Organizational Culture and Sensemaking for Crisis Counselors: Working in the Gray of Human

Experience

Dr. Chris Sadler

Dr. Timothy Halkowski

Dr. Steve Hill

Ashley J. Ormson

University of Wisconsin- Stevens Point

May 2014

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Communication

University of Wisconsin- Stevens Point

Stevens Point, WI

1

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the crisis counselors who volunteered their precious time to meet and share their stories with me. Without them, my processing a childhood memory would never have come to fruition. I am in awe of the work they do every day and not only for the clients who seek them out, but for their many contributions towards education and making our society healthier and safer for future generations. These human service workers sacrifice much of their time in order to make a small difference in our community.

I would like to thank the members of my committee. I thank Chris Sadler for introducing me to Karl Weick and sensemaking theory, without which I may not have started down this path of study; thank you Chris, for having faith in my ability to finish this project, especially when I struggled with believing in myself. I thank Timothy Halkowski for sharing with me his true passion for scholarship. You are an inspiration for me to keep learning and never give up a pursuit of knowledge. I thank Steve Hill for recognizing in me the potential to finish this project and supporting me every step of the way. Thank you for many hours of stories and snacks.

I would like to thank my parents for their combined love for education and continual unwavering support in all of my endeavors. I thank my mom for her patient, steadfast, unwavering confidence while I tried many different paths. She gave me the non-judgmental freedom to explore uncertainty, to fail and to start over, more than once. Thank you Mom and Chris for supporting me, and for your affirmation of my often changed educational aspirations. I want to thank my sister for the random Facebook messages and care packages that said she was proud of me. They were always received at a perfect time when a little love from South Korea went a long way.

I have to thank my editor-in-chief, aka my pops, for pouring over every word I ever sent him for an assignment. Your ability to wade through some of my not-so-brilliant sentences and find the true meaning of what I am trying to convey has always been a gift and greatly appreciated. I know how lucky I am to have you, as the first set of eyes to look over my work. I don't know how I would have been able to make as many edits work without your assistance.

I want to thank my Grandparents, Don & Kelly Brunner, for always celebrating my successes, no matter how small, with great excitement. I feel truly blessed to have your love and support in all that I do. Your support for your Granddaughter allowed me to brave many different paths and for that I will forever be grateful.

Abstract

Organizational culture is the umbrella under which established rules and norms guide all employee communication and behavior. But when individuals working in an organization are confronted with uncertainty, they will react first and evaluate their actions second.

The basic human process of reaction, contemplation and retention are here explored in Weick's (1979) sensemaking model and applied within an organization's cultural context. This qualitative study explores how crisis counselors make sense of an environment where ambiguity is the norm and culture is characterized as unrestricted and flexible.

First, coping strategies in situations of uncertainty are explored through Weick's (1979) sensemaking theory, and second are evaluated in the context of this organization's culture and approach to employees and clients.

Keywords: organizational culture, sensemaking, crisis counselors

Table of Contents

Introduction

This research study began as a childhood memory. Twenty-years ago, I sat in the back of a company vehicle my mother was driving. In the passenger seat sat an individual covered from head to foot in a *hijab,* the Islamic veil for women. There was no conversation between the two in the front seat, and the radio was turned off. The air was tense.

Upon arriving at the shelter, I overheard bits and pieces of a conversation between my mother and a co-worker. The young woman had been badly beaten by her husband; she was Egyptian and a recent immigrant to the United States. She did not have family in this country - other than her husband - nor did she have financial security, or a strong grasp of the English language. She was alone, afraid and vulnerable.

As a young girl I wondered how she was able to find the place where my mom worked. At the end of the day when I went home with my mom we sang along to the lyrics on the radio and talked merrily of dinner plans. The tension and worry seemed to melt away with each mile we put between the shelter and our home.

Twenty-years later as an adult studying sensemaking and how human service workers resolve highly complex client issues, make sense of their work environment, talk to each other and how they maintain their role and purpose in the organization, I cannot help but be taken back to that moment, which has been etched in my memory. From this childhood recollection emerged the desire to explore the culture of crisis counselors and how they make sense of multifaceted client issues.

This is a study in organizational culture and sensemaking theory. It is by definition a study steeped in ambiguity because the subject and focus of this study is people and their communication strategies under stress. Because humans want to make sense of their experiences,

even their most unsavory episodes, they attempt to organize and arrange their thoughts, behaviors and lives. At times, if experiences in life are extremely stressful or traumatic, the human being will mentally bracket their experience; this is defined in Weick's (1979) sensemaking process, and it is a key concept for understanding the communication strategy of the organization under study.

Studies in organizational culture, much like studies in sensemaking, seek to explore and describe the development and intricacy of an organization's communication networks. Social science scholars use sensemaking theory to understand the ways in which people reduce uncertainty in their environments.

The objective of this research is to explore how a crisis counselor's interpretation of organizational culture assists crisis counselors in sensemaking efforts to resolve challenging client situations. Additionally, how crisis counselors make sense of their e+30nvironment and maintain their role and sense of purpose in the organization. It will explore aspects of uncertainty reduction, while coping with role-identity and turning points.

Identifying how crisis counselors make sense of their experience can be accomplished by identifying the components within the sensemaking process in this organization. In addition, the body of sensemaking literature will grow and communication scholars will benefit from identifying the stages within sensemaking theory used by crisis counselors in highly complex situations.

There is a large body of literature regarding organizational culture, the role of sensemaking in organizations, and the nature of crisis centers. This study will draw primarily upon Weick's (1979, 2001) sensemaking theory, with an understanding of the influence

organizational culture imposes upon sensemaking. It will explore ways in which sensemaking in a particular organizational culture can be applied to crisis counselor communication.

A focus on organizational context is important, as individuals will contribute to understanding from familiar materials which are readily available to them. Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1982) understand and explore organizational culture as the body of beliefs, rituals, behaviors and expectations that guide employees in their individual and collective actions - sensemaking practices - within an organization.

Literature regarding domestic and sexual abuse shelters often focuses on client issues such as domestic and sexual abuse and substance abuse (Schumacher, 2012; Basow, and Thomas, 2012; Bennet, and O'Brian, 2007). The focus remains overwhelmingly on what services crisis centers offer clients (Melbin et al., 2003; Alix-Gaudrea, 2012; Macy et al., 2011; Kasturirangan, 2008). Consequently there is literature regarding how crisis counselors communicate with clients, but more literature concerning how crisis counselors communicate with each other is needed.

There is little information regarding how counselors communicate amongst themselves. There is very little attention given in the current literature to exploring how crisis counselors cope with difficult client issues, how they maintain purpose in their role and how they talk about unique and sometimes critical incidents with each other.

Consequently, through an application of sensemaking theory, this research will examine methods used by employees who work with client issues and uncover how crisis counselors make sense of difficult experiences.

Tracy et al., (2006) explore ways in which human social workers such as 911 call-takers, firefighters and correctional officers use humor as a sensemaking tool in their trade. They found

humor was an effective tool for helping these workers crystalize their identities and make sense of difficult, chaotic and threatening situations (Tracy et al., 2006). This study can apply to other human service workers to uncover sensemaking techniques and add to sensemaking literature.

This literature review begins by briefly looking at organizational culture as a framework for organizational communication, then proceeds to define sensemaking theory as a method to describe uncertainty reduction and understand organizational communication. Sensemaking theory is then defined and explored through its three phases: enactment, selection and retention. The role of turning points is incorporated into the sensemaking model. It concludes with an application towards crisis centers and crisis counselors use of sensemaking in highly complex situations.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

Theory of Organizational Culture

Organizational culture is a complex, intangible aspect of organizational communication which influences all aspects of an organization, including sensemaking phases. Understanding the complexity which defines organizational culture as a framework for sensemaking is important in organizational communication, as culture forms an interlocking system defined by the actions of individuals and groups. Organizational culture outlines and limits the content and method of communication within a particular context.

Organizational culture is collective stored knowledge which serves as a resource for explaining and making sense of new experiences. Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1982) conceptualized organizational culture as both structure and process. Using this interpretative framework, organizational culture is a valid method of interpretation (Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1982). Consequently, the overarching strength of looking at organizational communication as culture is that this position invokes an invitation to observe, record, and make sense of the communicative behavior of organizational members (Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1982). These observations at the macro level do not always correlate to the micro level, but they can provide a strong communication framework for studying an organization's communication structure.

Applying organizational culture as a theoretical lens to look at the type of communication that occurs between crisis counselors offers a unique contribution to communication studies. At a societal level, most people will not understand why a woman remains with or returns to her abuser when a prevalent theme in our culture is that individuals have the power to control their

environment (Alix-Gaudrea, 2002). However, the fact remains that most abuse survivors do return to perpetrators, or enter into additional abusive relationships.

There is scant literature exploring how crisis counselors cope with the emotional ramifications of performing their jobs by helping survivors, and deal with the disappointment of knowing that their work may not change the life circumstances of the survivors. Additionally, since survivors are not tracked once they leave the shelter, there is neither a true sense of closure nor a feeling of accomplishment. The literature focuses on services provided but not the communication between the frontline workers, and how they cope with the embedded culture of abuse and the service they offer.

In Weick's (1979) model, organizational culture emerges through the sensemaking process, but also guides the sensemaking process. Culture is created by individuals, groups and organizations within the system's environment. Culture is flexible and can be changed, especially in Weick's (1979) retention phase in his model of organizing and sensemaking.

Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1983) illustrate the emergent quality of organizational culture through the communication process of individuals within a group; how they maintain that organizational culture is represented through organizational performances, which are interactional, contextual, episodic and improvisational. By focusing on the individual and their actions in an organization's network, one is able to see both the inputs which influence sensemaking and cultural influences which impact the individual's sensemaking.

Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1982) explain in their organizational cultural understanding of communication the phases of sensemaking. Enactment, selection and retention are found as key elements in organizational culture:

> Culture as sensemaking, as a reality constructing and displaying by those whose existence is embedded in a particular set…(it is a) body of knowledge that is drawn upon

as a resource for explaining and making sense of new experiences…(culture is a structure and a process)…culture as a context is amenable not to causal analysis but to interpretation (Pacanowski and O'Donnell-Turjillo, 1982, p.123).

Organizational culture is described as ambiguous; therefore it is hard to quantify and define as it is constantly changing and influenced by input from the environment. An individual's actions and the resulting interpretations from others impact how cultures emerge and are understood (Sriramesh et al., 1996). In this way organizational culture is understood as both a necessary aspect to consider in sensemaking theory and a contributing element to this study.

Sensemaking Theory

The goal, according to sensemaking theory, is to reduce uncertainty in one's environment whether that is for an individual, a group or an organization. Often times, uncertainty can be dispelled through an application of formerly accepted rules and behaviors. However, when accepted rules and behaviors cannot be applied to a particular situation, sensemaking theory can provide a framework in order to help organize and make sense of the equivocal environment.

Weick (1979) proposes that individuals, groups and organizations use a circular process in order to help reduce uncertainty and make sense out of the environment. This formula begins with enactment, followed by selection, and finalized with retention.

Sensemaking is circular, meaning that enactment, selection and retention are not linear in direction. Enactment places inputs on both selection and retention, while selection takes inputs from both enactment and retention, and retention allows inputs from both enactment and selection. In this way, there is constant communication, inputs and outputs, going between the three phases resulting in a continuing flow of influence with checks and balances.

Equivocality or uncertainty is found in environments for individuals, groups and organizations when multiple possible interpretations present themselves for a single event. The

environmental changes and subsequent communication that occurs within crisis centers, offer a unique opportunity to study sensemaking and equivocality reduction.

As established, people communicate in order to reduce uncertainty. It is the act of communicating after an event and after action has taken place that is at the heart of sensemaking theory. Sensemaking theory is a retrospective theory that examines the ways in which understanding is formulated after an eventful behavior has occurred. The process of sensemaking goes beyond immediate problems and retrospectively examines causes in order for solutions to emerge and become integrated into an organization's culture.

Sensemaking theory presents a broad and somewhat ambiguous model for communication scholars. The flexibility of sensemaking theory when applied is a strength in that it allows for diverse application and interpretation. No two individuals, groups or organizations are exactly the same; therefore, sensemaking theory is not a prescriptive theory. It allows for individuality and context to play an important role in sensemaking. Since there are multiple factors to consider when dealing with survivors' issues, sensemaking theory offers a process in which communication between crisis counselors can be analyzed for understanding.

Weick (2001) relates sensemaking to the art of cartography. Through this metaphor, he makes the point that within the art of cartography, as well as sensemaking within organizations, "there is no 'One Best Map' of a particular terrain…It is the job of the sensemaker to convert a world of experience into an intelligible world." (Weick, 2001, p.9). This metaphor succinctly describes how sensemaking occurs as environments encounter disruptions and require individuals to act.

Accordingly, sensemaking is a process in which people in an organization continuously processes inputs, thru-puts and outputs in order to reduce uncertainty. In doing so interpretations

are sifted through and applied. Multiple interpretations may exist simultaneously; hence the challenge of uncertainty reduction boils down to the careful selection of which interpretations to apply.

Within sensemaking theory there are three phases working together as a system to reduce uncertainty in environments. The first phase is enactment, or the act of bracketing a portion of experience for further attention; the second phase is selection, or imposing a finite set of interpretations on the bracketed portion; and the final phase is retention, or storage of interpreted segments for future application (Weick, 1979 p. 45). While the three phases are explained in a set order, it is important to understand the circular nature of sensemaking. Each phase imposes influence upon the other. A basic understand of sensemaking phases and their interconnected function is essential to an examination of organizational communication, culture and sensemaking.

Sensemaking theory is relevant to the study of organizations and communication as it examines the social network of communication. Sense is accomplished by communicating the connections made between streams of experience, multiple actors, groups or organizations. "The outcomes of organizing are reasonable interpretations of a slice of experience; these slices are treated as being amendable as well as prescriptive for future activities" (Weick, 1979, p. 47). In essence, sensemaking is made through social networks of people in their day-to-day interactions.

Day-to-day life in a work-culture environment is communicated through connections, flows and experiences which directly relate to interpersonal relationships. Relationships, like many aspects of reality, but especially within the limits of an organization, are tied together through communication networks. Processing events, or ecological change, depends on the strength of communication ties. The direction of influence and the time it takes for information

to move around a circuitous process of sensemaking through enactment, selection and retention

all depend on the strength of communication and the culture of an organization.

Weick (2001) explicitly details the seven important themes found within sensemaking

theory. He argued for continual exploration of organizational environments and communication.

He believed that by bracketing events for future processing, individuals give direction and

meaning to the steam of organizational experience in organizational communication. When

individuals give meaning to their experience they influence culture and communication:

> 1) Reality is an ongoing accomplishment: Sensemaking is about flows, a continually
> changing past, and variations in choice, irrevocability, and visibility that change the
> intensity of behavioral commitments; 2) People attempt to create order: Through a social
> comparison, expectations, and actions flows become stabilized; 3)Sensemaking is a
> retrospective process: Remembering and looking back are a primary source of meaning;
> 4) People attempt to make situations rationally accountable: Justifications are compelling
> sources of meaning because they consist of socially acceptable reasons; 5) symbolic
> processes are central to sensemaking: Presumptions about patterns that underlie concrete
> actions constrain interpretation; 6) People create and sustain images of wider reality:
> Maps are pragmatic images that provide temporary guides for action; 7) Images
> rationalize what people are doing: Images of reality derive from rationalizations of action
> (Weick, 2001, p. 11).

In Weick's (1979) sensemaking phase model, attention is directed towards describing the

'how' in understanding a bracketed event. This means in Weick's (1979) model that individuals

will examine specific moments in their experience in order to reduce uncertainty and make sense

of their environment. Sensemaking focuses on the process of how understanding develops in

examining these bracketed episodes, including the behaviors and active cognitive selection of

meaning.

Turning point analysis is a communicative tool used in understanding the 'how' process.

Turning points are any event or occurrence that is associated with change (Baxter and Bullis,

1986). Bullis and Bach (1989) assert turning points are important to consider when using a model that focuses on change, rather than stability.

