

Navigating Organisational Change: Middle Managers' Sensemaking Practices in a Malaysian Organisation

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ABSTRACT

Sensemaking is critical for middle managers navigating organisational change, yet research on their sensemaking practices remains limited, particularly in the Malaysian context. This study examines how middle managers in a Malaysian organisation interpret and respond to change, drawing on the Communicative Constitution of Organisations The Montreal School (CCO TMS) theory. Using a qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 middle managers to explore their sensemaking strategies. The findings reveal seven key sensemaking practices: adopting a big-picture mindset, demonstrating empathy, reflecting on emotions, relying on Company Approved Procedure guidelines, engaging in storytelling, participating in change intervention programs, and utilizing internal communication channels. These practices enable middle managers to bridge the gap between senior leadership's strategic vision and employees' operational realities, fostering alignment and reducing resistance. The study highlights the crucial role of middle managers in facilitating successful change initiatives and underscores the importance of equipping them with communication and sensemaking resources. Organisations should prioritize structured communication strategies and leadership support mechanisms to enhance middle managers' effectiveness in guiding teams through change.

Keywords: Organisational Change, Malaysian Organisation, Middle Managers, Strategic Change, Sensemaking

INTRODUCTION

Organisational change involves a fundamental transformation in an organisation's purpose, priorities, and goals (Lewis, 2019). For organisations to adapt and thrive, employees must cognitively reorient their understanding of work structures and strategies (Mezias et al., 2001). Middle managers play a crucial role in this process, acting as intermediaries between senior leadership and operational teams. They are responsible for translating top-down strategic initiatives into actionable steps while simultaneously addressing employee concerns (Rouleau & Balogun, 2011).

Despite their strategic positioning, middle managers often struggle to make sense of organisational change due to ambiguity, misalignment in communication, and conflicting expectations from different hierarchical levels (Ionescu et al., 2014; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). This lack of clarity can hinder their ability to support change initiatives, leading to increased resistance among employees, diminished trust in leadership, and poor implementation of new policies (Huy, 2010). While extensive research has explored the role of senior leaders in organisational change (Goodall, 2020), studies on how middle managers construct meaning during change remain scarce, particularly in the Malaysian context. Malaysia's organisational culture is deeply influenced by collectivist values, where hierarchy, harmony, and respect for authority shape workplace interactions (Hofstede, 2010). In this environment, middle managers may face unique challenges in balancing top-down directives with the concerns of subordinates. Unlike in Western contexts, where open dialogue and

participatory decision-making are more common, Malaysian middle managers may struggle with a lack of autonomy, fear of contradicting leadership, and the pressure to maintain group cohesion (Abdullah & Sofyan, 2022). These factors can significantly influence how they make sense of, internalize, and communicate change within their organisations. However, existing research has not adequately addressed how these cultural dimensions shape middle managers' sensemaking practices during organisational transformation.

This study aims to bridge this gap by examining how middle managers in a Malaysian organisation engage in sensemaking during change initiatives. Using the Communicative Constitution of Organisations (CCO TMS) framework, this research explores the specific sensemaking practices middle managers employ to navigate change and facilitate organisational adaptation. By identifying these practices, the study provides theoretical insights into the intersection of sensemaking, middle management, and organisational change, while offering practical recommendations for leadership strategies that enhance middle managers' effectiveness in change management.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Organisational change

Organisational change is a dynamic process that involves transitioning from a current state to a desired future state to enhance organisational effectiveness (Lunenberg, 2020). This process is often driven by external factors such as technological advancements, market competition, and regulatory changes, as well as internal factors like leadership decisions and employee performance (Fitriasari, 2020). Organisations that fail to adapt to these changes risk becoming obsolete, as rigidity can lead to inefficiency and loss of competitive advantage (Brown & Harvey, 2021). Change initiatives can take various forms, including structural changes (e.g., reorganising departments), technological changes (e.g., adopting new software), and cultural changes (e.g., shifting organisational values) (Faupel & Sub, 2019). While change is essential for growth and sustainability, it is often met with resistance from employees, particularly when it disrupts established routines or creates uncertainty (Schneider et al., 2021). Resistance can stem from fear of the unknown, lack of trust in leadership, or perceived threats to job security (Iniguez-Gallardo et al., 2021). Therefore, effective change management requires not only strategic planning but also the ability to address human factors, such as employee attitudes and behaviours.

The Role of Middle Managers During Organisational Change

Middle managers play a critical role in implementing organisational change. Positioned between senior leadership and frontline employees, they act as intermediaries who translate strategic objectives into actionable plans (Kusa et al., 2022). Their dual role involves both executing change initiatives and addressing employee concerns, making them pivotal to the success of change efforts. During periods of change, middle managers are often tasked with communicating the vision of senior leadership, motivating employees, and managing resistance (Blakcori & Psychogios, 2021). Their ability to navigate these responsibilities can significantly influence the outcomes of change initiatives. However, middle managers themselves may face challenges during change, such as role ambiguity, increased workload, and conflicting expectations from superiors and subordinates (Kieran et al., 2020). These challenges can hinder their performance and, by extension, the organisation's ability to achieve its change objectives. A key to help them navigate themselves during organisational change is through sensemaking.

Sensemaking

Sensemaking is the process through which individuals interpret and give meaning to ambiguous or complex situations (Weick, 2020; Weick, 1995). In the context of organisational change, sensemaking is crucial for middle managers as they navigate the uncertainties and complexities associated with change initiatives. Sensemaking enables middle managers to understand the rationale behind change, align their actions with organisational goals, and communicate effectively with their teams (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Middle managers engage in sensemaking by gathering information, interpreting signals from senior leadership, and constructing narratives that help employees make sense of the change (Wyant & Kramer, 2022). This process

is particularly important during the early stages of change, when ambiguity is high and employees are seeking clarity about the implications of the change for their roles and responsibilities. By engaging in sensemaking, middle managers can reduce uncertainty, build trust, and foster a sense of shared understanding among employees (Balogun & Johnson, 2005). Moreover, sensemaking is not a one-time event but an ongoing process that evolves as change unfolds. Middle managers must continuously update their interpretations based on new information and feedback from employees (Weick et al., 2005). This iterative process allows them to adapt their strategies and address emerging challenges, thereby enhancing the likelihood of successful change implementation.

Sensemaking Practices in Organisations

When organisational change is implemented, middle managers can engage in various sensemaking practices to understand and manage the change effectively. Research identifies various sensemaking practices, such as storytelling (Kellas, 2021), workshops (Saleem et al., 2018), and social interactions (Li et al., 2020), that help middle managers interpret and navigate change. It is important to note that there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to sensemaking practices; the effectiveness of each depends on the preferences and contexts of the change participants (Hubel, 2022). One common sensemaking activity is storytelling, which helps individuals frame organisational change in a way that makes it easier to understand. Cooper (2021) suggests that managers who create personal narratives about their responsibilities and identities as loyal employees can reduce their stress during organisational change. Another activity is the use of metaphors. Metaphors help middle managers make sense of changes by offering justifications for their actions during times of uncertainty (Romo & Czajkowski, 2022; Vaara & Whittle, 2022). Social interactions are also critical, as they allow managers to exchange perspectives on how others are handling the change, which can lead to new insights and ways of understanding the situation (Fan & Dawson, 2022).

