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LEADERSHIP CONCERNS: DISCURSIVE FRAMING WITHIN THE
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A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

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Dedicated to Poptack—
The man who taught me to be the best I can be, and that knowledge is power.
"Remember Elizabeth, nobody can ever take your education away from you."
Love you Pop
Hope your buttons are all missing…

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

Abstract

Small businesses are an integral part of the U.S. workforce. Leaders of small businesses are often presented with opportunities to communicate the changes and transitions that occur as a small business grows. This research assesses the process of leader sensegiving and employee sensemaking through the use of framing as a discursive resource within the context of a small business. A qualitative approach, capturing 27 in-depth interviews assesses the framing-to-sensemaking overlap in a small business setting. Results indicate that framing and sensemaking unfold as a process: either as a harmonious framing-to-sensemaking outcome or a discordant framing-to-sensemaking outcome.

Chapter 1

Rationale

Small businesses are an integral part of the U.S. workforce. According to the statistics released by the U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Department of Commerce, as of 2009, there were 27.5 million businesses in the United States—only 18,469 of which were considered large businesses (i.e., defined as employing more than 500 employees)—classifying the remaining organizations as medium-sized (i.e., defined as less than 500 employees) and small businesses (i.e., defined as less than 250 employees) (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2012). Indeed, small businesses in the United States represent 99.7% of all employer organizations, account for nearly 50% of all private sector employees, pay 43% of total U.S. private payroll, have generated 65% of net new jobs over the past 17 years, and contribute to more than half of the non-agricultural private GDP (Gross Domestic Product) (Kobe, 2007). Staggering statistics on the prevalence of small businesses are not unique to the United States alone. In fact, in the UK, small businesses account for 99.8% of the country's employment sector, and in Europe, around 90% of all enterprises are small or medium-sized (Hillary, 2001). These percentages are similar to many countries spanning the globe (Hillary, 2001; Bridges, O'Neill, & Cromie, 2003). Safe to say, small businesses are numerous in many economies worldwide.

Small businesses play a vital role in cultivating a healthy market economy. Small businesses create and provide new jobs, even in the midst of

recessions; they invite innovation and foster entrepreneurial spirit and creativity; and they create competition that drives future business endeavors (Hillary, 2001). Researchers attribute the large number of small businesses to technological advances that allow more flexible production methods, the propensity of large organizations that reorganize, downsize, and outsource their workforce, and increased franchising and self-employment opportunities (Hillary, 2001; Bridges et al. 2003). As vital to new job creation and creative innovation as small businesses have proven to be, they are not without problems that, on occasion, contribute to their demise. Statistics indicate a steady decline in success for small businesses over time: specifically, of 10 new employer organizations, seven will survive at least 2 years; five will last at least 5 years; three will last at least 10 years; and a mere two of the original 10 prove to survive longer than 15 years (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2012).

Longitudinal census data have indicated a steady attrition of small businesses: 69% of new employer establishments in 2000 survived at least 2 years, and 51% survived 5 or more years with little regional or industry variation across the United States (U.S. Census Data, 2012). Clifford (2011) found that the worst small business failure rate was California at 69%, followed by Nevada at a rate of 65% due to housing market collapse. Statistics also indicate that New Hampshire had a small business failure rate of 38% due to real estate recession. The manufacturing industry in Tennessee caused a small business failure rate of 36% and Colorado's tourism businesses follows at a rate of 33%. Conversely,

Clifford (2011) notes that the states with the lowest percentage of failure rates were North Dakota (67% lower failure rate than the national average), Vermont (47% lower), Iowa (40% lower), Wyoming (40% lower), and Kansas (39% lower). Because these rural states lacked economic boom that other areas of the country had, the effects of the recession were not as notable. North Dakota and Wyoming, specifically, were also able to rely on rich energy resources for economic support.

If industry and region are not contributing factors to the success or failure, why do statistics indicate that nearly three-fourths of all entrepreneurial endeavors fail? Researchers suggest that small businesses may be unable to handle financial demands (e.g., late payment of bills and access to loan finance) or adapt to a changing market (Hillary, 2001). Additionally, lack of human resources to tackle unforeseen pressures, such as environmental regulation or stakeholders' concern, consistently prove to be problematic to small businesses (Bridges et al., 2003). As a result, small businesses experience either stunted growth or failure more so than large organizations.

As a result, small businesses experience failure or encounter stunted organizational life cycle growth at a faster and more profound rate than large organizations. Organizational life cycle refers to the phases that an organization undergoes from inception, through growth, to success or failure (Mintzberg, 1979). Researchers have studied, in depth, the different phases of the organizational life cycle (Mintzberg 1979; Miller & Friesen, 1984; Jawahar, &

Mclaughlin, 2001; Hajipour, Zolfagharian, & Chegin, 2011; Churchill & Lewis, 1983; Quinn, & Cameron, 1983). Although the names and numbers of these stages have been widely debated, scholars generally contend that organizations undergo some aspect of a) birth; b) growth; c) maturity; d) revival; and in some cases though not all, e) decline (Miller & Friesen, 1984). These stages consist of unique strategic and structural aspects of operation that affect the outcomes of small and large businesses alike. These stages also suggest specific leadership characteristics that outline how carrying out successful operations entails aligning leadership with strategy. Adherence to the strategically recommendations within the stages of organizational life cycles, however, is not a panacea to ensure success for all businesses. There are communication problems that tend to present themselves at various stages in the life cycle of small businesses (Miller & Friesen, 1984). Studying communication within small businesses attempting to establish success requires the researcher to view small business enterprises as their own entity; small businesses cannot be viewed or studied as a smaller version of a large business (Bridges et al., 2003).

Small businesses have distinct features of growth patterns that make them a unique avenue of research. These stages include aspects of expansion and communicative patterns that differentiate them from large established companies that make them a unique avenue of research. Small businesses provide a distinctive opportunity for research because, unlike large and/or mature businesses, small enterprises that are not yet established are in the midst of

4

negotiating the various stages of a process within the organizational life cycle (Churchill & Lewis, 1983). Churchill and Lewis (1983) have identified five stages specific to small business growth. The five phases of the model are as follows: (a) Existence, (b) Survival, (c) Success, (d) Take-Off and (e) Resource Maturity. The Success stage contains a critical point (Substage III: Success-Disengagement or Substage III: Success-Growth) in the life cycle of a small business in which the fate of the company balances the fine line between stagnancy and growth (Churchill & Lewis, 1983). Small businesses, more so than big businesses are frequently net creators of jobs especially small business in the "growth" stages, because the growth stage is identified as being the best stage for job creation prospects (Bridges, et al., 2003). Studying the growth stage within the context of the small business is crucial to understanding the aspects of communication that comprise this phase.

While the stages of organizational life cycles have been assessed, investigations into small businesses' success or failure lack an emphasis on communicative contributions. An astonishing amount of research has been conducted that describes various concerns of interest to small businesses, such as integration of technology (Steinfield, LaRose, Chew, & Tong, 2012; Bell & Loane, 2010; Anthes, 2011), ways to incorporate international practices (Coleman, 2012; Han Ei & Levy, 2011; Finkbeiner, 2011), and even recommendations for finance and accounting concerns in small businesses (Stone, 2011; Benkraiem, & Miloudi, 2012). Minimal research has been

dedicated to the communicative contributions to a small businesses success or failure. This dissertation first outlines a theoretical framework that assesses the ways in which leaders can frame messages of unfamiliar events for employees, and discusses the ways in which employees engage in sensemaking of the unfamiliar events through the frames provided by leadership. The unfamiliar event in question for this case study is a small, regional staffing industry involved in a situation mimicking the third phase of Churchill and Lewis's (1983) small business growth model: Success-Growth or Success-Disengagement. After a description of framing, sensegiving, and sensemaking, this dissertation catalogues the trajectory of mature businesses from birth to maturity and the contingencies of failure as a means of establishing a foundation for which to situate a conversation about small business growth. After the discussion of organizational life cycle literature, emphasis on Churchill and Lewis's (1983) *Five Stages of Small Business Growth Model*, first outlines the phases and then specifically focuses on the critical point of Substage III (Success-Disengagement or Success-Growth) to establish a context for this research in a small regional business. This chapter begins with the theoretical framework of sensemaking, sensegiving, and framing before moving into organizational stages of growth.

Sensemaking

"The making of sense" – Weick, 1995

How do we come to know what we know? Furthermore, how can we make sense of the events and situations in our lives to sort through all of the details we

6

are presented with on a daily basis? The general idea of *sensemaking* is described by Weick (1995) as literally "the making of sense" (p. 4). Scott (1987) describes sensemaking as an ongoing creation of reality during which time people make sense of the situations presented to them by assigning meaning to events. Moreover, Scott (1987) notes that organizations are comprised of "coalitions of shifting interest groups that develop goals by negotiation; the structure of the coalition, its activities, and its outcomes are strongly influenced by environmental factors" (p. 23). In addition to describing sensemaking as an ongoing entity, Weick (1995) extends the properties of sensemaking to include the tendency of individuals to seek explanations of plausibility over accuracy, and to occur retrospectively. To better understand sensemaking, a description of the characteristics of sensemaking that are ongoing, retrospective, and plausible-over-accurate is as follows:

Ongoing

Weick suggests that "sensemaking never starts" (p. 43). Sensemaking described as an ongoing event means that the nature of sensemaking has no beginning, middle, or end. As a result, the sensemaking process is continuous. Often, an interruption is a catalyst to disrupt the continuous flow of processing events and instances. These catalysts for sensemaking can differ. One instance of sensemaking can come from shock—for example, members of an organization whose leader unexpectedly passes away may be left to make sense of the situation, and how business will carry on afterwards. Another example in which

organizational sensemaking can unfold as a sudden shock could occur during a

corporate scandal (Chandler, 1969). While some situations provide a shock, there

are sensemaking interruptions that unfold slower and in a more subtle manner.

Instances more common in organizations include emotions that capture and

sustain attention, for example, ambiguity. Ambiguity stemming from changing

organizational situations can manifest as a number of circumstances including:

goals that are unclear, multiple or conflicting; success measures are lacking;

multiple conflicting interpretations; and roles and responsibilities are unclear

(Weick, 1995). Often, and especially in a small business environment undergoing

transition, there are unclear, or unspecified goals, measurement for success is

absent, and job descriptions are ambiguous as businesses seek to become

established. As ambiguity about a work situation continues, employees will

engage in ongoing sensemaking about that particular situation to reason through

that which is unclear.

Retrospective

Weick (1995) also describes sensemaking as a process that occurs

retrospectively, in that "the creation of meaning is an attentional process, but it is

attention to that which has already occurred" (p. 25-26). Schutz (1967) described

retroactive sensemaking as the reflection on some lived experience, the lived

aspect also includes some experience that has already occurred. As a result,

retrospective sensemaking often occurs as an activity in synthesizing previous

experiences (Weick, 1995). An additional component of retrospective

sensemaking is the premise that "attention is directed backward from a specific point in time, (a specific here and now), whatever is occurring at that moment will influence what is discovered when people glance backwards" (Weick, 1995, p. 26). In short, Weick is suggesting that events that are occurring in the moment have the power to influence sensemaking about events that have already occurred to re-introduce a new interpretation to past events. The "here and now" aspect of retrospective sensemaking becomes important as changes in small businesses emerge and must be managed by leaders.

Plausibility over Accuracy

While sensemaking has been accepted as an ongoing and retrospective process, at times, even in the most ambiguous workplaces, the ambiguity becomes a familiar entity that employees learn to integrate into daily practices. Even employees with the most undefined roles will turn attention towards a novel entity in the organization if the new information interrupts the ongoing flow of sensemaking. Magala (1997) defines the attention to the new information or circumstances as bracketing. Noticing and bracketing are both components in sensemaking that assist in the compartmentalization process. In the context of quick compartmentalization, sensemaking occurs retrospectively as employees spend time "inventing a new meaning for something that has already occurred during the organizing process, but does not yet have a name, and has never been recognized as a separate autonomous process, object, event" (Magala 1997, p. 324). During unclear circumstances, especially when there is a high volume of

cues to be interpreted, instances that are difficult to categorize capture the attention of employees in a way that disrupts what they may have come to know as a routine practice within the organization, one which requires little attention (Weick, 1995). Sensemaking is not about undergoing a process to find the truth. In fact, Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2005) state that "sensemaking is not about truth and getting it right. Instead, it is about continued redrafting of an emerging story so that it becomes more comprehensive, incorporates more of the observed data, and is more resilient in the face of criticism" (p.415). As a result, employees may seek comprehensive explanations as a means of resolving ambiguity by quickly compartmentalizing instances that they may be unfamiliar with in order to cope with the unusual situations. The result is a sensemaking outcome that is plausible but inaccurate. The necessity to seek plausibility over accuracy is problematic for organizations as the plausible interpretation may be a negative interpretation. Leaders can preemptively combat the tendency for uninformed employees to construct negative organizational interpretations by taking an active role in the sensegiving, or managing the meaning of events for employees, through framing.

Sensegiving

Whereas sensemaking is the process by which individuals seek to make sense of unfamiliar events and circumstances, sensegiving is the "process of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality" (Gioia & Chittpeddi,

1991, p. 442.) In other words, sensegiving is a process by which an individual, often a leader or person with status, attempts to structure an explanation of unfamiliar events for another person, in a way that strategically influences the meaning of the situation. Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) extend the definition of sensegiving to include a leaders attempt to communicate that an existing interpretive schema for the organization is no longer appropriate. The leader must find a way to effectively communicate a new vision to assist in the sensemaking process (Bartunek, Krim, Necochea, & Humphries, 1999). In small businesses that are undergoing change, ambiguous situations may arise that allow leaders the opportunity to sensegive as a means of controlling and establishing a meaning for the events occurring "here and now". Sensemaking and sensegiving are both issues of language, talk, and communication. Situations, organizations, and environments become talked into existence (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). Framing has the potential to direct the "talk" that assists in communicatively connecting sensegiving and sensemaking.

Framing

"The language of leadership" – Fairhurst, 2011

Framing, according to Fairhurst (2011) is the language of leadership—a component in the management of meaning in which the leaders of an organization can strategically participate in sensegiving. Where a frame is a "structured way of thinking" (akin to the creation of a schema), framing is "the act of communicating a concept" (i.e. a leader pitching the schema to his or her

11

followers) (p. 1). Whereas sensegiving is the action of conveying leader-managed

meaning, framing is the discursive resource, or the actual communicative tool, to

assist in the process. Put another way, leaders' sensegiving through framing

shapes the processes and outcomes of organizational "sensemaking," or the way

in which individuals attempt to interpret and explain sets of cues extracted from

their environments (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007; Weick, 1995).

Framing Principles

Managing the meaning of a message or situation, through framing, results

in the management of impressions. Fairhurst (2011) suggests that framing is an

opportunity for managers and leaders to interpret meaning of events in a way that

aligns with, and benefits the organization as a whole. Frames provide managers

with a way to assist in helping followers make sense of confusing organizational

events and often, followers expect leader-created sensegiving as part of the

territory of being a leader. The process of framing, or managing meaning, is an

elaborate practice that can provide a leader with the opportunity to construct a

transferable reality while displaying communication competence. Fairhurst

(2007) suggests three principles that assist a leader in creating a successful frame

for employees: 1) control the context; 2) define the situation; 3) interpret

uncertainty.

Controlling the Context

In controlling the context, Fairhurst (2007) suggests that while leaders

cannot control the events that occur in an organization, they can control the ways

12

in which the events are interpreted by the employees (p. 2). The idea that the interpretation of an event is controllable allows a leader to assist employees in understanding how to process the event. For example, an organization may experience some unforeseen crisis—perhaps financial or economic which affects the organizations people. Savvy leaderships' framing response to the event has the power to overcome the negative circumstance of the event and allows a strategic interpretation to be transferred to the employees. For example, a leader that responds to a financial setback by delivering a message such as, "this financial setback is tough for the company, but we are not down and out. We can overcome this issue together," is an interpretation that can inspire or motivate employees rather than leave them to the uncertainty and seemingly incorrect interpretation of no message delivered by leadership in times of a crisis.

Define the Situation

Fairhurst (2007) suggests that defining the situation is more about defining the "here and now" on a way that can connect with other members of the organization (p. 3). Successful defining of "here and now" allows for leaders to relay a clear explanation for events that are occurring pertaining to the current situation. Additionally, defining the here and now establishes an opportunity for leaders to assist in sensegiving that can affect employees sensemaking processes. For example, the response of leadership in crisis can provide an interpretation for employees that allow them to become comfortable with the current situation and prepare for transitions resulting from some event. Take for example a company

that comes under new management and has an issue with scheduling. The organization is made up of many individuals that have worked for previous management under direction that is subject to change. If leadership can define the situation here and now (e.g., "I understand that there is some apprehension about new management making changes to schedules you have worked for 10 years"), a message from leadership about the changes and how employees can prepare can aid in successful transition (e.g., "The new schedule will be tough at first but in time, we can work together to overcome this transition."). These messages that define the "here and now" have the ability to create underlying expectations about how the new situation will likely effect future interactions.

Interpreting Uncertainty

Lastly, Fairhurst (2007) describes a leaders ability to interpret uncertainty as a continuation of defining the "here and now" in a way that that provides an opportunity for framing messages to give meaning to a situation. There are many situations, especially during times of organizational change that are undefined, anxiety-laden, and wholly uncertain. When leadership is adept at recognizing the employee's uncertainty about an event, a framing opportunity emerges for leaders to give meaning in a way that is beneficial to the organization. Suppose leadership has to fire a large number of team members for criminal activity. The remaining team members may not know the cause of the firing and as a result, may misinterpret the mass-firing as a sign that the company is in trouble, and by extension, their positions (as sensemaking is prone to plausibility, rather than

accuracy). A message from the leadership that directly addresses the remaining employee's uncertainty, and reassures them of their position can serves as a means of reducing the apprehension and by extension, creating a frame that is beneficial for the organization.

Framing Benefits

The previous three framing principles are a foundation for understanding the purpose of framing as a means of managing the meaning of events in a way that is beneficial to the organization. The following paragraphs display the versatility of framing in situations that assist leaders in sensegiving. Such tools are: framing as facework, framing as trust building, framing to encourage feedback solicitation, and framing to encourage appreciative inquiry—tools that enhance the communication competence of a leader.

The scope of defining what communication competence encompasses is widely debated. Some scholars claim that communication competence is strictly the ability of an individual to transmit information through talking or writing (McCroskey, 1982). While the transmission of information through talking or writing implies linguistic competence (Chomsky, 1965; Habermas 1970), other definitions of communication competence suggest, at a minimum, a dyadic presence (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). Spitzberg and Cupach suggest that communication competence is the ability to balance effectiveness and appropriateness within interpersonal relationships (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984; Canary & Spitzberg, 1987). Mueller and Lee (2002) found that the overall level

of communication satisfaction among subordinates increases if the supervisor takes the time to cultivate high quality conversations with their subordinates. Conversations considered high quality are ones that cultivate trust among employees, attend to the relational and rapport building approach to facework, and expand the types of talk that can take place between supervisors and subordinates. Ford and Ford (1995) note, that for managers, "conversation has the power to create, sustain, focus, and complete a change" (p. 541).

The following demonstrates how the following successful and positive framing tools (i.e., framing as facework, framing as trust building, framing to encourage feedback solicitation, and framing to encourage appreciative inquiry) can be capitalized on only by communicative competent individuals, or an individual whose communication is both effective, and appropriate.

Framing as a Discursive Resource

To demonstrate the versatility of framing, the benefit of framing as a discursive resource from a leadership perspective are presented first. Framing is the language of leadership (Fairhurst, 2007). Leaders that use framing as a discursive resource understand that the communication they engage in has meaning for employees as sensemaking in the workplace occurs. Potter and Wetherall, (1987) describe discursive resources as tools that make up the linguistic repertoire during social interactions that are used in different ways and under different circumstances and with different degrees of emphasis. Discursive leadership is an approach to leadership whereby leadership emerges through the

process of managing the meaning of organizational events through the use of communication-based tools (Clifton, 2012). Allen, Gordon, and Iverson (2006) explain the function of discourse by stating that "discourse analysis refers to the examination of both talk and text and the relationship to the social context in which both are created" (p. 46). In other words, the conversations that occur in a workplace establish a common practice of normative behavior within the environment (Campbell et al., 2007). Cameron (1998) suggests that what "people do in discourse overrides changes initiated at other levels" (p. 963–964). More than just erratic statements, discursive resources can be characterized as a network of related statements that reflect and reproduce frames, (or points of view) within an organizational culture (Allen et al., 2006, Clifton, 2012, Morand, 2000). Discursive resources also come in the form of special language, artifacts, norms generated by individuals that become accepted by the organization (Cameron & Freeman, 1991). One of the major benefits of discursive resources for leaders within a small company is the opportunity to foster supportive interactions and transmit strategic information naturally through conversation and storytelling (Rosen, 2006). As the leader, who may also be the founding CEO, there is a vast advantage to sharing the root of the organization in a personal way, such as storytelling, so that employees can benefit from his or her vision and guidance—an advantage that large corporations are not afforded (Rosen 2006).

Leaders that are managing their communication by sensegiving messages to employees through discursively framing are engaging in managing the culture

and the sensemaking process of the employees which can be beneficial during times of ambiguity. An additional context of framing is to understand that employees are not just passive receptors of a message, but individuals who may also be working to manage the meaning of their communication through facework. One of the ways in which a leader can attend to successful message construction through framing is to understand the role that facework plays in a communicative exchange.

Facework

Any communicative exchange has the potential to be face-threatening. Managing the relational component of any exchange requires attention to what Goffman (1967) considers *face*. Face is described by Goffman as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (1967, p. 306). In other words, face describes public image. Public image, further explained by Cupach and Metts (1994) describes the identity "performance" that people engage in during daily interactions as a means of both *saving face* while managing others' impressions and directing their attention to some set of behavior or characteristics. If a subordinate wants to cultivate a public image of being a positive, responsible, hard-working employee to the supervisor, his/her might request from a boss an increase in workload or work overtime with no complaint. That subordinate is performing a role to the supervisor by embodying traits (being hard working, positive, etc.) that are valued in good employees, therefore managing the

impressions the boss may have about that individual. Behaviors that embarrass, shame, or anger another person are considered to be *face-threatening acts* (FTA's) because they diminish the public image of that person (Goffman, 1967).

The performance aspects of face are what Brown and Levinson (1987) refer to as *facework*. Facework occurs when individuals encounter what are called face-threatening acts (FTA's). FTA's have the potential to disrupt the public image that an individual has established for themselves in a shameful or embarrassing way. Facework and face maintenance are not solely individual pursuits. Cupach and Metts (1994) note the difference between individual and cooperative attempts at face saving maintenance strategies by explaining that "out of *self-respect*, communicators are emotionally invested in the presentation and preservation of their own face; out of *considerateness*, communicators exert effort to save feelings and maintain the face of other people" (p. 3). In other words, while individuals naturally seek to preserve their own face needs, people as a collective often assist in the process of maintaining face in a given context. The cooperative, interpersonal nature of facework can be described by Tracy (1990) as "socially situated identities people claim or attribute to others" (p. 210). Facework is cooperative in that multiple people can engage in corrective facework when a face-threat has occurred so that the loss of face must be remediated. An individual in the throes of a FTA might, with the help of others, reclaim their desired public image (Cupach & Metts, 1994). Corrective facework encourages redressive action to be taken—redressive action being a strategy that

attempts to mitigate a face threat—such as engaging in tactful blindness of an incident, which entails courteous ignorance, humor making light of a situation, or engaging in self-deprecation to engage the focus, or apologies which address the face-threat in a way that equalizes responsibility (Goffman, 1967). Facework can be utilized during attempts to balance effectiveness and appropriateness as they relate to the diminishment of face concerns to supervisors and subordinates. Spitzberg and Cupach suggest that the ability to balance effectiveness and appropriateness within interpersonal relationships is a sign of communication competence. *Effectiveness* is defined as meeting the requirements of the task and *appropriateness* accounts for the relational management component within interactions (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984; Canary & Spitzberg, 1987, Nicotera, Steele, Catalani, & Simpson, 2012).

