

# Giving an energy target sense: focus on an expert and discursive competences

Kjerstin Ludvig, email: kjerstin.ludvig@chalmers.se

Construction Management, Civil and Environmental Engineering, Chalmers University of Technology

Ann-Charlotte Stenberg, email: ann-charlotte.stenberg@chalmers.se

Construction Management, Civil and Environmental Engineering, Chalmers University of Technology

Pernilla Gluch, email: pernilla.gluch@chalmers.se

Construction Management, Civil and Environmental Engineering, Chalmers University of Technology

## Abstract

*EU has launched a new directive on energy efficiency for buildings. This directive forces property owners/builders to reduce their energy use which in turn requires large investments. As a consequence there is a need for these organisations to change their investment strategies and practices. This paper aims to contribute to our understanding of how an EU directive on energy use in buildings diffuses into, and is managed by, a public construction client organisation. Drawing on a framework of Rouleau and Balogun, we have examined how discursive competences were deployed by an energy expert as means to influence the organisational sensemaking of the target initially. The paper is based on an explorative case study, namely in-depth interviews with seven respondents, a focus group meeting and extensive field notes. Using a narrative approach, we account for talk, action and interaction between mainly the energy expert, the management team and officials. Thus, we unfold how the sensemaking of the target progressed over time.*

**Keywords:** discursive competences, sensemaking, expert role, energy target, public construction client

# 1. Introduction

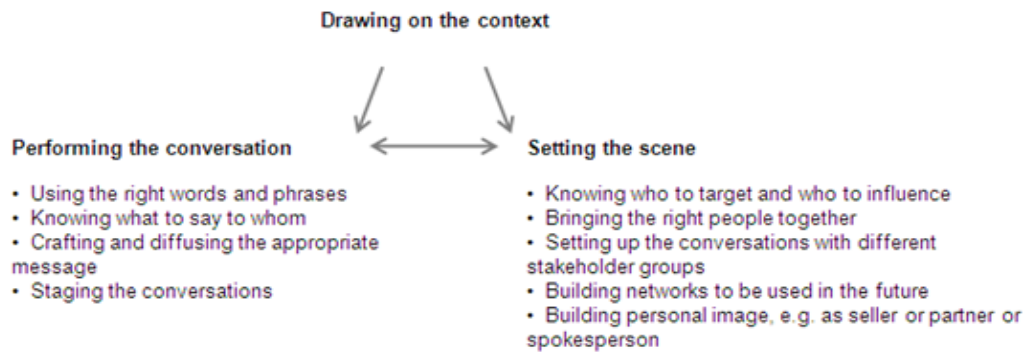
A new EU directive states that the energy use in buildings should be reduced significantly during the coming years (European Commission, 2010). How to meet this directive is thus an important topic discussed in many public authorities on national, regional and local levels as well as in construction client organisations all over Europe. The public sector is expected to take the role as fore runner in this development (European Commission, 2010) which has resulted in ambitiously set energy targets in public buildings in for example Sweden (The Swedish Ministry of Enterprise, 2011, Dalenbäck and Mjörnell, 2011). Accordingly many construction client organisations are currently facing a need to find appropriate ways to reduce energy use in their buildings. To meet these targets will, besides technology development, require a change of strategies, practices and behaviour in all public organisations involved in construction and refurbishment of buildings. However, organisations consist of individuals that make sense of their situation out of their context and pre-understanding (cf. Clegg et al., 2011). This implies that management has to find ways so that the directive as well as set targets can be made sense of by the concerned individuals.

