

TRIGGERS AND ENABLERS OF SENSEGIVING IN ORGANIZATIONS

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Drawing on a longitudinal study of sensegiving in organizations, we investigate the conditions associated with sensegiving by stakeholders and by leaders. For each group, we identify conditions that *trigger* sensegiving and conditions that *enable* it. Integrating these analyses across organizational actors, we show that, generally: (1) the perception or anticipation of a gap in organizational sensemaking processes triggers sensemaking and (2) both discursive ability, which allows leaders and stakeholders to construct and articulate persuasive accounts, and process facilitators—routines, practices, and structures that give organizational actors time and opportunity to engage in sensegiving—enable sensegiving.

Organizational life is full of attempts to affect how others perceive and understand the world. Gioia and Chittipeddi coined the term “sensegiving” to describe this “process of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality” (1991: 442). *Sensegiving* is an interpretive process (Bartunek, Krim, Necochea, & Humphries, 1999; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) in which actors influence each other through persuasive or evocative language (Dunford & Jones, 2000; Snell, 2002), and it is used both by organizational leaders (Bartunek et al., 1999; Corley & Gioia, 2004; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) and other stakeholders, including middle managers (Balogun, 2003; Westley, 1990), directors (McNulty & Pettigrew, 1999), and other employees (Maitlis, 2005).

Sensegiving is not only a prevalent activity in organizations, but also a critically important one. Gioia and Chittipeddi's (1991) study, for instance, reveals the significant role that leader sensegiving can play in effecting major change, a finding echoed in several other studies (Bartunek et al., 1999; Corley & Gioia, 2004; Dunford & Jones, 2000; Gioia & Thomas, 1996). More broadly, research on the symbolic aspects of leadership (Pfeffer, 1981; Pondy, 1978; Smircich & Morgan, 1982) has highlighted sensegiving as a key leadership activity in times of both change and stability. Sensegiving by stakeholders can also have profound consequences,

affecting strategic decision making, and stakeholders' integration into or exclusion from a range of important organizational processes (Balogun, 2003; Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Westley, 1990). More broadly, the pattern of leader and stakeholder sensegiving in combination has been shown to shape the processes and outcomes of organizational “sensemaking,” or the process of social construction in which individuals attempt to interpret and explain sets of cues from their environments (Maitlis, 2005).

In general, previous studies of sensegiving have focused on exploring the who and the what: who the actors engaging in sensegiving are, and what strategies they are using to do so. We know little, however, about the conditions associated with sensegiving in organizations—where, when, or why it occurs—despite the fundamental nature of these issues. Research has shown, for instance, that stakeholders and leaders do not always engage in sensegiving, even around issues that matter to them (Dutton, Ashford, Lawrence, & Miner-Rubino, 2002; Maitlis, 2005), but scholars lack a good understanding of why this is so. Most studies of sensegiving have either ignored this question, or relied on single case studies that have made it difficult to identify a broad range of motivators for sensegiving. Even less is known about the conditions that might facilitate sensegiving by those stakeholders and leaders motivated to engage in it. These are the issues we begin to address in this paper: drawing on a longitudinal, qualitative study of sensemaking in 27 issue domains across three organizations, we investigate the triggers and enablers associated

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with sensegiving by organizational leaders and stakeholders.

This large-scale comparative study is unique in sensegiving research and provides the foundation for two sets of contributions. First, we add to understanding of what *motivates* organization members' sensegiving by identifying two conditions that trigger sensegiving by stakeholders and two that trigger sensegiving by leaders. We then integrate these analyses to show that, more generally, sensegiving is triggered by the perception or anticipation of a gap in organizational sensemaking processes. Second, this study contributes to an understanding of the conditions that *facilitate* sensegiving by motivated actors. We identify three enablers for stakeholders and two for leaders and then integrate these analyses to show that sensegiving by both groups is enabled by (1) the possession of a discursive ability that allows them to fashion persuasive accounts and (2) the presence of process facilitators—organizational routines, practices, and structures that provide the time and opportunity to engage in sensegiving.

RESEARCH ON SENSEGIVING IN ORGANIZATIONS

Gioia and Chittipeddi's (1991) study has prompted a number of studies of sensegiving in a variety of contexts. Although most of these do not examine sensegiving as deeply as Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991), they offer concrete illustrations of a range of sensegiving actors and activities and highlight the importance of sensegiving in organizations. In this section, we review this research and its contributions to our understanding of sensegiving, note an important knowledge gap, and develop the research questions that guided this article.

Research on leader sensegiving has tended to focus on identifying the sensegiving strategies that leaders use to effect organizational change. In Gioia and Chittipeddi's (1991) study, for instance, the primary sensegiving agent was a new university president who used a range of sensegiving tactics, including holding meetings to "espouse his vision" and "disclosing intentions through hypothetical scenario presentations" in order to initiate and facilitate change (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991: 442–443). In another study, Bartunek and her colleagues (1999) examined sensegiving within the creation of an organizational development initiative, in which leaders constructed opportunities "in ways that appealed to the values of the receivers" (Bartunek et al., 1999: 38). Corley and Gioia (2004), in their study of identity change following a corporate spin-off, found that leader sensegiving represented an

attempt to provide either new labels to describe the company or new meanings underlying these labels (Corley & Gioia, 2004: 196). Others have looked at leader sensegiving as storytelling. Dunford and Jones (2000), for instance, highlighted the significance of senior managers' sensegiving in narratives about events surrounding strategic change in three organizations. Snell (2002) also found that narratives played a key role in leader sensegiving in a company's attempt to become a "learning organization"; the president drove change with "stories of progress" and "TQM-related success stories" supporting the learning organization initiative.

A second set of studies has pointed to the importance of sensegiving by organizational stakeholders other than leaders. In a study of a U.K. utility company, for instance, Balogun (2003) showed that sensegiving was a key function of middle managers during organizational change. Similarly, middle- and lower-level employees have been found to influence a range of decisions through the construction and propagation of issues in committees (Heller, 1998) and through "issue selling," in which subordinates try to "influence the organizational agenda by getting those above them to pay attention to an issue" (Dutton et al., 2002: 355). Sensegiving has also been shown to be an important activity of board directors, who shape both the content of company strategy and the processes through which it evolves, through such sensegiving activities as testing ideas, raising issues, and questioning assumptions (McNulty & Pettigrew, 1999). Looking at sensegiving by leaders and by stakeholders in combination, Maitlis (2005) showed how the pattern of leader and stakeholder sensegiving affects the kinds of accounts and actions produced through organizational sensemaking processes.

Together, these studies provide a rich description of organizational sensegiving. We understand that sensegiving is an important activity both of leaders and of other organizational stakeholders, with significant impacts on organizational change, strategy, and sensemaking (Bartunek et al., 1999; Corley & Gioia, 2004; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Maitlis, 2005). Through evocative language and the construction of narrative, symbols, and other sensegiving devices, leaders help shape the sensemaking processes of organization members toward some intended definition of reality. Stakeholders also play a significant role in organizational sensegiving, through activities such as issue selling, questioning, and the propagation of ideas in consultative committees. In addition, these studies highlight the importance of sensegiving: in leaders, it can be a crucial element in facilitating acceptance, enthusiasm, and energy for change, and in

stakeholders, it can determine the issues to which leaders and others attend and can help shape the kinds of accounts and actions that are generated. In effect, researchers have a good understanding of what sensegiving looks like (the sets of activities by leaders and stakeholders that constitute sensegiving) and its impacts on organizations and their members.

What is missing from all of these studies is a systematic examination of the conditions associated with organizational stakeholder and leader sensegiving. Although previous work has shown that leaders and stakeholders do not always engage in sensegiving around issues, even when it might benefit them or their organizations (Dutton et al., 2002; Maitlis, 2005), there is relatively little understanding of why this is so. Two issues in this regard concern the triggers of sensegiving (the conditions that motivate organizational actors to attempt to engage in sensegiving) and the enablers of sensegiving (the conditions that facilitate sensegiving on the part of motivated actors).

What understanding there is of sensegiving triggers comes primarily from the contexts in which sensegiving research has been done. Most studies of leader sensegiving have occurred in the context of major organizational change and have shown leaders motivated to shape the sensemaking of organization members in support of an intended change (Bartunek et al., 1999; Dunford & Jones, 2000; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Snell, 2002). Although this work suggests the importance of organizational change as a trigger for leader sensegiving, these studies report only one or a few case studies. They cannot therefore establish this relationship with any certainty, examine whether change might be part of a larger class of triggers, or reveal other possible triggers of leader sensegiving. Similarly, although studies of stakeholder sensegiving suggest that it may occur when stakeholders have an issue they wish to sell or an interpretation of events they want to legitimize (Dutton et al., 2002; McNulty & Pettigrew, 1999), previous research designs leave largely unaddressed the triggers of stakeholder sensegiving.

Research on the enablers of sensegiving by stakeholders and leaders is even less developed than that on its triggers. There has been very little systematic examination of the conditions that might facilitate sensegiving, despite its being a critically important organizational ability. Research on leader sensegiving has focused on the management of language and symbols (Dunford & Jones, 2000; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Snell, 2000) and so has implicitly suggested the importance of leaders' linguistic and interpretive skills. Descriptions of

stakeholder sensegiving highlight the role of a range of factors, including political skill and organizational structure (Heller, 1998), stakeholder understandings of organizational elites (Dutton et al., 2002), and formal authority (McNulty & Pettigrew, 1999). None of these studies, however, has systematically examined the enablers of sensegiving over a range of issues and actors.

Thus, two research questions guided this article: (1) What conditions trigger organizational stakeholders and leaders to engage in sensegiving activities? and (2) What conditions enable sensegiving on the part of stakeholders and leaders motivated to engage in sensegiving activities?

METHODS

These research questions make considerable demands on research design and methods. The study of sensegiving involves observing and interpreting organization members' constructions and accounts, which suggests the use of intensive qualitative methods (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Isabella, 1990). At the same time, however, the identification of conditions associated with sensegiving implies an analysis in which comparisons can be made among sensegiving situations and ideally among comparable organizations. The study on which this article is based met these criteria by following organizational sensegiving processes in real time, as they unfolded over two years in nine different issue domains for each of three matched organizations. This design provided a strong foundation for investigating conditions associated with sensegiving in organizations: the similarity of the three organizations allowed for meaningful comparisons of the processes and actors involved, and the diversity of issue domains and differences between organizations provided a basis for generalizability.

Research Context

We carried out this study in three British symphony orchestras, a context well suited to sensegiving research (see Maitlis [2005] for a more detailed discussion of the context). With numerous, powerful, and diverse stakeholders, orchestras offer a context wherein sensegiving behaviors are important and visible (Allmendinger & Hackman, 1996). Moreover, the products and processes of orchestras are highly subjective, creating an environment in which members must influence the interpretations of others to manage successfully (Hirsch, 1972).

Despite some distinctive characteristics, orchestras provide a high level of generalizability to a

broader population of organizations. Like any business, an orchestra has products (concerts and recordings) that must be marketed and sold, and it has a wide range of customers to satisfy. The structure of an orchestra is also similar to that of many midsized firms, with an administrative team that typically includes finance, marketing, operations, and human resource (HR) functions, and headed by a CEO who reports to a board. Important stakeholders include government, customers, employees, unions, and local communities. Because of these comparable goals, structures, and stakeholder roles, we would expect to find sensegiving dynamics that are similar to those in other types of organizations of similar size.

We based our choice of specific orchestras on the study's aims, seeking a balanced sample of organizations in which issues and processes could be compared but in which heterogeneity was also significant. For the sample, we took three orchestras, which are referred to hereafter as the Provincial, the Broadcasting, and the London, one from each of the three categories of British symphony orchestras (these categories are differentiated by their governance structures and revenue sources). To increase the study's generalizability, we chose orchestras that were "midlevel performers"—that is, neither the strongest nor the weakest (artistically or financially) performers in their categories—and thus avoided patterns of sensegiving that might only be associated with organizations with unusually high or low performance.

Data Collection

Our data collection was intensive, extending over more than two years and involving interviews; observation of meetings, rehearsals, and orchestra tours; and extensive documentary analysis. Data collection was aimed at understanding the sensemaking processes associated with issues in each of the orchestras; a particular focus was on gaining an understanding of who was engaged in sensegiving around different organizational issues, the ways in which they did so, and the reasons for their engagement or nonengagement in sensegiving around that issue.

