

Social Media, XL Foods and the Decision to Sell to JBS USA

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Abstract

XL Meats is the largest beef processor in Canada selling across the country to such retail giants as Costco. In 2012, the Brooks, Alberta facility became contaminated with e coli and several reports of seriously ill consumers followed. Not long after the problem became public the owners announced that they were bringing in a Brazillian firm to manage the plant. In January 2013, JBS (the Brazilian firm) announced they were exercising their option to purchase the facility. This paper employs qualitative techniques to examine the role of social media and past scripts in the decision to change ownership. Themes surrounding government meat inspection, big agriculture and foreign ownership are surfaced in the development of this analysis. Social media analyzed includes public comments in news media websites, blogs, Facebook, Twitter and other social media platforms.

Keywords: Beef, Agribusiness, Actor-Network Theory, Social Media, Qualitative

“...After-hours on Oct. 16, XL announced that a subsidiary of Brazilian agri-foods giant was taking over management of the company's beleaguered Lakeside Packers plant. As part of the deal, JBS USA also got an exclusive option to acquire Lakeside, which had been closed since September, and the rest of XL's Canadian and U.S. operations” (Warnica, 2012).

The XL Foods Lakeside Meat packing plant was closed by an e-coli outbreak in the fall of 2012. Eventually the Nilsson brothers (then owners of the plant) engaged a Brazilian firm to take over the day-to-day management of the plant. [JBS USA is the American subsidiary directly managing Lakeside]. The Brazilians also acquire a right to purchase the plant as part of the deal. That option was exercised on January 14, 2013.

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This paper examines thousands of social media discourses surrounding the e-coli breakout, the Lakeside plant, Nilsson brothers related operations, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and the Canadian Government. The breakout and the plant were subject to a great deal of media attention. Complicating the issues surrounding Lakeside Meats are the former ownership of the plant by Tyson Foods, the large volume of meat processed, the relationship with Costco, the two documentaries about the plant and the town of Brooks, Alberta, the large foreign worker population of the town (mostly working at the plant) and other recent Canadian food and water borne illness events.

Data for this study has been collected from social media such as Twitter, Facebook, topic forums, comments to news articles and other related matter employing thematic analysis (Aronson, 1994; Bowen, 2008; Krippendorf, 2008). These themes will be interrelated into webs of ideas employing Actor-Network Theory constructs (Czarniawska & Hernes, 2005; Latour, 2005; Law & Hassard, 2005). Following this author's previous work on non-corporeal actants, the paper will propose a web on ideas, beliefs and values holding power and influence over individuals and their decisions (Hartt, 2011, 2013; Hartt, Helms Mills, & Mills, 2012).

Individuals make decisions, these decisions are a product of sensemaking (Weick, 1995, 2010), we wish to discover the role of social experience in those decisions. Sensemaking relies on the concept of the legitimate choice; those choices the individual considers acceptable to others. These others have power and influence over the sensemaker (Helms Mills, Thurlow, & Mills, 2010). In relating Critical Sensemaking with Actor-Network Theory we have usually assumed direct connection among the members of the influencing network. In this paper, the influence of nearly anonymous persons on decision-making is considered. The paper will examine the possibility that a network of ideas may influence decisions disembodied from any physical manifestation.

The origins of this analysis come from decisions written from the perspective of the network described (Durepos & Mills, 2012; Hartt, 2013). The natures of the networks appear to produce different sensemaking of the events. This paper proposes the theoretical possibility that decisions as the product of prospective sensemaking are the results of non-corporeal actants (NCAs).

NCAAs are an ephemeral form of *actant* (Latour, 1992, 2005) which represents the tensions of understanding of ideas produced by the participation in groups and the sensemaking of how principles, values and ideas should be enacted under the influence of connectedness.

The decision itself appears to take place in the 2012-13 time-frame; however it is difficult to pinpoint exactly when it was made. The public traces of the announcement are used to provide some information about the timeframe. The decisions to give over management and possibly sell the plant and the actual sale are constructed as one decision in this analysis. The history of the plant and industry present the sale as a nearly forgone conclusion to the crisis. The plant is situated in an actor-network of people and things which (the network) is both real and apparent and may well be ephemeral.

