

Karl Weick

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Karl Weick's Bibliography

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Karl Weick

Karl Weick was born October 31, 1936 in Warsaw, Indiana. He attended undergraduate school at Wittenberg University in Springfield, Ohio. He attended this university from 1954-1958. From there he would go on to advance his education at Ohio State University. There he would acquire in 1960 a degree in psychology, and shortly after in 1962 he would earn his Ph.D. During his tenure at academic institutions he was married to Karen Lee Eickhoff on December 13th, 1957. They would go on to have three children: Kirk, Kyle, and Kris.[1]

Early life and accomplishments:[2]

After completing his education, Dr. Weick was first assigned assistant professor of psychology at Purdue University. There he taught from 1962-1965. His next major position would come as co-director of Ford Foundation Workshops on Organizational Behavior at the Carnegie Institute of Technology. He would later go on to teach at the University of Minnesota from 1968 to 1972. This would begin his study of Organizational Behavior. First being taught at Cornell University in 1972. Then later on becoming the rensis likert distinguished and collegiate professor of Organizational Behavior and professor of Psychology at the University of Michigan from 1988 to the present day.

Weick's first major publication came as a book titled *Productivity and Organization: a Metatheory of work and its Assignment*. This trend of organizational studies would continue with the *Social Psychology of Organizing* in 1969, and then in 1995 with *Sense Making and Organization*. These books coupled with nearly 108 journal articles would discuss Dr. Weick's three main contributions in the study of communication and psychology. As one colleague would put it, "most organizational observers were confused and disoriented by the radical changes described above, and for the most part persisted with the traditional models and concepts. Others acknowledged the new reality of unrelenting change, but did little more than comment upon it. Weick's body of work is unique in that he both identified the

fragmented, turbulent, and at that time's counter-rational quality of organizational life and struggled to make sense of it.”[3]

Descriptions of Weick's Studies and Theories[4]:

Karl Weick's first major contribution to the field of communication is his ideas on sensemaking in organizations and the process associated with it. He states that communication is a major concept in the factor of organization. This is because people will constantly try to adapt or modify their situation to logistically make an attempt easier or more organized. Weick states that when information is handled by the organizers they go through three steps:

Enactment—where they define the situation and begin the process of dealing with the information,

Selection—where they narrow the equivocality by deciding what to deal with and what to leave along, ignore, or disregard, and,

Retention—where they decide what information, and its meaning, they will retain for future use.[5]

He goes on to talk about how organizations will utilize these three steps in an effective manner, thus easily making a comparison or detailed analysis of a situation. A common example that Weick uses is the case of the Mann Gulch disaster. This is where wildfires were reported on August 5th, 1949, in Gulch located near the Missouri River. A team of smoke-jumpers parachuted into the midst of the fire thus rendezvousing with a separate team. Unfortunately, only three of the twenty five men survived.[6] Weick describes this theory of sensemaking in this situation as an important and designate example of how sensemaking in organizations failed and could, if had done properly through the help of communication, have avoided a disaster.

Weick's next major contribution, of equal importance, is his theories on loose coupling within organizational function. He describes it as a situation where several means can produce the same result; there is absence of regulations and high connect networks with very slow feedback time. For the most part, many of these attributions seemed quite negative. However, they may help organizations by allowing the organizations to temporarily persist the rapid environmental fluctuations, improve the organization's sensitivity to the environment, and allow subsystem breakdown without damaging the entire organization.[7] In laymen's terms what Weick is defining as loose coupling within organizations is a charismatic and somehow disgruntled organization sets. This means that one must have set rules and guidelines along with stability and an idea of structure within their system. An organization must still have loose and charismatic figures, ideas, and situations. This not only helps with communication, but also with the organization's structure and environment. As Weick would put loose coupling, “conveys the

image that coupled events are responsive, but that each event has its individual identity and the coupling can vary over time. It also suggests that you can break many organizations into largely self-functioning subsystems, and loose coupling is the real glue that holds them together.”[8]

Finally his third major contribution to be focused on is mindfulness or as his articles would say *organizing for high reliability: processes of collective mindfulness*. This again is a major benefactor related to an organization’s reliance and system making or high reliability.[9] Mindfulness is a cognitive mental orientation that continuously evaluates the situation and environment that: tracks small failures, resists over simplification, and remains sensitive to the operations in practice, retains the capability for resilience, and takes advantage of changes and who has expertise.[10] Simply put, mindfulness is when we seem to realize a current problem or expectation within an organization. Based upon any certain negative characteristics, the organization will try to continuously improve on new experiences and expectation biases to make a better situation, This is all to relate in a after cultural exhibit in proving the outcome of whatever organization and system it has in place. Weick then compares this to a term known as high reliability organization. This defines highly mindful organizations as exhibiting five characteristics. These five characteristics are broken up into elements: anticipation contains the first three and containment has the last two. Anticipation starts with:

preoccupation with failure

reluctance to simplify

sensitivity to operations

These, simply put, are an anticipation to any negative or future failures thus resulting in a system of containment and readiness due to undesirable events. Containment just like any other definition of the word is to put into action a response that will hinder or control an organization’s negative situation. This contains the second two elements:

Commitment to resilience

Difference to expertise[11]

If used affectively, this system in response along with the cognitive understanding of the organization can result in a positive feedback and outcome during any situation.

Final Thoughts:

Weick’s contributions to the communal society is one that is beneficiary and important in a crisis content. Most, if not all, of Weick’s theories and application of his theories can result in some correlation to a crisis situation within an organization. However, if the organization is alluding or follows any of the

above theories it can easily pre-assess and contain or fix any negative situation that arises from lack of communication. This then can relate to a proper functioning, sensemaking organization that can rely on its functions as a major contribution to society and the organization.

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- 1979, *The Social Psychology of Organizing (Second edition)*, McGraw Hill.
- 1995, *Sensemaking in Organizations*, Sage.
- 2001, *Making Sense of the Organization (Volume 1)*, Blackwell.
- 2001, *Managing the Unexpected: Assuring High Performance in an Age of Complexity*. with co-author Kathleen Sutcliffe, Jossey-Bass.
- 2009, *Making Sense of the Organization (Volume 2) The Impermanent Organization*, Blackwell.[12]

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