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Analyzing Discourse of Renewal in Post-Crisis Organizational Resiliency Among Nonprofit Organizations

Karen Kay Barone
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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ANALYZING DISCOURSE OF RENEWAL IN POST-CRISIS ORGANIZATIONAL

RESILIENCY AMONG NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Karen Kay Barone

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania
School of Graduate Studies and Research
Department of Communications Media

We hereby approve the dissertation of

Karen Kay Barone

Candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

November 5, 2013   Signature on File
_____   _____
                                   B. Gail Wilson, Ed.D.
                                   Professor of Communications Media, Advisor

November 5, 2013   Signature on File
_____   _____
                                   Nurhaya Muchtar, Ph.D.
                                   Professor of Communications Media

November 5, 2013   Signature on File
_____   _____
                                   Zachary Stiegler, Ph.D.
                                   Professor of Communications Media

ACCEPTED

        Signature on File
_____   _____
Timothy P. Mack, Ph.D.
Dean
School of Graduate Studies and Research

Title: Analyzing Discourse of Renewal in Post-Crisis Organizational Resiliency
        Among Nonprofit Organizations

Author: Karen Kay Barone

Dissertation Chair: Dr. B. Gail Wilson

Dissertation Committee Members: Dr. Nurhaya Muchtar
                                   Dr. Zachary Stiegler

The theoretical framework of discourse of renewal places a communicative emphasis on moving an organization forward following crisis by stressing provisional, prospective, optimistic and leader-based communication to stakeholders as a means for encouraging organizational sense making, learning and viewing the crisis as an opportunity for growth. However, discourse of renewal theorists Ulmer, Seeger and Sellnow contend that the use of renewal discourse following crisis is dependent on four key contextual characteristics including the type of crisis, prior stakeholder relationships, corrective action and change, and the type of organization. This study employs a qualitative collective case study approach to focus on two of those characteristics, namely crisis type and organizational type, and challenges the original theorists' assertion that renewal discourse is only applicable in crisis situations that physically destroy the company and within organizations that are privately held. Overall, the study found evidence suggesting that: transparency should be added as a critical message characteristic of discourse of renewal theory, the use of provisional messaging appears to be contextually bound, organizational leadership is a critical factor in the organization's ability to overcome crisis, and a broader scope exists for discourse of renewal than originally conceived.

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CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM

This study seeks to develop an in-depth description and analysis of discourse of renewal in post-crisis organizational communications at nonprofit higher education institutions with crises that do not necessarily threaten the physical presence of the organization. The purpose of this collective case study is to observe how the leaders of nonprofit organizations engaged their stakeholders during and after an organizational crisis through language of renewal, thereby encouraging the organization to emerge from the crisis stronger and more united.

This chapter begins with a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study and presentation of the key research questions asked within the study. The qualitative research approach is discussed as well as the rationale behind the use of case study as a means for studying this particular problem. A preview of the site selection and data collection methods is presented followed by a brief discussion of the researcher's assumptions and personal perspective. The rationale and significance of the study is discussed and key definitions are presented. Finally, this chapter concludes with an overview of the organization of the study.

Statement of the Problem

Traditionally, the research focus of crisis communication has been on the use of strategic communication techniques aimed at repairing damage to organizational reputation following a crisis. Very little research has been directed at the inherent

opportunities for organizational renewal that emerge following a crisis. Of particular interest to this study is the utilization of the discourse of renewal as a means for encouraging organizational sense making, learning, and viewing the crisis as an opportunity for growth.

Post-crisis discourse has traditionally taken a retrospective stance, focusing primarily on image restoration and placement of blame. In contrast, the theoretical framework of discourse of renewal places emphasis on moving the organization forward by stressing provisional, prospective, optimistic and leader-based communication to stakeholders (Ulmer, Seeger, & Sellnow, 2007). Ulmer et al. (2007) define provisional messages as those messages that are spontaneous and unrehearsed. They are not strategically planned in advance, but rather, are improvisational in nature. Prospective messages focus on providing a vision for the future, as opposed to looking back into the past at issues of blame and regret. Optimistic messages embrace the potential opportunities that are now available as a result of the crisis, and leader-based communications encompass those messages that are based on the core values and beliefs of the organizational leader (Ulmer, et al., 2007).

However, discourse of renewal theorists contend that renewal discourse is only applicable in certain types of crises (those that physically destroy the company) and with certain types of organizations (private enterprises) (Seeger & Ulmer, 2002; Ulmer et al., 2007). An exploration of the potential limitations of renewal discourse is examined in terms of whether the rhetoric of such discourse is in fact limited by the kinds of crises or disasters that occur and the specific organizational contexts in which they occur.

Nonprofit institutions of higher education are studied that have endured a recent crisis, which may or may not have been physical in nature.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to observe how the leaders of nonprofit organizations engaged their stakeholders during and after an organizational crisis through language of renewal, thereby encouraging the organization to emerge from the crisis stronger and more united. At this stage in the research, discourse of renewal will be generally defined as organizational, crisis and post-crisis statements that focus on the opportunities inherent in crisis as a means of moving the organization forward.

Research Questions

The grand research question that serves as the basis for this study asks: How is the issue of organizational renewal encouraged through the discourse of renewal in post-crisis communications at nonprofit organizations that do not operate under a single owner structure and may or may not have lost their physical facility presence as a result of crisis?

A range of descriptive, interpretive and theoretical questions is raised through this study with the intent to uncover the foundations of the four main categories of renewal discourse: provisional, prospective, optimistic and leader-based communication to stakeholders. These research questions include:

Provisional Questions

1. To what extent were the leaders' messages provisional (spontaneous and unrehearsed)?

2. How did a board of directors or board advisors respond to the leaders' initial messages?

Prospective Questions

3. How did the leaders' discourse take a prospective stance, focusing the stakeholders' energies in a positive, forward-moving, direction as opposed to looking back at whom was to blame?

4. How did the leader establish a vision for the future, and on what was it based?

Optimism Questions

5. How did the leaders' messages instill a sense of optimism in their stakeholders and how soon after the crisis did that optimism emerge?

6. Did positive outcomes emerge as a result of the crisis? If so, what were they?

7. How did the leaders' messages impact the sense of security among stakeholders during and after the crisis?

Leader-Based Questions

8. In what ways were the leaders' messages reflective of their own personal core values and beliefs as opposed to merely mirroring the organization's values and beliefs?

9. What organizational factors do leaders attribute to aiding in the creation of their post-crisis messages?

<h3 style="text-align:center">Research Approach</h3>

At the broadest level, the choice of a qualitative approach rather than a quantitative approach for this study is influenced by several factors. First, the grand research question predisposes the study to a more qualitative approach as it seeks to

understand a complex communication relationship within the context in which such communication occurred, in this case, corporate public relations. As Damon and Holloway (2011) contest,

> the implications for public relations and marketing communications practices . . . are unlikely to be comprehended through traditional research approaches. To study complexity, power relations and the co-construction of meaning in a holistic or critical sense requires a different, more flexible type of research where the process of discovery is blended with intuition. (p.5)

The suggestion being that, in general, research pertaining to the complex and communicative nature of public relations is often strengthened from applying a qualitative and holistic approach where emergent themes are explored as opposed to a more rigid and linear quantitative approach that might fail to capture the nuances of the human experience within the communication.

Additionally, a quantitative approach is not yet appropriate in this particular study because the issue of post-crisis discourse of renewal is still being explored and understood. At best, we are still in the observational stage of this issue, therefore this study seeks to gain as much information as possible about this narrowly focused situation. As Buddenbaum and Novak (2001) suggest, the deductive process begins with a theory about a problem, followed by the creation of hypotheses and testing using empirical methods. Any studies done in this area are still in the exploratory phase of research and, as such, there are no formalized hypotheses to test at this stage, again making a qualitative approach more appropriate.

A third factor that leads this study toward a qualitative perspective is the need for a complex, detailed understanding of renewal discourse within the context of post-crisis communication. As Creswell (2007) contends, an in-depth, qualitative approach is most appropriate when the researcher cannot separate what was communicated from the context in which it was communicated, as is the case with the current study.

A fourth factor that prompts a qualitative approach to this study is that due to the individualistic nature of the circumstances surrounding crises and post-crisis communication, the phenomena are not likely to repeat in exactly the same manner and are therefore not representative of the greater population. Quantitative research designs seek out those tests and experiments that are repeatable and able to be generalized to the larger population, further making a qualitative design more appropriate in this instance (Reinard, 2006).

A fifth mitigating factor in following the qualitative tradition is the need to study the phenomenon in its naturalistic setting through analysis of multiple data sources, both of which are hallmarks of the qualitative approach (Jensen, 2002). This study involves on-site data collection, going to the source to conduct interviews and review documents, falling more in line with a qualitative stance than a quantitative one (Creswell, 2007).

Therefore, due to a range of factors, including the field of study, the exploratory nature of the study, the need to study the phenomenon in its naturally occurring context, the uniqueness of each case and the reliance on multiple sources of data, the qualitative research approach emerges as the most suitable choice for this study.

Case Study Methodology

This study employs a collective case study methodology within the qualitative tradition, seeking to provide an in-depth description and analysis of three key cases. Creswell (2007) further describes the case study as an exploration of a "bounded system (case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information and reports a case description and case-based themes" (p. 73). Baxter and Jack (2008) build on Creswell's definition with the additional dimension of using case study analysis as a means of exploring a phenomenon within its naturally occurring context.

The choice of a case study methodology is built upon several important elements relating to the event itself. The role of renewal discourse in post-crisis rhetoric is an emerging area with very little scholarly research related to it. Eisenhardt (1989) argues that it is those areas where new research and emerging theories are being developed that are "particularly well-suited" to case study analysis (p. 548).

This study seeks to explore discourse, in general, and specific rhetoric that has already occurred in the recent past, therefore making the manipulation of participant behaviors impossible. Yin (2003) suggests that a case study approach is most appropriate in instances where the researcher is unable to manipulate the behaviors of study participants.

An additional rationale for using a case study approach is the importance of studying not just the phenomenon of renewal discourse, but also the context of crisis itself. As Gibbert, Ruigrok and Wicki (2008) posit, a case study methodology is particularly useful when studying the phenomenon within its naturally occurring context.

It is imperative to this particular study that the instance of renewal discourse is studied within the context of crisis, as opposed to looking at the two independently of one another.

Furthermore, the case study approach easily lends itself to providing the researcher with a multi-faceted approach to the collection and analysis of data for study, namely triangulation (Stake, 1995). As Denzin (1970, 1978) and Patton (1999) suggest, triangulation is achieved in a qualitative study via four means including the use of multiple methods of data collection (methodological triangulation), analyzing multiple sources of data information gleaned from the same methods (source triangulation), employing multiple researchers to analyze the data (analyst/investigator triangulation), and relying on multiple theories for data interpretation (theory triangulation). This study relies on both methodological triangulation and source triangulation.

Finally, a case study approach emerges as the best choice when compared to the three other prominent qualitative traditions including narrative, phenomenological, and ethnographic. A narrative approach seeks to explore the life of one or two individuals, at most (Creswell, 2007), whereas this study seeks to explore the event, more so than the individual, at a very specific moment in time (crisis) rather than a lifetime.

A phenomenological approach aims to understand the "essence" of a lived experience shared by several individuals, focusing on what they have in common in that experience (Creswell, 2007). Moustakas (1994) adds that the phenomenological focus is on the description of the experiences, not analysis and explanations. Creswell (2007) adds an important distinction between phenomenology and case study, stating that a phenomenology studies the individuals that shared an experience or event, while a case

study focuses on the experience or event. A case study is more appropriate in this study because the goal is on analysis and explanation of the event more so than on describing the individuals' experience.

Ethnographic research attempts to describe and explain a group with shared culture (Creswell, 2007). This study seeks to examine the instance of crisis across several organizations, therefore there would be no "shared culture" to focus on. In addition, the focus of the study is not on the group itself, but rather the event.