To describe any actor-network, one should probe the motivation to join the network. For this particular group of human actors, the enrollment in the network is a product of two choices: (1) the choice of the individual manager to seek the position; and (2) the corporate selection process. The means and manner of enrolment may impact the NCAAs enrolled and the discursive practices of the participants. From a critical sensemaking (CSM) perspective this may constrain the decision making options of individuals.

Theoretical Base

This discussion centres on the role of ideas, concepts, and perspectives in an actor-network and how that role influences the choices of individual actors. Theoretically, the NCA links the nature of the network with the sensemaking of individuals in the network. NCAAs can be linked back to corporeal (non-human and human) actors and actants (ones with a physical manifestation). But, as actors, actants, and other NCAAs interact, each individual develops his or her own understanding or meaning of the idea, concept or perspective. It is this understanding which is non-corporeal. In a network it appears that these understandings are shared in a limited way, but in the plurality of individual understanding, each actor makes his/her own meaning. This enacted meaning cannot be fully described and is unique to the sensemaking actor. The process was developed in order to surface some of these NCAAs from the traces surrounding an event.

Seven moves for analysis merging ideas from critical sensemaking (CSM) and actor-network theory (ANT) were proposed by Hartt in previous work (Hartt, 2013). These moves are based on Derrida's process of deconstruction (Norris, 1987). The aim of this process is to surface NCAs and identify their impact on decisions, as well as on enrollment and de-enrollment. Primary in seeing these actions for the management network is the theory of CSM which extends Weick's (1995) explanation of action in situations of uncertainty into a social situation of power and influence (Helms Mills et al., 2010).

Context in what is described in ANT (Latour, 1983, 1987) as translation of a network that provides a link from the network to the individual and an apparent link to CSM (Helms Mills, 2005; Helms Mills & Mills, 2004, 2009; Helms Mills et al., 2010; Long & Helms Mills, 2010; Thurlow, 2010; Thurlow & Helms Mills, 2009). In sensemaking theory, Weick provides a framework by which to reconstruct each individual's understanding of the world based on their preconceived notions rather than a fresh reading of the situation (Weick, 1977, 1979, 1988, 1990, 1993a, 1993b, 1995, 2001, 2002, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012; Weick & Browning, 1986; Weick & Quinn, 1999; Weick & Roberts, 1993; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007, 2011; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005, 2008).

Contextual factors are central to the form and development of networks. There are generally acceptable forms of organizing and means of interacting which come to an association of humans from the context in which the group coalesces (Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991; Unger, 1987). Latour refers to this as society, and within an actor-network, group specific norms are negotiated (Latour, 1990, 1991, 1993). Actors and actants enroll, interactions occur. The resulting discourse and normative factors socially produce outcomes. But, ANT appears to leave us at the point where decisions occur.

CSM appears to take this up as a point of influence of the group on the individual. In CSM, individual identity is influenced (and thereby decision-making) by organizational rules and norms, contextual conventions and dominant discourses (Helms Mills et al., 2010). CSM is very important in the mobilization (action-net initiation) of this study because it provides the link between enrolment in a network and the other choices made by individuals. Belonging to a group is an important aspect of identity construction in the individual (Casey-Campbell & Martens, 2009; Hughes & Oliver, 2010; Koole, 2010; Manstead, 2011).

In CSM, the constructed identity is a key to the understanding of choices made. The network is a source of identity. Therefore, the collective must be considered in the understanding of the actions of an individual.

Those who follow the discourse common to the network signify their participation. In CSM, discourse is important in the construction of the individual's identity (Helms Mills et al., 2010; Thurlow, 2010). By modifying our personal choices in discourse we signify a change in our understanding of ourselves. Discursive choice is an indicator of our selected identity. We choose discursive strategies according to the situation (Rehg, 1997). Discourse both demonstrates enrollment in the network and reinforces the norms of the network thereby influencing our sense of situation. By interrelating sensemaking with our presence in a network we unlock the meta-physical dimensions of decision making to ANT. Understanding discourse appears to be key to opening the connections.

