

Université de Montréal

**“This wasn’t supposed to happen”: Making sense of emotions
in the face of expectation breach**

par

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Abstract

Past research into emotions in organizational contexts, notably the research into the theories of emotional labour, the psychological contract, and equity theory, has tended to focus on questions of the rationality and appropriateness of emotional manifestations, as well as mechanisms used to control and moderate emotions. However, little empirical research has been done into how employees themselves make sense of their emotions and the processes by which they legitimize and render these emotions understandable, both to themselves and to others.

In recent years, an emerging research perspective has shifted away from the normative/rationalistic perspective to address these questions. Rather than being considered strictly subjective, private, and inaccessible experiences, emotions are now seen as accessible via discourse and narrative. And more than simply being expressed in language and communication, they are understood to be constructed and negotiated by them.

This research develops this perspective by drawing on the theories of sensemaking and narrative theory; looking at the detailed narratives gathered from four non-sales employees at an IT reseller. By asking research participants to talk about emotional experiences and analyzing their narratives using a narrative theory methodology, this research hopes to shed some light on how employees make sense of and legitimize their emotional experiences.

Among other things, the results suggest that the process of sensemaking is very closely linked with issues of identity.

Key words: organization, emotions, discourse, narrative analysis, sensemaking

Sommaire

Des recherches antérieures sur les émotions en contexte organisationnel, notamment autour des notions de travail émotionnel, de contrat psychologique et d'équité, ont souvent soulevé la question de la rationalité et du caractère approprié ou non des manifestations émotionnelles, ainsi que sur les mécanismes utilisés pour contrôler et modérer celles-ci. Cependant, peu de recherche empirique a été effectuée sur la façon dont les employés eux-mêmes font sens de leurs émotions au travail et le processus par lequel ils parviennent à rendre celle-ci compréhensibles et légitimes, à la fois pour eux-mêmes et pour autrui.

Au cours des dernières années, un courant de recherche émergent tend toutefois à mettre de côté la perspective normative / rationaliste pour soulever ce type de questions. Ainsi, au lieu d'être considérées comme des expériences strictement subjectives, privées, voire inaccessibles, les émotions y sont envisagées à travers les discours et les mises en récits dont elles font l'objet. Les émotions apparaissent ainsi non seulement exprimées dans le langage et la communication, mais construites et négociées à travers eux.

La recherche présente développe empiriquement cette perspective émergente, notamment en faisant appel aux théories du sensemaking et de la narration, à travers l'analyse détaillée des récits de quatre employés chargés du soutien à la vente pour un revendeur de produits informatiques. En demandant à mes sujets de parler de leurs expériences émotionnelles et en analysant leurs réponses selon une méthodologie d'analyse narrative, cette recherche explore ainsi la façon dont les employés parviennent à construire le sens et la légitimité de leurs expériences émotionnelles.

Les résultats suggèrent entre autres que ces processus de construction de sens sont très étroitement liés aux enjeux d'identité et de rôle.

Mots clés : organisation, émotions, discours, analyse narrative, *sensemaking*

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“Stories are the creative conversion of life itself into a more powerful, clearer, more meaningful experience. They are the currency of human contact.”

— Robert McKee

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Introduction

Working as a Communications Specialist for two large companies over the course of three years gave me the opportunity to observe how employees interact with each other and with their superiors, as well as their sources of both satisfaction and frustration. I witnessed (as well as experienced) a range of emotions and saw the effects of these emotions on my colleagues and myself. I also started to notice how employees talked about how they were feeling – both with me and with each other. Over time, these observations began to have a profound effect on me and I came to two realizations. The first was that emotions and emotional reactions at work were complex and highly multidimensional. The second was that communication had a rather significant role to play in the experience of emotion. It was from these fledgling realizations that my research interest grew and eventually became the impetus for this work.

I began my research by reading about established theories in organizational emotion, such as the Psychological Contract and Equity Theory, referring to the work of Robinson, Rousseau, Adams, and others. However, I found these theories unsatisfying in that they didn't offer a great deal of insight into how employees themselves understand the emotions they experience. I believe this to be, because until recently, emotions have been considered too subjective, transient, and inaccessible to be researched in an empirical way. However, an emerging area of organizational communication, led by Fineman, and Putnam & Mumby, and others contends that emotions can be accessed via discourse. In fact, these researchers go further to

suggest that not only can discourse make emotions known to others, it is via discourse itself that emotions are legitimized and made sense of.

It was in this vein that I undertook this research. By mobilizing the work of Karl Weick on sensemaking, and Jerome Bruner on narrative theory, I gathered narratives from research participants in order to gain some insight into how they make sense of their emotional experiences while at work. In so doing, I hoped to contribute to the theory of sensemaking, as well as our understanding of emotions in organizations. I believe there may be practical implications, as well. If research can uncover some of the processes by which employees make sense of their emotions while at work, managerial and organizational practice may be able to be informed in such a way as to support employee well-being and emotional health.

This research looked at a single organization, Atarco¹, a sales-centered organization in the IT industry. I interviewed non-sales employees. Having previously been an employee there myself, I was able to gain the trust of my research participants relatively quickly, which allowed them to be as forthcoming as possible in their interviews. I tried my very best to avoid inserting my own thoughts and feelings about the organization into the interview, while at the same time invoking the sense of corroboration and camaraderie the research participants expected.

During the interviews I attempted to elicit narratives about emotional experiences from the research participants without directly asking them to do so. Instead, I asked them how they like working for Atarco, if they ever talk about emotionally-sensitive topics with

¹ All proper names have been changed to maintain the organization and research participants' anonymity.

colleagues and how they decide which colleagues they can confide in. I asked for examples or anecdotes to illustrate the points they raised. Each interview was recorded, with the consent of the research participant, and after the interviews, I transcribed the recordings and isolated the narratives most relevant to my work.

Once these narratives were selected, I took a semiotic methodology as my analysis technique, guided by A. J. Greimas' Narrative Schema. Bruner and Greimas hold largely different views on the nature of narrative, but both emphasize the central role of contracts and breaches to the expected order of things when it comes to how narratives are typically constructed and told. As we will see these notions turned out be central to my research participants' narratives of their emotional experiences as well, and the ways they made sense of them. Greimas' Schema thus provided me with a means of operationalizing narrative theory and a strategy for reading and unpacking the narratives to access the ways in which events and emotions were constructed and made sense of.

A close analysis of all the selected narratives revealed that in most cases, research participants followed what seemed to be a sensemaking pattern in their framing of themselves as the research participants as well as the victims of breaches of their legitimate expectations by the organization's management. Further, in their attempts to make these experiences communicable and intelligible, they tended to appeal to norms as a way of legitimizing their feelings. They weren't just telling me how they felt, but explaining that it was legitimate to feel the way they did because established norms had been breached.

I begin with a review of the literature on emotions in the workplace, including the Psychological Contract and Equity Theory. I then discuss Weick's theory of organizational sensemaking and explain how it makes a solid theoretical framework for my research. Following this, I present the case and the many narratives I gathered from interviews with research participants. After an analysis of the narratives, I present the findings, and finally, suggest potential for future research.

CHAPTER 1 – Literature Review

1.1. Psychological Contract

One of the most well-documented constructs used to explore employee emotion and well-being at work is the Psychological Contract. The psychological contract refers to employees' perceptions of what they owe their employers and what their employers owe to them (Robinson, 1996). Argyris (1960) was the first to discuss the concept of the psychological contract in his work in organizational behaviour. He examined the condition of average employees working in formal organizations and determined that they are provided with minimal control over their work day and are expected to be passive, dependent, and subordinate. Further, they are expected to perform many different tasks well, without excelling or deeply engaging in any one of them. These conditions are such not because organizations are bad places, but because these are the conditions within which organizations can best reach their objectives and “optimize their own expression” (Argyris, 1960, p. 14). Therefore, Argyris understands the psychological contract to be a strategy designed by the organization whereby it is willing to pay wages and ensure adequate seniority in exchange for workers who are willing to adhere to what is expected of them – behaviours that are largely incongruent with the needs and wants of mature adults - for eight hours a day.

Argyris' conception is largely that of a contract involving tangibles – wages, productivity, security, etc. However, Menninger (1958), in his exploration of the psychotherapy contract - the doctor/patient relationship in therapeutic treatment – discusses the contract as something which can involve non-tangibles, such as skills, services, time,

expertise, counsel, etc. Further, he emphasizes two main points with regard to contracts between parties. First, there has to be an exchange of some kind; a give and take by both parties such that needs are met in a reciprocal and mutual way. Second, when this balance of giving and gain is not met, it is likely that one party will begin to feel the exchange is unfair and thus, the contract will eventually dissolve.

Building on the work of Menninger, Levinson, et al (1962) interviewed 874 workers about the expectations they hold at work, particularly as they relate to their employers. This research confirmed that the psychological contract is largely implicit or unspoken. It also supported the idea that the mutual expectations contained in the contract have an obligatory quality; that if one party holds up one end of the “deal”, the other party is then considered obligated to hold up its end. Finally, they determined that the expectations that comprise psychological contracts tend to arise unconsciously over the course of the employee’s term with the organization. When an employee begins his work with an organization, he may not be sure what he wants or what he is able/willing to offer his employer (other than basic job performance). He needs to experience the work environment and see how the written rules and regulations are implemented before he can begin to conceive of what he wants from his employer (other than employment) and what he is willing to give to get it.

Ho, et al (2006) moved the understanding of psychological contracts beyond the notion of expectations. They conceptualize these contracts as comprising promises. In other words, inherent in the contract is the belief that some sort of promise has been made and that both parties have accepted the terms and conditions. But it is important to note

that the promises and acceptance of terms are *believed* or *perceived* – nowhere are they formalized. Each side believes that it has made promises and both have accepted the terms; that each party *believes* it shares a common understanding of the contract and that each interprets the contract in the same way.

However, researchers have also emphasized that psychological contracts represent employees' beliefs about obligations between them and the organization as a whole, and not any one agent of the organization (Levinson et al., 1962; Rousseau, 1989; Sims, 1994). In a sense, the organization assumes an anthropomorphic identity in the eyes of the employee. For this reason, the psychological contract has been viewed as being held by employees alone, since the organization cannot enter into a contract, psychological or otherwise, with an employee (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994; Sims, 1994). Rousseau makes the following argument:

The organization, as the other party in the relationship, provides the context for the creation of a psychological contract, but cannot in turn have a psychological contract with its members. Organizations cannot 'perceive'. However, individual managers can themselves personally perceive a psychological contract with employees and respond accordingly (1989, p.126).

1. 1. 1. Psychological Contract Breach/Violation

In the climate of globalization and increased uncertainty in the work market, the traditional conception of the psychological contract that involves long-term job security in return for hard work and loyalty may no longer be valid (Sims, 1994). Further, unlike formal engagement contracts, the psychological contract is revised and redrafted throughout the employee's tenure in an organization (Rousseau & Parks, 1993). The longer the relationship endures and/or the more the two parties interact, the broader the

array of contributions and incentives that might be included in the contract (Rousseau, 1989). New job assignments, relocations, and organizational restructuring may be the catalyst for revised terms that then supersede the existing ones. Further, pressure from the competition, diversification into new areas of business, significant shifts in technology, and changes in the types of people entering the organization all have the potential to present/create problems, crises, or opportunities, to which strategic change is the only conceivable course of action (Tichy, 1983). This can increase the occurrence of psychological contract breach, as these constantly changing circumstances may make it more difficult for agreements to be met. As well, they increase the likelihood that confusion and lack of understanding will arise regarding what the agreement constitutes.

1. 1. 2. Unmet Expectations ≠ Psychological Contract Violation

Researchers have made specific distinctions between unmet expectations and contract violations. Expectations tend to involve that which the employee expects to receive from his or her employer - free from any sense of obligation or mutuality (Wanous, 1977, 1992). Employees come into a new organization with unrealistic expectations. Then, when these expectations are not met, employees may become less satisfied, perform less well, and become more likely to leave their employer. However, unmet expectations can usually be remedied by corrective actions, such as increased salary, a change in job description, more advantageous benefits, etc. Unmet expectations also tend to exist at the cognitive level. In other words, an expectation is considered to be unmet when a cognitive assessment of contract fulfillment alerts the employee to a

disconnect between what each party has promised and provided to the other (Morrison & Robinson, 1997).

