Making Sense of Human Advocacy Narrative: Raising Support for People Seeking Asylum Among Diverse Audiences

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Australian organizations supporting people seeking asylum face a challenging sociopolitical and communications environment. A dominant political narrative labels people seeking asylum as illegal arrivals, making it difficult to communicate humanizing alternatives capable of appealing to hearts and minds. This communication environment also limits the ability of advocacy organizations to raise community support. This research, involving a campaign delivered by an Australian advocacy organization, investigates how stakeholders make sense of human advocacy narrative. The campaign narrative focused on mobilizing activism for people seeking asylum, but in-depth interviews with participants revealed a wide range of emotional and cognitive responses. Findings result in a typology of three distinct audience types, offering insight into how and why different stakeholders respond to, and act on, the advocacy narratives designed to influence them. This research demonstrates how organizations can use communication to strengthen their appeal on emotive human advocacy issues, characterized by competing narratives.

Keywords: communications, narrative, campaign, advocacy, refugees and asylum seekers, identity, sensemaking/sensegiving

> "Those who have a voice must speak for those who are voiceless"
> —Oscar Romero, former Archbishop of El Salvador,
> and lifelong campaigner for the poor and powerless. (Romero Centre, 2022)

Australian nonprofits advocating for people seeking asylum face a challenging sociopolitical environment with limited policy support and resources. Since the 1990s there has been a notable turn of rhetoric in the political narrative surrounding people seeking asylum in Australia. The narrative has shifted from a welcoming message to refugees arriving by boat from war-torn Indochina in the 1980s, toward the labeling in the media of people seeking asylum as "illegal" and "security risks." The securitization of the asylum-seeker

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issue has legitimized policies such as boat turnbacks indefinite mandatory detention and refusal of permanent visas for those living in the community (Doherty, 2015; Maley, 2016). Against this backdrop of xenophobic instinct, a moral resistance has also emerged motivating alternate narratives appealing to what it means to be "Australian" or a "good global citizen" (Bamberg & Andrews, 2004; Bogen & Marlowe, 2015). The public narrative labeling people seeking asylum as illegal arrivals has been harmful and, alongside an increasingly harsh policy regime, has incited advocacy organizations to strengthen their support base.

Narrative's strength in appealing to hearts and minds has made it an obvious discursive device for human advocacy and the object of increasing interest in studies of organizational influence. There is consensus in the organizational narrative literature that humans engage in narrative cognition in how they organize and take meaning from their natural environment (Boje, 1991; Bruner, 1990; Fisher, 1985; MacIntyre, 2013; Ricoeur, 2010). Narrative can effectively advance advocacy outcomes, reframe debates, attract resources (social and material), and promote organizational objectives (Martens, Jennings, & Jennings, 2007; Polletta, 2008). However, much of the research on narrative has focused on the study of how narrative is constructed or used to influence audiences rather than on how different audiences might respond (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Patriotta, 2003).

At the same time, the multivocality of stories is well outlined in interpretive literature (Boje, Oswick, & Ford, 2004; Brown, Colville, & Pye, 2014), rejecting notions that a good story can be predestined for success. Research in the organizational narrative field has thus acknowledged both the sensemaking and sensegiving roles of narrative, and that narrativization infuses events with meaning, helping others make sense of them (Boje, 1991; Martens et al., 2007). Studies emerging from the field of social enterprise (Martens et al., 2007; Roundy, 2015a, 2015b) indicate different stakeholders respond in different ways to social cause narratives because of their identities (Brown, Stacey, & Nandhakumar, 2008). One study (Roundy, 2014b), for example, demonstrated that empathetic storytelling motivated philanthropic but not business investors. This increasing interest in organizational narrative as a tool for influence has led to calls for further work into how stakeholders make sense of narratives and the boundary conditions around influence (Martens et al., 2007; Roundy, 2015b). Such work is imperative to understand organizational influence through narrative. Insights from different contexts, such as human advocacy, can also contribute to knowledge of how organizations achieve a solidarity of vision with their stakeholders.

This study seeks to address these gaps through a study of how stakeholders identified with, and responded to, a human advocacy narrative. Specifically, this study focused on a narrative campaign and series of workshops run by one of Australia's largest dedicated organizations advocating for people seeking asylum (the pseudonym Network for People Seeking Asylum, or NPSA, is used in this study). The workshops involved a humanizing narrative with sensegiving objectives—to inspire and train supporters in how to actively advocate for people seeking asylum—making it a suitable, as well as convenient, case for the study. A sensemaking/sensegiving approach enabled analysis of individual stakeholder responses as a socially constructed process within embedded cases and comparison of responses across embedded cases with sensitivity to the impact of different identities. A related purpose of the study was to explore if and how emotion affected stakeholder sensemaking, given the highly emotive context and proposed links between narrative and emotion in the organizational literature (Fisher, 1985; Maitlis, Vogus, & Lawrence, 2013). This study ultimately revealed that stakeholders engaged sensemaking from three different stages of

identification with the sensegiving object—the cause of people seeking asylum—in a cognitive and emotional process, impacting response to the narrative.

This study is structured as follows. First, the sensemaking/sensegiving theoretical framework that underpins this study is discussed, and identification and emotion—concepts that are emerging as important areas in the sensemaking literature—are outlined. Second, the campaign (narrative) that provides the context for this study is detailed. Third, the method employed for the study is explained. Fourth, the findings are presented, followed by a discussion of their significance for advocacy communication and research. The article concludes by noting both limitations and opportunities for future research.

Theoretical Framework

Sensemaking/Sensegiving

This study uses a sensemaking and sensegiving framework to investigate internal stakeholders—specifically those connected to an advocacy organization—as the unit of analysis in response to narrative created by an advocacy organization. Sensemaking brings a unique perspective to organizational studies in defining actions and cognition, not as rational decisions, but as ways to enact sense (Cooren, Taylor, & Van Every, 2013; Gioia, Thomas, Clark, & Chittipeddi, 1994; March, Olsen, Christensen, & Cohen, 1976). The sensegiving framework, on the other hand, provides context for how stakeholders—who may be loosely associated with an organization—are externally influenced by organizational narrative.

