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through Translation

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High reliability organizations (HROs) need to collaborate to address risks that transcend organizational boundaries. HRO literature has yet to examine the challenge of creating interorganizational reliability, while collaboration literature can further explore how stakeholder priorities become dominant in collaborations. This study joins these bodies of literature to identify the growing domain of High Reliability Collaborations (HRCs). Drawing from two years of ethnographic research within a community emergency collaboration, the study theorizes that communicative translations constitute HRCs and serve to make sense of HROs and non-HROs as belonging to a shared collaborative framework. These translations are necessary to create reliability but also establish a negotiated order among collaborative stakeholders. This study finds that containing and controlling stakeholders can be an incentive to collaborate and that collaborative decision-making is influenced by stakeholder claims to urgency.

Keywords: Interorganizational collaboration, high reliability organization, communication as constitutive of organizations, emergency management, organizational communication

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As local communities face emergencies that spill over the boundaries of a single organization's responsibility, including increasing climate disasters and threats of violence tied to extremist beliefs, it seems fitting to draw in numerous stakeholders to prepare for these escalating risks (Long, 2018). As a result, US local emergency management offices are now tasked with interorganizational collaboration across government agencies, first responders, and non-emergency personnel that can provide needed expertise and resources (Butts et al., 2012). In this push toward collaboration, members must make sense of different stakeholders' goals and capabilities while also forming a coherent account of what the collaboration does to create a reliable emergency response. Organizational scholarship has already underscored the need for collaboration to respond to complex societal problems (Gray & Purdy, 2018). Simultaneously, high reliability organizing (HRO) research has noted best practices to achieve reliable performance in risky circumstances. HROs are organizations that operate in uncertain environments, in which organizational members should establish a strong culture that recognizes the interdependence of actions to create an error-free performance (Rochlin, 1993). This study calls attention to an under-examined but significant aspect of HRO work that warrants further analysis: the increasing need to create reliability *interorganizationally* to respond to community risks.

To date, collaboration research has encouraged practices that seek to minimize status differences in processes as members voluntarily come together to solve problems (Gray, 1989; Lewis, 2006). However, organizations that engage in high-risk work must also contend with cultures that value hierarchy and clear structure in their attempts to collaborate (Bigley & Roberts, 2001; Jahn & Black, 2017). At issue here is how high reliability organizations adapt and

translate collaboration in uncertain and risky operating environments as HROs and non-HROs attempt to work together. The concept of translation highlights that, in the composition of organizations, multiple conversations link together to orient members to the organization as a text. However, in this scaling up, meanings and understandings are transformed both by context and level of abstraction (Brummans et al., 2013). The issue of how emergency organizations make sense of collaboration is pressing given growing risks that require interorganizational response efforts to ensure community safety.

I introduce high reliability collaborations (HRCs) to reconcile the growing need for risk-oriented collaborations and the notion that collaborations should minimize power asymmetry in communicative processes. Drawing from the communication as constitutive of organizing (CCO) perspective, I argue that informal talk translates HRC priorities to contain certain stakeholders and grant power to stakeholders who can assert the urgency of their priorities. To demonstrate the unique communicative needs of HRCs, I draw from a 2-year ethnographic study of emergency management collaborations. The study's findings introduce the HRC characteristics of committing to an unambiguous mission, viewing collaboration as a risk to be contained through member talk, and prestructuring decision-making. To meet these needs, members translated everyday conversations into a dominant negotiated order of the collaboration's mission, constituting a distinct and decisive mission at the expense of non-HRO interests and priorities.

This study begins by reviewing the literature on interorganizational collaboration and high reliability organizations and draws in particular on the CCO concept of translation. Next, I present data drawn from the case and conclude with a discussion of theoretical implications for viewing collaboration as constituted through translation processes among members. This

analysis advances two contributions to organizational communication scholarship. First, the study demonstrates that HRCs represent a consequential and underexplored type of collaboration. For HRCs, collaboration itself may be treated as a necessary but risky process that threatens reliability and can, therefore, be used to contain and control stakeholders. Previous discussions of motivation to collaborate assume that organizations collaborate to capitalize on different stakeholder knowledge and resources. In the case of HRCs, collaboration instead is used to control stakeholders operating in risky environments. Second, this study extends theory about power and negotiated order in interorganizational collaboration, showing how translation is one communicative process in which claims to urgency can strengthen corresponding stakeholders' power. In this study, talk about collaborative members' missions led to the deprioritization of community care missions during disaster response. In the everyday emergence of negotiated order during relationship-building, HRCs also determine their priorities in ways that can have lasting consequences for the communities they serve.

Collaborative Challenges and Opportunities for HRCs

Collaboration has been defined by Barbara Gray (1989) as the joining of stakeholders who bring their expertise, resources, and competencies to a shared problem to create solutions that no single organization could envision or execute alone. This cooperative relationship among organizations is not something that could be purchased or forced by hierarchical mechanisms of control (Hardy et al., 1998). Instead, collaborations exist among members who voluntarily engage with each other (Keyton et al., 2008; Lewis, 2006). Lewis (2006) has noted a trend in collaboration scholarship to focus on successful collaborations and how collaborative relationships "tend to emphasize equality" (Lewis, 2006, p. 219). Power imbalances can create distrust among partners and hinder collaborative efforts (Hardy et al., 1998; Huxham & Vangen,

2005). For Gray and Purdy (2018), power imbalances "if not adequately addressed, can be a primary reason why partnerships fail" (p. x). Previous studies, then, have suggested minimizing power differences among stakeholders to facilitate collaborative success. This study takes an interpretive stance on collaboration: it is interested in organizational relationships that members perceive to be collaborative versus scholarly assumptions about collaborative activity. As a result, the study of HRCs is interested in how members make sense of power differences—as a barrier to collaboration or not.

