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Sensemaking at work: meaningful work experience for individuals and organizations

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to take a closer look at the concept of meaningful work experience for individuals and organizations, and discuss the role of sensemaking in creating it.

Design/methodology/approach – The main argument of the paper is that sensemaking efforts are among the fundamental tools that help create meaningful work experience for both individuals and organizations. The paper offers a conceptual framework that presents the interplay between sensemaking tools and enabling mechanisms in relation to internal and external organizational environments.

Findings – It is proposed that job crafting is a sensemaking tool – enabled by empowerment – for individuals to make sense of the internal environment of the organization; and strategy crafting is a sensemaking tool – enabled by organizational learning – for organizations to make sense of the external environment of the organization.

Originality/value – This paper attempts to converge micro- and macro-level concepts by bringing together individual- and organizational-level variables into a joint discussion. It places job crafting and strategy crafting in the context of sensemaking theory, and it reinforces the idea of proposing models that will consider the multi-level implications of organizational research.

Keywords Empowerment, Organizational learning, Sensemaking, Job crafting, Meaningful work experience, Strategy crafting

Paper type Conceptual paper

1. Introduction

Sensemaking has been defined as an activity that helps individuals interpret the cues from the environment and explain various complex (and often unexpected) events and issues (Maitlis, 2005; McDaniel, 2007; Weick *et al.*, 2005). As part of social constructionist thinking, sensemaking is a pervasive ongoing activity that retrospectively ascribes meaning to events happening around, while facilitating forward action at the same time. In this sense, it is an aid that serves individuals to deal with the complexity and uncertainty of their environment, by creating a reasonable account of the world (Maitlis, 2005). Often shaped by individuals' personal characteristics, beliefs, tendencies and

occupational background (Leiter *et al.*, 2010), sensemaking is arguably one of the fundamental processes that underlies all human activity, as we all encounter numerous complex and non-routine events in our everyday life, and continually try to respond to them.

Moreover, the world we live in today seems to make sensemaking an even more pervasive activity. It is recognized that the business world in the past few decades has become faster, more dynamic and more globalized, creating an environment far more uncertain, unpredictable and fluid (Adler, 2006; Drucker, 1992; Leavitt, 2007). The increased levels of change and dynamism have inevitably led business organizations to rethink themselves, and reorganize around new definitions and understandings. More specifically, organizations have adapted to change in a variety of ways, for example, by forming new organizational structures (e.g. network organizations), investing in information and communication technologies (e.g. social media) and using a workforce with higher levels of flexibility and adaptability. It is possible to suggest that these efforts are motivated by organizations' quest for survival, as their inability to be in the know of and catch up with the demands of their changing environment would ultimately mean they will cease to exist.

In this turbulent context, it seems critical to understand how individuals and organizations make sense of their world to adapt and move forward. For human beings and human organizations, the need to understand what they are doing and why they are doing it seems to be a fundamental tendency, as it fulfils the urge to make sense of their experience and the purpose of their actions, as well as to realize their position relative to others with what they do or say. Especially in today's environment, where predictability and stability have been significantly reduced as compared to, say, two or three decades ago, the expectation that the same inputs would consistently lead to the same outputs would be far-fetched. When the expectations are loose, and the conditions unclear, the individuals and organizations alike engage in sensemaking more frequently, or even continually. In this sense, a meaningful experience of the world would serve the same end for us all: to understand where we stand, what we do, where we want to go and how we can get there. We can, therefore, suggest that this fundamental quest is what keeps us going, and provides a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment as we go along.

Taking all these into account, our main purpose in this conceptual paper is to develop a framework to suggest mechanisms that help individuals and organizations make sense of what they are doing, and create a meaningful experience within their work environment. Arguing that activities of organizations and their members are driven by their incessant struggle to make sense of and adapt to their infinitely changing environments, we propose that sensemaking offers an excellent opportunity to account for this struggle. In addition to being an absolute necessity in today's world of work for individuals and organizations, we also propose that sensemaking efforts can originate from multiple locales in the organization, and permeate all layers. In the following pages, we present our theoretical perspective, followed by our conceptual framework and implications for theory and practice.