Turning points influence development in sensemaking and how crisis counselors communicate with each other. It may be of interest to question if particular bracketed episodes, or turning points, produce greater sensemaking. Sensemaking theory is a theory of change, as it circulates through each phase and takes in multiple inputs to reduce ambiguity. Turning points are bracketed episodes which influence sensemaking in all three of Weick's phases.

Some benefits of analyzing turning points include increased organizational productivity, reduced turnover, improved communication and enhanced decision making (Bullis and Bach, 1989). Turning point influence is also found in organizational culture and retention through improved member identification with an organization.

Developing turning point identification can lead to forming frames of reference in which to operate, make decisions and communicate. Ultimately turning points produce stories, which produce retrospective understanding; consequently turning point analysis is appropriate to consider as a sensemaking theory methodology. Stories can also produce turning points or can be sources of turning points.

Therefore, sensemaking theory is an interpretative model which seeks to observe individuals, groups and organizations engaging in their environments in a process of constructing organizational reality. There is a strong assumption that individual, group and organizational behaviors create the organizational environment and culture. Additionally, changes in behavior will change attitudes in order to justify and make sense of behavioral change, and thus result in changing culture or norms.

Organizational culture is the umbrella which provides boundaries for organizational environments; it reveals the codes of conduct, established norms and values for organizational environments and guides social interaction.

Enactment

Weick (1979) refers to the saying, "How can I know what I think until I see what I say?" as a basic tenant of sensemaking and to illustrate what sensemaking looks like (Weick, 1979, p.133). In enactment, the "saying" in the phrase represents the first focus of Weick's (1979) sensemaking theory, and the natural reaction to environmental stimulus.

In a crisis center, enactment occurs when a survivor walks through the organization's doors and is met by a crisis counselor. There is an initial intake where the client's issues are assessed and the counselor must act accordingly.

This intake meeting conducted by a crisis counselor becomes enactment as the human interaction forms a potential experience to bracket in the constant organizational stream of experience. By circular, it is meant that while enactment is the starting point for sensemaking and leads into selection and then retention, both previous moments of selection and retention assert influence on enactment.

So while enactment is accepted as the first phase in sensemaking, by nature it is neither the first, second or third phase, but a phase within the circular system of sensemaking. In this way, enactment illustrates many subtleties found in sensemaking. Enactment is the individual or organization's initial bracketing of inputs: words, actions, and happenings which are understood to be equivocal (Weick, 1979). When individuals encounter uncertainty it is only natural to bracket the episode and begin the process of ambiguity reduction or sensemaking.

In essence, enactment is the human action or attention to behaviors in response to an event or stimulus which subsequently creates the organizational environment. Enactment or how a crisis counselor reacts to the survivor's arrival is influenced by past experiences and interpretations of actions and decisions made during past episodes. This is important to understand because Weick (1979) makes it clear that through enactment he places individual's actions at the heart and center of organizational environments.

People create their environments, but environments equally create the people functioning within them. Organizational culture guides people within the environment, but sensemaking acts as the fluid, circular and ever changing variable in organizations which cannot be placed into a single prescriptive field or definition.

It is through the interaction of people and environments that culture is maintained, created, destroyed and modified. By retrospective understanding of behaviors, Weick (1979) would argue that people act first and then reflect upon their actions at some future time in order to make sense of the situation. Contrary to logical belief, as individuals we do not think first and then choose to act upon our analytical thoughts.

In order to construct retrospective understanding Weick (1979) argues individuals in the enactment phase utilize a form of mental bracketing, or examining specific episodes of experience. In other words, after a certain action people separate individual events for a delayed but deeper inspection and analysis. By stepping back to gain an unencumbered view, one can give further attention to specific moments in an individual's experience and retrospective sensemaking occurs.

Retrospective sensemaking occurs when individuals act first and then develop an interpretation of that action (Weick, 1979, p. 194). Individuals talk to each other in order to

"discover thinking" (Weick, 1979, p.165). Bracketing episodes and returning to uncover the ambiguity surrounding these episodes allows for these discoveries to occur.

One of Weick's (1979) primary criticisms regarding managers and their communication within organizations is that despite the time and communicative effort managers put into their environments, they often find themselves engaged in "pluralistic ignorance" (Weick, 1979, p. 151.). By pluralistic ignorance, Weick (1979) refers to something similar to "groupthink" in which managers do not allow retrospective analysis to dig below the surface. Their communication is either linear or superficially circular. These two types of communication lead to what Weick (1979) termed "stunted enactment" (Weick, 1979, p.151.) or the inability of managers to effectively make sense of their environments and act accordingly.

Enactment demonstrates that individuals are active within their environments. Individuals have power in that they can choose either to acknowledge or ignore inputs, and through these chosen actions people construct their realties. Because of this inherent necessity for human action Weick (2001) asserts, "enactment in the service of sensemaking can reduce, contain, or accelerate a developing crisis" (Weick, 2001, p.178), meaning that is it up to the individual's attention to inputs, and their subsequent action or thru-put to deliver an output worth noting.

Enactment is interesting to examine because it locates points in time and space at which culture evolves within organizations. Enactment is a point within organizations where new behaviors, patterns and understands can emerge. When new inputs are introduced in an organization it necessitates a process of retrospective analysis and application, and by rising to these needs individuals make sense of their situations and move forward toward phase two, or selection.

While enactment is the "saying" within the recipe, or sensemaking model, Weick (1979) adds "The enactment choice is phrased this way: 'Knowing what I know now, should I act differently?' The enactment choice involves a revision in the responses that create or respond to ecological changes" (Weick, 1979, p.217). Because enactment is a reaction to the environment and takes inputs from both selection and retention it is important to recognize these networks and links between the concepts within the model.

Enactment simultaneously influences and is closely influence by selection and retention, as Weick (1979) explains, "Enactments often consist of trial-and-error behavior, but it remains for the process of selection to impose on those earlier struggles the interpretation that trial-and-error was underway" (Weick, 1979, p.185). The sensemaking paradox here is that trial-and-error learning demonstrates ambiguity as a means of uncertainty reduction in an environment.

Trial-and-error learning allows for behavior first and interpretation second. It allows for past experiences to influence present decisions and for present actions to influence future knowledge. In essence enactment is "decision-interpreted, not decision-made" (Weick, 1979, p. 195).

Selection

To reiterate, sensemaking theory's function is to reduce uncertainty for an individual, group, or organization. Weick (1979) implements the phrase, "How can I know what I think until I see what I say?" (Weick, 1979, p.133) as the primary analogy for his sensemaking theory. Thus, in the second phase, selection is "seeing."

Selection, the second phase in sensemaking, functions to generate answers and explanations; it is decision making through a process of editing one's experience and eliminating actions that lead to undesirable results. Going back to Weick's (1979) sensemaking phrase:

"How can I know what I think until I see what I say?" because it stems from enactment, or "saying" selection is "seeing" what has been said, it reveals interpretations of "saying" and thus continues to generate equivocality (Weick, 1979, p.133). The enigma of uncertainty reduction is dealt with using multiple interpretation methods.

Weick (1979) states, "Actions are known only when they have been completed" (Weick, 1979, p.195). Despite the fact that selection deals with equivocality much like enactment, the interpretations, or the seeing of the process, are more complex as these interpretations begin to reduce and remove uncertainty (Weick, 1979). With the second phase of sensemaking, individuals and groups in the organization will begin to reduce ambiguity in their environment.

In crisis counselor communication, selection can occur through informal debriefing of situations. By communicating with peers, crisis counselors begin to evaluate their actions and start the process of interpretation. Selection is an emergent phase in which actors use a process of elimination.

Selection is the second phase in Weick's (1979) sensemaking theory, in that it follows enactment. Selection is also retrospective in that it looks to actions bracketed in enactment and attempts to justify those actions enabling the individual, group or organization to make sense of said action.

> Selection is about generating an answer to the ever-present question, "what's the story here?" To answer that question, individuals and groups sort through prior cues, label them, and connect them, which often results in plausible stories that are good enough to keep going and enlarge the circle of interested parties (Weick, 2001, p.237).

Interpretation is at the heart of selection. Weick (1979) describes the emergence of interpretation as the, "the meanings that are tried come both from previous experience and from patterns implicit in the enactments themselves" (Weick, 1979, p. 175). Thus, selection is a complex decoding act within the full sensemaking process of imposing a set of interpretations on

the enacted environment through established organizational rules and behavioral cycles guided

by organizational culture.

Individuals, groups and organizations, as in Weick's sensemaking model continuously

move between action and interpretation. Murphy (2001) explains how communicative

performances, within enacted environments, are embedded in everyday discursive practices. The

dilemma Murphy (2001) describes, is in knowing when to invent appropriate ways to respond

rather than being automatically constrained by past routines (Murphy, 2001). This dilemma is

reiterated multiple times within Weick's (1979) work on sensemaking theory.

In selection, there are multiple possible answers or justifications to enactment. Selection

calls for an answer, and thus draws upon prior experience and observation of enactment, but the

fact still remains that multiple answers exist in each bracketed enacted environment. Once an

interpretation is settled upon, there still exists within the circular reasoning of sensemaking the

possibility for a new interpretation to emerge at some future point.

This subtle understanding Weick (1979) summarized as:

(1) the enacted environment rather than the physical environment does the selecting, (2) the typical way in which an organization splits decisions is for retained information to be credited in the selection process and discredited in the enactment process, (3) retention and believing control seeing just as much as seeing controls believing, (4) fit with an enacted environment means that interpretations and labels are consistent with previous enacted environments (Weick, 1979, pp.187-188).

Selection is important in the process because it is the point at which enactment inputs are

interpreted, where meaning is derived and a communicative interpretation of equivocal inputs are

settled. Weick (1979) adds to the description of selection with:

The raw materials (feed) into selection consists of equivocal enactments and cause maps of varying equivocality; the purpose of this selection is to say more about the nature of these materials. The justification for this enlargement is that the nature of the materials dictates the nature of the process that must be posited if these materials are to be transformed into sensible outputs" (Weick, 1979, p.179).

Or in other words, through environmental inputs and actor enactment (saying), selection (seeing) justifies the former phase to make actors feel at ease with "saying" because through selection "saying" will fit into their world view and make sense within the environment.

The circular nature of Weick's (1979) sensemaking theory means that selection is influenced by both enactment and retention. The phase is influenced by enactment in that selection is the interpretation of the behavior.

> Retention is a reservoir of beliefs, and when we assert that believing is seeing (I'll see it/select it when I believe it/retain it) this is signified by a causal arrow from retention to selection. If believing is seeing, then retention is credited (+), constrains selection, and provides crucial inputs to it (Weick, 1979, p.187).

Thus, the circular system of Weick's theory is further explained and developed: to understand selection, it is important to recognize the inputs from both enactment and retention. Selection operates as interpretation and decision making in a situation which highlights the important influence of retention on selection.

Weick (1979) breaks the selection process down to focus on observation, and how selection will emerge from retrospective observation:

> any organization that pays close attention to multiple indicators, that has a decent retention system which contains numerous possible images to be superimposed on enactments, that is active and stirs up the world in which it operates, and that is neither so large that it is its own environment nor so powerful that it can control all of the resources on which it is dependent, can expect a steady stream of puns to be singled out of its stream of experience (Weick, 1979, p. 174).

Weick (1979) considered all individuals, groups and organizations fully capable of successfully completing the selection phase in sensemaking; however further along in his work he offers criticism regarding a consistent lack of practicing selection, or seeing what organizations say.

Weick (1979) criticized managers for not fully embracing selection by asserting "managers gravitate toward activities that are current, specific, well-defined and non-routine, (p.203), but managers justify this lack of full participation in the system by providing the excuse that there is not time for retrospection or deliberated selection. Plausible reasons for this tendency are time, resource and training constraints within organizational environments which often work together to hinder even the best intentions of managers.

Finally, Weick (1979) draws attention to the circular nature of sensemaking:

> On the basis of some enacted environment that is retrieved from memory, the interpretation choice is this: 'Knowing what I know now, should I change the way I label and connect the flow of experience?' It concerns whether or not the actor should revise the interpretations that he imposes on newer enactments (Weick, 1979 p.217).

Within the enacted environment, attempts made to reduce uncertainty results in ongoing evaluation and interpretation of past actions. This evaluation is necessary for organizational survival and continual learning, but also for avoiding some of the organizational pitfalls mentioned.

Retention

Retention, the third phase within sensemaking theory, is the process that encompasses the storage of interpreted (selection) segments of experience for future application. It contributes to organizational intelligence, memory and culture.

Retention is the continual development and maintenance of organizational rules that guide decision making. The contribution of retention to communication and sensemaking is multifaceted.

Retention guides crisis counselors in their decision making process. Information deemed important in debriefing affects stories that are told, and guides behaviors and communication

between crisis counselors. Retention essentially is the embodiment of decoding where uncertainty is broken down and remade into something understood and applicable. This "something" becomes the archival memory of an organization.

Weick (1979) cautions organizations against too much reliance on retention, which can lead to an inability to be open to the constant and ever changing inputs within an organization. Weick (1979) asserts that within a closed system, too much reliance on the validity of retention makes for inflexibility and limits an organization's ability to adapt to change. Organizations are then at risk of becoming stale and stuck in their ways.

Retention acts as organizational memory, and as part of the enactment-selection-retention model in sensemaking theory accepts inputs from both enactment and selection while simultaneously influencing both enactment and selection phases.

Retention asserts both positive and negative effects on enactment and selection through these two feedback loops. One key factor to note within this system is that both enactment and selection have the ability to accept or reject inputs from retention. This ability to choose whether or not to accept these inputs can cause a certain level of ambivalence and strategic ambiguity in organizational decision making.

Weick (1979) would argue that this is a more positive model of the sensemaking feedback loop, and one that organizations should strive for. With a maintained level of ambiguity in the feedback loop, organizations can encourage flexibility in communication which will foster survival through growth, development and interpretation while simultaneously avoiding the pitfall Weick warned against with stale and stuck organizational communication feedback loops.

Retention functions as a frame of reference for individuals, groups and organizations and produces social interaction. Weick (2001) puts retention into context by stating retention can be

conceptualized thusly: "When I learn what I think by seeing what I say, the thoughts I wind up with are a meaningful environment of my own making and thus an outcome" (Weick, 2001, p. 305). Weick (1979) further draws attention to the role of retention within his sensemaking phrase:

> 'How can I know what I think until I hear what I say?' The relevant modification for retention is, 'How can I know what I think because I forgot what I said?' The only way the sense-making recipe works is if you can remember the things you've said so that they're available for reflection (Weick, 1979, p.207).

Often, this is not as hard as it may seem, as decisions made from interpretations in the selection phase are made into formal policy and procedure in the retention phase.

However, as Weick (1979) points out, because information is continuously being processed, "incoming information is processed by information that is already recorded. Material that is already recorded tends to interact with newer information in ways that select for and maximize the impact of that which already exists" (Weick, 1979, p.211). Once again, Weick (1979) articulates the circular and regenerative quality of sensemaking.

Organizational cultural performance bolsters Weick's (1979) assertions regarding retention. Pacanowski and O'Donell-Trujillo (1983) assert past performances imbue the present (and future) with their specific meanings while the present, by its reconfiguration of the past, transforms past meanings. The future is also bound to be influenced by the accumulation of stored experience. The main point is that sensemaking and culture are temporally embedded and contextualized in organizational reality and understood through sensemaking theory as adaptable, changeable and permeable.

Retention is a crucial element in the recipe for sensemaking because it expresses often in narrative form, explanations which summarizes a sense of the situation,

These meanings, often in the form of cause maps, are the source of culture and strategy in

the case of organizations, and identities and continuities in the case of individuals. Episodes of successful sensemaking culminate in meanings that fit present moments into the context of past moments. Because plausibility rather than accuracy is the prevailing criterion that guides retention, ecological changes that filter through enactment and selection, have numerous features that are overlooked and forgotten (Weick, 2001, p.305).

These maps are cognitive stored units of bracketed episodes which inform action and decision making within cultural paradigms.