Site Selection and Data Collection

All three sites selected for this study represent similar types of organizational structure, namely nonprofit higher education organizations. The choice of nonprofit organizations is a critical factor in this study as the founding theorists of discourse of renewal contend that this form of post-crisis communication can only occur in private enterprises in which the organizational leader is free to make snap (provisional) organizational decisions without needing to consult with a board of directors or shareholders (Seeger & Ulmer, 2002; Ulmer et al., 2007). In order to more fully explore the boundaries of this theory, organizations whose leadership structure falls under a governing body administration are included in this study, rather than those that fall under an "owner-operated" organizational structure.

In addition, the study sites have all experienced some form of organizational crisis within the past 10 years and appear to have emerged stronger as a result of their post-crisis communication efforts. Selecting sites with relatively recent crises aids the researcher in acquiring pertinent data on the case, including gaining access to individuals involved in the case crises. Additionally, organizations that garnered a favorable response

from their stakeholders as a result of their handling of the crisis, as evidenced in media reports, are included to determine what role renewal discourse played in bolstering their post-crisis reputation.

The first case for this study is Wilson College's response to a smoldering fiscal crisis in which the traditionally all-female school voted to become co-educational in an effort to boost declining enrollment numbers in early 2013. The study's second case is Western Carolina University's handling of a student arsonist on campus in the fall of 2003. The third and final case is Tulane University's response to Hurricane Katrina as it devastated their New Orleans, Louisiana campus in August of 2005. The cases are presented in order of the physicality of the crisis involved, from the least physical crisis to the most physical crisis.

Data collection involves access to a number of data sources relating to the crises, including documentation (letters, memoranda, speech transcripts, news clippings, etc.), personal interviews (with leaders and key organizational administrators), and physical artifacts (including organizational newsletters/newsmagazines, photographic evidence of the crisis, etc.).

One of the primary limitations encountered by the researcher involves case participation in the study and the ability to gain access to a variety of data sources. The scope of potentially suitable cases for this study is limited to nonprofit institutions of higher education in order to provide for a consistent organizational structure from which to compare case outcomes. The availability of potential cases is further limited to those institutions that emerged favorably from their crisis in the eyes of their stakeholders and also demonstrated a commitment to renewal and growth following the crisis. A third

limiting factor in case selection stems from the potential organizations' willingness, or lack thereof, to participate in this particular study.

Researcher Assumptions

Based on the researcher's professional experience and background in nonprofit organizational communications, three primary assumptions are made regarding this study. First, the theory of discourse of renewal provides an alternative choice in the approach to crisis and post-crisis communication, one that enables the leaders of nonprofit organizations to engage their stakeholders during and after an organizational crisis through language of renewal, thereby encouraging the organization to emerge from the crisis stronger and more united.

Second, the scholars behind the discourse of renewal theory have unduly limited its potential application in the field by restricting its applicability to only those crises that represent a physical destruction of the organizational facility.

Third, the use of discourse of renewal in crisis and post-crisis communications is applicable in a broader range of organizational structures than what the original scholars have postulated.

Researcher Perspective

At the time of conducting this study, the researcher is a doctoral candidate in a communications Ph.D. program at a state university in Pennsylvania, as well as an adjunct faculty member at a small, private college in central Pennsylvania. The researcher had 15 years of experience in nonprofit communications before transitioning to academia.

Rationale and Significance

The rationale for this study is rooted in the desire to more fully explore the use of renewal discourse as an alternative approach in post-crisis communication. The study of discourse of renewal as a theory has been limited to just a few key researchers (Robert Ulmer, Timothy Sellnow and Matthew Seeger) who have worked together to develop and promote this approach, which is not yet widely known or understood.

A central goal of this study is that the findings are applicable for leaders and practitioners in the field as a collection of cases where an alternate approach to crisis, renewal discourse, was employed resulting in greater organizational resiliency. These case explorations may provide the communications professional with a broader context in which renewal discourse can potentially be employed, both in terms of the type of organization and the type of crisis, thereby expanding on the original parameters of the theory itself.

Definitions and Terminology

Crisis: A crisis can be any real or perceived threat to normal activity that has the potential to harm the health, safety or security of an individual, group or organization. From an organizational standpoint, Coombs defines crisis as "an unpredictable event that threatens important expectations of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization's performance and generate negative outcomes" (Coombs, 2012, p.2).

Discourse of Renewal: Discourse of renewal is generally defined as organizational post-crisis statements that focus on the opportunities inherent in crisis (as opposed to the placement of blame) as a means of moving the organization forward (Seeger & Ulmer, 2002; Ulmer et al., 2007).

Nonprofit Organization: For the purposes of this study, nonprofit organizations are broadly defined as those institutions where the primary purpose of the organization is an exempt purpose listed under the Internal Revenue Systems 501(c) code. Furthermore, the organization's primary activities demonstrate that a substantial part of its activities fulfill an exempt purpose under the 501(c) code. In addition, no earnings from the organization are distributed for the personal benefit of the trustees, directors or other administrators, and the ultimate legal and fiduciary responsibilities of the organization rest upon the board of directors/trustees. Finally, the organization's assets would be used to fulfill an exempt purpose upon the dissolution of that organization (Bennett, 2001).

Study Organization

This study is organized into five main chapters. Chapter 1 has provided a thorough introduction to the research problem of the study. Chapter 2 provides a literature review discussing the main theories and concepts related to traditional post-crisis communication, the use of discourse of renewal as an alternative form of post-crisis communication, and a discussion on how the current study seeks to advance what is already known about discourse of renewal. Chapter 3 presents the case study research methodology utilized in this study including a discussion of data collection, analysis and synthesis, as well as the ethical considerations related to this particular study. The findings of the study are presented in Chapter 4, along with a thoughtful analysis and interpretation of those findings. Lastly, Chapter 5 provides the final conclusions of the study as well as recommendations for future research related to this topic.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Purpose and Rationale

The purpose of this literature review is to provide a macro-level view of the use of

crisis and post-crisis communication by examining the various methods, strategies and

philosophies of traditional forms of crisis communication in order to more fully

demonstrate how discourse of renewal differs from these traditional models. The review

begins with a definition of "crisis," followed by a discussion of the more traditional

forms of crisis communication. Organizational learning and renewal in the wake of crisis

is considered, leading into a discussion of this study's theoretical framework, discourse of

renewal, which suggests an alternative approach to post-crisis communication. Finally, a

brief narrative on the history and usefulness of the case study methodology is included.

Defining "Crisis"

A "crisis" can be any real or perceived threat to normal activity that has the

potential to harm the health, safety or security of an individual, group or organization.

From an organizational standpoint, Coombs (2012, p.2) defines crisis as "an

unpredictable event that threatens important expectations of stakeholders and can

seriously impact an organization's performance and generate negative outcomes."

While crises can come from a variety of sources and present myriad threat levels,

there are several inherent characteristics that apply to nearly all crises equally. To be

considered a true crisis, there must be the potential for high consequence for those

affected, and often little time in which to make decisions (Hale, 1997; Moynihan, 2008).

Uncertainty and ambiguity often accompany a crisis, putting a strain on a crisis team's ability to analyze the situation and act accordingly (Moynihan, 2008). Finally, a crisis is often unpredictable in terms of how or when it will happen, but it should not be entirely unexpected, as most organizations should understand that it is not a question of "if" a crisis happens, but "when" (Coombs, 2012). Taken together, these characteristics create a unique environment in which to engage in high stakes group decision-making.

Traditional Approaches to Crisis Communication

Traditional approaches to crisis communication have focused on messages that promote organizational image restoration by describing, explaining and prescribing how one should communicate following a crisis (Ulmer et al., 2007; Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, 2011). These approaches are fundamentally defensive in nature and include apologia (Ware & Linkugel, 1973; Kruse, 1981), Benoit's image restoration theory (Benoit, 1995, 1997) and Coombs' situational crisis communication theory (2004, 2012).

Apologia

The modern basis for crisis communication can be found in the ancient Greek theory of *apologia*, where the word literally meant "speech in defense" (Hearit, 2010). Plato provides an account of Socrates' trial speech in *The Apology* (Plato, trans. 1871), though Socrates is in no way providing an "apology" to his accusers by our contemporary understanding of the word. Socrates' speech is an act of vigorous self-defense and denial of the claims against him. Aristotle, in describing what he recognized as the three types of discourse that humans were likely to engage in (ceremonial, political and judicial), included apologia in his discussion of judicial discourse as a method of self-defense (Shultz Huxman, 2004).

In their groundbreaking work on the topic, Ware and Linkugel (1973) build on an earlier work by Abelson (1959) in defining the four methods of self-defense utilized in apologia, namely denial, bolstering, differentiation and transcendence. Ware and Linkugel contest that denial and bolstering both represent "reformative" methods of defense in that they do not attempt to change the audience's view of the negative act but rather how the audience views the accused. Denial represents a tactic wherein the accused attempts to "disavow" his or her part in the offending act; while in a bolstering strategy, the accused attempts to identify him or herself with some thing or ideology that is viewed more favorably by the audience (Ware & Linkugel, 1973).

Differentiation and transcendence, conversely, represent "transformative" attempts to change the audience's meaning of the facts involved in the offending act (Ware & Linkugel, 1973). In differentiation, the accused tries to separate some fact from the larger issue, asking the audience to suspend judgment until the act is viewed from another perspective. A transcendent approach attempts to view a fact or detail in a larger context, moving toward a more abstract view of the occurrence resulting in a new view of the issue on the part of the audience.

Kruse (1981) sets out to expand the discussion beyond what she perceives as a lack of depth on the issue by identifying the foundational elements of apologia, stating "No rhetorical item can be considered apologetic unless it is produced by an individual responding in a particular way to a specific kind of situation with discourse that exhibits a certain structure" (p. 280), thereby isolating three key components: speaker, context and structure/motivation.

Because apologia is the rhetoric of self-defense, Kruse contends that one cannot engage in apologetic discourse for another person or for something other than a human (Kruse, 1981). While this speaker stipulation appears logical at first consideration, it fails to account for corporate apologia tactics that are later identified by Benoit (1995, 1997), Hearit (2010), and others in today's organizational discourse.

In Kruse's second component of apologia, context, she suggests that apologia is defined by the situation from which it emerges. Kruse proposes that if the statements are reflections of self-defense, then there must be some provoking, real events or behaviors that led the audience to criticize the accused. Finally, the third apologia component in Kruse's examination is structure/motivation, suggesting that the accused feels a need for self-defense and self-preservation as a means of responding to an attack on their moral character (Kruse, 1981).

Considered in its entirety, Kruse's identification of the parameters of apologia furthered the discussion of the topic past theoretical underpinnings and toward a more functional understanding of this particular form of rhetoric.

Several contemporary scholars have built on the early foundational works of Ware and Linkugel (1973) and Kruse (1981) to identify their own methods within apologia, including Fearn-Banks (1996, 2011) and Hearit (2006). While Both Fearn-Banks and Hearit agree that apologia represents an effort to defend and protect one's reputation, they disagree on the identification of the actual tactics used in apologetic response.

Fearn-Banks (1996, 2011) contends that there exist three key apologia tactics whereby the accused could either attempt redefinition of the incident, disassociation from

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the claim, or ultimately, seek conciliation. In redefinition, the accused maintains that there was no intent to cause harm, yet refuses to take responsibility for the outcome. A disassociation approach would argue that while it may appear to the audience that a misdeed has occurred, in fact, that was not the case, and further explanation would follow as to how the audience misunderstood the circumstances. Finally, Fearn-Banks (1996, 2011) recognizes that there are times when conciliation, or an actual apology, is warranted whereby the accuser admits guilt and regret, and seeks forgiveness for the action.

Hearit (2010) identifies five distinct rhetorical apologia stances, including denial of the claim, counterattack on the accuser, differentiation as a means of distancing the accused from their guilt, apology and a legal stance whereby no official comment is provided. Furthermore, Hearit contends that the choice of stance that an organization may use depends on the degree to which the organization is held responsible for some misdeed.

The common thread throughout the literature on apologia is that these tactics represent defensive responses to crises based on the assignment of blame and denial/acceptance of responsibility. It is this apologia foundation then that forms the basis for the majority of theory, research, and discussion in contemporary post-crisis communication.