Contract violation, on the other hand, involves a more general belief that respect for persons, codes of conduct, and other patterns of behaviour associated with relationships have been violated (Rousseau, 1989). Contract violation, therefore, creates a sense of deception and betrayal that has significant implications for the employer/employee relationship (Rousseau, 1989), particularly since psychological contracts are largely based on assumptions of good faith (MacNeil, 1985). Violation represents the emotional and affective state that may follow from the belief that one's organization has failed to adequately maintain the psychological contract. This conceptualization is consistent with research within the psychology literature, in which emotions are viewed as being based on cognitive appraisals of particular events (Frijda, 1988; Ortony, et al, 1988). It has been suggested that a perceived violation acts as a signal to the employee that the employer's original motives to build and maintain a mutually-beneficial relationship have changed or were false to begin with. This is because violations reduce the predictability of the employer's future actions, thus robbing employees of the sense of control that the psychological contract gave them in the first place (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994).

Specifically, violation is a combination of disappointment and anger (Ortony et al., 1988). At its most basic level, violation involves disappointment, frustration, and distress stemming from the perceived failure to receive something that is both expected and desired (Ortony et al., 1988; Robinson & Morrison, 1995; Robinson & Rousseau, 1994).

In addition, central to the experience of violation are feelings of anger, resentment, bitterness, indignation, and even outrage that emanate from the perception that one has been betrayed or mistreated (Ortony et al., 1988; Rousseau, 1989). Contract violations do damage that cannot be repaired by the same corrective action used to amend instances of unmet expectations. In the same way that trust and respect between friends are reduced when one friend violates terms of the friendship rule, when an employer violates a term of the psychological contract, employees' trust and respect decline.

1. 1. 3. Organizational Cynicism

Andersson (1996) suggests that contract violation may be the primary determinant for organizational cynicism - a negative attitude toward one's employing organization, comprising three dimensions: (1) a belief that the organization lacks integrity; (2) negative affect toward the organization; and (3) tendencies to disparaging and critical behaviours toward the organization that are consistent with these beliefs and affect (Dean et al, 1998). The connection between contract violation and organizational cynicism is particularly interesting as it would seem that cynicism, while certainly an outcome of the violation, may also *cause* perceptions of contract violation and the feelings of betrayal and mistrust that arise as a result (Robinson & Brown, 2004).

1. 2. Social Equity Theory

Related to the psychological contract and emotions resulting from violations thereof, are perceptions of organizational equity. John Stacey Adams (1963, 1965) developed a theory that attributed distress, in its varying degrees, to perceptions of workplace inequity. Adams determined that employees judge the appropriateness of their reward

level (salary, benefits, vacation time) by comparing their input/reward ratio, that is, how much work they put in vs. how much reward they get in return, to that of another employee; an “other” (Adams, 1963, p. 424). If an employee perceives that his input/reward ratio differs from, or is unequal to that of a comparison other, emotional distress ensues and the degree of the distress is directly proportional to the perceived inequality.

Building on Adam’s research, Carrell and Dittrich (1978), Dittrich and Carrell (1976b) and Dittrich, Cougar, and Zawacki (1985) identify seven dimensions that constitute organizational fairness and claim that it is based on these dimensions that employees calculate their input/reward ratios and those of others:

- 1) Pay rules – the pay structure and administrative rules use to arrive at the pay structure;
- 2) Pay level – the perceived fairness of one’s pay relative to the pay of others *outside* of the organization;
- 3) Pay administration – the perceived fairness of supervisors in managing the rules for pay raises and promotions;
- 4) Rule administration – the perceived fairness of supervisors in maintaining acceptable behaviour in the workplace;
- 5) Work pace – the perceived fairness of supervisors in maintaining a reasonable pace of work activities;

6) Task distribution – the fairness with which supervisors assign tasks to their employees;

7) Latitude – the degree to which supervisors allow subordinates latitude for planning and autonomous decision-making.

In their study of the effects of organizational fairness on work outcome of retail salespeople, Dubinsky and Levy (1989) found that perceived fairness with regard to pay administration, pay rules, task distribution, and rule administration were positively related to greater job satisfaction and perceived fairness with regard to pay levels, pay rules, and task distribution was positively related to feelings of commitment and loyalty to an organization.

1. 2. 1. Critiques of Social Equity Theory

Equity Sensitivity

Research by Miles, Hatfield, and Huseman (1989) questions the notion that all employees are equally sensitive to equity and experience similar degrees of distress based on the degree of perceived inequity. They suggest instead that individual differences among employees may have an impact on Equity Theory's distress prediction and that perceptions of equity/inequity and degree of subsequent distress may not be consistent across the board. In their review of the reward allocation literature, for example, they determined that other norms seem to contradict the norm of equity. For example, demographic and psychological differences among employees may mediate their reactions to equity/inequity. Miles, et al. therefore propose that every

employee will react in consistent but individually different ways to perceived inequity because they have different expectations and preferences.

Miles, et al. (Huseman, Hatfield, and Miles, 1985, 1987, in Miles, Hatfield, and Huseman, 1989) were able to identify three types of employees based on their “equity sensitivity” (p. 581), which refers to the extent to which they are sensitive to equity/inequity. 1) Benevolents don’t mind if their input/outcome ratios are lower than those of others (in other words, they are satisfied with giving more and receiving less) (p. 582). They may, in fact, prefer it that way. 2) Equity Sensitives conform to traditional equity theory in that they prefer their input/outcome ratios to be equal to those of others (p. 582). 3) Entitleds prefer that their input/outcome ratios are higher than those of others (that is, they want to give less but receive more) (p. 582). Stephen Fineman (2000) supports this taking into account of personality types and individual differences:

Arguably, a full exploration of emotion in organizations that fails to take into account individuals’ biographies and unconscious processes is as untenable as an account that ignores social structures and wider cultural/economic processes (p.3).

Research Model Weaknesses

Three issues have been raised regarding the equity field research that puts the application of the input/outcome model into question (Carell & Dittrich, 1978). First, by asking respondents to compare certain inputs with certain outcomes, a cognitive process is forced on them that may or may not be in the process they would normally use; the variables and referent persons specified by the research parameter may not be those that are most meaningful or important to the research participant.

Second, exploratory field research (Leventhal, 1976) suggests that research participants perceive fair treatment based not only on pay and other forms of compensation, but also on the organization's system of allocating these rewards. In other words, research participants may feel that their present compensation is fair in comparison to some pre-defined referent, but based upon earlier experience or the experience of others, they may be dissatisfied.

Finally, in order to avoid confusing research participants, the questions posed during this type of field research are simplified; presenting only a limited-variable model of equity (using only pay as an outcome, for example). A multiple-variable model would be much more reflective of employees' experience. However, because it would be more difficult to operationalize, it is not often used.

Leventhal (1976) has also suggested that traditional interpretations of Equity Theory only employ a one-dimensional view of fairness: that fairness is achieved when rewards are in proportion to contribution – the merit principal. However, the theory seems to ignore other standards of justice. For example, the needs rule which dictates that employee rewards should be a function of their need, and when that is done, employees will consider the reward allocation to be fair, even if they do not receive what their colleagues receive. In contrast, the equality rule dictates that all employees should receive the same reward, regardless of need, and fairness exists when that is done (Leventhal, 1976b). As well, equity theory exaggerates the importance of fairness in social relationships. Concern for justice may be a factor, but it may be much weaker

than others. Therefore, an individual's concern for fairness must be viewed as one component within the larger framework of social behaviour.

1. 3. Emotion in the workplace

The above demonstrates a rich literature on expectation and sense of fairness in the workplace and the emotional consequences of breaches or perceived inequity.

However, this consideration of emotional consequences seems to lack a certain depth.

To me, what has been established thus far is a cause and effect model that elucidates how feelings of loyalty or trust are diminished in the face of an expectation breach.

However, I question the value of such models without a more systematic look at employee emotions; one that includes the multiplicity of factors acting on employees at any given time, the expression or manifestation of these employee emotions reactions, and most certainly, the ways in which these emotions are understood and experienced by the employees themselves.

1. 3. 1. Traditional Views of Emotion

The absence of the treatment of emotions in organizational research is consistent with the traditional perspectives on organizations that are either normative or rationalistic.

These views characterize organizations as primarily goal-oriented, problem-solving, decision-making settings with their own interests and strategies designed to meet their objectives (Flam, 1990). In this perspective, emotions are understood to be private and irrational, and therefore without a place in the public work world (Fineman, 1993, 1996, in Tracy, 2000).

The tendency to think in these dichotomous terms led Putnam and Mumby to consider the “Myth of Rationality” (1993). They see the splitting of rational thought and emotion as prevalent in much of Western culture. As a result of this split, certain concepts are aligned with rationality and others with emotionality. Reason/passion, cognition/affect, and thinking/feeling have been established as irreconcilable dichotomies. In organizations, rationality is revered while emotions are deemed as inappropriate. Fineman sees this perspective as the first of his three characterizations of the relationship between rationality and emotion, as it has evolved over time – “emotions interfere with rationality (2000, p.11)” and like Putnam and Mumby, he sees this position as deeply embedded in Western thought.

The second of Fineman’s (2000) characterizations of the relationship between emotion and rationality positions emotions as the servants of rationality; they facilitate the emergence of rationality, lubricate the decision-making process, and signal that which is worth thinking about. However, rationality remains dominant in the context of organizational studies. Emotions may now be understood to be prevalent, even omnipresent, though while they are no longer ignored or denied, efforts to contain, control, and use them have emerged. Arlie Hochschild’s (1983) seminal work on the way in which flight attendants manage their emotions led to considerable research into the way in which individual emotions are managed in order to make them appropriate for the workplace. This phenomenon, called “emotional labor” (Hochschild, 1983, p. 7), has been explained as the way roles and tasks exert overt and covert control over emotional displays (Putnam and Mumby, 1993) and constitutes a type of work in which employees are paid to enact a given set, or package, of emotions (Hochschild, 1983).

Organizations often, if not always, dictate the set of acceptable emotional states which may be displayed, usually as a substitute for employees' authentic/genuine feelings. Organizations rely upon these "display rules" (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987, 1989, 1990, in Putnam & Mumby, 1990, p. 37) to take the place of true emotions, as the latter are often unpredictable and varied in nature. Overall, organizations tend to require "niceness" and politeness at all times, which often requires employees to suppress any other emotions. This emotional labour becomes even harder, and organizational norms have to be even more strongly exerted when the emotions employees are required to express go against their *actual*, genuine feelings, though the amount of stress employees experience due to the gap between felt and feigned emotions varies across organizations and among employees. Therefore, related research has also been done into the ways in which employees deviate from these prescribed norms: "emotional displays" (Flam, 1990, p. 131), also referred to as "outbursts" (Flam, 1990, p. 135).

Prescribed emotional outbursts among employees can be expected when the emotional display rules are violated. This can occur when the "right" emotions are not displayed, when the displayed emotions are perceived as acts of defiance, or when norms, rules, and expectations conferred by an employee's rank in the organization are not followed.

Proscribed emotional outbursts among employees can be expected when strategic expectations are not met *in a way that damages the organization's image*, or when the emotional display rules themselves become a source of dissatisfaction. This can occur when a rule or norm is no longer working and is actually obstructing goal-achievement, rather than supporting it. In these cases, emotional outbursts may have a constructive

outcome. However, most of the time, proscribed outbursts will be viewed as defiant and met with a negative reaction (Flam, 1990).

Looked at this way, organizational rules and procedures are actually emotion-management rules, put in place to dictate how emotions should be constructed and displayed in order to ensure that the employees sustain the organization's self-definition as well as its image (Flam, 1990). Therefore, different corporate actors foster a different set of representative emotions, based on need and desired image.