Some additional sensemaking practices are internal communication to share information and align understanding (Li et al., 2020), workshops and training sessions to gain new knowledge and skills (Saghafian et al., 2020) as well as notetaking and reflection to process emotions and plan actions (Heaphy, 2017). The following table summarizes key sensemaking practices identified in the literature:

Table 1: Examples of Sensemaking Practices

Scholars/Researchers	Sensemaking Practices
Weick (2020;1995)	Identity construction, Social interactions, Retrospective reflection, Cue interpretation, Ongoing process, Plausibility, Sensibility
Balogun & Johnson (2005)	Storytelling, Change interventions
Maitlis & Christianson (2014)	Storytelling, Metaphors
Heaphy (2017)	Listening, Reflexivity, Storytelling, Mindfulness, Empathy
Klein & Eckhaus (2017)	Collecting information, Communicating with leaders
Saghafian et al. (2020)	Focus on vision, Open communication, Workshops, Use of organisational resources
Blakcori & Psychogios (2021)	Internal communication, Dialogic communication, Self-reflexivity
Wyant & Kramer (2022)	Two-way communication, Apply previous experience, Observe others
Smith et al. (2022)	Collaborative interpretation, Negotiations, Passive acceptance

These practices, while diverse, all support middle managers in navigating the uncertainties of organisational change. By engaging in these practices, managers can clarify their roles, reduce anxiety, and guide their teams through transitions.

Demographic Sub-Patterns in Middle Managers' Sensemaking Practices

Research indicates that sensemaking practices are significantly influenced not only by the organisational context but also by the demographic characteristics of middle managers, such as their experience, hierarchical position, and gender. These demographic factors shape how middle managers engage in sensemaking during organisational change, highlighting the importance of considering these variables in change management processes.

Experience is a key factor that influences sensemaking practices. Senior middle managers, with greater organisational tenure, tend to engage in more strategic and long-term sensemaking. They are able to leverage their deep understanding of the organisation's history, networks, and established structures to interpret and implement change initiatives effectively (Blakcori & Psychogios, 2021). Their sensemaking process aligns closely with corporate objectives, allowing them to translate high-level strategies into actionable plans. Research by Gjerde and Alvesson (2020) further highlights that senior managers often have better access to critical information, which aids their ability to make sense of change in a more informed manner. In contrast, junior middle managers, who have less organisational knowledge and fewer resources, typically adopt a more adaptive and reactive approach to sensemaking. They rely heavily on peer interactions and guidance from senior leaders to navigate change, focusing more on immediate, task-oriented concerns (Abdul Manaf et al., 2020). This distinction in experience and access to resources shapes how these two groups interpret and implement change initiatives.

Gender also plays a crucial role in shaping the sensemaking practices of middle managers. Male managers often exhibit a more directive, task-oriented approach, relying on formal communication channels and structured decision-making processes (Inostroza et al., 2023). Female managers, however, tend to adopt a more relational and collaborative leadership style, focusing on building interpersonal relationships and fostering team cohesion (Pluckelmann et al., 2024). Research suggests that women in leadership roles create more inclusive environments that encourage participatory decision-making, which can improve the overall sensemaking process during times of change (Zeiser, 2024). Despite these advantages, female managers often face challenges related to authority and influence within organisations. The phenomenon of the "authority gap" suggests that women's leadership capabilities are frequently undervalued, which limits their recognition and reduces their influence in decision-making processes (Thelma & Ngulube, 2024). This gender disparity can hinder women's ability to effectively drive organisational change and influence the sensemaking process within their teams.

These demographic sub-patterns emphasize the importance of recognising both hierarchical and gender-based differences when examining sensemaking in organisational change. For instance, the experiences of senior versus junior managers or male versus female managers can lead to different interpretations of the same change initiatives. This has direct implications for the success of change management efforts. Organisations that recognise these differences and implement tailored training programs, mentorship, and leadership development initiatives can enhance the effectiveness of middle managers in navigating change. Facilitating knowledge-sharing between senior and junior managers, as well as fostering gender-equitable leadership practices, can significantly improve sensemaking capabilities and, by extension, organisational adaptability (Abdul Manaf et al., 2020; Inostroza et al., 2023).

Linking Organisational Change and Sensemaking Practices

The success of organisational change initiatives often hinges on the ability of middle managers to make sense of the change and guide their teams through the transition. Sensemaking practices enable middle managers to bridge the gap between senior leadership's strategic vision and employees' operational realities. By interpreting and contextualising change, middle managers can create a coherent narrative that aligns employees' actions with organisational objectives (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). In Malaysian organisations,

where cultural and contextual factors may influence how change is perceived and implemented, sensemaking becomes even more critical. Middle managers must navigate cultural norms, power dynamics, and communication styles to effectively manage change (Blakcori & Psychogios (2021)). For example, in hierarchical cultures, middle managers may need to balance the expectations of senior leaders with the concerns of subordinates, requiring a nuanced approach to sensemaking. Ultimately, sensemaking practices empower middle managers to act as change agents who not only implement change but also shape its meaning and impact within the organisation. By fostering a shared understanding of change, middle managers can mitigate resistance, enhance employee engagement, and drive successful change outcomes.

Communicative Constitution of Organisations the Montreal School (CCO) Theory

This study adopts the Communicative Constitution of Organisations the Montreal School (CCO TMS) theory to examine how middle managers engage in sensemaking during organisational change. CCO TMS theory posits that organisations are constituted through communication rather than existing as static entities; they are continuously shaped and reshaped through Conversations and Texts shared among organisational members (Taylor & Cooren, 1996). In the context of CCO TMS, Text refers to the language used in communication whether written, verbal, nonverbal, or visual that encapsulates the thoughts, emotions, and actions of individuals within the organisation. Conversations, on the other hand, represents the communicative exchanges between individuals, where meaning is shared and negotiated through interaction. Together, Texts and Conversations construct and sustain organisational identity and behaviour (Taylor & Van Every, 2000). CCO TMS provides a valuable lens for understanding how middle managers not only interpret but also actively shape the communication processes that define organisational change. Their role as communicators is pivotal in guiding their teams through periods of uncertainty by framing, reinforcing, and responding to evolving organisational narratives. In this study, Texts are defined as the messages created by middle managers including verbal, written, and nonverbal communications that reflect their interpretations of organisational change. Conversations refer to the interactions between middle managers and other organisational members, through which these texts are developed, exchanged, and negotiated. By applying CCO TMS, this research aims to explore how middle managers' communicative exchanges shape their sensemaking practices during organisational change.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design using semi-structured in-depth interviews to explore how middle managers in a Malaysian organisation engage in sensemaking during organisational change. Qualitative methods are particularly suitable for investigating socially constructed meanings and lived experiences (Taylor et al., 2016), making them appropriate for understanding the interpretative processes involved in sensemaking.