This paper is based on a case study in a public construction client organisation in Sweden. We have studied how a target on reduced energy use in buildings was translated into the organisational context and managed. Using sensemaking (e.g. Weick et al., 2005) as theoretical lens, we can understand what happened in the organisation when confronted with an ambitious energy target. Sensemaking has previously been used by scholars to explain how managers initiate, address and distribute meaning about organisational changes and crises (cf. Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010). It has also been shown that in order to implement changes, managers need to influence how others make sense by dispersing their own understanding of the change and/or the crisis (e.g. Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991, Maitlis and Lawrence, 2007). Here the role of the middle managers has been of particular interest since although they lack the authority that top managers have, they need to influence upwards, laterally and downwards in the organisations (Rouleau and Balogun, 2011). As shown by Rouleau and Balogun, middle managers do not only use conversations to influence people in their surrounding, but a range of different discursive competences to set the scene for where these conversations should be done and how. Drawing on their work this paper explores how discursive competences are used to influence actions and make sense of the energy target within a public construction client organisation. Specific focus is on the discursive competence of an energy expert, working at the R&D department, in interplay with for example the management team and other officials. The paper presents an account of what happened in the organisation from the point where the target was initially discussed in early 2010 up to the point when the target was anchored in the organisation in autumn 2010. This case provides an opportunity to study how meaning was made out of the target and how it was contextualized within the organisation. Since public construction client organisations all over EU face the same directive as our case organisation the study provides valuable insights for a broad spectrum of actors within the construction sector, such as policy makers, managers, energy experts and academics.

## 2. Making sense in organisations

With sensemaking we mean the cognitive process of how we construct meaning of what is going on around us. The concept is often accredited Karl Weick who has developed the theory of sensemaking (for later examples see e.g. Weick, 1995, Weick, 1988, Weick et al., 2005). Some of the inherent characteristics of sensemaking, as defined by Weick (1995), embrace for example that sensemaking is a continuously ongoing, social process where people search for plausible, though not necessary the most accurate, understanding. In this sense, sensemaking is conducted when the actors scan their environment and decide on what new information is relevant to interpret and take action on. Hence, it is the process where people generate what they then interpret (Weick, 1995: 13) and not the interpretation in itself. Although closely linked and often misused as a synonym (Weick, 1995), interpretation should not be used interchangeably with sensemaking. For the purpose of this paper, sensemaking is defined as “a social process of meaning construction and reconstruction through which managers understand, interpret, and create sense for themselves and others of their changing organisational context and surroundings (Rouleau and Balogun, 2011).

Sensemaking has received significant attention in organisational management and change research during the last two decades (e.g. Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010 for an overview), but is still under-represented in construction management literature (cf. Leiringer et al., 2009). The approach has been applied as a mean to understand and explain how managers at different organisational levels initiate, get acceptance for and implement organisational change (e.g. Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991, Rouleau, 2005, Rouleau and Balogun, 2011, Stensaker et al., 2008). In this paper, we pay attention to how actors develop mutual understanding as well as to how they influence people in their surroundings to adopt their view. The latter is referred to as ‘sensegiving’ (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991, Maitlis and Lawrence, 2007). Sensegiving is described as “the process of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organisational reality“ (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991: 442). Research has highlighted the strategic role that middle managers have in creating and distributing understanding of and acceptance for organisational changes. Middle management has to make sense of top management directives, implement and deliver accordingly. Yet, they lack the formal role of authority that top managers have (Rouleau and Balogun, 2011). “Top management provides important details about the change, while middle managers are left to construct their own meaning of it, and therefore play a crucial role in how change ultimately gets passed on to front line employees” (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010: 559). For example, scholars have addressed the way middle managers interpret and communicate strategic changes (Rouleau, 2005) and how middle managers’ use discursive competences when implementing organisational changes (Rouleau and Balogun, 2011). Discursive competences here concern how individuals are able to craft and disperse their message in order to influence the meaning making of others. It is not just about the language that is used, but also how the language is adjusted and used in specific contexts with specific stakeholders (Rouleau and Balogun, 2011). The ability to tell the right story at the right place for the right people is thus a key to influence others (Maitlis and Lawrence, 2007). Based on two studies of middle managers’ practices in change situations, Rouleau and Balogun (2011) developed a framework of discursive activities that are applied by middle managers in sensemaking processes, see Figure 1.