Many scholars have treated sensegiving as interchangeable with construction of narratives because of the contention that narrative is the ideal tool for embodying sense and are used in efforts (sensegiving) to influence sensemaking (Currie & Brown, 2003; Gabriel, 2004; Sonenshein, 2010). A sensegiving lens offers a rich understanding of influence over stakeholders and agency. Narrative, in this sense, is a discursive device to influence interpretive schemes and can be considered in addition to the seven principles of sensemaking (identity, retrospect, attention to cues, enactment of sense, ongoing, social, plausible). Sensegiving adds the possibility of "prospective" sensemaking to enact change (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) and sharing of identity between stakeholders and organizations that want to influence the way narrative meaning is constructed.

Identification

The notion of identification—based on some sense of shared identity—has been well established as a driver of the sensegiving efforts of organizations to influence how stakeholders make sense of narrative (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Drawing on social identity literature (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Meisenbach & Kramer, 2014; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998, p. 250; Pratt, 2000), identification refers to association with the ideological cause—in contexts such as advocacy—in which internal stakeholders are distantly located from the organization.

Arguably, internal stakeholders enjoy a degree of "identification" with an organization's mission through their connectedness. However, individuals are also part of social groups with multiple identities to draw on, and commitment levels can be difficult to qualify (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Boland & Tenkasi, 1995). Multiple identities are therefore thought to present a risk in the form of "de-identification" with social cause or advocacy organizations, which, in turn, could limit stakeholder support (Pratt, 2000).

Studies into nested identities (Meisenbach & Kramer, 2014) have extended discussions around identification to the nonprofit sector, exploring the nesting of rigidly defined lower-order identities (for example, those associated with clear roles and expectations) into higher-order and more inclusive identities (such as those driven by moral values and volunteerism). This nesting was thought to explain stakeholder behavior in relation to commitment to social cause organizations where fixed associations between organizations and stakeholders were unlikely. However, the significance of these identities can be difficult to understand without investigating how and why stakeholders engage with these organizations and/or social causes. Thus, calls have been made to further investigate the higher-order identities that might arise out of activities such as advocacy (see Meisenbach & Kramer, 2014). This study responds to this call.

The construct of nesting enables investigation of how lower-order identity (for example, seeing oneself as an academic or regional supporter, as was the case with this study) impacts sensemaking in response to a highly emotive narrative, drawing on ideological and abstract values about the type of person we are, often associated with higher-order identity. A review of the macro environment surrounding Australian advocacy groups confirms that supporters of people seeking asylum have a leaning toward the ideological, emotive, and human aspects of the asylum-seeker narrative. Bishop's (2020) critical analysis of the political narrative, for example, contrasts "justifications" for refusing asylum with humanizing accounts of refugees escaping dangerous situations, which are less well known but render the process of giving asylum an emotive humanitarian act. The word "humanitarian" is also used in the study to describe a value-based identity with an orientation toward social justice, compassion, and human kindness (Schwartz, 1994, 2006). This is drawn from Schwartz's (1994) description of universal values connected to principles and personally held beliefs, recognizable across cultures, and highly motivating of behavior. Behavior could also be seen as extending to identification with a narrative or cause projecting similar values.

Stakeholder engagement research further supports that some shared context is needed for identification to occur, often through a communication process (Boland & Tenkasi, 1995; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). For example, organizational identities can be projected through narratives communicating preferred meanings as to who organizations are and what they represent. Stakeholders legitimate core activities relating to organizational life, such as advocacy, by adopting core elements of these narratives (Czarniawska, 2004; Gabriel, 2000). Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley (2008) also noted stakeholders can extend their own identity through sharing of organizational narratives. Narrative can express "This is who I was" and now "This is who I am" as part of increasing identification—a sense of oneness—with organizations and/or their mission (Ashforth et al., 2008). Of interest to this study is how stakeholders are motivated to share these organizational narratives to promote a social cause.

This study also extends the explanatory value of sensemaking/sensegiving in assuming the stakeholder perspective and investigating multiple, rather than single, identities. Identity and identification underpin the sensemaking/sensegiving framework; however, the literature has focused on microcognitive processes or organizational sensegiving action. The result has been a conduit model of influence, rather than a deeper knowledge of how sensemaking and identification are experienced by the stakeholder, thus motivating them to respond to organizational narratives (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015).

Narrative

Narrative literature related to human advocacy (Batson, Change, & Orr, 2002; Johnston & Allotey, 2003; McNevin, 2010; Polletta, 1998) highlights the potential strength of narrative as a discursive sensegiving device used by organizations to encourage empathy from audiences. For example, one study in Australia linked the actions of a community organization in successfully using storytelling—as a form of narrative—to garner community support for the release of children from detention (Moss, 2004). Another study (Johnston & Allotey, 2003) demonstrated a link between the sharing of refugee stories and raising support for improved access to community health services for these beneficiaries. These single-case studies, however, offer limited insight into stakeholders' responses and conditions leading to action. Without stakeholders as a unit of analysis, stakeholder identities and values have often been assumed.

Emotion and Narrative Meaning

Another area of emerging interest in the sensemaking and narrative literature is the perceived impact of emotion on sensemaking, with scope to build on the work of Maitlis, Vogus, and Lawrence (2013) to conceptualize these links. Emotions are thought to be formed within wider social networks outside of the organization, which (a) endorse a sense of right and wrong action; and (b) can fuel or detract the stakeholder in their sensemaking (Forgas, 1995; Gabriel & Fineman, 1993; MacIntyre, 2013; Maitlis et al., 2013). Maitlis and colleagues (2013) noted that the "underdeveloped status of emotion in sensemaking theory was inconsistent with recent research," showing "the deeply interconnected nature of sensemaking and emotion" (p. 237). The possible impact of emotion on the microprocess of sensemaking was considered important in the context of this study, given a people-seeking-asylum advocacy-narrative campaign provided a highly emotive context.