The seven moves are a way of seeing action in a network as undertaken by individuals; surfacing the CSM aspects of the decisions those individuals have made; and tracing the effects of these actions on the enrollment of the network. From these moves potential NCAs are teased out of the black box of the processes within the network and individuals. The moves are:

Move1: Identify the problematic event.

Move2: Identify the actors and corporeal actants in the networks.

Move3: Surface the possible locations of sensemaking activities.

Move4: Identify sensemaking properties of the events.

Move5: Identify significant enrollments and de-enrollments of Human Actors (and punctualized networks).

Move6: Identify the NCAs enrolled and de-enrolled: Describe changes in sensemaking apparent in the network after the enrollments and de-enrollments

Move7: Identify the persistent NCAs which were linked to de-enrolled human actors: Surface the influence of previous networks and future networks in the production of identity and therefore sensemaking.

This paper expresses both a theoretical and empirical focus. Empirically the paper analyzes the decision to sell XL Lakeside.

Theoretically, this paper seeks to transpose and extend the seven moves described above from a historical context to current events. In both cases the analysis is of a decision and the sensemaking of that decision. Contextually a historic decision can be examined from the retrospections made upon it. A current event is subject to ongoing sensemaking. As was described by Weick in his 2010 retrospection on previous work, our understanding and analysis can be very different when temporally close to an event as opposed to later recollection (Weick, 2010). In the analysis section this paper will strive to recast the seven moves from the historic to the current thereby providing a framework for extended ANT analysis employing Critical Sensemaking from historiography to decision analysis. Hypothetically, this process could be further extended from ongoing sensemaking to prospective sensemaking of anticipated decisions.

Method

For this paper the materials searched included newspaper articles and related public comments, blogs, twitter feeds and other social media. The website "Social Mention" was used to fathom the frequency, popularity, affect and trends in social media related to XL Meats, the Lakeside slaughterhouse, JBS, CFIA (Canadian Food Inspection Agency) and the Nilsson brothers. Another website (wordle.net) was used to discern the prevalent words used in discussion of XL Meats, the ecoli crisis and related news, blogs, twitter and other social media commentary.

After the social media material and identified relevant traces were accumulated, a thematic analysis of the data was implemented (Bowen, 2008; Krippendorff, 2008). Thematic analysis is post-processual (beyond a process, requiring feedback loops). Each trace is read and clustered with other relevant pieces into themes. Traces were accumulated until no new themes appeared to be forthcoming (saturation). The themes clustered are based on the interpreter's understanding of the trace (Silverman, 2005). By using understanding rather than word counts phrases with similar meanings may be brought together into themes.

Empirical Themes Analyzed via the Moves

In Hartt (2013a) the first Move developed was "Identify the problematic event".

In the course of analysis of a history (or histories) this event can be found as pivotal in the casting of more recent happenings or as was in Hartt (2013a) the event is contested among the various histories of the period. In this milieu the event is readily visible as worthy of analysis. When working with current events or decisions this Move must be reconfigured to reflect the ongoing or prospective contestation of a decision. Borrowing a significant characteristic from Weick's description of sensemaking, the decision must be associated with a high level of uncertainty (Weick, 1995). For the purpose of this analysis Move1 is restated as ***Identify a situation with a high level of uncertainty leading to a contested decision***. If working prospectively one could omit the last phrase.

In the empirical material related to the sale of XL Lakeside the following opinions are found (representative of the thousands of traces related to the study):

"A coalition of farm and consumer groups is lobbying American authorities to block a potential \$100 million deal that would see a Brazilian-based company acquire a troubled Alberta meatpacker's plants south of the border" (McClure, 2012). "Bill Bullard, chief executive of Ranchers-Cattlemen Action Legal Fund (R-CALF), which is part of the coalition, said the 5,400 producers he represents are worried the deal would lessen competition'. A foreign meat packer would become the largest in the United States'. Bullard said. 'Their market power would be increased and they could harm prices paid to independent cattle producers". (McClure, 2012).

