

Organizing to counter terrorism: Sensemaking amidst dynamic complexity

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Abstract

Organizations increasingly find themselves contending with circumstances that are suffused with dynamic complexity. So how do they make sense of and contend with this? Using a sensemaking approach, our empirical case analysis of the shooting of Mr Jean Charles de Menezes shows how sensemaking is tested under such conditions. Through elaborating the relationship between the concepts of frames and cues, we find that the introduction of a new organizational routine to anticipate action in changing circumstances leads to discrepant sensemaking. This reveals how novel routines do not necessarily replace extant ones but, instead, overlay each other and give rise to novel, dissonant identities which in turn can lead to an increase rather than a reduction in equivocality. This has important implications for sensemaking and organizing amidst unprecedented circumstances.

Keywords

cues, frames, identity, novelty, organizing, sensemaking

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Introduction

At 10.06 a.m. on Friday 22 July 2005 in London, Jean Charles de Menezes was shot dead by specialist firearms officers from the London Metropolitan Police Service (MPS). He was shot in the belief that he was a suicide bomber in the act of detonating a concealed explosive device. He was shot at point-blank range using specialist ammunition intended to cause instant death before a person has the opportunity to trigger a bomb. At the time, Mr de Menezes had just boarded the carriage of a tube train in Stockwell underground station. The carriage was relatively full and many members of the travelling public witnessed the event.

The shooting was the culmination of a counter terrorism (CT) operation which had begun the previous day, following a series of unsuccessful suicide bomb attacks on the London public transport system which had led officers of the MPS to a suspect at an address in south London. At 4.20 a.m. on 22 July, Commander M initiated an armed police operation to maintain surveillance at 21 Scotia Road and safely contain and identify residents as they left the premises later that morning. Mr de Menezes emerged from this address at 9.33 a.m. and was followed by police surveillance officers. Some 33 minutes later, he was killed by specialist police firearms officers who believed he had been identified as the suspect, Hussain Osman. By the end of the day, it became clear that the belief that Mr de Menezes was a terrorist was a mistaken one. He was, in fact, an innocent young Brazilian electrician living in London, travelling to his place of work, when he became caught up in a series of events which had a tragic outcome.

Organizations are increasingly facing events that are variously unexpected, surprising, unorthodox and rare (Cunha et al., 2006; Lampel et al., 2009; Weick and Sutcliffe, 2007). So how do people deal with such circumstances and what effects does this have on their future organizing? Through a detailed examination of the circumstances that culminated in the shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes, this article will show how the CT unit of the London MPS undertook a novel organizational routine to counter what was then, in the aftermath following 9/11, a novel terrorist tactic of suicide bombing. The consequence of this for CT officers' sensemaking and action was embodied in dissonant, novel identities. We find that this coming together of three different forms of novelty – novel routines/tools, novel situations and novel identities – compromised organizational sensemaking in this case.

The sensemaking perspective is adopted here as a lens because through its use of concepts such as frames and cues, it addresses directly our aim of understanding events. As Weick et al. (2005: 410) put it, organizational sensemaking effectively explores a series of questions: 'How does something come to be an event for organizational members?'; 'What does the event mean/what is the story here?'; and 'Now what should I do?'. This article addresses these questions in the context of the development of novel organizational routines to counter changing patterns of terrorist threat. It is important to note that we do not seek to add to discussions of culpability in the shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes. Like Snook's example of a military organizational failure when two Black Hawk helicopters were accidentally shot down, thus killing 26 people, the tragedy resulted from 'good people struggling to make sense' (Snook, 2002: 206). By adopting a sensemaking perspective, we analyse and account for the struggles to make collective sense in this case.

In so doing, we make several contributions to research. First, we contribute an empirical example of sensemaking and organizing amidst conditions of dynamic complexity (Farjoun, 2010), in which three forms of novelty interact with, on this occasion, tragic consequences. The situation is that of a potential suicide bombing in London which leads to a fatal shooting. Secondly, while the tempo and temporality of how events are happening highlights the utility of the ontology of becoming (Chia and Holt, 2009; Clegg et al., 2005; Tsoukas and Chia, 2002), we pluralize and extend this with regard to frames, to include goings. The third contribution of our case analysis is to show how the integration of new frames and becomings with previous frames and goings (Colville, 2009; Weick, 2012) is crucial to understanding how events come into being for organization members, what they do next and why. The novel frame designed for tackling a new and unprecedented situation gives rise to the need for novel identities to be enacted by CT officers. However, these new frames and identities (concepts that are central to sensemaking) do not merely replace extant ones but overlay each other with important implications regarding speed of becoming and response to novel circumstances.

Our article first addresses the literature on organizing and sensemaking, and in particular, considers frames and cues. Following a section on methods, we then structure our discussion section around three core themes relating to novel situations, tools and identities, with reflection on their integrative implications for sensemaking and organizing. Finally, we draw conclusions and highlight implications for future research and practice of organizing and sensemaking.

Organizing and sensemaking

A central theme of both organizing and sensemaking research is that people organize to make sense of equivocal inputs and enact this sense back into the world to make that world more orderly (Weick et al., 2005: 131). Put differently, in an effort to tame the 'wild profusion of things' and to introduce a workable level of certainty or plausibility, people make informed bets as to 'what is going on' and 'what the story is' by ruling out a number of possibilities or 'might have beens'. The distinction between reducing equivocality and ambiguity (often mistakenly used as synonyms) is crucial in understanding the clarifying role of action. As Colville et al. (2012) point out, 'Lessening ambiguity implies that through action you can learn to discount what *might* have been going on and reach an answer to the question as to what *is* going on (i.e. 'what is the story?'). Reducing equivocality suggests that action does not clarify by allowing you to eliminate lack of clarity but that action clarifies by shaping what it is that you are attending to and in the doing, shapes what *is* going on' (2012: 7, emphasis in the original).

As found in Weick's (1979) classic 'enactment–selection–retention' organizing model, the sensemaking process rests on a combination of both thinking and action. People make sense of equivocal inputs by thinking about or 'reading' situations in order to generate richer and deeper interpretations as to what is happening. This is reflected in the advice that to deal with increasingly complex environments, you need to 'complicate yourself' so that the variety of the thinking matches that of the environment (Gioia, 2006; Tsoukas and Dooley, 2011; Weick, 1979). Weick's (1979) organizing model draws attention to this both/and quality by tying enactment (action) and selection (thought) together through sensemaking processes.