2. Background
2.1 Sensemaking as an organizational "process"
Traditional Western philosophy has long been established on dualisms between mind and body, reason and emotion, subject and object, organism and environment, among

others (Langley and Tsoukas, 2013; Seibt, 2013). These dualisms prompted philosophers and researchers to focus their attention on explaining the world based on concepts, or on static entities ("substances") that are distinct from one another, and whose interaction basically constitutes the happenings of the world. Furthermore, these dualisms create an artificial tension between the two counterparts, where opposing theories put forward their account of the world. As such, one of the fundamental assumptions on which theories of society rely on is the dichotomy around stability vs change (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). More specifically, theories that support stability regard society as a relatively stable structure, operating in an orderly and integrated manner, whereas theories that support change posit that societies are in constant change and conflict, operating within a non-static structure.

The same idea applies to organization studies where organizational events are explained at different levels of occurrence (individual, interpersonal and institutional), and among different actors, objects or states (decisions, structures, plans, managers, employees, behaviors, etc.). As such, elements that constitute an organization are viewed as distinct entities and/or concepts. The underlying assumption is that these entities remain intact over time; that is, they interact with each other from within their static position, and any attempt at change seeks to transition them from one static state of existence to another (Langley and Tsoukas, 2013).

What this viewpoint fails to capture, however, is the interaction or the change ("process") itself. It seems we have long been confined in the Western dualistic thinking which emphasizes states or concepts, and not the process. In contrast, systems theory of the organization is a first step toward a better understanding of the organizational processes, as it contextualizes them within a coherent whole by emphasizing the fact that parts of the structure are interdependent, tend to maintain balance and stability ("homeostasis") and are adaptable to the environment (Monge, 1977). Hence, systems view is able to capture the structure of the relationships among organizational elements, by recognizing their relative position and ongoing interaction. Implicated in this view is the idea that a system consists of dynamic processes to maintain its viability (Monge, 1990).

To account for a "process", however, we need to go one step further. Tsoukas and Chia (2002) argue that, although we use concepts such as evolution, change, transition, etc., we lack the terminology to explain "how" these activities actually come about. Concepts are useful, but their static nature is unable to account for change. Change is not the exception but the norm in our day-to-day life, and with our exclusive focus on concepts, we fail to capture the fluidity of the pervasive incremental changes we are involved in at all times (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). To account for change, we need to rely on intuition and information from within, which is only possible through direct experience and perception. As cited by Weick (2011, p. 144), Kant's seminal work *Critique of Pure Reason* emphasizes that "perception without conception is blind; conception without perception is empty".

Perception is about keeping an open mind to make sense of the events happening around as well as responding to them all at the same time. It feeds directly into "sensemaking", defined as an ongoing activity to comprehend the complexity of events, explain the unknown and predict the future (Hernes and Maitlis, 2013). Sensemaking is also viewed as a roadmap, a guide and a highly emergent activity with a lot of reasoning, hypothesis-testing and enacting involved (Ancona, 2012). In a similar vein, we argue

that, in an organizational setting, sensemaking is the tool that individuals and organizations utilize to walk their path in a meaningful work experience.

2.2 Sensemaking and meaningful work experience

The meaning of work or meaningful work experience can be identified as positive associations between the work individuals engage in and the rewarding outcomes they receive such as happiness, efficacy, satisfaction, among others (Pratt and Ashforth, 2003; Vuori et al., 2012). It is a concept that has been a topic of study by organizational researchers since the mid-twentieth century, trying to identify the role of work and the place it occupies in individuals' life (Dubin, 1956; Morse and Weiss, 1955). Studies of work motivation, work engagement (Brief and Nord, 1990; Gagné and Deci, 2005), job design (Hackman and Oldham, 1980), among others, are all designed to understand the conditions under which individuals would be more satisfied with their work, would derive a greater sense of meaningfulness and, as a result, experience more positive outcomes. While these studies are mainly geared toward explaining meaningful work experience for individuals, we posit that organizations also achieve meaningful experience, and sensemaking plays a vital role for both.

