they were not sure whether the new manager would understand the factory culture and operate in similar manner." To better prepare employees to deal with the uncertainties associated with having new managers, this participant told me that their company usually had the new managers come one or two months before replacing the current managers. In doing so, the employees would "have time to prepare what will be expected of them from the new manager while having their current working styles affected in a minimal way," according to this manager.

Another employee from a U.S. telecommunications company undergoing a re-structural change in a large unit provided similar evidence. This participant's manager decided to leave due to disagreement about the change. This employee illustrated how he felt when he learned the news:

> After knowing my manager was leaving, a crucial question came to me was who would take over his place. I have worked with my last manager for three years. I know exactly what he expected of me. Our manager was also well respected in the company. Whenever we had trouble pushing things through among different units, our boss can always find a way to get it done. Our unit

is a pretty messy unit, so I don't know how the new manager would handle

that. Furthermore, with the coming of a new manager, I'm not sure if it would

affect my career because I may have to start over to prove my ability.

Apart from the uncertainties related to the management style, another direct impact of

the managerial change seemed to be the career development. The existing plan of

career path suddenly seemed indefinite with the coming of a new manager.

Another employee from a U.S. food and beverage company exhibited her

uncertainties about her career during her company's relocation change. This

employee's company was merged several months ago with another European food

company. Then three months later she received the news that her manager would be

replaced by a manager from the European food company. This employee commented

on the interruptions of her career plan by the uncertainties of working with a new

manager:

> The company suddenly replaced my boss. This change considerably
>
> disrupted my career plan. My boss was talking about promoting me a month
>
> ago. Now it's all gone. The European company had different styles and
>
> ideologies in marketing. So our current operations could be totally changed. I
>
> was not sure whether I could still get a career advancement under the new
>
> manager.

As for this participant, the once clear career development suddenly seemed

unpredictable. The differences regarding her unit's function made her current career

plan looked even vaguer.

Uncertainty Reduction & Sensemaking

The above illustration discussed the perceived uncertainty avoidance among local employees and the key dimensions of uncertainties emerged identified by the participants. Since a key purpose of this study focuses on sensemaking during change, it is necessary to examine the influence of uncertainty reduction on sensemaking. In another words, an important aspect of the link between uncertainty reduction and sensemaking rests on how uncertainties affect the way meaning was made during change. Responses from the participants suggested that their uncertainty levels during change affected the meaning constructed for change through their activities in information seeking.

Participants examined in this research generally were active to reduce their uncertainties. If the uncertainties were reduced or maintained at a relatively low level, participants were likely to be open to seek both positive as well as negative information while making sense of change. If the uncertainties were not reduced after trial, participants were likely to engage in negative information behavior, such as selectively seeking negative information, unwilling to process positive information, or stopping seeking information. The following table provides a summary of how uncertainty reduction might affect the information seeking and ultimately meanings about change based on the interview responses.

Table 5: Influence of Uncertainty Reduction upon Sensemaking during Change

_____

| Uncertainty Level about Change (After Trial) | Information Behavior | Meaning |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Reduced/Low or Neutral | Open to Positive & Negative Information | Positive |
| Not Reduced | Selectively Seeking Negative Information | Negative |
| | Stopped Processing Positive Information | |

_____

*Uncertainty Reduced after Trail*

Uncertainties seemed to be inherent during change given the unpredictable nature of change processes and outcomes. Even for the relatively straightforward changes such as routine personnel change, uncertainties about the styles of new managers still emerged. When encountering uncertainties, organizational members generally sought actively to reduce these uncertainties. One example came from the case of relocation change in a Japanese automobile manufacturer. According to the human resources manager of this automobile company, "Employees usually tried to find answers to their unknowns during change. For instance, many employees emailed us and asked their line managers about the company's policies regarding transportation subsidies."

One employee from this automobile company echoed the above response from the human resources manager. This employee told me that he, along with his co-workers, was eager to know how the company would compensate for a long-distance and lengthy commute to the new plant site. "The new plant is located in a distant area. We wanted to know what benefits are available for us. I asked my line

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manager about this, and our union representatives reported our inquiries to the labor

union." When asked whether the company had responded to their questions, this

employee said:

> The union has asked us to fill out a survey about our opinion on transportation
>
> subsidies and told us that top management will consider either getting several
>
> big buses to take us to work or provide monetary compensation if the subway
>
> will be available. Although nothing was definite yet, at least I know the
>
> possible options, and we will get a response back from them.

> The director of the labor union from this automobile company provided

further information about how the company tried to resolve the issue. The company's

top management was in the process of making decisions regarding the transportation

benefits. The labor union director explained: "We realized how important this

information to our employees. We have repeatedly communicated with our

employees that benefits will be available for them. We have several options now,

which depended on the progress of the subway construction."

> When asked how their uncertainties related to their information seeking

during change, one employee from this automobile company said:

> Although management has not finalized the decision yet, we knew what
>
> options would be available for us. This company seemed to care about the
>
> concerns of the employees, and we would reciprocate. The other day I
>
> learned from my line manager that our overload time might increase to
>
> prepare for the testing of a production line. I think it would be fine because
>
> there's a lot of work to do for this relocation. This change after all will be

good for the company. The increasing volume of production would raise our

salary, too.

The above response from the employee showed that the reduced uncertainty toward

the issue of transportation compensation created trust toward the company. Although

this employee learned about the upcoming increased workload, he was able to

interpret it in a positive way.

Another manager from the same automobile company provided another

piece of evidence how his uncertainty reduction influenced the way he interpreted the

information he sought during change. In response to the employees' question about

the reasons for moving to a distant area, the company explained that one goal was to

diminish the harmful environmental impact on the neighboring communities. To

better clarify this explanation to his employees, this manager started his own search

on this environmental issue. Through consulting his friends at government agencies

and his own research, this manager found that the company's pollutant index would

soon surpass a new city law on regulating waste emissions. This new law would be

implemented citywide in two years. This manger described to me how he interpreted

this information regarding the company's waste emissions:

I didn't know about this law until I was talking about our company's

upcoming relocation with a friend. He mentioned this newly passed

legislation. I then searched on internet and found that our current waste index

would definitely violate the new environmental law. It was kind of upsetting

to know that we've been generating these wastes for years to the residents

living close by. But then I realized that this was exactly one of the reasons

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why we would relocate, and more importantly our company didn't hide

anything from us about this. I was talking to my team members the other day

that I was proud of our company's relocation because it cared about the

negative consequences created for the communities. My team members also

agreed with me on this.

Based on the above response, the participant interpreted the negative information he

found in a positive manner. Initially, the company provided information to answer

the employees' uncertainty about the reasons for a distant relocation. Such candid

disclosure also seemed to instill a sense of trust. While searching further information

about this issue, this participant was able to view the change from the company's

perspective and to positively construct the meaning of change.

Another example regard the influence of uncertainty reduction on information

seeking as well as meaning making came from the case in the U.S.

telecommunications company. This company initiated a re-structural change on its

core function—the global supply chain unit. After the full implementation of the

change, this unit would give its product requirements to the electronic manufacturing

services companies (EMS). EMS would then be responsible of production as well as

sourcing and purchasing the raw materials. In another words, the existing sourcing

and purchasing units at this U.S. telecommunications company would be soon

outsourced to another company. As a result, employees from the purchasing and

sourcing units might lose their jobs after two years till the completion of the change.

The job uncertainty became a key concern for these employees, according to a

purchasing manager in this company.

One employee from the sourcing unit described to me how he felt about his uncertainty and how he tried to cope with it:

> After hearing the news, I talked with my co-workers about this. We soon realized that after two or three years we would be out of job. To confirm this, I asked my manager. He said a final goal of this change was to delegate its production function to external companies so our company could have more financial resource to focus on product development. The company already planned how to use the employees' transferrable skills on other units. We could still keep our jobs if we could acquire new skills during the transitional period. After learning this, I felt better.

This employee's comment revealed he actively sought information from his manager to resolve his uncertainty about the future job security. The information provided by his manager helped him project his career in two or three years. With the ongoing change, this participant talked with his colleagues in other units to find out whether he could find a fit in the new unit. This employee continued:

> I spent a lot of time talking with my manager and other folks from other units to see where I could see myself working in two or three years. So far the logistics unit seemed interesting to me because I could use my existing skills there. Still there would be a lot of learning involved. I still haven't decided what I would do yet. One thing for sure is that I have learned useful skills after the change started. This change did seem to make operation processes simpler. Even if I decide to leave, it won't be hard for me to land another job based on the skills I have developed at this company.

It seemed that this participant was still actively seeking information to lesson his uncertainty about his future job. The level of uncertainty appeared to be reduced as he gained more information from both self-search and his manager or the company. This participant's initial reservation about the change seemed to be declining. Even facing the prospect of leaving the company, this participant viewed the change in a more positive light than from the beginning. He came to see the positive changes that this re-structural change could generate for himself and the company.

*Uncertainty Not Reduced after Trail*

The above cases explained how reduced uncertainty could affect information seeking and interpretation by participants during change. The reduced uncertainty seemed to encourage them to seek more information about change. The examples illustrated above indicated that some of my participants were able to examine the collected information from the company's perspective. In contrast to this situation, when their uncertainties about change were not reduced after trial, many participants seemed to give up information seeking or to even selectively attend to negative information. The following part discusses this phenomenon emerged from the results.

One example came from the case of the merger between two semiconductor companies. A U.S. semiconductor bought an Austrian semiconductor company. The Austrian company was scheduled to move into the U.S. company's new building in a month. For the employees at the Austrian company, a key uncertainty that they had at this stage was about the time line or the specific plan of merging the two structures together. One manager of technical support described his uncertainty:

We definitely have different organizational structures based on the information we know about them. Next month we will move in together. I don't think we will keep our current structure because after all we were bought by them. But it was frustrating that they haven't told us anything about the timeline. There are lots of preparations needed to be done before merging these two structures. Now everything was indefinite.

Another engineer from this Austrian company echoed the above comment: "We understand that it takes time for them to figure out all these. But at least they should be open about where they are right now in making the decision about merging the two companies. This uncertainty makes our work hard." When asked why they did not seek information from the U.S. semiconductor company, one sales manager told me:

We asked these questions about two months ago. Our vice president collected the questions and reported to management of the U.S. company. But we haven't heard anything back from them yet. We asked our vice president to ask them again about those questions, still no response from them. First time, no answer; second time, still no response. This no-response treatment really discouraged us to ask any more.

The above responses indicated the frustrations that employees of this Austrian company felt about not having information to reduce their uncertainty. As the above participant mentioned, their uncertainties would be reduced to some extent if the U.S. company could at least disclose how it would respond to their questions. It seemed to me that the inability to see how the merging process would turn out created

reservations toward the future at the U.S. company.  My observation was supported

from the following comment from a logistics manager:

> At first, I thought the merger might be good for this Austrian company
> because they still based their global management style on a family business
> operation.  As for now, I felt a little disappointed about this merger.  They
> wanted us to ask questions, and we did ask.  But they never responded to us.
> We don't expect to have all of our questions answered immediately.  No
> response for any of our questions made me question whether they really cared
> about us.  Maybe they bought our company so that they can do whatever they
> wanted.

This logistics manager's comment already showed some resentment about the U.S.

company's "no-response treatment."  Without being able to reduce uncertainties,

employees were likely to develop distrust toward the company.  As a result of this

distrust, this participant seemed to alter his previous interpretation of the merger to a

relatively doubtful interpretation.  Another comment from the human resources

manager of this Austrian company illustrated how this "no-response treatment"

affected the moral of employees and the interpretation of change:

> The way they responded to us just did not seem that this change is going
> toward the right direction.  It was very different from what they told us at the
> first town hall meeting.  Some engineers already started to speculate that
> maybe they want to sell us again to another company.  I told them that it is not
> likely.  But this kind of speculation already dampened our morale to work
> with them.

