

Interviewing and Sensemaking

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FLA Workshop

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Agenda

- I. "Sensemaking"
 - Definition
 - Among crew
 - Among ourselves
- II. Interviewing
 - Tips for Teams and Individuals
 - Opportunities for learning and culture change
- III. Interviewing Activity
 - Think about your fireline experiences

Part I

Sensemaking

Why sensemaking?

* FLA guide:

- ~~“where employees made mistakes”~~
- ~~“what should have been done”~~
- “illuminate why employees’ actions seemed reasonable at the time.” (p. 8)

Why sensemaking?

- * “Interviewers should strive to remember that their objective is to be able to describe how employees **developed their understanding** of the situation—and **then made sense** of their choices at the time” (p. 20).

Active Process (Not Passive)

- * Not: “how it *made* sense” (passive)
- * But: “how *they made it* make sense” (active)
 - * Leaves open the possibility of an alternate interpretation of the same situation in the future
 - * Training, stories, experience



Sensemaking is...

1. Grounded in identity construction
2. Done in retrospect
3. Enactive of sensible environments
4. Social
5. Ongoing
6. About looking for and extracting cues
7. About what's plausible over what's accurate

(adapted from Weick, 1995)

Sensemaking...

- ...by the crew (“them”)
 - ...by your own FLA team (“us”)
 - ...in the review (“us and them”)
- focus on interviews*

Understanding how they made sense of events

Sensemaking by the crew (“them”)

Sensemaking by the crew (“them”)

Common Scenario

- * Where to land the helicopter:
- * “Access is kind of hard, especially with the helicopter. You get dropped off in places and you’re just kind of like, well, that’s the **best place to be *dropped off.***” (Manzanita member)

Scenario

- * “We were going to land in the green and then just walk over and get in the black as a safety zone... ***And not a big deal to get into the black at all...*** So we landed and got out, the four of us, and kind of got ourselves situated. The helicopter takes off...” (Ben, West Fork)

1. Enactive of sensible environments

We experience and alter the reality we perceive

- * *Threat or opportunity?*

Questions to ask:

- * “Why did you think you were here?”
- * “What did you think you were facing?”
- * “Did your actions have the intended effects?”
- * “What else do you think your actions set into motion?”

Sensemaking by the crew (“them”)

Scenario

- * Ben (West Fork)
- * "...The helicopter takes off. And we turn around basically, and the **fire is starting to pick up** in activity already. So all the **gaps** are starting to get--the ones that are near us--are **starting to close** together. And so the **ways to get into the black are no longer as close.**"

2. Ongoing

Time is continuous but sensemaking "punctuates" it into episodes:

- * *What we actually experience:
abcdefghijklmnop...*
- * *How we make sense of it: "Abc, then def.
So, ghi and jkl.
Therefore, mnop."*

Questions to ask:

- * *How did the crew punctuate events?*
 - * *"When did the crew say 'uh-oh'?"*
- * *"What was the plan?"*
- * *"How did you make sense of what was going on?"*
- * *"What happened next?"*
- * *"Were there points when you felt nervous about what was going on? Describe those points."*

Sensemaking by the crew ("them")

Scenario

- * Ben, continued
- * “And there’s **one spot left** where there’s a pile of rocks, so it’s not burning specifically right there. And it’s just like **so that’s where we’re going to run through.**”

Scenario

- * Ben, continued
- * “...[supervisor] and I conversed briefly. He’s like *should we go through there?* And I was just like, ***we don’t have a choice.*** *It’s like go, yeah, get moving or we’re going to be crispy critters out here. It’s time to move.* So he runs through it. I turn around to yell at the two other firefighters that we’re going to run through the flames basically or through this gap that’s not specifically on fire. And so . . . And I take off and then they said **as soon as I moved flames just went Whoosh** kind of like right behind me. But they took off right after me and ran through.”

3. About looking for and extracting cues

We pick out cues to focus on in the environment

Questions to ask:

- * Where was the crew's attention?
- * "What were you looking for?"
- * "What were you seeing?"
- * "Did you sense any changes?"
- * What was your crew's typical way of handling the situation you saw?

