

Collective sensemaking during a major disruptive event: Insights from the Swedish aviation market in times of COVID-19

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Abstract

Today's business environment is increasingly shaped by unpredictable events, such as economic crises, natural disasters, terrorist attacks, pandemics, and wars, which can negatively affect companies. This study applies an organizational sensemaking perspective to examine how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced top executives' collective sensemaking of the future in the Swedish aviation market. As part of a broader research project, multiple market actors—including representatives from airlines, airports, industry organizations, authorities, and regulatory bodies—were interviewed at two distinct points in time during 2020-2022, focusing on their perceptions of the future of the aviation market. Our findings show that collective sensemaking of the future changed while the crisis advanced, making the future a moving target. Initially, uncertainty prevailed, but over time, a pressing need to make sense of the changed business landscape emerged, driving the creation of visions for future markets. Major disruptive events, therefore, act as wake-up calls for top executives in B2B settings, compelling them to reassess assumptions, envision potential futures, and adopt a more dynamic approach to navigating uncertainty and market change.

Keywords

Disruptive events, future, collective sensemaking

Track

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