The unresolved uncertainties seemed already to affect the way the participants attended to and interpreted the information. One engineer told me: "I don't care about what they say now. I will wait and see how they treat us after the move. If I still don't like it, I will leave." This participant appeared to have stopped processing or seeking information about change. Another engineer concurred: "From how they dealt with our questions, I don't think they would give anything we wanted to know. I noticed their stock price is declining the other day. Maybe they have enough trouble there. Maybe they shouldn't merge with us at the first place." This engineer started to notice the negative information about the company and to think the change in a less positive light.

The comment from the CEO of the U.S. semiconductor company seemed to differ from what the above participants from the Austrian company felt. This CEO described to me how his company dealt with the concerns from the Austrian company:

> Basically you need to communicate clearly with both companies about the merger, to let them feel your sincerity, and you really care about them. It's not something that we bought you and then pushed you in a black box for you to speculate. I think our company will soon have polices on the schedule of integration process and their benefits. The key is not to let them to guess. We need to make things visible to them and hear from their feedback.

This CEO's communication plan certainly contradicted what the employees at the Austrian company said. An obvious gap existed between how the CEO of the U.S. semiconductor company wanted to communicate and what the employees from the

Austrian company actually perceived.  Unfortunately I interviewed the CEO before I went to the Austrian company and was not able to interview him again.  This contradiction seemed to suggest two indications.  First, top management of the U.S. semiconductor company started to notice their communication problem and was in the process of changing how they communicated with the employees in the Austrian semiconductor company.  Second, such a message might be communicated but was not processed by the Austrian company's employees who had already begun to ignore the messages sent from the U.S. company.  Either way, the damage appeared to have been done.  The employees from the Austrian company felt dissatisfied about not having their uncertainties reduced, which evoked distrust and resentment toward the U.S. company.  In return, such resentment might have hindered them from processing positive information communicated from the U.S. company.

*Summary of RQ3*

The third research question dealt with the link between uncertainty avoidance and sensemaking.  Results suggested the following findings.  First, participants perceived little cultural difference in uncertainty avoidance between them and their international colleagues.  In another words, my participants did not observe a higher level of uncertainty avoidance among the local Chinese employees comparing to their international colleagues.  Instead, my participants reasoned that the difference in the level of uncertainty avoidance might result from personal characteristics such as personalities, working experience, or education levels.

Second, this study identified four key dimensions of uncertainties commonly felt by the participants: "job security," "employee benefits," timeline, and the

"immediate manager." These dimensions seemed to represent the areas that employees felt most uncertain during change.

Third, uncertainty reduction seemed to be related with information behavior and interpretation of the meaning of change by the participants. When their uncertainties were reduced, participants tended to be open about positive as well as to negative information about change. Even when the change was likely to affect the participants negatively, they were able to interpret the change from the company's perspective. Consequently, the meaning they came up about change tended to be neutral or positive. In contrast, when their uncertainties were not reduced, employees appeared to alter their information behavior. Change in information behavior included: seeking negative information about change, stopping processing positive information from the organization, and stopping seeking positive information about the change. As a result of this shift, the meaning that employees acquired about change appeared to be relatively negative.

Chapter V: Conclusion and Implications

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of public relations in sensemaking during organizational change. To reach this objective, I developed an overall theoretical framework including sensemaking, strategic management of public relations, and uncertainty avoidance in societal culture. I first explained the importance of meaning making in organizations from a symbolic interpretive approach. I then delineated how sensemaking was critical during organizational change. The link between sensemaking and public relations was established through the role of communication programs. The way individuals attended to and made meaning of various organizational events relied on the information provided by various communication programs. Public relations, as a function of managing both external and internal communication programs, certainly had an impact on the process of meaning making during change. Since this study focused on the multinational organizations in China, I examined one cultural dimension—uncertainty avoidance—that was related to how individuals process information in organizations. Specifically, I explored whether the local Chinese participants' uncertainty avoidance level had any influence on how they made meaning of change.

In the previous chapter, I presented the findings to my research questions. This chapter provides discussion of the findings and their implications. Before moving forward, some significant findings related to public relations should be highlighted. First, communication programs were vital for employees in the meaning making process during change. Communication programs helped participants understand the reasons for change. Poorly planned communication programs during

change resulted in employee confusion regarding change and distrust of management. Second, the contribution of strategic communication during change was recognized by some communication practitioners and top managers. Consistent with the strategic model of public relations proposed by J. Grunig and Repper (1992), I did find that strategic public relations programs were used to communicate with employees during change. Third, public relations programs encouraged acceptance and participation in change implementation. In cases where symmetrical communication was adopted to help employees resolve their cognitive gaps about change, employees were likely to accept and participate in change implementation. These findings indicated that public relations made a valuable contribution to change management in organizations.

I start this chapter with an overview of the major findings. I proceed to discuss the interpretations from the findings. I then explain how these findings relate to public relations theory and practices during change management, followed by discussion of the evaluation criteria for this research. I conclude with a discussion of limitations and suggestions for future research.

<center>Overview of Major Findings</center>

The findings were organized according to the research questions presented in the conceptualization chapter. The first research question explored how individuals in the multinational organizations engaged in sensemaking process during change. Specifically, I looked at how organizational members defined and bridged cognitive gaps encountered during change. The second research question examined the role of public relations during change. I probed the particular communication programs adopted to communicate with employees during change. The third research question

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examined the influence of uncertainty avoidance on sensemaking.  For this question, I

examined the influence by analyzing the impact of uncertainty reduction on

information seeking and how that information, in turn, affected the interpretation of

change.  The following table summarizes the major findings.

Table 6: Summary of Major Findings: RQ1: Sensemaking during Organizational
Change

| Item | Findings |
| --- | --- |
| I. How does something come to be an event? | ■ Disruption in identity <br><br> ■ Disruption of ongoing events |
| II. What does an event mean? (Processes of Enactment & Selection) | ■ Noticing and bracketing (Extraction of cues) <br>    * Noticing anomalies <br>    * Noticing primed cues <br><br> ■ Enactment of through plausible accounts by management (Enactment & Plausibility) <br>    * Consistent with ongoing sense <br>    * Facilitating with ongoing projects <br>    * Providing help or potential reward <br><br> ■ Enactment through collective actions by Employees <br><br> ■ Selection of meaning <br>   -- Retrospection <br>    * Influenced by current situation <br>    * Difference between management & employee <br>   -- Social sensemaking <br>    * Negotiating meanings with peers <br>    * Sensegiving by managers |
| III. Now What should I do? (Process of Retention) | ■ Retaining plausible accounts <br><br> ■ Retaining accounts consistent with identities |

Table 6: Summary of Major Findings: RQ2: Public Relations Function during Change (continued)

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| Items | Findings |
|---|---|
| I.  Common Patterns of Communication Program | ■ Reliance on traditional communication |
| | * Communication via company intranet |
| | * Townhall meeting |
| | * Internal publications |
| | * Internal feedback systems |
| II. Reliance on Communication With managers | |
| III. Unique Communication Patters | ■ Leadership communication |
| | ■ Strategic communication |
| | * Strategic planning |
| | * Management training |

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Table 6: Summary of Major Findings: RQ3: Impact of Uncertainty Reduction on

Sensemaking  (continued)

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| Items | Findings |
| --- | --- |
| I. Perceived Uncertainty Avoidance avoidance | ■ Low perceived difference on uncertainty |
|  | ■ Uncertainty avoidance & Individual characteristics |
| II. Key Dimensions of Uncertainty | ■ Job Security |
|  | ■ Employee Benefits |
|  | ■ Time |
|  | ■ Immediate manager |
| III. Uncertainty Reduction & Sensemaking | ■ Uncertainty reduced after trial |
|  | ■ Uncertainty not reduced after trail |

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Interpretation of Findings

*Change Management as Management of Meaning*

Weick's (1995) sensemaking framework draws our attention to the influence

of the actors (e.g., organizational members) in the process of change.  This

framework helps explain why some organizational changes are accepted while others

are rejected.  The acceptance of change is both facilitated and constrained by the

extent to which management is able to impose a sense of change on events.

Particularly, a smooth implementation of change relies on whether a strong sense of

successful change is imposed on ongoing events, which can be picked up by employees. To manage change is thus essentially to manage meaning that organizational members make of change.

To view change management as management of meaning is to place emphasis on the social and psychological process of actors engaged in change. Weick's (1995) sensemaking framework also embodies the process of organizing, which led Weick (2001) to conclude that organizing is sensemaking. The process of managing meaning thus can be represented by organizing's three key component processes: enactment, selection, and retention. Enactment involves how organizational members invent a situation that they must respond to. In the context of change, enactment entails how management makes something that can be sensed by employees. This meaning making appears to be effective when management creates plausible accounts that 1) are consistent with ongoing sense, 2) facilitate ongoing projects, and 3) provide hope or potential reward. These plausible accounts are likely to direct the attention of employees to cues conducive to change. Furthermore, employees can acquire an understanding of reasons for change, which helps evoke a sense of change among them.

The process of selection explains how organizational members reduce equivocality through retrospection and social sensemaking. Faced with a multitude of meanings about change, employees need value, priorities, and clarifications about preferences to help them sort out which projects matter, which in return enables employees to choose a plausible meaning as a response toward the change. It is thus critical for management to literally establish values and a sense of priorities to guide

employees in resolving their confusion. What employees obtain as a result of this reduction in equivocality is to regain a sense of order, clarity, and rationality disrupted by change. What an organization has to manage during change is thus the multitude of meanings that can be attached to a change situation. By managing the multiplicity of meanings management can help employees simplify the perceived problems during change. This simplification lays the foundation for inducing a plausible action toward the change.

Meanings made during enactment and selection are provisional and tentative. The retention process solidifies the meanings by choosing some to store as organizational memory, knowledge, and intelligence. The retained meanings tend to be plausible, connected to significant identities, and related to past experience, which serve as a source of guidance and input for enactment and selection. Management can guide employees to retain meanings conducive for current and future development by underlying values and rules that seem plausible and consistent with the core identities of employees.

It is critical to note the influence of identity in the management of meanings. Employees make sense of change by constantly asking what implications the change has for who that person is and will be. The sense of self that employees have cues their attention and guide their way through retrospection. Information and events that contradict this identity tend to be rejected and opposed by employees. To manage meaning thus requires management to provide cues that are consistent with the identity of employees and that enable employees to revise their framework regarding their identity.

To view change management as the management of meaning directs attention of management to focus on the process of sensemaking. Specifically, management needs to be conscious of how employees relate change to their identity, how they extract cues, how they link cues with past experience, and what meanings are retained. In doing so, management is able to predict and avoid conflicts in trying to introduce and implement a change.

*The Role of Power in Sensemaking*

*Power in enactment.* Power plays a major role in creating an environment ready and appropriate for change. Management presents information to employees in ways that frame change as a sensible choice. A sense of meaning on events is imposed by a small number of people. Mills (2003) pointed out that "organizational change results from the actions of decision-makers" (p. 52). Therefore, a series of critical question emerge: such as, whose environment is enacted? Whose voices are represented in the enacted environment? What voices are underrepresented in the enacted environment? It appears to me from the results that the voices of the most powerful actors (i.e., top management) take the center stage. Top management sorts out information and highlights it for employees so that their mental frameworks are framed to see the environment in certain ways. Power embedded in organizational structure privileges some actors to be more active than others. These active individuals in an organization acquire unequal access to roles and positions that grant them an unequally strong position to influence how others create realities (Mills, 2003, p. 153). The needs of these active individuals are thus placed ahead of the ones who are passive receivers of enactment.