Weick (1979) links retention to organizational culture frequently in explanations of his sensemaking theory, for example:

Retention is about culture as well as maps. Culture is an enacted environment that results from retrospective interpretation of recurrent patterns in enactment. Culture, memory, retention, cause maps, and stories, just to name a few, encapsulate how an individual, group or organizations formulate responses to the question: "how we do things around here (Weick, 2001, p. 306).

In addition to recognizing the link between retention and culture, Weick (2001) argues, "the more fully an organizational culture values storytelling, the more effective that organization will be. Effectiveness here means reliable performance of high-risk operations under conditions where unexpected threats to continuation can erupt without much warning" (Weick, 2001, p.306). Storytelling is a fundamental aspect of culture, as the use of metaphor to learn and teach cannot be underestimated in studies of culture and sensemaking.

The act of storytelling can fulfill many purposes, such as functioning as a locus of significant summaries, elucidating within an interpretive debriefing framework and preparing others for an event. Storytelling also develops cohesion and a sense of unity among a group of people.

The importance of storytelling relates directly to cultural theories, as storytelling along with rituals, rites, organizational facts, practices, vocabulary and metaphors are all symbols of organizational culture (Pacanowsy and O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1982).

These symbols create cohesion among individuals, groups and organizations enabling the building of new and strengthening of existing networks within the sensemaking model. Of course as Weick (1979) would caution, if these networks become too solid or rigidly constructed, creativity and the ability to interpret inputs could be stunted.

A final point to be made within the retention phase of sensemaking is the need for organizations to find a healthy balance between flexibility and stability. Flexibility, as already discussed in the selection phase is necessary in order for organizations to adapt and modify their current practices in response to changes within their environment: "Stability on the other hand, provides an economical means to handle new contingencies, since there are regularities in the world that any organization can exploit if it has a memory and the capacity for repetition" (Weick, 1979, p.215). As with all aspects of culture, it is important to encourage constant evaluation in order to foster the balance between flexibility and stability.

Similarly to oversights found within the selection phase, where managers become stale and stuck in their ways and are unable to find flexibility for new interpretations, Weick (1979) cautions:

> If a person repeatedly enacts and selects only those things that have been enacted and selected in the past, then this is case where stability drives out flexibility. Adaptation becomes endangered. When retention content is credited and constrains both enactment and selection, this means that both processes are activated in direct proportion to the amount of material that is retrieved from memory. As memory is retrieved to guide actions and interpretations, there is more activation of enactment and selection (Weick, 1979, pp. 217-218).

Accordingly, the final take-away is that sensemaking as a circular system can only be as good as the weakest individual channels working together to reduce equivocality in an environment. Thus, an examination of how crisis counselors act within their environments along with an interpretive critique of their communication among each other, in order to reduce

uncertainty found in the issues they deal with, offers a unique perspective to organizational communication and sensemaking theory.

Applying sensemaking to domestic and sexual abuse center research

Literature on domestic and sexual abuse shelters often focuses on existing client issues. Such issues include the trauma of partner battering and sexual abuse like incest, rape, and molestation (Bennet and O'Brian, 2007). But, these organizations also deal with multiple layers of challenges at any given time.

Issues discussed also take into account substance abuse, which include alcohol, narcotics and prescription drugs, or any combination of substance abuse (Schumacher, 2012; Macy et al., 2011; Bennet and O'Brian, 2007). Client challenges include coping with the causes of their issues and finding solutions that can realistically be encouraged and incorporated into their lives.

Because clients often suffer from multiple causes of abuse, providing clients with appropriate services can be challenging (Schumacher, 2012). Each client brings a unique set of challenges to the organization which requires both stability and flexibility in responses.

Reducing re-victimization rates of clients after shelter stay is a primary goal of crisis counselors, yet because re-abuse is a frequent event, coping with this knowledge can be difficult for many crisis counselors, and for some may even cause them to doubt their purpose. Examining how crisis counselors make sense of and deal with the cognitive dissonance they may experience is one aspect of communication not explored in the current reviewed literature. Most literature focuses on the services domestic and sexual abuse shelters provide for clients. Alix-Gaudrea (2002) asserts there are many aspects to consider: health care, social care, financial well-being and safety. Yet, there are often many challenges to wade through in order to provide these services.

While many services are offered to clients, there are also limits to treatment options. Macy et al. (2011) explore how managers of domestic and sexual abuse shelter prioritize their services. These services include, but are not limited to: crisis, legal advocacy, medical advocacy, counseling, support group, shelter services and emotional support; however, there is little evidence regarding the effectiveness of these services provided (Macy et al., 2011).

Many clients, when they arrive at a crisis center have little experience with activities that are self-determined, or activities in which they are the sole decision maker. Melbin et al. (2003) explain perpetrators of domestic violence often use economic means, such as ownership of housing, ownership of any means of transportation and ownership of banking, in order to ensure control and put constraints on victims.

The social and economic disadvantages of clients seeking help are often hard to understand because there are often multiple and highly complex layers of suppression involved; consequently, many clients have little experience managing their own resources and need training in order to successfully transition to a safer and self-determined environment.

Safety planning and support group services are among the primary services offered to clients (Schumacher, 2012). Domestic and sexual abuse shelters assist clients in accessing community resources when applicable. Crisis counselors try to achieve, by working with clients, their mission-oriented goals of promoting client safety, violence-free lifestyles, independent living and to help their client's access to material and social resources (Alix-Gaudrea, 2002). Many clients seeking shelter have little experience with managing their own resources and as a result empowerment and safety are broad and central goals that guide counselor interaction with clients.

The literature struggles with defining and applying empowerment in the context of domestic and sexual abuse centers. Empowerment is sometimes coupled with services provided; the thought process is that if the client is able to access certain resources then they will be more empowered.

Empowerment is also related to support group activity, and guiding clients towards an understanding of the causes of the violence in the first place, with a focus on 'cause' not 'problems' (Kasturirangan, 2008). At the heart of the matter, empowerment deals with engaging clients and avoiding dependency on the crisis counselor or shelter.

Kasturirangan (2008) cautions against the hasty assumption that solving client issues occur by simply offering services. Empowerment does not occur as a result of services rendered, rather for empowerment to occur programs should support clients by providing access to resources associated with a variety of goal setting, assessment, inquiry, analysis and action that may lead to self-determination.

Thus, as discussed, recurring themes in domestic and sexual abuse center literature are identifying client issues, providing services, empowerment and self-determination. While these issues are indeed important and contribute to many aspects of current and developing knowledge regarding such organizations, there is little information regarding how the service providers function within the system.

Accordingly, this study explores the communication between people on the frontlines interacting with clients. How do crisis counselors communicate with each other while working with issues? How do they maintain their role in the organization and sense of purpose? How do they reduce uncertainty in an environment in a constant state of equivocality?

Research Questions

RQ1: How do crisis counselors make sense of their experiences?

RQ2: How does storytelling influence frames of reference for sensemaking?

RQ3: What are key turning points, if any, that produce occasions for sensemaking?

Summary

Sensemaking theory, combined with organizational culture and turning point analysis, provide unique and complementary lenses for examining organizational communication. These key concepts allow for rich descriptions of how behaviors influence communication and sensemaking through uncertainty reduction in organizations. Crisis centers are locations of constant change and uncertainty; consequently, these theories are appropriate to guide research and answer the research questions.

Chapter 2: Methodology

A qualitative method is employed to study both the individual and shared group experience of crisis counselors working in an environment surrounded in uncertainty. The researcher conducted nine semi-structured interviews with crisis counselors working at a small midwestern domestic and sexual abuse shelter. Appendix A details questions the interviewer used to gather this study's relevant data.

Tracy et al. (2006), in their study of human service workers using humor in organizational sensemaking, also conducted interviews to gather data from crisis service workers. From these data, they were able to analyze how human service workers negotiated sensemaking in their line of work which also was surrounded in uncertainty.

For this study on organizational culture and crisis counselor's sensemaking practices, i.e. behaviors and storytelling, the researcher believes interviews are necessary to answer the research questions, as interviews will reveal individual's interpretive perspectives. Interviews also allow for storytelling, which fosters an abundant field of metaphorical and factual data.

Interviews are an important method of gathering data for this research project, and as Mack et al. (2005) assert, "The in-depth interview is a technique designed to elicit a vivid picture of the participant's perspective on the research topic (Mack et al., 2005, p.29). This research required interviews in order to honor and explore the unique and individualistic aspect of crisis counselors' experiences.

The interviews ranged in duration from 20-90 minutes. An average interview lasted for 60 minutes, which is considered within the normal range for research interviews lasting from one to two hours (Mack et al., 2005). The researcher believes the nine interviews yielded ample data for analysis.

Interviews were set up first through initial contact and approval from the director of the organization. The director supported and encouraged staff to meet with the researcher. The organization's employees were encouraged to contact the researcher via e-mail to set up interviews.

Of the 17 full and part time employees at this organization, nine staff members volunteered to participate in this study. Nine interviews were set up at various public locations at the convenience of the participant. Interviews were audio recorded. After review and transcription, the audio recordings were erased to protect participant identity and potential confidential information that had been shared during the interviews.

Interviews were a necessary and appropriate method to gather data for this research because each counselor's experience within the organization is unique; therefore, every individual's interpretation and reporting of specific experiences is a valid means of exploring sensemaking questions. Crisis counselors interpretation of bracketed actions and behaviors and their thoughts regarding future situations contribute to sensemaking. Mack et al. (2005) state, in-depth interviews are an appropriate method to "gain insight into how people interpret and order the world" (Mack et al., 2005, p.30).

All interviewed participants were given designated subject numbers in order to protect their identity during the research. All information that could identify when the participants met with the researcher: the location, the date and the times was eliminated from transcripts and results.

Setting and Participants

The organization under study is a domestic and sexual abuse shelter in a small midwest town. This setting is appropriate because it is the organization in which the communication and

sensemaking occurs. Crisis counselors process client issues, debrief with co-workers and make sense of their experience within the organization. Participants in this study are both full and part time crisis counselors.

Employment duration at this organization ranged from four months to almost 20 years. The broad range of employment and experience provided appropriate data for the exploration of sensemaking and the evolutionary process of sensemaking in this organization.

The choice of this site and participation selection is purposeful; it is a strategy as Maxwell (2013) describes which allows for deliberate study of specific settings, people, or activities as they are particularly relevant to the set of research questions and research goals. Maxwell (2013) details five possible research goals in which purposeful selection is appropriate:

> (1) to achieve representativeness of typicality of the setting, individuals, or activities selected; (2) to adequately capture the heterogeneity in the population; (3) to deliberately select individuals or cases that are critical for testing existing theories or theories being developed; (4) to establish particular comparisons to illuminate the reason for differences between settings or individuals; and (5) to select groups or participants with whom establishment of productive relationships will enable answering research questions (Maxwell, 2012, pp. 98-99).

Each of Maxwell's (2013) purposeful selection criteria are met in varying degrees with this research.

The participants are appropriate as they are the frontline human service workers who interact with clients consistently. Crisis counselors' personal testimonies of experiences and behaviors contribute to the exploration of how sensemaking works for crisis counselors.

Interview questions focused on allowing crisis counselors to describe past events and experiences. By allowing for individual crisis counselors to share their perspectives on past events, the researcher was able to gain insight on cultural memory. Identifying employee

experiences and how they talk about their experiences resulted in a collection of necessary data to answer the research questions.

Analysis and Validation

The ongoing and inductive analysis aimed to identify emergent themes, patterns, and questions. The purpose of ongoing and inductive analysis is to allow for the researcher to explore and discover emergent and recurring themes and categories from the data and apply these emergent themes to the final analysis. The researcher transcribed all individual interviews. Several themes emerged regarding organizational culture and cultural shifts, including the strong influence of organizational culture and its effect on counselor behavior and communication.

All transcripts from interviews were carefully read and analyzed in order to allow reoccurring themes to emerge from the crisis counselor's described experience. After completing the transcriptions, the first readings were done for general overall understanding. A second, more critical reading followed with a focus on reoccurring themes, and categorizing and coding units of important information. Connecting strategies, or the analysis of narrative structures and contextual relationships, is the primary analytical method to be implemented (Maxwell, 2012). Creswell (2007) asserts coding the data and folding coded information into broader categories or themes as one way to effectively illustrate and analyze qualitative data.

Creswell (2007) describes effective qualitative analysis as a spiral:

This process consists of moving from the reading and memoing loop into the spiral to the describing, classifying, and interpreting loop. In this loop, code or category formation represents the heart of qualitative data analysis. Here researchers describe in detail, develop themes or dimensions through some classification system, and provide an interpretation in light of their own views or views of perspectives in the literature (Creswell, 2007, p. 151).

The researcher was transparent with findings, allowing participants to request transcriptions in order to validate, check for clarification and accuracy of information provided.

The purpose of rigorously validating the data and working collaboratively with participants stems from an effort on the researcher's part to holistically explore crisis counselors sensemaking techniques.

Ethical Questions

Participation in this study was voluntary. Participants were given an informed consent approved by the University of Wisconsin- Stevens Point Institutional Review Board (IRB), stating the purpose of the study and it guarantees protection of the participant's identity and confidentiality.

The data collected on hard copy was stored in a locked cabinet at the research's home office. The audio data was erased upon transcription. The electronic data was stored in a password encrypted file on the researcher's personal computer. The researcher was the only person to access the data. While participants were offered the right to review transcriptions, none requested to do so. The nine employees who volunteered to participate in this study were assigned subject numbers in order to protect their identity. Any information given during interviews that could possibly identify the participant was not included in transcriptions.

Summary

As the method suggests, this study does not aim to generalize from the experience of crisis counselors, nor does it aim to provide answers to prevalent social issues found in domestic or sexual abuse shelters.

This study aims to explore the human experience of workers in this crisis center. It hopes to uncover methods of uncertainty reduction, and explore the shared experience, communication and sensemaking of these crisis counselors. Such information may be useful in understanding the

situations and experiences of other crisis counselors in other settings but that would require

further research.

Chapter 3: Results

Culture is a complex concept that guides organizations. Culture is always changing and morphing depending on the inputs received. Sometimes change is gradual while other times it can occur very quickly. In this organization, a culture was put into place and became the defining norm that influences and affects many of the communicative and sensemaking behaviors explored in this study.

The culture promoted at this organization is often referred to by the employees as "living in the gray." While exploring the gray, and the counselor's acceptance or rejection of the level of gray and its many ramifications, several important factors emerged.

The length of employment seemed to influence one's ability to accept or reject the gray. Participants interviewed had worked for this organization anywhere from four months to almost 20-years. Five out of the nine people interviewed have been employed for less than five years. Three of the nine people interviewed have been employed for less than a year. The large number of new employees may be a result of organizational changes. It recently instituted strong support for the gray culture and some employees left the organization.

The organization under study employs 17 full and part-time human service workers. Nine of the 17 employees volunteered to meet for interviews. The formulated interview questions were designed to allow subjects to share stories and experiences, with the hope that themes and patterns would emerge regarding organizational culture.

With a better understanding of this organization's culture, the researcher hoped to discover the communicative techniques and behaviors that human services workers employed to make sense of their turning points and their experiences in processing crisis. When all research questions were explored, several themes emerged.

The first and most broad- reaching theme that emerged regarding organizational culture was whether or not the subjects adhered to a culture of "living in the gray" or a culture guided by black and white rules and regulations. This is important to note because the individual employee's comfort level was directly related to how they dealt with the organization's ambiguous culture. Their abilities in handling the gray influenced their responses regarding turning points, storytelling and overall sensemaking.

The second theme that emerged is the acceptance or rejection of adopting an organizational culture comfortable with ambiguity or of "living in the gray." Gray is both structure and process. Gray is structure in that it is institutional environment and process as it is a method of communication. Living in the gray means accepting the uncertainty of this line of work and the interpersonal or psychological vulnerability involved in processing client situations.

The third theme is the ease or difficulty of daily processing with peers or supervisors. Processing in the organization includes both informal debriefing and formal monthly meetings.

The fourth and final theme is the presence or absence of internal triggers. Triggers are events that cause an increased or intense emotional response in employees. As will be discussed, the level of acceptance or rejection of organizational "gray" culture greatly influences how crisis counselors reported sensemaking and turning points.