Image Restoration Theory

Benoit (1995, 1997, 2004) builds on apologia with the creation of his image restoration / repair theory. This theory, like apologia, is reactive in nature, aimed at reducing or avoiding reputational damage (Seeger & Ulmer, 2002). Two assumptions

underlie Benoit's theory; the first being that communication is best considered a "goal-directed" activity wherein people use particular communication messages that they believe would aid them in achieving their goals. The second assumption in the theory is that the maintenance of one's positive reputation is a central goal of communication and human interaction (Benoit, 1995). Combined, these two assumptions suggest that when an affront is made to our reputation, we will choose those message strategies that we believe will have the greatest chance of achieving our goal, that of repairing our reputation and image.

Benoit stresses that the potential to use multiple communication strategies in achieving this goal is a significant characteristic of image restoration discourse (Benoit, 2004). He points to this as a central difference between his image restoration theory and Ware and Linkugel's (1973) apologia approach which stipulates that only one or two strategies should be utilized in defensive speech, with one emerging as the predominant tactic (Benoit, 1995).

The audience's perception of the incident is the critical factor in Benoit's theory. He argues that one's reputation is at risk only if an actual act occurred that is considered offensive by the audience, and that the accused is held responsible for that action (Benoit, 1995, 1997, 2004). In terms of organizational reputation then, it is not important whether or not the organization is *actually* to blame for the offensive action, but whether or not the organization is *believed* to be responsible by the key audience members. Furthermore, it is of no matter if the action was actually offensive, but rather if it was believed to be so by the audience. In Benoit's view, these perceptions on the part of the target audience are more important than the reality of what actually transpired (Benoit, 1997, 2004).

Image repair strategies in Benoit's theory are organized into five distinct categories, including denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness of event, corrective action, and mortification (an actual apology) (Benoit, 1997, 2004). Within those broad strategies are several calculated message options (See Table 1). Several of these tactics are borrowed from Ware and Linkugel's Apologia approach, including denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence.

Table 1

Benoit's Image Restoration Strategies

Strategy	Option	Key Characteristic
Denial	Simple Denial	Did not perform the act
	Shift the Blame	Provides alternate target to blame for act
Evasion of Responsibility	Provocation	Shifts some/all of responsibility from accused to another
	Defeasibility	Accused cannot be held responsible due to a lack of control/information preceding situation
	Accident	Accident/mishap makes accused less accountable
	Good Intentions	Accused performed act with good intentions, thereby evading full responsibility for outcome
Reduce Offensiveness of Act	Bolstering	Seeking to strengthen the audience's positive feelings toward accused in attempt to offset negative feelings connected with wrongful act
	Minimize	Reduce damage to reputation by convincing audience that act is less offensive than originally thought
	Differentiation	Differentiate this act from other, more offensive acts
	Transcendence	Place act in more favorable context or suggest a different frame of reference to view the act
	Attack Accuser	Damage credibility of the source of allegations in attempt to limit damage to accused's image
	Compensation	Accused offers to reimburse victim to mitigate negative feelings from the act
Corrective Action	Correct the Problem	Accused promises to correct problem by offering to restore situation to pre-action state, or by promising to prevent recurrence of offensive act
Mortification	Confess & Accept Responsibility	Accused apologizes and seeks forgiveness

Note. From "Appropriateness and Effectiveness of Image Repair Strategies," by W.L. Benoit and S. Drew, 1997, *Communication Reports, 10(2)*, 153-161. Reprinted with permission.

Benoit cautions that for image repair discourse to be truly effective, one should be honest and admit fault immediately if actually at fault for an act, and conversely, deny fault immediately if not guilty of the accused act (Benoit, 1997). This approach prescribes a direct, immediate response that allows the accused to "get out in front" and take charge of the situation from the onset.

Image restoration theory provides strategic, planned, reactive responses to crises that ultimately threaten the reputation of either the organization, the individual or both. Benoit's work on image restoration strategy is still the most complete theoretical framework used in post-crisis communication today (Seeger and Griffin Padgett, 2010).

Situational Crisis Communication Theory

Coombs' situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) provides a prescriptive approach to crisis by using the type of crisis as a guide in determining the choice of communication approach as a response (Seeger and Ulmer, 2002). Coombs relies on attribution theory as a guide in connecting the crisis case to appropriate response strategies, arguing that as reputational threat increases, communication strategies that exhibit acceptance of responsibility for the crisis should be utilized (Coombs, 2004). The reputational threat of a crisis grows as crisis responsibility attributions increase.

Coombs' approach extends Benoit's image restoration theory by linking the organization's potential crisis response strategies to the elements of the actual crisis situation (Coombs and Holladay, 2002). Crisis responsibility is organized into three clusters to include the organization as a victim of crisis, accidental cause of crisis and

intentional crisis as a means for determining the appropriate crisis response strategy

(Coombs, 2004). (See Figure 1).

Victim Cluster: In these crisis types, the organization is also a victim of the crisis.
(Weak attributions of crisis responsibility = Mild reputational threat)

Natural Disaster: Acts of nature damage an organization such as an earthquake.

Rumor: False and damaging information about an organization is being circulated.

Workplace Violence: Current or former employee attacks current employees onsite.

Product Tampering/Malevolence: External agent causes damage to an organization.

Accidental Cluster: In these crisis types, the organizational actions leading to the crisis were unintentional.
(Minimal attributions of crisis responsibility = Moderate reputational threat)

Challenges: Stakeholders claim an organization is operating in an inappropriate manner.

Technical-Error Accidents: A technology or equipment failure causes an industrial accident.

Technical-Error Product Harm: A technology or equipment failure causes a product to be recalled.

Preventable Cluster: In these crisis types, the organization knowingly placed people at risk, took inappropriate actions or violated a law/regulation.
(Strong attributions of crisis responsibility = Severe reputational threat)

Human-Error Accidents: Human error causes an industrial accident.

Human-Error Product Harm: Human error causes a product to be recalled.

Organizational Misdeed With no Injuries: Stakeholders are deceived without injury.

Organizational Misdeed Management Misconduct: Laws or regulations are violated by management.

Organizational Misdeed With Injuries: Stakeholders are placed at risk by management and injuries occur.

Figure 1. SCCT Crisis Types by Crisis Clusters. From "Protecting organization reputations during a crisis: The development and application of situational crisis communication theory," by W.T. Coombs, 2007, *Corporate Reputation Review*, 10(3), 163-176. Reprinted with permission.

Crises that are classified under the victim cluster in Coombs' model present a

minimum attribution of crisis responsibility for the organization and thus present only a

mild reputational threat to the organization. The accidental cluster crises possess low

attributions of crisis responsibility that equate to a moderate level of reputational threat

for the organization. Finally, the crises in the preventable cluster encompass a strong

attribution of crisis responsibility and therefore have the potential to present a severe reputational threat to the organization (Coombs, 2007).

Coombs' SCCT model is comprised of five key steps in handling organizational crises (Coombs and Holladay, 2002). First, the organization must identify the type of crisis occurring by evaluating how much personal control the organization has/had over the event and how much the organization is to blame for the crisis. Next, the organization should determine the potential for reputational damage as a result of the crisis. The stronger the potential damage to the organization's reputation, the more the crisis response strategies must attempt to accommodate the victim(s) and demonstrate care and concern for them.

Third, the organization must assess the amount of crisis responsibility that their publics attribute to the organization by considering the severity of the crisis and the performance history of the organization (i.e. past occurrences of similar crises for the organization). Next, the organization chooses a response strategy appropriate to that level of crisis responsibility. Coombs identifies eight key response strategies that are quite similar to those found in apologia and Benoit's image restoration theory. These strategies include attacking the accuser, denying responsibility, making excuses, victimizing the organization, justification for actions, ingratiating the organization to its publics, taking corrective action, and making a full apology (Coombs and Holladay, 2002).

Finally, Coombs and Holladay (2002) advise that the organization match their response strategy to their level of responsibility for the crisis. As crisis responsibility increases, so to must the organizational accommodation in the response strategy.

Much like apologia and image restoration theory, situational crisis communication theory is also reactive in nature placing the main communication focus on the protection of reputational assets during crisis.

Crisis as Opportunity

There is an emerging rhetorical approach that encourages a new view of crisis, one that recognizes opportunity and threat as two sides of the same crisis coin (Nathan, 2000; Kovoor-Misra, 2009). As discussed in the previous section, the traditional crisis paradigm views crisis as a threat to the organization; something to be contained, dealt with and avoided. The predominant rhetorical stance is focused on the organization's own needs; image/reputation restoration tactics become the paramount concern (Nathan, 2000; Kovoor-Misra, 2009). This approach, which places the organization in a defensive stance where the primary focus is on institutional survival, has the potential to actually extend the lifecycle of the crisis due to the damaging effects on organizational morale and the inability to learn from the experience (Sellnow, Seeger and Ulmer, 2002).

The flipside of the crisis coin suggests there is opportunity in crisis for organizational learning, growth and gain. The Mandarin Chinese word for "crisis" is represented by two characters, meaning "danger" and "opportunity" (Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger, 2011). Within that definition lies an important lesson for communication practitioners: while a crisis threat has the potential to cause harm to the organization, it also has the potential to provide new opportunities that did not exist in a pre-crisis state.

When viewed through this new paradigm, the organization is better able to capitalize on the opportunities inherent in crisis, such as an eagerness for employees to work together, a willingness to take risks and expand organizational perceptions, and the

opportunities for organizational learning and improvement (Kovoor-Misra, 2009; Nathan, 2000; Ulmer, 2011; Wheatley, 1993).

The notion of crisis as opportunity has its roots in the sciences and organizational development literature of chaos and change theory. Subsequently, the models of chaos and change are based on von Bertalanffy's systems theory (1968) and the area of nonlinear dynamics. We can learn five key points from this area of science: first, extremely ordered systems are incapable of giving birth to anything new; second, nonlinear systems are systems that appear chaotic because they do not follow straight lines while in change; third, a chaotic system represents the ultimate paradox of order and disorder due to bifurcation - or - flashpoints of change; fourth, chaotic systems display time irreversibility in that they are unlikely to find themselves in the same situation again; and fifth, a new order is found out of chaos whereby new patterns emerge (Thietart and Forgues, 1995; von Bertalanffy, 1968; Warren, Franklin and Streeter, 1998; Wheatley, 1993). Taken as a whole and applied to crisis, chaos theory tells us that a period of chaos (or crisis) is actually needed in organizations in order for a new, more adaptive, stability to be achieved; and ultimately, chaos (or crisis) has the potential to breed a new form of self-organization and creativity (Theitart and Forgues, 1995).

Lewin's (1951) discussion of change theory suggests that there are three main phases of change: unfreezing, moving, and refreezing. When viewing crisis through change theory, we can see that the onset of a crisis or organizational threat could be represented through Lewin's "unfreezing" stage, framing crisis as an opportunity for change could be seen through the "moving" stage, and permanent organizational changes as a result of the crisis could be marked by the "refreezing" stage in change (Kovoor-

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Misra, 2009). Lewin further suggests that there are two types of change: incremental and transformational (Lewin, 1951). Crisis ultimately has the potential to represent a transformational change for the organization wherein multiple organizational systems, beliefs and assumptions of the organization are fundamentally shifted as a result (Kovoor-Misra, 2009).

When applied to organizational settings, the lessons inherent in chaos and change theory argue that when confronted with chaos, organizations must be willing to let go of their current construction of reality in order to change and transform into a newly self-organized system. From a crisis standpoint, those lessons suggest that when confronted with crisis, organizations must seize the opportunity to maximize the event as a defining moment for the organization and encourage organizational growth and renewal as a result of crisis. Crises present organizations with opportunities that were not viable before their onset and provide the potential for a definite turning point in the organization's lifecycle. When viewed in this light, organizations can seize crisis as an opportunity to emerge from the event stronger with a renewed spirit and purpose (Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger, 2011).

Theoretical Framework: Discourse of Renewal

Scholars Ulmer, Seeger and Sellnow (2007) have developed an alternative approach to the traditional modes of crisis communication, called the discourse of renewal, based on maximizing those inherent opportunities that crises possess. Discourse of renewal is based on three key commitments by the organization, namely a commitment to stakeholders, a commitment to rebuild, and a commitment to organizational renewal (Seeger and Ulmer, 2002). Through renewal discourse, organizations are able to reframe

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the crisis situation for their stakeholders by focusing on the opportunities that arise as a result of the crisis and aid in moving the organization beyond crisis toward a new sense of normalcy (Kopp, 2010; Seeger, Ulmer, Novak and Sellnow, 2005).