This imbalance of power in enactment can be broken by the collective actions of organizational members. For instance, employees at a U.S. food and beverage company actively shaped an environment of being treated unfairly by organizing a labor union and taking collective actions against management, which successfully replaced management's enactment. As a result, management of this U.S. company was pressured to respond to the enactment of reality created by the angry employee. Weick (1979) articulated that organizational members usually do not realize the amount of control they actually have to affect enactment, so they remain passive. This finding suggests a role that public relations can take as a balance to management's enactment during change. Public relations professionals, as in-house activists (Holtzhausen, 2000), can raise the awareness among employees about their collective power in constructing their environment and can act as representatives for employees. In other words, public relations professionals can empower employees by assisting them to actively construct their realities and to deliver their sense of a situation to management.

*Power in resolving disparities of meanings*. Because of the equivocal situations confronted by organizational members, interpretations of the same events may differ. Power plays an important role in selecting which meanings are kept. Power is expressed through acts that influence what organizational members accept, ignore, and reject. Individuals with power to shape others' sensemaking tend to be managers and senior employees. These groups of individuals are likely to impose sense upon others.

Power granted to managers and senior employees arise from a variety of manners, such as privileged organizational structure, technical expertise, rich experience, and their roles in organizational networks. Managers and senior employees exert their control by providing cues, stressing certain aspects of identities, establishing criteria for plausible accounts, and highlighting some histories. Such control affects how members direct their attention to past events and then assign meanings to these events. Therefore, powerful figures (e.g., senior employees) in an organization become arbiters that legitimize the meanings created by individuals.

The role of power in shaping the construction of reality among organizational members underscores the social nature of sensemaking. Making of meaning by individuals is contingent upon how others respond and are thought to be reacting. The meanings selected and legitimized by the powerful individuals help transform individual sensemaking into collective interlocking behavior, by creating a shared sense about what is going on during change. Upon recognizing the role of power in sensemaking, organizations need to help these powerful figures to impose meanings conducive to change. Prior to introducing a change, organizations should work these individuals to develop shared understandings of change, so they can assume the role of arbiters of others' senses of change.

*Rebellious Acts as Problems of Switching Expectations in Retrospection*

Results from this study found that negative expressions or behaviors by employees need not be perceived as acts of rebellion against change. Rather, these negative expressions reflect the difficulty that organizational members have while

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switching rapidly their sense of the organization. This phenomenon represents a failure to recognize the pivotal influence that retrospection has upon meaning making.

Cues that employees notice at the current situation are placed into previous events for meaning making. What happened in the past has a dominant influence on how members make sense of the new change. The previously established patterns and expectations of how things should be in an organization will affect how members respond to the current change. As in the case of the relocation change that occurred in a U.S. food and beverage company, employees looked for cues to fit with the deeply entrenched expectations of a humanistic company when glancing backward for meanings to account for the current change. Employees interpreted the change as an unfair treatment, whereas the company viewed the reactions from employees as expressions of extortion and rebellion. This sharp contrast resulted in a fierce stand-off between top management and employees, which inflicted great damage on this organization's daily operation and reputation.

To avoid this pitfall, instead of focusing on the outcomes of meaning, organizations should focus on the process of meaning making. When initiating a change that may exhibit sharp disparity from the past, organizations should try to provide employees with cues that explain the reasons for these deviations. Employees can then see the deviations as plausible departures from the past, which enables them to revise their existing patters and expectations. If the materials that employees use to make meaning during retrospection remain unchanged, employees are hardly willing to embrace the change no matter how loudly the notion of change is expressed by management.

*Public Relations Facilitates Sensemaking during Change*

In the multinational organizations examined in this study, the public relations function was mainly used for media relations or for facilitating marketing efforts. The internal public relations aspect was managed solely by the human resources department or co-managed by the human resources department and other units such as corporate and marketing communication department.

The organization of the public relations function was decentralized, different from a centralized structure recommended in the Excellence study (L. Grunig, et al., 2002). Several reasons may account for such difference. The decentralized public relations function may be in accordance with a primary goal of the multinational companies in China to increase market share and to promote their products. Managing internal communication may not be a priority for these multinational companies, as one senior human resources director of a U.S. telecommunications company commented. Additionally, recent studies have recommended considering alternatives in organizing various communication units. Cornelissen's (2003) study found that integrated communication is reflected in high levels of coordination among separate communication units. Hallahan (2007) argued that public relations activities are not carried out only by public relations practitioners. Hallahan thus advocated more studies to be conducted on how public relations is involved in multiple coalitions and how public relations enables other units to collaboratively set public relations policies.

Despite the decentralization of the public relations function among the participating organizations, examining their internal communication programs

suggested that public relations can facilitate the meaning making process during change. Particularly, public relations can play the role of a facilitator by detecting cognitive interruptions, bridging cognitive gaps through communication, and reducing uncertainties.

*Detecting Cognitive Interruptions*

Public relations can help organizations identify the groups of employees affected by a change by considering the impact of change upon employees. Interview responses indicated that the human resources departments recognized the cognitive gaps felt by the employees. This was done by pre-change planning, directly getting information from employees, and receiving feedback from managers before and during the change. Organizations that successfully implemented their changes all carried out certain gap identification activities. For instance, through the inquiries from employees and feedback from managers the human resources department of a Japanese automobile company realized that employees had difficulty understanding why the company had to relocate to a distant place. A Swedish telecommunications company recognized through feedback from managers that the engineers perceived a gap about their professional identity due to the change. A U.S. telecommunications company learned through consideration of change consequences that the employees perceived a gap regarding their individual roles during change.

The role of the managers in providing feedback about the employees' concerns seemed salient from interview responses. These managers were the ones who had constant and direct interaction with the employees and who provided them with important information. Such close interaction tended to foster a sense of trust

that encouraged employees to disclose their concerns to their managers. This two-way interaction also seemed to make employees feel that they had their voices heard by management and that they were treated respectfully by their managers, which demonstrated what Schminke, Ambrose, and Cropanzano (2000) called interactional justice. J. Lee (2001) found that organizational members tended to cooperative communication behaviors when they perceived organizational justice. Cooperative communication behaviors involved activities designated to facilitate the joint achievement of work-group goals. Results from the current study did align with J. Lee's study. For instance, some employees who would be laid off after a change accepted the re-structural change and collaborated well with their peers in completing the projects during change. Such corporation was to a large extent contributed to the communication carried out by managers. These managers demonstrated interaction justice by listening to the concerns of those employees, empathizing with them, and helping them deal with their negative emotions.

Managers could thus function as the "eyes" of the public relations department to recognize the cognitive inconsistencies experienced by employees. In particular, they could recognize the emerging gaps as a change evolves. Through interaction with employees, the managers could inform the public relations department and top management of what employees were struggling to understand about change. For example, some units in a Japanese automobile company had to learn new operation systems in order to prepare for the relocation change. This seemingly simple adjustment met with resistance from the senior engineers. For this group of employees, this switch devalued the extensive manual skills that they had developed,

which in turn contested their established identity.  This resentment by the senior

employees soon generated similar sentiment from the junior engineers.  Feedback

from the line managers helped the human resources department to identify the gap

and to plan communication programs to resolve the inconsistencies about the identity.

*Bridging Cognitive interruptions through Communication*

As suggested by Weick (1995) and Dervin (1999), individuals will seek

information to resolve their perceived cognitive gaps.  The key to bridging these gaps

involves two core aspects: what information to provide and how to communicate the

information.  For organizations that successfully implemented changes, the human

resources department worked closely with top management to identify what

information to provide to employees to assist their understanding of the change.  Such

information served as the primed cues that directed attention of employees to certain

events in retrospection and helped employees revise their mental frameworks to be

consistent with change.

In organizations that successfully implemented changes, the human resources

department also provided specific training to middle managers to engage in dialogic

communication with employees during change.  The managers were usually trained to

provide cues useful to revise the mental frameworks of employees so that they could

reduce equivocal interpretations of change.  These middle-level managers could serve

as a bridge between top management and employees, bringing the concerns of the

employees into the management decision making.  This dialogic communication was

likely to exhibit some key characteristics of two-way symmetrical communication:

such as trust, reciprocity, openness, and credibility (Petronio, 1999).  This finding

was aligned with the research on the symmetrical, two-way, and interpersonal dimensions of the public relations practice (J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1992; J. Grunig, et al., 1995; Rhee, 2004; Toth, 2000).

Another key purpose of communication training aimed to help managers to deal with the emotions of employees during change. This finding supported Huy's (2002)'s findings that middle-level managers played a crucial role to help employees deal with negative emotions through empathetic communication. The manager's emotion-attending communication alleviated the anger and fear felt by employees during change, which in return could induce beneficial organizational outcomes (e.g., participation in change). For example, one senior director of a human resources department in a U.S. insurance company explicitly stressed that the inability to address the negative emotions felt by employees during change could largely affect the company's production efficiency and turn-over rate.

*Reducing Uncertainties during Change*

Organizational change creates various uncertainties (e.g., job security) for employees. In this study, reduction of these uncertainties was associated with how employees sought information and interpret meanings of change. Public relations can facilitate sensemaking by providing information to reduce the uncertainties experienced by employees.

When the uncertainties were reduced, employees were likely to actively seek information about change and to be able to examine the change from the company's perspective. As a result, even when the change had a negative impact on employees, they were able to understand the change from a relatively neutral perspective as long

as their uncertainties had been reduced.  In situations where the uncertainties felt by employees were not reduced, employees tended to seek negative information about change, stop seeking further information, or to stop processing even positive information about the change.  They did not always engage in damaging behavior about the change; but they certainly demonstrated unwillingness to embrace or implement the change.

To cultivate trust from employees and encourage them to seek and process information provided by the organization during change, public relations should identify and provide information to reduce the uncertainties felt by employees.  Some uncertainties could be anticipated during the planning stage by thinking through the change consequences.  Uncertainties that emerge during change could be identified through the feedback from the managers.

<div align="center">Theoretical Implications</div>

This research has theoretical implications for public relations theory and sensemaking theories.  I discuss the implications in the following section.

<div align="center">*Implications for Public Relations Theory*</div>

First, this study supported the value of public relations in helping organizations achieve effectiveness through cultivating mutual understanding, developing quality relationships with the publics, and helping reconcile the interest of the organization with that of its publics.  Although the multinational companies examined in the study organized their public relations function differently from what the Excellence theory (L. Grunig, et al., 2002) suggested, their communication programs indicated that public relations did help organizations manage change by

facilitating organizational members' understanding of change and building trust with employees. When the organizations examined in this study successfully implemented change, they usually achieved a mutual understanding about the change with their employees through communication. Therefore, the value of public relations is reflected in its ability to help organizations reach mutual understanding with their employees during change.

Second, the Excellence theory maintained that public relations should participate in the overall strategic management of an organization. This study supported this claim by providing empirical evidence of how public relations was involved in the planning and implementation of change in some organizations. The communication function units that assumed the role of public relations brought the concerns of the employees to top management, acting as an advisor for top management during change.

Third, this research extended the body of knowledge in public relations to a particular organizational context—organizational change. This study represents an exploratory effort to apply the strategic management model conceptualized in the Excellence theory of public relations in studying how organizations managed change. This study offered empirical support for the effectiveness of adopting this model in helping organizations manage change. The Excellence theory's strategic management model is applicable to public relations programs during change.