Narrative literature proposes that a strength of narrative is its capacity to appeal to hearts as well as minds (Fisher, 1985). Organizational theorists have further suggested emotional affects—linked to the design and content of narratives—can impact response (Gabriel & Fineman, 1993; Hochschild, 1979) and mediate the way in which narratives are understood by audiences, including in advocacy situations (Batson et al., 2002; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Wojcjeszak & Kim, 2015). Narrative theorist Keen (2006) claimed that empathy and emotion assist narrative persuasion. Roundy's (2014a, 2014b) findings into the use of narrative for social enterprises added to this, noting the significance of different stakeholder audiences in emotional response. For example, philanthropists were more likely to act on stories encouraging empathy than business investors.

Interpretive studies claim emotion is a discursive technique to influence stakeholder interpretations (Brown et al., 2014), while accepting that links between emotion and response have a scope for further theorization. Weick (1995) distinguished between mood and emotion in sensemaking, with emotion thought to have immediate appraisal qualities (Forgas, 1995). However, Weick's work focused on sensemaking during times of crisis, in which stakeholders have heightened emotional states. Other scholars (e.g., Maitlis et al., 2013) have noted that emotion involves a cycle, not simply an "event," and have called for more research to investigate the impact of emotion on sensemaking in noncrisis situations, such as the emotive campaign setting for this study.

Maitlis and others' (2013) theorization of emotion is used in this study, which acknowledges that emotion should play a role in fueling and triggering sensemaking, given this process can be hard work, and in closing sensemaking. Further to this, this study recognizes Maitlis and colleagues' (2013) finding that negative

emotions like fear or distress were energy intensive and would take more time to process in noncrisis situations. Positive emotions, such as hope and confidence, were linked to higher levels of cognition, creative thinking, and flexible interpretation of cues.

Despite these emerging research directions, most organizational narrative studies neglect audiences as the main unit of analysis. Without deeper insight into stakeholder motivation, there is limited knowledge about the drivers of stakeholders' responses to advocacy narratives. This study addresses this knowledge gap by investigating the drivers of stakeholders' responses to human advocacy narrative, with sensitivity to the multidimensionality of these audiences. Thus, the purpose of this research is to consider: *How do stakeholders identify with, and make sense of, organizational narrative used to influence them in advocating for people seeking asylum?* This investigation considered cognitive and emotional dimensions of stakeholder sensemaking.

The Campaign

This study focused on a sensegiving campaign run by nonprofit NPSA, an Australian-based organization. The organization is funded through donations and qualifies for tax-free charity status. It engages in both soft and direct advocacy activities, including providing support services to people seeking asylum and lobbying politicians for policy change. Since its inception in 2001, the NPSA has expanded its support base to around 1500 volunteers.

The campaign, called *Words for Humanity* for the purposes of this study, was designed to (a) mobilize existing supporters to be more politically active and (b) train supporters in how to have humanizing conversations about people seeking asylum with members of the community and politicians. The campaign involved the delivery of 50 workshops over the course of 2017. The workshops were led by two facilitators and involved 1,300 participants. These workshops typically ran for two hours, and the core campaign narrative was consistent across the workshops with some minor variations. Workshops targeted different stakeholder identities (lower-order identities), including experienced advocates, school students, youth groups, churches, and union representatives.

Key features of the narrative used in the workshop included:

1. *Credible storytelling*. One facilitator of the workshops was a refugee with lived experience, which emerged as a strength for the credibility of the narrative. Facilitators presented their own stories and linked this to the importance of humanizing people seeking asylum.
2. *Framing and preferred language/words*. Facilitators promoted a list of words, including "people seeking asylum," "escaping harm," and "compassion," to move supporters away from ineffective status quo messaging. This was based on organizational research indicating that advocates tended to debate issues using words such as "asylum seeker" or "illegal," keeping the emphasis on a security—rather than a human—frame. This had been harmful to the cause. Evidence-based research was used during the workshop to help supporters *break sense* with this messaging. The organization had research indicating most Australians (around 56%) were "persuadable" to support people speaking asylum if humanizing frames, centering on compassion and fairness, were used. The facilitators used an audio replay of a dial test to demonstrate these results.

3. *Conversational strategy*. Attendees were trained in how to use a conversation strategy with those in the community who were less supportive. The strategy emphasized human values, such as compassion and storytelling, to promote better treatment of people seeking asylum.

4. *Identification of policy priorities*. There was a facts-based aspect of the workshop, with attendees being provided with information about three policy priorities identified by the organization. These included release from detention for people seeking asylum in Australia, a pathway to permanent visas and family reunions, and fairer legal processes. The conversational strategy was designed to encourage empathy and connect this to advocacy for policy change. For example, a story about an asylum seeker refused reunion with a parent or child could be explicitly linked to the need for fairer legal processes.

5. *Encouragement of prospective sensemaking* and practice of the strategy. There were group exercises at the end of workshops in which participants would imagine and share what newspaper headlines would look like in 10 years if participants adopted and promoted a values-based advocacy narrative. Facilitators placed a significant emphasis on reinvigorating hope and vision within a despondent movement.

6. *Calls to action or specific directives* were directed toward participants. At a minimum, they were encouraged to use the conversation framework with "persuadables," and ideally, to extend this to political advocacy, such as lobbying politicians.

Method

This study drew on three embedded case studies to isolate the influence of identity (as a core principle of sensemaking) and to explore how different types of stakeholders responded to the campaign narrative.

Sampling

A first level of convenience sampling was used to identify the campaign narrative. The researchers became aware the NPSA was carrying out its campaign workshops and approached the organization to participate in the study with the understanding it would meet the established definition of advocacy narrative from the sensegiving perspective. The NPSA was immediately agreeable.

A second level of sampling involved the selection of three distinct stakeholder groups that became embedded cases. These were drawn from workshops involving (a) relatively homogenous stakeholders who shared a lower-order identity within the group and (b) stakeholders diverse from one another across groups (i.e., embedded cases) for the purposes of comparison. The NPSA informed the researcher about the timing and composition of these workshops. Three workshops—which met the sampling criteria and were the most conveniently timed for data collection purposes—were selected as embedded cases. Academics were involved in the first group of workshops, regional supporters in the second, and representatives from faith-based organizations in the third. From the organizational perspective, academics were targeted because of their perceived influence in education, regional supporters were an important frontline to challenge racism in more remote locations, and supporters from faith-based communities could persuade others that the issue of people seeking asylum was morally important. The primary author traveled to workshops locally in Brisbane, Australia, and in the regional area of Townsville, to observe participants during the workshops and seek participation for in-depth interviews.