That balance is made more difficult by the role of the third organizing process – retention. Retention is the remembrance of past sensemaking. This is a retrospective process in which, with history in hand, when people select interpretations for present enactments they usually see in the present what they have seen before (Weick, 1979: 201). The process is explained by the organization of past experience in the retention system, in which memories of past sensemaking are conceptualized as categories or types of activities. From this, we note that the answer to the question ‘what is organized in an organization’ (Bittner, 1965) is common-sense-making categories that are the products of prior organizing and sensemaking processes, thus achieving collective sensemaking. ‘For an activity to be said to be organized, it implies that *types* of behavior in *types* of situation are systematically connected to *types* of actors’ (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002: 573, emphasis in original). In the interests of generalizing, these categories are more abstract and broadly defined than the moments of sensemaking that gave rise to them. In this way, ‘organizing and sensemaking turn out to have a closer affinity than is signified by the word ‘and’ ... Sensemaking makes organizing possible’ (Weick, 2001: 95). From this, we conclude that the search for shared meaning is found in the relationship between frames and cues.

Frames and cues

The word ‘frame’ is frequently evoked to refer to these categories of organized experience (Goffman, 1974), and it is through these that current activities are singled out for closer attention and are understood. Placing stimuli or current cues into a frame provides a reference that enables people to ‘comprehend, understand, explain, attribute, extrapolate and predict’ (Starbuck and Milliken, 1988: 51). As Weick (1995) further elaborates,

Frames tend to be past moments of socialization and cues tend to be present moments of experience. If a person can construct a relation between these two moments, meaning is created. This means that the content of sensemaking is to be found in the frames and categories that summarise past experience, in the cues and labels that snare specifics of present experience, and the ways these two settings of experience are connected. (Weick, 1995: 111)

The flexibility of frame or organizational routine tends to be down-played in the change literature at the expense of its tendency to generate stability and be a source of inertia (Watzlawick et al., 1974). Feldman and Pentland have countered such interpretations in reconceptualizing organizational routines as a source of flexibility and change, by distinguishing between two aspects said to comprise routines: ‘The ostensive aspect is the ideal or schematic form of a routine. It is the abstract, generalized idea of the routine, or the routine in principle. The performative aspect of the routine consists of specific actions, by specific people, in specific places and times. It is the routine in practice’ (Feldman and Pentland, 2003: 101). In their view, both are necessary for an organizational routine to exist and for understanding the relationship between variability and stability which underpins change in organizing.

Building on this, Farjoun (2010) has argued that organizational change should be conceptualized as a duality (containing the seeds of change *and* stability) rather than the

more usual dualist conception, in which change and stability are understood as opposites. In making his case, Farjoun notes that stability of outcome or performance in dynamic settings is not self-sustaining but requires internal variation and effort, such that it is always tentative and requires explanation (2012: 200). However, there is a limit to the ability to adapt to change beyond a certain level and to deal with novelty (Weick and Sutcliffe, 2007). That is, '... a system may not be able to respond to some qualitative changes outside a certain range and, thus, allows the rigidity associated with exploitation to sneak back in' (Farjoun, 2010: 209). In such circumstances, routines become constraining rather than enabling and the inertia which has sneaked back in becomes a problem requiring change, i.e. change that involves the replacement or addition of routines rather than the modification or adjustments of what is already there.

This draws attention to the adequacy of the sensemaking process that is initiated to deal with an interruption: an interruption to the thinking-as-usual which, as W.I. Thomas (quoted by Schutz) put it, 'interrupts the flow of habit and gives rise to changed conditions of consciousness and practice' (Schutz, 1964: 96). It is about the ability of people to make sense of equivocality and to repair a situation by establishing shared, plausible meanings. Maitlis and Sonnenshein (2010) similarly argue that the bracketing of cues from the environment and their interpretation through salient frames is central to the development of plausible meaning. Sensemaking is thus about connecting frames and cues to create an account of 'what is going on'.

It is our contention that the adequacy of sensemaking and its ability to furnish a useful account of what is going on is restricted under conditions of dynamic complexity. The main constraint lies with the frames that are comprised of past moments of sensemaking. That is, the historical frames that comprise the organizational retention system over the processes of enactment and selection start to exert more influence – believing is seeing (Gioia, 2006; Weick, 1979) – and novel cues tend not to be noticed, let alone interpreted or acted upon (Jeong and Brower, 2008).

Frames shape what is bracketed and deemed worthy of further attention but they also leave out much else that may be cues in other frames, as we fail to notice that we have failed to notice as we have become too familiar with what surrounds us (Mangham and Pye, 1991). The suicide attack on the Twin Towers in New York on 11 September 2001, known as 9/11, was a revelation and had painfully shown that the assumptions on which CT had operated failed to match changing circumstances. In effect, novelty in the form of dynamic complexity was posing problems for such sensemaking and organizing. What remains open for question is what happens to organizing and sensemaking in response to such unprecedented, dynamically complex circumstances. We now turn to our case data to examine this question.

Method

Our method is underpinned by the assumptions that humans are interpreters and thus, in effect, creators of their own social worlds such that reality is a social construction, built out of meanings that are social in origin and in persistence (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). These assumptions lend well to researching sensemaking and underlie our qualitative case analysis of the Official Inquiry into the

shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes, conducted by the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC).¹ The use of official inquiry reports as source data for empirical study is well established through a robust body of literature (for example, Gephardt, 1997; Starbuck and Milliken, 1988; Weick, 1990; Weick and Sutcliffe, 2003). As Brown points out, such texts act as 'locales for the conduct of primary research' (Brown, 2004: 95). Although one must be cautious in over-generalizing from single-case accounts, such empirical studies are not only necessary ingredients for developing more general theories of behaviour but they also provide rich resources bridging empirical evidence and theory-building (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; Siggelkow, 2007; Suddaby, 2006; Weick et al., 2005).

