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# Organized sensemaking: A commentary on processes of interpretive work

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**Karl E Weick**

University of Michigan, USA

## Abstract

The contributions to this special issue focus on links among sensemaking, organizing, and storytelling. They are re-examined in terms of to what the authors pay attention, with what, and for what. In pursuit of linkages, authors attend to accounts of consulting failure, hearings about the recent financial crisis, life history storytelling by elite actors, conflict in a rugby team on tour in Australia, and recurring stories told by jazz musicians. With analyses of dominant stories, discursive devices, life stories, documentaries, and oral tradition, these authors aim for a deeper understanding of order, constraint, conflict, legitimation, embodiment, and distributed improvisation. An assessment of these efforts shows how they deepen, extend, and consolidate our understanding of interpretive work.

## Keywords

interpretation, narrative, organizing, sensemaking

The spirit of the preceding articles is captured in George Berkeley's (1685–1753) introduction to 'The principles of human knowledge', where he drew a contrast between the seeming untroubled comprehension of events in everyday life by the bulk of mankind and the difficulties that confront those who undertake philosophizing:

But no sooner do we [philosophers] depart from sense and instinct to follow the light of a superior principle, to reason, meditate, and reflect on the nature of things, but a thousand scruples spring up in our minds concerning those things which before we seemed fully to

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## Corresponding author:

Karl E Weick, Stephen M. Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan, 701 Tappan St.,  
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1234, USA.

Email: karlw@umich.edu

comprehend . . . The cause of this is thought to be the obscurity of things, or the natural weakness and imperfections of our understandings . . . [T]he mind of man being finite, when it treats of things which partake of infinity, it is not to be wondered at if it runs into absurdities and contradictions . . . Upon the whole I am inclined to think that the far greater part, if not all, of those difficulties which have hitherto amused philosophers, and blocked up the way to knowledge, are entirely owing to ourselves – that we have first raised a dust and then complained we cannot see. (Berkeley, 1990: 405)

Translated into the words of the call for papers (Colville et al., 2009), the ‘undeveloped linkages’ that concern the editors may be attributable to the problems they pose, to our bounded rationality, or to the dust we stir up? With respect to the themes of sense-making, organizing, and storytelling the questions become what’s the dust, who and what is stirring it up, and what can’t we see? These authors represent five significant efforts to see more clearly.

When I say ‘see more clearly’ I have in mind John Dewey’s (1902) threefold question for examining attention. Dewey argues that we need to examine *to what* attention is being paid, *with what*, and *for what*. *To what* do the editors direct attention? To action: ‘action that lies at the heart of organization (and management) studies.’ *For what* do the editors hope to recruit authors? To articulate ‘the inherent yet underdeveloped linkages among sensemaking, storytelling, and organizing’ and to bring theory and practice together. *With what* is it suggested that the authors work? Singular immersion in one of the three bodies of knowledge in an effort to connect with the other two. ‘Together these three themes of sensemaking, organizing and storytelling provide tremendous scope for further developing our knowledge and understanding of action that lies at the heart of organization (and management) studies’ (p. 1428).

The following brief comments are written in the spirit of Boje’s ‘terse stories.’

A terse telling is an abbreviated and succinct simplification of the story in which parts of the plot, some of the characters, and segments of the sequence of events are left to the hearer’s imagination. One hypothesis is that the terser the telling, the more shared the understanding of the social context since insiders know what to/leave to the imagination. (Boje, 1991: 115–116)

Thus, these comments are abbreviated, simplified, observations with a great deal left to the imagination. I sample phrases from each of the five articles with an eye to the way they help us move toward deeper linkages.