Sensemaking, in Weick's terms (1995, 1996), is an ongoing retrospective activity which helps individuals bring, in a sense, order to chaos. Not only is sensemaking an outgrowth of the bounded rationality theory in that human beings are unable to be completely rational in their decision-making due to their resource and cognitive constraints, it is an effort they probably rely on even more today, as mentioned before, due to increased complexity and uncertainty of the environment (McDaniel, 2007). The expectation is that once individuals are able to ascribe meaning to their experience, they can better cope with their environment, and experience positive outcomes such as motivation, well-being, goal-achievement, satisfaction and quality of life (Vuori et al., 2012). Therefore, we can easily view the actions of organizations and their members from the lens of sensemaking, where they try to achieve positive outcomes amidst changing times.

In addition to achieving positive outcomes, sensemaking involves thinking while doing. That is, sensemaking serves to understand *and* create the environment concurrently, as interpretation goes hand in hand with action (Weick et al., 2005). In today's world, individuals are often faced with situations where they have to make a fast decision, and, after that, they immediately interpret the new situation and adjust their new actions on the basis of the consequences they observe as they move forward. Moreover, especially when uncertainty and change prevail, individuals and organizations engage more in improvisation (Barrett, 1998; McDaniel, 2007), a form of creative action that is built up on collective interpretation of the environment grounded in know-how and prior experience. All of these point to the fact that there is an ongoing interplay between acting and thinking, where meaning is construed by that very action, which, in turn, influences the environment and guides the next action to be taken.

Meaning is construed not only through the interplay between acting and thinking but also through social interactions. Studies emphasize the social aspect of sensemaking, stating that social processes underline the mutual creation of meaning (Maitlis 2005; Narayanan et al., 2011; Richter, 1998; Stensaker et al., 2008; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). That is, organizational members, through their interactions with each other and the environment, make sense of their world and respond to it collectively (Maitlis, 2005).

Furthermore, organizational members share critical information and experiences about situations, which help reduce uncertainty, facilitate learning and enact the environment going forward (Lundberg, 2005; Richter, 1998; Thomas *et al.*, 2001). Viewing organizations as adaptive interpretation systems (Daft and Weick, 1984; McDaniel, 2007; Richter, 1998), learning and doing are co-created by organizational members, setting the ground for common creation of meaning.

All this leads us to the conclusion that meaningful experience is construed through a fluid ongoing activity cycle of perceiving, sensemaking and improvising, which basically entail actors responding to the environment in congruence with the meaning they ascribe to it. While the exact content of what constitutes a meaningful experience may vary for different individuals or organizations, one thing seems to be in common: as a malleable and evolving entity, meaning "is an understanding of the connections and purpose of an activity" (Vuori *et al.*, 2012, p. 233). We, therefore, argue that achieving meaningful experience is important for survival, and hence sensemaking efforts help create meaningful experience for both individuals *and* organizations. In other words, individuals and organizations actively produce their own meaningful experience by designing their own work environments, making their own decisions and defining their own position among other individuals and organizations that take part in the same environment.

3. Conceptual framework

As mentioned earlier, efforts to cope with change in the business world have created new organizational forms, equipped with new levels of interconnectedness powered by technology. These new forms have, in turn, necessitated new forms of empowerment for organizational members. As such, individuals working in various organizations, amidst all the uncertainty and fluidity of their fast-flowing environment, find themselves more self-reliant, more independent and sometimes more detached from the traditional organizational rules or boundaries (Rosso *et al.*, 2010). At times, this can go to the extreme for individuals, so as to lose the sense of connection between their daily activities and the goals they are working for – e.g. organizational goals (higher profitability, better quality, etc.), or personal goals (satisfaction, affluence, etc.). In this regard, individuals may seek fit more with their work than the organization they work for, so that they can maintain a sense of continuity in different contexts or over time (Pratt, 2013). All these, therefore, boost individuals' need for a sense of meaning regarding their work and organization, which implies that sensemaking efforts, serving to create their own meaning of the work, become prominent.

