Meaning-Making by Involuntarily Reassigned Employees

By

Robert Armand Richer

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Dissertation directed by

Michael J. Marquardt, Ed.D.

Committee:

David R. Schwandt, Ph.D.

John M. Ferriter, Sc.D.
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Abstract of Dissertation

Re-shuffling of employees is a popular method of balancing current mission requirements in fluid organizations. Employee knowledge is a valuable resource lost to downtime as employees make sense after involuntary reassignment. This study served to address the paucity of research on the sensemaking of employees who are involuntarily reassigned within their organizations. This study used meaning making theory to explore the mental models employed by eight Department of Defense employees as they made sense of being involuntarily reassigned. It identifies and describes the content of the mental schemes used by these employees to navigate their environment after the event.

The Self-Q interview methodology proposed by Bougon, Baird, Komocar, and Ross, (1990) is used to elicit the constructs of tacit mental models. The major constructs of sensemaking after involuntary reassignment were Identity, Performance, Management, Others (i.e. co-workers, family, supervisors, etc.) and Emotions.

Contributions to sensemaking (Weick, 1979; 1995) and adult learning theory (Mezirow, 1991; 2000) are suggested. Five implications for HRD practitioners and organizational leaders are discussed. Five recommendations for future research in theory and practice are offered.
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Chapter I

Introduction

People adapt as necessary to be effective in organizations, but questions arise regarding their effectiveness when they are involuntarily assigned new responsibilities as organizations re-invent themselves (Allen, Freeman, Russell, Reizenstein, & Rentz, 2001; Grunberg, 2000). Meaning making (Mezirow, 1991b) or sensemaking (Weick, 1979b) is what employees do as they navigate through reassignment activities as organizations balance workforce and business demands. Specifically, how does an employee describe the meaning making experience after being involuntarily reassigned?

Employee knowledge is a valuable resource (Ahlbrandt, Fruehan, & Giarratani, 1996; Martin & Freeman, 1998). Increasing competition and shrinking budgets cause organizations to reassign seasoned employees rather than lose the knowledge and expertise associated with performance. It is estimated that by 2003, all Fortune 500 companies will downsize their workforce (Wanberg, 1997) (e.g. recent cuts of 26,000 at Daimler-Chrysler (McCune, 2002); and 120 executives at Motorola (Kaiser, 2002)). Mission shifts cause involuntary internal reassignments as organizations re-align human-resource requirements.
In this knowledge era both individual and collective meaning making have been identified as important to the success of organizations (Senge, 1990; Vaill, 1996). During organizational mission shifts the involuntarily reassigned employee is left to make sense of the situation. Schutz (1932/1967) noted that when we make sense of an experience we normally have two options: (1) to make subjective sense of it alone and (2), to make sense of it socially in discourse - objective sensemaking.

Even those organizations that do not experience downsizing as such experience fluid structures and are forced to shuffle human resources. Martin and Freeman (1998), describe fluid organizations as those that are leaner, less hierarchical, more adaptive and more responsive and, as such, are more likely to create situations where leaders make personnel adjustments to meet organizational requirements.

Kegan’s (1982; 1994) work in cognitive psychology and Noer’s (1993a; 1995; 1998) and Allen, Freeman, Russell, Reizenstein, and Rentz (2001) studies in organizational survivorship also describe modern organizations as tumultuous and fluid. These highly fluid work environments create situations that offer opportunities and personal challenges of adaptation to new roles, norms and job tasks (Kolb, 1984; Marsick & Neaman, 1990; 1996; Mezirow, 1985; Nichol, 2000; Weber & Manning, 2001) as the individual is moved from position to position. Involuntary
reassignments force employees into equivocal sensemaking situations where multiple meaning from self and others must be re-balanced (Weick, 1995).

Past research has described meaning making as what we do as humans (Habermas, 1984; Kegan, 1982; Mezirow, 1991b; Schutz, 1932/1967). To make meaning is to “attribute coherence and significance to our experience in light of what we know” (Mezirow, 1991b, p. 10). Schutz (1932/1967) used the term “sensemaking” as seeking meanings that self and others use in conversation (p. 126-128). Weick (1995) following Schutz added the notion of multi-meaning synthesis or equivocation to the sensemaking process. Additional meanings or interpretations may be derived from interaction with team members, co-workers, leaders, parents, friends and cultural demands just to name a few. The problem for employees, says Weick, is a matter of “equivocality” not ambiguity (p. 27). As individuals adapt to changing roles, jobs, tasks, or other shifts due to involuntary reassignment in organizational units how do they make sense and assign meaning to their experience? This approach to sense making or regaining a sense of balance for the employee leads to employment of personal cognitive structures (Kelly, 1970); those personal belief systems that help us make sense of everyday life.

The personal cognitive structures for the activity of meaning making have been coined theories-in-use (Schon, 1987, 1995), meaning perspectives (Mezirow, 1991b), the “plan” behind communication (Schutz,
1932/1967, p. 130), organizing circumstances (Spear & Mocker, 1984), reorganizing schemas (Weick, 1995), and habitus (Bourdieu, 1979; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). These terms describe the accumulation of past meanings in the form of personal schemes or personal strategies, which are the basis for future action.

Many researchers see surprises (Louis, 1980), disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow, 1981, 1991b), triggering events (Weick, 1988), cognitive mismatches (Argyris, 1992), or cognitive differences (Kegan, 1994) - such as being involuntarily reassigned - as causing individuals to urgently seek explanations of their situation, therefore engaging belief systems in meaning making activities. Attributing meaning is the outcome of sensemaking. Weick (1995) sees sensemaking as a constant organizing activity of authoring one’s situations. Mezirow (1991b; 1995; 1998a) suggests that individuals who are part of upheaval in organizations are provided with opportunities for meaning making, which serve as catalysts for meaningful adult development. For Mezirow (1991b), Argyris and Schon (Argyris, 1977; Argyris & Schon, 1976), Marsick (1990), and Kegan (1982; 1994), meaning making in adulthood is seen as the constant change of meaning schemas through actively and critically questioning and reflecting upon personal basic assumptions during troublesome times. For Weick (1995) a "crucial property of sensemaking is that human situations are progressively clarified, but this clarification often works in reverse. It is less often the case that an outcome
fulfills some prior definition of the situation, and more often the case that an outcome develops that prior definition” (p. 11, emphasis in original). Husserl (1970) recognized what the human mind placed upon its experiences were “intrinsic structures of transcendental experiencing, that is, of the primordial reality given in lived experience and simply brought to thematic awareness and articulation in phenomenological reflection [discussion] (Kohak, 1978, p. xii). Strauss and Corbin (1998) states that description of a phenomenon in research is the “use of words to convey a mental image of an event, a piece of scenery, a scene, an experience, an emotion, or a sensation: the account related from the perspective of the person doing the depicting” (p. 15). As a phenomenological study, this project will describe the experiences of being involuntarily reassigned, through the use of words and graphics representing a full-spectrum view of the sensemaking schemes of those who have lived the event.

Problem Statement

The literature on changes in individual meaning schema (Bougon, Baird, Komocar, & Ross, 1990; Brown, 1992; Carley, 1992; Cossette & Audet, 1992; Eden & Ackerman, 1998; Eden, Ackermann, & Cropper, 1992; Eitel, Kanz, & Tesche, 2000; Hodgkinson, Brown, Maule, Glaister, & Pearman, 1999; Lloyd, 1989; Wallace, 1989; Walsh, 1995), indicate much
research has been done on the schema of managers and leaders. There has been little attention paid to identifying the schema of *involuntarily reassigned employees*. This study investigates meaning schemas of involuntarily reassigned employees as they describe the phenomenon.

Noer (1993a; 1998) and Allen, Freeman, Russell, Reizenstein, and Rentz (2001) suggest that if the reassigned individual is not effective in discovering differences between the tacit expectations of the new position and his beliefs about that situation, the individual fails to adapt to the new situation. Evidence suggests that the employee will maintain minimum effort and exhibit low risk behaviors (Bumbaugh, 1998) or become cynical and non-productive (Finger & Asun, 2001) in new situations and changing environments. These scenarios are costly in terms of cynicism (Finger & Asun, 2001) leading to action avoidance (Argyris, 1991; Weick, 1979b) for both the individual and for organizations. Identification of personal meaning schemas through the study of one’s actions is the first step in significant meaning making (Mezirow, 1991b; Weick, 1995). Identification of individual meaning schemes employed by individuals as they describe their reassignment has had little, if any, attention in the literature.
Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to describe the experience of the involuntarily reassigned employee. Personnel reassignments within organizations present individuals with opportunities to reinterpret meaning (Mezirow, 1991b; Vaill, 1996). Schutz (1932/1967) proposed that subjective meaning is made by internally engaging in conversations and objective meaning through dialogue with others. Both activities engage personal schemas. Building on Schutz, Weick (1979) suggested the study of individual activities to uncover schemas (“selection” schemas) used to engage an unpredictable environment. Mezirow (1996) continues Habermas’ (1984) work by stating that, in times of personal turmoil, we validate our beliefs through communication with others or fulfilling a communicative interest. This study investigated employee schemes as they recount their experiences of being involuntarily reassigned.

Specifically, this study focused on understanding the meaning of “involuntarily reassignment” (moved to a new role or status in an organization) for an individual employee. This research is conducted from the phenomenological perspective - from the perspective of those who have “experienced” the phenomenon in question (Creswell, 1994; 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Moustakas, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Participant explanations of their perceptions of the situation are studied through the lens of meaning making or sensemaking theory (Mezirow, 2000; Weick, 1995).
Significance

Understanding the phenomenon of involuntary reassignment from an individual perspective can add to the understanding of (employee) and adult meaning making, making it possible for Human Resource Development (HRD) specialists to facilitate transitions for involuntary reassigned employees. Noer (1993a) and Allen, Freeman, Russell, Reizenstein, and Rentz (2001) suggest that more research is needed to identify this displacement experience to create better employee-focused and practitioner-led interventions. This study gives practitioners increased awareness of the experience through the eyes of eight re-assigned employees - an ‘insider’s look’ of employee meaning schemes after involuntary reassignment.

Meaning making research (Courtenay, Merriam, Reeves, & Baumgartner, 2000; Courtenay, Merriam, & Reeves, 1998; Finger & Asun, 2001; Taylor, 1997, 1998) reveals that there is a need to assess the meaning schema employed in dramatic human experiences. Taylor’s (1998) analysis of 45 research projects notes there are questions remaining about the nature of the meaning making process. Investigating the meaning making processes of the involuntarily reassigned employees may reveal insights into the content and structure of meaning schemes as applied by the reassigned employee.
Cognitive mapping techniques have been applied in secondary education (Gabel, 1999), secondary teacher education (Irving, Dickson, & Keyser, 1999), spatial education (architecture) (Evans, Fellows, Zorn, & Doty, 1980), chemistry education (Gabel, 1999), and medical education (Eitel et al., 2000; Irvine, 1995; Van Neste-Kenny, Cragg, & Foulds, 1998), to assist teachers in understanding student action schemes as they master subject matter. Little if any cognitive maps have been created involuntarily reassigned employees within the same organization.

Cognitive mapping techniques in management science have for the most part been in assessing manager strategies and decision-making (Ackermann & Belton, 1994; Axelrod, 1976; Brown, 1991; Calori, Johnson, & Sarnin, 1994; Eden & Smithin, 1979; Hodgkinson et al., 1999; Huff, 1990; Kearney & Kaplan, 1997; Swann & Newell, 1998; Walsh, 1995). Some exceptions are with teams (Carley, 1997; Eden & Spender, 1998), with student learning strengths (Ihlenfeldt, 1981), and shared group maps (Langfield-Smith, 1992). Although Weber (2001) provides individual sense making during large organizational change, little has been done to map meaning schemes of the individual reassigned employee within an organization. Marsick, (1998), Mezirow (1998b), and Weick (1988) note more research is needed to provide insight to educators utilizing real-life case dilemmas and triggers of meaning making in the workplace. This study would add a unique example – the involuntarily reassigned employee - to the
body of research on individual cognitive mapping and individual meaning making in the workplace.

Research has been done with layed-off employees re-entering the workforce (Ingle, 1999; Spalter-Roth & Deitch, 1999). Spalter-Roth & Deitch found that anger and bewilderment cued the meaning making process in her sample of women, blacks and Hispanics, but they do not describe the meaning of job loss or re-entering the workforce has on these individuals. Ingle (1999), in her dissertation, found that her case study of one individual had a significant experience during layoff but she did not detail the meaning schemes applied by the individual. No studies were found detailing the meaning schemes of individuals changing jobs within the same organization.

The awareness of personal meaning making schema within the dilemma of involuntary reassignment could add the desired critical information Noer (1993b; 1998) suggests is needed in current placement interventions after organizational upheavals. Noer (1998) aptly describes the goal of placement interventions in schematic terms, that is, as helping individuals “move from the old set of assumptions to a new set” (p. 218). Professionals’ activities in placement interventions are often grounded in their knowledge of the workplace environment, which includes how employees interact with others and go through the process of making sense of their environment (see Noer, 1993a). Therefore, human and organizational researchers, and organizational leaders’ increased
understanding of how involuntarily reassigned employees experience dramatic and disorienting situations, may provide added insight towards retaining employees and maintaining productivity in future organizational re-engineering activities. Employee knowledge is a costly resource (Ahlbrandt et al., 1996; Martin & Freeman, 1998).

Weick states that by “understanding the triggering events and the ways in which small sensemaking actions can grow into large senseless disasters, we hope to develop a better understanding of how crises can be isolated and contained” (1988, p. 308). The sensemaking map of the reassigned employee containing the if-then assertions of the individual’s meaning schemes can assist practitioners in “developing specifically the activities of pre-assessment, prevention, and coping” (p. 308) during the meaning attribution process of sensemaking. Armed with employee schema, the human development specialist can be a valuable resource to the retroactive sensemaking process of the reassigned, thereby possibly avoiding personal crisis and subsequent productive time lost in grief (Daloz, 1986) and cynicism (Finger & Asun, 2001).

Employees are not at their most efficient and productive during reassignment (Allen, Freeman, Russell, Reizenstein, and Rentz 2001; Grunberg, 2000; Ingle, 1999). Organizational leaders are called on to provide cost-efficient and effective mechanisms for helping organizations and their employees through the process of reassignment (Noer, 1993a, 1998),
yet, little literature exists articulating what professionals need to know in order to support their employees after involuntary displacements (Allen, Freeman, Russell, Reizenstein, and Rentz, 2001; Noer, 1998). The discovery of sensemaking activities, those that hinder and those that generate action, may help organizational leaders and Human Resource and Development (HRD) specialists to create interventions that help the involuntarily reassigned get back to the work of the organization.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 displays the schematic for this study using guidelines provided by Schwandt (1999). The overall research question connects the context of the study to the current theoretical base (see Figure 2) for retroactive meaning making. The focus of the study is on the meaning making of involuntary re-assigned employees within an organization.
Figure 1: Conceptual Framework: Making meaning after involuntary reassignment.

Making Meaning during Involuntarily Reassignment

How do employees describe & make meaning of the experience of being involuntarily displaced?

Social Sensemaking

Problem Statement & Conceptual Framework

Individual Sense/meaning Making

How do employees describe their experiences in the context of Involuntary reassignment?

Social Context: Involuntary Displacement

cognitive schemes

RESEARCH QUESTION
Schutz’s Theory of Meaning, Mezirow’s Theory of Adult Learning and Weick’s Sense Making Theory will present an integrated theoretical look at the meaning making experience of the involuntarily reassigned employee. The common thread, represented by the lines connecting the three theories in Figure 2, represents their common interest in retrospective attribution of meaning. This integrated theoretical framework (Figure 2) will be used as a lens to describe the experiences of being involuntarily assigned represented by the center of Figure 2.

The methodology chosen gathers the data (schemes) as codes and major themes responding to the meaning perspectives of the individual participants. For the purpose of this research it is assumed that the involuntarily reassigned employee carries the affective and causal constructs of a personal history (Mezirow, 1996; Weick, 1995), as well as, applies
context specific attributes of the displacement into subsequent sensemaking and meaning attribution - the basic tenet of constructionist thought (Candy, 1989).

Table 1 compares each theory in terms of three common components - emotional, cognitive and behavioral. Table 2 is an operational depiction of the conceptual framework presenting overall constructs, supporting constructs, probable meaning making variables, method of data collection, data description, and target population. Each theorist is discussed in the following section.

Schutz (1932/1967) proposes the signs (labels) we use in personal or social discussion – he calls the process of typification - contain subjective or expressive (social) meaning making properties. In socially constructed meaning the individual uses labels containing personal meaning. "Objective meaning is the meaning of the sign [label] as such, the kernel, so to speak; whereas subjective meaning is the fringe or aura emanating from the subjective context in the mind of the sign-user" (Schutz, 1932/1967, p. 126). For Mezirow (1991b), these labels contain probable distortions having an epistemic, a sociolinguistic and/or psychic basis, which can only be resolved through personal reflection. Weick (1995), citing Schutz, (1932/1967), argues that retroactive sensemaking inherently contains the reflection of Mezirow’s argument. All three have a common thread of retroactive
attribution of meaning and will be discussed in greater detail in the literature review.

Table 1: Schutz, Weick, and Mezirow – A Comparison of Concepts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>System Name/</td>
<td>Stock of Knowledge = a learned and implicit set of assumptions forming individual reality (Schutz, 1932/1967)</td>
<td>Retention System</td>
<td>Meaning Schemes / Meaning perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System Component</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion</td>
<td>&quot;The imagining self does not transform the outer world&quot; (p. 258). Need to adapt / transform our environment.</td>
<td>Surprise – triggering sense making</td>
<td>Feeling of guilt or shame in a disorienting dilemma.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>A System of Relevances: &quot;We have, then a common surrounding to be defined by our common interests, his and mine. To be sure, he and I will have a different system of relevances and a different knowledge of the common surrounding if for no other reason that he sees from &quot;there&quot; everything that I am seeing from &quot;here&quot; Schutz (p. 237).</td>
<td>Retention system – cognitive structures borne from Enactment – Selection – Retention cycle</td>
<td>Meaning perspectives – meaning schemes used to select from experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral</td>
<td>In process of typification [discourse] -- &quot;The project of the speaker is always a matter of imaginative reconstruction for his interpreter and so is attended by a certain vagueness and uncertainty.&quot; (Schutz, 1932/1967, p. 128). (also Weick- retroactive sensemaking.) The interpreter - &quot;seeks the &quot;plan&quot; [sic] behind the communication.&quot; (Schutz, 1932/1967, p. 130, quotes in original) Through social typification, individuals deal effectively with the environment. The process allows humans to treat each other as typical objects of a particular kind (i.e. as doctors, engineers, cab drivers).</td>
<td>Enactment leading to selection and retention.</td>
<td>Discourse with others for verification of belief system leading to critical reflection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Operational Presentation of Conceptual Framework & Methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESEARCH QUESTION:</th>
<th>How do employees describe and make meaning of the experience of being involuntarily reassigned?</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OVERARCHING CONSTRUCTS</td>
<td>SUBORDINATE CONSTRUCTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Cognition</td>
<td>Typifications (labeling) -- Subjective / expressive functions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Cognition</td>
<td>Meaning schemes: Stock of Knowledge &gt; Reassigned activities -- Instrumental -- Communicative -- Emancipatory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question

The research question for this study is:

How do employees describe and make meaning of the experience of being involuntarily reassigned?