The final level of sampling required workshop participants—defined as internal stakeholders (McGregor-Lowndes et al., 2006)—from each embedded case to agree to semistructured in-depth interviews. The researcher required a minimum of five interviewees per embedded case to meet Langley's (1999) criteria for observing process patterns in qualitative analysis.

Data Collected

Data were collected between August 2017 and March 2018. This included (1) workshop documents, which were not analyzed in-depth but provided context for the campaign and the study; (2) observation of seven workshops, involving three different types of stakeholder identity; and (3) 20 semistructured, in-depth interviews. The interviews lasted 30–50 minutes and generated over 13 hours of interview data and over 300 pages of single-spaced transcript. The breakdown of participants for each embedded case is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Data Collected From Workshops (February to December 2017).

Case	Workshops Observed	Number of Interviewees	Details
Embedded Case 1: Academics	Two hours in length, representing the core narrative.	7	Six staff and one student across two departments. All but one had no direct exposure to people seeking asylum. These participants were the least familiar and most emotionally reactive to the issue of people seeking asylum.
Embedded Case 2: Regional	Up to four hours in length. More time spent explaining policy and practical exercises.	5	All interviewees volunteered with either the Townsville Multicultural Support Group (TMSG) or Adult English Migrant Program (AEMP). They represented a type of regional (as opposed to urban) identity, remotely located in Townsville, where polarization of views was strongly evident. These participants were familiar with the campaign material, but not political advocacy.
Embedded Case 3: Faith based	Two hours in length. Tailored to a faith-based audience with scriptures read from the Bible, Koran, Torah, and Buddhist	8	These participants attended workshops organized by churches and related organizations. Four participants identified as having a Christian faith. Five identified as active

texts to emphasize shared spiritual values concerning refugees.		in direct (including political) advocacy and were repeat attendees of the workshop.

Data Analysis

Two rounds of coding of the workshops and interviews were conducted, drawing on qualitative coding techniques designed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), in an iterative process before producing a coherent story. First-order codes were derived deductively from the sensemaking/sensegiving framework, while an inductive process drawing on the Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton (2013) method was also used to consider themes of interest emerging around emotion and identification, where links to sensemaking were explored.

In a second-order coding process, first-level codes were further categorized into "process codes" that could be represented as a sensemaking cycle. The relationship between first-order codes (key theoretical concepts); second-order codes (process); and sensemaking/sensegiving themes are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of the Coding Process and Relationship to Sensegiving/Sensemaking Themes.

First-Order Codes	Process Codes	Themes of SM/SG Cycle
Deductive (SM/SG theory driven)	*Inductive (data driven)*	*Deductive (matched for consistency)*
Objectives/aims *Identity personal* *Emotion/empathy* *Identification cause/campaign*	Responding to triggers (e.g., negative emotions)/Establishing rationale ("What's the story?"/"What should I do?") Identifying (Facilitators and Organizational Objectives)	Sensing (Initiating Sense) Underpins ongoing SM/SG
Image Organization *Image (self)* *Identification / Shared identity* *Retrospection—Beliefs/expectations* *Retrospection—Experience* *Noticing Cues—Themes/frames* *Noticing Cues—Facts* *Noticing Cues—Specific meaning/words* *Scripts (emotional and social)*	Breaking sense (old to new frame; reconciliation identity and image) Understanding retrospectively (emergent macro scripts) and Noticing cues (filtered through scripts)	Interpreting
Prospective/Vision *Emotion*	Imagining prospectively (Negative to positive or ambiguous emotions)	

Social interactionism	Assessing social environment	
Action—Commitment	Committing (Performance of Narrative, Influence of Macro Scripts)	Acting on Sense (Narrative)
Action—Intention Action—Possible	Considering possible actions (Filtered through Community of thought— social macro/"What can I do?")	
Plausible—Coherent/ Comprehensive Plausible—Believable/Accepted Plausible—Unsure Plausible—Rejected	Assessing plausibility (Across all processes)	Throughout SG/SM cycle
Ongoing—Change Ongoing—Undecided Ongoing—Same	Ongoing sense (Across all processes)	