In each orchestra, the first author conducted interviews with the executive director and every member of the management team; the primary non-musician "overseer," the principal conductor; and all musicians who served as representatives on the board and the orchestra committee (the musicians' elected representative body). In addition, she interviewed those who had been in the orchestra a long time or had previously been on the board or orchestra committee, as well as any other musician who

expressed an interest. At the beginning of the study, the first author explained to all parties that she was conducting a study of decision making in British symphony orchestras.

In total, she conducted 120 interviews, of which 106 were recorded and transcribed. In the remaining 14 formal interviews, she took detailed notes throughout. The interviews were semistructured and became increasingly focused over the course of the study. Each early interview focused on the interviewee's organizational role, the main issues in which he or she had been involved, and the processes through which those issues had been discussed and/or resolved. For the issues in which they had been involved, the first author asked interviewees what form this involvement had taken, why they had participated in the way that they had, who else was involved, what forms others' participation took, the points of conflict and cooperation associated with the issues, on what occasions the issues were discussed, and what actions were taken to understand, manage, and resolve the issues. As well as these formal interviews, many informal interviews with organization members and others were conducted as opportunities arose. Throughout the formal and informal interviews, respondents described both their own sensegiving and that of others. The informal interviews offered relaxed, spontaneous opportunities to investigate actors' sensegiving, but most of the interview data reported in this paper and all of the interview quotations come from formal interview transcripts.

The first author observed 107 meetings, including meetings of various groups within each organization (e.g., the executive team, the board) and meetings between orchestra leaders and external stakeholders (e.g., funders, collaborating organizations). In each meeting, she took verbatim notes, as far as possible, of what was said and by whom. The meeting observation provided many rich opportunities to witness leaders and stakeholders engaging in sensegiving on a range of topics and to observe conditions associated with these instances of sensegiving. The first author also collected a wide variety of documents for analysis. For each orchestra, these included reports, organizational appraisal documents, newsletters, and meeting minutes. In addition, she gathered all available sector-level strategy and policy documents that addressed current issues and changes in the British orchestra sector at large.

Data Analysis

We carried out the data analysis in three main stages. First, we developed a set of narratives that

described the sensemaking processes associated with issues that arose in all three organizations. Second, we identified issue domains in which stakeholders and leaders engaged in sensegiving. In the third stage, we focused on answering our research questions, identifying conditions that triggered stakeholder and leader sensegiving and conditions that enabled sensegiving on the part of stakeholders and leaders motivated to engage in sensegiving.

Stage 1: Creating narratives of the sensemaking processes. The output of the first stage of the data analysis was a set of “narratives” composed of ordered, raw data (quotes from interviews, meetings, documents, and field notes), each chronicling the sensemaking associated with an issue domain in an orchestra. This stage began with the first author listing every “organizational issue” that arose in the three orchestras during the study period (150–200 issues in each). An organizational issue was defined as a topic of discussion that involved a question or concern connected in some way to the organization as whole, rather than to a small subset of its members. Examples included “appointment of second concert master,” “improving orchestra’s stage presence,” and “making savings on orchestra van.” She then reduced this list to a comprehensive set of “typical” issues facing a British orchestra on which the analysis would focus, using four criteria. First, the issues had to have arisen in all three organizations. Through data reduction (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), it was possible to create categories broad enough that each captured an issue that arose in all three orchestras. Principal conductor appointment was one such issue. Two orchestras were considering whether to renew their incumbent’s contract; the other faced making a new appointment. Although these issues (appointment and renewal) are not exactly the same, they were similar enough for the purposes of this study to be grouped together as “principal conductor appointment/contract renewal.” The second criterion was that, in combination, the domains should cover artistic, financial, and personnel areas and include both strategy and operations. Applied together, the first and second criteria ensured that we examined sensegiving within a generalizable set of issue domains. The third criterion was that data for the selected domains should be available from multiple sources and largely gathered as the issue unfolded, rather than retrospectively. We used this criterion to maximize the validity of the data, ensuring triangulation through multiple sources and real-time data collection to avoid biases associated with retrospective accounts of action (Golden, 1992). The fourth criterion was that organization

members should consider all issues to be of real significance. This ensured that the issue alone would not determine leaders’ or stakeholders’ tendency to engage in sensegiving: it reduced the likelihood of leaders or stakeholders not engaging in sensegiving simply because they regarded an issue as transient or trivial. After developing a draft set of issues, the first author refined it on the basis of discussions with key respondents in each orchestra. All respondents confirmed that the final set covered the major issues that had arisen during the study period and that it captured the main categories of issues normally faced by their organization. The nine issue domains were as follows: (1) programming of repertoire, (2) principal conductor appointment/contract renewal, (3) reengagement of guest conductors, (4) dealing with unsatisfactory player performance, (5) appointment of key players (e.g., section principals), (6) players’ pay and contract review, (7) identifying areas for cost cutting, (8) increasing income generation, and (9) collaborative ventures.

Following Eisenhardt and Bourgeois (1988), the first author then developed a narrative of 5–25 single-spaced pages that chronicled the sensemaking activities for each issue domain in each orchestra (see the Appendix for an excerpt from one of the narratives). She constructed these 27 narratives by tracing through all the chronologically ordered raw data for each orchestra to identify every time a given issue arose and then describing the organizational sensemaking process through quotations from interviews, meeting transcripts, archival documentation, and field notes. Thus, these narratives are composed primarily of ordered raw data, with some additional commentary for clarity, which together tell the story of each issue as it unfolded. The first author used a broad definition of sensemaking at this stage to identify sensemaking processes, so that the narratives reflected all of the attempts by organizational actors to understand, interpret, or name an issue, or to affect the ways in which others did any of these.

Although the conventional criteria of reliability and validity are not easily applied to naturalistic research, it is still important to show why the findings of a qualitative study are representative of the phenomenon of interest (Lee, 1999). The longitudinal, ethnographic nature of this study, the numerous sources of data, and the diverse methods of data collection meant that the first author constructed the narratives not through some idiosyncratic impression she gained, but through a rigorous procedure that made full use of the wealth and complexity of data.

Stage 2: Identifying issue domains in which stakeholders and leaders engaged in sensegiving. This stage of the data analysis had two parts. The first part involved identifying stakeholders and leaders. We separated stakeholders and leaders in our analysis because we believed that the conditions associated with sensegiving on the part of each group were likely to be distinct. Previous sensegiving research suggests marked differences between leader and stakeholder responsibilities for sensegiving (leaders are expected to articulate their visions and promote directions in many organizational domains) and resources (Balogun, 2003; Bartunek et al., 1999; Dunford & Jones, 2000; Dutton et al., 2002; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Moreover, research from the stakeholder theory tradition suggests that leaders and stakeholders play distinct roles in organizations, attending to different sets of issues and basing responses on different sets of resources (Agle & Mitchell, 1999).

We identified relevant stakeholders inductively after the data collection, rather than assuming a set of stakeholders in advance or identifying them early on in the fieldwork. This was to avoid either focusing upon stakeholders subsequently found to be insignificant or excluding and therefore missing the sensegiving of actors who might at first have appeared peripheral. By combining certain groups and individuals (e.g., pooling all of an orchestra's administrators into one "administration" category), we were able to identify sets of stakeholders that were comparable across organizations. After refining the set through feedback from key informants, we identified ten stakeholder groups common to all three organizations: orchestra administration, player representatives, section principals, players as a group, principal conductor, overseers, customers, funders, guest artists, and the musicians' union. For each organization, we identified as leaders the two people with the greatest formal authority. The titles and roles of these individuals varied somewhat by orchestra, reflecting differences in the orchestras' organizational structures: in the Provincial and Broadcasting Orchestras, these individuals were the executive director and the next most senior administrator; in the London Orchestra, the leaders were the executive director and the chairman of the board. We chose two leaders from each orchestra because we observed in each organization a significant difference in organizational roles between these two individuals and the rest of the orchestra members. For each orchestra, the two leaders were both involved in and had authority over a far greater number of issues than any other member.

The second part of Stage 2 involved identifying

sensegiving by stakeholders and by leaders. In order to do this, we reviewed the sensemaking literature to identify typical sensegiving activities (e.g., Bartunek et al., 1999; Dunford & Jones, 2000; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) and analyzed a subset of our narratives to develop a list of concrete sensegiving activities in the orchestras. Although sensegiving is a form of influence, many forms, such as exchange and coercion, often do not involve attempts to shape the sensemaking of others or shift their definitions of reality (Lawrence, Mauws, Dyck, & Kleyesen, 2005). Moreover, individual activities do not in themselves constitute sensegiving, since a case of sensegiving typically involves multiple activities carried out by an actor to shape the sensemaking of others (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). We used this list not to determine what constituted sensegiving, but rather to sensitize us to potential types of activity that might be associated with sensegiving. Some of these activities were more obviously associated with the shaping of meaning construction, such as "justifying a view" or "promoting a position," and others were more apparently routine acts: we regarded calling a meeting, for example, as a sensegiving activity when the meeting was called in order to influence others' sensemaking (as evidenced by, for instance, the agenda or opening statements). In all cases, however, we only considered activities as elements of sensegiving when they were parts of attempts by actors to influence the sensemaking of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality. Some sensegiving activities were unique to leaders, such as presenting an executive director's report to an orchestra's board, but most were common to leaders and stakeholders.

For each of the 27 issue domains, we categorized leaders and each stakeholder group as sensegiving or not sensegiving. Our aim was to differentiate the domains in which leaders or stakeholders were attempting to "influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality" (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991: 442) from those in which such attempts did not occur. For each issue, there were always some stakeholders who engaged in sensegiving and others who did not. In contrast, leaders were found to engage in at least some minimal sensegiving activities in every issue domain; this was not surprising, since each issue concerned important organization-wide matters and was tracked over an extended period of time. We did not believe, however, that categorizing all of these instances as "sensegiving" was either consistent with the notion of leader sensegiving as described by Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) or useful for under-

standing conditions associated with leader sensegiving. We therefore considered a leader to be engaged in sensegiving only when we could identify his¹ “preferred redefinition of reality” and a clear set of behaviors through which the leader was attempting to move organization members and stakeholders toward this redefinition.

For example, in analyzing the Provincial’s guest conductor reengagement, we first identified which stakeholders were and were not involved in sensegiving. The Appendix, taken from the narrative of this issue domain, shows sensegiving by three groups: the player representatives (orchestra committee); the musicians as a group (full orchestra); and the orchestra’s administration (senior management). Analysis of the full narrative also showed that the principal conductor, guest artists, customers, funders, and overseers at various times attempted to influence the sensemaking of others with respect to the orchestra’s guest conductor issue. Each of these groups was classified as “engaged in sensegiving.” Two stakeholder groups—the section principals and the musicians’ union—were found not to undertake any sensegiving activities in this domain and so were classified as “not engaged in sensegiving.” We then analyzed the narrative to assess leader sensegiving in this domain. This procedure revealed that the Provincial’s leaders did not articulate a preferred definition of reality in relation to this issue and did not engage in more than a minimal number of activities aimed at influencing the sensemaking of others. We therefore classified leaders in this issue domain as “not sensegiving.”

In contrast, Broadcasting leaders were identified as sensegiving in the area of cost cutting, given their articulation of a preferred redefinition of reality and their engagement in a variety of behaviors aimed at moving others toward it. The Broadcasting CEO was clear in his vision for a new system for a “player release” (musicians’ paid time off), explaining that he sought a system that cost less and had a less negative impact on artistic performance. He first discussed the financial implications of change with the business manager and then brought the issue up in an orchestra committee meeting, expressing his concerns about the current system. In a subsequent meeting, he informed the committee of his plans for “streamlining” the system, explaining that they were going to undertake a study of other orchestras’ release systems, on which they would base their revised system. Some months later, the CEO presented the proposal for a new system to the

players’ chairman, to be communicated to the rest of the orchestra.

Stage 3: Identifying conditions associated with stakeholder and leader sensegiving. The final stage of the data analysis focused on identifying conditions associated with leader and stakeholder sensegiving. We should first note the relationship between sensegiving and sensemaking. Although sensegiving concerns influencing the sensemaking of others, we often observed that a person’s sensegiving also seemed to affect his or her own sensemaking around an issue. In fact, this seems nearly inevitable, since the ways in which people speak will always inform their understandings of their own beliefs and positions (Weick, 1995). The reverse, however, is not the case: not all instances of sensemaking involve sensegiving. Rather, much of the time, people try to work out the meaning of an event or action without attempting to shift others’ definition of reality (Weick, 1995). Weick (1995) argued that sensemaking is associated with surprising or confusing situations. We argue that sensegiving is also associated with a further set of conditions that differentiate it from sensemaking. Thus, we focused our analysis on conditions associated with sensegiving that extend beyond those that Weick (1995) associated with sensemaking. This stage of the data analysis involved three steps.