In a similar vein, as business organizations have been facing a pressing struggle to survive in the fast-changing and ever growing markets, the urge for them to be able to understand the changing environment and respond to it as fast as possible has been imperative. In this regard, strategic management practices have traditionally been an effective organizational response, as strategic management has always entailed holding a long-range planning perspective upon organizational activities and goal-achievement. With an increased need in recent years to view strategic management through a lens of flexibility, it is possible to suggest that strategic management practices, in a way, constitute organizations' sensemaking efforts. More specifically, organizations make sense of their environment with respect to their ability to sustain a long-term competitive existence in globalized markets.

In summary, we argue that sensemaking is an ongoing activity that individuals as well as organizations engage in, to understand and respond to their environment effectively. As a matter of fact, when we understand organizations from a sensemaking perspective, we come to realize how pervasive and encompassing it is. Sensemaking efforts are everywhere, flowing in every direction, created and recreated through ongoing interactions with the environment. We propose job crafting and strategy crafting as two prominent sensemaking tools for individuals and organizations respectively. Furthermore, we assert that sensemaking is made possible when organizations enable empowerment and organizational learning as the central components of the organizational climate. That is, these two mechanisms constitute the underlying philosophy or mindset that ensures the organization and its members are provided with the ability and opportunity to perceive, adapt and take charge of their actions *vis-à-vis* the internal and external environment. We conceptualize the relationships that we propose in the following model (Figure 1), which we further explain in the following pages:

3.1 Job crafting as a sensemaking tool for individuals enabled by empowerment
Job crafting, as defined in the seminal article by Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001, p. 108), consists of "the actions employees take to shape, mold, and redefine their jobs", and as such, it represents individuals' agency on their work environment to make their work more meaningful. Part of a relatively recent stream of research, Positive Organizational Scholarship (Cameron *et al.*, 2003), job crafting states that there's a dynamic relationship between the individual and his/her work, and that work is subject to a dynamic sensemaking process, closely attached to the definition of self and identity (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001). In this regard, individuals have a greater sense of agency and proactivity in construing their own meaning (Wrzesniewski *et al.*, 2003). Therefore, it is possible to suggest that individuals use sensemaking to achieve the following:

(1) Develop a sense of identity aligned with their area of expertise. This effort defines who they are and what they do. In an environment where work
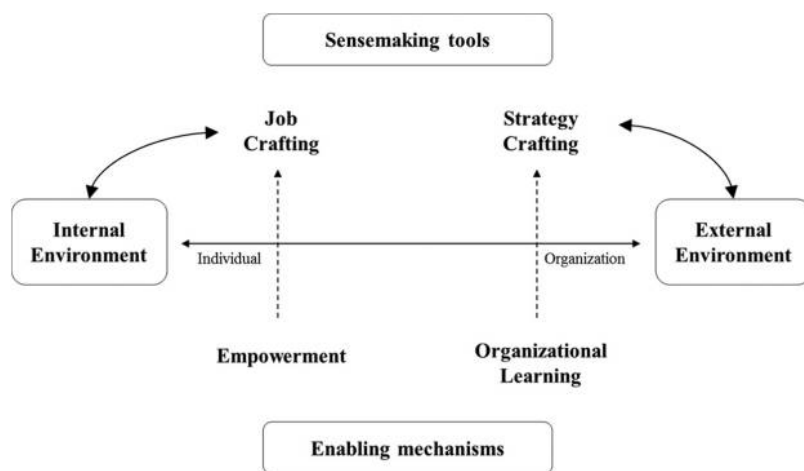
Figure 1.
Proposed sensemaking tools and enabling mechanisms with respect to internal and external environments

experience becomes more distinct from the organization, more discontinuous and more personalized (Weick, 1996), individuals may need more improvisation and enactment for leaving their mark on their job, which in turn feeds into their sense of identity and ownership of the work. While enacting their identity, they also construct the meaning of their day-to-day activities, and how these activities relate to organizational existence (Ashforth *et al.*, 2008).