This approach is most suited to cases where the issues of cause and blame are not necessarily in question. Ulmer, Seeger and Sellnow's research suggests that in such crisis situations, the story of organizational renewal and rebirth is more compelling to the media than the story of cause and blame (Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger, 2011).

There are four key characteristics of discourse of renewal: its focus on provisional over strategic communications, a prospective rather than retrospective stance, an emphasis on optimism instead of pessimism and its leader-based origins (Seeger and Ulmer, 2002; Seeger, Ulmer, Novak and Sellnow, 2005; Ulmer, Seeger and Sellnow, 2007; Seeger and Griffin-Padgett, 2010).

Rather than creating responses aimed at achieving some kind of strategic outcome (such as protecting the corporate image), discourse of renewal is more provisional in that it is spontaneous, natural and immediate as a crisis response (Ulmer, Seeger and Sellnow, 2007). The content of the message is often derived from the core values and beliefs of the organization's leader, where the focus is on what is best for the stakeholders as a whole rather than what is solely best for the organization.

A key example of this provisional rhetoric is seen through the case of Cantor Fitzgerald, a brokerage firm that lost some 700 of its 1,000 employees on September 11, 2001. Known for his tough, all-business approach, Cantor's CEO Howard Lutnick delivered a sincere, spontaneous, emotionally raw message via national television which immediately framed the event for stakeholders and spectators alike, saying "There is only

one reason to be in business - it is because we have to make our company be able to take care of our 700 families" (Seeger, Ulmer, Novak and Sellnow, 2005). This message was not planned; the impact on the organization as a result of the message was not discussed; yet it gave Cantor Fitzgerald's stakeholders a very clear vision of the company's new future.

As opposed to being retrospective and looking back at what happened in the crisis situation and who is to blame, the second characteristic of discourse of renewal is that it is prospective in looking forward to rebuilding the organization to a level that far surpasses its pre-crisis state (Seeger, Ulmer, Novak and Sellnow, 2005). This immediate commitment to rebuilding in the wake of a crisis or disaster is incredibly motivating to employees and other key stakeholders who rely on the organization as an integral part of their daily existence (Seeger and Ulmer, 2002).

This prospective stance was evident in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 as Tulane University President Scott Cowen communicated to students, faculty, staff and parents that while the campus was devastated by the flooding, the University would come back stronger than before (Kopp, 2010). Rather than dwelling on the damage to the school, Cowen reiterated the commitment to rebuild, reinvest, restore and re-establish Tulane University to a level far greater than it was before the storm.

The third characteristic of discourse of renewal is its emphasis on optimism instead of pessimism. As discussed earlier, crises provide the organization with opportunities that were not available prior to their onset. Myers and Holusha (1986) identify seven opportunities that have the potential to emerge as a result of crisis, including the fact that heroes are born, smoldering problems are addressed, change is

often accelerated, new strategies emerge, people are changed, new competitive advantages sometimes appear and early crisis warning systems are put in place.

Through their research regarding discourse of renewal, Ulmer, Seeger and Sellnow have identified several instances where positive optimistic outcomes resulted from crisis including the building of new, more technologically advanced buildings in the case of a devastating fire at Cole Hardwoods, a restructuring of the organizational culture to be more supportive of employee families in the case of Cantor Fitzgerald's massive loss of employees in 9/11, and a rededication to product safety in the case of Schwan Foods (2007).

The fourth and final discourse of renewal characteristic is that it is a leader-based form of communication that reaffirms the leader's role as the framer of meaning following a crisis (Seeger, Ulmer, Novak and Sellnow, 2005). Leaders are critical in post-crisis discourse because they are the ones the stakeholders trust and turn to for help in making sense of the event. As Weick (1995) explains, renewal discourse aids in sensemaking by linking the organization's pre-crisis past to the present crisis and, ultimately, to the future of a new and rejuvenated organization. It is the organization's leader that enables sensemaking to occur for the stakeholders.

Seeger, Ulmer, Novak and Sellnow (2005) cite a prime example of CEO leadership in the case of Malden Mills CEO Aaron Feurstein following the destruction of his manufacturing facility. Feurstein immediately committed to continue to pay workers while the factory was being rebuilt. This singular message reassured stakeholders as to the future of the organization and their stake in it, while helping them to make sense out of what was happening.

Organizational Renewal

The basis for discourse of renewal comes from the larger focus of organizational rhetoric, specifically restorative rhetoric. Seeger and Griffin-Padgett (2010) describe the purpose of restorative rhetoric as an effort to restore faith in an organizational system by rhetorically reconnecting to the organization's core values and beliefs, creating a sense of greater security, encouraging healing and establishing a vision for the future, essentially encouraging organizational renewal and resilience.

Organizational renewal is believed to be most likely in four explicit conditions, as identified by Ulmer, Seeger and Sellnow (2007). These conditions are based on crisis type, stakeholder relationships, corrective action and change, and the type of the organization.

A common thread throughout all of the case studies on discourse of renewal to date has been that the crisis involved a devastation of the physical presence of the organization. Whether through floods, fires or acts of terrorism, massive destruction often creates a context most conducive to renewal, providing for a symbolic cleansing as it were (Ulmer, Seeger and Sellnow, 2007).

The second condition leading to organizational renewal is stakeholder relationships. Early in their research, Seeger, Ulmer, Novak and Sellnow (2005) concluded that positive pre-crisis stakeholder relationships were necessary for organizational renewal because they provided the organization with a "reservoir of goodwill" from which to draw support post-crisis. However, in their research on Cantor Fitzgerald, they realized that a crisis event itself might have the magnitude to create that reservoir of goodwill, even when the pre-crisis reputation of the organization was less

than positive (Ulmer, Seeger and Sellnow, 2007). Prior to 9/11, Cantor Fitzgerald, and their CEO Howard Lutnick, had a reputation as a cutthroat business, putting profit ahead of all else. However, in his post-crisis discourse, Lutnick enabled the company's situation to create a large groundswell of support and goodwill in their mission to take care of the victims' families (Seeger, Ulmer, Novak and Sellnow, 2005).

A third condition for organizational renewal is for the organization to commit to corrective action and change by rebuilding or correcting the problem that created the crisis in the first place (Ulmer, Seeger and Sellnow, 2007). By expressing how the organization has learned from the experience and emphasizing solutions to the current crisis, the organization creates an opportunity for growth and renewal (Ulmer, 2011). In their research on memorials as a form of renewal discourse, Veil, Sellnow and Heald (2011) contend that organizations that recognize the importance of the past actions on the present situation have an opportunity to harness the power of learning in generating momentum for lasting change. Indeed, Sitkin (1996) argues that learning is only possible through failure as it promotes organizational experimentation, stimulates the search for solutions, and calls attention to problems that may have previously gone undetected.

The final condition that Ulmer, Seeger and Sellnow (2007) identify as necessary for renewal concerns the type of organization. The authors contend that private companies have fewer constraints than publicly held companies, and that increased autonomy is what enables the organization's leadership to engage in spontaneous renewal discourse without first having to consult with stockholders. In their case study analysis of devastating factory fires at Malden Mills and Cole Hardwoods, Seeger and Ulmer (2002) reported that both CEOs suggested that their immediate commitments to rebuild (even

while the fires were still blazing) would have been impossible if there were stockholders to report to; saying the stockholders would have vetoed that decision because it was not in the companies' best financial interests.

These first and last conditions are of most interest to the current study, as it seeks to explore other types of organizations that have engaged in discourse of renewal as a catalyst toward organizational renewal and resiliency following organizational crises of differing types.

Case Study Methodology

The origins of case study inquiries can be traced back to the fields of anthropology and sociology in the early 1900s, made popular by the renowned Chicago School (Creswell, 2007). Early applications of case studies can be found by looking to the practices of law and medicine, where "cases" were the focus of very detailed, in-depth study (as in "case work" or "case history") (Johansson, 2003).

By the early 1930s, however, social science research was beginning to move toward more positivist, quantitative-based study, and the case study design began to decline in acceptance (Tellis, 1997). However, by the 1960s, the case study experienced a resurgence in recognition as researchers became dissatisfied with some of the limitations of quantitative inquiry, namely the lack of in-depth analysis in positivist studies (Johansson, 2003 and Tellis, 1997).

A key criticism of the case study research design is that this inquiry strategy has no basis for scientific generalizations. Stake (1995) and Yin (1994) counter this notion by explaining that the purpose of the case study is to generalize (to a degree) to a theoretical

proposition, as opposed to generalizing to a population (as is the case in quantitative research) (Johansson, 2003).

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a review of the literature related to crisis communication. The term "crisis" was defined and discussed followed by an examination of the foundations of crisis communications. This examination presented an overview of the more traditional communicative responses to organizational crises, namely apologia, image restoration theory and situational crisis communication theory. It was noted that these models stipulated a more reactive communication response to crisis whereby the objective was placed on protecting the reputational assets of the organization involved. In contrast, the notion of viewing crisis as an opportunity for the organization was introduced as the underpinning of the theoretical focus of this study: discourse of renewal. Finally, related literature reviewing the case study methodology was presented as a preview of the study's research approach.

CHAPTER 3

PROCEDURES

Introduction and Overview

The purpose of this study is to observe how the leaders of nonprofit organizations engaged their stakeholders during and after an organizational crisis through renewal discourse, thereby encouraging the organization to emerge from the crisis stronger and more united. The grand research question that serves as the basis for this study asks: How is the issue of organizational renewal encouraged through the discourse of renewal in post-crisis communications at nonprofit organizations that do not operate under a single owner structure and may or may not have lost their physical facility presence as a result of crisis?

This chapter begins with a brief review of the rationale in choosing a qualitative methodology, followed by a discussion of the methods used in selecting the research participants for this study and an overview of the types of information required to answer the study's research questions. The overall research design for this study is discussed with an emphasis on the data collection methods and the process supporting each method. The means through which the data were managed, organized, and analyzed is also examined. The ethical considerations associated with this particular study are explored as well as the issues associated with trustworthiness, including credibility, dependability, and transferability. Finally, a discussion on the limitations of this study is presented.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the choice of a qualitative case study approach to this study was made after carefully comparing the study's focus with the merits of the qualitative tradition. When considering a range of factors, including the field of study, the

exploratory nature of the study, the need to study the phenomenon in its naturally occurring context, the uniqueness of each case and the reliance on multiple sources of data, the qualitative research methodology emerged as the strongest method for this study. Furthermore, the case study approach proved to be the best approach for this study within the qualitative tradition as it allowed for an in-depth description and analysis across the three chosen cases, focusing on both the phenomenon and the context of each case event. Additionally, the case study approach supported the collection of a myriad of data sources from each case, including data from both interviews and organizational documents.

As Creswell (2007) suggests, data collection is a circular process comprised of several interrelated activities with the ultimate goal of acquiring solid information with which to answer the research questions. These activities include locating a site or individual of study, gaining access and making rapport, purposefully sampling, collecting data, recording information, resolving field issues, and storing data (Creswell, p.118, 2007). While these data collection activities are applicable across the qualitative approaches, the specific forms of data are often varied within each approach. For case studies, the researcher looks to a variety of data sources in a multitude of forms in order to yield an in-depth description of the event itself (Creswell, 2007).

Research Participants

As is common in case study inquiries, the unit of analysis for this study was an event more so than an individual. The event-focus of this study was organizational crisis. As defined in Chapter 2, a crisis is "an unpredictable event that threatens important expectations of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization's performance and

generate negative outcomes" (Coombs, 2012, p.2). Furthermore, most crises possess several common characteristics, including the potential for high consequence for those affected and often little time in which to make decisions; uncertainty and ambiguity surrounding the event, putting a strain on the leadership's ability to analyze the situation and act accordingly; and an element of unpredictability in terms of how or when a crisis will happen or evolve (Coombs, 2012; Hale, 1997; Moynihan, 2008).

Participant Selection Criteria

While the types of crises encountered by the research participants in this study differed, all three crisis sites selected for this study represented similar types of organizational structure, namely nonprofit higher education institutions. The choice of nonprofit organizations as study sites was a critical factor in this study as the founding theorists of discourse of renewal contend that this form of post-crisis communication can only occur in private enterprises in which the organizational leader is free to make snap (provisional) organizational decisions without the need to consult with a board of directors or shareholders (Seeger and Ulmer, 2002; Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow, 2007). In order to more fully explore the boundaries of this theory, organizations whose leadership structure fell under a governing body administration were included in this study, rather than those that fell under an "owner-operated" organizational structure.