First, for each of the 27 issues, we identified first-order concepts (Van Maanen, 1979): situationally specific factors directly connected to stakeholder and leader sensegiving that could be described with a simple phrase such as “poor organizational decision process” or “poor outcomes of leader decision making” (both first-order concepts that aggregated to the second-order theme of “perceptions of a lack of leader competence”).² This step involved two rounds of analysis via the constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the first focused on stakeholders and the second on leaders. To identify first-order concepts describing conditions associated with stakeholder sensegiving, we began by examining each issue domain (e.g., programming in the Provincial) to see which stakeholder groups were and were not engaged in sensegiving and to ascertain the conditions that distinguished these groups from one another.

² Unlike first-order concepts in some qualitative studies (e.g., Corley & Gioia, 2004; Van Maanen, 1979), ours do not necessarily incorporate the language of organizational actors. Rather, the names of our first-order concepts are intended to provide simple, descriptive labels for commonly described conditions in our data, and so represent an initial aggregation of the data.

¹ All the leaders were male.

other. This was an inductive and recursive process in which we initially identified, for each issue, conditions that seemed either to trigger or to enable sensegiving by stakeholder groups engaged in sensegiving and compared these conditions to those of the stakeholder groups that did not engage in sensegiving. When we found that an identified condition did not differentiate sensegiving from nonsensegiving stakeholders for an issue, we either discarded that condition or revised it to more precisely describe the condition of only the sensegiving stakeholder groups. In the latter case, we cycled through the comparative process again to ensure that the revised conditions discriminated between stakeholder groups that did and did not engage in sensegiving around that issue. For example, one condition that emerged in our early coding as seeming to enable stakeholder sensegiving was the presence of a large number of individuals constituting a stakeholder group; as we tested this condition with respect to different stakeholder groups in different sensemaking domains, we found that it did not consistently differentiate those stakeholder groups that engaged in sensegiving from those that did not. As a result, we discarded it from the list of conditions associated with sensegiving. We then examined each stakeholder group to identify the conditions that distinguished those issue domains in which it engaged in sensegiving from those in which it did not. We followed a comparative process similar to that described above, generating initial first-order concepts that described conditions, comparing issue domains to check how well these conditions discriminated between issue domains in which the stakeholder group engaged in sensegiving and those in which it did not, discarding or revising nondiscriminating conditions, and then cycling through the comparative process until we had identified a set of first-order conditions for that stakeholder group. Each of these processes led to the development of a set of first-order conditions that described bases for stakeholder sensegiving and included characteristics of stakeholders, organization, and issue.

To generate the list of first-order conditions associated with leader sensegiving, we engaged in a similar process of constant comparison. First, we examined the issue domains in which leaders engaged in sensegiving and identified commonalities in issue, organization, or leaders in relation to different issues. We then compared first-order conditions present in the issue domains in which leaders engaged in sensegiving with those in the issue domains in which leaders did not. We retained the conditions that were evident only in issue domains in which leaders engaged in sensegiving and dis-

carded or revised them where this was not the case. We then cycled through the comparative process again with revised first-order conditions until we had identified a set that only occurred in the issue domains in which leaders engaged in sensegiving. We repeated this exercise looking for commonalities in issues, organizations, or leaders when leaders did not engage in sensegiving. Through the combination of these two sets of constant comparative processes, we thus produced two lists of first-order conditions, one associated with stakeholder sensegiving and the other with leader sensegiving.

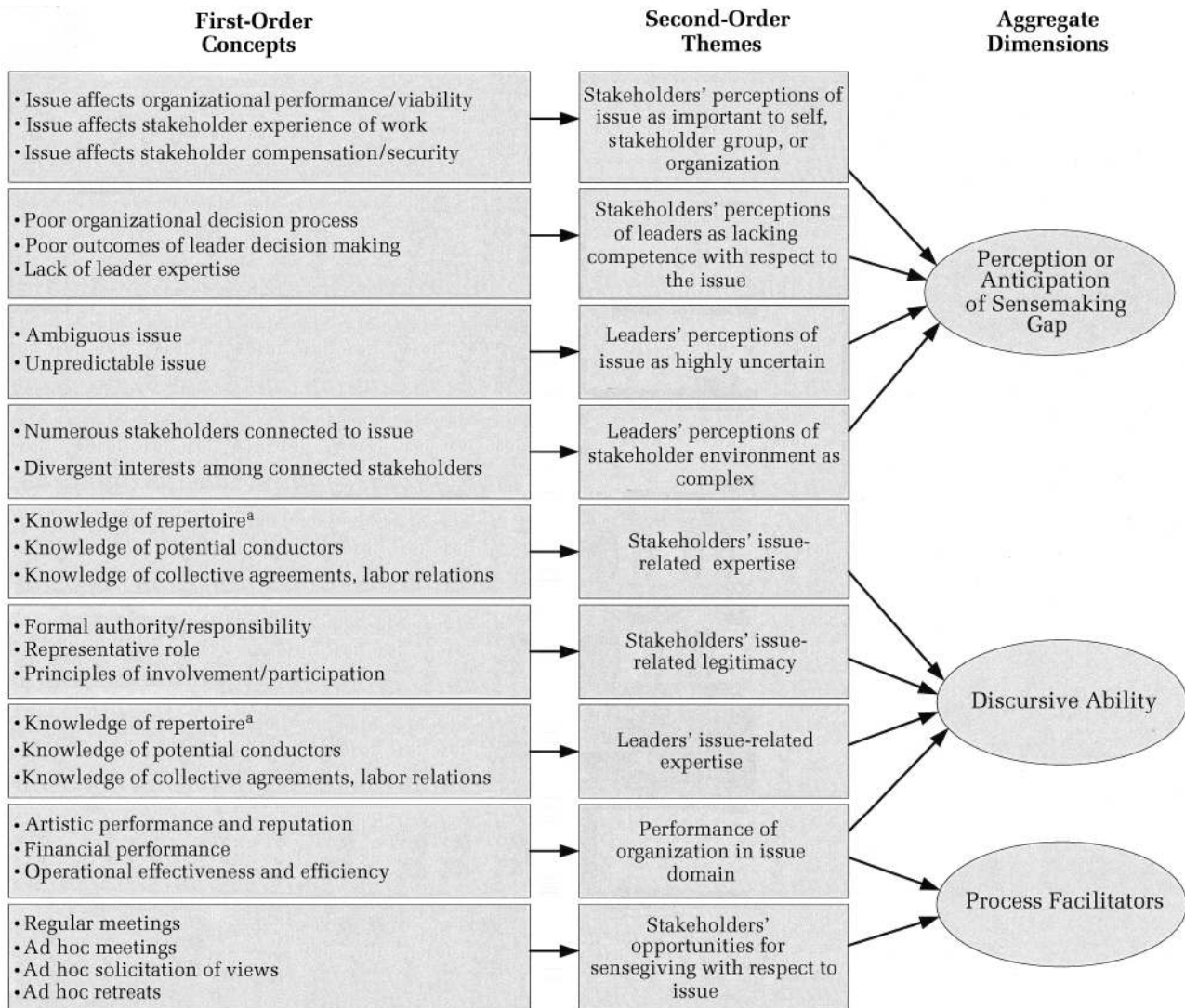
In the second step of this stage, we engaged in axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to build up more abstract descriptions of conditions that applied over multiple issues, combining first-order concepts to construct a set of second-order themes (Corley & Gioia, 2004). These themes represented more abstract and robust descriptions of the conditions associated with stakeholder and leader sensegiving; for example, "effect of the issue on the organization's performance or viability" was combined with "effect on stakeholders' everyday experience of work" and "effect on stakeholders' compensation or security" to create the second-order theme "stakeholder perceptions of issue importance." This step yielded a set of second-order themes that described the factors that were consistently associated with stakeholder sensegiving and leader sensegiving over the issue domains. Figure 1 shows the data structure that describes the final set of second-order themes and the first-order concepts from which they were derived.

The final step in this stage of the analysis focused on verifying the conditions identified. To do this, we repeatedly examined the relationships we were proposing in tandem with the data from which they were derived and checked for completeness in the trail of evidence. In keeping with an eliminative induction approach to theory generation (Miles & Huberman, 1994), we also sought exceptions to the rules and alternative explanations.

FINDINGS

Our research questions ask what triggers and enablers are associated with sensegiving by stakeholders and leaders. Our analysis of sensegiving in the 27 cases revealed a distinct set of conditions associated with stakeholder sensegiving and a distinct set of conditions associated with leader sensegiving. Although each condition in a given set did not have to be present for sensegiving to occur, the existence of each made its occurrence incrementally likely. In the remainder of this section, we first report the conditions that were associated with

FIGURE 1
Data Structure



^aAn example of stakeholder and leader expertise taken from a much larger set; see Tables 3 and 8.

stakeholder sensegiving and then those associated with leader sensegiving. We explore why these conditions might be associated with sensegiving in the following section, when we develop our theoretical model of sensegiving in organizations.

Conditions Associated with Stakeholder Sensegiving

Stakeholder sensegiving triggers. Two sets of conditions seemed to trigger sensegiving by stakeholders. First, we found that sensegiving was associated with stakeholders' perceptions that an issue was important—to themselves, to a stakeholder group whom they represented, or to their organization at large. "Perceptions of issue as important" is a second-order theme that aggregates several first-

order concepts: perceptions that the "issue affects the organization's performance or viability," that the "issue affects stakeholders' every day experience of work," and that the "issue affects stakeholders' compensation or security." Table 1 provides representative quotations from the study data that illustrate each of these first-order concepts. Quotation 1.3, for example, illustrates the perception of an issue affecting the organization's performance: in his interview, the Provincial's finance director described his perception that the orchestra's "most immediate problem" was its artistic policy. Quotation 1.8, from an interview with a London section principal, illustrates how player hiring was an issue perceived to affect stakeholders' everyday experience of work; the interviewee commented, "I can't think of any other job where you work in such

TABLE 1
Data Supporting the Theme “Perceptions of Issue as Important”^a

Associated First-Order Concepts	Representative Quotations
<i>Issue's effect on the organization's performance or viability</i>	<p>1.1 “At the end of the day it’s an orchestra, and there are five orchestras in London, and if we don’t play the right concert, then they’ll go tomorrow night and hear another one” (interview, LSO marketing manager) (LSO1).</p> <p>1.2 On the need for a “superorchestra”: “At that time [in the 80s], it felt like a rather threatening way to make rather marginal changes. Now it feels like this is something that really does need to be addressed.” (interview, BSO overseer) (BSO9)</p> <p>1.3 “The most immediate problem isn’t [the principal conductor], it’s our artistic policy, as I said the other day. God, I was getting fed up, I really was. Our artistic policy—we’ve got to get that sorted.” (interview, PSO finance director)</p> <p>1.4 “[The players’ chairman] expressed concern on behalf of the orchestra on the problem of [the leader] being ill and the implications about the stability of the orchestra.” (minutes, BSO management/orchestra committee meeting) (BSO5)</p> <p>1.5 “It was always a worry that we were going to lose our interesting, more exotic repertoire, which is what the orchestra’s reputation is on, I think. And my terror was that we were going to end up like the RPO: Tschalk. 5, Beethoven 5, and Brahms 4 ad nauseam, simply because it gets the bums on the seats.” (interview, BSO player) (BSO1)</p>
<i>Issue's effect on stakeholders' everyday experience of work</i>	<p>1.6 “It was felt that [conductor C] was a very dull and uninspiring conductor and the orchestra would not like to see him return.” (minutes, PSO artistic advisory subcommittee) (PSO3)</p> <p>1.7 “[Players] went from trying to be positive about him. Some of them were positive, and some of them tried to be positive. And it’s just gone. Even the people who liked him a year ago say they want to see him going. They think he’s totally inconsiderate, a poor music director. He doesn’t understand the [PSO] at all.” (interview, PSO orchestra manager) (PSO2)</p> <p>1.8 “I can’t think of any other job where you work in such close proximity. We’re all herded together like sheep—you have to get on with somebody. It’s both playing and how people like the person.” (interview, LSO string section principal) (LSO5)</p> <p>1.9 “I cannot overemphasize the damaging effect the [above] point has had on every individual in the orchestra: when we see a player of [this musician’s] caliber treated in this way, it is clear that none of us can count on the support of our management against the whim of any passing conductor.” (letter from BSO players’ chairman to CEO) (BSO4)</p>
<i>Issue's effect on stakeholders' compensation or security</i>	<p>1.10 “But the problem for orchestral players over the years is that they’ve never been paid enough, so they’re always grabbing for the extra bits and wanting to get paid for them, so that at the end of the day, they’ve got a reasonable amount of income. And up until fairly recently, it still didn’t mean a reasonable income. I still don’t think they get enough.” (interview, BSO orchestra manager), (BSO6)</p> <p>1.11 “There was a general discussion on the subject of the additional rights the BBC is aiming to acquire. The committee expressed the concern of the orchestra about the unrealistically large number of CD sessions desired by the BBC.” (minutes, BSO management/orchestra committee meeting) (BSO6)</p> <p>1.12 “Further discussions then took place about the players’ feelings when [the principal conductor] asked to see a player to discuss their playing. This caused players considerable stress and anxiety.” (minutes, PSO consultative committee meeting) (PSO4).</p>

^a In Tables 1–9, the Provincial, Broadcasting, and London Orchestras have been abbreviated to PSO, BSO, and LSO. The issue domain numbers (e.g., LSO1) identify both the orchestra in which and the issue to which a quote refers. The issue numbers are 1, programming; 2, principal conductor appointment/renewal; 3, guest conductor reengagement; 4, unsatisfactory player performance; 5, key player appointments; 6, player pay and contracts; 7, cost cutting; 8, income generation; 9, collaborative ventures.

close proximity.” Quotation 1.11, from a meeting between the Broadcasting’s management and its orchestra committee, conveys musicians’ concern about the impact of a new employment contract then in negotiation, illustrating the concept “issue affects stakeholders’ compensation or security.”