Framing as Facework

While framing manages the meaning of a message, individuals who attend to face needs during communicative exchanges manage the relational component of the exchange, as well. The framing aspect of face and facework can be seen in a multitude of ways during workplace exchanges that require attention to task as well as an effort to maintain the relational component of a message. The following common workplace scenario demonstrates the importance of a framing to mitigate face threats as a means of maintaining an effective/appropriate balance. Suppose a supervisor must deliver a negative performance appraisal to an employee. Because a negative performance appraisal has the potential to

embarrass, shame, or anger the employee, the way in which the supervisor frames the negative appraisal must be appropriate (i.e. the relational component) while still balancing being an effective supervisor (i.e. task; the necessity of giving a performance appraisal) (Campbell, White, & Durant, 2007). If the supervisor fails to frame a message with constructive feedback aspects during the appraisal (i.e., "you're doing well; there aren't really any problems"), the supervisor has not been effective. If the supervisor frames a message for a negative appraisal in a way that embarrasses, shames, or angers an employee (i.e., "your performance has been terrible, you seem to be incompetent at your job, and I am questioning why I even hired you"), the relational component of being appropriate has not been met (Gordon & Stewart, 2009). In this performance appraisal scenario, had the supervisor negatively framed the exchanges with too great a focus on the task at the expense of the face of the employee, the supervisor would have engaged in creating a face threatening situation for the employee, therefore deviating from a cooperative approach to another's face maintenance.

The previous hypothetical scenario is just one example of why framing in tandem with facework is important in avoiding a face-threatening message. A failure to frame a potentially face-threatening message can lead to employees who feel shame, anger, or embarrassment. Continuous face threatening behaviors, like shame, anger and embarrassment within the workplace lead to an increase in turnover from a workforce that may not have the tolerance to withstand a hostile work environment (Baron et al., 2001). Negative work outcomes like high

turnover rates or an underperforming workforce can have negative implications

for businesses, especially during times when small organizations are trying to

marshal resources towards growth. As a result, effort is no longer being focused

on growth; rather more time is spent trying to replace staff rather than directing

attention towards the growth of the business.

The previous hypothetical situation was an example of framing within the

context of a specific, potentially face-threatening conversation in the workplace,

the performance appraisal. Framing through facework can also occur in situations

not involving traditionally face-threatening contexts. Framing can work

preventatively in other circumstances to avoid placing oneself or another in a face

threatening situation. Preventative facework, the counterpart to corrective

facework, utilizes tactics that attempt to avoid FTA's from the start of an

exchange (Cupach & Metts, 1994). Refraining from addressing sensitive topics,

framing claims by hedging, and responding with ambiguity, are all examples of

ways in which a person can engage in preventative facework of self (Brown &

Levinson, 1987). An individual seeking to minimize potential negative

attributions that could inherently threaten their face might strategically frame the

message through use of disclaimers which are statements that request that the

listener suspend judgment about the speakers character (e.g., "I may be wrong

but…") (Hewitt & Stokes, 1975). Additional message frames that also work to

save face are apologies (e.g, "I am sorry to impose, but can you…"), using self-

deprecating or colloquial frames (e.g., "I know I am being a pain-in-the-butt with

these requests, but…"), or framing a request as a favor (e.g., "If you take a look at this for me, I will do the same in the future") (Morand, 2000). These instances all serve as examples in which framing is used to communicate a message that maintains both a relational and task oriented focus all while attempting to avoid a face-threat.

While face threats typically present challenges for all individuals engaging in social exchanges, they are especially common during the times of uncertainty that accompany growing businesses (Steinmetz, 1969). Because face and facework address the practice of attending to the relational component of message delivery, the content portion—the message, must be attended to as well. Within the realm of work, the focus of conversation is more often about task, rather than rapport. Understanding face and facework needs, provides leaders with the advantage of creating better frames when dealing with the relational component of communicative exchanges.

Leaders that attend to employee face needs while they frame difficult messages may be experience the advantage of fostering trust during those exchanges. Given the idea that attending to facework needs in interpersonal conversations can foster trust in hierarchical workplace relationships, as a rule rather than the exception, is an enticing motivator for leaders to frame messages (Mengis & Eppler, 2008)

Trust Building

To continue the advisement of fostering trust in workplace relationships, Graen and Uhl-Bien, (1995) discuss how truly cogent working relationships occur when feelings of trust are cultivated between supervisor and subordinate. Trust from followers is defined as the degree to which followers are willing to be vulnerable to their leader, in the hope that the leader will act benevolently towards them (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Leaders are involved in a plethora of complicated communicative and potentially face-threatening situations every day that test their ability to balance effectiveness and appropriateness, which in turn can affect followers' trust. Some situations that leaders engage in that have potential to deliver FTA's are in delegating tasks, explaining plans, directing, commanding, providing feedback, expressing concern, and venting frustration (Chemers, 2001). These commonplace business communication messages are what Campbell et al. (2007) refers to as "necessary evils." These communicative "necessary evils," if handled indelicately, without concern for balance between task (effectiveness) and relationship (appropriateness) can damage the faces, and by extension, the trust in the relationships between supervisors and subordinates. Again, the manner by which a message is delivered (e.g., using preventative facework strategies in conversation, recognizing when a face threat has occurred, and being quick to utilize corrective facework messages) has implications for relationships between supervisor and subordinate.

Framing as Trust Building

A leader can communicatively foster trust when the messages they relay to their workforce are framed to cultivate the relationship and de-emphasize power. Campbell et al. (2007) connect face management strategy with a leaders' ability to create a foundation for building trust in the supervisor-subordinate relationship by suggesting that "rapport management behaviors may offer subordinates clues regarding the degree to which managers are concerned with their interests and, therefore, whether they could be trusted to behave in a way that is beneficial to subordinates" (p.181). Bartolomé, (1993) identifies behavioral elements that supervisors need to establish in order to foster trust: (a) respect—does the leader listen to the concerns of the followers? (b) support— does the leader seem available and approachable? (c) fairness—does the boss give credit where credit is due? (d) predictability—does the leader react in a manner that is consistent? and (e) competence—does this leader demonstrate business savvy and professionalism? These qualities—respect, support, fairness, predictability, and competence—work to eliminate the focus on power differences.

Additional frames that leaders can engage in to de-emphasize power as a means of fostering trust between employees are demonstrated in a study done to influence subordinates' perceptions of trustworthiness. Whitener, Brodt, Korsgaard, and Werner (1998) found five behaviors that supervisors can engage in: (a) behavioral consistency (e.g., is the boss reliable? Can the employee count

on the boss to maintain a stable demeanor day-in and day-out?); (b) behavioral integrity (e.g., does the boss keep their word? Does the boss make moral and ethical decisions? Is there an agreement between the words and actions of the boss?); (c) sharing and delegation of control (e.g., does the boss invite the employee to participate in decision making? Does the boss display confidence in the employee?); (d) communication (e.g., accuracy, explanations, and openness within exchanges); and (e) demonstration of concern (i.e., necessary face management, consideration, support and respect for subordinates needs and wants). These behaviors are essential for a leader to engage in and embody to maximize the opportunity to foster trust among subordinates that lead to additional workplace benefits that aid in the success of the business to grow. Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Morrman, and Fetter (1990) argued that trustworthy leaders tend to focus on helping employees to achieve their goals and professional aspirations—positive outcomes that traditionally also benefits the organization. Followers whose work experiences are positive seek to repay the organization and leaders for these experiences in some way (Kacmar, Bachrach, Harris, & Noble, 2012). Bartolomé suggests that "trust grows from seeds of decent behavior, but it thrives on admiration and respect that only a capable leader can command" (p. 11). Essentially, leaders who assist employees in achieving goals can groom employees to take up the positions of middle management that can be beneficial in organizations that promote from within as the business expands.

Another example of framing as a means of building trust can be found when leaders engage in leadership sharing. Leadership sharing, a principle that allows leaders and members to play with the idea of an exchange of power develops when leaders feel comfortable enough committing to workplace relationships that minimize the status differences that occur in natural hierarchy (Kramer, 2006). Leadership sharing has implications for the method in which leaders and followers collaborate to make decisions. Kramer (2006) provides four examples of how leaders can frame messages in five different ways as a means of encouraging the idea of leadership sharing: direct strategies (e.g., framing a message specifically as a means of generating conversation or collaboration), indirect strategies (e.g., framing an idea as a question which poses less of a threat), suggestions/demonstration (e.g., framing a message in a way that provides followers the freedom to make adaptations in decision making), experimenting (e.g., encouraging an opportunity to have followers create their own solutions), and giving permission to lead (e.g., specifically vocalizing permission to accomplish a task). Without trust, followers may not respond to these strategies out of a fear of repercussion, which limits the creativity in decision making—an outcome that potentially has negative repercussions for an organization trying to expand their business. Leadership sharing can cultivate trust while at the same time allowing for a de-emphasis of power differences. De-emphasis on power is crucial toward organizational learning, adaptation and change in that taking the focus off of power dynamics provides space for true

feedback to occur. Clearly, there are benefits of trust in the supervisor-subordinate relationship.

Feedback Solicitation

Soliciting feedback as a supervisor and giving feedback as a subordinate are both challenging situations riddled with face-threatening conversations that create discomfort for both parties involved. Discursive resources, as explained by Allen et al. (2006) are often characterized as a network of related statements that reflect and reproduce particular points of view within an organizational culture. A leader who attends to the face needs of employees may instill in an organizational culture a confidence that employees will be treated respectfully, ethically, and consistently. A leader that consistently frames their messages and communication to meet face needs and foster trust may have an easier time creating a network of employees that feel comfortable engaging in negative feedback solicitation. Even the best circumstances—strong perceptions that the leader is trustworthy—is not enough to ensure that pertinent information from subordinates will be made known to the leader.

Leaders can only utilize the frontline worker perspective if such perspective is given—a feat not easily overcome due to employee reticence and fear of repercussion. Weick and Sutcliffe (2007) established that often the most accurate depictions of what is not functioning well in a workplace are most salient to the frontline workers in the lower and lowest status levels of an organization. Because status and hierarchy concerns can hinder upward

information transmission, employees are less likely to bring bad news to their supervisor at the risk of damaging their own face, which can have implications for job advancement, pay, and reputation (Bisel, et al., 2012, Bartolomé, 1993, Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007). FTA's, like the performance appraisal scenarios, occur not just from supervisor to subordinate, but from an upward communication vantage point, as in subordinate to supervisor, although, due to status and hierarchy differences, they are less likely to occur. Ploeger, Kelley, and Bisel (2011) describe the condition of hierarchical mum effect where subordinates, due to a lower status position were reluctant to provide true feedback to their bosses out of fear of retaliation. Additionally, within subordinate to supervisor feedback is the fear of disqualification which suggests that the person with the higher status has the divine right to speak at the expense of the person with the lower status. Being forced into a face threatening situation, fear of retribution and disqualification are just a few of the reasons for reluctance to provide feedback. All of the previous reasons contribute toward the perception that submitting negative feedback is a stressful situation that both supervisors and subordinates try to avoid. Failure to communicate problems can lead to negative outcomes for the employees and the boss. From a large scale perspective, failure to communicate problems adversely affects the organization as a whole and the ability to grow and succeed. However, if there is established trust between supervisor and employee, additional benefits can be found in the instances where

subordinates bring bad news to their bosses, potentially eliminating issues that would be problematic as the organization moves towards growth.

Framing as Feedback Solicitation

Bartolomé (1993) explains that while candor, described as frankness in relaying information, is an essential part of successful upward information transmission, there are limits to how truthful an employee can be when there are questions about level of trust with the boss. To overcome such a discrepancy, entrepreneurs can frame messages that encourage negative feedback. Bartolomé (1993) suggests that leaders can use framing in four ways to encourage frontline workers to speak up with negative feedback: (a) encourage disagreement, which entails letting employees know that they can voice negative feedback without retribution (e.g., "I want us all to do better as a team, so I want to hear your opinions about what can be improved in this workplace"); (b) create anonymous feedback loops that allow opportunities for employees to voice opinions with candor (e.g., vocally promoting and supporting an anonymous suggestion box for employees to contribute); (c) seek out an informant from certain individuals—top performers, for example, are more secure in their positions, therefore more likely to open up with feedback (e.g., "You're doing well here, what suggestions do you have that could allow others to continue to improve?") ; and lastly (d) never ask for information as the boss unless you can handle potentially negative information.

Weick and Sutcliffe (2007) discuss deference to expertise as a means setting aside notions of hierarchy in favor of soliciting feedback from lower status members of the organization who have both a vested interest and can provide strong first-person feedback. Cultivation of trust and de-emphasis on power, at times have the power to transform the culture of an organization from one where negative feedback giving is avoided to a culture where negative feedback is embraced. Framing Bartolome's (1993) feedback solicitation suggestions as desirable is tantamount to gaining the negative feedback that a leader should want in order to have the information necessary to facilitate better operations within an organization. The negative information is unlikely to be generated from subordinates who do not have an established sense of trust. Leaders who evoke a sense of trust in their employees cultivate an opportunity for followers to transform their work environment from formal and contractual to one that is more representative of a family—one in which greater allowance is made for communication that has the potential to be face-threatening.

Framing through Appreciative Inquiry

The focus of appreciative inquiry emphasizes what organizations do well. Barge and Oliver (2003) suggest that leaders can engage in appreciative inquiry by framing messages through the lens of what works within organizations rather than what exists as a problem and barrier for organizations. Additionally, Barge and Oliver (2003) consider that for appreciative inquiry to be considered successful, members of an organization must develop an affirmative and

generative competence that will allow them to think in terms of positive possibilities and solutions. Essentially, appreciative inquiry breathes life into an organization and the members rather than focusing on what could be problematic. The opportunity for leaders to frame communication through appreciative inquiry is to construct messages with a focus on what is positive which de-emphasizing that which is negative. Framing through the lens of an appreciative inquiry mindset serves to "strengthen a systems capacity to apprehend, anticipate and heighten positive potential" (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2000, p. 5). A leader can assist followers in the process of sensemaking from an appreciative inquiry standpoint if the leader can "accept that a willingness to explore ego-threatening matters is a pre-requisite for developing a more mature individuality and identity. Negotiating such identity change requires a process of profound self-questioning," (Brown & Starkey, 2000). Such an undertaking may require a leader to mindfully self-question and re-frame their leadership decisions as a strategy to prevent against bias and invite the opportunity for feedback (McKenna et al., 2009). Mindfulness, or the attention to both the ongoing sensemaking and sensegiving processes, requires that a leader actively "check in", refrain from auto-pilot leadership, and establish strategies that invite dialogue in followers (Langler, 1989).

The process of appreciative inquiry cannot occur without the mechanizations of a competent leader. Because appreciative inquiry focuses mainly on thinking in terms of positive possibilities and solutions rather than

problems, training employees to adopt such a schema requires communicative

competent leader. The process of mindfully seeking to reframe potential

problems as positive possibilities is a process that takes a skilled leader who

utilize discursive resources such as reframing (Fairhurst, 2011) or soliciting

feedback from employees (Bartolome, 1996; Ploeger et al., 2010). Leaders that

recognize the value of appreciative inquiry can use that framework as a means of

assisting members to sensemake the meaning of events through a positive

perspective.

Summary

The previous section explained a number of different ways in which leaders

can use framing as a means of managing the meaning of a message for

employees. Starting with the foundation of controlling the context, defining the

situation, and interpreting uncertainty, leaders can take advantage of all the

versatile ways in which to use framing in the workplace. Framing is an

opportunity for a leader to actively take part in the construction of a message in a

way that mitigates face threats, builds trust, allows for better feedback solicitation

outcomes, and establishes a platform for leaders to engage in a more

communicative approach to leadership. These possibilities cannot be realized

without a leader who is aware of the need to be communicatively competent.

In demonstrating competence, an individual has to attend to face needs

within the context of the situation and adapt accordingly. The consequences of

being communicatively incompetent can stifle the flow of upwards feedback from

employees, cease to establish and cultivate trusting relationships, and lead to high turnover—all of which has negative implications for the growth and success of a small business. Attention to, and enactment of competent communication has the power to build trust among employees, which can expand the types of communication through which a supervisors can engage. The benefits of trust in supervisor-subordinate relationships are immense and leaders who successfully frame messages that foster trust in the workplace can position the organization to receive better outcomes. Framing with the intent of building trust must take into account the potential obstacles that accompany status differences in the workplace. A communicatively competent frame is one that benefits an organization because the followers can buy into the reality provided by the leader in a way that translates direction, minimizes uncertainty, and fosters positivity— situations common in business.

Sensemaking, sensegiving, and framing have a place in small business, especially from the vantage point of the entrepreneur trying to become a viable and successful organization. Competence has a place in all facets within the organizational life cycle. Entrepreneurs need to be communicatively competent at the start of the business in order to assist employees in making sense of their new work roles (Starbuck, 1971); new-hire managers need communicative competence in order to handle the sensitive matter of leading first-phases employees (Tushman et al., 1986); and manage the meaning of events for employees as the company shifts and grows through transition (Churchill &

Lewis, 1983). The beginning of fostering communication competence begins with learning to effectively frame the meaning of events while balancing effectiveness and appropriateness in everyday business situations. Leaders that learn to frame well may foster a workplace and workforce that is trusting, more comfortable with increasing negative feedback, and more capable of utilizing a wider range of discursive resources—practices that lead to better conversation, relationships, and decision making outcomes.

Conversely, if framing leads to better conversation, better decision making outcomes, and better relationships among employees, then a failure to frame, and by extension, a failure to manage impressions, creates an absence of meaning management that, as a result becomes a negative frame. A lack of framework and impression management for an entire organization can result in an organization of employees who are forced to interpret leadership decisions on their own. Thus, a member of an organization undergoing a transition period in which leadership fails to communicate the direction of the transition has implications for the employees making up the workforce. One such example of organizational transition is that of the bimodal trajectory for small businesses in which leadership can direct the company towards the success-disengagement or success-growth phase The following paragraphs demonstrate the opportunity for sensemaking and sensegiving, as an ongoing process within small businesses, continually evolves as interruptions of growth force changes in events and interpretation (Weick, 1995). Growing a small business involves many

ambiguous situations where entrepreneurs must constantly attend to changing cues in their environment (Bird, 1989). What follows briefly describes the stages of the organizational life cycle and continue with an in depth description of the phases of growth that provide an opportunity for entrepreneurs to assist in employees' sensemaking process as the company moves through periods of transition. To my knowledge, a communicative framing approach to sensemaking and sensegiving has not yet been approached in the context of entrepreneurs undergoing growth in small business.

Organizational Life Cycles

Large, successful, long-term organizations do not just pop up overnight ready to thrive for the rest of their existence as a Fortune 500 companies. A fairly obvious statement, research indicates that, much like children, businesses need to develop incrementally, in stages that essentially start with birth (Miller & Friesen, 1984). Additionally, like children growing into adults, businesses need to be attended to and maintained in order to ensure survival. The interest in the process, function, structure, and form of how large, successful, and long-term organizations navigate the life cycle stages to maintain their status is not new (Gray & Ariss, 1985). Chandler's (1962) pioneer work into the life cycle stages of corporate giants such as du Pont Company, General Motors, and Sears and Roebuck focused on critical crises facing the leaders and the decisions they made to ensure survival. His longitudinal work identified the premise that structure follows strategy—as organizations move through the stages of growth, the

strategies and structures of the organizations' operations, as well as the ways in which leadership unfold, also undergo transitions that play a role in the success or failure of the company.

The five developmental stages for businesses unfold in a predictable trajectory—meaning the stages where different pressures and threats in the organizational life cycle unfold is fairly consistent across most businesses (Jawahar & Mclaughlin, 2001). Scholars have conceptualized organizational life cycle models to include a variety of features, although the number and name of stages differ slightly according to scholar. The generally recognized trajectory of the phases of the organizational life cycle for organizations that have reached large-business status is as follows: a) birth; b) growth; c) maturity; d) revival; and e) decline (Miller & Friesen, 1984). Decline is included because a vast majority of organizations do eventually transition into decline; however, not all businesses reach this phase in the organizational life cycle. An additional phase worth considering although not widely noted across the literature is craft[1] (i.e., a specific sector unique to the birth phase). Though the names of the stages differ, the ideas about what comprises each phase are similar across scholars. Table 1 outlines the different titles and phases noted by scholars.

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[1] Not widely recognized in the literature because this organization virtually never exceeds beyond birth, craft refers to the specific small proprietorships and pre-factory organizations that epitomize apprentice-ship styles of operating (i.e., pottery studios, barbershops, and service station, construction, and farming) (Mintzberg, 1979). These organizations, traditionally the smallest, are identifiable by their informally organized, one-group structure that has a natural, skill-based division of labor. Miller, (1959) describes the management style as having "little need for direct supervision, management is inherent in relationships within the group: either there is no recognized leader at all, or, if there is one, he spends most of his time working alongside the other members of the group on tasks comparable to theirs" (p. 244). Middle-management does not exist in craft organizations because there is very little standardization of work—stemming from the result of apprenticeship training (Mintzberg, 1979).

Table 1: Phases of Organizational Life Cycle

Scholar	Phase 1		Phase 2	Phase 3		Phase 4	Phase 5
Mintzberg (1979)	Craft	Entrepreneur	Bureaucratic	Divisionalized		Matrix	
Miller & Friesen (1980)	Birth		Growth	Maturity		Revival	Decline
Quinn & Cameron (1983)	Entrepreneurial Stage		Collectivity	Formalization and Control		Structure Elaboration and Adaption	
Jawahar & Mclaughlin (2001)	Start-up		Emerging Growth	Maturity		Revival	
Hajipour, Zolfagharian, & Chegin (2011)	Conception and Development (Courtship)		Commercialization	Growth		Stability	
Churchill & Lewis (1983)*	Existence		Survival	Success Disengage	Success Growth	Take-Off	Resources Maturity

* Denotes **Small Business Growth Cycle** Model

Organizational life cycle models are comprised of various stages, each representing a unique, strategic context that influences the nature and extent of resource needs and resource acquisition challenges (Hite & Hesterly, 2001). Before any attempt can be made to understand the resources, challenges, structures, and communication styles of small businesses facing disengagement or success in the growth stage, there must be a firm understanding of the intricacies of large and well established businesses from start-up to decline. An understanding of the general life cycle process situates a context for the characteristics of the small business growth cycle. For the purposes of clarity and continuity, the following paragraphs describe each stage of the large-business organizational life cycle using the labels applied by Miller and Friesen's (1984) model (i.e., a) birth; b) growth; c) maturity; d) revival; and e) decline). Each stage includes a description of the roles of leadership, the business strategy

during each interval, and notable communicative characteristics involved in internal operations.

Birth

There are a number of ways in which a company attempts to start operating. An entrepreneur, who seeks to organize a new group, express a new political philosophy, or promote a new product or service, establishes a new organization—hence the idea that a company is born (Mintzberg, 1979). Another way in which a company may begin might not even have a new idea; rather, an entrepreneur decides to establish an organization as the foundation of a previous, similar endeavor crumbles under decline or failure (called 'post-death organizing') (Walsh & Bartunek, 2011). Another organizational origin stems from the possibility that an employee, frustrated with their currently held position, decides to break away and establish their own operation (Walsh & Bartunek, 2011). In break-away cases, the involvement in previous organizations assists the founder in establishing a culture and deciding how to organize the economic and technological resources available (Walsh & Bartunek, 2011). In any sense, the new organization typically starts as a primitive structure that needs to develop organically (Mintzberg, 1979).