*Implications for the Sensemaking Framework*

This study demonstrates several implications for the sensemaking framework as a tool to analyze the process of meaning making during change. First, this study

illustrates the heuristic value of using Weick's (1995) sensemaking framework in combination with the organizing process (enactment, selection, and retention) to uncover the behaviors of organizational members who create and react to the changes. What matters to the implementation of a change program lies in the meanings made for events during change. Particularly, this framework directs our attention to the factors that may facilitate and constrain the ability of organizational members to develop plausible accounts during change. This process-oriented approach helps disclose why organizational members think the way they do and how different meanings of change are negotiated and selected to reach a shared understanding.

Second, this study highlighted the influence of power in sensemaking that is not as evident in Weick's (1995) sensemaking framework. This study suggests that power plays a significant role in enactment and resolving different meanings. Many studies (e.g., Eddy, 2003; Mills, 2003; Murphy, 2001) have described how management enacts a particular environment for employees. Employees, nevertheless, can enact the environment through collective actions. Power formed through collection actions can help employees break the constraints of enactment. Just as managers are able to impose a sense of a situation upon employees, the senior employees appear to be another powerful influence in determining which meaning is deemed as acceptable and plausible for the situation.

Third, the theories of sensemaking are mainly built upon research in Western countries. This research extends the body of knowledge in sensemaking by examining its usefulness in understanding the meaning making process that local

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Chinese employees engaged in. Findings from the study revealed the utility of using Weick's (1995) sensemaking framework in non-Western countries.

Lastly, this study adds the component of public relations strategic management to the existing sensemaking framework. Public relations can assist organizational members to make sense of change by helping management resolve cognitive disparities as well as uncertainty resulting from change. This enrichment is aligned with the central role that Weick and his colleagues (e.g., Weick et al., 2005) placed on communication.

<div align="center">Implications for Public Relations Practice</div>

This study has several implications for the practice of public relations. These implications may be particularly useful to change management since the organizations examined in the study all went through certain types of planned change. I believe the findings of this study may also be useful for multinational organizations in China, especially for those organizations planning to implement a change. These implications are outlined below.

*Participation in Strategic Management*

Results indicated that public relations practitioners should be involved in the overall organizational change planning process. Practitioners can demonstrate their value by identifying groups of employees (i.e., strategic publics) affected by a change. Communication programs should then be planned accordingly based on the different impacts upon these groups of employees. The goal of the communication programs during change should include 1) helping organizational members

understand change, 2) fostering trust with the employees, 3) understanding the concerns of the employees, and 4) gaining support from the employees about change.

*Communication with Managers*

Public relations practitioners should provide training to managers regarding how to communicate with employees during change. This study showed that employees usually turned to their immediate managers to seek information about change. Managers played a key role in how their team members understood change. Managers also facilitated two-way symmetrical communication between the organization and employees by giving the feedback from employees to the top management. Public relations practitioners thus should incorporate the communication training of managers into their program planning.

*Satisfying Employees' Information Uncertainty Needs*

Results from this study indicated that uncertainty reduction was related to how employees attended to and sought information during change, which ultimately affected their interpretation of the meaning of change. To gain the acceptance and support from employees, public relations practitioners should conduct research and work with various unit managers to provide information to reduce the uncertainties felt by the employees. As this study suggested, during change employees usually needed information about job security, employee benefits, time line of change, and their immediate managers. If the information cannot be provided for certain reasons, public relations practitioners should advise an organization to be honest and open with employees about the reasons why such information is not available. In doing so,

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employees will have trust toward the organization during change and will likely reach an understanding about the change.

## Evaluation of this Study

I discussed evaluation standards for qualitative research in the second chapter on methods.  For the purpose of evaluating this study, I use the four criteria suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985).  These four criteria include: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

### *Credibility*

This criterion deals with the degree to which the subject of research is accurately identified and described.  To increase credibility, I followed the suggestions by Lincoln and Guba (1985).  First, I used data triangulation.  Particularly, I included both managerial and non-managerial participants from various organizational units in my research.  By analyzing the different types of data, I was able to increase credibility.

Second, I employed member validation suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to seek participants' feedback on data interpretations.  Toward the end of my research process, I shared parts of my research sections with two participants.  I asked these two participants whether the results and interpretation were credible to them.  I also called one participant and read excerpts of my results.  When consulting with my participants, I discussed my results and got their feedback.  In addition to formal member validation explained above, I also used informal member validation.  During my field study, I engaged in some informal conversations with my participants after interviews to get their feedback on my research.  While interacting with my

participants either before or after interviews, I tried to gain their rapport through sharing my education and life experiences and expressed my sincere appreciation for their participation in my study.

Third, I used peer debriefing to increase credibility. I shared parts of my findings with two other colleagues and asked for their feedback, which was helpful to me in understanding the results. Peer debriefing was also useful for me to think about other competing interpretations of the results.

*Transferability*

This standard refers to the extent to which the results can be transferred to other situations, groups, or contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To increase transferability, I followed Lincoln and Guba's suggestion to use "thick description" (p. 316) of the settings. The purpose of providing such thick description is for future researchers to decide the degree of similarity or dissimilarity with their own research settings. I have included extensive quotations and detailed descriptions of the context for each organization, which will enable future researchers to come up with their conclusions from the data.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that the burden of proof is on future researchers who hope to make the transfer. I think I have provided adequate description of the data and the context for future researchers to arrive at their own conclusions.

*Dependability*

This concept is related to reliability in quantitative research. Following the suggestion of Kirk and Miller (1986), I dealt with this issue by constantly checking,

questioning, and theoretically interpreting the results. I continuously referred back to between the literature and the interview transcripts to increase the dependability of this study.

I also kept a record of all the data collection and analysis procedures and described them in detail in the method chapter and the results chapter. For instance, in the method chapter, I detailed how I obtained access to the participating organizations, recruited participants, and my interaction with them.

*Confirmatibility*

This criterion deals with the question of whether others can confirm that the results did not reflect the researcher's biases. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended techniques such as keeping a reflexive research journal, triangulation, and confirmatibility audit by another researcher. I applied data triangulation and kept a journal recording my thoughts, ideas, feelings, observations, daily schedules, and logistics of the study. I believe that an auditor would be able to confirm the results of this study.

<div align="center">Limitations</div>

Several limitations exist in data collection and data analysis. First, change is a sensitive topic for many organizations. Many organizations that I contacted told me that they did not want to participate for fear of disclosing business information or presenting a negative impression about their companies. Some participants specifically told me to keep their responses confidential. At the first two interviews, I could sense that participants did not feel comfortable about going too far in commenting upon their company's policies. To ensure candid disclosure from

participants, I repeatedly stated that I was doing this as a doctoral dissertation research project and would protect their confidentiality and anonymity. As a result of this rapport building and my reassurances about protecting confidentiality, my participants seemed comfortable to candidly disclose information about their organizational changes. By recruiting participants from both managerial and non-managerial positions, I was able to reduce the possibility of getting only one-sided comments from my participants.

Second, the level of participants might be improved by recruiting more expatriates and participants from top-level management. Part of the reason for the lack of expatriate participants was because most of the multinational companies have shifted management to local Chinese nationals. Middle level and most senior level managers were local Chinese nationals. Only the top level managers such as CEO or senior vice president were expatriates. Another reason was access. Although I was able to interview senior managers in some companies, they told me that they did not want the company to know that they had accepted my invitation to talk about their company's change. The number of front-line employees was also fairly small in my research due to their work schedule (e.g., night shifts) and my limited access to them.

Third, the interview experience itself might have some influence on me. I sometimes had to conduct six interviews in one day to accommodate the unpredictable schedule of my participants. So I stayed at some companies from 9 am to 6 pm. Such long hours of interviews were surely exhausting, which limited me to some extent in my ability to write as fully as I should have liked about each

interview. I tried to deal with this limitation by recording my interview observations on tape to save time.

Fourth, some interviewees specifically asked me to stop the digital recorder when they were making comments about their top management and company policies that were sensitive. As a result, I was not able to use that information even though it might have helped me illustrate my findings.

Fifth, language was a problem during data analysis. As mentioned previously, the English interview protocols were translated into Chinese in order to conduct some interviews. Most interviews and transcripts were in Chinese. When I analyzed the data, I had to translate them into English since my dissertation would be in English. While translating the responses into English, I might have made some misinterpretations. When I encountered some problems, I showed my colleagues both the original Chinese transcripts and the English translations to get a second opinion regarding the accuracy of translation. I also asked two participants to verify if my interpretation of their comments was the way they meant during the interview. Both methods helped me deal with the language issue in the data analysis.

Lastly, at a U.S. food & beverage company, the participants specifically told me that I could not associate their positions or titles with the names of their units. They feared that titles would reveal their identities to company insiders. During their company's leadership, merger, and relocation changes, a huge controversy arose concerning the company's mistreatment of their employees. To protect its reputation, this company enforced a strict policy prohibiting any of its employees

from talking about these changes to outsiders. I assured my participants that I would not publish any research about their company in China.

<div align="center">Directions for Future Study</div>

This study employed a qualitative approach to explore the role of public relations in the sensemaking process during change in multinational organizations in China. Specifically, this study used the strategic management model in the Excellence theory of public relations as well as the sensemaking theories by organization scholars (e.g., Weick, 1995) to examine how organizational members made meaning of change. Future studies can extend this line of research in the following directions.

First, the scope of the study could be extended to multinational organizations located in places other than China. Including multinational organizations from various geographic locations can help provide a comprehensive view of how organizational members in multinational organizations engage in sensemaking during change. In particular, comparisons could be made with multinational organizations that place internal communication under public relations to see the likelihood of adopting strategic management during change.

Second, future studies on this topic could also include more expatriate participants to compare their level of uncertainty avoidance with that of the local employees. This kind of study could clarify whether uncertainty avoidance is related more to the personal characteristics (e.g., personality, work experience, or education experience) than to cultural differences.

Third, another course of study would be to conduct quantitative research to further explore the correlations among uncertainty reduction, information seeking behavior, and the positive or negative nature of the meaning about change. It would be interesting to conduct a regression analysis to probe whether the amount of uncertainty reduction can predict employees' information seeking behavior and the positive or negative nature of the meaning about change.

Fourth, further study might also probe in detail the effectiveness of different gap-bridging methods identified in this study could vary in different types of change. Such study could selectively choose more organizations in each change type (e.g., merge, structural change, personnel change, and so on). Differences may be found about how employees rank these gap bridging methods based on different types of change.

## Appendix A: LETTER OF SOLICITATION

Dear Ms./Mr. _____:

My name is Yi Luo, a doctoral student in the Communication department at the University of Maryland. I am conducting a research project for my dissertation. I am interested in exploring how publics relations facilitates organizational change. Specifically, how public relations helps organizational members make meanings out of organizational change.  In this case, I am interested in multinational organizations in China conduct public relations programs during organizational change. I would like to conduct interviews with people like you, who are [involved in public relations functions or organizational strategic planning] [organizational employees].

I am writing to ask you to participate in this study. The interview will take from 60 minutes. I understand how busy you are and the interview can be divided into two 45-minute sessions if you wish. The responses you give will provide valuable insight into this project.

All responses will remain strictly confidential. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from participation at any time. If you decide to participate, please sign the attached "Informed Consent Form" and send it back to me by mail using the enclosed envelope. You also can provide your verbal or email consent if you wish, and I can collect the actual form when I meet you for the interview.