Research Design

A "phenomenological study describes the meanings of the lived experiences for several individuals about the concept or the phenomenon" (Creswell, 1998, p. 51). The phenomenon under inquiry is that of attributing meaning to being involuntarily reassigned. Bougon et al’s (1990) Self-Q method was employed as methodology for this research. The Self-Q method relies upon engaging and recording the cognitive schemes of participants by participants (Bougon, 2001; 1992; Bougon et al., 1990; Weick & Bougon, 1986). Schematic themes are then graphically mapped by the researcher and verified by participants.

In phenomenological research one explores the concrete experience of people and the meaning their experiences have for them (Kohak, 1978; Moustakas, 1994; Seidman, 1991). For the constructivist, there “is no unambiguous social reality ‘out there’ to be accounted for” and thus the researcher and co-researchers co-create thick descriptions of their lived experiences (Miles & Huberman, 1994 p. 2). Rigor is maintained through the trail of evidence that validates the map in terms of its meaning and significance to the participant (Eden & Ackerman, 1998). Bougon et al’s (1990)
Self-Q method maintains rigor by continually engaging participants in discussion of individual schematic themes (Barrett, 2001; Bougon, 2001; Bougon et al., 1990).

**Participant Selection and Data Collection**

Participants for this study were drawn from a Department of the Army research, development and engineering center. Participants selected were involuntarily reassigned.

Participants were subjected to three, 60-90 minute interviews. The first interview is a self-interview. Participants are seen as “the experts of their own personal knowledge (a static structure) and on the basis of their own thinking (a dynamic process) about the situation they are questioning. Thus, the events, objects, and concepts they use to express their questions not only reveal their tacit and explicit knowledge but also expose their construction of their understanding of the social system” (Bougon et al, 1990 p. 329 parentheses in original). The cognitive meaning system revealed in the self-questions is the grammar that the individual employs to interact with the environment (Finger & Asun, 2001). Self-questions contain the concepts of the cognitive structures – the schemes that form personal meaning perspectives. The concepts are then handwritten on 3 by 5 inch cards and re-validated by the participant during the second interview.

In the second interview participants stack the concept cards into themes. Themes form the cognitive map - a graphical representation of the individual’s meaning schema for the experience of being involuntarily reassigned (see fictitious example Figure 3). The map is the basis for the third interview.
Figure 3: Example of Cognitive Map

Need to learn new players
Learn new role for self

Need to identify tasks to be done

Involuntary Reassignment

Anger
Fearful
Anticipation

The cognitive map helps the participant revalidate and re-construe meaning and provides linkages between themes. The map represents the structure of the event for the participant.

Mezirow (1991b) suggests that cognitive mapping, such as the Self-Q method (Bougon et al., 1990; Weick & Bougon, 1986), will make explicit the meaning structures that are used to construe meaning from experience. Unlike the repertoire grid method (Stewart, 1997) in which meaning constructs are researcher generated (Eden & Ackerman, 1998), the Self-Q Method was selected because it allows participants to freely explain their experience without researcher intervention, especially during the initial interview when idiosyncratic (self-questions) constructs are made explicit (Barrett, 2001). The Self-Q (Bougon et al., 1990) methodology helps the interviewer bracket or suspend his/her bias during the crucial opening interview. Bracketing is the cornerstone of phenomenological research (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 1990). As a further precaution to assure bracketing of researcher bias, the researcher has provided a cognitive map – a ready reminder - of his experiences in being
reassigned due to organizational readjustments. This researcher’s cognitive map of his experience was created prior to data collection and is provided at Appendix A.

Structured or semi-structured interviews focus the participant on the intent of the interviewer (Moustakas, 1994). Aligning with the assumptions of constructivism (that participants create their reality), the Self-Q method allows that to happen. The simple and elegant three-phase method of the Self-Q is completely participant-focused and driven by participant concepts, the cornerstone of phenomenological research (Creswell, 1994; Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994).

Participant Review and Ethical Issues

Participants were asked to sign an Informed Consent Form (at Appendix B) after reading the Information Sheet for Participants (reproduced below) thus gaining a complete understanding of study parameters and their level of commitment.

### Interview Number One

We, as individuals, have certain expectations and assumptions about ourselves, and our organization. These expectations raise questions within us every time we face a new experience. The experience I’d like you to think about is the one where you were involuntarily moved from one job to another in this organization.

As you think about what it meant for you to be involuntarily moved, please write the questions you asked yourself about how you experienced being moved in this organization.

HRD professionals are concerned with ethical issues, especially as they help employees discover meaning perspectives. A potential effect of the study may be that participants would face the differences between current held meaning schemes and
those expectations of the new assignment. Also, it may become uncomfortable if differences arise between participant espoused theories, what they propose to believe; and their actual theories-in-use, what they actually do, while re-creating and mapping the meaning of involuntary reassignment during the interview process. Understandably, care was taken by the researcher not to suggest strategies toward resolution of differences. Decision to act upon new knowledge or a newly acquired perspective is solely the responsibility of the individual participant and an essential part of personal development.

Delimitations

This study is bounded by the breath of the sample and therefore may not be transferable to other government research and development organizations or other work environments. Participants are employees who have been reassigned due to organizational issues, such as organizational realignment and changing work requirements, and thus the findings may not be valid for employees reassigned for performance or behavioral concerns. Also, this organization hires highly educated middle-class professionals, thus findings are not generalizable to other types of employee environments. Also, participants are government career employees and as such have strict employment rights, thus findings may not apply to the private sector.
Limitations

This study describes the meaning making for eight individuals after involuntary reassignment in the same organization. Qualitative inquiry does not consider generalizability an issue. No generalizations will be made of a larger population or particular industry. Findings can only be said of the sample. A sample selected from different organizations may have greater credibility, but would have lesser confirmability (Patton, 1990). Participant memory is retrospective, subject to re-interpretation (Weick, 1979b, 1990) and serves only its user not necessarily the ‘truth’ of others or the organization.

Definition of Terms

**Adult Learning:**

“The process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience in order to guide action” (Mezirow, 1991b, p. 12)

**Context:**

The personal and socio-cultural factors that play an influencing role in the process of learning (Clark & Wilson, 1991). This term was operationalized for this study to mean being an involuntarily reassigned employee, that is, an employee moved from one position to another position without the individual’s consent.

**Construct**
A construct is “a textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience, incorporating the invariant constituents and themes” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121)

Critical Reflection:
An intentional reassessment of prior learning - meaning perspective - to seek validity by detecting and correcting socio-cultural, psychic, or epistemic distortions in its content, process or premises (Mezirow, 1991b). “Our meaning structures are transformed through reflection, defined here as attending to the grounds (justification) for one’s beliefs” (Mezirow, 1994)

Dialogue:
Dialogue or communicative activity aimed at understanding the meaning of a common experience to coordinate action (Mezirow, 1991b). Schutz (1932/1967, p. 126) provides a similar definition.

Description:
"Description: The use of words to convey a mental image of an event, a piece of scenery, a scene, an experience, an emotion, or a sensation: the account related from the perspective of the person doing the depicting" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 15)

Enacted environment:
Enactment is a social process by which a ‘material and symbolic record of action’ is established (Smirchich & Stubart, 1985). An “enacted environment has both a public and a private face. Publicly, it is a construction that is usually visible to observers other than the actor. Privately, it is a map of if-then assertions in which actions are related to outcomes” (Weick, 1988, p.307). Schutz (1932/1967) provides a similar definition for socially constructed meaning.

**Habitus:**

“A matrix of actions, perceptions and thoughts transmitted to each individual during early socialization, in others words, a system of durable dispositions and transposables” (Graw, 1996, p. 18, from an interview of Bourdieu, translation by author)

**Involuntarily reassigned employee:**

An involuntarily reassigned employee is an individual who has been moved to another job in the same organization without his/her consent.

**Meaning Making:**

“Meaning is an interpretation, and to make meaning is to construe or interpret experience – in other words to give it coherence” (Mezirow, 1991b, p. 4). Mezirow (Mezirow, 1995) states later that “creating meaning refers to the process of construal by which we attribute coherence and significance to our experience in light of what we know” - our meaning perspectives (p. 40).
Meaning scheme:
“Past experience provides boundary conditions for integrating and differentiating information and for determining the meaning of an event. A [meaning] schema is one formulation of such boundary conditions; it is an organized representation of an event that may serve as a prototype, norm, or context” (Mezirow, 1991b, p. 10).

Meaning perspective:
“Sets of habitual expectations or “meaning perspectives” (created by ideologies, learning styles, neurotic self-deceptions) constitute codes that govern the activities of perceiving, comprehending, and remembering. These symbols that we project onto our sense perceptions are filtered through meaning perspectives” (Mezirow, 1991b, p. 5).

Memory:
Human memory is made up of the stored meanings from sensory experiences. (Anderson, 1980; Mezirow, 1991b)

Perspective Transformation:
Perspective transformation is the process of changing structures of habitual expectation [meaning schemes and meaning perspectives] to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative perspective (Mezirow, 1991b).

Role:
Role is defined as a “comprehensive pattern for behavior and attitude, constituting a socially identified part in social interaction, and capable of being enacted recognizably by different individuals” (Turner, 1979, p.124)

Sensemaking:

Sense making can be viewed, as a recurring cycle comprised of a sequence of events occurring over time. The cycle begins as individuals form unconscious and conscious anticipations and assumptions [schemes], which serve as predictions about future events. Subsequently, individuals experience events that may be discrepant from predictions. Discrepant events, or surprises, trigger a need for explanation, or postdiction, and, correspondingly, for a process through which interpretations of discrepancies are developed (Weick, 1995).

Structure of the Dissertation

The remainder of the dissertation contains chapters II through V. Chapter II is the literature review covering retroactive sensemaking theories of Schutz, Weick and Mezirow.

Chapter III presents the methodology for the study. Described in this chapter are interviewing techniques, participant selection and the description tools used to create cognitive maps. Chapter IV presents the data and the analysis. Chapter V presents findings, implications for research and practice, and conclusions of the study.
Chapter II

Literature Review

This chapter describes the concepts of making meaning for involuntarily reassigned employees in organizations. This study used the lens of meaning making or sensemaking to understand the phenomenon of being involuntarily reassigned within an organization. The terms *sensemaking* and *meaning* making will be used interchangeably to indicate the process of balancing the equivocality experienced by employees after being involuntarily reassigned. The first part of the chapter describes the context of the study – involuntary reassignment. In the second part is a description of the activities of meaning making as portrayed in the literature; specifically the works of Jack Mezirow (1991; 2000), Alfred Schutz (1932/1967; 1973), and Karl Weick (1979b; 1995; 2003). Table 3 lists the sections as they appear in the chapter.

Table 3: Sections of Literature Review

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Involuntary reassignment: What it is and what it isn’t.

The context for this study is the movement of an employee from one position in the organization to another without the consent of the individual -- involuntary reassignment. The context is a situation in which the employee is thrown into a situation where coherence of equivocation is sought. The focus of this research is on the retroactive sense making of the employee who is living this event.

The extant literature on job loss is inappropriate for this study because it does not address attitudinal changes in job shift (Bonner, 1998; Kozlowski, Chao, Smith, & Hedlund, 1993), however, Noer’s (1993; 1994; 1998) extensive empirical work in the area of survivorship – the changes in attitudes of those left behind after organizational downsizing is particularly useful in understanding the attitudinal and coherence seeking activities of sensemaking. Noer is particularly sensitive to employee meaning making for survivors as he defines successful interventions as geared toward helping the employees “move from the old set of assumptions to a new set” (1998, p. 218). Bonner (1998) found that those left behind felt much like those who were let go – insecure
about their future and living in an ambiguous environment in which they had to make meaning of their situation.

Noer (1993; 1995; 1998) describes survivor sickness in Kubler-Ross (1969) theoretical terms such as anger, fear, and sense of guilt. Taylor (1997; 1998; 2000) addresses similar emotions in the 47 empirical analyses of Mezirow’s theory and Weick (1999; 1995) notes that emotion is the key ingredient linking being thrown into an event such as an involuntary reassignment and the subsequent stitching together of personal meaning after the fact. Allen, Freeman, Russell, Reizenstein, and Rentz (2001) longitudinal study found that survivor dissatisfaction with management increased and job involvement decreased over time.

Identity issues have been stressed by Mezirow (2000) and more so by Weick (1995) as central to meaning making. Thoits’ (1995) work in psychological symptoms and stress has found that identity-relevant events such as job loss or reassignment may be given existential meanings and cause feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness. Ashforth (2001) focused his latest volume on “the intersection of role and identity” because of its importance to organizational life. An important connection between Noer’s work above and Ashforth’s is that both identify the psychological contract, expectations one has that management cares for its employees, and its violation, as impacting employee attitudes and affecting meaning making in the individual and the organization. Thus, it is expected that forced role transitions, such as job loss, and possibly involuntary reassignment, are identity-threatening events especially for Americans who identify themselves by what they do.
The involuntarily reassigned employee within an organization is neither the survivor of Noer nor the employee who has lost a job and seeking another. What is different? The involuntarily reassigned employee may have lost face, status, has to return day-after-day to the same organization, may be facing the same peers, and may not have a clue as to the “real” reason behind the reassignment. These concerns are by no means exhaustive but merely serve as probable examples. Involuntary reassignment has not been studied as a human phenomenon within our ever-changing organizational structures (Gowing, Kraft, & Quick, 1998; Martin & Freeman, 1998). An individual living through this experience poses numerous questions about performance in the old job, concerns of self-efficacy in the new one, perceptions of others and lost relationships in the old job and uncertain relationships of the new one (Bougon, 2001; Bougon et al., 1990) and can add another example of subjectivity as the feedstock of practice (Weick, 1999) to the theories of meaning making – making coherence of our work lives after disruption of expectations (Mezirow, 1991b; Weick, 1995).

Although survivor studies are not specifically focused on how the survivor makes meaning after the event, Noer (1993; 1998) and others (Allen, Freeman, Russell, Reizenstein, and Rentz , 2001) define survivor sickness after organizational downsizing in terms of a grieving process including anger, distrust of management strategy, and decreased job involvement. Allen, Freeman, Russell, Reizenstein, and Rentz (2001) in a longitudinal study of survivors concluded, “it seems likely that survivor reactions and adjustments to downsizing is a function of both dispositional and situational variables” (p. 161). These researchers come the closest to identifying meaning making variables,
but only in the broadest terms of disposition, relating to individual schema, and situation, relating to the organizational context.

Notions of theory building

A discussion of theory building is necessary to understand the goals of our theorists. Weick (1999) reinforces the stance that theory must "synthesize backward understanding and forward living" in an article on theory building (p. 139). His arguments conclude with the following 11 issues to consider in theorizing.

1. Analysis is focused on what people do.
2. Context of action is preserved, and context-free depiction of elements is minimized.
3. Holistic awareness is attributed to the actor.
4. Emotions are seen to structure and restructure activity.
5. Interruptions are described in detail with careful attention to what people were doing before the interruption, what became salient during the interruption, and what happened during resumption of activity.
6. Activity is treated as the context within which reflection occurs, and reflection is not treated as separate from, behind, and before action.
7. Artifacts and entities are portrayed in terms of their use, meaning, situated character, and embedding in tasks rather than in terms of their measurable properties.
8. Knowledge is seen to originate from practical activity rather than from detached deductive theorizing or detached inductive empiricism.
9. Time urgency rather than indifference to time is treated as part of the context.
10. The imagery of fusion is commonplace, reflecting that activity takes place prior to conceptualizing and theorizing.
Detachment from a problem and resort to general abstract tools to solve it is viewed as a last resort and a derivative means of coping rather than as the first and primary means of coping (whatever else people may be, they are not lay social scientists). (Weick, 1999, p. 139)

These latter arguments support the theory of sensemaking as ongoing. Weick continues stressing the importance of analyzing and embedding sensemaking theory into our day-to-day work activities, as in intra-organizational reassignments, or to study what we do in our organizations. Theorizing and theory building is seen by both Mezirow (1998) and Weick (1999) as being an ongoing discussion of the practice of being an organizational member and making sense of the things we do as organizational members.

The ongoing social argument, whether in self-talk or in social discussion, stems from the equivocation between individual beliefs – the baggage we carry with us - and what is being perceived. An essential difference between these two researchers is that Weick (1979; 1995) sees individual cognitive schemes – in what he labels a retention system - as manifested in the actions of the individual, and the study of these actions, as enactments, is the key to sensemaking. For Mezirow (1978; 1991b; 2000) the cognitive schemes, labeled habits of mind and meaning perspectives, are the knowledge of past learnings which are the basis of attributing meaning and construing the present experience. The retention system for Weick is a subsystem of a processes not merely stacked knowledge from past learning, as Mezirow (1991b) defines meaning perspectives. Weick views the process, as a system of systems in constant motion while Mezirow perceives it as a more static and linear process. These notions will be discussed directly or indirectly throughout the chapter. For the involuntarily reassigned
employee the sensemaking process includes much questioning of what is happening and the ongoing search for the place where the details fit together and make sense – the process that attributes meaning into our lives.

Mezirow (1978; 1991b) sees theory building as he sees adult meaning making, as a deliberately rational discourse. Individuals transform their meaning perspectives through rational means, that is, reflective action or a re-look at the assumptions supporting beliefs. For Mezirow and others, the self is primarily a rational entity and its well-formed ego is to promote intellectual rational thought (Mezirow, 1991a; Schein, 1985; Scott, 1997). But, the rational ego can be fooled into believing and accepting the cultural assumptions uncritically assimilated in childhood and education, which are now believed to be immutable, and beyond individual control (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970/1977; Mezirow, 1985; 1991b; 2000). These assumptions about the world and how it operates manifest themselves in specific meaning-making systems involving everyday rules, social roles, and relationships – the ways we see, feel, and act toward each other and toward the environment.

Cognitive systems: Individual meaning schemes

The framework of this study is located in the literature describing reflexive meaning making. Specifically, the study will focus on the personal cognitive systems employed by involuntarily reassigned employees as they make meaning after the fact. In cognitive psychology, schemata or meaning schema are those meanings which form our memory and with which we construct future experiences (Anderson, 1980; Candy, 1990). Schemata are the cognitive structures people use to make meaning of
experiences. Meaning schemes have also been referred to as theories-in-use (Argyris, 1982; Schon, 1983), personal constructs (Kelly, 1955; 1970), and habits of mind or frames of reference (Kegan, 1994; Mezirow, 1991b). Although subtle differences in wording, researchers agree that cognitive structures are the basis of language and agency and therefore can be studied (Finger & Asun, 2001).