The study of organizational culture reveals limitations and methods that influence communication and sensemaking. While it is complex, Pacanowski and O'Donnel-Trujillo (1982) offer a framework that can assist interpretation when they assert that organizational culture is both structure and process. Consequently, the results section includes an examination

of both the institutional structure coupled with the individual and group interpretation and process.

While all participants stated there are no typical days or standard responses to episodes of crisis because they are working with human subjects and no two experiences are the same, employees do rely upon organizational cultural values, structures and processes in order to interpret the constant inflow of experiences. Storytelling becomes organizational culture as it takes on the form of a coping process to explain and make sense of new experiences (Pacanowsky & O'Donnel-Trujillo, 1982). The following sections will explore the elements of organizational culture that emerged from the interviews.

Living in the Gray

In addition to models and modes employees relied upon to guide their behavior, and make sense of their experiences, a culture of "living in the gray" emerged as a reoccurring theme. Not all subjects interviewed accepted living in the gray as a mode of functioning; however, it did appear to form an environment that the organization promoted.

Four of the nine interviewed individuals specifically labeled their work environment as "gray" and described the elements of gray culture. Of these four, all have been employed for over a year at this organization.

Three of the nine interviewees described in detail the characteristic of organizational gray culture but did not specifically call it gray. Two of the nine people interviewed made no mention of gray culture, one of these employees is a recent hire and the other described their feelings of frustration over the lack of rules and regulations.

The duration of employment appears to influence the level of acceptance or rejection of living in the gray as well as influencing levels of communication with peers and superiors. Data

collected from interviews also explored themes such as the role of peer support, the role of debriefing both informally and formally with peers and superiors, and the ties between stories and resulting turning points. These debriefing meetings dealt with the uncertainty of how to process trauma and client issues as well as internal struggles and triggers.

Two anecdotes were shared during interviews that put the gray into perspective. These stories provide examples of how one may choose to cope with the gray. They also appear to separate the individual from the bracketed situation and allow for culture to emerge. One subject shared a story she was told while dealing with a difficult situation:

My old supervisor told this story about a butterfly, when she was a little girl she had a caterpillar that she put into a jar, she poked holes into it, she fed it plants and it cocooned up. She would watch it every day breathlessly waiting for the butterfly to come out, and it did. One wing came out and it was flapping and it was beautiful and the other one didn't and she kept waiting and waiting and so she thought to herself that she could just help out a little bit and so she pulled the cocoon off. The butterfly was unable to fly because the second wing was unable to fully develop naturally. So when we take away the opportunity to struggle we rob them (clients) of their opportunity to find their own strength or how strong they actually are. It's not in our power to take over for people. When we struggle is when we learn.

Storytelling provides frames of reference for sensemaking to occur; the second research question explores this process. A second story used to guide crisis counselors operating in the gray was shared by one subject:

Something that helps me cope is a story about a Russian farmer. He had horses and his son was trying to get these wild horses that they saw. The community was like, oh my

gosh these wild horses, that's such great news we need to go get them. And the farmer

said, 'good news, bad news, I cannot tell.' So the community goes out to get these horses

and they get three new horses, and everyone is like, 'oh great news!' and he said, 'good

news bad news there is no way to tell.' His son starts to train the horses and he falls off

and breaks his leg, the community says, 'oh that's terrible this is such bad news!' and the

farmer response is, 'good news bad news no way to tell.' Then a war breaks out, the

whole country goes to war and the army comes to collect all the young strong men and

the farmer's son could not go because he had a broken leg and everyone says, 'oh you are

so lucky this is such great news,' and the farmer response is once again, 'good news, bad

news no way to tell.' There is no ending to this story, it just keeps going on and on,

always ending in ambiguity. What matters is how people attach meaning to things. If I

say, that is good or that is bad, I'm attaching a meaning to it when we don't have the

larger long-term view. We don't have the perspective until much, much later, or maybe

never, so for me to define this as good or bad is limited thinking. So that helps me to not

go there, to not go to the judgment part, when I think about those types of thinking it does

it for me.

This particular story emphasizes the cultural aspect of living in the gray, of living in the

moment and recognizing the organization's desire to refrain from passing judgment upon a

situation regardless of how challenging or unchallenging it may appear. Living in the gray, as a

cultural norm, is not an easy task. If this ambiguity is not accepted, it can lead to some

difficulties, as one crisis counselor shared:

I really care about the shelter, and I really care about the staff, and I get the work. I felt

that our services were diminishing because we had a lot of transition over a short period

of time with people who were well-meaning, who came in and didn't understand, and did

a lot of damage in not understanding set up and supported dynamics of factions and

people started warring against each other, became very judgmental and gossipy and at the

bottom everyone thought they were doing the right thing. They thought they were doing

what was best and it was this faction of black and white thinking, and gray thinking, and

even the gray thinkers became even more extreme only in reaction the extreme black and

white thinkers. So there was no middle ground where sometimes you need rules that are

clear so you can function and sometimes you need gray to allow for the humanity of it all.

I'm learning how to transfer my approach towards victims to my co-workers.

It appears that many, if not all of the interviewed crisis counselors are conscious of

these cultural norms in place. They accept living in the gray, and they have expectations

regarding storytelling and processing client challenges. As with any culture, there are those that

adhere to the cultural expectations and those that try to ride the edge of such expectations.

Sometimes it is not clear though, for established cultural norms in organizations are not always

openly discussed. In this organization, these cultural norms are openly discussed, repeatedly

examined and are often bolstered through storytelling. One crisis counselor openly

acknowledged this established culture and some of the challenges associated with it:

It is very challenging to live in the gray of the nature of our work, there are policies in

place that say you can do this, you can't do that, but maybe you can depending on the

county, agency, and victim. It just changes all the time and if you are a truly structured

person who likes the day to be x, y and z, if you don't have the flexibility to bend, it will

be a horrible environment for you. For me, I love going to work every day and that is

worth dollars on a salary, but you certainly want to have worked through any issues that

you have of your own that may relate to this line of work. You have to really be able to

take yourself out of the equation you are not there for anything for yourself, even if you

are strictly there as a sounding board to provide information to let that person be

whomever they need to be at that moment and know that you have no place in trying to

change their mind or encourage them to do anything and that I just love it.

Gray culture is both structure and process. Because it is present in both aspects of this

organization and because it was discussed in seven of the nine interviews it emerged as an

important theme to explore. As acknowledged by the interviewed crisis counselors, gray are not

easy. Individuals expressed their unique perspectives on balancing between the stability and

flexibility of their role in the culture. Some of these challenges will be explored further.

Challenges of Living in the Gray

While many of the subjects recognized the organization's support of living in the gray,

two of the nine people interviewed described their struggle with the concept. One struggle is the

lack of stability in organizational structure and process. As one crisis counselor shared:

I'm calloused. I understand that it's essentially not wanting to sound rude, but it's not my

problem, it's their problem and there is a limit as far as the rules go…Most of the

coworkers I identified with or agreed with are gone, they have moved on to other

organizations or completely different careers…The CEO of (this organization) came

down, she came firmly down firmly on the side that I was not on, when the CEO comes

and tells you that you are wrong, you are wrong.

The flexibility encouraged by the gray in interpreting the formal rules and regulations of

the organization has left some individuals wanting more stability. Yet, an additional comment

reinforces the difficulty with interpreting, working and living in the uncertainty of the gray.

We have no say in shelter rules, we can't enforce anything, we can only strongly suggest. Say someone is violating rules, answering phones, opening doors for people, inviting an abuser here, we can't do anything about it, and we can't kick them out. We have to call people, and set up a committee. We don't have the authority to say, 'no you are violating safety rules.' We have to go through all this red tape and craziness. Sometimes there is nothing wrong with a little dictatorship, because at least you know who is in charge. We are supposed to enforce rules, but we don't have the authority to do so; we are supposed to provide shelter, but we can't actually take actions to keep the shelter safe.

Another crisis counselor explained how the decision making looked recently when the organization underwent a large-scale cultural shift in their training and approach to trauma and in a need to address the emerging and warring factions in the organization:

Fixing the workplace environment came down to a choice of either firing everyone and hiring all new staff or working with the people as is.

Exploring the influence of organizational culture imposes on an organization and how it permeates communicative decisions and behaviors is important to understand and keep in mind as the next two themes are explored.

Learning about the organizational culture allows one to explore the sensemaking process and the roles of stories and turning points. Crisis counselors process these stories and turning points in different ways, yet their reported actions allow for exploration of sensemaking.

Accepting the reality that there is no single best way to respond to client issues is exactly what living in the gray promotes. But, as Weick (2001) argues, sensemaking is an attempt to reduce uncertainty in one's environment, therefore relying on a set of models and peer

processing appear to be two methods employees use to make sense of the work they are charged with.

Mantras and Models

In the interviews, five of the nine people, when confronted with challenges paused to remind themselves of the core values and mission of the organization. They utilize training, frameworks and models to guide their thoughts and actions. They also used similar mantras to check in with themselves, help the subjects function while operating in the gray, and adapt to a culture of trauma. These mantras act as barriers to secondary trauma and burn out. As one crisis counselor put it:

> In my mind, I have a framework of advocacy of what I'm here to do: provide non-judgmental support, information, accompaniment, and having the courage to be with someone when they are the most vulnerable. One of the models that we use is called RICH: "R" is for respect, we always engage with respect first for that person, their autonomy and their ability to make decisions for themselves. "I" is for information, giving accurate, timely and relevant information that I may have to help people make informed decisions. "C" is for connection, compassion, caring, and community, you can't have any of those in a relationship with a person until you have a connection, and are vulnerable enough yourself to be present with them. You start with two people making a connection and everything else can grow from there. And "H" is for hope, hope for healing, hope for feeling safe, hope that they can find purpose and meaning in their life, and it's not up to me to decide for them what they need or what will be best for their life, but I trust that they will determine that for themselves, at every opportunity when I'm using a strength based approach.

Models of conduct, internal mantras and peer or superior support are some ways this organization's culture fosters sensemaking day by day. These coping mechanisms help to remind crisis counselors of their priorities in the organization and the organization's accepted culture. Some crisis counselors referred to the models they learned in training or further education, while others explained how these models were incorporated and explored as internal structures to guide thought and action. One subject explained how to incorporate these internal models through the direction of their supervisor:

> My previous supervisor was very helpful in setting up an internal structure to work with things, and that has helped me come back to work. One of the roles of empowerment is not doing for other people what they can do for themselves; or not being responsible for other people's choices. There is a grid in our training: being responsive and being responsible. When I am responsible, I fix, I try to take care of, I own something. I feel heavy, burdened, and really over-invested, and then I am personally impacted by the choices others make. When I am responsive, I can be present, I can be with someone, I can let go of their choices, I can trust them that they are on their own journey that my own presence there is intended to be supportive yet they can make their own choices because they get to decide their own life. Whether or not I agree with the choices they make doesn't matter, I don't have to. And, it's not my role in their life, so trusting that and going into that allows me to let go.

Along with living in the gray, the ease or difficulty associated with being able to seek superior or peer support contributed to themes of storytelling and organizational culture. One crisis counselor explained:

I feel very lucky to have a very supportive staff and a direct supervisor, along with individuals who feel comfortable processing things with me. I can also process with them, and we try to make sure that no matter how busy we are there is always time for that and I think that is very important because it builds trust in the organization, and peers because we are all here for a common purpose, a greater good. We do a lot of hard work, so we also have to take care of ourselves, and we focus on that in our monthly staff meetings. We talk about taking care of ourselves, not getting fatigue, emotional fatigue, secondary trauma essentially. It can turn into burn-out and very detrimental things for the person you're working with and the climate in the organization.

Day to day challenges cause both mental and physical stress for crisis counselors, but the secondary trauma can manifest as doubt of one's role in the organization or a sense of losing one's purpose. This loss of one's role or sense of purpose, as described by crisis counselors, often leads to burn out, and losing sight of the organization's mission. Additionally, there appeared a correlation between a weak acceptance of the gray culture and a weak affiliation with the organization's purpose. Yet others reported that through peer and supervisor support, they were able to vocally process situations and regain a sense of purpose and strengthen their commitment to the organization's culture.

Peer Processing

As explored previously, models, training, and a strong belief system are some resources subjects employ in order to make sense of the trauma and experience in their work. All nine interviewed individuals specifically stated that they used peer processing. The role of peer processing is significant in this organization as is allows for crisis counselors to operate more effectively in the gray, it helps in maintaining their role and a sense of purpose.

While the degree to which each individual felt comfortable processing with their peers or their superiors varied, it is significant to note that this theme appeared in all nine interviews. Reflecting upon these values of open and honest discussion helps crisis counselors focus their efforts in day to day encounters with clients. As one crisis counselor shared:

I deflect back to the core social work values, especially respect and dignity, understanding that these are their decisions to make, not mine and just knowing the importance of empathy and understanding their unique experience. A lot of women are in situations where their abuser has isolated them from their family, friends and support system and have created an-us-against the world mentality, so I just try to understand the big picture.

While this crisis counselor did not specifically mention the gray in this moment, the description of behaviors and self-awareness is one that embraces many of the aspect of the gray. Another crisis counselor added:

Sometimes when I'm really struggling I would go to my supervisor and she would give me the time and patience to work through it. I always went back to clarifying what is my role here? And that is what I set up for everything in general, this belief system is important and forging it through this process is important.

Being able to process through ambiguous situations and define one's role in the system demonstrates a strong understanding and acceptance of the gray. As one crisis counselor reiterated the role of peer support in processing:

Part of what I encounter I process at work, like when something significant happens. I have some great co-workers, I usually tell them how I feel about it, and ask what could I have done better, and what would they have done in my situation. After so many years of

experience, I know that I can't solve the problems of the world. I have to look at one

small segment I might be able to help and view that as a success. I can't just drag it

around with me, because you can't, the burn out rate is extremely high if you do that.

Another subject added to the significant role peer support and the necessity of processing

work experiences with ease and frequency:

When I work with an extreme case that is very draining, we will go into another person's

office and just talk about it back and forth. I might say, 'thank you for listening to me,'

you know, just debrief like that and let it all out.

All nine interviewed crisis counselors attested to the fact that there was no typical day to

contend with in this organization. Each day brought new challenges and triumphs. Because the

subjects interviewed are human service workers, they explain how the human experience cannot

be placed into a box easily labeled "day-to-day" experiences. Each client brings a new story and

each story requires a unique and fresh response.

While subjects do agree that they must draw upon prior experiences to help guide their

actions, there appeared a strong resistance to describing typical responses or typical days. There

was a strong insistence that the human experience found within the walls of this organization

cannot be typified, as one subject stated:

It's a constant learning because in the world of serving these types of populations, there is

no black and white… everybody comes with their individual unique experience. It is just

a world of gray, even yesterday, there was a situation that came up where I don't know

exactly, there is no clear cut way to handle this, so we work together, we call people into

the office and ask what do you think, everyone here wants to be sensitive to the nature of

these certain people's lives.

In addition to meeting the needs of each individual who seeks help, crisis counselors are constantly challenged to meet their own needs as human service providers and avoid secondary trauma. They are constantly challenged with the need to quickly respond and prioritize their responses in the organization. As one crisis counselor explained:

Trying to decide which has a higher priority right now, the phone, this situation with people screaming, or the door, and if you're alone you are trying to manage that, and in a quick decision making manner, because everyone who is seeking help in a crisis mode. You don't want to be in a crisis mode yourself and you're like okay just breathe and keep yourself calm and ready for action. Just assess the situation, you know, take a five in my head and just assess: okay I can put this person on hold, oh wait but what if that person is suicidal, okay so there are sometimes where you have to choose your path or your adventure. You do what is best at the time, and be okay with that, and explaining to the individual, 'look I'm really sorry I'm the only one here right now and there is another thing going on, I'll be five minutes I'll go and diffuse this and be a second to see what their need is and be right back.' I try to just make everyone aware that I'm human, and I can't do everything at once. I try to say, 'I know your needs are important here, everyone's needs are important here,' and just make sure that everyone understands that here, I've got it under control. But you know, it is a chaotic environment, and most of the time it doesn't seem to be a problem at all.