*Figure 1: Discursive activities applied by middle managers in sensegiving processes (Rouleau and Balogun, 2011: 972)*

Rouleau and Balogun identified two main sets of activities that middle managers use in order to influence other stakeholders' sensemaking. First, middle managers perform the conversation with stakeholders. This activity is described as the "multiple interactions middle managers engage in through formal and informal conversations with their peers, subordinates, superiors, and customers or other stakeholders, to draw others into their agenda" (Rouleau and Balogun, 2011: 958). The second activity regards how middle managers are setting the scene, which is described as "what is done to set up the context for, background to, and occasion for the conversation performance" (Rouleau and Balogun, 2011: 958). The success of both sets of activities are dependent on how well the middle managers can draw on the context, which means how well they understand and make use of contextual factors, such as history and knowledge of stakeholders, context specific rules, language and terminology. The study by Rouleau and Balogun (2011) thus suggests that middle managers need be aware of organisational politics and act politically in order to engage in sensegiving. This means that whom is given the opportunity to influence the surrounding depends on how well that person can translate and apply contextual knowledge and discursive competences, rather than formal power received by hierarchical position. Moreover, Maitlis and Lawrence (2007) studied conditions that trigger and enable sensegiving activities. Based on their study of three British symphony orchestras, Maitlis and Lawrence propose that actors are more likely to engage in sensegiving when they possess issue-related expertise and/or legitimacy as well as when provided with the right opportunities. Further, what triggers an actor to influence how others understand an issue relates to whether the issue at stake is perceived as important for him/her, for his/her colleagues and/or for the whole organisation. Drawing on Rouleau and Balogun (2011), it is possible to unfold and when actors, such as the energy expert in our case study, make use of discursive competences in order to influence the organisational interpretation and management of the energy target in the organisation.

### **3. Method**

The paper is based on data gathered in a research project carried out between December 2010 and August 2011. Focus of the study was organisational actions triggered by a political directive to significantly cut the energy use in buildings managed and operated by a public construction client organisation (here called Alpha). Taking a narrative approach, the story of how Alpha made sense of a political directive is based on interviews, field observations and written documents. This explorative,

longitudinal study, posed an opportunity to study how meaning was made over time and how it was contextualized. The full empirical data set consists of observations of 13 project meetings, various documents, in all 25 interviews and extensive field notes. However, for the purpose of this paper a subset of the empirical data has been used. The subset of data consists of in-depth interviews with seven people and a focus group discussion. One of the respondents, an energy expert at Alpha, was interviewed at eleven different occasions covering the whole study period. Applying a thematic interview approach, six additional actors were interviewed once and encouraged to narrate: (1) activities and decisions taken in order to investigate implications from the target and (2) the energy target. The additional actors included three members of Alpha's Management Team and three actors that became involved in an investigation project of implications from the target. The interviews lasted for one to three hours each. All interviews were recorded and transcribed in verbatim. More, during one of the project meetings the first author of this paper was given the opportunity to hold a discussion that resembled a focus group (Bryman, 2008). The first author presented the identified actions taken during the investigation of the implications from the energy target and gave an account of main events and decisions in chronological order. During this presentation, four of the respondents discussed and elaborated on what had actually happened during the process, thus enhancing their own sensemaking but also helped verifying the research results. The discussion was recorded and fully transcribed. The analysis has been an iterative process altering theory with empirical data (cf. Langley, 1999, Dubois and Gadde, 2002) which has made it possible to identify and understand organisational sensemaking within the organisation. Identified characteristic and/or events have been analysed by applying the framework in Figure 1. The study presents a retrospective account for these events since they occurred before the starting point of the study (in December 2010). Accordingly, the story presented is based on the respondents' retrospective narratives.