In addition, the study sites all experienced some form of organizational crisis within the past 10 years and appeared to have emerged stronger, in terms of media and stakeholder positive support, as a result of their post-crisis communication efforts. Selecting sites with relatively recent crises aided the researcher in acquiring pertinent data on the case, including gaining access to individuals involved in the case crises.

Additionally, organizations that garnered a favorable response from their stakeholders as a result of their handling of the crisis, as evidenced in media reports, were included to determine what role renewal discourse may have played in bolstering their post-crisis reputation.

In summary, inclusion in the research participant sample was first based on the organization's status as a not-for-profit institution of higher education, followed by evidence of the organization having experienced a crisis within the past 10 years; and finally, evidence that the organization garnered favorable response from stakeholders in their handling of their individual crises.

The researcher utilized several sources of information in order to identify potential study participants, namely through online searches. *The Chronicle of Higher Education's* online archive was heavily employed as a source of information on crises specifically relating to organizations of higher education. In addition, the search engine Google allowed for a wide net to be cast across the Internet for potential crisis cases and additionally provided access to stakeholder responses to crises through media reporting on the various events. Finally, numerous discussions with colleagues within the fields of both higher education and crisis communication yielded fruitful suggestions for potential cases for consideration.

Identification of Study Participants

Four institutions were initially identified as potential study participants using criterion sampling, intensity sampling and ultimately, convenience sampling. These institutions included University of Virginia, Tulane University, Western Carolina University and Wilson College. Selection of these four cases was purposeful in that each

case first met the criteria for inclusion in the study, the phenomenon of discourse of renewal appeared to be intensely critical to the outcomes of each institutional crisis, and each case was well documented, providing rich information and details into the crises themselves.

The presidents' names and contact information for each institution were identified via the schools' websites. A formal letter of invitation was sent to each president via both their campus email address and their postal address. A sample informed consent document accompanied the letter. The letter indicated that the researcher would follow up with them by phone within approximately a week to 10 days. (Appendix A).

After the stated waiting period, the researcher began follow up telephone calls with the university presidents' secretaries for a period lasting anywhere from two to six weeks until the president either agreed or declined to be a part of the study. Of the four institutions contacted, the University of Virginia declined to participate; representatives from Tulane University declined to be interviewed but did direct the researcher to a website with a multitude of case documentation for the study; Western Carolina University agreed to participate fully; and Wilson College agreed to allow the researcher to interview the president of the institution.

Participant Composition

Each participant is a nonprofit institution of higher education, collectively spanning both the private and public sectors. All three were founded in the 1800s and represent a range of enrollment sizes from the very small (Wilson College at an enrollment of 695 for the 2012-2013 academic year), to the mid-sized University of

Western Carolina (with a 2012-2013 enrollment of 9,608), and finally the larger Tulane University (enrollment of 13,486 students for the 2012-2013 academic year).

Additionally, each participant experienced a true crisis. Recall from the discussion in Chapter 2 that in order to be considered a true crisis, an event must have the potential for high consequences for those affected, little time in which to make decisions, above normal levels of uncertainty and ambiguity, and an element of unpredictability in terms of how or when it could happen (Hale, 1997; Moynihan, 2008; Coombs, 2012). All three cases in this study met those criteria.

Each case also represented different crisis types including a long-term financial crisis encountered by Wilson College, a concentrated physical disruption in the case of Western Carolina University, and a widespread physical destruction to campus in the case of Tulane University (See Table 2 below for a complete comparison).

Table 2

Study Participant Demographic Information

	Wilson College	Western Carolina University	Tulane University
Type of Institution	Private, Liberal Arts Institution*	Public, Coeducational Liberal Arts Institution	Private, Coeducational Research Institution
Year Founded	1869	1889	1834
Location	Chambersburg, PA	Cullowhee, NC	New Orleans, LA
2012-2013 Student Enrollment	695	9,608	13,486
Number of Faculty	76	457	1,140
Type of Crisis Encountered	Smoldering financial crisis	Physical disruption due to repeated dorm fires	Physical Destruction due to Hurricane Katrina
Year of Crisis	Ongoing, but decisive action taken in 2013	2003	2005

* Wilson College was established as an all-female institution, later allowing men in both the graduate program and continuing education program.
Sources: *http://tulane.edu/about/facts.cfm; http://www.wcu.edu/193.asp; http://www.wilson.edu/admissions/undergraduate-college/wilson-college-quick-facts/index.aspx*

The inclusion of case participants that represented varying types of crises was critically important to this study, as one of the key goals of the research was to identify cases where the discourse of renewal was effectively utilized in instances where physical destruction may - or may not - have occurred. Recall from the discussion in Chapter 1 that discourse of renewal theorists contend that this form of discourse is only applicable in certain types of crises, those that physically destroy the company (Seeger and Ulmer, 2002; Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow, 2007). An exploration of the potential limitations of renewal discourse was desired in terms of whether the rhetoric was in fact limited by the

kinds of crises or disasters that occur and the specific organizational contexts in which they occur. Therefore, case participants were identified for this study that represented a range of crisis types, as evidenced in Table 2.

Overview of Information Needed

A range of descriptive, interpretive and theoretical questions was raised through this study with the intent to uncover the foundations of the four main categories of renewal discourse (provisional, prospective, optimistic and leader-based communication to stakeholders). These research questions include:

Provisional Questions

1. To what extent were the leaders' messages provisional (spontaneous and unrehearsed)?

2. How did a board of directors or board advisors respond to the leaders' initial messages?

Prospective Questions

3. How did the leaders' discourse take a prospective stance, focusing the stakeholders' energies in a positive, forward-moving, direction as opposed to looking back at who was to blame?

4. How did the leader establish a vision for the future, and on what was it based?

Optimism Questions

5. How did the leaders' messages instill a sense of optimism in their stakeholders and how soon after the crisis did that optimism emerge?

6. Did positive outcomes emerge as a result of the crisis? If so, what were they?

7. How did the leaders' messages impact the sense of security among stakeholders during and after the crisis?

Leader-Based Questions

8. In what ways were the leaders' messages reflective of their own personal core values and beliefs as opposed to merely mirroring the organization's values and beliefs?

9. What organizational factors do leaders attribute to aiding in the creation of their post-crisis messages?

The "Matrix of Information Needed," presented in Table 3, depicts an overview of how the study's research questions addressed the four message characteristics of renewal discourse (provisional, prospective, optimistic and leader-based), the information that the researcher sought to gain through the research questions, as well as the sources of evidence from which the information would likely originate.

There were three types of information needed for completion of this study, namely contextual, perceptual, and theoretical. Contextual information helped describe the culture and environment of the case setting, in essence helping to set the scene for the case. Background and historical information on the participant organizations, such as vision and mission statements, and organizational structure all worked in concert to provide the researcher with a detailed understanding of how the organization functioned prior to, during, and following the crisis incident, allowing the researcher to view the crisis (and the leadership's crisis messages) within the context of the greater organization. Several sources of evidence were utilized to gather this information, including personal interviews, news articles and organizational documentation.

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Perceptual information is particularly important in qualitative research as it provides insights into the actual views held by the participants. Personal interviews proved to be the most effective sources of evidence for achieving a perceptual understanding of the case. Research questions 1, 4, 8, and 9 in particular address perceptual issues. (See Table 3).

Finally, theoretical information pertaining to the discourse of renewal was vital to the researcher's understanding of what is already known and proposed within the theory. This background information comes directly from various literature sources as identified in Chapter 2. Furthermore, the four main characteristics of renewal discourse messages as proposed by the theorists were addressed through each of the research questions. Sources of evidence pertaining to the theoretical model itself came from interviews, news articles, and organizational documentation. (See Table 3).

Table 3
Matrix of Information Needed

Message Characteristics	Research Question	Information Needed	Sources of Evidence
Provisional	1. To what extent were the leaders' messages provisional (spontaneous and unrehearsed)?	The impetus behind the message; its source of origin; gut reaction or strategic messaging	Interviews
	2. How did the board or advisors respond to the leaders' initial messages?	The reception of the message on the part of the governing body	Interviews, News Articles
Prospective	3. How did the leaders' discourse take a prospective stance, focusing the stakeholders' energies in a positive, forward-moving, direction as opposed to looking back at whom was to blame?	Commitment to moving organization beyond the crisis	Interviews, News Articles, Recorded/Transcribed Speeches, Organizational Documentation
	4. How did the leader establish a vision for the future, and on what was it based?	Creation of a shared, positive, future-oriented vision for organization stakeholders	
Optimistic	5. How did the leaders' messages instill a sense of optimism in their stakeholders and how soon after the crisis did that optimism emerge?	Focus on emphasizing possibilities in crisis over issues of cause, blame and defeat	Interviews, News Articles, Organizational Documentation
	6. How did the leaders' messages impact the sense of security among stakeholders during and after the crisis?	Commitment to taking care of stakeholder needs following crisis	Interviews, News Articles
	7. Did positive outcomes emerge as a result of the crisis? If so, what were they?	Actual opportunities resulting from crisis that were not available prior to onset	Interviews, News Articles, Organizational Documentation
Leader-Based	8. In what ways were the leaders' messages reflective of their own personal core values and beliefs as opposed to merely mirroring the organization's values and beliefs?	Impact of personal values on message	Interviews, News Articles, Organizational Documentation
	9. What organizational factors do leaders attribute to aiding in the creation of their post-crisis messages?	Impact of organizational values on message	Interviews, News Articles

Research Design Overview

The following list provides a summary of the steps the researcher undertook in carrying out this study.

1. A broad literature review was conducted to study and document the theoretical contributions of other researchers in the field of crisis communications whereby the researcher identified the issue of renewal discourse as an area of interest.

2. The researcher developed the grand research question for the study and prepared an initial prospectus of the study to accompany the Research Topic Approval Form and study summary that were presented to the dissertation committee.

3. After topic approval was granted by the dissertation committee, the researcher submitted documentation on the study's methods, protection of human subjects, and anticipated outcomes to the institution's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects for review.

4. The IRB granted conditional approval pending receipt of site approval letters from research participants.

5. Potential research participants were identified and contacted via mail and email. Those who agreed to participate sent acceptance letters to the IRB.

6. The researcher was then permitted to begin writing the first three chapters of the dissertation, which included the statement of the research problem, the literature review and the study's procedures.

7. A qualitative content analysis coding framework was created to assist with data analysis.

8. Following review and approval of the first three chapters by the dissertation committee, the researcher was granted permission to begin data collection.

9. Triangulation of methods was utilized through the collection of organizational documentation and news coverage of the individual crises situations by the researcher. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with personnel directly involved in the crisis messages.

10. Triangulation of three main types of data sources was conducted by examining interview transcripts, news articles and organizational documentation in order to develop converging lines of evidence in support of the grand research question.

11. Individual case analysis was first conducted, followed by the development of cross-case comparisons and conclusions. Data analysis was based on pattern matching between case details and the theoretical foundation, explanation building as to whether or not the case contradicted or supported the assumptions of the theoretical foundation, and cross-case synthesis to determine whether different cases appeared to share similarities in their findings.

12. The final study report was prepared and presented for review and defense.

Data Collection Methods

For this qualitative case study, the researcher employed methodological triangulation to obtain pertinent data by conducting both personal interviews with individuals directly involved in two of the cases as well as a content analysis of documents relating to each case. Documents selected for analysis included news coverage about the crises in particular and the organization in general, recorded and transcribed speeches made by the leadership during and after the crises, and organizational documentation in the form of internal emails, memos, newsletters, etc.

As Yin (2009) contends, triangulation of data sources allows for a convergence of evidence aimed at corroborating the same phenomenon, thus supporting the facts of the cases through multiple sources of evidence. Information from various sources of data, such as interviews, speech transcripts, news articles, and organizational documentation all represent varying points of view. Through triangulation, the researcher is able to combine those points of view from the varying sources of evidence into more comprehensive findings that collectively support the same phenomenon. In this study,

separate passages of text taken from interviews, news articles, speeches and organizational publications are considered in context with each other in order to support conclusive findings within the case that support the phenomenon of discourse of renewal.