Strategies used for analysis within cases included: use of narrative and NVivo quotes to establish each interviewee's story and exploring commonalities and differences; and design of process maps for each embedded case (presented in Figures 1–3 below), linking key theoretical concepts to the sensemaking process and core themes (Langley, 1999; Miles et al., 2014). Data analyzed within cases were then compared across cases to establish meaningful patterns as related to key themes, forming the key findings of the study.
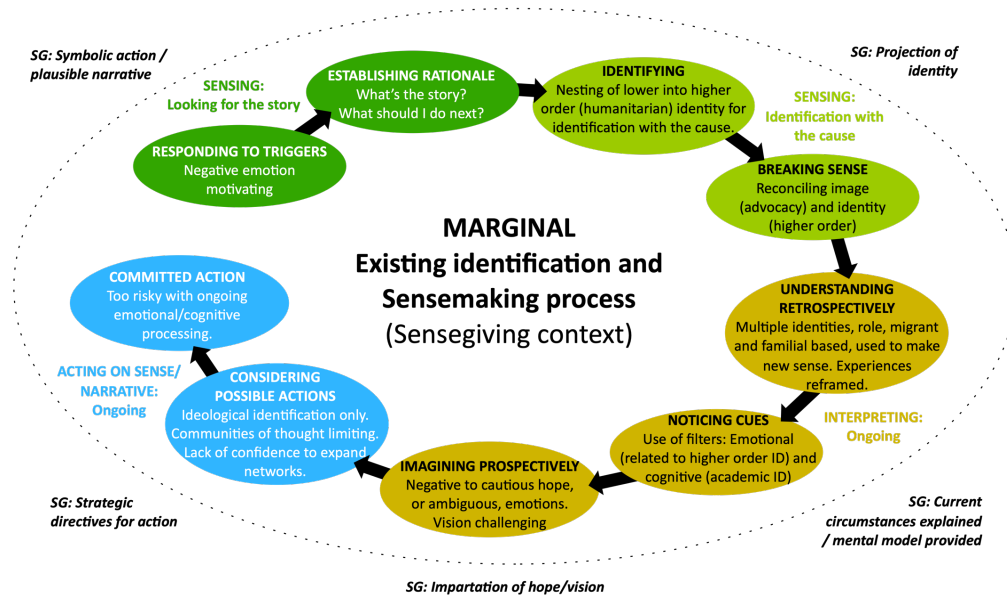
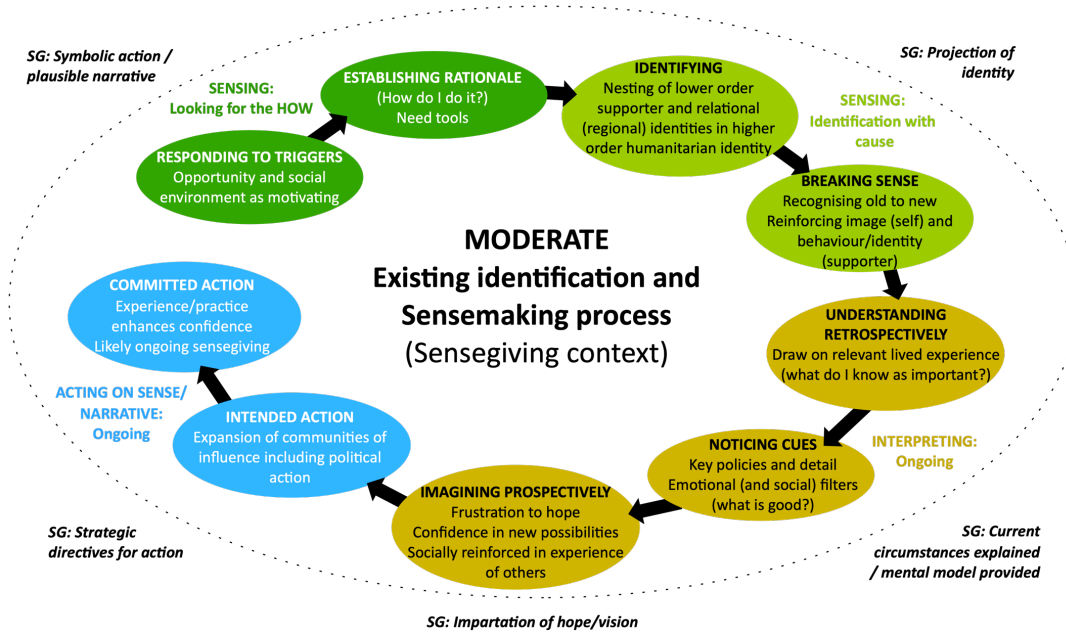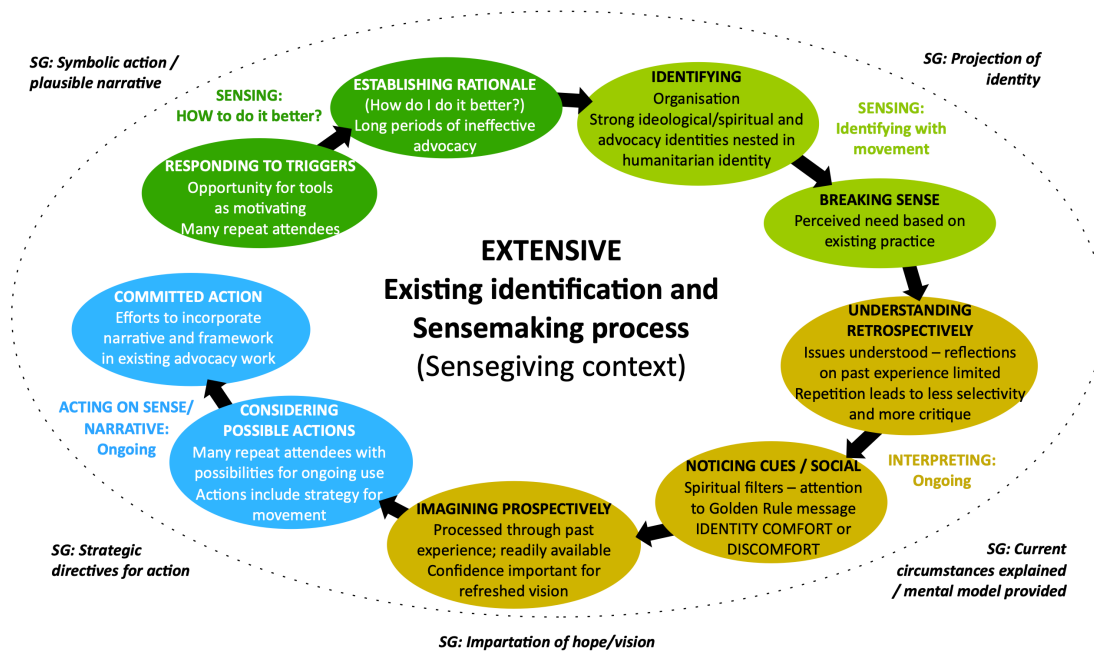**Figure 1. Sensemaking/sensegiving process map for university workshops.**

Figure 2. Sensemaking/sensegiving process map for regional workshops.

Figure 3. Sensemaking/sensegiving process map for faith-based workshops.

Findings

The findings are presented as the three key themes or phases of a sensemaking process in response to this narrative: sensing, interpreting, and acting on sense. Meaning was attached to these themes following comparison of findings within and across embedded cases using the principles of sensemaking and sensegiving presented in Table 2. Inductive analysis revealed how, and at what stage, emotion and identification impacted sensemaking. In particular, it was clear that levels of familiarity with the target of the organization's sensegiving (identification with the cause of people seeking asylum) impacted the rationale for sensemaking, emotional, and cognitive responses to the narrative, and ultimately, the actions of stakeholders.

Sensing

Establishing Rationale for Sensemaking

Interviewees revealed different levels of knowledge and experience with the cause of people seeking asylum and reported motivations to respond to the workshop, and—consistent with sensemaking principles of reducing uncertainty—looked to fill gaps for where things are and where they should be (Weick, 1995). These differences resulted in the operationalization of participants as having "Marginal, Moderate," or "Extensive" existing identification with the cause of people seeking asylum. Within cases, there was a similar pattern of identification among participants, as shown in Table 3, and therefore these categories align with embedded cases.