#### **4. The story of how Alpha made sense of a political directive**

The studied organisation, here called Alpha, is part of a Swedish public county organisation which is governed by democratically elected politicians. The county organisation provides "the prerequisites for good public health, a rich cultural life, a good environment, jobs, research, education and good communications". Alpha was formed in 1999 when four regional districts merged into one and today Alpha owns, rents and manages public facilities such as health care buildings, museums and other public premises. More than 80% of Alpha's energy use is related to operation and maintenance of nine large emergency hospitals. Several of these hospitals were built between the years 1950-1975, and both the buildings and the technical systems of the buildings are now reaching the end of their technical life span. More, the operation of care has changed over time, which put new requirements on the premises. Accordingly, these buildings are in need of major refurbishment. In addition, new health care buildings are planned or under construction. The story told here took off in early 2010. This was at a time when the politicians discussed how to formulate the target, but before it was officially launched in Alpha. The story ends with an event day in autumn 2010, called the Energy Day, which contributed to the organisational sensemaking of the target in several ways. The time frame and some key events in the story are illustrated in Figure 2.

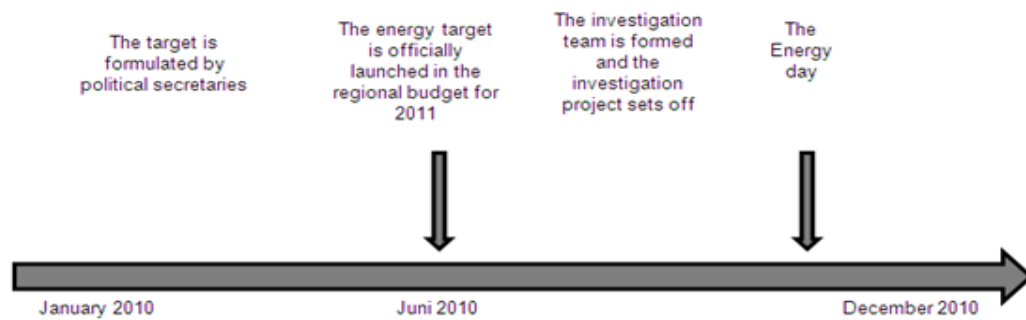


Figure 2: Time frame and key events

## 4.1 The story voices

In the story of Alpha, we give rise to different voices in order to understand how different actors develop a mutual understanding of the political energy directive as well as to how they influence people in their surroundings to adopt their view. Thus, the key characters in the story need some presentation. The most central character is *Mr Energy*, who has an engineering background and has been working at Alpha since it was formed in 1999. He is part of Alpha's R&D department and is formally responsible for development of work practice regarding operation and maintenance of buildings and energy issues. He has thirty years of experience within this field, and has executed several successful projects and initiatives related to reduced energy use in buildings. In his daily work, he spend a lot of time on networking, both inside Alpha and externally and he puts high value in having a rich personal network. Other respondents in the study witness that 'everyone' have great confidence/trust in him and that he is seen as 'Mr Energy', i.e. the energy expert, in Alpha. Other important characters in this story are three (out of eight) members of the Management Team, i.e., the *General Manager*, the *R&D Manager* and one *District Manager*, DM; as well as an external *Energy consultant*. All four have an engineering background. The GM, the R&D manager and the DM have been working for Alpha since it was formed. Other respondents describe the GM's leader style as consensus driven. The R&D manager previously worked as a district manager, but has been in his current position for some years. Mr. Energy described the DM as a 'locomotive' when committed to something, which is reason why he became involved in managing the energy target. All three members of the Management Team are supporters of energy efficient measures. The fourth character is the Energy consultant. He is described by others as a driving spirit and entrepreneur in the energy efficiency area and for several years Alpha has been a major client for the consultancy firm he is partner in. Two groups of officials that are also part of the story are the Regional Secretaries and the Environmental Department. The Regional Secretaries support the political parties in for example preparing proposals and basis for decisions. The Environmental Department is a 'sister organisation' to Alpha, with responsibility for general environmental issues in the count organisation. These groups of actors play an important role in the initial phase of the story. However, they were not included in the case study setup, i.e. they have not been interviewed.