In the birth stage, organizations are small, young, and dominated by the entrepreneur, who acts as the main manager, as the new organization is attempting to become a viable entity (Miller & Friesen, 1984). A threat to the viability is that nascent organizations suffer from liabilities of both "newness"

39

and "smallness" and often lack critical internal resources that would ensure their successful survival (Hite & Hesterly, 2001). Start-up funds, cash flow, and customer acceptance are the most critical needs, because of the threat to organizational survival (Jawahar & Mclaughlin, 2001). As is to be expected, survival is a primary focus for businesses in the birth phase. Quinn and Cameron (1983) note a need for businesses to "attempt to obtain legitimacy and needed resources from the environment to achieve a 'survival threshold'" (p. 34). As a result of the survival of the fittest mentality, the energies of the owner are primarily diverted to holding the group together rather than focusing attention to primary tasks (Miller, 1959).

Role of Leadership

Instrumental to the birth of an organization is the role of leadership which is described in short by Quinn and Cameron (1983) as "one-man rule." Similar to the hierarchical patterns established in a vertical division of labor, the entrepreneurs make all the important decisions, coordinate the execution of those decisions by direct supervision, and dictate that everyone else carries out the orders (Mintzberg, 1979). The leading method of coordination and control is verbal command and communication from the leader (Walsh & Dewar, 1987). Because the leader is holding everything together, he/she is the central point of contact in this flattened hierarchy with the responsibility of framing the situation so other employees can make sense of the uncertain work environment. The social network of the organization is the same social network of the

entrepreneur—cultivated as a network of ties that exist on the interpersonal level (Hite & Hesterly, 2001).

Quinn and Cameron (1983) expand upon the "one-man rule" mentality that identifies leadership characteristics in the birth stage as "emphasizing deinstitutionalization; fluid non-bureaucratic methods of task assignment; directing with strong personal power; director has no permanent office; strong emphasis on creativity; no organizational chart could be drawn" (p. 46). Emphasizing deinstitutionalization and non-bureaucratic methods of task assignment help in establishing an informal environment. As a result, the informal nature of these entities in the birth phase also assists in constructing an environment that limits formalization. Entrepreneurs typically dislike formalization due to the limited capacity to fully explore innovative ideas, which in turn impede the likelihood of autonomous rule (Mintzberg, 1979). The entrepreneur, in an attempt to resist formalization, maintains a pulse on incoming information and tightly controls resources (Gray & Ariss, 1985). In these early stages, structural formality is discouraged; instead, entrepreneurs opt for a non-existent middle-management hierarchy. Because the distribution of power is highly centralized, the decision making methods and information processing relay is often limited and rudimentary (Miller & Friesen, 1984).

Communication Characteristics

Because the features of the birth phase factor around a small, young, run-by-the-owners establishments, communication in the early stages of the

41

organizational life cycle is marked by uncertainty pertaining to task and what actually comprises "work" in the organization. Successful leaders identify the uncertainty and frame messages that assist members of the organization in making sense of their basic work roles. Starbuck (1971) described operations in the early stages of organizations as follows:

New organizations tend to have vague definitions of their tasks. They are not sure which segments are important or necessary, and they are not sure how the tasks should be factored…As an organization gets older, it learns more and more about coping with its environment and with its internal problems of communication and coordination…the normal organization tried to perpetuate the fruits of its learning by formalizing them. It sets up standard operating procedures; it routinizes reports on organizational performance (p. 480).

With no defined job description, no precedent to model behavior after, and the energies of the main decision maker engaged elsewhere, the birth stage is rife with miscommunication. As Weick (1995) notes, sensemaking can result in plausible conclusions, rather than accurate interpretations—an instance that can be problematic for the members of the organization and the health of the organization as a whole. Additionally, there are few experiences that can be formalized; rather, the constant introduction of new situations causes a lack of consistency in communication (Engelen, Brettel, & Heinemanr, 2010). As organizations in the early stages after birth age and grow, patterns develop and

they begin to formalize their structure and eventually make the transition into a new stage more focused on growth (Mintzberg, 1979).

Growth

An organization transitions into the growth phase as an organization establishes a record of competences and as the company starts to maintain footing, usually after some initial product-market success (Miller & Friesen, 1984). The size and dimension of the organization usually expands and efficiency and productivity improve due to the accumulation of knowledge and skills (Hajipour, Zolfagharian, & Chegin, 2011). An example of the benefits of accumulated knowledge and skill would be in establishing and maintaining steady communicative patterns that were problematic in the birth stage. The organization is older, expanding from small to medium sized in personnel with a focus on rapid sales growth and accruing a higher volume of resources (Miller & Friesen, 1984). The changes in the nature of opportunity present problems for entrepreneurs with the tasks they need to perform to survive. Bhide (1999) suggests that as businesses assess and negotiate different levels of risk as they emerge from the start-up phases, to evolving or transitional business endeavors to large well-established businesses, they undergo different levels of uncertainty, investment requirements and opportunity for profit. Uncertainty felt in the birth stages about initial capital and resources, although not dissipated, has shifted to specific focal points. Hite and Hesterly (2001) suggest:

As firms move from emergence to early growth, they face three specific

resource acquisition challenges: availability, access, and uncertainty.

Resource availability involves a firm's ability to identify where needed

resources are available….Once a firm locates available resources, its

attention turns to access. Resource access involves a firm's ability to

acquire needed resources….The third challenge, uncertainty, deals with

how predictable the conditions are that surround a firm. Uncertainty often

makes access problematic in new firms because other firms are reluctant to

exchange resources with a new firm that faces an uncertain and hazardous

future (p. 276-277).

As a means of adapting to the challenges to resources, organizations attempting

to grow will continue to rely on product and service innovation and creativity as a

push for continued success (Quinn & Cameron, 1983). As companies move from

birth to growth, the leader must adapt to changing roles as well, and continue to

frame the transitions of the organization in ways that connect with members of

the organization.

Role of Leadership

Whereas the birth phase is characterized by an emphasis on informality of

form and function, the growth phase starts to establish a measure of formalization

to deal with added pressures. In the birth phase, leaders hesitate to delegate power

and formalize structures because the main focus is in ensuring survival. As an

organization increased in size, a coping mechanism emerges in formalization

(Walsh & Dewar, 1987). Simply put, the entrepreneur can no longer function in the "one-man rule" capacity that may have sufficed in the birth phase as the organization was attempting to get going. In the birth stage, control is easily achieved through commands and goal setting form the leader. Maintaining that one-man rule mindset of central control, despite the increased size of an organization, can result in the entrepreneur becoming over-burdened and over-loaded due under the weight of information processing and decision making (Mintzberg, 1979). With increasing numbers in employees, clients and products, command giving from a single individual is ineffective in dealing with many fairly routine decisions that could be better handled through delegation (Walsh & Dewar, 1987).

Delegation has the potential to alleviate a number of operational concerns. As the organization grows, problems arise in maintaining a reliable consistency of production and product (and/or service) availability, matching demand increases from customers, maintaining steady cash flow, and creating a formalized organizational structure pertaining to leadership (Jawahar & Mclaughlin, 2001). Entrepreneurs that are successful recognize the need to establish a functionally-based structure with authority delegated to middle-managers in department-head positions (Miller & Friesen, 1984). De-centralized leadership starts to emerge, procedures are formalized, and formal information processing and decision making methods start to develop (Miller & Friesen, 1984). Mintzberg (1979) suggests that "job specialization requires the elaboration

45

of the hierarchy of authority to effect coordination through direct supervision. Then as work becomes more specialized and the units larger, the organization turns to standardization for coordination" (p. 244). Formalization consists of structuring work related activities, along with specialization of activities and standardization of operating procedures—actions that alleviate the potential that employees are unfamiliar with what tasks are deemed important or necessary or how "work" gets accomplished (Walsh & Dewar, 1987). Formalization of work related activities (i.e., through standardized job descriptions or written expectations) can serve as a means of sensemaking for employees who now have a formal means of identifying their roles in the organization.

As companies continue to grow, the number of people involved in the daily operations continues to grow as well. A result of additional players in the organization is the additional resource base during times of decision making (Miller & Friesen, 1984). Establishing a board within the organization guards against catering decision making toward the whims of the entrepreneur; rather, the decisions become tailored to the consumer in the market that the organization is gearing products towards through the discussions and deliberations of several managers (Miller & Friesen, 1984). The presence of multiple shareholders may emerge rather than one leader dictating the direction of the company. The politics during growth operate on the ability of those in power (often a successor to the entrepreneur or a dominant coalition) to reform the decisions made during birth

into concrete policies and standardized procedures that reflect and support broader self-interests that multiple leaders entertain (Grey & Ariss, 1985).

Communication Characteristics

Where communication in the birth phase may have led to uncertainty as to the nature of "work," formalization in the growth phase can alleviate that uncertainty. As formalization is implemented, uncertainty reduces. Survival for organizations relies on the adoption of formal patterns of behavior, coordination, and the presence of more elaborate channels of communication (Mintzberg, 1979). The price of ignoring formalization as the organization grows comes at the expense of the entrepreneur. Maintaining informal procedures actually requires more energy from the entrepreneur. The employees, now more numerous and specialized, need to be informed of how their job description pays a role in the overall trajectory of the company and what that job means in the coordination of the company as a whole. The second stage in the Quinn and Cameron (1983) study found that communication shifted in the growth stage in such a way to allow "work teams to form; staff and community workers had high cohesion; and there was a missionary seal and dedication to the 'cause'" that was not present in the birth stage (p. 46). Characteristics of communication in this stage tend to be associated with a human relations model (i.e., informal communication and structure, a sense of family and cooperation among members, high commitment among members, personalized leadership) (Quinn & Cameron, 1983).

As the company moves into a more mature state with formalization and attention to administration as the emphasis, a shift starts to occur in the leadership (Quinn & Cameron, 1983). As the patterns of a more formal hierarchy and communication structure that emerged in growth become established, a decrease in rapport (i.e., less communication with the CEO/Entrepreneur) results as the flattened hierarchy of the smaller business becomes more vertical, with more middle-management stepping in a liaisons (Mintzberg, 1979). Leaders who recognize the necessity of an informal-to-formal transition can frame messages that assist members in making sense of the new rules or regulations that accompany formalization. As Fairhurst (2007) notes, the leaders successful defining of the situation "here and now" can play a role in sensegiving through framed messages about newly-imposed reutilization. The growth stage brings a lot of change, and a lot of structural and communicative negotiation as the organization makes the transition from birth through growth to maturity.

Maturity

Pending a successful company expansion, as growth rate slows, the organization enters into a stable phase of life: maturity (Hajipour et al., 2011). The phase of maturity follows growth in that as the level of sales stabilizes, the level of innovation also decreases. Rather than being a risk taking endeavor, maturity marks a larger, older, competitive organization that settles into an established organizational structure with the goal of becoming a smooth and efficiently functioning entity (Miller & Friesen, 1984). At this point, managers

may regard the company and themselves as successful, respected leaders and role models because of the stability fostered from the growth period into maturity (Jawahar & Mclaughlin, 2001). In short, the mature stage is the relatively flat period that follows the rapid growth period (Jawahar & Mclaughlin, 2001).The goal becomes smooth and efficient functioning.

Role of Leadership

Generally, in the maturity phases, business is good and leaders are no longer fighting to establish a foothold, or having to endure anxiety over unknown growth attempts (Jawahar & Mclaughlin, 2001). As a result, some leaders may experience overconfidence due to excess cash and the absence of critical needs. At other times, in the phase of maturity, leadership becomes diluted to a diverse board of directors due to circumstances such as the original entrepreneur retiring, going public with the company, or selling the business (Miller & Friesen, 1984). A team of professional managers may now be responsible for maintaining information processing and decision making in a more participatory manner (i.e., the manner in which managers make decisions together with their subordinates and subordinates are offered the opportunity to influence outcomes by taking part in setting objectives and deciding issues) established during the growth phase; however, the focus of information processing and decision making is slightly altered (Miller & Friesen, 1984).

At the maturity stage, companies have established a formal and bureaucratic structure—one that focuses most of the attention on budgets,

controlling costs, and earning adequate profit margins in a competitive market environment (Miller & Friesen, 1984). Leaders may also reframe their resource allocation decisions as gain domain and implement a risk-averse strategy (Jawahar & Mclaughlin, 2001). Efficiency attributed to formalization replaces innovation, thus requiring effective financial controls, and as a result, the decision making becomes conservative with the aim of not rocking the boat (Miller & Friesen, 1984). Decisions are made with intentions to avoid upsetting the status quo, meaning less responsive and adaptive outcomes with regard to market choices and consequently resulting in decreased performance from the organization. If left unchecked, the role formalization plays in establishing power and influence can contribute to organizational decline because efficiency cannot ensure a successfully operating organizational structure (Walsh & Dewar, 1987).

Communication Characteristics

Communication within the maturity phase is fairly predictable. Companies no longer have the burden of establishment and so leadership and employees have fallen into patterns that become expected. At this point, management teams are responsible for a majority of the decisions, due to the centralized nature of operations (Miller & Friesen, 1984). As a result, there is a decrease in the delegation of power in the maturity phase than had been seen previously in growth (Miller & Friesen, 1984). The necessity for fewer managers is a result of stabilized and simplified operations that no longer have the risk factor seen in birth and growth phases (Miller & Friesen, 1984). A pitfall to the stability and

50

simplicity of operations emerges as a tendency to fall into rote patterns of operations. If a organization is doing reasonably well, there will be a strong incentive to avoid tampering with any element of a tried and true formula (Miller & Friesen, 1980).

If management decides to take the option of outsourcing business overseas, the communicative problems that arise are that executives have trouble navigating how to manage, coordinate, and control the rapid growth and widely dispersed operations of overseas units (Millman et al., 1991). Human resources tend to primarily assist managers in coping with the difficulties that controlled growth, bureaucratization, and specialization of jobs during these periods of growth. At this point, management (and the attentive human resources department) is likely to focus on creating greater congruence among its various units and programs, both international and domestic (Millman et al., 1991). Regardless of the decision made by leadership—to outsources, grown, remain at the status quo, or some alternative, the direction needs to be communicated to the employees of the organization as a means of preemptively reducing uncertainty that comes with a change in the organization. The decisions made by leadership must be managed; otherwise leaders run the risk of employees plausible rather than accurate sensemaking about proposed changes.

Revival

On occasion, businesses that experience a strong period of growth can encounter a lag in business that leads them to the stage in the organizational life

cycle called the revival phase. Revival is not the same as the decision in the maturity phase to expand again in growth (e.g., entering into international markets). When performance declines, or new leadership takes over, the organization may choose to engage in a revival or revolution that seeks to re-align the organization with a consistently changing environment (Miller & Friesen, 1984). With the introduction of an unexpected element, either decline in performance or new leadership, the management of the meaning of these events needs to be framed for employees in a way that addresses the "here and now", similar to messages that would have been given in the growth stage. With transitions occurring, employees that are aware of the current situation (and by extensions, cooperating with the proposed changes rather than resisting) can assist in a way that is beneficial to the organization. The leadership can choose to embark on a number of transitions with the hopes of jumpstarting a stagnant organization, and a successful framework can potentially utilize the employees as a resource during that change (Millman et al., 1991).

The complacency that may have permeated a business in the stages of maturity gets rebooted in the revival stage as the company attempts to diversify their offerings to different markets (Miller & Friesen, 1984). The revival period in the organizational life style is marked with an increase in innovation in product, service, or market location (Miller & Friesen, 1984). A number of factors can contribute to the desire for management to undergo a companywide revival. Though not all older and larger organizations diversify and divisionalize,

issues of oversaturation in the market, too many competitors in traditional markets, or management boredom with old markets can trigger managements' desire to seek out new challenges as organizations age and grow (Mintzberg, 1979). Miller and Friesen (1984) note "there is a movement from one market to many reversing the stagnation of the maturity phase" (p. 1173). As the growth rate of stable organizations slows, they initiate to investigate innovative areas, which need new knowledge and skills. Therefore, stable organizations look for alliance partners from whom they know how to learn latest skills and access new resources (Hajipour et al., 2011).

Role of Leadership

The role of leadership is slightly more complicated in the revival stage because of the company's move towards diversification. In the birth stage, there was a strong leader-presence in the "one-man rule" tendency for business owners to control their own destiny and fulfill their own vision for the company. As the company continued to grow and expand, the energies of a leader simply cannot be directed to all areas requiring attention—thus the need for additionally leadership in the roles of middle management. As companies expand and grow, so does management until more formalized structures, hierarchy and chain of command are implemented to maintain control. Maturity sees leadership falling into established bureaucratic patterns that lack innovation and rely on competition for action cues.

The revival stage provides an opportunity for leaders, once again, to seek out the challenges that made them hungry in the birth and growth stages. This time around, however, leadership is now in a position where decisions are less based on the whims of the entrepreneurs "one-man rule" and more in the form such that "a group of head office executives use highly sophisticated control systems to monitor the performance of their divisions" (Miller & Friesen, 1984, p. 1173). Because the company has diversified and created different divisions to handle the increased territory and product, there is also an increase in division heads responsible for decision making and performance in different markets. Strategy-making power remains highly centralized with authority over operating decisions shifting to the division heads. These leaders have the freedom to oversee their own research and development, marketing, and production while still maintaining a united alliance with the new direction or directions the company is taking (Miller & Friesen, 1984).

Communication Characteristics

Combining the diversification strategy of the revival stage with the increased and complex levels of leadership, common communicative characteristics seen in this stage tend to utilize group strengths. The risk taking involved in using innovation to drive acquisition encourages companies to start, once again, requires leaders to form original thought, rather than rely on cues from competitors (Miller & Friesen, 1984). Communicatively, task groups are formed to analyze problems and generate different solutions on how to navigate a

successful revival. Decision making, at this point in time, does not embody the more lax structures characteristic of the informal conversations in the birth stage and even in some cases, through the growth stage. In fact, decisions are now made with conscious effort towards "ensuring that the organization develops in an orderly and systematic way… the most challenging situation is met by the most sophisticated structural and decision making orientations" (Miller & Friesen, 1984, p. 1174).

Decline

In the decline stage, business is still classified as highly competitive, but the diversification strategy of the business in previous stages yields to the return of a homogenized existence in the market place (Mintzberg, 1979). Because the organization is regressing to old patterns that preceded the growth stage, the opportunity to maintain any level of achieved success becomes limited. There are a number of reasons, both internal and external, why organizations enter into the decline stage that ultimately leads to organizational failure. Internally, and in the spirit of Darwin's observation, an over-emphasis on policy, stability, administration, rule and procedures drives companies to deplete the ability to respond and adapt to a changing environment (Quinn & Cameron, 1983). Externally, recession and economic factors reveal an overall stagnation as markets dry up, or there are too many like-minded competitors and organizations begin to decline with them (Miller & Friesen, 1984). Additional challenges leading to decline can be an unexpected change in leadership (i.e., the death of a

key leader), poor business investments (i.e., defaulting on a loan) or lack of

innovation in marketing (i.e., refusing to alter current marketing strategies)

(Chandler, 1962). These external challenges lead to a decrease in profitability that

can rebound if leadership addresses these concerns. Chandler (1962) identified

the case studies of du Pont, General Motors, and Sears and Roebuck as examples

of organizations that needed to address these external challenges or risk

impending decline. The leadership in these organizations took charge and

addressed the specific situations pertinent to each company problem.

Role of Leadership

There are, however, ways in which the problems that contributes to the

decline of an organization are ones in which management plays a role.

Sometimes businesses owners that achieve some measure of success enjoy a

privileged position due, in part, to their successful implementation of productive

(effective) use of formalization (Walsh & Dewar, 1987). The focus shifts to either

an inward maintenance of a privileged status, or to other external pursuits (Lewis

& Churchill, 1983). As a result, owners begin to pay less attention to their

organization's competitive environment and the trajectory of the organization can

turn towards decline (Mintzberg, 1984). In instances where management

contributes to the problems of the organization do not go unnoticed by

employees, and as a result, the observations of the employees play a role in the

sensemaking processes attributed towards the failure of the organization.

An acceptance of decline or failure to take action contributes to the

dissolution of an organization and ultimately, the death of the company. In the

early stages or revival stages of business, companies are more innovative and risk

taking, trying to get the trajectory of the organization back on a profitable track.

In the decline stages, leaders revert to the same informal and less sophisticated

information processing systems and decision making methods that characterized

the earlier and less organized phases of business (Miller & Friesen, 1984).

Communication Characteristics

Tensions develop during the decline stage that tends to be the most overt

and intense of the organizational life cycle (Gray & Ariss, 1987). Tensions

increase during decline due to the depletion of resources in light of declining

revenues and shrinking markets (Gray & Ariss, 1987). The organization may

exhibit the characteristics of a formal bureaucratic structure that still maintains

moderate differentiation and centralization as the company begins to dismantle

(Miller & Friesen, 1984). Organizational activity becomes reduced, as well as the

level of performance from staff (Walsh & Bartunek, 2011). As a result, leaders

begin implementing layoffs and shut down departments as plans to dismantle

progress—actions that rarely accompany a framed explanation for employees,

resulting in sensemaking that stems from uncertainty about job security. Often,

the result of layoffs and reduction of work leaves workers confused about what

they should be accomplishing on a day to day basis (Walsh & Bartunek, 2011).

For example, a coworker gets fired and the redistribution of work is unclear for

the remaining employees, resulting in similar sensemaking patterns seen in the birth stage. As a means of protecting themselves from the organizational change that is occurring around them, members hold tightly to the formalized rules that assisted in their initial outcomes of success (Walsh & Dewar, 1987). The logic is as follows: In the hopes of regaining organizational effectiveness, the members of the organization are likely to believe that following the rules is equivalent to successful performance outcomes. Members can fall prey to the trap of making, interpreting, and refining rules that are actually the catalyst leading to declining conditions in the organization's environment (Walsh & Dwear, 1987).

On occasion, members protest the declining conditions out of fear and anger. Walsh and Bartunek, (2011) noted in their study a collective endeavor of employees to attempt to rescue the organization as a sign of strength to both to "contest leaders' decisions and to actively resist their plans for closure" (p. 1026). When rescue attempts fail, a shared sense of demise and anger infiltrates the exchanges between subordinates and supervisors, as well as colleague to colleague communication (Walsh & Bartunek, 2011). Unless the organization undergoes serious strategic transformation and redevelopment, the organization will fail (Gray & Ariss, 1985).

Summary

The life cycle stages of an organization are diverse and complicated. Strategy, structure and leadership characteristics play a role in all phases as a determinant of success or failure. In the early stages, in an attempt to establish a

basic existence as a business entity, the efforts of those involved in these small companies is summed up by devoting their energies to survival. Leaders are the quarterbacks of the business, running point on operations, calling the shots on all decisions and devoting time, energy and personal resources to establishing a foothold—framing most of the messages that employees will use in the sensemaking process. Communication among employees in the birth phase may lead to uncertainty about job description because, frankly, the company's ability to weather the first few steps in building a client base is uncertain. Again, this uncertainty must be managed by the leadership in a way that is beneficial to the organization.

As businesses grow and develop, the structures, strategies and direction of leadership grows and develops as well. Leadership becomes more formalized as an organizational hierarchy becomes established and the employees, who might have experienced some confusion as to job description early on, may now have a more salient understanding about what their role in the organization entails based on leaderships' framing of the job description. Communication issues that once stemmed from uncertainty become ironed out as operations become formalized and stability, through the process of framing within the organization gets stronger. Growth allows for more profit and a business that survives the growth period moves into maturity.

In maturity, the organization, leaders and workers may become complacent as they settle into routine patterns. As a result, communication in these stages is

fairly smooth because operations and leadership are established. Formal structure

is established and rarely changes. Leadership is established and often will lack

innovation in adapting to an evolving market, which may trigger the start of a

decline. The failure to adapt may warrant a revival of the company, one in which

innovation is reintroduced into operations and leadership seeks to take risks again

by divisionalizing operations that previously did not exist. The push to

divisionalize can be a big risk and, if done well, can return big rewards.