These statements provide a clear indication of the contestation around the sale of the plant. As we pass through the second Move we surface more controversy as well as an ever widening network of people and things surrounding the plant and decision. We also discover the possibility that the sale of the plant is more apparent than real. The industry appears extremely interrelated and closely bound.

The second Move of the historical analysis (Hartt, 2013) was "Identify the actors and corporeal actants in the networks". Contextually this Move is independent of time resulting in simple restatement as admonition for successful analysis of a current or future decision. Move2 of this work is exactly the same in language as in Hartt, 2013. So we will, ***Identify the actors and corporeal actants in the networks***. By corporeal actants we refer to either non-sentient things such as the plant itself, the cattle or the equipment.

We could also refer to what Latour calls punctualized networks; actor-networks which appear to act as one to those outside the group (Latour, 2005). In the case at hand, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), the government (federal or provincial), the Union and news media might be considered punctualized actants. One of the aspects of these actants is that members may *oscillate* between status as individual actors and being part of the punctualized actant (Mol, 2002, 2010). The empirical analysis at hand begins with the assumption that the decision to sell XL Lakeside rests with the Nilsson brothers. There is evidence that this may not be correct, but it is not conclusive. In the second Move we collect traces which appear to surface the corporeal actors and actants. The word corporeal is used to denote those with an identifiable physical existence. As we explore the quoted material as well as the many pages of discussion not repeated herein the traces provide us a picture of the actor-network. The material described also begins to surface the NCAs which we'll discuss later. In Move two we accumulate much of the empirical material for exploration.

In the traces we find many references to the CFIA:

"CFIA shuts down the plant, and XL suddenly decides to expand the recall to include primals (steaks and roasts). From the CFIA website: 'The CFIA announces that it has temporarily suspended the licence to operate Establishment 38 – XL Foods Inc., in Brooks, Alberta. The CFIA determined that adequate controls for food safety were not fully implemented in the facility. The CFIA identified a number of deficiencies during an in-depth review of the facility. To date, the company had not adequately implemented the agreed-upon corrective actions and did not present acceptable plans to address longer-term issues' (Monk, 2012)

"Bob Kingston is president of the Syndicat Agriculture Union that represents federal food inspectors... Bob tells Senate that the CFIA cannot effectively perform their jobs at the XL plant, claiming that the CFIA did not have the resources in place to fully understand what was going on in the plant. Further, he alleges that most of the CFIA at the plant WERE NOT TRAINED in the Compliance Verification System (CVS). Bob's revelation: 'Because of the pace of production and other factors, those with CVS knowhow at the XL plant did not always share the results of CFIA conducted CVS tasks and tests so other inspectors would have no idea if there was a problem that required heightened vigilance' (Monk, 2012).

A reader named Heather commented on Shei Monk's blog on October 24, 2012 at 12:14 am said: "...the CFIA call the shots and make the rules. They answer to no one and operate on their own and although they are paid by our government, they make their own protocols and play by their own rules, even to the point of creating rules that are to the detriment of trade in the beef industry. Far be it for the CFIA to accept any responsibility for their lack of care or attention". Another reader with the handle, "Need to stay private" said on October 18, 2012, "They were to test specific parts but were testing something else and did not know the difference until XL Beef employee brought in the diagrams and proved to them they were testing the wrong parts. Hmmmm – isn't CFIA trained?" Travis added later that day, "By the way I know several CFIA workers very well many of them have said on many occasions (from both lakeside and Sunterra meats.) They say openly we are underworked and over paid. To get a job in CFIA you must have at least a bachelors(sic) in biology and or chemistry".