The study was conducted at XYZ Organisation, a large Malaysian corporation that has undergone significant organisational change in recent years. The organisation was selected due to its active restructuring efforts, providing a relevant setting to examine middle managers' sensemaking practices. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure they met two key criteria: a minimum of four years of employment at XYZ to ensure familiarity with the organisation's culture and operations, and at least one year of experience in a middle management role to ensure direct involvement in organisational change initiatives. A total of 30 middle managers participated in the study, representing 12 different departments within the organisation. The sample included eight female and 22 male managers, with work experience ranging from four to 25 years. To protect confidentiality, all participant names were replaced with pseudonyms.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which allowed for flexibility in exploring participants' personal experiences while maintaining consistency across key themes (Knott et al., 2022). Each interview lasted between 45 to 90 minutes and was conducted in either English or Malay, based on the participant's preference. The interview questions focused on how middle managers interpreted and responded to organisational change, the strategies they used to make sense of change, and the communication practices they employed to align with leadership and employees. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to preserve participants' original meanings. To ensure accuracy in data representation, member checking was conducted by returning transcripts to participants for verification.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a widely used qualitative method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis followed a systematic approach, beginning with familiarization with the data, where researchers read and re-read transcripts to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' perspectives. This was followed by initial coding, where transcripts were coded manually using an inductive approach. Codes were assigned to words, phrases, or segments related to middle managers' sensemaking practices. Once the initial codes were established, they were grouped into preliminary themes based on similarities and patterns. These themes were then reviewed against the dataset to ensure they accurately represented participants' experiences. The refining process involved defining and naming themes while ensuring they were meaningfully linked to existing sensemaking theories. Finally, the finalized themes were reviewed for coherence and alignment with research objectives. The seven key sensemaking practices identified in this study, including adopting a big-picture mindset, demonstrating empathy, engaging in storytelling, and participating in organisational interventions, emerged through this iterative coding process.

To enhance the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the study, multiple strategies were employed. Credibility was ensured through member checking, allowing participants to review and confirm their interview transcripts, and triangulation, where insights across different middle managers from various departments were compared. Dependability was strengthened through a code-recoding process, in which initial codes were reviewed again after a two-week interval to ensure consistency. Additionally, an audit trail documented coding decisions, theme development, and data interpretation to maintain transparency. Confirmability was upheld through reflexivity, where the researchers continuously reflected on their positionality to acknowledge potential biases. Direct quotations from participants were incorporated to support findings, ensuring interpretations remained grounded in the data.

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from XYZ Organisation's management, and informed consent was secured from all participants. Confidentiality was strictly maintained by removing identifiable details and replacing names with pseudonyms. Participants were fully informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without consequences. By adhering to these ethical principles, the study ensured that participants' rights, privacy, and well-being were safeguarded throughout the research process.

FINDINGS

Respondents' demographic background

A total of 30 middle managers from 12 different departments at XYZ organisation has participated in this study. There are eight female respondents and 22 male respondents. The shortest years of experience working at XYZ organisation are four years and the longest are 25 years. Meanwhile, the shortest work experiences as middle managers are three years and the longest are 15 years. Lastly, this research had 23 male middle managers and seven respondents' female middle managers. The demographic backgrounds of the 30 respondents are being summarised in Table 2:

Table 2: Respondents' Demographic Information

No.	Name (Pseudonym)	Gender	Years of working at XYZ	Years of being Middle Manager	Middle Manager's Position	Division
1.	Luq	Male	4	3	Junior	Business Performance Management
2.	Athi	Female	5	4	Senior	Engineering and Technology
3.	Mad	Male	7	6	Senior	Risk, Insurance and Compliance
4.	Zuh	Female	8	3	Junior	Engineering and Technology

5.	Isza	Female	9	4	Junior	Quality
6.	Zul	Male	9	4	Junior	Engineering and Technology
7.	Wan	Male	9	7	Senior	Finance
8.	Ami	Female	9	8	Senior	Quality
9.	Mus	Male	9	5	Senior	Quality
10.	Fu	Male	9	5	Senior	Supplier Management
11.	Isma	Female	10	4	Junior	Engineering and Technology
12.	Man	Male	10	6	Senior	Production
13.	Haz	Male	10	8	Senior	Programme Management
14.	Saf	Male	10	7	Senior	Quality
15.	Tafa	Male	10	6	Senior	Risk, Insurance and Compliance
16.	Hila	Male	11	10	Senior	Engineering and Technology
17.	Wana	Female	12	8	Senior	Programme Management
18.	Fara	Female	14	5	Senior	Commercial
19.	Han	Male	15	10	Senior	Mechanical Assembly
20.	Abdul	Male	17	15	Senior	Production
21.	Jas	Male	18	10	Senior	Information and Technology
22.	Wahub	Male	19	12	Senior	Production
23.	Elmy	Male	19	15	Senior	Programme Management
24.	Zah	Female	19	15	Senior	Supplier Management
25.	Affan	Male	20	11	Senior	Core Processing
26.	Hed	Male	20	15	Senior	Production
27.	Hak	Male	20	13	Senior	Production
28.	Sheikh	Male	20	10	Senior	Programme Management
29.	Zain	Male	20	12	Senior	Quality
30.	Siv	Male	25	15	Senior	Quality

The thematic analysis revealed seven key sensemaking practices that the middle managers employed to navigate organisational change. These themes were developed through an iterative coding process, where initial codes were reviewed, refined, and grouped into broader categories. Some overlapping themes were merged to improve clarity, such as combining “personal reflection” and “emotional processing” under

‘reflecting on emotions’ and consolidating ‘formal’ and ‘informal communication strategies’ into ‘utilizing internal communication channels’. These seven themes reflect how middle managers engaged in meaning-making to adjust to change and support their teams.

Big-Picture Mindset

Many middle managers highlighted the importance of adopting a broader perspective to navigate change effectively. By focusing on long-term organisational goals rather than immediate disruptions, they were able to stay motivated, reduce stress, and encourage their teams to adapt positively. Luq reflected on how shifting his focus to the bigger picture helped him cope with uncertainty, *“At first, the restructuring felt overwhelming, but when I started thinking about how this would benefit the company in the long run, it made more sense. Instead of resisting, I tried to find ways to align myself with the changes”*. Haz emphasized how reframing change as an opportunity rather than a burden helped him guide his team. *“If we see change as something forced upon us, we resist. But when we frame it as a chance to grow and improve, we become more open to it. That’s what I remind my colleagues every time they feel uncertain”*. Ami noted that a big-picture perspective allowed her to manage stress more effectively, *“Whenever I feel frustrated, I remind myself that short-term challenges lead to long-term stability. That shift in mindset makes a huge difference in how I handle change”*. By maintaining a big-picture mindset, middle managers were able to reduce resistance and promote adaptability among their teams. This perspective also enabled them to communicate the benefits of change more effectively. However, for this mindset to be effective, middle managers needed to establish trust and emotional connection with employees. This was where empathy played a crucial role.

