

# Karl Weick decision-making theory critical vision assignment

[Business](#), [Management](#)



ADVANCED COMMUNICATION THEORY (CCG5123) INDIVIDUAL ASSIGNMENT  
(15%) Critique One 1. Read and understand Karl Weick ' s theory 2. Use FIVE  
(5) main principles of a good theory to evaluate the theory 3. Discuss each of  
the principles in relations to the theory 4. Use APA style ( the latest edition)  
5. Please state the reference(s) Grading of the paper: 1. Introduction: 3% 2.  
Content: 10% 3. Conclusion: 2% [pic] Universiti Utara Malaysia [pic] Faculty  
of art and science Department of communication Advanced communication  
theory) Assignment about: Karl Weick's Information Systems Theory Critique  
– (Sense-making) – [pic] Khalid Daif (801346) Date of Submission 18. 01.  
2009 Lecturer: DR. Norhafeza Binti Yosof INTRODUCTION: The task of this  
assignment is to decide whether Weick's Information Systems Theory is a  
good theory by looking at the theory itself and then applying the five  
principles of a good theory to this particular theory to find out if it complies  
with these principles.

I will do so by first describing Weick's Information Systems Theory in short  
and pointing to its main assumptions as well as essential concepts; I will then  
go on to look at the validity of the theory by checking how it relates to the  
five principles of a good theory. WEICK'S INFORMATION SYSTEMS THEORY,  
THE MAIN PRINCIPLES AND CENTRAL ISSUES In order to act cohesively and  
successfully, people have to organise themselves; in order to organise  
themselves, they have to communicate and arrange the rules of behaviour  
accepted as a norm in various settings.

All human organisation systems are very complicated and they all depend on  
the norms accepted by the members, however – in order to set the rules and

arrange the acceptable norms, all organisations need effective communication; communication is defined by the Wikipedia online encyclopaedia as: the process to impart information from a sender to a receiver with the use of a medium. (... ) Communication happens at many levels (even for one single action), in many different ways, and for ost beings, (... ) [<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communication>]. In other words, communication is a transfer of meaning between two participants of the act. Communication is an essential factor in running any sort of organisation as all the human activity is based upon successful interaction between people. If we look at organisation as a human collective, where members of the collective group together to achieve specific goals, we have to take into account the need for effective transfer of meaning.

Karl Weick looked at the various systems of communication used in different organisations and tried to determine which of them are working well and why; in the process he has started formulating an Information Systems Theory, which will be the focus of this critique. When accepting the fact that passing information within an organisation is an essential factor in its running, we have to also accept that the information must make sense in order to make it possible for people to understand it.

Weick puts sensemaking at the core of his theory; he defines sensemaking as the process of finding ways to cope with disruptions appearing in the daily flow of activity. As James Douglas Orton Says: ‘... stories start in order, (... ) there is order first, then all hell breaks loose, then people try to recover some sense of order (... ), [" Making Sense of Organizing", ICOS presentation

2006, slide 14]. Weick Himself puts his theory of sensemaking very succinctly in one sentence: ‘ Order, interruption, recovery.

That is sensemaking in a nutshell. ‘[W[Weick 2006, p. 1733]Sensemaking is essential in running any organisation because of the fact that there is not a set of rules and norms do deal with every appearing problem and situation, there are rules that were used successfully in a similar situation beforehand, these rules have got to found and tested in order for new rules to be formulated. These new rules will be kept for future reference.

The organisational Sensemaking Strategy can be broadly divided into three parts: Enactment – emergence of a problem and choice of a strategy deployed before do cope with a similar problem; Selection – choosing the emerging options and ‘ working through them’ Retention – after one of the options worked best towards the solution of the problem, this one is chosen and selected to be remembered for future reference. All these have been extensively researched and renamed differently, however these names are sufficient for the purposes of this work.

In developing his theory, Weick recognises the essential factors if sensemaking is to take place and be successful; he puts them together in an acronym SIRCOPE. SIR COPE stands for: Social, Identity, Retrospect, Cues, Ongoing, Plausibility, Enactment. Explaining these concepts Weick also gives clues to all leaders who want their organisation to succeed. • Because sensemaking is a social process: ‘ People don’t discover sense, they create it, (... they need conversations with others to move toward some shared idea

of what meanings are possible. As a leader, encourage conversations, don't treat them as malingering. ' [K[Kathleen M. Sutcliffe and Karl E. Weick, Managing the Unexpected] • when the inexplicable occurs, people take on identities to cope with the situation, certain identities limit the solution options, ' As a leader, help people solidify other identities (... ) roles that help people build a context that aids explanation. ' [K[Kathleen M. Sutcliffe and Karl E.

Weick, Managing the Unexpected] • in order to make sense of the situation, people need to look back at what happened and how it has been dealt with, such retrospective thinking should be encouraged: ' Faced with the inexplicable, people often act their way out of their puzzlement by talking and looking at what they have said in order to discover what they may be thinking. (... )As a leader, make it possible for people to talk their way from the superficial, through the complex, on to the profound. ' [K[Kathleen M. Sutcliffe and Karl E.

Weick, Managing the Unexpected] • In looking for a solution to a problem, people look for cues to help them see a bigger picture: ' People deal with the inexplicable by paying attention to a handful of cues that enable them to construct a larger story. As a leader, help people expand the range and variety of cues they include in their stories. You know this will heighten confused complexity. But you also know that confusion can provide a transition between the superficial and the profound if people struggle with a wider range of issues and complexities before they settle for their " answer. [K[Kathleen M. Sutcliffe and Karl E. Weick, Managing the Unexpected] •

Sensemaking is an ongoing process: ‘ Sensemaking is dynamic and requires continuous updating and reaccomplishment. As a leader, don’t let people languish (... ). Recovery is about workable, plausible stories of what we face and what we can do. But these are not final stories. They are stories that should be modified based on new inputs and new opportunities and new setbacks. ‘ [K[Kathleen M. Sutcliffe and Karl E.