<div align="center">***Table 3. Levels of Identification of Participants.***</div>

Level of identification		Characteristics	Sensemaking stage
Marginal (Embedded Case 1; academics)	-	Little to no experience of people seeking asylum or knowledge of the cause	Information gathering: *"What is the story?"* *"What should I do?"*
	-	Emotion (e.g., distress) as a trigger for wanting to learn more but can feel overwhelmed	
	-	Limited capacity to digest or recall information	
Moderate (Embedded Case 2; regional supporters)	-	Existing familiarity with the cause	Learning new tools: *"How can I do it?"*
	-	Not active in direct/political advocacy	
	-	No self-identity as advocate, though engaged in volunteerism or services	
Extensive (Embedded Case 3; Faith-based advocates)	-	Very familiar with asylum-seeker advocacy (core and committed)	Reframing the narrative: *"How can I do this better?"*
	-	Self-identified as "advocates"	

Identification levels impacted the sensemaking process in important and connected ways. Emotional and cognitive starting points led to different motivations in the sensing phase with ongoing consequences. Interviewees with "marginal" identification wanted to know more about the cause, but emotions such as distress in response to hearing new stories about the situation facing people seeking asylum left many feeling overwhelmed. Confronted with many possible meanings, this led to the simplification of the narrative and emphasis on emotional responses rather than the details (as per Dervin & Frenette, 2001; Weick, 1995). In contrast, interviewees who were "moderate" in their identification—those mainly involved in support services but not political advocacy—explored ideas for further support. Their emotional responses to the narrative were often reported as inspiration and hope. Those with "extensive" identification and experience as advocates were the most familiar with the cause and the least emotionally reactive. Cognitively, they were attentive to cues and motivated to learn new terminology and strategies.

A Shared Higher-Order "Humanitarian" Identity

Identity is assumed to guide all sensemaking and, therefore, began as a primary construct in analysis. Targeting lower-order identities was also a method used by the NPSA in organizing its workshops, highlighting the significance of this construct for the case setting. However, analysis across embedded cases revealed that lower-order identities were not as significant to the findings as originally thought. Instead, participant responses demonstrated a shared higher-order identity explained a common empathy and orientation in relation to the human advocacy narrative.

All interviewees described an interest in the human cause—not the organization—as a reason for attending workshops, while explaining how their various lower-order identities (academics, regional supporters, faith-based advocates) had opened the door to possibilities of providing support. Shared professional or organizational identities brought interviewees together in a workshop; however, these identities did not explain sensemaking in response to the narrative. When asked about their interest in

people seeking asylum, interviewees referenced an instinct toward "social justice," feeling "obliged" to do something "good" and the importance of "human compassion." One interviewee remarked her surprise that not everyone felt the same way, revealing the instinctive nature of a higher-order identity (Meisenbach & Kramer, 2014). This was labeled "humanitarian" by the researchers, borrowing from Schwartz's (2006) description of universally understood human values reflecting an orientation toward social justice and compassion.

Interview responses indicated a nesting process was used to respond to the narrative and achieve deepening identification with the cause of people seeking asylum. An example of this was the use of Christian and other spiritual identities as a reference point for participants in Embedded Case 3. These emerged as having "lower-order identities" because of their reliance on established paradigms to direct behavior. For example, Beth, a lobbyist, had always identified as a Christian and had once lobbied "against" people seeking asylum and stopping boats. When someone at her church invited her to visit young men in detention, she agreed. This event had a life-changing consequence as she was confronted with the human cost of Australia's immigration policy, leading Beth to make behavioral changes. These adjustments reinforced a humanitarian self:

> For about four or five months, I couldn't stop crying because I realized that I'd come from
> a place where I'd been quite black and white and strongly speaking out for stop the boats.
> Suddenly I started to realize these are people. These are kids. (Beth, Lobbyist)

Findings support claims in the literature that lower-order identities can be nested in higher-order identities and explain behavior in relation to social cause organizations (Aquino & Reed, 2002; MacIntyre, 2013; Meisenbach & Kramer, 2014). A humanitarian identity was seen to orient and unify the responses of otherwise diverse audiences in the context of the human advocacy narrative.

Interpreting

Breaking and Making Retrospective Sense

Facilitators placed significant emphasis during the workshop on the need for supporters to "break" sense with a failed status quo message, reliant on argumentation. The recommended replacement was a model for talking about people seeking asylum using a language of shared "human" values, moving away from a security frame. There was a perceived need for the movement to project a less aggressive image to those considered "persuadable." It would be much easier to reach common ground using words such as "compassion" and describing people seeking asylum as people "escaping harm," than it would be debating the meaning of illegal or legal migrants.

The NPSA had expected sensebreaking elements of the workshop training would be met with resistance or offense by supporters, but instead, many interviewees across cases responded with relief. This reaction aligned with a higher-order humanitarian identity rather than a role-based advocacy identity which many interviewees saw as too confrontational. For example, "I always feel slightly guilty that I'm less political than a lot of my colleagues. The workshop reinforced it's ok to do what I am doing" (Ron, Equity Officer).

Those self-identifying as advocates (mostly in Embedded Case 3) presumably had the most to lose in revising the image around their activities and associations. However, the sensebreaking aspects of the workshop typically prompted new understanding of their behavior, in retrospect: "I even noticed some of the language I'd been using wasn't effective language" (Judy, Policy Adviser, Coalition of Churches).

The organizational narrative was successful in encouraging stakeholders to explore their preconceptions and to agree a reframed narrative was needed.

Making Sense Prospectively and Positive Emotion

The findings suggested that positive and hopeful emotions were dominant in driving prospective sensemaking. This meant prospective sensemaking was more evident in cases with "moderate" and "extensive" levels of identification, where they were less confronted by "new" and disturbing information. Positive emotion emerged as a motivator for ongoing sensemaking and action.