Showing Empathy

Empathy emerged as a critical sensemaking tool, helping middle managers maintain trust, foster collaboration, and ease tensions between leadership and employees. Many respondents emphasized that understanding their colleagues’ emotions helped facilitate smoother transitions during organisational change. Wan highlighted the importance of listening to employees’ concerns, *“People feel frustrated when they think their voices don’t matter. I make sure to acknowledge their concerns, even if I can’t change the situation immediately. That alone makes them more receptive to change”*. Hak reflected on how empathy helped him manage difficult conversations with both employees and senior management, *“Sometimes, I don’t fully agree with leadership’s decisions, but I understand their pressures. Likewise, I know employees struggle with uncertainty. By balancing both perspectives, I can communicate change more effectively”*. Fara emphasized that empathy fosters stronger teamwork during transitions, *“Instead of focusing on what’s difficult, I try to make my team feel like we’re all in this together. That sense of unity makes adapting to change much easier”*. By demonstrating empathy, middle managers were able to create a supportive work environment where employees felt heard and valued. However, while understanding others’ emotions was important, middle managers also needed to regulate their own emotions to remain effective leaders during change.

Reflecting on Emotions

Many middle managers recognized that acknowledging and regulating their emotions was crucial for maintaining control and adapting to organisational change. Self-reflection helped them manage frustration, uncertainty, and stress, allowing them to lead their teams with confidence. Jas described how practicing emotional awareness helped him remain professional, *“At first, I would react negatively to unexpected changes, but over time, I learned to pause and reflect before responding. If I lose control, it affects my team, so I try to stay composed”*. Tafa shared how emotional reflection helped him embrace change instead of fearing it, *“Initially, I was anxious about all the new policies, but once I took time to reflect, I realized my resistance came from fear of the unknown. When I understood that, I was able to adapt more easily”*. Athi emphasized how emotional regulation allowed her to stay focused, *“Change brings uncertainty, but if I let my emotions take over, I lose my ability to think clearly. So I make a conscious effort to stay calm and focus on solutions”*. By reflecting on their emotions, middle managers were able to stay composed and maintain their leadership effectiveness. However, beyond personal reflection, they also relied on structured organisational resources, such as company-approved guidelines, to guide their actions.

Using Company Approved Procedure (CAP) Handbook

Middle managers frequently turned to official company handbooks, policies, and procedural guidelines to navigate change more effectively. These structured resources provided clarity, consistency, and reduced uncertainty during transitions. Abdul explained how referring to company guidelines helped maintain alignment with leadership, *"Instead of making assumptions, I always refer to our Company Approved Procedure Handbook. It helps me ensure that my team is following the right procedures"*. Wana emphasized how CAP provided a sense of stability during uncertainty, *"With so many things changing, having a structured reference point like the handbook makes things less confusing"*. Man noted that using official procedures minimized errors, *"I don't want my team to waste time fixing mistakes. Following company guidelines in the CAP ensures we get things right the first time"*. While written guidelines were essential, many middle managers also relied on storytelling as an informal yet powerful tool to reinforce meaning and motivate their teams.

Storytelling

Storytelling emerged as a crucial sensemaking practice, allowing middle managers to understand the change process, clarify uncertainties, and align with organisational expectations. By exchanging stories, they gained both emotional reassurance and practical insights, reinforcing their commitment to change initiatives. Haz described how informal storytelling helped him make sense of leadership decisions, *"During breaks or meetings, we share stories about leaders' recommendations. It helps me verify my understanding and adapt more effectively"*. Tafa highlighted how hearing colleagues' perspectives deepened his commitment, *"Sharing stories about how change impacts success helps me see the bigger picture. Listening to my colleagues reassures me that we're all in this together"*. Zain reflected on how storytelling shifted his perspective on change, *"At first, I felt like, 'Oh no, not again!' But hearing others' struggles and strategies made me see the benefits. Their stories helped me work more independently"*. Through storytelling, middle managers processed change both practically and emotionally, strengthening workplace relationships and increasing their confidence in navigating transitions.

Attending Organisational Change Program Interventions

Another key sensemaking activity undertaken by XYZ middle managers during the change process was participating in organisational change program interventions, such as workshops, meetings, and seminars. These programs provided access to official information, opportunities for clarification, and a platform for engagement with leadership. Bobby highlighted how attending these interventions helped him gain a clearer understanding of the organisation's transformation, *"These sessions clarify the goals and impacts of change. The trainers explain processes, while meetings allow us to ask questions about the new mission and vision"*. Beyond obtaining information, participation in these interventions fostered collaboration and alignment among middle managers, leadership, and employees. Tafa described how these sessions enhanced teamwork and professional development: *"Workshops and meetings provide accurate updates and help us understand technical job requirements. They also strengthen cooperation between leaders and staff"*. Attending these interventions also countered misinformation by allowing direct communication with leadership. Isma emphasized the importance of these discussions in maintaining transparency: *"These sessions let us express concerns, ask questions, and receive direct answers instead of relying on rumors"*. Overall, participation in change interventions served as a crucial sensemaking strategy, equipping middle managers with clarity, collaborative opportunities, and direct engagement with decision-makers.

Utilizing Internal Communication Channels

The final sensemaking activity identified among middle managers was the effective use of XYZ's internal communication channels, such as face-to-face discussions, emails, company intranet, memos, and digital platforms. These structured communication methods ensured that middle managers remained informed and actively engaged with the change process.

Jas described how leveraging these communication tools enhanced clarity and efficiency, *“I read memos, attend meetings, and use the intranet and newsletters. This approach helps me complete tasks with fewer mistakes”*. Middle managers also emphasized the importance of combining digital communication with in-person interactions for deeper understanding. Tiana highlighted how internal communication complemented direct conversations with leadership, *“Emails and the intranet provide insights, but face-to-face discussions with management give additional clarity”*. Beyond leadership communication, middle managers used these platforms to coordinate with colleagues and ensure smooth implementation of change. Saif explained how multiple channels facilitated cooperation and information-sharing, *“We refer to work manuals, attend briefings, and communicate via emails, WhatsApp, and meetings. This keeps us aligned with company expectations”*. By utilizing internal communication channels, middle managers clarified change objectives, verified information, and reinforced alignment across the organisation. Musa reflected on how these platforms ensured work accuracy and trust in leadership. *“I check updates to complete my tasks correctly. Face-to-face interactions also help me assess leadership’s body language and credibility”*. In addition to improving work processes, internal communication enhanced team motivation and change acceptance. Saif emphasized how clear communication boosted morale and managerial effectiveness. *“These channels help me educate my team, improve motivation, and strengthen my leadership. Clear communication makes change easier to accept”*. Sham further explained how effective communication fostered unity across all organisational levels, *“Good communication aligns leaders, middle managers, and staff. It promotes teamwork, shared goals, and a strong sense of belonging”*. Ultimately, internal communication channels were essential for navigating change, enabling middle managers to access accurate information, support their teams, and maintain organisational cohesion during the transition.