However, the dichotomies created by the "real self vs. fake self" thinking that has previously characterized discussions about emotions in the workplace seems oversimplistic (Tracy, 2000). It supposes that the real problem of emotional labour is the stress or discomfort it causes the employee, called "emotive dissonance" by Hochschild (1983, in Tracy, 2000, p. 97). This thinking rests on the assumption that individual identity is external to or separate from the organization and pain or discomfort results when the real self conflicts with the performance in the workplace. It implicitly upholds the understanding of emotions as discrete, specific sets of manifested behaviours that can be controlled according to prescribed standards, even if doing so causes a certain degree of discomfort. However, recognizing emotions as present, but in need of control and manipulation via display rules, does not really integrate emotions into organizational conceptions, nor does it position them as legitimate aspects of the workplace dynamic.

Fineman's third characterization of the relationship between emotion and rationality also characterizes much of the current research into emotions in organizations: "emotions

and rationality entwine” (2000, p. 11). Fineman recognized not just the presence, but the importance of emotions in the workplace, leading him to characterize organizations as “emotional arenas” (Fineman, 2000, p.1), referring to the intense emotional activity that takes place during an average day at work. Fineman and others have recognized that not only are emotions inseparable from organizational settings, they actually help create and inform organizational process. In fact, it has been suggested that emotions constitute the “lifeblood” (Fineman, 2006, p. 675) of organizing; tying in inextricably with meaning-making and cognitive processes. Emotions have also been considered as the process through which members constitute their work environment and negotiate a shared reality, and not just an adjunct to work (Putnam and Mumby, 1993).

1. 3. 2. Defining Emotion

I would posit that at least part of the reason research into emotions has tended toward the superficial is because the concept of emotion is one that is very hard to define. Attempts to do just that have resulted in a variety of definitions and explanations that, while similar, never totally agree as to the nature of emotions. Klaus Scherer, one of the leading researchers in the field of emotion, believes that while this kind of conceptual and definitional discussion can be stimulating and help advance the field with regard to the conception and understanding of emotion, *“it can have stifling consequences for the advancement in the field and for collaborative research between different disciplines”* (2005, p. 697). Scherer himself proposed the component process model of emotion. He seems to have integrated the concepts put forth by Norman and integrated them into a more complete/integrative picture of emotional reaction; one that

I feel will be more useful for this current research. According to Scherer, an emotional reaction is

An episode of interrelated, synchronized changes in the states of all or most of the five organismic subsystems in response to the evaluation of an external or internal stimulus event as relevant to major concerns of the organism
(Scherer, 1987, 2001, in 2005, p. 697).

I was drawn to this definition as it incorporated both the physiological and psychological to create a complete picture of emotion. Scherer goes on to elaborate on all the stages of emotional reaction and at what level they occur.

Three of the components discussed have, according to Scherer (2005), had a long-standing status as modalities of emotion: expression, bodily symptoms & arousal, and subjective experience. The inclusion of a cognitive or informational processing component, however, is not consensual in the literature. There are many theorists who still prefer to see emotion and cognition as two independent, though interacting, systems. However, Scherer argues that all the subsystems mentioned above function independently most of the time and the special nature of emotional reactions is how appraisals lead to the coordination and synchronization of all these subsystems during the emotional episode.

Clearly, the area of emotions within organizations is forging ahead. What began as cursory looks at the emotions resulting from perceived breaches of the psychological contract and organizational equity, largely informed by the normative/rationalistic view of emotions, has moved toward a more integrative, discursive approach that suggests that it is via discourse itself that employees make sense of their emotions.

CHAPTER 2 - Problematique

Fineman's (2000) third characterization of emotions, along with the work of Putnam and Mumby (1993), underscores a basic assumption in the study of organizations: that emotions in organizational settings cannot be discussed without considering their interactive and discursive nature. Putnam and Mumby state that the shared meanings and cumulative experiences developed among employees are primarily created through language and interaction patterns. Edwards points out that people's discourse is rich and varied, full of contrasts and alternatives and is extremely useful in putting together a description of human action and interpersonal relations, via a host of discursive tactics such as recollection, reflection, and self-censorship. These accounts not only *illustrate* emotion-in-action, but go even further to actually *constitute* how life is thought about, experienced, and negotiated with others. This is because words themselves are discursive realities and therefore part of the nature of emotion.

We need the word "anger" in order to *be* angry because naming a feeling is a part of living that feeling. "Emotion" words are more than a label for the host of physiological and psychological reactions described by Scherer. These reactions mean little to us unless we connect them with words and the meanings assigned to those words because otherwise, we can neither understand them nor know what to do with them. In this way, the words we use to label emotions, not only describe what we are experiencing, but also *act back* on that experience, tying the words and the experience of emotions inextricably together. Therefore, discursive accounts taken directly from employees can provide important insight into the experience of emotion (Sturdy, 2003).

This shift from the normative/rationalistic perspective on emotions represents a shift away from their conception as isolated, subjective, unknowable, and transient; thereby negating the assumption that emotions cannot be studied in an empiric way due to their inaccessibility. If emotions are, in fact, constructed via discourse, then they can become objects of study, which moves the field of organizational communication forward by long strides. The goal of research into emotions, then, becomes not about understanding the underlying variables and causes, but rather gathering descriptive accounts of emotions that allow them to be brought to life (Sturdy, 2003).

However, this approach to studying emotion in organizations remains underdeveloped and there is a lot to be learned about the discursive and constitutive expression of emotions. My research interest lies in building on this growing body of work; looking at how emotions are talked about and also positioning emotional discourse as the process by which employees legitimize and make sense of their realities. I turn to the theory of sensemaking (Weick, 1995, 2005) as the theoretical framework for this research since it has long been understood to be the primary process by which meaning is developed; making it a strong basis for the study of how employees create meaning from their emotional experiences.

2. 1. Sensemaking

Sensemaking involves the ongoing retrospective development of plausible explanations for what people are doing or have done. Viewed as a significant process of organizing, sensemaking unfolds as a sequence in which people engage in ongoing circumstances

from which they extract cues and make plausible sense of, and enact order into, them (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005).

More simply, sensemaking is the process by which people organize in an effort to make sense of imprecise and unclear external cues in order to enact this sense back into the world and in so doing, make the world make sense (Weick, et al., 2005). Sensemaking is to be thrown into an ongoing, unpredictable, and unknowable series of events and to ask “*What’s the story?*” and then, once the nature of the story begins to emerge, “*What do I do next?*” (Weick, et al, 2005).

However, sensemaking is not about finding the truth or “getting it right” (Weick, et al, 2005). More important than a standard of accuracy is the continued redrafting of an emerging story so that it becomes more comprehensive, incorporates more of the observed data, and is more resilient in the face of criticism. In an important study of culture change Mills (2003, in Weick, et al, 2005) found that stories tend to be seen as plausible when they tap into an ongoing sense of current climate, are consistent with other data, facilitate ongoing projects, reduce equivocality, provide an aura of accuracy, and offer a potentially exciting future. In other words, organizational members do not need to accurately perceive the current situation or problems to solve them. They can act effectively simply by making sense of circumstances in ways that appear to move toward general long-term goals (Weick, et al, 2005).

2. 2. Sensemaking and expectation breach

Given that sensemaking is focused on equivocality, the search for meaning can be understood as a way to deal with uncertainty (Weick, et al, 2005). In this way, instances

when the current situation stands in contrast to that which is expected are catalysts for periods of intense focus on sensemaking. In essence, sensemaking is activated by question “*Same or different?*” When the situation is different, it can be experienced in multiple ways. However, the shared property is that in every case an expectation of continuity is breached. “*Same or different?*” questions tend to emerge under one of three conditions: situations involving the dramatic loss of sense, situations where the loss of sense is more mundane but no less troublesome, unfamiliar contexts where sense is elusive (Weick, et al., 1995). When there is a shift from feeling immersed in the flow of action to feeling that the flow has somehow become interrupted, sensemaking emerges as a way to either resume the interrupted flow, or, if that proves problematic/impossible, to identify alternate courses of actions (Weick et al, 2005).

Weick also discusses what he refers to as “cosmology episodes” (Weick, 1985, p. 51-52). These are situations in which the flow of everyday activity has been so thoroughly disrupted that the universe suddenly no longer seems to be the rational and orderly system it once was. What makes these cosmology episodes so dramatic and distressing is that the lack of sense is coupled with the loss of the capacity to re-establish sense (Weick, 1985, in Weick, 1993). For Weick, these represent “*vu jadé*” moments (p. 65). As opposed to “*déjà vu*” moments where everything seems familiar; as if they have happened before, in “*vu jadé*” moments nothing feels familiar and there does not appear to be any conceivable course of action to get out of the situation.

2. 3. The retrospective nature of sensemaking

A crucial characteristic of sensemaking is that equivocal situations are always in the process of being clarified, of being made sense of, *in reverse*. In other words, a situation gets defined *after* it has occurred. As Garfinkel explains it (1967, in Weick, 1995), agents discover the nature of the situations in which they are acting in the course of their actions. This means that to talk about sensemaking is to talk about reality as constantly in the process of being created. This idea stems from Schutz's (1967) discussion of "*the meaningful lived experience*":

It is, then, incorrect to say that my lived experiences are meaningful merely in virtue of their being experienced or lived through. Such a view would eliminate the tension between living experience within the flow of duration and reflection on the experience thus lived through... The reflective glance singles out an elapsed lived experience and constitutes it as meaningful. If afterward there occurs an intentional backward reference to the spontaneous Activity which engendered the experience as discrete unity, then it is by and through the Act of attention that meaningful behaviour is constituted (p. 70 & 71).

The key word in the above is "lived". The use of the past tense expresses the notion that people can know what they are doing only after they have done it. Therefore, sensemaking is an attentional process, but it is attention paid to that which has already occurred. Two elements complicate this process. First, whatever is occurring at the moment people begin to look backward will necessarily influence what is discovered during that backward glance. Second, because the past has already happened, it can only be invoked in the form of memory. Therefore, anything that affects the process of remembering will affect how those memories are understood and made sense of (Weick, 1995).

2. 4. The communicational nature of sensemaking and narrative theory

Communicational exchange (or talk) is considered to be the critical element of the sensemaking process (Weick, 1995, 2005) and it is via sensemaking that people enact (or create) their world, constituting it through verbal descriptions that are communicated to and negotiated with others. Closely related to sensemaking, and underscoring the importance of communicational exchange in sensemaking is “*sensegiving* (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991)”, the process of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality. Sensegiving can be considered a natural extension of sensemaking. Where sensemaking is concerned with understanding, sensegiving is concerned with influence and sharing of understanding. As sensemaking occurs, one will naturally engage in sensegiving. As one makes sense out of what was previously not understood, it would be expected that one would want to share that newfound insight; understanding he has carved from the “chaotic flood of information” (Holt, n.d., p. 8). This may be to influence others toward one’s own understanding or it simply might be a desire to share an analysis one finds particularly satisfying.

The communicational component of sensemaking and sensegiving is most often realized through narrativization (or the forming of narrative). This is likely because the narrative form allows for sequences of actions to be organized temporally that imparts a particular logic; forming a plot that explains equivocal events/outcomes (Brown, Stacey, and Nandhakumar, 2008).

Hayden White asserts that narrative is the means by which knowing, often an intangible, subjective experience, can be made shareable; communicable:

Narrative might well be considered a solution to a problem of general human concern, namely, the problem of how to translate knowing into telling, the problem of fashioning human experience into a form assimilable to structures of meaning that are generally human rather than culture-specific (White, 1980, p. 5).

Jerome Bruner (1991, 2004) also believes that turning experiences into discourse that can be understood by someone else is the primary way in which people make sense of them:

We organize our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative— stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing and not doing, and so on. Narrative is a conventional form, transmitted culturally... Unlike the constructions generated by logical and scientific procedures that can be weeded out by falsification, narrative constructions can only achieve 'verisimilitude'. Narratives, then, are a version of reality whose acceptability is governed by convention and 'narrative necessity' rather than by empirical verification and logical requiredness (Bruner, 1991, p. 4 - 5).