The second condition that was associated with sensegiving by stakeholders was “perceptions of a lack of leader competence” with respect to a given

issue. This is also a second-order theme that aggregates several first-order concepts: stakeholder perceptions of “poor organizational decision process,” “poor outcomes of leader decision making,” and “lack of leader expertise.” Table 2 provides quotations from the study data that illustrate each of these first-order concepts. Quotation 2.2, for instance, is from an interview with a Broadcasting orchestra committee member who commented on

TABLE 2
Data Supporting the Theme “Perceptions of a Lack of Leader Competence”

Associated First-Order Concepts	Representative Quotations
<i>Poor organizational decision process</i>	<p>2.1 “[The associate leader] expressed concern over the lack of information from the office and wondered whether enough was being done to seek out potential leaders to work with the orchestra.” (minutes, BSO orchestra committee meeting) (BSO5)</p> <p>2.2 Commenting on the appointment decision process for an orchestra leader: “It’s one incredible grey area. Nobody seems to know what’s happening with that and no one seems to know whose responsibility it is. . . . Eventually, the principals just made it so clear that basically they weren’t happy [that the appointment was not made]. . . . But we have a theory that he may have promised the guy the job first, and got himself into a pickle.” (interview, BSO orchestra committee member) (BSO5)</p> <p>2.3 Commenting on a decision not to terminate a player, a LSO player board member commented: “There was a decision over this player. The vote was taken and it went against the wishes of the chairman, and he said, ‘Well okay, we’ll call a council of principals meeting’. . . . Most of the principals are more than happy to sit on the fence. They’ve got a hard enough job. They don’t want to put their oar in and stir things up, so of course the vote went the other way. Now I think that’s a misuse of power, if you like. You’re widening the goal posts and moving them at the same time. I was more than a little pissed off about that because it didn’t seem to be fair. What was the point of having a [board]?” (interview, LSO player board member) (LSO5)</p>
<i>Poor outcomes of leader decision making</i>	<p>2.4 “Programming is [the senior producer]—you couldn’t ask for better repertoire. [The senior producer] is very successful. He has organized some very good programmes and concerts.” (interview, BSO player) (BSO1)</p> <p>2.5 “Looking back on all this, I would say that those judgments [of the chief executive] were fatally flawed for our organization on two counts: [the principal conductor’s] availability and commitment, and his financial cost.” (interview, PSO player director) (PSO2)</p> <p>2.6 “It was like lambs to the slaughter. The contract [the principal conductor] was offered should never have been accepted.” (interview, PSO deputy CEO) (PSO2)</p> <p>2.7 “If you look at the main [home city] concerts, something has happened there, and we’ve lost our thread, because we had three distinct series. . . . So I think the [PSO], represented by the board and the senior management, has a duty to make sure that the repertoire actually fulfils the artistic strategy.” (interview, PSO player chairman-elect) (PSO1)</p>
<i>Lack of leader expertise</i>	<p>2.8 [We need] someone who knows what they’re doing, who has sufficient commercial grasp to know the effect of what they’re doing, and appreciates the need to create a programme for [the PSO home city] that will also apply in [other regional towns]. It’s that thorough vision that is lacking at the moment, causing all sorts of orchestral problems.” (interview, PSO finance director) (PSO1)</p> <p>2.9 “You have someone here [the chief executive] who has no understanding of orchestras at all.” (observation, musicians’ union representative, PSO players meeting with musicians’ union) (PSO6)</p>

the confusion and inertia surrounding an important hiring decision. Quotation 2.6 is from an interview with a Provincial senior administrator who believed that the orchestra's leadership had agreed to a very poor contract in previous negotiations with the principal conductor. An example of a perception of lack of leader expertise (quotation 2.8) comes from the Provincial's finance director, who believed that the orchestra's leaders lacked "sufficient commercial grasp" to know the effect of their programming decisions.

Stakeholder sensegiving enablers. Our second set of findings in relation to stakeholder sensegiving concerned the three conditions that enabled it. The first was stakeholders' possession of relevant expertise: stakeholders were more likely to engage in sensegiving when they possessed expertise relating to an issue. Table 3 summarizes the types of expertise associated with the different issues and stakeholders in each orchestra. The areas of expertise that we argue are associated with each issue are based on the long-term and intensive observation by the first author of decision making in each organization. We made an assessment of stakeholder expertise in each of these areas based on the knowledge of each party's professional background and training (e.g., musician; investment banker board member) and evidence of expertise shown or described during fieldwork interviews and observation. Expertise was differentially distributed across different stakeholders for different issues. For example, although section principals in each orchestra possessed the skill, training, and experience to judge the musical performance of their colleagues (expertise area 10) and of job candidates (expertise area 13), they did not have any particular expertise in assessing the audience appeal of orchestral repertoire (expertise area 2) or knowledge of other orchestras' contractual agreements (expertise area 17). In contrast, the marketing manager of each orchestra possessed expertise in area 2, and the musicians' union representatives had expertise in area 17. There were also differences in stakeholder expertise among the orchestras: for example, some of the Broadcasting overseers knew where organizational slack lay in that orchestra (area 20), but overseers in the Provincial and London did not possess this kind of knowledge about their orchestras' operations.

The second condition that seemed to enable stakeholder sensegiving was legitimacy, which provided stakeholders with an acceptable basis from which to engage in sensegiving. This second-order theme aggregates the following first-order concepts: "formal authority/responsibility," "representative role," and "principles of organizational involvement/participation." Table 4 presents quotations from the data that illustrate each of these first-order

concepts. In quotation 4.1, for instance, the Provincial's players' chairman described the formal authority of the principal conductor, who was given "hire and fire" powers, which gave him the legitimacy to comment on the quality of players' performance and argue for their dismissal. Quotation 4.6 comes from the Provincial's musicians' union representative, whose legitimacy in the area of player pay and contracts came from his role as the players' representative in this domain. Players often gained their legitimacy from an orchestra's principles of participation or involvement: in quotation 4.9, a London player contrasts his orchestra with another, suggesting that the London players are allowed much greater involvement in decision making around such issues as principal conductor appointments.

The third condition that seemed to enable stakeholder sensegiving was the opportunity to engage in such behavior. The second-order theme of "opportunity" aggregates four first-order concepts: "regular meetings," "ad hoc meetings," "ad hoc solicitation of views," and "ad hoc retreats"; together, these represent the most common kinds of sensegiving opportunities for stakeholders in the orchestras. Table 5 presents quotations from the data that illustrate sensegiving in each of these contexts, and also, in the third column, the relative frequency of each kind of opportunity in each orchestra. Quotation 5.1 illustrates sensegiving by Provincial players in the context of a regular committee meeting, in this case the Provincial's Concerts Department subcommittee. Quotation 5.3 describes "orchestral meetings," a less regular kind of sensegiving opportunity in the London, in which all players had the chance to express their views on key issues. Other opportunities for sensegiving occurred through ad hoc solicitation of stakeholder views. In quotation 5.8, for example, a Broadcasting player describes how the senior producer (one of the orchestra's leaders) informally solicited player perspectives during lunch and dinner breaks. Ad hoc retreats, the last main category here, provided a distinctive opportunity to engage in sensegiving around strategic issues. Quotation 5.10, taken from a retreat's "Overview Document," describes its purpose as "to brainstorm where we believe the Orchestra should be in the medium term."

Conditions Associated with Leader Sensegiving

Leader sensegiving triggers. Although scholars have long argued that a central leadership function is the construction of meaning (Pfeffer, 1981;

TABLE 3
Types of Issue-Related Expertise Possessed by Stakeholders^a

Related Types of Expertise	Stakeholders Possessing These Types of Expertise
<i>Programming</i>	
1. Musical knowledge of repertoire	PSO: Some administrators (artistic advisor and deputy CEO); principal conductor; one board member; guest artists. BSO: Principal conductor; some overseers; guest artists. LSO: Principal conductor; guest artists.
2. Knowledge of what repertoire will attract audiences	PSO: Some administrators (marketing manager; deputy CEO); customers. BSO: Some administrators (marketing manager); customers. LSO: Some administrators (marketing manager); customers.
3. Understanding of the orchestra's artistic strategy	PSO: Principal conductor; some funders. BSO: Principal conductor; funders. LSO: Some funders.
<i>Principal conductor appointment</i>	
4. Knowledge of potential conductors for the position	PSO: None. BSO: None. LSO: None.
5. Musical appreciation of conductors' styles, abilities, and potential	PSO: Some administrators (deputy CEO); players; some funders. BSO: Players; funders. LSO: Players; some funders.
6. Sense of the fit between a conductor and the orchestra	PSO: One board member; players; some funders. BSO: Overseers; players; funders. LSO: Players; some funders.
7. Knowledge of typical principal conductor contractual arrangements	PSO: Some funders. BSO: Overseers; funders. LSO: Some funders.
<i>Guest conductors</i>	
8. Awareness of potential conductors for the position	PSO: Some administrators (deputy CEO); players; principal conductor; one board member; guest artists. BSO: Players; principal conductor; some overseers; guest artists. LSO: Players; guest artists.
9. Musical appreciation of conductors' styles, abilities, and potential	PSO: Some administrators (deputy CEO); players; principal conductor, one board member; guest artists. BSO: Players; principal conductor; some overseers; guest artists. LSO: Players; guest artists.
<i>Player performance</i>	
10. Awareness of and ability to judge musical performance	PSO: Some administrators (orchestra manager); some section principals; some players; principal conductor; some customers; guest artists. BSO: Some administrators (orchestra manager); some section principals; some players; principal conductor; some customers; guest artists. LSO: Some section principals; some players; some customers; guest artists.
11. Knowledge of reasons for poor performance	PSO: Some administrators (orchestra manager); some section principals; some players; principal conductor. BSO: Some administrators (orchestra manager); section principals; some players; principal conductor. LSO: Some administrators (orchestra manager); section principals; some players.
12. Knowledge of the procedures for dealing with player performances issues	PSO: Some administrators (orchestra manager); section principals; player representatives; players; principal conductor. BSO: Some administrators (orchestra manager); section principals; player representatives; players; principal conductor. LSO: Some administrators (orchestra manager); section principals; player representatives; players.
<i>Player hiring</i>	
13. Ability to judge musical performance of job candidates	PSO: Some administrators (orchestra manager); some section principals; some players; principal conductor; guest artists. BSO: Some administrators (orchestra manager); some section principals; some players; principal conductor; guest artists. LSO: Some section principals; some players; principal conductor; guest artists.