To consolidate the findings, Table 3 summarizes the seven key sensemaking practices employed by middle managers during organisational change. Each practice represents a distinct strategy used to navigate uncertainty, bridge communication gaps, and facilitate smoother transitions within the workplace. These findings illustrate the dynamic and multifaceted nature of sensemaking, highlighting how middle managers actively interpret, adapt, and communicate change-related information.

Table 3: Middle Managers’ Sensemaking Practices

No.	Sensemaking Practice	Description
1	Big-Picture Mindset	Adopting a strategic perspective to reframe challenges positively.
2	Showing Empathy	Understanding and considering the perspectives of colleagues and leaders.
3	Reflecting on Emotions	Acknowledging and managing emotions to maintain adaptability.
4	Using Company Approved Handbook	Relying on official procedures to navigate change.
5	Storytelling	Sharing personal experiences to reinforce understanding.
6	Participating in Change Interventions	Engaging in organisational programs to clarify expectations.
7	Utilizing Internal Communication Channels	Seeking and sharing information through formal and informal networks.

DISCUSSION

While this study provides valuable insights into middle managers’ sensemaking practices during organisational change, certain limitations should be acknowledged to contextualize the findings. First, the research is based on a single organisational setting, which may limit its generalizability to other industries or cultural contexts.

Future studies could adopt a cross-industry approach or conduct longitudinal analyses to capture the evolving nature of sensemaking over time. Additionally, demographic variations such as gender and seniority were explored, but further research could deepen this analysis by considering intersectional factors, including industry-specific challenges or cultural influences on managerial communication. Despite these limitations, the findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how middle managers navigate change, particularly in a collectivistic cultural setting. The following discussion will examine key sensemaking themes observed in the study, with a focus on how managers at different levels experience and interpret organisational change. The discussion will also highlight how these findings align with or diverge from existing sensemaking theory which is Weick's seven properties of sensemaking.

Demographic Sub-Patterns in Middle Managers' Sensemaking Practices

In examining the sensemaking practices of middle managers, notable demographic sub-patterns emerge based on factors such as experience and gender. These variations are consistent with the findings of the study, which reveal how different managerial levels (senior vs. junior) and gender influence the way middle managers interpret and respond to organizational change.

Senior middle managers, with extensive organizational experience, engage in more strategic and long-term sensemaking. Their ability to draw on deep organizational knowledge and established networks allows them to effectively interpret and implement strategic changes. This aligns with the data, which shows that senior middle managers tend to focus on high-level strategy and integrate their understanding of the organization's history to drive change. This is in line with the findings of Blakcori and Psychogios (2021), who argue that experienced managers, with their consistent interactions with senior leadership, play a pivotal role in shaping organizational change. In contrast, junior middle managers, with less experience and limited access to strategic information, often adopt a more reactive and task-oriented sensemaking approach. The research reflects this distinction, as junior managers typically navigate organizational change by seeking guidance from peers and senior leaders, focusing on immediate concerns rather than long-term strategies. This finding corresponds with Gjerde and Alvesson (2020), who also highlight the role of hierarchical position in shaping the type of information available to managers, ultimately affecting their sensemaking process.

Gender differences also significantly influence sensemaking practices among middle managers. The study found that male managers predominantly adopt a directive and task-focused approach, emphasizing structured decision-making processes and relying on formal communication channels. This aligns with existing studies, such as those by Inostroza et al. (2023), which confirm that male managers typically favor formal, top-down communication styles. On the other hand, female managers in the study demonstrated a more relational and collaborative approach, focusing on building interpersonal relationships and fostering team cohesion. These women tended to encourage participatory decision-making, which reflects findings from Plückelmann et al. (2024), who highlight how women leaders tend to create inclusive environments where team input is valued. However, the research also indicates that female managers face significant challenges related to authority and influence. Despite their relational leadership qualities, they encounter an "authority gap," wherein their leadership capabilities are undervalued compared to their male counterparts. This, as documented by Thelma and Ngulube (2024), limits their influence in decision-making processes and undermines their ability to effectively drive change. In this study, this authority gap was evident, with several female middle managers expressing frustration over being less recognized or taken less seriously than their male counterparts. This disparity not only hinders their sensemaking process but also affects their ability to guide their teams through change effectively. Addressing this gap requires organizations to actively promote equitable recognition and support diverse leadership styles.

Middle Managers' Sensemaking Practices

Organisational change necessitates middle managers to engage in sensemaking to navigate evolving work structures, expectations, and responsibilities. Without a clear understanding of change initiatives, their ability to make informed decisions and guide employees may be compromised. This study found that sensemaking enables XYZ middle managers to comprehend organisational change and adjust their roles, relationships, and leadership approaches accordingly. The findings suggest that middle managers primarily engage in guided

sensemaking, where interpretations of change are constructed collaboratively between leadership and middle management. While Tan et al. (2020) explored similar patterns of sensemaking, this study extends the understanding by demonstrating how middle managers in XYZ negotiate meaning within a structured but high-power-distance organisational environment.

Developing a broad perspective allows middle managers to interpret change beyond immediate disruptions and align their actions with long-term organisational goals. Many respondents struggled with balancing professional responsibilities and personal commitments, making it difficult to maintain a strategic outlook. However, those who actively adopted future-oriented thinking were better equipped to anticipate the implications of change and guide their teams accordingly. Carton et al. (2021) argue that strategic thinking shapes top management behavior, but this study highlights that middle managers also engage in long-term sensemaking to ensure organisational continuity at the operational level. Cultivating this perspective enhances their ability to manage crises, make objective decisions, and implement problem-solving strategies that align with the organisation's evolving priorities.

Empathy also emerged as a crucial sensemaking tool that enabled middle managers to navigate organisational change. Many initially resisted leadership decisions but later recognized their necessity after adopting an empathetic stance. This shift in perception was influenced by leaders who displayed genuine concern for employees' well-being, particularly during economic downturns caused by the COVID-19 crisis. While Men et al. (2020) emphasize the role of leaders in demonstrating empathy, this study highlights that middle managers themselves actively construct and communicate empathy to foster alignment, reduce resistance, and maintain morale. By engaging in empathetic dialogue, they mitigate tension between leadership and employees, reinforcing their role as key intermediaries in the change process.

Organisational change also presents an emotional challenge for middle managers, requiring them to regulate their responses and manage team dynamics effectively. This study found that middle managers engage in emotional reflection to assess how their feelings influence decision-making and workplace relationships. By identifying sources of stress, acknowledging emotional responses, and implementing coping strategies, middle managers transform negative emotions into constructive engagement with change. These findings align with DeeJay et al. (2023) and Blackori & Psychogios (2021), who argue that emotional regulation enhances adaptability during transformation periods. However, this study provides new insights by demonstrating that emotional regulation is not only an individual process but also a relational one, where middle managers model emotional resilience to their teams, fostering a more stable organisational climate.