Bruner's primary thesis with regard to narrative is that we have no other way of describing lived time except via narrative. For him, lived time is not time measured by a calendar or a clock, but rather by the events that took place within it deemed meaningful by the research participant. Bruner also contends that narrative imitates life and life imitates narrative. By this he means that life is constructed via the same type of reasoned thought/thinking – ratiocination - as narrative. When someone talks about his/her life, it is a culmination of cognitive processes, a narrative achievement, rather than the recital of something unequivocally "there" to be expressed (2004). Bruner goes so far as to suggest that the processes that guide the creation and telling of life-narratives eventually gain enough power to actually structure experience; to organize

memory; and to segment and interpret the events that make up a life. In the end, he says: “*we become the autobiographical narratives by which we ‘tell about’ our lives* (2004, p. 694, italics in the original).”

In his exploration of narrativity, Bruner’s (1991) main concern is not simply how narrative is constructed, but rather, how it operates as an instrument; a tool in the construction of reality inside the minds of each and every person. To this end, Bruner outlined ten features of narrative:

1. *Narrative diachronicity*. A narrative is an account of events occurring over time. The time involved, however, is human time rather than abstract or clock time (Ricoeur, 1984-88, in Bruner, 1991). It is time that is made significant by the events that take place within it.
2. *Particularity*. Narratives reference particular happenings. Stories tend to fall into general types: boy-meets-girl, bully-gets-what’s-coming-to-him, etc, and the details of individual and particular narratives still reflect these broader and standardized types.
3. *Intentional state entailment*. Narratives are about people acting in a setting, and the things that happen to them must be relevant to their beliefs, desires, theories, values, and so on. But intentional states in narrative never fully determine the course of events, since a character with a particular intentional state might end up doing practically anything. Some measure of agency is always present in narrative, and agency presupposes choice—some element of freedom.

4. *Hermeneutic composability*. The accounts of the storyteller and the events that are recounted are selected and shaped in terms of a story that then contains them. In other words, a story can only be realized when its parts and the whole can “live” together.

5. *Canonicity and breach*. Not every recounted sequence of events constitutes a narrative, even when it is diachronic, particular, and organized around intentional states. For a story to be worth telling, it must be about how an implicit canonical script has been breached, violated, or deviated from in a manner that harms the legitimacy of the canonical script.

6. *Referentiality*. The acceptability of a narrative cannot depend on its accurate reflection of reality. Narrative truth is judged by its *verisimilitude* rather than its *verifiability*.

7. *Genericness*: The characteristic of narrative whereby the story can be classified as a genre.

8. *Normativeness*. For a story to be tellable it must rest on or refer to a breach of conventional expectation. Narrative is necessarily normative because a breach presupposes a norm.

9. *Context sensitivity and negotiability*. The characteristic whereby narrative requires a negotiated role between author or text and reader, including the assigning of a context to the narrative. In fact, it is the context-dependence of narrative accounts that permits cultural negotiation.

10. *Narrative accrual*. Refers to how stories get joined together to form a sort of whole. Narratives accrue, and eventually begin to form something that can be called a culture or a history or even, a tradition.

Bruner's fifth feature of narrativity, *canonicity and breach*, is the most relevant for the current research. He contends that not every sequence of events constitutes a narrative nor is every sequence of events worth telling, even if it meets other criteria. For a story to be worth telling it has to be about how an implicit script, or norm, has been breached. In other words, for a story to be worth telling something unexpected has to happen.

This usually involves a "precipitating event" (1991, p. 11), which tends to be very conventional and easily recognizable by members of a culture (ex: a women is cheated on or an innocent man is charged with a crime). He also brings up the important point that individual stories must blend, to a certain extent, into the whole of life stories.

Tellers and listeners must share some common understanding of what constitutes a life. Otherwise, if the rules of "life-telling" are completely arbitrary, then tellers and listeners are sure to be alienated from one another by being unable to grasp what the other is talking about/referring to.

My research goal is to look at employees' sensemaking processes, specifically the communication aspect of sensemaking that takes shape through narrative and story-telling, in order to learn something more about how emotions are constructed and made sense of via discourse.

CHAPTER 3 – Methodology

3. 1. Atarco: The case

Atarco is a sales-centered organization in the IT industry. Atarco follows a business model similar to that of other IT resale companies. It partners with IT manufacturers to expedite and facilitate sales in the business to business market.

Atarco's business is primarily conducted via telesales. It has approximately 90 employees whose sole job is to call existing and potential customers and to make sales – the Account Executives (AEs). The AEs each have daily, weekly and monthly quotas to hit, their calls are recorded and often monitored to gauge performance, and the amount of time they spend on the phone is measured daily, as is the percentage of their customer lists contacted every day. As well, they earn a commission on every sale so their base salaries are relatively low. This means that just one or two days of poor sales mean a smaller paycheck.

The AEs do have access to a number of perks. First, Atarco offers a number of sales promotions aimed at encouraging activity on the sales floor. These sales promotions might be daily, weekly, or monthly. For example, a daily promotion might be that every employee who sells \$1,000 worth of X products receives a \$50 gift card. A monthly promotion might reward AEs who exceed their quotas by a given percentage. For longer-term promotions, prizes are often quite significant, ranging from cash bonuses, to electronics, to trips. Further, there are often several sales promotions running at any given time, so the rewards and bonuses can really add up.

Beyond Atarco's internally-run sales promotions, many of their partners also offer incentives. For example, one manufacturer might have a rewards program which gives AEs cash loaded onto a credit card if they sell X amount of a featured product. Other manufacturers offer similar incentives with prizes including trips, electronics, and cash to AEs who make them the most profit in a given period of time.

Because Atarco's primary goal is sales, and the AEs are responsible for making the sales, they are management's priority. Every time the directors sit down to determine how to maximize sales or increase profits, specific attention is paid to supporting and rewarding the sales employees. The organization lives and dies by AE activity and it conducts itself accordingly.

All non-sales employees fall under the category of "support" employees, despite the fact that the non-sales staff vary greatly in terms of their responsibilities, ranging from HR and finance to marketing and product management. Regardless of their position, however, the support staff are quite literally there to support sales, and by extension, the AEs. Everything support employees do is aimed at making the AEs' jobs easier, whether it is compiling client call lists, designing sales incentives, or negotiating discounts and rebates with the various manufacturer partners.

However, they don't have access to the same perks as the AEs. They are never eligible for any of the sales promotions offered by Atarco or by the manufacturer partners.

Further, because of the way their work is structured, they are not able to earn commissions. As well, it happens quite often that if AEs fail to perform as expected, the support employees are held responsible.

Informal conversations with support employees revealed that this has led to problems with morale and motivation. When support employees signed their contracts and agreed to work for this organization, they expected to be relevant, respected members of the team. The terms of the contract were explicitly laid out on paper, and implicitly laid out in their minds. They believed that they would serve the company as best they could and in return, the company would respect their contribution and reward them accordingly. However, this is not their reality. The following example illustrates this. One day, after working for several hours on a project aimed at making a particular sales pitch easier for the sales reps, two support employees were commenting that no matter what they did, it wouldn't be good enough. One said:

It's like we offer [the AEs] everything on a silver platter. We tell them who to call and what to tell them, we create flyers and documents to facilitate the sale, and we create promotions to incite and encourage them. And yet, we know that if the expected sales outcome is not achieved, we will be the ones to turn around and say 'Oh, I'm so sorry, we didn't plan this well enough, it's our fault. We'll do better next time (Personal communication, Atarco employee).

Because I experienced this imbalance with regard to the support employees' roles and witnessed how it gave rise to continuous and frequent experiences of expectation breach, I believe it presents an excellent field for the current research.

3. 2. Data Collection

My research participants were selected from a single organization, making this exploration a specific case study. I used an organization that I worked for from March 2008 to April 2009. While using an organization where I once worked as my research field could have potentially posed a problem to the validity of the research, as this alters the traditional interview setting where the researcher is more removed from the

participants, often with no previous knowledge of them, let alone a high degree of familiarity with them and their experiences. However, in this case, I found it to be not only a sound choice, but particularly advantageous. First, having worked in the organization, I was personally familiar with how it functions and the nature of its corporate culture. Of course, I needed to base my analysis on the data collected from my research participants, but having a certain *a priori* knowledge of the organization helped me interpret the data in a way that an outsider may not have been able to. In order to prevent myself from biasing the research participant during the interview, I made every attempt to show that I understood what the research participant was saying without *engaging* in the conversation. For example, if a research participant talked about a situation involving a certain manager, I refrained from talking about any personal experience I may have had with the same manager.

Second, having once worked at the organization, I had the opportunity to establish trust relationships with many of the employees who I approached to become research participants. This gave me a few distinct advantages. First, contacting potential research participants was facilitated as I could email or call previous colleagues and work acquaintances directly, rather than having to go through mitigating channels. Second, there was already a level of trust established between me and the research participant because he/she knew that I had shared similar experiences, and therefore could understand more readily what he/she was describing.

Further, my research participants knew through having worked with me that I could be trusted not to divulge or repeat anything they told me that might be sensitive or that

might be negatively-sanctioned by management should it learn of it. I believe this to be a very important point, as talking candidly about a current employer can cause a lot of stress to employees and actually dissuade them from agreeing to participate. As it was, of the more than 20 employees I contacted, only four were willing to participate, despite being assured complete anonymity and confidentiality. I believe this was due to the fact that in my request, I told them that the research dealt, at least in part, with perceptions of equity in the workplace. It is therefore quite possible that potential participants were too nervous to discuss this issue with regard to a current employer. Added to this source of reluctance may have been the fact that generally, people don't like to talk about their emotions, particularly in settings as sterile and academic as research interviews are often perceived to be.

The employees I contacted to participate in my research were all non-sales staff from the organization, which was a sales-centered workplace. Having been a non-sales employee myself, I had a closer rapport with this group of people. In the end, I conducted four in-depth interviews with non-sales employees from different areas of the organization. Derek works in facilities, Caroline is on a team responsible for implementing a new program, Ben is a graphic designer on the marketing team, and Connor is a technical software specialist. In the initial request, it was made clear to potential research participants that their participation was entirely voluntary, and their input would remain anonymous and confidential. All necessary ethical considerations were attended to, and all research participants signed a consent form prior to being interviewed.

I opted to use interviews to collect data as this allowed me to interact directly with the employees, something not possible with questionnaires or other, less personal data-collection methods. Further, because during an interview research participants are not likely to recount their experiences in a cold, emotion-free way, I conceptualized the interview, as Alvesson suggests, as a type of performance setting (2003), where, to a certain extent, employees could engage in sensemaking as they found ways to tell me about their emotional experiences. During the interviews, I tried to create a situation where the research participant would feel at ease structuring his answers in narrative form. Asking research participants to elaborate on certain points or to provide anecdotes or examples to illustrate their points allowed me to access the ways in which they frame the events or situations they were describing. The questions I asked, as can be seen in the grid (see appendix 1), were aimed at putting the research participant in the right frame of mind to discuss emotional reactions without actually asking them to *“Tell me about an emotional experience you had at work.”* The questions were also geared to prime respondents toward emotion by asking them to differentiate mundane, work-related issues from more emotional issues, as well as how they decide which co-workers they can confide in when discussing issues of a personal or emotional nature

3. 3. Narrative Analysis

I chose to undertake narrative analysis to examine and understand the data collected during the interviews, based on the work of Bruner (1991, 2004), as discussed above, and Greimas (1983, 1989), as will be discussed. I also mobilized the work of Barbara Czarniawska (2000). According to her, a research participant may retell narratives that circulate in his/her given site of practice, or the interview itself may become a site for

narrative production (see also Alvesson, 2003). Further, Czarniawska contends that narrative constructs are not only a way for research participants to convey meaningful insights, they are *the only way*. She cites Mishler who said that “*Telling stories is far from unusual in everyday conversation and it is apparently no more unusual for interviewees to respond to questions with narratives if they are given some room to speak* (Mishler, 1986, in Czarniawska, 2000, p. 14)”. However, Czarniawska explains that research interviews will not *necessarily* evoke narratives. In fact, interviews may cause the conscious avoidance of narratives since they are more likely to be regarded as settings for logical, scientific, knowledge production, something not achievable by narrative. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the interviewer to “*activate narrative production* (Holstein and Gubrium, 2007, in Czarniawska, 2000, p. 14)”.