If power differences can inhibit collaboration, scholars have proposed using ethical communication practices to overcome this challenge. Heath and Isbell (2017) argued that ideal collaborative practices should involve "consensus decision making" and "space for dialogue" (p. 33). This literature highlights that it is not enough to get stakeholders to participate; the communication practices involved in collaboration should include open communication (Koschmann et al., 2012). Hardy et al. (1998) suggested that "collaborative decision making must reflect the relative autonomy of those involved and extend participation to all members of the group – coercive or authoritarian decision making undermines the collaborative initiative" (p. 20). However, Keyton et al. (2008) critiqued the implicit assumption in this literature that if members engage in a deliberative process, they will create successful, collaborative outcomes, including shared power. Taking a communicative view, these practice approaches have highlighted that collaboration is not merely a preexisting structure; instead, it occurs when participants join their organizations together through talk.

Creating a shared understanding of collaboration seems essential; however, negotiating a shared vision necessarily involves making choices about the collaboration's priorities, especially when joining members from different organizational backgrounds. Scholars have explored these

issues in their discussion of collaborative authoritative texts. Koschmann et al. (2012) argued that successful collaborations create agency on behalf of their collective and influence the perception and actions taken in the problem domain. Creating a coherent understanding of the collaboration is important to achieving this influence, as is delegitimizing preexisting practices and ways of thinking that impede collaboration among members (Koschmann & Burk, 2016). Heath and Isbell (2017) similarly explored the importance of "shared representations" in collaboration, which express the group's vision or mission statement, values, and commitments. Heath and Isbell suggested that stakeholders share their values to create agreed-upon sets of principles to guide future decision-making. Shared representations are also essential for HROs, as creating a shared frame for interpreting unfolding events facilitates a coordinated response to that event.

Given the importance of creating this shared understanding, collaborative stakeholders can use different potential sources of influence to weigh in on that mission (Heath & Isbell, 2017). Studies using stakeholder theory have argued that potential collaboration members can draw on decision-making power (e.g., due to legal recognition), access to needed resources, and/or discursive legitimacy (i.e., the socially sanctioned ability to speak "on behalf" of a particular issue or group) (Hardy & Phillips, 1998). Authors have especially noted the link between control of resources and stakeholder influence, as capitalizing on needed resources is commonly seen as a key motivator for collaborating (Koschmann & Kopcyznski, 2017; Lewis et al., 2003; Woo & Leonardi, 2018). In terms of discursive legitimacy, collaborators may attempt to speak on behalf of the collaboration, for example, by invoking the collaboration's shared identity to justify decisions (Hoelscher, 2019). To these potential sources of influence, Mitchell et al. (1997) added urgency, meaning stakeholders who can persuade others that their claims and

viewpoints of the problem possess exigence are also more likely to obtain influence.

Collaborations must decide what problems fall into their domain and how to create influence

over those problems. Establishing these goals can include a struggle by stakeholders over

meaning and decision-making (Hoelscher et al., 2017), which in HROs also includes a struggle

to interpret and understand crises (Hällgren et al., 2017).

HRCs face numerous risks, which create both opportunities and potential conflicts as

members attempt to solve community problems. HRCs pose an important case study to explore

how multiple potential sources of stakeholder power, including decision-making power,

discursive legitimacy, and claims to urgency, are negotiated and influence the collaborative

framework. Through the study of HRCs, scholars can ask how the collaboration is influenced by

stakeholder claims to urgency and how the organizational field of HROs comes to influence the

collaboration.

High Reliability Collaborations and Negotiated Order

Within the problem domain of emergency response and risk management, communities

are aware of an increasing need for collaboration across partners and sectors. However, as these

organizations respond, they must negotiate historical ties to bureaucratic and military structures

(Bigley & Roberts, 2001; Jahn & Black, 2017). Gray (1989) has cautioned that not every

situation calls for collaboration. Despite this warning, the US government has dictated that

emergency response groups must collaborate across community stakeholders as part of

increasing calls for "whole community" approaches that favor resilience over preparedness and

response frameworks (Rice & Jahn, 2020). The legacy of high reliability organizing poses a

challenge to the attainment of collaborative ideals.

A systematic treatment of high reliability organizations is beyond my purpose here (see LaPorte, 1996; Rochlin, 1993; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015; Weick et al., 2008). Instead, I focus on how previous HRO research has addressed decision-making, hierarchy, and negotiated order, as these are critical challenges in collaborating across organizations. Work in this area has focused around several themes: (a) high reliability stems from a strong culture of learning and vigilance, (b) decision-making dynamics must be both well established and flexible, and (c) through communication, a negotiated order can emerge in interactions among members to meet these decision-making needs. Studies of reliability have focused on in-the-moment operations that can minimize errors as they unfold (Rochlin, 1993). In emergency management, reliability is prized as organizational members seek to create failure-free operations that respond to emergencies, anticipate unfolding events, and hone operations to correct and mitigate consequences (Haddow et al., 2017). HRO research has emphasized the relationship between group norms, organizational learning, and reliability. HRO members must understand the organization's goals and recognize how their actions fit into the system as a whole (Weick et al., 2008). The need to create a strong culture can pose a challenge to HRCs as multiple cultures collide and interact in the new collaborative environment.