Näslund and Perner, attend *to* accounts of consulting failure, *with* the lens of dominant stories, *for* purposes of explicating order and constraints on change. One display of their efforts at linking is the following:

If organizations are in a state of continuous flux, and its members use stories as a means of making sense of this flux, to label and categorize the events taking place, then the concepts used to label and categorize are a central part of the sensemaking process. We argue that a dominant story may be able to fix the meaning of central concepts required to construct stories about the events in the organization, so that they are given specific associative connotations in the local linguistic context of the organization. (p. 106)

Part of their effort to articulate linkages is directed at *continuous flux*. And much discussion in these articles as well as the field of organization studies starts with flux, its composition (e.g. polyphony), its categorization, its persistence, and its effects.

William James is famous for his description of flux:

If my reader can succeed in abstracting from all conceptual interpretation and lapse back into his immediate sensible life at this very moment, he will find it to be what someone has called a big, blooming buzzing, confusion, as free from contradiction in its 'much-at-onceness' as it is all alive and evidently there. (1987: 1008)

What is less well known, but potentially more crucial for purposes of linkage development are the next four sentences, edited here for compactness:

Out of this aboriginal sensible muchness attention carves out objects which conception then names and identifies . . . Out of time we cut 'days' and 'nights,' 'summers' and 'winters.' We say *what* each part of the sensible continuum is, and all these abstracted *whats* are concepts. *The intellectual life of man consists almost wholly in his substitution of a conceptual order for the perceptual order in which his experience originally comes.* (James, 1987: 1008–1009, italics in original)

Why is this so crucial? Because it is about organization in general, not just experiences in organizations. Concepts as well as visible dominant stories travel from one setting to another (e.g. Dutton and Dukerich, 1991). To 'fix' a concept, as appears to happen with dominant stories, is to have broad influence. To recover 'original' buzzing blooming confusion and reconceptualize its much-at-onceness, is sufficiently difficult that basically organizations can only change in the direction of the dominant story. An alternate story is implausible and at the extreme, unthinkable.

Concepts that become fixtures and central to the sensemaking process have a unique property that affects forward-looking organizations. This uniqueness is captured in James's discussion of his 'conceptual method':

This treatment supposes life to have already accomplished itself, for the concepts, being so many views taken after the fact, are retrospective and post mortem. Nevertheless we can draw conclusions from them and project them into the future. We cannot learn from them how life made itself go, or how it will make itself go, but, on the supposition that its ways of making itself go are unchanging we can calculate what positions of imagined arrest it will exhibit hereafter under given conditions. (James, 1987: 739–740)

Positions of imagined arrest are akin to strategies. And even though retrospect is a flawed guide to the ways in which past development unfolded, if that retrospect is made current and embedded in dominant stories, then those unchanging qualities captured in the story can be projected, imagined into existence, and enacted.

Näslund and Perner demonstrate the ways in which a dominant story influences sensemaking and organizing. Dominant stories (Geiger and Antonacopoulou, 2009) may be a source of inertia but, from the perspective of organization theory, order that persists is not necessarily a bad thing. And, if that persistence is attributed to stable concepts

given meaning by a dominant story, then process as well as structure are the explanations that link. Näslund and Perner use the phrase ‘the resilience of dominant stories’ (p. 91) to describe their persistence. That suggests a family resemblance to the oft-cited concept of ‘normalization.’ Näslund and Perner observe that dominant stories ‘[fix] the associative connotations of some of the central concepts’ that are needed to label and make sense of ‘organizational events such as good leadership, employee, consultant or project’ (p. 105). It is the mobilization and deployment of these very same associative connotations that occurs in the organizational practice of ‘normalization.’ Prior to the explosion of space shuttle Challenger, ‘technical anomalies that deviated from design performance expectation were not interpreted as warning signs but became acceptable, routine and taken-for-granted aspects of shuttle performance’ (Vaughan, 2005: 34).

Narration that fixes associative connotations helps us appreciate once more the close ties between perception and conception preserved in Kant’s well-known phrase, perception without conception is blind, conception without perception is empty (cited in Blumer, 1969: 168; Colville et al., 2012). Näslund and Perner tie this idea to the editors’ quest for linkages when they paraphrase Brown’s (2004) summary description of dominant stories: a hegemonic story may be able to fix the meaning of the concepts and labels available to narrate events in the organization, and thereby circumscribe sensemaking.