Businesses that fail to revive often head for demise, where the organization

declines to the point that any attempt to save the organization will be in vein. On

occasion, the catalyst for a founder to start a new business may stem from the

demise of an existing organization, one in which some of the old values are

implemented and old networking connections are maintained—thus recreating the

cycle of business once again at birth.

Small Business Growth Phases

In order to make the transition from small business into a large, successful

business, organizations must first start out as small businesses that undergo some

aspect of growth. The previous section discussed the organizational life cycle of

large businesses. From an economic and managerial standpoint, small businesses

a) are defined as having a relatively small part of the market; b) are characterized

by an owner or part-owner administration that operates in a personalized way,

rather than through a formalized management structure; and c) are independent of

a larger enterprise that would impose control in principal decisions (Stanworth &

Curran, 1976). Small businesses, on the whole, have the opportunity to follow a similar trajectory through the big business organizational life cycle stages of birth, growth, maturity, revival and decline. Scholars have identified a specific segment of the organizational life cycle process that focuses specifically on the area of *growth* that assists to transition small businesses into larger entities (Churchill & Lewis, 1983; Scott & Bruce, 1987). Organizations that become big businesses most likely have met the challenges of the small business growth phases successfully. Churchill and Lewis, (1983) outline five stages of small business growth: a) existence; b) survival, c) success-growth or success-disengagement; d) take-off; and e) resource maturity. While these phases sound similar to the organizational life-cycle stages, the main focus of the growth phases catalogue the *progression of growth* within a small business that pushes a business through the organizational life-cycle roughly from birth to maturity.

Noteworthy is the critical point of the third stage in which business owners (for the purposes of this dissertation, entrepreneur, owner, and leader are used interchangeably) choose either success-growth or success-disengagement (Churchill & Lewis, 1983). The success or failure of a company is contingent upon understanding the nuances that differentiate this critical point. Scott and Bruce (1987) posit that as a small business develops, the movement through the five growth stages requires change, relying on a transition or crisis that serves as a catalyst for change to push the organization from one stage of growth to the next. For example, increased demands of product from customers may act as the

61

crisis that pushes an entrepreneur towards hiring additional employees—a response that, in turn, perpetuates growth for the business. Not all crisis situations are negative; however, due to the disruptive nature of crises, managers that are proactive in framing the changes in a way that connects to the members of the organization stand a better chance of minimizing problems (Scott & Bruce, 1987). In order to grow, small businesses must evolve their organization, incorporating changes to management structure, operational planning, control, and communication processes (Street & Meister, 2004). The following paragraphs explain each of the growth phases (e.g., Existence; Survival; Success-Disengagement/ Success-Growth; Take-Off; and Resource Maturity), highlighting aspects communication and crises that assist with the evolution within the small business organization.

Existence

Similar to the "one-man rule" leadership patterns common in the Birth stage of Miller and Friesen's (1984) organizational life cycle stages model, the do-it-yourself mentality prevails in the Existence stage of Churchill and Lewis's (1983) organizational growth model. The entrepreneur *is* the business, and as a result, performs all the important tasks, provides the energy, direction and, with the assistance, at times, of relatives and friends, capital (Scott & Bruce, 1987). The organization is basic—restaurants and retail stores to high technology manufacturers that have yet to stabilize either production or product quality, with the owner involved in every aspect of the business including direct supervision of

subordinates, and high opportunities for sensegiving (Churchill & Lewis, 1983).

Entrepreneurs are preoccupied in answering the following questions: "Can we get

enough customers, deliver our products, and provide services well enough to

become a viable business?" and "Can we expand from that one key customer or

pilot production process to a much broader sales base?" and "Do we have enough

money to cover the considerable cash demands of this start-up phase?" (Churchill

& Lewis, 1983, p. 32). Again, similar to the strategy in Miller and Friesen's

(1983) model, an established system and formal planning is minimal to

nonexistent—the one and only objective is for the organization to remain alive.

With regards to resources, entrepreneurs tend to rely on familial ties as a means

of gaining the key resources, both in personnel and in capital, needed to establish

firm viability (Larson & Starr, 1993).

Communication

Small businesses, especially those in the early stages are typically

characterized by a flattened organizational hierarchy characterized by close

proximity to coworkers. Often, the relationship between the entrepreneur and the

employees is familial (Steinmetz, 1969). The informality of such relationships

contribute to effective communication practices and are often carried out face-to-

face as the situation warrants rather than through regularly scheduled meetings,

formalized status reports, or structured briefings typical of larger organizations

(Fann & Smeltzer, 1989). The benefit for entrepreneurs during this stage stems

from the close-contact exchanges that provide maximum operational flexibility

(Street & Meister, 2004). These close contact exchanges allow the entrepreneurs to sensegive to employees in an informal manner, and allow sensemaking to occur as a direct result of leadership messages. As a result, such communication practices allow the owner to understand what is going on within the organization with greater awareness that facilitates growth.

One of the negative aspects of communication that arises at this stage is that first-time entrepreneurs who face a myriad of decisions may also have a high level of uncertainty due to inexperience (Fann & Smeltzer, 1989). At times, the circumstance is that the entrepreneur is somebody with an idea for a business, rather than an individual with leadership experience—a circumstance that leads to communicative pitfalls due to the lack of know-how in leading employees (Steinmetz, 1969). Such an instance might prove to be an additional challenge when tough business situations call for leadership talent over enthusiasm for entrepreneurship considering that communication competence in a leader is essential for maintaining a successful business. In a similar vein, Fairhurst (2007) notes that a framing principle is to interpret uncertainty for employees—a challenge that is especially difficult if the leader his/herself is facing uncertainty about how to lead.

Crisis

Statistically, due to failure, many companies in the first stage never experience the chance to grow. Those businesses that do grow must face a crisis that acts as a catalyst for change and growth that allows them to evolve to the

next stage (Scott & Bruce, 1987). In the existence stage, the crisis consists of: a) an emphasis on profit; b) administrative demands; and c) increased activity and demands on time (Scott & Bruce, 1987). Crisis of emphasis on profit lies in the ability of the manager to recognize new demands within the business for generating positive cash flow. Profitability entails a shift in management attitude and a concentration on new and different business aspects (Scott & Bruce, 1987). Administrative demands present a crisis in organization. Entrepreneurs must make a shift from uncertain management processes and procedures to a formalized and systemic record keeping endeavor. Managers that do not have the desire or skills to address these requirements in this stage may choose to ignore detailed book keeping at the expense of the company's existence (Scott & Bruce, 1987). Lastly, increased activity and time constraints demand that successful managers learn the power of delegation. As a result, bottlenecking and confusion diminishes because the structure of organization has changed or adapted, enabling the organization to broach survival status (Scott & Bruce, 1987).

Many entrepreneurs fail to adapt or frame the different crises that arise in a way that meaningfully connects to members of the organization. Problematic internal communication could complicate an already precarious business situation if not resolved. As a result, a lack of sufficient customer acceptance or product capability causes entrepreneurs to close the business when the start-up capital runs out. Entrepreneurs during this phase, if they fail, tend to lose on average 44% of their savings (Steinmetz, 1969). On occasion, entrepreneurs choose to

sell the business for its asset value. Still in other cases, the demand on the entrepreneurs' time, finances, and energy drive the decision to quit. Only when the owner adapts to the crises facing the business can a viable entity emerge. The companies that remain in business become enterprises in the second stage which is focusing on survival.

Survival

In the survival stage, the business has demonstrated that it is workable business entity due to at least minimally demonstrated competence from employees (Scott & Bruce, 1987). Entrepreneurs are now concerned with asking: "In the short run, can we generate enough cash to break even and to cover the repair or replacement of our capital assets as they wear out?" or "Can we, at a minimum, generate enough cash flow to stay in business and finance growth to a size that is sufficiently large, given our industry and market niche, to earn an economic return on our assets and labors?" (Churchill & Lewis, 1983, p. 34). Some organizations never grow beyond the survival stage. The organizations that do not expand beyond the survival stage are traditionally categorized colloquially as the "mom and pop" stores or as manufacturing businesses that fail to maintain a steady pace in getting their product or process sold regularly.

Communication

At this stage, pressure to reach potential dictates that companies figure out "the way things are done around here" and adapt accordingly (Scott & Bruce, 1987). Entrepreneurs establish efficient delegation in their management styles as

66

a means of coping with new demands. The owner may delegate through levels of command to "lieutenants," or new management that have the authority to take the original skill and transform that skill into something profitable (Steinmetz, 1969). The introduction of delegation and increased responsibility on lieutenants needs to be framed to reduce inaccurate sensemaking from the employees and to generate trust and reassurance in the newly promoted individual. An example of allowing others to explore different areas of revenue would be in tasking the new managers with finding a way to turn would-be waste into profit. A modern day example of employees that met such a waste-to-profit challenge is the luxury handbag retails, Coach ™. Coach™ Handbags utilized leftover fabric from purse colors that were slow-moving to sell and turned the fabric into a highly profitable line of patchwork purses (International Directory, 2002). The new management has the benefit of fresh perspective and innovation that could be essential if the entrepreneur decides to grow the business further.

Expansion within the organization changes the control that the entrepreneur has over the employees. Prior to this point, the minimal management problems yield to a myriad of issues such as "paperwork multiplies, personnel must be added to the payroll, promised dates are not met, and facilities get crowded" (Steinmetz, 1969, p. 31). At first, a few extra working hours on the part of the entrepreneurs are sufficient to cope with these problems. Over time however, unless the entrepreneur has the expertise and is willing to take on the

financial burden themselves, another person, usually a full time book keeper is

brought in to handle and control budgetary matters (Scott & Bruce, 1987).

The addition of personnel complicates the status quo that the entrepreneur

has developed already and the entrepreneur must attend to supervisor-subordinate

relationships—a communicative situation that must be managed by the leadership

(Steinmetz, 1969). Leaders once responsible for a majority of the sensegiving

(mainly dictated to employees) may take a more discursive approach to

leadership. A discursive approach to leadership—one in which the management

of meaning through the organizational landscape is articulated through

conversation (i.e., talk) between employers and employees can assist a manager

in creating a culture beneficial to the organization on the whole (Clifton, 2012).

When employees feel connected to their work, companies move past mere

survival and move into opportunities to thrive (Rosen, 2006). Attachments and

feelings of loyalty formed in the workplace drives employees to make a solid

contribution toward the success of the overall business. In order to obtain such a

connection and to achieve business goals, employees not only need to establish

supportive relationships on the job, but they also need information from their

supervisors about how their contribution to work furthers business goals (Rosen,

2006).

An entrepreneur who does not take an active role in fostering the

development of the workplace job descriptions, a common framing strategy, may

run the risk of a workforce that is dissatisfied (Steinmetz, 1969). Employees are

more satisfied in positions where reliability and accountability are expected than in jobs where expectations of the employee are unclear and leadership is less defined (Baron et al, 2001). As Grunig (1992) notes "employees are most satisfied with information that helps them make sense of their situation… by telling them how their job fits into the organization mission [and] about organizational policies and plans" (p. 558). Overall, middle-management wants employees who contribute to the success of the business and employees want to know how their jobs fit into the overall company mission. Achievement in either endeavor is a result of excellent employee communication in tandem with an excellent management process (Rosen, 2006).

An entrepreneur, who takes time to craft and articulate work roles that emphasize reliability and accountability from employees, engages in discursive leadership that, as a result, cultivates feelings of organizational legitimacy (Baron, Hannan, &Burton, 2001). The crafting and articulation of work roles as expressed to the employee is an example of an instance in which employees are made to understand what is expected of them, thus creating expectations of employee reliability and accountability stemming directly from a framework implemented by the entrepreneur and the instituted system of management. The implementation of such a tactic is especially important considering that testing for accountability is particularly intense during organization building due to the fact that employees want guarantees that careers within the organization are managed in a rational manner (Baron et al, 2001).

69

Crisis

The crisis that pushes businesses towards greater growth presents as: a) overtrading; b) increased complexity of expanded distribution channels; c) change in business competition; and d) pressure for information (Scott & Bruce, 1987). Biting off more than one can chew is an adage commonly associated with overtrading. Overtrading is the inclination for entrepreneurs to force expansion too quickly before the business is logistically capable of handling additional demands (Scott & Bruce, 1987). Overtrading is not necessarily a contributor towards propelling an organization towards the next phase of growth because, if mishandled, overtrading acts as a deterrent towards advancement. Entrepreneurs need to make sure to maintain a steady growth rate that includes only operating at the capacity capable of a business in the survival stage (Scott & Bruce, 1987). If businesses stay within realistic parameters, the opportunity for controlled growth that will result in more successful transitions is abundant. The second crisis, increased complexity of expanded distribution channels, recognizes the same pitfalls that overtrading presents. The opportunity to expand geographically may present a temptation that owners are not feasibly ready to undertake. Managers that recognize this constraint and delegate accordingly establish better odds for success if and when the decision to expand becomes a feasible possibility (Scott & Bruce, 1987). In any case, the first two crises in the survival stage rely on strong leadership skills of the entrepreneur to maintain an appropriate pace in expansion.

The third crisis within the survival stage presents a change in the basis of competition. As new competitors infiltrate the market, entrepreneurs need to maintain an emphasis on differentiation of product or service to continue a competitive edge. Stretching the spans of control and acquiring new skills and financing parameters allow for new demands of business, which in turn lead to new demands on management. At this point, managers can continue to delegate or hire new employees to assist in meeting the demands that accompany the changes (Scott & Bruce, 1987). The last crisis arising in the survival stage is in the pressure for information. The previously mentioned crises will put a demand on the systems that are in place within an organization.

Entrepreneurs that create problems by trying to expand too quickly, or that fail to respond to changing competition and information needs, run the risk of burning out. Additional problems stem from a lack of leadership towards employees. Without sufficient direction, the entrepreneur exposes him or herself to the possibility that employees may become dissatisfied with their job, disloyal to the entrepreneur's vision for the company, or resentful the lack of direction causing confusion (Steinmetz, 1969). Another circumstance that could occur from too-rapid expansion is that the company may remain at the survival stage for an extended period of time, earn marginal returns on invested time and capital, and eventually go out of business when the entrepreneur gives up or retires (Churchill & Lewis, 1983). These businesses that have established

marginal enough economic viability may have enough of an advantage to ultimately be sold, usually at a slight loss (Scott & Bruce, 1987).

Success

The entrepreneurs who reach the success stage have a decision to make: do they keep the company stable and profitable, providing a base for alternative activities (Success-Disengagement); or do they exploit the company's accomplishments and expand (Success-Growth) (Churchill & Lewis, 1983)? The decision that is made at this junction has the potential to affect the communication outcomes for the rest of the organization and the successful framing of the decision is imperative to employee sensemaking. The following sections describe the characteristics of either decision of the Success-Disengagement and Success-Growth trajectory.

Success-Disengagement

Success-disengagement is the decision by the entrepreneur to stop actively growing the business in favor of maintaining a healthy company. Similar to the characteristics described in the maturity phase, many businesses that have taken this route have gone on, successfully, for many years maintaining the same pace. One of the primary characteristics of the choice to disengage relates to a measure of apathy within the current venture. Entrepreneurs who choose to disengage might do so as a means of making time to start up new enterprises, run for political office, or pursue hobbies and other outside interest while maintaining the business more or less in the status quo (Churchill & Lewis, 1983). The

entrepreneur can indeed engage in other pursuits because at this point, the company has earned a strong enough foothold and has attained true economic health, size, and product market penetration to ensure economic success.

The company at this point also has a track record of earnings that are average or above-average for profit. Provided there are no environmental changes that could threaten the market and that management remains effective, the company can stay at this stage indefinitely (Churchill & Lewis, 1983). The management that the entrepreneur implements, as well as the explanation to the employees, plays a key role in maintaining the status quo that allows for the pursuit of other interests.

Communication. As the business matures and the entrepreneur continues to disengage, distance pushes more power and responsibility into the hands of hired management. While the competencies of management must be at least moderate, the decisions of the entrepreneur to halt growth limit the potential for managers to hit higher individual career goals on a personal level (Churchill & Lewis, 1983). Indeed the main goal is not in pursuing opportunities to grow; rather, the main goal is in maintaining the status quo**.** The strategy in maintaining the status quo is linked to the way in which business is conducted. The main concern for entrepreneurs from a logistical standpoint is in avoiding a drain on cash in times when the company is economically prosperous, in other words, making sure the company maintains a financial surplus. The strategy in financial surplus allows the company a little leeway in balancing the ability to withstand

times when cash flow is not as prosperous (Churchill & Lewis, 1983). The focus is basic—basic financial, basic marketing, and basic productions systems are in place rather than elaborate systems focusing on additional profit. Conducting operations in this manner allows many companies the opportunity to maintain the comfort of Success-Disengagement status. Only if the economic situations changes *and* the company fails to adapt to changing circumstances will the organization fold or regress to a marginally surviving company (Churchill & Lewis, 1983). There is virtually no crisis propelling the company to new heights because the entrepreneur has chosen to avoid the exploration of new business outlets.

Framing Disengagement. The communication of the strategy to maintain the status quo is crucial to successful maintenance. From a logical standpoint, the messages to employees since the first day in business have centered on growing the business. As an entrepreneur disengages, the nature of work that employees have come to know no longer exists. Sensemaking about the changed nature of the workplace may occur as employees adjust to new management goals of maintain status quo. The message about the intention to maintain needs to be framed in a way that both connects with the members of the organization and is beneficial to the organization. Accomplishing such a message is difficult when the ramifications for the employees of the disengagement phase are limited opportunities for professional career growth and a working environment that is unchanging.

Success-Growth

　　The alternative to the success-disengagement stage is that of success-growth. The success-growth stage is the point in which an organization can make the strategic decision to grow beyond survival, viability, or sufficiency (Hite & Hesterly, 2001).The success-growth phase is an opportunity for the entrepreneur to consolidate the company and marshal resources for growth (Churchill & Lewis, 1983). Entrepreneurs focus on a few key elements in order to ensure that the basic business stays profitable so that it will not outrun its source of cash. One of those elements involves developing the skills of the current managers to meet the needs of the growing business. The second task requires recruiting a new workforce that is geared towards the future of the company rather than the current condition. The standard operating procedure may also be altered with greater emphasis on implementing systems attuned to forthcoming needs (Churchill & Lewis, 1983).

　　Communication. Training and planning become key components in the Success-Growth phase (Masurel & Montfort, 2006). Vastly different than the involvement in the Success-Disengagement phase, the entrepreneur is involved extensively in aspects of strategic planning and attention to building a solid infrastructure. The quicker an entrepreneur can establish consistent, coherent, and well-understood organizational operational procedure, the more beneficial the outcome for employees. Leaders working to frame the opportunity to grow can establishing a uniform set of practices and a coherent management process

benefits the employees in a number of ways. For example, organizations that invest time and energy into training programs that highlight organizational philosophy reduce turnover (Baron et al, 2001). Additional benefits from formalized organization-wide practices include the benefits of accelerated and simplified learning and an organization that can "more readily differentiate itself from competitors, helping to attract workers well-suited to the kinds of jobs and values the organization has to offer" (Baron et al., 2001, p. 961). If the move to continue growth is successful, the company advances into the Take-Off stage. If attempts to grow are unsuccessful, entrepreneurs have the option of becoming Success-Disengagement owners or, if efforts have been extremely unsuccessful, retreating to the Survival stage may be possible prior to bankruptcy or potentially liquidating assets in a distress sale (Churchill & Lewis, 1983).

Framing Growth. The trouble that leaders may encounter in framing their plans to disengage are not found in the success-growth phase because leadership will not stop growth. Instead, the framing issues in the success-growth phase center around the attention to current problems and the risks that accompany the push for growth. As Fairhurst (2007) notes, with the introduction of new organizational events, the context must be controlled in a way that resonates with the members of the organization. Characteristically, in the success phase, an entrepreneur temporarily turns attention towards fixing issues that currently present problems—a context that may seem like entrepreneur dissatisfaction or nitpicking over the current state of operations, which has the

potential to become face threatening. For example, a business may be doing well, but suffers from high turnover. That high turnover may need to be addressed before the business can prime for additional growth. A leader needs to frame this temporary attention to one aspect of the business in a way that can mitigate uncertainty for employees, build trust, and frame the situation "here and now". Additionally, an entrepreneur needs to be aware that an attempt at further growth does not come without risk. Businesses that grow too quickly, or without addressing current problems run the risk serve harm to the current success, or at worst, self-annihilation. These ongoing issues will need to be continually framed as the entrepreneur faces challenges that arise with new growth.

Crisis.　　　Because entrepreneurs in the Success-Disengagement phase prefer to leave the business at a profitable status-quo state, there is no crisis that provides a catalyst for growth. The crisis for growth will most likely direct the entrepreneurs' Success-Growth efforts. The most common forms of crisis in the Success-Growth stage are: a) Entry of larger competitors; and b) the demands of expansion into new markets or products. Similar to Miller and Friesen's (1984) discussion on the expansion from niche market to more diverse offerings, similar circumstances apply with this idea. As an industry develops, the competitors facing that industry become a more prominent threat, using economies of scale as a weapon, which puts pressure on price (Scott & Bruce, 1987). Smaller businesses starting to push into the market would be wise to trade volume for

margin—a move that forfeits market share but allows for greater product differentiation.

The second crisis is that of expansion into new markets or products. Again, there are similarities in this move to the strategy outlined in Miller and Friesen's (1984) discussion of expanding what an organization has to offer the consumer. The success of this endeavor lies heavily in the style of management and the ability for the entrepreneur to relinquish a degree of centralized power. Emphasis on the professional aspect of operations must be present as a cooperative expansion to diversity. Such a step means that the entrepreneur must trade in the one-man mentality and allow managers to wield power in their own areas of expertise within the organization—a step that is often difficult for entrepreneurs to enact (Scott & Bruce, 1987). If entrepreneurs are successful in the delegation of power, and the continual framing of the context here and now, the company has the chance to take-off with regards to growth.

Take-Off

The take-off stage, as the name suggests, is the point in which the efforts to stretch the managerial and financial resources have paid off—a pivotal period in a company's life (Churchill & Lewis, 1983). If the entrepreneur rises to the challenges of a growing company, both financially and managerially, the venture can become a big business. Typically, the focus for the entrepreneur results in attention to operation: "Can I delegate responsibility to others to improve the managerial effectiveness of a fast growing and increasingly complex enterprise?

Will the action be true delegation with controls on performance and a willingness to see mistakes made, or will it be abdication?" (Churchill & Lewis, 1983, p. 35). The successful decentralized of power on the part of the entrepreneur has implications for aspects of either sales or production. The people to whom power and control is relinquished must exceed the competency level sufficient for managers in the success-disengagement stage. Managers at the take-off level must be highly driven and have the skills to handle a growing and complex business environment (Churchill & Lewis, 1983). This workforce needs to be involved in the operational and strategic planning in order to continue the successful trajectory in the take-off phase.

Communication

Even though the most successful organizations initiate constant environmental shifts, such change can sometimes be abrupt and painful to participants, especially those who have been with the organization a long time (Tushman, Newman, & Romanelli, 1986). Upheaval through new management brings a renewed vigor that could be useful in aiding a business in the take-off phase. New management has the potential to bring a different perspective, a different way of working, and a different set of values and ideas about how the company should advance. With new management advancing the business into a more professional arena, politics are likely to become a focal point within the organization (Scott & Bruce, 1987). Employees that started with the organization may be staunchly committed to the traditional ways of work and may be

unprepared for the adaptation introduced by new management (Scott & Bruce, 1987). Conversely, newer management, hired on specifically in anticipation of growth (in the success-growth phase) may lack the sensitivity in dealing with members operating under a potentially different company ideology—an instance that may prove to be face threatening to employees who started from day one. In order to overcome the pitfall of contrasting values and actions, cooperation and collaboration is required on behalf of all members to operate successfully at this scale. Entrepreneurs who successfully frame the necessity of new cooperation and collaboration can engage in a sensegiving opportunity that may assist in the employee sensemaking process.