Cognitive systems contain individual beliefs, values, and attitudes forming the platform of adult action. When faced with a situation requiring sensemaking, adults normally ask questions of themselves and others (Bougon et al., 1990). Individual interests drive the questions (Habermas, 1984; Mezirow, 1991b); and individual meaning schemes form the grammar and the labels of the questions (Finger & Asun, 2001).

Cognitive structures include cultural and psychological assumptions unwittingly absorbed in childhood within which new experience is assimilated and transformed (Mezirow, 1985). In an iterative fashion, cognitive structures form images and mental models, based on prior retention systems for Weick (1979b) and meaning schemes for Mezirow (1991b). Both Schon (1983) and Mezirow (1991b) refer to mental models as metaphors that represent for the individual a heuristic, a rule of thumb for what is expected in the environment – an individual’s constructed reality. For Weick (1979b) and Schutz (1932/1967) however, labels containing meaning are used in discussion. This researcher contends that labels, or possibly a set of labels, and metaphors can be used interchangeably to mean the complex and dynamic models that act as cognitive platforms to interpret new experiences. Three specific theories will be used as a lens to explicate meaning making during involuntary reassignment: Schutz’ (1932/1967) theory
of meaning, Mezirow’s (1991b) meaning making theory or transformation theory of adult learning and Weick’s (1979b) sensemaking theory.

**Activities of meaning making**

For the purpose of this study meaning making and sensemaking will be used interchangeably. Both processes have been described as coming to coherence or a personal understanding after a surprise or a dilemma in one’s life (Louis, 1980; Mezirow, 1991b; Weick, 1995). Both processes have been described as being ongoing and as situations that uncover the relevancies of our lives (Weick, 1995; 1999). The schemes or mental models we employ to add coherence to our lives after expectations have been interrupted as in involuntary reassignments help us reinterpret, restructure and transform new schemes to challenge the next interruptions of daily organizational living (Kegan, 1994; Mezirow, 2000; Weick, 1995).

**Figure 4: Weick’s Sensemaking activities**

(Adapted from Weick, 1995)
Figure 4 describes the activities of Weick’s Sensemaking theory. Ongoing organizing is the core of Weick’s (1995) sensemaking process. The activities of social, retrospect, ongoing, enactment, identity, plausibility and extracted cues are tools used by the individual to reorder, reinterpret, and align the different segments to regain balance of the situation. Ongoing organizing is all the activities in constant motion to interpret / re-interpret action and to structure / re-structure personal cognitive schemes. Citing Allport (1924), Weick suggests these activities are in constant motion in conversation with others and labels the connections between the activities as double-interact where each activity has ongoing and continuing influence on the other. Figure 4 notes the double-interact as a multidirectional or double-headed arrow. Weick (1995) also notes a multi-valent aspect to the connection dependent upon the affect of the individual at the moment of connectivity. It is expected that the employee is mad, sad or glad about the disruption in the flow of expectations brought about by involuntarily
reassignment and thus continuing the impetus to make sense and seek balance between internal predictions and external perceptions.

Also Weick (1979b) surfaced early in his theoretical discussions of sensemaking the concept of *requisite variety* where a variety of tools are needed to cope with the variety of concerns; in this case, variety lies in the equivocation of feelings, questions and perceptions brought up to awareness by the dilemma of being involuntarily reassigned, thus, variety is needed in the tools used to balance the equivocation. More simply stated, “it takes variety to control variety” (Weick, 1999, p. 137). Sensemaking is not a linear process and each activity is multivalent depending upon the individual’s affective penchant in the moment. Weick (1989; 1995) proposes the sensemaking process as gathering a set of raw materials for disciplined imagination rather than steps or phases to meaning making. Each of these activities will be discussed with input from other researchers.

From Husserl (1970), the father of phenomenology, to his student Schutz (1932, 1967), there is a belief that "in living with one another each one can take part in the life of the others. In this communalization there constantly occurs an alteration of validity through reciprocal correction" (Husserl, 1970 p. 163). The constant alteration of validity, the search for meaning in our lives through others is a basic tenet of meaning making with Schutz (1932/1967). Figure 5 depicts Schutz’s view of the attribution of meaning through communication activities.
For Schutz (1932/1967) and for Weick (1995) meaning is socially constructed on two levels - individually and in social discourse. On both levels the basic building block - the label - or what Schutz also called the “sign” (1932/1967, p. 26) embeds individual meaning in communication. Labels in self-talk or social discussion surface meaning – concepts, thoughts, ideas, or beliefs - for validation and re-interpretation. It is important to note that for Schutz the intrinsic conversation, (self-talk) necessarily includes others. Others for Schutz (1932/1967) included people dealt with directly, social contemporaries (i.e. personal heroes and political figures) or predecessors only read about or studied. Weick (1979b) calls these other voices “phantom others” and a source of other voices adding to equivocation for the individual sensemaker (p. 67). The notion of construing meaning in self-talk and in discussion are discussed by Mezirow (2000) when he
describes *objective reframing* of meaning in social discourse and *subjective reframing* in self-reflection of one’s basic assumptions (p. 22-23).

Mezirow’s theory is a synthesis of concepts from the fields of philosophy, psychology and sociology. "The theory involves an analysis of the psycho-cultural process of making meaning, the nature of meaning structures and how they are transformed through reflection, rational discourse, and emancipatory action" (Mezirow, 1995, p. 39). An awareness of "why we attach the meanings we do to reality ... may be the most significant distinguishing characteristic of adult learning" (Mezirow, 1981, p. 11). Mezirow uses adult learning and meaning making interchangeably. An extensive analysis of the studies prompted by Mezirow’s (1978) theory (Taylor, 1997; 1998; 2000), finds it is referred to as a meaning making theory, an adult learning theory, and as a theory of adult development. For Mezirow (1981) adult learning and therefore adult development is:

“... becoming critically aware of how and why our presuppositions [meaning schemes] have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; of reformulating these assumptions to permit a more inclusive, discriminating, permeable, and integrative perspective, and of making decisions or otherwise acting upon these new understandings. More inclusive, discriminating, permeable, and integrative perspectives are superior perspectives that adults choose if they can because they are motivated to better understand the meaning of their existence" (p. 11). Critical reflection and awareness of "why we attach the meanings we do to reality ... may be the most significant distinguishing characteristic of adult learning" (Mezirow 1981 p. 11).

*Figure 6: Mezirow’s Meaning Making Theory*
As depicted in Figure 6, Mezirow's transformational learning theory is more linear in its formulation than Weick's (1995) or Schutz's (1932/1967) meaning making approaches. The numbers refer to ordinal activities that encompass adult learning and adult development. Mezirow sees making meaning as a learning process that is “understood as a continuous effort to negotiate contested meanings” (2000, p. 3). The notion of contested meanings, step one of Mezirow’s theory, is very similar to Weick’s (1979) notion of equivocality. The meanings for Mezirow (2000) are formed possibly by others, uncritically accepted ideological distortions, personal learning styles, self-concept, attitudes, and aesthetic judgments. Mezirow (1991b) previously referred to these as psychic, socio-linguistic and epistemic distortions and currently (2000) refers to them as habits of mind. “A habit of mind is a set of assumptions – broad, generalized, oriented predispositions that act as a filter for interpreting the meaning of experience” (2000, p. 17). For Mezirow (2000) a habit of mind once expressed in social discourse is identified as a point of view.

Emancipatory nature of Mezirow’s theory

For Mezirow (1991b) transformational learning is seen as key to adult development. “Adult development is seen as an adult’s progressively enhanced capacity to validate prior learning through reflective discourse and to act upon the
resulting insights” (p. 7). Kegan (1982; 1994) posits that adults develop through higher levels of consciousness by engaging the self in intrinsic or extrinsic conversation about experience. Although not cited in Kegan, Schutz’s (1932/1967) notions, stated half a century earlier, about internal and external communications employing meaning-filled labels as linguistic meaning structures are remarkably similar.

Habermas’ (1984) Communicative Action Theory provides the “social theoretical context” for Mezirow’s transformational learning theory (Mezirow, 1991b p. 7). Habermas (1971) identifies three human interests leading to three different kinds of meaning: (1) the technical interest leads to instrumental learning – meaning what; (2) the practical interest leads to communicative learning – meaning how; and (3) emancipatory interests lead to emancipatory learning – meaning why. Although all three types of meaning may be within the coping strategies of the involuntarily reassigned employee, the primary focus for Mezirow’s (1998a; 1998b) adult development processes are on the psychosocial premise changes, the why I think the way I do and thus within Habermas’ (1984) dimension of emancipatory activity.

The emancipatory strategy does employ the tactics of instrumental and communicative competences from Habermas (1984). “There are two distinct domains of learning with different purposes, logics of inquiry, and modes of validating beliefs: instrumental learning – learning to control and manipulate the environment or other people, and communicative learning – learning what others mean when they communicate with you” (Mezirow, 1996, p. 164, italics in original). Although Argyris (1977; 1982; 1991) and Schon (1983; 1987; 1995) focus on practice, and Mezirow (1991b) on theory, all three espouse the use of instrumental and communicative
strategy. All three espouse a learning strategy of questioning one’s basic assumptions; questioning those basic beliefs that form personal cognitive meaning systems - to reach a better understanding of one’s theories-in-use. Schon (1983) addresses these two areas of competence (instrumental and communicative) in his call for an epistemology of practice, which "places technical problem solving within a broader context of reflective inquiry" (p. 69).

**Retention System or Meaning Perspective**

For Weick (1979a), sensemaking is distorted by what learning is retained from past enactments as it is for Mezirow’s (1991b) meaning perspective. New enactments (actions) get processed via old selection systems based upon old retention systems. In order to break the cyclic pattern the “enactment perspective urges people to include their own actions more prominently in the mental experiments they run to discover potential crises of which they may be the chief agents” (Weick, 1988). As Mezirow (1998a) proposes *critical reflection* as a key test in human meaning making, Weick (1979b) proposes *mental experiments* for sensemaking challenges. Weick suggests we challenge ‘avoided tests’ based upon faulty conclusions that constrain the organization thus limiting individual action. Will the involuntary reassigned employee ask, “Do I have no options? Can I buck the system?”
Role of the Other

Within the interpretive paradigm, we do not alter our lives alone (Bandura, 1986; 1997; Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Meaning making within the parameters of the interpretive or belief system is social (Lincoln & Guba, 1989) - the individual is not alone in making sense of experience. Habermas (1970) followed by Mezirow (1994) say we validate our beliefs through critical self-examination “in response to intuitively becoming aware that something is wrong with the result of our thought, or challenging its validity through discourse with others of differing viewpoints and arriving at the best informed judgment” (Mezirow, 1994, p. 46). Making meaning of experiences is through discourse with others. When perspectives become problematic (Mezirow, 1991b) or expectations are interrupted (Weick, 1995), there is opportunity to alter individual schema in meaning making. Others introduce labels, concepts and metaphors in discourse, providing both sense makers a rich environment in which to interpret and legitimize belief systems.

One of the supporting questions of this research is to discover with whom the reassigned individual communicates. In Mezirow’s (1991b), Schutz’s (1932/1967), and Weick’s (1979) terminology, the “other” is the person with whom the individual validates and legitimizes beliefs systems in the process of sensemaking or finding coherence in the details of the experiences following involuntary reassignment.

The role of the other is also well documented in Action Learning literature. Action learning is the “deliberate, conscious effort to review and reflect on action of an individual” on a group setting (Marquardt, 1996 p. 227). There are volumes of support for deliberate reflective discourse in the action learning literature where others provide the individual sensemaker with probing questions from their views of the sensemaker's
problem (Marquardt, 1996, 1997; 1999; Marsick & O’Neal, 1999; Mumford, 1996; Pedler, 1991; Weinstein, 1995). Does the involuntarily reassigned individual employ communicative learning stratagem (Habermas, 1984; Schutz 1932/1967) as in action learning, in sensemaking after job reassignment?

**Role of reflection**

Mezirow (1981; 1985; 1991b; 1997) and Argyris and Schon (1976) contend that adults faced with a cognitive dilemma normally ignore, resist, and contest any meaning making when perceptions do not cohere with currently held meaning schemes. However, in dramatic situations, (Mezirow calls ‘disorienting dilemmas’), individuals have the opportunity for significant learning through critical reflection upon beliefs and in rational discourse with others, followed by subsequent alteration of meaning perspectives and action (Mezirow, 1991b). Weick (1999) contends that “rationality is an account rather than a tool” making it an established process for the individual which makes the individual less willing to make explicit the tacit understandings sought in sensemaking. Schon (1983) maintains when surprises occur in practice, the professional encounters a minor anomaly or something never encountered before, it becomes a trigger to begin reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action - the sensemaking process. Weick (1995) agrees with Schon and stresses that action - enactment - itself is reflexive and the individual has already employed schemes to the situation and expresses meaning while acting in the social setting. Weick believes that reflection is of no greater importance than any other activity (as noted in Figure 4) and, in fact, slows further action in ongoing organizing - sensemaking. Social enactment
validates and re-interprets meaningfully loaded labels in discourse. The involuntarily re-assigned employee may seek validation of beliefs through information seeking activities with colleagues or may go it alone in subjective reframing.

**Role of Identity**

In Bandura’s (1977; 1997) extensive work in self-efficacy, a self-efficacious individual believed that s/he was capable to muster the motivation, cognitive resources, and the actions needed to gain control over a task or a situation. Barrett (2001) found in a study of twelve scientists and engineers that wanting to be perceived as self-efficacious (an identity issue) is within their cognitive schema of being held accountable. Schon (1995) calls for a new epistemology to include the knowledge of self. Expectations are that the involuntary re-assigned employee might have identity concerns about the perceived self (Schon, 1995), self identity (Weick, 1995; 1999a), and/or self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) as the sensemaking process is engaged.

Identity plays an important role, if not the central role, in meaning making. For Mezirow (2000) psychological predispositions to attributing meaning to experience are the individual’s self-concept, personality traits, repressed parental prohibitions, emotional patterns of response, fantasies, and dreams. Weick (1995) sees identity as a force to be considered in the process of exacting sense of a situation. Weick states that employees enact their organizational identity and that “process represents enactment in sensemaking” (1995, p. 37). Pratt (1998) reinforces this notion by establishing ties between individual identity and organizational identity where individual beliefs about the organization become self-referential or self-defining.
In his earlier work, Mezirow (1978) emphasized the adaptation of individuals in personal dilemmas, such as changing jobs, is often adaptation to changing roles in the organization. Role or social identity (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000), or rules embedded within membership roles (Belbin, 1993; Katz & Kahn, 1978) have long been linked to the individual’s feeling of belonging in groups and organizations (Smith & Berg, 1997). Role or social identities will serve the individual as either an account of role expectations (Weick, 1999) or as a rational means of construing (Mezirow, 2000) meaning of the experience under inquiry.

Role of Context

For Schon (1987), the reflective practitioner and coach asks those questions which “click” in the mind of the student (p. 297). The practitioner-coach questions the assumptions supporting the student’s theory-in-use, providing the linguistic trigger for integrating the lessons of current experience – the context - and therefore being the catalyst for the transformation of cognitive structures. The coach’s catalytic questions are similar to the questioning of others in the action learning set (Marquardt, 1999). For Mezirow (1991b), meaningful adult learning is fundamentally the alteration of meaning systems in an individually disorienting context, where multiple meanings in the context act as catalysts for personal transformation and human development (Daloz, 1986).

Mezirow for not considering the immediate variables of the context and of the organizational culture to be significant in meaning attribution. Mezirow (1991a) counters with "the cultural context is literally embodied and gives meaning to the symbolic models and meaning perspectives central to my argument. Both are learned in a social context and are, for the most part, culturally assimilated" (p. 190).

Weick (1999) praises “theorists who are able to narrow the gap between understanding and living, or between the present-to-hand stance of the spectator and the ready-to-hand stance of the agent, are more likely to generate work that is judged to be moving” (p. 139). Narrowing the gap between meaning attribution and the present contextual issues, the things we are *doing* in social situations, is ongoing sensemaking (Weick, 1995) in an uncertain present of the involuntarily displaced employee. The individual is left filling the gap between forward living and backward understanding alone (Weick, 1999).

**Uncertainty in context**

Labels carry individual meaning into social discourse. For Schutz (1932/1967) the social conversation is for individual interpretation and re-interpretation of labels – meaning - “so is attended by a certain vagueness and uncertainty" (p.128). Uncertainty in that Schutz proposes the individual enters into discussion to validate personal beliefs with self and others. Weick (1983; 1995) furthers this argument by stating that communicative actions based upon beliefs and fired by emotion are surfaced in discussion to be interpreted and reassessed. Mezirow (1985; 1991b) borrows this same notion from Habermas’ (1984) communication theory. Habermas writes that
democratic discourse is where individual meaning rises to be validated and reaffirmed to become part of shared social activity. This same shared social activity may be the cultural norms embedded into the context holding the individual to certain preferred actions and not allowing a wider range of possibly more transforming activities (Mezirow, 2000: Weick, 1995b).

**Role of Emotion**

An interruption in our meaning making such as a “disorienting dilemma” (1978; Mezirow, 1991b) or a triggering event (Weick, 1979b), like the loss of a position, necessarily elicits emotion. “Emotion is what happens between the time that an organized sequence is interrupted and the time at which the interruption is removed, or a substituted response is found that allows the sequence to be completed” (Weick 1995b, p. 46). Weick continues with “these emotions affect sensemaking because recall and retrospect tend to be mood congruent (Snyder, 1982). People remember events that have the same emotional tone as what they currently feel” (p. 49). Cognitive psychologists purport that memories are the stacked remembrances of past learnings which are the expectations structuring cognitive schemes (Anderson, 1980). Mezirow’s (1978; 1991b) earlier theory stated that emotion was the first step in the meaning making process. Currently, Mezirow (2000) has truncated earlier steps into an initial step entitled “order meaning.” Emotional response patterns are a psychological habit of mind for Mezirow (2000). These response patterns “arbitrarily determine what we see and how we see it -- cause-effect relationships, scenarios of sequences of events, what others will be like” … and how we will react toward them … “they suggest a line of
action that we tend to follow automatically unless [deliberately] brought into critical reflection” (p. 18). Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1990) work supports Mezirow’s notions of emotion as a disposition - a learned habit - that may be manifested in social discourse (in Burkitt, 1997). Burkitt (1997) argues that emotions are not things to individuals and their biological nature, but are socially derived from interdependencies. He also notes Wittgenstein’s (1953) argument that feeling joyful is recognized through behaving and thinking in a joyful manner, which exhibits the more reflexive and concept connectivity argument of Weick (1995, 1999). It is not expected that the emotions revealed by the involuntarily reassigned individual will resolve the issue of connectivity; but it may shed some light on its origin.