The Official Inquiry into Mr de Menezes' death was documented in what became known as the IPCC Stockwell One Report (2007)² and provides our primary data source. This kind of incident was and still is exceptional in the UK (see Discussion section below), and in case study terms it exemplifies an extreme event from which much may be learnt (Eisenhardt, 1989). We use the IPCC Stockwell One Report (2007) (from hereon called 'the Report') as an authoritative account of the events leading up to the shooting of Mr de Menezes. Such authority rests on its constitutional primacy together with the fact that the content of this report, in terms of timelines and recorded explanations, have remained uncontested.³

It is an unusual inquiry case example to the extent that this was a highly complex situation with a variety of different stakeholder interests. However, unlike the investigation of the heat wave disaster in France (Boudes and Laroche, 2009), where there were seven different reports into the disaster, there is only one report of the actual Stockwell incident. This is the legally upheld statement of what happened which, although not without criticism,⁴ is considered to be 'definitive' by HM Government. Unlike other inquiry report analyses (for example, of the Barings case by Brown [2005] or the Board of Banking Supervision case by Magee et al. [2009]), we chose not to include media coverage as data as our research focus is on the operational/organizational details of what happened. While the implications of the Stockwell case will remain politically charged, our case analysis focuses on the operational/organizational details which were central to officers' sensemaking and enacting as accounted for in the Report.

Case data

All details of the incident in this article are taken from the Report, from which we have been granted unrestricted permission to reproduce extracts. The IPCC investigators⁵ were effectively awarded police officer status in order to conduct their enquiries such that key participants were interviewed under caution and under oath, and no officer involved gave any subsequent press or other interviews. For this reason, it was not possible to gather further data through interviews with key participants. However, as our aim was to make sense of their sensemaking rather than to seek out 'the truth' of who said or did what to whom, this was not problematic. To this end, we were effectively following Czarniawska's advice for organization theorists 'to be close to the practice of organizing while keeping enough distance to problematize it' (Czarniawska, 2008: 133). As she

goes on to explain metaphorically, ‘... researchers contribute a re-contextualized picture of practice’ and then ask, ‘Do they [practitioners] recognize the picture?’ (Czarniawska, 2008: 133). As our primary data have been collected and synthesized by others, our analysis and theorizing remain grounded in this evidence (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007). Hence, we felt it appropriate to seek an answer to Czarniawska’s (2008) question. To this end, senior members of the MPS⁶ recognized and found resonance in our analysis and the conceptual sense we made of this material, which adds support to the grounded, robust nature of our theorizing.

Such is the nature of CT policing with high levels of security, secrecy and confidentiality embedded in its operations, this Report offers a rare but valuable insight into sensemaking and organizing in a fast-moving, dynamic and potentially life-threatening environment. Given the very public nature of the shooting on a commuter train, over 650 people took part in the IPCC investigation by the team of investigators, which comprised the IPCC Chair, two former Detective Chief Superintendents appointed as senior investigators, six trained major incident room staff and 17 investigators. During the 5 month investigation, they gathered and analysed 1700 pieces of evidence from police, forensic experts and civilian witnesses, including: approximately 890 sworn witness statements, voice recordings, CCTV footage of events and written logs, together with interviews under caution with 15 officers who were directly involved in the incident (see IPCC website for further details⁷). Written logs provide a distinguishing feature of the data in this case: for example, a Detective Inspector wrote formal logs of decisions taken by the Designated Senior Officer (DSO) in charge, and also of meetings and events taking place in Room 1600 that day; and surveillance logs were kept at the Observation Posts.

The Report is not written in terms of what a layperson might understand to be ‘a whole story’ of what happened. Instead, the document effectively provides the evidence base, across 170 pages, clustered into 19 different sections, from which its authors then draw their 24 pages of conclusions, and make recommendations to the CPS in the final Section 20. Each of the 20 sections comprises numbered bullet points (with usually only one, two or three sentences in each), and all of the key actors are either anonymized or given their coded designations, e.g. Trojan 80 or Charlie 12, where Trojan indicates a particular tactical (firearms) advisor and Charlie means a specialist firearms officer (see Table 1 for a glossary).

Data analysis

Langley (1999) identifies seven generic strategies for the analysis of process data and elaborates key characteristics and implications associated with each approach. These are not exhaustive, can be used in combination and should be considered alongside Thorngate’s proviso about commensurate complexity (Weick, 1979: 35), necessitating inevitable tradeoffs between generality, simplicity and accuracy in inquiry. With this as our guide, we took up Langley’s central challenge of ‘moving from a shapeless data spaghetti toward some kind of theoretical understanding that does not betray the richness, dynamism and complexity of the data but that is understandable and potentially useful to others’ (Langley, 1999: 695).

Table 1. Selected code names, abbreviations and designations used in this London Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) assignment.

Designation	Code meaning
<i>Central</i>	<i>Members of Special Branch working in Room 1600 on 22 July 2005</i>
Charlies	Specialist Firearms Officers
CO19, also referred to as SO19*	Specialist Firearms Department
DSO	Designated Senior Officer under a Kratos Operation
<i>Hotels and Tangos</i>	<i>UK Police Special Branch surveillance team members</i>
Loggists	Both Commander P and Trojan 80 had loggists recording their decisions throughout the operation.
<i>Nettle Tip</i>	<i>Codename for the suspect Osman</i>
<i>Operation C</i>	<i>Operation C was a policy written to deal with the threat of a suicide bomber at a pre-planned public event, for example Trooping the Colour (in which guards parade in front of Buckingham Palace).</i>
Room 1600	Special Branch operations room at New Scotland Yard (NSY)
SO13**	Anti-Terrorist Branch
SO12**	Special Branch
TA Centre	Territorial Army Centre close to Scotia Road
Trojans	Tactical Firearms Advisers – Trojan 80 was one of several who had central roles in this incident.

Italicized abbreviations for the above can be found in the Report but are not used in this manuscript.

*In 2005, SO19 was the name given to the Specialist Firearm Command branch within the MPS that had responsibility for provide firearms-related support to unarmed colleagues. At that time, it was also in transition to being redesignated as CO19, i.e. Central Operations19.

**The MPS Counter Terrorism Command is known within the MPS as SO15 (i.e. Special Operations15), and aims to protect London and the UK from the threat of terrorism. The Command was formed in 2006 through the merger of its two predecessor units: the Anti-Terrorist Branch (SO13) and Special Branch (SO12).