CFIA does not stay quiet in the face of this criticism demonstrating that they are a participating actant in this network. "A statement from the CFIA in response to reports about American audits of the XL Foods plant. As well, news reports have only used select information from certain audits and, as a result, paint a misleading picture of Canada's overall food safety system. For example, reports have highlighted certain graphic examples from a U.S. audit report but failed to explain that the same report noted that the 'CFIA and the establishment took immediate and appropriate corrective actions". (Wherry 2012b) The Nilsson brothers should be key to the network but they are relatively quiet in the face of the criticism. In the early 2000s they developed a reputation as leaders during the Bovine Spongiform Encephalitis crisis but since taking over Lakeside Packers they became more reticent. Each brother gave one interview during the ecoli event. "XL Foods is committed to the best interests of the cattle industry, our employees, the city of Brooks and all affected by the idling of the Brooks facility," Brian Nilsson, co-CEO of XL, said in the news release. "We are hopeful that the CFIA will bring this to a swift and viable resolution". (Wherry 2012a) Here Brian seems to be deferring to the CFIA. Another key punctualized actant seems to be the federal government usually represented by Agriculture minister Gerry Ritz:"We take the safety of Canada's food supply very seriously and we remain committed to the continuous improvement of Canada's strong food safety systems," (Macdougall 2013).

The discussion of the new actor, JBS of Brazil ,raises a controversy. For example, Sheri Monk talks about the industry, "Anyone who has followed my writing over the years knows how I feel about the vertical integration of this industry That leaves the packers – by far the most reviled, mysterious, feared, respected and envied of the chain. In all the steps in the chain before them, cattle are born, raised, bred, fed, sold, bred again, auctioned, fed some more and then something amazing happens – they turn into meat. Make no mistake – it is at the packingplant where all that beautiful native prairie becomes money. Whether it's a little provincial abattoir, or the largest plant in the country, that's where the beef chain becomes a beef business" (Monk 2012a).

In the alternative view we have the union who seems to want an external (large) new force in the plant and places the blame for the problems on the Nilsson Brothers team at XL Lakeside, "Doug O'Halloran of the United Food and Commercial Workers union received cheers from workers at a news conference Thursday when he said those who have been running the XL Foods Lakeside operation -- the black hats as they are known for the colour of their headgear -- need to be removed. 'We believe this is a positive situation,' he said. 'We endorse it with caution because, like anything, the proof is in the pudding. JBS is going to have to come in here and prove they can run the plant. And in order to do that, they are going to have to reach out to the workers" (CP, 2012).

In the same article the CFIA responded, "A recommendation on next steps will be based solely on these observations and test results," the CFIA said in a release. "Any change in management or ownership at XL will not affect our assessment". And, the producers expressed their worries (or lack thereof), "The Canadian Cattlemen's Association said producers are not concerned about the XL Foods plant being sold to a foreign buyer. Spokesman John Masswohl said (sic) 'JBS USA has the skill and money to turn the XL plant around and get it back into the U.S. market. It doesn't really matter to us who owns the facility, as long as they can operate it properly,' he said from Ottawa. 'If it is at all possible to make that facility run properly, then these are probably the guys that can make that happen" (CP 2012). In the twitterverse the opinions seem to be very negative about foreign ownership, a retweet from Kody Wilson of the tweet of @westernproducer remarks "sad that we are going to end up policing foreign workers with our labour laws. And profits will fly out of Canada" (Wilson, 2012)tweeted on Jan 14, "JBS, the biggest meat company in the world, 2nd largest in the US, is getting bigger.

#foodopoly [http://foodpoisoningbulletin.com/2012/consumer-groups-cattlemen-urge-review-of-jbs-xl-foods-merger/ ...](http://foodpoisoningbulletin.com/2012/consumer-groups-cattlemen-urge-review-of-jbs-xl-foods-merger/)" (Hauter, 2013).

