that mind-set. Successful HRD professionals will be expected to understand
the environment in which a business performs and that environment affects
an organization's profit and loss, choices, and overall functioning. Most impor-
tant, HRD must be able to demonstrate how it directly adds value to organi-
zations. The Future of Capitalism contributes to the development of HRD
professionals as well as HRD as a discipline by offering insight into how global
changes affect businesses. This insight will undoubtedly contribute to the effec-
tive positioning of HRD and its competencies in the context of business reali-
ties.

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The most prominent executives, leaders, and researchers are continually search-
ing for the organizational responsibilities and actions required to make their
operations effective. The common thread among high-performance organizations
is often assumed to be insightful problem solving or decision making. Kepner
(1979) proclaimed that inefficient problem solving is the cause of wasted effort
and lost time. In other words, decisions based on guesswork result in predictable
mishaps. However, Kepner only alluded to a thought process in solving organi-
zational woes. Sensemaking in Organizations describes this thought process,
which, because it is action-oriented, is the flip side of decision making.

In the Preface, Weick is unabashed about the intensity of this book. He
says that if readers lay it aside periodically, they will helplessly engage in ses-
sions of sensemaking about short-term topics that come to mind. Sensemak-
ing in Organizations imposes a different kind of activity through its purposeful
philosophy and theoretical discussions. Readers should be prepared to exercise their minds in searching for understanding. Every word hinges upon another, thereby requiring frequent pauses for reflection. Although the author's intention was to write the book as an ongoing discussion or conversation about sensemaking, it is impossible to read it this way. Readers must be open-minded and willing to accept the existence of a new theory-based organizational paradigm.


In the first chapter, Weick illustrates sensemaking through an analogy of the battered child syndrome. The concept of sensemaking is also discussed in the context of secondary sensemaking theory. The author contends that the sensemaking process may be stalled because of an organization's resistance to change. To HRD professionals, this information is not profound. Chapter One also contains an Emily Dickinson poem that describes the parameters of sensemaking. Dickinson's poem conveys the debatable nature of sensemaking: Is it madness or is it sense to consider the process of sensemaking? Weick stresses the existing dichotomy between sensemaking and interpretation, through a jury deliberation that results in a verdict. Sensemaking involves the ways individuals deal with the information they receive. The book enables HRD professionals to recognize and embrace the value of existing situations before responding to futuristic market changes. Weick also refers to sensemaking as a cognitive map, the equivalent of Mezirow's (1990) conceptual mapping process.

In Chapter Two, the author offers a lengthy description of the seven characteristics of sensemaking. He states that it is (1) grounded in identity construction—an examination of the variety of individual responses to situations; (2) retrospective—an analysis of previous experience; (3) enactive of sensible environments—individual participation in the sensemaking process; (4) ongoing—continuous; (5) social—sharing meanings or viewpoints; (6) focused on and by extracted cues—symbols of sensemaking; and (7) driven by plausibility rather than accuracy—searching for the unknown and illogical ideas. Again beginning with a poem, Weick introduces the question, "How can I know what I think until I see what I say?" to show how these seven properties are components of sensemaking.

Chapter Three is undeniably the most disappointing part of the book. The author's effort—to help the reader make the transition from individual sensemaking to organizational sensemaking—was unproductive. Weick uses Scotland's Hawick's textile organization as a case study in which to apply the seven properties of sensemaking. But because of the historical nature of the case,
there is no "comfortable fit" with modern organizations. HRD professionals will only be confused in trying to compare the author’s example with their own organizations or personnel.

The book redeems itself in Chapter Four by applying sensemaking to a more generic organizational framework. Comments made in this chapter seem more applicable to today’s organizational life. Weick’s discussion of ambiguity and uncertainty and their relationship to communicating information in organizations is superb. He argues that sensemaking occurs when there is a searchable desire for more information rather than remanufactured or reformatted information. HRD personnel should recognize that sometimes organizational desire for more information does not result in information that contributes to understanding but rather in bothersome and futile additional reports.

Chapter Five embarks on frames and cues as the vocabulary of sensemaking. Weick lists and describes six vocabularies: ideology, third-order control, paradigms, theories of action, traditions, and stories, all of which affect sensemaking through reference to past and present events. Chapter Six emphasizes the belief process in sensemaking by making comparisons of committing and manipulating actions. In this chapter, Weick introduces arguing as an opportunity for commitment and manipulation. Using the example of meetings as a primary arguing hole in organizations, the author connects the belief process to the self-fulfilling prophecy. In a discussion similar to Weick’s, Senge (1990) likened the self-fulfilling prophecy to receiving compound interest. Undoubtedly, the most recognizable comment in the entire book for HRD professionals and organizations to ponder is this: “Most people in organizations spend their time trying to make sense under conditions where self-fulfilling prophecies should flourish.”

In Chapter Seven, Weick addresses the action-driven side of sensemaking, clarifying the binding action of commitment and its effect on organizations. He says, “Organizations that routinely create a contact that is high in visibility, volition, and irrevocability should generate strong commitments, richer justification, and should make more sense to members.” Although this concept is clearly understood, an applied example would have been helpful. In the concluding Chapter Eight, the author makes a plea for research on horizontally structured organizations with less regulation and uncertainty rather than vertically structured organizations, because of their organic nature. In keeping with his poetic theme, he concludes with a poem about how to write. Here Weick attempts to show how continually recording information enhances one’s ability to make sense of organizational processes and operations.

Although the primary audience for this work is academicians and doctoral students who are interested in gaining conceptual knowledge, any HRD professional will find this book worthwhile. Sensemaking in Organizations is an exceptional information source for the individual focused on organizational performance and development. A thorough reading of the book, with close attention paid to the points described, will provide HRD professionals
with the tools to be change agents who can stimulate opportunities for improving the workforce. Sember (1997) posits that theoretic models—like this one—are helpful to the HRD discipline in solving organizational performance issues.

I have three concerns about the book and one recommendation to enhance the acceptance of the sensemaking process as action-based rather than just theoretical. First, given the complexity of this material, it seems senseless to require the reader to search for poetic meaning. Readers interested in a book of this nature and magnitude will be willing to contend with its theoretical flow. In addition, it seems unnecessary to continue to define sensemaking throughout the entire book. Readers will understand the definition of sensemaking after Chapter One. The audience would have been better served by greater devotion to organizational examples depicting actual business activity. Third, Chapter Three is frustrating to readers who think critically and analytically and, further, they should not be subjected to walking a tightrope to discovery of application in Chapter Seven. Finally, it would be beneficial to organizations to be able to apply sensemaking in team environments. The author stresses the need to research turbulent organizations. Sources of turbulence in team-based organizations also deserve research consideration.

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References


This book is a fifteen-chapter scholarly treatise divided into four parts. It contains chapter bibliographical references and subject and author indexes. The work is a follow-up to a symposium that the editors organized in 1993 to examine the “more challenging aspects of workplace diversity” (p. vii). The book is addressed
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