Whittle and Mueller attend *to* exchanges in one of 17 hearings about the recent financial crisis, *with* the lens of discursive devices intended to win a struggle of competing storylines, *for* purposes of developing analyses of antenarrative. One display of their efforts at linking is the following:

Viewing discourse as social action enables us to appreciate the performative aspects of storytelling; what the stories achieve or perform for those telling them. (p. 134)

These authors tell their own terse story when they remind us not to read storytelling as ‘hot air.’ In place of that they show how stories told by bankers were notable for the ways in which discursive devices justified actions and developed antenarratives.

Justification, understood as discourse that introduces legitimacy and stability into social action, is a source of linkage that recurs in several articles. Cunliffe and Coupland, for example, argue that we create sense ‘if we can find justifications (*narrative rationality*) for our and others’ actions’ (p. 69). They then describe rugby star Matt Dawson’s continuing struggle for coherence and justification as he grapples with fallout from criticisms of his coaches. Maclean, Harvey, and Chia argue that leaders ‘shape systems of meaning’ to justify ‘their privileges and rewards’ (p. 18) and then show what this shaping looks like. Whittle and Mueller describe how, in crises, people are ‘called upon to justify or excuse their own role (or lack thereof)’ (p. 133) using story-lines built from discursive devices. Justifications are crucial anchors in organizing as they bind people to actions that are consistent with them. And such actions tend to recur, stabilize, and serve as resources for dominant stories.

Whittle and Mueller link their interest in lived experiences of storytelling with Boje’s (2001) important concept of the antenarrative (see also Hopfl and Matilal, 2005). ‘Antenarrative is the fragmented, non-linear, incoherent, collective, unplotted and pre-narrative speculation, a bet’ (Boje, 2001: 1). Organizing, in the context of antenarrative, is a bet that these fragments will have become orderly and that efforts to impose temporality

on them will facilitate that ordering. People are often thrown into pre-existing, organized action patterns. They experience the middle of a narrative but only the vaguest beginnings or ends. Without those boundaries people dwell in antenarrative. But that is where sense-making, organizing, and discursive devices make a difference. 'People who are thrown establish their own temporality' (Hernes and Maitlis, 2010: 31).

To talk about antenarrative as a bet is also to invoke an important structure in sense-making; namely, the presumption of logic (Meyer, 1956). 'Without faith in the purposefulness of, and rationality of art, listeners would abandon their attempts to understand, to reconcile deviants to what has gone before or to look for their *raison d'être* in what is still to come' (1956: 75). Antenarratives set up a similar dynamic. The transition from story to narrative is fostered by the belief that the fragments will have made sense although at the moment that is little more than a promise. Sensemaking, storytelling, and organizing become linked, in a Treasury inquiry or a recounting of one's life story, when actors say to themselves and others, I will have moved on with these unplotted fragments because they promise to amount to something eventually. Even though closure is being displaced, experience and action and activity continue to build up, which increases the probability that order, coherence, a plot, and stability will somehow be stirred up. This is a minimalist account of organizing, which, minimal though it is, includes story (in Boje's sense of antenarrative), ordering, action, sensemaking, and stabilizing, in the context of the impermanent and the temporary.