"When it comes to communication, Brian and Lee Nilsson, the Edmonton-based co-CEOs of XL Foods, hew to tradition. If the Edmonton-based brothers have nothing nice to say, they rarely say anything at all. 'We're hearing from the disaffected workers. We're hearing from the union. We're seeing stories on...the 'mysterious' characters behind XL Foods". says Neil Everton, a partner at Podium Media and Communications Coaching in Nova Scotia. The only ones we weren't hearing from were the owners" (Warnica 2012). "Nilsson Brothers, owners of XL Foods' self-named parent company, had been doing such a pathetic job of public relations and brand management -- which was recently described in this space as a textbook example of how not to handle a PR crisis... based on their capable performance during the Alberta Mad Cow Disease crisis of 2003 know how to deal with this kind of situation... If this conclusion is correct, it would be reasonable to speculate that the ineptitude of the Nilsson Brothers' handling of their PR crisis had as much to do with the wishes of their silent partners, whomever they may be, as any other factor" (Climenhaga, 2012) .

"This was one case where appearances, or the lack thereof, really did have a bearing on reality. The price, US\$100 million, is considerably less than the Nilssons paid for Lakeside alone three years ago, and it immediately raised questions about their finances. Less than 24 hours after the deal was announced, the Calgary Herald published evidence that XL was likely drowning in red ink. Some began to question how the Nilssons, who 20 years ago had barely a toehold in meat packing, had so quickly become dominant players in the Canadian industry. (With Lakeside, XL Foods was Canada's second-largest meat-packing concern after U.S.-based Cargill Inc.) The Nilsson family has been in the Alberta cattle business for three generations, mostly on the auction side, until it bought XL Foods in 1998. The company then picked up Lakeside from Tyson Foods in 2009. 'I was really puzzled by that,' says Ian MacLachlan, an agricultural economist at the University of Lethbridge. 'I didn't think XL had the capital resources to do it". (Warnica 2012).

The question of where the Nilssons got the money and the identity of their silent partners leads to related issues which may surface under Move6.

Speculation abounds over where the ongoing money comes from and who is influencing the Nilssons. Some bloggers suggest that another set of brothers provided the \$145 million needed in 2009 to buy the plant from Tyson Foods, "The Mancal Companies are known to be owned by another pair of well heeled and low profile brothers, Calgary's Fred and Ron Mannix, who according to Canadian Business Magazine and other sources are among the 10 richest Canadians. The Mannix brothers are said to be so shy they fine their public relations counsel if their names ever appear in the media!" (Climenhaga 2012). A commenter (Don McLeod of Napean, On.) on the Cattle West eNewspaper website suggested that the Nilssons were paying 30% interest on the loans (West 2013).

The Mannix brothers and or other investors are clearly actors in the network surrounding XL Lakeside and its owners. Through the traces we can see a range of human actors, punctualized groups and non-human actants surrounding the decision in question. There are various investors (seen and unseen), the Nilsson Brothers, JBS, possibly Tyson Foods, the CFIA, governments at the federal, provincial and municipal levels as well as those in opposition, cattle farmers, the stores which sell the meat (particularly Costco), wholesalers, auctioneers, associations of food producers, consumers and the media including those who comment on the news and bloggers who are increasingly included in the world of journalists, and many others. Inspection methods, equipment used in processing, immigration procedures and many other actants form a role. The makers of two documentaries on the Lakeside Plant and the town of Brooks, Alberta (where it is located) are not mentioned in the recent stories but they cannot be far from the discussion of the story (Broadway 2007; Broadway 2000; Stull and Broadway 2012; Broadway 1997; Broadway and Stull 2008). These films detail the multicultural nature of the town generated by the importation of workers from developing countries for the dangerous and difficult work of meatcutting.

As we work with the collection of actors and actants and develop the themes from their quotes and portrayals in the messages of others we begin to see a pattern of sensemaking leading us to Move3, "Surface the possible locations of sensemaking activities". Once again it is unnecessary to make significant changes in this Move from the historical analysis of Hartt (2013) to the decision analysis at hand. In this paper the Move is prosecuted in the same manner with the caveat that it is less apparent and the surfacing is more challenging.