I plan to stay in China for the interviews from June _2008__ to August _2008_. If I get the informed consent from you, I will call you or email you to arrange an interview with you during that time period. You can also contact me at: yiluo@umd.edu or: 301-405-0775.

To show my appreciation for your participation, I will send you the abstract of my dissertation upon completion of this research project. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or the Principal Investigator, Dr. Elizabeth Toth at: Email: eltoth@umd.edu or phone: 301-405-8077.

Thank you very much for your time and I look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,
Yi Luo
Doctoral student, Department of Communication
University of Maryland

# Appendix B: Consent Form

| | |
|---|---|
| **Project Title** | Public Relations and Sensemaking during Organizational Change in Multinational Organizations in China |
| **Why is this research being done?** | *This is a research project being conducted by Dr. Elizabeth L. Toth and Yi Luo at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are an organizational member at a multinational organization in China. The purpose of this research project is to explore how organizational members make meaning during organizational change and the influence of communication in the process of meaning making.* |
| **What will I be asked to do?** | *The procedures involve a face-to-face interview that lasts about one hour about how communication influences meaning making during organizational change. With my permission, this interview may be audio-taped. I understand that I will be asked questions such as: "Please think about the last major organizational change that your organization has gone through. What meanings did you make of it?" and "How do you think the organization communicated the change with you?"* |
| **What about confidentiality?** | *We will do our best to keep your personal information confidential. To help protect your confidentiality, both the identities of you and you organization will remain confidential. Only the Principal and Student Investigators will have access to the names of participants and their organizations. Data will be securely stored in a locked office on the Student Investigator's computer, several hard disks, and audiotapes. All data will be destroyed (i.e., shredded or erased) when their use is no longer needed but not before a minimum of five years after data collection. When I write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.* |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Project Title** | *Public Relations and Sensemaking during Organizational Change in Multinational Organizations in China* |
| **What are the risks of this research?** | *There may be some risks from participating in this research study. Because the interview will be audio-taped and may be identified by name, this project presents minimal risk to participants. The identities of you and your organization will remain confidential. Participants will be told that their participation is voluntary and that they can decline to answer specific questions or to end their participation at any time without penalty. Participants will not be asked questions that would compromise their positions with their organization.* |
| **What are the benefits of this research?** | *The benefits to you include a greater understanding of public relations management and current research on organizational change management. Additionally, the participating organization will receive a written report of the results.*<br><br>*The potential risks and benefits will be explained to all potential interview participants before their participation begins.* |
| **Do I have to be in this research? May I stop participating at any time?** | *Your participation in this research is completely voluntary.  You may choose not to take part at all.  If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time.  If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify* |
| **What if I have questions?** | *This research is being conducted by **Dr. Elizabeth L. Toth and the Department of Communication** at the University of Maryland, College Park.  If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Dr. Elizabeth L. Toth at: University of Maryland at College Park, 2130A Skinner building, College Park, MD 20742-7635. Phone: 301-405-8077. Email: eltoth@umd.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:* **Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742; (e-mail) irb@deans.umd.edu;  (telephone) 301-405-0678** *This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.* |

| Project Title | *[This title should be the same as the project title used in the IRB application.]* | |
|---|---|---|
| **Statement of Age of Subject and Consent** **[*Please note: Parental consent always needed for minors.*]** | *Your signature indicates that:*    *you are at least 18 years of age;,*    *the research has been explained to you;*    *your questions have been fully answered; and*   *you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project.* | |
| **Signature and Date** **[*Please add name, signature, and date lines to the final page of your consent form*]** | **NAME OF SUBJECT** | |
| | **SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT** | |
| | **DATE** | |

# Appendix C: Consent Form (Chinese) 同意书

| | |
|---|---|
| **项目名称** | 公共关系在中国国际公司改革中的作用：职员如何理解改革的意义 |
| **为什么要做这项研究？** | 这是一项由马里兰大学(College Park, 马里兰州, 邮编 20742-7635)传播学系 Elizabeth L. Toth 教授和博士候选人罗翙进行的研究项目。我们邀请您参加这项研究因为您是一个已年满 18 岁的本科生。此项研究意在理解人在大学环境下对特定情景的判断和反应。 |
| **我将被要求做什么？** | 本研究的具体过程为：参与计时约为一个小时到一个半小时的采访。所有采访都将由研究生罗翙进行。经由本人同意，采访者会用录音方式记录下采访的过程和内容，以便进行研究分析。只有本研究的指导教授和研究生罗翙才能接触到采访内容的录音带及其他相关资料。 |
| **信息保密是怎样的？** | 本研究中收集到的所有信息（包括采访内容和其他相关资料）只作为本次研究使用，将予以保密。参与本研究的组织，企业公司及个人的名字不会在任何时候被披露。我提供的信息将不会与我本人以及我所在的组织联系起来。我知道研究者会将我的信息保留5年。 |
| **这项研究的风险是什么？** | 我了解我参与这项研究会有一些隐私方面的潜在风险，但是微乎其微。 |
| **这项研究的益处是什么？** | 我了解本研究不是针对我本人利益所设计，但是通过本研究可以帮助研究者深入了解跨国公司如何利用公共关系管理公司改革。我还知道我可以向研究者索取一份研究报告的摘要。 |
| **我必须参加这项研究吗？我可以在任何时候退出吗？** | 您参加这项研究完全是自愿的。您完全可以选择不参加。如果您决定参加这项研究，您可以在任何时候退出。如果您决定不参加这项研究或在任何时候退出了，您不会受到惩罚或失去您原先应得到的好处。 |
| **如果我有问题呢？** | 这项研究是由马里兰大学(College Park, 马里兰州, 邮编 20742-7635)传播学系 Elizabeth L. Toth 教授进行的。如果您对研究本身有问题，请联系 Elizabeth L. Toth 教授：Dr. Elizabeth L. Toth, Department of Communication, University of Maryland, 2130A Skinner Building, College Park, MD 20742. 电话: 301-405-8077; 电邮: eltoth@umd.edu.<br><br>如果您对参与研究所享有的权益有疑问，或者想报告由于研究引起的伤害，请联系：**Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742; (e-mail) irb@deans.umd.edu; (telephone) 301-405-0678**<br><br>这项研究的审核是根据马里兰大学(College Park) 的有关用人做研究的机构检查委员会（IRB）的程序的。 |

**Appendix D: Interview Protocol for Public Relations Manager**

Hi, my name is Yi Luo. I'm, a doctoral student at the Department of Communication at the University of Maryland, College Park. I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in my dissertation research. The purpose of my study is to learn about how employees in multinational organizations learn about and come to understand planned organizational change. I have given you a letter (consent form) explaining my study and asking if you would participate.

Thank you for agreeing to do so.

I hope that you don't mind if I tape-record our conversation. It will be very helpful so that I don't have to rely on my notes.

你好，我是罗翊，是马里兰大学传播系博士学生。首先谢谢你同意参加我的博士论文研究。此项研究的目的在于了解跨国公司职员如何理解公司既定改革、及如何与员工在改革中进行沟通在此前给你的同意书中已附有此项研究的大致介绍。 在此感谢你的参与。

我希望你不介意我用录音机录下我们的谈话内容，因为这样我就不用依赖笔记来记录我的谈话。

## I. 热身问题

1 I'd first like to know some general information about you. How long have you been with this organization? 首先我想知道关于你的一些基本情况。你在此公司待了多长时间了？

2. Now, tell me a little about your job responsibilities? 现在，你能谈一谈你的工作具体涉及哪些方面吗？

      Probe: What do you like about your job? 你喜欢你的工作的哪些方面？
             How has your job changed over time? 就你在公司的这段时间，你的工作有哪些改变？

## II. 公司改革

3. From the __department, I know that your organization has recently gone through a planned (describe exactly what the change was) change. Now tell me: how do you perceive this change?我从某部门了解到你的公司最近进行了 一些变化（简要介绍次改革）。请问你是如何看待这个变化的？

      Probe: What aspects do you think this organization tried to change during this change? 你觉得此次改革想要改变的是那些方面呢？
             What was your experience like during the change? 在此次改革中,你能描述一下你的一些亲身经历吗？

4. You just mentioned some aspects that you think the organization tried to change. Why do you think those aspects needed to be changed? 刚才谈到了你公司试图通过此次改革调整的一些方面。在你看来，那些方面为什么需要改革？

> Probe: What impact do you think the change had on the organization? 这次改革给公司带来了那些效果呢？

5. How did you feel when you first learned about change? 当你刚开始知道这次改革时，心里时如何想 的？

> Probe: Did the change cause you to feel happy, sad, relieved, frustrated, nervous, or anxious? 这次变化让你感到开心，如释重负，沮丧，紧张，或者伤感?
> Why did you feel this way?你为什么会产生这样的情绪？
> Among these feelings, which ones did you feel much strongly than others? 在以上提到 的情绪中，哪一些比较强烈？
> What did you do to cope with these feelings?
> 你又是怎么去调整这些情绪的？
> What could the organization do to help you deal with these feelings?你觉得这个公司能做些什么来帮助你调整这些情绪？

**III. RQ1**: How do organizational members make meaning of change in multinationals in China?

As I mentioned before, my research is about how organizational members interpret change. Next, I'll focus on the interpretation process from the employee's perspective. 我刚才提到我的研究目的是探讨公司成员是如何理解公司改革的。下面，我的问题会集中在公司成员是如何理解改革的。

- Employee's own interpretation about change 公司职员本人对于改革的理解

6. Please tell me which information sources did you rely on to get information about the recent change?"首先，你是通过那些渠道来得到关于这次改革的消息？

> Probe: Why did you choose these sources or channels?
> 你为什么选择这些信息渠道？

7. What information do you think you were most likely to pay attention to during the change? 在改革中，你会对哪些比较关注呢？

> Probe: How did you decide what information to pay attention to?
> 你为什么会选择关注那些信 息？
> What information did you expect to receive during change? 你希望得到得到什么样的信息？

8. How could you describe the previous planned change that this organization went through? 请回忆一下最近的这次改革，你怎么阐述你公司最近的这次改革呢？

> Probe: Why do you describe it this way? 你为什么会这样描述？
> How did you talk about change with your peers?
> 你和同事间如何谈论这次改革？

9. Do you think your role as the head of the public relations department has affected the meaning you came up with about the change? 作为公关部经理，你认为你在公司这一职位是否影响了你对这次改革的理解？

　　Probe: Why? 为什么？

谢谢分享你对公司改革的一些个人看法。接下来我想了解一下其他公司员工是如何理解这次改革的。Thanks for talking about the change from your own perspective. Now I'd like to know something about how other employees have interpreted the recent change.

- Other employees' interpretation for the hange 其他公司员工对于改革的理解

10. As the head of the public relations department, what information do you think employees were most likely to pay attention to during the change? 作为公关部经理，你认为公司员工在改革中最可能关注的是哪些类型的信息？

　　Probe: Why was that type of information important to the employees?
　　　　为什么那些类型的信息 对于员工来讲是重要的？

11. Whom or which group of people do you think employees usually turned to for information during the change? 你认为公司员工在改革中会向那些人寻求 关于改革的信息呢？

　　Probe: Why did employees turn to these people for information?
　　　　为什么员工会转向那些人寻 求信息呢？

12. What do you think the employees in this organization interpreted about the recent change? 你认为其他员工会如何理解这次改革呢？

　　Probe: Do you think there is an agreement about the meaning for the change among the employees in this organization?
　　　　你认为公司员工对于此次改革取得了比较一致的理 解吗？
　　　　How did the employees reach such agreement about the meaning for the change? 你认为他们是如何达成一致理解的吗？

**V. RQ2**: How do multinationals in China use public relations programs to communicate change with organizational members?