Often this form of debriefing occurs in a matter of minutes to just check in to seek another's opinion on the subject's chosen course of action. These retrospective debriefing sessions draw upon previously established organizational norms and experience.

All nine crisis counselors described to varying degree the beneficial role these informal debriefing sessions played in their day to day ability to make sense of their work environment and role within the organization. A subject described the ease and frequency of dropping in to process with peers:

> Before I jump into something, I'm very mindful of if they're busy. You know, I'll ask if they have a moment. I'll say, I just want to process something, I just got off the phone with someone and this is challenging. I'll go through a timeline of what happened, I'll talk about what I feel good about, what I don't feel good about and what was hard. I want to touch on all things. I've modeled this off of other co-workers, you know always talking about what's good and what's challenging. I'm always trying to look at the whole process. I try not to fall into the, 'I should have done this or I should have done that,' I don't want to should all over myself, which I try not to do as an advocate, so you know just talking it out for me puts more substance to it than holding it back. I ask, how would you handle this? I'm just looking for growth through it.

The role of debriefing with peers and superiors cannot be over-examined. While some subjects reported the role of informal and formal debriefing to be as important in their day to day work as meeting the client's needs, others reported the importance of debriefing at less significant levels. It appears that the more difficult or challenging a case was, the role of debriefing increased in significance.

> When I work with an extreme case that is very draining, we will go into another person's office and just talk about it back and forth. Thank you for listening to me, you know, just debrief like that and let it all out… It was more difficult in the beginning, but now I recognize thought processes in life, I recognize red flags, the things I teach people, but

really just talking to my co-workers, my drive home, thinking through things and just

being better by the time I get home… You just have to learn to leave it at work, the spill

over will burn you out really quick; just really learn how to disengage from work.

The role of peer processing appears influential for many of the individuals interviewed.

Part of the influence stems from the organization's culture of promoting unstructured debriefing

between peers. Processing acts as a method for uncertainty reduction and coping for many of the

individuals interviewed. With each new completed debrief whether formal or informal, the

process contributes to and strengthens the structure of the organization's culture. This creates a

circular sphere of influence in supporting and promoting the culture of gray.

Avoiding Peer Processing

While many subjects reported frequent informal processing with peers and supervisors,

some subjects did not feel as comfortable or eager to seek support. Three of the nine people

interviewed shared they felt comfortable only with specific and limited people. One subject

shared:

I basically avoid conversation. I do the work and do the best that I can do, but as far as

processing and socializing I just don't do it.

Length of employment could be one contributing factor to feelings of limited processing

opportunities. As another crisis counselor added:

I don't feel incredibly close with any of my coworkers, but I guess I would say

(communication is) more limited. Typically, in the social service setting, you can count

on people being more friendly and open. I don't have anything negative to say about my

coworkers, just more limited contact at this job than other places I've worked.

An additional element to consider when assessing peer processing limitations is the type of employment and shifts available at the organization. There are 17 full and part-time employees, and the only time all 17 have the opportunity to come face-to-face is at monthly meetings. As one crisis counselor shared:

> We do have the monthly meeting, it's an open process time for the set amount of time, but I don't think everyone is comfortable in the environment. Not everyone wants to share that something has affected them. We are in this work to help others, and for us to need help, admitting that we need help is very hard.

Informal and formal debriefing does appear to be promoted within the organization's culture, and while six out of nine crisis counselors interviewed shared the ease with which they felt they could process experiences with co-workers and their supervisor, there were still three out of nine who feel communication and support are limited. While some choose not to share or process with co-workers, others feel the opportunity is not quite open to them, and are uncomfortable with the current format set in place for processing.

Turning Points as Recognized Triggers

The final theme emerging from this organizational culture is the important notion of a trigger or turning points as occasions for sensemaking and a corresponding voluntary vulnerability among the counselors. While not every subject during the interviews identified turning points, or moments where further understanding of their purpose within the organization revealed itself, many crisis counselors did relate stories in which internal triggers caused them to pause and retrospectively examine their thoughts and actions.

Living in the gray allows for a unique and flexible response to each new crisis. For those subjects embracing this format of sensemaking, there appeared openness towards multiple

turning points and honest debriefing. There appeared to be an acceptance of personal vulnerability in regards to dealing with and processing the episodes of crisis brought to the organization. Vulnerability is explored through constant checking in with one's self and actively seeking out peers or supervisors to debrief bracketed episodes of crisis.

 In contrast, those subjects who preferred a culture characterized by stricter rules and regulations explained their dismay at the graying of the organizational culture, and felt a loss of purpose within the organization. Additionally, there appeared fewer episodes producing triggers or turning points for those subjects who either do not accept the gray or have not fully learned the gray due to shorter employment. They also reported less communication between peers and supervisors; consequently, the subjects reported fewer episodes or opportunities for sensemaking.

Turning points are events or experiences that produce opportunities for change (Baxter and Bullis, 1986). Since the only constant in this line of work as a human service provider is change and unpredictability, turning point analysis allows for a unique lens to interpret sensemaking theory in human service employees. A turning point influences sensemaking in that it allows for one to examine a particular incident, and the effects it produces not only within the counselor but perhaps the counselor's wider network.

Turning points revealed themselves as a crisis counselor's recognized internal "trigger." A trigger may be a presenting client's issue which corresponds to a counselor's deep memory, experience, or a buried trauma they believed had abated. Six of the nine people interviewed described specific triggers, while seven out of the nine people interviewed spoke of things that caused triggers to begin. Only two of the nine people interviewed specifically stated they did not experience any sort of trigger which provoke turning points.

Stories were told explaining how difficult experiences produced a personal trigger. These personal triggers could potentially add to our knowledge of sensemaking techniques and assess both effective and ineffective sensemaking techniques.

Those crisis counselors who recognized a highly complex case that resulted in an internal struggle or trigger also appeared to have several options when seeking help or support through several methods. These methods included both formal and informal means of peer support and debriefing. Informal processing occurred frequently and throughout the day. Formal processing occurred during monthly staff meetings where two hours were specifically set aside to allow for staff to discuss and process events and how they were coping with secondary trauma. Triggers most frequently produced opportunity for turning points when subjects felt the clients were most like themselves, or when they felt an affinity to the situation. One crisis counselor stated:

An unexpected trigger for me is seeing children with a parent who do not have a lot of parenting skills, and if the children are the same age as my nieces and nephew wow, it totally took me by surprise, so that was a trigger moment. I had to work through it so I could be respectful and available for the person.

This crisis counselor went on to express the benefits living in the gray and struggling through episodes of crisis that produce triggers. These internal triggers provide moments of turning points as they allow for retrospective thought and processing. Allowing oneself to explore triggers and work through them enhanced this subject's ability to meet the needs of clients in crisis. Another crisis counselor stated:

I think that maybe clients that are more like us. Maybe that are more like me, who I perceive to have more things in common with, whether that be a friend, a neighbor, another colleague who is going through an abusive situation, another professional,

someone who I've worked with, with a similar age, similar education, maybe someone

that I've known socially that my internal radar might have been curious or wondered

about her relationship with her partner. You know my gut might have told me, I didn't

have knowledge of it, because I see this is what I do. I'm aware of these things, but I

didn't know it for sure. I've had several incidents where a number of women who I know

in the community have tremendous courage, who come in, they are brave and say, I never

thought I'd have to come in and talk to you about this. And I assure them that I would

provide the same service to them as everybody else, and assure them that their secret is

safe with me. And perhaps it's the daughter of someone I know. With clients its always

our goal to provide the same service, we don't pick favorites, whatever resources we are

aware of, services we can provide, we are not picking and choosing, I don't like her as

much, it's our professional responsibility to know how to handle these situations, but I'd

say it's clients who are the most like me, my perception of that they are more like me

with a similar education and socio-economic status, yes its very challenging.

This crisis counselor recognized her trigger, and her ability to make sense of her work

when she met a client who most resembles her own socio-economic status, level of education

and member of fraternal social circle.

Crisis counselors interviewed often spoke of education, and economic challenges, as the

most prevalent barriers among clients seeking the organization's services; so recognizing clients

who do not fit the stereotypical demographic of someone seeking shelter as a trigger produces

turning points. One crisis counselor noted:

I note in myself that when I start to get nightmares, maybe I'm a little stressed, because

there is this case, and this is going to court. Especially with children, I'm very vigilant

and it can be very hard to drop this at home. There are times when I have had some very

strong emotional responses to things and it was overflowing into my life and I wasn't

coping well with it. I've talked with our employee assistance program, provided so we

can seek out a peer counselor and talk with them for free, I've done that one time and that

was helpful, just being so self-aware and being easy on myself.

Another interviewed crisis counselor explained a particular incident about making a

decision which resulted in lasting emotional consequences. While this crisis counselor explains

the process of survival, the experience continues to influence present thoughts and actions:

There are only a handful of us left with less than solid personal boundaries who survived

a period when it was a punishing experience for staff to address these issues head on. I

don't qualify for PTSD but I recall a particular situation when some of us where

disciplined for addressing the safety of another when it had become very, very unsafe…

The current supervisor, as did her supervisor before, spent a lot of time focusing on

restoring a culture where dealing with things assertively is valued. We get a constant

message from our supervisor reminding us that we are empowered to act in the moment

and to trust our judgment in the moment to do what we need to do and then come and

process it afterwards. It's very reassuring, but it doesn't mean that I don't feel my gut

knotting up when I'm in a situation where she seems to be presenting a safety issue to

others in shelter. If I deal with this in the best way, I know I will be supported.

Intellectually I know, but emotionally I'm not there, the good thing is that the

organization has recognized it and is putting a lot of resources in trying to mitigate some

of it. As individuals, we respond to that differently. For some, that is really gut-

wrenching and we haven't quite figured out a way to adequately process one another

when we observe things that are probably reportable.

For those employees who have been employed both part and full-time for many years,

current turning points are often compared and contrasted retrospectively to past episodes of

crisis, yet some subjects stated they could not find an episode they processed in which internal

triggers posed a problem. One crisis counselor assured though:

So knowing that, assume that you have a trigger and if you haven't found it yet, you will

and it will affect you, the work will affect you and you might have secondary trauma.

Your life will change. When I first started working I was scared at night, which I'd never

been before, scared to walk in the streets, when I lived in a much bigger city, I was

walking around at night all the time and I felt safe, and maybe I was at an increased risk

there because there are more people there. There are just interesting fears that emerge

when doing this work that in general you might feel less safe in the world once you

become aware of the scope of how many people are impacted. I mean, you can know the

statistics, but when you are directly working with these people you just witness it so

much more, it humanizes the experiences, and you see what the community you live in is

capable of. What I see is that these are not stranger assaults, these are interpersonal

disputes, people who know each other are hurting each other, so why would walking in

the streets scare me? It shouldn't, but it mirrors what our victims are going through which

is a general mistrust of the world around them, and a feeling of being on high alert, so

people doing this work might have mirroring impacts of trauma and how it impacts them.

Finally, as one crisis counselor explains, internal triggers or turning points often occur in

relation to the experiences an individual already carries within themselves.

The things that are unhealed in us, the things that we don't like about ourselves, in our own life, when we see those in other people, we have our own reaction because we are reacting to whatever we have internally that is responded to and unhealed. When people have the courage to explore this and say hey what's going on, and they have the opportunity to see this as a gift because you can see it and say thank you for this struggle, and ask yourself what is this about. I have the opportunity to learn something about myself. It doesn't mean the struggle will go away but that maybe there is a nuance or turning of information that will help something move on that needed healing, it's the shared relationship, it's the peer versus the power dynamic. I learn from so many people things about myself, and that is a gift that I would not have gotten any other way.

This role has been very life changing, advocating for others and being a support person. It's not like I'm just in a role with a client, this is just who I am now, I'm a more aware person.

Awareness of one's environment also appeared as a turning point within the interviews, as when employees noticed their work training influenced their personal life in multiple ways. One way it impacted their personal life is a general increase in awareness of how to communicate with people, how to be more present and non-judgmental. Their employment produced turning points resulting in an increased awareness of issues within the community and an increased sense of safety for themselves.

Absence of Triggers

Turning points do not always appear as triggers. In the examples above, turning points were episodes that helped crisis counselors recognize an internal struggle. These episodes often forced them to examine their own coping abilities around the trigger issue(s). Additionally, crisis

counselors listed the emotional ramifications of these triggers on themselves: numerous nightmares, nutrition and dietary insufficiencies, diminished exercise habits and chronic work fatigue. Yet, three of the nine crisis counselors did not report experiencing internal triggers.

Secondary trauma was also a reoccurring theme found among many of the employees interviewed, one crisis counselor stated:

Internally, there are always things that go on because we all bring our own experiences with us to the job. I try really hard to keep that on the back burner because it's really about the client and what they need in that moment. That is something I have to work harder, to stay in that moment, because things change. We are only with them at this time, they could make a decision to report and be fearful in an hour, or decide not to report, and that is okay, I need to keep my opinion out of the equation because it's not about me, it's about them and that is okay, so there is a lot that goes into even a five minute phone conversation. It takes a lot of thinking through to just be there with that person and not try to influence in any way, just be there. I'm fortunate that I don't have any triggers from the work I do. I've known many people throughout the years who have tried to do this type of work, who have their own experience, who are unable to do it after they have decided to do it. I feel that by using my experience and my education in such a way that can provide support and hope to the victims that I meet… it's just really significant in my own growth and my own recovery so to speak. I always said if I could ever use the experiences I bring, and use them for a good purpose, that would be the most rewarding thing. That just solidifies for me that experiences happen for a reason. There are many avenues I can take, I haven't found a need. What I more process is questions I have related to, I don't find that anything haunts me. I thought that I would be that kind

of person that would take it home and try to save the world and not be able to put it away, but really I am able to leave it.

There are a variety of responses to internal triggers sparked by client challenges. Crisis counselors who reported working for more than five years at this organization articulated triggers in greater detail. Additionally, they appeared to recognize the beginnings of these triggers and had quicker responses both internally and externally. Subjects who reported working less than five years were less articulate in describing triggers, usually referring to burn-out or lack of trigger reaction.

Summary

As a result of these interviews several themes emerged to help understand sensemaking. These themes include the processing of found triggers and the avoidance of internal triggers, the organizational culture of living in the gray, ability and acceptance of living in the gray, utilizing models or frameworks to conceptualize reoccurring interaction with client challenges and ease or avoidance of debriefing or processing experiences with peers and supervisors. These themes will be explored in conjunction with the research questions and will be further analyzed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Analysis

This has been a study of communication in situations of ambiguity between human service workers and clients when uncertainty permeates communication contexts from start to finish in every bracketed episode or experience. The culture of working in the gray means the complex negotiation of being present with each new client will be conducted in an environment of ambiguity. It is a place of non-judgment, potentially a place of maximum self-realization and transformation.

The gray allows uncertainty to permeate a situation from start to finish in every bracketed episode or experience. The gray accepts human vulnerability and allows for each new episode to reveal itself without trying to "fix" it. Working in the gray promotes questions but does not necessarily require answers. It is flexible and permeable.

The gray influences not only how crisis counselors interact with clients and complex situations, but also how they interact with each other. It influences how they bracket episodes for future processing. The gray encourages crisis counselors to process bracketed episodes, and the model is inclusive, for it applies not just to clients but also to crisis counselors by themselves, on themselves, or with each other.

The gray allows for non-judgmental reflection of bracketed episodes that cause triggers or turning points and the gray opens clients and staff to explore their thoughts, feelings and actions. The gray does not require answers or solutions to triggers, only recognition of the facts and contemplation regarding them.

Yet peer processing, the active attempt to make sense of the culture and the triggers, proved to be incredibly influential to many crisis counselors abilities to maintain their role and sense of purpose in the organization. This is important to note because without the constant

processing and the support to do so, the gray would potentially not be as strong and influential on crisis counselors. Peer processing opens up the occasion for sensemaking to occur in all three of Weick's (1979) sensemaking phases.

Consequently the organizational culture greatly influences communicative behaviors in this organization like peer processing and recognition of triggers and how crisis counselors explore these bracketed experiences. The final element to note is the length of employment.