Drawing out narrative in a setting that seems more primed for logical representation involves emphasizing the characters at play and how/where they fit into the account; putting an emphasis on “*member categorization* (Sacks, 1992, in Czarniawska, 2000, p. 14)”. In an interview setting, if the researcher suggests a tentative or initial character categorization or description, the research participant has to either agree and go along with it, or disagree and offer an alternative account (Czarniawska, 2000). The other way to draw out narrative is to focus on the plot. Narratives that simply follow straight chronology are of little value to a researcher. Rather, narratives must involve transformations from one state to another, as discussed at great length by Greimas (1983, 1989), or a breach in the normative script (Bruner, 1991). The key to evoking narrative, then, is to fish for a missing element in the plot. Once the characters and plot have been established, a story has been constructed (Czarniawska, 2000).

3. 4. A. J. Greimas

Building on the work of Vladimir Propp (1968), who analyzed the basic plot components of Russian folk tales to identify their simplest irreducible narrative elements, and Levi-Strauss (1958) who examined the structure of myths, Greimas posited that there is a structure inherent to all narratives. In other words, he believed that each and every narrative comprises a series of components that are the same, and unfold in the same way, in any narrative recounting (Groupe d'entervernes, 1984). For Greimas, all narratives have meaning because the narrated events are not randomly dispersed. Rather, they are tied together in such a way that they make up a series or string of narrative programs that reveal a recognizable direction or intentionality to the narrative. In other words, narratives can be and are used as a sensemaking device because they define relationships between actions (selecting events and linking them together) and between the various people that are invoked in the narrative (Greimas, et al, 1989).

Greimas was a well-know semiotician, and his work in semiotics informed his work on narrative and narrative analysis in a significant way. His position was that a semiotic analysis of any narrative account consists of recognizing and describing the differences between the different states described in the account. That is, an account presents as a series of states and the transformations that lead from one state to the next. Therefore, narrativity is simply the succession of states and transformations - this is what creates meaning (Groupe des entervernes, 1984).

States refer to instances of “being” (etre) or “having” (avoir) with regard to the relationship between a subject (S) and an object (O). It is important to note here that subject and object, in this context, refer to interdependent roles, rather than the more

traditionally understood person (subject) and thing (object). Transformations refer to instances of “doing” (faire) with regard to the passage from one state of being or having to another. There are only two possible types of transformations:

Conjunction: $S \cup O \rightarrow S \cap O$

Disjunction: $S \cap O \rightarrow S \cup O$

The transformation from conjunction to disjunction or vice versa represents the realization of a required action and is referred to as Performance. For example, in the classic fairytale, the princess goes from being imprisoned to being free thanks to the prince rescuing her – the required action needed to transform from one state to another. This succession from one state to another due to the performance of an action is what Greimas refers to as a Narrative Program (Groupe des entervernes, 1984).

The ability of an agent to realize the required action (and thus the transformation) rests on his/her competence. This competence includes wanting-to-do, having-to-do, knowing-how-to-do, and being-able-to-do the required action. To refer back to the example above, in order to rescue the princess, the prince must be brave, strong, determined, clever, etc. He may also have been given a magic wand or other magical object by a helpful fairy or wizard. Essentially, any person or thing that facilitates the performance of the action is referred to as the adjuvant. Any person or thing that hinders or blocks his performance of the action is referred to as an adversary (Groupe d'entervernes, 1984).

Greimas' theoretical Narrative Program is the primary principle around which his Narrative Schema is organized. The Narrative Schema is made up of four parts. Performance (FAIRE ETRE) is the central component of this sequence and, as explained above, competence (ETRE de FAIRE) is the prerequisite for performance. Included in every narrative is also the catalyst that makes the action necessary. A breach in the normal order of things is experienced, which initiates the manipulation phase (FAIRE FAIRE) which deals with having-to-do or wanting-to-do. In other words, an identified need or want makes the action necessary. This phase usually involves a sender – the one who confirms the need to perform the required or desired action; one who exercises a certain type of power over the subject. The aim of this exertion of power is to produce a fiduciary contract in which the sender outlines what needs to be done and the subject agrees to the terms. This contract is grounded in a reciprocal trust, particularly for the subject, as the promise made by the sender can only be realized after the required action has taken place (Budniakiewicz, 1992). Finally, after the required action is completed, the sender is responsible for recognizing and evaluating the transformed state(s) and ultimately determining if the action was carried out as outlined and that the resulting state truly is as it appears to be. This is the sanction phase (ETRE de l'ETRE). The fiduciary contract is again invoked at this stage as while the sender is evaluating the truth of the final state, he is also determining whether the terms of the contract were properly fulfilled. The sanction phase also involves the reward or punishment following the completion (or not) of the action (Groupe d'entervernes, 1984).

Put into a temporal order, the Narrative Schema can be summarised as follows:

Phase 1 Manipulation (faire faire)	Phase 2 Competence (être du faire)	Phase 3 Performance (faire être)	Phase 4 Sanction (être de l'être)
<p>The subject is made to do something/ given a task</p> <p>The sender and the subject enter in a fiduciary contract</p>	<p>The subject draws on the necessary skills to realize the task</p>	<p>The subject realizes the task</p>	<p>The fulfillment of the fiduciary contract is also determined.</p> <p>The performance is evaluated and the subject is rewarded or punished accordingly</p>

Greimas' approach to narrative provides one way of operationalizing Bruner's narrative theory; because he goes beyond saying that narrativity is present in discourse and is used for structuring and even creating meaning. Rather, Greimas provides a type of strategy for actually breaking down and analyzing narratives, making his approach a useful methodological model.

CHAPTER 4 – Data Analysis

4.1. Narrative Selection and Categorization

The narratives I chose to analyze for this research were taken from interview transcripts after many thorough readings. The selected excerpts represent, I believe, the most complete and meaningful units. They are accounts that if removed from the rest of the interview context continue to make sense and communicate something about the experience of emotion. Further, during the close reading of the selected narrative units, two very clear categories emerged. There were those narratives that told of negative emotional experiences and those that told of positive experiences. It is for this reason that I have presented them in this way. As well, another theme emerged that was neither positive nor negative, per se. This was the theme of safety or security, and is therefore treated in a separate section toward the end of this analysis.

4.2. Narratives expressing negative emotions

This first section includes narratives expressing negative emotions (usually frustration, disappointment, and anger) in the face of an expectation breach which either prevented the subject from being able to perform the required or desired action or made it significantly more difficult.

Derek's cancer narrative

“... I guess in the spring, I was diagnosed with cancer... and I had to have surgery to have the tumour removed and Cathy wanted me to use my vacation days. So, I had 15 days of accumulated time because we had done a huge project to divide the building – we have tenants now... So I worked my butt off to do it. I had 15 days in the bank and they made me use my 15 days, my sick days, and then they wanted me to go on unemployment. Um, so finally one night, I think at 10 o'clock at

night, I had a chat with Sally and said ‘this is ridiculous, I’m doing my job, I’m working from home, I’m getting phone calls...’ so she gave me, I think, six days back. But when I phoned payroll they said ‘well, Cathy said you have to use your vacation.’ So, how does that make a person feel? You know? You just got diagnosed... just diagnosed with cancer, you’re still doing your job, you know? Uh, the day after surgery I was on the phone with Peter, doing everything... So I think that’s a pretty good example... And then, uh, I can tell you that I had to go for radiation, and I ended up on unemployment for eight or ten weeks. Company refused to pay me. [Pause]. So how does that make a person feel?”

In this narrative, the breach that violates the order of things is Derek being diagnosed with cancer. Therefore, Derek’s doctors initiate the manipulative phase by telling Derek that surgery is required to remove the tumour – this is the action that will restore normalcy and order. In terms of his competence (his ability to perform the action), Derek discussed how he “*worked his butt off*” to divide the building to accommodate new tenants and therefore had 15 vacation days owed to him. The fact that he had time set aside made it possible for him to get his surgery without any negative effect on his work schedule, nor his salary. However, in this narrative he invoked a powerful adversary who kept him from the required action: Atarco’s management. It told him that he had to use his vacation and sick days for treatment even though this time off was supposed be a reward for his extra work. In terms of an adjuvant, someone who helped him perform the action, Sally appeared to play that role when she told him he could have six days of vacation back. However, the final judgement; the telling of how things really are (the sanction), was handed down by payroll (speaking for Cathy) when they told Derek that regardless of the six days he had gotten back, he had to use all his vacation and sick days. This sanction also nullified any efforts previously made by the

adjuvant. Because the action HAD to be performed despite being denied permission to take any time off, the consequences of this sanction were the loss of eight to ten weeks pay and significant anger and frustration experienced by Derek at the lack of compassion he was shown, indicated by the rhetorical “*How does that make a person feel?*” uttered twice in the short narrative.

Clearly, in this narrative, the first breach is that Derek was diagnosed with cancer. However, there is a second breach which is the treatment he receives from management. The judgement passed down by payroll/Cathy that he has to use his vacation and sick days leads to the consequences it does because, I believe, it goes against our cultural norm of showing compassion to someone who is facing a serious, potentially life-threatening illness. And while the research participant never explicitly states the emotions he experienced, the implication is made clear by the rhetorical “*So how does that make a person feel?*” This question appears to me to be an implicit suggestion of the negative emotions he experienced as well as a strong negative sanction of the organization’s behaviour. In a sense, he is also telling me that the organization’s behaviour in this instance was completely at odds with what he expected, and what was reasonable to expect according to societal norms.

Derek’s window narrative

“Atarco is too frugal to allow me to do my job properly. And they don’t understand, when you own a \$13 million building there are investments that are required... Silly example. I remember we had a window with about 6 inches of water turning green, and they wouldn’t give me the budget to change it. This is \$1000, not even, \$800, and it was like pulling teeth to get the money. I think it was the CIO, before he became the CIO, Stan Smith, when he came in to town and showed him and he

went ‘This is ridiculous. Change it.’ But at local, Cathy or Daniel, they don’t understand.”

The breach in this narrative; that which disturbs the order of things, is the leak in one of the windows where water is collecting and turning green. The manipulative phase is initiated by Derek himself who positions himself as both sender and agent, with the mission of getting the window fixed. He is the sender in that he takes it on himself to fix the window; no one tells him or asks him to do it. It is his *conscience professionnelle* that tells him that it needs to be done. However, it can also be argued that Derek only takes it upon himself because it is his job to attend to these kinds of problems.

Therefore, in a sense, the organization is the sender, because they hired Derek in that role and designated his responsibilities. It is just that in this case, the organization has not explicitly asked Derek to perform this specific action.

Derek should have had all the necessary competencies to perform the required action given that he has the knowledge, the expertise, and the responsibility to fix problems that pose a risk to the building. However, Cathy and Daniel, the finance director, are invoked as adversaries who hinder his ability to perform the required action by not understanding the cost associated with maintaining such a large building and denying him the necessary funds. What is interesting here is that the sender and the adversary appear to be represented by the same people. Given the role they assigned him, it would be reasonable for Derek to expect that when a problem emerges with the building, he would be supported in his attempt to fix it. This contradiction can only increase Derek’s frustration as the very people who hired him to keep the building in

good shape are preventing him from fixing a problem with the building, thus his assertion that “*They don’t understand.*”

The adjuvant in this narrative comes in the form of Stan Smith who empowers Derek to fix the problem by getting him the funds he needs. It is also Stan Smith who passes the final judgement (sanction) that the problem *is* real and *does* require attention. There is also an element of self-sanction as Derek feels as though he failed to perform the action that he needed to perform. This feeling that he was unable to restore order may add to his negative emotions.