Weick, *Managing the Unexpected*] • When faced with a new situation, people tend to accept the first plausible explanation and solution, it is a task of the leader not to: ‘(... ) let the first plausible account be the last possible story. The first plausible account is assembled to help people make meaning. (... )’ as the leader,’ Help people get that first story. But then help them revise it, enrich it, replace it. ‘ [K[Kathleen M. Sutcliffe and Karl E. Weick, *Managing the Unexpected*] • Weick recognises the need for action(enactment), he says: ‘...

People have to keep moving. Recovery lies not in thinking then doing, but in thinking while doing and in thinking by doing. No one has the answers. Instead, all we have going for us is the tactic of stumbling into explanations that work and talking with others to see whether what we have stumbled into is in fact part of an answer. ‘ [K[Kathleen M. Sutcliffe and Karl E. Weick, *Managing the Unexpected*]In short then, Weick’s information Systems Theory has been designed to help managers understand how people make sense of events in various more or less confusing situations.

Faced with a new situation, people will easily accept an old solution to a similar problem in the past; the manager's role then is to ensure that this easy solution does not become the accepted one. By encouraging communication using various channels and in all possible directions, managers should help the other members of their organisation work on other possible solutions and work through all the emerging possible solutions to a given problem.

Only after the initial confusion subsides and the multitude of options has been discussed and discarded, there can be a successful recovery. IS WEICK'S INFORMATION SYSTEMS THEORY A GOOD THEORY? FIVE PRINCIPLES OF A GOOD THEORY In order to be valid, each social communication theory has got to undergo a strict process of determining if it fulfils the five basic principles of a good theory, these principles are: Utility – this principle asks how useful this theory is for understanding the forms, functions and consequences of communication.

Scope – this principle asks what the focus of this theory is, is it applicable on the macro scale (applicable on a scale bigger than just a single specific organisation) or the micro scale (single specific organisation only). Parsimony – this principle asks about how complicated the theory is and how easily it can be understood and put into practise. Heurism – this principle asks if the theory is capable of stimulating new ways of thinking within the community. Falsifiability – this principle asks whether the claim made by the theory can be proven to be false.

I will now look at all these principles in relation to Karl Weick's Information Systems Theory. HOW DO THE PRINCIPLES OF A GOOD THEORY RELATE TO WEICK'S THEORY? WEICK'S INFORMATION SYSTEMS THEORY AND THE PRINCIPLE OF UTILITY Since Weick's theory elaborates on the communication as an essential factor in the successful working of any organisation, and it underlines how an organisation can only work successfully if the process of sensemaking is allowed to take place his theory might be understood to fulfil this principle. Taking into account the fact that Weick explains the sensemaking process and makes it clear for all interested, as well as giving specific advice for leaders, it must be admitted that Karl Weick's Information Systems Theory completely fulfils this principle. WEICK'S INFORMATION SYSTEMS THEORY AND THE PRINCIPLE OF SCOPE Since Weick's Information Systems Theory can be applied to any organisation on any level of human interaction, and thus is universal for all communicative situations, it cannot be argued that this theory has a limited scope, thus proving that it fulfils the principle of scope applying to a good theory.

Weick's only requirement is that sensemaking (one of essential principles of his theory) be applied with an open mind and a willingness to use 'one's own experiences as data' (Maitlis, S. , " Making Sense of Organizing", slide 40, ICOS presentation 2006), this requirement makes his theory practically limitless in its scope; the principles of his theory available for application anywhere and at any time within human existence.

WEICK'S INFORMATION SYSTEMS THEORY AND THE PRINCIPLE OF

PARSIMONY Looking at how complicated Weick's theory is, one must admit



that it is pretty easily accessible. Of course whether it is easily understood will depend on multiple factors – including the appropriateness of the source to the level of the enquirer, the individual level of ability and understanding, and so on; however, generally speaking the theory is easily accessible.

The fact that Weick's theory is constantly reworked, broadened and amended by the author himself as well as by many of his followers, can also point to the easy accessibility of this theory for testing and elaboration due to the fact that it has been described in many different ways and interpreted by various scientists who put stress on its various elements. This theory has been developed by a temporary scientist who is still available to explain any unclear concepts; this fact also makes it more compliant with the principle of parsimony.

#### WEICK'S INFORMATION SYSTEMS THEORY AND THE PRINCIPLE OF HEURISM

Since this principle asks if the theory is capable of stimulating new ways of thinking within the community, and it has already been mentioned above that the theory has found many followers among the contemporary communication theorists and specialists, as well as a number of practitioners among the managers and leaders of many organisations, it can be inferred that this theory is fully compliant with the principle of heurism.

#### WEICK'S INFORMATION SYSTEMS THEORY AND THE PRINCIPLE OF FALSIFIABILITY

Looking at what has already been written about this theory by Weick himself and by other communication scientists, as well as the fact that the theory is being constantly developed and re-developed with multiple additions and re-

interpretations, one has to consider the possibility of its continuous improvement and development rather than the chance for someone to try and disprove it or call its claims invalid. Weick's Information Systems Theory is thus compliant with this principle as well. CONCLUSION

The task of this assignment was to evaluate Weick's Information Systems Theory in terms of its ability to fulfil the five main principles of a good theory. Starting my work, I have described the Information Systems Theory in short and pointed towards its central themes describing the essential ones in more detail. I have then looked at the five principles of a good theory and applied these five principles to Weick's Information Systems Theory coming to the assumption that Weick's theory fulfils all the principles of a good theory.

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