## 4.2 Facing a new target

In the beginning of 2010, as a consequence of the new national directives on energy, the Regional Secretaries were about to formulate the energy target for buildings on demand from the county

politicians. At the time, officials at the regional Environmental Department who cooperated on a daily basis with Mr. Energy and shared an agenda for increasing the energy efficiency in the region, promoted him as ‘the expert to talk to’ regarding energy targets for buildings. Thereby, the officials in the Environmental Department set the scene for a dialogue between the politicians and Mr. Energy and thus, they made use of his expertise to strengthen their case; *“You can say that the Environmental Department took help of me when it came to the energy demands for buildings, through initiating the dialogue between me and the politicians.”* The fact that the officials at the Environmental Department saw him as a spokesperson for energy issues further increased his influence in the dialogue and strengthened his reputation as an energy expert in the region. The first contact between the Regional Secretaries and Mr. Energy was taken after a political meeting. As a consequence, they initiated a dialogue that lasted until the formulation of the target was set. However, according to Mr. Energy the Regional Secretaries did most of the talking while he took on a rather passive role and the GM stayed inactive and just listened. Mr. Energy recalls; *“The GM and I presented an issue for the Regional [political] Board, when a Regional Secretary grabbed me and asked to talk to me. She presented how they intended to write [regarding the energy demand] and asked if they had missed something. During this time, the GM just stood there and listened. [...] I felt that the GM had great confidence in me. He laughed and said ‘It is really good that you take responsibility for this, otherwise it would have become a mess’. So, he [GM] knew more about this [issue] than most of the others [in the organisation].”* Since the GM did not intervene in the dialogue between Mr. Energy and the Regional Secretaries, he gave Mr. Energy his passive support and the opportunity to use his expertise in the formulation of the energy target. This support was important for Mr. Energy, as he knew that the benevolence of the Management Team would be crucial for a successful implementation of the new target. Moreover, with Mr. Energy as an expert in the target formulation process, the GM certified that it was ‘crafted appropriately’. In the dialogue, Mr. Energy drew from earlier experiences of implementing energy efficiency measures at Alpha in order to guide the Regional Secretaries to avoid the most troublesome formulations. He used the opportunity to craft the message to be more appropriate, i.e. certify that the formulation would be beneficial for Alpha and the whole region. According to Mr. Energy the dialogue with the Regional Secretaries was informal and off the record. For him, it was vital that his colleagues at Alpha did not see him as the driving force behind the energy target. Instead, it was important that the target was viewed as the ‘work of the politicians’ as it gave the new target the needed legitimacy. For Mr. Energy, this dialogue was an opportunity to set the scene for an increased energy focus at Alpha. Informally, he was also very careful about keeping the GM and the R&D Manager informed and therefore he discussed energy issues with them on a regular basis.

### **4.3 “Then he put his foot down”**

Several respondents (i.e. the GM, the R&D Manager and the DM) independently gave a similar picture of what happened when the rest of the Management Team heard about the target for the first time. During spring 2010, the GM invited a Regional Secretary to the Management Team for an information session regarding the forthcoming energy target. The reactions from the Management Team members were diverse, where especially the district managers expressed the most cautious attitudes. The DM, for example, questioned the Regional Secretary about the background of and details about the target. When the secretary did not have all the answers ready the DM became

sceptical and therefore, the DM's reaction to the energy target was to consider it as 'a passing fancy' from the politicians. By the time for the information session, the GM had already understood and accepted that an ambitious target was coming up, during regular discussions with Mr. Energy. He had also made up his mind on how this target should be approached by Alpha and during the session he made his standpoint clear to the rest of the team, stating; *"If the politicians set a target that we should meet... Well, we take it as a compliment that they set such a tough target, because it signals that they believe in our capabilities!"* The GM told them that the target was not negotiable; it was a demand from the politicians and should be treated as such. By this statement, he set the scene for the Management Team and did not allow for any other positions; *"The reaction was that 'Now we must devote every effort to change the politicians' minds because they are off track completely'. Well... then [the GM] put his foot down and said that 'this is an owner demand and we just have to adjust to it'."* This forceful exclamation, as described in the citation by Mr. Energy, shows that the GM wanted to give a clear message to his team, i.e. that they had to adopt the target and adjust to the new situation. Furthermore, this statement by the GM was important for Mr. Energy's forthcoming work of implementing the target in the organisation, and he often retold this story in conversations with colleagues to emphasise that the target was legitimised by the GM.

