



## **Sensemaking in Everyday Science Practice**

Xu, Sunny Mosangzi

*Publication date:*  
2018

*Document version*  
Peer reviewed version

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
Xu, S. M. (2018). *Sensemaking in Everyday Science Practice*. Poster session presented at Academy of Management Annual Meeting 2018, Chicago, United States.

# Sensemaking in Everyday Science Practices

Sunny Mosangzi Xu

PhD fellow

✉ smx@ifro.ku.dk

🐦 @SunnyMXu

## Abstract

University has been going through dramatic changes over the decades. Besides research and education, university took on the role of contributing to regional economic development through commercialization and academic engagement activities. This has brought a series of strategic and organizational changes in universities. On an individual level, academic scientists are changing their daily practices of doing academic science; their identities are actively shaped and developed.

Therefore, in my PhD research, I would like to explore

1. How scientists make sense of their identity in everyday practice and continuously shape and develop their identities while interacting with various stakeholders;
2. How artefacts and objects enact scientists in their identity work and daily practices while interacting with various stakeholders.

Through a longitudinal in-depth field study at a multidisciplinary research group in a top Danish university, I aim to observe and understand

1. how scientists make sense and give sense to their actions in different situations
2. how scientists' identity work on different levels influence their individual strategy praxis;
3. how ideas and perceptions are defined, made sense of, transported and stabilized through material artefacts.

## Keywords

sensemaking;  
strategy-as-practice;  
identity work;  
materiality;  
ethnography

## Theoretical Background

### SENSEMAKING PERSPECTIVE

- » The major focus is action and interpretation, rather than decision and choice making (Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld, 2005).
- » "Sensemaking is central because it is the primary site where meanings materialize that inform and constrain identity and action" (Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld, 2005).
- » From a sensemaking perspective, identity shapes our enaction and our interpretation, which, in turn, stabilizes or destabilizes our identity (Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld, 2005).

### IDENTITY THEORY

- » Identity is one key micro-concepts to make sense and explain actions (Gioia et al., 2013; Powell and Colyvas, 2008).
- » It is a fluid and dynamic concept that it can be developed, sustained, or altered over time (Gioia et al., 2013).
- » Macro-level -- organizational identity; Micro-level -- individual identity; Meso-level -- interpersonal identity (Lebaron, Phillip, and Thompson, 2009).

### STRATEGY-AS-PRACTICE

- » It is about the doing of strategy.
- » In SAP, identity theory has been used to study practitioners, actions and praxis. Previous studies have mostly applied both the macro-level and micro-level identity theory, but few have tried to understand how identity work on different level has an influence on individual strategy praxis (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009).

## Research Design

A longitudinal in-depth field study in a multidisciplinary research group at Natural History Museum in a top Danish University. The empirical focus here is the actions and communications in and around the research group. By physically being there in the research group



in an extended period of time, I will embed myself in the field to acquire a "native" understanding of the research group and the context they are working in.

Data collection includes:

- Observations at meetings
- Shadowing
- semi-structured and open interviews with group members and relevant stakeholders
- Participate in workshops, events, and possibly conferences
- Desk research
- ethnographic fieldnotes
- research log with a level of reflexivity

Data collection period is expected to end when having reached a level of data saturation.

I will take a iterative data collection and analysis, aiming to generate a theory grounded in data.

Specifically, ethnographic fieldwork will

- Zooming in on the interactional patterns performed by the practice (Nicolini, 2009)
- Zooming in on "the actual doing and its temporal flow" (Nicolini, 2009)
- Zooming in on "the active contribution of artefacts and other practices in the accomplishment of the activity at hand" (Nicolini, 2009)

## Reference

- Gioia, D. A., Patvardhan, S. D., Hamilton, A. L., & Corley, K. G. 2013. Organizational identity formation and change. *Academy of Management Annals*, 7(1): 123-193.
- Jarzabkowski, P. & Spee, A. P. 2009. Strategy-as-practice: A review and future directions for the field. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 11(1): 69-95.
- Lebaron, C. D., Phillip, G., & Thompson, M. P. 2009. Identity work during Boundary Moments: Managing Positive Identities Through Talk and Embodied Interaction. In L. M. Roberts & J. E. Dutton (Eds.), *Exploring Positive Identities and Organizations: Building a Theoretical and Research Foundation*: 3-23: Routledge.
- Nicolini, D. 2009. Zooming In and Zooming Out: A Package of Method and Theory to Study Work Practices. In S. Ybema, D. Yanow, H. Wels, & K. Frans (Eds.), *Organizational Ethnography: Studying the Complexities of Everyday Life*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Powell, W. W. & Colyvas, J. A. 2008. Microfoundations of institutional theory. *The Sage handbook of organizational institutionalism*, 276: 298.
- Weick, K. E., Sutcliffe, K. M., & Obstfeld, D. 2005. Organizing and the Process of Sensemaking. *Organization Science*, 16(4): 409-421.