Length of employment appeared to influence many responses to these themes: three out of the nine interviewed people had been employed less than a year. Three of the 9 interviewed people had been employed for less than 5 years; and three interviewees had been employed for more than five years.

Results revealed the gray umbrella that surrounds and guides their organization's communicative behaviors. They also revealed differences in levels of accepting the gray. The gray influences day-to-day peer processing and reactions to internal triggers as turning points. This organization provides an excellent environment to study sensemaking as it recently underwent a cultural shift.

Sensemaking is the attempt to reduce uncertainty in one's environment. Examining communication within an organization that essentially never encounters the same situation twice provides an excellent example to review sensemaking. In an environment where uncertainty is the only certainty, this provides a unique perspective on sensemaking because this organization actively promotes the acceptance of uncertainty and provides time and space for both informal and formal debriefing to occur. Living in the gray permeates the sensemaking techniques practiced by its employees.

The purpose of this research is to explore the multiple ways crisis counselors make sense of highly complex client situations and maintain a sense of purpose. The research questions aimed to explore areas such as turning points, storytelling and day to day experiences. Several themes emerged during the interviews such as internal triggers, the culture of living in the gray, mantras, storytelling, models and the role of debriefing. The research questions and results of these emergent themes, will be explored in further detail.

RQ 1: How do crisis counselors make sense of the day to day work of being a human crisis service worker?

Weick (1979) explains the essence of sensemaking as the interpretation of day to day experiences. In this line of work there is little routine to be found, leading to the courageous expectation of meeting the unexpected with flexibility. In other words, they understand their environment is ambiguous and they purposefully make sense out of it by embracing the culture of living in the gray.

Enactment and Culture

Examining the influence and potential impacts of living in the gray is incredibly important when considering Weick's (1979) sensemaking model, because organizational culture can be understood as the umbrella under which the organization finds stability, or reduces uncertainty.

Organizational culture explains the codes of conduct, norms and values which guide social interaction. All subjects interviewed addressed the culture of living in the gray. While individual interpretations of this culture and the behaviors associated with living in the gray may vary slightly between each subject, what is significant to note is the paradox between the

affirmed culture of living in the gray versus the production of frames of reference subjects used to reduce uncertainty in their environment.

Many of the interviewees explained how their first thought or action when working with clients was to reflect back onto a client their strengths or help them reframe facts of their particular situation. They carefully work to avoid passing judgments, but deliberately act as a sounding board for clients. The gray culture is not about finding answers or solutions to problems, but about being present with individuals in their moment of need and offering whatever support is required at that time.

This mental bracketing can be seen in the individual's descriptions of day to day peer processing. Often when an event occurs, interviewees report the stressful situation of having to finish tasks at hand before seeking a peer to process what occurred. By allowing time to pass between the initial contact and its processing, it allowed the crisis counselor to return several times to that bracketed event and analyze the episode. With each layer of analysis, the employee interprets and reinterprets what occurred, in the effort to understand the circumstances presented.

By remaining open to regular and consistent self-examination and peer-evaluation, subjects are open to the uncertainty and vulnerability of the gray. Through acknowledging these challenges posed by the ambiguous nature of their work, growth and development can occur with processing.

Continuous sensemaking is dependent upon a crisis counselor's willingness and commitment to the organization's culture of gray. The gray culture is encouraged and supported in this organization, and rejecting these opportunities to process and grow hinders the crisis counselor's ability to contribute to organizational culture and to the team's network.

Enactment takes place during a constant revision of one's environment, which is what living in the gray demands each individual to practice every single day. Trial and error learning is allowed in the gray as it allows for behavior first and interpretation second and it allows for vulnerability, flexibility and accepts disruption as a natural element for growth and learning. In this type of a constantly changing and sometime volatile environment, it appears necessary to embrace each moment in order to remain competent and confident in one's role at this organization.

As ambiguity and uncertainty abound, it's possible in each case to lose sight of one's role; consequently, as it was reported at this organization, the ability to quickly reach out to a peer at almost any moment notice seems vital to maintaining a sense of role identity and purpose and is also important for sustaining the gray of the organization's culture.

Selection and Culture

A selection phase is defined by a retrospective interpretation of experience. This occurs most often in this organization as informal day-to-day debriefing and checking in with one another. By talking with each other, crisis counselors process episodes. In processing episodes, crisis counselors eliminate elements of an experience that do not fit within their accepted cultural norms. Sometimes, however, a crisis counselor does not accept the culture and they may not take the time to process bracketed episodes. But when someone does process an episode, they compare present experiences to past experiences. Refusing to process episodes can potentially lead to a loss of purpose and confusion in one's role in the organization.

Selection is the active process of identifying what occurs in an environment. Murphy (2001) fittingly describes the dilemma of discerning the differences between episodes that require a new inventive and creative response rather than relying on past experiences that can

constrain subjects in their response. Being able to invent new responses is just another example of how one can adopt and even thrive in the culture of living in the gray.

In the interviews conducted, it was reiterated that no two days are the same; similarly, no two clients situations are ever the same. Consequently, each client requires attention to detail and support in discovering their own responses to their unique set of challenges. While crisis counselors will rely upon past experiences to provide support, living in the gray requires crisis counselors to consider each new client with a fresh and unbiased lens.

Living in the gray also accepts this selection phase as a fecund place of repose, where one is able to allow for new understanding to emerge. Weick (1979) did not hesitate to criticize organizations for their lack of preparing for and following through with regular debriefing, and described many of the consequences associated with not allowing employees to process their work experience.

However, it is clear that this organization's culture fully supports and encourages processing whenever it is needed by employees. This support allows for sensemaking to work continuously toward uncertainty reduction. Selection is a continuous evaluation of one's environment and one's role in the environment. Constant evaluation in these cases allows subjects to face the culture and experience of gray and feel that they are valued in the organization.

Constant evaluation allows for culture to emerge and evolve. With each new episode processed, subjects contribute to the organization's reservoir of stories which maintain or change organizational cultural norms and standards. Settling upon an interpretation results in what Weick (1979) referred to as retention.

Retention is organizational culture. In some organizations, retention is viewed as static and outdated, but as can be seen in this organization's culture, it is open to ever changing development and interpretation.

Retention and Culture

In Weick's (1979) sensemaking model, retention is essentially an organization's established shared memory and culture. Each time a crisis counselor successfully processes an event they are able to explore a bracketed episode for meaning. The final interpretation selected contributes to the organization's cultural development and influences future decision making.

Sometimes the outcomes of bracketed episodes are turned into formal organizational rules and regulations, but most often they provide informal examples of how to cope with living in the gray and demonstrate examples of successfully living in the gray. Two ways in which this occurs is through formal monthly meetings where decisions are made and put into writing, and by day to day contact between crisis counselors in the processing of conversations.

Often these episodes of meaning making are later used as stories, both hypothetical and real. Consequently, it is the outcome of what occurs during the retention phase that ultimately guides organizational culture through the ways in which these subjects tell stories and explain their personal exploration of living in the gray. If a processed experience helps explain living in the gray, or provides an example of living in the gray, these stories are repeated to others and become part of organizational memory.

One danger found in strong retention or strong organizational culture is the development of rigid rules and norms. However, as can be seen with many of the comments from interviewed subjects, this organization actively promotes an open, flexible system of enactment and interpretation. Living in the gray supports continual change and an adaptable environment.

Therefore, perhaps the danger faced by this organization lies in knowing when to apply more rules and regulations. Too much flexibility, or too much gray, can also lead to negative effects: staff losing site of the organization's goals, confusion over their role within the organization's network and effectively responding to a client's situation.

Despite the dangers associated with too few rules and regulations, Weick (1979) would support this organization's culture of living in the gray because of how it strives to maintain a certain level of ambiguity. An organization fostering acceptance of ambiguity can create a culture of continual growth and development fostering new discoveries, new growth, new and recast identities and perhaps even a new mission.

Growth and development occur more effectively when processing is allowed to occur. As explored, this organization promotes constant processing, exploring what went well in bracketed episodes of contact with clients. They are encouraged to explore what could have been more productive, to reframe the situation in the present or how to look at a similar situation in the future. Processing occurs as a means to reduce uncertainty in one's environment but also to prepare for future episodes.

Sensemaking and culture are temporarily embedded and contextualized in organizational reality. This means that culture will change over time. Sensemaking theory explores how culture adapts and changes over time. It also explores how communication of culture permeates through the organization. The outcomes of retention are shared through stories and from cultural paradigms which guide future decision-making and communication.

Closer attention is drawn to two contributing themes found in sensemaking at this organization. The first is the role of peer processing on a day to day basis, or in more formal

words, debriefing. The second theme is the role of models and mantras used as culturally guiding paradigms.

Peer Processing

Social networks and interpersonal relationships forged between crisis counselors strongly impacts the interpretation of day to day experiences. The ability to adapt to this flexible environment appears closely linked to the strength of interpersonal relationships. The subjects who reported feeling at ease or comfortable going to their peers and superiors to process events also appeared more open to living and working in the gray culture.

Those subjects who reported fewer or limited interpersonal connections within the organization also seemed to be disconnected from their internal triggers and communicated resistance or unclear vision of living in the gray. The majority of subjects who reported limited processing with peers and superiors also reported fewer years of employment.

This may mean that they have not yet fully developed interpersonal relationships with their co-workers, or have not yet developed a comfortable acceptance of their role in the organization, as not enough time has passed to fully develop into their role. It could also potentially mean that the newer employees are still becoming familiar with the gray and what that means to the organization and their role within the organization.

Some crisis counselors reported limited interpersonal connection with co-workers because they simply did not agree with the gray culture and wished to simply do their part in the organization as best as they could and still hold on to some semblance of rules and regulations. However, unacceptance of the gray also appears to contribute to role uncertainty, a misreading of organizational cultural identity and an unease in the environment as a whole.

Sensemaking is only as strong as the least committed member of the organization. Therefore, it is significant to note the factions present in the organization. These factions can be separated broadly into those that accept and embrace the challenges of living in the gray, and those that have either not come to understand the full meaning of living in the gray or those that avoid acceptance of working living in the gray.

Perhaps one of the most visible symbols of the two factions is the participation in or the absence of peer processing. As crisis counselors talk to each other and talk through experiences on a day to day basis and also during the monthly meetings, those who participate and share freely their experiences become more visible in the organization.

On the other hand, those subjects who do not feel comfortable sharing, or do not feel the need to share, are conspicuously less-visible in their non-sharing and non-participation while engaging in the important role of experience processing.

In addition to processing, a second theme that emerged in day to day work experiences is the presence of mantras and models. Through both formal and informal training, many counselors develop mantras and models to help guide their thoughts and actions. These mantras and models are rooted in training but also supported by the organization's culture.

Mantras and Models

Finding a healthy balance between flexibility and stability can be a challenge for any person, and it is a theme that subjects can and do struggle with on a regular basis. However, recognizing the role of mantras and models contributes to many of the elements of living in the gray. A very fine line exists between flexibility and stability, but by recognizing the separation of the two, lifelong learning can occur. Finding a balance between flexibility and stability poses itself as a lifelong challenge that reoccurs with each new client, situation and experience.

Mantras are phrases that an individual can call upon to help make sense of a situation. They can function as reminders of one's role. They can pose as questions to help guide someone's thoughts and actions, and act as a source of comfort through a grounding sensation.

When a particular situation seemingly spirals out of control, a mantra can function as a reality check. Some subjects interviewed reported using mantras as a source of stability during moments of crisis. Mantras are also internal and personal, so they do not require the presence or dialogue of a second person. This can be helpful, especially for seasoned employees who need to a take a five minute break to check in with themselves, or for an employee is working alone and cannot access a second person for immediate crisis processing.

Models, like mantras, can be used as personal and internal resiliency tools to ground oneself in a particular situation. Models are formalized paradigms that guide a person in a particular thought process toward a desired outcome. Models also help to put an organization's mission and culture into perspective. Models are something tangible an employee can return to, and this is incredibly useful when trying to find the balance between flexibility and stability in a world and culture of gray, uncertainty and ambiguity.

RQ2: How does storytelling influence frames of reference for sensemaking?

Storytelling functions as a reservoir of summaries and frameworks, as it fosters a sense of unity and purpose while developing a sense of cohesion among individuals. Antidotes, like fairy tales, provide examples to help guide counselors in their thoughts and actions.

The first story shared was one of a young girl trying to hatch a butterfly. She pours hours into caring for the caterpillar and preparing for the emergence of the butterfly. Her intentions, by all means of observation are good, yet when the young girl sees the butterfly struggle to emerge

from the cocoon, she makes the mistake of pulling the cocoon off for the butterfly, consequently disabling the butterfly's ability to survive.

This is similar to the fine line every counselor walks between providing a hand up or a hand out, and unforeseen consequences of hand-outs. Despite the best intentions one may bring to the table, unless the crisis counselor is prepared and willing to allow the client to fail, and fail on their own, they will disable the client's ability to grow and develop.

The second story of the Russian horse farmer also illustrates, in a hypothetical narrative, many important aspects of living in the gray. That is to say, one may never know what the outcome will be, and it is important to not pass judgment on a situation or predict a future outcome. Each situation in unique, and is neither good nor bad, it just is.

Crisis counselors are to work with what they have but once again attempt to remain sounding boards and objective observers. By avoiding judgments, the crisis counselor is able to fully embrace the gray and meet the client in a space they choose.

This story also illustrates one of the blind alleys in a counselor's life. When working with human subjects, counselors are seldom privy to knowledge of a client's well-being once they leave the organization; therefore, it is difficult to know whether or not the choices a client makes are good or bad.

By not passing judgment on a client's choices, crisis counselors are able to follow the old horse farmer's example to be present, to act as a wise and confident sage and to watch and wait in ambiguity while allowing for an unknown future to arrive. This is of course a scary prospect for many people and poses a challenge, as living in the gray can be very challenging.

Internal triggers, already discussed as turning points, are also resources for storytelling. When triggers are brought forth from the subject's consciousness and are repeated as stories,

they become another way in which sensemaking allows for personal growth and development as well as professional growth and development within the organization.

Most triggers are associated with a certain level of uncertainty, most often triggered by an external event. Certain events produce an internal trigger causing the crisis counselor to doubt or disrupt their personal paradigm. The nature of this organization accepts the fact that the context for each individual may always be changing; the context changes on a minute by minute basis for crisis counselors and clients, yet crisis counselors allow for any take-away emerging in the gray, these take-away lessons ultimately influence future experiences and storytelling.

Each time a crisis counselor examines a past trigger and uses that experience as a narrative for learning, sensemaking occurs. When one subject shares a story with another, the shared experience often results in a sense of unity and purpose. That is to say when crisis counselors share stories, it is another form of saying to each other, yes I've been there, I understand what you are going through, you will be able to process this too, and each difficulty is a chance for growth and development.

As stories are told and repeated, they eventually become organizational summaries and narratives which can be used to support or reject organizational culture. Many of the subjects interviewed expressed their practice of working to support their peers as much as they would their clients. They stated they work to apply the gray thinking to all aspects of their lives in order to not pass judgment on each other and allow for long-term outcomes to emerge on their own.

A third way in which storytelling appeared as a form of sensemaking is through the many informal debriefing moments between peers. These daily moments are used to process client issues and events while also forming a reservoir of shared experience and organizational summary.

When a crisis counselor meets with a peer to process an event, they choose what details to include and exclude. As with most dialogue, when one person shares their experience and asks another their thoughts the second person may respond in an indirect way sharing one of their own stories or experiences. This practice of sharing stories for reducing uncertainty may be more prevalent in this organization compared to others as it is an affirmation of the organization's purpose to remain in the gray.

Living in the gray discourages judgment, and allows each person to figure their situation out on their own; consequently, it is a practice to not state what one thinks another "should do" or what is the "best way" to handle a situation.

Because of the ambiguous nature of living in the gray, sharing stories passes as a way of providing advice without passing the judgment often associated with giving advice. It is more simply a way of sharing what one has done in past similar experiences and what the outcome may have been at that time.

Up to this point, the research focused on specific elements or specific events that produce occasions for sensemaking to occur. Sensemaking is an ever evolving yet grounded process and experience. The final research question explores some of the ways in which sensemaking occurs daily for crisis counselors.