Use of enactment: Making meaning of human experience

For Lindeman (1926), Dewey (1916; 1939), Kolb (1984), and Jenson and Kolb (2000) employing human experience as a basis for self-study is the means toward a more integrated person and citizen. Making sense or creating meaning of our experiences is a basically human phenomenon, but when the context in which we are searching for understanding involves ‘critical reflection’, the posing of premise questions, the ‘What led me to believe this way?’ questions, there is a probability for significant learning and development (Kegan, 1982; Mezirow, 1991b; 1997). For Weick (1995) the action, the enactment, what we do in reaction to experience, should be the focus of our attention. The enactment contains the meaning attached to the experience by one’s schemes. In Schutz’s (1927/1962) words “the world of the speaking I has already passed through the life form of memory and of the acting I, which constructed
ever new symbol series, and through meaning positing and meaning interpretation of
the I and the Thou relation” (p. 160). Weick’s (1979) “How can I know what I think until I
see what I say?” (p. 175) is the way individuals answer the question “what is the
meaning of what is happening to me?” Social discourse, socially re-interpreting what
one means, continues selection and enactment, two of the systems core to Weick’s
(1969; 1979) sensemaking.

For Schutz (1932/1967) and Weick (1995) we study enactment, \textit{what we do},
because it reveals those meanings developed by cognitive schemes, specifically what
Weick calls “retentive systems" developed through past learning. For Mezirow (1991b;
2000) the process of sorting through meanings, through critical reflection to action - a
more linear process is what is studied. In either case, to capture the schemes
employed by the involuntarily reassigned employee, the researcher must engage the
individuals in the reinterpretation of their experiences (Weick, 1986; Bougon et al.,

\textbf{Role of Plausibility}

“Accuracy is nice but not necessary,” says Weick (1995, p. 153). The
involuntarily displaced individual, much like most employees of the equivocal (Weick,
1979), fast paced, downsizing (Wanberg, 1997, Grunberg, 2000; McCune, 2002,)
organization, is left to make pragmatic choices sacrificing accuracy for speed (Fiske &

Sensemaking in general, and selection in particular, is tested when the individual
is faced with a seemingly “implausible” occurrence like involuntary displacement (Weick,
The individual may choose to ignore meaningful segments of his enactment (action), especially those that do not fit his current perspective. Or, the individual may choose the one voice – in the equivocality – that will help challenge the ‘sense’ within his enactment and therefore ‘see’ a new way of acting.

Making meaning is interpreting the current experience through distorted habits of mind uncritically accepted in youth (Mezirow, 1991b) and idiosyncratically schema driven (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Candy, 1989). George (2001) in her study on sensemaking found support for Weick’s (1995) notion that “accuracy is meaningless when used to describe a filtered sense of the present, linked with a reconstruction of the past, which has been edited in hindsight” (p. 57).

Accuracy is also confounded by the affective mode of the individual blocking rational thought (Brookfield, 2000; Mezirow, 1991b; Taylor, 2000) and interpretation (Weick, 1995). Since stability is blocked for the involuntarily reassigned, the individual turns to a “combination of selective noticing, selective shaping, and serial self-fulfilling prophesies” (Weick, 1995, p. 153) to seek validation of individual beliefs (Mezirow, 1991b; Schutz, 1927/1982; Weick, 1979b) and the answers to such questions as; “Am I doing OK?” or “Why did this happen to me?” (Bougon, 2001).

**Role of Extracted cues**

Extracted cues are drawn from the context and the context determines how we use them. Cognitive psychologists understand that we draw cues, or figures from ground, that are unusual or different and become meaning in the present social situation (Anderson, 1985). Weick (1999) states that these extracted cues set the stage for or the flavor our sensemaking and as subsequently or social interaction (pp. 49-55). It is
reasonable to imagine that an extracted cue of the involuntarily reassigned employee may be management hasn’t a clue as to what is really happening in the organization and let that be the flavor of conversations with others in the organization.

Starbuck (1988) noted that cues from the environment may depend on what level you are in the hierarchy. Can we expect the reassigned admin assistant to “cue” on budgetary issues in making coherence of the situation? Cues tie cognitive elements together and as such “prophesy” the nature of the construct (i.e. management, leadership, peers, etc.) for the individual (Weick, 1995, p. 54)

Learning and sensemaking

Learning is intentional. We seek to know how to do something, what others are saying or why we do the things we do based upon our intent – the probabilities that we conjure through our personal schemas. Schutz (1932/1967; 1973) and Habermas (1984) state that intentionality or our human interests drive the questions we ask ourselves (Bougon et al. 1990) in seeking answers to the puzzles or problems in our lives. Mezirow (1991; 2000) as a radical humanist focuses primarily on the emancipatory learning, our seeking why we do the things we do, in order to understand ourselves and better cope with or break from the social bonds that hold back individuation. Weick (1979; 1995) as an interpretivist seeks to understand the patterns of social order that we create and live within, and still puzzles over the question “Why do we find it so difficult to break frame?” (2003, personal communication).
Bourdieu and meaning making

One of the challenges to our discussion of the durability of cognitive structures is mention of Bourdieu’s (1970/1977) notion of a more determinate basis for enactment called *habitus*. The notion of habitus has its basis our educational backgrounds and in being successful at what one does in society – our choice of vocations.

Bourdieu’s (1970/1977) concept of habitus is the foundation upon which successful action in a particular cultural role is based. The habitus would be the socially hardened role expectations of oneself and others in that role. For example, an engineer is honed by education and society to *be and act* a certain way and, as such, does not stray to far from *being an engineer*. In a 1996 interview, Bourdieu defined habitus as a “matrix of actions, perceptions and thoughts transmitted to each individual during early socialization, in others words, a system of durable dispositions and transposables” (Graw, 1996, p. 18, translation by author). He continues in the interview to state that the habitus is hardened continually by social action and personal candor is difficult; “… collective defense mechanisms exist. I give you an example; knowledge in science is hard, social facts are also hard. The question of dying or surviving [socially] is continually re-visited. People ask themselves if they are acting correctly and if it is worth the trouble. Living [within a habitus] is so hard that practice of self-reflection would be impossible for most. This is why most do not allow others to see within.” (Graw, 1996, p. 18, translation by author). This argument may be supported by Bougon’s (1992) notion of cryptics, words or phrases having multiple meanings, which are the “glue of the aggregate that link it to the participants own cognitive maps” (p. 384). These cryptics are the glue for the social system used by the individuals but, may
“hold similar, yet different, meanings for individuals” (p. 369). Although the individual participants may use similar cryptics or labels for their individual concepts, Bougon (1992) states that we may never reach the actual meaning for each individual. The purpose of this study is to uncover the concepts used in meaning making and not necessarily uncover the individual meanings made of the phenomenon, which are necessarily idiosyncratic.

Bourdieu’s notion of habitus seems to be rigid and confining but, not in social discourse with others of similar habitus:

“I was in the midst of science types … where I found myself discovered and could permit revealing serious personal flaws [in science] without committing social suicide. Certainly some would now say “See Bourdieu. We always said he was not a real savant.” (Graw, 1996, p. 16, translation by author).

The habitus is found to be socially enabling and confining, and despite an individual’s mastery of cultural codes, “there is no guarantee that the environment will extend immediate recognition and admission of success” (Alvesson, 1994, p. 540). Habitus is seen as a strong identity to one’s vocation, therefore making the acceptance of equivocality difficult. Alteration of meaning schemes which structure the habitus would be difficult, therefore unfettered discourse leading to self-reflection could not be maintained (Mezirow, 1991b; 1998a). Social enactment (Weick, 1979b) could not lead to the creation of better selection and retention systems. The process of typification could not be maintained through communicative action to allow interpretation and re-interpretation of others’ system of relevances (Schutz, 1932/1967). Bourdieu’s habitus, although plausible in the extreme, if true for the involuntarily reassigned, would cause
great psychic dissonance, a possible argument for Mezirow’s (1991b) psychic distortions and as an extension, albeit weak, to Weick’s support of identity theory.

Bourdieu does not offer a working model other than an interpretation of habitus as hard and unyielding (Alvesson, 1994). Alvesson found that habitus “may reflect ‘true’ conditions or beliefs of how people become constituted” in his study of advertising agents in Sweden (p. 543). The concept of habitus could be applied in this research were each participant a member of the same field, i.e. electrical engineer, industrial engineer, chemist, or biochemist, but finding enough participants made it impractical.

Summary

Meaning making is a social activity. Meaning making encompasses many activities in its search to align and cohere the mental creations of the individual. The literature review of survivors and meaning making has indicated that emotions and identity play a large part in the meaning construction of experience. Noer’s (1998) extensive and often-cited work with survivors speaks extensively of the psychological contract and the expectations individuals have of management. Role transitions and subsequent attitudinal changes may be issues for the involuntarily displaced as they are for organizational survivors (Allen, Freeman, Russell, Reizenstein, and Rentz, 2001; Ashforth et al., 2000). Turmoil in the workplace may lead to inordinate stress and additional meaning making in constant role transitions (Thoits, 1995). Do involuntarily reassigned employees balance the creations of their idiosyncratic schemes and habits of mind (Weick, 1995; Mezirow, 2000) as they juggle others’ and their own expectations of the new assignment?
By definition the involuntarily reassigned employee is neither an organizational survivor nor one who has lost a job and looking for another. However, s/he may share some of the attitudes of survivors as s/he tries to make sense in the new job. The many elements or activities of meaning making theorist were delineated and will be used as a lens to qualitatively “see” into the lifeworld of the involuntarily reassigned - through their own words (Creswell, 1994).

This study will add a unique example to the literature of meaning making or sensemaking – the way individuals act their way out of the situation of being involuntarily reassigned. Eight (8) involuntarily reassigned employees participated in this study and shared with this researcher how they view their situations. Chapter III delineates the method used for extracting the personal schemes used by these participants as they negotiate the pieces of their created reality.
Chapter III

Methods

Overview of the methodology

This chapter describes the design and the methodology used to collect and analyze the data. Part one provides a summary of the design and conceptual framework of the study. Part two describes the context and the participants. Part three describes the data collection and analysis methods used for the study. Part four discusses the techniques used to enhance the trustworthiness of the data and lessen researcher biases.

Qualitative Research and Exploration

Creswell (1998) states that a qualitative research approach is chosen because of the exploratory nature of the research, the necessary detail of the description of the human experience under inquiry, to study individuals in a natural setting, and to emphasize the role of the researcher as an active learner in the process. This study meets Creswell’s entire criterion for qualitative inquiry. This study explored the complex experiences of involuntarily reassigned employees at work.

The study was influenced by two research traditions phenomenology and constructivism. In phenomenology the researcher seeks the essence of a human event or phenomenon from individuals who have lived that experience (Kohak, 1978; Schutz, 1932/1967; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Creswell, 1998; Strauss, 1998). In this study the central issues of being involuntarily reassigned has been explored from the view of eight individuals. Kohak (1978) states that Husserlian phenomenology seeks to reproduce
the experience for others to understand. Strauss (1998) states that phenomenology extracts the “use of words to convey a mental image of an event, a piece of scenery, a scene, an experience, an emotion, or a sensation: the account related from the perspective of the person doing the depicting” (p. 15). This study concludes with a graphic image and a description of the experience of being involuntarily assigned.

Constructivists believe that individuals build concepts as the tenets of mental models or repertoires of predictability about the world around them (Kelly, 1955, 1970; Candy, 1989, 1990). An exploratory of the constructions of involuntarily reassigned employees’ mental models is the focus of this study. The exploratory question is “How do employees describe and make meaning of the experience of being involuntarily reassigned?”

Research Procedures

Epistemology

Individual interests (Habermas, 1984; Mezirow, 1991b) drive the types of questions (Bougon et al., 1990; Bougon, 2001) asked by individuals experiencing organizational phenomenon. Labels are attached to experiences as individuals construe the meanings of their organizational experiences (Kohak, 1978; Schutz 1932/1967; Weick, 1979b). Individual meaning schemes, revealed as expectations, form the grammar and the labels within the questions asked. During this study participants were asked to reflect upon the meaning of the experience of being involuntarily reassigned in a research and development organization. Again, a qualitative research methodology was selected because the research question is to
understand the essence of the phenomenon from the individuals’ point of view and not
from a collective or management’s point of view (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985;
Moustakas, 1994).

**Theoretical perspective**

The disciplines supporting phenomenology are philosophy, sociology and
psychology (Creswell, 1998). These three disciplines are represented in the theories
that drive this study. The sociological approach represented by Schutz’s (1932/1967)
Meaning Making theory is born of the phenomenological beliefs of Husserl, Schutz’s
Transformational Learning theory has its origins in the sociological Theory of
Communicative Action by Habermas (1971; 1984) and cognitive psychology. The third
theory that drives this study is the Sensemaking perspective of Weick (1979b; 1995)
that has its origins in cognitive psychology and the sociology of Schutz above. All three
share the common theme that individual meaning is constructed through a retrospective
view of human experience.

**Sampling and Participants**

The government research and development organization from which the sample
was taken comprises of approximately 1200 scientists, engineers, and support
personnel. The average age is approximately 45 and the length of service 15 years
(Barrett, 2001). The sample of eight employees is comprised of the following ethnic
Mix: 2 African American females, 1 Caucasian male, 1 Hispanic Male, 4 Caucasian females, has an age range from 38 to 59 and a service range of less than 15 and over 30 years.

Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that qualitative research be purposefully sampled. This study used a purposeful sample in order to get information-rich cases for in-depth interviewing and to get the widest range of employees who lived the experience of being involuntarily reassigned (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990; Creswell, 1998). Participants for the research project were employees of a Department of Defense research and development center in the mid-Atlantic United States. The eight participants were scientists, engineers, technicians and administrative support personnel who have worked for the organization for more than twelve years. Five of the participants have been involuntarily reassigned within the past year and the remaining three within the past three years. Thirty individuals were asked to participate in the study.

Methodology

Bougon and his associates lay out an elegant qualitative data process designed to engage the participant in self-reflection to reinterpret the phenomenon under inquiry (Bougon et al., 1990; Bougon & Weick, 1986). The basic premise of the process is that internal self-questions contain the constructions of interests, expectations, assumptions, and beliefs embedded in personal meaning perspectives. For this research, the constructs of being involuntarily reassigned sought by this inquiry are within the self-questions provided by participants.
Data Collection

The Self-Q approach, Bougon et al.’s (Bougon, 1983; Bougon et al., 1990) process, eliminates or brackets researcher bias by moving the control of the interview directly to the participant. Bougon and his associates anticipated Kvale’s (1994; 1999) warnings about researcher bias introduced in structured and semi-structured interview techniques where researcher questions contain the beliefs and assumptions of the researcher (Seidman, 1991; Weber & Manning, 2001). Barrett (2001) proposes Bougon’s (1983) method especially if the researcher has strong views on the phenomenon under inquiry. A graphical presentation of this researcher’s construction of the experience under inquiry, called a cognitive map, is provided at Appendix A. Participant cognitive maps will be explored in Chapter Four.

The nature of Bougon et al.’s (1990) three-interview method begins at the outset, the first interview, with the participant reflecting upon the self-questions asked during the event. In the second interview the individual sorts through the constructs of the experience provided in the first interview. During the third interview the participant is provided a graphic to draw connections and list the importance of the constructions of the experience under study. For this study, participant and researcher physically drew the connections on the graphic during the third interview. The third interview provides the basis of analysis for the experience, that is, the basis of connections between the more important constructs for the individual. The non-essential or constructs of lesser importance to the individual may be disregarded as the study seeks to reach the essence of the experience per Husserlian phenomenology (Kohak, 1978).
Prior to the first interview each participant received an invitation to participate and an electronic version of the participant’s Informed Consent Form (IRB # U030237) (see Appendix B) developed for this study by the researcher and The George Washington University. Email as a form of introduction and for work is an accepted form in the organization in which the participants work. The purpose of the email was to seek the participant’s help and also to allow the participant to decline for personal and/or political reasons. The researcher is known in the organization as a personal and career counselor and as such may be perceived as a threat to individual identity issues – a probable tenet of sensemaking (Weick, 1979; 1995).

Interview One

The purpose of the first interview was to generate self-questions from the participant. First, the researcher provided a printed copy of the Informed Consent Form stated above for him and the participant to review and sign. Second, the Interview Number One form (reproduced below) was utilized for this study. It provides a short introduction and blank forms on which the participant writes self-questions. The form provided the heading below and a few boxed and lined pages for the participant to write self-questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Number One</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We, as individuals, have certain expectations and assumptions about ourselves, and our organization. These expectations raise questions within us every time we face a new experience. The experience I’d like you to think about is the one where you were involuntarily moved from one job to another in this organization. As you think about what it meant for you to be involuntarily moved, please write the questions you asked yourself about how you experienced being moved in this organization.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The statement in the box above was read to the participant and the participant was asked if there were any clarifications before beginning to write self-questions. Figure 7, Recovering from a Stall, a graphic designed to help the individual re-focus on the situation, was left facedown on the table before the participant. The participant was told that if s/he was stuck in the process, s/he could read the document and the researcher would be willing to answer questions. Although Bougon (2001) cautioned this researcher that some participants might be reluctant to start or continue the process of listing their questions, only one of the eight participants required attention during the first interview.

Figure 7: Recovering from a Stall

Recovering From a Stall: You may find yourself in a stall. A graphic diagram has been developed to help you get restarted. This diagram, the Three Circle diagram, consists of three circles containing the words "I", "Me" and "They." Three lines marked "A", "B", and "C" connects the three circles.

You may, either at the beginning or in the middle of your self-questioning experience a stall or a writer's block. This diagram will help you ask questions to yourself. **Line A** represents questions you may ask yourself about how you experience being involuntarily reassigned. **Line B** represents questions you may ask yourself about the many other people that influence your feelings/experiences about being involuntarily reassigned. **Line C** represents questions you may ask yourself about what the people you meet at work consider about you and your being involuntarily reassigned.
Although the Self-Q process allows for Interview One to be held as a group, scheduling did not permit any group interviews and thus all interviews were done individually. Individual interviews avoided possible cross-contamination of others’ questions, and thus precluded any social bias of individual retrospective sensemaking of the experience under inquiry.

As a result of a discussion with the first participant after the first interview the form that was used to capture the self-questions was altered. The researcher removed the numbered lines because the participant felt that “some may feel they have to fill all 30 slots.” The first participant did state s/he was not intimidated and did provide all that “was necessary” to complete her story.