Work guidelines also serve as a critical sensemaking resource, enabling middle managers to navigate change with greater clarity and consistency. By adhering to the Company Approved Procedure handbook, middle managers distinguish between misinformation and verified policies, ensuring that their responses align with organisational expectations. Prior research (Bolt, 2023; Demerouti et al., 2021) emphasizes the importance of employee handbooks during crises, but this study reveals that middle managers are not merely passive users of guidelines, they actively contribute to refining them. Many respondents collaborated with top management to adjust CAP procedures, ensuring that policies reflected the realities of daily operations. This participatory role fosters a sense of ownership and belonging, reinforcing previous findings that the exclusion of middle managers from change planning leads to low morale, stress, and increased turnover (Ayodele et al., 2020).

Storytelling emerged as another effective sensemaking activity, allowing middle managers to translate abstract change narratives into concrete, relatable experiences. The findings suggest that storytelling enhances comprehension, engagement, and alignment with organisational objectives. Wilson (2019) argues that storytelling reinforces change adaptation, but this study further demonstrates that it also fosters emotional reassurance and strengthens commitment to transformation efforts. By sharing and interpreting stories, middle managers construct a collective understanding of change, making transitions more meaningful and less disruptive.

Participating in change intervention programs provided middle managers with structured opportunities to clarify expectations, reconcile concerns, and engage directly with leadership. Unlike previous studies (Liu et al., 2019; Glover et al., 2019), which emphasize the top-down nature of change interventions, this study

highlights that middle managers use these interventions as a platform for negotiating meaning rather than merely receiving instructions. Many respondents described these programs as essential for building a shared sense of purpose, strengthening two-way communication between management and staff, and improving confidence in executing change-related tasks.

Finally, internal communication channels play a pivotal role in middle managers' sensemaking processes. Some respondents preferred written communication (emails, memos, newsletters, intranet platforms) to ensure clarity, while others relied on face-to-face interactions to assess leadership's sincerity and credibility. Thakhathi et al. (2019) emphasize the role of written communication in reinforcing change messages, but this study reveals that middle managers strategically combine multiple communication modes to verify leadership intentions, clarify uncertainties, and align their teams with evolving expectations. By leveraging structured communication methods, middle managers ensure greater transparency, improve team motivation, and enhance organisational cohesion during the transition.

Compared to previous studies (Kieran et al., 2019; Saghafian et al., 2020; Blackori & Psychogios, 2021), which identify a limited number of sensemaking practices, this study provides a more comprehensive and practical framework for understanding middle managers' role in navigating organisational change. Additionally, while Weick's sensemaking model (1995) remains theoretically influential, its application to real-world contexts has been criticized for being overly abstract and challenging for practitioners. This study addresses that gap by offering a structured and transferable framework that allows middle managers to actively shape, interpret, and implement change strategies within their organisations.

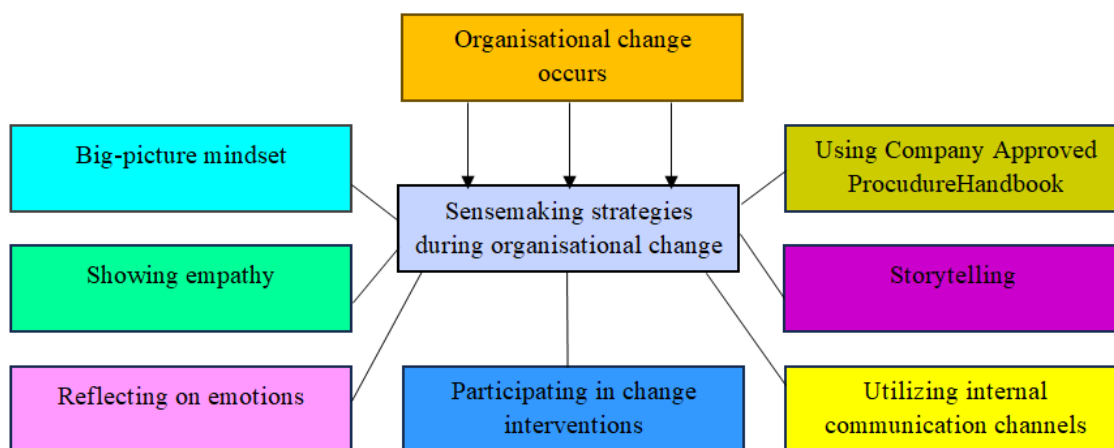


Figure 1: Framework of Middle Managers' Sensemaking Practices during Organizational Change

Figure 1 illustrates the interaction between the seven sensemaking practices identified in middle managers' responses to organizational change. These practices, including interpreting, explaining, and aligning with the broader organizational narrative, work together to shape how managers make sense of change. The interplay between these practices highlights the dynamic and evolving nature of sensemaking during transitions, providing a framework for understanding how managers navigate and communicate change within their organizations. By presenting clear, evidence-based sensemaking practices, this research enhances the practical applicability of sensemaking theory while providing valuable insights for both scholars and organisational leaders.

Linking Research Findings to the CCO TMS Theory

This study contributes to the CCO TMS theory by demonstrating how middle managers actively shape organisational change through Text and Conversations. While prior research often frames middle managers as mere recipients of top-down communication, the findings of this study reveal that they are active agents in the communicative construction of change. By engaging in adaptive interpretation of organisational texts and strategic conversations, middle managers negotiate meaning, refine policies, and construct alternative narratives that align leadership directives with frontline realities. This challenges traditional applications of the

CCO TMS perspective, which assume that organisational communication primarily flows from leadership through fixed texts. Instead, this study shows that change is co-constructed through the interplay of texts and conversations, where middle managers continuously interpret, modify, and legitimize organisational discourse.

One of the key contributions of this research lies in its reconceptualization of Text within the CCO TMS theory. Previous studies treat organisational texts, such as policies, guidelines, and change manuals, as authoritative documents that structure workplace communication. However, the findings indicate that middle managers do not simply follow these texts verbatim; instead, they reinterpret them based on situational demands. This study demonstrates that Text is not static or prescriptive but dynamic and negotiable, shaped by the everyday interactions of those responsible for enacting change. For example, the Change Approved Procedure handbook, a formal text designed to guide employees through organisational transformation, was frequently adapted by middle managers to suit operational constraints, team-specific challenges, and real-time feedback from employees. This extends existing research by illustrating that organisational texts only gain significance when they are enacted, debated, and reframed through discursive practices. The findings also highlight the central role of Conversations in the sensemaking process, reinforcing the argument that organisational change is not imposed solely through official documents but actively co-constructed through discourse. Unlike prior CCO research that emphasizes top-down messaging, this study reveals that middle managers generate, validate, and challenge change narratives through peer discussions, participatory interventions, and informal dialogues. These conversational spaces allow middle managers to clarify uncertainties, mediate tensions between leadership and employees, and contextualize abstract change policies into actionable knowledge. This study further supports the claim that organisational change is not simply “communicated” through predefined channels but emerges in real-time through interpretative conversations that continually shape and refine its meaning.