Sensemaking by the crew ("them")

Scenario

- * Ben (West Fork) continued:
- * "we could say that it was like one of those things where ***we couldn't have seen it coming. But*** it was 2:00 in the afternoon, ***right in the heat of the day***. There was, I don't remember, but I bet there was probably a cold front or thunderstorms were predicted or something to drive the wind like that. And so we went out there with some information like ***that but I didn't have it in the forefront of my mind.***"

4. About what's plausible over what's accurate

We never have time to gather all the facts; we have to make it make sense as we go

Questions to ask:

- * "How did you make sense of what was happening?"
- * "Did you have any feelings of doubt, or worry about bad outcomes?" (p. 21)
- * *What would someone need to understand to make this account make sense?*

Sensemaking by the crew ("them")

5. Done in retrospect

We interpret what we are seeing based on past experience / slides

- * "RPD"

Questions to ask:

- * *Had the crew ever faced anything like this before?*
- * "Were you reminded of any previous experience?" (p. 21)
- * "How did you make sense of what you were seeing?"

Sensemaking by the crew ("them")

Scenario

- * Ben, continued
- * “We were pretty surprised, because I remember we **counted up the years of experience** that we had between the four of us that were there. And it was quite **considerable**. I mean, it wasn’t like a hundred years or anything like that, but it was, for four firefighters it was a lot of years...**Nobody had dealt with that before. We were all surprised that it did happen.**”

6. Social

“What I say and single out and conclude are determined by who socialized me, and how I was socialized, as well as by the audience I anticipate will audit the conclusions I reach” (Weick, 1995, p. 61).

Where are social influences and pressures strongest?

Collective Sensemaking by the crew (“them”) (illustration)

The Workgroup

- * Workgroups:
 - * The intersection between the *individual* and the *organization*.
 - * Where the organization's rules, policies, practices are translated for individuals into *action*.
 - * The social group to which people hold their *actions* accountable.
 - * What are the crew values?
 - * "Normal" ways the crew does things.

Two Workgroups

	West Fork	Manzanita
Make- up	25-person, 2 helicopters Low turnover Long average tenure in fire Higher level quals (Crew boss, Helicopter manager, ICT4) Few apprentices	20-person, 1 helicopter High turnover Low average tenure in fire Lower level quals (Squad boss, ICT5) Many apprentices
Assignments	Constant rotation among modules Few AARs for entire crew	Travel together for all assignments AARs common crew practice

Two Workgroups

	West Fork	Manzanita
Crew values: Differences	Work as individuals. Know what to do with minimal direction. All members are given a great deal of responsibility	Actively learn, participate in AARs and other learning opportunities. Operate “by the book,” account for their actions/ decisions.
Central value	“We are experienced.” Members act autonomously, figure things out on their own.	“We are a learning crew.” Members get comfortable talking about experiences. Justify their actions to the group.

Workgroup Values → Action

West Fork “expert crew”	Manzanita “learning crew”
“We have the experience and leadership and we train it into our people. And so when we hit the ground, we can just hit the ground running. You don’t need to huddle up and tell them what to do. I mean, they know what they’re doing. ”	“And as long as people are talking and you’re discussing your options , whether it be fire behavior or whether it be flying or whatever it might be, you can get to the same place safely in more than one direction...There’s a lot of dialogue going on.”

Workgroup Routines

- * West Fork
- * I made a point to ask how it went in the helicopter, because that's when he started developing his plan--talking to dispatch, people on the ground, figuring out what to order, and we're watching for other aircraft and dip sites. So I asked specifically, "how did it go in the helicopter for you?" He's like, "you know, **I didn't even really notice anything.** It went well, I guess," is what I took from that."
- * Manzanita
- * "When we're flying into it, **everybody's eyes are out the windows** looking around saying... "okay, the wind's **pushing it this way.** And **look** how it's **burning on that side.** We're **landing here.** The first thing we've got to do, **where's the best black to get into?**" Kind of come up with some sort of a game plan before you even land...**It's pretty well communicated.**"

6. Social

Group, workplace, and organizational culture, shared language

- * *Be a culture detective*

Questions to ask:

- * "How would you describe your crew culture?"
- * "What about your crew makes people proud to be part of it?"
- * "What is leadership like in your unit?"

Sensemaking by the crew ("them")

7. Grounded in identity construction

Sensemaking begins with self-conception

- * *Desire for self enhancement*
- * *Desire for self-efficacy*
- * *Desire for self-consistency*

Questions to ask:

- * *How does the crew view themselves?*
- * *How do they hope others see them (reputation)?*
- * *“What’s a good assignment for you?”*
- * *“What counts as success for your crew?”*

Sensemaking by the crew (“them”)

Workgroups

- * Bottom line:
 - * Get the story from the individuals, but also get insights from them about their workgroup.
 - * What are the workgroup’s values?
 - * What are the “typical” ways the workgroup accomplishes a task?
 - * What are the links between what a workgroup values and the ways they approach their work?
 - * Focus on *action*: How values and group identity are turned into action.