As a result of their complex operating environment, HROs must retain the tension between predictable structures and flexibility in decision-making. While HROs necessarily contain hierarchical structures, they also cope with surprises by supporting improvisation among members (Weick et al., 2008). As a result, decision-making in HROs is often decentralized and takes place on the level where actions must occur (LaPorte, 1996). HRO research has suggested that members should defer to those with subject-matter expertise in cases where improvisational decisions are necessary (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015). However, in practice, the presence of

hierarchies in HROs makes it difficult to defer to low-status members (Jahn & Black, 2017; Rice, 2018). Still, HRO decision-making is an important practice that enacts the operating environment along with learned reliability practices (Jahn, 2019).

HRO literature has already acknowledged the informal emergence of hierarchy in decision-making, and the concept of negotiated order helps to explain how HROs come to these decisions. The negotiated order approach considers negotiation in interaction as fundamental to organizing (Strauss, 1988). Originally applied to hospital settings, negotiations among members focus on the organizational norms and values that should apply to a given situation. Negotiations are more likely when openings in rules and policies create uncertainty and flexibility (Svensson, 1996). As a result, in HROs, tactical decisions are more likely to be negotiable during moments of uncertainty, leading to bargaining among members (LaPorte, 1996). Schulman (1993) suggested that HROs can incorporate both a strong structure and slack in the face of fluctuations by formally embracing negotiation as a crucial part of reliability. Negotiated order helps explore how HROs collaborate by acknowledging order and hierarchy as both created and changing in member interaction.

Like HRO literature, collaboration scholars have turned to negotiated order to consider how broader institutional fields influence collaborations. From this perspective, scholarship has focused on how collaborations achieve a shared understanding of their problems, why they adopt the structures they do, and how they seek legitimacy from institutional actors (Wood & Gray, 1991). Further, negotiated order highlights that changes in the environment require responses from the collaboration. For HRCs like emergency management collaborations, institutional fields can influence the group to seek collaboration but also encourage isomorphism to the field norms of reliability. As such, this study also creates an opportunity to examine how organizational

fields and institutions influence cross-sector collaborations. Given the potential clash of these institutions, this study asks how negotiated order emerges in HRCs and is influenced by professional and institutional norms.

Despite these valuable insights, this literature reveals key shortcomings. At issue is a broader question of how high reliability organizations must work with non-HROs to establish collaborative relationships. To date, collaboration literature has presented the idea of collaboration as minimizing power differences in processes, while high reliability literature has broadly ignored the need to create interorganizational reliability and shared sensemaking frames (Brummans et al., 2008). Collaboration may not be voluntary for HROs, as collaborations are required to meet legal statutes in high-risk industries (Barbour & James, 2015). The vast majority of HRO research has explored intraorganizational attempts at reliability by a single organization within an uncertain environment (with some exceptions, see Jahn & Black, 2017; Roberts & Bea, 2001). Neither approach satisfyingly answers questions about how HROs work together to establish shared frames for collaboration in risky environments. Acknowledging negotiated order is necessary to understand how everyday talk transforms from member interactions into a workable collaboration among HRO stakeholders. As a result, this empirical study asks how HROs work together to create reliability interorganizationally. Studying HRCs opens up the potential to consider how claims to reliability and urgency influence collaborative decision-making. In the next section, I turn to the communicative constitution of organizations (CCO) and translation to develop a conceptual framework of HRCs.

Toward a Constitutive View of High Reliability Collaborations

An organizational communication perspective is interested in the dynamics surrounding the translation of various missions in collaboration. To make sense of different and potentially

competing stakeholders, these stakeholders' interests must be transformed and brought into a

shared collaborative framework. As mentioned previously, authoritative texts are needed to

create a collective identity for the collaboration. Authoritative texts are created as conversations

and collaborative activities "scale up" and come to stand in for the collaboration itself.

Scholarship conducted in the CCO tradition has emphasized that in this process, conversations

and texts experience transformations in meaning as they are translated—or used, interpreted, and

reinterpreted over time. This focus on translation can enhance our understanding of how

collaborative members create intersubjective meanings for their work by drawing upon existing

and emerging discourses. I draw on the concept of translation to explain how HRCs routinely

negotiate, accommodate, and transform member differences to constitute their collaborations.

Translation

Scholars identified with the Montreal School of CCO are particularly interested in the

text/conversation relationship. In their work, conversations are depicted as emergent, everyday

activities through which speakers orient to and coordinate with each other in immediate

situations. Texts are records of such conversations, which become abstracted from those

situations. Once removed from specific interactions, texts thus become the basis for future

conversation. CCO theorizing frames translation as necessary to this process through which

conversations become texts. Here, translation is viewed as "the inductive stitching together of a

multiverse of communicative practices that scale up to compose an organization" (Brummans et

al., 2013, p. 177). Translation occurs in the transformation of medium and form. It involves both

losses of distinctions and "new readings that conform to the realities of the new situation and its

favored ways of making sense" (Brummans et al., 2013, p. 177). In translation, potential

understandings of ongoing interaction are subtracted from and added to organizational

repertoires, as communicative practices join and scale up to the textual level. As texts become distanced from their speakers, they can be used to coordinate practice in new contexts— however, these texts are always imperfectly adapted. Translation thus occurs in multiple activities that constitute organizing and permeate an organization's network of practices. The concept of translation emphasizes that the abstraction of conversation necessarily changes the meanings of immediate discourses. Similarly, in everyday doings and sayings of collaborative members, intentional and unintentional changes in meaning occur (Feldman, 2000).

