

COMMUNICATION AND SENSEMAKING DURING THE EXIT PHASE OF SOCIALIZATION

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ABSTRACT

This study examined communication during the three phases of exit: preannouncement, announcement/actual exit, and post-exit. Data from both interviews and questionnaires were collected from employees who had voluntarily left jobs. Results showed that during preannouncement, potential leavers communicate about a number of topics and employ specific communicative strategies; these may act as signals or cues of the impending exit. Leavers discuss exit with family, friends, potential employers, bosses, coworkers and customers. Leavers make sense of their decision throughout the preannouncement period, which is triggered by their initial decision to leave. Through sensemaking, people create accounts for why they leaving. These accounts are presented to others during the announcement process of exit. Leavers announce their exit in phases, telling their inner circle first, then providing the formal announcement, followed by a period of spreading the word that can extend well past a person's physical exit from the organization. Leavers are motivated to provide accounts by the desire to save face, justify their exit, and explain the reasons for their exit. Leavers use a variety of strategies to amend their accounts, vary accounts based on the target, and consider account plausibility more important than accuracy. Finally, communication during the post-exit period is characterized by a reduction in frequency and a general shift to more personal oriented topics.