Although inquiry reports effectively provide an official endeavour to synthesize an understanding from dynamic, rich and complex data, given the fragmented nature of the Stockwell Report's content, we effectively had to do this once again. Hence, first we prepared a case study document based on our initial readings, which effectively provides a succinct summation of the case (see Case context and synopsis section below). The Report itself did not examine the meanings of key words – neither meanings given nor meanings taken or received – beyond the explanations given by key actors. Hence between us, we ultimately read the Report over 30 times in classic, iterative, grounded, qualitative data analysis mode (Charmaz, 2006; Golden-Biddle and Locke, 2006; Miles and Huberman, 1994), oscillating between theory and data, coding, comparing and categorizing our data as well as discussing and cross-checking with each other at each stage in the process.

From our initial reading of the Report, we had each independently identified headings/potential codings from which we collectively created an initial framework of broad first-order/open codes (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Van Maanen, 1979). In so doing, we faced many of the common challenges of process data analysis, including complexity, multiplicity and ambiguity, as well as variable time and space, precision, duration and relevance by Langley (1999). We then agreed that the third author (himself, a former police officer with CT experience) would undertake the next step, sifting backwards and forwards through the different sections to glean information from the accounts and witness statements, effectively developing and fleshing out the case. Following this, we then collated codes into themed clusters, i.e. second-order coding, which reflected the complexity of qualitative data analysis (Pratt, 2009).

A strong theme throughout our data analysis relates to 'context', which is essential to making sense of behaviour. Staw and Salancik referred to this as the 'ecology of organization' (Staw and Salancik, 1977: 4) and it was an important element in our data analysis in terms of both content and process, evidenced in a process of actors enacting their environment (Weick, 1979). Fairhurst notes: 'With a discursive and social constructionist view, a multi-layered and dynamic view of context is captured when we are able to demonstrate how individual, dyad or group, organizational and socio-historical influences reflexively interrelate at particular moments in time' (Fairhurst, 2009: 1623). We concur with her ambition to develop an integrative analysis of action in context or 'space of action' (Daudi, 1986, cited by Fairhurst, 2009: 1623), and to that end draw attention to points of sensemaking that may evidence 'discrepant sensemaking' (Brown et al., 2008: 1035).

With this in mind, we all reread the Report once more to 'scrutinize' the data, in effect, checking out relationships between codes to help deepen and strengthen the conceptual second-order linkages representing these data: that is, '... those notions used by the field-worker to explain the patterning of the first-order data. Descriptively, many second-order concepts are simply statements about relationships between certain properties observed to co-vary in the setting and may occasionally converge with first-order interpretations' (Van Maanen, 1979: 541). From this analysis, three concepts or themes stood out as being critical to the sense being made: these were a novel situation in which a novel tool called Operation Kratos was key to the sense and identities being enacted police officers. Evidenced through both explicit and implicit use of language, artefacts and behaviours, we see the power of a tool or frame to influence identities and behaviour such that the call to 'stop him' was understood within the Kratos frame with regrettable, lethal consequences. In the sections that follow, we first provide an introduction to the case and selection from our data and analysis, which is then followed by the Discussion and Conclusions.

Case context and synopsis

Preparations by the police service to counter the threat of suicide bombers

Suicide bombing was largely unrecognized in the West as a terrorist strategy until:

- On 11 September 2001, over 2000 people were killed by two aircraft flying into the Twin Towers in New York City. This led to the plausibility of a passenger aircraft carrying a full load of aviation fuel effectively becoming a bomb, and the hijackers controlling the aircraft being regarded as suicide bombers. This became known as 9/11.
- On 11 March 2004, the Madrid train bombings killed more than 190 people. Detonation was by remote control: seven suspects blew themselves up following confrontation by the police.
- On 7 July 2005 (known as 7/7), the London public transport system bombings killed 52 people and the four suicide bombers, as well as injuring 700 more in Central London. Then, two weeks later:
- On 21 July 2005 (known as 21/7), four attempted synchronized bomb attacks disrupted part of London's public transport system in Central London. The detonators failed to trigger the main charges and the suspects escaped. This was the day before the Stockwell incident.

This series of events created the context in which the London MPS CT unit was working. Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the USA, the MPS reviewed its strategies to combat the increased threat of suicide bombings in the UK by conducting research throughout the world to determine appropriate tactics. In October 2003, a draft paper entitled 'Operation Kratos People' (Kratos is the Greek God of War) was circulated to all 43 police services in England and Wales. The paper noted, when facing a suicide bomber, 'It may not be appropriate to issue a warning, the shot may be to the head to avoid detonating an explosive device and [that] a decision to shoot may have to be taken on the command of a senior officer who has sufficient information to justify use of lethal force' (IPCC, 2007: 41).

The following section provides material selected from our original summation of the case, compiled from the Report, which is particularly pertinent to this article.

Selected extract from the IPCC Stockwell One Report (2007)

All text in italics is quoted from the Report and followed by the page number reference in brackets. The non-italicized text reflects our combined first reading, and has been confirmed by MPS senior officers.⁶ Quotation marks were used in the Report for direct quotation from officers, and hence they are also used in our text.

The briefing (see Table 1 for glossary)

01:00hrs Commander P received a request by telephone to report for duty at New Scotland Yard (NSY) at 07:00hrs as the DSO to '*do Kratos Commander*' (49).

05:00hrs The DSO arrived at NSY and undertook detailed briefing *from documents and training presentations on Operations Kratos and Operation C* (49).

06:04hrs Operation Theseus had commenced: i.e. a strategy for the safe containment and identification of all people leaving 21 Scotia Road, such that the premises at Scotia Road were under observation.

06:50hrs With officers from CO19, *Charlie 2 went to the armoury at Leman Street Police Station, and amongst the weaponry he booked out was a Glock 9mm handgun*

loaded with 17 rounds of 124 grain hollow point ammunition. Charlie 2 records that the ammunition had been specially authorized for Operation Theseus, due to the nature of threat that existed and that they had to face, i.e. armed terrorists and suicide bombers. Charlie 2 describes the need for the ammunition for the immediate incapacitation to stop a suicide bomber (90).

The assumption here is that officers *would* face a substantial threat, and the issue of specialist ammunition was consistent with the threat being that of a suicide bomber and delivery of a 'critical shot', should it be authorized by the DSO.