We can hypothesize or suggest where sensemaking occurs in a spacial and temporal space but the interactive effects of the actor-network require some speculation. As in the messages and comments we are unsure as to how JBS, Tyson Foods, the Mannix brothers and the Nilsson brothers interact. The financial connections (if any) are not spelled out in any public documents. This is a disadvantage in analysis of recent or current events when compared to a historiographic or historic analysis.

The sensemaking of the Nilsson brothers in their choice to engage JBS as operator of the plant and offer or agree to the option for JBS to buy the plant (exercised on Jan. 14, 2013) can be explored in terms of past scripts and ideas generated by those scripts (NCAs). We know that the plant has been sold several times before and it appears that sales have occurred subsequent to some crisis: Bovine Spongiform Encephalitis (BSE), unionization, and strike for example.(Broadway 1997; Stull and Broadway 2012). We also know that the Nilsson brothers have become reluctant to appear in the media; this seems to be a change in behaviour from the early 2000s. The physical location of the decision making is likely in the offices of their primary business, a cattle auction. This poses its own question as it would seem that the meatpacking business is a larger entity than the feedlot and auction operation of the family, yet they work at the auction site. This may suggest that there are other actors in control of the meat packing plant as suggested in the social media traces.

Intellectually, the location of the decision may be within the idea of the plant as more of an encumbrance than an interest. It's possible that the plant is something they agreed to be the nominal owners of within a network rather than an enterprise they wished to pursue. Within this metaphysical situ, the decision makes more sense.

In order to open up the black box of the sensemaking process we first invoke Weick's (1995) seven properties of sensemaking situations. In Hartt (2013) this is described as Move4: "Identify sensemaking properties of the events". Once again we can apply this technique to current events. At the socio-psychological level sensemaking can be viewed as

- 1) grounded in identity construction;
- 2) retrospective;

- 3) enactive of sensible environments;
- 4) social;
- 5) ongoing;
- 6) focused on and by extracted cues; and

Following along these seven properties and analyzing with regard to what we know about the Nilsson brothers we can see an obvious link to Weick's conception of sensemaking and in particular the critical form as described by Helms Mills and Thurlow. Beginning with property one, there is a clear differentiation between the identity of a cattleman and auctioneer versus that of slaughterhouse and meat packing plant owner. The Nilssons' shared identity appears to be constructed as cattlemen not industrial meat packers. The traces which describe them as located in their auction house or on the cattle range support this thesis.

The decision to sell the plant appears to come from a retrospection on the previous solutions to these sorts of crises following Weick's second property. The decision seems to be within an environment of sensemaking described by Weick as having twelve characteristics of its own most prominent of which is uncertainty. If we accept that the Nilssons are unsure as to what the outcome of the E coli crisis will be and its impact on their other operations, which do not appear to have the asset base to survive the potential losses, then we must accept that the environment is quite uncertain and therefore fulfilling Weick's third property.

The social and influential aspects of sensemaking situations (Weick's fourth property) relate most clearly to the examination of actor-networks. As was earlier established it appears that the brothers Nilsson did not have the money to buy the plant. It also seems quite apparent that the plant experiences significantly more dollar throughput in terms of the value of the meat than the value of the plant. "Recent studies done by researchers Kevin Grier and Claudia Schmidt at the George Morris Centre, an agricultural think-tank in Guelph, Ont., estimated that negative publicity generated by E. coli-related (sic) recalls costs cattle producers \$100 million in lost sales a year. 'It has been very damaging when it comes to demand,' Grier said... Using an average price of \$3 per pound — an amount that Grier said is plausible — the cost to XL Foods could range from a low of \$48 million to a high of \$135 million" (Edwards 2012). This suggests that the sales losses in one month could be more than the purchase price for the plant.

If one accepts this premise then the Nilssons would rely on a network of suppliers, purchasers and financiers producing a social situation in which they have relatively little control on their own decisions. The influence of the social (actor-network) is paramount.

