

Course work on making sense of ambiguous situations

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



1. How can leaders encourage collective sensemaking that results in a shared understanding of the situation?

Groups of people are considered to be able to make better decisions than individuals because they can pool the diverse talents of a team of individuals. This way the synergy effect can be achieved. Groups merge ideas from diverse perspectives, which creates the potential for new ideas and options that no individual could create on their own. It is, however, the leader's function to stimulate and process sensemaking, so that it brings the most fruitful results. In this connection it should be taken into account that a leader is first of all a good communicator. The leader is supposed to provide the staff with overall knowledge about the company, including its short- and long-term goals, mission statement, etc. and share the latest news with the staff, which evokes a feeling of engagement or implication, hence not only giving the employee a clear overview of a particular situation, but also fostering loyalty. Clear lines of communication are vitally important, as the speed and quality of shared decisions' transmitting directly depend on it. Another crucial factor, determining the level of the shared understanding, is the appraisal system, which can be introduced by the leader in both financial and nonfinancial forms. Only when the employee feels, that his work is valued, will he try to put in all his efforts (Robinson, Perryman, Hayday, 2004).

2. Does sensemaking always lead to better future decisions? Why or why not?

It goes without saying that sensemaking, as any concept, cannot be a universal solution. This fact is extremely vividly outlined on the example of a famous forest fire that took place in 1949, as described by Karl Weick. The main problem is that decisions, taken on the spot, especially in ambiguous or dangerous situations, are not only influenced by the shared experience and knowledge, but also pure intuition. In the example, given by Weick, the leader of firefighters, Dodge, came up with a single and most appropriate for the situation idea to light a small fire in front of the raging blowup to be able to escape and survive. However, this behavior was not regarded as “making sense” by his team, as due to low personal experience they had a wrong attitude to the danger at that moment. Dodge failed to transfer his on-the-spot decision to his subordinates, as he lacked communication skills and was in severe time limits. What is more important, the idea of transmitting intuition is difficult to implement, especially due to the fact, that the crew had already “made sense” contrary to what the leader was trying to say, which led them to a cognitive dissonance, hazardous in such situation.

3. In what circumstances is a team likely to outperform individuals working on their own? In what circumstances are individuals likely to outperform teams?

In all situations, when enough time and leeway is available, collaboration provides more benefits. Firstly, due to the fact that shared knowledge and experience leads to higher staff capacity, whereas an individual worker observes the situation from only one point of view, which may be subjective or incorrect. Secondly, team members are more likely to come up with

innovative ideas and approaches, as such techniques as brainstorming are available for them.

Individuals, working on their own, are mostly productive, if they are confronted with projects, specially designed for them, according to their specialization, knowledge, expertise and psychological characteristics. Furthermore, well-prepared individuals are more likely to take the right decision at a crucial point, when a lack of time is observed. Therefore, it is reasonable to empower certain specialists in such situations, to eliminate unnecessary hesitations among the other staff members.

References

Robinson, D., Perryman, S., Hayday, S. (2004). The Drivers of Employee Engagement. Institute for Employment Studies.

Weick, K. E. (1993). The collapse of sensemaking in organizations: The Mann Gulch disaster. *Administrative Science Quarterly*. p. 628