Understanding how we make sense of what we're up to

Sensemaking by the FLA Team ("us")

Sensemaking by the analysis team ("us")

How might these apply to the FLA Team?

1. Grounded in identity construction
2. Retrospective
3. Enactive of sensible environments
4. Social
5. Ongoing
6. Focused on and by extracted cues
7. Driven by plausibility rather than accuracy

Sensemaking by the analysis team ("us")

How might these apply to the FLA Team?

1. Grounded in identity construction
 - * Who are we? What are we doing here?
 - * What do we have invested in this?
2. Retrospective
 - * What does this remind us of? Have we seen something like this before?

Sensemaking by the analysis team ("us")

How might these apply to the FLA Team?

3. Enactive of sensible environments
 - * Why kind of environment are we facing?
 - * What are we setting into motion by being here?
4. Social
 - * How are we viewing the world?
 - * Who is our audience? What language are we using?
 - * What culture(s) do we come from?
 - * What's our writing style?

Sensemaking by the analysis team ("us")

How might these apply to the FLA Team?

- 5. Ongoing
- 6. Focused on and by extracted cues
 - * What kinds of details are we noticing?
 - * What do we put in the timeline?
 - * Where do we start and stop the story?
- 7. Driven by plausibility rather than accuracy
 - * How detailed do we get?
 - * What story makes this make sense?

Sensemaking by the analysis team ("us")

Part II

Interviewing

“Us” Making Sense with “Them”

Opportunities for Learning in the Interview Process

“Us” making sense with “them” in interviews

Team Agreements

*** Group Interviews**

- * Tactics
- * Group dynamics

*** Individual Interviews**

- * Workplace, organizational, cultural setting
- * FLA as cultural inquiry
 - * “Mosaic” of individual perspectives

“Us” making sense with “them” in interviews

Team Agreements

- * Who will we be in our interviews?
 - * “Miners” or “Travelers”?
- * What are our ground rules for interviewing?
 - * Are our interviews “confidential”?

Interrogation
~Miner~

Therapeutic
~Traveler~

“Us” making sense with “them” in interviews

Team Agreements, cont’d.

- * Who to interview and when? (order)
 - * Crew roster
 - * Crew availability
- * Where will we conduct the interviews?
 - * Private setting
 - * Minimize distractions

“Us” making sense with “them” in interviews

Team Agreements, cont'd.

- * How will we conduct our interviews?
 - * Individually or in pairs
 - * Who will be paired with whom?
- * What is our agreement for taking notes?
 - * Issue of “witness statements”

“Us” making sense with “them” in interviews

Interview Process

- A. Introductions
 - * Rapport, trust
 - * “Baseline” of behaviors
- B. Preview *what will happen in interview*
 - * Reinforce spirit of FLA
 - * Time estimate
 - * Note taking

“Us” making sense with “them” in interviews

Note-taking suggestions

- * Right hand / Left hand column
 - * Right hand is what is said in conversation
 - * Left hand is what I'm thinking / the sense that I'm making *right then*
- * Type up notes right away (you keep LH)
- * Compare with co-interviewer
 - * Create a composite

"Us" making sense with "them" in interviews

Interview Process

A. Intros B. Preview

C. Elicit the narrative

How does the story look from the point of view of this participant?

- * Open ended questions
 - * "Help us understand...."
 - * "Take us back to..."

"Active listening"

- * *Paraphrase back*
- * *Name emotions to clarify them*
- * *Avoid:*
 - * *Interrupting (use LH)*
 - * *judging*
 - * *offering advice*

"Us" making sense with "them" in interviews

Interview Process

A. Intros B. Preview C, Narrative

D. Circle back

- * Questions you noted

E. Wrap-up

- * Reinforce non-punitive
 - * "Best outcome?"
- * Summarize topics
- * Open for follow-up
 - * Cell numbers
- * Any questions for us?

"Traveler" stance

- * *Help me understand...*
- * *Why would...*
- * *Avoid:*
 - * *traps/gotcha questions*
 - * *criticism*
- * *Name discomfort*
 - * *I noticed that you seem...*
 - * *Would it be accurate to say that...*

"Us" making sense with "them" in interviews

Dilemma

What do you do if you believe the participant is withholding information or lying?

FLA as Cultural Intervention

- * Interview as an opportunity to demonstrate the spirit of the FLA
- * Non punitive
- * Confidential
- * Truly interested in learning

"Us" making sense with "them" in interviews

Interviewing Activity

- * Each Table
 - * 1 interviewee
 - * 1-2 interviewers
 - * Everyone else take notes