(2) Possess an intimate knowledge of what the organization stands for. Especially relevant during an organizational change process, where organizational members interpret the new situation in line with new frames of reference (Bean and Hamilton, 2006), this effort gives them a sense of belongingness and ability to do their job aligned with organizational goals and performance expectations. Hence, their performance will contribute to enhance the organization's existence, as well as the association between the individual and the organization.

By crafting their job, individuals can alter the number and kinds of tasks they perform (physical boundaries), their approach to their work tasks (cognitive boundaries) and the number and nature of their relationships with others during their work (relational boundaries) (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001). That is, they can actively change what they do at work, whom they work with and how they understand where their work stands relative to others. As a result, job crafting mainly deals with the internal environment of the organization and influences the meaningfulness of the work experience for individuals (Vuori *et al.*, 2012). There are multiple examples of job crafting behaviors observed at different levels of the organization, and at different industries or professions, all of which aimed at increasing the experience of meaningfulness and gratification derived from work (Berg *et al.*, 2010; Brickson, 2011; Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001).

Furthermore, the self-initiated nature of job crafting implies that it refers to an autonomous redesign of jobs (Berg *et al.*, 2010). Although autonomous, and not initiated by management hierarchies, this type of work-customization often goes parallel to the aims and objectives of the organization (Lyons, 2008; Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001), and works to its benefit, as it enhances effectiveness of the performers by giving them a greater sense of meaning, engagement and satisfaction through work (Berg *et al.*, 2007; Chalofsky and Krishna, 2009; Wrzesniewski, 2003). That is, individuals engage in job crafting by themselves, and for their own sake, recognizing and utilizing the opportunities to create and/or enhance their own sense of meaningful work experience. This proactivity in shaping one's own meaning of work, in turn, increases individuals' initiative-taking and versatility in the enacted environment (Berg *et al.*, 2010). In addition, job crafting allows individuals to conceptualize their "ideal" work, and actively restructure their work to meet that ideal (Brickson, 2011). As such, it represents another way to enhance meaning and gratification, feeding into feelings of responsibility for and attachment to the work.

In this regard, we emphasize "empowerment" in our model as the enabling mechanism to make job crafting possible in an organizational setting. Adopting the macro perspective of empowerment here (Spreitzer, 2008), we define the term as sharing of power, information and resources between superiors and subordinates, so as to increase subordinates' sense of ownership and enable their decision-making authority (Bartunek and Spreitzer, 2006). Using Kanter's terminology (1977; cited in Spreitzer,

2008), the four power tools that enable empowerment are opportunity, information, support and resources. Individuals in an organizational setting can be empowered once they are given access to these tools.

The idea of sharing power with lower levels of the organization is rooted in the values of democracy and employee participation, and hence, relates to delegation of responsibility. It is, therefore, possible to argue that the more an organization is managed with democratic ideals, the more empowered its members will be. In addition, empowerment brings change in the collective sensemaking of the organization, in that the very idea of sharing the authority redefines the traditional (mostly top-down) structure of organizational decision-making (Labianca *et al.*, 2000). With empowerment, we posit that employees of the organization are recognized to possess greater discretion and authority to perform their work. As such, they are allowed to make decisions about their work (its content and performance) that will enable them to create and enact their environment. In other words, empowerment secures an environment where individuals are able to exert greater agency upon their work to make it a more meaningful experience. Furthermore, empowerment allows organizational members to take on more responsibility, be more proactive, more efficient and accountable, all of which leading to a smoother and more productive organizational functioning (Bartunek and Spreitzer, 2006), and more meaningful experience. We therefore argue that empowerment lays the groundwork for job crafting to be utilized as a sensemaking tool by individuals.