(Continued)

TABLE 3
Continued

Related Types of Expertise	Stakeholders Possessing These Types of Expertise
14. Awareness of available candidates	PSO: Some section principals; some players. BSO: Some section principals; some players. LSO: Some section principals; some players.
<i>Player pay and contracts</i>	
15. Knowledge of collective agreements, labor relations	PSO: Some administrators (deputy CEO); some player representatives; musicians' union. BSO: Some administrators (orchestra manager); some player representatives; some overseers; musicians' union. LSO: Some player representatives; musicians' union.
16. Negotiation skills	PSO: Musicians' union. BSO: Musicians' union. LSO: Musicians' union.
17. Knowledge of other orchestras' contractual agreements	PSO: Some administrators (deputy CEO); some player representatives; musicians' union. BSO: Some administrators (orchestra manager); some player representatives; musicians' union. LSO: Some administrators (orchestra manager); some player representatives; musicians' union.
<i>Cost cutting</i>	
18. Knowledge of organization's operational costs	PSO: Some administrators (finance director, deputy CEO); overseers; some funders. BSO: Some administrators (business manager); overseers; some funders. LSO: Some administrators (deputy CEO); overseers; some funders.
19. Understanding of management accounting	PSO: Some administrators (finance director); overseers. BSO: Some administrators (business manager); overseers. LSO: Some administrators (finance director); overseers.
20. Knowledge of where organizational slack lay	PSO: Some administrators (deputy CEO, finance director). BSO: Some administrators (business manager, orchestra manager); overseers. LSO: None.
<i>Income generation</i>	
21. Knowledge of income-generating opportunities	PSO: Some administrators (deputy CEO, development director, education director, marketing director); overseers; customers; some funders; some guest artists. BSO: Some administrators (education manager, marketing manager); overseers; customers; funders; some guest artists. LSO: Some administrators (development director, marketing manager, education officer); overseers; customers; funders; some guest artists.
<i>Collaborative ventures</i>	
22. Awareness of opportunities for collaboration	PSO: Some administrators (development director, marketing director); some overseers; some funders. BSO: Some overseers. LSO: None.
23. Awareness of strengths/weaknesses of potential collaborators	PSO: Some administrators (development director; marketing director); some funders. BSO: Some overseers. LSO: None.
24. Awareness of environmental factors that (en/dis)courage collaboration	PSO: Some administrators (development director, marketing director); overseers; some funders. BSO: Some administrators (business manager); overseers; funders. LSO: None.

^a The types of expertise were defined through ethnographic observation by the first author. Judgments as to possession of expertise were based on knowledge of each party's professional background and training and evidence of expertise shown or described during fieldwork interviews and observation.

Pondy, 1978; Smircich & Morgan, 1982), we found that the leaders in our study were only triggered to engage in sensegiving under specific conditions. The first condition was their own "perceptions of an issue as uncertain." The second-order theme of issue uncertainty aggregates two first-order concepts: ambiguous issues and unpredictable issues.

Table 6 provides representative quotations from the study data that illustrate these first-order concepts. Quotation 6.1, for instance, illustrates the first-order concept of ambiguous issues: here, the Provincial's CEO describes the ambiguity associated with assessing the strengths and weaknesses of a conductor, as demonstrated by the different per-

TABLE 4
Data Supporting the Theme “Stakeholders’ Issue-Related Legitimacy”

Associated First-Order Concepts	Representative Quotations
<i>Formal authority and responsibility</i>	<p>4.1 The players’ chairman explained that the principal conductor had “hire and fire powers,” observing, “[the principal conductor] has already got rid of one person and has others he wants to.” (interview, PSO players’ chairman) (PSO4)</p> <p>4.2 “Management do have overall right to appoint who they want, the same with the leader, they do have the right to do that, but again, that is hopefully done in conjunction with the section principals. Really I think the section principals would say it’s their responsibility.” (interview, BSO orchestra committee member) (BSO5)</p> <p>4.3 Applications have been processed by a meeting of principals. Some candidates will be invited to guest lead, others will be auditioned.” (minutes, BSO orchestra committee-management meeting) (BSO5)</p> <p>4.4 One member described the orchestra committee as doing “the day-to-day running of the orchestra, mainly personnel things, discipline, for example, someone having to be moved.” These included “a lot of personnel decisions about people’s playing; little incidents, whether to suspend someone, or give a verbal or written warning.” (interview, LSO board member) (LSO4)</p> <p>4.5 A BSO overseer explained that the head of music would pull together a business plan, involving the senior producer and the business manager, at which point he [the overseer] would review it: “I often will have a strong influence on it, if it looks as though our management or resource costs look rather high in relation to the rest of the costs or what income’s likely to be.” (interview, BSO overseer) (BSO7)</p>
<i>Representative role</i>	<p>4.6 “I’m not supposed to be making a recommendation—I’m not making a recommendation—but I can imagine there’s no way you can vote to accept this. . . . If you vote to accept, we won’t go on talking and you have a pay freeze. If you don’t accept, we will go on talking and you have a pay freeze” (observation, musicians’ union representative, PSO players meeting with musicians’ union) (PSO6)</p> <p>4.7 The artistic advisory subcommittee is “[the players’] forum to say what they think is wrong with some of our decisions. . . . So the orchestra feel they have a way of being heard, and ultimately what they say is taken into consideration.” (interview, PSO part-time artistic advisor) (PSO1)</p> <p>4.8 “The first meeting we had with them, there was a bit of a bump, because they [section principals] always push this hierarchy with me, and say, ‘we represent our sections,’ and I’m not convinced of that. . . . I asked them to go back and consult their sections, and I actually checked with the rank-and-file players whether they’d been asked.” (interview, BSO head of music) (BSO4)</p>
<i>Organizational principles of involvement/participation</i>	<p>4.9 “If we want to get a conductor in, the management and [board] don’t just get the conductor in, they ask the orchestra. They don’t do that in the [other orchestra].” (interview, LSO player) (LSO2)</p> <p>4.10 Now I talk to people individually—grab them at tea break and have a little chat. They don’t have to feel under any pressure and can say exactly what they want. They do say exactly what they want.” (interview, LSO string section principal) (LSO5)</p>

ceptions of different groups (the board, the public), and his role in managing that ambiguity. Quotation 6.4 illustrates the first-order concept of unpredictable issues. In this case, a Broadcasting leader described the unpredictability of programming for the orchestra; opportunities often arose that created significant changes to the orchestra’s plans.

The second condition that seemed to trigger leader sensegiving was an issue’s association with complex stakeholder interests. This second-order theme, “leaders’ perceptions of the stakeholder environment as complex,” aggregated two first-order concepts: “numerous stakeholders connected to the

issue” and “divergent interests among connected stakeholders.” When these were present, leaders were more likely to engage in sensegiving in order to construct interpretations that bridged stakeholder differences. Table 7 provides representative quotations from the study data to illustrate the theme of stakeholder complexity. Quotation 7.1 illustrates the situation in which an issue is associated with a large number of stakeholders: the Provincial’s CEO describes programming in the orchestra as directly involving the board, the principal conductor, the part-time artistic advisor, the deputy chief executive, and an external consultant.

TABLE 5
Data Supporting Theme “Stakeholders’ Opportunities for Sensegiving”

Associated First-Order Concepts	Representative Quotes	Frequency and Type of Opportunity by Orchestra
<i>Regular meetings</i>	<p>5.1 “[A player] said the orchestra was anxious to know that a new leader was acceptable to [the principal conductor] as this would mean there would be fewer problems in future with the schedule. . . . The feeling in the orchestra is that the division of work between the two [concert masters] ideally should be 50/50; certainly no more than 60/40.” (minutes, PSO Concerts Department subcommittee meeting) (PSO5)</p> <p>5.2 “Representatives from [the orchestra committee] attended the quarterly Consultative Committee meetings, as well as the artistic advisory subcommittee meetings that took place in between the Consultative Committee meetings. Player directors and the players’ chairman attended the bimonthly board meetings and also the board away-day, where matters of programming and, more widely, artistic strategy, were discussed. (PSO, field notes) (PSO1)</p> <p>5.3 “Conductors” was frequently mentioned as a typical topic of board decision, and debate around different individuals took place at some of the meetings I attended. . . . The minutes from a board meeting in October summarize discussions that had taken place about three different individuals. (field notes, LSO) (LSO3)</p>	<p>PSO: Weekly senior management operations; monthly senior management strategy; quarterly board; quarterly finance, marketing, and development board subcommittees; quarterly Consultative Committee; quarterly artistic, concerts, and marketing Consultative Committee subcommittees.</p> <p>BSC: monthly administrative; monthly orchestra committee-management; quarterly orchestra committee-senior management.</p> <p>LSO: quarterly board; quarterly management subcommittee.</p>
<i>Ad hoc meetings</i>	<p>5.4 “This is a cynical, commercial decision we have to make: we’ve just got to bite the bullet” (Observation, comment from union steward in PSO full orchestra meeting) (PSO3)</p> <p>5.5 “The players’ chairman called a full orchestra meeting to discuss the leader situation, which had come to a head because of his lack of availability for rehearsals for the festival concerts. At the meeting, players expressed anger at the leader, for having ‘two jobs in two different countries,’ and at management, for making a late change to the rehearsal schedule, which the leader was unable to accommodate.” (field notes, PSO) (PSO5)</p> <p>5.6 “We have orchestral meetings where everyone has a say. . . . [the chairman] and [the CEO] get together and then they have to persuade the [board], but any of the major decisions eventually have to come to the whole orchestra.” (interview, LSO board member) (LSO3)</p>	<p>PSO: Orchestra committee every few weeks; full orchestra every few weeks.</p> <p>BSC: Orchestra committee at least every two weeks; full orchestra every few weeks; senior management–full orchestra about twice a year.</p> <p>LSO: Orchestra committee every few weeks; full orchestra meetings every few weeks.</p>
<i>Ad hoc solicitation of views</i>	<p>5.7 “I meet once every two months with half a dozen members of the orchestra, and it’s really their forum to say what they think is wrong with some of our decisions.” (interview, PSO part-time artistic advisor) (PSO3)</p> <p>5.8 “[The senior producer] does come and sit down with players at mealtimes sometimes, so I expect he gets some feedback that way. . . . that’s probably the main route where he gets information about how people feel.” (interview, BSO orchestra committee member) (BSO3)</p> <p>5.9 “We were seeking a new conductor, and there was to be a search. We [the board] thought, ‘What the hell do we know about conductors? . . . You, orchestra, go away and draw up a list of conductors you would like to have, or try out.’” (interview, PSO board member) (PSO2)</p>	<p>PSO: Board chairman with player representatives.</p> <p>BSC: Ongoing discussions between CEO and managers.</p> <p>LSO: Frequent meetings between CEO and individual managers.</p>
<i>Ad hoc retreats</i>	<p>5.10 The purpose of the PSO senior management away-day was “to brainstorm where we believe the orchestra should be in the medium term” (overview document, PSO senior management strategy away-day) (PSO1)</p> <p>5.11 The players’ chairman commented that “the majority of the orchestra feel the relationship with [the principal conductor] has reached the end of its natural life” (Observation, comment from player’s chairman, PSO board away-day) (PSO2)</p>	<p>PSO: One senior management retreat; two board retreats.</p> <p>BSC: Management retreat every few months; CEO-overseer retreat every few months.</p> <p>LSO: None.</p>

TABLE 6
Data Supporting the Theme “Perceptions of Issue as Highly Uncertain”

Associated First-Order Concepts	Representative Quotations
<i>Ambiguous issue</i>	<p>6.1 “People such as [this board member] have a very clear perception of his [the principal conductor’s] strengths and weaknesses, but that’s different from the public saying he’s great, and what seems to me to have happened over the last few weeks has been about the managing of perceptions. Managing the relationship is second to managing perceptions.” (interview, PSO chief executive) (PSO2)</p> <p>6.2 “I think the fact that people have pointed at the [PSO] and said, ‘What is it all about?’ has been fair comment, and has been largely fog that surrounds [the principal conductor], given the title of music director and artistic director, but never being able to articulate what he’s doing.” (interview, PSO chief executive) (PSO1)</p> <p>6.3 “It’s very rare to have a unanimous appointment. There’s always someone who says, ‘I can live with that’” (interview, LSO string section principal) (LSO4)</p>
<i>Unpredictable issue</i>	<p>6.4 “It’s constantly evolving—I could go and meet someone today and we’d talk about certain projects and it would change the whole plan for a month. You suddenly get a brilliant idea and so you change the whole thing.” (interview, BSO senior producer) (BSO1)</p> <p>6.5 “The managing director explained that there had been a very difficult period through December 1995 when it was reported that [a conductor] had agreed to be principal conductor of another European orchestra. However, nothing has been signed and the [LSO] remains in negotiation with him. The situation is now clearer, but whether the orchestra will be in a position to sign the contract depends on the Arts Council’s grant. The orchestra needs to have sufficient extra subsidy to be able to finance his retainer, substantial concert fee and travel expenses.” (minutes, LSO Trust) (LSO2)</p> <p>6.6 “We couldn’t make even the next stage of the negotiations without knowing whether the Arts Council was going to give us more money to fund the residency. I needed to know that all that money was in the bag so we could fund our ongoing programme of artistic work before actually moving.” (interview, LSO managing director) (LSO1)</p> <p>6.7 “There’s some uncertainty about whether [the orchestra] finally accepted the pay freeze.” (comment, senior management away-day, PSO, 7/96)</p> <p>6.8 “[The BSO] is such a huge organization compared to what I was in before, where you had your finger on every penny, you knew exactly what was happening. It’s very difficult when it’s such a big organization and you’re part of it. It’s very difficult to put realistic figures on anything to be honest. It’s all a bit of a guesstimate, and I think it probably always will be.” (interview, BSO senior producer) (BSO7)</p>

In quotation 7.5, the London’s CEO describes the diversity of interests associated with putting on a concert, arguing that every stakeholder essentially wanted a different concert.