Connor’s feedback narrative

“Well, I got a voicemail from a customer directly saying, you know, ‘We’re really happy, thanks for your help’, mentioning my name, so I forwarded back to my manager at the time, I don’t remember who it was, and, uh, and they said ‘Congratulations’ and that was it... I assumed that things like this would play a positive role in my reviews, but they don’t. To my perception.”

The deviation from the normal order of things in this narrative is actually at the level of sanction. This manipulative phase is initiated by Connor himself, as he tasks himself with doing the best job possible for his client. As with Derek, it is his *conscience professionnelle* that motivates him to do so. It can also be suggested here that he only takes it upon himself because it is his job to attend to client relations. Therefore, the organization is implicitly framed as the sender, because they hired Connor into that role and designated his responsibilities. Connor’s competence in providing his client with good service is implied by the fact that client is happy with the work he did and goes so far as to leave him a message in which he praises and thanks him. However, for reasons that are not made clear in the narrative, perhaps because they are unclear to

the research participant, even though he performs the required action and gets corroboration from an important outside source (the client), his manager fails to recognize this good work.

As an agent of the organization, his manager has the power to pass the final judgement. Therefore, his failure to recognize the work Connor did is almost a statement that the action was not, in fact, performed appropriately at all. The incongruence of the manager's judgement and the client's satisfaction is startling and distressing for Connor and his feelings of frustration and disappointment seem to stem directly from it. As he says: *"Well, the company's stressing this 'value your teammates', um, 'celebrate your wins' but it's just in talk. They don't actually put that in practice."* Given this, I also suspect that Connor will be reluctant to try to perform this action again.

This breach is perhaps more disturbing than some of the others due to the fact that the company had previously gone out of its way to set up the expectation that a job done well would be recognized and rewarded. However, it was an agent of that same company that then breached the expectation. It wasn't just an implicit expectation. It was made explicit; held up as a guiding principle of the organization, and then violated by the same people who established it.

Ben's narrative about a colleague

"He was talking... we were just talking about our jobs and then he's going to start to say 'You know, Ben, I'm so fed up, I'm not getting paid properly, everywhere else I should get like this, job description doesn't match [what I'm actually doing], my boss wants me to do this, this, and this and I told him if you want me to do this, this, and this, you should pay me like this and they don't'. And they keep on coming up with excuses, too, because Atarco, they always encourage you to try to get

higher up there... to prosper and when the opportunity arises, they won't give it to the person. And Walter actually took some steps to... he actually talked to people about it and said 'listen, like, I like my job and everything but this is ridiculous. We've got to try...' and at the end he got so fed up that he quit and he got another job elsewhere."

The breach in the order of things in this case is actually an amalgamation of issues. It's as though Walter finally had enough of all the little breaches (i.e. not getting paid appropriately for the work he does, lacking alignment between his actual job and the description he was given, etc.). Perhaps there was some event that represented "the straw that broke the camel's back" or perhaps his patience or tolerance just ran out. Regardless, Walter's patience running out initiated the manipulative phase in which he decided to make some changes to his current work conditions. Walter is thus both the sender and the subject in this narrative. Interestingly, the action he tasks himself with performing is at once one that he *wants* to do and one that he *has* to do. He undertakes this mission because he wants to see some improvements to his current situation. As his narrative indicates, however, his failure to perform the required action precipitates his leaving the company, thus elevating the status of something he wanted to something he needed.

Atarco's management had previously established the necessary competencies by stressing their interest in seeing employees move up in the company and "*prosper*". However, here again, the adversary proves to be Atarco's management who did not allow him to improve his situation, despite their claims to want to do so. In the end, despite going to management to explain his concerns and to seek out a solution, he

fails to perform the action. Atarco's management then passes the final judgement that the status quo is acceptable and will be maintained.

However, Walter also sanctions the organization's apparent hypocrisy, which appears to be the source of his negative feelings. In fact, in this case he gets so frustrated and angered that he leaves the company and goes to work somewhere else, as though telling them that their behaviour was intolerable.

Interestingly, while I did ask Ben to tell me about the experiences of his colleagues with the organization, it seems reasonable to suppose that Ben would choose to tell a story that resonates with him – perhaps because it echoes his experience. Therefore, it seems possible that the breaches experienced by Walter were of concern to Ben, as well. Therefore, by telling me that Walter got so fed up he left the company even though he liked his job, Ben is actually justifying the strength and depth of his own similar feelings.

Connor's manager narrative

“... I've talked to her about the way that upper management has ideas that never get to the floor, the sales floor, the lack of communication between departments... And, um, that's what I said, I was like 'Look, I'm gonna be honest with you, these are things that are really frustrating and I find that there's this big view of the company, where it needs to go, and all these little things are missed. Yeah, this is a great model that we're going to get here, but getting there, we're missing these crucial steps...”

“Mmhmm”.

“And there's steps that are being missed. And she said 'Oh, well...' [Laughs]. It's quite funny because instead of... [dealing with my concern] she would just start venting about how many hours she had to

work and the overtime she put in, to me. Which is like, 'What are you doing? You're my manager, you know, don't vent to your subordinates. It's not professional and you should be doing it to your manager... Yeah, cuz the expectation of me venting to my manager is I expect my manager to be able to do something about it; change these policies.... Which is, I think, natural to expect that upper manager makes the rules so they can change them. But, if she's venting to me I can't do anything about it, so, like, why overload me with... why load me up with this stuff?"

Much like the previous narrative about Walter, the breach in this story seems to be an amalgamation of frustrations that, for some reason, reach a critical point. This initiates the manipulation phase in which Connor tasks himself with going to talk to his manager about some of his concerns, presumably so they could be resolved. What makes him competent to perform this action is that he knows the chain of command. That is, he knows where he needs to go or who he needs to see to air a complaint or discuss an issue. The adversary in this narrative is his manager, and she acts as a double obstacle. First, she dismisses his concerns rather offhandedly, as demonstrated by her saying "*oh well*" rather than engaging in a conversation about them. In so doing, she shrugs off her role as his superior; as one who can change his situation, leaving Connor in a difficult position as he believed that going to her with his concerns was the appropriate thing to do. Given that this turned out not to be the case, it is likely that Connor feels very helpless. If the person who is supposed to help refuses to help, it can be very distressing.

Second, she actually begins to vent her own problems, and in so doing, hands him issues that he is unable to deal with. This serves as the more serious and distressing breach, as by doing this, she is in essence turning the whole hierarchy established by

the organization on its head. Connor actually articulates this quite well when he says: *“Yeah, cuz the expectation of me venting to my manager is I expect my manager to be able to do something about it; change these policies.... Which is, I think, natural to expect that upper manager makes the rules so they can change them. But, if she’s venting to me I can’t do anything about it, so, like, why overload me with... why load me up with this stuff?”* This role reversal represents a significant expectation breach based not only on the norms established by the organization, but by the deeply ingrained societal norms that in work settings, complaints and concerns must be directed upward in the hierarchy.

Further, this narrative suggests that his frustration goes beyond the breach of the traditional boss/employee relationship. Connor adds that not only has his boss breached organizational and societal norms by venting downward in the hierarchy, but since he has not been empowered (by her or anyone else) to help or do anything about her concerns, the cumulative effect is, therefore, that not only are his original concerns not dealt with, he now has been handed additional issues, causing him to leave the interaction more burdened than when he arrived.

The sanction comes from his manager, as she indicates that his issues are not going to be discussed. But Connor also sanctions the manager’s actions with his anger and frustration at the breach of a highly ingrained norm: *“You’re my manager, you know, don’t vent to your subordinates. It’s not professional and you should be doing it to your manager...”*

Sally not caring

“Um... I was talking with Sally and she just turned around and said ‘Derek, I just don’t care.’ She’s overloaded, she’s got too much work, and I can’t remember what the subject was but she just said ‘I don’t care. Do whatever you want. I’m at my wits end’.”

The manipulative phase wherein Derek determines that he needs to have a conversation with the Human Resources director is initiated by something not represented in the story. As in Connor’s story above, Derek is empowered to perform this action by the structure that the organization has set up. According to this structure, Sally should have been the one to help him, or at least listen to him and take his concerns seriously. However, she proves to be a significant obstacle hindering Derek’s required action, as she simply does not do what she is supposed to do. Also similar to Connor’s story, Sally shrugs off her role as his superior; as one who can change his situation, leaving Derek unclear on how to proceed. But Sally goes a step further than Connor’s manager. Rather than tacitly sidestepping or avoiding her responsibility with a dismissive or placating comment, Sally explicitly states that she doesn’t care about what he is telling her. This represents a breach on three levels. The first level is that she is unwilling or unable to perform the role that has been designated to her by the organization. The second level is that she actually tells Derek that she is not going to do it. For me, the fact that she verbalizes the fact that she will not perform her role intensifies the breach. The third level is that she tells Derek he should just do what he wants, which is obviously not a viable option. While she may not mean that literally, the fact that she says it indicates her dismissal of the entire process the organization has

put into place and a refusal to maintain the hierarchy that was instituted to maintain order and efficiency.

It is therefore Sally who passes down the final judgement in this story: that Derek is not going to get the help he wants.

Caroline not getting credit from management

“And so... I’m part of this project, right? And that’s my full time job. Like, I’m not supposed to be doing anything else. And I found out that my former departments were short-staffed. I told Rachel, who’s my boss, I took the initiative and I said ‘You know what? They’re short-staffed, I don’t have a lot of work, I’m just going to go and help them. They need the help.’ And I still see them as my team, because I’m close with a lot of people on that team, so I just took the initiative and I started helping. And, like, I told Jack (her former departments’ manager) ‘FYI, I’m helping your team.’ He’s like, ‘Oh, ok, good.’ That was it. Do you know what I mean? Like, I think when somebody especially does something that’s not even what they’re supposed to be doing, there should be some sort of recognition. And I’m not even talking about, like, a gift card or anything. Just tell me that they appreciate me, just tell me that I’m doing a good job. You know, like, it’s something that’s free. Right? They just don’t do it.”

Caroline’s story is very similar to that of Connor’s above. The manipulative phase in which Caroline determines the need to go above and beyond her job description is initiated by her recognition that her previous work teams are short-staffed and struggling to get all their work done. Therefore, she decides to help them out. Her competency is clear as she explains that she used to work on those teams and knows how to do the job. She also appears to have been given the necessary clearance from her current boss. So while she is able to perform the task, she does not receive the sanction she expected or desired from her old boss. By saying “*Oh, ok, good*” he does not recognize

the extra work she did on his behalf or even thank her for her help. In fact, he makes it sound as though he expected her to step in and help. He is also the one who sanctions her performance; he passes the judgement that Caroline did not go out of her way to help out her former teammates, but only did what she “should” have done given the situation. This causes Caroline to feel undervalued, taken advantage of, and consequently, frustrated. As she intimated, she didn’t want a trophy or a parade held in her honour, but some recognition of the extra steps she took would have been important to her.

4. 3. Narratives expressing positive emotions

Ben confronting management

“...My job description did not match at all what I was doing and like, after three months I went to go see them and confronted them about it, because like, I’m not the type of guy who likes confrontation, to be honest, but, I’m not going to be scared to speak up if I think things are unfair. Do you know what I mean?... So, after three months, I walked in there and I said ‘Listen, look at my job description, look what I’m doing, this does not match whatsoever.’ And they agreed. And the way it goes though, the bigger the company is, the bigger it is, the harder it is to get what you want cuz they have to go through all these legal things. It’s not like if it’s a small company you say ‘Listen, I should be making this’ and he’s like, ‘You’re right’ and just does it. So they agreed, actually, and they gave me a raise...”