3.2 Strategy crafting as a sensemaking tool for organizations enabled by organizational learning

Strategy making is about surviving, exploiting the organization's own capabilities and resources and anticipating and exploring future opportunities, within an ongoing sense of direction. Traditionally, strategic management has been the field of study that deals with long-term viability of an organization through visionary planning for sustained competitiveness. To maintain competitiveness in a complex and changing environment, organizations devise intended, or planned, strategies to put in action (Mintzberg and Waters, 1985). Generally viewed as the job of the top-level managers in an organization, strategic management produces an impact that encompasses the organization as a whole. From a sensemaking perspective, it would be fair to say that top managers gather the (imperfect) information available in the organizational environment, and devise the organization's responses on the basis of their interpretation (Narayanan *et al.*, 2011). The formalized steps of strategic management can, therefore, be said to help organizations make sense of their existence, and continuously try to comprehend and construct meaning through their interactions with their environment. As a matter of fact, scanning (collecting strategic information), interpreting (comprehending the meaning of the information collected) and responding (acting and implementing decisions) are considered the key processes of strategic sensemaking (Thomas *et al.*, 1993). Therefore, it would not be wrong to assert that being able to respond to the demands of the environment and sustaining organizational existence constitute meaningful work experience for organizations.

As mentioned before, however, there has been an increased need to understand strategic management through a lens of flexibility, where the traditional view (i.e. top managers deciding on the fate of an organization) has gradually dissipated. Organizations are conceptualized as "the body of thought thought by organizational

thinkers" (Weick, 1979, p. 2), within which learning and interpretation are of ongoing nature by every organizational member. In this sense, strategic sensemaking goes beyond the planning perspective, and engenders that strategies are not always planned, but also "crafted" (Mintzberg, 1987, pp. 66-67). Strategy crafting is a metaphor put forward by Mintzberg, when he made an analogy between strategy-making and pottery-making processes, emphasizing the fact that strategy is subject to being molded and crafted just as pottery clay, and taking shape along the way. That is, in addition to formulating "deliberate" strategies through planned and controlled processes, organizations develop "emergent" strategies through a flexible process of learning while doing (Lundberg, 2005; Mintzberg, 1994).

Mintzberg further argues that strategists need to be able to "sense" the environment, not just analyze it; and be open-minded and flexible enough to adapt the strategy to the changing conditions or demands from the market. He states "The salesperson who finds a customer with an unmet need may possess the most strategic bit of information in the entire organization" (Mintzberg, 1987, p. 68). As a highly interpretive process (Smircich and Stubbart, 1985), strategy crafting implies not only flexibility and adaptability when responding to market demands but also a fluid process of enacting the strategy, which further implies creating one's own meaning and existence. Just like pottery making, there is some sort of enactment of strategy here, as strategists must move forward in applying the strategy, at the same time as interpreting environmental cues, understanding the needs and adjusting the strategy as they proceed. Thus, strategy can be accepted as a theory that is socially constructed, and strategy making as "structured by the meanings and interactions among those making strategy" (Bürgi et al., 2005, p. 82).

Furthermore, evidence increasingly suggests that middle managers play an important role in adapting to change and effectuating strategy at the organizational level (Burgelman, 1983; Huy, 2002), as a consequence of their position in the organization. More specifically, middle managers are in a unique position in an organization, being close enough to top management to participate in strategy making, while also being in close proximity to the lower levels so as to share with them and translate the message from the top ranks (Rouleau and Balogun, 2011; Sharma and Good, 2013). In this regard, they are ideally located to mediate and facilitate sensemaking efforts in the organization, and act as sensegivers for lower levels of the organization to help them create their meaningful experience. Balogun and Johnson (2005) further argue that middle managers' sensemaking of top-down initiatives contribute to the emergent nature of strategic change, in that, sensemaking in the lower levels of the organizations feeds back into the learning and crafting efforts of top management.