Seven of the eight participants wrote the questions out themselves. Only one required that the researcher be listening as s/he wrote the list of self-questions. In all cases, the researcher ensured that the questions were legible so that they could be properly prepared for the Interview Two. Each participant’s questions were then restructured according to Bougon’s (2001) instructions, that is a question like “Am I not a valued employee?” becomes the statement “I am not a valued employee.” Some questions may produce multiple ideas or constructs. Bougon states not to worry about getting the statement wrong because the participant has the second and third interviews to re-verify, re-interpret, and re-create ideas, concerns, concepts, labels and meanings. Statements or codes are individually placed on 3 by 5 inch cards before the Interview Two. This process resulted in stacks of between 23 and 70 note cards of labels, issues, concerns, and beliefs per participant.
Interview Two

For Bougon et al. (1990) the second interview allows the participant to sort the note cards according to importance. As with Barrett (2001) doing a phenomenological study means grasping not only the more important constructs, but also describing the constructs of each individual meaning maker. Barrett proposed these activities for the second interview. First, present each participant with a stack of note cards. Second, have each participant stack the cards into similar or like ideas; and third, have the participant "label" each stack (2001, p. 64). For this study Barrett’s third step allows the individual another retrospective look at the constructs of the meanings of the event under inquiry. In meaning making terminology, this step is a revalidation of meaning for the individual (Schutz, 1932/1967; Weick, 1979; Mezirow, 1991). Weick (1995) would also add that Barrett (2001) is aware of the ongoing nature of sensemaking and provided another opportunity to prepare the way for action.

Participants sorted through all the note cards, made corrections and additions and labeled each stack. These data are the basis for creating the individual cognitive maps used for the third interview.

Interview Three

The researcher prepared cognitive maps prior to each third interview. The maps were constructed using the stack labels as category headings and the card statements as supporting nodes. Bougon and his associates (Bougon et al., 1990; Bougon, 2001) state that the third interview is to determine causal relationships. In Weick’s (1995) terms the third interview would be yet another enactment to verify the meaning of each
category supported by the extracted cues depicted in the supporting nodes. In
Mezirow’s (1991; 2000) terminology the third interview is another chance to sort the
meanings of the experience by reviewing categories and nodes.

For this study the participants listed the categories in order of importance and
provided the meaning making links between categories. For Weick (1995) the strength
of these links to the individual is the “meaning” provided to the categories, and as such,
provides the individual impetus for action. Thus, during the third interview the
participants have made explicit the implicit connections between the constructs of their
meaning schemes as they make meaning of the experience of being involuntarily
reassigned (Bougon, 2001). For this study, the third interview provided, one, the
opportunity of participants to make further sense and validate their meaning making of
the event and two, provided meaningful connections between individual constructs.
These meaningful connections between the categories provided the researcher with the
categories of importance for the creation of a compilation map rendering the categories
or constructs of meaning making during the phenomenon under inquiry.

After the third interview the individual cognitive map was given to each participant
along with the cognitive map of the researcher and a promise to follow-up with
electronic versions of these via email. A brief discussion of the similarities and the
differences between the maps ensued providing common language labels for the
development of an aggregate map of the meaning making constructs of the event as
told by the eight participants. This step provided additional participant validation to the
meaning construed after the event. The compilation map served as a means of
performing the verification and validation, or the member check, of the data (Creswell,
The individual cognitive maps and the aggregate map were provided to two other researchers for additional validation of common language labels of the constructs provided by participants of the meaning making done during the experience of involuntary reassignment.

**Data Analysis**

The data for this study was displayed and analyzed using cognitive mapping technique. MindMapper Plus (v3) software was used to create the mind maps and Microsoft PowerPoint was used to add arrow connections between categories and display the cognitive maps in this report. Although Microsoft PowerPoint software proved versatile, the graphics were saved as device independent bitmaps to size them into this report. Each cognitive map contained the ordered and grouped perceptions of each participant, as s/he perceived the experience of being involuntarily reassigned in the organization. Participants verified and ordered their perceptions on the graphic themselves during the third interview. Participants and researchers also provided verification of the common language provided for the aggregate cognitive map of the phenomenon under inquiry.

**Member checks and external audits**

Member checks and external audits enhance the trustworthiness of the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Creswell, 1998). Participants themselves checked the data provided in each step of the process and verified its accuracy. Participants also made
further meaning during interview three by making connections between categories and sequencing their constructs of the experience of being involuntarily reassigned (Weick, 1995). Two researchers, who have no connection to the study, provided external audits of the processes and the products of the individual accounts to assure their accuracy (Creswell, 1998)

In meaning making the trustworthiness of the data lies in the continuation of the individual story. As the individual participant draws meaning and connections between the different constructs of the event, especially during interview three, the data becomes a heuristic, a pattern of stories which the individual can apply in future action (Weick, 1995). Eden (1998) states that the telling and re-telling (interpretation and re-interpretation) of an individual’s story of being involuntarily reassigned further validates for the researcher the meaning structures or constructs of the phenomenon. Mezirow’s (2000) first step in transformation of meaning perspectives is the ordering of meaning; the making of connections between former beliefs and the present situation, in other words, the internal validation of what is believed. Weick (1995) explains, "sequencing is a powerful heuristic for sensemaking. ... two stories in a repertoire, connected in some way, generate meaning" (p. 129). Meaning is in the sequencing of what is believed and what is at hand. In the interpretive paradigm, truth for the person lies in the matching of what has been meaningful to what is extracted from experience (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Weick, 1995; Mezirow, 2000; Carley, 1997).

Phenomenological research requires that the researcher “bracket” his views of the phenomenon under inquiry. For this purpose, a researcher’s cognitive map was developed and completed before the first interview with participants (see Appendix A).
Although sensemaking (Weick, 1995) and the ordering of meanings (Mezirow, 2000) are ongoing it was necessary to properly bracket the experiences of the researcher to lessen researcher bias (Patton, 1990; Maxwell, 1996; Creswell, 1998). I believed that the experience of being involuntarily reassigned was debilitating as it challenged my identities as an employee advocate, and as a “good employee”, and my worth to the organization. My bias going in was that I would find kindred spirits who would share my views and thus lessen my fear of being the “only one.”

**Participant and Ethical Precautions**

Prior to Interview One each participant received an invitation to participate and an electronic version of the participant’s Informed Consent Form (IRB # U030237) (see Appendix B). Within the consent form are the risks to the participant and what is expected during the study. At the first interview the participant was asked if there were any questions and would s/he sign the consent form. A classroom or the researcher’s office provided the privacy needed for participants to share experiences for all interviews. Also, the participant themselves selected individual code-names to sustain any personal identity issues. Signed participant consent forms were kept in a separate and locked file cabinet from the data to insure the identity of the participants.

**Summary**

Chapter III described the methods and procedures for collecting the evidence necessary to answer the research question “How do employees make meaning of the
experience of being involuntarily reassigned.” A qualitative phenomenological approach was chosen to find the essence of the experience for eight individuals from a research and development organization (Creswell, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Bougon et al.’s (1990) Self-Q method was selected because of its participant-centeredness and ability to provide the constructs, as well as, the meaning connections between constructs employed by participants as they experience the phenomenon of involuntary reassignment. Bougon et al.’s method allows for the bracketing of researcher bias and the continuation of ongoing sensemaking of the event. In this study, the Self-Q helped the researcher make sense of sensemaking.

The techniques used to enhance the trustworthiness of the data and lessen researcher bias were participant member checks and external audits. In Chapter IV the results of the study are reported.
Chapter IV
Results and Analysis

Overview

Chapter four presents the data from research investigating how employees make meaning after being involuntarily reassigned. The data was gathered from eight participants who work in a Department of Defense research, development and engineering laboratory. The first section will present the data from each individual participant using a cognitive map of concepts followed by a participant profile of sensemaking. The second section will present an aggregate map of the primary concepts employed by participants in sensemaking followed by a description of these concepts.

Cognitive Map Key

Figure 8 below is an example of a fictitious participant’s cognitive map of the experience of being involuntarily moved. The example illustrates the different parts of a cognitive map as used in this study.
Figure 8 illustrates each of the concepts employed by this participant while making meaning of their situation after being involuntarily reassigned. Concepts or ideas occupy a line. For example, “lied to me” and “offered no support” are concepts supporting the category “management”. Each of the concepts are connected to a participant-labeled category or meaning construct. For example, “I’m a good employee” and “I perform extra duties” are participant concepts defining the participant-labeled construct “self-worth”. More simply stated the participant identifies himself as a worthy employee who takes on extra duties.

Categories are numerically labeled in order of importance. In the figure above the participant feels that “management” is more important than “self-worth,” which is more important than the category “others”. Hence the participant numbered “management” 1, “Self-Worth” 2 and “Others” 3.

The single headed arrow indicates that influence is in a singular direction. For example, in the figure above “management” has influence on the participant’s sense of “self-worth.” A double-headed arrow indicates that influence is mutual, but not necessarily equal. For example, the participant’s “self-worth” has influence and is influenced by “others” and vice versa.

Sensemaking Profile Key

There are seven activities in Weick’s (1995) sensemaking process; enactment, identity, plausibility, extracted cues, social, retrospect, and ongoing. Weick states that he did not intend for these to be a checklist for sensemaking but simply a heuristic for study. Each participant used each activity to some extent. The sensemaking profiles
used in this chapter focus on the primary activities of sensemaking employed by the participants. For example, it is understood sensemaking is inherently retrospective – a re-look at the event and its subsequent meaning to the participant. It is also understood that the sensemaking argument is plausible to the participant otherwise sensemaking would change course for it would no longer serve the purpose of the schema under which sensemaking is continuing. For example, if a participant scheme is “management is only interested in the bottom line – the fiscal paradigm” and the leader does something for the people that was not necessary and hinders the bottom line then the participant would re-think, ignore, not see or in some way change sensemaking activity to insure plausibility and regain balance. The remaining five activities will be discussed as they appear in the sensemaking argument of each participant. Figure 9 is a fictitious participant sensemaking profile derived from the “participant” cognitive map (Figure 8 above) followed by a description of the profile.

Figure 9: Fictitious participant sensemaking profile

In the above example, the participant primarily focused on the perceived management activities as cues selected from the environment. Specifically, the cues were being “lied to,” “having no options,” and being offered “no support.” These cues,
connected to the self-perception of being a “good employee,” provided the energy for further sensemaking and validation of the participant’s feelings about the situation with “others.”

**Anita and her perceptions of being involuntarily reassigned**

Anita is a fifty-year-old Caucasian female. Her reassignment was 15 months ago. Figure 10 is her description of the experience.

Figure 10: Anita’s cognitive map of being involuntarily reassigned

Anita’s primary focus is on her identity – her sense of self. She sees herself as a “team-player” and “here to do a job.” She’s willing to “be a teacher,” take on “extra duties,” and has difficulty “saying no” to others. Her sense of identity primarily influences and is influenced by others and her interest to learn the new job. However, she does not want to “be a dumping ground for other’s unwanted work” and is anxious about being not well thought of coming into the new position. Although she feels that she can learn the new job, she is anxious about meeting others’ and her expectations while accepting undesirable duties.
Anita’s philosophy is “such is life ‘pick up and go.’” She has a strong sense of the ongoing activities she will face, such as, proving herself and gaining others’ trust. She did feel a little “insecure” when reassigned because she did not know how she “fit into this organization”.

Anita’s sensemaking profile (Figure 11) is highlighted by her sense of identity. Her determination to learn and her philosophical outlook are evidence of the ongoing nature of her sensemaking after reassignment. Her overall outlook is that she has to “start at the bottom again” and prove herself in the new situation.

Blossom and her perceptions about being involuntarily reassigned

Blossom is a forty-two-year old African-American female. She was involuntarily reassigned seven months ago. Figure 12 is her description of the experience.
Blossom’s primary focus is on the activities of the “leadership” and their influence upon and by on her “career goals.” A subordinate concept within leadership is her expectations and how they were not met. A plausible example to Blossom of unmet expectations is that after 7 months, she still has no defined duties and she does not know who her “primary investigator” is – the person whom she supports. Other examples of leadership cues that Blossom has selected to make sense of the situation are that the director made all the decisions without input from team leaders and that she was not given any rationale for her reassignment. Although the communication from the leadership has been minimal, Blossom perceives that her career may be enhanced by greater responsibility and the possibility for training and promotion. Influencing her career goals and being influenced by both her career goals and leadership activities are her emotions labeled as “resistance,” “acceptance,” and “apathy.” Although she feels she must resist, she has chosen a “wait and see” attitude and “not to complain,” and not to “fight the move.”
Blossom’s sense of belonging is influenced by and has influence on leadership through her concept of “team relations.” The anxieties of this construct rest upon issues of “not get along” with the primary investigator and a feeling of “awe” around some primary investigators.

Although last on her list of five concepts, she does feel that she “was given a way out,” but was “told to give it 120 days.” Although Blossom states she “should look at the private sector / to industry,” she is the only participant of the eight in this study who felt like they had a choice other than to leave the organization.

Figure 13: Blossom’s sensemaking profile

Blossom’s primary focus in sensemaking (Figure 13) is on the extracted cues of leadership and their responsibilities to her and to team leaders. Her identity interacts with these leadership cues to add impetus and veracity to her sensemaking argument. She defines herself in career terminology noting that the situation may lead to “greater responsibility,” “better work” and “possible advancement.” Interaction between extracted cues of leadership and team relations adds to her uneasiness. Blossom
works alongside higher-level principal investigators (PI) whom she holds in awe and fears she may not “get along” with them.

Burton and his perceptions about being involuntarily reassigned

Burton is a fifty-three-year old Spanish-American. At the time of his interviews he was notified of his reassignment but has yet to be assigned a new position. Figure 14 is his description of the experience.
Figure 14: Burton's cognitive map of being involuntarily reassigned

- I screwed up by sending letter to boss
  - I am branded a troublemaker for raising a job concern
- I can work for another organization
  - I can even "do" the work of a new job?
- I have faith in myself
  - I can take a "leap of faith" and apply for new job
- situation is like falling off the earth
  - what's next?
- my coworkers are nosy about my reassignment
  - coworker grapevine knew I got dropped from this job
- my integrity was openly questioned (I am honest)
  - I am not untrustworthy
  - I have no way of escaping this with my dignity intact
- I lose sleep wondering if new job will be challenging enough
  - or if I can do the work
  - I do not know if job will be interesting
  - I hate a change of surroundings
- I feel management doesn't care
  - despite all rhetoric, management doesn't care
  - mgmt does not have good system for who gets what job
  - mgmt does not treat all alike
  - top people care about having enough people to support their position
  - top people care about justifying their position

- I helped them with a replacement (I did their job for them)
  - I do valuable work for this organization
  - I bring lots of money to this organization
- I can do the work
  - I support our customer
  - I "bust my butt" for this job
  - I am doing higher level work
- I am a valuable employee
- Resentment at management treatment
  - I believe it is because I spoke up
  - It is "who you don't piss off"
  - It is "who you know"
  - some get "taken under wing" - others can languish
  - some employees get treated better than I do
  - they had me "on the cheap"
  - higher level work deserves a promotion
  - a select few get promotions

- personal commitment
  - I do things to negate the effects of my ADD
    - they see me as different
      - I care what others think
      - I don't like my aggressiveness
        - I do give a shit
        - how I behave
        - how I see things
        - What I do directly affects...
  - I want to be able to remember things
    - I am different
Burton’s primary focus is his identity as a person having attention deficit hyperactivity syndrome (ADHD) and being “a valuable” and “important employee”. This identity influences all other concepts he has identified; his self-efficacy, how he is perceived, his faith in self, his coworkers, management failings, and his resentment at management treatment. His identity influences and is influenced by only his “handling change” category. For Burton there is mutual influence between his ADHD and the way he handles change. His “handling change” category also employs self-defining identity phrasing, such as, “I am honest,” and “I am not untrustworthy.”

Burton’s second category is “How I am perceived” which influences and is influenced by “management failings” and further influenced by “resentment at management treatment.” Burton extracts cues from management actions influenced by his sense of others’ perceptions of him. For example, how he is perceived is influenced by “who you don’t piss off,” who gets “taken under wing,” who gets treated “better than I do” and who gets selected for promotions reflect how he perceives others see each other and him.

“Coworkers” was the only category standing alone in Burton’s cognitive map of the event. Burton deliberately did not number this category stating that it did not matter what others thought because they were “nosey about my reassignment.” Burton defines the whole event as “situation is like falling off the earth”.

Burton's sensemaking focus (Figure 15) is primarily on his identity as a valuable employee with ADHD coping and adapting to the situation. His secondary focus is on the extracted cues from others around him, especially management. Burton’s ongoing sensemaking is coping and adjusting to the unfairness of management and others’ treatment of him and a lack of a fair selection process.

Charles and his perceptions about being involuntarily reassigned

Charles is a forty-nine-year old Caucasian male. He was involuntarily reassigned twenty-nine months ago. Figure 16 is his description of the experience.
Charles’ cognitive map of being involuntarily reassigned

- **Self-worth**:
  - Disillusioned
  - Disappointed
  - Lack of Management (Mgt) support
  - Overburdened

- **What does today bring?**
  - Chaos

- **Charles**
  - A question of dread
  - Exercise coordinator

- **Disillusioned**
  - I felt I was being punished by Mgt. (bridge to 2b)
  - Contractor should not lead (I was contracting officer, rep. - I should lead)
  - I designed and developed the programatics: products & issues
  - I was the program manager, but, not treated as one
  - I am valuable enough to stand alone - good enough to do the job
  - My true expertise was not considered by Mgt. - most important

- **Disappointed**
  - Mgt. needed my talents & expertise yet I was the least paid
  - I just didn’t want to be here
  - Manager stated that contractor would “do” the work
  - Mgt. reassigned the exercise coordinator
  - I thought I had better rapport with the manager of the job I desired
  - I was chosen for a job where I had supposed poor rapport with the manager
  - I was not chosen for the other job
  - Mgt. did not think program was important enough for training expert (bridge to 2b)

- **Overburdened**
  - Mgt. did not see we needed a training coordinator (bridge to 4)
  - I got no leadership from manager or mgt.
  - Mgt. gave me no guidance as to what I was “stepping into”
  - Mgt. did not tell me there were others in the group
  - Mgt. plugged holes, people not chosen for their talents
  - Mgt. did not tell me why
  - I felt overwhelmed and asked manager for help
  - I also became exercise coordinator

- **Chaotic**
  - A question of dread
  - Chaos

- **What does today bring?**
  - Chaos

- **2a**
  - Other was given consideration, I was not
  - Mgt. did not give me same consideration others got (bridge to 1)
  - Certain other had reputation for being contentious, critical, obnoxious
  - Others less enthusiastic were brought on board
  - I was the ‘leader’, not the manager
  - I asked to be moved out of this new job & Mgt. let him go
  - Exercise coordinator was ‘ushered out’ under adverse conditions
  - Mgt. does not hold people accountable for doing things right
  - Mgt. (it seemed) expected program to fail
  - I was jammed ‘in the middle’
  - It makes no sense that Mgt. reassigned training expert

- **2b**
  - Other was given consideration, I was not
  - Mgt. did not give me same consideration others got (bridge to 1)
  - Certain other had reputation for being contentious, critical, obnoxious
  - Others less enthusiastic were brought on board
  - I was the ‘leader’, not the manager
  - I asked to be moved out of this new job & Mgt. let him go
  - Exercise coordinator was ‘ushered out’ under adverse conditions
  - Mgt. does not hold people accountable for doing things right
  - Mgt. (it seemed) expected program to fail
  - I was jammed ‘in the middle’
  - It makes no sense that Mgt. reassigned training expert
Charles’ retrospective look at his situation involved primarily his sense of identity, as perceived self-worth, and the extracted cues he selected from management’s actions. Charles made meaning in his new situation by comparing his sense of self-worth to others in the same job. He was doing the work of the manager while being the “least paid.” His concept of fairness was challenged in that he was “valuable enough” to be the “program manager” but not enough to be “treated as one.” The emotion attached to the situation Charles labels “disillusioned” and “disappointed.” His disillusionment was fed by the management cues such as lack of consideration for his concerns and special consideration of others in the group. And “disappointment” was cued by management’s lack of guidance, selection of others less excited about the work, not selecting him for a more suitable position, and his apparent, to others but not him, “poor rapport” with the new manager. Charles felt “overburdened” as he assumed the duties of the manager and an exercise coordinator, while not being treated or compensated as one. In retrospect Charles’ primary question each morning coming to work was “What does today bring?” He admittedly faced most days in the new position with a sense of dread.
Charles’ sensemaking (Figure 17) is marked by an imbalance between what he perceives as his self-worth and the management actions in the environment. His assumption of manager duties does not match his salary. Linked with his perception of the ineptitude of management and lack of caring about the program from others fuels his sensemaking argument causing disillusionment and disappointment amounting to an overall sense of dread.