In this narrative, Ben’s concerns with the discrepancy between his job description and his actual job as well as his dissatisfaction with his salary reach a critical point for some reason not indicated in the narrative. However, it initiates a manipulative phase in which Ben takes it upon himself to rectify the situation by discussing it with management. His competency to perform this action is indicated by his willingness to be confrontational when necessary. As he says: “... *I’m not the type of guy who likes*

confrontation, to be honest, but, I'm not going to be scared to speak up if I think things are unfair. Do you know what I mean?" In this narrative, Ben is able to perform the desired action, which is confirmed when management agrees that he is not being paid as he should be and gives him a raise. This act of giving him a raise acts as its sanction, as it passes the judgement not only that Ben's request was reasonable, but also acts as proof that he was able to properly complete the action he set out to do. As a result of this success, Ben is pleased and somewhat encouraged that he has some ability to make things better for himself. However, not included in this narrative excerpt is Ben's frustration at the fact that he shouldn't have had to confront them to get his raise; that he should have been paid more to begin with. So this narrative does express positive emotions, but there are still underlying negative ones that may mitigate the positivity.

Caroline's coup narrative

"Like, a really good example of definitely being treated better than the rest of my team was we used to have a 9-6 shift, right? So, from 9 in the morning to 6 at night. Nobody wants to do that. It's a crappy shift. Especially in the winter. You know, it's like dark when you leave... it's depressing. So, all of the department kind of decided to almost do a coup and stand up against it and say 'No, we're not doing this.' Everybody got dragged into a room and got in so much trouble. Like, it was not funny. They all got dragged into a private meeting. I got dragged out for coffee. I don't know why. I don't know why I was ever treated differently but I definitely was... Uh, [my boss] was just like 'You know, I just expect better from you guys.' And I explained to him 'Well, it was the only way that we thought you'd listen. You need to hire somebody that does that shift cuz we're tired of rotating. We're done.'

You know? And it was almost like after him and I spoke he took it on and he actually hired somebody that did 9 to 6. So, I don't know why I was treated differently with Jack, but I definitely was... So on that I was definitely lucky.”

Here the precipitating event is the team's inability to bear the 9am-6pm shift any longer. This initiates a manipulation phase in which the team takes it upon itself to stand up to management and get something done about the shift in question. It may be worth noting at this point that it is unlikely that the whole team acted as one at one specified time. There was likely a leader or someone who instigated the “revolt” but this is not specified in the narrative. In terms of competencies, the team, as a whole, has very few, which is perhaps why a full-scale rebellion is necessary to get their point across. However, as an individual, Caroline enjoys a privileged position with regard to her manager, which gives her the opportunity to talk to him on a one-on-one basis. This allows her to be able to explain the reasoning behind the revolt and allows her manager to understand that the 9-6 shift poses significant problems to the members of the team. In the end, we learn that Caroline (and by extension, her team) is able to perform the required action as her manager hires someone else to take the shift in question. This acts as a sanction that not only is Caroline's request reasonable, but the action is truly performed – as evidenced by the presence of said new employee. This successful performance is the source of Caroline's positive emotions.

What is of special interest to me here is how Caroline makes sense of her privileged position with regard to her manager. She attributes her preferential treatment to luck, presumably because she does not know how to make sense of the treatment she receives; she can only benefit from it and try to have her team benefit from it, as well.

This enjoyment of benefits, however, is no doubt mixed with feelings of confusion as not knowing why she receives preferential treatment weighs on her mind. Therefore, perhaps the only sense she can make out of the whole thing is that she is lucky, which, almost by definition, requires no further exploration on her part.

4. 4. What these narratives say

These narratives are very interesting from a research standpoint in that they provide a great deal of insight into how the research participants account for the emotional experiences they have at work. An analysis of their narratives indicates that their emotional reactions were framed as stemming from two main causes. First, negative emotions emerged when the action the research participant was required to do or desired to do was blocked or hindered. Further, the reason that they were unable to complete that which was required was either because the adversary they encounter proved too powerful, or in the most distressing cases, because the sender turned around and prevents the action it catalyzed in the manipulation phase.

The second cause was when the action was adequately and appropriately performed but the research participant received no sanction from the sender, thus, essentially leaving the research participant with the sense that the action was not completed, or at least, not completed well. As a logical corollary, positive emotions were framed as being due to performances that were completed and/or properly sanctioned.

In their attempts to make these experiences communicable and intelligible, they tended to appeal to norms as a way of legitimizing their feelings. They weren't just telling me

how they felt, but explaining that it was legitimate to feel the way they did because norms, or expectations, they considered to be standard had been breached.

What I also find particularly significant was that in the narratives expressing negative emotions, the adversary that blocked or hindered the performance, and/or the sender who withheld sanction, was either a specific member of Atarco's management or Atarco's management as an undifferentiated whole. It was almost as though every research participant followed the same sensemaking pattern; that is, it was implicitly ingrained in them that the source of emotional experiences at work was management.

4. 5. Safety and Security

Throughout the narratives collected from my research participants, one major theme emerged repeatedly; that of safety and security, or, more specifically, the importance of feeling safe and secure at work. There were two main contexts in which this theme arose with enough regularity and strength so as to be noticeable: 1) during discussion of personal relationships at work and 2) the need to protect oneself or to otherwise be protected from the organization.

4. 5. 1. Personal Relationships

The first and most salient emergence of this theme was when the research participants talked about the personal relationships they engage in at work. Note that the relationships discussed were limited to friendships and not romantic or intimate relationships. For this reason, I will refer to them from now on as friendships, with the understanding that the degree may vary from case to case.

It became clear to me from the narratives that friendships with coworkers had to be considered safe. For the most part, “safe” meant relationships within which no expectation breach had ever been experienced. After all, a viable definition of feeling safe is: knowing what to expect; being free of danger and/or risk. Therefore by its very definition, a relationship in which an expectation had been breached would no longer be considered safe; and could therefore no longer be considered a friendship.

The importance of knowing what to expect in order for a friendship to develop is not surprising given the numerous accounts of expectation breach each research participant talked about in his/her professional relationships with management and the organization as a whole. It was as though in their dealings with Atarco they began to expect expectation breaches. By contrast then, friendships within which behaviour was “as expected” were not only very welcome, but this characteristic proved absolutely necessary for a friendship to develop in the first place.

Research participants also indicated that establishing a friendship, therefore, takes time, as one cannot be sure that a co-worker won’t breach an expectation after only one or two encounters. As Caroline says:

“And, I don’t know, I just started talking to her and, you get this sense, you know, that these people are grounded, they have both feet on the ground, and you trust their opinions. And then you realize that you can definitely... you can trust them, you know? Cuz trust is not something that’s given freely. It needs to be earned. Right? So, you know, after many, many, many, conversations, you’ll open up, you know? And it won’t just be about work. It will be about a lot of personal stuff...”

Underscoring the importance of safety in friendships, in one of his narratives, Derek goes so far as to invoke the concept of actual danger; specifically, the danger that what he tells a friend will make its way to back to management:

“There’s probably only one or two people in the building that I’ll speak to for fear of it going back to management... but if you want to talk about a hockey game, I could talk to anyone about that because there’s no level of, uh, danger.”

Another important factor in friendships seems to be the sharing of sensitive or personal information, as it makes for a balanced relationship where both parties trust and are trusted. For example, Connor feels most safe in relationships when the other person has opened up to him as much as he has opened up to him/her:

“Usually it’s people that have shared something with me off the record, disclosed some information to me so that I know if I talk to them off the record it’s not going to gonna be broadcast on some blog on [the company’s intranet]... it’s usually people that have opened up to me first, whether it’s directly or just a process of talking. Like, um, you know, we’ll talk about something and it will just lead to ‘Ya, yesterday, you know what, Andrea asked me to do this, it’s just ridiculous, it has nothing to do with my job’ and then from there it goes up to, I guess, more details or other experiences.”

It also occurred to me that a more cynical take on this need/desire to “have something” on the other person may be that it serves as a type of insurance policy that the friend in question won’t betray your trust, as he/she know that you could betray him/her right back. And while not overly pleasant, this interpretation may actually have some merit, at least for Connor, as he told me that even within those relationships that have been designated as friendships, he remains “on guard” for any instance of breach. As he

said, conversations about personal or emotional issues “*always*” end with “*if you tell, I will kiiiiiiiii you!* [said in a funny voice followed by laughter]”.

Finally, Caroline used an interesting metaphor when discussing the workplace; one that highlights the search for and comfort of true friendships:

“Everything about it reminds me of high school. I hated high school. [Laughs]. Right? There was so much gossip, everybody was kind of after everybody else, like, I find there’s a lot of backstabbing. There’s a lot of, just, generally people not being happy, so they think that... it’s sad to say but generally speaking, human nature is if I feel bad about myself, about where I am, I’m going to make someone else feel bad. It’s just the way people are. Right? So it’s very much, like... it’s just... it’s high school all over again. You’re just missing the goddam lockers! Thank god. [Laughs].”

High school is a time in people’s lives that is notorious for intense feelings of insecurity and vulnerability and not being sure who one’s friends are and who can be trusted. The fact that she likens the work environment to high school suggests that these feeling also exist for her in her workplace.

4. 5. 2 Protection From the Organization

The first emergence of safety described in the context of protection came from Caroline as she discussed how she handles herself at work:

“... I think it’s Reception that did that to me. Was like, you always had to be in a good mood, right, because I was the face of the company. You can’t be a receptionist and welcome visitors in a bad mood. You can’t be having a bad day. You have to be perky. You also have to be a Stepford wife. Right? So I think it’s just kinda something that I... it’s literally protected me from going crazy. I think that’s probably why I’m still there. Because when I get home, it’s like ‘okay, it’s over’, you know?... it’s always Caroline 1.0 when I’m at work. It’s not really me. It’s not who I am when I’m at work. It’s like I... this is a whole

psychology thing, now. I've almost created, like, a different person. I guess maybe it's to protect myself."

I find her explanation of the division of her selves fascinating. The first part of her narrative reflects the traditional perspective of emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983). She acts in a way that is expected of her due to the role she is in, regardless of her true feelings. However, she seems to indicate that the separation from the self she is required to display and her real self is so great, she conceives of two distinct versions of herself. This is presumably done in order to protect herself from the dissonance described by Hochschild, as well as, I would suspect, from allowing the organization to dictate her personality. Their expectations can dictate how her work self behaves, but they have no say over her real self – it's protected from their influence.

Also highlighting Caroline's instinct to protect herself from the organization is her narrative about the Atarco Christmas party:

"... we all gave each other our gifts and we had a good time and Cathy (the VP) came in and she was going around the table asking people what your favourite Christmas memory is...I didn't tell them my favourite Christmas memory. I don't see why I should have. It's not really... I mean, I know you, but I don't really know you [referring to others around the table in that story]. So I made one up, you know? It's just... I don't know... I... I can't. I just... I can't. I feel like I can't give that. It's like something, you know... I almost feel like they've taken so much already that I can't give... I can't give that. Like that's special, you know? It's my sparkle."

Similar to the previous example, Caroline is unwilling to share her favorite Christmas memory at the party because that would involve giving something of her true self; something she feels she can't "give" them as it would mean giving too much of herself or leaving herself vulnerable to people she doesn't really know or trust. It's also very

telling that Cathy was present in this situation there because as I have seen through the previous narratives, Caroline really does not feel safe around her. In fact, it could be argued that Cathy represents EVERY SINGLE instance of expectation breach discussed in this work because, as the executive VP of Atarco, she represents all of Atarco's management.

Finally, while Ben does not explicitly talk about protecting himself from the organization, it seems to me that he mobilizes the concept when he talks about giving up on the company, which he did multiple times during the interview:

“I’m just at the point right now, I... I... I gave up on Atarco. Like, I don’t even bitch about it anymore, moneywise and stuff, because I know it’s useless.”