By analyzing how middle managers fuse Text and Conversations, this research demonstrates that these elements do not function independently but are mutually reinforcing. Organisational texts provide structure and legitimacy to change initiatives, but they require conversational engagement to gain relevance and acceptance within the workplace. Conversely, conversations allow middle managers to challenge, validate, or reinterpret texts, ensuring that formal policies align with practical realities and employee concerns. This challenges the traditional assumption that texts dictate organisational behavior, instead suggesting that texts are fluid and malleable, continuously reshaped by conversational processes. The findings also reveal that not all conversations hold equal weight in sensemaking. While formal leadership communications (such as briefings and policy meetings) play a role in defining organisational expectations, peer-to-peer discussions, informal knowledge exchanges, and storytelling serve as more influential channels for legitimizing change. This suggests that the CCO TMS theory must account for the layered and hierarchical nature of conversations, where different types of discourse influence change implementation in varying degrees.

This study further refines the CCO framework by demonstrating that middle managers serve as discourse mediators, navigating the tensions between formal organisational texts and informal conversations. The findings suggest that middle managers strategically adapt communication styles depending on their audience, adhering to official texts when engaging with leadership, while incorporating conversational nuance when addressing employees. This positions middle managers as key communicative agents who bridge structural directives with lived experiences, ensuring that change is not only formally mandated but socially legitimized. By integrating these insights, this research extends the CCO TMS theory by arguing that Text is not simply an authoritative source of meaning but a discursive resource that is repeatedly shaped through conversational engagement. Similarly, Conversations do not merely disseminate information but actively construct, challenge, and reconstruct change narratives. These findings emphasize that organisational change is not a unidirectional process dictated by leadership but a fluid, interactive phenomenon shaped by those responsible for enacting it.

Comparison of CCO TMS theory and Weick’s Seven Properties of Sensemaking

The CCO TMS theory and Karl Weick’s seven properties of sensemaking offer distinct perspectives on how organisational members make sense of their environments and experiences. While both frameworks acknowledge the centrality of communication in sensemaking, they differ significantly in their

conceptualization of individual versus collective sensemaking and the role of communication in constructing organisational reality.

Weick's seven properties emphasize that sensemaking is primarily an individualistic process, where personal identity, retrospection, and individual enactment are central to how people interpret their environments. According to Weick, sensemaking starts with an individual's perceptions of events, which are then shaped by their past experiences (retrospection) and the meaning they ascribe to these events (Weick, 1995). For example, the enactment property posits that sensemaking involves individuals acting on their environment based on their understanding, which then shapes future interpretations and actions (Weick, 2015). This approach focuses on how individuals interact with their environment and make sense of it, often relying on extracted cues and plausibility rather than accuracy to guide their decisions (Weick et al., 2017). In contrast, the CCO TMS perspective suggests that sensemaking is a co-constructed phenomenon, emerging not solely from individual cognition but from social interaction and communication. For CCO TMS, sensemaking is not confined to individual interpretation; it is an organisational process, where meaning is continuously negotiated through interactions and the collective construction of reality (Mills et al., 2023). This framework underscores that organisational members make sense of events together through ongoing communication, which helps shape organisational identity, structure, and culture (Adamu et al., 2024). Unlike Weick's view, which emphasizes individual actors, CCO TMS places communication at the heart of sensemaking, viewing it as the vehicle through which organisational meaning is created and sustained (Cooren, 2020).

While both frameworks acknowledge the importance of communication, they differ in their understanding of how it contributes to sensemaking. In Weick's model, communication plays a secondary role to individual action and interpretation. Weick argues that sensemaking is primarily driven by individuals, who act based on their interpretation of events and engage in retrospective sensemaking to understand past actions and decisions (Glynn & Watkiss, 2020; Weick, 1995). Though communication is acknowledged as a means of exchanging cues and information, it is still an individual process where personal interpretations shape organisational understanding (Kimura, 2024). On the other hand, CCO TMS sees communication as constitutive where it not only facilitates but also constitutes the organisation (Schoeneborn et al., 2025). For CCO TMS, sensemaking emerges through the social construction of meaning in which members participate. Communication is not just about transmitting information; it is the process through which members co-create the organisational reality, and this process is central to maintaining and transforming the organisation's identity and structure (Cooren, 2020). Through discourse and dialogic exchanges, members engage in meaning-making that shapes the way the organisation interprets change, conflict, and transformation (Fadzil et al., 2019).

Weick's concept of identity construction in sensemaking emphasizes that individuals' roles and self-concept are critical in how they make sense of their experiences within organisations (Weick, 2020). Sensemaking, according to Weick, is influenced by the individual's identity and the role they enact within the organisation. This view holds that each person's understanding of organisational events is tied to their self-concept and role, making sensemaking a deeply individual experience influenced by personal and role-based identities (Weick, 2017). In contrast, CCO TMS stresses that identity is co-constructed through communication. Organisational identity is not a personal construct but a shared reality built through collective interaction. In this view, sensemaking is inherently social, and the meaning derived from organisational events is shaped not just by individual roles but through the interactions and relationships that constitute the organisational fabric (Zhang & Zhang, 2021). Organisational members actively participate in constructing and reconstructing the organisational identity through communication, reinforcing the idea that sensemaking is a socially negotiated process (Azizan et al., 2023).

Both Weick's and CCO TMS offer valuable insights for understanding organisational change, but their applications differ. Weick's framework is useful for understanding individual responses to change, particularly in how people react to uncertainty and make sense of new information based on their past experiences. It emphasizes that sensemaking is ongoing and driven by retrospection, making it particularly useful in crisis situations where individuals need to process and adapt to change rapidly (Weick, 2018). In contrast, CCO TMS is better suited for understanding how organisations as a whole process and respond to change. By focusing on collective sensemaking through communication, this framework is more adept at explaining how organisational members together construct new meanings during times of organisational transition. It is

particularly relevant in contexts where organisational identity and culture need to be negotiated or redefined, such as during periods of transformation or restructuring (de Metz et al., 2024).

In sum, while Weick's seven properties provide valuable insight into individual-level sensemaking, emphasizing identity construction, retrospective interpretation, and enacted behavior, CCO TMS offers a more collective and communication-driven view, arguing that sensemaking is a co-constructed phenomenon. These differing perspectives contribute to increase people's understanding of how organisations and their members navigate change, offering complementary insights into the dynamics of sensemaking within organisational contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the sensemaking practices of middle managers during organizational change, highlighting their role in interpreting and adapting change directives within the unique context of a Malaysian organization. The research, underpinned by the CCO TMS theory, explored how middle managers navigate the complexities of evolving roles, responsibilities, and expectations during periods of change. The findings emphasize that middle managers are not passive recipients of top-down directives but are actively involved in constructing meaning through adaptive interpretation of organizational texts and strategic conversations.