Another way to demonstrate entrepreneur communication competence is to foster cooperation from the first-phase employees by refining policies and procedures to incorporate blended values, to develop personnel to administer uniform training, to promote confidence in the accepted norms and beliefs, and to establish roles, status and sources of power (Tushman et al, 1986). One of the ways in which an entrepreneur within a small company can engaging in sensegiving to bridge first and second phase employees can be through the opportunity of storytelling. Storytelling is a frame that provides the opportunity to foster supportive interactions and transmit strategic information naturally through conversation (Rosen, 2006). As the entrepreneur, who may also be the CEO, there is a vast advantage to sharing the root of the organization in a personal way so that employees can benefit from his or her vision and guidance—an advantage

that large corporations are not afforded (Rosen 2006). The result of a framing-through-storytelling tactic is the simultaneous easing of tensions for second phase employees, and the reassurance of first phase employees that the values of the organization have not changed.

As a means of addressing the necessity of cooperation to new management, the entrepreneur can continue to frame core values and the original mission to the new management a means of promoting awareness and sensitivity to first-phase employees (Tushman et al., 1986). The results of a lack of cooperation can result in pushing the company back into the stage of survival or fail completely (Scott & Bruce, 1987). Other potential pitfalls lie in the newly hired and newly empowered management behaving in a way that goes against the mentality of what is best for the company. Newly empowered individuals, at times, run the risk of abusing the power given to them. The administrative elite enjoy a privileged position, in part because of their effective use of formalization. The focus shifts inward to maintaining elevated privilege and the promoted employees begin to pay less attention to their organization's competitive environment (Mintzberg, 1984). Entrepreneurs can keep such tendencies in check by continually framing the organization as one that, while successful, cannot fall prey to the unnecessary spending and attention to perks famous in large and established corporations.

Another example of enjoying the elite privilege at the expense of the business would be a manager that orders unnecessary office equipment of high

81

price technological gadgets (Steinmetz, 1969). Such an action detracts from the benefit of the business at a whole because every resource, both personnel and financial, is being geared toward making the business a stable success at a bigger level. Additional communicative pitfalls include newly hired and newly empowered individuals fighting amongst themselves for power, denying responsibility for mistakes as adaptation unfolds and even developing resentment towards members who have been with the company from the start (oftentimes the relatives of the entrepreneur) (Steinmetz, 1969). Again, a strong leadership frame of reminding the employees of the "here and now" can serve to keep power struggles in check and keep employee focus on the growth of the company—an outcome that is beneficial for the organization.

Crisis

The most common forms of crisis in the take-off phase are: a) the distance of top management from the "action"; and b) the need for external focus. Mentioned earlier, the decentralized nature of leadership during this time within the growth cycle of an organization necessitates a shift on part of the involvement of the entrepreneur. If the decision to grow unfolds according to plan and the business is successful, then they entrepreneur would have taken steps to back away from a centralized leadership role and give more power to the newly hired management in favor of a more professional operation. Having done so, the professional management team would, together, hold greater power as well as sway in decision making, which can dilute the power base of the original

entrepreneur (Scott & Bruce, 1987). This is not always the case but can be the outcome.

The second crisis pushing the business towards a mature corporation is that of the need for external focus. Similar to the problems with product diversification in the Miller and Friesen (1984) revival stage, the route to success revolves around the ability of the organization to focus on customer needs and adapt product and product offerings to meet those needs. Doing so maintains a competitive edge and extends the scope of avenue to turn a profit. The differentiation of product and service is actually a difficult endeavor to attain (Scott & Bruce, 1987). The reason for the difficulty is that intensified competition creates turbulence—an obstacle that can be alleviated by a proactive and anticipatory alignment on part of management (Scott & Bruce, 1987). If the entrepreneur, management and employees take the necessary steps require from this phase, they better the chances of the organization reaching the status of an organization with mature resources.

Resource Maturity

Similar to the Miller and Friesen's (1984) Maturity phase, Churchill and Lewis's (1983) resource maturity phase highlights the attention owners must place on improving the functions already implemented in the organization. Whereas Maturity suggests an organization that "made it" growth-wise, the difference between the two suggests that Resource Maturity is an ideal state for entrepreneurs gearing up to grow their enterprise. To think of resource maturity

as having "made it" is a naïve mindset. Though overcoming the trials and tribulations of the previous stages facilitated the arrival in resources maturity, the reality is that the company is still a growing entity, there still needs to be a focus on the operations, and there are still some key issues that management needs to face. Some of the key issues are in the areas of expense control, productivity, and continuing to keep an eye geared towards new business ventures and opportunities for growth (Scott & Bruce, 1987).

Communication

Entrepreneurs need to have worked out the situation "here and now" that accompanies the uncertainty of a redistribution of power so to provide employees with an accurate understanding of a potential change in power. At the point of resource maturity, when roles have been established, the company can then begin to focus on external aspects of communication (Scott & Bruce, 1987). For the first time, the organization may be more inclined to focus on offensive business tactics by way of establishing a marketing strategy that can generate business—a strategic decision that would be best implemented if employees are aware. The reason why this integration may be possible is due to the fact that, at this stage, the business finally has some additional capital that could be used on assets that are not directly necessary for keeping the business buoyant (Scott & Bruce, 1987). At this time, crisis determining another stage is unknown.

Summary

Churchill and Lewis, (1983) outline five stages of small business growth: a) existence; b) survival, c) success-growth or success-disengagement; d) take-off; and e) resource maturity, with a focus on the dichotomous direction of the success stage into the entrepreneur's decision to grow or to disengage. The phases move incrementally, with the introduction of crisis pushing the organization to through the different phases. Because the growth of the organization results from change resulting in crisis, leadership needs to control the way in which these crisis' are framed especially if the events themselves cannot be controlled (Fairhurst, 2007). Most businesses that start will not move to the second stage, let alone the last stage of resource maturity. However, the organizations that do move through the phases will have had to do so through the adaptation of the entrepreneur, and the successful framing for the benefit of the employees.

The prominent communicative contributions that are noted are aspects that pertain to leadership and the phases of growth for the leader that parallel the organization. At the start, in existence, the leader is the business and has a hand in most facets of organizational decision making and operation. Familial ties are heavy as the entrepreneur leans on such resources for personnel and finance. Formalization is lacking as entrepreneurs prefer informal face-to-face communication as a means of information exchange. Employee uncertainty about

role results in sensemaking to create the necessary know-how to contribute to the organization.

As the business steadies in the survival stages, the different pressures to relinquish some control affect the success of the business's ability to grow. If power is relinquished on the part of the entrepreneur, additional problems make crop up with subordinates who abuse power, and lack of framing can complicate the negotiation of new roles. If power by the entrepreneur is not relinquished, the risk of choking the growth of the business is a possibility. Entrepreneurs may also utilize discursive resources as a means of communicating changes in position requirements and informing employees of their contributions of reliability and accountability. Entrepreneurs who take advantage of the opportunity to manage meaning for employees can create the opportunity for better defined expectations that allow for smoother transitions during an uncertain time. If left unchecked, issues arise with employees regarding satisfaction, loyalty and avoiding resentment.

As the organization grows and becomes successful, the entrepreneur is faced with the decision to stay at the status-quo or marshal resources to expand the business further. Communicatively, the necessary steps to ensure success are a formalized decentralization of power and a focus on establishing and maintaining a clear and coherent organizational procedure as a training resource for employees. Doing so establishes the opportunity to foster leadership, cultivate a competitive foothold, enhance organizational learning, and delineate

requirements for the work force. Whatever decisions the entrepreneur reaches, the messages about the direction of the organization, employee job security, and direction of the organization need to be framed in a way that both connects to the employees and benefits the organization as a whole. If entrepreneurs make the necessary changes, adjust to the each crisis accordingly and adapt the quality of leadership, the business has the potential to enter the take-off stages and finally settle into resource maturity.

Research Questions

Statistics indicate that of 10 new employer organizations, seven will survive at least 2 years; five will last at least 5 years; three will last at least 10 years; and a mere two of the original 10 prove to survive longer than 15 years (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2012). This statistic indicated that the organizational life cycle is one marked with a variety of pitfalls and challenges that force a company to demonstrate the ability to adapt. The success of a small business does not rely on the fate of natural, organically unfolding events. Entrepreneurs invest time in creating a strategy that allows their businesses to flourish including attention to the market they will sell in, the people that will work under them, and the communication skills that will mark the characteristics of their leadership. The companies that reach maturity do so by balancing leadership, communication, and strategy so that the company maintains a position as a success rather than resorting to revival or fading into decline.

Before a small enterprise can attain the status of a mature company, a series of crises and an appropriate response occurs that propels the organization to and through growth. Companies that respond well to the crises facing them will traverse the terrain from existence, through survival, and into an area where they can be considered a success. At the point of reaching success entrepreneurs have a choice: they can attain additional growth as profit takes off and the company reaches the point where resources mature; or they can choose to be content with the success of the company and disengage from further opportunities for growth.

From a communication standpoint, there is still a lot to learn about businesses that are facing the decision between maintaining the status quo and continuing growth that are of interest to learn in furthering the literature on organizational communication. One of the known caveats to the choice of Success-Disengaging from further areas for growth includes the limited opportunity for employees to promote through the company. If employees are aware of the limited potential from growth within an organization, such knowledge might affect the way in which they communicate with their bosses, approach their job, or interact with their colleagues. On a similar note, entrepreneurs who have chosen to disengage from further growth, to pursue hobbies, to open other businesses, or to run for political office may have altered the messages given to their workforce. An altogether unframed circumstance, resulting from entrepreneur uncertainty, has the potential to be even worse that

the choice to disengage or to grow—specifically because the organization is left in limbo without a clear cut direction to either preference. Such an outcome can generate additional problems that evolve from mismanaged internal organizational communication.

Confusion regarding direction in an organization does not have to stem directly from choice. At times, the circumstance is that the entrepreneur is somebody with an idea for a business, rather than an individual with leadership experience—a circumstance that leads to communicative pitfalls due to the lack of know-how in leading employees (Steinmetz, 1969). A lack of know-how in leadership relates to the potential for entrepreneurs to fail in balancing effectiveness and appropriateness, disregard face threatening messages, ignore discursive resources, and negate the opportunity for building trust in the workforce. Given the possibility of an organization becoming stationary—one that has tried to marshal resources for a Success-Growth period and failed due to lack of leadership experience, warrants interest in assessing the communication issues that may have accompanied failure in the following research question:

RQ1: What are the messages given by leaders of a small business to employees as they manage the issues of organizational stability and growth?

RQ2: How do employees of a small business make sense of messages addressing issues of stability and growth given to them by its leaders?

These research questions segue into assessing the leadership messages within the organizational life cycle of a small, regional, business on the cusp of

the decision to maintain or grow. The opportunity to evaluate the ways in which

both the transition phase, and the decision between the two choices affects the

communication styles of the organization. Such an investigation offers an avenue

to contribute to the literature pertaining to the organizational culture, management

styles, and entrepreneurial concerns facing small business owners.

Chapter 2

Method

A qualitative method was used to address these questions. Qualitative methods are appropriate for the reasons of gaining thick description (Geertz, 1988) which allows the researcher to collect an abundance of concrete detail about both the organization and the participants. Additionally, the idea that tacit knowledge of a context gained through time in the field require the methods of data collection to be qualitative. In particular, I conducted an in-depth case study of one organization, Universal Employment, Inc. (pseudonym used throughout). The choice to choose one organization was appropriate for the purpose of understanding leaders' messages and employee sensemaking in an organization undergoing issues of growth and stability. Identifying an organization that fit the criteria of negotiating growth and stability provided an opportunity to interview participants undergoing a uniform experience that may be receiving similar leadership messages within the same organization. Likewise, matching the leadership frames to the employee sensemaking was fairly consistent since the organization and the leadership did not change.

The Organization

Even in the midst of a recession, employment opportunities abound in the staffing industry, which serves as the context of this research. The staffing industry, which ranges from temporary to temporary-to-permanent placement, allows individuals the opportunity to work on a daily basis with some opportunity

for permanent placement with outside companies. Universal Employment, Inc. is a small, regional, temporary labor provider on the east coast. Universal Employment, Inc. was founded by two general owners in August, 2001 and has been in operation for 11 years.

In August of 2001, Universal Employment, Inc., founded by entrepreneurs Traynor and Ashby, entered into the market with a niche focus on unskilled and semi-skilled workers, meaning the client base consisted of construction jobs, golf course maintenance, light industrial, manufacturing, curbside pickup, recycle, electric work, dry walling, painting, scaffolding, newspapers, furniture store staffing, etc. The first dispatching branch consisted of a single location employing four people, including cofounders and owners, Traynor and Ashby. In November of 2001, three months after establishing the first branch, Universal Employment, Inc. expanded to another branch totaling eight employees. Universal Employment, Inc. decided to open a sister company, Garbage Pickup, Inc. to handle steepening demands in one specific area of waste collection. One year after opening, Universal Employment, Inc. had grown to four branches with 15 employees. Two years after first starting in business, Universal Employment, Inc. decided to open an additional company, Property Holdings, Inc. primarily focusing on real estate so that they could buy buildings to support the branches that were opening at a steady pace. In 2004, after the opening of six total branches, the demand for space and personnel dictated the decision to establish an official corporate office totaling 21 employees, as well as the need for a larger

corporate office, staffing more employees predicated the opening of the current corporate office employing nine people formalized HR department and Safety Director.

In 2005, due to skyrocketing prices for tools used to service the jobs, Traynor and Ashby decided to open another sister company, Tool Providers, Inc. so that they could continue to service their current jobs as well as compete in the market for additional clients to supply. During this time, two more branches had been established and were operating successfully, totaling 30 employees.

By 2007, the total number of branches reached 12, including the first out of state branch, employing a totally of 42 employees. In early 2009, Universal Employment, Inc. met with their first real failure. Due to a slump in the construction industry, coupled with a failure to hire and retain competent managers, two of the branches needed to be closed. One branch completely shut down operations and the other merged into a nearby office space that had not felt as drastic of an effect in declining business. By the end of 2010, business had picked up again, incurring an additional three branches.

In early 2011, Universal Employment, Inc. diversified their business and opened a Clerical/Professional division. Whereas the previous market specialized in a semi-skilled to unskilled workforce, the Clerical/Professional division focused on finding temporary-to-permanent positions in placed of administration, receptionist positions, light industrial management, and even placement for chemists and other technical specialists. This division opening segued into

Universal Employment, Inc. hiring an additional crop of employees, totaling 52, solely dedicated to sales in 2011. The repercussions of this decision provided the opportunity for four VOP (Vendor-On-Premise) branches to open. VOP's are permanent dispatching operations located on the property of a consistent client that requests a large number of workers every day. The next move, in 2012 towards diversification was to branch into the Hospitality Division, which entails placing people in positions such as food service, event staff, bartenders, housekeeping service, etc.

After 11 years, Universal Employment, Inc. has stopped growing at 14 branches total (9 Dispatching, 4 VOP offices, and one corporate office) with 54 employees, nine of whom are corporate employees. Recently, the CEO, Traynor, informed me of stationary growth, extremely high turnover, cash-flow problems, and overall decreased morale among the workforce. This information warranted an interest in this organization. It appears that the organization is facing a decision regarding the Success-Disengagement or Success-Growth direction of the company taking into account the place within the growth cycle and the current use of discursive resources used in supervisor-subordinate relationships.

Ethnographic Data Collection

Similar to the ethnographic data collection processes of Scott and Myers (2005), I engaged in participant-observation methods, including ride-along opportunities with employees, deliveries, customer maintenance activities, dispatch and payout rituals, and corporate processions, among the different

branches of Universal Employment, Inc. I collected demographic information about participant's jobs, ages, demographic, and tenure with the company. As a means of developing understanding about Universal Employment, Inc. and the daily activities, I engaged in informal, unstructured conversations with employees (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). I observed 50+ participant observation hours and collected pertinent organizational artifacts, including job description checklist sheets, HR-collected exit interview data, and a picture of the organizations logo and motto as a means of rounding out the data set. Ethnographic data that were collected were not analyzed in the data set; however, they did provide the researcher with a historical and demographic context to situate the research.

Interview Data Collection

In addition to observation, I conducted 27 face-to-face interviews with both owners, and then individuals from all roles in the organization including: operations managers, service coordinators, corporate accounting individuals, human resources representatives, salespeople, a driver, a recruiter, and former employees (*See Appendix C*). Interviews were conducted in private in a conference room at the individual offices of the employees during work hours, or in en route to another location of the employees choosing, specifically during deliveries and customer service maintenance visits. Interviews with employees followed a semi-structured interview schedule. Separate interview schedules were used for the Owners.

For the employees, I created the protocol by developing questions based on the areas of organizational growth and success or stagnancy, the role of leadership, and the role of coworkers in the daily exchanges on the job based on the literature review (*See Appendix A*). The first question is a general background question designed to both get the participant talking and to assist the participant with a question that can easily be answered. Questions 2-6 deal with the perceived growth and trajectory of the organization from the vantage point of the participant and include the participant's observation of the role of leadership towards growth or stagnancy. Questions 7-13 deal with issues of leadership and the communicative exchanges between supervisor and subordinate. Questions 14 and 15 reflect the desire to learn about the influence of communicative contributions of coworkers on the participant, including an opportunity for the participant to construct a hypothetical response to a potential new hire. The last question closes the interview by giving the participant the opportunity to inform me of any information they feel is pertinent to the interview.

A similar interview schedule was presented to the leaders of the organization with slight word modifications to fit the nature of their position of authority and an additional question (2) that deals with leadership philosophy (*See Appendix B*).

For both sets of interviews, follow-up questions were used to probe and clarify, including typical follow-up question, such as, "What does that mean?" "Can you clarify?" and "Such as (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Rubin & Rubin,

2005)?" Each participant signed a consent form, in keeping with institutional review board oversight. The range of interviews lasted between 32 and 108 minutes with an average of all interviews at 37. All interviews were digitally recorded and forwarded to an external transcriptionist to be transcribed. Interviews resulted in 460 single-spaced, verbatim transcription pages.

Data Analysis

I chose thematic analysis as a means of answering the research questions, and employed a constant comparison method to note emerging themes (Suddaby, 2006). Prior to analysis, I listened to each recording with the typed transcripts in hand, to ensure accuracy in the transcribed versions of the interviews. Corrections fell into two categories: name/place misspellings or gaps in the data due to inaudible recording (participant coughing, phone ringing, etc.). Transcription inaccuracies of names and places were corrected and errors due to inaudibility were reexamined alongside handwritten notes taken during the interview. 90% of inaudible accuracies were accounted for.

For the purpose of data reduction, I first sought to eliminate background conversation (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Then I reread the remaining data. I further reduced the data by paying particular attention to descriptions relating to the research questions, specifically comments relating to leader messages and employee sensemaking. I coded the data to identify emergent and recurrent patterns (i.e., codes). After the initial set of codes emerged, I sought examples where the data could be situational-coded into categories. Lastly, categories that

originated during situational coding were analyzed for possible alternative

explanations that could account for possible interrelationships among them

(Charmaz, 2000, 2002).

Chapter 3

Results and Interpretation

The data analysis process described in the previous chapter resulted in two major explanations of the interactions between the messages framed by leaders and the sensemaking done by employees. The two interactions are Harmonious Framing-to-Sensemaking and Discordant Framing-to-Sensemaking. The research questions position the processes as separate but the results of this analysis indicate that both framing and sensemaking unfolded as a unit. Therefore, the research questions will not be answered separately, rather, they must be answered as a unit—by describing the way in which the interactions were successful in producing harmonious results and the way in which the interactions produced discordant results.

In the following paragraphs, I explain the ways in which leadership framed messages about growth and stability as well as the ways in which the members of the organization made sense of leaders' messages. Because sensemaking is an ongoing process in which framing plays a role, this analysis first describes the way in which leadership engaged in framing, followed by the ways in which employees engaged in sensemaking.

The two ways in which leaders framed messages are: 1) Harmonious Framing-to-Sensemaking; and 2) Discordant Framing-to-Sensemaking (*See Table 2*). Harmonious framing-to-sensemaking represents framing situations consisting of instances where: a) Leadership engaged in sensegiving through some framed

message and sensemaking by employees aligned with the intentions of the frame;
b) Leadership framed a message and sensegiving resulted in a positive outcome
beneficial to the organization; c) Leadership provided one, non-competing framed
message that resulted in clear sensemaking situations for the employees.
Discordant framing-to-sensemaking adhered to one of the following three criteria:
a) Leadership engaged in sensegiving through some framed message and
sensemaking by employees did not align with the intentions of the frame; or b)
Leadership failed to frame a message and sensegiving resulted in a negative
outcome for the organization; or c) Leadership provided multiple competing
framed messages that resulted in ambiguous sensemaking situations for the
employees.

Table 2: Criteria for Harmonious/Discordant Framing-to-Sensemaking

Harmonious Framing-to-Sensemaking Criteria	Discordant Framing-to-Sensemaking Criteria
a) Leadership engaged in sensegiving through some framed message and sensemaking by employees aligned with the intentions of the frame b) Leadership framed a message and sensegiving resulted in a positive outcome beneficial to the organization; c) Leadership provided one, non-competing framed message that resulted in clear sensemaking situations for the employees.	a) Leadership engaged in sensegiving through some framed message and sensemaking by employees did not align with the intentions of the frame b) Leadership failed to frame a message and sensegiving resulted in a negative outcome for the organization c) Leadership provided multiple competing framed messages that resulted in ambiguous sensemaking situations for the employees

As a means of explaining the way in which framing and sensemaking are
a hand-in-hand process, the criteria for harmonious and discordant framing-to-
sensemaking explore the ways in which each work together to produce

organizational outcomes. Overall, harmonious framing-to-sensemaking yielded

outcomes that are *beneficial* to the leadership, employees, or the organization,

whereas discordant framing-to-sensemaking yielded *detrimental* outcomes for

any combination of leadership, employees, or the organization.

Harmonious Framing-to-Sensemaking

There were a number of examples of the way in which leadership framing

is successful in assisting employees in the sensemaking process—creating

harmonious leader-member expectations that are beneficial to the organization.

The following paragraphs demonstrate the way in which frames created by

leadership (e.g., Company motto and logo; artifacts distributed to employees) was

picked up by employees and repeated as a means of explaining and understanding

their roles and contribution to the organization.

Motto and Company Principles Framing

One of the features in every Universal Employment Inc. branch is the

larger-than-life logo, motto, and company principles painted on the walls in a

prominent location for anybody who enters the building to see. Essentially, the

design reads as follows:

Universal Employment Inc.
"We get the job done"
Expert- Value-Service-Price-Ownership
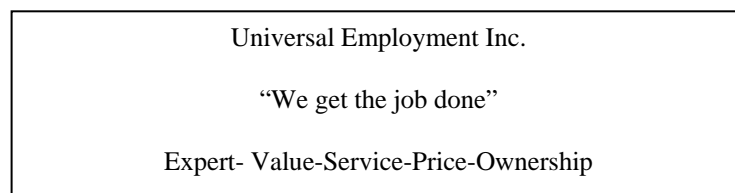
Additionally, the logo, motto, and company principles description is

located in three places in the corporate office: Once in the main entrance behind

the reception desk and then twice more in both owners' personal offices, respectively.

The idea to place the design on the walls of all the branches was implemented by Ashby, the owner responsible for operations, and is explained to each new hire prior to their first day of work. The goal of the display is so that the employees can enact the principles and apply each principle to their job performance. The following provides explanation from the leadership:

> My goal, as an owner, is to teach everyone to be an *expert* in the staffing industry. That's why those words are everywhere that they see on all their paperwork and everything they do… You give that service. [The customers] see value in you. You become an expert and if you just care about your customers, you can grow a good business (Ashby).