07:45hrs Charlie 2 and other specialist firearms officers were briefed by Trojan 84. *The officers were told they must trust the information coming from Room 1600 and that the officers might use unusual tactics and also that they might be asked to do something they had not done before. Charlie 2 states the information he received at the briefing he took to mean that he may have to face a suicide bomber* (91).

The instruction to 'trust the information' from Room 1600 and the term 'unusual tactics' were also consistent with a Kratos operation, although no officer in the UK had yet delivered a 'critical shot'.

08:45hrs Charlie 2 and other officers were given a further briefing by DCI C who was operating as ground commander for the DSO, Commander P. *The briefing gave details of the 7/7 bombings, the 21/7 incidents and information concerning the two suspects Hussain Osman and the second suspect. DCI C stated that the men were prepared deadly and determined suicide bombers and they were 'up for it'. He also informed the officers that devices could be concealed on the body and triggered easily* (91).

Charlie 2 then went with other officers to a holding position in a police vehicle. He stated that, at this stage, 'I believed that it was very likely that I would be asked to intercept deadly and determined terrorist suicide bombers' (91).

For information: some have technical posts, e.g. Trojan 84 or Charlie 2, so these are pre-known and would have been used as part of their communication. The named officers were Special Branch officers whose identities were disguised after the event.

09:33hrs Mr de Menezes was seen to leave 21 Scotia Road.

The identification

09:36hrs Mr de Menezes walked towards Tulse Hill and boarded a Number 2 bus. *Charlie 2 stated that he heard over the Cougar radio that ... he heard over the radio the surveillance officer saying [of the man on the bus] 'this was definitely our man'* (91).

Charlie 2 has now heard a positive identification over the radio and whilst not coming directly from Room 1600, it was consistent with the preparation he had received.

Shortly before 09:39hrs 'James' saw Mr de Menezes walking in Tulse Hill and identified him as 'possibly identical' to the subject [Osman] *Nettle Tip*. Another officer, 'Harry' *was not able to identify the male as being identical to the first suspect Osman* (55).

There is equivocality from 'James' but 'Harry' is clear he was unable to identify the suspect.

At about 09:47hrs 'Ivor' [now on the bus and answering a phone call asking him about the suspect's identity] ... *stated that he could not positively identify the male as the first suspect Hussain Osman (Nettle Tip)* (56).

Trojan 80's loggist notes 'Not ident male as above discounted' ... and 'this is consistent with the uncertainty of the surveillance team regarding the identification' (56).

09:47hrs *'Laurence' [observing first a side view of his face, then but 'a full frontal view of his face for a split second' as he drove past] told 'James' and 'Ken' 'he did not believe that the person was identical to Nettle Tip' (56–57).*

Hotel 11 also saw him get off the bus, and then rejoin the queue and use his mobile phone. From a distance of 10 metres, Hotel 11 considered the person to be a similar likeness to the photograph he had seen previously (57).

... 'Pat' [surveillance monitor] then informed [Commander P] 'it is him, the man is off the bus. They think it is him and he is very, very jumpy.' This is recorded within [the DSO's] loggist's notes (57).

'Pat' from Room 1600 was relaying information to and from officers engaged on the operation. He appears to have paid attention to comments from the surveillance officers that tended to confirm identification but those disconfirming identification were not relayed to Commander P.

Charlie 2 heard it said that the man was 'nervous, acting strangely and was very twitchy' (91).

Commander P sought additional confirmation regarding identification and through 'Pat' asked the surveillance team to give a percentage indication of how certain they were ... 'James' received this message and considered this to be impossible to answer. He informed 'Pat' that when he briefly saw the male at 09:39 he thought he was a 'good possible' for the subject 'Nettle Tip' but since that time none of his team had been able to get a close look at him (58).

Although 'Pat' does not himself recall saying this, Commander P and others ... heard 'Pat' say words to the effect that 'They cannot give a percentage but they believe it is Nettle Tip' (58).

DCI C was at the TA Centre when he heard over the surveillance radio that the person being followed on the bus had been identified as Nettle Tip. He was in no doubt this was a positive identification. (57).

The CO19 team ... were travelling towards Stockwell on blue lights and sirens (59).

The interception

Commander P in consultation with Trojan 80 decided that 'the subject believed to be Nettle Tip cannot be allowed to enter the tube system. He must be arrested before by SO19' (Decision Log 16). Commander P's decision was communicated directly to both Trojan 80 ... [face-to-face] ... and to DCI C who had an open phone link. Central 1614 entered Room 1600 and heard the surveillance monitor [officer in room 1600 providing verbal updates] commenting that the man under surveillance was on a bus. He then heard he was getting off the bus and the surveillance monitor asking senior officers whether he should be stopped. He states that Commander P and a senior SO13 officer shouted, 'yes stop him' (59–60).

10:05hrs *Charlie 2 also states he heard that the 'suspect' had got off the bus and was heading towards Stockwell Underground station. Charlie 2 then heard over the radio, 'stop him from getting on the tube, he must not get onto the tube'. The officer believed it was a relayed instruction from the DSO (91).*

It is clear at this stage that Charlie 2, having travelled at speed to the underground station, now believed (as instructed) the information relayed to him about the identification of Mr de Menezes as the suspect and further believed the instruction to stop him was given from within the meaning of a Kratos operation.

Charlie 2 drew his handgun as he reached the train and ... saw a person he believed to be a surveillance officer point at a male ... Mr de Menezes stood up and was grabbed by the surveillance officer who pushed him back onto the seat. Charlie 2 was convinced Mr de Menezes was a suicide bomber about to detonate a bomb. He states that he honestly believed that unless he acted immediately everyone present was about to die. ... He held his gun to Mr de Menezes' head and fired (64).

When interviewed, in response to being asked to *explain the word 'Stop'*, Commander P's response was that *'Stop' is a common word in policing terms and it was meant as 'stop and detain' (134).*

Discussion

The Jean Charles de Menezes case throws into sharp relief the processes and consequences when an organization introduces a novel routine to cope with a potential novel situation. Our analysis reveals how the degree of change required in this case lies beyond the elasticity of an existing frame or routine. It also draws attention to how an extant frame does not necessarily break, i.e. stop, in the face of new cues but instead lingers on in a process of being overlain by a new 'becoming'. In so doing, this highlights the impact of the interplay of novel frames and cues on participants' identities, heedful inter-relating (Weick and Roberts, 1993) and collective sensemaking. This discussion section will first address frames and cues that are central to our case, as evidenced through a novel tool and changing situation. We then go on to consider the people who are core to enacting this case, and draw attention to the critical consequences that these novelties have for identities and action, which in turn draws us back to foundational principles of sensemaking. Throughout this, we retain an awareness of how sensemaking requires us to 'stay in contact with context' (Weick, 2009: 265).