Leader sensegiving enablers. Our second set of findings in relation to leader sensegiving concern the two conditions that enabled it. The first was “leaders’ issue-related expertise”: when leaders had expertise relating to an issue, they were better able to shape others’ interpretations of it. Table 8 summarizes the types of expertise associated with different issues and the leaders in each orchestra who possessed that expertise. The relevant areas of expertise for each issue are the same as those for stakeholders (Table 3) with the addition of one area, “awareness of how to balance different income-generating opportunities to create a coherent portfolio for the orchestra,” which was possessed by the orchestras’ leaders but not by any of their stakeholders. As with stakeholder expertise, we assessed leader expertise in each area on the basis of knowledge of

each leader’s professional background and training and evidence of expertise shown or described during fieldwork interviews and observation. For example, although the leaders in the Broadcasting and London orchestras had high levels of musical training and many years as senior arts administrators, and thus were able to judge the “fit” between a conductor and the orchestra (expertise area 6), the Provincial leaders had narrower musical backgrounds or none at all and so did not possess this kind of expertise. When it came to knowing the reasons for the poor performance of an orchestral musician, however, the only leader with this understanding was the London’s chairman, who was a player himself and therefore generally well acquainted with his fellow musicians’ situations and difficulties.

The second condition that seemed to enable leader sensegiving was the “performance of the organization in an issue domain” which, when strong, provided leaders with an acceptable basis for engaging in sensegiving about that issue. This

TABLE 7
Data Supporting the Theme “Perceptions of Stakeholder Environment as Complex”

Associated First-Order Concepts	Representative Quotations	
<i>Numerous stakeholders connected to issue</i>	7.1 “The technical answer is that the board should have the artistic strategy. The reality is that [the principal conductor] sort of produced repertoire by sparking off [the part-time artistic advisor], [the deputy chief executive], and [the external consultant with knowledge of the PSO]. . . . Emerging out of that process is ultimately [the part-time artistic advisor] producing rolling drafts of the repertoire.” (interview, PSO CEO) (PSO1)	
	7.2 “This contractual thing . . . started with me saying, ‘I want more rights, I want to buy more rights.’ And it went to London [the BSO overseers], and London picked it up and said, ‘Okay, what do we do about rights?’ It also started at the same time when [the new head of music of radio] came on board saying, ‘We don’t have the rights on the orchestras. Ridiculous. How can we be a broadcasting orchestra if we don’t have broadcasting rights on them? It’s unbelievable. Go back and rethink it,’ which we all did. So that starts a process going where we then start talking to my management, my team, the people round here, locking into other BBC orchestral managers, and devising a plan to say, ‘This is what we want,’ and then we have to discuss it with the union and the players.” (interview, BSO CEO) (BSO6)	
	7.3 “You get a consensus, and then I can go to the [board] and say, ‘We need a Council of Principals meeting, because I want to appoint X,’ and they say, ‘Have you spoken to the section?’” (interview, LSO string section principal) (LSO5)	
	7.4 “Section principals make representation to the [board] if they want to do something. The [board] then has to undertake a whole series of meetings with the individual, the section principals generally, their immediate colleagues, and the [board] then have to decide what to do, and do it.” (interview, LSO chairman) (LSO4)	
	<i>Divergent interests among connected stakeholders</i>	7.5 “The general public want good concerts—good conductors with pleasant repertoire which they know, with accessible ticket prices. Record companies only want you to give concerts of music which you’re going to record, which they can sell. . . . The Arts Council want us to do Harrison Birtwhistle for two hours nonstop, subsidizing empty seats. The problem with that is it requires lots of rehearsals, a big orchestra. The sponsors want a great night out with a star conductor, a star soloist, Beethoven 9, Dvorak 9, or Beethoven 5, so they can hum away the tune, concert as short as possible, interval as long as possible, and get to the grub as soon as they can afterwards. Promoters outside London want something no one local can give them: high-profile conductors, for no money.” (interview, LSO CEO) (LSO8)
		7.6 “There’s often a variance between the wind and the strings. Often conductors that really work well with the strings spend so much time with the strings, the wind players get bored silly. But they’re usually quite good conductors.” (interview, BSO senior producer) (BSO3)
		7.7 “1) There was a general discussion on the subject of the additional rights the BBC is aiming to acquire. The committee expressed the concern of the orchestra about the unrealistically large number of CD sessions desired by the BBC. . . . The committee suggested that [the CEO] should talk to the orchestra on these issues.” (minutes, BSO orchestra committee meeting) (BSO6)
		7.8 “There’s 6 percent who can take a balanced view and look beyond their own feelings, 10 percent at the other end who just play the concert, and then you’ve got the majority in the middle who are voluble, irresponsible and expect to change conductors every year.” (interview, PSO board chairman-elect) (PSO2)

second-order theme aggregated the following first-order concepts: “artistic performance and reputation,” “financial performance,” and “operational effectiveness and efficiency.” Table 9 presents quotations from the data that illustrate each of these first-order concepts. For example, quotation 9.2 is an observation made by the Provincial’s CEO at a meeting with the full orchestra, acknowledging the

significant problems the orchestra had experienced with its artistic policy. To be associated with such problems clearly affected the Provincial leaders’ credibility in this issue domain. In contrast, quotation 9.6 describes the good financial performance achieved in the London through its income-generating activities. The fact that the leaders had achieved a surplus in an industry

TABLE 8
Types of Issue-Related Expertise Possessed by Leaders

Related Types of Expertise by Issue ^a	Leaders Possessing These Types of Expertise ^b		
	PSO	BSO	LSO
<i>Programming</i>			
8.1 Musical knowledge of repertoire	Artistic director	CEO, senior producer	CEO, chair
8.2 Knowledge of what repertoire will attract audiences	None	CEO, senior producer	CEO
8.3 Understanding of the orchestra's artistic strategy	Artistic director	CEO, senior producer	CEO
<i>Principal conductor appointment</i>			
8.4 Knowledge of potential conductors for the position	None	CEO, senior producer	CEO
8.5 Musical appreciation of conductors' styles, abilities and potential	Artistic director	CEO, senior producer	CEO, chair
8.6 Sense of the "fit" between a conductor and the orchestra	None	CEO, senior producer	CEO
8.7 Knowledge of typical conductor contractual arrangements	None	CEO, senior producer	CEO
<i>Guest conductors</i>			
8.8 Awareness of potential conductors for the position	Artistic director	CEO, senior producer	CEO, chair
8.9 Musical appreciation of conductors' styles, abilities, and potential	Artistic director	CEO, senior producer	CEO, chair
<i>Player performance</i>			
8.10 Awareness of and ability to judge musical performance	Artistic director	CEO, senior producer	CEO, chair
8.11 Knowledge of reasons for poor performance	None	None	Chair
8.12 Knowledge of the procedures for dealing with player performance issues	Artistic director	CEO	CEO, chair
<i>Player hiring</i>			
8.13 Ability to judge musical performance of job candidates	Artistic director	CEO, senior producer	CEO, chair
8.14 Awareness of available candidates	Artistic director	CEO	Chair
<i>Player pay and contracts</i>			
8.15 Knowledge of collective agreements, labor relations	Artistic director	CEO	CEO, chair
8.16 Negotiation skills	None	None	CEO, chair
8.17 Knowledge of other orchestras' contractual agreements	Artistic director	CEO, senior producer	CEO, chair
<i>Cost cutting</i>			
8.18 Knowledge of organization's operational costs	CEO	CEO	CEO
8.19 Understanding of management accounting	CEO	CEO	CEO
8.20 Knowledge of where organizational slack lies	CEO	CEO	CEO
<i>Income generation</i>			
8.21 Knowledge of income-generating opportunities	CEO, artistic director	CEO, senior producer	CEO
8.22 Awareness of how to balance different income-generating opportunities to create a coherent portfolio for the orchestra	Artistic director	CEO	CEO
<i>Collaborative ventures</i>			
8.23 Awareness of opportunities for collaboration	CEO, artistic director	CEO	CEO
8.24 Awareness of strengths/weaknesses of potential collaborators	Artistic director	CEO	CEO
8.25 Awareness of environmental factors that (en/dis)courage collaboration	Artistic director	CEO	CEO

^a Based on ethnographic observation by the first author.

^b Based on professional background and training, and evidence of expertise shown or described during fieldwork interviews and observation.

where deficits are common doubtless increased their credibility in the eyes of others, enabling them to engage in sensegiving. The third first-order concept was "operational effectiveness and efficiency." Quotation 9.7 captures the problems the Provincial had experienced in the area of hiring. As a result, leaders were less likely to engage in sensegiving around this issue.

DISCUSSION

The findings we report above describe the triggers and enablers of sensegiving for stakeholders and leaders in 27 issue domains. In this section, we discuss these findings, develop a set of propositions that formalize the relationships suggested by our data, and present an overarching model of the conditions associated with sensegiving in organizations.

TABLE 9
Data Supporting the Theme “Performance of the Organization”

Associated First-Order Concepts	Representative Quotations
<i>Artistic performance and reputation</i>	<p>9.1 “The [Arts Council appraisal] team learned that there was some audience resistance to the new initiatives. . . . In the light of the [PSO]’s experience in the 19[XX–XY] season, the team was reassured to learn that the 19[XZ] season, while retaining an emphasis on adventurous programming and a number of the other new features, will return to a clearer artistic and audience focus for the individual series.” (Arts Council PSO appraisal report) (PSO1)</p> <p>9.2 “The board accept that the artistic policy hasn’t been successful in delivering an audience” (observation, PSO CEO–full orchestra meeting) (PSO1)</p> <p>9.3 “[The LSO] is increasingly the first choice of orchestra for conductors and soloists performing in London. . . . [There are 11 international conductors who] choose to work with the [LSO] in preference to other London orchestras. . . . The list of conductors working regularly with the orchestra is the strongest evidence of the status of the [LSO] in international musical circles.” (LSO submission to panel of independent evaluators) (LSO3)</p>
<i>Financial performance</i>	<p>9.4 “The board’s responsibility is to oversee the well-being of the organization, and that includes overseeing the two main appointments of the organization, that of the chief executive, and that of the principal conductor. And I feel personally let down by our board because we now find ourselves in a financial and artistic difficulty, and they tell me that they took advice on the appointment of the principal conductor from the chief executive, and they also paid heed to the orchestra’s wishes. But my bone of contention is that they approved the contract he was given, which has proved to be almost the death knell of the organization, due to his high financial outlay, and the lack of return artistically. . . . We just have not had a return on our investment. (interview, PSO player director) (PSO2)</p> <p>9.5 “Despite the [PSO]’s confidence that it would meet its cash obligations during the year, the team is concerned as to how the company proposes to finance the accumulated deficit of £610,000 which it is projecting at the end of the current financial year.” (Arts Council PSO appraisal report) (PSO7)</p> <p>9.6 “The season had been carefully balanced to achieve a small year-end surplus.” (minutes, LSO board meeting) (LSO8)</p>
<i>Operational effectiveness and efficiency</i>	<p>9.7 At the start of the study period, the orchestra had been without one of the principal woodwind players for four years. This position and the other key ones that became vacant at around this time remained so for over a year into the fieldwork period. All three vacancies resulted from player resignations that happened prior to the study period. (PSO field notes) (PSO5)</p> <p>9.8 The orchestra had made severe cuts in expenditure some years before, and now operated with minimal overheads. In any case, because of the freelance nature of the London orchestras, they carried a much smaller overhead than the regional and BBC contract orchestras, only having to pay their musicians when they worked. The one major cost-cutting exercise undertaken concerned the players’ fees. This saved the orchestra a considerable amount of money, precluding the need for further large-scale cuts. (LSO field notes) (LSO7)</p>

Sensegiving Triggers

Our first research question asks what conditions trigger sensegiving by stakeholders and by leaders. We found distinct sets of triggers for each of these groups. For stakeholders, sensegiving was triggered by issues that they perceived as important either to themselves, to a stakeholder group whom they represented, or to the organization at large, and by an assessment of organizational leaders as incompetent with respect to these issues. For leaders, sensegiving was triggered by issues that they perceived as ambiguous, unpredictable, and involving numerous diverse stakeholders. Both of these findings

contribute to existing research on what motivates organizational actors to engage in sensegiving.