In this regard, we emphasize "organizational learning" in our model as the enabling mechanism to make strategy crafting possible in an organizational setting. Modeled after individual learning, organizational learning is the process by which organizations adapt to change and adopt new ways of taking action in response to the environment. As suggested by Fiol and Lyles (1985, p. 803), organizational learning is "the process of improving actions through better knowledge and understanding". Learning is first initiated individually at the lower levels of the organization (i.e. the employees and middle management), then is transformed into organizational learning, and is adopted in organizational systems and strategies. In addition, adopting the interpretive model of

organizations, organizational learning can be conceived as a highly social activity of an ongoing nature, and concurrent with "doing" (McDaniel, 2007; Richter, 1998). In other words, while learning happens through individuals, it is still a communal activity, where knowledge is mutually created, and hence, meaning is mutually constructed.

From a similar viewpoint, Huber (1991) identifies four constructs and processes of organizational learning as knowledge acquisition, information distribution, information interpretation and organizational memory. In this regard, organizational learning entails sensemaking, where the information is acquired, shared and interpreted together within the organizational community (Richter, 1998; Thomas *et al.*, 2001). As a matter of fact, this idea fits well with the conceptualization of Crossan *et al.* (1999), who state that knowledge is constructed through the generic stages of intuiting, interpreting, integrating and institutionalizing, in a sequence from the individual level toward the organizational level, where learning that has occurred at the individual or group level is embedded into routines, systems and strategies at the organizational level.

We mentioned earlier that we conceptualize sensemaking and creating a meaningful work experience for organizations as sustaining the organization's competitive existence through adaptive responses to the environment. We argue that this is possible through strategy crafting – as posited by Hart (1992), all organizational members participate in strategy making, as they are expected to play different parts in the process. The more flexible and open this process is, the more the capability of strategy crafting unleashed. In this regard, organizational learning becomes a tool for the organization to enable this adaptive capability from individuals to the organization as a whole (Kuwada, 1998; Thomas *et al.*, 2001). Equivalent to strategic learning in this context, organizational learning entails behaviors and processes that help understand the information from the environment, enable interpretation and use strategic tools and actions that serve to respond to it. In turn, these tools help the organization enhance its process of learning, discovering and inventing the future with the strategy used (Pugh and Bourgeois, 2011). We, therefore, argue that organizational learning lays the groundwork for strategy crafting to be utilized as a sensemaking tool by organizations.

4. Implications for theory and practice
We can summarize our arguments so far as follows. We claim that meaningful work experience for individuals corresponds to their ability to make sense of the internal environment of their organization, and achieve positive outcomes through work to lead a fulfilling life, which individuals can achieve through job crafting. Meaningful work experience for organizations, on the other hand, corresponds to their ability to make sense of the external environment of their organization and respond to it in a way that will help sustain their competitive existence, which organizations can achieve through strategy crafting. We, therefore, argue that these sensemaking efforts (job crafting and strategy crafting respectively) manifest themselves at both individual- and organizational-level practices to actualize these meaningful experiences.

Our perspective presents various implications for theory in organization studies, especially with regard to sensemaking. We concur with the idea that organizations are not static entities; instead, they consist of multiple actors, processes, interactions and incremental changes on an ongoing basis, and continue to "become" throughout their existence. We argue that sensemaking is one of the most significant processes in organizations, as it fulfils a fundamental need for individuals as well as organizations:

the need of having a sense of meaning and satisfaction through work, and sustaining one's existence within a complex and dynamic environment. In this regard, we place job crafting and strategy crafting within a wider context of sensemaking theory.

As regards job crafting, we state that it is a pervasive and widespread activity engaged in by individuals to make their work fit with their style and sense of meaning. It provides individuals with agency about redefining their work boundaries, and is so significant that it entails an identity-building component while creating one's own meaningful work experience (Pratt, 2013). This sense of meaning and identity is further reinforced by individuals' perceptions and social interactions in the workplace, so as to better make sense of their work activities (Moon, 2008). In sum, we suggest that the more individuals have a say in determining the content of their work, the more they will make sense of it and derive a meaningful experience in the workplace.