Maclean, Harvey, and Chia attend to life history storytelling by elite actors, *with* the lens of sensemaking processes and becoming, *for* purposes of articulating how legitimizing is accomplished. One display of their efforts at linking is the following:

It is language that constructs and gives order to reality, which it (temporarily) stabilizes, as individuals seek provisional resting-points offering plausible accounts of equivocal situations. (p. 20)

The construction of 'plausible accounts of equivocal situations' is often treated as the interpretive work of sensemaking. Sensemaking has been defined in a variety of ways, which may stir up dust, or remove it. Gephart et al. define sensemaking as 'an ongoing process that creates an intersubjective sense of shared meanings through conversation and non-verbal behavior in face to face settings where people seek to/produce, negotiate, and maintain a shared sense of meaning' (2010: 284–285). Cunliffe and Coupland treat sensemaking as 'collaborative activity used to create, legitimate and sustain organizational practices or leadership roles' (p. 65). If we add the phrase 'and individual' to the word 'collaborative' in that definition then we have a rendition of sensemaking that works for the Maclean et al. article, right down to the focus on legitimacy and leadership. Whittle and Mueller also anticipate and inform the nature of reconstructing a life story when they depict sensemaking as 'a broader term [than stories] that refers to the process through which people interpret themselves and the world around them through the production of meaning' (p. 114). It is their focus on 'meaning' and their inclusion of both the person and 'the world around them' that fits Maclean. Later in their article, Cunliffe and Coupland effectively summarize sensemaking as embodied efforts to figure out what to do and who we are. That is a tidy framework for interpreting the life stories of elite bankers since they are essentially figuring out what they did and who they were, with heavy editing, to point up the legitimacy of the what and who that are retrieved.

Maclean et al. also demonstrate clearly how sensemaking can be defined by its stages. The movement through time of different forms of interpretive work is captured in their phrase ‘language that constructs and gives order to reality, which it (temporarily) stabilizes’ (p. 20). They suggest that this movement consists of locating, meaning-making, and becoming. For comparison, Starbuck and Milliken (1988) assert that ‘sensemaking refers to “comprehending, understanding, explaining, attributing, extrapolating and predicting.”’ Jeong and Brower (2008: 225) propose that practitioner sensemaking develops through the three stages of noticing, interpretation, and action, which vary as a function of the ecological, institutional, and social relational contexts in which they are constructed. And Abolafia (2010), with his important work on how the Federal Reserve’s Federal Open Market Committee thinks and constructs policy narratives, finds that they move between events and models in the stage of *abduction*, move between glosses and narratives in the stage of *plotting*, and then proceed to the stage of *selective retention* where they move between choices and policy.

Maclean et al. point to an intriguing tension in sensemaking. The tension is generated by the question, is sensemaking episodic or continuous? The authors focus on life stories that appear to be continuous, and yet these same stories also pinpoint temporary stability, provisional resting points, and constructing, which suggests episodes and occasions. Similar ambiguity is found in the definition of sensemaking as ‘the ongoing retrospective development of plausible images that rationalize what people are doing’ (Weick, 2008: 1403). Here sensemaking is ‘ongoing,’ yet it consists of the development of many distinct plausible images. Sharper distinctions point to the tension. Gephart (2010: 281) for example, argues that ‘[t]here is no timeout from sensemaking.’ Arguments such as Gephart’s emphasize the ongoing process of producing and sustaining a sense of shared meaning.

If sensemaking is treated as more episodic, it starts with a breach of an ongoing project and concludes with repair of the breach and restoration. From this perspective sensemaking is confined to interruptions, anomalies, and the unexpected. In the language of Heidegger, sensemaking is triggered when the availableness of ready-to-hand coping is interrupted and attention shifts to unready-to-hand occurrentness. The interrupted project still provides a frame and restoration occurs within that frame. An important linkage resides in the fact that environments vary significantly in the frequency of unexpected events. Environments that generate frequent interruptions and anomalies, such as the management of electrical power grids (e.g. see Roe and Schulman, 2008), will have so many breaches and repairs that sensemaking may appear continuous, even though it still consists of distinct episodes.

From the perspective of episodic sensemaking, sensemaking is project-specific. Projects are what get breached. As expertise increases (Dreyfuss and Dreyfuss, 2005), breaching decreases, and experts are able to keep going because the availableness in which they are immersed is broad and deep. More of the world is available and ready-to-hand. Even when there is a breakdown, it is more likely to remain contextualized (unready-to-hand) than to be stripped of context (present-at-hand).