So far, we have discussed how you interpreted the recent change along with how you personally felt about it. In the next section, I will focus on the public relations function (or Human Resource function or Corporate Communication function). 我们已经讨论了你是如何理解公司最近的一次改革以及你对于这次改革的一些个人的感想。在接下来的问题中，我会讨论一些关于公共关系（或人力资源）部的问题。

13. Please tell me the function of your department. 请你先谈一谈这个部门的主要职责。

Probe: Which department in this organization was responsible of communicating with the employees? 哪个部门负责跟内部的员工进行沟通呢？

What about communication during change? 那么在改革中哪个部门负责跟员工沟通？

14. What function do you think your department served during the change? 你认为你的部门在这次公司改革中起到了什么作用？

15. Looking back, which groups of employees did your department emphasize when developing communication programs during the change? 请你回忆一下，你的部门在制定与员工的沟通方案中，你们着重于哪些部分的员工呢？

Probe: How did you recognize these groups of employees? 你的部门是如何意识到这些员工的重要性的？

Why did you think it was important to communicate with them? 你觉得为什么跟他们沟通是重要的？

16. What communication programs did your department develop to communicate with the groups of employees important to the change? 你们制定了怎样的与这些员工进行沟通交流的方案？

Probe: What factors did you consider while developing the programs? 在制定这些方案时你们考虑了哪些相关因素？

What were the purposes of these communication programs? 这些交流计划或方案要到达到什么样的效果？

How did your department implement these communication programs? 你的部门是怎样执行这些方案的？

Can you use a specific communication program as an example for illustration? 你能够举一个具体的与员工交流的事例来说明吗？

17. Previously we mentioned the meaning regarding the change, what role do you see this department played in communicating the meaning of the planned change with the employees? 我们不久前讨论了关于这次改革是如何理解的，那么你认为你的部门在与员工的交流过程中起到了什么样的作用吗？

Probe: In particular, what do you think your department has done to help employees understand the meaning of the recent planned change? 具体的说，你认为你的部门究竟做了哪些工作来帮助员工理解这次改革的？

How do you think your department has achieved this goal? 你认为你的部门是如何达到这一目标的？

18. What were the barriers you think the employees might have while trying to understand the change? 你觉得员工在理解这次改革是遇到了哪些障碍？

Probe: What did this department do to help the employees deal with these

barriers?你的部门是如何帮助员工消除这些障碍的呢？

19. How did the communication programs encourage employees' participation in organizational decision making? 与员工的交流计划中，你们是如何鼓励员工发表意见及参与到公司管理或决策的？

> Probe: How did such involvement influence the original meaning that this organization intended to communicate with the employees? 公司鼓励员工参与性这一特点是怎样影响公司与员工交流此次改革的意义的？

**IV. RQ3**: How does the meaning that organizational members make for change reflect uncertainty avoidance in Chinese culture?

After discussed the interpretation of the change, next I'd like to discuss something related to how you personally felt about the change. First I'd like to talk about the uncertainties you felt during the change. 刚才我们讨论了关于如何诠释这次改革的意义，接下来我想知道你本人对于这次改革的感想。首先我想问下你对变化中不确定性的看法。

20. What were the aspects did you feel uncertain during the change? 在这次改革中，你对哪些方面感到不确定？

> Probe: Why do you think you were uncertain about those aspects of issues during change?为什么你会对这些方面感到不确定呢？
> What did you to cope with the uncertainties?你是怎么样去消除这些不确定性的？

21. As we probably mentioned before, there were many things that the employees felt uncertain during the change. Some Western scholars found that Asians deal with uncertainty differently from Westerns. Particularly, research has showed that Asians (e.g., the Chinese) like clear instruction and consistency. Of course, Westerns have similar preference. But Westerns tend to have a higher tolerance of uncertainties compared to the Chinese during unpredictable periods such as change. You probably have worked with the local Chinese and internal employees. Have you seen such difference among your colleagues? 我们刚才可能已谈到在改革中有很多不确定的因素。一些西方学者认为亚洲人在处理不确定性方面与西方人有所不同。比方说，有一些研究认为亚洲人（例如，中国人）偏好偏好事物的发展有明确清楚的方向性。当然西方人也有相类似的偏好。但是在处理不确定因素方面，特别是在像改革这种比较动荡的时期，研究发现西方人比中国人更能适应这种不确定性。在工作中，你可能跟中国及外籍员工都有共事过，你认为是这样的吗？

> Probe: If so, where do you think such difference come from?
> 如果确实有不同，你觉得这种不同的原因是什么呢？
> If not, why? 你为什么认为这样的差异很小或没有？

22. How was clear instruction and consistency of message considered in planning the communication with the employees? 在与员工沟通的中你觉得这次公司的变革是否考虑到了中国文化的这一方面？

> Probe: If yes, how did the organization or your department take this factor into your communication plan? 如果有考虑这一因素的话，你们公司或者你的部门是如何在与员工共的沟通中体现出来的呢？
>
> If not, why? 如果没有，为什么？

Before we end, is there anything that you would like to add?  Or any questions?  请问你还有什么需要补充的吗？对于这次访谈还有什么问题吗？

Thank you very much for your time.  May I contact you again if I need clarification or if I have any other questions？谢谢你接受我的访谈。如果我有问题的话，可以再跟你联系吗？

**Appendix E: Interview Protocol for Top Management**

Hi, my name is Yi Luo. I'm, a doctoral student at the Department of Communication at the University of Maryland**,** College Park.  I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in my dissertation research. The purpose of my study is to learn about how employees in multinational organizations learn about and come to understand planned organizational change. I have given you a letter (consent form) explaining my study and asking if you would participate.

Thank you for agreeing to do so.

I hope that you don't mind if I tape-record our conversation. It will be very helpful so that I don't have to rely on my notes.

你好，我是罗翔，是马里兰大学传播系博士学生。首先谢谢你同意参加我的博士论文研究。此项研究的目的在于了解跨国公司职员如何理解公司既定改革、及如何与员工在改革中进行沟通在此前给你的同意书中已附有此项研究的大致介绍。

在此感谢你的参与。

我希望你不介意我用录音机录下我们的谈话内容，因为这样我就不用依赖笔记来记录我们的谈话。

## I. Warm-Up Questions

1. I'd first like to know some general information about you. How long have you been with this organization? 首先我想知道关于你的一些基本情况。你在这个公司待了多长时间了？
2. Now, tell me a little about your job responsibilities? 现在，你能谈一谈你的工作具体涉及哪些方面吗？

## II. Organizational Change

3. I learned from the HR department that your organization has recently gone through a XX change. I learned from the HR department that your organization has recently gone through a XX change.    我听说你的公司最近进行了改革（简要介绍次改革）。请问你是如何看待这项改革的？I
    Probe: What aspects did your organization try to change?
        你觉得这个公司想要想要改变的是那哪些方面呢？

4. You just mentioned some aspects that you think the organization tried to change. Why do you think those aspects needed to be changed? 你刚才谈到了你公司试图通过此次改革调整的一些方面。在你看来，那些方面为什么需要调整？

Probe: What impact do you think the change had on the organization?
这次改革给公司带来了哪些变化呢？

**III. RQ1**: How do organizational members make sense of change in multinationals in China?

As I mentioned before, my research is about how organizational members interpret planned change. Next, I'll focus on the interpretation process from your own perspective. 我刚才提到我的研究目的是探讨公司成员是如何理解公司改革的。下面，我的问题会集中在你个人是如何理解改革的。

- Employee's own interpretation about change 公司职员本人对于改革的理解

5. In retrospection, what key phrases would you use to summarize the recent change? 回头再来看这次的改革，你会怎样概括总结这次的改革？
    Probe: Why do you describe it this way? 你为什么会这样描述或有这样的结论 呢？

6. First, I'd like to know what meaning your organization tried to communicate with the employees during the change? 首先关于这次改革，我想知道你们公司想要与员工沟通关于这次改革的内容是什么？
    Probe: How did your organization communicate the meaning about change with employees? 你们公司又是怎样与员工沟通这些意思的？
    How effective were the communication programs?
    这些沟通的方案的效果是怎样？

我们刚才讨论了你个人是怎样看这次的改革，下面我想了解一下员工是怎样理解这次改革的。After talking about change from your own perspective, I'd like to know something about how other employees interpreted the recent change.

- Other employees' meaning developed for the change
  公司员工对于改革的理解

7. As a member of top management team, what information do you think employees were most likely to pay attention to during the change? 作为高级管理层的一员，你觉得员工会对哪些信息比较容易注意？
    Probe: Why was that type of information important to the employees?
            他们为什么会觉得那些信息很重要呢？
8. What do you think the employees in this organization interpreted about the recent change? 你认为员工会如何认识这次改革呢？
    Probe: Do you think there is an agreement about the interpretation for the change among the employees in this organization? 你认为他们对这次改革意义的认识达成了一致吗？
            How did the employees reach such agreement about the meaning for the change? 他们是如何达成一致的？

**IV. RQ2**: How do multinationals in China use public relations programs to communicate change with organizational members during change?

So far, we have discussed what meaning the organization tried to communication during change and the influence of a particular aspect of Chinese culture. Now I would like to know more about the public relations department in your organization and its function during the recent change. 到目前为止，我们已讨论了公司希望与员工交流的改革的意义以及中国文化的影响。现在，我想知道一些关于公关部（人力资源部）在这次改革中的作用。

9. First, what is the structure of the public relations department? (or human resource function or corporate communication function?) 首先，你能谈一些关于公关部（或人力资源部）组织结构的情况吗？
      Probe: Why does your organization set up the public relations function that
            way? 你们公司为什么会这样设立公关部呢？
10. What role do you see public relations play in the organization? 公关部（人力资源部）在这个公司中起了什么作用呢？
      Probe: What about its function? 这个部门的具体职责范围是什么？
            Does the public relations department has anything to do with
            communicating with the employees? 这个部门负责跟员工沟通的工作吗？
11. Then during the last organizational change, what function do you think the public relations department has served? 在公司改革中，你认为公关部（人力资源部）发挥了什么样的作用呢？
      Probe: In what ways do you think the public relations department has fulfilled
            the function that you just mentioned during the change? 就你刚才提
            到的公关部在改革中的作用，你认 为公关部是
            如何发挥这些作用的？
12. How did the communication programs help the organization manage change? 公关部制定的与员工交流计划或方案是如何帮助公司管理改革的？

**V. RQ3**: How does the meaning that organizational members make for change reflect uncertainty avoidance in Chinese culture?