Translation is also an essential process in the ongoing constitution of *interorganizational* texts. Cooren (2001) has argued that translation animates coalition building, as actors associate their respective expressions of interest with achieving a common purpose. Translation is also key to sensemaking, serving as the process by which someone or something becomes inserted into another actor's evolving narrative schema. Translation, then, can both define the collaboration's goals and be used to align the diverse efforts of members toward those goals. Constituting interorganizational collaboration requires continuous attempts at intersubjective understanding of the interorganizational text.

Translation is relevant to HRO collaborations because translation from texts back to everyday practice is essential as texts instruct organizational members on safety (Jahn, 2016). Additionally, translation highlights the mechanisms by which HRCs engage in negotiation of order—in other words, for HRCs, tactical decisions must emerge through negotiation among members as challenges arise. In sum, a communicative perspective on translation helps explain the transformations of meaning that must take place for high reliability organizations to collaborate. This study asks how HRCs engage in translations to make sense of stakeholders and constitute interorganizational reliability. Studying translation creates empirical insight into the

ordering of HRC priorities that can then facilitate reliable performance. Next, I present an empirical case of high reliability collaboration to illustrate this framework.

<div align="center">**Methods**</div>

This study draws from two years of ethnographic observation and interviews at an emergency management collaboration in a populous county in the Western United States. County Emergency Management Collaboration (CEMC)[i] is located in a city in the Western US with a population of approximately 100,000 people. The collaboration existed to prepare for emergencies that could impact various populations of the county. CEMC had five full-time employees tasked with coordinating other county employees, first responders, and nonprofit volunteers during emergencies. The county is composed of several smaller cities and suburban towns, along with expansive mountain and grassland areas. The county municipalities are typically threatened each summer by the possibility of wildfires that require the collaboration to bring in numerous stakeholders to manage the response. Additionally, CEMC responded recently when the county experienced catastrophic flooding. Data for this project was collected prior to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. The group was robust and met monthly—meetings often involved 30 members, with a peak of about 50. The site was uniquely concerned with conducting translations—that is, soliciting, interpreting, prioritizing, and reconciling member organizations' distinctive needs.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred over two periods: first, in the fall of 2015, and then between the summer of 2017 and fall of 2018. Data collection included ethnographic observation and semistructured interviews. I observed 182 hours, leading to the writing of 194 pages of single-spaced, thick description fieldnotes. Observations included monthly meetings, prescheduled

staffing during public events, exercises, and emergency management training courses.

Observation focused on practices, or everyday doings and sayings of members (Nicolini, 2012), that facilitated translation of various stakeholders into the frame of collaboration To observe this, I looked at practices that members deemed "collaborative" in their interactions and took notes on how these designations invoked particular ideals of the collaboration. Here, I took the starting point that translation occurs in the transformation of the semiotic form (e.g., in changes from specific conversations to generalizable texts, Brummans et al., 2013). I focused my observation on communicative practices that appeared to co-orient different members to the same organizational worldview (e.g., shared risks) and inserted multiple members' actions into a shared interorganizational account (Cooren, 2001). This observation focused on how translation forms a critical process in the constitution of collaborative texts (Lewis, 2006). Observation of translation focused on communicative "scaling up" of local practices to form a collectivity that could be subsequently distanciated and used to create procedures and standardization within the collaboration (Brummans et al., 2013).

In addition to ethnographic observation, I conducted 30 semistructured interviews. Interviews lasted between 37 minutes and 84 minutes. Members belonged to various organizations, spanning CEMC paid staff members, county sheriff's officers and local law enforcement, county employees, and nonprofit and volunteer members (see table 1). After obtaining informed consent, I digitally recorded interviews, which I later transcribed. Interview questions asked participants to characterize their collaboration and their involvement in the collaboration (e.g., "Tell me how you got started working with CEMC?"), and asked participants to describe the priorities of the collaboration (e.g., "What sort of concerns does CEMC try to prepare for? How do you prepare?").

HIGH RELIABILITY COLLABORATIONS

--table 1 about here--

Analysis

Data analysis used three main coding steps during coding, borrowed from Strauss and Corbin's (1998) grounded theory. Open coding was done in NVIVO data analysis software and yielded 113 codes that generally described the "what" of the scenes observed and interview answers. Next, I used axial coding, comparing codes to codes to flesh out the relationship among codes. Finally, I used selective coding that related subordinate codes to build aggregate themes from the data. I used thick description to create *resonance* in the written observations (Tracy, 2010). I crystallized my findings by considering both field notes and interviews to look for consensus while still acknowledging that perspectives are necessarily partial and incomplete (Ellingson, 2009; Tracy, 2010).

After conducting open coding, I noticed that members spent a great deal of time explaining—to me and each other—what their collaboration did and did not do. In explaining what the collaboration did, members produced accounts of what different subgroups of members were like and how their interests differed. I noticed these accounts in interviews and then recognized their ties to similar events associated with other contexts, including practices related to hazard identification, trainings, exercises, and meetings. Working from these open-level codes, I started to ask what these accounts of collaboration had in common and how they affected the members' senses of their respective identities and interests. During selective coding, I looked *around* each practice to see what previous events these accounts responded to and how others reacted to their performance. Initially, I identified multiple practices that included characterizing what other members were "like." However, in selective coding, I found that the purposes of the practices tended to overlap. I pared the themes down into three functions of

translation for the HRC (see figure 1). Strategic categorization among participants functioned to create and reinforce a clear collaborative mission. Discussion of priorities among member categories oriented members toward potential risks created by collaboration. Finally, the creation of a clear mission through member characterization also served to prestructure decision-making among members.