Cunliffe and Coupland attend *to* a series of volatile moments in a rugby team on tour in Australia, *with* the lens of embodied sensemaking as exhibited both by the observed and the observers, *for* purposes of correcting the excessive intellectualism associated with the concept of sensemaking. One display of their efforts at linking is the following:

Sense and organizing emerge when a story begins to come together, identities begin to make sense, identities and actions can be given a sense of narrative rationality and we can connect plot and character. (p. 81)

This is my favorite one sentence effort to provide a template for further development of linkages. The sentence is noteworthy because it includes sense, organizing, story, identities, actions, making sense, giving sense, narrative rationality, plot, and character. All of these elements are portrayed in the context of beginnings and emergings, which conveys a sense of ongoing forming and dissolving. While the word 'embodied' is missing from their summary sentence, presumably it provided the fundamental resource with which the authors experienced these connections.

Cunliffe and Coupland call attention to polyphony. That one word is rich in connotations for them. It suggests contestation, making meaning with others, the overlap of sensemaking and sensegiving, and the emotionality of sensemaking. Despite these complexities, people try to make life sensible 'by responding to and taking into account polyphony of "other" voices' (p. 80). The complexities of polyphony become even more severe if we adopt Czarniawska's (2008: 134) suggestion to replace the word polyphony with the word 'plurivocality.' Plurivocality adds to the meaning of 'many speaking at the same time' the additional indication that they use different voices, dialects, language. Plurivocality may be more suitable if we adopt Chia's (2003: 130) image of organization as 'nothing more than islands of relatively stabilized relational order in a sea of ceaseless change' or 'a temporarily stabilized event cluster.' Stories do the stabilizing.

A pathway for further development lies in Cunliffe and Coupland's innocent-sounding phrase, 'take into account the polyphony of "other" voices' (p. 80). Given the many difficulties of holding things together, producing recurrent action, and reaccomplishing organizational structures, a difficulty flagged by the organizational desirability of 'uncertainty absorption,' one wonders why people don't shun polyphony, hear less, accept fewer voices, confirm their biases, and tune out all but the dominant rather than make an effort to 'account for' it? A tin ear can be just as functional as a resonant ear if the intention is to keep going. One striking difference in organizations is that polyphony is stratified. Some levels hear fewer voices than do other ones.

When Cunliffe and Coupland incorporate polyphony into their first plotline, they make it more meaningful to examine contested stories. The openness of narrative performances to contestation is mirrored by Whittle and Mueller when they discuss storytelling as combative as well as concertive, and when Humphreys et al. (2012) argue that jazz stories are contested when they run counter to a contextual dominant discourse. The difference between contested and uncontested polyphony may link to antenarratives. Boje (2001: 2) argues that when people translate stories into narratives they 'impose counterfeit coherence and order on otherwise fragments and multi-layered experiences of desire.' Counterfeit coherence is unstable, subject to detection and breaching, all of which link the degree of contestation to sensemaking, organizing, and transitions between stories and narratives.

Cunliffe and Coupland describe their own efforts as an abductive 'interplay of conceptual and illustrative empirical material' (p. 65). But they seem less eager to characterize Matt Dawson's conjectural efforts at reputation management as equivalent

efforts to link traces with plausible plots. The iterative process of connecting cues to interpretations back to cues, etc. is a hallmark of organizing no matter in whose hands the 'method' is placed (e.g. Hansen, 2008). Patriotta (2003a), for example, likens abduction to the unfolding of detective stories and documents this treatment with his important account of sensemaking on the shop floor (Patriotta, 2003b). An important linkage implied by abduction is that it incorporates a fundamental act of sensemaking, namely, the connection of a cue to a frame. Jeong and Brower (2008: 231), for example, state that a cue plus a frame of reference = process of typification. A concrete individual entity is categorized into an idealized general one and becomes meaningful. A cue, by itself, without a frame, has no predicate. Once you put it in a frame, it does. A further linkage is that the emphasis in abduction on supposition ties it to antenarrative conceived as a bet or speculation akin to a presumption of logic that needs to be worked out.