Frames and cues: A novel tool and a novel situation

The answer to Goffman's (1974: 4) question, 'What is going on here?', hangs on the ongoing stream of experience, how it is punctuated to form moments or cues, and the frame through which such moments are understood. This is the process by which events (be) come into being for organizational members and how we make sense by endowing experience with meaning (Bruner, 1990). This is a conservative process which tends to be shaped by 'what has gone on in the past', with pre-existing frames providing not only guides for interpretation but also for action and emplotment (Czarniawska, 2008). Hence, for sense-makers in that context, a sensible event often resembles one that has happened before. The question then arises as to how people in organizations recognize changing circumstances and take them into account: that is, how do they deal with novelty and the surprise of the unexpected, and what impact does this have on subsequent organizing and sensemaking?

With particular regard to the CT context, as former director of GCHQ David Omand put it, 'What we prepare for, we deter. So what we experience by way of events is alas what we have not prepared for' (2010: x). This was evidenced through the 9/11 Commission Report (2004), which showed how CT agencies were prepared for and on the *alert* for signs of the past, but were unprepared for and *unaware* of signals of an emerging, changing present. The Report concluded that the attacks of 9/11 revealed four kinds of failure – in imagination, policy, capabilities and management (9/11 Commission Report, 2004: 339) – reserving its most stinging criticism for a failure in organizational rather than individual imagination. Imagination is not a gift usually associated with bureaucracies; nevertheless, the Commission notes, 'it is crucial to find ways of routinizing even bureaucratizing the exercise of imagination' (9/11 Commission Report, 2004: 334).

In effect, what the 9/11 Commission concluded was that the frames that reflected the organization of/for CT had become grounded and routinized to the extent that they did not notice weak signals in the environment (Turner and Pidgeon, 1997; Vaughan, 1996). 'Operation Kratos People' was built on this vicarious learning from 9/11 in an endeavour to provide a new routine for handling the novel situation of 'suicide bombing', which had not yet been experienced in the UK. In this way, a new frame becomes a resource by providing a recipe for interpretation and action, described in this case as a new tool. We use this descriptor as it resonates better with the language of practice where managers and police officers talk of operational tools rather than routines. The common thread that interweaves them both is that they serve as framing devices for action.

The briefing of specialist firearms officers by Trojan 84 served to reinforce the belief that they were dealing with a suicide bomber and that they were in a Kratos situation. Although never announced formally as a Kratos operation, there were many cues documented in the Report (see Case Context and Synopsis above), which implied that it was, namely:

- the specialist ammunition for immediate incapacitation;
- the appointment of DSO with the authority to order a critical shot;
- firearms officers being told that they 'must trust' (IPCC, 2007: 91) the information coming from the Control Room, which profoundly changed the 'normal rule' for them – away from their being legally responsible for the decision to shoot, to dependence on the Control Room for that instruction;
- their being told that they may have to use 'unusual tactics'; and
- that they may have to do something they had not done before.

Individually, each of these indicators points to Kratos. Taken collectively and in relation to this briefing at this time and in this context, those briefed, i.e. those who fired the fatal shots, began to believe this to be a Kratos operation. For example, as 'William' (member of the Firearms team) put it when discussing the final moments preceding the killing, 'the tone of voice and urgency of this radio transmission, combined with all the intelligence meant to me that he must be stopped immediately and at any cost' (IPCC, 2007: 61). He explains that together with the intervention of the DSO and advice emanating from the Control Room, 'this all leads me to believe this to be a Kratos incident if the male did not comply immediately with police actions or requirements.' (IPCC, 2007:

61). This was underscored by a further briefing by DCI C who talked of 'determined suicide bombers', and said that 'devices could be concealed on the body and triggered easily' (IPCC, 2007: 91). Expectations are being created here that will drive subsequent interpretations: a case of believing is seeing (Gioia, 2006; Weick, 1979).

The momentary awareness for those being briefed makes most plausible sense by believing it *is* a Kratos situation which they are looking at and against which they orient their action. The original strategy of a safe containment which those involved knew as routine from 'past moments' had fallen, while Kratos had been 'behaviourally defined', even though not officially named. Furthermore, Kratos was a new tool and, although it was based on recent past moments, none of those moments had been experienced by the people involved in this case. The plan had never been operationalized and, as we see in this case, a lack of prototypical past moments can prolong the search for meaning (Weick, 1995: 111).

Our case exemplifies a situation consistent with the process perspective: that is, through organizing, events are in the process of becoming and, in so doing, what has gone on before frames that shaping process. Framing pursues experience into memory, where it is systematically altered to conform to our canonical representations of the social world (Bruner, 1990: 56). This organization of past experience is brought to bear on current circumstances in the hope that a past representation will provide a plausible answer to what the story is, or what is going on. This is why a sensible event is one that resembles something that has happened before and why history is crucial to understanding the process of how events are ushered into existence (Weick, 1995). In order to make sense of what is going on amidst this ongoing stream of experience, people have to interrupt that stream to step aside and reflect back on what it is that has just happened.

It took 33 minutes between Mr de Menezes leaving his flat and being shot – an intense period of very fast-moving action. Two frames are at play in this situation – the old and the new (i.e. Kratos) – and remain provisional amidst the search for confirmation of the suspect's identification. Without an identification of the suspect, this complicates the frames in use, which in turn both affects and effects what cues are seen and meanings ascribed to them, and ultimately shapes the action that follows. This example speaks to Tsoukas and Chia's (2002: 580) encouragement to develop our understanding of being *and* becoming, or organization *and* organizing, and adds both a temporal and a plural dimension to this. In addition, we recognize that the process of becoming overlays a process of going, which both take time to come and go and which also happens at different speeds (Colville, 2009). As Weick (2012) notes, 'Organizational becoming (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002) is a recurring perspective ... but becoming is actually becomings and becomings unfold at different speeds. Faster becomings provide frames within which slower becomings gain their meaning' (Weick, 2012: 148).