#### **4.4 Preparations for an Investigation**

During summer 2010, through continuous discussions with the GM and the R&D manager, Mr. Energy convinced them that the consequences of the energy target for Alpha needed a thorough investigation, focusing on opportunities and threats. Mr. Energy was very well aware of whom to direct, namely the Management Team, and what to tell them, that the energy target must be taken seriously. Hence, he paved the way for the Management Team to allow him to develop and implement a strategy to meet the new target. These preparations were a way of setting the scene for an Investigation project aiming at facilitating for Alpha to meet the target. After summer 2010, the GM approved that an Investigation project regarding the consequences of the energy target should be conducted, appointed Mr. Energy the assignment and gave him full responsibility for it. By giving Mr. Energy 'free hands' to design and conduct the Investigation project he was made responsible for formulating the task description including setting budget and defining scope and goal of the Investigation project. There did not seem to be any doubts among the Management Team members about giving one single actor, Mr. Energy, such a large responsibility. On the contrary, the R&D Manager gave this view, when asked about it: *"I am not worried about that. It is all about the person. Personally, I have great confidence in [Mr. Energy]. We have worked together for so many years now. [...] I know that if there is something he is unsure about, whether or not he has the mandate to do something, he'll turn to me. And he knows that I want him to take initiatives without asking me for permission. Accordingly, if he would be barking up the wrong tree I have to back up for him. He doesn't do that but if he would, I am responsible if something goes wrong. The whole organisation trusts in him. These [energy] issues are close to his heart. He has a large network; he cares for his contacts with universities and trade organisations. He uses his network to secure that he is on the right track."* Also the GM appreciated Mr. Energy as Alpha's spokesperson and driving force for energy issues, calling him 'our Energy man' and also arguing why he was given the task by saying that the organisation is *"lucky to have someone that suitable, to do this kind of work"*.



## 4.5 Forming a team

Once given ‘free hands’ to set up and conduct the Investigation project as he liked, Mr. Energy started to form a team that could assist him in the Investigation. For Mr. Energy, the personal network and individual relations were essential and, as he stressed in an interview, he considered the personal attributes, interests and characteristics more important than titles and organisational belonging. Thus, he searched for enthusiastic driving spirits with specific competences when forming the team for the Investigation project. He soon identified the Energy consultant as a beneficial partner. Mr. Energy and the Energy consultant had met a few years earlier in one of Alpha’s investment projects, where they worked together in a team they both described as creative and engaging. This work led to them to conclude that there was a ‘strategic gap’ between building plans and how plans should be realized in Alpha. That is, they lacked a strategy for how the building plans should be implemented. According to the Energy consultant, the current situation, with a political set energy target but no strategy yet for how to meet the target, was similar. Furthermore, Mr. Energy knew that the Energy consultant earlier in 2010 had been engaged by Alpha to design plans for a new hospital building, a work that resulted in significantly lower energy use than for conventional buildings. Together, these two aspects made the Energy consultant an attractive and inspiring partner in the Investigation team: *“I knew [the Energy consultant] to some extent and had been working with him in a previous project. So I knew that we had been able to talk to each other very well... It was the same instinct feeling that I felt before [...]. I was not interested to start working with someone if that collaboration resulted in a lot of hard work. It was very much a matter of personal chemistry...”* The others in the team were for example junior consultants from the consultancy firm and an Alpha Real Estate Economist. By choosing people he enjoyed cooperating with, Mr. Energy set the scene for conducting the Investigation project in his own way. According to the Consultant, Mr. Energy already at this moment knew what result he wanted from the Investigation. However, he needed support to achieve his goal; *That was what [Mr. Energy] said: ‘I want to [get the energy efficiency work going], but we need to phrase it in a way so that we get an assignment’. By then the target [to reduce energy use by half] had been launched. ‘How do we do this?’ [...] Mr. Energy called me and asked: ‘Are you interested to join this team?’ Of course! It was kind of the most exciting thing to do. It was me, [a junior consultant colleague] and [Mr. Energy], and we had no clue of where this would end....* Thus, this early composition of an Investigation project team had a vision of what they wanted to achieve with the Investigation, but how to reach that goal was open-ended.