Deecce and her perceptions about being involuntarily reassigned

Deecce is a forty-two-year old Caucasian female. She was involuntarily reassigned 11 months ago. Figure 18 is her description of the experience.
Figure 18: Deecce’s cognitive map of being involuntarily reassigned
Deecee’s re-look at the involuntary reassignment initially raises emotions labeled “Apprehension & Apathy.” Emotions are expressed in labels such as “I have lost prestige” and “I will just go quietly”. Her perceptions of cues from within herself and of others are labeled as “positive outlook,” “perception of those around me,” “perception of the organization (how it behaves),” “mixed feelings,” and “new organization.” She was concerned about explaining to others her loss of stature from the old job to the new position and feared the negative perception of family and friends. Essentially her internal conversations were focused on her former identity and having to establish a new identity in the new organization. The former identity will be lost as expressed in labels such as “my contributions will be forgotten,” and “will not be appreciated.” The new identity is initially formulated as others may see her as a “prima dona.”

Deecee’s focus then turns to seeing the experience as a “positive opportunity” again in terms of identity, such as being a “good employee,” and being “loyal to my manager.” She sees the new position as a building block to an “ultimate promotion opportunity” supported by positive labels, such as, “will be a good change,” “something better,” and “open new doors.”

In ongoing sensemaking, she turns to the cues of management action. Her perception is that “management misled me – moving is an adverse ramification,” “this was part of the ‘master plan’,” “personnel rules were broken (or bent),” “party line is positions not people,” and has thoughts of consulting “union help,” “leaving the organization,” “looking to industry,” and questioning her “allegiance to this organization.” Deecee’s meaning of the situation leads to thoughts that she’ll “have to work twice as hard” and “if job does not work, I’ll have to “drop back and punt.”
Deecee’s sensemaking (Figure 19) is marked by extracted cues from others and self drawn from internal conversations of how she identifies herself and how she perceives others (management, friends and family) see her as an involuntarily reassigned employee. Also, as her former identity fades in the new position, her percolating identity raises self-efficacy concerns in meeting self and others’ expectations.

Helen and her perceptions about being involuntarily reassigned

Helen is a fifty-nine-year old Caucasian female. She was involuntarily reassigned 32 months ago. Figure 20 is her description of the experience.
Helen's primary focus is on the actions of management as extracted cues to make sense of her perceived situation. She sees herself as not having options and that management did not think she was “good enough for the new office,” a job she desired. At the time of her involuntary reassignment she was facing family issues caring for aging parents and dealing with lack of family member support.

Helen’s concerns were that she would not be able to meet others and her expectations in the new position. Concerns to “satisfy others” ranged from her coworkers, through the immediate supervisor to the directorate - up three levels of management. Although she states “I truly don’t like it” about her dilemma, she is sure she’ll handle “customer” and “personality conflicts,” as well as, perform on her own, do the job as best as she can, while “being flexible” and “make [ing] changes to be successful.”
Helen finalizes her sensemaking cycle with a list of expectations and desires from the organizational culture. Some examples are her expectation to be supported by the new boss, a desire for “enhanced development training,” and a desire to be empowered and trusted.

Helen’s sensemaking (Figure 21) is marked initially by extracted cues selected from management actions. Management actions lead to a situation she must face along with family issues in her life. She defines herself in terms of her family and her job, extracting cues from her family life and being capable at work.

Joie and her perceptions about being involuntarily reassigned

Joie is a fifty-three-year old Caucasian female. She was involuntarily reassigned 6 months ago. Figure 22 is her description of the experience.
Joie’s primary focus in being involuntarily reassigned was on the actions of management. She selects cues from the activities of management in terms of “management responsibility” and “team leader problems”. Management responsibilities labeled as commitments link to the construct “management moral issues” as exemplified by “did not tell me the truth,” and “did not feel I was worth the trouble”.

Joie’s secondary focus is on what she has labeled “old issues” directly enhanced by “sexual harassment.” Old issues for Joie are an identity of “I was different,” and “something about me that draws such responses.” This self-definition and the sexual harassment event lead to a “quandary” – her label for the dilemma of the involuntary reassignment. She labels the situation a quandary because there were moneys to pay her in the former position. “Old issues” is also influenced by “new job concerns” and
“new coworker concerns.” Joie is concerned that she may not be welcomed by neither the new supervisor nor her new coworkers. She’s concerned that perceptions of her will affect her new job in some way. Also tied to old issues is the label “my contribution” which is a retrospect of Joie’s contribution to being reassigned. Joie states that she was not firm enough with her demands, she did “something wrong,” she “should have spoken to management” and thus, she “possibly contributed to being moved”.

As a centerpiece to her sensemaking constructs, Joie ties “take to future” and “my immediate affect/action” where the first construct has influence on the latter. “Take to future” is a list of lessons learned and activities she will take to the new job to help her get started. An example is that she feels that there must be a way to excel in the new position. The construct “my immediate effect/action” is a list of actions chosen at the time of reassignment. Some examples are “I chose not to fight” because it “would be unhealthy to fight,” and “no real control drove me crazy.” Joie does make one mention in this construct to her view of her performance when she states, “I did exceptional work.” There is one other self-referent comment under “management moral issues” where she states, “I was the last in ‘exercises’ – they ‘picked my brain’ and let me go.” A synopsis of Joie’s sensemaking follows.
Joie’s sensemaking (Figure 23) is marked by selected cues from management activities in conjunction with her identity around being different (old issues) and being a victim of sexual harassment. Joie also has social concerns about the new position, especially concerns about how she will be perceived by the supervisor and coworkers.

Victoria and her perceptions about being involuntarily reassigned

Victoria is a thirty-eight-year old African-American female. She was involuntarily reassigned 8 months ago. Figure 24 is her description of the experience.
Victoria’s reflection upon the experience of being involuntarily reassigned raises fear and disbelief, labeled “not likely!” and cued by the plausible intent that “the boss is trying to get rid of me.” She fears there is no returning to the old position soon, because there has been no mention as to how long she’ll be on the new team. The concept “not likely” influences a trilogy of emotional constructs labeled “indispensable,” “fear of unknown,” and “performance anxiety.”

Victoria sees herself as an indispensable employee and fears her old duties will not be accomplished, “the customer would not be satisfied,” and she does not “trust old team members can fill in” for her. She fears there will be no replacement for her and that the work will not get done. The second in the trilogy is “fear of unknown” which is supported by a list of Victoria not knowing whom she reports to and gets work from, who
grants her leave and is “in charge,” and who are the other members of her team. The third of the trilogy is “performance anxiety” where she is in angst over the benefits of the new position to her career, and the expectations of new team members. She also questions her self-efficacy against the demands of the new position.

The primary construct, “not likely,” also influences one labeled “given the boot”. In “given the boot” Victoria states she had neither a say, nor a choice, nor a rationale for the reassignment. Thus, she is left not knowing what to tell others about her move to the new team.

“Being banished” and “losing it all” are a dyad of constructs influencing each other but not being influenced by or influencing any others. In the former Victoria has a sense of geographic loss - having to move out of her old office and being sent to a possibly “dirty and dark” place to work. The latter refers to the loss of her computer, a parking place and loss of contact with others because her telephone number did not go with her. These two constructs are also not numbered as important in the sensemaking process.

A final construct, which stands alone, is “will they like me?” It encompasses Victoria fears that old team members will be angry at her leaving and new team members won’t like her.
Figure 25: Victoria’s sensemaking profile

![Diagram showing Victoria's sensemaking profile]

Victoria’s sensemaking of being involuntarily reassigned (Figure 25) is initially focused on her identity as an indispensable employee. She fears that others may not “satisfy the customer,” including old team members, the way she had. She extracts cues from management actions as not having a say in and not being given a rationale for the reassignment. Victoria is also concerned with how others may view her reassignment and what to tell them when they ask.

Aggregate of participant constructs of being involuntarily reassigned

In the previous section the individual participant experiences were described. In this section primary schemes as constructs of meaning making will be described. Figure 26 is an aggregate of the primary constructs provided by the eight participants in this study.
An aggregate cognitive map is designed to give the reader a snapshot of the participants’ constructs used to make sense of involuntary reassignment. The participants have done a member check of the map above. The absence of arrows in the aggregate chart does not mean the absence of influence of one construct on others. This study found that all 5 constructs above influenced and were influenced by others in a lesser or greater degree at the idiosyncratic level in ongoing sensemaking after involuntary reassignment. A description of the influence of each construct was discussed with individual mindmaps earlier in the chapter. At the aggregate level all constructs are of equal influence to the ongoing process of sensemaking. A broad description with participant examples of each of the constructs follows. Further description of the relationships of the constructs will be provided in Chapter 5.

As a review, meaning is born upon the connection of two constructs and the subsequent addition of weight or significance in the form of emotion (Weick, 1999). A description of the emotions surfaced by involuntary reassignment will be done shortly, but a discussion of emotion and the role it plays in this study is part of chapter five.
Descriptions of the constructs of involuntary reassignment

Each of the five primary constructs of involuntary reassignment will be discussed and described in turn. There is no specific hierarchy for these constructs other than a possible cybernetic hierarchy based upon idiosyncratic feelings or meaning placed upon the connections of one construct to another during the sensemaking event. Table 4 below indicates that all five primary constructs were a part of the sensemaking of all participants. Although, importance and influence factors of the constructs lie at the idiosyncratic level, often-deployed and interlacing construct pairs did emerge. These construct pairs are discussed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Anita</th>
<th>Blossom</th>
<th>Burton</th>
<th>Charles</th>
<th>Deecce</th>
<th>Helen</th>
<th>Joie</th>
<th>Victoria</th>
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Identity

Identity was a construct for all participants. Phrases such as “I am a good employee, “I work hard for this organization," I, Me, We, and other self-referent phrases indicate the centrality of this construct to sensemaking after the event. Sensemaking is
idiosyncratic stemming from individual mental models. The self-talk between an individual’s “I” (knowledge of self) and an individual’s “me” (knowledge of themselves in a social setting, i.e. an employee, a parent, an engineer, a leader) is the stuff of sensemaking for the construct of identity. Identity of the individual whether the self as seen by the individual or the self as seen by others plays a significant role in sensemaking after being involuntarily reassigned for all the participants in this study. Figure 27 is a graphic presentation of the dialectic I-me quality of the self-and-other development of human identity. Examples of participant descriptions of the identity construct of the phenomenon under inquiry follow.

Anita defines herself in the social setting as a “team player and “here to do a job” and expresses issues of self-efficacy as not being able to meet “boss’” or “my expectations. Anita also expresses a performance tint to her identity in stating, “I am here to do a job.” Anita’s sense of being is tied to her being able to perform her role. Blossom’s identity construct is marked with her gains to becoming a “better technician.” She supports this with personal cues of “greater responsibility,” “possible advancement” and “possibility to learn more.” Burton’s strongest construct is in his sense of self. His identity is wrapped around his ADHD and his coping in this situation. Charles’ identity is in his worth as an employee. He notes “management needed my talents & expertise yet I was the least paid,” and “I was the manager, but not treated as one.”
Deecee’s conversation with her ‘self’ is marked by a question about her self-efficacy in the new job as well as the perception of her new team members. Self-efficacy issues harden the bond between the identity and performance construct.

“Perception of those around me” ranks second in priority of Deecee’s eight constructs of the meaning making process. Helen’s identity is linked to external cues from others and her feelings of being “very capable to handling this new job. Joie’s identity is within the concept of “old issues.” She states “this is like my past life” – in a previous position – and her belief that “there is something about me that draws such responses.” She also sees herself not only as a victim of sexual harassment but as a victim of a management system that treats her as “different” and a problem. Victoria sees herself as an “indispensable” and “important” employee that could satisfy her customers better than a replacement or her old team members could. Linkages to others in the self-conversations within participants also provide linkage to the others and management constructs of the event of being involuntarily reassigned. Also, linkages produce emotions adding energy to the mix of constructs in sensemaking.

Performance

As a constructive player in the sensemaking process, performance is sometimes in the open and sometimes in the shadows within another construct as in some examples previously used to describe identity. Figure 28 is a graphic presentation of the participants’ description of the performance construct. The performance as described by the participants clearly shows its dialectic nature. Participants describe
both an anxiety at not meeting expectations and seeing an opportunity to do well.

Specific participant examples of performance are provided below.

Figure 28: Performance construct of involuntary reassignment

Anita’s focus for performance is in being perceived as a team player (identity) in meeting the expectations of others. Blossom identifies herself in performance terms of becoming a better employee with greater responsibility and being a team player and not choosing to complain. Burton defines himself as a “valuable employee” supporting “our customer” and “busting [his] butt for this job.” His identity is wrapped into his performance. Charles’ performance as “the manager” of the program is a central theme for sensemaking influenced by and influencing emotions and management cues.

Deecce believes that “reassignment is a reflection of my performance” and fears that she may not meet the expectations of her new role and faces the “next 3 months” with a sense of “expect the unexpected.” Helen’s focus on her performance is within her knowing she can meet the demands of the new job.

Joie’s view of performance in her meaning making mixture is within the fact that she was the last “exercise” person left on the team and she was abused as such and subsequently discarded (involuntarily reassigned). For Victoria, her performance in her old position supports her belief that she is an “important” and “valuable employee” linking performance to her identity. Performance as a construct wraps itself within and
Management

Management or specifically the extracted cues of management activities was a construct for all participants as they made sense after being involuntarily reassigned. Because management were the ones “doing” the reassigning participants drew extracted cues as to what and why this event was happening to them. These cues did match individual scheme when “management decides where people work” is the individual scheme as in Helen’s sensemaking process; and, did not match individual expectations as Blossom’s “leadership” expectation that employees should be consulted prior to reassignments. Figure 29 represents the management construct of sensemaking for the eight employees. Although the participants understandably chose the negative activities to fire their beliefs, within the negatives are the supportive aspects as foiled expectations. Participant usages of the management construct follow.

Figure 29: Management construct of involuntary reassignment

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Anita’s primary concern in the management construct is its connection to satisfying the expectations of her boss. Management issues loom large in Blossom’s making meaning of her experiences. She labels this construct as leadership, which she
defines as the things the leader does which confront her model of leadership. Burton’s construct of “management failings” describes his view of management as non-caring and self-serving and in his view influences the way others perceive him. Charles’ “lack of management support” is a central theme influenced and influencing his emotion constructs of “disappointment,” “disillusionment,” and “overburdened.” Charles charges management with the responsibility for the balance of labor in the program.

Management actions influence the meaning and attribution of feelings such as apprehension and apathy for Deecee. She perceives deception and her reassignment as part of the manger’s professed “master plan.” Management influences the “mixed feelings: new and old job” construct in Deecee’s meaning perspective. In Helen’s “management” construct she cues on “management may feel I am not ‘good enough’ for the new office” and summarily employs the heuristic “management decides where people work.” Victoria’s single comment of “the boss is trying to get rid of me” is at the top of her most important construct “not likely.” Management activities provide the cues interpreted by participants to continue their ongoing support of idiosyncratic meaning perspectives.

Others

Others is an overarching construct of sensemaking in the face of involuntary reassignment. Others as coworkers, management, friends, and family members, to name a few, provided energy for ongoing sensemaking as others in self-talk or others in providing discursive feedback mechanism for identity, performance, or management actions. Figure 30 represents the Others as described by participants. Others as a
construct is a powerful feedback, in the form of actual human beings, and feed-forward as an anticipatory – what I expect others will say or do – mechanism for the participants. It seems to represent for participants the looking back but living forward nature of sensemaking. Participant examples of the construct follow.

**Figure 30: Others construct of involuntary reassignment**

![Diagram of Others construct]

Others for Anita are coworkers, her supervisor (boss) and “them” the term she uses for all the folks whom she may come in contact with in day-to-day administration of her duties. Blossom defines others as the principal investigator, team leaders and the director of the organizational unit. She selects cues from their behaviors to make sense of her experience. Burton’s focus on management issues is in his attempt to balance his situation in that he perceives he is coping better than management is to this situation. An excellent example of an internal conversation with others is Burton’s conversation between his self-identity and how he perceives others see him. Others for Charles are coworkers and management. One coworker was “contentious, critical and obnoxious,” while the other “was not excited about the program.” Charles cued on coworker activities to link to his “self-worth” and “lack of management support” to continue the ongoing plausible argument of being the program manager without the accompanying compensation.

Others rank high in the sensemaking process for Deecce. Her concerns are that family and friends may not understand her dilemma and may not remain supportive. In
Helen’s construct labeled “satisfy others” she fears not meeting the expectations of coworkers and customers and not becoming part of the team. The others in Joie’s ongoing sensemaking are coworkers, her team leader and management – the team leaders’ boss. She admits she “possibly contributed to being moved” but cues on management’s not knowing “their moral obligations” or “responsibilities” in meeting her expectations. Joie sees herself as being used by management by stating “I was the last in exercise (a unit role) … they picked my brain and let me go.” Others in Victoria’s sensemaking are new and old team members, the boss, and customers. She fears customers will not fair well while she is in new position and old team members will “be mad at me for leaving.” She also fears “the boss is trying to get rid of me.” Others provide the cues interpreted by the individual sensemaker for ongoing validation through enactment of schemes and meaning perspectives.

Emotions

Emotions as a construct was identified by many different labels when participants were asked to categorize their concepts, thoughts, ideas, and feelings of being involuntarily reassigned during the second interview. Figure 31 represents the Emotions construct for the participants. It clearly shows the array of affect for participants and the dialectic nature of the construct. Participant usage of the construct for sensemaking follows.

