Sensemaking in Crisis Intervention Team Members

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ABSTRACT
This article represents a part of a dissertation project, where we will examine sensemaking processes from the macrocognitive perspective in a crisis intervention domain. By using the Critical decision method we will conduct interviews focusing on non-routine situations with experts from a crisis intervention team. Next, we will create scenarios based on the situations experts have experienced and go through the scenarios individually with the novices. Finally, we will identify the cues and criteria which experts and novices use for sensemaking and we will look closer at the sensemaking processes they use. Confronting the novices with the experts’ perspective will enable the knowledge transfer focused on the relevant criteria considered in the non-routine situation.

Introduction
Sensemaking is one of the primary macrocognitive functions [1, 2, 3]. As a framework for our study we will use the data/frame theory of sensemaking [4]. Many of previous studies were focused on sensemaking processes in a socio-technical context, exploring the possibilities of improving the environment in order to facilitate the sensemaking [eg. 5]. As the work of a crisis response team is based on helping other people to cope with the consequences of accidents, we will review studies where the decision makers have to make sense primarily of other people’s behavior, for example in the work of police officers [eg. 6].

As stated by Malakis and Kontogiannis [7], in routine situations the frames were identified by simple pattern matching that participants often performed spontaneously without deliberation. Therefore, we will focus on the non-routine situations, where the way of handling the situation is not obvious.

Study design
The main aim of our study is to describe sensemaking processes while coping with a novel non-routine situation. In the first part of the study we will conduct CDM (Critical Decision Method) interviews with experienced team members analyzing non-routine situations which were difficult in decision making from the professional perspective. Afterwards, we will create scenarios from the selected incidents. In the second part of the study, we will individually go through the scenarios with novices, questioning their sensemaking activities, as the situation unfolds. This approach allows us to compare the sensemaking processes, cues and reasoning of participants in the same situation. Moreover, using real-world situations for training purposes has a benefit of high ecological validity.

The objectives of the study are as follows: 1) Identify cues and important decisions in a non-routine situation during a crisis intervention (interviews with the experienced team members). After creating the scenarios from expert situations we will 2) identify the nature of sensemaking processes during the crisis intervention using the combination of focus and prediction paradigm and also 3) identify the criteria used by the novices to frame and reframe their mental pictures. Finally, we will 4) compare the cues used by experts and novices, providing the novices with the expert perspective after the interviews.

The potential ways of improvement of sensemaking process will be also discussed. The study may have implications for designing further training materials.

Participants
Participants will be members of the Slovak Crisis Response Team Blue Angel, which provides a psychosocial support for the victims of mass casualties, accidents, robberies, deaths of close relatives and other tragedies. The organization also provides support for crisis management teams of cities after disasters. We will focus on situations where the Blue Angels had to intervene immediately after the accidents and therefore had to cope with a novel situation. Our participants will have a different level of experience, from the most experienced team members to new team members - novices. The expected number of experienced team members is 3 and of novices at least 10.

Materials and Procedure
We will elaborate the scenarios on the basis of the interviews with experienced team members. Subsequently, we will individually go through the scenarios with the
We will ask novices. After each sequence of the scenarios we will ask set of questions, which we will derive from the research of Zimmerman on police officers [7]:

1. What do you think is going on here? What specific factors (or cues) are leading to this interpretation?

2. Do you have any concerns at this time? What are they?

3. What errors would inexperienced officer be likely to make in this situation? Are there any cues they might miss?

4. Can you give me a numerical rating, from 1 to 7, of your comfort level with continuing as this officer is continuing, using the anchored scale shown here?

5. If I told you that the officer decided to call for a roll-by at this time, would you think that was a reasonable course of action? Why or why not?

6. Given that your overall goal is to complete this call without incident, what are your short-term objectives at this time?

7. Are there any alternative courses of action that might work? Would you do anything different than this officer?

8. Are there any other cues you see that are influencing your actions that you have not mentioned yet? Are there cues that you expect to see that are not present? As a supervising officer, would you be satisfied that all actions take thus far are acceptable?

Exact wording of questions for our study will be adapted from these questions after creating the concrete scenarios.

Analysis
The CDM interviews will be analyzed according to structured approach [8]. The data from scenario-interviews will be coded for initial frame and for six sensemaking activities: Initial frame and data leading to it, Elaborating the frame, Questioning the frame, Preserving the frame, Comparing frames, Seeking an alternative frame and Reframing.

Expected results and contribution
While studying police officers, Zimmerman [9] found that experts and novices used the same type of cues to create the initial frame but they differed in the way in which they elaborated the frame. Therefore, we also expect to find similar results between the experts’ use of cues and the novices’ sensemaking activities. Moreover, we expect to shed light into sensemaking processes in crisis intervention decision making by identifying the character of data leading to the initial frame and then defining the criteria for preserving and changing the frame. Results regarding the sensemaking activities might be applicable beyond the crisis intervention field in the fields such as police or military peace interventions, where the decision makers primarily have to make sense of behavior of other people involved.

Author Keywords
sensemaking; Critical decision method; scenarios; crisis response team.

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REFERENCES