Stakeholder sensegiving and bounded responsibility. Critical to understanding when stakeholders engaged in sensegiving is what we refer to as “bounded responsibility”: stakeholders showed limited motivation to construct meaning for others, doing so only when they perceived a need to take some responsibility for an issue.

The degree to which stakeholders are motivated to influence the interpretation of issues is an unsettled question in management research. On the one hand, a common assumption in much of the literature on political decision making and stake-

holder theory is that organizational stakeholders will be motivated to influence issues in which they have a vested interest (Agle & Mitchell, 1999; Mangham, 1986; Pettigrew, 1973). On the other hand, research on behavioral decision making (March, 1994) and on employee participation (Heller, 1998; Pasmore & Fagans, 1992) suggests that employees and other stakeholders become involved in issues fluidly, often choosing not to participate, even in issues that directly affect their interests. Our findings, and particularly the notion of bounded responsibility, offer a way of reconciling these conflicting views and help us understand when stakeholders are likely to be motivated to engage in sensegiving. Although sensegiving, concerned as it is with influencing the interpretations of others, is undoubtedly a political activity, our findings suggest that a strictly political understanding of sensegiving limits understanding of stakeholder motivations. We found that sometimes self-interest motivated stakeholders to engage in sensegiving but also that sometimes feelings of responsibility or organizational stewardship motivated it: a perceived gap in leadership around issues that were at least as important for the organization at large as for any individual stakeholder group often triggered stakeholder sensegiving. Moreover, the notion of bounded responsibility may be a useful addition to existing research on stakeholder participation. Organizational stakeholders have limits on their available time and energy that act as constraints on their motivation to engage in sensegiving. In the face of these constraints, sensegiving seemed to be triggered by stakeholders' perceived responsibility for important issues. Thus, the responsibility sought by stakeholders in organizational sensemaking is "bounded" by the combination of their perceptions of the issue's importance and whether they perceive themselves as needed to co-construct meaning around the issue because of their leaders' incompetence. This formulation leads to our first proposition.

Proposition 1a. Stakeholders will be motivated to engage in sensegiving when they perceive an issue as having important consequences for themselves, a stakeholder group whom they represent, or their organization at large and perceive their leaders as lacking competence in relation to that issue.

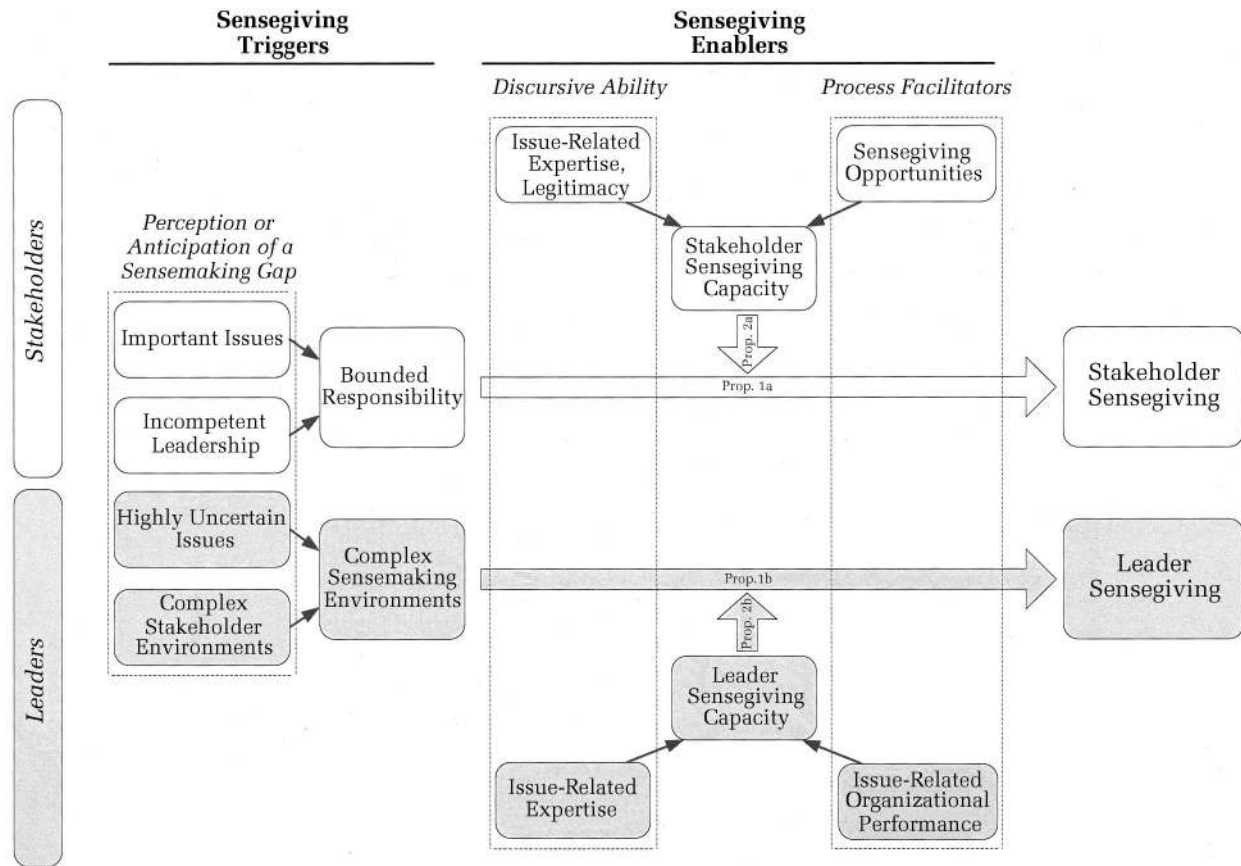
Leader sensegiving and complex sensemaking environments. Weick noted that environmental complexity creates "occasions for sensemaking" (1995: 87). We found that complex sensemaking environments created occasions for leader sense-

giving, as leaders sought to construct stories that could make sense of unpredictable, ambiguous issues for stakeholder groups with divergent interests. This finding advances understanding of when leaders will be motivated to engage in sensegiving. Whereas previous studies have focused primarily on organizational change as the trigger for leader sensegiving (Bartunek et al., 1999; Corley & Gioia, 2004; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), our study shows that leaders are motivated to engage in sensegiving in a broad range of contexts: leader sensegiving was found in relation to issues such as income generation, key appointments, and pay and contract review, which were not part of significant organizational change but were associated with complex sensemaking environments. This finding also helps to explain why organizational change might motivate leader sensegiving. Change increases the unpredictability and ambiguity of many issues and increases the salience of divergent stakeholder interests. Together, these may prompt sensegiving on the part of leaders so that the organization and its stakeholders can construct shared, coherent accounts of a situation. In Corley and Gioia's (2004) terms, complex sensemaking environments create a "sensegiving imperative" for leaders. These dynamics lead to our next proposition.

Proposition 1b. Leaders will be motivated to engage in sensegiving when they perceive issues as ambiguous and unpredictable and/or as involving numerous, diverse stakeholders.

We have analyzed the triggers of stakeholder and leader sensegiving separately and identified distinct triggers for each set of actors. Without separate analyses of leaders and of stakeholders, these findings would not have emerged. There is also value, however, in looking at both leaders and stakeholders to identify common roots to their triggers. Taking the commonalities and differences together, we see our findings as suggesting that, in general, organizational actors' sensegiving is triggered by the perception or anticipation of a "sensemaking gap." Figure 2 depicts an overview of our proposed model. Stakeholders commonly expect leaders to fulfill the main sensegiving roles in organizations (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) and so perceive or anticipate sensemaking gaps when issues are important but leaders lack competence with respect to those issues. Our study suggests that leaders perceive or anticipate sensemaking gaps when issues are ambiguous and unpredictable—and hence demand sensemaking (Weick, 1995)—and relevant stakeholders are numerous and divergent in their interests, and so unlikely to construct a shared account of the issue

FIGURE 2
Conditions Associated with Sensegiving in Organizations



on their own. Thus, we propose “perception or anticipation of a sensemaking gap” as an aggregate dimension to describe the general condition that triggers sensegiving on the part of both stakeholders and leaders.

The notion of a sensemaking gap as a trigger for sensegiving adds to sensemaking theory and research. First, it provides a general description of conditions under which organizational actors will be motivated to engage in sensegiving. Although there has been significant discussion of what leads individuals and groups to engage in sensemaking (Weick, 1995), the conditions that trigger sensegiving have been relatively unexamined, with most research tied to specific organizational contexts, such as major change (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1995; Snell, 2002). The concept of a sensemaking gap is intended to describe a triggering condition for sensegiving that can be applied across contexts and actors. Second, it reflects the practical and political tensions associated with sensegiving. Sensegiving is a political process, influencing the interpretations of others and consequently affecting their decision making. In our

study, however, we only saw sensegiving being triggered by the perception or anticipation of a sensemaking gap, which suggests that organizational actors interested in exerting influence will more often engage in less costly tactics that perhaps have more predictable impacts than sensegiving. As a form of influence, sensegiving carries with it several uncertainties, including whether others will adopt one’s preferred definition of organizational reality and, if they do, what the consequences will be for their actions and decision making. Many of these uncertainties can be avoided with use of more direct forms of influence, such as exchange or bargaining (Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson 1980; Maitlis, 2004). More direct influence routes may not be available, however, when a sensemaking gap occurs, because actors will lack a shared definition of organizational reality that might provide the foundation for exchange or bargaining. Thus, the perception or anticipation of a sensemaking gap may lead organizational actors to engage in sensegiving as an influence strategy because other approaches seem less likely to be successful.

Sensegiving Enablers

Our second research question asks what conditions enable sensegiving by stakeholders and by leaders. As with triggers, we found distinct sets of enablers for each of these groups. Stakeholder sensegiving was enabled by their possession of issue-related expertise, legitimacy, and opportunities to engage in sensegiving. Leader sensegiving was enabled by leaders' possession of issue-related expertise and by their organizations already performing well in the relevant issue domain. Each of these findings contributes to existing research on what helps organizational actors to engage in sensegiving.

Stakeholder sensegiving capacity. First, our findings extend previous research on stakeholder sensegiving, providing a broader understanding of the relationship between stakeholder sensegiving and organizational context than previous research (Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Dutton et al., 2002; Westley, 1990). The enablers of stakeholder sensegiving that we observed—expertise, legitimacy and opportunity—suggest an image of sensegiving that is highly “situated,” embedded in the relational identities of actors and in the social and technological contexts in which actors are operating. This view opens up the potential for an integration of sensemaking research with the emerging practice perspective (Schatzki, Knorr Cetina, & Von Savigny, 2001; Whittington, 2003). Rather than focusing, for instance, on sensegiving as the employment of linguistic devices, such as metaphor or narrative, that transcend specific organizational contexts, this perspective suggests that sensegiving be understood as a situated practice grounded in and dependent on the social and physical technologies of specific organizations at specific times. Although storytelling, for example, has gained prominence as a form of sensegiving (Boje, 1991; Dunford & Jones, 2002; Snell, 2002), our study suggests that the ability to engage in sensegiving goes beyond simply telling a good story: for stakeholders to engage in sensegiving, they must tell sensible stories (drawing on relevant expertise) at the right time and place (opportunity) and occupy a social position that leads others to listen (legitimacy). Thus, although sensegiving may often be prompted by or in the service of organizational change, our study suggests that sensegiving itself is a highly institutionalized form of social practice, with context-specific rules and resources. From a practice perspective, sensegiving should be studied as “creative and knowledgeable work . . . which may or may not achieve its desired ends and which interacts with existing social and technological structures in un-

intended and unexpected ways” (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006: 219).

