



UMEÅ UNIVERSITET

# **INFLUENCE IN SENSEMAKING DURING CHANGE:**

## **A Study of the Swedish Police Reform and Subsequent Change Work**

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### **Akademisk avhandling**

som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Rektor vid Umeå universitet för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen framläggs till offentligt försvar i Hörsal SAM.A.230 (S213), Samhällsvetarhuset, fredagen den 18 november, kl. 10:00.

Avhandlingen kommer att försvaras på engelska

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**Organization**

Umeå University  
Umeå School of Business,  
Economics and Statistics

**Document type**

Doctoral thesis

**Date of publication**

28 oktober 2022

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**Title**

Influence in sensemaking during change: A Study of the Swedish Police Reform and Subsequent Change Work

**Abstract**

This dissertation is based on four articles, and examines efforts of influence in processes of sensemaking during, and subsequent to, the Swedish police reform. Sensemaking – a process where individuals work to understand what is going on when they encounter confusing events – is of central importance for how organizational change unfolds. Influence in sensemaking refers to activities with capacity to shape persons preferences and perceptions, as they try to make sense. In this dissertation, the overall purpose is to increase the understanding about influence in sensemaking during micro-processes of change. The research questions address how efforts of influence in sensemaking at different organizational levels can be understood, and by which means actors attempt to influence others sensemaking. The research applies sensemaking and sensegiving as its theoretical framework. With a qualitative approach, and ethnographic methods, influence in sensemaking is examined on four levels: Article 1 examines how the strategic level of reform promote change through visual media. The results show how 44 videos function to layer meaning and construct stereotypes in attempts to influence how the sensemaking of change would take place. Article 2 reports an ethnography of middle-managers involving employees in a multivocal process that aims to influence how sensemaking evolves. This process has four features: open-endedness, low control over cues given, several sources of cues, and the encouragement of complexity and ambiguity. Article 3 studies employees working as ‘change’ agents at employee conferences. Results show that these actors exert influence in three ways: drawing on positional power, acting powerless, and by attempts to give power away. Article 4 reports an ethnography of employees enacting a change initiative. The results show how employees’ various enactments involve episodic power, which influence the sensemaking process to varying degrees and towards diverse ends. Overall, the results from the articles outlines three understandings of influence in sensemaking: top-down efforts, reflexive interactions and responsive enactments – each with particular consequences for *who* can take part in processes of sensemaking, organizing, and change work, *when* and *how*. For organizations, the results imply a need for managers *and* employees to raise awareness of others as well as one’s own influence in sensemaking, as it shapes the way they make sense of, understand, and enact organizational change. In a larger perspective, this has significance for which forms of organizing are stimulated to develop – democratic or undemocratic.

**Keywords**

Sensemaking, Sensegiving, Influence, Organizational change, Reflexivity, Power, Enactment

**Language**

English

**ISBN**

print: 978-91-7855-895-7  
PDF: 978-91-7855-896-4

**ISSN**

0346-8291

**Number of pages**

116 + 4 articles