Interviews

Interviewing is one of the most widely utilized qualitative research methods in communications research today as it allows the researcher insights into the perspectives of those directly involved with the case event (Jensen, 2002). Interviews are particularly useful when studying events that have already occurred and therefore impossible for the researcher to observe personally (Creswell, 2009). One key limitation of the interview as a method of data collection, however, is that the information gained has been "filtered" through the lens of the interviewee. While this allows for keen insights into how the individual made sense of the situation, it should not be considered as actual "facts" of the case itself (Jensen, 2002).

As Fontana and Frey (2005) suggest, it is unrealistic to paint the interviewer as a neutral research instrument within the interview methodology. Rather, the interviewer is just as active a participant in the exchange of information as the interviewee. As such, the interview becomes a "contextually bound and mutually created story" (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 696).

In this light, semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to allow for a freer exchange of information between the interviewer and the interviewee whereby flexibility was built into the framework so that follow up questions could be raised in response to the interviewee's answers.

An interview protocol (Appendix C) was followed which outlined general questions applicable to all of the case crises, with specific questions geared toward each case individually. The interviews were audiotaped and notes were taken during the actual interview session. The interviews were later transcribed by the researcher, with a copy of the transcription sent to the interviewee for fact checking.

Tulane University officials declined to be interviewed for this study, explaining that there had already been a plethora of interviews given and stories completed on the Tulane University crisis and they would be unable to participate at this level. However, the University's public relations office did provide web links to a special website that had been created commemorating the fifth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. That site contained the University's archived documentation of press statements, interviews and stakeholder messaging delivered during the crisis and aftermath, and was extensive enough to provide the researcher with sufficient data to adequately answer the research questions as they applied to this case.

Interviews were conducted with two of the cases in this study including Wilson College and Western Carolina University. Wilson College's President Barbara Mistick granted a telephone interview, as did Western Carolina University's former head of public affairs, Leila Tvedt. Western Carolina University's Chancellor Bardo declined to be interviewed for this study as he retired from the University in 2010.

Documents

The second data collection method utilized in this study was that of document collection, both internal to the organization and external. The qualitative case study is strengthened through the use of document collection as the production of documents

occurred prior to the study and was not "biased" by the researcher in any way (Jensen, 2002). Furthermore, internal organizational documents serve as products of self-description. A researcher's understanding of how an organization functions and behaves in a specific context is based on an understanding of how the individual functions and behaves within that organization. Studying the various activities of readers, writers and speakers from within the organization affords the researcher the opportunity to gain a richer understanding of the workings of the organization in the specific case context (Atkinson & Coffey, 2004).

Several different types of internal documents were collected for this study, many of which were widely accessible on the organizations' websites. These included speech transcripts of messages delivered by the organization's leadership, alumni newsletter articles regarding the crisis incident, student newspaper archives relating to the crisis, memos from the organization's leadership to the employees and students, and archived website updates as to the status of the crisis situation.

Documents were also collected that were external to the organization, including news articles about the crisis and reports written by academic researchers relating to the organizations' responses to the crises situations. These documents ranged from local newspaper coverage to national academic journal articles.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

Data analysis was conducted through the use of qualitative content analysis. As Schreier (2012) explains, the goal of a qualitative content analysis is to systematically describe the study's data using the research questions as the lens through which to view the data. A qualitative content analysis has three key benefits in research. First, the

qualitative content analysis provides a systematic approach to analysis via a clearly defined sequence of steps that are applicable to any type of material or research question. Second, its inherent flexibility stems from the fact that the researcher tailors the coding framework used to categorize the data to the unique material generated through the specific study. Third, the qualitative content analysis affords the ability to reduce large amounts of data by focusing the analysis on the specific aspects of data that are relevant to the study's main research questions (Schreier, 2012).
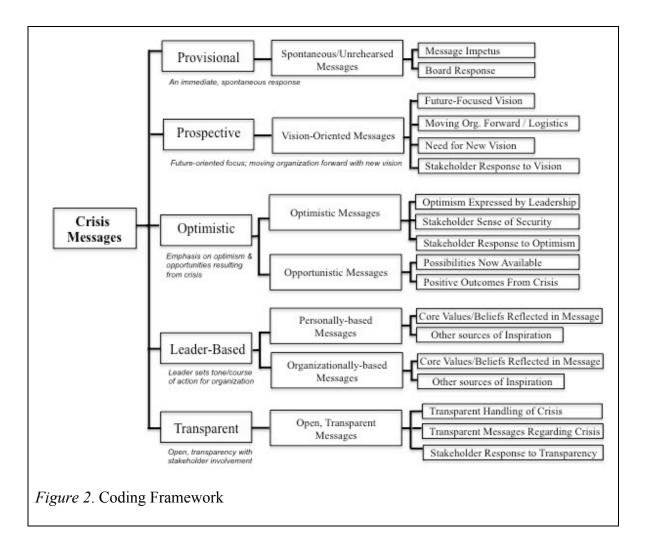
The content analysis approach also works well with triangulation of data sources, as the goal of both is to systematically describe the meaning of the phenomenon by examining multiple sources of data for recurring findings (Schreier, 2012; Wilkinson, 2006).

Case study interviews are often described through a phenomenological analysis process wherein the meaning of the lived experience of a phenomenon is explored across several individuals (Creswell, 2007). That level of analysis was not possible in the current study because the researcher was unable to gain access to the presidents of each case institution. Had each president been agreeable to an interview process, then a phenomenological analysis of the interview content would have been the best choice for analysis. Instead, a content analysis was used to maintain consistency across all data sources.
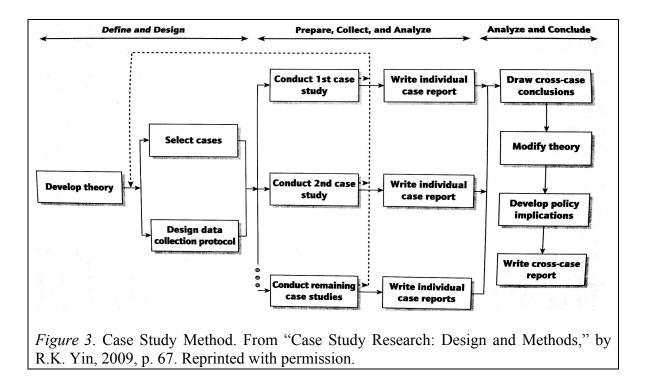
A coding framework was created for this study in order to organize the data into meaningful categories that sought to uncover the elements of renewal discourse within the various crisis messages and also coincided with the research questions. (See Figure 2). The researcher conducted the coding of data through the use of Schreir's (2012)

analytic approach of a combined concept-driven and data-driven method, what

Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) refer to as a template and editing approach. In this

approach, messages were first organized into four concept-driven categories that each

represented the four main categories of messages presented in the discourse of renewal

theory: provisional, prospective, optimistic and leader-based. The coding framework's

subcategories (second level) identified key passages of text that supported the higher

categories of messages. For example, the first level main category of "provisional"

messages had a second level subcategory of messages that represented key passages of

text that were "spontaneous and unrehearsed." Delving further to a third level, the origin

(or inspiration) of the message was analyzed, as was the Board of Directors' response

(where applicable) to that "spontaneous and unrehearsed" message.

A data-driven approach was then utilized to capture those messages that

represented categories that emerged during data analysis. A fifth main category was

added to the coding framework during data analysis, titled "transparent." This category

represented a message feature outside the scope of Ulmer, Seeger and Sellnow's (2007)

original message characteristics, yet was a recurring category of messaging across the

three cases and therefore needed to be identified. (See Figure 2).

Figure 2. Coding Framework

A collective approach to analysis was employed due to the desire to fully explore the cases in multiple crisis contexts in order to provide an analysis of similarities and differences. As prescribed by Stake (1995) and Yin (2009), each case was initially analyzed separately through the coding framework referenced above to identify those direct leadership messages that included one or all of the four key message characteristics proposed in the discourse of renewal. Then, a thematic analysis across the cases (cross-case analysis) was employed through pattern matching to explore the use of discourse of renewal in differing crises and organizational contexts. (See Figure 3). A key aspect of the grand research question for this study was how the discourse of renewal was

expressed in differing crisis contexts. The only way to explore this question was to

examine multiple cases across different contexts.

Figure 3. Case Study Method. From "Case Study Research: Design and Methods," by R.K. Yin, 2009, p. 67. Reprinted with permission.

The method of reporting followed Yin's example (as noted in Creswell, 2007)

which began with an overview vignette of the research problem followed by a detailed

account of the research questions, the case study parameters and data collection methods.

Descriptions of the cases were limited to a narrow focus on the issue of renewal discourse

in the context of organizational crisis across the case subjects. The issue was further

developed with details about selected issues brought to light for analysis. Assertions were

made in the form of "lessons learned" from the organizational post-crisis communication

and subsequent resiliency, and a final closing vignette summed up the study.

Ethical Considerations

The three main ethical concerns raised by interviews focus on the issues of informed consent, rights to privacy, and protection from harm (Fontana & Frey, 2005). An informed consent document was sent to the presidents of each case institution for their review prior to agreeing to participate in the study, and also made available to every interviewee prior to the start of their interviews (Appendix B). The informed consent form provided details of the study, stressing that participation on the part of the interviewee was completely voluntary and the participant could discontinue their part in the study at any time.

Confidentiality was not guaranteed as part of participation in this study as one of the goals of this qualitative case study was to be able to share the in-depth data derived from the subjects. Kaiser (2009) maintains that an appropriate alternate approach to confidentiality in qualitative studies is for the researcher to first make the subjects better informed as to how their data will be used (including the identification of potential audiences and dissemination techniques), and instituting a process that facilitates a dialogue between researcher and subjects as to how their data can be used (typically involving subject input on the informed consent process).

The subjects were informed that their responses would not remain confidential. The organizational leaders were informed in their invitation letters that their responses would be identified, as their messages were a critical part of this study.

The subjects were notified via the informed consent form that the results of this study could be shared with other academics, professionals in the field, city or state policy makers, and the public-at-large through a variety of dissemination venues including drafts

read by dissertation committee members and other faculty, academic journal articles, live or recorded presentations, newspaper or magazine articles, online articles, books or commentaries. The subjects were encouraged to discuss with the researcher any apprehension they had regarding the distribution of their data so an alternative consent form could be drafted specifically addressing those concerns if needed.

Participation in this study involved only the minimal risks of everyday life. The subjects were asked about specific, non-confidential, communication messages that were delivered as a result of a past organizational crisis. Furthermore, the researcher had already submitted a complete IRB protocol to the graduate institution, which was approved. In addition, a copy of the approved IRB protocol was made available to the research participants to ensure that they were fully informed of the study's focus, parameters and potential risks.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Qualitative reliability was achieved through two key tasks as recommended by Creswell (2009), including checking of transcripts for mistakes and guarding against definition shifting of codes during the analytical process. The interviews were digitally recorded and written transcripts were created within 48 hours of the interview to ensure that the memory of the interview was still fresh in the researcher's mind thereby aiding in the transcription process. Printed transcripts were then proofread, checked for any spelling errors, and also crosschecked against the actual recordings to ensure accuracy. The Matrix of Information Needed, presented earlier in Table 3, was kept beside each data source as coding was completed to allow for easy access to both the code definitions as well as the listing of key information that the researcher was looking for within each

category. This aided the researcher in preventing shifts in code definitions over the course of the coding process.

Creswell (2009) further suggests that testing for intercoder agreement helps to ensure reliability. However, intercoder reliability was not employed for this study due to the complex nuances involved in defining the various message characteristics. The researcher spent over a year analyzing this theory, arriving at a sensitive understanding of the inherent differences between the message categories, thereby making it impracticable to train another coder in those nuances in the time available for analysis. Alternately, a double-coding approach, as recommended in both Schreier (2012) and Baxter and Jack (2008), was employed instead to enhance reliability. In this approach, the researcher coded a set of data and then recoded the same data at a later time to compare the consistency of the results.