Identity is a latent theme in many linkages, as, for example, in Maclean et al.'s assertion that 'who we are lies importantly in the hands of others' (p. 24). Cunliffe and Coupland make the organizing power of identity explicit in Plotline 3 when they assert that 'making life sensible is as much about who we are as about narrating events and experiences' (p. 69). Not only do the Lions players try to recognize themselves in the stories they tell, but more generally in any storytelling. The haunting question is how do I fit into the story. Näslund and Pemer talk at a more macro level about 'semantic fit.' In the case of Dawson and the Lions, the fit is more micro, more telling, and more influential in the determination of what happens next.

As a final comment to follow-up on the template for linking that Cunliffe and Coupland provide, while they keep three processes in motion, it is unlikely that all three stabilize at the same time. It is plausible that the first of the three to stabilize then acts as a frame within which the other two unfold. Thus, while there may be a dominant story that shapes organizing and sensemaking, there may be dominant sensemaking or dominant organizing that constrain the other two. It is all a matter of sequences of stabilization. Organizational becoming (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002) is a recurring perspective in these linkages, but becoming is actually becomings and becomings unfold at different speeds. Faster becomings provide frames within which slower becomings gain their meaning (Colville et al., 2012).

Humphreys, Ucbasaran and Lockett attend *to* recurring stories told by jazz musicians, *with* the joint lenses of sensemaking and sensegiving, *for* purposes of articulating the order that makes improvisation possible. One display of their efforts at linking is the following:

The various stories about [Duke] Ellington and [Miles] Davis we have presented continue to be recounted by contemporary musicians, not just as interesting anecdotes but more significantly as templates for sensemaking about the processes of leadership and organizing in jazz. Our research suggests that these storied templates are particularly important in an organizational environment characterized by improvisation, freedom of expression and creativity. (p. 50)

Humphreys et al. contribute resources for linking in their choice of jazz as a rich site to study linkages and their reference to stories as templates that lend modest structure to the equivocal environments fashioned by improvisation. Jazz performance is a good

example of ‘reconstituting the evolving present’ (Langley and Tsoukas, 2010: 13). There is recurrent adapting that is simultaneously the same and different. Jazz performance itself is a good example of activity where ‘there is no timeout from sensemaking.’ As jazz is about the general problem of managing the tension inherent in defining ‘the parameters within which creativity is permitted,’ it deals with the conflicting demands of creative diversity of individuals and cohesion of the group.

A good story holds elements together, which enables it to serve as a guide for sensemaking and organizing. Here is an illustration in the form of a contrasting jazz story for one of the exemplars mentioned by Humphreys et al. They portray Art Blakey as being at the center of many jazz education stories. This is exemplified by the name of his group – the *Jazz Messengers* – and his continuing efforts to show musicians how they should compose within hard bop. As a tempering counterpoint, Bill Crow (2005: 44) relates the story of how Blakey, in his early days playing drums with Chick Webb’s orchestra, was himself in need of education. Blakey was an especially ‘showy’ drummer with twirling drumsticks, flourishes with his arms, facial grimaces, and embodied rhythms, all of which may have pleased the audience but irritated other musicians. Finally, Chick Webb had had enough. Tersely, with emphasis, he told Blakey, ‘The music is on the drums, not in the air!’ Showy drumming stopped. The educator got educated. That story can be treated as a template for sensemaking: showy jazz is deviant. That story also connects ‘actions, characters and plots with history and biography’ (Cunliffe and Coupland, 2012: 66) into a narrative that situates musicians.