--figure 1 about here--

Results

To a significant extent, CEMC members talked about what their collaboration did and did not do by characterizing different priorities of members of their collaboration. During these explanations, members repeatedly prioritized first responder (police, fire, and paramedic) functions of the collaboration. This prioritization was, in turn, complemented by accounts that minimized other functions of the group, including cultivating long-term disaster recovery, providing human services, ensuring public health, and integrating nonprofit missions such as providing shelter and raising donations.

Health and nonprofit agency members I interviewed also seemed to accept this ordering by buying into this account. Here, related practices among participants included identifying hazards, instructing others during training scenarios, and informally characterizing other members in everyday talk. First responders primarily performed these practices for other members of nonprofit organizations and health agencies. Those other members acted as a receptive audience, and their responses reinforced member differences by effectively deferring and disavowing the priority of health and nonprofit missions. These practices led to the consistent translation of multiple identities and interests into an account that suggested the domination of the collaboration by the subgroup of HROs.

By consistently asserting and differentiating the identities of various members and groups involved, CEMC members translated member differences into a dominant ranking of collaboration priorities. In this process, members characterized each other in ways that created a ranking of organizations involved and their corresponding missions. I observed members valuing these relative priorities on multiple occasions—including in explicit discussions during trainings (three observations). Similarly, during the three hazard and risk identification meetings I observed, someone broached public health concerns only once. Finally, in the seven meetings I attended that were devoted to planning and conducting exercises, all of the related exercises (except for one scenario related to anthrax) were fire-related. For the CEMC members, this consistent ordering of identities and missions did not appear detrimental to their operations. Instead, these translations facilitated successful collaboration by serving three purposes: creating an unambiguous mission, containing the potential risks of collaboration, and pre-structuring decision making and member interactions.

Commitment to an Unambiguous Mission

Relationship building in HRCs is essential to understanding how various members and actions interrelate. HRCs must work to create a common operating picture and shared goals to achieve reliable operations. Participants seemed to create this understanding by translating different member goals into an ordering of collaborative priorities. Through everyday talk, members came to understand various collaborative partners and their role in response efforts, and in turn, the mission of the collaboration. These translations created a common operating picture while also ordering the priorities of the group.

CEMC members made sense of differences by translating individual member qualities into generalizable information about their affiliated organizations' priorities. Stakeholder

descriptions helped members to interrelate and created a dominant understanding of CEMC's

mission as reliability-focused. For example, many members talked about their identities and

tendencies as first responders. Police and firefighters involved in the collaboration often thought

through "worst-case scenarios" and prepared as if those scenarios were certain to occur. As Phil,

a police officer, told me, it was a question of "when, not if" security threats like mass shootings

occur in the county. This mindset was so prevalent that police agencies working with CEMC had

started treating occurrences like community events as mass casualty plans, in case an active

shooting occurred at the event (fieldnote). Members like Stewart, a police officer, saw these

plans as common sense. During his interview, Stewart told me that "car into crowd…shooting

into crowd…people go 'man, I can't believe that happened.' I'm like 'weird, I'm at Mandalay

Bay [hotel in Las Vegas] this summer looking up, and I was like...man, somebody could do that

[shoot from the hotel tower].' That's not unique to me, that's my profession" (interview).

Stewart referenced the Las Vegas Harvest Festival Shooting here, indicating that it was not

beyond his imagination that threats like that could occur. First responders like Stewart translated

this mindset into a characteristic of their organizational affiliation and treated it as an asset to the

collaboration. The ability to imagine threats, anticipate surprises, and react quickly to respond

was a prized part of the first responders' high reliability culture. First responders tied their focus

on reliability to the collaboration's success.

Conversely, strategic translations of health and human service missions subordinated

human services and nonprofits under the core mission of CEMC, which members defined as the

immediate emergency response. As Rachel, from the sheriff's office, explained, CEMC saw the

immediate need to attend to deaths and injuries caused by emergencies as their main priority

(interview). Members repeatedly mentioned immediate rescue and medical care as top priorities, followed by incident stabilization and protection of property.

In contrast to this goal, CEMC members often described nonprofits and human services as a resource for the collaboration. They translated nonprofit and human service missions as peripheral missions to CEMC by labeling these organizations as "support" (fieldnote). Nonprofit and human service workers seemed to accept this framing. Alex, who worked for a nonprofit, went so far as to call CEMC his "client" during responses. Alex's role during an emergency was to set up shelters, and he said the key to collaborating was to "know who your customer is. Know what...the key thing is knowing what the response objectives are. Being on the same page, and agree on your objectives" (interview). Alex saw the collaboration as a customer, saw objectives as created in the collaboration process, and seemed unbothered by the potential for contradiction between these frameworks. Kiley, a human services employee, shared numerous stories of creative acts by nonprofits and volunteers that helped CEMC, including "donation management, no one does that, but it's gonna come back to bite you during a big event" (interview). Translating nonprofit and human service into support services served to deprioritize their missions. However, members like Kiley seemed to say that their work was still important and pushed back on the top priorities by noting that first responders could not do it all. Despite the way that their missions were decentralized, nonprofit and volunteer organizations seemed to value participation because it gave them a chance to fulfill their goals of serving the community. They saw their work as useful even if CEMC did not treat it as a focus, as Kiley explains in the above quote. Deprioritization was accomplished by characterizing health and nonprofit groups as peripheral, secondary supporters—a communicative move that held up reliability goals as the unambiguous top priority for the collaboration.

Collaboration as a Potential Risk

Additionally, HRCs face challenges in their use of collaboration and may view collaboration as a potential threat to creating reliability. Collaboration itself introduces uncertainty into interactions and responses. In response to this, HRCs engage in translations that communicatively contain the risks of collaboration by discussing when collaboration is appropriate and from what stakeholders. Translations in this collaboration moved from member descriptions to establishing a ranking among members of the collaboration. Using these translations, members then deemed certain types of participation as risky to the creation of reliability.

In particular, CEMC members described nonprofits as unpredictable and impulsive – as letting their drive to help others get in the way of the collaboration's broader mission. CEMC was very concerned about controlling access to disaster sites—members often referenced past incidents from around the world where people had posed as members of nonprofit groups, for example, to access and loot damaged homes after Hurricane Katrina (fieldnote). Members translated these anecdotes into a broader understanding of nonprofits as potentially obtrusive – and thus uncooperative and untrustworthy. It was quite common for CEMC members to remind themselves (and each other) of the importance of not interfering with a response that was outside of one's expertise area. One volunteer named Jake said, "You know the Red Cross and Salvation Army—the real issue is when you get the faith-based organizations…They're there to help, and you know they'll play nice when they can, but if they feel they aren't being played nice with, they'll skirt and go around, to do what they feel they're being called to do" (interview). In other words, if CEMC didn't call the faith-based organizations and give them specific assignments, they might show up anyway. CEMC members said that if they did, they could potentially get "in

the way" of first responders, replicate efforts in one area when other areas needed more help, or

enter the scene with untrustworthy people (fieldnote). Through talk, members translated the self-

starting, human services missions of nonprofit groups as a potential risk to the collaborative

mission.

Talking about what other members were "like" went far beyond mundane sensemaking

and relationship building. It was also political in its effects. According to this account, nonprofit

and health groups were overzealous and interested in superfluous concerns that were not part of

the initial response. As a result, CEMC should contain them so that they could not impede the

group's reliability efforts. For example, CEMC often talked about the importance of all

nonprofits "checking in" at a particular location before they began their work to account for all

groups involved. Jake, a volunteer, told me that nonprofits would cooperate with this system

because they wanted to get to the scene to start helping (fieldnote). CEMC contained the "risk"

of these groups by fostering interdependence. By casting nonprofit and health groups as at best

supporters and at worst creators of equivocality and errors, members also demarcated certain

types of participation that could have been viewed as collaborative but were instead seen as risky

to the creation of reliability.

Prestructuring Decision-Making

Finally, HRCs face needs to operate in complex, fast-paced, and uncertain environments

and value unambiguous decision-making as a result. Translations of group interests into a

dominant mission also serve to prestructure the HRC's decision making, facilitating high-level

awareness of the collaboration's goals. That is, this practice created patterns of interaction that

facilitated the selection of some decision options over others. High reliability collaborations are

particularly predisposed to perform this practice because managing the urgent and chaotic nature

of their task environment requires the execution of established protocols. In emergency management, members typically do not have the luxury of extended time for conducting deliberation during emergencies. As a result, in member interactions, decision-making repeatedly enacted first response priorities as top priorities.

This prestructuring of participant interaction could be seen in various scenarios and exercises that members used to think through emergencies. For example, during one training, class participants were asked to work in groups to respond to various scenarios. The classroom setting created some tensions as participants tried to negotiate what "should" be done to respond to possible incidents. In one such event, I participated with a group working through a scenario of a fire breaking out at an elementary school. The table for this activity consisted of two nonprofit volunteers (Jake and Penelope), one wildland firefighter (Amanda), and myself. The scenario told us that the fire was of unknown origin and could have been caused by a bomb. As a result, the scenario instructed us to consider our range of available resources and to prioritize our sequence of responses. Penelope and Jake started talking about the need to order crisis counselors to the school and create a point for parent reunification (this resource was not listed in the scenario). Amanda, the wildland firefighter, pushed back, saying that we should order construction equipment (which was listed in the scenario) to start clearing the scene to look for injured people trapped inside and to establish the cause of the fire and put it out. Jake was adamant that we needed to get counselors on the scene right away. Amanda instead suggested we order school buses to take the kids home and that we could order crisis counselors to the scene later. Jake pointed out again and again that the scenario was that the fire started around 10:00 AM and that we could not put kids on the school bus to go home to empty houses, especially after such a traumatic event. Eventually, Amanda started filling out our practice resource order

form anyway, prioritizing the construction equipment. Jake and Penelope talked about the need for counselors, while Amanda kept repeating that we could order that resource later.

When it came time to debrief after the scenario, Donna, a CEMC staff member, told me that she felt our interaction had illustrated how nonprofit organizations thought. She had come around to talk to our table during the exercise. She told the group that "realistically, the Command Post isn't doing reunification and counseling; what they're concerned about is the first responders." This comment effectively disciplined the nonprofit members of our table. By pressing members to think about what was "realistic" in the scenarios, leaders asked them to accept the given order of priorities and to agree to these values before a real emergency occurred. Describing and differentiating participants was thus not just about navigating and understanding who was in the collaboration. It was also a way to facilitate "success" by prioritizing certain group priorities and ways of thinking over others. In translation, first responders' interests were framed as the correct top priority. The practice of training collaboratively ensured this outcome by reinforcing that first response work was the dominant priority of the organization. Agreeing to this value ahead of time had the potential to allow for diffuse decision-making throughout the collaboration during emergencies as members were already aware of the central collaborative mission.

Discussion

This study invites continued research on HRCs by offering a framework for understanding the production of high reliability frames through processes of translation. The three themes presented in the data demonstrate how HRCs orient toward particular images of shared priorities and activities. HRCs respond to their demanding and uncertain environments by engaging in multiple translations to make sense of collaboration among disparate stakeholders.

Most prominently, for collaboration scholars, the findings demonstrate that capitalizing on stakeholder resources and expertise is not the only motive to collaborate—collaboration can also serve to contain and control stakeholders. As HROs collaborate with non-HROs, these organizations assimilate into the collaboration by allowing their missions to be deprioritized in communication. Additionally, the study demonstrates that claims to urgency lead to increased influence for corresponding collaboration stakeholders, inviting further research about how stakeholders claim power. Finally, the study highlights how in negotiated order processes, the HRC's mission is constituted in ways that prioritize the professional field of HROs. For HRO scholars, the presented case also moves research on reliability beyond single organizational boundaries to demonstrate how translations constitute interorganizational sensemaking frames oriented toward reliability.

The Need for Interorganizational Reliability

This study introduces the concept of HRCs and identifies the communicative strategies members use to cope with challenges to collaborating in high reliability work. In HROs, collaboration itself appears as a risk that must be contained, creating the need to establish a robust central mission and prestructure decision-making. These translations demonstrate that even as HROs collaborate, the paramilitary structure of risk-oriented organizations can inhibit more egalitarian outcomes of collaboration. Multiple practices present in this study demonstrate that while emergency management organizations value collaboration, they also seek to contain collaboration to maintain order and clarity of command. Jahn and Black (2017) argued that while hierarchy is unavoidable in HROs, communicative practices can overcome these barriers and create a climate of open information sharing. In this study, however, it was clear that participants

saw creating enough negotiated order, rather than overcoming hierarchy, as the challenge brought on by collaborating.

For HRO scholarship, this study also pushes the boundaries around reliability from intraorganizational to interorganizational. There is a growing need to address wicked problems that require multi-organizational responses (Gray & Purdy, 2018). During rapidly unfolding events, collaborations face high-stakes needs for coordination through communication. With few exceptions (see Bigley & Roberts, 2001; Jahn & Black, 2017), HRO scholarship has focused on how single organizations create reliability. This study responds to calls to move beyond single-organization boundaries in organizational communication research generally and in studies of sensemaking in particular (Brummans et al., 2008). The findings demonstrate that HRCs work to create shared sensemaking frames before emergencies to then use to work together during emergencies. Establishing a shared sensemaking frame is both challenging and essential to coordinate activities among different organizations in the collaborative environment. Participants in this study prioritized shared frames over acknowledging different stakeholder goals and activities.

Finally, collaboration itself was deemed potentially risky by the HROs involved and was translated to fit within the constraints of the HRO frame. Members emphasized the need for everyone to understand their place within the system (Bigley & Roberts, 2001) to create stability of interpretations during unfolding, fast-paced situations (Schulman, 1993). Thus, members sought to negotiate an order that created a dominant framework of the collaborative mission. Member characterizations of health and human service members translated these organizational values into secondary roles subsumed under the mission. Collaboration itself, then, was translated to fit the high reliability environment. Beyond creating priorities, the HRC also placed

limits on how collaboration should occur based on situational needs. Members did not see this limit as an issue and instead emphasized that getting everyone "on the same page" was essential to collaborating. As such, talk that seemed to contain collaboration also served to foster interdependence among members. Attendance to how systems interrelate is a key principle for HROs (Weick & Roberts, 1993). In HRCs, translations appear to facilitate understanding of how members' actions impact reliability and serve to fit member actions in the collaborative frame.

While negotiations of priorities did occur, the lens of translation demonstrates that through everyday talk, members identified priorities and created a dominant mission that predetermined the outcomes of in-the-moment decision making. As HROs increasingly seek collaboration with non-HROs, the transformation into an HRC can establish a new negotiated order where HROs retain top priority in the collaboration.

Collaborating to Contain Stakeholders

Additionally, this study generates insight for collaboration researchers by exploring how collaborations contain stakeholders to address risk, demonstrating how a professional field can influence collaborative frames, and providing empirical support for the establishment of shared representations in collaboration. HRCs are an important context to understand how collaborations manage stressors. Weick et al. (2008) suggested that HROs create insight into effective processes in stressful conditions, which all organizations can and do face. Here, HRCs open the door to the study of collaborations operating in hazardous environments and through crises. To contain risk, the HRC used communicative practices that ensured all stakeholders were on the same page and would work within a common operating picture during a crisis. These findings have important implications for the broader domain of interorganizational collaboration

and encourage further exploration of how collaborations address risk and crisis situations, whether they belong to the domain of HROs or not.

In particular, this study troubles the assumption that stakeholders are motivated to collaborate solely to share resources and expertise to address a shared problem (Gray & Purdy, 2018) by demonstrating how collaboration can also serve to control stakeholders. Stakeholder theory has already complicated resource-dependency views of collaboration (Koschmann & Kopcyznski, 2017). Communication scholars can increase understanding of stakeholder relationships by considering how power is attributed to certain resources and produced in stakeholder relationships (Koschmann & Kopcyznski, 2017). This case adds to this line of literature by demonstrating that stakeholders can be invited to collaborate to constrain and supervise their activity around a problem domain. Emergency management collaborators noted that if they did not invite certain nonprofit organizations, those organizations might show up to the emergency scene and operate independently. Thus, collaborators saw relationship-building with these stakeholders as an effective way to control their activities by encouraging practices of accountability, like checking in with other members. This study highlights a previously unidentified motivation to collaborate in the form of containing stakeholders.

This study also demonstrates empirically how a professional field's claims to urgency come to influence shared frames of the collaboration's priorities. More than claims to power or legitimacy, the ability to claim time-sensitive concerns seemed to lead to the greatest influence for stakeholders. Here, reliability became the agreed-upon value that then influenced future decision-making. Brummans et al. (2008) have suggested that the framing of conflicts is influenced by the stakeholders' motivations, including the organizations and professions they represent. This study presents an empirical case of how collaborations construct sensemaking

frames and how professional identities influence those frames. Establishing collaborative frames

is important to HRCs, as incorrect frames can lead to catastrophic errors (Cornelissen et al.,

2014). In this study, however, professional identities also seemed to motivate stakeholders whose

missions were deprioritized. Like Barbour and Manly's (2016) study of emergency volunteers,

volunteers and nonprofits struggled to create legitimate claims to the central mission in this site.

However, even as their missions were decentralized, health, human service workers, and

volunteers did communicate in ways that granted them expertise over activities like sheltering

and grief counseling. Nonprofits and volunteer groups had control of a critical resource (e.g., the

volunteers who had sheltering resources) but accepted the first responder claims to urgency and

the account that they were supporters. These stakeholders seemed motivated to collaborate

within the HRC due to their interest in serving the community (Heath & Isbell, 2017) even if

they did not have as much influence over the central mission as first responders. In this process

of sensemaking, the deprioritized groups seemed to accept that HROs had the most impactful

claims to stakeholder urgency (Mitchell et al., 1997). This case demonstrates that the

professional field of HROs was both used by those practitioners and accepted by others in the

collaboration as ordering shared priorities. Claims to urgency strengthened certain collaborative

members' power, inviting future research into how stakeholders claim power in collaborations.

Further, this study adds to our understanding of how shared representations are

constituted through translations. As Heath and Isbell (2017) suggest, collaborations may benefit

from voicing values before making decisions to create solutions that are agreeable to multiple

stakeholders. Shared representations of the collaboration's goals and identity can be ambiguous

so long as they are meaningful enough to connect participants (Heath & Isbell, 2017). Here,

shared representations may also become dominant representations when one group and set of

interests emerge in the negotiated order of collaboration. The shared frame of the reliability goals

meant that members could make decentralized decisions during an emergency, knowing that all

stakeholders understood the central goal. Thus, the collaboration's preestablished values

continued to organize members, serving to facilitate decision-making at the lowest level.

This study adds to understanding of power in collaboration by using translation to

highlight how different levels of influence emerge in collaborative processes. Using

ethnographic observation enhanced understanding of how various practices of translation "scaled

up" to form the interorganizational mission. Translations are not value-neutral, even if the

practices that constitute translation are unintentional. Translations that defined the mission of the

emergency management collaborations perpetuated the preferred HRO practices of dominant

group members. This study thus advances understanding of the ways that stakeholders can

support their interests in collaboration.

Directions for Future Research

This study has several limitations that invite future follow-up studies of HRCs. First, the

study was a long-term, qualitative study of a single HRC. While this created depth of

understanding of the participants' views and communication activities, studies across multiple

HRCs could establish cross-cutting themes and challenges and further characterize HRCs as a

unique area. Further, high reliability is a need across multiple sectors beyond emergency

management (e.g., wildland firefighting teams, nuclear power plants, and air traffic controllers).

These industries and organizations may face differing needs to collaborate and must do so with

different stakeholders. This study is intended as a starting point to study the growing need for

reliability in collaborations. It is certainly not an exhaustive list of needs or contexts that HRCs

may face. Additionally, this study theorizes about activities undertaken to create reliability, but

the HRC studied did not experience a major crisis during the observation period. As a result, it is difficult to say how the negotiated order might have involved further translations in an emergency.

Conclusion

This study advances that high reliability collaborations are an essential and underexplored type of interorganizational collaboration that brings HROs and non-HROs into contact to work together. HRCs engaged in translation of informal member talk into a negotiated order of dominant priorities that contained certain stakeholders. For collaboration scholarship, this study demonstrates that controlling stakeholders is a previously overlooked incentive to collaborate. Additionally, the study demonstrates how an institutional field comes to influence collaborative priorities and frameworks through claims to urgency. While collaboration scholarship has suggested best practices for minimizing power differences among members, this study sheds light on how those power differences come to exist in communication practices. For HRO scholarship, this study invites future explorations of how reliability is created across organizational boundaries. HRCs feel the increasing need to collaborate to address community risks. Through translation, members made collaboration work in the high reliability environment. However, in these translations, members also made decisions about the collaboration's mission and, thus, about their community's priorities and concerns surrounding risk management and response.

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[i] Organizational name and all participant names are pseudonyms.