Qualitative validity was also achieved through employing two key strategies including triangulation of data sources and participant checking of themes in the transcribed interviews, both of which are recommended by Creswell (2009). For this study, the researcher utilized a number of different data sources, as discussed below, and provided each interviewee with a copy of the interview transcript for review and fact checking.

Achieving construct validity through the triangulation of data sources requires the collection of multiple sources of evidence, which enhances validity by providing multiple measures of the same phenomenon (Yin, 2009). The researcher reviewed a number of different sources of data for each case including print news articles, journal articles,

official organizational statements in the forms of press releases and website updates, personal messages delivered by the organizations' leaders, and personal interviews.

While qualitative studies are not inherently generalizable to other settings, there is an expectation that they may at least be transferrable to other contexts of study (Volpe, 2008). As such, the use of thick descriptions was employed by the researcher to provide a holistic and realistic picture of each case thereby enabling the reader to determine relevance to other contexts.

Limitations of the Study

As previously mentioned in Chapter 1, one of the primary limitations of this study involved case participation. The participant selection criteria formulated for this study ultimately limited the types of organizations that could be considered for inclusion. The availability of potential cases was further limited to those institutions that emerged favorably from their crisis in the eyes of their stakeholders and also demonstrated a commitment to renewal and growth following the crisis. A third limiting factor in case selection arose from the potential organizations' willingness, or lack thereof, to participate in this particular study.

Another area of limitation involved the researcher's ability to gain access to the needed sources of evidence from within the organization. Each case participant allowed for differing levels of access to their organizational resources, thereby creating an inequality in the sources of information gathered across the cases.

A final limitation was directly related to the types of organizations studied. Because the participants in this study are institutions of higher education, a key stakeholder group within these organizations, the student body, was no longer available

for participation in the study as they had already matriculated and left the organization. Therefore, it was impossible to conduct first person interviews with this group of stakeholders.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provides an overview of the case study methodology that was employed as part of this study's research. The research participants were discussed in terms of their selection criteria, their identification and their composition. In all, three participant organizations were a part of this study: Wilson College, Western Carolina University, and Tulane University, a diverse blend of organizations in terms of institution type, size and type of crisis.

Three types of information were required for completion of this study, namely contextual, perceptual and theoretical information. A comprehensive picture of how this information was derived from the research questions, as well as an identification of the sources of this information, was presented in Table 3.

The research design steps were outlined, followed by a discussion of the data collection methods and a preview of the data analysis that will occur in Chapter 4. Finally, the handling of various ethical considerations related to this study was addressed, accompanied by a discussion on the issues of trustworthiness and the limitations related to this particular study.

CHAPTER 4

DATA AND ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study is to describe how the leaders of nonprofit organizations engaged their stakeholders during and after an organizational crisis through language of renewal, thereby encouraging the organization to emerge from the crisis stronger and more united. The grand research question that serves as the basis for this study asks: How is the issue of organizational renewal encouraged through the discourse of renewal in post-crisis communications at nonprofit organizations that do not operate under a single owner structure and may or may not have lost their physical facility presence as a result of crisis?

This chapter presents background information on each of the three cases separately followed by a discussion of key findings within each case. Finally, the chapter ends with a review of the study's initial assumptions and a discussion as to whether or not those assumptions were supported in the study findings.

The cases are presented in order of the physicality of the crisis involved, from the least physical crisis to the most physical crisis. Wilson College's smoldering financial crisis represented a non-physical crisis and is presented as the first case. Western Carolina University's residence hall fire represented a small physical crisis and, as such, is the second case in this study. Finally, Tulane University's hurricane disruption, the third case in the study, represented the most physical crisis of the three cases. The cases were examined in this order to reflect Ulmer, Seeger and Sellnow's (2007) assertion that a physical crisis is more conducive to the use of discourse of renewal than a non-physical one due to the destruction potentially causing both a contextual and physical space in

which to rebuild. This study examined cases that may or may not have had physical destruction as a means of exploring that assertion.

Individual case discussions begin with general background information on the institution itself, followed by an overview of the specific crisis situation involved in the case. The crisis overview discussion is presented according to Coombs' (2012) three-stage crisis model: pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis. The pre-crisis stage includes normal, daily operations of the organization, any crisis pre-planning that had occurred up until that point, as well as any early crisis warning signs (prodromes). The crisis stage is marked by the crisis outbreak and includes any actions taken to mitigate the crisis situation. The final post-crisis stage represents the period after the crisis is considered to be resolved, though organizational recovery likely continues through this stage.

The individual case findings are discussed according to whether or not the organizational leadership's messages represented each of Ulmer, Seeger, and Sellnow's (2007) discourse of renewal message characteristics: provisional, prospective, optimistic, and leader-based. The fifth message characteristic, transparency, was added as a result of data-driven findings during this study's case analysis and was not part of Ulmer, Seeger and Sellnow's original message characteristics.

Finally, each case discussion closes with a summary of the key findings and themes that emerged as a result of the data analysis.

Case 1: Wilson College - A Smoldering Crisis

Wilson College is a small, private, single-sex liberal arts institution located in rural Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, a town of roughly 18,000 residents located 55 miles southwest of the state capital of Harrisburg ("About Chambersburg," 2013). Founded in

1869 through a generous contribution by local resident Sarah Wilson, the college was established to provide "for the education of young women in literature, science and the arts," encouraging its students to "think for themselves and thus become leaders, instead of followers, in society" ("History and Tradition," 2013).

The Wilson College case represents what is known as a smoldering crisis, one in which a negative situation worsens and grows until it reaches a breaking point for the organization (Smith and Millar, 2002). In Wilson's case, the crisis has been a financial one, with declining enrollment and stagnant revenue for many decades. As is often the case in a smoldering crisis, the lines between Coombs' three crisis stages (pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis) become blurred, making it difficult for the stakeholders involved in the organizational crisis to recognize the worsening situation until a dramatic point is reached.

Pre-Crisis Stage

Undergraduate enrollment peaked at Wilson College in 1967 at 732 students, with the college unable to reach even half that number since 1976 (Mistick, 2012). The college has continued to struggle financially over the past 40 years, largely due to decreasing enrollment. The college's crisis peaked when the trustees reached consensus in calling for a decisive vote on the financial situation.

Crisis Stage

Wilson College's trustees voted to close the college in 1979 due to financial difficulties, prompting a group of alumnae and students to sue to keep the school open (Biemiller, Sept. 23, 2012). The trustees and the college continued to operate in financial distress. In an effort to boost enrollment, and the flat-lining operating budget, Wilson

College began a commuter continuing studies program in 1982 that offered adults (both male and female) the opportunity to further their education and complete their degrees, and in 1996 was one of the first schools to offer single mothers with children an on-campus, residential education ("History and Tradition," 2013). Still, the college continued to struggle financially.

In 2010, the College embarked on a strategic plan that school officials hoped would pave the way to a resolution of the ongoing financial crisis. The plan called for a 1,000-student enrollment goal in order to allow the college to balance the budget. However, a consultant hired in 2012 suggested that if the college hoped to meet expenses, it would need to achieve overall enrollment of at least 1,325 (Biemiller, Sept. 23, 2012). Despite adding new programs and continuing to provide substantial coursework in equestrian studies, certainly a niche area, Wilson College started the 2012-2013 academic year with only 316 undergraduate women and 379 men and women in the adult continuing studies program (Biemiller, Jan. 13, 2013).

Financially, the College operated with budget deficits for three of the past four years, and as of the 2012-2013 school year also carried $31 million in debt. The school deferred nearly $10 million in needed physical maintenance on campus, including closing the library two years ago due to a failing floor, and must begin making payments on a multi-million dollar bond in 2018 (Biemiller, Sept. 23, 2012; Mistick, 2012). Thus, Wilson College found itself at the breaking point in a 40-year financial crisis.

The College made attempts prior to 2011 to turn the situation around which resulted in the aforementioned strategic plan and the hiring of strategic consultants. In addition, Wilson College conducted surveys of students to better understand where

perceived gaps existed in their current programs. Survey results indicated that only two percent of college-bound women would consider applying to a women's college, potential students looked at academic programs first and considered campus lifestyle second, and the current students were less academically engaged than the average Pennsylvania student and also had greater financial needs. Additional results of the survey found that student on-campus housing at Wilson fared worse in ratings than every other competitor of the school and current students would have preferred attending a college with a larger enrollment (2,000 to 10,000) than Wilson in a city larger than Chambersburg, Pennsylvania (Biemiller, Sept. 23, 2012; Mistick, 2012). Perhaps most intriguing, however, was the finding that each year's applicant base typically had only one daughter of an alumna in its mix (Biemiller, Feb. 4, 2013), suggesting that the Wilson tradition has not been passed down within families of attendees.

The College took two key steps on its current path to crisis mitigation. First, the Board of Trustees hired Barbara Mistick as the College's new president in 2011, asking her to assume the role of an "agent for change" for the institution (Biemiller, Sept. 23, 2012). Mistick, in turn, created The Commission on Shaping the Future of Wilson College, a 23-member committee comprised of College trustees, alumnae, faculty, staff and student members ("Positioning Wilson to Thrive…," 2013). Through months of fact finding research, town hall meetings and dialog, the Commission made five recommendations to Mistick for advancement to the trustees focusing on the areas of pricing and value, academic programs, infrastructure, marketing and coeducation (Mistick, 2012). Promoted as the Wilson Today Plan, the trustees voted to approve the recommendations in January, 2013 ("Wilson College Board…," 2013). While not

without its bumps along the process, the College has attested that the Wilson Today Plan will deliver measurable results and ensure Wilson College a stronger financial future.

Post-Crisis Stage

This case represented a crisis that was still ongoing at the time that this study was completed. While Wilson College created a recovery plan, and had begun enacting critical steps from that plan, the college had not yet moved beyond the crisis. Therefore, the post-crisis stage was unable to be documented.

Case 1 - Data Analysis & Findings

The study of the Wilson College case focused on the collection of three main types of data, namely a personal interview with the president of the College, print news coverage at the local and national level about the crisis in particular and the organization in general, and organizational documentation in the form of newsletters, press releases, op-ed pieces and website updates.

The data analysis process was a mix of both concept-driven and data-driven approaches (Schreier, 2012) aimed at understanding how the issue of organizational renewal is encouraged through the discourse of renewal in post-crisis communications. The initial main categories of the coding frame were concept-driven and based on the four main theoretical foundations of the discourse of renewal, namely provisional, prospective, optimistic and leader-based messages (Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow, 2007). The coding frame's sub-categories were data-driven and largely based on the actual material collected. The addition of a fifth message category, transparency, was added as a result of data-driven findings during analysis. Five main findings emerged from this case study.

1. President Mistick did not deliver provisional messages.

2. President Mistick delivered prospective messages.

3. President Mistick delivered optimistic messages.

4. President Mistick delivered leader-based messages.

5. President Mistick delivered transparent messages.

What follows is an in-depth discussion of the findings with further details to support and explain each finding.

Finding 1: President Mistick Did Not Deliver Provisional Messages. The first two research questions sought to determine to what extent the organization's leader delivered provisional, spontaneous, unrehearsed messages to stakeholders and the response to those messages on the part of the organization's board or advisors. The initial finding to this case was that Wilson College's president, Barbara Mistick, did not engage in provisional messaging throughout her crisis and post-crisis communications. President Mistick spoke of her approach to communications with stakeholders in the following way:

> I believe in preparation, so I always have a prepared message, but I always allow
>
> people to ask questions and there are always things that I respond to that are off
>
> the cuff, so to speak, or in response to questions. (Mistick, personal interview,
>
> July 10, 2013)

This finding is highly significant as theorists Seeger, Sellnow and Ulmer contend that discourse of renewal originates from a spontaneous, natural response to an immediate crisis situation (Ulmer, Seeger and Sellnow, 2007). Mistick herself contended that her responses were neither spontaneous nor provisional.

However, the crisis in this case represented one that had been ongoing for a number of decades and therefore did not constitute an "immediate" crisis. It is possible that a smoldering crisis response, such as the one presented in the Wilson College case, presents less need for immediate, spontaneous reactionary messages and requires more thoughtful, pre-planned responses to the situation, as suggested by Mistick's comment.