It is not just process researchers who endeavour to 'catch reality in flight' but it is also those officers involved in trying to make sense of a fast-flowing stream of experience: quite literally, on the run. Thus, sensemaking is in the nature of the reflective glance (Weick, 1979: 194), informed by previous efforts of organizing and retained as frames of organized past experience (Goffman, 1974: 4). Frames shape not only what aspects of the stream will be noticed – current cues – but also the meaning that will be ascribed to them and, with that, the enactor's identity and actions undertaken, to which we now turn.

Novel identities

In discussing frames and cues, and their becomings and goings, it is important not to lose sight of the people who carry frames, notice cues, and endeavour to make sense of what is happening and take action as a consequence of this process. Identity is a core property of sensemaking because 'Depending on who I am, my definition of what is "out there" will also change ... But the direction of causality flows just as often from the situation to a definition of self as it does the other way.' (Weick, 1995: 20). Cunliffe and Coupland (2012) argue that these images of identity are not confined to cognitive representations and that sensemaking includes embodied efforts to work out 'who we are' and 'what we should do'. Notions of embodied sensemaking infused with identity are particularly germane when action is not only swift but, as seen in this case, where bodily movements and their relationship to the weapons they were carrying are of central importance to next acts (Goffman, 1974).

The fast-moving pace by which circumstances were happening in our case increased further once the suspect left the house, which in turn further heightened anxiety. Communication and coordination, and hence organization (Taylor and Van Every, 2000), become equivocal as different parties report various degrees of confirmation about whether the person being followed is indeed the suspected suicide bomber, Osman. The original police operation instigated by Commander M was to maintain surveillance at 21 Scotia Road and to 'safely contain' anyone leaving the premises. Like many organizational situations where contrarian events take place, that falters with the departure of the suspect before the arrival of CO19 officers. Circumstances and contexts are moving towards a definition of the situation that makes sense in terms of the Kratos frame for CO19 officers. However, the pre-existing firearms officer identity is also potentially in play, such that there is equivocality as to which identity is more appropriate to the situation. Without the confirmed identification of the suspect and without the command to shoot, what was going on was a routine CT operation. There was an extant organizational frame that had been honed and practised over a number of years and was deeply embedded in the identity of firearms officers.

Given that there will be differences in those circumstances, adjustments or change to maintain a steady outcome will often be realized through the ongoing variations, which emerge frequently, even imperceptibly, in the slippages and improvisations of everyday activity (Orlikowski, 1996: 88). The extant frame and routine were deeply engrained in firearms officer training and institutionally embedded, effectively providing their 'tool' for dealing with firearms incidents. As servants of the Crown and in the exercise of their sworn duty to protect life and property, UK police officers ultimately hold individual responsibility and accountability, and use autonomy to act as they deem necessary given their judgement of the threat they face. Thus this frame had taken on the quality of a template – if not exactly a taken-for-granted one, then that of one that was well rehearsed, routinized and reliable.⁸

However, it was adjudged that the routine could not accommodate the changes anticipated to deal with the novelty of a suicide bombing. The difference between past frames and current cues was of an order that necessitated a novel routine rather than an amendment to the extant one for handling terrorist attack. Within the protocols of a

Kratos operation, responsibility for the authority to take the 'critical shot' is shifted from the firearms officer to the DSO, who has to satisfy him- or herself that they have 'sufficient information to justify use of lethal force' (IPCC, 2007: 41). This was a radically new frame that removed the decision and accountability for action to open fire away from firearms officers and to the DSO such that the role of the firearms officer then became 'fire when instructed' by a DSO, rather than resting on the judgement of a firearms officer in the field: a radically new identity for CO19 officers.

In sum, our case shows how novel cues had to be translated and stabilized into a novel routine that not only would notice cues but also provide guides to action so they may be 'made sense of'. There was a frame borne of historical routine running alongside a novel frame to deal with a novel situation and as yet un-experienced by those involved here. This meant that both frames were in play and availing as a resource for sensemaking. This led to two plausible accounts as to what was going on which further complicated matters in as much as the identities and the respective definitions of what cues 'out there' meant and what behaviour followed also differed.

This suggests that definitions of the situation are bound up with definitions of identity. Organizational identity comprises not only beliefs, thoughts and claims about 'who we are as an organization' but also 'what we do' (Nag et al., 2007). Identity is a concept that organizations enact and, as such, is relatively underdeveloped as an area of research in general and particularly in its relationship to sensemaking (Gioia et al., 2010). Our research resonates with work encouraged by Weick et al. (2005) not only to show how sensemaking is more boldly meshed with identity, but also to give more insight as to how the enactment of identity is tied to operating frames within which cues are interpreted. Under Kratos, the firearms officers of CO19 had a different identity from that which pertained under the 'normal' routine for dealing with armed terrorist incidents. This generated dissonance because the different identities call for different responses on their part. 'Who is going on' affects interpretations as to what is going on and what action follows as a result. When the DSO issues the command 'Stop him' under a non-Kratos routine, it means 'stop and detain him'. This is in fact what the DSO said had meant. Under Kratos, which Charlie 2 and other members of CO19 believed to be the case, such that if directed by the DSO to fire a critical shot then they would, it meant something else. 'Stop him' seemed unequivocal: tragically, it made fatal sense.

Conclusion

Organizationally, the MPS CT unit created a novel routine to deal with a novel situation which was adjudged beyond the scope and flexibility of extant organizational routines. However, as we see in this case, rather than reducing equivocality or clarifying the situation, the presence of two possible routines to handle the circumstances leads to an increase in equivocality. This equivocality is generated not because of the elusiveness of shared or plausible meanings – rather more that the meanings were shared out and different, depending on which routine was judged to be relevant. The problem was not a lack of plausible meaning but the presence of a number of plausible meanings. As a result, the answer to the questions, what's going on here and what should I do, are tragically different, although they all make sense in terms of their own routine or frame.

Sensemaking is consistent in terms of each frame but inconsistent at the collective level of organizing. We unpack this overarching conclusion in terms of its contribution to the furtherance of organizing and sensemaking theory, the relevance to organizational practice, and how it aids the development of a bridge between theory and practice.