After discussed the meaning that this organization tried to establish during the change, next I'd like to discuss something related to Chinese culture. 我们刚才探讨了这个公司想要给员工沟通的改革的意义，接下来我会讨论一些来自于中国文化对于公司的影响。

13. As we probably mentioned before, there were many things that the employees felt uncertain during the change. Some Western scholars found that Asians deal with uncertainty differently from Westerns. Particularly, research has showed that Asians (e.g., the Chinese) like clear instruction and consistency. Chinese culture likes clear

instruction and consistency. Do you agree with this view? 我们刚才可能已谈到在改革中有很多不确定的因素。一些西方学者认为亚洲人在处理不确定性方面与西方人有所不同。比方说，有一些研究认为亚洲人（例如，中国人）偏好偏好事物的发展有明确清楚的方向性。中国的文化偏好事物的发展有明确清楚的方向性。你认同这样的观点吗？

> Probe: Why or why not? 为什么你认为是这样的？为什么你认为不是这样的？

14. Research showed that Westerns tend to have a higher tolerance of uncertainties compared to the Chinese during unpredictable periods such as change. You probably have worked with the local Chinese and internal employees. Have you seen such difference? 当然西方人也有相类似的偏好。但是在处理不确定因素方面，特别是在像改革这种比较动荡的时期，研究发现西方人比中国人更能适应这种不确定性. 在工作中,你可能跟中国及外籍员工都有共事过，你认为是这样的吗？

> Probe: Why or Why not? 为什么你认为是这样的？
> 为什么你认为不是这样的？

15. How was clear instruction and consistency of message considered in the planned change? 你们公司在改革中是如何考虑到这一文化方面的因素的？

> Probe: If yes, how did the organization take this factor into your communication plan? 如果有考虑这一因素的话，你们公司或者你的部门是如何在与员工共的沟通中体现出来的呢？
> If not, what were the barriers to clear instruction and or consistency of messages? 如果没有考虑到这一方面，与员工沟通要达到明确清楚的方向性，会有哪些障碍呢？

Before we end, is there anything that you would like to add? Or any questions? 请问你还有什么需要补充的吗？对于这次访谈还有什么问题吗？

Thank you very much for your time. May I contact you again if I need clarification or if I have any other questions? 谢谢你接受我的访谈。如果我有问题的话，可以再跟你联系吗？

## Appendix F: Interview Protocol for Middle Management

Hi, my name is Yi Luo. I'm, a doctoral student at the Department of Communication at the University of Maryland**,** College Park. I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in my dissertation research. The purpose of my study is to learn about how employees in multinational organizations learn about and come to understand planned organizational change. I have given you a letter (consent form) explaining my study and asking if you would participate.

Thank you for agreeing to do so.

I hope that you don't mind if I tape-record our conversation. It will be very helpful so that I don't have to rely on my notes.

你好，我是罗翊，是马里兰大学传播系博士学生。首先谢谢你同意参加我的博士论文研究。此项研究的目的在于了解跨国公司职员如何理解公司既定改革、及如何与员工在改革中进行沟通在此前给你的同意书中已附有此项研究的大致介绍。

在此感谢你的参与。

我希望你不介意我用录音机录下我们的谈话内容，因为这样我就不用依赖笔记来记录我们的谈话。

## I. Warm-Up Questions

1 I'd first like to know some general information about you. How long have you been with this organization? 首先我想知道关于你的一些基本情况。你在此公司待了多长时间了？

2. Please tell me something about your job responsibilities？ 现在，你能谈一谈你的工作具体涉及哪些方面吗？

      Probe: How has your job changed overtime? 就你在公司的这段时间，
             你的工作有哪些改变？

## II. Organizational Change

From the HR department, I know that your organization has recently gone through a planned (describe exactly what the change was) XX change. 我从人事部了解到你的公司最近进行了 改革（简要介绍）。

3. Now tell me exactly what happened during the change? 请问这次改革到底发生了什么？

      Probe: What aspects did your organization try to change?
           你觉得这个公司到底想要改变公司的是那些方面呢？

How do you perceive this change? 你是怎么看这次改革的吗？

4. You just mentioned some aspects that you think the organization tried to change. Why do you think those aspects needed to be changed?你刚才谈到了你公司试图通过此次改革调整的一些方面。在你看来，那些方面为什么需要改革？

> Probe: What impact do you think the change had on the organization? 这次改革给公司造成了那些影响呢？

5. How did you feel when you first learned about change?当你刚开始知道这次改革时心里时如何想 的？

> Probe:  Did the change cause you to feel happy, sad, relieved, frustrated, nervous, or anxious? 这次变化让你感到开心，如释重负，沮丧，紧张，或者伤感？
> Why did you feel this way?你为什么会产生这样的情绪？
> Among these feelings, which ones did you feel much strongly than others? 在以上提到 的情绪中，哪一些比较强烈？
> What did you do to cope with these feelings?
> 你又是怎么去调整这些情绪的？
> What could the organization do to help you deal with these feelings?你觉得这个公司能做些什么来帮助你调整这些情绪？

6. How do you think your employees felt during change based on your observation? 就你的观察而言，你的员工有什么情绪上的反应？

> Probe: Why do you think they felt that way? 他们为什么会有这些情绪呢？
> What did you do to deal with their emotions? 你是如何处理他们的情绪呢？

**III. RQ1**: How do organizational members make sense of change in multinationals in China?

As I mentioned before, my research is about how organizational members interpreted change. Next, I'll focus on the meaning developed for change from your own perspective. 我刚才提到我的研究目的是探讨公司成员时如何理解公司改革的。下面，我的问题会集中在公司成员是如何理解改革的。

- 公司职员本人对于改革的理解 Employee's own meaning about change

7. First of all, which information sources did you rely on to get information about the recent change? 首先，你是通过哪些信息渠道来获取关于改革的消息？

> Probe: Why did you choose these sources? 你为什么会依赖这些渠道呢？
> What information did you expect to receive during change?
> 你希望得到得到什么样的信息？
> Why did you expect to get such information? 你为什么想得到这样的信息？

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8. As you recall, how could you describe the previous planned change that this organization went through? 就你的回忆而言，你如何描述你们公司刚刚进行的改革呢？

> Probe: Why do you describe it this way? 你为什么会这样描述呢？
>
> How did you talk about change with your peers? 你和同事间如何谈论这次改革？

9. Do you think your role as the head of the XX department has affected the meaning you came up with about the change? 作为__部门的经理，你认为你的职务影响了你对公司改革意义的理解吗？

> Probe: Why? 为什么是这样的？

10. What were the constraints that you felt while trying to understand the change? 在理解公司这次改革的过程中，你感到了有哪些障碍吗？

> Probe: How did you deal with these constraints?
> 你是怎样面对这些障碍的？
>
> How could the organization help you deal with the constraints?
> 你认为公司可以怎样帮助你消除这些障碍呢？

After talking about the change from your own perspective, I'd like to know something about how other employees have developed meaning for the recent change. 我们刚才聊了一下你对公司改革的一些个人看法。接下来我想了解一下其他公司员工是如何理解这次改革的。

11. What meaning did you come up with about the last change? 你觉得这次改革的意义是什么呢？

> Probe: How did you talk about the interpretation of change with your coworkers? 你又是怎样与你的同事谈论对于这次改革的理解的？
>
> How did the discussion with your peers help you understand the change?
> 你跟同事之间的讨论又是如何帮助你理解这次改革的呢？

- Other employees' interpretation for the change 其他公司员工对于改革的理解

12. As the head of the XX department, what information do you think employees were most likely to pay attention to during the change? 作为此部门经理，你认为公司员工在改革中最可能关注那些类型的信息？

> Probe: Why was that type of information important to the employees? 为什么那些信息对于员工来讲是重要的？

13. Whom or which group of people do you think employees usually turned to for information during change? 你认为公司员工在改革中会向那些人索取 关于改革的信息呢？

> Probe: Why did employees turn to these people for information?
> 为什么员工会转向那些人寻求信息呢？
>
> How do you think employees discuss change with each other? 你觉得员工之间会如何谈论这次改革呢？

14. What do you think the employees in this organization interpreted about the recent change? 你认为其他员工会如何理解这次改革呢？

> Probe: Do you think there is an agreement about the meaning for the change among the employees in this organization? 你认为公司员工对于此次改革取得了比较一致的理 解吗？
>
> How did the employees reach such agreement about the meaning for the change? 你认为他们是如何达成一致理解的吗？
>
> How did you help your employees or team members to understand the change? 你是如何帮助你的员工理解这次改革的？

**IV. RQ2**: How do multinationals in China use public relations programs to communicate change with organizational members during change?

So far, we have discussed what the organization tried to communicate about change and the influence of a particular aspect of Chinese culture. Since a focus of my research is on communication, now I would like to know more about the public relations department in your organization and its function during the recent change. 我们已经讨论了你如何理解公司最近作的一次改革以及你对于这次改革的一些个人的感想。在接下来的问题中，我会讨论一些关于你们公司公共关系（或人力资源）部的问题。

15. Which department is in charge of communicating with employees? 公司的哪个职能部门负责跟员工之间的沟通交流？

> Probe: What about during change? 那么在这次公司的变化中有是哪个部门跟员工沟通？

16. What do you think about the function of public relations department during the last change? 你认为在最近的公司改革中，公共关系部（人力资源部）起到了什么作用？

> Probe: Does it have anything to do with employees?
> 公共关系部恢复任何关于公司员工的事吗？

17. From a manager's perspective, how did the communication programs help the organization manage change? 从一个经理的角度来看，你认为公司的交流计划是如何帮助公司进行改革的？

18. What communication programs do you think the public relations department has carried out during change? 你觉得在改革中公共关系部执行了哪些与员工交流的计划？

> Probe: How effective were these programs in communicating change with employees? 这些与员工交流的计划有什么成效呢？

19. How did you talk about change with your employees? 你是如何与其他员工谈论这次改革的？

> Probe: What role do you think you had on your employees' understanding of

the change? 你觉得你对于你的下属对这次改革的理解起到了什么作用呢？

20. Looking back, which groups of employees did your organization try to focus on to communicate with about change? 请你回忆一下，你的部门在制定与员工的沟通计划中，你们着重于那些或哪些组的员工呢？

> Probe: Retrospectively, which groups of employees do you think were most affected by the change?
> 回头看来，有哪些员工是最深受这次改革影响的？
> Why? 为什么？
> How did the communication programs deal with these groups of employees whom you think were most affected by the change?你觉得公司的沟通计划是如何与这些你认为最深受改革影响的员工进行交流的？

21. Is there any change you'd like to see in terms of communicating with employees when similar change happens again? 如果相类似的变化再次发生你希望公司在与员工沟通的过程中作出什么改变？

> Probe: Why do you think these changes are important?
> 你为什么认为这些变化是重要的？

**V. RQ3**: How does the meaning that organizational members make for change reflect uncertainty avoidance in Chinese culture?

After discussed the interpretation of the change, next I'd like to discuss something related to one aspect of the Chinese culture. This cultural aspect is related to who individuals attend to my research. First I'd like to talk about the uncertainties you felt during the change. 刚才我们讨论了关于如何诠释这次改革的意义，接下来我想知道你对于中国文化其中一方面的看法。首先我想问下你对变化中不确定性的看法。

22. What were the aspects did you feel uncertain during the change? 在这次改革中你对哪些方面感到不确定？

> Probe: Why do you think you were uncertain about those aspects of issues during change?为什么你会对这些方面感到不确定呢？
> What did you to cope with the uncertainties? 你是怎么样去消除这些不确定性的？

23. As we probably mentioned before, there were many things that the employees felt uncertain during the change. Some Western scholars found that Asians deal with uncertainty differently from Westerns. Particularly, research has showed that Asians (e.g., the Chinese) like clear instruction and consistency. Of course, Westerns have similar preference. But Westerns tend to have a higher tolerance of uncertainties compared to the Chinese during unpredictable periods such as change. You probably have worked with the local Chinese and internal employees. Have you seen such difference among your colleagues? 我们刚才可能已谈到在改革中有很多不确定的

因素。一些西方学者认为亚洲人在处理不确定性方面与西方人有所不同。比方说，有一些研究认为亚洲人（例如，中国人）偏好偏好事物的发展有明确清楚的方向性。当然西方人也有相类似的偏好。但是在处理不确定因素方面特别是在像改革这种比较动荡的时期，研究发现西方人比中国人更能适应这种不确定性。在工作中，你可能跟中国及外籍员工都有共事过，你认为是这样的吗？

      Probe: If so, where do you think such difference come from?