By integrating the CCO TMS theory, this research reveals that organizational texts (such as policies, guidelines, and change manuals) are not static, top-down tools of control. Instead, they are dynamic resources that middle managers continuously reinterpret and modify through ongoing workplace conversations. These dialogues, both formal and informal, enable middle managers to adapt change initiatives, ensuring they are both contextually relevant and practically applicable. In doing so, middle managers play a crucial role in bridging the gap between senior leadership's strategic vision and the operational realities of their teams, fostering alignment, reducing resistance, and facilitating smoother transitions. This study identified seven key sensemaking practices that middle managers employ to navigate change: adopting a broad perspective, demonstrating empathy, reflecting on emotions, relying on workplace handbook, engaging in storytelling, participating in change interventions, and utilizing internal communication channels. These practices underscore that sensemaking is not an isolated cognitive process but a socially co-constructed phenomenon, with middle managers actively co-creating change narratives alongside leadership and peers. The findings challenge traditional notions that organizational change is solely communicated through official documents, instead emphasizing that change is enacted, debated, and legitimized through ongoing conversational processes.

The study contributes to the broader understanding of how organizational change is communicatively constituted. It underscores the importance of middle managers as key communicators in the change process, emphasizing their role in interpreting, adapting, and translating organizational texts into actionable steps. This highlights the necessity of empowering middle managers through targeted communication resources and structured support systems, which can enhance their capacity to navigate ambiguity, foster engagement, and facilitate change in ways that resonate with employees at all levels. Ultimately, this research calls for a shift in organizational practices. Rather than treating middle managers as passive conduits for top-down messaging, organizations should recognize them as active participants in the change process. To support middle managers effectively, organizations should prioritize structured communication strategies, leadership support mechanisms, and HR initiatives that foster a culture of open dialogue, psychological safety, and continuous learning. By investing in the development of middle managers' sensemaking and communication competencies, organizations can enhance their ability to implement change successfully and build more adaptive, resilient workforces.

Theoretical and Practical Contributions of the Study

This study makes significant contributions to the Communication Constitutes Organisations (CCO) theory, particularly in its understanding of Text and Conversations in the sensemaking process. Unlike previous research that has traditionally viewed organisational texts as static, top-down tools of control, this study illustrates that texts are dynamic and negotiable. They derive meaning only when actively interpreted and

enacted by middle managers. The findings demonstrate that middle managers do not merely adhere to policies but adapt them, aligning change frameworks with operational realities and addressing employee concerns. This research extends the CCO framework by arguing that texts are not fixed sources of meaning but flexible resources that are continuously reshaped through conversational engagement.

Furthermore, the study highlights that conversations are not simply vehicles for transmitting information; they play a central role in the co-construction of change narratives. Middle managers engage in formal discussions with leadership and informal dialogues with employees, strategically adjusting their communicative approach to bridge gaps between policy directives and workplace implementation. This finding reinforces the argument that organisational change is not a linear, one-way process, but rather one that is communicatively constituted through ongoing, discursive interactions. Another key theoretical contribution lies in positioning middle managers as crucial discourse mediators. These managers operate in a liminal space, navigating the tension between formal organisational texts and informal workplace conversations. Unlike senior executives who design strategic policies or frontline employees who predominantly react to change, middle managers must translate, reinterpret, and legitimize change messages to ensure acceptance and effective implementation. This study refines the CCO framework by demonstrating the pivotal role middle managers play in shaping how organisational texts are understood, internalized, and acted upon in practice.

Building on these theoretical insights, the study offers several practical implications for organisations seeking to improve communication and change implementation. First, it underscores the importance of recognising middle managers as active communicators rather than passive implementers. Organisations should involve middle managers in change planning and decision-making processes, rather than treating them as mere intermediaries for top-down messaging. When middle managers are empowered to engage in adaptive sensemaking, they can reduce resistance, clarify uncertainties, and facilitate smoother transitions. Additionally, the study highlights the need for structured conversational spaces where middle managers can collaborate and refine change narratives. Organisations should create opportunities for interactive leadership dialogues, participatory policy workshops, and peer discussion forums to ensure that change initiatives are not only disseminated but actively debated, adapted, and internalized. By fostering an environment in which middle managers can openly engage in meaning negotiation, organisations can enhance the effectiveness of their change initiatives.

The findings also suggest that organisations should rethink internal communication strategies to account for the dynamic interplay between formal policies and informal knowledge exchanges. Traditional communication models that rely solely on memos, newsletters, or policy briefings are insufficient to capture the nuanced ways middle managers interpret and convey information. Instead, organisations should adopt hybrid communication models that combine formal documentation with interactive engagement tools, such as storytelling initiatives, real-time feedback sessions, and digital communication platforms. These approaches ensure that change is not just communicated but also collaboratively co-constructed.

From a Human Resource (HR) perspective, the study calls for the design of targeted interventions to enhance middle managers' interpretative and communicative skills. HR training programs should focus on developing key competencies such as active listening, strategic messaging, and facilitation. These programs would enable middle managers to translate organisational directives into actionable steps for their teams. Workshops and coaching programs, incorporating real-world case studies of change management, would further enhance their ability to navigate ambiguity and lead with clarity. Moreover, HR policies should prioritise regular communication forums between middle managers and senior executives. By establishing structured feedback loops and dialogue platforms, organisations can foster shared sensemaking, ensuring that middle managers are not mere recipients of top-down directives but active contributors to the change discourse. These initiatives align with constructivist perspectives on sensemaking, which emphasize the iterative and co-constructed nature of meaning-making within organisations.

Finally, organisations should cultivate a culture of open dialogue, encouraging middle managers to discuss challenges and share insights without fear of reprisal. By creating psychologically safe spaces, middle managers can voice concerns, experiment with communication strategies, and refine their sensemaking practices. Additionally, recognising and rewarding effective sensemaking behaviours can reinforce desired

practices. Performance appraisal systems should incorporate metrics that assess middle managers' ability to interpret and disseminate strategic change messages effectively. By integrating these insights into HR policies and training programs, organisations can strengthen middle managers' capacity to mediate change more effectively, fostering a more adaptive and resilient workforce.

Suggestions for Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights into middle managers' sensemaking practices, future research could further explore the communicative dimensions of organisational change in different contexts. This study focused on a single organisation, and while the findings are theoretically significant, comparative studies across different industries and organisational structures would provide a broader understanding of how middle managers negotiate change discourse in diverse work environments. Additionally, future research could examine the longitudinal effects of middle managers' sensemaking practices. Change processes unfold over extended periods, and the way middle managers interpret, adapt, and communicate change may evolve over time. Conducting a long-term study that tracks middle managers' sensemaking strategies across different stages of change implementation would provide deeper insights into how discourse shapes organisational transformation over time. Another avenue for research is exploring the role of power dynamics in the communicative construction of change. This study found that middle managers strategically modify organisational texts and engage in interpretative conversations, but future research could analyze the constraints and organisational tensions that limit their agency. Investigating how power hierarchies shape middle managers' ability to influence change discourse would further refine the CCO TMS theory.

Lastly, future studies could examine how technological advancements impact middle managers' sensemaking practices. Digital communication platforms, AI-driven decision-making tools, and remote work environments are increasingly shaping how change is communicated within organisations. Research into how middle managers use digital communication to construct, challenge, and disseminate change narratives would offer valuable insights into the evolving nature of sensemaking in technologically mediated workplaces. By addressing these areas, future research can build on the findings of this study and further refine the understanding of how middle managers communicatively construct, negotiate, and implement organisational change.

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