The authors’ use of the concept of ‘orchestration’ not only provides a rich category to encode recurring stories of jazz leadership, it also points to larger issues of organizing. Many of the arguments in these articles are about more than activities *in* organizations. They begin to ‘explain how an organized state is achieved’ (Czarniawska, 2010: 156). They are concerned with organization theory, with explanations that ‘separate processes of organizing from the sites where they take place’ (Czarniawska, 2010: 156). To talk about abduction as cue + frame + connection, or about improvisation as variation + selection + retention, or about recurrent action patterns (Cohen, 2009) as routines, or about dominant frames of reference, is to reach for a more sweeping grasp of social order.

As a final observation, I am not certain that the authors ‘explore the actual organizing processes of jazz musicians.’ Their data seem to be some steps removed from actual organizing processes. Closer to these actual processes are accounts in the book *Do You Know...?* (e.g. ‘Do you know the tune Body and Soul?’) written by the working jazz musicians and sociologists, Robert Faulkner and Howard Becker (2009). They describe how strangers can meet on the bandstand and play cohesively through an entire evening because of a shared jazz repertoire. They’ve done it, are currently doing it, and report firsthand how it is done. In a related manner, when Cunliffe and Coupland discuss Matt Dawson’s signs of embodied emotion, they tell us too little about their own embodied feelings as they watched him squirm. Their embodied feelings are more central to their argument than are those edited into a documentary by a filmmaker. As Cunliffe and Coupland themselves argue, a ‘risk of translation’ is the ‘betrayal of the original’ in an effort to construct the comparable (p. 0). Betrayals can stir up dust that conceals originals.

## Conclusion

We started with the image of dust that conceals. We conclude with the contrasting image of dust that reveals. If the medium is the message, then dust is the medium that has become the message. Dust is defined as ‘particles of matter regarded as the result of disintegration’ (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 3rd edn, 1996: 572). Dust is the buzzing, blooming confusion that has been present, at least since William James named it, but which has become even more visible lately in the form of confusion that is both figure and ground (e.g. financial market volatility). These articles suggest that life is antenarrative in search of narrative rationality or, as the editors put it, ‘unpredictable equivocality’ (Colville et al., 2012: 7).

These articles are generative because they don’t stop there. They demonstrate that confusion need not immobilize us, either in everyday life or in our scholarly life. In a way, any old structure and structuring provide temporary resting points. It is against that background that older genres, predispositions, institutions, devices, and dominant stories have a disproportionate influence on our sense of what is occurring. That is a mixed blessing. It provides temporary clarity but it also leads us to notice fewer cues and ignore even more. We enact our anachronisms.

But that’s not inevitable as these articles also make clear. Actions, contemporary stories, embodied reactions, imagination, presumptions of logic, faith, and creative assembly of antenarratives into plausible narrative rationality, all can broaden, multiply, and update the number of cues with which we are willing to become acquainted. Furthermore, these articles show the importance of labels that are discriminative, since the nuances of knowledge by acquaintance tend to be swallowed by the coarse-grain of knowledge by description.

Berkeley’s philosophers, beset by ‘[a] thousand scruples [that] spring up in our *minds*,’ miss half of the story. The other half concerns what springs up through our *actions*. Simple actions have the potential to edit the thousand scruples down into a manageable story. We see this clearly in these articles. They affirm that slower, more deliberate, less frenzied movement in contemplating the phenomena of sensemaking raise less dust, something we already knew to be true in everyday life. Although I may be stretching the concept of simplicity, slower, more deliberate inquiring can pry loose ‘shapes’ that may be novel yet are still comprehensible. An inside story, a transcript, an interview, a film, and a recurrent story can be acted on to provide a shape that is both generative and suitably complex. It’s all there if you take the time to look and feel. These novel shapes blend acquaintance and description in ways that reflect the ‘both/and’ quality of simplicity.