RQ 3: What are key turning points, if any, for crisis counselors that produce occasions for sensemaking?

Internal Triggers as Turning Points

Recognizing internal triggers appeared as a strong theme in interviews. Most often when working with a client, subjects reported an increase in an emotional response to clients who appeared most similar to them and those that had similarities whether that be in personal or

professional areas. Also, if a subject has experienced previous trauma, processing client issues sometimes caused an emergence of internal triggers, where the employee began identifying too strongly with the client and consequently began to lose a sense of their purpose and role within the organization.

When a client presents with a complex set of issues but also disrupts the stereotype of a person seeking shelter, this disruption provides an opportunity for sensemaking. By disrupting the stereotype, the client reminds subjects of the gray in human experience and in their work environment. While each individual presents with unique experiences and stories, some of these experiences extend beyond the parameters of what is typically anticipated as a client issue.

While there are reoccurring themes when it comes to client issues and challenges, those subjects who disrupt the environment the most have a higher socioeconomic status, or may have obtained a formal education. Sometimes, as reported, a client presents who is known in the social circles of workers. In such a case, when the client is more like the employee, yet experiences the violence of domestic or sexual abuse, their experience seems closer to home. It reminds subjects of the unknown, and their own vulnerability as potential clients, in a world and culture that often overlooks or tries to hide domestic and sexual abuse.

The stereotype is that those who are victims of domestic and sexual abuse belong to a certain socio-economic status, have education past high school and are dependent on either a perpetrator or the government financially. While many clients do fit this stereotype, there are some clients who do not. It is this group of disrupters that often provide opportunities for crisis counselors to explore their own internal triggers and make sense of the present experience.

The trauma experienced by children presenting at shelter appeared to have a stronger trigger for subjects, as children demonstrate trauma in many more ways than adults. Children are

often victims that society as a whole would recognize more easily. Therefore, it can be perceived that children are unable to control their environment or make empowering choices to change their situation.

Internal triggers were often associated with prior personal experience, trauma or secondary trauma. These triggers appeared more difficult to work through as they already existed before a client presented to shelter. It seems difficult to provide support to someone in need when one is already working through and processing similar personal experiences.

It would appear these subjects are already too close to the issues at hand and would more easily associate with clients and find it harder to set boundaries and provide unbiased support. These subjects appeared to be more closely associated with secondary trauma and reported feeling fatigued and burnout. Crisis counselors who recognized that specific triggers were associated with personal experience and trauma, and were able to process these experiences appeared stronger and more resilient in their work.

Recognizing triggers, talking through them, and acknowledging them reveals an acceptance of living in the gray and a high level of comfort in this organization's culture. Part of living in the gray is accepting uncertainty and vulnerability. Knowing our human vulnerability, we can act in the moment on our best choices while simultaneously accepting that there are no black or white responses to the human experience of trauma.

Recognizing triggers is necessary for being aware of the onset of secondary trauma and taking steps to avoid burn-out. As reported, some crisis counselors noticed signs that their work was interfering with their personal life. Upon processing these emotions, and recognizing the presence of internal triggers not fully being processed, crisis counselors reporting being able to

overcome the emotions. However, when left unchecked, internal triggers can most definitely lead to burn out, feelings of failure, or even an inability to for some to complete their work.

Despite the strong presence of uncertainty in this organization, sensemaking also focuses on the 'how' of reducing uncertainty through a process of retrospective understanding or processing. This 'how' process- retrospective reframing- emerges as a prevalent factor when examining the turning points of crisis counselors and their triggers.

Turning points are situations which help individuals understand a process; internal triggers, as reported, are situations that allow crisis counselors to reflect upon a situation. Because triggers cause discomfort, it requires a selection process to occur. Triggers bracket specific situations for further processing.

For those subjects who reported experiencing triggers, they also appeared to be more open to embracing the culture of living in the gray and processing openly with peers and superiors. Living in the gray means accepting one's vulnerability and maintaining a strong desire to work through a circular process for understanding any situation. In the gray, crisis counselors are able to examine their role and limitations faced because of the multiple, complex and often ambiguous challenges presented on a daily basis. Through processing these triggers, the gray culture is retained and reinforced.

Some of the benefits of processing turning points include but are not limited to improved retention rates, organizational productivity, enhanced decision making and improved communication (Bullis and Bach, 1989). These benefits, in this organization are evident in crisis counselors who choose to remain and continue the organization's mission. They are employees who have accepted the gray as a way of organizational operation. Successfully processing a

turning point, or trigger, often resulted in a reported stronger- and longer- commitment to the organization's culture and purpose.

Discomfort and struggle can bring about growth in personal life, but also in the professional realm. It is evident in stories of turning points reported by these subjects in this organization.

Absence of Triggers

As reported, three of the crisis counselors interviewed did not report experiencing internal triggers. There are two possible reasons for an absence of recognized triggers or turning points. First, some of the subjects who reported a lack of internal triggers also reported being employed at the organization between five months and four years. Perhaps length of employment is an important factor in the presence or absence of triggers, as time opens a crisis counselor up to more awareness, more experiences and triggers.

A second reason for a reported absence of triggers is the rejection of the organizational culture to live in the gray. By rejecting the opportunity to examine one's limitations in face of the human experience and trauma, one also rejects the ability to bracket episodes for further retrospective learning. Consequently, the crisis counselor diminishes both personal and organizational growth and development.

Some subjects suggested that if one has not experienced a trigger, they will, so actively participating in the formal processing would allow for broader interpretations of triggers when they occur. As one subject reported, even after working for more than ten years in this line of work, they still experienced episodes that caused an internal trigger and reported that even after ten years, there are surprises.

Examining the absence of triggers in comparison with the presence of recognized triggers is interesting when following the sensemaking model, because each subject is working to interpret slices of experiences. Sometimes these slices of experience are only seconds of a person's day but they are important. These seconds can produce internal and external reactions with repercussions that may only last for hours, days or even for years. These repercussions and triggers which cause moments of sensemaking influence a subject's future in all aspects of their professional life.

Summary

The themes discussed are linked and dependent upon each other in a fluid and flexible manner. As discussed, turning points produce occasions of disruption and growth. They provide resources for storytelling to make sense of organizational culture and the subject's roles within the organization. Stories also produce moments of turning points and help with maintaining organizational culture as they also provide models and frames of reference with which to check one's thoughts and actions.

The role of interpersonal communication, during day to day processing, proved incredibly important in maintaining a sense of one's role and purpose in the organization. It also contributed to understanding and accepting the gray culture of this organization. Processing also contributed to organizational unity and commitment, as it allows for employees to reduce uncertainty in their environment.

In addition to the role of interpersonal processing as a form of sensemaking and cultural maintenance, processing provides a means of day to day coping. Processing allows for productive coping in the organization, it reinforces a sense of purpose in one's role and burnout.

If crisis counselors feel comfortable and supported in seeking out peers and superiors to process events, then secondary trauma can be dealt with in the moment rather than allowing it to spill over into personal lives. A delay in processing could potentially present itself in in staff burn-out or a reduction in productivity.

Maintaining a sense of purpose is also beneficial in sensemaking as it can help reduce uncertainty. Organizational culture also provides a framework to reference in order to support a sense of purpose. This organization's culture is one that allows for uncertainty and ambiguity to abound. To create such an environment, it is essential to have processes that reinforce a strong sense of purpose in order to balance the culture which is so gray. This cognitive dissonance can be seen in the factions that have emerged in the organization, and in role confusion among some. This is an aspect of organizational culture to explore in further detail.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

I do not recall the reasons why I was sitting in the back seat of a company car my mother was driving that afternoon 20-years ago. I don't remember the month or the season. I do however remember observing emotions. I listened to the way my mother and her co-worker spoke to each other in hushed tones and quick bursts of speech. I also remember the feeling of released tension as we drove home at the end of the day.

In the end, sensemaking is not about the mystery of a bracketed episode, but the details we remember: feelings, emotions, a young woman in a *hijab* and gut reactions. Perhaps it was my desire, after 20-years of pondering that scene, to put a black and white label on this bracketed episode and file it away forever.

Now I know, however, that if I were looking for black and white answers, they are not forthcoming. What I found is richer and more gravity filled.

The gray allows not only the crisis counselors interviewed to cope with their experiences if they so choose, but has also opened a third avenue for me to look back, process and make sense of my observation of a young woman in trouble and my mother's response.

The stories from crisis counselors in domestic and sexual abuse shelters, along with sagas I've heard from human service workers are a lot like the hypothetical Russian story: gritty and true. These biographical histories are, more often than not, descriptions of real people living through harsh episodes in their lives. Their crucible is shaped by sordid events that society tries to ignore, cover up or excuse away. But they are true representations of our collective human experience and they can only be ignored at the expense of our integrity and growth.

This study is not meant to answer sweeping societal questions, nor is it meant to provide prescriptive answers or best practices for shelters; it is an honest exploration of organizational

culture and a study of how sensemaking is employed as a coping strategy by several crisis counselors. It is also a retrospective examination of a childhood observation, a bracketed episode that has been processed many times in order to remove the *hajib* and make sense of this experience.

Strengths

An unexpected strength of this study are the observations regarding employment duration and the link to interviewees' sensemaking facility. Being able to survey the varied responses from crisis counselors employed for under a year, from a year to five-years, and from five to almost twenty years provided data to explore the current state of the organization's culture and trends of the emerging culture.

A second strength of this study is timing. The recent cultural shift in the organization toward a strong emphasis on the gray provided a new perspective from which to look at coping strategies. Employment duration and cultural shifts provided data for the pre and post-cultural environments. It also allowed for an exploration of some of the struggles individuals faced with cultural shifts.

This study achieved its purpose of exploring how some crisis counselors attempt to reduce uncertainty in the work environment. A snapshot of an organization's culture under change and a wide scope of employment proved to be a surprising source of rich data.

Limitations

One of the greatest limitations in this study is the number of participants. It would have been ideal to interview 15 people or all 17 of the full and part-time employees. As it happens, just over 50% of the available crisis counselors volunteered to participate. If more crisis

counselors had volunteered to participate, it would have allowed the researcher to more fully

validate emerging themes.

A second limitation to this study is the duration, or available time to collect data. All

interviews were conducted within a four week period. The data provided delivers a snapshot of

the organizational culture and crisis counselors interpretations of their existing and emergent

culture. If the researcher had more time to conduct a longitudinal study and repeat interviews at a

future time, perhaps more themes would emerge or current themes might provide a deeper

analysis. With continued study, an existing theme that seemed important now may fade in

importance as subjects could articulate new and more relevant themes.

Longer longitudinal duration could benefit the researcher's analysis of the data in two

ways. The first way it could benefit the researcher's analysis would be to explore crisis

counselors understanding of how the organization's culture develops and evolves over time. This

could lead to significant findings especially for the newly hired crisis counselors.

The second way it could benefit the researcher's analysis is by exploring the evolution of

the organization's promotion of and enculturation of the gray culture. As discussed, the gray is

heavily supported at this organization, yet a deeper exploration of the two factions of white and

black thinkers and gray thinkers could further explain the importance and purpose of the gray.

Potential Implications for Crisis Counselors

By identifying and exploring the themes from the interviews, perhaps future crisis

counselors will be able to learn additional coping skills. Identifying some of the triggers shared

could open future discussion and allow for a more conscious and deliberate sensemaking to

occur fostering growth and development for the organization. Improved training and a better

explanation of the gray culture for new employees could be strengthened by utilizing proven communication techniques: peer processing, storytelling, mantra-making and sensemaking.

Managers may use this study to develop criteria for evaluation of employees and their comfort or effectiveness within the gray culture. It could also help managers evaluate employees' commitment to the mission and an employees' skill level when using the tools of the trade: sensemaking, bracketing, storytelling, metaphorical counseling and their willingness to accept the gray.

Future Research

Future research could be done at a larger organization. By accessing a varied demographic of ages, client demographics and employment duration, a detailed study may yield a yet unknown treasure trove of themes and sensemaking techniques that could be a positive contribution to management understanding and counselor effectiveness.

Future research could be done over a longer period of time because longitudinal studies unveil deeper levels of organizational cultural identity and rich data on its evolution and development. A snapshot allows researchers to explore the interpretations of culture in the moment, but longitudinal studies solidify the deep rivers of an organization along with the eddies that make up its alternate trends and countercultural currents.

Future research could also make use of focus groups. This study aims to understand both the individual and shared group experience of sensemaking within the organization; as interviews will reveal individual interpretive perspectives, while focus groups allow a researcher to conduct authentic observation. This will provide access to evaluate both the inner dynamics of individuals grappling with their work and make observations about the complex communications within agency group dynamics.

Focus groups will be helpful in understanding organizational culture, communication and group dynamics, and interpretation of particular high complexity situations or client problems. Mack et al. (2005) states focus groups are appropriate for "identifying group norms, exploring opinions about group norms, and discovering variety within a population" (Mack et al., 2005, p. 30). It is important to have an understanding of organizational culture in order to place sensemaking practices in context. The data of interest includes organizational culture, group dynamics, and methods of interpreting high complexity situations.

Focusing on group dynamics within shared shifts is important, as individuals within a particular work shift may share a sub-culture within the organizational culture; individuals sharing the same shifts may reveal common experiences with resultant differences in sensemaking techniques. Mack et al. (2005) believe focus groups are an appropriate method to use in order to create a comprehensive description and understanding of how a given issue affects a community of people, and also how a community makes sense of a particular issue (Mack et al., 2005, p. 52). The purpose of combining interviews and focus groups is to yield the rich data concerning individual and group sensemaking techniques within this organization.

Summary

Two communication theories were combined to create a framework for this study: Pacanowski and O'Donell-Trujillo's (1982) organizational cultural theories and Weick's (1979) sensemaking theory. These two theories provided a framework for the researcher to explore and describe the human experience found at a small domestic and sexual abuse shelter.

In addition to the guiding theoretical frameworks, a qualitative methodology was implemented. Individual interviews were selected as the most appropriate means for gathering data as interviews allowed for individuals to share their unique experience in relation to the

structure and process found in the organization. Both institutional structure and communication process were addressed as important influences on the crisis counselors experience and mode of operating in the organization.

Nine interviews took place during a four week period. The interviews yielded many themes regarding organizational culture and sensemaking for crisis counselors at a single organization.

Four major themes emerged during interviews: gray culture, mantras and models, peer processing and triggers as turning points. The major theme which asserted influence on the other three themes was gray culture. It is of great interest to note that this organization embraced the inherent uncertainty within its environment.

Weick's (1979) paradoxical sensemaking model emerged as a relevant and important interpretive tool, allowing the researcher to wrest meaning from the drama within human stories. These stories, for better or worse, make up the communication context of this study and reveal the human beings innate drive to make sense of all experience.

It was Victor Frankl, survivor of the Nazi Concentration Camps during WWII, who articulated the fact that finding meaning, even in the most absurd of circumstances, makes the difference for humans in the choice to keep up the grand struggle or quietly acquiesce.

And while no story told to these counselors, nor any struggle related to this researcher embodied the gravity of a holocaust, the drive for meaning still exists. It was discovered in this study and is best summarized thusly: Our drive for sensemaking clarifies the past, reconstitutes the present and provides a springboard for the commencement of new life-trajectories.

References

Alhabib, S., Nur, U., and Jones, R. (2010). Domestic violence against women: systematic review of prevalence studies. *Journal of Family Violence 25* pp.369-382.

Alix-Gaudrea, K.M. (2002). *A safe place: Effectiveness of domestic violence shelters and their impact on clients seeking help* (Unpublished master's thesis). The University of Georgia, Athens, GA.

Ashcraft, K.L., and Kedrowicz, A. (2002). Self-direction or social support? Nonprofit empowerment and the tacit employment contract of organizational communication studies. *Communication Monographs, 69(1),* pp. 88-110.

Ashforth, B.E., and Humphrey, R.H. (1993). Emotional labor in service roles: the influence of identity. *Academy of Management Review, 18(1),* pp.88-115.