In this quote, Ashby is using the motto and the company principles as a frame in order to explain expectations to employees. His use of the principle words expert, service, and value demonstrate both the importance and the meaning these words have for this company. He references the repetition of the messages by indicating that the same motto is framed on the company note pads, business cards, letterhead, and walls of branches to serve as a constant reminder for employees. Traynor, the other owner of this organization describes the logo and motto in a way that also directs attention to framing the expectations of the employees through the needs of the customers:

'We get the job done'. This idea breaks down what's important. Other labor pools don't get the job done...I look at it like I expect my employees to do the extra work, and follow through and get the ticket filled *that* day. We don't want to be like the other companies who say "we'll do it tomorrow." We want to provide the customer good service by filling the order. It lets our people know what's expected of them. (Traynor)

Traynor's use of "we get the job done" serves as a frame that dictates standard practice in the organization of *how* employees should work. Employees in the organization know that the expectation of leadership is place people in jobs that day. His words also serve to subtly compare other staffing industries practice of not finishing the job. These messages, along with the repetition of the message on business cards, company note pads, and the walls serves as a leader-implemented frame to assist employees in making sense of the values and goals established by leadership. These messages also serve to establish leaders' expectations for employees in performing beyond industry standards as a rule, rather than the exception to the rule. The messages pertaining to the logo and motto serve as an example of one, uniform message from both leaders that outline clear intentions for the employees—a criteria of harmonious framing-to-sensemaking interactions.

Motto and Company Principles Sensemaking

The motto and company principles pictured on the walls of Universal Employment Inc., potentially have the same outcome as a unifying symbol. Of

unifying symbols, Cheney (1983) proposes that "an individual may come to accept the identifications that are shaped and suggested by appealing forms, such as well crafted statements of identity such as logo, or trademark" (p. 155). The following statements demonstrate how members of the organization make sense of their roles, and identify with leadership by mentioning the ways in which the leadership-implemented frame of the motto and company principles highlights growth and personal contribution. The Director of HR is a 36-year-old male employed for 9 years. He splits time in the corporate office and in the field and describes the state of the organization by mentioning the company principles; "We have the infrastructure; we have the model that Ashby has kind of put together. The *expert, value in price, ownership*, *service, price, and ownership*, is outstanding. If we build upon it, it can take us to great places." The Directors quote serves two purposes—first, the mention of Ashby indicates that the motto and logo is a leader-generated frame; and second, the Director indicates his belief in the motto, suggesting that the organization can grow if the employees capitalize on the principles.

Likewise, similar sentiments are echoed in the descriptions of a number of the operations managers. A 24-year-old female manager, employed for 3 years indicated: "It's a great company to work for. I mean you learn all the aspects of the business. You become an *expert*…. An *expert* and in this kind of industry and in general too." This operations manager is explaining the way in which she has learned about the business and become an expert at her position—a

104

sensemaking outcome that aligns with the intentions of the frame communicated by the leadership.

> Another manager, a 31-year-old male, employed for 2 years suggests:
>
> One of our values is definitely *ownership*, and, I appreciate that.
> There are a lot of changes and it's the nature of the staffing
> industry to start pointing fingers. I think—Okay, I am going to
> take ownership and say "This is what we should have done better,
> and what could I help my team do better?" Am I the best at [this
> job]? No. But I give it a shot, and do what I can.

This operations manager describes ownership by discussing the ways in which he handles issues that arise in his team. He describes the expectation of ownership as a catalyst for taking responsibility when the tendency is to find blame elsewhere. The idea of taking ownership for mistakes aligns with the expectations of a frame of accountability emphasized by the leadership. This quote also serves, in an indirect way, as a benefit to the organization. When individuals in power, in this case, an operations manager, reflects on his or her own contribution towards process improvement, the result could be beneficial to the organization—an outcome of harmonious framing-to-sensemaking interactions.

The previous examples demonstrate identification with the company principles regarding how to work. With other employees, the motto resonates as an indicator of how employees should work. Another operations manager, a 27-

year-old female, employed for 5 years uses the frame of the motto in explaining how she grows her branch: "How do I grow my branch? *I get the job done*." For this operations manager, the identification with the motto serves almost as a sensemaking panacea—allowing her to explain the more complex process of growing a branch (i.e., actually managing the people competently, passing audits, signing new clients) through a simple sensemaking interpretation that still aligns with the leaders frame.

District Manager 1, a 45-year-old male, who helped start the organization, discusses the skills he brings to the organization through the motto: "I never give up. I get a call from a customer late, and I tell them that I can get a guy there. It will take two hours but I can get a guy. *I get the job done* and the customer is happy." The use of the motto allows the district manager to make sense of the way in which he does the job. He suggests that even in difficult situations, he moves towards a solution that satisfies the customer. Customer satisfaction is directly noted by the owners as a link to the company principles of allowing the customer to see value in the employees—in the district managers case, because he filled an order that other staffing places might have let go.

These statements demonstrate the way in which employees have made sense of the messages created by leaders as a means of understanding their role and expectations in the organization. These statements also demonstrate harmonious framing-to-sensemaking because employees of the organization have used the frame to make sense of, and explain how the frame determines their

expectations for aspects or growth, and personal contributions. The process as a whole qualifies as a harmonious framing-to-sensemaking interaction because expectations align with the leaders' unified framing intention and the outcome both connects with the employees and is beneficial for the organization.

Position Description Framing

There are other examples separate from the motto and company principles that have the same effect of assisting the employees in sensemaking their roles within the organization based on leaders messages. An additional example would be the position description checklists given to each employee prior to starting work. Checklists given to each worker describe both their overall position in the organization and the specific job duties for which each position is responsible. All new hires are required to have each item (e.g., learn payout, cut checks, dispatch) "checked" by the direct supervisor before completing the training program. The checklists were described by Traynor as "a means of both protection and accountability. People need to understand what they are going to be trained on and these checklists ensure that they can't come back to us and say that [a specific task] isn't in their job description." Again, the purpose of this frame specifies leader intentions towards clear sensemaking situations, criteria of harmonious framing-to-sensemaking interactions.

In a frame that remained consistent with Traynor, Asbhy described the checklist as "a system put in place that helps this organization run smooth and hold people accountable." The creation serves two purposes: to remain

transparent on what is expected of new hires to ensure accountability, and to

provide a description that can mitigate role uncertainty for new hires getting a

sense of what the position entails. The position description checklists fulfill are a

unified leadership framework because every new employee gets the same

checklist applicable to the job, and the message intentions are explained as a

means of providing a frame free of ambiguity—a criteria required of harmonious

framing-to-sensemaking interactions.

Position Description Sensemaking

An operations manager is responsible for overseeing the training of a new

hire and is required to follow the checklist. A 27-year-old operations manager,

whose fantastic audit record promoted her to a training-improvement task force

suggests: "We have a checklist for all of our new employees that they first, on

their own, go through the checklist and then they come in and get the training for

each task on each day." The operations manager is describing the expectations of

the document as a means of sensegiving—in that employees who are newly hired

are expected to review the document prior to the first day of work. Essentially,

the review of the checklist acts as a component of sensemaking in that new hires

are given the opportunity to learn more about their role prior to the first day of

work.

A 25-year-old service coordinator described the way the checklists serves

as a means on ongoing sensemaking for him by describing the properties of a

long-term reference: "I've been here for 8 months. I still sometimes forget the

order but [my operations manager] put the checklists in a How-To book. If I'm

lost, I look there first." Ideally, the checklists, in addition to other checklists that

provide directions on the job act as sensemaking in an ongoing capacity so that

this individual may continue to understand the role he plays in the organization

by honing the skills he must know to do his job. The use of positions description

checklists as an ongoing sensemaking tool benefits the organization by fostering

individuals who can find the answers to the questions that enable them to do their

jobs better.

     Another service coordinator, a 50-year-old male who has been employed

for 3 months also described the learning process of their role by referencing the

checklist as a tool: "We do have a training sheet check, a training checklist that

we go through…You can see that it's got, and a lot of the areas of training, so,

it's thorough." He describes the checklist as a thorough tool that will enable him

to benefit from the training in a demanding, detail oriented position.

    Yet another service coordinator, a 24-year-old female, described the

checklist as both a learning tool and beneficial in a long-term capacity:

> I know my job because I crossed everything off the service coordinator
>
> checklist when I trained. But I wanted to know how far I could go, so I
>
> took the checklists of the operations manager and learned that job too so I
>
> can be ready for anything this job throws at me. I don't want to be
>
> standing around when something happened because I don't know how to
>
> do what the ops manager does. He won't always be here to help.

The service coordinator in this instance is using the framework established by the leaders in an innovative way. She describes the service coordinator checklist as a tool that she needed to learn her position, but she also references the desire to know her direct supervisors job duties. This service coordinator describes not only making sense of the service coordinator role, but she also uses the checklist as a means of making sense of her supervisors position—an outcome that requires long-term sensemaking and can be beneficial to the organization because the result is a well-trained employee that can handle issues above her technical pay-grade.

The checklists, created by the leaders, act as both sensegiving tools, and as a means of assisting the employees in making sense of what each position entails. The framework established by the leaders in the position description checklists becomes a harmonious framing-to-sensemaking situation as employee expectations align with the frame created by leadership. In both examples, framing, in tandem with sensemaking, demonstrated the ways in which leadership controlled sensegiving is successful in both connection to the members of the organization, and in generating outcomes that are beneficial to the organization, thus making this a harmonious framing-to-sensemaking outcome.

Discordant Framing-to-Sensemaking

Although identification with the logo, motto, and company principles, and the position description checklist resulted in employee sensemaking in a way that was beneficial to the organization and consistent with the leadership framing, not

all attempts at leadership framing resulted in sensemaking that worked to connect in a meaningful way to employees or was beneficial to the organization. Three issues resulted in discordant framing-to-sensemaking 1) future directions framing/sensemaking, which resulted in reiteration of values, transparency issues, and conjecture; 2) competing values comments; and 3) bi-modal leadership. Because framing and sensemaking tend to unfold as a result of the influence of one on another, the leadership frames are presented first followed by the employee sensemaking that occurred as a result of the framing or lack thereof.

Future Directions Framing

The focal point of this analysis is situated in the ways in which leaders frame messages about organizational position in the disengagement/growth phase of Lewis and Churchill's (1983) stages of small business growth model. The ways in which the leaders of the organization talked about the future directions varied both in terms of a compatible goal for the organization and also the way in which the goal for the organization was communicated to their employees— criteria of a discordant framing-to-sensemaking interaction. Both owners described their projections for the next five years in ways that competed with the other's vision for the organization. Traynor, the owner involved in the financial and accounting portion of the organization described the growth projections as:

> We are stuck now where we don't have a plan for opening additional
>
> offices. We do think there are some major markets we should be in
>
> but there's so much uncertainty. It doesn't seem anybody understands

111

Obamacare. We don't know what the ramifications are going to be,

so we are very cautious about expanding business right now.

Traynor is describing uncertainty about the new legislation and the ramifications

of expanding business during a time of uncertainty. Traynor went on to describe

the reasons why he chose not to explain the motives for maintaining the status of

the business: "I don't want to tell my employees 'Oh, we're not comfortable with

the administration so we're not doing anything for four years.' It's just not a good

message for anybody." This discourse indicates both a) a frame by the leader

concerning uncertainties about an organizational event that cannot be controlled

(the introduction of new legislation) and b) a failure to frame a message because

of perceived message connotation. The failure to frame a message because of

morale concern (i.e., "it's just not a good message for anybody") results in

discord for a number of reasons.

One of the principle ideas of framing is that leaders cannot always control

the events that occur within an organization, but they can influence/manage the

way in which the events are interpreted (Fairhurst, 2007). The complete failure to

frame a message because the message may be negative is a missed opportunity

for leadership on Traynor's part. Although the organizational event (change in

legislature) cannot be controlled, the interpretation of the even can be managed in

a way that is meaningful to the employees and beneficial to the organization. The

lack of framing altogether fails on both accounts resulting in a discordant

framing-to-sensemaking interaction.

An additional component adding to a discordant frame is the counter-message being delivered by Ashby, the operations owner, on the subject of growth. Contrasting the messages given by Traynor, Ashby, describes a desire to capitalize on the current market: "I want to grow. I want to keep adding pieces of the puzzle in staffing, because I look at the value of [this state] and I say 'this market is in the hundreds of millions." This discourse from Ashby competes with the future direction desires described by Traynor because where Traynor is describing a desire to hold the organization at the status quo, Ashby is describing potential to capitalize on further growth. Where Ashby fails to communicate is in translating the vision of growth to the employees in a way that is meaningful, favoring instead, an unexplained approach in grooming the employees.

> We got this plan, we're going to expand. If you got no one to expand
> with, you can have a plan, but if you can't execute that plan, it's like
> saying you're going to fly to war with no guns. Well, you run out there
> with no guns and you'll get shot. You can't do it so we've got to see, as
> owners, that's our responsibilities to develop people, see potential in
> people, and help move them all.

Ashby recognizes that in order to progress, the people that work for Universal Employment Inc. need to be groomed for promotions and properly trained. While the motto and the company goals are striving to explain the vision, the underlying motivation behind the vision (to expand) is not being communicated to the people

directly. Ashby explains the motivations through metaphor, a common framing tool, but fails to connect meaningfully with the employees.

These goals, as described by the leaders, are problematic in two ways. First, they are either not being communicated out of uncertainty (via Traynor) or they are being communicated, indirectly, through action but not clearly explained (via Ashby). Second, the goals are clearly incompatible and as a result, they create a disconnect that needs to be managed and framed in a way that is meaningful for employees and is beneficial to the organization.

The apparent disconnect between goals as framed by the two owners is noted by members of the organization at other times. The Director of HR noted "Ashby was gung ho about [adding a new branch] but I don't think that Traynor and Ashby could agree upon it." Not only are the goals incompatible but the inconsistency is being noticed by the employees. Sensemaking, as an ongoing event, occurs often when the flow of reality becomes interrupted. In this case, employees progressed in their jobs until the disconnected goals became part of the narrative between the two owners. The Controller, a 30-year-old male, 9 years on the job (the longest tenured employee after the owners) described a similar observation to the HR Director. He explained: "It's confusing. It's been a little of back and forth between those two. One wants to have it; one doesn't." The controller describes two noteworthy features—first he confirms that the goals are incompatible and second, he describes the confusion that occurs as a result of the incompatibly framed messages. As a result of competing future directions goals

as framed by the owners, an ambiguous sensemaking situation is established as opposed to a context-controlled situation, resulting in misinterpretation among employees—two characteristics of discordant framing-to-sensemaking interactions. The ambiguous context, in this situation, is one in which the future directions messages are either indirectly expressed, or not expressed at all. As a result, the employees may experience confusion or uncertainty about which direction the organization is taking. While the way in which the Controller and the Director of HR make sense of the situation seems to align, the way in which the future directions framing is discordant is in a sensemaking outcome generating both a detrimental outcome for the organization, through confused employees, and also through the creation of the ambiguous context.

Future Directions Sensemaking

Again, the focus of the analysis centered on the disengagement/growth phase of a small business growth cycle, and as a result, many messages from participants centered on the potential and expected growth of the organization as a whole. Many employees were able to identify the growth that had occurred through retrospective sensemaking. Participants were able to make sense of where the organization had grown from through various observations. A former employee, a 63-year-old female, described her identification of growth as: "I knew we were growing when I went from part-time to full-time." Her indication of growth resulted from the observation that she was being asked to come in to work more hours that she had originally signed on for.

The corporate employees described the observations of growth through tangible observations. A corporate employee, a 26-year-old female, described growth in terms of "Well, we moved from the teeny, tiny, cramped office to a luxurious one." Again, this observation serves as a means of describing growth by noting physical markers of space. Other markers by employees were about tangible indicators. A 33-year-old, male, accounting administrator, employed 7 years noted that, "We had more paperwork." Another accounting administrate, a 65-year-old female, employed for 8 years, indicated growth via employees: "There were more people on the payroll." The corporate employees described the growth through retrospective observations about issues central to their specific role (i.e., payroll, paperwork, needing a larger office space to house the additional paperwork).

The employees in the field described growth in a way that retrospectively made sense to them. A 6 year, on-again, off-again, male service coordinator described his observation of growth through changes that affected the branch: "We were growing when this place became (*pause, said with disgust)* corporate…they installed cameras in the branches." Many employees discussed the technology as a means of describing the ways in which the organization was growing. A 28-year-old Operations Manager, with 5 months tenure described his observation of technology through: "We merged to one system." A previous system kept each branch separated on a different account and under a segregated computer system. These comments describe the state of growth from past

observations carrying participants through present day. The unification of one technology system was one of many important factors described by employees as a means of making sense of organizational growth in various ways. .

Although they were able to retrospectively make sense of growth in the past, when pressed to describe the projected growth plan, the responses fell into three categories: a) reiteration of leader messages; b) commentary on transparency issues; and, c) conjecture.

Reiteration of leader messages. Reiteration of messages describes instances where employees explained their ideas of growth through the frame that the leadership constructed. While, on the surface, reiteration of the leader messages suggests harmonious framing-to-sensemaking, the discord becomes apparent because some employees adopted the growth framing and others adopted the stability framing. A closer look yields further reiteration of messages based on leader-alignment—an understandable outcome given the disconnect of the stated goals of the leader and the ways in which the two frames are communicated. A reiteration of messages refers to the sensemaking that results from individuals located in close proximity to one of the leaders of the organization.

For example, Traynor goes to lunch with the Controller on a daily basis. At times, instead of lunch, Traynor and the Controller will opt to go to the gym. On occasion, some of the accounting personnel and the Director of HR will join in on informal lunch. Traynor, the Controller,

and the Director of HR were at one point, also on a company softball team. Ashby also engages in informal activities with various members of the employees working in operations. Ashby will ride along with the Director of HR to visit the branches and he frequently goes selling with the sales people. He will take high performing branches out to lunch during quarterly audits. Ashby is also responsible for the monthly meetings with the District Managers. Due to the nature of a given positions, employees would have more face-to-face encounters with one leader or another and therefore become more susceptible to one frame over another.

Because Traynor describes the uncertainty of the introduction of new legislation and the effects that unknown legislation could have on the outcome of the business, a similar message is repeated among only the individuals working closely with Traynor. The controller, who is also the leader of the accounting administration team, repeated a similar sentiment: "Right now we're just hunkering down with the market, hoping to get through this financial crisis the country's in. Really, do you want to spread yourself thin, at this time, especially with Obamacare coming down the line?" Similar statements were made from additional members of the corporate office who work under the direction of Traynor. An accounting administrator described the state of the organization in the following terms: "We need to be in a position of financial strength. Right

now it's just a holding pattern." Overall, those working in close proximity to Traynor, in tandem with additional circumstances would increase the likelihood that similar sentiments would be repeated by these participants.

A closer look at the future growth comments by the people in operations, and therefore working closely with Ashby, yield sentiments that mirror a trajectory geared towards growth: Another District Manager 2, 47-year old male, who helped start the organization states: "We're saying that we're going to grow between five and seven percent every year and we're going to open a new office every 18-24 months." District Manager 1 describes the growth by displaying a disregard for the numbers: "We need to keep growing more business. I don't know the numbers, but our profit margin is up compared to last year." These comments, from District Managers who meet with Ashby on a monthly basis, are mirroring similar sentiments in terms of the organizations potential. The District Managers also describe the projected growth in a way that deemphasizes concrete, financially informed observations in favor of abstract terms that focus on the prospect of potential—a potential discussed by Ashby.

Again, the reiteration of leader messages as a means of making sense of the organization may seem like harmonious framing-to-sensemaking outcomes, but in the end, the function of the reiteration is merely an alignment with messages from one leader or another. With multiple and conflicting goals, discordant framing-to-sensemaking occurs resulting in a lack of guidance and an increased

119

potential for uncertainty among members—an outcome that does not benefit the organization, the employees, or leadership.

Commentary on transparency. The preceding section demonstrated how the reiteration of messages as a sensemaking technique worked for individuals who are working in close proximity to one of the leaders. These individuals are outnumbered by the main workforce—the Operations Managers, the Service Coordinators, and Drivers who have limited face-to-face contact with either leader. The discrepancy in communication from the leaders to the remaining members in the organization is, again, a circumstance that becomes noticed as employees make sense of unfolding organizational events: "I see an effort to have monthly meetings with the sales managers and the district managers. I don't see an effort to include any service coordinators or operations managers." This accounting administrator noted the attendees only because the Corporate Office, where the accounting staff is located is also the site of the Conference Room where the meetings are held.

As noted, service coordinators and operations managers were able to retrospectively make sense of growth that had occurred in the past, but struggled more with discussions of future directions. Many of the people working in these positions recognized an issue with transparency: A 27-year-old operations manager, working 2 years, demonstrated a lack of transparency by commenting: "I don't know if I can definitely say that there's a clear, five-year plan that's been communicated." A 45-year-old, male service coordinator described his take on

the lack of communicated plan through the lens of the role: "I don't see why they would [communicate a five-year plan]. I'm just a service coordinator." Yet another service coordinator, a 24-year-old female described her lack of information: "Plans? Like for what's next in this business? No, I don't hear of plans." These people are all indicating the lack of transparency that may be occurring because they are not in direct contact with either leader on a regular basis

These comments demonstrate one of the more salient themes that emerged from the data set: a lack of leader-to-employee transparency. Transparency is defined as "readily revealing information and explaining complicated problems" (Tser-Yieth, Kuang-Peng, & Chien-Ming, 2010, p. 408). Transparency of information in an organization results in higher supervisor-subordinate trust, and inter-organizational learning opportunities. The lack of transparency is also noted by the previously discussed individuals who do have more of an opportunity to interact with the leadership. The controller explained: "Some people that have been here for six, eight months, we don't speak to them about possible plans of the company." This statement illustrates leaderships' lack of transparency in communicating the direction of the company. By withholding information, the leaders miss an opportunity to frame a message that could manage the meaning of employee interpretations. Additionally, the Director of HR, who has many weekly and monthly encounters with Ashby, described the failure to frame on Ashby's part as, "No. There is no message or direction for

where we are going. It's just 'go out and get sales.'" District Manager 1 also

expressed frustration with the lack of transparency communicated about the

direction. He notes "No, we haven't had one single company meeting where we

set direction, only shareholders meetings."

Meetings in general seemed to be a requested entity by employees of the

organization working in a variety of capacities. One of the drivers, a 65-year-old

male commented: "The right way to do business is to sit down once a month as

the management of the company and go over what the company has done." The

lack of transparency in the organization leaves employees hungry for information,

direction, or even the opportunity to contribute. A corporate employee notes "We

need formal and informal meetings. Perhaps create groups or special groups that

are in charge of developing something within the company." The comment from

this employee demonstrates both a desire to meet, and presumably be more

informed, as well as a desire to become invested in the company. Ramifications

of no meetings not only stunt the ability for the employees to become invested,

but a lack of employee input stifles the innovation and creativity that frontline

workers can bring to the organization. Put another way, employees that are

requesting regular meetings are doing so because they are unsure of the direction

of the company. An additional consideration may be that employees requesting

meetings want the opportunity to contribute and may feel their ideas may benefit

the organization in some way. Leadership, seeking to improve the communication

and the organization, would be wise to solicit feedback from employees that are

actually working through the day-to-day processes as a means of getting direct feedback from the most knowledgeable source.

The organization holds an annual shareholders meeting where those who contributed startup funds, and therefore have a stake in the yearly distribution, are informed of the previous year's progress. Even in these shareholders meetings, the format is not inclined towards transparency. The Director of HR expressed his frustration by commenting on a recent meeting: "I'm going to tell them they need to be fair to us. I mean, I'm not sure, but even in that case, let's have transparency on who is and who isn't a shareholder for crying out loud." Collectively, these comments are indicating a failure on the part of the leadership. From the perspective of lower level employees, specifically the operations managers and the service coordinators, the lack of transparency refers to the employees' expectation that no information would be communicated to them by virtue of the position. From the upper level employees, the Director of HR and the District Managers, the lack of transparency is in part, a leadership failure to frame about a direction combined with a lack of information transfer.