## 4.6 The Energy Day

As described above, Mr. Energy experienced that the Management Team’s attitude towards the target became positive during summer 2010, after the GM’s action to ‘put his foot down’. On the other hand he also noted in informal conversations with colleagues, that the general opinion in Alpha was rather sceptical towards the target. He was familiar with a large share of the employees, due to his formal role at the R&D department, his long history in the organisation and his outgoing personality. He had regular contacts with for example project leaders, operation and maintenance personnel regarding energy issues in general and during this particular time, the new energy target in particular. Early autumn 2010, Mr. Energy masterminded an ‘Energy day’ where all employees at Alpha were invited to participate. By inviting all employees, Mr. Energy wished to create a positive spirit regarding

energy efficiency. However, the invitation was on Mr. Energy request sent out by the GM, and Mr. Energy deliberately made sure that he and his energy-dedicated colleagues did not appear as key players of the day. Now, the Management Team should be seen as the leading partner and the one sending out the message to the organisation. The Energy day was initially planned to take place during spring 2010, but Mr. Energy chose to postpone it until the target was officially launched. Headline of the day was *"See the opportunities and rise to the challenge!"* and it was in detail orchestrated by Mr. Energy. Not only did Mr. Energy initiate the Energy day, he also set the agenda and invited the speakers, thus he set the scene completely. Drawing on earlier experiences of how important the Management Team's commitment was for successful implementation, Mr. Energy stressed the importance of having the Management Team on stage; *"When I presented the agenda of the day to the Management Team, I told them that I would not be in the limelight that day. I have arranged the day and I have put your names on the different presentations. And then they looked at me and asked: 'Can't you do it, because I don't know this properly? Can't you make the presentation instead?' No, I said, I will help you, I will prepare the presentation for you, I will do everything for you, but I won't present."* As put forward by one of Mr. Energy's colleagues at the R&D department and member of the Investigation team: *"This is what has been missing [before]. Mr. Energy has been on the barricades and then we have been a few that have supported him and occasionally been on the barricades. But we have lacked the Management Team's [commitment]."* Mr. Energy described how he experienced the Energy day; *"I think it was important that the [staff] saw that it was the Management Team that brought the message across. [...] We had people from the National Energy Agency here and we had other external guest presenters. In the afternoon we had our own people presenting different examples and we talked about how to meet the new demands. And then [the staff] probably realized that this is something that pervades the entire society. This is taken seriously! And since that day things have actually changed continuously. In fact, today I think everyone is on track on this."* Hence, the Energy day was an important event for the organisational sensemaking in several ways. Firstly the target became everyone's business. To accomplish this, Mr. Energy made sure to invite people from all parts of the organisation, not only those who were directly involved in energy use in buildings. Secondly, the renewed focus on energy became legitimised by the presence of and actions by the Management Team. By insisting on presentations by the Management Team, these became more prominent during the day, sending the message to the employees that that this was something the management supported. As such Mr. Energy triggered a sensemaking process within the organisation.

## **5. Discussion and concluding remarks**

This paper aims to contribute to our understanding of how an EU directive on energy use in buildings diffuses into and is managed by a public construction client organisation. We take a micro-perspective in our story of how the actors made sense of an energy target and its implications. We have examined how discursive competences were deployed as means to influence the organisational sensemaking of the target initially. Using a narrative approach, we have accounted for the talk, action and interaction between mainly the energy expert, the Regional Secretaries and the Management Team in order to examine how the sensemaking of the target progressed.