“Like I said earlier, like, I pretty much gave up. I mean, I’ll talk... I’ll talk to people about stuff, like, what I said, like for example when Walter started talking to me about things that are bothering him. Like, of course, I talk to him about the same things, too, because I could totally relate. You know? It’s like everything he was saying I was like ‘Oh my god, same thing here’ – type deal, you know? So yeah, I let my frustration out with a few colleagues here and there... depends who it is. But, like, when it comes to talking about that stuff to the important people, it’s like I gave up because I know, nothing... like, I mean, If I’ve been working there for seven years almost, and I’m still not making the money I deserve, I think it’s pretty much a lost cause. [Pause]”

This repeated assertion that he doesn’t care anymore interests me a great deal, as I wonder if it is part of a protection strategy he has adopted. It seems possible that, in the context of everything he has said previously, that he has learned not to expect anything from the organization due to the consistent breaches he has experienced. Looked at this way, his “giving up” can be equated with ridding himself of any and all expectations. Therefore, if he does not have any expectations, they cannot be breached. By giving up, Ben successfully neutralizes instances that may have, previously, been considered

a breach and make it a non-issue. In this way he does not have to worry about anything the organization does; it can continue to go about business as usual because he remains protected from the negative feelings associated with the inevitable expectation breaches.

CHAPTER 5 – Discussion

5.1. The tie between emotions and identity

After analysing all of my research participant's narratives it seems that their emotions are not messy or irrational at all. In fact, they seem very organized, stemming from identifiable sources and giving rise to justifiable reactions. In each narrative, research participants attributed their emotional experiences to a specific instance of expectation breach. When asked to elaborate on them, research participants could pinpoint not only the instance that initiated the emotion but also who and what were factors in the episode's unfolding. And while, as expected, expectation breach was a significant catalyst for emotional experiences, analysis of the narratives revealed that two very specific types of expectation breach were in play. The first was when activities that were desired or deemed to be necessary could not be completed due to an insurmountable obstacle or adversary, and second was when performance of a required or desired action received no recognition from authority. The fact that these two types of expectation breach gave rise to emotional experiences that research participants felt were worth telling, coupled with the recurrent theme of safety and safe relationships, gives me some insight as to where their emotional triggers lie. It appears that negative emotions emerged when they were faced with situations in which they came face to face with issues of a) what I do, and b) who I do it with. Particular distress arose when the current situation contrasted with what they believed to be true.

I believe that both these issues make up part of the larger and more fundamental questions of "Who am I?" It has been said before that making sense of events and situations necessarily has implications for identity as particular explanations for events

strengthen certain images of the self while eroding others. As Eisenberg points out, it is no coincidence that Weick lists identity as the first property of sensemaking (2006).

Weick contends that sensemaking is “*triggered by a failure to confirm one’s self..., sensemaking occurs in the service of maintaining consistent, positive self-conception*” and that “*people learn about their identities by projecting them into an environment and observing the consequences* (2006, p. 23)”. Weick et al discusses how the stakes in sensemaking are high when issues of identity are involved (2005). From the sensemaking perspective, who we think we are as organizational actors shapes what we enact and how we interpret.

Further, as Coopey, et al point out: “*Faced with events that disrupt normal expectations and, hence, the efficacy of established patterns of meaning and associated behaviour, individuals attempt to make sense of ambiguous stimuli in ways that respond to their own identity needs* (1997, in Weick, 2005, p. 416)”. Further, Taylor (1989) looks at what it is to be human and contends that “humanness” is characterized by a lifelong search for identity; for a “*narrative-of-self* (1989, in Coopey et al, 2002, p. 872)” that is only constructed in reference to others. Humans’ ability to understand themselves and others comes from collective emotional experiences in a common space and based in a shared language.

5. 1. 1. Ontological security

This seemingly inextricable link between identity sensemaking and emotion brings to mind Giddens’ concept of ontological security: “*the sense of trust in the continuity of the object-world and in the fabric of social activity* (1984, p. 50)” In other words, ontological security is a continuous sense of self (Giddens, 1984), a confidence in the continuity of

a self-identity and in the constancy of the social and material environment (Giddens, 1976, in Dupuis & Thorns, 1998). The origins of ontological security come from Erikson who discussed how an infant initially learns to trust in the existence of the “self” and in the repetition of patterned and routinized events. This is first expressed in the infant’s willingness to let his mother out of his sight without becoming anxious or angry. This is because he has become certain that she really does exist and trusts in the predictability of her eventual return. For Erikson, it is predictability, continuity and sameness that provide a sense of ego identity, based on the recognition that there is an inner collection of remembered and anticipated sensations/images that correlate with the outer collection of familiar and predictable things and people (Erikson, 1963, in Giddens, 1984).

Giddens discusses how all people work to maintain a framework of ontological identity and the way the framework is most predominantly maintained is by the predictability of routines (Giddens, 1990, in Dupuis & Thorns, 1998). Instances where the predictability of routine is radically altered are experienced by people as “*critical situations* (Giddens, 1984, pg. 50)”. These critical situations are characterized by anxiety that overwhelms habitual modes of activity and cannot be contained by traditional and familiar systems/routines. This notion echoes Weick’s notion of cosmology episodes very closely, strengthening the indication that sensemaking is used to maintain a coherent sense of self and when that identity is threatened, distress ensues.

In light of the narratives gathered from my research participants, it seems reasonable to interpret the expectation breaches they experienced in their work lives as critical

situations or cosmology episodes, albeit minor ones, perhaps. Each expectation breach disturbed what the employees believed to be “right” or “true” and forced them to reinterpret the situation. Significant negative feelings emerged as a result of each breach, as has been made clear; both anger at the very occurrence of a breach, and frustration, anxiety, and stress as a result of the breach. It may even be the case that this workplace is so unsettling and so rife with expectation breach that employees’ sense of ontological security was constantly being challenged; even threatened. Therefore, every minute of every day became critical situations in which employees had to call on all their coping and defense mechanisms to get through it, leaving them in a constantly heightened state of “readiness”; another possible explanation for research participants’ consistent references to safety and security.

5. 2. Implications of links to identity and communicative action

The implications of this research, at least to my mind, could be significant in organizational settings. While the psychological contract was conceived of as a means of keeping employees satisfied and thus productive, it will never truly meet this end because the issue of emotional well-being is far more complex than that. Employees may agree to abide by a tit-for-tat paradigm as they consider it to be inherent to the work world, but their true emotions will never be managed or assuaged by it. Further, the research into equity and distress also misses the mark as emotional well-being does not come from a simple comparison to others, but rather, as we have seen, is co-constructed by employees as they search to make meaning out of their experiences.

Therefore, it could be the case that if employers want to nurture and/or support the emotional health of their employees, they need to listen to their employees *express themselves the way they want to express themselves*. It is the employees themselves who have to frame the issues, free from the constraints of boxes, forms, or surveys. To my mind, this will allow greater access to important information: What are their concerns? What are their fears? What excites them? While this could be done via more traditional means, such as surveys and focus groups, given what I have learned about the power of discourse and narrative in particular, there is greater value in listening to their public conversations (i.e.: not meant to be private and therefore listening in does not constitute an unethical an illegal act) such as those that take place in the break rooms or standing in line in the cafeteria (Berner, 2010).

Conclusion

Summary of Research

I began this research by reading about standard theories in organizational emotion, such as the psychological contract and equity theory. I found these theories lacking in a systematic look, not just at how employees feel at work, but how they understand the emotions they experience. I believed this to be, because until recently, emotions had been considered too subjective, transient, and inaccessible to be researched in an empirical way. However, an emerging area of organizational communication, led by Fineman, and Putnam & Mumby, and others contended that emotions can be accessed via discourse. In fact, they went further to suggest that not only can discourse make emotions known to others, it is via discourse itself that emotions are legitimized and made sense of.

It was in this vein that I undertook my research. By mobilizing the work of Karl Weick on sensemaking, and Jerome Bruner on narrative theory, I decided to gather narratives from research participants in order to learn about how they made sense of their emotional experiences while at work. Bruner's primary thesis with regard to narrative is that we have no other way of describing lived time except via narrative. For him, lived time is not time measured by a calendar or a clock, but rather by the events that took place within it deemed meaningful by the research participant. Bruner also contends that that narrative imitates life and life imitates narrative. By this he means that life is constructed via the same type of reasoned thought/thinking as narrative (2004). He also went on to define ten main features of narrative, of which canonicity and breach, the fifth feature, proved to be most relevant to my work.

I chose to look at a single organization, Atarco, a sales-centered business in the IT industry. I interviewed four non-sales employees. Having previously been an employee there myself, I was able to quickly gain the trust of my research participants, and they seemed forthcoming in their interviews. I did my very best to avoid inserting my own thoughts and feelings about the organization into the interview, while at the same time invoking the sense of corroboration and camaraderie the research participants no doubt expected; this was what allowed them to feel comfortable opening up about their current employer. During the interviews I attempted to elicit narratives about emotional experiences from the research participant without directly asking them to “*Tell me about emotional experiences*”. Instead, I asked them how they liked working for Atarco, if they ever talked about emotionally-sensitive or charged topics with colleagues and how they decided which colleagues they could confide in. I frequently asked for examples or anecdotes that illustrated the points they were raising. After the interviews, I transcribed the recordings and isolated the narratives that told of emotional experiences. Once these narratives were selected, I took a semiotic approach in my analysis, guided by A. J. Greimas’ Narrative Schema. This helped me discern and describe how my research participants linked events and actions into a narrative that made sense of their emotional experiences.

A close analysis of all the selected narratives revealed that these employees framed their negative emotional experiences in one of two ways. Either they positioned Atarco’s management as hindering the performance of required actions (or blocking them entirely), or they positioned Atarco’s management as withholding sanction in the face of actions that were performed. In every case, research participants followed what

seemed to be a sensemaking pattern in their positioning of the organization's management as the adversary, and each narrative appealed to norms or expectations that were breached as a means of legitimizing the emotional reaction while making it intelligible to me.

The fact that these two types of expectation breach gave rise to emotional experiences that research participant felt were worth telling, gave me some insight as to where their emotional connections lay: in issues of a) what I do, and b) who I do it with. I believe that both these issues make up part of the larger and more fundamental questions of "Who am I?", suggesting that negative emotions arise when something happens that forces employees to question who they are and therefore, when making sense of emotional experience, employees use discourse to construct an explanation that reaffirms their identity as employees and that aligns with previously held view of themselves.

Potential Limitation

Because I chose to only look at one organization, the generalizability of the results is largely constrained. Also, I had a rather small sample size, which also influences generalizability. As previously explained, though, this small sample size was in part because many of the potential research participants that I approached were reluctant to participate. I assume this was because they were nervous about speaking out about their dissatisfactions with their current employer.

However, a very positive implication of this small sample size was that I was able to spend more time with each research participant and take a closer, more detailed look at

their transcripts; reading and rereading their narratives, constructing the deepest and most accurate picture possible of their sensemaking processes.

Implications for future research

During the interviews, research participants discussed emotional experiences that had occurred a fairly long time prior. This leads me to wonder what effect proximity in time to the emotional experiences would have on the sensemaking narratives. In future research, I would like to hear narratives about emotional experiences much closer to the experience itself. I would also be interested in doing a type of longitudinal study in which the same research participants would tell me about the same experience immediately after it occurred, a few days later, a few weeks later, etc. I believe this might give some insight into, not only how employees make sense of emotional experiences, but also how they integrate this meaning into their everyday experiences and move forward.

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Appendix 1: Interview grid

PART 1 - biographical information	How did you come to work at Atarco?
	How long have you been working there?
	Have you always held the same position?
PART 2 - individual experience	Do you enjoy working at Atarco? WHY?
	Can you give me specific examples of the above?
	How do you feel you are treated relative to other employees? EXAMPLE.
PART 3 - "other" experience	Do your co-workers enjoy working at Atarco? WHY?
	Can you give me specific examples of the above?
	How do they feel they are treated relative to other employees? EXAMPLE.
PART 4 - collective experience	How do you come to know what your colleagues are feeling? EXAMPLE.
	Do you engage in conversations about how you are feeling with colleagues? WHY?
	Are your conversations about how you are feeling different from those about work projects or other, more mundane subjects? HOW?
	How do you choose which colleagues to engage in conversations about how you are feeling? EXAMPLE.
	Do you ever talk about your feelings with anyone in management? WHY?