Although we acknowledge that job descriptions are important elements that define job content, we posit that they are static entities which may remain open to interpretation *vis-à-vis* various (unpredictable) situations in real life. We, therefore, believe that job crafting can be a great complement in research in organizational behavior and human resource management, where the extent to which individuals deviate from job descriptions can be assessed, along with the outcomes this may produce. While we believe everyone engages in job crafting in one way or another, we recognize the fact that job crafting may not be as widely allowed in every organization; we, therefore, propose empowerment as an enabling mechanism. That is, the more empowered the individuals, the more freedom and discretion they will have to craft their job. As mentioned before, job crafting, when it occurs, works to the benefit of the organization (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001). Hence, we position empowerment as an underlying approach that makes job crafting possible within a more meaningful work environment and more satisfied organizational members.

As regards strategy crafting, we state that it is a sensemaking tool that enhances organizations' flexibility and adaptability in responding to the environmental demands. Possessing accurate strategic insights is vital for organizational survival in today's fast-changing and unpredictable economic environment. As DeGeus (1988, p. 71) puts it, "the ability to learn faster than competitors may be the only sustainable competitive advantage". We, therefore, argue that the traditional planned process of formulating and implementing deliberate strategies represent only one side of the story with regard to strategy making. What is needed is strategy crafting, as it implies making sense of and adapting to environmental conditions, through organizational efforts that increase responsiveness to the environment. As emphasized by Mintzberg (1987), anybody in the organization can possess information that is of strategic quality – therefore, channels of communication and learning must be open to let the information flow. We, therefore, propose organizational learning as an enabling mechanism for strategy crafting. In that sense, positioning organizational learning at the root of the strategy process will mean:

- allowing all organizational members to participate in the crafting process; and
- adopting (incorporating) emergent strategic patterns shaped by the environment into the implementation process.

Our perspective also presents various implications for organizational practice. If managers can recognize sensemaking as a fundamental need in organizational life and provide the means and tools to make it possible, they can raise the level of productivity

and happiness in the organization. Positive Organizational Scholarship can offer a sound theoretical background here, as it emphasizes strengths, capabilities, motivations and everything that is positive about organizational existence (Cameron *et al.*, 2003; Caza and Caza, 2008). One possible suggestion for letting sensemaking take effect is to adjust organizational climate to provide more discretion and flexibility to organizational members. Managers can start by empowering employees and by adopting the learning perspective as a foundational rule for organizational existence, both of which will allow employees to shape their work, to experiment, learn, implement and to adapt their work even further based on new learning.

5. Concluding remarks

In this paper, we argued that sensemaking is an ongoing, pervasive, but subtle activity in today's organizations that takes place at both individual and organizational levels. Due to the complex and fast-changing nature of the environment, organizational members are far more in need to understand where they stand and what their work means, not only for their own sense of meaning and satisfaction but also for performance expectations. Organizations, on the other hand, while struggling to maintain competitiveness, are as well in need to understand where they stand *vis-à-vis* the competition, and realize if their strategic direction needs adjustment.

With our paper, we juxtaposed existing constructs in organization studies literature, and tried to bring a new outlook to their interrelationships through the lens of sensemaking. We aimed to further explore and contextualize the relationships we posit between individual- and organizational-level variables, and discuss how their interplay helps create meaningful experience at each level of the organizational existence. Future research endeavors should focus on future implications of the conceptual model as well as address measurement and operationalization issues. There is already ongoing research on each of the constructs put together in our model, and it is our hope that our model can put the existing literature in a new light with a more informed understanding of the potential interrelationships of these constructs. As regards managerial practice, we believe our model can highlight the need to address both individual and organizational issues in the organizational environment, and can lead to a complementary understanding of concepts such as adaptability and flexibility at both levels. We think our framework can help individuals and organizations in the business world better understand their own actions, as well as what stands of importance for them. Therefore, individuals and organizations alike can be provided with the means to help them realize meaningful and potentially fulfilling experiences in the workplace.

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