The importance of expertise, legitimacy, and opportunity for stakeholder sensegiving leads to our second proposition.

Proposition 2a. Stakeholders will be more able to engage in sensegiving in domains in which they possess issue-related expertise and/or legitimacy and in which organizational processes provide them with opportunities to engage in sensegiving.

Leader sensegiving capacity. Second, our findings extend those of previous studies on leader sensegiving. Earlier work has linked leader sensegiving to organizational change prompted by an external threat (Dunford & Jones, 2000) or a newly demanding environment (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Our findings suggest that such contexts will be associated with high levels of leader sensegiving only under certain conditions: when the threatened aspects of an organization are those in which the leaders have expertise and in which the organization has been performing strongly. All sensegiving is in response to troubling, uncertain, or confusing issues, but our study suggests that if an organization's leaders have a limited appreciation of the threatened area, and if the threat is affecting an already poorly performing aspect of the organization, leaders will find it difficult to engage in significant sensegiving. The role of issue-related organizational performance in leader sensegiving stems from two sets of dynamics. First, sensegiving in complex environments is a time-consuming process that demands significant attention and energy from leaders if their accounts are to be persuasive. In our study, in issue domains in which the orchestras were not performing effectively, leaders were typically consumed by day-to-day problems that required resolutions based on quick compromise or immediate action. This left them with little time or energy to manage interpretations of issues through the construction of accounts. Second, in these organizations, leaders were prominent figures to whom the orchestra's success or failure was often attributed. The roles of expertise and issue-related organizational performance in enabling sensegiving lead to our final proposition.

Proposition 2b. Leaders will be more able to engage in high levels of sensegiving in issue domains in which they possess relevant expertise and/or in which their organizations are already performing effectively.

Our analysis of sensegiving enablers involved separate analyses for stakeholders and leaders, which provided us with valuable insights into the different conditions that allow motivated leaders and stakeholders to engage in sensegiving. Like sensegiving triggers, however, these enablers share important commonalities. Looking at both stakeholders and leaders, we can break the enablers that we identified into two categories. First, there are those that affect the discursive ability of organizational actors—their ability to construct and articulate persuasive accounts of the world. For stakeholders, these conditions were issue-related expertise and legitimacy. We saw that the discursive ability of different stakeholder groups varied tremendously within each issue domain, as it did for each stakeholder group across different issues, as their professional backgrounds and training and organizational roles and responsibilities interacted with the issue at hand. Organizational leaders' legitimacy largely came with their formal roles, but their issue-related expertise and their organization's performance around that issue affected their discursive ability: the former affected the skill with which leaders could construct accounts, and the latter affected their credibility in an issue domain. Thus, in Figure 2, we propose “discursive ability” as the second aggregate dimension in our model of the conditions associated with sensegiving in organizations. The importance of discursive ability as an enabler of sensegiving across actors opens up to sensegiving research the methodologies and frameworks developed within discourse analysis: textual analyses focusing on the content of sensegiving; investigations of when and how sensegivers invoke other legitimate texts and fields of discourse; and explorations of the role of different rhetorical strategies, including appeals to emotion, logic, or status (Phillips & Hardy, 2002).

The second set of enablers that we identified facilitate the organizational processes through which sensegiving occurs. For stakeholders, sensegiving was facilitated by the opportunities they encountered to shape others' interpretations of reality; often lacking direct control of the organizational processes associated with an issue, stakeholders were more able to engage in sensegiving when formal and informal opportunities allowed them to articulate accounts of the issue that would be heard by relevant others. Leader sensegiving was facilitated not so much by opportunity, over which they tended to have significant control, but rather by the issue-related performance of their organizations, which, if strong,

made fewer demands on their time and attention, enabling them to engage in sensegiving. In view of these commonalities, we propose “process facilitators” as the third aggregate dimension in our overarching model. This aggregate dimension highlights the organizational nature of sensegiving: its dependence on organizational routines, practices, and structures that can either hinder or enable sensegiving by both stakeholders and leaders. Research on sensegiving needs, therefore, to include close attention to the organizational context in which it occurs. This insight builds on and extends previous work that has highlighted the importance of such elements as role structure (Balogun, 2003; Weick, 1993) and change management processes (Bartunek et al., 1999; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) in effecting sensegiving in organizations, and it demonstrates the value of conducting contextually sensitive studies for future research in the area.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we have drawn on a study of sensemaking in nine issue domains and in three comparable organizations to identify conditions associated with sensegiving by stakeholders and by leaders. Our research questions were aimed at identifying the triggers and enablers of sensegiving. For stakeholders, we found that a sense of bounded responsibility triggered sensegiving; they engaged in high levels of sensegiving when they perceived issues as important and leaders as incompetent with respect to that issue. For leaders, sensegiving was triggered by complex sensemaking environments—those that were ambiguous and unpredictable and that involved numerous stakeholders with divergent interests. More generally, we argued that the perception or anticipation of a sensemaking gap triggered sensemaking; leaders or stakeholders perceived the need for an account of an issue and could not see who else would provide it. In examining the enablers of sensegiving, we found issue-relevant expertise, legitimacy, and an opportunity for sensegiving enabled stakeholder sensegiving, while issue-relevant expertise and effective organizational performance in the issue domain enabled leader sensegiving. Looking at both these groups, we argued that sensegiving was enabled by the combination of a discursive ability that allowed actors to construct and articulate persuasive accounts of the world, and process facilitators in the form of organizational routines, practices, and performance.

Our study does, of course, have limitations.

One stems from our data reduction strategy. In order to produce a manageable and analyzable data set, we assessed leader and stakeholder sensegiving levels for each of the 27 issue domains and consequently did not address changes in those levels over the life of the issue. Although examining those changes would be a worthwhile analysis, we believe that our approach provides a useful foundation for the study of sensegiving that could be extended in future studies. A second issue concerns the transferability of this study's findings to other research contexts. While orchestras are similar in important ways to many medium-sized companies, they offer products and services different from those of most firms and operate in a sector with specific dynamics and a distinctive history. We do not believe that these differences are likely to affect the conditions of sensegiving in ways that diminish the study's findings, but this remains a question that only further research can answer. Despite these limitations, we believe that our study points to important future directions for sensegiving research.

Future Research Directions

One issue for future research is whether sensegiving by certain organizational groups may at times become part of a self-perpetuating system. For instance, our findings suggest that situations in which leaders are both lacking in issue-related competence and perceived as such by stakeholders are likely to be associated with high levels of stakeholder sensegiving and low levels of leader sensegiving. Such a situation may create a positive feedback cycle, reinforcing stakeholder sensegiving through two mechanisms: (1) stakeholder sensegiving may lead stakeholders to gain expertise and legitimacy through their involvement with an issue, while leaders do not do so, reinforcing stakeholders' ability to engage in sensegiving and (2) as stakeholders gain expertise and legitimacy regarding an issue, they may become more confident and critical in their assessments of leaders' competence with respect to that issue, thus reinforcing that sensegiving trigger. A similar dynamic may apply in reverse, whereby leaders are, and are perceived as, more expert in relation to an issue than are stakeholders: stakeholder perceptions of high leader competence will diminish their own motivations for sensegiving, and leader expertise will enable leader sensegiving. Such patterns may be problematic because both leader and stakeholder sensegiving have significant, positive effects (Mait-

lis, 2005), and so patterns that reduce either in a consistent, ongoing manner may lead to less than optimal outcomes for organizations and their members (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2003). Sensegiving research might therefore valuably draw on approaches that have been useful in the exploration of other self-fueling cycles, such as "vicious circles" of bureaucracy (Crozier, 1964) and efficacy-performance spirals (Lindsley, Brass, & Thomas, 1995), which cannot be completely understood by means of traditional, linear notions of cause and effect (Weick, 1979). Such exploration could be facilitated by modeling tools from systems dynamics, to capture the parallel and recursive properties of self-fueling cycles (Wolstenholme, 1990).

A second research implication is related to the possibility that organizational stakeholders and leaders might, if interested in affecting patterns of influence around an issue and aware of the conditions associated with sensegiving, be able to affect those conditions and, consequently, influence the extent of others' sensegiving. For example, organization members might work to structure organizational change and strategy processes in ways that facilitate sensegiving by both stakeholders and leaders and thus increase the potential influence of either or both groups. In the context of an important change initiative such as a merger, leaders could alert stakeholders to the importance of the issue, as well as support them with the legitimacy and opportunity that would facilitate their sensegiving. Similarly, stakeholders might make leaders aware of the complexity of their sensemaking environments and provide leaders with the time to develop influential accounts of an issue and its potential solutions. The possibility also exists, of course, that leaders or stakeholders may work to minimize the triggers and enablers of sensegiving by others, in order to more closely control the sensemaking and decision making around an issue. Leaders might, for instance, attempt to minimize stakeholders' perceptions of an issue's importance and work to discredit their expertise and legitimacy. Equally, if stakeholders aim to overwhelm the influence of leaders on an issue, they might undermine perceptions of leaders' expertise, as well as perceptions of the past performance of relevant areas of an organization. These dynamics point to the importance of research that examines the strategies through which stakeholders and leaders shape the conditions of sensegiving, and perhaps the circumstances associated with such strategies.

Concluding Thoughts

As Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) first noted, sensegiving is a critical process through which issues are constructed and interpreted in organizations. Issues are not objectively defined and do not appear in the same form to all organization members at the same time: issues are noticed, shaped, interpreted, and sold by some members to others (Dutton et al., 2002), with important organizational consequences (Maitlis, 2005). Identifying conditions that trigger and enable sensegiving by leaders and stakeholders in organizations fills an important gap in understanding this process and points to interesting areas for future research.

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APPENDIX

Provincial Orchestra: Reengagement of Guest Conductor Narrative

For each issue domain in each orchestra, we developed a multipage narrative composed primarily of ordered raw data, with some additional commentary for clarity, which together tell the story of each issue as it unfolded. The following is an excerpt from one of the 27 narratives.

The players' chairman addressed the orchestra committee on this matter in October. He told them that the executive director had spoken to him after the last Board meeting, explaining that conductor X had offered to do a lot of work with the orchestra, including recordings and a special concert series, and he was wondering whether to give him a title. The committee discussed this issue at some length, considering the advantages and possible disadvantages of such an appointment. Many of these were raised at the full orchestra meeting called by the chairman a few days later. Some players expressed concern that the title would give him power which might be abused. Another said,

"I think we shouldn't have too much with him artistically, but he is a pull. On the round country tours he's very popular. If we need to fill the diary. . ." (full orchestra meeting)

Another replied: "Five or six years ago we didn't want him any more."

Someone else cautioned, "I don't think we should be too negative. Should say we welcome him, but not too much."

The exchange continued:

"Why give him a title?"

"As a figurehead."

And then, from the union steward: "This is a cynical, commercial decision we have to make: we've just got to bite the bullet."

One member of the orchestra committee expressed some very clear views about the prospective appointment:

"I feel quite strongly: when I was last on the players' committee, there was a lot of talk about not employing him at all—he's such a poor conductor—and then it turned out he was so popular, could bring in the money, but we kept pushing that it should be limited. Now they seem want to give him all these things. That has to be seen as purely financial, and they want us to condone it. I just don't feel we can, but there is a strong feeling, because he's so popular. So I feel that's a mistake."

He went on: "I don't think [the executive director] realizes how damaging it is to have him for three weeks. The orchestra's playing appallingly. I think we were almost too successful last time in curtailing him: we only have him for a couple of days a week, go out of town to make some money, and that makes people think he's alright."

And even appealing to the judgment of the principal conductor, he continued: ". . . I don't see how [the principal conductor] could think that appointment would be

okay—how it could be a musical decision.” (orchestra committee member)

At this time some rumors were going around that the conductor had already been offered a position. However, when the players’ chairman asked the executive director about a title when he came to address the full orchestra in December, the executive director replied dryly:

“I haven’t found one yet” (CEO to full orchestra meeting)

A player said: “What about ‘not-coming-here-again?’”

To the player’s evident surprise, the executive director replied: “That’s not the prevailing view of the orchestra.”

In the senior management away-day several months later, the issue was again raised. The team was discussing possible candidates for the “jigsaw” of guest conductors, and whether conductor X should be given a title. One manager said, “He has such a bad name in the business—don’t give him a title” (senior management away-day, July)

Another added vehemently, “If you give [conductor X] a title, we’ll be laughed out of court.”



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