Figure 31: Emotion construct of involuntary reassignment
Although Anita has a “such is life” attitude as part of her meaning schema she does admit feeling a “little insecure when it [reassignment] happened.” Blossom identified two emotions in her construct labeled “emotions.” Apathy and acceptance were the two identified. In “apathy,” Blossom chooses not to fight the move and in acceptance, she takes a “wait and see attitude.” Burton’s emotions are in the connections he makes from his identity as a caring (“I give a shit”) employee to “resentment at management treatment.” This later construct for Burton is a litany of management metaphors such as, it is “who you know” and “who you don’t piss off” to “higher level work deserves a promotion” and “a select few get promotions.” There are three emotional themes central in Charles reflection of the event “disillusioned,” “disappointed,” and “overburdened.” These emotional ties link the other constructs of the event. For Charles the event was carried for over a year and was overarched by the everyday question of dread, what does today bring? Deecee has two of her five major constructs as emotions: “Mixed feelings: new and old job” and “apprehension and apathy.” Both of these constructs link the others in a swirling mix of ongoing sensemaking. Helen’s “desires and expectations” scheme is a list of ‘wants’ in her new position. This scheme influences and is influenced by “all about me,” Helen’s list of capabilities to meet the demands of the new position. Joie’s emotions are linking her identity as the last exercise person and her moral outrage at being used and then cast aside by management. Her outrage acts as a catalyst to look
for cues to support her argument – coworkers may not “know what really happened.” Victoria has many constructs that suggest emotion – “fear of unknown,” “performance anxiety,” not likely!, being banished,” “losing it all,” “will they like me?,” and “given the boot.” All contribute to her belief that only she can satisfy her customers best and that the boss is trying to get rid of her. Emotions as an attribution of meaning and as a construct of sensemaking after the event are significant. Emotions provide the energy, the fuel for the sensemaker to continue interpretation and reinterpretation of external and internal cues to supporting meaning schemes.

Summary: View of Compiled Individual Perceptions of Involuntary Reassignment

All individual comments and categories from the participants coalesced on five constructs: Identity, Performance, Management, Others and Emotions. Participants used these constructions in a cybernetic hierarchy providing each sensemaker the energy to struggle through the experience.

In summary, when asked to discuss what they considered important after being involuntarily reassigned this group of participants focused on their identity, how they view themselves, and how they view others see them; performance, how they view their working ability against this event; management, how they view leadership roles in the event; others, how they interpret the views and actions of others around them and within them; and emotions, what emotions they identified in the combination of all constructs, and how the energy of these affective states played out in the ongoing nature of their sensemaking.
Chapter V

Findings and Conclusions

Conclusions from Sensemaking of Participants

The purpose of this research was to answer the question "how do employees describe and make meaning of the experience of being involuntarily reassigned?" By investigating employees’ perceptions about being involuntarily reassigned, this research also intended to add to the literature on sensemaking. In answering the research question, this study also endeavored to develop a better understanding of sensemaking at work. The context for the study is being involuntarily reassigned. The work setting for this study is a government research, development and engineering organization in the Department of Defense assigned with the mission of protecting the soldier and the homeland against chemical, biological and nuclear weapons of mass destruction.

Based on the analyses of the eight individual participants' experiences of being involuntarily reassigned, the following findings are offered. In this concluding section, the findings are offered as constructs of the phenomenon of involuntary reassignment. These constructs have been agreed upon by the participants as those describing the human event of being involuntarily assigned in this government organization. Figure 32 is their collective story of the phenomenon. As illustrated in Figure 32, the five constructs are Identity, Performance, Management, Others, and Emotions.

The individual participants create meaning in sequencing what is believed of these constructs and what is selected from the context. In the interpretive paradigm,
truth for the person lies in the matching of what has been meaningful to what is 
extracted from experience (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Weick, 1995; Mezirow, 2000; 
Carley, 1997). At the social level, which is for this group of eight individuals, Figure 32 
is a group mental model of the shared social knowledge of being involuntarily 
reassigned in this organization. This graphic representation provides the “core facets” 
of the meaning of the event, which is the purpose of phenomenological research 
(Moustakas, 1994, p. 58). These core facets are the 5 constructs employed by 
involuntarily reassigned individuals in sensemaking.

Figure 32: Aggregate map of primary involuntary reassignment constructs

Sensemaking was the lens for the study of the phenomenon of involuntary 
reassignment. Applying Weick’s (1995) model of sensemaking to the above aggregate 
yields the following view of involuntary reassignment (Figure 33). Weick (2003) recently 
asked "why is it so difficult to break frame" especially in crisis. He applies the 
sensemaking model to crisis situations, such as wildfires, to understand the social 
pattern in the hand-off moment - that moment where one team takes over the fire from 
another. The hand-off moment in this study is the moment where the leader told the
employee of the reassignment - the firefight - and the subsequent sensemaking activities of the individual – the hand-off. The frame of reference or meaning scheme of the 8 participants in this study was durable throughout the interview process and for some over two years after the reassignment. Figures 32 and 33 reveal the durable nature of frames as individuals maneuver sensemaking activities. This finding begs the question “Do these five constructs play a role into the durable schemes of the organization?”

Figure 33: Sensemaking for the involuntary reassigned employee

As I created the involuntarily-reassigned sensemaking model (Figure 33), it became clear that organizational culture had provided labels used by its individual members. Individuals employed personal identity and performance constructs using organizational labels, for example, being a good employee means one who meets
customer needs. Durkheim (1895/1977; 1897), Schutz (1932/1967; 1973) Mead (1934) and more recently Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) remind us that the individual self is socially created. Durkheim (1897; 1895/1977) tells us that man creates social facts, like religion and law, to deal with the uncertainties and difficulties of social life; and then has to struggle to live under the constraints of these social facts. Schutz (1973) writes of the social invasion of the individual self, or as he labeled it the lifeworld, through education and socialization; two systems of integrated social facts. Bourdieu (1990) continues this belief through the use of the term habitus – those hardened actions, perceptions and dispositions gained through socialization and education. In the writings of all four social scientists, we have a clear understanding of the creation of the individual self is social; the individual creates society and then depends on portions of society to cope with the constraints of living socially. In this study I found that the individual sensemakers employed socially plausible arguments to struggle against their subjective and objective feelings and thoughts about being an involuntarily reassigned employee.

The Five Major Constructs of Sensemaking for the Involuntarily Reassigned

The next section describes each of the five major constructs forming the plura-belief system of being involuntarily reassigned, as perceived by the eight participants in this research, as well as supporting or questioning research. These conclusions are a macro view of what it means to be involuntarily reassigned, hence the use of the term plura-belief system, as perceived by eight employees of a government research and development center.
Identity

The social construction of the self continues in the American tradition as well. For the eight participants, the construct of identity was a discussion between the “I” and the “me” as portrayed by Mead (1934). Figure 34 below is an illustration of Mead’s concept as depicted by Hatch (2002). For the participants of this study, the identity of being a good employee, a hard worker, or as serving the customer the like was derived from the internal or external conversations involving the interactions of the other constructs and others in their lives. For example, involuntary assignment is viewed as a bad thing (extracted cue) done by management (one of the others) to a good or hard-working employee (perception of self – identity). Barrett (2001) also found that a “sense of self” was a construct of the phenomenon of being held accountable for work in this organization, and that had an internal (I) and an external (me) component. For Mead (1934) the me was defined through the interaction of the self with others. For Schutz (1932; 1967) these conversations can be self-talk or in discourse with others. Hatch (1999) states that identity is half you and half other. In a more recent presentation Hatch (2002) depicted the relationship as in Figure 34.
Hatch (1999) states the problem with moving from static to a dynamic model is in finding a dynamic imagination to keep up. It is suggested that Weick’s (1995a) focus on verbs rather than objects within the model above will create for the participant a new look at future action and possibly the employment of a more dynamic imagination. In other words, seeing management as managing would likely focus the participant to the dialectic nature of the concept of the management construct (Kelly, 1955; 1970), thus the individual sensemaker may see good managing and bad managing activities in the same cognitive selection.

This study agrees with the findings of Ibarra (1999) who studied individuals transitioning from one job to the next. Ibarra found that participants observed role models to identify identity, experimented with their image and evaluated their image based upon internal and external feedback. Ibarra also over sampled with women as in this study. Her participants also clung to old selves and questioned adaptation to a new self. However, Ibarra’s participants volunteered to change positions within their
organization and thus did not exhibit the strong emotions due to the involuntarily nature of the phenomenon under inquiry here.

**Performance**

Performance is closely linked to Identity for the participants in this study. The concepts of *being a good employee or satisfying the customer* cross the divide between identity and performance and provide energy for continuing meaning making. All individuals were challenging the cues received from others in self-talk or discourse while validating their beliefs. Efficacy beliefs influence how people feel and think about themselves in new situations. Bandura's (1993) work shows that self-efficacy beliefs produce these diverse effects through “four major processes cognitive, motivational, affective, and selectional [sic] processes.” (p. 118). This study found that performance identity, and affective constructs are also employed by the involuntarily reassigned individual’s selection system.

Bourdieu and his associate (Bourdieu, 1979; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970/1977) posit that the connection between education and meaning making system is developed from grade school through professional training and change very little in adulthood. This study found some support for Bourdieu’s notion with the discovery of comments such as “logically thinking like an engineer” and “behaving like a scientist.” As a member of this organization I can support that there is a general belief that “scientists think this way while engineers think that way.” There are however scientists and engineers who have made a cognitive effort, due to the mission of our organization, to *cross over* the educational divide to create the science and build
the science base and technical devices necessary to support the soldiers, sailors and airmen in a chemical and biological environment.

Management

Sensemakers in this study were “bounded” by the schemes of the organization; they were involuntarily assigned reassigned and subsequently thought of themselves as “possible failures.” This study agrees with Clark & Goia (1993) who found that individual sensemaking was bounded by the contextual factors (management activities) such as organizational performance routines and supporting metrics that define success or failure. Many participants asked themselves why they were being moved when they “supported the customer” – a strong performance metric in this organization.

However, there was also evidence to the lack of commitment to the organization and its management. One of the eight participants talked of commitment to the job. Barrett (2001) also found commitment to be missing as a construct of her middle managers description of being held accountable. These findings in the employee and the line managers are quite disconcerting.

Deecceee’s question of her reassignment as possibly part of “the master plan” and Joie’s concept of “I was the last in ‘exercise’ … they ‘picked my brain’ and let me go” are just two of the eight examples of perceptions of a broken psychological contract. In the case of the involuntarily reassigned employee and the perception of a broken psychological contract (Noer, 1998), a lack of commitment to management is plausible. But, a lack of commitment to the organization begs the question, “does involuntary
reassignment lead to lack of commitment or does a lack of commitment perceived by management, lead to involuntary reassignment?

This study found that for most participants the question “what will I be doing” was still unanswered. Management did not respond to participant satisfaction. Geigle (1997) found in her study of sensemaking during radical organizational change the same question was “still unanswered” and that individual schemes proposed “further negative consequences were expected” (p. 211).

Others

Participants defined others as management, family, friends and coworkers. There was also evidence of “phantom others” (Weick, 1979b) employed in self-talk or social discourse (Schutz, 1932/1967). Others represent the social link within the I-me conversation (Mead, 1934; Hatch, 1999; 2002) with which the individual creates the equivocality in ongoing sensemaking. Others are the prime link that helps the individual create himself and place himself in the environment. Participant concerns in this study were all about others and their roles and connections to the others in the organization and to the others in their heads. Statements such as “I am a good employee” and “I serve the customer” serve to define participants in time and space. Time is the present, as they perceive a challenge to their image by the fact that they are being reassigned against their will. Space is within this organization that stresses customer service as symbolic of doing good work. Barrett (2001) also found that working with others was a major construct of sensemaking in her phenomenological study of accountability for mid-level managers in this organization.
Others play a vital role in the individual means of survival in a group (Weick, 1979) and sense of belonging (Smith & Berg, 1997) in organizing individual reality in a social setting. The strong connections stated by the participants between the constructs of others, and identity tended to strengthen through the interview process.

Emotions

Emotions provide rhythm and tone to the sensemaking dance. Emotions were the main ingredient in construing meaning for the involuntary reassigned employee. Emotions hold the meaning and allow a flow of energy for ongoing sensemaking. Emotion is the intensifier – the adverb – of meaning. Those two individuals furthest from the event; those individuals for whom the event was over 2 years ago, were found to have less emotional intensity around the event. This suggests that time does allow the individual emotional healing. The intensity of the emotion has subsided but emotion as a conduit and a construct still remains for all participants. More recent studies of emotions in the workplace also indicate their use as constructs and conduits (Ashkanasy, Hartel & Daus, 2002; Ashkanasy, Hartel, & Zerbe, 2000; Lord, Kanfer, & Klimosky, 2002; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996).

Taylor (2000) who has researched 42 studies of Mezirow’s meaning making theory concludes, “research should begin focusing on particular feelings – anger, fear, happiness and the like and explore how they individually inform the reflective process” (p. 305). Weick (1979b) identified 24 years ago that we as organizational researchers must do our homework in emotions in the workplace. In Weick’s (1999) analysis of why some theories make a difference and others do not, he concludes that theories such as
active listening, commitment, and action are more powerful because of their focus on emotion. It is suggested that closing the gap between forward moving and backward understanding can only be understood if researchers can get to the emotion holding the meaning of the moment.

The raw feelings that involuntarily reassigned employees experienced have to be understood and acknowledged by leadership or minimum effort, low risk behaviors, cynicism, and action avoidance (Weick, 1979b; Argyris, 1991; Bumbaugh, 1998; Finger & Asun, 2001) will prevail leading to lost human capital in detachment.

Group culture

Carley (1997) posits that a perspective of the sensemaking constructs from this group of participants may represent organizational “culture -- those ideas, beliefs, norms, ways of acting, etc. that are commonly though not necessarily universally shared” (p. 536). If this is the case, then the probable use of Figure 33 in future research in this organization is warranted to understand its culture.

Anger is the first step

Participants in this study referred to feelings of anxiety, anger, disillusionment and mixed emotions but little mention of guilt. Mezirow’s (1978; 1991) earlier work states guilt in the first step of making meaning. This study did not support Mezirow’s finding of guilt. Although, some participants may have initially asked “What did I do wrong?” they quickly responded by placing blame squarely on the shoulders of management. This study supports Kubler-Ross’s (1969)
who found that anger was the first step rather than guilt. Noer (1998) discovered from over a decade of work with survivors that employees blame management and are angry at the change in the psychological contract.

The psychological contract

Figure 33 can tell us something about the organization or lead us to question the commitment of the organization to its employees – the elusive psychological contract. I asked 32 individuals involuntarily reassigned and received 9 affirmative responses. One individual and I could not arrange our schedules for interview and thus the study is built on eight individuals. What is it about these eight that made them want to participate? Did they simply want to be heard – to be given voice? What is it about the remaining 23 individuals who chose not to participate? Realizing that these questions are tough to answer without further inquiry, I did want to list some of the responses for the reader to ponder as possible cues to their sensemaking schemes. The list is from those who chose not to participate. However they do provide possible clues about organizational culture.

- I was closer to the top of the food chain so I knew where I was going … but we all were involuntarily moved.
- The shuffle was expected and I ended up OK
- I feel OK about it and thus don’t need to talk to anyone
- I’m too afraid to share because I made such a fuss at the time
- I don’t want mgt to know I talked to you
- I can’t help … it was 3 years ago but I remember it like it was yesterday
- My boss said no there are legal concerns pending
- I do not fit because I am happy with the move
- I haven’t been reassigned yet [after 4 months]
- My team name was changed ‘to protect the innocent’

Adding these comments to the sensemaking mix could give the reader some idea of the culture of the organization. The culture is both permitting and restraining.

**Short term memory**

Miller (1956) noted that humans have limited capacity in short-term memory (Daniels, de Chernatony, & Johnson, 1995; Daniels & Johnson, 2002; Eden & Spender, 1998). Miller claims that short-term memory is capable of balancing seven plus or minus two constructs, therefore, five (5) to nine (9) constructs were expected. Two participants in this study do not agree with Miller (1956). Their sensemaking constructs were four (4) and twelve (12) bracketing Miller’s claims. Also, this researcher employed eleven (11) constructs in the creation of his meaning of the experience.

**Use of metaphors**

Metaphors help us cope by providing a *slot* or a *bin* in which to place experience; otherwise, we desperately search for the right label for meaning to be assigned. Mezirow (1991) suggests that we cleverly create metaphors to construe meaning. Most participants did not have previous metaphors in which to plug-in their being involuntarily
reassigned. They admittedly created the following metaphors for the event during the interviews for this study.

Burton: “Situation is like falling off the earth.”

Charles: What will today bring?

Joie: This is a “Quandary”

Valerie = ”Not likely!” “Being banished,” “the boss is trying to get rid of me”

Billy Collins, US Poet Laureate, in a National Public Radio public radio interview with Terri Gross (26 Sep 01), suggested that without a metaphor there could be no meaning assigned and thus, we cannot make sense and move on. Most participants and this researcher were left numb and immobile by the experience of being involuntarily reassigned. There was no moving on without healing the wounds (Daloz, 1986; Noer, 1998; Kegan, 1994) that we created.

**Thermodynamics and Emotion**

This study took an interpretive point of view. However, the sample for the study was taken from a US Army research and development organization with an eighty-five year history steeped in the study of the hard sciences of physics, chemistry and biology, applied to battlefield and homeland concerns. One of the purposes of this project was to find a description of involuntary reassignment that made sense, realizing an “*aha, I understand*” (the purpose of phenomenology - Kohak, 1978) from my colleagues on the job. In answering the question, “how do I get my findings understood by the scientist and engineers who manage this organization,” I shared Figure 33 (above) with two
colleagues, Genovese and Nolan (2002), research chemists who share over 40 years of experience in this organization. The following discussion ensued.

Genovese and Nolan (2002) suggested that the Figure 33 could be easily explained employing the theory of thermodynamics - the study of energy flow. It is suggested that the reader consider the making of meaning as the point where an individual construes or experiences emotion (energy) in the connection of two constructs. The potential charge in the form of thermal energy (heat) gained by the connection provides the energy for ongoing sensemaking - the ongoing validation of belief systems. The first law of thermodynamics is: the energy in the universe is constant, energy is conserved – neither created nor destroyed or you can’t get something for nothing. The participants could not understand their involuntary reassignment without enactment (action). Some chose apathy and did not talk to management thus conserving energy for them; and as such, did not receive desired feedback. Other participants chose to confront their leadership for greater understanding. Choosing to speak to management may have revealed rationale for their reassignment and a greater understanding of leadership constructs – creating a win-win situation. In either case, they did not find the responses they received satisfactory – they did not return to a comfortable stasis. Participants throughout the interview process showed the enduring nature of personal meaning schemes.