Alvesson, M. (2002). *Understanding Organizational Culture.* London, UK: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Basow, S.A., and Thompson, J. (2012). Service providers' reactions to intimate partner violence as a function of victim sexual orientation and type of abuse. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence 27(7)* pp.1225-1241.

Baxter, L., and Bullis, C. (1986). Turning points in developing romantic relationships. *Human Communication Research,* 12, pp.469-493.

Bennett, L., and O'Brian, P. (2007). Effects of coordinated services for drug-abusing women who are victims of intimate partner violence. *Violence Against Women 13(4)* pp.395-411.

Bullis, C., and Bach, B.W. (1989). Are mentor relationships helping organizations? An exploration of developing mentee-mentor-organizational identifications using turning

point analysis. *Communication Quarterly,* 37(3), pp.199-213).

Cox, T. H., and Blake, S. (1991). Managing cultural diversity: implications for organizational competitiveness. *Academy of Management Executive, 5(3),* pp. 45-56.

Creswell, J.W. (2007). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among five Approaches*(2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Deetz, S. (1979). Social well-being and the development of an appropriate organizational response to the de-institutionalization and legitimation crisis. *Journal of Applied Communication, 7(1),* pp.45-64.

Edelstein, A.S. (1983). Communication and culture: the value of comparative studies. *Journal of Communication, 33,* pp. 302-310.

Everett, J. L. (1994). Communication and sociocultural evolution in organizations and organizational populations. *Communication Theory, 4(2),* pp.93-110.

Falkheimer, J. and Heide, M. (2006). Multicultural crisis communication: towards a social constructionist perspective. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management, 14(4),* pp.180-189.

Frentz, T. S., and Farrell, T. B. (1976). Language action: a paradigm for communication. *The Quarterly Journal of Speech, 62(4),* pp. 333-349.

Hale, J.B. (1996). *An examination and synthesis of the work of Karl E. Weick in the study of human organizational communication* (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, Stevens Point, WI.

Harding, H.G., and Helweg-Larsen, M. (2009). Perceived risk for future intimate partner violence among women in a domestic violence shelter. *Journal of Family Violence 24* pp.75-85.

Hochschild, A.R. (1979). Emotion work, feeling rules, and social structure. *American Journal of Sociology, 85(3),* pp.551-575.

Kasturirangan, A. (2008). Empowerment and programs designed to address domestic violence. *Violence Against Women 14(12)* pp.1465-1475.

Linstead, S., and Grafton-Small, R. (1992). On reading organizational culture. *Organizational Studies, 13(3),* pp. 331-355.

Liu, B.F., and Pompper, D. (2012). The crisis with no name: defining the interplay of culture, ethnicity, and race on organizational issues and media outcome. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 40(2),* pp.127-146.

Mack, N., Woodsong, C., MacQueen, K.M., Guest, G., & Namey, E. (2005). *Qualitative research methods: A data collector's field guide.* eEEUU EEUU: Family Health International.

Macy, R.J., Johns, N., Rizo, C.F., Martin, S.L., & Giattina, M. (2011). Domestic violence and sexual assault service goal priorities. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 26(16), ppl. 3361-3382.

Maxwell, J.A. (2013). *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach (*3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Melbin, A., Sullivan, C.M., & Calin, D. (2003). Transitional supportive housing programs: Battered women's perspectives and recommendations. *Affilia* 18, pp.445-460Morris, J.A., and Feldman, D.C. (1996). The dimensions, antecedents, and consequences of emotional labor. *The Academy of Management Review, 21(4),* pp.986-1010.

Murphy, A.G. (2001). The flight attendant dilemma: an analysis of communication and

      sensemaking during in-flight emergencies. *Journal of Applied Communication Research,*

      29(1), pp.30-53.

Pacanowsky, M.E., and O'Donnell-Trujillo, N. (1982). Communication and organizational

      cultures. *The Western Journal of Speech Communication, 46,* pp.115-130.

Pacanowsky, M.E., and O'Donnell-Trujillo, N. (1983). Organizational communication as

      cultural performance. *Communication Monographs, 50,* pp.126-147.

Sass, J.S. (2000). Emotional labor as cultural performance: the communication of caregiving in a

      nonprofit nursing home. *Western Journal of Communication, 64(3),* pp.330-358.

Schumacher, J.A., & Holt, D.J. (2012). Domestic violence shelter residents' substance abuse

      treatment needs and options. *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 17(3), pp. 188-197.

Seeger, M.W., Sellnow, T.L., & Ullmer, R.R. (2003). Theories of organizational crisis. In M.W.

Seeger, T.L. Sellnow, & R.R. Ullmer (Eds.), *Communication and Organizational Crisis,*

      pp. 21-43. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Seeger, M.W. (2006). Best practices in crisis communication: an expert panel process. *Journal of*

      Applied Communication Research, 34(3), pp. 232-244.

Sriramesh, K., Grunig, J.E., and Dozier, D.M. (1996). Observation and measurement of two

      dimensions of organizational culture and their relationship to public relations. *Journal of*

      Public Relations Research, 8(4), pp. 229-261.

Tracy, S.J., Myers, K.K., and Scott, C.W. (2006). Cracking jokes and crafting selves:

      Sensemaking and identity management among human service workers. *Communication*

      Monographs 73(3), pp.283-308.

Waldron V.R., and Krone K.J. (1991). The experience and expression of emotion in the

    workplace: a study of a corrections organization. *Management Communication*

    Quarterly, 4(3), pp. 28-309.

Weick, K.E. (1979). *The Social Psychology of Organizing Second Edition.* New York: McGraw-

    Hill, Inc.

Weick, K.E. (2001). *Making Sense of the Organization.* Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Welker, L.S. (2004). Extending the bounds of interpretive inquiry: toward a performance

    approach to organizational studies. *Atlantic Journal of Communication, 12(1),* pp.46-57.

Appendix A: Individual Interview Questions

Q 1: How long have you been employed at this organization?

Q 2: What was your prior work experience?

Q 3: Explain what an average day is like.

Q 4: Describe a common or recurring client challenge.

Q 5: Describe your own typical response to client challenges.

Q 6: What techniques do you use in your daily life to process work experiences?

Q 7: Describe an unusual or high complexity case you experienced.

Q 8: When a particularly difficult case needs your attention, how do you disengage your work life from your personal life?

Q 9: Describe the relationship between your co-workers.

Q 10: Describe the communication between you and your co-workers.

Q 11: What advice do you have for the organization to help process these experiences?

Q 12: What advice to you have for future crisis counselors, or people interested in working this field?

Q 13: In your own words, what are the goals of this organization.

Organizational Culture and Sensemaking for Crisis Counselors

Appendix B: IRB Protocol

University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Protocol for Original Submissions
A complete protocol must be submitted to the IRB for approval prior to the initiation of any investigations involving human subjects or human materials, including studies in the behavioral and social sciences.

For all research protocols, please submit the following:
- **1 printed copy with Faculty Mentor and Department Chair signatures** of (1) the completed protocol; (2) project abstract; and (3) samples of informed consent forms. PROTOCOLS LACKING ANY ONE OF THESE THREE ELEMENTS WILL NOT BE APPROVED.
- **A second copy of this page, with signatures.**
  Printed materials should be submitted to: **IRB/ORSP, 208 Old Main.**
- **Electronic copies of all submission materials (multiple files are acceptable)** emailed as attachments to Jason R. Davis, IRB chair: jdavis@uwsp.edu AND Sharon Courtney, Grants Office: scourtne@uwsp.edu

PLEASE TYPE
Project Title: Organizational Culture & Sensemaking for Crisis Counselors

Principal Investigator: Ashley Jasmine Ormson

Department: Communication   Rank: Graduate Student

Campus Mailing Address: CAC 331

Telephone: 715-346-2060   E-mail address: aormson@uwsp.edu

Faculty Sponsor (if required):
(Faculty sponsor required if investigator is below rank of instructor.)

Expected Starting Date: January 2014   Expected Completion Date: May 2014

Are you applying for funding of this research? Yes   No X

If yes, what agency?

Please indicate the categories of subjects to be included in this project. Please check all that apply.

—X— Normal adult volunteers —— Minors (under 18 years of age)
—— Incarcerated individuals —— Mentally Disabled
_____ Pregnant women _____ _Other_____ (specify)

(**Faculty Member**) I have completed the "Human Subjects Protection Training" (available at http://www.uwsp.edu/special/irb/start.htm) and agree to accept responsibility for conducting or directing this research in accordance with the guidelines.

_____

 (Signature of Faculty Member responsible for research)

(**Department Chair or equivalent**) I have reviewed this research proposal and, to the best of my knowledge, believe that it meets the ethical standards of the discipline.

_____

(Signature of Department Chair or equivalent)

   **************************** Do not write below this line – for IRB use only
****

IRB approval_____
Date_____
              (Signature of IRB Chair)
Approval for this research expires one year from the above date.
If research is not completed by this date, a request for continuation must be filed and approved before continuing.   Revised form: August 2011

Proposal Abstract

Write a brief description of the purpose of the proposed research project. (100-200 words)

This is a study in organizational culture and sensemaking theory. Studies in organizational culture, much like studies in sensemaking, seek to describe and understand the development and complexities within an organization. Social science scholars use sensemaking theory to explore the ways in which people reduce uncertainty in their environments. The objective of this research is to explore how crisis counselors make sense of experiencing and processing highly complex client situations. This study will use sensemaking theory and organizational culture to describe how crisis counselors make sense of their environment and maintain their identities. It will explore aspects of uncertainty reduction, coping with role-identity, turning points, client issues and work environment. Identifying how crisis counselors make sense of their experiences is important; by identifying the components within the sensemaking process, learning can occur within organizations to benefit employees. In addition, the body of sensemaking literature will benefit from identifying the stages within sensemaking theory used by crisis counselors in highly complex issues.

This study aims to explore and understand both the individual and shared group experience of crisis counselors working in an environment ever surrounded in uncertainty. Consequently it will use a qualitative method to answer the research questions. The researcher will conduct semi-structured interviews of employees at a small shelter in the mid-west region of the United States. Appendix A details interview questions. Interviews are an appropriate method to gather data relevant for this study. From this data, they were able to analyze how human service workers negotiated sensemaking in their work situations.

Please complete the following questions for all research.

1. Describe the characteristics of the subjects, including gender, age ranges, ethnic background, health/treatment status and approximate number.

   Subjects of study are crisis counselors: ranging in age from mid-twenties to mid-sixties; both male and female; predominantly Caucasian; approximately 20 individuals.

2. Indicate how and where your subjects will be obtained. Describe the method you will use to contact subjects.

   Participants will be recruited through collaboration with the director of the Family Crisis Center. Semi-structured Interviews can be conducted at any location, in order to ensure the safety of clients, and at times that work best for participants.

3. What are you going to ask your subjects to do (be explicit) and where will your interaction with the subjects take place?

   The researcher will ask the subjects to share stories regarding their work experience. Appendix A details research questions to help initiate storytelling. Interviews will be conducted at an agreed upon location between the researcher and the participants

4. Will deception be used in gathering data? ~~Yes~~   ~~No~~ X
   If yes, describe and justify.

5. Are there any risks to subjects? ~~Yes~~   ~~No~~ X
   If yes, describe the risks (consider physical, psychological, social, economic, and legal risks) and include this
   description on the informed consent form.

   There are no anticipated risks to subjects participating in interviews.

6. What safeguards will be provided for subjects in case of harm or distress? (Examples of safeguards include having a counselor/therapist on call, an emergency plan in place for seeking medical assistance, assuring editorial rights to data prior to publication or release where appropriate.)

   No anticipated safeguards will be needed for participants, as interviews function as a neutral place to discuss   experiences and provide an opportunity for sensemaking to occur.

7. What are the benefits of participation/involvement in this research to subjects? (Examples include obtaining knowledge of discipline, experiencing research in a discipline, obtaining course credit, getting paid, or contributing to general welfare/knowledge.)   Be sure to include this description on the informed consent form.

This research can benefit subjects as it allows for open sharing of their shared experience working as

human service professionals in a neutral and safe environment.

8. Will this research involve conducting surveys or interviews? ~~Yes~~ X ~~No~~
   If yes, please attach copies of all instruments or include a list of interview questions.

 Refer to Appendix A for a list of informal interview questions/statements.

9. If electronic equipment is used with subjects, it is the investigator's responsibility to determine that it is safe, either by virtue of his or her own experience or through consultation with qualified technical personnel. The investigator is further responsible for carrying out continuing safety checks, as appropriate, during the course of the research. If electronic equipment is used, have appropriate measures been taken to ensure safety?   Yes X   No

An audio recorder will be used during interviews. Upon transcription of the interview, all audio recordings will be destroyed.

10. During this research, what precautions will be taken to protect the identify of subjects and the confidentiality of the data?

All participants will be given pseudonyms (e.i. Subject A, B, C, etc.). Data will be kept in a locked cabinet at the researcher's residence; the researcher is the sole owner of a key to the cabinet. Once data has been transcribed the original recordings will be deleted.

11. Where will the data be kept throughout the course of the study? What provisions will be taken to keep it confidential or safe?

The data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher's residence. The researcher is the only owner of a key to the cabinet.

12. Describe the intended use of the data by yourself and others.

The data will be collected and used to analyze for emergent and reoccurring themes in sensemaking techniques. Also, to write a Master's thesis in order to complete the graduate program in communication.

13. Will the results of the study be published or presented in a public or professional setting?
      Yes ~~X~~   No~~~~   If yes, what precautions will be taken to protect the identity of your participants? **State whether or not subjects will be identifiable directly or through identifying information linked to the subjects.**

All participants will be assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities. Data that can directly be linked to an individual or a work shift will not be included in data, transcriptions, results or used while presenting the final material of the data. All supporting data for analyses will be generalized so no identifying information will be available to link data to participants. Data will be presented at a required colloquium in order to meet the requirements to complete the Master's thesis.

14. State how and where you will store the data upon completion of your study as well as who will have access to it? What will be done with audio/video data upon completion of the study?

    Data will be stored in a locked cabinet at the researcher's residence. It will remain accessible only to the researcher.

A completed protocol must include a copy of the Informed Consent Form or a statement as why individual consent forms will not be used.
                    Revised form: April 2012

Informed Consent to Participate in Human Subject Research

Ms. Ashley J. Ormson, graduate student in the Communication Department at the University of Wisconsin- Stevens Point would appreciate your participation in a research study designed to explore the sensemaking methods and techniques used by crisis counselors at the Family Crisis Center in Stevens Point, Wisconsin. You are being asked to participate in a one hour individual interview.

I anticipate no risk to you as a result of your participation in this study other than the inconvenience of the time to participate in the individual interview. You could, however, experience some discomfort while sharing stories and experiences.

While there may be no immediate benefit to you as a result of your participation in this study, it is hoped that providing you with an open, safe, and neutral place to speak about experiences and make sense of client issues, your profession, and personal identities will be beneficial.

The information that you give me in the interviews will be recorded using an audio recording device. Upon completion of transcription, the audio data will be deleted. All completed transcriptions along with interview notes will be kept in a locked file cabinet at the residence of Ms. Ormson and will not be available to anyone not directly involved in this study. I intend to share all transcriptions with the participant interviewed, and be transparent with data collection in order to best validate findings and represent the organization.

I will not release information that could identify you in any way. Your anonymity is guaranteed through careful preparation of interview transcripts, and data labeling.

If you want to withdraw from the study at any time you may do so without penalty. The information provided by you up to that point would be destroyed and not used in any way toward completion of this study.

Once the study is completed, we would be glad to give you the results. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please ask us or contact:

>   Ms. Ashley J. Ormson
>   Department of Communication
>   University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point
>   Stevens Point, WI 54481 (715) 346-2060

If you have any complaints about your treatment as participant in this study, please call or write:

>   Dr. Jason R. Davis, Chair
>   Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
>   School of Business and Economics
>   University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point

Stevens Point, WI 54481
(715) 346-4598

Although Dr. Davis will ask your name, all complaints are kept in confidence.

Your completion and submission of the survey to the researchers represents your consent to serve as a subject in this research.

Name _____**Date** _____
     (Signature of subject)

This research project has been approved by the UWSP Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects.