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Communicating Impermanence: Temporal Structuring of the COVID-19 Pandemic

in Everyday Organizational Life

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Communicating Impermanence: Temporal Structuring of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Everyday Organizational Life

by

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Dedication

For all of the wonderful members of the study organization, thank you. It is an honor to work on our important mission together to get the right books to the right kids at the right time. I am so proud and humbled by your swift and joyous positive actions due to the COVID-19 crisis.

For my committee, Dr. Dawna Ballard, Dr. Joshua Barbour, Dr. Matthew McGlone, and Dr. Benjamin Gregg. You have been excellent and exacting critics and guides.

For Dr. Larry Browning who got me started.

For my late mother and father, The Reverend Shirley Kay Hickman and Dr. John Waldron Ball.

For Floyd Henry Allport, my mother's teacher.

For Tonya Riley, my yoga teacher.

For my patient, kind, and helpful son Remi.

For providing unwavering encouragement throughout, my loving husband Ron, who wrote:

impermanence is

a fact

a necessity

a guide

an instigator

a bane

a prompt and a

blessing

Abstract

Communicating Impermanence: Temporal Structuring of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Everyday Organizational Life

By

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Impermanence is an essential yet understudied aspect of organizational communication. This study addresses the research question: *How do people communicate about (or avoid communicating about) impermanence in the workplace?* Taking impermanence—defined simply as the fact that reality is constantly in flux, transient, and effervescent—as a fundamental condition of life, this dissertation explores to what extent impermanence can be identified through organizational communication. During the onset of an unprecedented cosmological event (Weick, 1995), the COVID-19 pandemic, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork through an established, mid-size non-profit organization while employed in a leadership role. Building upon 10 particular actions Weick (2012) used to describe organizational impermanence—believing, discarding, doubting, enacting, interrupting, labeling, reasoning, repeating, seeing, and substantiating—observations were taken on how members accepted and avoided the pandemic through everyday communication. These 10 actions have been further arranged through existing models of temporal structuring (Orlikowski & Yates, 2002; Ballard & Seibold, 2003, 2004) along five multidirectional feedback cycles—processes of confidence, awareness, influence, continuity, and affirmation. Further analysis explores how these cycles identify and express the lived experience of impermanence. I aim to further the paradigm of "the impermanent organization" (Weick, 2012), as well as temporal structuring and feedback cycles, so that researchers have more tools to describe and identify how impermanence is (or is not) communicated in the workplace. Finally, I will offer some practical recommendations for leadership and members of organizations on how to adapt to and cope with impermanence in daily life.

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Chapter 1: Communicating Impermanence

Stakeholders and members of organizations commonly prioritize keeping their efforts going with a focus on continuity, sustainability, and longevity, but communication researchers suggest there should be more attention on how and why organizational systems change, decay, and ultimately end (Kuhn, 2008; Levy, 2000; Meisenbach, 2008; Weick, 2012). Attention often focuses on the traumatic or catastrophic level, such as large-scale technical or ethical breakdowns, natural disasters, medical errors, and operational closures (Ashcraft & Kuhn, 2003; Starbuck & Farjoun, 2009; Weick, 1993, 2009, 2012). Others have pointed out attention should also be focused on interactive everyday experiences that make up organizations as complex, self-structuring, dynamic systems (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997; 1998; Nonaka, 1994; Poole, 2014; Weick, 2012). Attention on the inevitable endings of organizational life may be best captured in the concept of *impermanence*.

In *Making sense of the organization, volume two: the impermanent organization;* Weick (2012) looked towards Eastern philosophy to find an overarching perspective on his assessment on the fundamental conditions of organizational life. Weick suggested that a greater understanding of impermanence leads to more reliable performance in organizations (Weick, 1993, 2009, 2012). Weick recounted that the Buddhist path toward enlightenment includes the realization that the fundamental nature of reality is impermanence, and this is the cause of human suffering (Weick, 2012). He pulled from contemporary Buddhist writings to offer the following description of impermanence:

> Impermanence is the quality of experience that everything is shifting, going to pieces, slowly dissolving, rising and falling, and that moment-to-moment experience is all there is (Gunaratana, 1990; p. 94).

In other words, and at the risk of oversimplifying Buddhist philosophy: *avoidance of impermanence leads to suffering, and acceptance leads to enlightenment.*

While this paper draws from Buddhist thought, it offers a contextualized contemporary view of impermanence, limited specifically to organizations. Impermanence is defined for this study as *a quality of organizing that reveals an underlying condition of transience, unreliability, and instability to observers and members, and also a heightened awareness of the organization as unfolding, becoming, and passing through time*. Acknowledgement of impermanence is more fundamental than dealing with uncertainty or crisis or external threats: it is something that can be found in common places and ordinary times, through the ways that members act, interact, and communicate. A related assumption that impermanence defines the natural condition in which processes of organizing occur, and organizing does not arize from or move towards a condition of permanence. Observing members communicating impermanence provides a particular way of understanding how members experience time in organizations, and how they go about making sense of it.

The conclusion that organizations should be viewed as impermanent was drawn from Weick's long-term work in organizations focusing on trained professionals and experts such as firefighters, NASA engineers, and emergency room doctors (Weick, 2012). As High Reliability Organizations (HRO's), these types of workplaces have a special relationship to the concept of impermanence (Roberts, 1989; Weick, 1987; Weick, 2009; Tracy, 2012). HROs strive for predictability and stability, because they are intended to perform functions that are inherently unpredictable and high risk, where failure and unanticipated endings is an ever-constant concern. Weick's work illuminated how catastrophic failures such as the Challenger and Columbia space shuttle disasters and the initial troubles of the medical community to identify battered children syndrome and the West Nile Virus outbreak in New York City happened through a variety of failures of communication. Through observation and reflection, Weick (1995) strived to explain how members responded to complex realities of such environments in ways that postitivistic inquiry could not reconcile:

> Control is not a cause of action….control is an effect of action. Actions create relationships that then become binding or releasing. When people choose their constraints, choice is the independent variable, and constraints, determinism, and control are the dependent variables. For instance, police officers in the field … take actions with respect to their supervisors and dispatchers that carve out wider latitude and discretion within which they can do their job. Dispatchers and supervisors may intend to control officer actions, but officers act to enlarge this area. (Weick, 1995, p.167)

This passage shows how the choices that individual members make may be unpredictable in relationship to the actions and decisions of other members. This issue could lead to misunderstandings or withholding key information from other members (Sutcliffe & Weick, 2008), but it also leads to possibilities for improvement and recovery. In Weick's words, building from the laws of requisite variety (Ashby, 1958), "the larger the action available to a control system, the larger the variety of perturbations it is able to compensate" (Weick, 2012, p. 159). As more and more members interact, the possibilities grow exponentially. The paradigm of impermanence offers ways for members to more easily process this exponentially complex interaction and to become more closely attuned to certain communication and actions in the workplace so that they can better choose to accept unexpected change and avoid systematic failures.

Therefore, given the potential value of a greater awareness of impermanence in dealing with change, endings, and complexity in workplaces as described by Weick and his colleagues (2012), this dissertation explores how, when, and to some extent, why, organizations and their members communicate impermanence through everyday activities and events.

In addition, building from Weick's (2012) concept of "the impermanent organization," it will seek for potential relationships between different processes of communicating impermanence. Drawing on larger social science research literatures, connections will be made between impermanence and related work in temporal structuring and sensemaking (Ballard & Seibold, 2003, 2004; Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997; Gioia, Thomas, Clark & Chittipeddi, 1994; Orlikowski & Yates, 2002; Weick, 2012). Most importantly, it will propose some underlying processes that may both contradict and complement these literatures: i.e., *communicating impermanence*.

C*ommunicating impermanence* conveys an expressed awareness between members of organizations that things change and ultimately do not last. While holding impermanence in organizations as a given condition, this paper will develop *communicating impermanence* as a fundamental everyday process of organizing that can be observed through the qualities of and variations in organizational communication between members. Through close observation and description of how members of organizations communicate about and through impermanence in daily life, this dissertation aims to bridge the gap between Weick's proposed processes of impermanence and current organizational communication scholarship (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Stephens, Jahn, Fox, Charoensap-Kelly, Mitra, Sutton, Waters, Xie, & Meisenbach, 2020) by answering the exploratory question: *How do people communicate about (or avoid communicating about) impermanence?*

To this end, the overall research objectives of this study are twofold: a) to observe, describe, and interpret how, when, and why people in organizations communicate impermanence through discussion, messages, reports, and actions; and, b) to understand how organizational members orient to each other and to events in a temporal way through some dynamic processes of communicating impermanence.

In the following sections, more explanation will be presented about the cultural context of impermanence, the significance of communicating impermanence, the conceptualization of communicating impermanence from an applied organizational communication perspective, and argue for the overall significance of this line of inquiry.

CULTURAL CONTEXT FOR IMPERMANENCE

Organizational scholars have turned to Japanese cultures for many years to learn from processes that helped their country achieve a high place in world economics starting in the later part of the 20th Century, and influenced the success of global companies such as Apple, Toyota, and Fujifilm. (Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka, Kodama, Hirose, & Kohlbacher, 2014; Purser, 2013). Going again back for a moment to Weick's original sources for the idea of impermanence to dig deeper into the cultural context for the concept, impermanence appears to be foundational within the "Four Noble Truths" of eastern philosophy, attributed to the teaching of the Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama, B.C. 568). Namely, these four truths can be summarized as:

> 1) Life is suffering.
>
> 2) All suffering is cause by ignorance of the nature of reality and the resultant craving, attachment, and grasping that stem from such ignorance.
>
> 3) Suffering can be stopped by overcoming ignorance and one's attachment to the material world.
>
> 4) The path that leads away from suffering is the Noble Eightfold Path, which consists of right views, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right-mindfulness, and right contemplation. (Juniper, 2003, p.17)

While not translated as such here, Juniper (2003) goes on to make the explicit connection between "the nature of reality" and "impermanence" as one and the same thing. Zen adaptations of these Four Noble Truths led to a further cultural directive: that we must face impermanence, particularly the fear of our inevitable deaths, if we are to be released from suffering. The relationship of suffering to Buddhist thought and our modern-day organizational life may not be immediately evident, but many scholars and practitioners have drawn from this perspective to better understand communication in the workplace, particularly in a global context (Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka, Kodama, Hirose, & Kohlbacher, 2014). The relationship between the "right-nesses" of the Noble Eightfold Path and best practices in the workplace is still of interest to researchers today. For instance, organizational aestheticists recently described how as Buddhist philosophy moved from India through China to Japan, a related concept and cultural practice emerged, called simply *wabi sabi* (Purser, 2013).

To further understand the subtle qualities of impermanence, Juniper (2003) provides original Japanese translations, photographic examples, and insights into *wabi sabi.* The words *wabi* and *sabi* themselves are hard for even a fluent Japanese speaker to translate, closest perhaps literally to "lonely" and "desolation" (Juniper, 2003). As a cultural expression, *wabi sabi* is an age-old aesthetic of simple natural materials in conscious but unadorned display, such as Japanese gardens, tea ceremonies, and haiku poetry. While popular culture identifies haiku as a poem with a rhythm of 5-7-5 syllables when spoken that evokes a particular feeling, we should seek for proper models in Basho, a much admired 17th century Japanese poet closely associated with the *wabi sabi* movement, as translated by Hamill (2006):

Nothing in the cry
of cicadas suggest they
are about to die

Here the poet confronts death directly in a way that often makes some people uncomfortable. Not all *wabi sabi* observations are so starkly morbid, but most haiku exhibits a simple but detailed observation and captures a moment of unexpectedness without judgement. Common knowledge dictates that nature is the standard subject of haiku, but again looking to Basho, nature is not the only subject, as people are also seen in a *wabi sabi* light:

Wrapping dumplings in
bamboo leaves, with one finger
She tidies her hair

As seen in the haiku above, the way the phrases interrupt each other convey a sense of plainness or age without being direct about it. Juniper (2003) observes, *wabi sabi* avoids being direct.

However, poetry is not the only way this aesthetic is expressed. *Wabi sabi* artifacts such as pottery, furniture, and clothing textiles use natural dyes and found items such as rocks, wood, and even rusting metals, in configurations designed to elicit insight, winsome and bittersweet but somehow satisfyingly pleasurable feelings (Juniper, 2003). The absence of chrome and plastic and even painted enamels make the objects seem more authentic, pure, and stubbornly transcendent of time (Juniper, 2003). In tandem with this, collectors, artists and critics across many cultures promote that "*wabi sabi* expressions can engender a peaceful contemplation of the transience of all things" (Juniper, 2003, p. 27).

Wabi sabi has a following in the research community, however, that extends to organizational science. Researchers in information science working on the communication of knowledge via organizational wikis to communicate shared knowledge described how members saw a *wabi sabi* beauty in the impermanent quality of others' posts, and noted how this observation might "encourage contributors to participate, whereas before, the integrity of a seemingly finished knowledge asset discouraged participation" (Majchrzak, Wagner, & Yates, 2013, p. 445). They showed how the *wabi sabi* principles of "impermanence, imperfection and incompleteness" contributed to "the emergence of a 'wiki-way' of writing in organizational and educational settings" (Barondeau & Bonneau, 2018). Thus, *wabi sabi* emerges as a helpful way to describe complicated phenomena like suffering and impermanence in organizational life. To summarize:

> *Wabi sabi* is an intuitive appreciation of a transient beauty in the physical world that reflects the irreversible flow of life in the spiritual world. It is an understated beauty that exists in the modest, rustic, imperfect, or even decayed, an aesthetic

sensibility that finds a melancholic beauty in the impermanence of all things. (Juniper, 2003, p. 51)

Developing a *wabi sabi* sense of impermanence guides a way to sensitize researchers toward the collective sensemaking moments that happen when an organization is experiencing their reality as impermanent. These are important moments for scholars and organizational members that should not be missed, because they shine a brighter light on moments of transcendence and connection through communication.

Wabi sabi provides a qualitative guidepost for organizational communication and impermanence. It presents a novel label to aid in filtering observations of the qualitative experience of impermanence in the workplace. And, it inspires an imaginative vision for how modern working lives can perhaps be managed with more mutual care and less suffering. Managing impermanence with a *wabi sabi* view aims for a future of a richer and more satisfying appreciation of the everyday experiences found in organizational life.

SIGNIFICANCE OF COMMUNICATING IMPERMANENCE

Weick (2012) was the first to claim the paradigm of 'the impermanent organization," not meaning organizations in crisis or distress, but as an everyday type of condition applicable at all organizational levels. But the term can be found in other contexts in the extant literature, showing a difference between impermanent organizations and communicating impermanence. For instance, when approaching the idea of communicating impermanence in organizations, it should not be overlooked that some types of organizations are purposefully impermanent. The intentional duration of an organization certainly constrains the ways not only goals are set, but how members' expectations of impermanence, positive or negative, relate to the tasks at hand (Weick, 2012).

Certain organizations—such as movie crews and disaster aid teams—are designed with impermanence in mind, and others—such as banks and museums—are designed with an intention of indefinite permanence. Organizations that are intentionally temporary have been studied in several industries and sectors, including arts, entertainment, advertising, law, and technology (Kramer, 2005; Ferriani, Corrado & Boschetti, 2005; Meyerson, Weick, & Kramer, 1996; Walsh & Bartunek, 2011). Of particular interest to this study, there has been work on mission-based non-profits that close when their missions are accomplished (Helmig, Ingerfurth, & Pinz, 2014). Organizations that experience bankruptcy, dissolution, and closure have also been studied (Walsh & Bartunek, 2011) as impermanent organizations, but for now, we will put unintentional and unpredictable scenarios in separate buckets and continue to examine organizations created with the intention of stability, reliability, and continuation. In summary, different types of organizations have different explicit and implied goals (Kotlar, DeMassis, Wright & Frattini, 2018), and even multiple and competing purposes across and within the membership (March & Simon, 1958). It must be kept in mind that stakeholders and members might therefore have different expectations and experiences regarding their experience of and attitudes towards time and impermanence.

It could be interpreted that Weick (2012) used the term impermanence in a way that favored the lack of agency of those participating, even with an attitude of serendipity or surrender, making it less appealing to researchers interested in control systems, technology, human agency, leadership, and organizational performance. As Weick (2012) put it:

> The phrase ‘impermanent organization' may seem like a questionable choice of words because it can be read as both trivial and ambiguous. It sounds trivial because it suggests that organizations come and go. It sounds ambiguous because it fails to

> make clear just what it is that comes and goes. The essays in this book begin to tackle that ambiguity and to do so in a way that makes impermanence less trivial and more significant. If impermanence is inherent in organizations, it matters greatly how people try to organize portions of this impermanence and redo these organized portions when they begin to unravel. (Weick, 2012, p. 3)

This study takes up the challenge to further the assertion above that 'impermanence matters greatly.' While Weick's work over many decades does much to show how organizations are constituted and disrupted through communication—including some high-profile examples of how this happened in large scale public health, firefighting, and space science settings—the underlying processes of coming together and unraveling as an actual everyday experience remain generalized and abstract. Because of this, a need had developed to re-connect abstractions drawn from the cosmological episodes Weick (2012) studied back to everyday organizational life, and see if they still hold true.

For Weick, impermanent organizations are conceived as processes, systems, or enactments; embodied through organizations less concerned with productivity than with specific and urgent problems to solve (Weick, 2012). This resonates at a time when many companies, both for profit and non-profit, are beginning to adopt social benefit roles (Lewis, 2005). While some have taken issue with Weick's lack of historical and institutional context in relation to thought and action (Weber & Glynn, 2006), others have found excellent models for ongoing flows of communication as a natural outgrowth of his work (McPhee & Zaug, 2009). Many prominent organizational scholars agree that communication is not simply a messaging that happens within an organization, but that the interactive engagement of members actually constitutes organizations

(Brummans, Cooren, Robichaud, & Taylor, 2014; Putnam & Nicotera, 2009; Cooren, Kuhn, Cornelissen, & Clark, 2011, among others). Moreover, Brummens, et al. (2014) describe how the word "constitution" itself implies an ontology of setting up, fixing, placing, establishing, or forming something new: communicating impermanence offers the opposite dismantling reactions at the other ends of the processes. The idea points to a possible dialectical tension between the communicative *constitution* of organizations and the communicative *impermanence* of organizations to be pursued later in this paper. In other words, scholars should consider not only how organizations are made up of communication, but how they end, dissipate, or fall apart through the inevitable impermanence of membership negotiation, institutional positioning, activity coordination, and organizational self-structuring (McPhee & Zaug 2009). For all these reasons—the need for more application, the need for more social benefit, and the need to recognize the inevitable falling apart of organizations—inquiry into impermanence and the processes through which it manifests in everyday life is urgently required.

This dissertation addresses this need by focusing on a highly contemporary context, the COVID-19 pandemic, and a uniquely situated organizational communication research opportunity for ethnography. When identified, defined, refined, and reflected upon, the presence of an observable process of communicating impermanence will emerge from collected evidence as reliable indicators of 'organizational unfolding' in a way that allows for both observers and participants to better perceive both (temporary) permanence and (enduring) impermanence with more clarity (Weick, 2012). Arguably, a more descriptive, wholistic view of impermanence will offer a promising way to further understand and enrich the fundamental realities of life in the workplace, schools, community-based organizations and other social situations through which people gather and communicate.

CONCEPTUALIZING THE EXPERIENCE OF IMPERMANENCE

Given a long-term empirical focus on sensemaking and reliability, Weick's (2012) rich and reflective conceptualization provides a fertile scholarly framework for the study of impermanence (2012). Ample evidence from across the literature shows that organizations are made up of communication that an organization produces in day-to-day interactions over time (Ashcraft & Kuhn, 2003; Starbuck & Farjoun 2009; Taylor, Cooren, Giroux, & Robichaud, 1996; Taylor & Cooren, 1997; Taylor & Van Every, 1999). Therefore, evidence of impermanence will likely be found through observations of the common, everyday messages, activities, behaviors, and artifacts found in organizational practice.

Attention to organizational impermanence allows organizational members to better navigate the environments in which they operate (Weick, 2012). In a practical sense, if organizations want to achieve optimal performance, including positive social impact and the overall well-being of their membership, they need to be more aware of the ways that impermanence shapes and constrains their organizations through communication. For instance, letting go of fixed concepts (or "dropping your tools" see Weick, 2012, Chapter 14) allows members and observers to become more aware of the actual situation in which they find themselves and choose to perform:

> When people develop the capacity to act on something, then they can afford to see it. More generally, when people expand their repertoire, they improve their alertness. And when they see more, they are in a better position to spot weak signals

which suggest that an issue is turning into a problem which might turn into a crisis if not contained. (Weick, 2012, p. 32)

Acting and seeing are not only a beginning to a possible solution, but an ending of an unperceived problem, with lack of alertness as the intractable obstacle. Weick argues in several cases that more intentional mindfulness in organizations will lead to more reliable performance in organizations (Brummans, 2014; Weick, 2009; Weick & Putnam, 2006; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2008). Greater awareness of impermanence allows members to focus on tasks at hand and prevent any problems that a dysfunctional clinging to the impossibility of permanence might create (Weick, 2012; Gersick, 1991).

Through self-reflections on his research, Weick (1979, 1987, 2009, 2012) identifies a number of sensemaking actions that people go through in organizations to deal with impermanence on a day-to-day level (Weick, 2012). This study builds upon these conceptual foundations, identifying 10 key actions particularly useful to describe observable communication that reflects the experience of impermanence: *believing, discarding, doubting, enacting, interrupting, labeling, reasoning, repeating, seeing,* and *substantiating* (Weick, 2012). These 10 dynamic actions, which do not occur in any particular sequence or order in Weick's work, are interpreted as evidence of the phenomenon of impermanence, discrete communicative events that demonstrate the transient temporal structuring of organizational members.

For deeper insight into the meanings of these 10 actions, Table 1 (p. 15) presents definitions from the abridged Oxford English Dictionary (2020) listed along with a short explanatory phrase which illuminates how Weick (2012) describes these exact words as related to impermanence. To reiterate, this particular collection of 10 verbs do not appear as a single list or synthesis anywhere in the original research. They are found in the headings in some articles and in the index (Weick, 2012) with enough emphasis and frequency that they call for more interpretation. These concepts are being proposed through this study to best embody the processes of impermanence that were described repeatedly and in much detail throughout his body of work (Weick: 1979; 1987; 1993; 1995; 2006; 2009) and highlighted in Weick (2012).

Table 1.

Weick's 10 Actions of Impermanence (in alphabetical order)

Processes	Weick's Explanation (2012)	OED Definitions (2020)
Believing	Success depends on faith that actions will not fail. (p. 38).	To have confidence or faith in, and consequently to rely on or trust, also, to give intellectual assent to, accept the truth or accuracy of (a statement, doctrine, etc.), give credence to.
Discarding	'In pursuit of knowledge, everyday something is acquired. In pursuit of wisdom, every day something is dropped' (Lao Tzu, cited in Muller 1999: 134) cited in (p. 36).	To reject as being no longer wanted or needed; to cast aside, get rid of; to abandon, also, to rid or free (a person) of something.
Doubting	When a leader says "I don't know," it seldom stops the conversation. It invites response and authenticates doubt (p. 270)	To be uncertain or divided in opinion about; to hesitate to believe or trust; to feel doubt about; to call in question; to mistrust; also to dread, fear, be afraid of.
Enacting	A behavior of shaping or stirring the world so that it yields something. Also aligned with improvisation, both as a noun and verb (p. 37).	To bring into act, accomplish, perform; also, to work in or upon; to actuate, influence; also, to implant, inspire; also, to declare officially or with authority; to appoint.
Interrupting	Regression, thrownness, inconsistency, cosmology episodes, forgetting, the unexpected, threats, and disasters (p. 39).	To break in upon (esp. speech or discourse); to break the continuity of (something) in time; to break off, to hinder the course or continuance of, cause to cease or stop (usually temporarily).
Labeling	"Vocabularies are tools for coping rather than tools for representation" (p. 33, from Rorty, 1989: 119) cited in (p. 33).	To apply a classifying word or phrase to (a person or thing); to categorize (a person or thing) using a particular word or phrase (sometimes with the implication that such categorization is inaccurate, simplistic, or

Table 1 (continued)

		restrictive).
Reasoning	Guided by mental models….the world is simplified (p. 134).	To think (something) through, work out in a logical manner. Also, to employ reasoning or argument with a person, in order to influence his or her conduct or opinions.
Repeating	Order is transient and needs to be re-accomplished repeatedly (p. 32).	To say again something which one has already said; also, to do, make, or perform again; also, of an event or phenomenon: to recur in the same form; to happen again in the same way.
Seeing	Sometimes, a highly trained professional must "drop some tools" to be able to see a novel situation (p. 37).	To be or become aware of (a fact, state of affairs, etc.) by means of visual or observable signs; also, to become aware of (information, a fact, etc.) as a result of reading something; to learn about from a written document.
Substantiating	A collective holding of things together by text, conversation, and justification (p . 39) .	To give solidity to (something); to make firm, to strengthen; to affirm, also, to prove the truth of (a charge, claim, etc.); to demonstrate or verify (something) by evidence; to give good grounds for, to justify.

Note the marked difference between the way that Weick uses these 10 terms and their common definition, which indicates the need to more precisely define them for research purposes. Still, these 10 actions reflect the possible range of dynamic tensions between avoidance and acceptance of impermanence that are likely to play out throughout organizations on a day-to-day basis. They offer distinct but inter-related dynamic actions that propel individuals and organizations towards a greater understanding and meaningful sensemaking of the complex impermanent situations that they find themselves in. In order to further clarify, the 10 next sections are additional definitions and descriptions of *believing, discarding, doubting, enacting, interrupting, labeling, reasoning, repeating, seeing,* and *substantiating* (Weick, 2012) offered for this study.

Definition and Description of Believing

Believing, in the context of communicating impermanence, is an individual or collective action that indicates confidence in a particular perception, interpretation, or conclusion related to the ephemeral experience at hand. Synonyms or like words for believing in this context include faith, confidence, and even thinking and feeling. Weick often said, to paraphrase, “I don’t know what I think until I see what I say” (Weick, 2012). Thinking with awareness of communicating impermanence in organizations together with other members, reads as analogous with believing: *I don’t know what we believe until I see what we say*. Organizational belief may be different, then, than an individual belief, but they are related.

Grounded in sensemaking, which occurs naturally (Weick, 2012), belief becomes evident when people gather information and communicate together about the validity of their observations, such as “I believe this or that is true” or, more confirming, “I believe you” or more personally, “I believe in you.” Belief beomes a way of making meaning arise from an otherwise overwhelming amount of information, or information that points towards imminent disruption or endings. According to Weick (2012), belief relates to faith, and he treats them somewhat interchangeably, as if belief is synonymous with faith. He describes people in organization acting on the “[faith that we are right]….the [faith that we shall not fail]” (p. 38). He makes a distinction between the mental component of believing and the motivational component, with caveats about the hedging, betting, and guessing efforts that distinguish belief from reason, framing belief as a commitment without full and convincing evidence.

Weick’s observations reveal that organizations facing impermanence will often act on clues and hunches, and a wider variety of these clues and hunches help mitigate adversity in complex situations (Weick, 2009). Indeed, in a complex dynamic world, Weick might argue an imperative to act solely on belief, even in the absence of full information (Weick, 2012, pp. 66-81). In organizations, belief is often expressed through the strength and frequency of formal written and oral communication. When people believe in the face of impermanence, they are able to act, make decisions, and reach consensus that allows them to move onto the next step of a continuing personal or organizational journey (Weick, 2012). Part of the notion of belief belies an assumption that not everything is impermanent; that there are some aspects of current experience that will continue to persist. What is and is not impermanent can become a space of continuous contestation in organizational life. Belief as an action relates to impermanence in that it provides awareness of a situation that can be either accepted or avoided.

Definition and Description of Discarding

Discarding, in the context of communicating impermanence, is the conscious rejection or abandonment of a course of action, policy, procedure, relationship, goal, or material item that an organization has adhered to in the past. Synonyms and like words for discarding include rejection, abandoning, and canceling. By discarding, an organization makes room for new possibilities, but also risks losing something of value or meaning to their identity and resources. Discarding can be distinct from the more general concept of ending, in that the agency for discarding is seen as internal vs. external. Like other aspects of sensemaking, discarding can be seen most clearly in retrospect, such as in a reflection, announcement, or summation of something that has already past. In regard to discarding, Weick says:

> Discarding is about the practice of dropping one's tools in order to adapt to changing circumstances. Discarding reduces the compounding of abstractions and moves closer to mindful perception of change. (Weick, 2012 p. 236)

Discarding is somehow disruptive, but also focusing in regards to the present time. Because individuals must ultimately choose what they keep and what they discard, is is apparent during the time of COVID-19 in the United States that there is more variation in the choices, with some people adapting to recommendations and others keeping their routines and behaviors even in the face of critical health warnings. What people keep and what they discard reveals where they value and find meaning, and where they find these qualitites lacking. Through discarding, differences in values and meanings that were once hidden in discarded ideas, things and activities of organizational members become more evident. Discarding as an action is related to communicating impermanence in that it provides a point where the choice is made to avoid.