In the 33 minutes between the suspect leaving the house in Scotia Road and being shot, a number of possibilities were becoming, depending on what routine was understood to be salient. The circumstances were inchoate and, even though still plausible, the meanings were equivocal. Meanings inform and constrain identity and action (Mills, 2003). Here we have a situation which exemplifies how the meaning of what is going on is tied to who is going on and what action follows (Brown, 2006). Kratos gives a different identity that has different legal responsibilities and different action consequences for CO19 and the DSO. From this, we conclude that who we are is central to sensemaking such that, when novel situations give rise to novel routines, this can lead to different and swiftly changing identities that impact on meanings and action taken. Organizations not only face times of unprecedented change but, in a more profound sense, also find out who they are and who they are becoming.

Identity has always been important in organizing and sensemaking. Our case analysis reveals it to be even more critically important, and also more malleable and dynamic than has previously been considered. Theoretically this points to analysis that extends beyond sensemaking in crisis to a more pluralistic, temporal consideration of how sensemaking is altered through changes that follow crisis: that is, examining the combined effects of triple novelty (i.e. of situations, tools and identities) on sensemaking and organizing. In the case examined here, we see how the endeavour to reduce equivocality through creating Kratos ultimately had the effect of increasing equivocality and then led to a further crisis.

The implications for organizational practice are considerable as they point out not only the difficulties of noticing and responding to dynamic complexity but also the potential effects of instigating changes to deal with such circumstances. The 9/11 Commission recommended bureaucratizing imagination in order to contend with a fast-changing world that owes little to yesterday. However, there is little appreciation of how this might be achieved or the organizational frailties that could underlie this process. A lesson for organizations seeking high reliability of outcome in complex dynamic environments is that too much novelty can lead to an increase rather than a reduction in equivocality, and may lead to mistakes rather than reduce them. This highlights the need for careful appreciation of lessons learnt from crisis and how their implementation may then alter the ability of the organization to make collective sense of what is going on and what should be done next. The notion of the integrated effects of this triple novelty on sensemaking and organizing also warrant closer consideration with regard to training and preparation for prospective sensemaking and organizing.

Theorizing practice, Corley and Gioia (2011) argue that a scholarly contribution is made by management academics anticipating in their theorizing what society needs to know and of influencing the sensegiving process as to how that knowing is received. We argue that the dynamic complexities experienced by the MPS CT unit as they organized to make sense of changing patterns of terrorist threat serve as a prototype of the conditions that will become more commonplace for organizations tomorrow. The meta-lesson

that can be drawn from this is that lessons learnt from such circumstances may not serve well for future sensemaking and organizing where novelty of frames, identities and unprecedented dynamic complexity come together simultaneously and concurrently.

This theorizing has important implications for organizations that are increasingly caught up in, and do not want to be caught out by, fast-changing circumstances. The consequences of such events happening are all too tragically evidenced in our case. The shooting of Mr de Menezes was a tragic mistake. We hope that our analysis of the sensemaking that led to this mistake will provide insights for those involved in both the theory and practice of sensemaking and organizing amidst dynamic complexity.

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Notes

- 1 The IPCC is a non-departmental public body, established in 2004 and funded by the UK Government's Home Office, 'by law entirely independent of the police, interest groups and political parties and whose decisions on cases are free from government involvement'. Its purpose is to ensure that suitable arrangements are in place for dealing with complaints or allegations of misconduct against any person serving with the Police Service in England and Wales. Reports are prepared by designated investigators – in this case two recently retired detective chief superintendents, each with over 30 years' experience of police service.
- 2 As articulated in the Report (IPCC, 2007: 5): 'The primary purpose of the report was to meet the statutory obligations of the IPCC following an investigation of this kind. These are to advise the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) of any criminal offence that may have been committed and to provide it with the evidence necessary to come to its decision about any prosecution; to enable the 'responsible authorities' of the officers concerned, in this case the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) and Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA), to consider what action they may need to take in relation to discipline or other matters; in cases of exceptional gravity such as this, to inform the Home Secretary of the circumstances; and finally, to assist the Coroner in relation to any Inquest.' It concludes that the CPS might consider criminal charges for serious offences including: Manslaughter, Abuse of Public Office and Attempting to Pervert the Course of Justice, as well as for breach of Health and Safety at Work Act. In 2007, the MPS was found guilty and fined for this breach.
- 3 This remains the case, even though the veracity of reasons given for those explanations was later challenged during the prosecution of the police and the subsequent Coroner's Inquest (which ultimately returned an open verdict in 2008).

- 4 Members of the police service and CT officers are 'servants of the Crown' and the IPCC is an 'independent authority' that investigates complaints against the Police Service. Given the nature of this case, together with family and public response and complaints lodged against police conduct, the IPCC also conducted a second inquiry into 'complaints about the MPS' handling of public statements following the shooting of Mr Jean Charles de Menzes'. Entitled *Stockwell 2*, this report concluded with six general recommendations for improving police conduct, and that while the complaint against the Commissioner was unsubstantiated, five officers were recommended to 'receive constructive advice from their managers' and the sixth named officer's case was referred to the Metropolitan Police Authority for them to take action concerning his 'conduct issues'.
- 5 In this particular case, the Inquiry was led by Bob Cummins (Senior Investigating Officer) along with a Deputy, Steve Reynolds, and his 'team'. Although the report does not identify the size or membership of the team, both named officers are former senior police officers and all team members have 'powers and privileges of constables' (IPCC, 2007: 12) in order to fulfil their brief.
- 6 While these senior officers were formally unable to contribute to our inquiry case analysis, they were engaged in a pilot study we were undertaking as the basis for further research that we were proposing to conduct into UK CT operations. These included a DAC and four senior members of MPS staff with CT involvement at both policy and operational levels. Hence we took the opportunity to present our analysis and findings in order for them to be able to evaluate the robustness of our work.
- 7 www.ipcc.gov.uk.
- 8 The reliability and flexibility of the police routine is found in the fact that in 2005–2006, firearms were authorized for use in 18,891 police operations in England and Wales. Of these, 14,355 operations requested an armed response vehicle to be sent to the scene of an emerging event in case they were called upon to make an armed intervention. Yet for all these armed operations in 2005–2006, firearms officers discharged their weapons on only 9 occasions, including the shooting of Mr de Menezes on 22 July 2005. It is also important to note that the UK police are not routinely armed: only 4 per cent of serving officers are trained and authorized to carry firearms.

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