It is clear from the empirical account that Mr. Energy had a most distinguished role, sanctioned by the GM, in the organisational sensemaking process. Mr. Energy made use of his experiences, his own networks and his communicative skills in order to manoeuvre the organisation in the direction he found beneficial for the organisation. As acknowledged by Rouleau and Balogun (2011) an effective strategic player is characterized by “*their ability to relate and engage in a way meaningful to those they seek to influence and lead*” (p. 977). This description fits well with Mr. Energy. Not only did he contribute to, but he also guided the organisational sensemaking of how the challenge posed by the target should be managed by the organisation. He did this by deploying discursive competences, such as crafting an appropriate message, knowing whom to influence and how to communicate with different stakeholder groups. These are all examples of discursive competences presented in the framework of Rouleau and Balogun (2011). Energy efficiency was one of the top topics on Mr. Energy’s personal and professional agenda. However, he experienced that the organisational focus on energy had been lost over the last years. Therefore, he could use the political target to legitimise an increased focus on, and create commitment for, energy efficiency. This confirms what Maitlis and Lawrence (2007) found regarding what triggers and enables stakeholders to engage in sensegiving activities. What enabled Mr. Energy to influence how the organisation made sense of the target was that he had expertise knowledge in the area and that his actions were legitimised by the Management Team. Further, he was triggered to engage in sensegiving since the political set target was in line with the energy efficiency work that he had strived to implement for many years in the organisation. One could even say that the political target came as a spark to his fire and fuelled his motivation for the issue further. In spite of these good prerequisites, Mr. Energy still made sure that he had the support and goodwill of the Management Team during the sensemaking process. He continuously anchored his understanding and reflections regarding the new target with the GM and the R&D manager, as they had the most strategic roles regarding energy management strategies and practices. This way he certified that they understood and supported his interpretation of the target and took the formal responsibility. Talking and acting along the informal decision routes, he anchored his work the formal way. Thus, he executed the power he had in the role of an appreciated energy expert.

The aspect of how power is executed and maintained has not been in focus of this paper, but power issues are sensed in the way Mr. Energy acted to guide the organisation. Hence, this confirms what for example Weick et al. (2005) and Maitlis and Sonensheim (2010) have noted, namely that power in sensemaking and sensegiving is an issue that needs further examination. Maitlis and Lawrence mean that narrative studies can provide a powerful way of exploring how power and politics influence sensemaking in organisational change. Mr. Energy’s power to influence is for example shown in how the Management team gave him free hands to influence, investigate and define an issue that was of high strategic relevance for the organisation. However, as seen in the empirical account, Mr. Energy was also dependent on that other people saw him and presented him as an expert. Initially, we learnt how others, more precisely the Environmental Department, set the scene for him to craft an appropriate energy target for the region. Without their intervention, Mr. Energy would probably not have been invited to assist the Regional secretaries with the formulation. Later on, we learnt how the general manager and the R&D manager set the scene for Mr. Energy to conduct an Investigation of the organisational consequences of the target. They allowed him full control and ‘free hands’. In their explanation of why they let him work so independently, they gave explanations in terms of trust, confidence and appreciation. In the accounts presented here, Mr. Energy benefit from that others set

the scene for him to perform the conversation and thereby influenced how sense should be made. The observation that an expert, in our case study the energy expert, was enabled to engage in sensegiving processes since other people set the scene for him/her can be seen as a contribution to Rouleau and Balogun's (2011) framework of discursive activities applied by middle managers in sensemaking processes. In conclusion, the expert role can be described as a 'sensegiving agent'. Using his/her discursive competences, he/she manoeuvres the organisational sensemaking in the way he/she sets out. But the manoeuvring needs to be enabled by tacit and/or active support from top management and other organisational actors. Thus, more research is needed to unfold the role of the sensegiving agent in strategizing processes.

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