Definition and Description of Doubting

Doubting, in the context of communicating impermanence, is the action of wavering between decisions, of wrestling with uncertainty. It is synonymous with indecision and disbelief, with elements of destructive inaction, but also of constructive reflection. When faced with a heightened awareness of the inevitability impermanence, members tend not to immediately accept it, but instead stumble, fight and rail against it through doubt. While doubting can lead to better questions and information gathering, too much doubting or reflection can become problematic in the forms of rumination or regret.

Doubt drives inquiry, allowing members to question, poke holes, and make explanations. Doubt provides the means to negotiate and control that which is unstoppable. Members seek to find closure, and yet, resist it if the closure is something unexpected or unplanned or undesirable, at least from the point of view of where they are in the moment. Doubting becomes a way of seeking to find the truth, indirectly. It can express itself as motion without much progress. Weick (2012) prompts readers to allow for doubt as a means towards wisdom:

> If uncertainty is unwelcome in organizations, equally unwelcome should be the admonition that members should doubt what they think they know. However, that is the very message … In an impermanent world, events may be other than they seem and can abruptly turn otherwise. Doubt is adaptability writ large, but certainty is adaptability to current conditions that is writ even larger. Certainty is insensitive to change, and doubt is one of the few means to restore that sensitivity. (Weick 2012, p. 261)

From this perspective, doubting has a restorative side, useful for fact-checking in the face of faulty evidence, and introducing distance that increases critical thinking and allows in the long run for better decisions, activity, and advice. While it would be hard to operate in a mode of constant doubt, Weick indicates it would be foolish to never doubt the messages or conclusions presented in the workplace (2012). Doubting is similar to discarding, but with less conviction. Doubt as an action is related to communicating impermanence in that it provides awareness that a situation should likely be avoided.

Definition and Description of Enacting

Enacting, in the context of communicating impermanence, is the action of putting into action, implementing, authorizing, or otherwise directing activities conducted through organizations. It is synonymous with recording or resolving, when done as a collective body. While individuals can enact alone, they are most often doing so on behalf of the authority or responsibility granted to them through an organizational culture. Enacting does not always involve authority, as groups of individuals can enact a project or mission collectively, with shared responsibility and agency. Indeed, the most successfully executed enactments are generally collectively accomplished.

Note that the term "enactment" has additional scholarly meanings that are related to, but do not fully express, the meaning of enacting in this study as it relates to communicating impermanence. Ballard and Seibold (2003) discuss enactments specifically in contrast to construals of time, where enactments are how members "perform" time, and construals are how they "orient" towards it. Weick himself uses enactment as part of a process of sensemaking related to exchanges between members and their environment:

> The basic evolutionary process assumed by sensemaking is one in which retrospective interpretations are built during interdependent interaction…. sensemaking can be treated as reciprocal exchanges between actors (Enactment) and their environment (Ecological Change) that are made meaningful (Selection) and preserved (Retention). (Weick, 2012, p. 139)

Weick goes on to describe the relationship between prior knowledge in organizations and enactment, which must be both believed (positive causal linkage) and doubted (negative causal linkage) in a dynamic way in order to keep the exchanges going and the organization sustained (Weick, 2012). While closely aligned with Ballard and Seibold's (2003) concept of enactment as performance and Weick's (2012) foundation fo sensemaking, as seen from a broader theoretical perspective, enactment is in the context of this study the ongoing embodiment of organizations. It is what the manifestation of the communicative constitution of organizations looks like. Thus, enactment as an action is related to communicating impermanence in that it constitutes the actual situation that a member is in that, in any given moment, can be either accepted or avoided.

Definition and Description of Interrupting

Interrupting, in the context of communicating impermanence, is the action of temporarily stopping, pausing, or being distracted from an organizational task, activity, or procedure. It is more akin to taking a break or suspending a service, rather than the complete discarding function of cancelling or ending. It could be seen as an uncomfortable cross between and ending and continuing, which may be why it is so frustrating many people to be interrupted at work (Ballard & Seibold, 2004). However, interrupting also has a positive side. Weick situates interruption as a facet of beginnings: product launches, planning meetings, and project milestones (Weick, 1995). He also connects it to the concept of arousal, the generation of interest and feelings of attraction and hope:

> The interruption of an ongoing Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) or project is a sufficient and probably necessary condition for autonomic nervous system arousal. Interruption is a signal that important changes have occurred in the environment. Thus a key event for emotion is the "interruption of expectations." It makes good evolutionary sense to construct an organism that reacts significantly when the world is no longer the way it was. (Weick, 1995, p. 45)

Interrupting, then, can be seen both as an ending and beginning. Moreover, if the state of impermanence is constant, as we have assumed for this study, then members live more in the condition of interruption than that of order or recovery. Organizational life is a constant interruption, with merely agreed upon illusions of order and recovery, and members are always operating at the "edge of chaos" (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997). Interrupting as an action is related to communicating impermanence by providing a sudden and unexpected awareness of a situation that must be accepted and cannot be avoided.

Definition and Description of Labeling

Labeling, in the context of communicating impermanence, is the action of putting or attaching specific words, phrases, or ideas to something that has been seen or recognized as being distinctly different than something else that has already been labeled. It is synonymous with connecting and categorizing, which may have both constructive applications for sorting and systemizing, and counterproductive unintended outcomes such as segregation, inequality, and unfair restrictions and constraints.

The problem of labeling becomes one of abstraction – labels create a shorthand in the brain that allows us to ignore things that should be paid attention to that exist at the margins of known and tidy categories. However, as a process of sensemaking, Weick considers labeling essential to make sense of the streaming of experience. Through labeling, people can notice and bracket possible signs of trouble for closer attention, helping them to simplify the world and make sense of it (Weick, 2012, p. 134). Labeling as an action relates to communicating impermanence in that indicates that a situation that has already been acknowledged and accepted by members, and might be in danger of fading from concious awareness.

Definition and Description of Reasoning

Reasoning, in the context of communicating impermanence, is the action of making sense of the situation at hand as a group; it is a primary aspect of sensemaking and the ways in which people maintain a sense of purpose and meaning in their work. It is synonymous with justification, discussion, explanations, and arguments, but in this context, it is not aligned with the more abstract ideal of logical, methodical, evidence-based thinking. In this context, it is more “being reasonable” than “having reasons,” in keeping with the perspective of communicating and organizing as processes, and not static states.

Weick doesn’t directly use the word reasoning very often, but when he does it aligns with his interest in rational decision making: or more properly, his dismissal of it. In short, he does not believe that organizations fit the model of rational decision making, in part, because most members do not have full access to accurate information or perceptions from which to draw upon.

> Problems must be bracketed from an amorphous stream of experience and be labeled as relevant before ongoing action can be focused on them. Furthermore, managers with limited attention face many such issues at the same time, often evaluating several situations, interpretations, choices, and actions simultaneously. Thus, inaccurate perceptions are not necessarily a bad thing. (Weick, 2012, p. 141)

This indicates that for most functions in everyday organizational life (at least in general aspects of organizations where mathematical, scientific or technical precision is not absolutely required), reasonableness becomes more important than accuracy. For things to be reasonable, to allow agreement and collective action, they must be, in the Aristotelian sense, plausible. In organizing, as the paraphrased quote from the Poetics goes, ‘the probable impossible is preferable to the improbable possible’ (Lucas, 1968). Reasoning as an action relates to communicating impermanence in that it develops awareness of a situation that can be either avoided or accepted.

Definition and Description of Repeating

Repeating, in the context of communicating impermanence, is the action of redoing a task, activity, idea, or message so that it may be remembered, perfected, and replicated well. It is synonymous with routines, reiterations, and even reversals, the kind of "do overs" that are necessary when learning a new task, or correcting a one-time mistake. In the context of organizational impermanence, repeating reveals a secret weapon, a means of creating a sense of control when few other assurances exist. It also can both enable and obscure mindfulness. Like all of these processes, an assumption may be made of an ideal amount of repeating that should be done in organizational life at any given point in time—neither too little, nor too much—but this may not be accurate. Organizing happens when members choose how routine and repeating times with others is best spent. Repeating as an action relates to communicating impermanence in that it accepts a present situation and allows it to be better controlled and managed through perfecting routines, while perhaps avoiding other potentially distruptive situations appearing in the environment.

Definition and Description of Seeing

Seeing, in the context of communicating impermanence, is the action of noticing, observing, identifying, recognizing, and comprehending the events, people, and things that make up organizational life. It is synonymous with perception and realization; more cognitive than believing, but less comprehensive. Seeing is not explicitly visual in this context, but more of an initial moment of invention or discovery, although that moment may perhaps repeat more than once or extend over a relatively longer period of time than just a moment.

Weick relates seeing back to labeling, and the problem of abstraction that obscures the truth of the observation. Referencing previous scholarship in compounded abstraction, Weick shares a paradox that “seeing is forgetting the name of the thing seen” (Weick, 2012, p. 113). Seeing in the context of organizations usually happens individually and then spreads through the group by means of communication: it is a rare event that allows all members of an organization to see a situation similarly at once. Seeing in this context intimates that something appears of its own agency; or at an almost subconcious level for members of organizations. There as many times when members cannot see the whole, but only one part at a time, as in the famous Indian parable of the blind men and the elephant, who, when touching different areas and communicating abou them, still don’t see the elephant in the room. Seeing arises from having access to the ongoing unfolding of new events and information from the future into the present, but happens at different times and ways for different members. Seeing as an action relates to communicating impermanence in that, when members share what they are seeing, it heightens and focuses awareness of the present situation.

Definition and Description of Substantiating

Substantiating, in the context of communicating impermanence, is the action of confirming, agreeing, checking up on, or reporting on activity that guides, directs, or informs members of the organization on pursuit of a particular decision or desired result. It is synonymous with verification and affirmation and provides evidence or proof of something that may not be evidently apparent to all members. It connects members back to a common sense of shared reality. Like enacting, substantiation has legal and financial overtones from the authoritative constructs of the professions but remains essential even in informal ways for organizations to constitute themselves. When substantiation fails, trust can be broken, and doubt can overflow. Substantiating becomes the mechanism through which belief may be delicately sustained, and the conviction of collective action can occur. Focusing more towards the median of interrelationships, substantiating has a more complicated process and standard of rigor than enactment. Substaniation may be complex and large scale, or small and simple, complete and unequivocal, or subtle and quick, like the obligatory "Roger?" "Roger" double-interact of NASA telecommunications. Substantiation comes in many shapes and sizes, and evidenced by the affirmations and release when facts are confirmed.

Weick was particularly elusive when providing definitions of substantiation, turning to philosophers such as Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Thorngate to connect substantiation to big questions such as "is life worth living" (Weick, 2012, p. 40). As a scholar and philosopher, he himself wrestled with the role of theory to help people cope, a recursive sensemaking of sensemaking that left some questions unanswered and models untested (Weick, 2012). He offers this reflection in a passage which he has labeled under the salient heading of "Substantiating":

> Organizing is the act of trying to hold things together by such means as text and conversation, justification, faith, mutual effort, (heedful interrelating), transactive memory, resilience, vocabulary, and by seeing what we say in order to assign it to familiar categories. Efforts to hold it together are made necessary by interruptions and regression, thrownness, inconsistency, cosmology episodes, forgetting, the unexpected, threats, and disasters. Our job as researchers is to develop theories about what 'holding it together' means, what it depends on, and when what it depends on happens …. We can do better at such theorizing. (Weick, 2012, p. 40)

While protesting that this theory has actually done quite a lot already, this study is a substantiation of Weick's philosophy and even a relative point of view more so than his theory. If theory is a stable, comprehensive and unified model of reality, impermanence seems to resist it. Researchers have shown how some paradoxes and tensions are not meant to be resolved, but meant to be instructive (Smith & Lewis, 2011; Carlson, Poole, Lambert & Lammers, 2017). While it may not contribute much directly to a formal theory of sensemaking or the communicative constitution of organizations, the communicating impermanence paradigm should, nonetheless, provide evidence of how impermanence permeates our organizational experiences, and confirmation that communicating about it should not be so easily ignored.

Summary of Weick's 10 Actions of Impermanence

Earlier on in Weick's career, he described the interaction between people as "loosely coupled," with a realization that each pursues actions unknown to, but in reaction to, the other. Weick defined loose coupling in systems as responsiveness while maintaining a fully separate identity (Orton & Weick, 1990). The concept of communicating impermanence in organizations assumes each actor has an independent identity with full agency of choice, in relationship to their awareness of their situation. The dialogue that they communicate together indicates awareness of a situation, and the presence of these 10 verbs points towards evidence of this awareness without the specific word or concept of "impermanence." The fact that they are communicating together, loosely coupled, is constituting a process of organizing. Drawing from his predecessors, Weick was exceptionally sensitive to the orchestration of people as actors on the ever-present stage of life (Goffman, 1958; Goffman, 1978; Czarniawska, 2006).

However, these 10 actions alone do not clarify when or why people in organizations become (or do not become) aware of impermanence. Throughout his work, the temporality of situations is rarely in the forefront of his analysis. Because of this, there can be difficulty in seeing how these 10 actions can be connected to larger events; as beginnings, middles, and endings in everyday organizational activities. If, however, they are seen as discrete actions of individuals that can be observed through expressed communication, they can become useful tools to recognize some of the ways that impermanence might be expressed, following Weick (2012).

The 10 actions above do, however, offer a situated place in the organizational science literature from which to categorize empirical observations and further identify the process of communicating organizational impermanence. Members may directly communicate in speech and writing using these exact and similar words about impermanence when they are aware of it, and what they say and do is worth further study. Members may also stay silent, or not use these exact words, and this too would be worthy to note. Observations of communication through the lens of Weick's 10 actions offer researchers a way to capture experiences of impermanence directly and indirectly and even when members are not yet accepting or even aware.

In the following chapter, temporal structuring and feedback cycles will be discussed, and relationships among these varied processes will be modeled offering a systematic way to conceptualize communicating impermanence, and to locate how members orient themselves to impermanence in daily life.

Chapter 2: Impermanence and Organizational Communication

STUDYING IMPERMANENCE AS AN ORGANIZATIONAL SCIENCE

The contemporary study of organizations encompasses business, management, anthropology, sociology, and psychological research. This project is grounded in the field of organizational communication (Redding, 1979; Buzzanell & Stohl, 1999). Scholars in this field commonly adopt two ways to look at organizational communication: one through which communication is something that happens within, between, or across organizations, and the second is that communication is something that actually makes up—or constitutes—the organization itself (Brummans, Cooren, Robichaud, & Taylor, 2014; Cooren & Martine, 2016; Giddens, 1984; Koschmann, 2013; Lutgen-Sandvick & McDermott, 2008; McPhee & Zaug, 2009). From extant literature, three active lines of inquiry guide this study's assumptions and perspectives on communicating impermanence: *sensemaking, organizational temporality,* and *feedback cycles.*

First, sensemaking, as an earlier model of organizing presented by Weick, has been widely adopted as a means of understanding the critical role of ongoing, multidirectional processes on communication (Weick, 1995). Second, temporal research in organizational communication and social psychology provides a framework for unit analysis on moment-to-moment, everyday events (Chia, 2003). Third, feedback cycles provide a groundwork for better understanding how Weick's 10 actions, unfolding over time, become dynamic processes of communicating impermanence.

Sensemaking and Impermanence. Impermanence as a communication construct both builds upon and focuses on the construct of sensemaking, "the ongoing retrospective development of plausible images that rationalize what people are doing" (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2008, p. 409). Other scholars such as Balogun and Johnson (2005) described sensemaking as primarily a conversational and narrative process (Brown, 2000; Gephart, 1993) involving a variety of communication genres (Watson & Bargiela-Chiappini, 1998), both spoken and written, and formal and informal" (p. 4). Maitlis and Christianson (2014) concluded that communication and organization scholars had achieved a high degree of agreement about many aspects of sensemaking, but there were still some issues to resolve. They were particularly concerned about *where* sensemaking takes place (in individuals or as collectives) and—more importantly for this study—*when and how* sensemaking takes place in the workplace. This dissertation will build upon the research and theories of sensemaking to focus on communicating impermanence, particularly as processes, as a natural extension of this rich body of work.

While sensemaking in organizational scholarship provides a rationale for understanding the fundamental processes that underlie organizing, communicating impermanence aligns more with the understanding of sensemaking as a narrative process evident in everyday communication. Narrative can be seen as a collectively constructed process of speaking, talking, and listening over time, "fluid and dynamic, and open to the interpretations of its many participants" (Cunliffe, Luhman, & Boje, 2004). Weick's (1995) perspective also offers a description of action-driven processes, with members actions as part commitment (explanation and cognition) and part manipulation (enacting change in the environment), another example of the dynamic tensions or conflict within both sensemaking and communicating impermanence. In the communicating impermanence model, commitment can be seen on the same scale as acceptance, and avoidance as a kind of manipulation or control. Moreover, some of the distinctions Weick originally explored were the differences between ignorance (not enough information) and confusion (too much information), and subtle sub-meanings of ambiguity, equivocality, uncertainly, and lack of clarity

(Weick, 1995). This was important, he proposed, because occasions for sensemaking occur optimally when situations are ambiguous or changing, in other words, impermanent. (Weick, 2012).

Ambiguity is a central problem of sensemaking and of communicating impermanence, and consciously focused attention is offered a possible remedy. Weick and Putnam (2006) propose mindfulness as "a rich awareness of discriminatory detail coupled with wise action, both being generated by organizational processes" (p. 280). Borrowing from intellectual traditions from both the East and the West, Weick touches on mindfulness as a way of counteracting ambiguity. Most importantly, he introduces the construct of mindfulness as "engagement," which clarifies the words "attention" and "awareness" as essentially a deep, directed, intentional, conscious mental focus. Putting deeper discussions of mindfulness aside, "awareness" will more often be used in this study to describe both Weick's contributions to the research on mindfulness, and what researchers called "the self-evident link between sensemaking and attention" (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014, p. 108).

Sensemaking processes were further defined by Weick through seven themes which create better (more functional) interactivity, summarized in the acronym SIR COPE: *social, identity, retrospect, cues, ongoing, plausibility,* and *enactment* (Weick, 2012; pp. 57-58). Coping is offered as the practical application of sensemaking, and these themes frame sensemaking as a way of coping with change in the workplace. Other scholars stress additional aspects that contribute to understanding of a sensemaking experience such as *novelty, ambiguity, confusion,* and *violation of expectations* (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). For them, the process of sensemaking begins with an interruption, i.e., a violated expectation, which is arguably an everyday form of ending. The concept of sensemaking has elicited much discussion, both generative and critical, but it remains a fertile concept for understanding how members of an organization communicate in the present moment.

Interestingly, Weick (2012) eventually simplified the condition of sensemaking down to three states: "**Order, interruption, recovery**. **That is sensemaking in a nutshell**" (p. 39, my bold). This "nutshell" frame for sensemaking implies a process, but does not extrapolate it. Moreover, it risks oversimplification by also implying a sequential or linear constraint (Purser, Bluedorn, & Petranker, 2005). Even more fundamental in the work on sensemaking is the awareness that groups of people are not made of fixed social structures, but of fluid and complex communication. This flexibility is at the core of organizational impermanence. The process of organizing, according to Weick (1979) consists of an act (an expression of meaning or an externalized behavior) an interact (the communication between two acting agents), and then a double-interact (an adaption or strengthening of original actions by the agents) which concludes the first act but loops into exponentially more interacts (Weick, 1979). Due to Weick's influence, scholars came to see and accept human organization is constituted by series upon series of overlapping, looping communicative double-interacts, infinitely dynamic and complex (Weick, 1979, see also Allport, 1954, 1967; and Katz & Kahn; 1978; also, Czarniawska, 2006).

One possible contribution of an emphasis on impermanence is to foreground the fact that if these interacts are perceived as always and continuously happening, there would be no sensemaking possible. In order for actors to find meaning, there also needs to be moments of perception where the interacts end. The actors need a way to orient themselves to the situation. Through this view, the beginnings and ends which we so often focus on in the flow of time become more arbitrary in everyday life. This points to new perspectives of the experience of the everyday awareness of impermanence: a constant spiral of exciting but brief beginnings, long and tedious middles, and sudden but satisfying endings. Or, another perspective might convey unexpected beginnings, peaceful and joyous middles, and well-earned but tragic ends. Sensemaking and communicating impermanence all depends upon the perspective of the actor as organizational member, acting in a specific moment of time. Weick and Browning (1986) identified how the narrative paradigm can be a fruitful way of investigating paradox, irony, and ambiguity in organizations, as well as how uncertainty absorption, overload and interpretation change the stories that members of organizations tell. "Face-to-face conversation builds, reaffirms, and can change the pattern of the organization" (p. 255). Moreover, they show how narrative puts *information* in context, having influence over processes of decision making. In the context of organizational communication, they make a convincing case for more emphasis on communication and less on organizations. Building from this, communicating impermanence as a paradigm offers a way to put *time* in context.

Temporality and Impermanence. The temporal context of organizations has been well recognized in organizational scholarship with diverse lines of inquiry (Barbour, Ballard, Barge, & Gill, 2017; Ballard & McVey, 2014; Ballard & Seibold, 2003, 2004; Bluedorn, 2002; Bluedorn & Denhardt, 1988; Cunliffe, Luhman & Boje, 2004; Gómez, 2009; McGrath & Kelly, 1992). A tension has existed, however, between stable notions of time, such as causal or fungible, and dynamic notions of time, such as epochal or flow (Bluedorn, 2002; Purser, Bluedorn, & Petranker, 2005). Some researchers define change using as a specific number of months or years between predictable cycles of events with generalizable features, and even proscriptive life-and-death cycles (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997; Jawahar & McLaughlin, 2001). Others argued that an externally driven notion of time creates “a sense of temporal alienation …. the passage of time—its turbulence and dynamics—are viewed as negatives …. time itself is seen as a noxious and unruly force, and the aim of management is to bring it under control” (Purser, Bluedorn, & Petranker, 2005). On the other hand, Chia (2003) describes organizational life as a chaotic “temporarily stabilized event cluster” against a “sea of ceaseless change” (pp. 130-1). Indeed, Bluedorn (2000) argues that time should be seen not as a constant, but as a variable; not as a single thing, but as a collective noun, made up of many features. More importantly, time in relationship to this line of inquiry is a social and not a natural phenomenon (Adam, 1988). As an outgrowth of this discourse, communicating impermanence advances the study of organizational perceptions and behaviors around time by describing an essential but elusive feature that heretofore has been on the periphery.

Temporal researchers have defined multidimensional perceptions and behaviors of time in the workplace, and examined present and future time perspectives (Ballard & Seibold, 2003). As defined in relationship to endings, both future and past come to mind when thinking about impermanence, however, when focusing on actions, a conscious foregrounding of the present moment is more at play. Communicating impermanence offers a way to glimpse how and, to some degree, when members perceive time in moment-to-moment interactions as they unfold. And, while in past research, future-centered temporality was advised to cope with accelerating change, communicating impermanence offers a present-centered view, driven by the acknowledgement that the present is fleeting, the future is unknown, and roles and identities are not fixed (Purser, Bluedorn & Petranker, 2005).

Adopting Orlikowski and Yates' (2002) framework of temporal structuring, communicating impermanence can be seen as a particular type of structuring that is always present in everyday organizational life. Developed to further understand the social impact of time, *temporal structuring*, reflects Gidden's (1984) structuration theory, applying it to an intersubjective view of time, namely, how "people (re)produce (and occasionally change) temporal structures to orient their ongoing activities" (Orlikowski & Yates, p. 685). Orlikowski & Yates (2002) describe several types of oppositional constructs of time: universal vs. particular, linear vs. cyclical, natural vs. social, and closed vs, open-ended, and summarize the idea of temporal structures as a way to transcend these dualities for a more nuanced way of understanding how people think and act around and about time. Communicating impermanence as a construct furthers this to a micro degree, providing a framework for making these structures more visible in everyday life. The designation of clock-based and event-based times as distinct from each other and separate often breaks down in practice. Because both are human accomplishments, people routinely blur the distinctions between the clock and events. (Orlikowski & Yates, 2002, p. 690). The lens of communicating impermanence helps members recognize that temporal structuring in everyday life is not driven by a clock, or by the beginning and endings of events, but as dynamic, multidirectional actions, orienting their work in one place or another along a temporal framework of "loosely coupled" interactions (Weick 1995).

Bridging objective, (clock-based) and subjective (event-based) perspectives, temporal structuring bridges the gap "between objective and subjective understandings of time by recognizing the active role of people in shaping the temporal contours of their lives" (Orlikowski

& Yates, p. 684). Furthermore, Yates & Orlikowski bridge the subjective/objective divide that complicates constructs of impermanence by proposing a practiced-based perspective, which:

> suggests that people in organizations experience time through the shared *temporal structures* they enact recurrently in their everyday practices. That is, when taking action in the world, people routinely draw on common temporal structures that they (and others) have previously enacted to organize their ongoing practices, for example, using a project schedule to pace work activities, and the seasons to inform vacation activities. Whether implicitly or explicitly, people make sense of, regulate, coordinate, and account for their activities through the temporal structures they recurrently enact. (Orlikowski & Yates, p. 686)

Temporal structures are social structures, where the agency is shared or co-created between clock time and event time, and between members of an organization and their external environment. Adding communicating impermanence to this perspective increases the understanding of temporariness to temporal structuring. Through practical application of their theory to the process of documenting Common LISP, a particular technological communication project, Orlikowski and Yates (2002) demonstrated how an overly routine and persistently eternal perspective of time is problematic, because it clouds what is actually happening in the moment. "Our structuring lens sees this (interaction between members) not so much as the existence of multiple times, but as the ongoing constitution of multiple temporal structures in people's everyday practices" (p. 687).

On the theoretical level, time-bound expressions of individual and collective awareness of impermanence have much to offer an inquiry into organizational experiences, particularly at the micro (personal) and meso (small group or organization) levels (Ballard & Seibold, 2003; Barbour, 2017; Klein & Kozlowski, 2000). By studying how members perceive and communicate about time, hidden conflicts and underlying assumptions can be better brought to light and proactively addressed by members. Communicating impermanence offers a particular way to look at temporal experience in organizational membership associated with events, language, and actions.

The philosophical positioning *being in the moment* highlights the temporal nature of impermanence. While there may be moments when an individual would mask or cover their awareness of impermanence, such as to save face or hide fear (Goffman, 1955), or a company would overestimate their permanence in an annual report intended for the public (Seeger, Sellnow, Ulmer, & Novak, 2009), these both can be seen as personal resistance to the reality of impermanence (Oreg, 2006). Likewise, the contemporary development of nonstandard work agreements, such as part-timers, temps, teleworkers, and independent contractors have pointed to particular challenges with the concept of membership, leading to "real" and "ghost" relationships reflecting both acceptance and avoidance of an organizational culture (Ballard & Gossett, 2007). Since impermanence is a ubiquitous condition that operates at many scales of time and space, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly when it happens, but it does seem more evident when people become aware specifically of interruptions, closures, and actual loss of human life, or as a result of conspicuous failure, bankruptcy, or other organizational trauma (Hormann & Vivian, 2017). In each case, everyday talk and behavior, particularly activating actions of impermanence, can be viewed in a new light when seen through the lens of temporal structuring (Orlikowski & Yates, 2002). A temporal lens helps to "bridge the subjective-objective dichotomy that underlies much of the research on time in organizations" (p. 684). Using a practice-based approach to time, as opposed to a subjective or objective perspective, members can be seen as “knowledgeable agents” who can actively monitor and modify their own experiences with impermanence (p. 688).

Ballard and Seibold (2003) also noted that “the experience of time is communicatively negotiated through members’ interaction patterns and reflected in their language” (p. 380). They constructed a model of organizational temporality by defining and testing a set of 11 dynamic dimensions of how people perform (enact) or construe (interpret or orient to) time (Ballard & Seibold, 2003, 2004). In relationship to the “nutshell” view of sensemaking, Ballard and Seibold’s (2003) temporal enactments of “scheduling”, as activities planned or accounted for; “separation,” as tasks interrupted or divided up; and “flexibility,” as dynamic or adaptive practices, mirror an essential repetition/interruption/recovery process that sets up a focus on impermanence (Weick, 1995). Moreover, Ballard and Seibold (2003) presented a meso-level model of organizational temporality with three communication structures at the center of organizational work: coordination methods, workplace technologies and feedback cycles (p. 392). In addition to system characteristics, individual characteristics, and cultural and environmental influences, these three communication structures were shown to be evident in the self-reported expressions of the temporal experiences of organizations and their members (Ballard & Seibold, 2004). Building from this model, and focusing on a present time perspective, this study will focus on feedback cycles as micro-level, everyday enactments and a possible means to make visible a process of communicating impermanence.

Feedback Cycles and Impermanence

Building from prior research on feedback cycles based on accountability of performance, norms, and membership, Ballard and Seibold (2003) demonstrate how different organizational members have different experiences of time, and how this can lead to conflict. Feedback cycles can be seen in four types across two variables, high and low task variability and high and low task completion intervals (Ballard & Seibold, 2004), with specific findings for each observed cycle in the field. Through an empirical study, they demonstrated how the "feedback environment" shapes a member's "sense of time" (p. 21), particularly when one team feels that the other team is rushing them or the other is going too slow. One of the assumptions is that the tasks and time expectations are defined by the environment, perhaps a supervisor or a pre-defined set of professional standards, or perhaps, drawing from Weick (2012), a cosmological event. Expanding on this idea, communicating impermanence is a means of identifying a self-structuring double interact between more or less equally empowered members. A feedback cycle, for the purposes of this argument, is not only a double interact that a supervisor gives to an employee and then the employee reports upon in a prescribed or expected way. Feedback cycles are processes of everyday interaction that constitute communicating impermanence over member-defined periods of time.

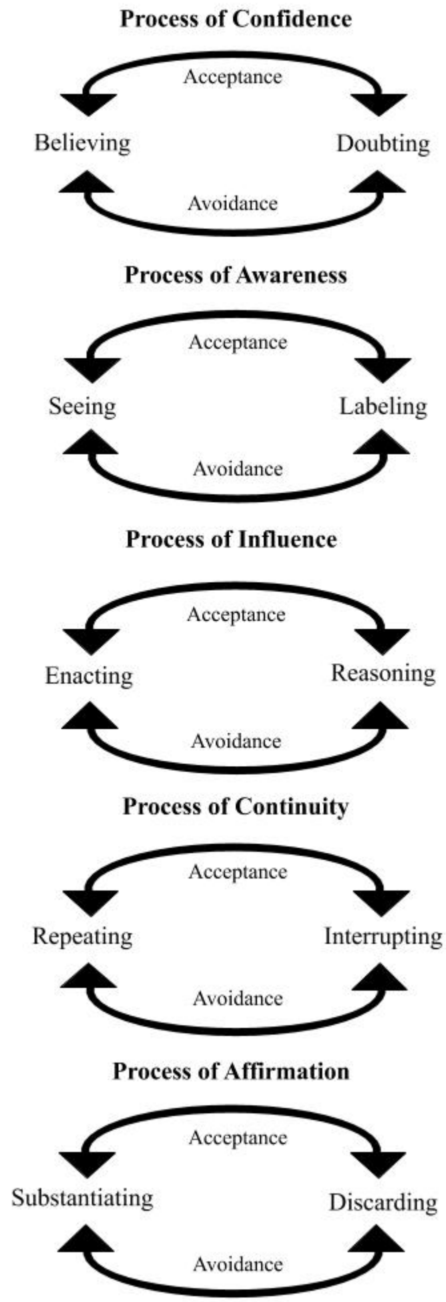
Thus, Weick's 10 actions can be seen as the outer boundaries of a particular set of feedback cycles that members of an organization communicate through the language that they use in everyday practice. As Purser, Bluedorn, and Petranker (2005) state, "instead of imposing images or trying to steer the course of change toward some pre-established aim, 'action' becomes 'acting,' part of the dynamic play of time" (p. 29). A feedback cycle indicates something that repeats (periodically but not necessarily infinitely), as well as something that helps members orient themselves and each other to time. As such, Weick's 10 actions can be further organized into five sets, each consisting of two opposing actions or multidirectional forces that work in ongoing dynamic cycles. These will be called *processes of communicating impermanence.*

Five Processes of Communicating Impermanence

Building again from Ballard and Seibold (2003), while the 10 actions are seen as enactments, the five processes of communicating impermanence are more in alignment with construals, or how members orient themselves in relationship to time. Different time perspective orientations of a linear nature of past, present, and future might make members quicker to act or slower to act, or to put more energy or less energy into a project. Moreover, while Ballard and Seibold (2004) defined how members construe time as urgent, scarce, punctual, and delayed, communicating impermanence offers the following five present-oriented processes as feedback cycles: *confidence, awareness, influence, continuity,* and *connectiveness.* These five processes of communicating impermanence represent everyday episodes of potentially conflicting thoughts, actions, and choices that people express in everyday organizational life through language, and can be better understood by noticing them as pairs of opposing actions. Many observable moments of interaction are situated along a double-loop of feedback between two opposing forces or actions, and members may choose to move back or forth at any time. Acceptance can be seen as reinforcing an action, while avoidance can be seen as diminishing its strength. The acceptance or avoidance of these multidirectional forces have complex interactions that are difficult to isolate and nearly impossible to predict, but they can be represented in time through a relational model (Figure 1, p. 42).

Figure 1.

Five Processes of Communicating Impermanence



The "confidence process" consists of "believing," the trust with which people pursue a goal, and is countered by "doubting," which makes members pause. The "awareness process" consists of "seeing," the noticing and identifying of something new in the environment, and is countered by "labeling," which makes the new thing something known. The "influence process" consists of "enacting" the performance of a task, and is countered by the "reasoning" that happens, sometimes before and sometimes afterwards. The "continuity process" consists of "repeating" as a comforting norm and path of precision, until "interruption" breaks up the pace. The "affirmation process" constitutes the "discarding" or throwing away of something once valued, where as "substantiating" is the keeping of it and connecting it back to a shared meaning.

When each of these processes are happening, other members may choose to reinforce the current action or diminish it, which will in turn change other member's perceptions of the situation. The may also introduce a new action, or refrain from acting at all. In Figure 1 (p. 42) the top double arrow indicates the reinforcement (or diminishment) of the two actions through acceptance, and the bottom right double arrow represents the diminishment (or reinforcement) of the two actions through avoidance. Note that choices can move along both arrows both ways between the two actions, in a multidirectional fashion. One implication is that this cycle is self-correcting, and members will tend to move towards the center, unless they see a strong need for an extreme action. While this model overall does not directly account for the strength or frequency of interactions, it does indicate relative directions, towards an action in acceptance, or away in avoidance, that moves the episode to a different place on the cycle. The model shows how these actions may be situated with others, and provides a map for members to orient themselves on five particular feedback cycles of communicating impermanence. This can be contrasted with clock time or event time: it is structuring of time and interaction through processes or feedback loops. For instance, one member may say they "see" that there is an opportunity for a new partnership. Another member may start to "label" that opportunity as a sponsorship (Koschmann, Kuhn, & Pfarrer, 2012). Through this model, regardless of the desired outcome, they can both agree during the moment that they are in the process of awareness. Then, the first member might see the partnership more as a collaboration. They might then enter another loop of "reasoning" to further develop the opportunity as either a collaboration or a partnership, until together they are able to "enact" it. This will be facilitated by the clarity that the two members are currently operating in a "process of influence." The premise is that while expressions of actions are as unique as every individual who participates as a member, and each interactive moment will change personal attitudes as well as socially constructed events in which the members participate, there is enough similarity between the qualities of these five processes that they can be easily identified during the course of everyday activity. These five processes of impermanence are thusly offered as tools that can be used to clarify the direction of communication based on ongoing interactions in the present.

Presentation of the Research Questions

Because the three research questions are seen as interdependent, they are being presented here as a group instead of at the end of each relevant section. The first question relates the most general approach to communicating impermanence. The second relates to how this study interfaces with prior research, most notably, Weick, (2012). The third explores new territory, the proposed five processes of communicating impermanence, a type of subjective feedback or activity cycle generated by members of organizations. The three guiding research questions of this study are:

RQ1: How do organizational members communicate about (or avoid communicating about) impermanence in the workplace?

RQ2: How do Weick's 10 actions communicate impermanence in lived experience?

RQ3: Can five processes of communicating impermanence (confidence, awareness, influence, continuity, and affirmation) help members adapt to and cope with impermanence?

COMMUNICATING IMPERMANENCE IN ORGANIZATIONAL STUDIES

Connecting the expression of communicating impermanence with inquiries in organizational communication on sensemaking, temporality, and feedback cycles, this study situates it as a constitutive process of organization (McPhee & Zaug, 2009). These literatures were reviewed with attention toward impermanence, and how it is communicated interactively through talking, listening, reading, writing, and action in everyday organizational life. Researchers remind us that people have goals, but groups do not, and that formally stated organizational goals are often contradictory and even tangential to goals of their members (Czarniawska, 2004; Kotlar, De Massis, Wright, & Frattini, 2018). While this understanding has led to more subtle investigations into organizational goals, there is still much work to be done in this area:

> Further research questions relate to the impact of organizational goals on outcomes at the individual, group and institutional levels. Moreover, it will be important for future studies to consider links between organizational goals and outcomes across both internal/external and financial/non-financial goals dimensions. Finally, a major area for further research concerns how organizational goals adapt to feedback

> loops regarding organizational outcomes and contextual changes: in particular, how, at various levels, changes to goals are or are not implemented. (Kotlar, et al., 2018, p. 14)

Impermanence as a construct offers a means of identifying and mapping feedback loops or cycles in relationships to organizational goals that are at the surface as well as hidden. While this study focuses on everyday expressions of impermanence, the concept in the future could be applied at the macro levels of relative organizational size, institution affiliations, or length of duration. An attention to internal and external goals will be paid through this study, embodying the concept of frontstage/backstage actions as described in the work of Goffman (1979).

It is important to note that none of these 10 actions are inherently negative or pejorative: there is a time and place where each one might be the most appropriate and effective response. The appreciation of communicating impermanence allows an observer to notice these small moments of interaction as they happen, and monitor the situation for potential imbalances in these opposing forces. With a preference or desire for balance, one member may choose to insert the opposite force. With a preference or desire for extremes, another may choose to reinforce the current expression. The concept of self-structuring dictates that there are an infinite number of ways that members will choose to act and react, and this is what in turn will create the unique structure of each organization (Allport, 1954, 1967; DeSanctis & Poole, 1994; Katz & Kahn, 1978; Giddens, 1984; Poole, 2014). The perspective of communicating impermanence helps observers develop a better appreciation for this uniqueness of each moment in time, and of each organization they engage with. The premise is that through greater appreciation and awareness of these 10 actions, and by identifying where members are oriented along a continuum of related actions at any given point in time, observers can help others become more mindful of the current situation and make more informed choices as they navigate through time together.

Rounding out this chapter was the introduction and description of five feedback cycles as processes of communicating impermanence in organizational life: confidence, awareness, influence, continuity, and affirmation. These processes grew out of deep consideration of the data collected and 10 particular (but not mutually exclusive) actions reflective of the impermanence of life in organizations that were proposed and developed by Weick (2012). They appear to be consistent with the temporal notion of construals (Ballard & Seibold, 2003), or ways that members of an organization might orient themselves in relationship to present time. Drawing from the sense of balance that is inherent to concepts of mindfulness and rightness in Buddhist thought (Brummans, 2014; Juniper, 2003), there are theoretically optimal amounts, directions, and strengths of communicating impermanence that would benefit both individuals and the organizations that they co-create (Taylor, Cooren, Giroux, & Robichaud, 1996), any given moment, neither too much, nor too little.

The next chapter will move into the methods used to conduct this study, and present more about the context, particularly the specific non-profit organization which is the setting for this project.

Chapter 3: Methods

There is a continuing need for communication research to become more firmly grounded in reality and to break out of the isolation that the system of scholarship can create (Simpson & Siebold, 2008). In addition, there is a need for practitioners to be better informed by and guided by the theories and methods that rigorous, engaged researchers can provide (Barbour, Ballard, Barge, & Gill, 2017). This project was designed to address both issues. While the method was informed strongly by organizational ethnography (Arnold & Brennan, 2013; Ellingson, 2009; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011), it also employed a content analysis component to help organize and develop a more objective perspective on the data (Humble, 2009; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Neuendorf, 2016). This design is particularly appropriate to the topic of impermanence, as the experience of impermanence is grounded in cultural contexts and personal experience. Additionally, engaged scholarship provides a bridge between theory and practice, between research and the general public (Barge & Shockley-Zalabak, 2008). Reflecting the constitution of organizations through communication (McPhee & Zaug, 2009), the execution of this research reflects the processes of co-missioning, co-designing, and co-enacting with the subject characteristic of engaged scholarship (Barbour, Ballard, Barge & Gill, 2017).

Ethnography and Organizational Autobiography

Identifying the lived experience of impermanence suggests the need for a personal narrative approach (Jensen, Cruz, Eger, Hanchey, Gist-Mackey, Ruiz-Mesa & Villmail, 2020; Van Manen, 2016). Scholars in communication use many different terms for personal narratives, including ethnography and autoethnography, representing the interplay of social, cultural, and personal experience, each with its own expectations, practices, and procedures. Moreover, narratives are particularly useful in organizational studies, as means of capturing the complexity of lived experience (Browning, & Boudès, 2005). As Emerson, et al. (2011) notes: "the task of the ethnographer is not to determine "the truth" but to reveal the multiple truths apparent in others' lives" (p. 4). Communication researchers have used ethnography to focus on "how structures are constituted by communication among members of a culture" (Ellingson, 2009, p. 130). As drawn from anthropology and sociology, ethnography historically focuses on the cultural context of a lived experience. Applied communication research has successfully used ethnography also for political, practical, and theoretical goals (Ellingson, 2009), demonstrating its flexibility and applicability in contexts where culture is not specifically foregrounded. Across many disciplines, the focus on concrete and specific details are the marks of exemplars of this method and strengthen researcher's credibility (p. 132). This aspect of the ethnographic method of participant observation and fieldwork focusing on detailed interaction is integral to this project's design, because it promises to capture naturalistic examples of people dealing with impermanence *in vivo.*

Moreover, Ellingson (2009) stated that "applied communication ethnographers seek to *be there* in various sites for the purpose of learning about and assisting in the development, change, or improvement of that site or other related sites" (p. 129). This "being there" points to the present-focused attention as described by prior research as a feature of the experience of impermanence. Thus, ethnography has been used successfully by organizational researchers as participant researchers (Van Maanen, 1979, Leonardi, 2007). On the other hand, ethnography is often employed by researchers who are not full participants in the organizations or cultures they are studying (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011, p. 24). The subtlety of communicating impermanence demands a more intimate involvement, such as that of a "complete-member researcher" (Adler &

Adler, 1987). In other words, because ethnography aims towards the objective description of cultural contexts, and impermanence implies a personal awareness of an existential situation related to their construal of time, a slightly different perspective is required to capture the manifestation of the experience of impermanence as both a personal and social interaction.

Another research approach to lived experience is the more personal perspective of autoethnography (Bochner & Adams 2020). While most traditional scientific methods call foremost for replicability and objectivity (Babbie, 2015), acceptance of specific cases of subjective experience allows communication researchers to position themselves not solely as observers, but also as subjects of their research. While it is common in literary and humanistic studies, it has been sometimes contested as a scientific method:

> In personal narratives, social scientists take on the dual identities of academic and personal selves to tell autobiographical stories about some aspect of their experience in daily life. In literary autobiographies, an author's primary identification is as an autobiographical writer rather than a social scientist, and the text focuses as much on examining a self autobiographically as on interpreting a culture for a non-native audience. …. Autoethnography, narrative ethnography, self-ethnography, memoir, autobiography, even fiction have become blurred genres. In many cases, whether a social science work is called an autoethnography or an ethnography depends on the claims made by those who write and those who write about the work. (Ellis & Bochner, p. 211-214)

Acknowledging that traditional scholarship finds autoethnography as messy or even irrational, some researchers assert that the risks are mediated by the value of bringing unheard voices to the fore, as well as for addressing the theoretical and interpersonal tensions and inconsistencies often found during applied research (Ashcraft and Trethewey, 2004). Through efforts to connect the larger societal forces with individual member experiences, autoethnography arguably presents accounts of experiences in ways that honor both the researcher and the subject as more equal participants. As such, autoethnography has been used in an increasingly common way to give voice through performances, memoirs, and speeches, especially by members of populations often marginalized in the practice of social science (Bochner & Adams, 2020). As Bochner and Adams (2020) observe, “many autoethnographies deal with the pain, suffering, and tragedy of human existence, but happiness is at stake in every autoethnographic story of suffering” (p. 715). With this meaningful connection to the alleviation of suffering, and an echo of its aforementioned Zen cultural roots, autoethnography can be seen as likely appropriate for this particular study of communicating impermanence.

However, keeping in mind that the topic of this research is organizational communication, and not cultural description or social critique, and because there are so many definitions and types of ethnography and autoethnography, the design of this research on lived experience might best be expressed with some other term. Getting away from the cultural aspects of autoethnography, this research design will instead aim for an autobiography in its generally used form, as the story of a person’s life, told by the subject themselves. Moreover, because its focus is communication between members, and not the researcher’s own thoughts, feelings, or interpretations, the term *organizational autobiography* is offered as the best way to describe this particular research design, consistent with autoethnography as a particular form of ethnography. In other words, borrowing primarily from the methods of ethnography, but with the additional insights of autoethnography, organizational autobiography is presented and adopted in this study, defined as a research-informed personal narrative drawn from organizational life, written in first person.

DATA COLLECTION & ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELDNOTES

The data was collected in the field over a three-month period from March through May 2020, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Approximately 210 pages of college-ruled notebooks were filled with handwritten notes during this time. Secondary sources were gathered as available and appropriate from the organization's body of communicative artifacts, including emails, internal messaging and chat boards, meeting agendas and minutes, and task management software, particularly Basecamp, which was adopted right at the onset of this period when stay at home orders were first put in place.

This study employed an ethnographic fieldnote approach for data collection, seeking to achieve accurate and detailed observations of social interaction related to the COVID-19 pandemic in the field (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2012). The goal of this method is to develop rich and thick description of member communication in a variety of contexts related to the study organization (Tracy, 2010). In addition, exploratory narrative inquiry (Polkinghorne, 1988; Czarniawska, 1997; Riessman, 1993), in the form of more reflexive and subjective field notes, was helpful to consider how communicating impermanence was revealed as part of a co-created, intersubjective organizational story of survival during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Guided by Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw (2012), ethnographic fieldnotes were taken at the end of the day in private, so as to not interrupt or disturb other organizational members doing their day-to-day work. This involved the reflexive reporting on in person and online meetings, phone calls, face-to-face conversations and other informal interactions that spontaneously arose during the period of observation, which was recorded in handwritten journal entries nights and weekends, as the daytime was spent in the actual management of the organization (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Fieldnotes were recorded with dates and timestamps, and spanned from only a few sentences for a simple interaction to many pages long for an event that unfolded over some multiple periods of time. The writing process itself was part of the data collection, not separate but in itself a form of qualitative inquiry (Richardson, 2003).

As is established in best practices for ethnography, fieldnotes aimed for objective reports of observed behavior and spoken and written conversations. Following as Emerson et. al (2012) recommended:

> Ethnographers should attempt to write fieldnotes in ways that capture and preserve indigenous meanings. To do so, they must learn to recognize and limit reliance upon preconceptions about members' lives and activities. They must become responsive to what others are concerned about in their own terms. But while fieldnotes are about others, their concerns, and doings gleaned through empathetic immersion, they necessarily reflect and convey the ethnographer's understanding of these concerns and doings. Thus, fieldnotes are written accounts that filter members' experiences and concerns through the person and perspectives of the ethnographer; fieldnotes provide the ethnographer's, not the members', accounts of the latter's experiences, meanings, and concerns. (p. 16)

With a point of view as an ethnographer, fieldnotes taken for this study provided rich narrative examples useful in describing the complexity of experience of impermanence in an organizational context.

In order to answer the research questions, however, additional data that was clearly more objective than ethnographic fieldnotes were necessary, particularly for an organizational autobiography designed to speak not only for the identity of an individual, but playing the role as a leader of an organization. Basecamp, an online communication tool with chat rooms, message boards, tasks and milestones provided additional source material and gave insight into the thoughts and concerns of many additional internal organizational members in conversation. Thus, the second part of data collection provides a balance from which to gain perspective on the personal more towards the organizational view. In addition, more traditional secondary organizational communication data, consisting of over 2400 incoming and outgoing emails and electronic documents from the researcher's work accounts including the keywords "COVID-19" or "pandemic" were retrieved and converted to pdf form for future analysis. Many of the partnering organizations in our network, from healthcare, education, early childhood, and human service agencies, provided regular communications about their unfolding experiences during COVID-19, and these provided interesting context and more reliable reports about what was happening at the local, regional, and national levels.

Overall, the activity-focused fieldnotes together with common internal and external communication between organizational members and partners served to complement each other and provided a balance of perspectives which increased the study's polyvocality (Arnold & Brennan, 2013). The total combined set of data provides a means of critically examining "grand narratives" while demonstrating the depth and breadth of the COVID-19 situation on an interactive, communicative, personal and small group level (Tracy, Geist-Martin, Putnam, & Mumby, 2013).

DATA AND CONTENT ANALYSIS

The analysis of the qualitative fieldnote data was an interpretive exercise, guided by sensemaking, “a process that is: 1) grounded in identity construction; 2) retrospective; 3) enactive of sensible environments; 4) social; 5) ongoing; 6) focused on and by extracted cues; 7) driven by plausibility rather than accuracy” (Weick, 1995, p. 17). Multiple readings of the notes lead to additional notes and reflections, which in turn informed the proposed model eventually presented. Moreover, as ethnography tends to be emic and inductive, most ethnographic projects tend to avoid beginning with a model or hypothesis (Tracy, Geist-Martin, Putnam, & Mumby, 2013). This was helpful for keeping the notes focused in the moment, although it should be noted that there are some examples where it is used in a more etic, or deductive way (Ellingson, 2009). Thus, in addition to the emic exploration of personal narrative, some deductive analysis was employed during the writing process.

From the onset, this project was guided by deep body of work from Weick (2012) that pointed towards a possible relational model for communicating impermanence, and this construct has strong enough evident value to actually apply in a deductive manner. Content analysis, and the direct method offered by Hsieh & Shannon (2005) demonstrated ways to apply a prior construct or theory to bodies of text, dialogues, and messages, including ethnographic field notes. Directed content analysis is appropriate to use when “existing theory or prior research about a phenomenon that is incomplete. . . would benefit from further description,” with the goal “to validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1281). Humble (2009) suggested that directed content analysis can be used as a triangulation method to improve the trustworthiness of qualitative research findings, and thus, NVivo 12 Software was employed to organize and categorize both the Basecamp and email data (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). The descriptions of Weick's 10 processes presented in Table 1 (see p. 15) were used as a framework to organize communication events that reflects these processes in NVivo (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). The 10 interrelated actions that Weick has previously identified were used as sensitizing concepts to filter and organize the data. Reports helped relationships between the actions emerge and confirmed intuitions about observations made in the field.

During the writing process, the software aided in finding specific examples that demonstrated how acceptance and avoidance enabled and constrained Weick's 10 actions as five paired feedback cycles as processes of communicating impermanence. It should be noted that only after the data collection were relevant examples of these 10 processes in authentic communication content identified. There was a period of at least two weeks between ethnographic fieldnotes were taken, and when synchronous related data was drawn down and compared to experience with the aid of the software. During the fieldnote data collection, the attention was merely on observing the unfolding situation and interactions that members were having. Then, examples of these process collected in the field were compared and contrasted with the Basecamp and available secondary data, to allow more precise definitions and descriptions to emerge to more fully capture the dynamic interaction expressed by communicating impermanence.

THE NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONAL SETTING

Organizational communication scholars are embracing the non-profit sector as a rich and unique source for the study of our discipline, and the potential to open the field to more diverse applied research and broader contexts seems great (Kirby & Koschmann, 2012). Non-profits, sometimes called public sector agencies or NGOs (particularly outside of the United States), are organizations whose general purposes are social, cultural, charitable, benevolent, and/or educational, with "potentially unclear lines of ownership" (Isbell, Sanders, & Koschmann, 2017). This does not mean that they cannot be large or powerful. In the U.S. alone, non-profits with a 501(c)(3) status with the Internal Revenue Service represent 1.41 million organizations and nearly 5.4% of the GDP, and just over a quarter (25.3%) of adults volunteered an estimated 8.7 billion hours valued at $179.2 billion in 2014 (McKeever & Pettijohn, 2015). Non-profit activities span healthcare, human services, the arts, environment, education, religion and disaster relief efforts, just to name a few. Non-profits (interchangeable with "nonprofits" but the former will be used in the study) have their own topical journals in management studies, such as *Nonprofit and Management Leadership* and *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, but are frequently used as contexts for field research in the leading communication journals. While they can be looked at in policy, business, economic, political and sociological terms, their unique power to generate, preserve, and transmit meaning between people make them ripe for deeper investigation with a communication lens.

The particular organization under study in this dissertation is an established, mid-size non-profit serving a 30,000 square mile region of the South-Central United States. The region is composed of a five-county area with an estimated population of over 2 million people, racially diverse population with near majority minority status, approximately 48% total, consisting of primarily Latino/a, Black, and Vietnamese people (US Census Bureau, 2015). It also has been noted as being particularly economically disparate and segregated (Florida, 2017). The organization has been in continuous operation in this location for over 45 years and has an annual total operating budget between $1 - $2 million dollars. It serves upwards of 100,000 children a year with early literacy services. It enjoys a Platinum GuideStar rating and averages five stars from visitors on Yelp, Google and Facebook pages but it is not yet prominent enough to be rated by Charity Watch and Charity Navigator, indicating its small to mid-level standing in the non-profit field (Levine & Eckerd, 2019). It routinely employs between 5-10 permanent full and part-time Staff members, as well as Federal Work Study students and VISTA AmeriCorps Volunteers. It is managed by a self-elected Board of Directors of approximately 15 people serving three-year terms, and has a diverse and relatively stable funding base of individuals, foundations, corporate, and government donors, 90% contributed and 10% earned through program fees. However, very little of this funding is multi-year in commitments. It has strong community support with active partnerships with 200 healthcare, education, and community-based organizations and enlists up to 800 Volunteers annually including both individual and corporate and civic groups. It should be noted that this data provided by the organization refers to averages for the four years prior to July 1, 2019 so these metrics are from before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The organization's primary purpose is promoting and distributing books to children in low socio-economic households to remedy childhood and family illiteracy. It has long been asserted by childhood and reading advocates that lack of access to books and limited reading aloud activities at home creates a lifetime deficit for children's academic and social success (Hart & Riesly, 2003; McCormick & Mason, 1986; Neuman, 1999). The organization aligns with research that indicates neither parents' education nor their socio-economic status could more profoundly predict the educational success of a child than did the actual number of books in their house (Evans, Kelly, Sikora, & Treiman, 2010). The research suggests that having 20 or more books at home is a significant indicator of three more years of education for a child. The organization reports that in their particular region in 2018, only 46% of families with children 12 and incomes under $40,000 reported having 20 children's books at home. The organization strives to provide as many free books as possible for children, with distribution ranging between 1 to 10 books for ownership per child per year per program partner and model. The organizational theory of change states that in addition to books at home, parent education and family motivational supports are needed to encourage and establish a lifelong love of reading.

It is an organization that, due to its culture and particular commitment to the written word and education in general, tends more towards permanance and stability of service than embracing impermanance and instagating immediate short term change. While some non-profits have social missions to address or solve particular urgent concerns, as a domestic violence or suicide prevention organization, books are seen as vehicles to ensure a better future for children of low socio-economic classes over time, addressing a problem of low literacy that is chronic rather than acute. Children are always being born, and, unfortunately, the condition of poverty appears to be endemic. Because of these qualities, this particular organization offers an opportunity to study impermanence as an underlying mediating or indirect feature, as opposed to a disaster aid or emergency response organization conditioned to face impermanence directly.

Members and Partners of the Organization

The organization is comprised of a variety of individual members in diverse and sometimes overlapping roles. Roles include full-time and part-time paid Staff, Volunteers, customers, program partners, donors, contractors, consultants, as well as stakeholders and advisors. As a non-profit entity, it can be seen as communicatively constituted through a diverse array of moment-to-moment informal and more reflective and composed longer term messages. Members are, in general, highly dedicated to the cause, and the particular organization under study enjoys a good reputation among other non-profits that work on similar early childhood literacy and health and human service sectors in the local and national levels. There also is a fair amount of fluidity of roles, as members have moved from Staff to board and back again, or from Volunteer to Staff and back throughout its relatively long history for its sector. The common confusion over who does what in a non-profit, from Board to Executive Director to Staff to Volunteers, sometimes makes assigning roles and agency challenging, but it also makes the sense of organizational agency and identity stronger than the individual roles of members.

One of the key topics of study in organizational communication over the past 50 years has been the relationship between leadership, supervisors and employees (Garner, et al., 2016). *Roles*, in this instance, are the externally prescribed patterns of relationships that are held together by communicative-organizational acts, whereas *identities* are how individuals perceive their places within the larger organizational or societal framework (Mumby & Stohl, 1996; Ganesh & Stohl, 2014). As organizational communication as a discipline focuses on the intersection between the individual and the group, it is important to pay attention not only to the individual roles and identities of actors, but to the collective agency of the organization as a whole. Better said, from this perspective both individuals and organizations have agency to choose and take responsibility for their actions; the dynamics of how this agency is expressed in everyday life is the focus through communicating impermanence.

In non-profits, the dyad of supervisor/subordinate or leader/follower roles seem murkier than in the corporate system with its implicit hierarchy (Ganesh & Stohl, 2014). Not the least of these reasons is because the "top" of the organizational structure of a non-profit, in legal and financial terms, is a volunteer Board of Directors (Preston & Brown, 2004; Kramer, Meisenbach, & Hansen, 2013). Instead of governing to gain resources for their own personal use, they become stewards of community resources intended to benefit the community at large. In most instances, they are not paid—in fact, they themselves pay for the privilege of their participation by means of contributions, gifts, and/or dues (Cornforth, 2002). In order to study non-profits, and the organizing communication that creates them, this simple factor must be considered in a structural and sociological way. Staff members, in this study, are paid members, but were not otherwise compensated for their participation in this study. Volunteers, families beneficiaries, and vendors benefit in various social and materials ways.

In short, non-profits are promising for this exploratory study around impermanence in part because of the fluid boundaries of the roles and identities of members. Blending organically in strength and purpose and over time, members of non-profit organizations commonly express participation through well-studied concepts like membership negotiation, threats to individual and organizational identities, and dealing with organizational change (Zorn, Page, & Cheney, 2008). In practice, Volunteers may play leadership or worker roles; professionals may be the Staff members or the experts offering services; philanthropists may be individuals, corporations, or other agencies, or the Staff and board within the organizational boundaries; beneficiaries may be direct, indirect, and from any walk of life that is seen as being in need; and partnerships exist in many different facets and levels that evade formal legal definitions (as well as those that embrace them). For the purpose of this study, all internal participants of the organization, Volunteers, Staff and board members, are considered members, and all external stakeholders, beneficiary families, program partners, funders, and vendors, are considered partners. The internal/external relationships have been simplified into organizational members and engaged partners to keep focus primarily on the complex interplay of daily communication within the organization, with some attention to immediate and direct environmental influences coming in from the outside.

ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

As a non-traditional researcher who is more practitioner than academic — "pracademic" (Posner, 2009; Powell, Winfield, Schatteman & Trusty, 2018) — I am most aligned with the concept of a *complete member researcher* (Adler & Adler, 1987) in the day-to-day operations of the organization. As I write, I have been employed full time by the organization in the role of Executive Director for the past five and a half years. While participant researchers observe in the field, and active member researchers engage but are not instrumentally involved, complete member researchers have 'gone native,' having unique access to gather data, and to gain the trust and cooperation of organizational members (Adler & Adler, 1987). Complete member research is rarely seen in organizational communication, but provides valuable opportunities to directly address power, equity, and social justice issues, as well as a better understanding of the unique symbolic codes and meanings of a particular organization (Foster, 2010; Chuang, 2015).

The complete member relationship in an organizational context does not necessarily rely on friendship or comradery alone, as it is situated in the workplace, and may be "more activity oriented and businesslike, in addition to personal in character" (Adler & Adler, 1987, p. 52). For instance, I began my PhD program prior to joining the organization, and it has supported my continuation towards this goal with an understanding that it would allow me to become better at collecting and using data to inform and improve our work and the goal-driven performance of the organization itself. From this very intimate perspective, I am in a unique position to both access and interpret the data with knowledge of the background, context, and intentions of each communication event observed.

While this less commonly adopted research role can have potential drawbacks in terms of loss of perspective and over identification with the subject (Adler & Alder, 1987), as an BFA in acting and an MFA in playwriting and screenwriting who is interested in language, communication, and organizational performance, my work is balanced by the invited participation of other members of the organization. I have engaged employees, leadership, and stakeholders throughout the process, particularly to discuss impermanence as a condition, which is an interesting concept for lay people to discuss. This collaborative approach to the fieldwork and data collection, and a separation of time of at least two weeks between recording the field notes and analyzing them, has help to shield the study from personal bias and ensure the validity of the proposed dissertation through triangulation (Humble, 2009).

ETHICAL, POWER, AND PRIVACY CONCERNS

Ethnography seeks to find evidence of phenomena as unobtrusively as possible, but the positionality of the researcher remains a key ethical concern, and is heightened when there is positional authority involved (Van Maanen, 1979). Ethical integrity and member privacy was deeply considered during this research process. To respect the ethical complexities of positionality in this study, the identities of both individuals and the core and affiliate organizations involved have been largely masked to protect and retain confidentiality.

While I cannot feasibly mask my own identity, including my own organizational and institutional affiliations, any possible identifiers of participants in the study such as names, genders, races, and even organizational roles have been changed, including specific details of dates and locations situations that may appear in narrative data (Emerson, et al., 2012). Individual participants were provided informed consent forms and the opportunity to opt out completely of the study, and the study was approved by the Board of Directors of the organization as well as the formal IRB of my home institution.

As guided by Simpson & Seibold, (2005), I have aimed to give aid whenever possible, avoid harm at all costs, and make amends immediately if unintended consequences occur. I strive always in my work to communicate transparently, and I'm grateful that the Board of Directors of my organization has a good track record of holding me accountable for these goals. In addition, I have been and will continue to be particularly careful of power relationships, and make concerted efforts to be clear with employees when I am wearing my researcher hat, and when I'm being the leader, that anything discussed at all times in confidence will be kept strictly confidential and have absolutely no impact on their future job evaluations or assignments.

Reliability and Validity

As with all research, issues of validity, meaning accuracy about the topic of study, and reliability, meaning consistency across different accounts of the phenomenon, are key, but they are particularly complex when involving autoethnography. This document will aim more at creating reliable meanings than arguing for a particular theoretical model or set of facts, with commitment towards consistency of scientific description within the application of Weick's 10 actions and the proposed five processes of communicating impermanence model. In light of the role of personal narrative approach outlined in applied communication research, this study aims to:

> understand research as oriented not only toward facts, but also toward meanings; not only under the rules of rigor, but also under the inspiration of the imagination; not only to achieve better predictions, but also to alleviate human suffering; not only from the position of neutrality and distance, but also from the position of caring and vulnerability; not only toward the production of conventional received texts, but also toward the performance of creative, artistic, and dialogic modes of representing lived experience (Bochner & Adams, 2020, p. 711).

In order to improve the validity around impermanence and trustworthiness or reliability of the accounts through this organizational autobiography, the analysis and writing period involved frequent triangulation and even open, frank, and curious discussion with fellow members about the purpose of and progress on this dissertation (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011; Humble 2009). The members have quite diverse and varied backgrounds, from education to ethnicity to professional roles to gender and economic status. As partners in engaged research, they were informed of the basic goals of the study and have helped in developing contextual knowledge of impermanence within the organization. A full draft of this entire dissertation was shared with the participants to help frame and elicit their feedback to the discussion. In order to make sure that any observations made by me, the researcher, regarding the performance of organizational goals in the discussion and conclusion is reliable, participants were asked to review and comment on the document, and their feedback has been incorporated into the final dissertation (Miles & Huberman, 2002). Several members gave substantial feedback and additional narrative material. One said "I can't believe you listened to me so closely. No one ever does that. You really heard me!" Another said, "Yes I read it. And I don't have anything to add. We're not dumb, you know." Admittedly not everyone who was given a copy did provide comments, which should be duly noted. Still another said, “what a thing you’ve done, in telling our story. And how amazing it is that we are surviving, not only that, I think we are really thriving.”

Opportunistic Research and Timing

The unique historical period of COVID-19 presented an unprecedented opportunity to examine the topic of impermanence in the field of the workplace. While I had originally planned to do observations of organizational members in face-to-face interactions, this was made impossible by the reality of legislatively mandated and freely elected precautionary distancing measures taken to avoid the spread of the virus. As Barbour (2017) and his colleagues suggest, engaged scholarship demands the "need for the improvisational redesign of research methods over time" and necessitates the "use of intensive, overlapping, mixed methods to take advantage of propitious moments during engagement" (Barbour et al., 2017, p. 373). The unfortunate fact of the unexpected occurrence of a global pandemic coinciding with the planned fieldwork required many alterations made to the original research design. There was originally a second organization involved to help enhance validity, but they were unable to participate after national and local shelter in place orders went into effect. This forced my role further into the complete participant researcher mode, and I adjusted my data collection accordingly. Working on nights and weekends, I made reflective notes on the many Zoom and phone conversations and activities of the day and week, as much as a tool for managing stress as means to collect data for this study. Ultimately, a large body of source material generated during actual work hours was collected went into the results of this study, including emails, chats, messages, plans, website updates, social media posts and engagements (Waters, 2017). All of this evidence was drawn from ethnographic field notes and organizational communication collected specifically and only during the three-month period of March, April, and May 2020. Selections from this material, were made for their fitness to the processes of communicating impermanence, as well as an attempt to mirror and honor a variety of voices and relationships that were active during the period, as I observed while managing a particular organization through the early days of a modern pandemic.

This opportunistic research resulted in what is sometimes called "bricolage," a French term that refers to "a pieced together set of representations that is tied to the specifics of a complex situation" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 4). As such, this report is a kind of patchwork quilt which benefits from having direct access to members and organizational records over an extended period of time and in a variety of contexts, as well as implicit knowledge of the communication genres and styles commonly in use by the organization (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992).

This concludes the methods chapter. In the next chapter, I will present the organization's autobiographical findings, which are rich in detail, anecdotes, and narratives, intended to help practitioners in organizations, as well as scholars working in organizational communication, better recognize, confront, and manage impermanence. Please note that the chapter is organized by the five processes of communicating impermanence and not chronologically, and thus there may be a sense of repeating or looping of episodes, items and materials, reflecting the heightened sensemaking happening in our organization during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the findings chapter, the "we" and "ours" will refer not to my identification with scholarly researchers, but to members of the organization under study.

Chapter 4: Findings

The first two weeks of March 2020 our non-profit early literacy organization was working on a strategic plan and hoping to find a new home in a donated, constructed, or purchased building. Our programs were in full swing and our fundraising goals were on track. On Wednesday, March 11, the Novel Coronavirus Disease, COVID-19, was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization. On March 13 a national emergency was declared in the United States concerning the COVID-19 outbreak by the Centers for Disease Control. Although everyone was looking forward to the following week to celebrate Spring Break, the local school district announced extended closures that day, and by March 24th, school had been cancelled and "non-essential" local businesses, such as shopping malls, restaurants, bars, and sports activity in our region had all but stopped. March was dubbed by many in the social media as the longest month on record, sparking jokes as it dragged on about "The 89th day of March" and "by the way, April Fool's Day is cancelled" (Scott, 2020). But for many, April and May seemed just as long.

As the Executive Director, Staff looks to me for both direction and support, and I felt a strong responsibility to be cautious but optimistic about our ability to continue our operations and fulfill our mission despite the unfolding crisis. During our last regular days in the office, we joked nervously about food supplies and lack of toilet paper, but happily, everyone in our Staff seemed to have the basics under control. While none of us had any experience living and working through a pandemic, everyone seemed to adopt a "we'll get through this together" kind of attitude, and by in large, this has remained in place. With the support of our Board of Directors, who meet monthly and discuss relevant issues frequently outside of meetings, my focus has been primarily on keeping our people safe, our organization viable, and making pivots on our immediate operational plans and program deliverables. As of this writing, the pandemic is still affecting all aspects of our work and the world, and we face a future with a newfound awareness and appreciation of impermanence.

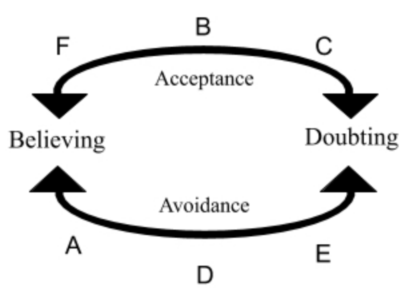
The following 30 episodes are divided into five sets of six topics, with a title used as a label for each episode to describe something that happened in our organization during the study period. Episodes in these findings cover a period of self-defined duration related to the topic. For each of the following sections, graphics are provided which indicate the most evident process for the set of episodes, and an assessment where each episode fits in along the process, indicated by letter labels matching the titles to a point in the process figures (A, B, C, D, E, F). In reality, there are likely many processes going on at any given time, but these are the ones that came to attention the most in relationship to the process as defined.

EVIDENCE FROM THE ONSET OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Process of Confidence

Figure 2.

Episode Orientation on the Process of Confidence



There were numerous examples of individuals and organizations communicating the process of confidence in the face of impermanence, and this led to observable actions of the interplay between believing and doubt. For instance there was a lot of discussion immediately about what to say about our response to the crisis and whether we should avoid being specific, or accept the situation and take action. Many were afraid of using the word "closure," worried that it would affect our funders, the public's expectations, and the Staff's morale, but some were also afraid to say that we were actually open to the public. A Board member suggested we use the word "watching the situation closely" regarding our operations. On March 23rd, we started a "Coronavirus Updates" page on our website:

> As we all are adjusting to life under the restrictions needed to control the Coronavirus Pandemic, our organization is looking for ways to help children and families choose reading as part of their daily routines. We are closed to the public but still working towards our mission to build early literacy at home, including enhanced digital curation of open online children's book and reading resources. We are watching the situation closely. We want to hear how you are doing and how we can help you and your family at this uncertain time."

Once there was more direction from local officials, and it became clear that the Staff for the most part was willing keep working in the office and accepting volunteer help with precautions, we re-wrote the copy on this page to better reflect the changes in attitudes we were all experiencing:

> We are open as an essential business providing services to low income families. However, we are observing all city, county, state, and federal mandates as best as possible. This includes requiring the use of face masks and gloves from all employees and Volunteers, practicing social distancing of at least 6 feet, staggering work hours and locations, and never having more than four people work in the same

space at a time. We use disinfectants and hand sanitizers frequently and have a three-day book quarantine policy for all books coming in and out of our inventory.

We went from being somewhat vague and doubtful about what to do, to being much clearer and more confident on the issue of our operational status. However, it took a while for us to know what to say and what to believe. While our organization took a cautious and pragmatic approach to communicating our position on the shut-down, some of our partner organizations seemed to present their efforts with more confidence right off the bat.

External Event Cancelation (A). A first example from within our organization shows a how we came to believe in the pandemic, aligned more with the acceptance of impermanence and avoidance of doubt.

There was a great hunger for news and information at the onset of the crisis, such as "Did you hear that someone already tested positive at Sunnyside School?" Or, "Is it true that you know someone who had traveled to China who got sick?" As we all looked for ways to make better decisions about how to react to the unfolding event, we had to make decisions based on what we believed more than what we actually knew. For many of us, we did not really believe that there was something truly serious going on until the city began to cancel large public events. When a large, well-known annual international festival was cancelled by the city, the emails flew and threads of responses simply said "Wow." "Yeah, Wow," meaning, this is something we must pay attention to. The negative economic impact was immediately apparent to everyone in the business community who depended on this event. The drop in our confidence that this situation would be easily resolved was evident from the sound of the low in tone whispers over the next day or two: "did you hear they cancelled XYZ festival?" with eyes rolling and shrugged shoulders as the only response. It was undeniable evidence that something unusual and seriously disruptive was going on right in our community. There was little left to say, as it was acceptance of impermanence, but it moved us away from believing, and more toward doubt, and correspondingly, a lack of confidence.

Suggestion to Furlough (B). As the second example, early on in the crisis, a Board member suggested that the first course of action for our organization should be furloughing all Staff members. Their reasoning was based on their belief that Staff members would be able to apply for unemployment, and that employees might enjoy their time off. This idea actually gained some traction amongst other members, until it was shown that most employees would not be receiving their full salaries if furloughed, even with some additional stimulus in the form of $600 extra in weekly payments (as this amount would be capped for higher earning employees). In addition, the lack of Staff would make it impossible to fulfill some deliverables on active grant funds, which might in turn need to be returned, which would not be good if the organization was intending to resume work at a later date.

Eventually, a financial review by the Finance Committee of the Board showed that the organization was not in an immediate cash flow crisis, and that funding for current positions were secured at least through the end of the fiscal year. The member who proposed the furlough was not aware that unemployment would not cover full salaries, and when they heard that fact, quickly let go of that belief and withdrew the suggestion. Some Staff looked upon this as a bullet dodged. On the other hand, it was the Board member's quick acceptance of the condition of impermanence that allowed them to express that initial radical proposal to the organization, instigating a larger and much-needed discussion about alternative actions that might be taken. This is an example where an initial resistance to, or avoidance of, impermanence offered by an internal member laid the path for an acceptance of it that was in the end a more positive experience for the membership as a whole.

It is important to note that although this particular suggestion was ultimately rejected, there was no social penalty to the member for offering it. There had been enough trust created between the Board membership and me as an Executive Director that I did not take this suggestion as a threat, and I didn't struggle or panic with it. My guidepost was to find out the truth as to if it would be a good idea for both the organization and the Staff to consider. This is a case where one member's belief in the severity of the current situation—in other words, an immediate acceptance of impermanence—helped to spur on a process of discussion that ultimately generated a confidence that continuing employment was worthwhile. Thus, this shows how difference in positions towards impermanence across the membership, and by extension, different individual perceptions of time, work to strengthen an organizations resiliency as a cohesive unit.

Ultimately, I believe in part to the attention put on this issues, but also in reaction to a growing awareness of how the crisis was unfolding for the economy overall, it was decided that a high priority for the organization moving forward through the COVID-19 crisis would be retaining Staff as long as possible. These early actions helped to create an atmosphere of both confidence and trust which seems to have persisted as a theme of our overall organizational story (Meyerson, Weick, & Kramer, 1996).

School and Church Closures (C). In our organization, much time was spent wrestling beliefs and doubts around the continued closure or opening of schools. This process of confidence about our public school system has remained highly volatile, and is palatably unbalanced. For this next episode our organization was more in the location of the process of the cycle towards doubt.

"What are we going to do if the schools don't open," said Lola one afternoon.

"Those kids will be so sad they are not going to get the books they were expecting," said Helena.

"Can we maybe partner with the schools and give them out with their free lunches? I saw they were still providing the lunches in a drive-up service at Diamond Elementary," said Lola.

"Yes, but who is going to give out the book? You? Our Volunteers? We can't just drop a box of books there…" I said.

"What if the books carry the virus?" Said someone else.

These were all serious questions to which some of us had opinions but no definitive or agreed upon answers. "We will just have to plan for every scenario," said Marsha, who works with elementary school campuses on our team. "And be prepared to act on every one." Across the country, teachers struggled to serve their students, many of whom did not have adequate support to flip to an online learning environment. Here is a particularly vivid account that was shared on a e-newsletter and website that we follow from a group we look to as thought leaders:

> On the second day of her school's COVID-19 related closure, sixth-grade teacher Elizabeth Raff sent her students a video through Google Classroom. In it, she talked about what she had been up to, including celebrating her son's second birthday at home, and she told her students that she missed them and wanted to hear how they were doing. She invited them to send her an email, and she promised to reply.

> Within a few hours, her inbox was flooded. In a survey conducted by Education Week, 41 percent of school leaders said they could not make remote learning accessible to every student for even one day. Though educators in such districts cannot teach classes or give assignments, they can still play a valuable role in their students' lives by staying connected in this time of uncertainty and heighted anxiety. "We know that strong, secure bonds with our teachers are really important in social-emotional development. To suddenly lose out on that under such strange and unprecedented circumstances can be really hard on kids," said Jamie Howard, a senior clinical psychologist in the Anxiety Disorders at the Child Mind Institute and the director of the Center's Trauma and Resilience Service. (WETA, 2020)

Back in our offices, we were still struggling as an organization with the fact that 30% of low-income children in our service area were not given devices to access the Internet during the school closure period. We are acting even in the doubt that the digital efforts that we make will not make the largest dent in the areas of need in our population. Our most practical path is to continue to offer print books and paper flyers and messages, cute stickers and bookmarks and refrigerator magnets with inspirational reminders to read a book, even as we try to replace human contact with text messages, phone calls, and for those who can access them, video meetings. We are aiming for families to read a book together, following the adage 'readers are made in the laps of those they love.' But we also have heard of tales of increased domestic violence from partners in our local network of youth and family services. Our tools and resources are ineffective for treating or preventing such fundamental suffering. In addition to the closures of schools, the mandates impacted religious organizations, one of the other key places that we partner with, and where people come together in a physical place due to the restrictions on number of people gathering at one time. Some religious leaders fought the ban in the name of religious freedom, but others met more out of a sense of wanting to fulfil a need for comfort in a time of anxiety. Sharing stories of avoidance of impermanence becomes informative for others facing similar situations.

Even as I write, people are continuing in our city to gather for parties, celebrations, and protests, even while the virus is still active and spreading. Rising deaths, in June of reportedly over half a million people, show the continued dangers of gathering, even (and perhaps particularly) for those who avoid directly facing the many processes of impermanence such as business closures, job loss, bankruptcies, and ultimately, human deaths brought on by COVID-19. Across all organizations and sectors of human interaction, the specter of closures in the material, operational and metaphorical sense were ever-present in the quality of life throughout the period of March, April, and May 2020, and this has not resolved as of this writing. We have been forced to address out own impermanence, and we can choose to become enlightened, or stay bogged down with suffering. We must look for teachers, mentors, tools, tips, guidelines, methods, research, and theories to help us do so.

Economic Uncertainty and Personal Safety (D). From early on in the period, the uncertainly of the short and long-term economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic created a new level of operational doubt in the business sector, and across the leadership of our organization, including both myself and the Board of Directors. At the end of March, which investors observed as the most volatile of any month ever (Newmyer, 2020), Goldman Sachs predicted the gross domestic production (GDP) would fall "by a stunning 34 percent plunge in the second quarter that would be by far the worst period in post-World War II history," but afterwards in the third quarter there would be a 19 percent surge “that would take the U.S. from the worst quarter in history to its best” (Newmyer, 2020, p. 7). While the Board of Directors had been predicting for several months that the economy was headed for a downturn, potentially impacting our fundraising plans and prospects for a capital campaign for a new building, this kind of uncertainly put even the most conservative scenarios into doubt. At first, hopes for a lower real estate market rate kept the prospect of a new building alive, but by April, all discussion of finding a new facility had ceased, with offhanded comments at other meetings or conversations, “well the building’s most certainly put on hold.”

It was not only those studying the GDP who had a heighted sense of uncertainty, wavering widely in both thought and action. Our entire network of non-profits and the for-profit service providers that support them wrestled with what the uncertainty would be doing to the business model of non-profits, fueled by philanthropic donations and volunteer labor.

For instance, Lola from our Staff offered the following concern, early on in the crisis: “In light of current and developing messaging from government and medical officials, do we want to be an organization that is encouraging people (i.e., Staff and Volunteers) to be leaving their homes and traveling to deliver "non-essential" items that could potentially spread the virus?”

In a practical and operational sense, we worked daily to make sense of the situation and provide frameworks and perspectives that could help us help clients and participants make the best choices from available information. “I heard it lives on surfaces for 24 hours.” “I heard for two weeks!” “How about three days? We let things sit for three days after they come in and three days after packing before they go out? Can we all live with wearing masks?” “Yes, that seems reasonable.”

This approach of expressing doubts and building beliefs was helpful in developing ways to deal with the day to day questions of modifying organizational behavior in the face of contradictory mandates and competing types of information. Instead of making directions based on generic recommendations from our human resources consultants, I found myself asking Staff, Board, and Volunteers, "would you feel comfortable doing that? What would we need to change to make you feel safe?" It seemed far more appropriate to be asking questions rather than dictating specific policies about physical attendance in the workplace.

Acting as an organization, we were able to sustain a belief that our work with parents and children was still of fundamental importance, even as the health and welfare of older and immunocompromised individuals was clearly at greater immediate risk. We were particularly motivated when we realized that people in low-socioeconomic classes, whom we aimed to serve, were facing higher food and housing insecurity than normal. "I wish I could be doing more," said Monica, a communication manager with personal roots in the communities we serve.

Negative Expressions of Belief (E). Interestingly, amongst ourselves internally, there were examples of the reverse or opposite expressions of belief during the observation period. Within our small group of Staff, "belief" was often used in a hedging way that ironically expressed disbelief or even doubting. "I *believe* it was left at the warehouse," meant "I think, but I am not sure." It was also used to express that shock or disbelief caused by the pandemic, such as "I *cannot believe* that it's been two months since we've been on lock-down." These two examples highlight how actions such as believe and doubt are difficult to isolate in a single direction, and how a multidirectional perspective as proposed better fits how these actions are sometimes expressed in day-to-day communication. As such, related expressions of disbelief could also indicate an intensity of experience, again in the negative form for something accomplished: “it’s *hard to believe* that we’ve been able to make so many changes so fast.” Sometimes this conveyed a feeling or sense that we might be taking on too much, or might not be able to accomplish something that we were trying. In efforts to restore belief in the work and in our ability as a team to persevere, I consciously granted more permission to fail and extended deadlines for specific assignments. Incidentally, this observation about the mutability of believing and disbelieving does not seem particularly isolated to the COVID-19 crisis: upon reflection, it was used in ordinary times as well. Whether used in the positive or negative, invoking belief appears to have a generally palliative effect, relieving the tension of uncertainty from the onset of an event which elicits impermanence.

While we ultimately determined that our literacy focused mission was still relevant, and our supporters and funders agreed, the doubt created by the drive to volunteer and the drive to stay home and safe still plays out dynamically at our organization, and many others, often changing from day-to-day.

Payroll Protection Program Doubts (F). Another example of doubt that caused initial avoidance of an effervescent opportunity, one that we ended up giving in and accepting eventually supplied a much-needed bridge to sustain our operations. Although we became aware of possible Federal funding for non-profits quite early on, we were reluctant to apply due to the lack of clarity from federal and financial industry leaders as to what the exact terms such funds would be. One partner wrote to us (leaving formatting in the original for emphasis):

> Dear Partners: I know your time is precious as you juggle many critical decisions, but I wanted to ensure you are aware of the financial assistance for non-profits created in the recently passed CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic

Security) Act. (*If you are already on it as I know many of you are, you can stop reading now and resume trying to keep the ship afloat.*) **Of particular interest to many of you will be the Paycheck Protection Program** which offers **forgivable loans** if terms are met. **Applications open April 3, 2020** (*tomorrow*). Pursuing the Paycheck Protection Act is **time sensitive**. Per the Chamber of Commerce, "*while the program is open until June 30, 2020, the government is advising borrowers to apply as soon as possible given the loan cap on the program*."

As an organization, we applied the first round on the first day, but heard nothing. We reached out to ask how other organizations were faring with their submissions and found out that the first round was gone within one day. It felt a bit like a kick in the gut, as we really thought we had been on top of the process. I strongly doubted that this PPP loan was going to happen, and even if we should be asking for it at all: it seemed too good to be true, and I had seen government agencies go back on or cancel awarded grants before. But with the help of our lenders, Board Members, non-profit partner networks, and Staff research, we were able to overcome our doubt and take advantage of this fleeting opportunity for a forgivable Federal loan. When Congress authorized a second round, we submitted three applications within the first weekend, and were eventually funded for 2.5 months of salary, reinforcing our commitment to keeping our employees.

However, my doubt continued to simmer. For instance, just days before repayment of the initial amount was to begin, terms were changed to extend repayment until the end of the year. An acceptance of the uncertainty makes the experience of engaging with the PPP more bearable for me. I don't think I would have utilized it if I had been a small business owner, on my own.

At this point, we anticipate the entire amount being forgiven, that is, converted from a loan to a grant. While many details needed to be worked out even after the signing of the loan, including the length of time that the funds could be used, and what they could be used on, in all we feel like the PPP has been a good transaction for our organization. This is an example where I personally went through a process of doubting, believing, doubting, believing, doubting and finally, arriving again at belief. Both Staff and Board members acted as sounding boards for this process, but ultimately, I had to come to believe it was the right thing in order to make it happen for the organization.

Communicating Impermanence through Confidence. A process of confidence allows members to act with the strength of belief, but also allows them to doubt actions when conditions direct them to do so. For instance, the overall story for this organization's performance during COVID-19 is that we're doing remarkably well. As one member put it, "Every time I have mentioned to friends and family that I am working MORE now than I did before the aliens landed, they are puzzled, a feeling that is immediately replaced by amazement when I tell them why and how." Believing that the work that we are doing has value provides motivation and meaning to the day to day activities.

This process of confidence is not only internal but reflected by and extended to those in the community with whom we are working across organizational boundaires. We received several unplanned new grants from foundations and local agencies who recognized that we were doing something positive to help communities. In due course, the families that we serve began to provide visual evidence of their gratitude for the books they were receiving, and this strengthened our belief in our value.

One parent sent in a photo to share on social media said, “we all waited and she was so excited when she received her books in the mail. Thank you.” While we were accustomed to other agencies sharing rights-cleared photos of children, this marked the first time we had been given a photo directly by parents of a child whom we had immediately served, explicitly with the permission to share the image freely and publicly.

Figure 3.

Child Beneficiary of Organizational Service (used with permission)

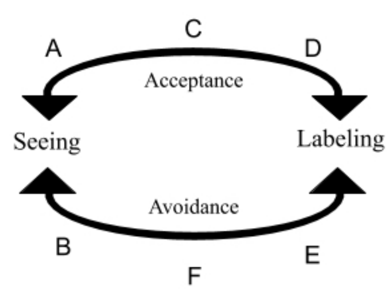
As of this writing, we have not let go of any Staff member, we have not returned any grant funding, and we have been able to keep books and motivational activities flowing into our community, albeit at a lesser rate than prior to the COVID-19 crisis. Because we also are avoiding the doubt that we can to better, we are moving along the process to acceptance that we can do more.

The evidence for the way that we express the process of confidence with each other and externally is also found in a statement made in our meetings, our social media, website, and mailings to members that “now, more than ever, books in the home matter.” Response rates like the photos above, as well as donations and contributed video from Volunteers, seems to resonate. It might have been harder to adapt to the COVID-19 crisis as well as we did without this sense of hope, faith, and belief coming from both our internal and our external networks: but also without the doubt that we should stop what we're doing, or that we wouldn't be able to continue our work. The process of confidence, as a rich and dynamic interplay between believing and doubt, exemplifies our experience of communicating impermanence.

Process of Awareness

Figure 4.

Episode Orientation on the Process of Awareness



One of the primary ways that our organization became aware of the unfolding situation was by seeing the novel and expressive reactions of our external partners towards it. By seeing what messages they were producing, their observations helped us find words, labels, and concepts for the things we were also experiencing for the first time.

Employees Over Customers (A). Of the many external messages from our vendors of March that reflected the growing awareness of the situation, one in particular from a Software as a Service (SAAS) company stuck out as doing an excellent job of balancing both the emotional and the informational sides of the situation. I particularly appreciated the recognition that not only external customers, but the internal workings of the organization itself, its people, were at risk:

> We wanted to reach out today and assure you that we are monitoring the coronavirus (COVID-19) situation closely and are working to ensure we meet the needs of our customers as well as provide for the health and safety of our employees. We realize this health situation has already been disruptive to many businesses across the globe and wanted to share facts about what we're doing to support both our customers and employees. These steps include:
>
> - Moving employees to work from home in a thoughtful, choreographed manner.
> - Working closely with our partners to make sure we have additional equipment and supplies to take care of employees, and by extension, our customers.
>
> As a company proudly serving the small business community, we know how critical the online tools we provide are in helping our customers maintain their business. Know we will be investing in our capabilities, equipment and support and reacting in real-time to make sure we are here supporting our customers through this.

By seeing this particular company, much larger than ours, but with a focus on the small business sector, put their employees before their customers, made me aware that there was a shift happening due to the pandemic about assumptions for service organizations, like the virus was now a shared enemy, and the boundaries of our companies had temporarily dropped. That somehow, everyone's mission was now focused on keeping people employed and safe at the same time. This significantly altered how I and others viewed our performance objectives, so much that we motioned to drop them significantly during a Board meeting. Instead of quantity of books distributed, we would focus on the quality of experience that family beneficiaries would be having with us as an organization: not the least of which was safety.

How Are You Feeling? (B) One of our fundraising event consultants, at one of the last face to face meetings that we had, suggested that we reach out to all our partners and simply ask, "How are you feeling?" Instead of reporting on our condition or asking for financial support, she suggested that we just check in, and see how people were doing. This was a good piece of advice that several of us used, not only to maintain business and donor relationships, but to friends and family who lived in other regions. Another local group that we had done some consulting work within strategic planning offered the following note with a similar theme. It was partly a sales pitch for more services, but its added value brought to light what others in similar organizations were going through, and confirmed how unusual the times had become:

> *Before today, no one had asked me how I was feeling in the past two weeks.*
>
> *I didn't realize how much we needed to process what is going on right now.*
>
> *This was the most important conversation we've had as a Staff in years.*
>
> These are some recent comments that we've heard after facilitating virtual meetings with organizations and collaboratives. You, social sector leaders, are doing so much right now. After logging a lot of time with non-profit and government leaders tasked with responding to the pandemic over the last month, we wanted to offer a few insights:

1) Make time for yourself. This means self-care, but it also means making space for thinking, reading, writing, and reflecting. While there is real challenge, scarcity and fear in the social sector right now, there is also creativity, collaboration, and innovation. Be sure that you are nurtured and informed enough to be able to see and capitalize on the opportunities.

2) Prioritize connection. Make time for connection with peer colleagues. Give your Staff permission to talk about their feelings. Hold space for your board to make meaning of the current crisis. It is possible to do all of this on videoconference, but in our experience, only with a clearly designed agenda and meeting objectives, a designated facilitator, and by breaking up larger group meetings into smaller conversations of 5 or less.

3) Embrace adaptive or emergent strategy. Can you develop a strategic plan right now? Maybe, or maybe not. But you can certainly adopt an attitude of curiosity about the assumptions your team held previously that are no longer true at this moment; or consider potential future options and scenarios; or even adopt a rapid prototyping mindset to pilot a potential new strategy.

If you need help or want to talk further about any of the above, we're here to support you. Really.

This message helped me see just how different people's sense of time and sensitivity to the situation had become. Knowing these consultants personally and respecting their work and knowledge, I felt that the support and guidance of this message was heartfelt. And while I didn't take time to call them or schedule a meeting, I did think seriously through their three pieces of advice: take time for yourself, prioritize connection, and embrace adaptive and emergent strategy, and these carried us through some darker times. Similarly, many Staff reported making connections with people to check in, and that it was, overall, much appreciated by those receiving the message. Showing care without the implicit urge for a transaction became more of a norm in the workplace during the onset of COVID-19, so much that Facebook implemented a new emoji specifically for this purpose: . As an organization, we use Facebook heavily to communicate with our program partners and Volunteers, and this icon was heavily adopted in our external communications.

When It First Felt Real (C). While many Staff members elected to keep working in our small and mostly private offices at least on a part-time basis, I enjoyed the privilege of being able to work from home from the beginning. This is both due to the primarily administrative nature of the work I do, and also a personal necessity for family health reasons. I have been able to order almost everything we need as a family online, and have it delivered, or pick up curbside. Because of this, almost all of my experience with the virus and with my staff was mediated through television, radio, the phone, or the internet.

One day, when my family ran out of some basic items, I finally had to walk inside my local grocery store for the first time. I was shocked not so much from how it looked, with some aisles completely empty, but how it felt. The darting look of eyes over masks, the sideways walks to keep out of each other’s way, and the loudspeaker issuing friendly reminders to keep a proper social distance of six feet made me feel as if I was in a panopticon or dystopian novel. I bucked up and tried to keep it together, and was doing my shopping fast and efficiently, until I reached the check out. I was taken aback by the plexiglass between me and the cashier. I hadn’t heard about this feature of the pandemic, clear plastic dividers to mitigate the spread of breath and spit and phlegm: it was the first time I had seen it. It immediately made sense, but upon seeing it so unexpectedly, I was overcome by the sense of loss, and fear. This place that I had been to so many times, that felt so cozy and familiar, my grocery store, was suddenly so different and dangerous and distant. It was seeing that plexiglass at the check-out that brought the pandemic home to me. I started crying, and had to work hard to hold back the sobs until I got to my car. It took me several days to shake off the sadness, and for something so simple and designed to make me and others safe.

While this example above was not directly related to the workplace, it is relevant because I decided to share the story with everyone on Staff. I wasn't sure if I should, but it felt right, and Weick recommended that leaders should sometimes exhibit doubt to make room for discussion (Weick, 2012). After that, a few people also shared stories of the moment that the crisis became real for them. A few also felt it at their grocery stores. But others felt it at parks, while out walking their dogs, when trying to go out to a bar with friends, or at home with their roommates or children. This dissertation could not be complete without the stark recognition of feelings of sadness and grief for the loss of the time before, as well as the continuing fear of what will come. One Staff member found and gave a label for it: the "Covid-coaster," that helped us all describe the emotional rollercoaster that living through a global pandemic has become.

Seeing Racial Injustice (D). Another example of seeing the emerging awareness of racial injustice came in a very serendipitous way. I participated in an online happy hour for Executive Directors through a national organization that I was invited to join by a current grantor. This was in the long hard March and there was a very low turn-out. The moderator was experimenting with breaking out the Zoom into rooms with smaller groups. I was placed in a group with the Executive Director of a small non-profit working in the same community as me. She identified as Latinx, and was very upset from the findings that Black and Brown people were being much more strongly impacted by the coronavirus than Whites. She reported that the infection and death rates were much higher for in the populations that she served, which were largely the same as who we served, and they were more likely to be out of work or have to work in high risk, first responder situations.

She told a story of going to the city government to try to ask for more support to address this issue earlier that day, and was distressed that she was waiting to hear about a task force for it. I asked her: what did the people need? She said, just basic information, like wash your hands, wear your mask. She said this information was not being put out in multiple languages, and people often didn't trust who it was coming from. I told her we could do something about that. "We're sending out books, we could put in basic information about how to protect families from the virus, and we can do it in multiple languages." She said, "you would do that?" I said, "of course."

Sophia, a Latina on our team, took on the project, and designed a specific flyer with the input of the other Executive Director for this exact purpose. She also has been very mindful of what we are doing to advance social justice and combat racism, and frequently spoken up to ask and suggest what we could be doing to address this through our work. We aim as a team to provide diversity of representation at all levels, and try to be very sensitive to the use of specific words. Like many non-profits, we have Diversity and Inclusion in our core values, but we do not always have adequate representation on our Board and Staff. Our field which includes social work, health and human services, education, childcare, children's books and libraries, and our sector, non-profits charities, are admittedly dominated by White cisgender women, like me. While I feel we have done much in recent years to listen to our communities and improve our representation of books by and for minority ethnicities and other diversities such as language and gender, I know we still have much work to do on racial injustice, and as an organization, we have not yet come to an agreement or action that could firmly be called anti-racist. Seeing this experience through the COVID-19 pandemic made that label, anti-racist, more acceptable across our organization, and has led to the creation of statements of support and a committee and advisory board focused on holding ourselves more accountable for social justice. This is an example of a problem that has been caught in a cycle of seeing and labeling for many years, with many people avoiding the reality of its presence even as they strive to accept all people. As shown by this spontaneous collaboration, sometimes the feedback cycle of a process of awareness takes a very long time to move from avoidance to acceptance, but the evidence indicates it will, eventually move. Which way it moves in dependent on individual member interactions towards the shared purposes of an organization.

Government Mandated Labels (E). When laws are made, they often open eyes to condition or issues that might otherwise be overlooked, but with details that at first glance seem arbitrary. This arbitrary novelty is part of what makes them effective. On March 20, 2020, our organization's state in supporting the federal government legally mandated that 1) people could not gather in groups of 10; 2) that people avoid drinking, eating, and entertainment establishments; 3) that people could not visit nursing homes unless providing critical assistance; and 4) all schools should temporarily close. The order was issued until April 3 but indicated that it could be, and eventually was, extended.

Meanwhile, county and city governments worked rapidly to interpret, confirm, reinforce, and refine these orders, often coming to divergent conclusions for the application and enforcement of such directives. As the reality of the closure and limitation of businesses and schools began to settle into the general public, and particularly in the workplace, differences in attitudes, behaviors, and enforcement of such mandates quickly appeared. In the United States, an overall lack of centralized response meant that the social agency for closures were placed on institutional, organizational, and often individual choice. For instance, the State Workforce Commission, which governs employee/employer relations in the state, offered the following recommendation to Employers in its March newsletter:

> Small businesses are the backbone of our great state. We encourage those concerned about operating capital or making the next payroll to apply for any designated programs under the U.S. Small Business Administration….For information on preventing layoffs by cutting employee hours or furloughing workers, we encourage you to explore shared work programs. These programs are designed to allow employers to supplement their employees lost wages because of reduced work hours with partial unemployment benefits….We encourage all State employers to follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines on social distancing, cleaning and disinfecting frequently, and providing teleworking options when available. (Demerson, 2020)

Later, in a question and answer section that was directed again at employers and their roles in navigating the prospect of business closures, the delicate issue of allowing or excluding individual workers from participating in the workplace was discussed:

> In keeping with an employer's general duty to maintain a safe and healthy workplace for employees, employees who appear to be sick may be asked to go

> home, but do so as politely and discreetly as possible. However, the employer should be consistent and treat all employees who exhibit risky symptoms the same….A question might come up if it is permissible for an employer to require a doctor's release / fitness for duty certificate or something similar if an employee is returning from an absence caused by something that looks or acts like COVID-19. It would be good to keep in mind that many employees may have financial problems relating to inability to pay to see a doctor, so employers should take that into account, and also that at least under current conditions, medical documentation should be requested only if a person is known to have been exposed….Moreover, medical offices are almost overwhelmed, so issuing documentation will not be high on their priority lists, and tests for COVID-19 are not yet widely available. Finally, request for medical documentation should be done consistently and fairly for all similarly situated employees. (Demerson, 2020).

However helpful guidelines like this from state and local governments might have been, it was still left primarily up to school districts, individual school leaders, and even individual teachers as to how to address the reality of closures with children and families. Our organization managed much of this by taking the details in but ignoring some of them until they made a direct impact on our work.

We were still talking about the possibilities of schools opening until one school in our network sent out a newsletter with the unambiguous headline in bold red sans-serif font: "The District is Closed Indefinitely." That was a moment of instantaneous seeing and labeling. It is still hard to accept that this is the case, and that currently there are no firm plans being offered for the academic year starting in Fall of 2020. With the Presidential Election also on people's minds, the ability of our membership to see and interpret labels related to government regulation has been clouded, tested, and exhausted. "I was watching the news last night…" "You cannot watch the news, it's not good for you." "I know, I can't stop it. I just don't know what's going on. It's a disaster." "Let's just get back to work and know that we're doing good." "You're right, you're right." "I don't know if I'm right, I just don't know what else to do."

One of the very first things we did when schools were closed was reach out to partner first responder agencies, police, firemen, and the food banks to see if we could distribute books through their networks, although it had been explored earlier in "normal times" and found to be logistically challenging. Unfortunately, this time was no different. The food banks were even more cobbled by the loss of group volunteering, and we realized that our conviction to providing families with opportunities for choice of language, subject, and age-appropriateness would be far more difficult to execute while they were providing adequate types of food to eat. The labeling process occurred when we supported our local colleagues and helped to advocate for them when it became clear that the lack of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) was becoming a threat not only to their Staff, but to the people they were serving. When some PPE did become available through a local operations center, an email went out from a coalition organizer to our entire network.

"Thank you for the information," said one network member, "however, they are prioritizing who gets the equipment and pantry workers are nowhere in the list of priorities….we (food pantry workers) are not even categorized under "other" responders," our colleagues said. The published list of labels as provider by the organizer from the operations center said, "Priority 1, 2, and 3," were as follows:

Priority 1 - Hospitals or health care professionals in contact with or treating confirmed COVID patients with potential for high loss of life.

Priority 2 - Facilities and EMS personnel that may encounter a suspected case and interface with a vulnerable population.

Priority 3 - Other first responders (Fire and Law Enforcement)

Our colleagues who worked in early childhood were mandated to stay open and available for the first responder's childcare needs, but were not even listed under "Other." We felt our colleague was justified to point out this unfair omission in the definitions in the label of 'first responders.' Supporting the notion that childcare workers, food distribution providers, and housing assistance were equally as important as healthcare, fire, and public safety, we signed on to a petition to expand the local definition and get the food pantry workers, childcare providers, as well as cafeteria workers passing out meals to low income families at schools whom we had been hearing were getting sick on the job, on the list of local workers eligible for available PPE.

We ourselves were caught in the trap of workplace labeling during COVID-19, with some Board Members initially questioning if we were truly an "essential service," another label that was used not only locally but at the state level. As a non-profit that primarily serves low income families, a legal review by our Board determined that we were technically included in the local and state definitions, but we also chose consciously to stay open as a business, and continue our service for the benefit of the families who were suddenly forced to stay home. In this case, a tangential process occurred of doubting and belief as well as seeing and labeling, with different members of the organization at different places in different processes, simultaneously.

Utility of Labels (F). As mentioned in the description, labeling can also be quite a useful process. As an organization we use color-coded labels to keep track of the source, quality, and condition of our books in inventory, both purchased and donated. And, I have learned over time as a supervisor that its very helpful to my direct reports to put labels on their accomplishments as a means of recognition and reward. Compliments are far more meaningful when they are authentic and specific. And everyone likes to feel appreciated at work. Here's an example of how I did this one Monday during the pandemic:

> Hello everyone! I just wanted to send out some heartfelt thanks today to:
>
> Monica, for strategically and personally reaching out to our top donors last week and getting all the thank-yous out;
>
> Helena, for packing books, braving the USPS, and taking care of unloading the book donation box;
>
> Sophie, for helping secure the Giving Circle grant, sorting and labeling in the warehouse, and getting a new agreement for books for the Head Start kids;
>
> Freida, for creating such great positive messaging through our newsletters and social media, and keeping our communication so clear and consistent;
>
> Lola, for getting out over 1300 books to 300 homes through the mail, and more by working with schools for drop offs, and keeping clinics going as well; and
>
> Anita, for keeping on top of requirements for the PPP and having our most important financial statements done by the deadline two months in a row.
>
> You are all brave, creative, and persistent, and I am lifted up by your efforts.

In practice, everyone was recognized for something, and something specific. While opportunities to call out and carefully label detailed performance wins should be taken advantage of all the time between people working together, both in vertical and lateral directions, these moments are particularly important when the odds seem so daunting against success, such as during the time of COVID-19.

Also, I have noticed that when groups get together and a good idea pops up, they very quickly want to put a label on it. There is kind of a competition to be the first with a good name or title, and then an interesting dance of competing titles and metaphors and images and rhymes that get lobbed about in the air, hoping that one will land solidly and rally the troops. Perhaps this is specific to nonprofits; perhaps there is a line of communication research around this that I am not yet aware of (brainstorming, maybe). For us, the labels that emerged for our programmatic and fundraising pivots, both with and without my prompting, were Delivered, Direct, and Digital. Delivered, the first label that emerged, became both a program and a fundraising initiative to gather information from partners so that we may ship books directly into homes; Direct, which was what some people accidentally called Delivered, became a subset of the Delivered program, where we were reaching out directly to families through local health and human networks and social media, as opposed through partner organizations as in our previous operations, and Digital was the label for anything we created for online video, social media, or text message delivery, which we began to focus more on as the realities of the increased cost of shipping books began to come clear. Falling short of fully developed social intervention programs, these labels help guide and define a new way of doing things and cut through the uncertainty. By accepting labels, impermanence can be better managed, and the emotional effort of seeing can be avoided, if only temporarily.

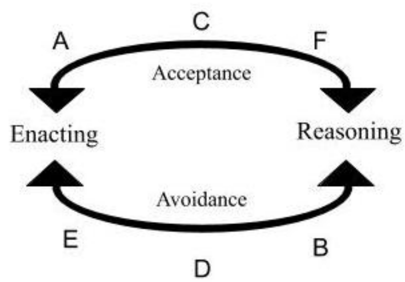
Communicating Impermanence Through Awareness. A process of awareness allows an organization to better understanding incoming information and novel phenominon and partition it in ways so that it is manageable. It also ensures that an organization is not overlooking key information that would significantly impact its operations. For instance, I believe that our organization became aware of the many challenges due to COVID-19 fairly early on during the period, and was accepting of seeing them, and constructive in their labeling processes in order to deal with them. I was happy to hear our labels start to be used by other people, and aware that the labels given to us by external partners seem to provide focus for our ongoing actions. While it is a daily struggle to keep our eyes open to see the ever arriving stream of new events, we continue to make useful and functional labels, and aim to stay aware of how to best manage these as programs during the constantly changing pandemic situation. As a result, we have been able to continue to distribute books at an increasingly robust rate.

In addition to awareness of incoming information and unfolding events, the process of awareness involves members subjective and objective experience. For example, when we see each other having a bad day, we back off and let things go for a while, being compassionate of each other's experience of suffering and loss. "I am so sorry for your loss. Do you need to take some time off?" "No, I'd really rather keep working, I just don't want to go to the meeting." "That's perfectly fine, don't come to the meeting. Make yourself some nice tea and sort the books." "Okay, I will do that, thanks." The process of awareness, with spontaneous acts of seeing as well as sorting and classifying acts of labeling, was one of the ways that communicating impermanence became clear during my observations within the study period.

Process of Influence

Figure 5.

Episode Orientation on the Process of Influence



Our organization goes through many routine processes of influencing, comprised of interrelated acts of enacting and reasoning, that work to keep our programs and operations going. Our Board of Directors meets to enact governance regularly, when minutes and financial statements from the previous month are reviewed and approved. Our Staff creates letters of agreements with partners and invoices them for payment to share the cost of service for our shared low-income beneficiaries. These activities continued without much interruption during the period of study. But some of these processes of influence did not go as smoothly as in normal times.

Payroll Protection Program Resolution (A). Because of the PPP mentioned earlier, the Executive committee needed to enact a specific resolution empowering the Executive Director to accept the loan, which was enacted over email between regular meetings. I was quite nervous about this, as peers from outside my organization were sharing stories that their Board of Directors were refusing the loans due to concerns about their own personal liability, and others were saying that their personal credit was being checked as part of the processing of the loan.

As an organization, we had no long-term debt, and so I had never had to sign any document that seemed to bind me personally to a liability for the company. However, the paperwork on all the bank materials only had the option for an individual lender as "owner." I spoke to the bankers to explain that I wasn't an "owner," this was a non-profit corporation, overseen by a volunteer Board of Directors. While they assured me that they understood this, the forms kept coming back with boxes checked for me as a "owner." I kept pushing the forms back with revisions, and collected a sample resolution from another organization whom I trusted to ensure that there was some paperwork that clearly authorized the loan on behalf of the entire organization, and not me personally as an individual. The President, President Elect, Treasurer and Secretary signed the resolution, and it gave me the comfort and confidence to sign the final paperwork to accept the loan.

Family Medical Leave On Our Own (B). However, there were other aspects of Federal policies enacted that were harder to navigate and seemed of less importance to us as an organization. One of these was the Family First Coronavirus Response Act, designed to help employees who get sick from COVID-19 get adequate paid sick leave. Our human resource vendor provided general information about the Act, and I looked to the Board for advice:

> We are exempt from FMLA, but under this Act, we must comply as a business with less than 500 employees. This has a lot of implications for how we can navigate possible future employee actions. Below is a summary with details and recommendations for next steps. I am not foreseeing any particular difficulty for us to comply with the Family First Act, but I think it's worth a deeper discussion.

After some time passing with no response, I reached out to a particular member with expertise in this area by phone to see if they had any thoughts or any clues about what other Board members might be thinking. They apologized first for the lack of response, then said, “You may be on your own to take a first swing on these changes and communicate what you’re doing as you go. Most of us on the board are professionals and we’re in the middle of our own disaster planning with our companies. I think you’ve got this one under control.”

In the past, I had generally passed anything regarding personnel policy up to the Board for review. While I was sad not to have the input about the topic, I also felt empowered by this member’s confidence in me. It definitely changed the speed with which we were able to make minor policy changes in order to accommodate Staff and volunteer safety and support, which instead of months with face-to-face meetings with discussion and review, could be passed in days via email and phone calls and Executive actions, as opposed to a vote of the entire Board. By less collective enactment, I was accepting more personal responsibility for the Staff’s wellbeing and risk.

Spanish Intake by Phone (C). A third example of enacting involved the creation of a method to better accommodate families who might not have access to the internet to fill out online forms. A manager came up with the idea of a designated phone line, but didn’t want to use their personal phone. While our Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) system allowed for incoming calls to be routed to the company provided desktops of Staff members who chose to work from home, outgoing calls still came from personal numbers.

Realizing that the scope of possible replies directly from family members would be quite different from the working through partners method previous employed, we explored setting up a

Google number to screen incoming and place outgoing calls. After testing and pricing and reviewing our other services, we found that there was another line available on our VoIP system that wasn't being used.

The manager who came up with the idea was able to record an outgoing message in Spanish and English, and the incoming message was routed via email to a team that could transcribe the information from the families. It may seem like a mundane communication innovation, but for our organization, it was a strategic enactment towards embracing a direct service model that had long been avoided. This enactment allowed us to adapt to the impermanence in relationship to our operational model.

Hiring Freeze Decisions (D). One act of leadership involving reasoning is something that I still regret doing: not because of the decision I made, but because of how I said it. During a meeting, I snapped at someone who was asking for more resources. This was before we had done our full cash flow projection, and before we knew if we had secured the PPP. The request was not insignificant and would be an ongoing cost, and it was not the first time that the issue had been brought up. But I had already offered a lower level, affordable position that I thought was reasonable before the COVID-19 crisis, and I said I intended to stand by the offer, and I couldn't understand why the person was asking for more, and more importantly, why this person was asking for more at that exact moment.

"Why are you bringing this up right now? Listen, I am trying as hard as I can to keep these doors open and keep everyone employed and keep our mission going, and I have already told you what I would approve, and I need you to just stop asking about that right now, alright?"

There were two people in this meeting, and I was relieved when the second person said, “maybe we should table this,” so I could say, “yes, let’s table this,” and we could move on.

I did apologize later on for raising my voice to the person and losing my temper, and they acknowledged that it was difficult time for everyone, but that they still had needs for support. We have continued to work on securing the resources needed, but I also took this as a cue that I needed to take some time off myself. The most difficult part of my job is staying calm at all times, and not letting my own frustrations get in the way of constructive discussion with my employees. I have taken two week-long vacations over the past four months, and that is more than I took in the first four years of my employment with this organization. I have needed and am grateful to be able to take the time off – not only to write this dissertation, but to process the stream of new information and unfamiliar choices I’ve had to face in this particular role. I try to keep a keen sense of if I am avoiding something or accepting something too quickly, and I’ve trained myself to go in the opposite direction if I feel the balance is too strong. Some people advocate for leading from your gut; I have found, for the most part, that my decisions are better if I am able to sleep on them and reflect, and if the decision-making process is allowed to extend over a longer period of time than I or others might feel more comfortable with.

Program Pivots (E). Another popular label that arose during this period was the idea of “program pivots.” We did lots of reasoning and discussing about our new Delivered model as we enacted it, the project for how to restructure/restart deliveries with new boundaries, scheduling, and safety precautions. Most of this was done in Basecamp shortly after a series of meetings we had discussing what this might look like. This example is long but illustrative of the double-interact between members and how it spirals into both more complexity and paradoxical clarity, and also, of my attempts to control the system – both for better or worse.

> Me: Here is copy for the website to share and any partners who are wondering what's up. Please review. This should also be translated into Spanish. Please let me know your thoughts!
>
> Veronica: I think I need clarification. Is this program to be used exclusively for partners that we need to fulfill our partnership agreement obligations to? Or are we to prioritize those partners FIRST but then let the public apply for the program? Or is it just first come first served? We had discussed targeting people we'd never reached before in far-away zips but if we're making good on our obligations then we can't prioritize those un-reached zips. I also need to know if we need to add a question in the app that asks who referred them to this page so we can track partnership obligation fulfillment.
>
> Me: Yes, please add a question about how they heard about it/referral to the form. I'm seeing that we offer the application form via email first to our partners, although the page with info goes live so partners can know to reach out to us. We let that run through April, then we start with the target zip codes through a direct mail post card in May. Make sense? Please continue to consider an ask questions.

One of the primary questions we had was if our funders would be willing to continue supporting our programs through the Delivered model. We have about 30 active private and public foundation funders through grants with specific deliverables. This is due to a very aggressive grant program that submits at least one proposal a week. While some of the grants were written in such a way that they did not need to be changed, a number of them did need to be contacted and pitched the new model, even before we knew how exactly we were going to do it. Our development lead was chomping at the bit for explanations, but the program team wasn't sure of exactly how all of this work would be done. The development lead and I moved forward with our key funders with what we had. Thankfully all the grantors all agreed to the new model – although some asked for new directives, such as serving specific sites or community partners. Next, the Staff needed to discuss, explain, reason, and figure out how to get things done.

> Lola: Here is something I've been thinking about. Families are still going to schools to pick up/drop off work packets, to various food pantries, and most likely lower income families still have to do a majority of their transactions with cash so they go into stores/pay their landlords/etc. in person or through no-contact drop offs. Would it be worth rethinking the delivery process (or making the delivery method specific to the partners)? For example with the housing authority: I am almost certain that those families still need to go to the main onsite office for various tasks. What if we still packed the books for individual families but then had a volunteer drive the large bin of books to the offices, dropped them off at the site then left it up to the community manager to distribute to the residents? I know that puts more pressure on partners, but I'm thinking it would be faster and cheaper for our partners that still have a "home base" that clients/families/residents have access to, even if limited.
>
> Frieda: Sounds reasonable for some orgs. But I think that Delivered has a good chance of getting funding to get the books to more families. What if they could get

us the mailing addresses to housing authority families with kids birth to age 12 at home? Or all of the addresses, and we send them the post card for opting in? Then we could aim through the grant to direct mail 3 books to 2500 families over the summer.

Me: Glad you're thinking this way! I think the first step is reaching out to the housing authority about what would work best for them. We've been working with them for over 4 years, and the communication at the site level has sometimes been a little challenging, because we're not high on their list of priorities. I do think Volunteers could still drop off at doorsteps of the communities, or we might direct ship possibly. So maybe it's a little bit of both?

In addition to grant funding, most of our partners engage in a written agreement for services from us, and we prioritize them above groups that are getting a lower level of service pro-bono. We wanted to make sure they were still getting the highest level of service in our new model.

Veronica: OK, I know Mattie and I both have partners that have paid that we'd like to prioritize, so maybe we'll make a list of April priorities from highest to lowest and see what the response is like? I know we can never truly know what the next day holds but I'm fine with this tentative timeline.

Mattie: I will say I'm a little hesitant to open up Delivered to more partners until I know what the general agreement should be, specifically the program fee. I know that things are very up in the air and constantly moving, but I really want to try to get consistent messaging out to partners. Right now the consistent messaging is "fulfilling outstanding orders" which people understand. If we're going to open it up to new partnerships I want to know how to navigate that conversation.

Me: I'm 90% sure we need to scope new partners (other non-profits and schools) at $5.25 per child for three books or $1.75 per book...but let's keep the commitment to a within next three months timeframe, not one year. We have tried to change these prices in the past, and our existing program partners just don't respond well to it. It does not seem to be the time to raise program fees any. These are rough numbers that will be refined in the budget process, but I wanted to let you know what I'm currently thinking. Hope that helps and does not alarm.

Here there is some avoidance to make changes apparent. It's yet to be seen if we can get to the 1000 books a week delivered that we're aiming for during this period, although there have been partners continuing to sign on for our services in Summer and even Fall 2020 despite the crisis.

Although there are still many kinks being worked out in the Delivered model, there are also opportunities yet to explore, such as the ability for our vendors to ship books directly to homes, something that they have not been willing or able to do in the past (more avoidance). Despite some doubts on mine and other's parts, there is much hope in our Delivered model and some evidence of success. Through weekly one-on-ones and bi-weekly team meetings, the Staff and I have mostly solidified all this reasoning into enactments, through a process of influencing one another.

A few weeks after the discussion above, Veronica posted happily: "Curated packing sheets all day, we're up to over 900 orders! Soon we'll have sent our 1000th parcel! Mattie, you'll see these come in soon through the form, and Anita will be cc'ed on the invoice soon."

My assessment is that we as an organization did (and do) a fairly good job of both reasoning and enacting along the spectrum of the process of influence, both in creating open discussion and using that discussion to come to collective decisions.

Volunteer Management Struggles (F). Having grown from grassroots Volunteers, with the first paid Staff arriving almost 20 years into the organization's founding, this particular organization thrives specifically because of its engagement with Volunteers. Members have noted that this is a consistent, fluid process that requires thoughtful organization, planning, and ongoing management. Evaluations have shown that word of mouth is an extremely powerful factor in getting people to volunteer, and we recruit a variety of corporate and civic contacts, as well as relatives, friends, and casual acquaintances.

Because of the priority of program quality and necessity for financial and administrative professionals, the role of volunteer coordinator has been a much debated and frequently contested place on our organizational chart. At one point, we had a designated Staff member to manage Volunteers, but over time, over 1/3 of our resources were spent on volunteer management and volunteer driven activities with our partners, that were not necessarily aligned with program funding or program goals. With the advice of consultants, as well as attention to research on Volunteers (Cruz, 2009; Iverson & McPhee, 2008; Kramer, Meisenbach, & Hansen, 2013) we turned the volunteer program into an actual mission-based program, that focuses on Volunteers. As such, the volunteer management is spread across the entire Staff, and is not concentrated in one person with one designated role. However, not everyone on Staff or on the Board is convinced that this is the right path, and even during the COVID-19 crisis, there has been pushback, said Fran, a seasoned library professional:

> Although I understand the necessity of having all of us handle our own volunteer needs, having a central person would be a far superior option for so many reasons, all stated above: organization, building and maintaining relationships, accountability, to name a few. It is a time-consuming endeavor that takes time away from what we are focusing on in our individual jobs and often results in miscommunication and unmet needs.

This is one area where we are clearly living in an impermanent state of indecision. Because we do not currently have the resources to hire a person solely to perform volunteer management, indeed, we are struggling to keep the Staff we currently have, I do not see how this situation will change in the near future. People often suggest, "write a grant for a person," but writing a short-term grant for a single position is not a good long-term solution to a problem. I am trying to stay open to any reasonable suggestion, such as having one particular Staff member take the leadership on it. This was the original plan, but the person tasked with the position decided to quit shortly after the onset of the pandemic. Another role was empty because I had terminated another employee for performance reasons just before it began. While we have been working to improve our volunteering through opportunities such digital content development and remote book sorting, we still have a way to go in this area. This struggle makes it hard for me to make decisions, and I see how that negatively impacts my Staff over time, because of the extra influence I have due to my positional role as an authority. The Volunteer management issue shows how an imbalance of reasoning to enacting, because of overthinking an issue, can grow to be a problem.

Communicating Impermanence through Influence. A process of influence is one that allows members to exhert their personal desires and fulfill their wants and needs through organizational membership. But is also allows the organization as a collective agent to exhert influence back on its members, and on external partners. The examples above show how the process of influence was exhibited by members in our day to day actions. There is one more episode that helps to illuminate how our organization influenced and was influenced by other organizations.

As a longstanding organization closely aligned with elementary school education, we have positioned our value as influencing the motivation to read, and moreover, actually increase reading skills in participating children. One of our programs had collected three years of evidence that we had not only stopped but reversed the summer reading slide which is a documented problem for low socioeconomic children. We had worked with third party researchers and collaborated with the district to collect and analyze standardized scores against a matched comparison group to show the program's efficacy (Shavlik & Booth, 2020).

That program had culminating activities planned over a year in advance for April and May. It quickly became apparent that they would not be able to go on as planned. We understood the risks to program efficacy by changing the model, but we were informed by a larger discussion for the need to continue on, and we started to enact it. Educators across the country were suggesting that the summer slide would be a model for a new, even more threatening COVID-19 Slide, with as much as 50% to 70% of children seeing significant loss of learning by the fall of 2020, losses that would compound throughout their learning careers:

> Summer slide data gives a starting point for the analysis of the impact of school closures on student learning, the complete answer needs to be found in research from an established longitudinal database and working in collaboration with

> schools to identify their specific circumstances. Schools, families, and communities are working in countless ways to support their children academically during this crisis, experimenting with online learning, homeschooling, exploring extending the school year and/or providing additional supports when school resumes, among other examples. Collaborative and timely research will enable patterns of loss to be identified that can be generalized to the larger population of schools throughout the United States and define potential policy for our schools' recovery that can be expanded throughout the United States in a timely manner (Kuhfeld & Tarasawa, 2020)

Like many educational enrichment non-profits able to stay in operations, we saw this as reasons for a change in the way serve children to become independent of face-to-face interaction. Digital resources were quickly adopted and shared rapidly with families throughout our network. For instance, one resource that we had been referring families to for many years was Storyweaver (Pratham Books, 2020), an open access children's book publisher located in India. We had featured them in numerous places on our website and promoted them verbally with both parents and educators. They compiled a number of books into related units that more directly resembled traditional curriculum, and credited school closures for the effort:

> Across the globe, more than 1 billion children are at home due to school closures, in an effort to control the pandemic. The need for high-quality, open digital reading resources is more urgent than ever. As part of our efforts to keep children reading, thinking and learning even when they are away from school, we are excited to present a new resource. We've curated a host of grade-appropriate storybooks,

themes and activities. From spotting and counting books for preschool, to readalongs for beginner readers, to Social-Emotional Learning content for middle schoolers, to STEM storybooks and biographies for advanced readers - we’ve got something for everyone! (Pratham Books, 2020)

Due to a quick recognition of the potential learning loss as a result of school closures, and both its short term and long term learning effects, our organization was able enact new ways of providing literacy services and books directly to children. This involved the influence of external organizations, and to some extent, actual resources of these organizations. The evidence shows how little reasoning time this took to get in place: we and others moved quite quickly to enacting because we were able to accept the reasons given by our larger partner network. This is supported by data collected from the project management tool during the the first week of April showing that we had already figured out the basic means of how to enact this goal:

Helen: Hey guys, we've got orders in already!!

Lupe: Do we have a hashtag/message prepared to print and include in each order? So that families know to tag us/upload photos of them reading their new books?

Helen: We can put that information onto one of the pieces of literature we put into the box. It's also shared on the bottom of the information we initially have sent out to the families, giving them the link to the application form.

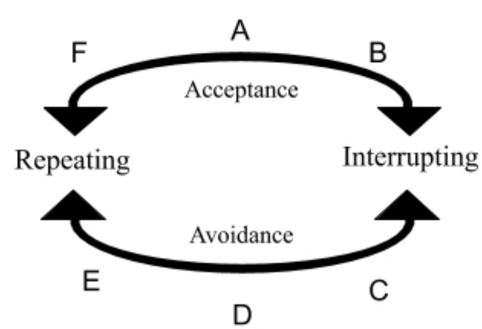
Lupe: Ok, just want to make sure they have everything they need in one place (i.e., the box) since they're probably being inundated with emails etc. from school.

While we ended up using envelopes for most packages instead of boxes, and have used a variety of delivery methods including the U.S. Postal Service and third party providers, the course we set to alter our operations in the first two weeks of the crisis has continued and developed throughout this period, driven primarily by the prospected of continued, possibly sporadic, school closures in the Fall of 2020. These reasonings and enactments, leading to a faster and farther-reaching process of influence, was truly a team effort. To be honest, though, we are still making sense of it all. The process of influence, on a scale of accepting and avoiding enacting and reasoning actions, illuminated the sensemaking aspects of communicating impermanence.

Process of Continuity

Figure 6.

Episode Orientation on the Process of Continuity



There are so many examples of both repetition and interrupting in the workplace, it is hard to know where to begin. As a concept, it relates to flow and duration (Bluedorn, 2002) and to member's experiences of working. Not all members of an organization desire the same optimal experiences, indeed, the variety of ways that people prefer to work are most evident when observing the processes of continuity in the workplace: the repetition and interruptions that make up most of our structured time.

Working From Home, Or Not (A). With access to masks already limited and their efficacy unclear, we began to discuss the possibility of teleworking, but several of our Staff members could not actually imagine how they would be able to do their work from home.

"But this is where all our *things* are," said Marian, an experienced professional who manages program inventory in our office and warehouse.

"We'll find something for you to do," I said—perhaps a little too offhandedly—thinking of how we had been planning to develop digital content for some time. "There is always something to do."

This didn't seem to convince her. She led the charge to keep the office open, at least for Staff, and to keep coming into the office if not daily, at least most days. Eventually we set up a calendar to "check out" the spaces so we could maintain some control and distance. At another point, Staff members became concerned enough about the situation that they requested to work from home specifically. This happened more organically than from a top down mandate.

For instance, one afternoon, a Staff member asked me to step outside. "I thought I was okay, but, people keep coming in, and I don't know them, and I don't know where they've been, and I just don't feel comfortable anymore."

"I understand, and I'm glad you talked to me. Go home," I said, "right now. Take your laptop, and anything you think you need right away, and just slip out."

"But what about my job, I need the pay,"

"Don't worry about your pay, we'll keep it up, we'll figure it out. We'll have a Zoom meeting."

"We're just going to have to adapt," they said.

"Right," I said. And, because of personal health reasons, I too soon left the office that day, right after they did, only to return visit when absolutely necessary. I remember leaving the office, and saying goodbye to my desk and carpet and chair when there was no one there.

Zoom Fatigue (B). On 2:00 Tuesday March the 10th, we started a regular all Staff Zoom meeting, something that we continued throughout the period. This was consciously designed to create a routine to counteract the interruption. The first meeting went almost an hour over time…as much for social times and being together as for getting work done. For the most part, this has worked, although we found that two meetings a week was often too much. We have done some happy hours and more social calls as well, that were more spontaneous, to interrupt the patterns we had just established. Members say our organization is never boring, that's for sure.

Issues of interruption of time scales, workloads, and resources in relationship to organizational goals also came up. We sought ways to cut all expenses, planning for a 20-30% reduction overall. One position that was vacant was assigned, with agreement, to a currently employed Staff member. However, even though we said we would pull back, we did not actually give up the practice of delivering books to schools, and were able to arrange some distributions along with school lunch deliveries or with instructional material pick-ups scheduled with parents by the schools.

It seemed to most that while we may not be going into the office every day, we were working as hard, or if not harder, than ever. Elana said:

> I've been thinking about how to still get materials to kids and I can't see a way to do so that fits within the constraints that we are currently under. I think we should

wait and see what happens in the next two weeks, if schools are going to open again

or not, and be using that time to plan how we can serve the students digitally.

Like many organizations, we quickly saw both the need to deliver more services digitally, along with the concern that a large group of our constituents may not have ready access to digital devices or reliable internet services. One day, in our one-on-one, Ariel sheepishly brought up the subject of the Zoom Meetings.

Ariel: Are we still going to have the Thursday Zoom Meeting?

Me: What do you mean, the Tuesday Staff meeting?

Ariel: Well, that second one.

I did start, the first few weeks, to have two staff meetings, one on Tuesday, and one on Thursday, partly because I wanted to try to keep a sense of what people were actually doing, and partly because I was afraid that some, including myself, might be getting lonely.

Ariel: I was thinking I could use that for a marketing meeting.

Me: Marketing, what kind of marketing?

Ariel: You know, me and Monica. Just the two of us.

Me: Oh, well. Of course. Everyone can have Zoom meetings on their own, not just me calling them. Does everyone know that? I'll make sure everyone knows that.

Ariel: Great! I'll let Monica know.

Me: Do you think those meetings are getting too much?

Ariel: Well…

Me: I mean, I'm getting pretty tired from being in all these video meetings…

Ariel: I know, I don’t know who or what to look at. And all the different platforms display everyone differently.

Me: Okay, let me think about that. Maybe we don’t need the Thursday meeting for everyone on Staff anymore.

In practice, it wasn’t only Zoom we used, but Google Meet, WebEx, and even Microsoft Teams, based on whatever our partner’s and Board members or funder’s preferences were. Some staff members found it easier to adapt and switch between them than others. Whatever the platform, almost everyone at some time spoke of being fatigued by being “on camera” too much. Our Board President said she wouldn’t even do the video anymore unless her boss at work made her. “Zoom Fatigue” was a label that arose and was adopted quickly, as Zoom rose and faded from common use, with some companies ultimately discarding it due to security issues, called “Zoom Bombing.” The Zoom Fatigue represents a self-selected interruption that arose out of perhaps too much repetition.

Okay to Say No (C). At first, we tried to partner with the schools to give out our materials during Federal Free and Reduced-Price meal distributions. But logistics of working safely, together with the challenges of giving families an exact set of materials relevant for their child’s unique interest and needs, showed us that we needed to come up with an alternative method for collaboration. We “pivoted” — a word borrowed from high tech start-up culture that became ubiquitous to describe the adaptations all kinds of organizations were making due to the pandemic — to a direct to family model, where we began shipping materials directly to addresses provided voluntarily by families through outreach with our partner schools. But this was not without struggle. We had no expertise with shipping to homes through external services, and we were not sure if we could or should ask our Volunteers to move their deliveries from schools to private homes. After initial discussions about this idea, Tonya expressed the following concern:

> I'm sorry if I'm saying a lot of "no's" but I tend towards caution and anticipation of problems. I am keeping a close eye on both local/state/national/international news and developments, I don't think it would be a wise decision to try to run deliveries directly to homes through Volunteers right now, and if we decided to do it I wouldn't be willing to participate in that right now.

This reflects the tension between accepting what would be best for the clients we serve, and avoiding risk for the Staff's well-being: a tension that is often present in non-profits serving populations of people in need, but was notably heightened in times of stress. It also reflects the avoidance between interruption and recovery.

Stop Being Productive (D). At one point, I sent an article around to the Staff about the increasing pressure on "productivity" in a work at home environment, the basic gist being "Stop Being Productive." "My sentiments right now is that we should be working slower and more carefully with lots and lots of forgiveness for everyone, including ourselves! Just a Friday thought," I wrote. Several folks replied:

> I think it's a matter of trying to measure time, which we all need to find a new way to do. Because there is a tendency to work more than 8 hours if you do it casually. I noticed I get more done/spend more time on task on Mondays than any other day, then taper off thru the week. Our needs are different now. We are our own "startup", and in that scenario a lot of effort is pushed up front. Once we settle into a new

groove the flow of time will adjust. No danger of burn out yet. At least that’s what I think.

Another, dealing with being at home with a young child for the first time, chimed in:

> I appreciate you sharing that article. I can work 8 hours a day remotely no problem. Will they be consecutive? Probably not. Will they be uninterrupted? Certainty not. Will they always be 9 am to 5 pm? No. That's just my quarantine life. :)

Expectations of productivity definitely changed, but for most of us, we felt like we were being even more productive than before COVID-19. I actually felt a need to encourage and remind the Staff to take needed breaks and vacation time, and was intentionally fuzzy about deadlines so that they could be pushed out easily with no negative repercussions. Everyone needed wiggle room to deal with an even larger volume of unexpected interruptions than normal, including myself.

Time for Interruptions (E). While Staff neither appeared to overly avoid or accept interruptions, they have been a ubiquitous part of our COVID-19 experience. It has been interesting to add that prior to this time, the Staff would sometimes complain of interruptions in the office when they were trying to work on something, and a member of the public or other Staff member would walk into their space and start talking about something they needed or wanted. Complaints about interruptions have reduced, but I wonder if because life at this moment is simply a series of constant interruptions. A positive sense of living more in acceptance of interruption is that a sense of comradery has developed that is much more palatable than before. Check-ins on Mondays and Fridays are more consistent and personal and gentle.

Monica says: “Hope everyone is doing okay this week. As this crisis keeps unfolding, it's so easy to be overwhelmed. So grateful for you all.”

Another gives some graphic love: ❤️.

Still another says:

> I had my first weekend without touching my work computer and it was GLORIOUS. I was able to just relax and live my life and I really needed to do that. We all do. The danger of spreading your work-life out into a daily thing is that it hovers over you like a slobbering monster (even if it isn't one). Now refreshed, I will focus on what needs to be done.

Another gives a round of applause 👏.

Another types, “Right on!”

Another shares a sign of strength 💪.

While interruptions and off-task communication may be scoffed at by some organizers and planners as counterproductive, in the time of COVID-19, we in our organization have received them as welcome respites and psychological lifesavers for those doing the work at hand.

Program Recoveries (F). Another example of a disruption due to the pandemic and subsequent pivot was delivering on the last phase of an annual reading and fundraising program where students read as much as they can for a two-week period at the beginning of the year and raise money so that other kids can have their very own books. Due to school closures in March and uncertainty regarding reopening, prizes, awards, and t-shirts for the participant readers could not be delivered to the schools, which presented a logistical challenge. The decision was made immediately that despite the necessity to cancel 50 Volunteers for this final phase of the program, we had to follow through on our commitment to the participating kids by mailing packages directly to their homes. The dedicated Staff time and added mailing expense were worth keeping our promise of rewarding our students for a job well done. The photos and stories of happy kids at home with their medals, t-shirts and prizes were terrific affirmations of the right decision made early on, but it cut down on the net proceeds from the annual event, and put the model for the program in the following year in question.

It is often noted by Staff and partners that we do a good job with technology. We were some of the first of our peers to move fully to a cloud computing environment, we frequently update our website, and our social media is often commented on as being authentic and engaging. One of the most wonderful things about technology is successful automation. We have systems that will send us reports about volunteer hours automatically every week or month; notify us every time someone makes a donation and send them an automatic tax receipt as required by the IRS; create dashboards of inventory and the thousand or so book distribution events we (were) supporting each year on the fly. Some of the most remarkable people on our Staff are the ones who are able to do a job consistently, thoroughly, and expertly, with joy and dedication. Mattie is one of these people, and the first good example I have of repeating is something that she's done every week since the beginning of this crisis, like clockwork.

For instance, every Tuesday at 4:30, Mattie and other team members have sent out short informative text messages to the parents and caregivers of children to whom we've gifted books in Spanish and English. These text messages tie back to tips that we would have given in person, and additional content on our website, including digital books. While it's not yet reaching all of the parents we serve, we believe that it's a powerful way to remind families about reading and influence actual behavior.

Moreover, the team began to work on building up more digital content, including contributions by Volunteers. We also began to increase efforts towards translation into Spanish and additional languages to serve our target population, about 25% of which speak Spanish in the home, and are about 80% Latinx. But even this was done in fits and starts, when the website translation system didn't work well for Mexican Spanish (it generated formal European Spanish translations) and we had back-ups of workloads on posting material translated by Volunteers due to limited Staff and Volunteers with expertise in WordPress. Still, it's undeniable that our organization's willingness to use technology significantly improved our ability to adapt to the impermanence created by the COVID-19 shut downs.

With a focus on early childhood, we stress the value of structure and predictability for optimal social development and academic readiness. On our COVID-19 update webpage, the first sentence was intended to convey this message: "As we all are adjusting to life under the restrictions needed to control the Coronavirus Pandemic, we are looking for ways to help children and families choose reading as part of their daily *routines*." Routines are hard to establish, but once they are there, provide much comfort. During the study period, there was much discussion about time management, and how our sense of time was changing. We talked directly about re-establishing routines. We set up daily and weekly automatic check ins "what will you be working on this week," and "what did you work on today?" attached to a message board that everyone had access to. Some Staff embraced them more than others, and they were not required, they were voluntary. One Staff member, who used this feature more than most, mentioned at one point:

> "I've literally had to repeat this to myself over and over again: we're in a global pandemic crisis and I can't do my job the way I want to do it. But I can adapt to

this temporary normal and know that some of these virtual resources and aids are going to help some families."

The beauty of routines is that once established, they can help improve process compliance, and reduce stress. We were fortunate to have a new senior finance and operations director join us right before the crisis. They did much to clarify and improve essential routine business processes, such as submitting invoices for payments and receipts for reimbursement, which we were getting by on with an outside contractor but weren't as accurate or timely as they could be. Having these processes cleaned up and more tightly adhered to certainly gave me comfort, as well as our Board of Directors. While some Staff members resisted attention on these processes, others appreciated having more clarity and punctuality. Repeating, well done, illustrates how every job worth doing in every organization matters to the whole health and well-being of the organization.

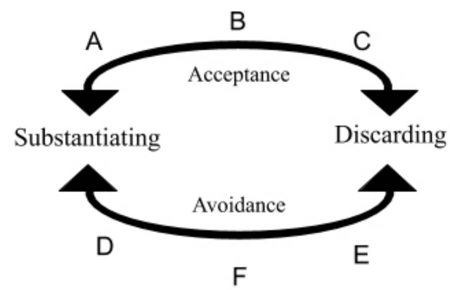
Communicating Impermanence Through Continuity. A process of continuity is an counteraction to the reality of impermanence, and is perhaps the main tool that members have to create order out of the chaos of the ongoing stream of time. Organizations become more defined with more continuity, and are more stable when there is less interruption, both in volume and in magnitude. However, interruption is sometimes necessary to that the repetitions that are happening are not reacting to the past, but to the present situation. For instance, I hate to admit, but there is a part of my nature that hates repetition, and this is evident in the field notes that I took and in the issues that I've had repeatedly as an organizational leader. I can see how my lack of willingness to repeat things until they are correct can lead to greater failings, and I am fortunate to have people with multiple skill sets and personality traits engaged with our organization to balance this weakness. Like many people I can be too easily distracted by what's shiny and new, and try to fix something that is not broken. As the newer administrative manager, Brenda, on our team observed: "It's not that your financial processes were wrong. It's that you weren't applying them consistently." Sometimes, I overcompensate for this by trying to muscle through and out-perform in other ways, that are not ultimately productive or efficient. "You are too nice! You give in too easily," the administrator said. "And stop saying you're sorry!" I like, enjoy, and respect her very much, and am grateful that she can speak openly with me, because the process of continuity is something that I could improve on. I am also grateful that she routinely meets all the important financial deadlines of the organization, because this improves our organizational continuity. One of the things that greater attention to the process of continuity, and repetition of activities, helps me with is to let go of static and unrealistic notions of outcomes. I am very goal driven, and when goals are not met, it takes me a while to recover and refocus. This process helps me to remember to focus on the day-to-day tasks, and seek carefully to find the pleasure in each moment by doing them well.

For example, before the pandemic, we were struggling to get out financial statements in to our Finance committee on time. This was due to my inexperience in this area and the need to outsource it to contractors unfamiliar with our organization. When Brenda delivered a consistent, standardized financial packet, including a balance sheet, profit and loss statement, statement of functional expense, and a cashflow report not only on time, but early, for March, April and May, it created continuity that gave financial confidence to all. The forgrounding of repeating is an unexpected benefit of the pandemic is slower time. The process of continuity, moving between repeating and interruptions, is an essential component of communicating impermanence, because it mediates member experience of uncertainty of continuous change.

Process of Affirmation

Figure 7.

Episode Orientation on the Process of Affirmation



Affirmation is a process that moves between substantiating and discarding. Substantiating was perhaps the hardest process to identify from fieldnotes taken in the workplace. While we did close our office to the public as an act of substantiation of the danger of the COVID-19 virus, and we were fortunate not to have to lay off or furlough any workers, and we were able to fulfill all our existing program commitments with some requested adaptations, the situation was still very much in flux and uncertain at the close of the observation period. Thus, there is still much that in normal time that would have been addressed which has been left unsubstantiated. Still, while we were aware that many other non-profits and small businesses and their employees faced debilitating operational closures and record high unemployment, this was not our lived experience. I can substantiate that we were still, mostly, fully operational, and this affirmed our value and meaning as a charitable organization.

Postponing the Gala (A). For example, there was much discussion during the COVID-19 period internally, externally, and contextually about postponing vs. cancelling events, because we had different members wanting to substantiate their value and continue, and other who were willing to discard the activity all together. The pros and cons of the finality of cancelling vs. the open-endedness of postponing were much debated and argued, not only within our organization, but in the industry as a whole. For instance, from a non-profit newsletter in mid-April:

> Right now, nonprofit leaders are faced with a lot of tough decisions. “How should I speak to my supporters?” “Should I cancel my events or postpone them?” Even, “Is it appropriate to ask people for donations during the crisis?” …. There’s a lot at stake right now for nonprofits. The inability to choose may be tied directly to the fear of making a mistake. We’ve talked to clients who seem to be frozen in place. The coronavirus crisis is a fast-moving situation. Information seems to change every week. And perhaps worst of all, there is conflicting information out there, making it difficult to make informed choices. That’s why this is a time when it’s important to rely less on data and more on your gut ….“if you don’t make the right decision, you can make the decision right.” (Fulton & Van Huss, 2020)

Our organization had a major event, a luncheon gala, planned for May 1, that was expected to raise upwards of $100,000. Of all the pivots we made as an organization, this one seemed to elicit the most struggle. Members of the committee that planned the event initially pushed for a virtual event, a kind of replication in content and sequence of a formula that had worked well in previous years, and was expected to do well or even better in this iteration. Other members had doubts about our technical ability to execute the event, as well as the likelihood that the attendees, who are by in large more mature individuals, would be inclined to participate in an online event. Still others were optimistic that we would be able to simply postpone our event until the following Fall, believing that the crisis would likely be over. While the organization struggled to make a decision, Monica, our key fundraiser, had the daunting task of contacting everyone who had already committed to the event. She wrote:

> I wanted to thank you for your generous support and update you on our luncheon event, previously scheduled for May 1. We are adopting a wait and see approach as we consider a live or virtual event in the fall or beyond. Please let me know if you have an opinion for live, virtual or no event for the foreseeable future. Once we have more information on what is happening in our world and are able to make an informed decision, I will be in touch but welcome a call or email in the meantime.

One sponsor quickly replied:

> Thank you for reaching out! At this time, we still plan on honoring all of our sponsorships. However, things have been assessed on a case by case basis with virtual events. If you all decide to go with a virtual event please forward me the sponsorship packages so I can relay that to my Marketing Director to ensure we are doing the same level of sponsorship. If you proceed with a live event in the fall, if you would let us know the date so we can update our calendar that would be great! Either way I hope that we can support whatever type of event you choose to move forward with!

When a Board member suggested that we postpone not only to the Fall of 2020, but to the Fall of 2021, a new concept was introduced, and this had to go through a process of substantiating to see if members affirmed the direction. "What does it mean if we postpone vs. cancel. Will the event be the same as it was this year? If we postpone, will we have to do something else instead?" Eventually, after much information seeking and reasoning, members mainly agreed, and the Board voted to approve that this direction was the most prudent. The external donors and supporters almost universally agreed to reallocate any restricted funding towards our new Delivered efforts, and we decided to postpone our major fundraising event over a year into the future, a move that seemed to be received not only as prudent, but as somehow even considerate.

Discarding SMART Goals (B). In the months before the pandemic hit, our organization was celebrating its 10-year anniversary, with a beautiful and summative annual report full of charts, graphs, and audited financial statements, and thanking all previous Board Members, foundation and corporate funders, and cumulative individual lifetime donors over $1000.

In the previous five years, the revenues had grown by approximately 30%, and the key program metrics, including children served, had grown by 40% - a strong organizational performance by common non-profit measures. We had topped 100,000 children and 200,000 books in the previous twelve months – and we had hoped to get to 240,000 books, one for each of the estimated 80,000 children in our area reported to be living in poverty by the American Community Survey of the United States Census Bureau (2015).

We had worked very hard to collectively define and accomplish these goals, and to establish a means of measuring our activities organization wide across all programs. We moved from spreadsheets to a custom database that made it easy to communicate specific up-to date metrics to funders and stakeholders through a dashboard that provided real-time statistics. However, with a third of our program operated as a supplemental educational service, and the closing of schools meant our access to children was suddenly and severely limited.

As reports came in, we realized that in some schools, we would not only not have access to the children, we would not even be able to retrieve books and supplies that had already been delivered to locations in anticipation of future events. When it became clear that the schools might stay closed through the academic year's end, we were devastated to realize that we would not be able fulfill our original commitments to children who were expecting our program and partners who depended upon us for academic enrichment. The sheer seriousness of the situation hindered the ability to take action or make decisions in any direction, including discarding. But the original budget and SMART goals, Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Reasonable, and Time Based were how we normally substantiated our performance. Now, they were recognized as impossible, and were being discarded.

Eventually, we decided to cut our projected year-end program SMART goals (specific, measurable, actionable, reasonable, and time-based) of number books distributed and number of children attending by up to 35% and moved from annual to monthly goals with rolling updated 3-month projections. The rapid flip in objectives made the program Staff, who were hard working and used to meeting or exceeding expectations, look and feel like someone had "moved their cheese" (Johnson, 2015). The metrics on which we had hung our success suddenly lost meaning.

Over the entire period, we have been able to build up this activity to serve about 1000 families a week with home delivery of an average of 3 books and printed materials and with text messages and educational digital content. While we are proud of this accomplishment, it is only a quarter of the client impact we were able to achieve before COVID-19 in similar time periods through a large group face-to-face activity model, which allowed us to distribute as many as 4000 children in attendance with 3 books, or 12,000 books each week.

Our progressive Staff, Board of Directors, and funders accepted the change in organizational goals readily. Our mission and overall goal to build early literacy have not changed, but our methods absolutely had to, and the way we were measuring our impact before the pandemic was suddenly no longer possible or relevant. We focused instead on satisfaction and program quality surveys.

One key question that we've been asking parents of participants for several years is "do you agree that it's important to read a book together twice a day?" This novel request was grounded in research and supported by motivational messages and materials with the same message. The original effort was designed to show the strength of persuasive impact of the services and information we were providing to families (McGlone & Pfiester, 2009; Chen, Bell, & Taylor, 2016). This was part of our SMART goals for program quality that we have been able to retain. The average score on this survey went from 85% agreeing prior to the pandemic to 95% agreeing during the course of the study. While it was not a new metric for our performance, as it was something we had been casually measuring before, it took on new meaning and weight in a new situation. Even now as I write, we are still working on exactly how to scope our outputs, objectives, and activities in what is being called in the media "the new normal" (NPR, 2020).

Restarting the Volunteers (C). As previously mentioned, our volunteer program as a whole was one of the more clunky processes churning during the three-month period of the study. On Saturday, March 7, an automatic reminder notification went out of our volunteer management system to one of our corporate partners, one of the largest local employers. On Monday morning, we got a message from the organizer: "Given the Covid-19/Coronavirus precautions taking place, are you still hosting volunteer sessions? Just wondering whether I need to reschedule our group for a time after the virus threat is contained." We were discussing what to do, when the news broke a story that an employee at that same company had tested positive for the Coronavirus, and the entire company was being directed to work from home.

We decided to go ahead and cancel the group as well as the activity. We were all acting out of concern and fear, as the WHO had just declared a global pandemic the evening before, and the magnitude of the situation was just beginning to come clear.

"I was afraid of this two weeks ago," said Marion. "It's hard to stop the hysteria. Maybe we send a message that we're still Business as Usual?" "Maybe we do send out an email that we're Business as Usual, but that we are following procedures to maintain a safe environment, and warning that we may cancel slots if necessary and appreciate their understanding. Something along those lines," said another Staff member, Helen, who works primarily with schools. It was becoming clear that our operational model, heavy on group volunteering and external partnerships, was going to be heavily disrupted for the foreseeable future.

After that first cancellation, there was a quick decision to cancel all the scheduled large group activities, which in a typical year can be as many as 800 placements. However, we also have some recurring individual Volunteers, and what their relationship is to us and how we were going to decide if they should come in or not was a much greyer area. Because most of these Volunteers were over 60 years of age, and early reports were showing that the disease was more deadly to those in that category, we discussed them not coming in for their own safety. Once the local "shelter in place" order was announced, this seemed like a reasonable option.

However, the local orders designated our work serving special populations in need as an "essential service." So, as a professional service organization, we never really stopped working, with some paid Staff members continuously going into the office throughout the period. We began to realize how critical group and individual Volunteers were to our basic operations, and, we found that the civic and corporate volunteer groups that we regularly worked with were eager to help, and moreover, had time to help. There was a small period of debate and confusion, some Staff who thought that we had instituted a policy of no Volunteers, and others were still calling in individual Volunteers to do certain tasks. The Board was rightly concerned about volunteer liability, and we checked our insurance and posted signs that made clear that masks and 6 feet social distancing was to be used at all times in the workplace, by Staff and Volunteers. I found it funny that some people thought we had a firm “no volunteer” policy, as it to me was just a one-time adaptive directive as a result from that first incident. Perhaps I did not fully embrace my responsibility and agency in this area. However, it was important during this time that I did not force any decision on others, so I waited for a collectively acceptable path emerge from discussion with both Staff and Board.

Eventually, we did fully discard the practice of large group volunteering. But we also started up several types of remote and digital volunteering for individuals, families, and corporate groups that kept the Volunteers engaged and helped us quickly evolve and adapt. But some of them begged to come in person, to count and sort books, to have something to do, to keep busy. So, with a firm face mask requirement and limits of four people in each space at a time, plus the growing need for assistance to keep the work going, we agreed. The volunteer management during this period was characterized both by acceptance and avoidance, not only by Staff, but by Board members and Volunteers, and by me as the Executive Director as well. Interestingly, Board members were some of the first to come back to volunteering at our warehouse, picking up boxes to count remotely at their homes, or outdoors, in at least one particular instance under a big shade tree outside of the warehouse, at a safe social distance.

Sharing Mann Gulch (D). Internally, we worked consciously to address and manage the tension by letting go. In his highly cited paper about the Mann Gulch disaster of 1949, Weick describes the collapse of sensemaking when 13 young firefighters, facing a raging burn behaving wildly, refused to drop their tools and run when so directed (Weick, 1993). Mann Gulch was a place of disaster. The 13 charred bodies of the firefighters were found, some with chainsaws still in their hands, unable to let go of their identities as brave heroes and their trained behaviors to fight even as an overwhelming fire approached. While the account is often called on to describe a failure of leadership (though some have questioned Weick's research efficacy as a secondary source interpreter, see Babsøll, 2010) his crystallization of the call to "drop your tools" has become a useful shorthand for many scholars and organizations when facing unimaginable cosmological events (Weick, 1996). As a longtime student and follower of Weick, I couldn't help but turn to this concept to try to help our entire team as we saw the quickly approaching fire of coronavirus.

In our first full Staff Zoom meeting after closing to the public, and at my prompting on the meeting agenda, we discussed as a team the notion of "dropping your tools." I recounted the Mann Gulch story as a guiding narrative story. The Staff seemed to find the allegory useful and perhaps even comforting, as we all struggled to absorb the information about the pandemic and redefine our work promoting early literacy in children and families in the time of social distancing. I heard them echo "dropping tools" in many our exchanges the rest of the week. "I'm dropping my tools," one would say brightly, looking for my approval or perhaps showing compliance. "You know, I'm having a little hard time dropping my tools today," said another quietly, a few days later. "That's okay. We don't have to do it all at once," I said. "Pick one thing to let go, and one thing new to pick up, and we'll see how it goes." Of all the actions I have taken during the pandemic, having that discussion directly about "dropping your tools" so early on might be the one that I think did the most good for our team. As a practicing pracademic, I can thank Weick and organizational communication scholarship for that moment.

Google Calling (E). One of the oddest moments I had during the pandemic period was being called on my personal cell phone by someone representing himself as someone from Google. In my role I am often solicited without invitation, and I'm also quite serious about internet security when it comes to the business, as well as my personal privacy. However, this person knew what our primary account username is, which is not readily available, and assured that they were only calling to be sure that our business was still open. I said, yes, we were still working, but we were not "open" to the public. He seemed confused. "But are you open?" "Yes," I said, "we're basically open." He said he just wanted to know if the hours were the same so they could be updated on the profile if needed. I said, "we know how to do that," and no, the hours didn't need to be changed. I asked him how things were where he was. I guessed, based on the accent he was speaking with, India? "No, Pakistan," he said. "It is bad. I lost my father." There was a slight pause. "We weren't close," he said. After another moment of silence, I said, "I'm very sorry anyway." I also got a survey from Facebook, asking many questions about how we had been impacted, had there been a loss of revenue, had we gone remote, had our supply chain been interrupted. I didn't reply to that one. The phone call from Google, a company so large that it seemed impossible to be talking to a person at all, created far more connection than a popup survey.

Co-Pilots and Storms (F). One of the ways that I was able to stay balanced in my role as Executive Director during the COVID-19 crisis was through a "co-pilot" relationship with the Board President of the organization. The basic metaphor is that this relationship should be like the two pilots in the cockpit of a twin-engine plane, where the Board is one engine, and the Staff is the other (Garry, 2017). The President must keep their eye on how the Board is running, and the Executive Director must keep their eye on the Staff, and they both must look ahead to see what's in front of them and where they're going. This had been recommended by an international group I belong to, the Non-Profit Leadership Lab, a group of Executive Directors of small to mid-size non-profits that meet on Facebook as well as in webinars and a private access website. As the pandemic increased, the social media posts began to include stories of layoffs, closures, coups, power struggles, and firings. In relationship to the PPP, some boards refused to accept them for fear that they would become personally liable if the loans were not forgiven.

Although I had always felt a collegial relationship with all of the Presidents during my tenure, I had started to take an extra regular monthly meeting with them once joining this Lab. These were particularly helpful during this period, when I needed basic moral support even more than operational. At one particular point, the President said, "I really think you're doing a good job, you know. Better than my company is, I think." I highly admired their company, which was succeeding by all measures and had grown exponentially over the past few years. Later, in another moment of doubt, where we were discussing the impact of school closures not only on non-profits, but on our families, as we both have children still in school, she said:

> President: I have been thinking that this experience of COVID-19 is sort of like driving down a road in the driving rain. It's a huge thunderstorm, and all you can do is keep your eye right in front of you, and stay within the white lines.
>
> Executive Director: I think you're so right. I love that. And our plans, our strategic plan, that's our white lines.

President: Right. And you really can't do anything about the storm, but keep going.

Executive Director: Oh, I'm thinking about a time when I was really caught in a storm driving home from college in Chicago. It was a snowstorm. I had to pull off the road.

President: But we're not going to pull off the road, right?

Executive Director: No, I don't think we need to.

President: At least right now.

Executive Director: At least not now. We're pretty fortunate, right?

President: Right.

Executive Director: Thank you for being here.

President: It's my pleasure. Thank you for your work.

This particular episode shows a choice not to discard the direction that was settled upon collectively prior to the pandemic, and substantiates the will of the organization, through its two key officers, to persevere. As informed by Garry (2017), this particular relationship, and the quality of the way these two members interact, is absolutely key to the success of a non-profit organization. If these two roles are not acting in tandem, with connection, the engines push in different directions, and the plane falters. If the co-pilots are both flying the plane to the best of their abilities and in coordination, the tasks are less important than navigating the organization's path through impermanence.

Communicating Impermanence through Affirmation. A process of affirmation gives agency to substantiation and closure to discarding, helping members to agree that they have done the right thing for the circumstances that they are in. The best affirmation of our performance right now is not our financial statements, parent and participant surveys, and activity reports that substantiate that our children served and book goals at the end of the study period, and subsequent fiscal year close, were much higher than anticipated when the COVID-19 crisis began and we cut our SMART goals back. Because of the photographic and social media post evidence from our Staff, Volunteers, and the families who are receiving our services, the effort and thinking that went into our program and goal pivots was affirmed. The hearts, claps, likes, and follows are the best evidence that we are making real connections with our Volunteers and family beneficiaries.

To further demonstrate, our financial health is a particular way to substantiate performance and affirm sustainability, at least in the short term. In our organizations financial reports don't go beyond five years forward or ten years backwards. And if we use that measure, our organization is currently in good health, with cash in the bank, pledges for more funds, and no long-term debt once the PPP is forgiven. Because of this affirmed stability and the observed losses, such as the discarding of jobs, of the COVID-19 crisis, we did temper messages with the call that many organizations and people were in need, and that food banks and housing organizations should also be considered for funding. We refrained from applying for some ongoing programmatic grants that were aimed at these more basic needs. In order to replace lost revenue from our annual fundraising event, we substituted it with a raffle for a new television and a card for streaming children's media services. It only raised a fraction of the goal of the fundraising event, but it has helped us keep focused and forward thinking at a time when we didn't know what else to do and offered a little light and levity for those who are participating. "Help kids and get a chance to win!" This story of substantiating, both in the guise of avoidance and acceptance, demonstrates how hard it was to actually decide anything in the time of COVID-19, and why so many organizations, such as major league sports, restaurants, and universities, continue pushing for physical re-openings, even as the human death toll continues to rise. As an affirmation of this condition, we cut back our near term projected budget by 30%. We will need to pay close attention on a month to month basis of funding pledged and accounts receivable, and we will need to keep belt tightening all discretionary expenses. This points to the need for an ongoing process of affirmation, not only in regards of finances, but in all areas of organizational functions. By navigating challenges and new information through substantiating and discarding, what is important and valuable to organizational members may be kept and preserved, and what is no longer necessary or wanted may be let go.

RESULTS OF THE FINDINGS

In the preceding sections, I presented evidence from ethnographic fieldnotes as an organizational autobiography, grouped by the five processes of impermanence: confidence, awareness, influence, continuity, and affirmation. These were discussed through personal narrative accounts of the expressions of the 10 actions that Weick (2012) described as actions of impermanence in organizations again, for reference—believing, discarding, doubting, enacting, interrupting, labeling, seeing, reasoning, repeating, and substantiating. Rather than being discrete, independent variables, these processes were shown to be better understood as dynamic and overlapping qualities of interdependent and interlocking events (Allport, 1954; Weick, 2012). The point of focus is on moments of interaction between members of a particular organization at a particular place over a particular and unusual period of time.

In answer to the guiding research questions, it will be necessary to pull out from the day-to-day accounts of the organizational ethnography and turn back towards the communication research to articulate both answers and scholarly relevance.

RQ1 Results

How do organizational members communicate about (or avoid communicating about) impermanence in the workplace?

The findings show that members of organizations communicate about impermanence through messages, discussion, and actions that they take that can be observed and recorded. This can happen in a single interchange, like “Wow.” “Yeah, Wow,” when hearing life altering news, or, it can be over a long series of exchanges, like doubting and deciding on a formal corporate resolution. Because impermanence is so ubiquitous, and for some people or sometimes hard to accept, the ways that members discuss it are not always overt. The word impermanence itself might not be used itself at all. One needs to intimately understand the context and develop an appreciation for feedback cycles to be able to better identify how members communicate impermanence.

The tendency to avoid and the tendency to accept vary greatly in different situations and for different members, and this is reflected through the diversity and complexity of communication that constitutes their organization. The presence of communication about impermanence, either through Weick’s 10 actions, or through the “nutshell” sensemaking frame—order, interruption, and recovery—or discussions about death, closures, and endings alone indicates some level of acceptance. Accepting impermanence happens when we communicate about change, and when we engage in sensemaking to create a fresher shared sense of meaning of a new situation. Avoidance is easier to see in other members, but can be noticed subjectively through introspection. And although there were less instances of overt avoidance at the organizational level, there were times when members actively expressed goal seeking, systems controlling interactions that were countered by other members. In addition, there are times when different members perceive quite differently the nature of impermanence, its strength and texture, and this can cause confusion, miscommunication, and result in disorganization. One result of disorganization found through this study is disassociation and isolation and the overall reduction of communication and increase in frequency and types of media. This said, during this study there were more opportunities to see direct communication about impermanence than there might have been in ordinary times. It should be remembered that moments of impermanence happen in everyday conversation, when plans are changed, endings are recognized, and humor and appreciation break up the rigor of self-established routines with emojis and pats on the back and happy hours. Often, when members talked about order and recovery, they were talking about avoiding impermanence, like when a special event was re-imagined, and the volunteer activities were started up again. Avoidance of impermanence was presented not in itself a bad thing, unless it goes too far, such as not acting to reassign a role after the loss of an employee after a reasonable amount of time. It is avoiding impermanence that allows us to plan, set goals, and accomplish great feats in the face of adversity, such as commit to a Delivered model without knowing the price of postage. It is natural for members to attempt to create order out of the chaos of the impermanent stream of experience. By communicating about it, they can push back against the stream, and find ways to manage it with less suffering.

RQ2 Results

How do Weick's 10 actions communicate impermanence in lived experience?

The findings revealed that sequencing of events is certainly a topic of frequent conversation, in terms of starting/stopping/continuing tasks and activities, and these can be sought out to find the boundaries of events. This supports prior research that states that events make up the structures of organizations, and these structures are not static and fixed, but dynamic and impermanent (Allport, 1967; Nonaka, 1994; Weick, 2012). By breaking down dynamic interactive events into smaller elements, such as the 10 actions investigated in this study, it becomes easier for an observer to see how events, exchanges, and messages convey communication about impermanence. It is not evident that member participants were aware of these 10 actions and their relationships to impermanence, but they were found in all the communication artifacts. They interplayed together in mostly connected, but somewhat illogical or irrational ways. To summarize, an exchange between members may start with believing and lead to doubting. It may spin off into substantiating, or directly to discarding. Repeated routines may be interrupted and then re-established. Long passages of reasoning may take place, leading to enactments, or activities can been enacted without significant planning or prior thought. Something formerly unseen may become clearly seen, and then labeled in such a way that it can become manageable.

RQ3 Results

How do the five processes of communicating impermanence (confidence, awareness, influence, continuity, and affirmation) help members adapt to and cope with impermanence?

In terms of possible relationships between the process, there emerged from the findings a useful oppositional arrangement of Weick's (2012) 10 processes of communicating impermanence. These helped identify and categorize many oppositional actions in interrelated pairs: *believing/doubting, seeing/labeling*, *repeating/interrupting, reasoning/enacting,* and *discarding/substantiating*, which were seen as feedback cycles or processes of confidence, awareness, influence, continuity, and affirmation, through which members of an organization accept and avoid impermanence. Each of the 30 episodes presented were able to be mapped as to where they were oriented on a model of an interactive communication process (Figs. 2, p. 66; 4, p. 80; 5, p. 94; 6, p. 108; 7, p. 119).

Communicating about impermanence allows people to adapt performance expectations as situations unfold. Using a lens of the dynamics of confidence, awareness, influence, continuity and affirmation, the underlying actions of communicating impermanence are made more evident. If all exchanges are looked at first as opportunities for feedback and engagement between members, and not for control and direction, then space is made for a cycle to be put in action. To recount, the findings showed how a scholarly account of “dropping your tools” was shared with participants, bringing research into the action, with generally positive results (Weick, 2012). While is it human and helpful to have tools and training, and financial and material resources, that is not all that an organization needs to succeed. Communication research shows us that sometimes the people and tools do their jobs right and the job is done mostly as expected, but unfortunately, there will always be times when the plans fail and success needs to be improvised. In addition, in this study and for our organization, switching methods of delivery meant that the prior performance measures established became impossible. Through the member’s agility, skill, and trust, the organization was able to craft a new story with new metrics that reflected a new operational environment. This was particularly remarkable due to the truly existential threat of COVID-19, impacting internal members, external partners, and the entire world through a pandemic of unprecedented scope. In summary, the findings illustrate how storytelling and narrative communication are keys to understanding and managing impermanence. The dance of acceptance and avoidance is to be mindfully appreciated and observed closely by those who wish to gain the benefit of ancient wisdom for better coping in times of crisis, and of calm.

SUMMARY OF THE PROCESSES: A STORY OF IMPERMANENCE

Now that we have gone through all of the five processes of communicating impermanence, one by one, here is a very simple demonstration of how the 10 actions that Weick (2012) originally led us to, broken out again from their pairs of five processes, might be useful still in describing the experience of impermanence in this particular organizational context. Knowing how much people need narrative to make sense of a situation (Polkinghorne, 1988; Czarniawska, 2004), and being surrounded by children's literature through a shared organizational mission, the story will take a fairy-tale-like tone. Also, note the attention to a verb form: For it is actions that drive stories, and keep a listener's and observer's attention:

> In the beginning, there was a Sweet Little organization with a great big mission to give away books to kids who needed them. It had been **Repeating** many of its programs year after year, perfecting the way it found and presented its books to the children, ensuring there was variety and choice and that trusted adults, doctors and teachers and parents, supported and reinforced the idea that reading was fun and good to do. All of the sudden, the whole world was **Interrupted** with a terrible, life threatening virus. Nobody was sure where it came from, and nobody was even sure how it was transmitted, what it was doing to people, or how to stop it. Big Mean organizations started **Labeling** it, and also all of the things they were going to do to address it, and all of the things they wanted people to do to try to protect themselves. The Little organization did what it could to keep up with all the new rules, and to protect its people, and still fulfill its mission. There was a great disagreement across the land between personal freedoms and taking care of one

another. A great moment of **Seeing** happened when everyone saw an innocent person being killed by the authorities of the Big Mean organizations. Suddenly, the virus did not seem as important as social issues that had long been avoided, like corruption and injustice. The organization wrestled with how to keep doing their original mission and also do a better job fighting social injustice. In fact, these issues might even be more threatening than the virus, which was hard to see and hard to test for, although most reports said it was getting worse and killing many people. The organization went through many acts of **Reasoning** to come up with new ways of doing things and make sure everyone together felt like they were doing the right thing. It learned about what it was and who it stood for by **Enacting** the decisions it made to keep working towards it mission, getting books to kids. The people involved with the Sweet Little organization kept **Believing** that they were doing the right thing and doing the best job that they possibly could, under the circumstances, and when they began **Doubting**, they shared their doubts and helped each other find trust and focus to act again. They had trouble **Discarding** some of their planned events and comfortable identities, but through a cycle of avoidance and acceptance, came to live with and accept the uncertainty. By seeking **Substantiating** opinions, such as continued funding and positive feedback from participant families, they were able to come to some decisions that allowed them to keep acting. Through this acting, they kept fulfilling their mission, and they expect that this will continue, no matter what the Big organizations do, as long as there are kids that need books. And, if, in the end, they can’t continue as the Sweet Little

> organization for some reason, they believe some other organization will be able to continue the work. Because as long as there are kids, and long as there is economic disparity the mission and work will remain meaningful, despite the condition of impermanence, and there is nothing wrong and everything good with giving books to kids who don't have enough at home.

Note that this story does not use the five processes or the 10 actions in alphabetical order, but rather as how they unfold in a cohesive, collectively created narrative through-line (Fisher, 1989). This short example is just one of the possible ways that these 10 processes can be helpful filters through which to observe the reality of impermanence in the workplace, and makes evident some particular salient processes of how impermanence may be noticed by members and communicated. At the very least, it helps create a sense of narrative flow and balance to the organizational autobiography presented in this chapter. The narrative summary is meant to put into perspective the various scales of events of the early days of COVID-19, such as the facts of small, personal losses, like the struggle giving up some much-anticipated events, the fears of loss and uncertainty, and collective adaptations that were more positive, like reasoning through new ways of working. There were obstacles to overcome, like the labeling and navigating the control tactics of larger organizations and institutions, and moments of opportunity when injustice was seen, and the organization acted (or failed to act enough) to make changes. There were happy interactional moments, like external approval from funders and beneficiaries, and transformational moments, such as when the organization re-considered a program model or a means to enhance social justice. In next chapter, I will stake some more claims about communicating impermanence, and tie these findings back to the relevant organizational communication literature.

Chapter 5: Discussion

FURTHERING FEEDBACK CYCLES

The findings presented a series of episodes that placed observed interaction along one of five processes of communication impermanence. These processes were presented as feedback cycles, where the paths of movement between the two extremes were acceptance and avoidance. These paths, however, we not seen strictly as one way directional. At the point when a member responded, the feedback they gave might direct another member to reinforce the activity proposed, or reverse and send them in the other direction. Each episode had many different exchanges, and each exchange had its own unique characteristic to the member and the organization and the historical context. I argue that there is not a sequential, direct, or indirect relationship evident between or across to these variables, at least at this point in the inquiry. However, it appears that each of the 10 actions can be avoided or accepted independently: i.e., a member can think of avoiding repetition or accepting it, or avoiding interruption or accepting it. And, the five processes proposed are subjective in nature. While I as an observer identified, labeled, and categorized a particular episode as being a process of confidence, another member or observer may see it as a process of influence. Neither one's perception is necessarily true or untrue (although there may be ranges of reasonable acceptance of interpretation coming from external benchmarks). Strength of actions were not considered in the findings, and it may be possible that dynamic actions like these may appear as processes in any order and at any scale. Any accounts of how impermanence is communicated are not exhaustive nor mutually exclusive. Therefore, it is difficult to isolate particular actions in the field. This presents a challenge for those looking for ways of quantifying the experience of communicating impermanence, either in measurable time, or in volume of activity.

However, there are ways that the social construction of time have been successfully quantified, and this work is meant to compliment this line of inquiry. Ballard and Seibold (2004) were able to quantitatively analyze feedback cycles into two constructs, the variability of the task or activity, which is essentially a measure of its complexity, and the length of time needed to complete it, which is essentially a measure of clock time. They found through surveys, consistent with prior research, that members who had a long amount of time to complete a complex task were more future-focused than those who had fewer variable tasks for briefer periods (Ballard & Siebold, 2004, p. 21). While this finding illuminates the relationship between construals of time and feedback cycles, it depends still upon clock time to indicate the beginning and end of a particular task or activity. The findings here support that the members of this organization were more present time focused than future time focused, perhaps because the tasks were less complex and the time clock has seemed to stop, making most of the moments reported as low complexity yet over extended time periods. Because impermanence is an underlying feature of physical existence, appearing at any moment spontaneously in the course of an activity, and as such, it is not quantifiably measurable or predictable, there are other frames needed to see it qualitatively. Ballard and McVey (2014) recognized this in proposing temporal frames for activity cycles, still along the axis of high or low task variability and brief or extended time windows, but allowing for spontaneity of moments within the panes of the window (p. 196). The narratives in the findings presented here are meant to show more of the complex variability of tasks and activities that occurred in just one organization, and show how these are compounded when time windows are not defined by clock time, but by qualitative processes of communicating impermanence. This does not suggest that all attention to clocks should be discarded in the practice of organizing. There were many times in the findings that dates, days of the week, and hours of the day were important to the members and their stories. But it does provide a way to look at organizing where both sets of variables, tasks and activities and the duration of a process, are subjective and determined not by an external agent or force, but collectively by the membership of an organization. Also, it indicates that there are powerful and unexpected external agents, like the pandemic, that have a great deal of influence on organizations, perhaps even more so than the powerful agreed upon time zones and constructions of clock time.

Moreover, the elusive and multidirectional nature of the 10 actions and five processes in the findings reflect how participants must not be too obsessed with, nor too in denial of, the inevitable ending of every system or organization they are engaged with (Weick, 2012). The findings support that the scale and strength of which endings and impermanence become present from the external environment is best conveyed through a method of qualitative narrative inquiry (Czarniawska, 1997, 2004).

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEMPORAL STRUCTURING

The episodic nature of the findings points to a particular dimension of time that has been discussed previously in organizational scholarship (McGrath & Kelly, 1992; Ballard & McVey, 2014). The idea of a "period of time" as a structuring framework was evident throughout the findings, and indeed, I believe, can be seen in the findings as both a strength and weakness in the way I perform this particular role in this organization. Because I, as a managing member, am less attentive to clock time than I am to constructed time, it was easier for me to see paths through which to navigate the challenge of COVID-19 than if I, and we as an organization, had stayed rigid to the calendar deadlines of schools, events, and business cycles that customarily constrict our work. As Orlikowski & Yates (2002) suggested, “changes to the temporal structures enacted by members of a community may be introduced explicitly or implicitly, and they may be accomplished with substantial planning and preparation or they may emerge more subtly and slowly from the everyday slippages and accommodations that arise in ongoing human action” (p. 688). The findings suggest that, at least in this organization during the study period, processes of confidence, awareness, influence, continuity, and affirmation were sustained through slippages and accommodations, more than planning and preparation.

Orlikowski & Yates (2002) also suggested that future research answer the question: “What alternative, complementary, or contradictory temporal structures are being enacted that influence or threaten the continued reliance on these temporal structures?” (p. 696). Impermanence as a temporal structure was shown here to be an alternative and somewhat contradictory to the existing models, as it does not seek for linearity, sequence, or past or future time perspectives. Communicating impermanence makes an open space for discontinuity in order to be more agile when disruptions occur, somewhat paradoxically so that organizations can be more adaptive and ultimately relied upon. Thus, the model of communicating impermanence through multidirectional processes provides a complimentary contribution to the practice-based temporal structuring literature. While Orlikowski and Yates (p. 696) offered that a “practice-based perspective on time views it as experienced through the temporal structures people enact in their **recurrent** practices;” (p. 690) the communicating impermanence view of temporal structuring presented by myself as a practitioner/scholar focuses more on how people make sense of their **interrupted** practices, with a fundamental assumption that this situation, i.e., impermanence, is the norm.

Evidence for making sense of interrupted practices comes from episode that provide some examples of both avoidance and acceptance almost simultaneously: applying for the PPP, or letting volunteers come even though our offices are closed to the public. While some episodes are clearly one or the other, most have elements of both. On the micro-level, when an action is expressed by one member, other members may move in either direction towards the opposite action, such as the irony of "I can't believe" statements meaning exactly the opposite. For the purposes of application as seen in the narrative examples, the duration of a process represents the theme, summation or outcome of the episode from the perspective of an observer, and signifies the overall orientation of the episode as a unit to a dynamic process between two actions. The process is the grounding from which to find footing for interpretation and sensemaking, as members may be both subjects and observers. The duration of multiple interactions constitutes the process that the members are in; as defined by this model, a process of confidence, awareness, influence, continuity, or affirmation. As another indicator of the paradigm of communicating impermanence, in almost all cases, the episodes did not represent a complete or finished process, but a dynamic one, actively rising and falling through interaction between members.

To further underline the importance of an assumption of interrupted vs. recurring practices, when things are interrupted, more communicating impermanence appears in the system, either by the actions of members of the organization itself, or from external conditions. Thus, there is a dynamic interplay of stronger or weaker, faster or slower, or more or less communication impermanence that an organization is expressing at any given time, either towards it (accepting) or away from it (avoiding) as a whole, and these qualities of expression reflect the member's actual experience of impermanence. The strength, speed, and volume of communication about impermanence relate to Ballard and Seibold's (2004) dimensions of temporality, including "urgency" for speed, "scarcity" for volume, and "punctuality" for strength (p. 151). Because different members perceived the strength, speed, and volume of communicating impermanence differently, the findings demonstrated these subtle qualities of impermanence through subjective, personal narrative accounts, creating the artifact of an organizational autobiography.

While this particular method invites questioning the author and their trustworthiness, the purpose of studying impermanence is not to assign blame or attempt to better control the reality of impermanence. A practical application of the processes of watching the interactive dynamics between doubt and believing, oriented to confidence; between seeing and labeling, oriented to awareness, between enacting and reasoning, oriented to influence, between repeating and interrupting, oriented to continuity, and between substantiating and discarding, oriented to affirmation, is to alleviate the suffering that resistance to or ignorance of impermanence might cause. As Orlikowski and Yates (2002) demonstrated, "The repeated use of certain temporal structures reproduces and reinforces their legitimacy and influence in organizational life. Because such temporal structures are often routinely and unproblematically drawn on, they tend to become taken for granted. As such, they appear to be given, invariant, and independent, creating the impression that time exists externally" (p. 686). The findings show that members suffered most when they tried to hold on to certain structures that had in fact ceased to be possible: a gala event, group volunteering, going into the office, face-to-face staff meetings. This erroneous assumption that things will not change is what the framework and practical application of this construct of communicating impermanence is designed to remediate. By changing the temporal structure from something that is fixed to something that is flexible, and engaging all members in the practice, considerable suffering was avoided: most notably when we worked as a team to figure out the Delivered and Direct program models. In other words, communicating impermanence (or the lack thereof) in organizational life should not be taken for granted, and has a place within research related to temporal structuring and member experiences of time.

BEYOND GOFFMAN, WEICK, AND SENSEMAKING

One of the most important findings of this study was conveying an account of how one particular organization found meaning and purpose in the wake of a cosmological episode. The resulting narrative and dialogical features point to the sensemaking that was done primarily by me as the complete member researcher, but also, through accounts of the interaction, provided glimpses of this sensemaking by other internal members and external partners. This meaning crystalized an existing philanthropic purpose, getting the right book to the right kids at the right time, providing not only the when and how, but the why of how this particular group organized through communicating impermanence. To harken back to the challenge of expressing why "it matters greatly" how members of organizations understand impermanence (Weick 2012), it is because we need to know right now how to create more order, trust, safety, and equity in our society, and we need to do it fast (Meyerson, Weick, & Kramer, 1996). This is not just because of the COVID-19 crisis, but to confront a myriad of global environmental and social challenges that we as a species are facing. Temporal researchers have pointed to the accelerating speed of modern communication and two problems that it has caused: 1) encouraging members to try to map the past onto current events, and 2) alienating members from a past that seems completely irrelevant

(Purser, Bluedorn, & Petranker, 2005). These conflicting concerns call for ways to be reconciled, because neither situation recognize that experiences do not flow in time, rather, they make up time (Purser, Bluedorn, & Petranker, 2005). Communicating impermanence is a way of situating an organization to time, that reflects this temporal distinction. As global events travel farther and faster, there has perhaps never been a greater need for the application of the ancient wisdom of impermanence than now.

Weick talks often of trust, but this was not directly addressed in this analysis (Weick, 1995, 2001, 2012; Meyerson, Weick, & Kramer, 1996). The findings, I believe, show that a good amount of trust was exhibited between members in the study organization, because of the high level of participation and the candidness of respondents. However, I do not mean to imply that this trust was generated as a result of our reaction to the COVID-19 crisis. Trust has been a topic both explicitly and implicitly in the organization, both in dialogue with other members, and internally within my own identification with the role of Executive Director. Weick (2012) implies that trust is a glue that is created by compassion. The five processes as described—confidence, awareness, influence, continuity, and affirmation—fall on the compassionate side of experience, rather than the critical. Compassion, in this view, is better than passion, because it is more about the other person than it is about the self. The individual often wants outcomes that they can control. And while the individual may be able to shape these outcomes, they are ultimately created only through communication with others, through appreciation and improvisation (Purser, Bluedorn, & Petranker, 2005). Working through organizations are the ways in which individuals can transcend impermanence. That's why communication as a fundamental process of organizing is so important to understand, improve, and celebrate. And why the extended isolation imposed by the social distancing in the time of COVID-19 is likely to have inexplicable impact for years to come.

Survival and the will to live are shared goals across society, and yet, impermanence reminds they are impossible, at least at the individual member level. Erving Goffman, whose work *The presentation of self in everyday life (*1959) influences this (and probably all) organizational ethnography, posited somewhat cynically in his observations that the purpose of human interaction was mainly to maintain a definition of the situation (Goffman, 1959). As a sociologist working through a theatrical lens, Goffman (1959) elicited this idea across culture and class. Despite his efforts to include a diversity of subjects and intellectual scaffolds, it is easy to pick at this work today as somewhat sexist, racist, and elitist. However, the work is also supremely observant and sensitive with wonderful and abundant portraits of people playing at professions from a range of social classes and some geographic scope (Shetland Island crofters, Indian Brahmins, mental asylums, college co-eds, con men and prostitutes, the affluent gentry). His ability to observe, record, recall, reconstruct and reorder dramatic scenarios from the field for illustrative effect is certainly remarkable.

In addition to Weick's life work, Goffman's life work paved the way for this study, and both pursued the explication of an underlying bias that all members have, namely, a subliminal intention to search for permanence (Czarniawska, 2006). They both portrayed how the limited wants and needs of the individual create the conflict, tension, or struggle between accepting and avoiding our roles, settings, and plots in life (Czarniawska, 2006). Along these lines, it seems to me that a rich attention to impermanence calls for a rather different metaphor from Goffman's (1959) introspective 'maintaining a definition of the situation' as the purpose for or meaning of life. Indeed, as Goffman himself mused on a lighter note in a different episode: "The world, in truth, is a wedding" (1959, p. 45). This more celebratory image conveys greater power because of our social need to gather, come together, to organize, to connect. For a new metaphor for communicating impermanence, drawn from the poetic and aesthetic foundations of Weick and Goffman (Weick, 1995, pp. 6 & 197; 1979, p. 14; Goffman, 1959; Czarniawska, 2006), please consider this brief 5-7-5 syllable poem as a summary of this 'golden braid' of connection:

> impermanent world
> in organizational life
> constitutes haiku

WABI SABI IN THE WORKPLACE

Upon reflection, the findings had many moments of *wabi sabi* from my perspective, not that I intentionally put there, but might have been noticed due to my sensitivity to and personal preference for the concept and aesthetic. The "Wow" moment. The "don't watch the news" moment. The Google telephone worker's father's death. *Wabi sabi* deals with negative aspects of aging, isolation, and poverty and imbues them with a transformative *wabi sabi* aesthetic:

> Melancholy, an emotion nurtured in the Zen world, was used as a whetstone on which to sharpen spiritual awareness; this was not a self-indulgent form of self-pity, but rather a sadness tinged with an intangible longing. (Juniper, 2003, p. 50)

Applying this *wabi sabi* philosophy to the workplace reinforces the notion that if organizations want to achieve optimal (even enlightened?) performance, including positive social impact through the products and services they offer and in the overall well-being of their participants, they need to be more aware of the subtle, artful ways that impermanence shapes and is shaped by their organization. They can do this by learning to be more accepting, watchful, avoidant, routine, and exceptionally respectful of the now. Attending to communication and culture as much as or even more so than operations and strategy, as in Weick's (1987) recommendations for HROs, is urgently necessary in our increasingly turbulent times.

Here is one more instance from the fieldwork to better illustrate the aesthetic. Although no one in our immediate membership, meaning Staff or Board of Directors, has passed due to COVID-19 as of this writing, one of the first personal accounts I "saw," in the sense of the process of awareness, was one of our school librarians, who had lost not one, but both of her parents to the virus. It was quite early on in the pandemic, and they were in a nursing home in New Orleans. She was not allowed to visit them, one of the first accounts of this type of forced separation. She spoke of how traumatic it was not to be able to be with them when they passed, nor for them to be with each other. That unconnected loss seems tragic and needless to me, in a way that encapsulates the communal suffering during the period of study: these were deaths that were not *wabi sabi*. It reminded me how I was physically with both my parents when they passed (now many years ago) and how, in a relative way, it was fortunate that it was after lengthy illnesses when we all knew the end was coming. Fisher (1989) offers a concept in the narrative paradigm of a satisfying ending, or an ending done right, and this account of my parent's death demonstrates a bittersweet *wabi sabi* experience, made possible because we were able to appreciate and accept the concept of impermanence, together. COVID-19 took that type of ending away from this librarian. But her telling the story to others seemed to act as a proxy for connection, because in times of crisis, communicating impermanence through narratives is a reciprocal compassionate act.

Organizational leadership should consider that because there is not likely to be an exact measurable amount of communicating impermanence for members to optimize, organizational members should be allowed to actively choose a balance of processes that will express itself in a unique way. The goal would be the achievement of a dynamic equilibrium, performed to help members resolve ongoing tensions and accept incoming paradox (Smith & Lewis, 2011). The next direction to take at any moment must be felt and enacted through observation of behaviors and listening to language, which is more an art than science. In the words of the Buddha, optimal awareness of impermanence would be "the middle path," which avoids "the pitfalls of both overindulgence and self-denial" (Juniper, 2003). In an organizational way, a *wabi sabi* mindset instructs the organization towards more qualifiable reliability and away from strictly quantitative growth. As such, a qualitative approach to the study of communicating impermanence in organizations helps to reveal the tensions, dichotomies, and irrationalities of the act of constitution. These are best demonstrated by paying conscious attention to the internal and external processes of communicating impermanence, and most notably how other members actively accept or avoid expressions of confidence, awareness, influence, continuity, and affirmation.

LIMITATIONS

As a limitation, this study examined the communication of only one particular organization in one geographic location over an unprecedented time of global crisis. While this evolved into a unique opportunity to study the concept of impermanence when it is perhaps more visible than usual, the results will not be fully representative of organizations as a whole and will not be replicable nor generalizable, except in a naturalistic way (Tracy, 2010). Moreover, the historical and political influences during the time period of early COVID-19 that impacted the world and the organization were not expected when this project was initially undertaken and have not been able to be put into full perspective by anyone involved.

As with any human observation, there may be gaps in the data, as seeing and recording experiences are not perfect. The selection of documents voluntarily collected may have failed to capture representative situations in which meaningful acceptance or avoidance of organizational impermanence might have occurred, such as informal conversations or personal emails, or side conversations between members of which I was not aware. The forced isolation and separation caused by the crisis was conducive to writing, but not to direct observation, and this was disappointing from a strictly rigorous scientific standpoint of access to participants. While to me, the actions and processes were highly evident in the findings, others may not find it so. However, the examples provided were only a fraction of the total instances recorded in the fieldwork. There were many other interesting and important events that occurred during this time, but they could not all be included in this project.

These weaknesses are mitigated by the assertion that the ethnographic approach is a journey, aimed not at exact measurement or accurate predictions, but at capturing and showing the breath, depth, and complexity of a particular situation (Tracy, Geist-Martin, Putnam & Mumby, 2013). While this study was not able to examine any particular inferential or causal relationship between the processes more closely, processes of communicating impermanence is suggested as a promising topic for further research, linking to other works in temporal structuring.

In the following concluding chapter, I will focus on implications of this overall endeavor, and make some recommendations for future study and action by researchers, and action and study by organizational members.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

IMPLICATIONS FOR TIMES OF CRISIS & CALM

One of the benefits of the acceptance of impermanence in the time of crisis is that it balanced the sense of urgency in decision making that was being demanded in a turbulent time. The rampant chatter during the onset of COVID-19 about "shutting down" the economy and "furloughing" employees conveyed an underdeveloped sense of impermanence; members who were more coping saw that closure was not a final ending, but a temporary ending with something possibly more positive at the end; and that multiple paths forward were possible. "It is a time," one of our members observed, "that we should be exploring all possible paths for the future." A possible practical implication for times of crisis is to add more direct communication about impermanence throughout one's personal influence on organizational communication. One of the benefits of the acceptance of impermanence in the time of crisis is that it balanced the sense of urgency in decision making that was being demanded in a turbulent time. The rampant chatter during the onset of COVID-19 about "shutting down" the economy and "furloughing" employees conveyed an underdeveloped sense of impermanence; members who were more coping saw that closure was not a final ending, but a temporary ending with something possibly more positive at the end; and that multiple paths forward were possible. "It is a time," one of our members observed, "that we should be exploring all possible paths for the future." A possible practical implication for times of crisis is to add more direct communication about impermanence throughout one's personal influence on organizational communication.

With some of the partners we worked with, closure was positive, in the psychological sense of letting go of something or "putting a button on it," a sense of finishing or completion with satisfaction, rather than a sense of traumatic loss. Such was the decision to postpone our annual gala. Although grief from loss was experienced as well, such as when we realized how much we were looking forward to it, and how sad we were that it couldn't go on as planned. When seeing happens as a group, it is usually traumatic, like the space shuttle Columbia exploding, or the Twin Towers burning. Part of what's so unsettling about the COVID-19 pandemic is that it can't be seen all at once. There is no smoke or raging fire like Mann Gulch and all we are seeing is tiny fragments of broken pieces of a collective experience. Communicating impermanence allows us to reorder these pieces through processes that point again towards order, but an order with more respect to its fragility.

From the Zen Buddhist concepts of yin and yang, equal but opposing light and dark forces of the universe, calm times need disruption inserted to keep the artful balance of a *wabi sabi* aesthetic (Purser, 2013; Juniper, 2003; Smith & Lewis, 2014). While it is increasingly hard to remember the time before COVID-19, when times are more "normal," a slightly more direct and open approach to communicating about impermanence might improve the quality of experience for those engaged with an organization in any operational condition. During times of calm, actions like doubting, reasoning, and substantiation should be noticed and accepted for their positive aspects. When external events and players signify a heightened awareness of impermanence, members of organizations are perhaps more likely to communicate directly about it than in calmer times, so it might be more necessary to actively cultivate communicating impermanence when it is least expected.

APPLICATION OF COMMUNICATING IMPERMANENCE IN THE WORKPLACE

Communicating impermanence reflects a lived experience informed by the perspective that organizing happens within an underlying condition of transience and unreliability, but also with a corresponding ongoing quality of unfolding or becoming through time. Awareness of impermanence, and communicating impermanence, is often activated by inexplicable events that require collective sensemaking. Weick's offering to practitioners facing crisis situations was a set of words that he called resources, with the acronym SIR COPE: *social, identity, retrospect, cues, ongoing, plausibility,* and *enactment* (Weick, 2012; pp. 57-58). One of the weaknesses in this recommendation is that it mixes verbs, nouns, and adjectives, and does not explicate how to apply these recommendations in an organizational setting. Other scholars have given more specific advice on applying theory into practice in the context of temporal structuring:

> Preparing organizational members to operate more routinely in flow time requires a certain degree of openness, as well as becoming less emotionally reactive when situations do not flow smoothly. The intuitive competency being described here amounts to being able to tune into the present moment with a subtlety and depth that lets us sense the potential of our thinking, speech and behavior to condition the future. To the degree that organizational members can enhance their awareness of time as a creative dynamic for change, such a capacity can be further cultivated and developed (Purser, Bluedorn, & Petranker, 2005, p. 32).

While focused more on the unfolding present that the unforeseen future, the communicating impermanence model presented in this paper offers a list of three practical things that members of organizations can do while interacting to help elicit a richer expression of the situation, revealing underlying complexities as well as paths for action towards shared goals. First, members should observe what they and their fellow members are saying, by listening closely for each of Weick's 10 action verbs, and closely related forms in talk, writing, and even in gestures and behaviors. When they are expressed, attention should be paid to them closely, and also, to the appearance or absence of their opposite. This attention to the appearance specific action of impermanence in any moment (believing, discarding, doubting, enacting, interrupting, labeling, reasoning, repeating, seeing, and substantiating) may turn into discussion, action, or reflection, depending on the members judgement of the situation. Second, members can ask themselves and others if they are currently accepting or, more importantly, avoiding any particular action, observation, or situation. This can be worded as an open ended question, or be more specific to the context: "Is there anything that we're overlooking or avoiding about this issue?" "Can you tell me why you want us to accept that plan?" Be prepared for any response, and be careful to stay open, respectful, and non-judgmental about the other member's contribution. Finally, members can ask questions of each other about the five processes, and specifically where other members of the organization would place themselves and the group on a map between two actions. This is a two-step process: One, begin by asking: "Where do you think we are on this issue? Are we in a place of confidence, awareness, influence, continuity, or affirmation?" This is best done in small groups of 3-5 members, although it could also be done through surveys or one-on-one interviews. Two, if and when consensus is reached about what process the group is situated in, share the dual component actions of the process, and discuss if the group is moving more towards one or the other actions. For instance, if the group is in a process of continuity, you may ask: "Are we leaning more towards repeating this issue, or towards interrupting it?" At that stage in the intervention, the participating members of the group should have a better understanding of their individual and collective orientation towards one of two specific actions, within one process of communicating impermanence. This method should aid in expediting sensemaking, and enabling the flow of experience to pass with less stress and more flexibility of choice, and with the benefit more shared knowledge of the current situation (Purser, Bluedorn, and Petranker, 2005).

FIVE TAKE-AWAYS FOR ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERS

Communicating impermanence represents not only a way of doing research but a "way of being-in-the-world" (Cunliffe, Luhman & Boje, 2004). Every day we can continue our work and listen to members of our organizations communicating impermanence. Here are five take-aways from my personal observations about how to do this in the workplace:

1) **Assume that everything is falling apart** – because the context of the organization is impermanence, it is wise to assume that change and disorder will happen unless the right amount of member action is put in a counter direction.
2) **Embrace that your job is bringing it together** – because communication is the way that organizations are constituted, members should actively seek to build meaningful structures and seek dynamic equilibrium together.
3) **Compassion is always the first step to take** – because members have a tendancy to be critical and judge before listening and observing, and also because avoidance is often easier than acceptance, we must be respectful yet direct, honest, and clear with all our communications.
4) **Vision many futures and realize that outcomes are uncertain** – because the past can inform but will not necessarily predict the future, we must set and hold on to our goals and

objectives with lightness that allows for alterations and enhancements, but develop them nevertheless, together and in direct response to the current situation.

5) **Great performance takes two or more, it is inter-subjective** – because organizations are made of communication between members, the performance of this communication has a great impact on organizational performance, and it can be enhanced through more conscious effort to improving interaction between multiple members.

These five observations are drawn from my experiences as an Executive Director of a small to mid-size non-profit organization, but I have found them useful in other roles I play in my life with other organizations, both larger, like the university and political organizations, and smaller, like my family. They may not be right for every workplace, but I hope you will consider them, along with Weick's 10 actions and the five processes of communicating impermanence, the next time you are in a phone call, zoom meeting, or face-to-face interaction, and share your observations and conclusions with others.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND ACTION

This study does not aim to model the causal relationships or levels of communicating impermanence. However, it could be possible to establish markers and measures of its variance or volatility over time as a series of events. Weick's 10 processes may be a possible basis for markers of communicating impermanence in a time series, and could be mappable in a more precise way than the cycle models presented in this study. For future work, researchers could explore scale development of communication cycles as discrete communication variables and apply the use of quantitative fractal analysis, which can calculate graphic visual representations of patterns of change, as well as relative (not absolute) values for turbulence, roughness, and topology as complex systems (Brown & Liebovitch, 2010; Nonaka, Kodama, Hirose, & Kohlbacher, 2014). These imaginative and ambitious areas are still a long way out from being incorporated into the formal inquiry, and were beyond the scope of this project. However, some initial explorations early on in the project indicated that there was a possible relationship between the awareness cycle and financial performance, which might be a fruitful direction to go in a quantitative or predictive inquiry. The concept of turbulence might be helpful in further describing the variability of communicating impermanence between actions, episodes, processes, or within or between organizations.

This study supports a claim that nearly all of Weick's thinking in one way or another illuminates the concept of impermanence, but a thorough review of the literature shows he is not alone in recognizing this shared experience phenomena in organizational communication. While not specifically labeled as impermanence, change is ubiquitous experience that has a broad coverage in organizational literature. While impermanence could be seen as part of the study of organizational change; it has a crispness, temporality, and economy that organizational change as a larger concept, lacks. Impermanence calls into attention our humility and mortality; in a way that could offset too much attention on continuous change (Weick & Quinn, 1999; Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997).

As Lewis, Hamel, and Richardson (2001) point out, discussions about change have been a special topic of organizational communication for some time, but have been limited by a focus on one way messages from planners to stakeholders that do not embrace the unexpected. Two different paradigms arose to describe different perspectives on change, *planned change*, akin to internally-driven strategic planning, and *unplanned change*, akin to crisis or catastrophic situations driven by the environment. Change could be viewed as either a positive force and a destructive force, depending on who was experiencing it and what impact it was having on the organization and its stakeholders at the time (Lewis, Hammel, & Richarson, 2001). This organizational autobiography shows how in one organization, unplanned change was not necessarily a destructive force, because communicating impermanence mediated its effects.

Moreover, temporal scholars Purser, Bluedorn, and Petranker (2005) called out impermanence explicitly in their case for members of organizations to let go of the past and focus instead on the unfolding future:

> Another, more radical way of "installing ourselves in duration," is to accept (on more than just an intellectual level) that everything is impermanent, everything is change, which goes against the Western tradition that has privileged the idea that organizational identity is separate from, or independent of, the flow of time. …. For Bergson (1911), impermanence was a fundamental assumption: Reality is flowing. This does not mean everything moves, changes and becomes; science and common experience tell us that. It means that movement, becoming, change is everything there is, there is nothing else. There are no things that move and change and become; everything is movement, is change (p.28). If organizational identity is not actually separate from the flow of time, then there is no solid ground for staking a permanent position that could support claims of identity. Instead, there is only duration, and the ongoing social constructive acts that constitute an attempt to secure a relative position of stability. (p. 19)

The paradigm of communicating impermanence presented in this argument is an acceptance of the above position, with the caveat drawn from fieldwork that observers are indeed able to describe durations of processes in terms of recognizable social actions. Moreover, the findings illustrated how that these actions are something that may be mapped in a model in relationship to each other as a process of virtuous or vicious cycles (Smith & Lewis, 2011). This mapping reinforces the stability of an organization, even though the fundamental context is impermanence. Members will aim for stability, however elusive, and to help them, we should use some of the tools that the physical sciences have used to map phenomenon that are more fluid than fixed (Brown & Liebovitch, 2010). To paraphrase, scholars will be more able to read and respond "to the uniqueness of every situation by operating not from a model of what has worked in the past, but one that accepts that the future is uncertain and ever-changing" (Purser, Bluedorn, & Petranker, 2005, p. 32). The challenge for future work is to further demonstrate to the field of organizational science why communicating impermanence matters now, and that it is possible to identify and represent it, not only through time and narrative, but even in relationship to space, systems, and complexity (Brown & Eisenhart, 1997; Levy, 2000).

EMBRACING THE REALITY OF IMPERMANENCE

Though there is little doubt of the reality of the impermanence of physical existence, much of human endeavor is preoccupied with trying to make material objects as well as personal identities more permanent, dependable, and predictable. And to be fair, many of these efforts do appear to hold impermanence at bay. Think of the successful longevity of human-made structures such as the Pyramids in Egypt or the Great Wall of China; the persistence of institutions such as the Roman Catholic Church (circa 30 AD) or Harvard University (founded 1636 AD); or singularly memorable individuals, such as Lucy, an indigenous Ethiopian representing the first evolutionary human, who 3.18 million years ago died by cracking her head open upon falling out of a tree (Johanson & Edey, 1990; Kappelman, et al., 2016). These people, things, and organizations indicate that as a collective human race, if not individually, we appear to be capable of creating and sustaining a relative permanence. While this gives some confidence, most of the organizations that people work in will not likely persist to quite an extent, and that should be more understood.

As for the Coronavirus. COVID-19, the future is still appearing. Will it stay, forever changing the way humans interact? Will it go, or be replaced with another existential threat to humanity? The answer to both these questions, in *wabi sabi* style, is yes, and….no.

With a population of over 7 billion people and the rapid and significant changes we are now facing in the economy, environment, politics, technology, and now public health, a better understanding of what impermanence is—how to recognize it, how to measure it, and perhaps, even learning to embrace it—is sorely needed to help alleviate cruelty, suffering, and an unrealistic sense of what really matters to individuals working in organizations. It is my sincere desire that this inquiry may be helpful to those trying to cope by providing the practical tactic of viewing and orienting daily interactions through processes of confidence, awareness, influence, continuity, and affirmation in order to deal with the ever flowing experience of impermanence when it gets tough.

For fellow practitioners, particularly members of non-profit organizations, may you go forth about your work with a *wabi sabi* view. For communication scholars, communicating impermanence presents a renewed opportunity to apply concepts of temporal structuring and the moment-to-moment ways that language and action co-create our ephemeral reality.

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