The failure to frame also had adverse effects on the functioning of the organization. A former receptionist noted her sensemaking process from overhearing. "Sometimes I would hear just by the chatter around the office that we're adding a branch. Wait a minute, a new branch? Okay, when is that happening and what's going on? There weren't any kind of once-a-week staff meetings." Again, an employee notes a lack of transparency in information

sharing that could result in negative outcomes for the organization. In this instance, the position of the receptionist in this organization acts as a "hub." The position requires the individual to direct most traffic to the appropriate accounting person in order to keep the corporate office organized. If the receptionist is not aware of the opening of a new branch, any incoming communication from that branch might not be directed toward the correct person, or may be completely overlooked all together. The mismanagement of financial documents or any branch-specific information would yield a negative outcome for the organization.

The combination of a lack of transparency and a failure to frame information produces adverse effects in an organization. Of lower level employees, a lack of information about direction can result in employees who are kept in the dark, who may feel underutilized, or undervalued. Exit interview data demonstrated former employees who embodied these traits. Anonymous data collected by the HR department yielded comments such as "I'm not being utilized; I'm not appreciated for what I do; I can do so much more; this opportunity doesn't let me contribute." With regard to the upper level employees, the negative consequences that stem from a lack of transparency could contribute towards an ambiguous sensemaking situation. The role of District Manager, or the Director of HR entails the overseeing and management of three levels of people. A District Manager who is not clued into the direction of the organization is going to be ineffective in managing the uncertainty of their direct employees—

124

another negative outcome stemming from both a lack of transparency and a failure to frame that mirrors the characteristics of discordant framing-to-sensemaking interaction.

Conjecture. Because of a lack of transparency about the direction of the organization combined with a failure to frame to employees outside of the leaders' circle, many employees voiced directions for the organization that were conjecture or assumption based. One such conjecture based interpretation focused on an assumption from speculation heard in passing "Nobody has said anything but I think, I assume … because, well they kind of mentioned it before that they wanted to expand" (Operations Manager, 4). This operations manager is basing the proposition of growth on speculation suggesting that growth was a possibility because of an assumption. Other conjecture-based interpretations were based on previous directives to employees. The receptionist, a female in her 40's described the way in which she understood the future direction of the organization by making sense of past directive: "earlier in the year, I was told that I should start looking for other offices in [projected locations], so I think that's where they are looking to expand to." These examples are sensemaking processes that are occurring from previous ambiguous framing attempts from leaders. The ambiguity in directives as well as the unclear messages mentioned in passing lead employees to sense make in ways that are plausible, rather than accurate—a common characteristic of the sensemaking process.

Some employees reported directions that were completely inaccurate. A 23-year-old service coordinator, working one month suggested: "We're going to be opening new branches soon, in Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina, or at least Orlando." Because the leaders had already attempted, and failed, in a branch

outside the state lines, opening another branch beyond the current state is unlikely. Fact checking revealed "Out of state expansion is unlikely at this time because there are still many markets in [this state] that would make more sense because they are closer to corporate support. That's why the [current out-of-state] branch is failing" (Traynor). The ramifications of such an inaccurate sensemaking outcome are twofold. First, the assumption that more out of state expansion would occur resulted from leadership's lack of transparency in communicating the current deteriorating out-of-state endeavor. Second, a failure to frame the context of that deterioration allowed employees to make sense of pre-existing cues in a way that was again, plausible, but highly inaccurate. The aspect of this employees sensemaking outcome that is discordant is that this individual is not only clueless about actual organizational events, but also operating under false expectations about future growth—a negative outcome for the organization.

Other conjecture-based sensemaking occurred as a result of an organizational event that leadership failed to frame to employees. A year ago the organization made a change to the logo, shortening the words found on the logo to initials. A male sales associate, three months on the job, relayed the following incorrect information: "I think the owners got their start as some sort of a merger type of situation." In this instance, an event in the organization occurred (i.e., the logo change) and employees were offered no explanation as to why the name of the organization changed. While not a major infraction, this statement reveals great concerns, first about the way in which employees are making sense of

127

unmanaged organizational events, and second as a means of a consistent pattern emerging within an organization whose leadership fails to frame the meaning of events for employees.

Yet another instance of sensemaking occurring from an unframed organizational event was an observation recounted from another sales person. He was told "Ashby takes care of the employees. [District Manager 1] used to be just an employee and now he is an owner of the company too." The conjecture occurring here is that District Manager 1 worked into the position of owner. The truth of this instance is that District Manager 1 (and District Manager 2, for that matter) started with as an owner controlling 1% of the organization from the first day. While both district managers have the title of "owner," the reality is that Traynor and Ashby are the controlling owners and the principle decision makers in this organization. Of even greater concern with this sensemaking scenario is the propensity for such incorrect sensemaking to yield unrealistic expectations. The spirit behind this comment is situated in the expectation that if one works hard enough, one can work into a position of owner. Both Traynor and Ashby confirmed that no shares in the organization can be earned by an employee working through the ranks. Such an outcome can have negative organizational consequences for employees who operate under inaccurate expectations based on plausible, yet inaccurate conclusions.

The introduction of multiple conflicting interpretations or goals regarding the direction of the organization can lead to the manifestation of ambiguous

128

sensemaking situations. In the case of this organization, the competing leader messages regarding the future direction of the organization resulted in employee sensemaking that reified transparency issues and established conjecture as a plausible explanation for organizational events. Such messages can cause confusion and long-term internal communication issues for the organization—an outcome of discordant framing-to-sensemaking.

Competing Values Framing

Although the future directions messages are ambiguous at times, the leaders were clear about framing messages that highlighted the values that they feel are important to the success of the business. Like the goals messages, these values were in direct competition with each other: Ashby claims "You want to grow a business? Start with sales. Sales are first," whereas Traynor placed emphasis on managing the money from an accounting perspective—"There are things to do from [a financial] side. It's not all just sales. It's workers compensation deals, managing the insurance companies, and finding ways to save money." These communicated sentiments position the leaders as having valuable knowledge at the expense of the others contributions. Ashby is suggesting that the first key to growing a business is sales, whereas Traynor is suggesting that there are additional money-saving ways to run a business. When values are positioned as "better," or "first," the tendency is to devalue what another has to offer. Realistically, sales and the management of finances cannot exist for a long time independently.

As a means of discounting the contribution that Traynor's team makes, Ashby delivers messages that suggest that the finances essentially run on their own. While Ashby claims that sales are first and he also noted that "Numbers are numbers. Math don't lie. But there is a lot more to organizing a whole organization and driving the company. I drive the company." The spirit of Ashby's comment indicates his position, and by default his ignorance on the matter of keeping the financial records. Ashby's ignorance on the detail required in keeping the books and the money saving tactics used by Traynor is confirmed by the Controllers statement: "Ashby has never, not once, looked at a financial statement. He wouldn't know what to do with one." The comment by the controller demonstrates that while Ashby is in control of the domain with which he is familiar, the weakness lies in his lack of knowledge about the financial portion of the organization. He frames his ignorance by positioning "sales as first"—a message that contributes to a discordant framing-to-sensemaking situation based on competing leadership messages to employees.

Traynor also claims that his responsibility saves money as he attends to the distribution of the money, as well as money saving tactics. Traynor falls into a similar pitfall by framing his contribution by positioning Ashby's contribution as "it's not just sales." The messages that both leaders are giving are framed in such a way that each individual contribution is positioned as better, or first, at the expense of the other contribution. When there is a "first" or a "better," there has to be a "second" and a "good-but-not-best." A framework that pits one aspect of

the business as a winner and another as a loser positions the employees that work for one or the other as winners and losers as well. Again, the reality of the situation is that without sales, there is no money to attend to. Likewise with a failure of attending to the money, no amount of sales will keep a business afloat. The leaders are clear about how they position their contributions as "first" and "better" and the messages to employees are subsequently framed in that spirit— the ramifications of such a frame contribute to a discordant frame—one that undermines the others' contribution.

Competing Values Sensemaking

When values are communicated as hierarchical, the messages to employees tend to resonate with a similar sentiment. An 65-year-old female accountant, one who manages the finances, mentioned: "You can be told 'Your job is not important, sales are important and your job doesn't generate income.' And these are NOT private messages." The idea behind such a sentiment indicates that the speaker, in this case Ashby, devalues the individual *because* the nature of their job is not in bringing in revenue, but in maintaining revenue. The accountant went on to state "If we get back to my position in the company, I know what my value is. I know what my worth is." Because this individual is a more experienced employee, a devaluing message may not have the impact as if the message was delivered to an employee who has less experience. An additional feature of this message is the idea that this sentiment is stated in a public setting. Since the offices of both leaders fall into the corporate office, and the corporate

131

office personnel all work in an open area, a message delivered in public would be heard by all members of the corporate office.

The controller noted that a common message communicated to salespeople is: "Now go out and make me some money," which again emphasizes the value of a sales-first approach. A salesperson noted: "I've been told by Ashby 'You're taking care of the company and I am going to take care of you'"—a message that indicates respect for a salesperson at the expense of a corporate worker, or even operation employees. The employees of the organization notice the emphasis placed on certain members of the organization, mainly salespeople. The Director of HR commented: "If you put more emphasis on the value of a sale person, then you have a war between sales and operation. I said to [the leaders], if you have a war, you have a fighting." The spirit of this comment is a combination of the value-based comments emphasizing sales and the tendency for the frames created by leaders to be noticed by employees.

Traynor's "it's not just sales" resonated with other individuals throughout the organization, all in various positions. Employees talked about their contributions to the organization in ways that did not include sales. A former receptionist noted "I created a system of organization. When [Ashby] needed a bill, I think he appreciated that I could find it." The receptionist indicates that her organization skills and system establishment assisted in accomplishing the tasks that assisted the sales people to succeed. Another employee, a service coordinator commented "If I can help out, I go ahead and do it. It's not part of my job

132

description, and sometimes it's above my pay grade. You just do what you have to do." This employee, a non-salesperson position, is describing the value that he adds to the organization as a team member. That his contribution extends beyond his job description, or pay grade, is an indicator that he interprets value as an entity that entails more than generating revenue.

The idea behind value based comments as a discordant frame-to-sensemaking outcome is that the way in which this frame unfolds is at the expense of one or more types of members in the organization. The leadership is providing multiple competing frames emphasizing different areas as more important, an outcome that fails to connect with employees and results in outcomes that are not beneficial to the organization. Specifically, Ashby's sales-oriented messages, forces other employees in the organization, whose job does not generate revenue, to position their contributions as valuable by emphasizing instances that are not just sales-based—an exercise that potentially generates a negative work environment.

Bi-Modal Leadership Frames

One of the most commonly expressed frames articulated by both leaders was the distinction of their contribution to leadership. Both leaders framed their accomplishments and the accomplishments of the other in terms of parallels: "Ashby handles operations, I handle finances" (Traynor) and "I take care of the people in the field. Traynor is just the numbers guy" (Ashby). Both leaders

133

indicated a desire to keep their industry expertise separate by positioning the reasons in a metaphor frame. Traynor explained:

> Ashby always puts it as the mommy and the daddy. If there are two of us directing people, then all of a sudden when they want something and they go to the daddy and they don't get it, then they go to the mommy. It becomes a situation where there's a conflict and we don't need the conflict.

Traynor uses the metaphor of children (the employees) being directed by two parents (Traynor and Ashby) as a means of explaining why the leaders chose to keep operations and finances separate. This leadership frame intended to provide clear, objective parameters for employees by position each leader's expertise as individual and independent of the other person. The reason for the distinction was so that employees would be clear of the direct hierarchy and so that the employees did not try to pit the owners against each other (much like children do with moms and dads). The decision to keep the two parts separate is not without ramifications. The leaders establish the parameters of two leaders with separate expertise based on good intentions of avoiding conflict, but as a result, fail to control the context that accompanies that frame. As a result, discordant framing-to-sensemaking interactions emerge as employees interpret the context as two interests with which they must align—a negative outcome for the organization.

Bi-Modal Leadership Sensemaking

The nature of bi-modal leadership indicates that there are bound to be instances where the messages from leaders will not be uniform, or cohesive with organizational goals. The leaders of the organization position themselves in two camps—one in finances and one in operations. The extended repercussions suggest that each unit within the organization, either the operations people, or the finance people, will get messages from only one individual that are, at times, bound to be disproportionately skewed. The following section exemplifies, first, an instance of biased-leader messaging, followed by the inclination for followers of one leader or another to fall prey to what is known as othering, or the creation of binary systems of opposition as a means of recognizing either autonomy or participation in a group opposite to the "other" (Jaworski & Coupland, 2005).

Biased-leader messages. The leadership had good intentions of avoiding conflict by keeping the two leadership opportunities segregated. Sensemaking from employees manifested as a result of the messages given by the leaders, interactions (or lack thereof) with the leaders, and conclusions based on observations. A number of explanations provided about leadership mirrored the framework established by the leaders themselves. An HR Administrator suggested "Traynor is more interested in finances. Ashby in more interested in operational things." The ramifications of this statement suggest that not only are the owners separate in their expertise, but also uninterested in the others' contribution. A former employee noted, "Ashby grew the business by being

active in the field. I think Traynor helped the business grow by being the financial guy." Again, this statement mimics the frame established by the leaders themselves, this time, discussing the ways in which each contributed by growing the business. An operations manager, a 29-year-old male suggested "Ashby gives the face to the company. Traynor is more indoors." This operations manager uses his own frame to make sense of the situation, specifically, a metaphor that suggests that one leaders acts as the figurehead of the organization and the other fulfills a less significant or important role. While one might reasonably argue that the sensemaking by the employees and the frame from the leaders match up, therefore constituting a harmonious framing-to-sensemaking situation, such an assumption would be incorrect due to the negative ramifications for the organization of this particular frame.

The negative ramifications occur from the parameters that result from carrying out a leader-in-operations and a leader-in-finances frame. Physical parameters are required to keep such a frame in place—specifically that Traynor rarely to never enters into the field. Many field employees also confirmed this physical segregation. Both Operations Manager and Service Coordinators from five of the branches admitted to never even meeting Traynor. Employees made comments such as "I've never even met Traynor," and "Nope, never met him, I've only met Ashby," and "Traynor doesn't come around here." The nature of the frame created by leadership dictates that Traynor spends his time in the corporate office working on the finances with the accounting team. Likewise,

Ashby spends most of the time in the field with one exception—his office is located in the same corporate building as the accounting team.

Because many of the operations people, including sales people have never met Traynor, the framed messages they get from leadership primarily come from Ashby. Framed messages from only one leader can lead to a skewed playing field with regards to the resulting sensemaking. When employees only get one leadership message, the interpretation is subject to biased perspectives. One accountant noticed: "It's a shame. Traynor doesn't get out in the field and the other guy gets to run wild." This accounting individual is describing the propensity for Ashby to manage the meaning for employees in the same way that he interprets the situation. The result of such a framework has negative connotations for the organization, especially during times when leadership is in disagreement.

One such disagreement that illustrates the potential for negative sensemaking based on biased leader interpretation is a point of contention over where Traynor works. Traynor often works from a second home located out of state, sometimes spending weeks away from the corporate office. While he is on location, he gets the corporate mail delivered, holds conference calls with the corporate accounting team, checks the records, and still maintains the productivity of the job with the same hours worked in a day. This management decision is one that is understood by the members of the accounting team. The controller notes: "Now, pretty much, the boss goes away for weeks on end, and I

don't think it's a problem. Everything gets done; the entire accounting end of the business is kept up and done."

The employees working with Traynor understand the decision to work from a secondary location; however, the operations' employees interpret the situation based on a different frame provided by Ashby. An operations manager mentioned: "I heard Traynor takes vacation all the time," a statement based on information coming directly from Ashby. Another comment from a Service Coordinator working at a different branch reflected the same spirit: "Ashby says that his kids are still young. Traynor already has grown kids. He's just around the world, taking vacation time off and just takes care of the numbers." This statement reinforces a framework based on competing interpretations about the circumstances of work from the perspective of one leader.　　　　　While the parameters of the leaders' decision prohibit Traynor from offering a message about the circumstances of his work, the negative repercussions stem from Ashby's negative frame implying that Traynor is lazy, or apathetic, as well as the failure to frame on Traynor's part. There is only speculation about why Ashby would tell a field employee that Traynor takes vacation all the time—perhaps Ashby is unaware that the finances are kept up, or perhaps he is resentful that he himself does not take as much time off. Regardless of the reasons why the employee was informed incorrectly, the focal point is that the framing of the message (i.e., Traynor is lazy or apathetic and takes vacation), coupled with the idea that sensemaking is often based on plausible explanations rather than

accurate conclusions (i.e., Operations people noticing that Traynor is never around) is damaging to the organization. Given that one leader of the organization is negatively representing the other leader to the employees also does not present a unified front from which employees can draw sensemaking cues—specifically adding to a discordant framing-to-sensemaking situation.

Othering. Bi-modal leadership led to biased-leader messages as a unified front, at times, failed to emerge. From the perspective of leadership, framing each role as "mine" and "his" sets a precedent for indicating instances where teamwork failed. A similar pattern emerged among the employees of the organization as they described the ways in which they operated as a team. From the corporate office, employees described their coworkers as "jumping in to help out when needed," and "doing the assignments on the list, even though it's not yours to do." These comments from corporate employees indicated an overarching attitude of pitching in to complete the tasks, even in instances where they were not assigned directly. Similar sentiments from the operations people indicated, "I believe we are a team, when one person is gone, we all step up to fill in," and "We work well together, as a family would." These comments indicate a sensemaking attitude of individuals who work well using the metaphor or family.

Employees in the field and in the corporate office were often quick to describe the concept of "team" as playing an integral part of the workplace; however, the team concept did not extend into domain beyond their positioned expertise (either the operations team, or the corporate office). In addition to the

negative ramifications of employee's sensemaking from biased leader messages, the propensity to engage in othering occurs from bi-modal leadership. Othering, again, is the creation of binary systems of opposition as a means of recognizing either autonomy or participation in a group opposite to the "other" (Jaworski & Coupland, 2005). In this organization, othering occurred as members of the organization positioned their affiliation with either the corporate office, or field operations.

When the business first started, all operations were run out of one location, the first branch. The decision to move to a corporate office came as a result of more work and more paperwork. Traynor noted "The accounting work was more than one person could do. We needed a corporate office to kind of separate ourselves." A separation occurred as a means of segregating the paperwork that needed to be done, from the active and loud hustle and bustle of a branch that has people in and out all day. The decision to move to a different location without an attempt for leaders to sensegive caused an unmanaged context for employees to sensemake inaccurately.

The sensemaking from the field employees implies an elitist vibe from the corporate people. One of the operations managers informed me that "I don't communicate with them. [District Manager 1] can talk to [the corporate people]." The use of "them" as a descriptor indicates the start of an "us" vs. "them" mentality, a principle of othering. A service coordinator indicated their take on the interactions with corporate individuals by suggesting: "Sometimes I have to

140

call the corporate people, but they don't have a clue what we do." The othering perspective is not solely an operations-created mentality. From a corporate perspective, an accounting person indicated: "Sometimes when I'm talking to people in the branches I think 'Do we even work for the same company?!' I've had people in the branches say to me 'You guys don't really care about us.' There is no team here." The team mentality that was highly revered by the people working as a corporate unit, or as an operations unit, is not viewed in a similar manner when combining both the operations *and* the corporate contributions.

Employees in this organization are picking up the bi-modal leadership frames of the leaders and recreating them in a manner that is detrimental to the organization. Because this parallel was established and promoted by the leaders, the sensemaking that occurred from such positioning mirrored the frame that had been established. Again, a mirroring outcome may seem to fall into the category of harmonious framing-to-sensemaking, but actually functions as a discordant frame-to-sensemaking outcome, especially when the resulting mindset positions field employees and corporate employees as two difference teams, rather than two units of the same team.

Summary

As a means of understanding the ways in which leadership framed messages about growth and stability as well as the ways in which the members of the organization made sense of leaders' messages, I described interactions of Harmonious Framing-to-Sensemaking and Discordant Framing-to-Sensemaking.

141

Framing and sensemaking classically unfold as separate entities, rather than a unit. However, to answer the research questions, the Framing-to-Sensemaking properties had to be explained in tandem. I used the data from the participants of a small business in limbo to describe ways in which the interactions between leaders and employees were successful in producing harmonious results and ways in which the interactions produced discordant results.

Harmonious framing-to-sensemaking represents framing situations consisting of instances where: a) Leadership engaged in sensegiving through some framed message and sensemaking by employees aligned with the intentions of the frame; b) Leadership framed a message and sensegiving resulted in a positive outcome beneficial to the organization; and c) Leadership provided one, non-competing framed message that resulted in clear sensemaking situations for the employees. Discordant framing-to-sensemaking adhered to one of the following three criteria: a) Leadership engaged in sensegiving through some framed message and sensemaking by employees did not align with the intentions of the frame; or b) Leadership failed to frame a message and sensegiving resulted in a negative outcome for the organization; or c) Leadership provided multiple competing framed messages that resulted in ambiguous sensemaking situations for the employees. Whereas harmonious framing-to-sensemaking yielded outcomes that are beneficial to the leadership, employees, or the organization, discordant framing-to-sensemaking yielded undesirable outcomes for any combination of leadership, employees, or the organization.

Chapter 4

Discussion

This chapter is organized into a discussion of the data, the theoretical contributions resulting from the analysis, the practical recommendations from the study, and the limitations and future directions. As a reminder, small businesses make up nearly 99.7% of all employer organizations, account for nearly 50% of all private sector employees, pay 43% of total U.S. private payroll, have generated 65% of net new jobs over the past 17 years, and contribute to more than half of the non-agricultural private GDP (Kobe 2007). Many of the businesses that achieve a viable status do so as a result of specific movements geared towards growth—diversification, formalization, and a concerted effort towards process improvement during periods of change. As businesses grow from the existence stage, to the survival stage, to success and beyond, there are many opportunities for the leaders of the business to manage the constant change of events. For this study, the primary focus was on how leaders of one small business manage the meaning of the messages during a specific period where there is a choice to maintain the status quo, or marshal resources to advance the organization further—the Success/Growth or Success/Disengagement phase of small business growth (Churchill & Lewis, 1983). The decision to stay or grow generates a context of unfamiliar events—if leadership chooses to maintain the status quo, the messages of growth shift to maintenance. If leadership chooses to grow, the messages have to shift towards process improvement and weakness

144

evaluations before growth can occur. Both circumstances, to stay or grow create ambiguous situations for employees who are undergoing a sensemaking process of unfamiliar events. From a leadership perspective, there are additional opportunities to frame situations that are unfamiliar for employees.

Discursive leadership identifies the ways in which leaders can control the context of an event in a way that manages the meanings of unfamiliar events for employees. Specifics ways in which leaders lead discursively are through the use of framing and sensegiving. Framing principles include: 1) Controlling the Context; 2) Defining the Situation; and 3) Interpreting Uncertainty. Controlling the contexts describes the premise that while leaders of an organization cannot control the events that occur within the organization, they can influence the way in which the events are interpreted by employees. Defining the situation, along with sensegiving, allows leaders to strategically craft a message that manages the meaning of unfamiliar events in a way that is meaningful for employees and beneficial for the organization. Lastly, interpreting uncertainty suggests that leaders can identify places where employees may face situations rife with ambiguity and alleviate some uncertainty through a well-crafted message.

As a counterpart to framing as a discursive tool, the idea that employees engage in sensemaking establishes a context for understanding the power of frames. Sensemaking is considered the actual process of making sense of unfamiliar situations through retroactive reflection, ongoing observation, and at times, as a means of compartmentalizing that which is plausible rather than that

which is accurate. Retrospective sensemaking occurs when individuals gain an understanding of their situation, or context by reflecting on events that have already occurred. Ongoing sensemaking indicates a propensity for sensemaking to continually occur, and become more salient during times of interruption. Plausible sensemaking over accurate sensemaking reminds leaders that making sense of a situation is not always based on truth and accuracy, and sometimes can be based on figuring out an explanation that fits a reasonable explanation.

Through the combined lens of framing, sensemaking, and sensegiving, this study assessed the way in which a small, regional staffing business managed the context of staying or growing. The research questions focused on messages framed by leaders and sensemaking interpretations made by employees. The research questions for this study were:

RQ1: What are the messages given by leaders of a small business to employees as they manage the issues of organizational stability and growth?

RQ2: How do employees of a small business make sense of messages addressing issues of stability and growth given to them by its leaders?

At times, the original research questions for a study give way to an unexpected emerging theme. This unexpected theme was present during the analysis of this organization. Although the original research questions posited that framing and sensemaking emerged as two separate units, the data indicates that framing and sensemaking actually overlap as a circular process, rather than a separate entity. While the research questions started as two independent concepts, the analysis

146

answers both questions as a mutually unfolding and interdependent process. The

goal of this study was to understand how leadership framed messages about

stability and growth and how members of the organization subsequently made

sense of, and responded to the efforts made by leadership in framing. Results

indicated that two main ways that framing and sensemaking processes interacted:

1) Harmonious Framing-to-Sensemaking; and 2) Discordant Framing-to-

Sensemaking.

Harmonious Framing-to-Sensemaking

As a reminder, the characteristics of harmonious framing-to-sensemaking

represents framing situations consisting of instances where: a) leadership engaged

in sensegiving through some framed message and b) the sensemaking from

employees aligned with the framed sensegiving from the leadership in a way that

is beneficial to the organization, and c) leadership provided one, non-competing

framed message that resulted in clear sensemaking situations for the employees.

Weick (1995) identifies specific ambiguous catalysts that tend to arise as an

occasion for sensemaking, one of which being the idea that "roles are vague,

responsibilities are unclear" (p. 93). Weick (1995) describes such an ambiguous

circumstance to include the idea that employees lack a defined set of expectations

about what their performance should entail and as such, leave the role open to

dispute. The harmonious framing-to-sensemaking process demonstrated by the

identification with the motto and company values, and through the position

description checklists, is successful in avoiding this ambiguous sensemaking

situation in two ways: by sensegiving through the explanation of employee expectations and then by framing in a manner that requires a savvy use of framing tools. First, the sensegiving in this context, the creation of the logo and company principles is the visionary creation of the leaders, a vision that serves as an interpreted framework that will be communicated to employees and championed by leadership (Gioia & Chittipedi, 1991). The vision is constructed with the intention of providing a framework that will influence the recipients of the framework, in this case, the employees.

Second, the manner by which the sensegiving pertaining to the motto and company principles is carried out occurs through the use of common framing tools: catchphrase and jargon (Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996). As Clifton (2012) notes, discursive leadership involves utilizing language in a way that is meaningful for employees. The catchphrase of "We get the job done" serves the organization by using simple language as an explanation; the longer explanation is "we do whatever it takes to satisfy the needs of the customers and go above and beyond industry standards of others who would not go to such lengths to ensure that we maintain successful business relationships." The jargon from in this example is the remaining terms of Expert- Value-Service-Price-Ownership. Jargon provides an appealing alternative in the sense that as the words become accepted and familiar, the words take on meaning for the subjects that they are associated with (Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996). The members of this organization have been

indoctrinated into the use of these words so that they take on specific meanings for only the members of the organization that may not apply to an outsider.

Other ways that demonstrate the harmonious leader framed messages are through artifacts that create and communicate the expectations of the leadership. The use of position description checklists serves as a means of socializing the new hire to the position that they will be working. Kramer (2010) describes this process as a means of familiarizing newcomers with the particulars of the organization and their roles including understanding job performance expectations, relationships to coworkers, and the culture of the organization. The checklists serve to communicate expectations about the position to employees, first by having them read the descriptions on their own, and second by having them work through each item on the list to learn the position. The creations of both the motto/company principles logo, in tandem with the checklists by the leaders of the organization are examples of ways in which the sensemaking on part of the employee was harmonious to the design of the messages by the leader.

Harmonious framing-to-sensemaking in this case study also serves as a means of generating a frame that serves as a means of stabilizing the organization. From a framing perspective, the creation of the motto/logo and job description checklists acts as a means of implementing a system that can assist employees in sensemaking whether the organization remains at the current size, or whether the owners pursue growth. If the organization remains at the status quo, the framing tool is effective for future employees, thus acting as an effective

149

stabilizer. If the organization chooses to grow, the frame serves as a tool for employees promoting into positions, or new employees during the hiring and training process—both outcomes are beneficial to the organization and provide direction free of ambiguity.

Discordant Framing-to-Sensemaking

In contrast to the harmonious framing and sensemaking described above, leaderships' discordant attempts to frame became the frames that the employees used to make sense of an organization in the disengagement/growth phase of an organization. As a reminder, the characteristics of discordant framing-to-sensemaking are a) Leadership engaged in sensegiving through some framed message and sensemaking did not align with the intentions of the frame; or b) Leadership failed to frame a message and sensegiving resulted in a negative outcome for the organization; or c) Leadership provided multiple competing framed messages that resulted in ambiguous sensemaking situations for the employees. Weick (1995) notes ambiguous circumstances that provide occasions for sensemaking: multiple conflicting interpretations, and multiple unclear goals that may also be conflicting. In instances where leadership has not clearly defined goals, ambiguity about the trajectory of the organization leads to an ambiguous sensemaking situation. Additionally, if leadership has made goals clear, but there are multiple conflicting goals (as demonstrated in this case study), another ambiguous opportunity for sensemaking arises for the employees, potentially creating internal issues from a mismanaged leadership framework.

One of the principles of discordant sensemaking is in leadership failing to frame a message that resulted in a negative outcome for the organization. Certain issues arose in this organization that resulted in a missed opportunity to frame a message, and a mismanaged attempt to control the context. The issues presented as a lack of transparency, conflicting value-based comments, and bi-modal leadership, which resulted in discordant faming to sensemaking. Additional issues that occurred from discordant framed leadership messages were sensemaking through conjecture. Conjecture as an outcome aligns with Weick's (1995) indicator that explanations for unfamiliar events are not always based on accuracy, rather based on a plausible conclusion. As a reminder, the goal of successful framing is to control the context of unfamiliar organizational events and interpret the events in a way that gives meaning to employees (Fairhurst, 2007). Controlling the context allows leaders the opportunity to sensegive an alternative interpretation in a way that connects with employees and interprets uncertainty about that unfamiliar event. In the case of this organization, Traynor's reluctance to deliver a message about the future direction of the organization, and *his* uncertainty about the new legislation resulted in sensemaking that was either misinterpreted or completely inaccurate. His failure to frame resulted in a failed attempt to control the context, and by extension, provide a sensegiving message to the employees resulting in various inaccurate depictions about the trajectory of the organization.

One of the ways in which the inaccurate depictions about the trajectory of the organization manifested is in conjecture. Every one of the conjecture-based examples demonstrates an organization where leadership is failing to manage the meaning of organizational events, and where sensemaking is occurring as a means of plausible conclusion due to lack of framing rather than accurate explanations. Though largely innocuous, the problematic reality behind employees in an organization operating under conjecture-based sensemaking is the likelihood that unrealistic expectations develop, are over time unfounded, and leave employees disappointed. For example, a salesperson may become resentful overtime because he/she has not made "owner" yet or a service coordinator may assume that the organization is in trouble because out of state branches have not opened up after an extended period of time even though neither of these may be realistic expectations. Additionally the propensity for these employees to sensegive their incorrect assumptions to new members of the organization can occur the longer conjecture-based assumptions go uncorrected. The idea that employees would misinterpret clues or messages about a sensemaking event in a way that is plausible, rather than accurate aligns with the principles Weick (2000) described when discussing the pitfalls of some sensemaking processes. The conjecture represented in employees interpretations of organizational events displays the harm that occurs when the context of events are not framed in a way that is meaningful to the employees and can result internal communication

problems such as unrealistic expectations, resentment, and low subordinate-supervisor trust.

With regards to the last criteria of discordant framing-to-sensemaking, there were a number of instances where leadership provided competing mixed-message frames that resulted in misinformation or worse, alignment and othering. With regards to the remaining issues of the mixed-message format from the leadership represented in the competing value-based comments, potential pitfalls include the likelihood that employees may align with one leader-message or another. Both leaders participate in framing their values and roles in the organization in two parts. One part is identification with "sales-first" mentality and "the field guy" and the other is the identification with "accounting" and "the numbers guy." While the intentions of the leadership are to position themselves as a partnership where both owners play up their strengths as a team, the resulting framework serves to position the leadership as competing entities with which to be aligned. Again, we see here a discursive approach to leadership through the use of language ("he's numbers, I'm in the field")—constructing a leader frame that positions the employees to align with one side or the other.

Alignment in an "us" versus "them" mentality has extreme negative consequences for any organization that relies on the coordinated actions of all team members working towards the same goal. Research has demonstrated instances where the "us versus them" mentality has contributed to "othering" (Jaworski & Coupland, 2005; Keen 1991). Designating "others" is a process that

can lead to binary systems of opposition as a means of recognizing either autonomy or participation in a group opposite to the "other" (Jaworski & Coupland, 2005). At times, such a designation has the power to position those labeled as the "other" in a way that dehumanizes or targets "other" members with hostility. When members of the same organization engage in othering, the ramifications for the health of organization are potentially serious. The definition of othering requires that members position themselves in an almost combatant standpoint, which can breed resentment and hostility in the workplace.

As the leaders position their orientation to each other as "him" and "me," they frame a metaphor, of perhaps, two team captains picking teams at recess. Fairhurst and Sarr (1995) describe metaphors as a strategic tool that describes a subject's likeness to some other entity. The strategy of using a metaphor, a common discursive resource, as a framing tool is so that the sensemaking process is made easier by using a familiar tool to explain (Farihurst, 2007; Clifton 2012). Of complex metaphors, Fairhurst (2007) explains that "our unconscious searches for the deeper meaning and purpose behind the intricate series of comparisons draw by metaphors" (p. 95). Despite the best intentions of the leadership to positions themselves as having two complimenting strengths, the way in which they frame their roles has the opposite effect and positions them as combatants in the eyes of their employees. Such an outcome can have a negative effect on the overall health of the organization if the employees enact an alignment with one leader or the other.

Theoretical Contribution

This study advances theories in three ways. First, this research assesses a discrepancy in the Small Business Growth Phases Model. Second, this research contributes additional Framing Strategies through the identification of additional framing tools. Lastly, this research identifies a previous theoretical deficiency in two ways—through the discussion of the overlap of Framing-to-Sensemaking Processes and through the introduction of the concept of "failure to frame."

Until this point, Churchill and Lewis (1983) positioned the Success-Disengagement and the Success-Growth decision as a two-directional decision, essentially suggesting that entrepreneurs have one of two choices. The previous research suggests that entrepreneurs reach a measure of success and *actively* stop growing, or *actively* continue to grow their business. This research counters the claim of active choice by suggesting that external circumstance lends another component to the choice of growth or disengagement. As seen in this analysis, the unframed communication on the part of Traynor was the result of a "hunkering down indefinitely" mentality to wait out the current state of the market, and an uncertainty about how a communicated message would affect employee morale—neither an active choice to stop growing or to continue to grow, and yet, still a circumstance that needed to be, and was unsuccessfully framed. In a similar vein, the messages delivered by Ashby, emphasizing the desire to "put sales first" result from no clear active choice to grow, was a value statement that happens to be growth-oriented rather than emphasizing status quo.

The theoretical contribution lies in the recognition of a third option to Success-Growth and Success-Disengagement that focuses on a holding pattern. Perhaps the title of such a stage, in following with the model established by Churchill and Lewis (1984) could be Success-Stationary. Success-Stationary could be an organization that exemplifies a desire to remain at the status quo based on a reaction to *external* circumstance rather than choice. Success-Stationary could also characterize organizations that are trying to engage in further growth but are failing based on too many internal communication problems such as those exhibited in the case study and thus remaining stationary. At any rate, the important contribution lays in the notion that, at time, the "choice" to stay or grow may not be a choice at all, rather a response to circumstance.

Fairhurst (2007, 2010) identifies a variety of different framing tools, such as jargon, metaphor and contrast, used to manage the meaning of organizational events. While such tools are verbal in nature, Fairhurst identifies written versions of framing tools through mission statement and organization vision. The identification of the motto and logo as well as the position description checklists serves as an unidentified written framing tools that leaders can use to successfully frame company principles and expectations for employees Identifying these additional tools is an important contribution in two ways. First, the motto and logo, in addition to the position description checklists, are entities that leaders can use as a means of controlling for spontaneity. Although previously not mentioned in this work, Fairhurst (2010) presents another framing principle that suggests

"effective framing requires leaders be able to control their own spontaneous communication" (p. 12). The creation of the position description checklist for publication entails that leaders construct the frame in a way that is controlled, strategic, and planned—effectively controlling for spontaneity. Second, the publication of expectations framed by leadership functions as a continuous reminder for employees to "receive" carefully framed messages from the leadership. For example—the careful creation of company principles, posted on the walls of the offices, serve as a constant, framed message whether the owner is physically present or not. Constant, carefully framed messages function in ways that provide steady, context controlled meaning management—a counter measure to alleviate ambiguous situations.

Another way in which this research contributes theoretically to the framing literature is by identifying two deficiencies: the overlap of Framing-to-Sensemaking Processes, and through the introduction of the concept of "failure to frame." Harmonious and Discordant Framing-to-Sensemaking has been discussed extensively and identifies specific criteria outlining the overlap between framing and sensemaking. Essentially, this research contributes to the idea that framing is the specific discursive resource used in sensegiving—a process that influences sensemaking. The specific criteria for Harmonious and Discordant Framing are unique to the literature which only discusses sensemaking and framing as independent entities. The importance of identifying both framing and sensemaking as a united concept draws from two distinct fields of

communication processes. From the vantage point of sensemaking, the notable theoretical identifications outline sensemaking cues (i.e., social, ongoing, retrospective, grounded in action, etc.) (Weick, 1995). The current literature lacks research on the sensemaking process as a response to direct leadership cues. From the vantage point of Framing, previous literature identifies the ways in which framing is used as a means of leadership power (Fairhurst, 2010). Understanding leadership via the effects of employees identifies not just that framing is a powerful discursive resources, but also identifies the *ways* in which the power of framing effects employees' sensemaking situations. Leadership literature that focuses on employee sensemaking responses to framing offers a unique contribution to the current literature.

Lastly, this research extends the literature regarding the effects of framing. While Fairhurst (2007) describes the art of framing as a means of improving communication, unrecognized is the idea that a **failure to frame** can generate negative framing situations. A failure to frame results from a lack of strategic message control on the part of the leadership and is more likely to result in sensemaking that is based in plausibility rather than accuracy. While Weick (1995) identifies specific sensemaking situations that characterize ambiguous organizational contexts (i.e., multiple conflicting interpretations; different value orientations; goals are unclear or conflicting). While these situations identify common catalysts for ambiguity in sensemaking, none address leadership's failure to frame as a contributor to an ambiguous situation. The concept of

"failure to frame" serves a theoretical tie that both sensemaking and framing by understanding another communication dimension generating ambiguous organization situations. The result of this dimension of sensemaking as it is linked to framing provides and additional context with which to view both sensemaking as result of framing.

Practical Recommendations

As a means of reducing discordant framing-to-sensemaking outcomes, the study suggests the following recommendations. The characteristics of this organization are described as a small for-profit business, operating under the leadership of two owners. The following recommendations are directed to leaders regardless of the structure of the organization.

1) **Develop one unified interpretation for employees**: In the event that an organization is operating under the leadership of two people, the leaders must work together to reduce multiple conflicting interpretations of organizational events and strive to frame cohesive goals for members of the organization. This analysis demonstrated how dysfunctional communication between at leadership team can lead to internal problems such as bi-modal alignment, conjecture, and othering within the organization. Leaders that construct a presence that communicates one set goal to the members of the organization can reduce the amount of ambiguous sensemaking situations stemming from mismatched or misaligned goals of leadership.

2) **Avoid the tendency to harbor a "need-to-know" mindset**: Leadership that

harbors a need-to-know mindset can fall into the trap of completely neglecting to

inform employees about crucial changes to their positions. Leaders that employ a

need-to-know mindset are also likely to overlook the contributions of employees

concerning their frontline worker experience. One of the principles of High

Reliability Organizations suggests that leadership defer to expertise as a means of

staying sensitive to operations (Weick & Suttcliffe, 2007). Employees working

on the frontlines presumably gain an expertise in their area and have the ability to

offer suggestions on process improvement. Leaders need to suspend a need-to-

know mindset in favor of soliciting negative feedback from employees. While

soliciting negative feedback from employees can be face threatening as a leader,

such feedback can lead to process improvement for the organization,

subsequently engaging in sensitivity to operations. In instances where a need-to-

know mindset prevails, a missed opportunity to gain input from employees on the

frontlines can result in a missed opportunity to improve the function of the

organization.

3) **Solicit feedback in regularly occurring meetings:** In the same vein as putting

aside a need-to-know mindset in favor of feedback, the implementation of regular

meetings can assist in sensitivity to operations. While meetings should not be

used solely for informing, the opportunity to discuss changes and generate

feedback can occur from regular, formal, conversation. In this organization, one

of the main employee concerns was in the lack of meetings. In organizations such

as Universal Employment Inc., failure to solicit feedback from front-line workers results in an organization that misses out on innovation, creativity, and expertise from the individuals working those positions. Meetings that occur on a regular basis not only serve the organization as a source for relevant suggestions for improvement, but they also have the ability to allow employees to become invested in the organization as a contributing member. Meetings are an especially important function for small businesses in transition because change is occurring at a rapid pace. Meetings allow leaders of small businesses a formal opportunity to frame the changes that are occurring in a regulated way that limits ambiguity and cuts down on employee uncertainty. Of course, like anything, meetings should occur in moderation and should not waste time or occur unnecessarily.

4) **Become visible as a leader**: In this organization, there is limited visibility from at least one of the leaders. The owners of this organization feared that increasing visibility would lead employees to position them as a "mommy" and a "daddy" figure—ultimately causing conflict. Increasing leader visibility and building a rapport with people does not have to mean that the integrity of an established hierarchy becomes compromised. Leaders that find themselves in an organization where their strengths are complimentary (in this instance, one leader was good with numbers, the other good with operations) does not mean that the finance person must retreat to the office or the operations person must never look at a financial statement. Leaders can increase personal visibility without offering direction that competes with the others authority. Increasing visibility does not

necessarily mean in a physical presence. Leaders, especially in a small business, can take advantage of morale building concepts such as a monthly or quarterly newsletter highlighting positive events or people. Another method of increasing visibility can occur through social events such as an annual company picnic or holiday event. Increasing visibility positions leadership as a single unit, rather than as a bi-modal pair, and also serves to provide a single team that members of the organization can align with, rather than two competing entities fighting for member loyalty. Instead, both leaders have the opportunity to direct impressions on a personal level, rather than letting ambiguous sensemaking opportunities grow legs of their own.

5) **As a leader, cross-train in all assets of the organization:** The leaders of this organization segregated themselves based on their individual talents, a decision that resulted in an outcome of bi-modal leadership and employee alignment. Leader partnerships, in which both leaders have expertise in one area, should provide at least a basic education for the other partner about the details of their specialty. While suggesting cross-training may be potentially face-threatening, the positive results can add tremendous value to the organization. An organization where both owners have a main expertise *and* a minor expertise creates a knowledgeable leadership unit. Creating cross-trained leaders allows leaders to view the organization from a "big picture" perspective—a powerful advantage in running a small business. Additionally, knowledge is powerful in other ways, specifically in the idea that well-informed leaders of the craft as a

whole will also have a better understanding of what the counterpart contributes.

A better understanding of the contribution of the counterpart allows for increased

sensitivity to the others position. Lastly, from a practical standpoint, dual leaders

in an organization will automatically have a contingency plan put into place

should some event occur that forces one owner to act alone (i.e., a leader is

incapacitated; a leader leaves the business; a leader is out of contact for an

extended period of time). An organization that fosters leaders that not only have

an expertise, but also are trained in the others' expertise has numerous benefits to

the health and maintenance of the organization.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study, like all studies, has limitations. These data do not ascertain the

status of the organization as being either directly success-growth oriented or

success-disengagement oriented. An additional limitation is that this data set is

not longitudinal.

This organization in this study did not fall into either of Churchill and

Lewis's (1984) Success trajectory (Growth or Disengagement). Future directions

for research could use this study as a pilot study for assessing the conditions that

lead to a stationary condition (Success-Stationary) or growth across

organizations. Additionally, because there was no clear status of the direction of

this organization, future research could assess the ways in which an organization

becomes committed to one direction or another and then frames those messages

of change. This research also focused on one specific context for framing within

the Small Business Growth Phases. Potential research assessing the Small Business Growth Cycle literature could also document the different leadership framing techniques during each point of growth, including Existence, Survival, and Resources Maturity. A final future direction could focus on collecting longitudinal data to ascertain the long-term success or failure of a business that engages in Harmonious or Discordant Framing-to-Sensemaking messages.

Conclusion

No matter the size of the organization, the number of leaders, or the potential directions the organization can take, discursive leadership through framing is a skill needed in managing the meaning of uncertain and ambiguous organizational events. The power of framing as a sensegiving tool can alleviate employee uncertainty even in instances where leaders may be unsure of what is to come for organizations. Leadership framing as a tool can also assist in employee sensemaking in instances where multiple messages or conflicting goals can detract from the overall operation of the organization.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol-Employees

1. Please tell me your name, position and job description. How long have you worked with Universal Employment?

2. What role have you taken in the success of this company? How have the leaders of this company responded to your efforts?

3. Please describe the current state of Universal Employment? What direction do you see the company going in the next five years?

4. What are the changes that you have seen since you started working at Universal Employment?

5. What direction do you see leadership taking this company? What information have you been given about the direction of the company?

6. How have the leaders of Universal Employment contributed to the success or failure of this organization? What would you have done differently? What would you keep?

7. Please tell me of an instance where you felt listened to or heard by your supervisor?

8. Please tell me of an instance where you did not feel listened to or heard by your supervisor?

9. Please tell me of an instance where you felt you could give either positive or negative feedback to your supervisor?

10. Please tell me of an instance where you did not feel could give either positive or negative feedback to your supervisor?

11. What steps have been taken on the part of leadership that has enabled you to succeed in this organization? (How has the leadership helped you succeed?)

12. What did you learn from your coworkers upon being hired here at Universal Employment? What advice did you coworkers give you when you were first hired?

13. If I were a new hire in at Universal Employment, what would be the most important thing for me to know about working here?

14. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about the leadership of this organization, the trajectory of this organization or your role in this organization?

Appendix B: Interview Protocol-Leaders

1. Tell me briefly about how you came to create this organization.

2. What role have you taken in the success of this company? How have the employees responded to your efforts?

3. What is your leadership philosophy with regards to running the company? To employee relationships? To times of organizational success or failure?

4. Please describe the current state of Universal Employment? What direction do you see the company going in the next five years?

5. What information have you given your employees about the direction of the company?

6. What are the changes that you have seen since you started Universal Employment? Besides the size?

7. How have the employees of Universal Employment contributed to the success or failure of this organization?

8. What steps have you taken to enable your employees to succeed in this organization?

9. Please tell me of an instance where you listened to concerns raised by your subordinates?

10. This might be a bit difficult to admit to, but can you tell me of an instance where you overlooked concerns raised by your subordinates?

11. How do you let employees know that they have done a good job? What is the procedure for letting other employees learn about their coworker's success?

12. Please tell me of an instance where you felt you could give either positive or negative feedback to your subordinate?

13. Please tell me of an instance where you did not feel could give either positive or negative feedback to your subordinate?

14. What do you consider important for employees to know when they are hired here at Universal Employment?

15. If I were a new hire in at Universal Employment, what advice would you give me about working here?

16. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about the trajectory of this organization or your role in this organization?

Appendix C: Organizational Chart