The ‘thousand scruples,’ and the ways in which they can obscure, raise new questions about the meaning of requisite variety. Supposedly a thousand scruples are a thousand sensors, which should register more of what’s happening than would ten scruples. But, requirements for requisite variety may become meaningless under the twin questions, variety of what, with reference to what? Something may be requisite in unpredictable times, but that something may be a plausible narrative rather than fragmentary beliefs that register fragmentary events. Requisite homogeneity may become the goal. Boje’s ‘counterfeit coherence’ (2001: 2) may be sufficient to trigger self-correcting action that produces comprehensible shapes. Small patterns become small wins. These articles point

to the future as filled with stronger imperatives for pattern-making such as embodiment, discursive devices, and dominant stories. A central issue in sensemaking will be the ways in which people redeploy concepts in order to ward off blind perceptions, and redirect perceptions to ward off empty conceptions. This is a central tension in simplicity (Colville et al., 2012), and, it is a shadow tension throughout this Special Issue.

All of this commentary can be translated into exercises that allow researchers to enlarge on these presentations. For example, adopt Dewey as a means to assess your attention. Create three columns labeled 'to what,' 'for what,' and 'with what.' Then create five rows and copy the 'to,' 'for,' and 'with' whats that I used to introduce each of the five articles. Then create a sixth row where you describe your own work using Dewey's three questions. Which cell was hardest to describe? Is this a potential block in your work? Which one of the five sets of authors seems closest to your work? Could you answer your questions in their setting? Do your paired answers suggest a synthesis, a foil to improve both findings by further work, a way to change your own answers? You get the idea.

Similar prods to your imagination and to next steps are possible. List verbatim the linking sentences that I identified in each article. What linkages do they suggest that you might have overlooked? Insert the nouns from your own work (e.g. London riot policemen, wildland firefighters, aging flamenco dancers) and see how their activities are shaped by linkages among sensemaking, organizing, and storytelling mentioned in the verbatim list. Place Cunliffe and Coupland's three plotlines on top of your work to see which, if any, you have adopted, how your work would change if you adopted more or fewer of those plotlines, what would you suggest as a fourth plotline, and how you would rank their plotlines from most to least important. Listen to people when they talk about their lives and watch for Maclean et al.'s 'locating, meaning-making and becoming' (p. 0). What talk was tough to categorize, did the discussion seem to be one long cycle involving the three phases or were there several cycles, what differs when someone confesses that they are 'clueless' about who they are and tries to explain why?

Brush up on pragmatism. There is a hint of pragmatism in the background of several of these arguments, which is consistent with Corley and Gioia's (2011) appeal for bringing it more to the forefront in theoretical work. Pragmatism is also common between philosophers with their 'thousand scruples' and the non-philosophers with many fewer. As events become less certain, useful ideas in the form of presumptions play a more important role since they hold lines of action together long enough for those lines to produce meaningful shapes and names. We may also need to 'brush up on everyday life.' The 'untroubled comprehension' of non-philosophers going about their day likely illustrates pragmatism in the rough, which bridges readily to organizing and sensemaking in the rough.

Suppose dust turns out to be all there is. In that case *grounded* theory is a bit less of a sanctuary. Nevertheless, we can strive to stir up less dust, move to locations that are less dusty, improvise around and through it, lean even more heavily on remembered paths or means of path-finding, normalize it, accept it, or differentiate its textures and the means to cope with each texture. This is clearly more about dust than you ever wanted to know. But, the image does organize, narrate, and render sensible connections among a multitude of next steps to learn more about who we are becoming and what matters in what we have become.

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Karl E Weick is the Rensis Likert Distinguished University Professor of Organizational Behavior and Psychology, and Professor of Psychology at the University of Michigan. He is a former editor of *Administrative Science Quarterly* (1977–1985) and former Associate Editor of *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance* (1971–1977). Weick’s research interests include collective sensemaking under pressure, medical errors, handoffs and transitions in dynamic events, high reliability performance, improvisation, and the management of uncertainty through sensemaking and mindful action. [Email: karlw@umich.edu]