The *Words for Humanity* narrative required workshop participants to envisage success using a new framework. Visionary exercises were problematic for participants in Embedded Case 1 with "marginal" levels of identification. They appeared to be in need of emotional and cognitive catch-up compared to other cases. For example, several interviewees from Embedded Case 1 expressed sentiments including "It's worse than I thought," and ambiguity about future vision. For example: "While I was motivated to do more, there was a part of me that was 'Why are we fighting this? Do we have to fight this fight?' It seems disheartening" (Kel, Director, Equity Services).

Findings supported claims that emotional processing will take precedence over cognitive processing until the stimuli can be reduced (Gabriel & Fineman, 1993; Weick, 1995). Most experienced advocates (Embedded Case 3) had less emotive responses with a general mood of despondency. For regional advocates (Embedded Case 2), envisaging success in a highly polarized environment instilled hope and confidence,

reinforced socially through group exercises. The group exercises were endorsed as being highly inspirational for these interviewees. Many described emotional transitions during the workshop from despondency to hope, and deepening identification with the cause of people seeking asylum: "I found the workshop was quite empowering . . . I guess it's given me a little more confidence to be a more open advocate" (Meg, English Teacher).

Acting

Taking Action in Sensemaking

The organization asked workshop participants to: (1) use the conversational framework and (2) engage in political activism. These calls to action were seen as reflections of how effectively narrative "performed" (Boje, 1991), or the extent to which meanings were shared between stakeholders and the organization. Results pointed back to the initial stages of existing identification with the cause of people seeking asylum and different motivations for attending the workshops.

Seventeen of the 20 interviewees reported the workshops as motivating for further action to some degree, even if it was to simply learn more. However, the sensegiving campaign had limited success with Embedded Case 1 participants with "marginal" identification. There was little evidence of prospective sensemaking—such as adopting a hopeful vision for the future—within this group and this had implications for responses to organizational objectives communicated through the narrative.

Embedded Case 1: Ongoing Emotional/Cognitive Processing and Limited Action

Embedded Case 1 participants with marginal identification wanted to know "What was the story?" and "What can I do?" Meanings were shared as ideological endorsement of the narrative, accepted universally as "important" and "comprehensive." However, the processing (emotionally and cognitively) of too many meanings resulted in limited action against the organization's community and political advocacy objectives. None of these interviewees recalled the political directives of the organization. This finding suggested there was a ceiling on cognition or attention.

Interview responses in Embedded Case 1 strongly indicated a "lack of confidence" to use the conversational framework as a limiting factor for advocacy action. All interviewees in this group commented on a lack of time to practice the framework. For example: "I'm not sure there was time to do the framework justice and even now I'm not confident enough to—I read it and understand it—but I wouldn't be confident enough to have a go" (Kim, Music Lecturer).

This result is consistent with a premise of sensemaking, in that actions with social consequences require strong justification (Weick, 1995). At the time of interview and up to six weeks after the workshops, there was little evidence this group would undertake active advocacy. However, interviewees were universal in endorsing the cause of people seeking asylum and sentiment of the workshop. It was possible that "ongoing" sensemaking would lead to future action and a sense of growing confidence not captured at the time of interview.

Embedded Case 2: Confidence and Expanded Sensegiving

Embedded Case 2 participants with "moderate" identification were the most likely to expand efforts to include political activism. They were already engaged in service-related advocacy activities but now reported feeling "confident enough" to approach a member of Parliament or have more difficult conversations. As examples, Meg, an English-language teacher, was ready to approach a politician to advocate for the first time. Rita, a volunteer at the Townsville Multicultural Support Group (TMSG), reported an unexpected opportunity to share the narrative at a public meeting after the workshop. This is her record of how she used the *Words for Humanity* framework:

> I got up . . . "I'm Rita, and I'm a mother of two, and I live here, and this is my first time coming to something like this and speaking up. This is what I have seen on the news about the Rohingya crisis, and as a mother, you know, when I see those women holding their children's hands, and the hands of their dead children that have been killed, I just think, you know, how can we help people find a safe pathway, and safe passage?" . . . And it went quite well. It received applause from the room, which I just found extraordinary. Absolutely extraordinary. (Rita, volunteer)

At first, Rita had been reluctant to identify as an advocate but was now considering a full range of other political advocacy activities. This example demonstrates links between positive emotions like confidence, shared narrative, and likely repeat action (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005).

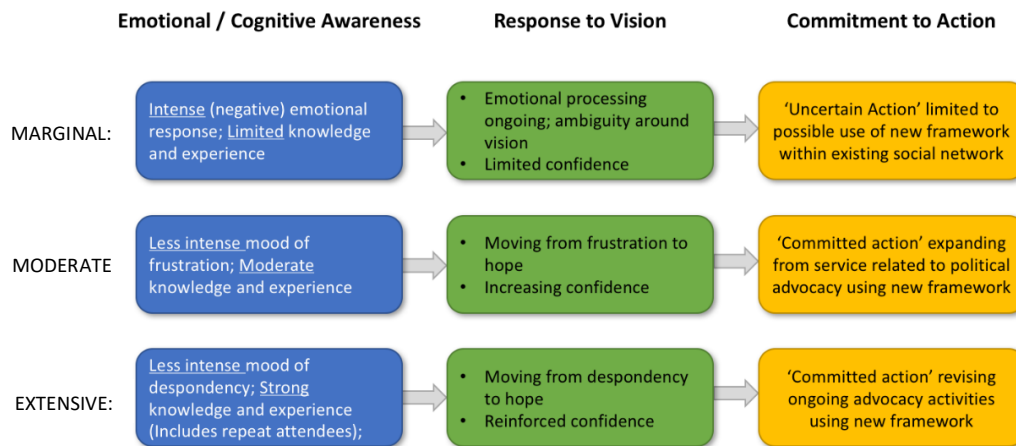*Embedded Case 3: Familiarity and Revising Actions*

Embedded Case 3 participants included five repeat attendees at workshops and experienced advocates with "extensive" identification with the cause. These interviewees were active in direct advocacy and had wanted to know, "How can I do this better?" This group easily transitioned from despondency to hope during the workshop with the promise of new language tools for advocacy.

By the time of interview, many Embedded Case 3 participants had already undertaken changes in how they communicated about people seeking asylum. This included changing the words on websites to "people seeking asylum" and removing phrases such as "people seeking asylum are not illegal" as part of existing campaigns. For example, Justine, a volunteer with one group, was heavily involved with fundraising. She said they had "changed a lot of our banners and slogans and signs," using words like "compassion" and moving away from words vilifying the immigration minister or that could be seen as antagonistic. This was quite a cultural shift in the group's communications.