The second law of the thermodynamics game is: you cannot return to the same energy state - entropy of the universe is ever increasing or you can’t break even. As HRD professionals we cannot return the involuntary reassigned employee to his
previous state of equilibrium, only the individual can. We can only coach him from where he is to another state of understanding (maybe). Participants can’t break even but they can win given an alternative view; a view more flexible in thought and deed, a view in which they deliberately acting their way into understanding – a sensemaking view. HRD specialists or astute organizational leaders can become sensegivers, sharing rationale and then asking “tell me if you (a) do not understand, (b) cannot do it, (c) see something I do not” (Weick, 2002). More recently, Weick (2003) more recently introduced the acronym STICC; Situation, here’s what we face; Task, here’s what I think we should do; Intent, here’s why; Concern, here’s what we should keep an eye on; and Calibrate, now talk to me. Although his advice is for the Incident Commander briefing his/her team of firefighters, the procedure has application for the individual leader who risks the loss of an employee’s productivity through detachment in involuntary reassignment.

The third law of thermodynamics is: the entropy of all pure crystalline solids at absolute zero is zero, or you cannot get out of the game because absolute zero is unattainable. A state of no energy is unattainable. In other words sensemaking, finding meaning in our everyday experiences is ongoing and never reaches an end state. Sensemaking is always fueled by internal or external cues. The end state becomes the object of enactment (Weick, 1995) or state of consciousness (Kegan, 1992) as the participant re-construes or critically reflects (Mezirow, 2000) the meaning of the enactment. Fortunately for us, the metaphor breaks down in that the human psyche never sleeps. It continues the sensemaking process as it insists on making meaning of life at work – for better and for worse.
Contributions to Theory

Weick (1979b) suggested over 23 years ago that researchers give attention to the role of emotion in sensemaking. For the participants in this study, emotions played the roles of mediators and moderators between constructs, as well as, constructs themselves in sensemaking. This study also added an example of sensemaking at the employee level, while previous analyses were at manager level.

It is suggested that learning, or what Weick (2003) recently labeled breaking frame begins at a frustrating moment where emotion surfaces due to foiled expectations. Emotion motivates interests to finding responses raised by frustrations and creates the intentionality to act toward balancing intrinsic and extrinsic meaning – ongoing sensemaking. Emotion motivates individual interests in seeking responses to “what do I need to know to deal with this situation,” do I understand what others mean,” and “why do I act the way I do” (Habermas, 1984). Emotion also blocks action in that it binds two constructs so tightly that it creates a virtual do loop causing the frame to tighten rather than loosen for learning.

The critics of Mezirow’s adult learning theory (Taylor, 1997; 1998; 2000) note more attention was needed in emotions other than the guilt proposed by current theory. This study found that forms of anger were prevalent for the participants making meaning of involuntary reassignment.
Implications for Practice

This research focused on making explicit the feelings, beliefs and activities employed in making meaning of the experience of being involuntarily reassigned within the same organization. Five implications for human and organizational development practice are proposed.

1. Career growth

Participants of this study were concerned about their career growth and development opportunities as a result of reassignment. Downsizing organizations have been found to pay little attention to the career development of employees (Bozionelos, 2001). Noer’s (1993; 1998) extensive research on survivor sickness notes that career development issues are part of the psychological contract which survivor’s deem broken by management. Bozionelos (2001) found that all employee’s surveyed and 20 percent of top managers acknowledged that little attention was being paid to the career development during and after an 18 month reorganization effort. Barrett (2001) concluded the appraisal mechanism for this organization lacked support for career development issues of employees. She states that The Army Performance Evaluation system (TAPES) is not being used as intended – an appraisal and a career development mechanism. Its intent is to communicate expectations of the job, those roles and tasks that will be appraised during the rating period and the training and development activities that will prepare the employee for the next assignment or promotion. It is concluded that an effort to give attention to the involuntary reassigned
employees in their current positions could lessen the personal and organizational impact of involuntary reassignment.

2. Where HRD and OD practitioners can make a difference

Where can an HRD specialist effectively influence involuntary reassigned employee action? As a 25-year veteran in career counseling and organizational development, I find that practitioners can possibly make a difference in what Kegan (1994) calls the “zone of mediation,” what Schutz’s (1932/1967) deems as self-talk, what Mead (1934) sees as the I-me conversation, what Mezirow (1978; 1991; 2000) sees as critical reflection, where meaning is being made in the sensemaking process (Weick, 1969; 1979; 1995). Any intervention to help the involuntary reassigned employee must plug-into ongoing sensemaking at the site where two constructs are colliding – where meaning is being made.

Kegan (1994) suggests re-framing, turning the subject into object. The most developed form of human consciousness for Kegan is being capable of seeing one’s actions, beliefs, and attitudes as the object of study and acting upon them. This notion is shared by Mezirow’s (1999) references to subjective reframing as a result of self-reflection or social discourse and by Weick’s (1995) re-look for the deep assumptions which influence sensemaking at "implicit, tacit, preconscious, mindless, and taken for granted" levels (p. 114) of human activity – our mental models. If we can re-introduce the event, we can possibly affect the space where meaning occurs – the “zone of mediation” which is "that most human of "regions" between an event and a reaction to it
- the place where the event is privately composed, made sense of, the place where it
[experience] actually becomes an event for that person" (Kegan, 1982, p. 2).

HRD specialists must be able to intervene at the I-me conversation level if we are
to make a difference for the individual and the social organization. Kegan (1982)
reminds us, "constructive developmental psychology reconceives the whole question of
the relationship between the individual and the social by reminding us that the
distinction is not absolute, that development is intrinsically about the continual settling
and resettling of this very distinction" (p.115). What is relevant to our discussion of
sensemaking is Kegan’s description of the transition place, the unsettling and resettling
of the sensemaking moment. If meaning making is ongoing, then HRD and OD
specialists and management leaders have the opportunity to help the individual
sensemaker with the re-settling process.

After the September 11, 2001 terrorist event in New York, my colleague Linda
Fatkin, a research psychologist with the Army Research Laboratory, and I began a
series of interventions under the Army’s Consideration of Others Program. The
workshop was designed to initiate ongoing discussions to help employees make sense
of the event. I created Figure 35 to initiate discussion.
With a minor introduction the participants understood what the concepts to the right of Figure 35 had in common (they all have holes in them). Additionally, the practitioner questioned the audience to elicit discussion of the individual (I) and the social individual (Me) or the individual employed in social settings (affected by roles, social status, power issues, organizational norms and culture). What normally ensued in smaller groups was a discussion around the individual reactions to the event and coping mechanisms used by individuals. Figure 35 was found to be a successful “plug in” mechanism for ongoing sensemaking in the small groups. Coping mechanisms were recorded in the large group session as a “take home” for employees who wished to take this back to the office or home to their families. HRD practitioners can make a
difference in the sensemaking of the organization in every intervention they create with an eye on the zone of mediation (Kegan, 1994), the point at which practitioners can help the individual raise questions about enactments (Weick, 1979; 1995) or subjectively reframe (Mezirow, 2000) mental models.

3. Cognitive mapping as catalyst for healing

Although it is not the intent of methodology to become part of the healing process (Bougon, 2001), some participants thanked the researcher for allowing them to air their beliefs and for sharing his cognitive map (see Appendix A) at the close of the final interview. Comments such as “I really feel better now that we’ve talked,” “the map is really revealing of the things I need to pay attention to” and “this process was a catharsis for me,” were offered after the interviews. These comments may show signs toward action (Weick, 1995) after critical reflection (Mezirow, 1978; 2000) or show signs of healing (Daloz, 1986; Kegan, 1994) brought about through ongoing sensemaking connections.

4. Learning and meaning making

Is learning meaning making or is meaning making learning? Participants of this study showed adaptation as an issue in their search for responses to their questions. I would suggest that we learn by chasing our intellectual interests as with Habermas (1984). His notions of differing human interests - technical, communicative and emancipatory – lead us to learning to do, learning what others are saying, and learning
to be ourselves. This scenario provides an interesting backdrop to Weick’s (1995) model, as an addition to the ongoing nature of sensemaking – creating meaning in our lives. Mezirow’s work is primarily focused on the critical acceptance of one’s assumptions – the why of learning – and the constant struggle between the me of the environment and the I of the self or the struggle for individuation (Boyd, 1991; Kegan, 1994). I see Mezirow’s views as more Hegelian and Marxist in nature where an individual sees the social system as having greater power and, as such, needs to be fought and overthrown for the individual to be free. In his case freedom would be individuation of the self. Although Habermas is also considered a critical theorist, his views on discourse are extremely democratic (Habermas, 1984); everyone’s argument has equal weight in the in the discussion.

5. HRD practitioner or Organizational leader as “Toxic Handler”

Employees will not give up their beliefs and meaning systems lightly. Management has to pay attention to these employees on the periphery of performance. Schutz (1962) notes “We are not ready to abandon our attitude toward it [i.e., the world of everyday life] without having experienced a specific shock, which compels us to break through the limits of these "finite" provinces of meaning and to shift the accent of reality to another one (p. 343-44). Schutz is challenging HR specialists and organizational leadership to continue challenging employees with change opportunities. Involuntary reassignment will continue being a viable means of balancing organizational challenges and human resources. However, HR specialists and organizational leaders can choose to become “toxic handlers” (Frost & Robinson, 1999) – those who help heal these employees by listening to and validating their feelings and concerns. This
researcher supports the use of toxic handler to help the involuntary reassigned make sense of their situation as they see it. What is needed is a volunteer or a designated trustee who has the fortitude and the stamina to face angry individuals – the possibly walking wounded left to make sense alone. These brave sensegivers can help these employees make significant personal changes by critically questioning what they do and what they wish to do – acting their way to make sense for themselves.

It is suggested that organizational leaders are in a unique position to become sensegivers for the involuntarily reassigned employee. The rationale for the reassignment to answer the burning question “why was I moved” and a concerted effort to integrate the employee into the new job to assuage fears around “where do I fit into the new unit” would lessen the impact of detachment and lost production while employees seek the answers to their questions in sensemaking.

Recommendations for Future Research

The participants of this study focused on five constructs deployed in their sensemaking activities. As a result of these findings, the following recommendations are made for future research.

1. A longitudinal study

This study could become a longitudinal study with the same participants to discover changes in participant schemes and challenge transformational learning theory. Merriam’s (2001) favorable review of Mezirow’s (2000) more recent book
was that the authors did not rule out other kinds of learning other than transformational. We as HRD specialists must prepare our interventions within organizations to focus on the three interests of Habermas (1984) – technical, the what of learning; communicative, the how we learn what others see; and emancipatory, the why we do what we do. The why we do what we do is the primary focus in Mezirow’s (1978; 1991b; 2000) transformational learning theory and the primary purpose of Weick’s (1969; 1979a; 1995) insistence that we study what we do to discover the premise and act without “the specious validity of self-fulfilling prophesy” (from Merton, 1948; in Weick, 1995, p. 147).

An intervention for the involuntary reassigned may be of an action-learning nature (Baskett, 1996; Garratt, 1991; Inglis, 1994; Marquardt, 1999; Marsick & O’Neal, 1999; Weinstein, 1995) where the contextual clues selected by participants can be challenged in the safe environment of the action learning set.

2. Construct Pairs

A peer reviewer suggested comparison of individual hierarchy of constructs. Also, Jenkins (1997) suggests “comparative-mapping methods needs to allow the research to move beyond the assumption of internal consistency to the detailed assessment of specific concept groups within the map” (p. S89). Although the individual maps had varying hierarchies, pair constructs do appear to warrant attention. Management activities do affect the perception of self at work, thus the management-identity pair warrants future study.
Also, the strong connection between how individuals identify themselves and their performance warrants attention to the identity-performance connection. Emotions connect and interweave the blanket of meaning over the whole concept of sensemaking. If we assume that without meaning there is no reason to enact and thus sensemaking is moot, then emotions and their connection to meaning needs further study.

3. A template as cryptic for sensemaking

In response to Noer’s (1993; 1998) work with organizational survivors, it is suggested that a study be done to map the constructs of a small sample of survivors to establish a cognitive map of survivor sensemaking constructs. Subsequently this map could be employed as the basis for Noer’s request for an intervention to begin the healing of survivor sickness. Also, it is suggested that the sensemaking model provided by the eight participants of this study be used as a building block for the creation of an intervention for internally moved personnel. In my 22 years of organizational development work in this organization, I suggest that the cognitive map, Figure 35, will provide the kick-start necessary for a meaningful discussion and validation of ideas, feelings, and beliefs for involuntary displaced employees. Also, a future intervention with these 8 participants employing the map at Figure 35 could be the first step in sorting meanings for transformational learning (Mezirow, 1991b; 2000) and a tool to sort equivocation and an enactment for further sensemaking (Weick, 1979; 1995).

Bougon (1992) claims that there exists only one underlying “collective cognitive structure” of a social system and it is expressed in cryptics - those labels that hold
similar, yet different, meanings for individuals (p. 369). These cryptics are claimed to be similar enough to engage employees in social action, but not similar enough to hold all idiosyncratic meanings. Bougon’s notion is reminiscent of Orton & Weick’s (Orton & Weick, 1990) notion of loose coupling. It is suggested that Figure 35 could provide the cryptic for an intervention while allowing the loose coupling necessary for individual interpretation strategies to be challenged.

Participants referred to our organizational culture as based upon a fiscal paradigm rather than their expected people paradigm. A stronger cryptic for an intervention within this organization could be the combination of Barrett’s (2001) constructs on accountability – sense of self, working with others, and job itself - and the constructs from this study. Organizational processes are embedded in employee sensemaking. Addition of Barrett’s findings could be part of the organization's concept map revealing some of the more macro-level concerns of all its employees. The map may even provide our top team with the constructs to challenge basic assumptions and bring about cultural change (Schein, 1985; Schwandt, 1995).

4. A choice of methodologies

In a recent study, Daniels et al. (Daniels, Johnson, & de Chernatony, 2002) returned to their participants and asked them to rate all participants’ idiosyncratic constructs on a five-point Likert-scale to deepen the understanding of managers’ mental models of competition. This would be interesting with the findings in this study, but it is suggested that the micro-level concepts may be more appropriate. The five constructs identified by the participants in this study may be too broad and their power to excite
may become too diffused. The concepts at the statement level; those employed for the second interview could also be employed with the repertory grid technique (Stewart, 1997) to possibly deepen our understanding of the phenomenon under inquiry.

In defense of their choice mixed methodologies in the first study, Daniels et al. (2002) conclude that it may not be possible or desirable to use multiple methodology based upon the research question. It is suggested that for the involuntary reassigned phenomenon that the micro-level concepts could be readily employed with the current participants. Questions of validity and reliability would have to be addressed if a divergence of findings is revealed. Daniels et al. (2002) warn that other research methodologies may be measuring different aspects of cognition. Rating a construct in print is a very different function than making one’s own constructs explicit. As in a survey technique, the reader is led by the constructs proposed by the researcher and not necessarily by individual meaning perspectives.

5. Other contexts for sensemaking

This research has been conducted in a government research, development and engineering laboratory. Public and private sectors are experiencing similar turmoil and as a result organizations are faced with reorganizing, downsizing, rightsizing and all other labels for shifting employees from place to place or out the door. If sensemaking is at the center of human activity, research must continue to study other organizing activities at work.
Conclusion

Will Rogers, the political satirist supposedly remarked “when you find yourself in a hole, the first thing to do is stop digging” which is very similar to Einstein’s notion “we cannot get out of this mess with the thinking that got us into it.” We as HRD specialists and leaders in organizations must help the individual sensemaker get out of the hole s/he and we collectively helped create or accept the costly consequences of employee detachment. There is no cure for “involuntary reassignment blues;” because the individual immediately clouds the sensemaking moment with cues selected through a shroud of anger.

Ilgen & Hollenbeck (1992) define roles as sets of expectations of the role holder and others. Ashforth et al (2000) conclude their study of everyday role changes, of which involuntary reassignment may be included, with “if everyday life is indeed increasingly mediated through numerous, formal roles in organizational settings, it is important that we gain a firmer grasp of the dynamics that govern the frequent and recurring transitions between these roles.” The sensemaking constructs of these individuals in role change may give us an indication of the complexities of sensemaking during these recurring transitions. Organizational change agents, HRD specialists, and leaders have a unique opportunity to affect the lives of the walking wounded during transition by being attentive to the human frailties in sensemaking and provide the sensegiving to help them dig their way out.
Appendix B

Informed Consent Form
Meaning Making and the Involuntarily Reassigned Employee
IRB # U030237

Investigator: Robert A. Richer
Telephone Number: 410-436-5505
Faculty sponsor: Dr. Michael J. Marquardt
Telephone Number: 703-437-0260

I. INTRODUCTION
You are invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide to be a part of this study, you need to understand the risks and benefits. This consent form provides information about the research study. A staff member of the research study will be available to answer your questions and provide further explanations. If you agree to take part in the research study, you will be asked to sign this consent form. This process is known as informed consent.
Your decision to take part in the study is voluntary. You are free to choose whether or not you will take part in the study.

II. PURPOSE
As a student in the The Graduate School of Education and Human Development of The George Washington University, I am carrying out a research study to find out how people make sense of the situation of being involuntarily moved from one position to another in an organization. The investigator is Robert A. Richer.

III. PROCEDURES
The research will be conducted at the US Army Soldier Biological Chemical Command, Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD. You will need to come to three, one and a half hour sessions during the study. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is four and a half hours over the next five weeks. You will be asked to tell your story around the way you adapted to being moved and to the new position.

IV. POSSIBLE RISKS
To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life. Although we have made every effort to minimize this, you may find some questions we ask you (or some procedures we ask you to do) to be upsetting or stressful.

VI. POSSIBLE BENEFITS
You will not get any personal benefit from taking part in this study.
VII. COSTS
There are no costs associated with taking part in this study except for the time you spend with the researcher.

VIII. COMPENSATION
You will not receive compensation for participating in this study.

IX. RIGHT TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY
Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may decide not to begin or to stop participating study at any time. You will be told of any new information about the research study that may cause you to change your mind about participation.

X. CONFIDENTIALITY OF RESEARCH RECORDS
Your records will be confidential. You will not be identified (e.g., name, social security number) in any reports or publications of this study. It is possible that representatives of acting on behalf of the University and/or regulatory agencies may come to GWU to review your information. In that situation, copies of the relevant parts of your records will be released with all identifying information removed. Except for these entities, research study records will be kept confidential unless you authorize their release or if the records are required by law (i.e. court subpoena). Your records will only be used for research purposes.

XI. QUESTIONS
If you have questions about the procedures of this research study, please contact Robert A. Richer at 410-436-5505 during the workday. If you have questions about the informed consent process or any other rights as a research subject, please contact the Assistant Vice President for Health Research, Compliance and Technology Transfer at (202) 994-2995

XII. SIGNATURES
By signing this consent form, you affirm that you have read this informed consent, the study has been explained to you, your questions have been answered, and you agree to take part in this study. You do not give up any of your legal rights by signing this informed consent form. You will receive a copy of this consent form.

__________________________  Date __________
Participant (Print Name)  Signature

XIII. INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT
I certify that the research study has been explained to the above individual by me or my research staff including the purpose, the procedures, the possible risks and the potential benefits associated with participation in this research study. Any questions raised have been answered to the individual's satisfaction.

____________________________  Date _____________
Robert A. Richer, Investigator  Signature
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