This brings us to Move5: Identify significant enrollments and de-enrollments of Human Actors (and punctualized networks). This Move is difficult in the short-term nature of analysis of current decisions. It is possible to describe in this case the expected de-enrollment of the Nilsson brothers but that is unlikely given that they remain owners of a cattle auction, feedlot and other related initiatives. In the revised Move 5 for decision analysis it is proposed that we **Identify expected enrollments and de-enrollments of actors and actants**. In the case at hand the expected de-enrollments would most likely be some of the investors, some managers and possibly other changes brought about by foreign ownerships. New enrollments of other government agencies are more likely.

Once again in Move 6 the analysis of the current decision pushes into the future (expected). A prospective sense of the likely changes in NCAs enrolled as a result of the changed character of the network is required. So replacing the Hartt (2013) Move6: "Identify the NCAs enrolled and de-enrolled: Describe changes in sensemaking apparent in the network after the enrollments and de-enrollments"; we search for anticipated changes in NCAs as a result of the NCAs the new owners are likely to bring into the actor-network. The new Move 6 is **Identify NCAs which are expected to be de-enrolled as a result of the change in sensemaking promoted by the decision and its outcomes**. JBS is among the world's largest processors of meat, it is quite likely that they will enroll their own management practices and de-enroll NCAs related to local ownership and community ties which the Nilsson brothers would have valued. It is entirely possible that meat may be sourced from Brazil, Argentina and other places where JBS operates and that workers may be exchanged with these plants rather than the Nilsson (and Tyson Foods) practice of recruiting temporary foreign workers from developing countries in Africa and Asia. JBS attitude toward unions is quite different from that of American and Canadian companies which may lead to the enrollment of a new approach to labour relations.

This process has led us to Move7: Identify the persistent NCAs which were linked to de-enrolled human actors: Surface the influence of previous networks and future networks in the production of identity and therefore sensemaking. The prosecution of this Move requires a restating to reflect the speculative nature of the analysis and the reliance on retrospective sensemaking of previous decisions in order to develop an analysis. Restated the Move is: ***Propose the NCAs which are likely to persist regardless of anticipated de-enrollments given retrospection on previous changes.*** Given that a propensity to sell the plant in the face of controversy and a reluctance to participate in public relations and media survived the Tyson Foods sale to the Nilssons XL Meats, it is very likely that these NCAs will persist once JBS has fully taken over. JBS has been more available to the media than the previous owners but one of the lessons of previous analyses employing the seven moves in historical context has been a demonstration of recurrence of NCAs after a period of quiescence. The possibility of resale will defy analysis until the next inevitable crisis in the Canadian beef industry.

Conclusion

The analysis above appears to have successfully processed a plausible account of networked sensemaking in a current event. This leads to the proposition that the seven moves of analysis developed in a historical context where the empirical material were archival traces can be employed in an ongoing situation where the material is constantly evolving. It is quite likely that any such analysis will lead to re-analysis as did Weick's analysis of the Bhopal explosion, however; this is no different from any other attempt at decision explanation. Sensemaking is ongoing.

For the work at hand the original seven moves were recast in order to work with current event. The seven moves proposed herein are:

Move1: Identify a situation with a high level of uncertainty leading to a contested decision.

Move2: Identify the actors and corporeal actants in the networks.

Move3: Surface the possible locations of sensemaking activities.

Move4: Identify sensemaking properties of the events.

Move5: Identify expected enrollments and de-enrollments of actors and actants.

Move6: Identify NCAs which are expected to be de-enrolled as a result of the change in sensemaking promoted by the decision and its outcomes

Move 7: Propose the NCAs which are likely to persist regardless of anticipated de-enrollments given retrospection on previous changes.

The analysis of the decision to sell XL Lakeside by the Nilsson brothers is likely to create an entity with much less responsiveness to the local community and the local cattle producers. New NCAs related to globalism as well as the culture of business in JBS home country of Brazil are likely to be enrolled in the network of operations at XL Lakeside. However, it is proposed as probable that the plant will continue to avoid publicity and should a new crisis arise, XL Lakeside will probably be sold again.

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