The decisive actions of participants with extensive existing identification with the cause required "less" change than other workshop attendees with less experience and networks for advocacy. However, results also confirmed connections between familiarity and positive emotions like confidence, which empower creative and strategic thinking (Maitlis et al., 2013). At the same time, any positive action— ranging from ideological endorsement of the narrative to enhanced advocacy—signaled deeper identification with the cause of people seeking asylum. From a sensegiving perspective, participants in each embedded

case demonstrated a positive response to the organizational narrative, reflecting organizational influence. However, it remained significant for action that sensemakers entered and exited the campaign environment from different cognitive and emotional starting points.

Figure 4 illustrates the proposed relationship between different stages of emotional and cognitive processing, prospective sensemaking, and action.

Emotional / Cognitive Awareness	Response to Vision	Commitment to Action
MARGINAL:	Intense (negative) emotional response; Limited knowledge and experience	• Emotional processing ongoing; ambiguity around vision • Limited confidence	'Uncertain Action' limited to possible use of new framework within existing social network
MODERATE	Less intense mood of frustration; Moderate knowledge and experience	• Moving from frustration to hope • Increasing confidence	'Committed action' expanding from service related to political advocacy using new framework
EXTENSIVE:	Less intense mood of despondency; Strong knowledge and experience (Includes repeat attendees);	• Moving from despondency to hope • Reinforced confidence	'Committed action' revising ongoing advocacy activities using new framework

Figure 4. Stages of emotional and cognitive awareness, and action.

Discussion

This study investigated sensemaking in the context of a people seeking asylum advocacy campaign to provide further insight into how narrative could influence different types of stakeholders. It found that narrative can influence stakeholders by (1) providing information to reduce uncertainty and ambiguity; (2) breaking sense with past perceptions or behaviors, enabling further identification with the cause; (3) giving sense through a new mental model that resonates with social identity; (4) encouraging vision for strategic change; and (5) directing strategic action around "what to do next." Findings also revealed three different levels of identification—"marginal," "moderate," and "extensive"—between stakeholders and the sensegiving target (the cause of people seeking asylum) with emotional, as well as cognitive, dimensions.

A Shared Humanitarian Identity as a Basis for Identification

Studies have proposed abstract higher-order identities drive identification between stakeholders and social cause organizations (Meisenbach & Kramer, 2014; Pratt, 2000). The findings of this research support Meisenbach and Kramer's (2014) claim that lower-order identities are likely to be nested in higher-order identities in the context of social cause organizations. However, findings also reveal a dominant humanitarian identity in the context of a human advocacy campaign, explaining what brought together an otherwise diverse group of stakeholders. A humanitarian type of stakeholder was drawn to values of social justice and compassion,

leading to positive responses to an advocacy narrative. This identity explained a unanimous expression of relief and acceptance about the organization's sensebreaking of an aggressive image of advocacy, enabling sharing of meanings between stakeholders and the organization (Boje, 1991; Czarniawska, 2004).

Although Pratt (2000) noted multiple social identities can increase risks of deidentification with organizations, this study found multiple identities were a pathway to strengthening a dominant higher-order identity. In turn, this led to closer identification between stakeholders and the organizational narrative through nesting.

Different Levels of Identification (Cognitive and Emotional) and Sensemaking

The most significant variation between stakeholder responses to the narrative related to different emotional and cognitive starting points for sensemaking, empirically demonstrating a role for emotion in the sensemaking process. Findings in this study highlighted the importance of transitioning from negative to positive emotions (for example despondency to inspiration) through prospective sensemaking in particular. Prospective sensemaking relied on a hope-fueled vision around advocacy. In turn, this prompted stakeholders to respond to organizational directives with complicit action, such as engaging in expanded political advocacy.

Although negative emotion was found to motivate sensemaking, findings appeared to support claims that heightened emotions such as distress demand attention, detracting from ongoing sensemaking until alleviated (Maitlis et al., 2013; Weick, 1995). For stakeholders with "marginal" existing identification, this resulted in more simplistic recall and attention to cues with limited action as a result.

This study links narrative interpretation, emotion, and action by highlighting identification as an ongoing emotional and cognitive process, revealing conditions under which organizational narrative can influence stakeholder action. This relies on a related understanding of the multidimensionality of stakeholders as emotional and cognitive sensemakers. Different levels of cognitive and emotional understanding matter in how audiences respond to the same organizational narrative above and beyond a shared higher-order identity.

Conclusion

This study responded to a gap in organizational literature by adopting a stakeholder perspective of sensegiving and identification in relation to human advocacy narrative. This approach brought unique insights into how internal stakeholders respond to human advocacy narrative. Findings highlighted the potential and limitations for nonprofits using narrative to strengthen a support base among diverse audiences and in an emotive environment.

A dominant humanitarian identity explained broad-based support for the human advocacy narrative and proved more significant than role-based identities, such as "advocate" or "employee." This work extended insight into how nesting of multiple identities leads to higher-order identity salience, explaining a base level of identification with social causes (Meisenbach & Kramer, 2014). However, different levels of emotional and cognitive identification with the advocacy cause ultimately limited or enhanced stakeholder action in response to the narrative.

These findings enhance the explanatory value of the sensemaking/sensegiving framework for other studies exploring stakeholder communication and response. Practically, the research suggests nonprofit and advocacy organizations using narrative need to understand their stakeholders through a lens of emotional and cognitive awareness. By classifying stakeholders as "marginal, moderate," or "extensive," narrative can be better tailored to these groups.

Limitations of the Research and Future Directions

This study was limited to the investigation of responses to one sensegiving event at a single point in time. There would be value in a longitudinal study for investigation of gradual change in response to advocacy narrative, consistent with the premise that sensemaking is ongoing (Weick, 1995) with deeper levels of identification possible over time. This study also focused on individual aspects of sensemaking with potential to investigate social sensemaking in a campaign context. Finally, findings from this study may not be transferable to less ideological or emotionally charged contexts.

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