      如果确实有不同，你觉得这种不同的原因是什么呢？

      If not, why? 你为什么认为这样的差异很小或没有？

24．How was clear instruction and consistency of message considered in the planned change? 在与员工沟通的中你觉得这次公司的变革是否考虑到了中国文化的这一方面？

      Probe: If yes, how？如果有，是如何体现在跟员工共的沟通当中的？

      If not, what were the barriers to clear instruction and or consistency of messages？ 如 果没有考虑这一点，在公司与员工交流的语言中，有哪些因素阻碍你得到明确的信息？

      How did you cope with any lack of instruction and/or inconsistent messages? 如果公司与员工交流的语言中欠缺明确清楚的方向性，你是如何对待的

Before we end, is there anything that you would like to add? Or any questions? 请问你还有什么需要补充的吗？对于这次访谈还有什么问题吗？

Thank you very much for your time. May I contact you again if I need clarification or if I have any other questions? 谢谢你接受我的访谈。如果我有问题的话，可以再跟你联系吗？

## Appendix G: Interview Protocol for General Employees

Hi, my name is Yi Luo. I'm, a doctoral student at the Department of Communication at the University of Maryland, College Park. I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in my dissertation research. The purpose of my study is to learn about how employees in multinational organizations learn about and come to understand planned organizational change. I have given you a letter (consent form) explaining my study and asking if you would participate.

Thank you for agreeing to do so.

I hope that you don't mind if I tape-record our conversation. It will be very helpful so that I don't have to rely on my notes.

你好，我是罗翊，是马里兰大学传播系博士学生。首先谢谢你同意参加我的博士论文研究。此项研究的目的在于了解跨国公司职员如何理解公司既定改革、及如何与员工在改革中进行沟通在此前给你的同意书中已附有此项研究的大致介绍。 在此感谢你的参与。

我希望你不介意我用录音机录下我们的谈话内容，因为这样我就不用依赖笔记来记录我的谈话。

## I. Warm-Up Questions

1. I'd first like to know some general information about you. How long have you been with this organization?
首先我想知道关于你的一些基本情况。你在此公司待了多长时间了？
      Probe: What interests you about working for this organization?
           这个公司什么地方最吸引你在这儿工作？
2. Now, tell me a little about your job responsibilities? 现在，你能谈一谈你的工作具体涉及哪些方面吗？
      Probe: How has your job changed over time?
           就你在公司的这段时间，你的工作有哪些改变？

## II. Organizational Change

3. From the HR department, I know that your organization has recently gone through a planned XX change. Now tell me: how do you view this change? 我了解到你的公司最近进行了 一些变化（简要介绍次改革）。请问你是如何看待这个变化的？
      Probe: What aspects do you think this organization tried to change during this
           change?你觉得此次改革想要变化的是那些方面呢？
           What impact do you think the change had on the organization?
           这次改革给公司带来了那些效果呢？
           How was this change related to you personally?

这些变化对你个人有什么关系吗?

4. How did you first realize that this organization was undergoing a change? 你是怎么意识到这个公司在进行改革的?

> Probe: Looking back, how did the change represent anything different from your previous knowledge about the organization? 回头再来看, 你觉得这次公司的改革有不同于以前你对公司改革的认识吗?

5. How did you feel when you first learned about change? 当你刚开始知道这次改革时, 心里时如何想 的?

> Probe: Did the change cause you to feel happy, sad, relieved, frustrated, nervous, or anxious? 这次变化让你感到开心, 如释重负, 沮丧, 紧张, 或者伤感?
> Why did you feel this way?你为什么会产生这样的情绪?
> Among these feelings, which ones did you feel much strongly than others? 在以上提到 的情绪中, 哪一些比较强烈?
> What did you do to cope with these feelings? 你又是怎么去调整这些情绪的?
> What could the organization do to help you deal with these feelings? 你觉得这个公司能做些什么来帮助你调整这些情绪?

**III. RQ1**: How do organizational members make sense of change in multinationals in China?

As I mentioned before, my research is about how organizational members interpret change. Next, I'll focus on the interpretation process from your own perspective. 我刚才提到我的研究目的是探讨公司成员是如何理解公司改革的。下面, 我的问题会集中在公司成员是如何理解改革的。

- Employee's own interpretation about change 公司职员本人对于改革的理解
6. First of all, which information sources did you rely on to get information about the recent change? 首先, 你是通过那些渠道来得到关于这次改革的消息?

> Probe: Why did you choose these sources? 你为什么选择这些信息渠道?

7. What information did you select to pay attention?
你对什么信息比较容易注意呢?

> Probe: Where did you get information about change? 你从那儿得到这些信息的?
> How did you assess the usefulness of the information that you received about change? 你是怎样判断这些信息的价值的?

8. What information did you need most during the change? 在公司的这次改革中, 你最需要得到什么样的信息呢?

Probe: Why was it important to you?
为什么这样的信息对你来说是重要的？

9. What were the constraints that you felt while trying to understand the change? 在理解公司这次改革的过程中，你感到了有哪些障碍吗？

Probe: How did you deal with these constraints?
你是怎样面对这些障碍的？

How could the organization help you deal with the constraints? 你认为公司可以如何帮助你消除这些障碍？

10. As you recall, how could you describe the previous planned change that this organization went through? 就你的回忆而言，你会怎样描述这次公司的改革呢？

Probe: Why do you describe it this way? 为什么会这样描述呢？

11. What was the new idea or knowledge that you had to learn about the change? 在这次改革中你学到了什么新的知识或理念吗？

Probe: How did you learn those new ideas?
你是如何获取这些新的知识的？

How did you talk about these new ideas with your coworkers? 你又是怎样与其他员工谈论这些新的知识与观念的？

12. What meaning did you come up with about the last change? 你觉得这次改革的意义是什么呢？

Probe: How did you talk about the interpretation of change with your coworkers? 你又是怎样与你的同事谈论对于这次改革的理解的？
How did the discussion with your peers help you understand the change? 你跟同事之间的讨论又是如何帮助你理解这次改革的呢？

谢谢分享你对公司改革的一些个人看法。接下来我想了解一下其他公司员工是如何理解这次改革的。After knowing about the meaning for change from your own perspective, I'd like to know something about how other employees have interpreted the recent change.

- 其他公司员工对于改革的理解 Other employees' interpretation for the change

13. Whom or which group of people do you think your peers usually turned to for information during the change? 你觉得你的同事会向那部分人询问关于改革的消息呢？

Probe: Why do you think they turned to these people for information？
你认为他们为什么会向那部分的人索取信息呢？

14. What do you think your peers interpreted about the recent change? 你认为你的同事是如何认识这次改革的呢？

Probe: Do you think there is an agreement about the meaning for the change among your peersin this organization? If so, what is the agreement? 你认为你和你的同事间对于这次改革达成了一致吗？

How did you and your peers reach such agreement about the meaning for the change? 你觉得这种一致是怎样达成的？

**IV. RQ3**: How do multinationals in China use public relations programs to communicate change with organizational members during change?

So far, we have discussed how you interpreted the recent change along with how you personally feel about it. In the next section, I will focus on the public relations function (or Human Resource function or Corporate Communication function). 我们已经讨论了你是如何理解公司最近的一次改革以及你对于这次改革的一些个人的感想。在接下来的问题中，我会讨论一些关于公共关系（或人力资源）部的问题。

15. Does the public relations department have anything to do with the employees? 你们公司公关部职则范围涉及到与员工的沟通吗？
   - Probe: Could you tell me in what specific ways? 你能说得具体些吗？
     If not, which department deals with the communication with employees? 如果不是，又是哪一个部门负责跟内部员工共的沟通？
16. In what ways, do you think this organization has communicated with you during change? 你觉得这个公司在改革中是如何与你进行沟通交流的？
   - Probe: Can you use an example to illustrate the ways the organization has communicated with you during change?
     你能用一个事例来说明公司是怎样与员工进行沟通交流的？
17.？From your own perspective, what were the main themes of the communication programs that this organization adopted during change? 从你的角度看，这个公司在改革中与员工的交流计划中有哪些主要内容
   - Probe: How did the meanings communicated through the communication programs differ from your own understanding about the change?
     你觉得公司与员工交流的关于改革的意义与你个人对这次改革的理解有不同吗？这些不同表现在哪些方面？
18. From your perspective, how did this organization try to understand your voices and concerns during change? 从你的角度看，这个公司在改革中是如何去倾听理解你的意见或建议的？
   - Probe: How would you like to communicate your concerns about the change with theorganization?
     你希望怎样去和公司沟通你对改革的一些想法或建议呢？
     In what ways do you think the future communication programs can help you voice your concerns about change to the management? 你认为今后公司的沟通交流计划可以从那些方面来帮助你向公司管理层提出你的建议或者意见呢？

**V. RQ3**: How does the meaning that organizational members make for change reflect uncertainty avoidance in Chinese culture?

After discussed the interpretation of the change, next I'd like to discuss something related to one aspect of the Chinese culture. This cultural aspect is related to who individuals attend to my research. First I'd like to talk about the uncertainties you felt during the change. 刚才我们讨论了关于如何诠释这次改革的意义，接下来我想知道你对于中国文化其中一方面的看法。首先我想问下你对变化中不确定性的看法。

19. What were the aspects did you feel uncertain during the change? 在这次改革中你对哪些方面感到不确定？

> Probe: Why do you think you were uncertain about those aspects of issues during change? 为什么你会对这些方面感到不确定呢？
>
> What did you to cope with the uncertainties? 你是怎么样去消除这些不确定性的？

20. As we probably mentioned before, there were many things that the employees felt uncertain during the change. Some Western scholars found that Asians deal with uncertainty differently from Westerns. Particularly, research has showed that Asians (e.g., the Chinese) like clear instruction and consistency. Of course, Westerns have similar preference. But Westerns tend to have a higher tolerance of uncertainties compared to the Chinese during unpredictable periods such as change. You probably have worked with the local Chinese and internal employees. Have you seen such difference among your colleagues? 我们刚才可能已谈到在改革中有很多不确定的因素。一些西方学者认为亚洲人在处理不确定性方面与西方人有所不同。比方说，有一些研究认为亚洲人（例如，中国人）偏好偏好事物的发展有明确清楚的方向性。当然西方人也有相类似的偏好。但是在处理不确定因素方面，特别是在像改革这种比较动荡的时期，研究发现西方人比中国人更能适应这种不确定性。在工作中，你可能跟中国及外籍员工都有共事过，你认为是这样的吗？

> Probe: If so, where do you think such difference come from? 如果确实有不同，你觉得这种不同的原因是什么呢？
>
> If not, why? 你为什么认为这样的差异很小或没有？

20. How was clear instruction and consistency of message considered in the communication conducted by the organization? 在与员工沟通的中你觉得这次公司的变革是否考虑到了中国文化的这一方面？
> Probe: If yes, how？ 如果有，是如何体现在跟员工共的沟通当中的？
>
> If not, what were the barriers to clear instruction and or consistency of messages? 如果没有考虑这一点，在公司与员工交流的语言中，有哪些因素阻碍你得到明确的信息？

21. How did you cope with any lack of instruction and/or inconsistent messages? 如果公司与员工交流的语言中欠缺明确清楚的方向性,你是如何对待的?

Before we end, is there anything that you would like to add?  Or any questions?  请问你还有什么需要补充的吗？对于这次访谈还有什么问题吗？

Thank you very much for your time.  May I contact you again if I need clarification or if I have any other questions?  谢谢你接受我的访谈。如果我有问题的话，可以再跟你联系吗？

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