Furthermore, even though Mistick was charged as a "change agent," it was necessary for her to work in concert with the organization's trustees to ensure proper support for any messages or plans that were presented to the stakeholders. As Mistick explained:

> The Commission put together a report. I worked to integrate the things that are in the report; and then from there we really rebranded the primary outcomes of the commission work that were approved by the board into a plan called Wilson Today. (Mistick, personal interview, July 10, 2013)

Because she was accountable to a board of trustees, it was likely best for the crisis response process, and in Mistick's personal best interest, to work in concert with the Commission and trustees to ensure stakeholder buy-in with the process and to spread responsibility for the decisions to those in authority. It is this responsibility to a higher authority that Ulmer, Seeger and Sellnow (2007) suggest make discourse of renewal more applicable to cases where the organizational leader is more autonomous and able to make snap, immediate decisions. In Ulmer, Seeger and Sellnow's view, private, leader-run organizations that do not have stockholders or boards of advisors, present an environment where the leader has the freedom and authority to make provisional messages about important organizational decisions. President Mistick was not operating

in that kind of an autonomous environment and, subsequently, did not engage in provisional messaging.

Finding 2: President Mistick Delivered Prospective Messages. Both the third and fourth research questions focused on determining if the organization's crisis messages were prospective in nature. The third research question asked how the leader's discourse took a prospective stance, focusing the stakeholders' energies in a positive, forward-moving direction as opposed to reflecting backward at whom was to blame. The fourth research question asked how the leader established a vision for the future and on what that vision was based. The second finding in this case is that President Mistick delivered messages that were often prospective in nature.

A number of Mistick's messages point to this forward-focused direction in answering the third research question, including the following: "We really need to get to a sustainable financial model without losing who we are, without losing our legacy and traditions" (quoted in Biemiller, Sept. 23, 2012), and "Regardless of which recommendations the board approves, Wilson will evolve again. But what will not change is a continued mission to educate and prepare all our students for success, personal and professional" (Mistick, 2012).

It appeared that in these two passages, presented above, President Mistick was preparing the College's stakeholders for necessary changes that were inevitable in order for the organization to move forward into a more secure future. At the same time, Mistick was reassuring the College community that while change was on the horizon, the school's legacy would continue as would a commitment to the success of all students (potentially implying both females and males inclusively).

In a third passage presented, President Mistick suggested to a reporter for *The Chronicle of Higher Education* that any plausible solution to the financial crisis would be considered at this point: "She (Mistick) said from the start that everything was on the table…" (Biemiller, Feb. 4, 2013).

This simple statement likely encouraged the College's stakeholders to engage in open dialogue about the potential solutions to problems, framing the situation in a forward-moving direction as opposed to dwelling on the problems that led up to this point in the process. This openness even applied to what stakeholders referred to as "our four-letter word," as Mistick explained:

> So, I wanted to make sure that we, that those things were on the table. And that was just hard to get people, in the beginning; it was just about really having people understand that everything had to be on the table. We talked about that for a long time. And I think, I remember when I first came here, people wouldn't say coeducation to me except behind a closed door. And they'd say, 'our four-letter word is boys,' or 'our four-letter word is male.'… But everybody was, you know, reluctant to bring it up to talk about it. And, so, you can't really examine something until you can at least say it out loud. (Mistick, personal interview, July 10, 2013)

The preceding passage points to the magnitude of a topic that, at the point of Mistick's arrival, would only be whispered behind closed doors: coeducation. By encouraging even this verboten topic be put on the table for discussion, and voiced in open forums, Mistick's messages appeared to further push the stakeholders' energies in a forward moving direction.

From the standpoint of the discourse of renewal, Mistick's forward-focused messages alluded to what made this crisis approach so effective: the messages garnered the support of stakeholders and gave these groups a vision to follow in order to move beyond the crisis (Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger, 2011).

Several messages aided in answering the fourth research question regarding how the leader established a vision for the future and the basis for that vision, including the following:

So our key message has really been that we want to be a thriving institution. We don't want to just be a surviving institution; we want to be a thriving institution. And different people can define thriving in a different way, but people do have a sense of what thriving means. (Mistick, personal interview, July 10, 2013)

Even before a formal recovery plan was in place, President Mistick and the College leadership helped to shape the vision of what Wilson College could be by framing the message in a prospective stance: that of a thriving institution, rather than a floundering one. After repeated delivery from Mistick, that mantra spread among the stakeholders:

I constantly get feedback from alums or from other people who say, 'we want to be a thriving institution.' They've heard me talk about that. I've talked about that with the same words, defined it the same way for two full years, and now I see many people come back to me and say, 'we want to be a thriving institution.' And those who might be opposed to some of the changes that are coming about understand that we fiscally need to do this to be an institution that's not struggling but that is thriving. (Mistick, personal interview, July 10, 2013)

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President Mistick further suggested that engaging the stakeholders in the recovery process and encouraging open discussion about potential solutions that would shape the vision for the College's future helped transform the entire process:

> So, it's one thing for the administration to say these are the changes that we're considering and this is why, and it's a whole other thing when people within the community talk about them. Because, I think it really does help the rest of the community work through it when it is on that kind of peer-to-peer level. (Mistick, personal interview, July 10, 2013)

To be clear, however, there was pushback from some alumnae and student groups to the vision that emerged from the Commission, specifically over the move to become a coeducational institution. However, as President Mistick explained, even that experience was a learning opportunity for all involved, further supporting the vision of Wilson:

> One of the student speakers at commencement talked about how we were part of this whole process last year, and we learned a lot about how we can contribute, but also how to deal with decisions once decisions are made… I think it's a great learning experience. What a great thing to learn in a college environment. One of the things that I think we take pride in is making sure our students respect others' opinions. And so, by finding a way to come back to consensus too. So, it was a great learning experience for everybody. (Mistick, personal interview, July 10, 2013)

The Commission's recommendations, later approved by the Board of Trustees, involved the following key points, as reported in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*:

- "Admitting men to the college's traditional undergraduate program

- Adding new academic programs in disciplines for which the college foresees demand, including health sciences

- Reducing the sticker price for tuition and creating a program under which the college would buy back a portion of loans taken out by students who completed their studies

- Improving the college's facilities" (Biemiller, Dec. 3, 2012).

Thus, the new vision for Wilson College was formalized and announced, beginning a recovery process that would likely take years to realize. In a statement released by Wilson College, Board Chairman John Gibb said:

> The Wilson College Board of Trustees has acted to ensure the financial well-being of the institution… Our decision will enable the college to thrive… I am confident that with the transformational measures approved today, we have taken an important step toward Wilson's fiscal sustainability and ensuring a vibrant academic institution. ("Wilson College Board," 2013)

Again, we see emphasis on the notion of "thriving" that President Mistick discussed earlier. In this respect, the theme of thriving enveloped the entire crisis response. From the early messages that set the stage for the vision to the final unveiling of the plan, the image of a thriving institution remained a constant in the crisis messaging.

Still, establishing a vision and maintaining the path to achieving that vision are two separate issues. A key theme that emerged was the need to respect and adhere to decisions once they were made. As President Mistick explained:

In many ways, you need to be able to make a collective decision and then everybody come together and move on. And that's really hard in a group that's that big. And it's hard in a group that really wants to honor each other's opinions. And in this particular case, we couldn't really… everybody can't win. (Mistick, personal interview, July 10, 2013)

…We really had to acknowledge that we had to stick to the decisions that we made. And I think that's not an easy… that's not easy to do that for an organization where the governance really requires multiple constituencies to hang together, because people are trying to pull apart any one of those constituencies. So, that's really, it's messy. (Mistick, personal interview, July 10, 2013)

President Mistick's comments highlighted a key challenge in group-decision making, that of getting everyone on the same page and moving in the same direction. Ulmer, Seeger and Sellnow (2007) suggest that it is this very challenge of consensus that makes the discourse of renewal more practical in private, owner-led organizations that do not require stakeholder buy-in. However, as we saw in Wilson College's example, the group decision-making model provided some difficulty but did not derail the overall decision process in crafting and implementing the new vision for the school.

A final piece of supporting evidence in answering the fourth research question suggested that deadlines became a critical factor in helping the stakeholders support and enact the vision established by the leadership. As Mistick explained, "I think the next part is to really create deadlines. I think this is really critically important and I think my faculty and staff would tell you that really made a difference" (Mistick, personal interview, July 10, 2013).

Mistick continued, saying:

> There are other people who would tell you that they really hated me for sticking
> to the deadlines. People don't like to be held accountable to a deadline - they
> really don't. But, folks around here knew that we hadn't really come up with a
> plan in the past, and knew that we would have to talk and talk and talk more, and
> talk again. But, what we had here in the commission process, I set deadlines up,
> and every single deadline I set up, people tried to move. And every single one, I
> had to say, 'nope, you can't move it, this has to happen for this reason.' (Mistick,
> personal interview, July 10, 2013)

In this example, it appeared that setting and meeting deadlines aided in moving
the recovery process forward for Wilson College by ensuring that certain benchmarks
were met at various stages along the process. These incremental milestones seemed to
help make a very large and cumbersome process more manageable and realistic for the
stakeholders, thereby assisting the leadership's goal of moving the organization toward
the established vision.

As evidenced in the preceding discussion, numerous messages and actions on the
part of the Wilson leadership supported the prospective nature of discourse of renewal,
including statements suggesting that every suggestion was on the table, engaging
stakeholders in the recovery process and encouraging open discussion, emphasis on
respect and adhere to decisions once they were made, and setting and adhering to
deadlines along the recovery process.

Finding 3: President Mistick Delivered Optimistic Messages. The next three
research questions addressed the discourse of renewal message characteristic of

optimism. The fifth research question asked how the leader's messages instilled a sense of optimism in the stakeholders and how soon after the crisis that optimism emerged. The sixth question asked how the leader's messages impacted the sense of security among the stakeholders during and after the crisis. Finally, the seventh question asked if positive outcomes emerged as a result of the crisis, and if so, what they were. Considering the evidence in its entirety, the third finding in this case is that President Mistick delivered optimistic messages.

Several sources of evidence suggested that Mistick and the board leadership expressed optimism in their messages throughout the crisis and recovery, including these two statements: "I [Mistick] am confident that this plan is the right mix of initiatives to help Wilson grow and remain a vibrant institution that will not only provide students with a high-quality education, but also benefit the entire community" ("Wilson College Board," 2013), and "Wilson College and its Board of Trustees have set in motion a transformative plan that will best position the College to remain a vibrant, rigorous academic institution" ("Wilson Today," 2013).

In both messages, the words "grow," "transformative," and "remain a vibrant institution" were used in describing the new vision of Wilson College. These were positive words with promising connotations that framed the process in an overall optimistic light and reflected back to the establishment of the recovery plan. It appeared that even just having the plan helped lead to optimism among stakeholders. As President Mistick explained, "So, we have very specific, solid methods to try to get to our goals. I think that's what really excited people, as they see these as really having the potential to get us to where we want to be" (Mistick, personal interview, July 10, 2013).

Recall from the case background that while the College had no shortage of ideas for what the school could be, there had never been a concrete plan in place for achieving those goals prior to this recovery process. Having such a plan would have likely influenced the optimism held by stakeholders.

For some stakeholders, however, it appeared that an optimistic attitude toward the crisis recovery came with the initial hiring of President Mistick in 2011 as evidenced in the following stakeholder comments:

> Ms. Mistick was picked, he says, because 'we were looking for someone who could be an agent for change as well as someone who could reach out and have the confidence of the faculty and the staff.' - 2012 Board of Trustees Chair John Gibb (quoted in Biemiller, Sept. 23, 2012)

> We have certainly been successful in finding a person with the skills to meet that challenge in Barbara Mistick… We are certain that Barbara will build on Wilson's many strengths and engage our community in exciting new efforts… - 2011 Board of Trustees Chair Trudi Blair (quoted in Mentzer, March 1, 2011)

For other organizational stakeholders, it seemed that it was Mistick's creation of the Commission on Shaping the Future of Wilson that encouraged optimism among them. From the commission's composition of representatives of each of the key stakeholder groups, to its open, transparent process, numerous stakeholders seemed to frame the process in an optimistic light. As Mary Ann Naso, Wilson College's VP for enrollment commented, "This whole commission concept has really energized me" (quoted in Biemiller, Sept. 23, 2012). Board of Trustees 2012 Chair John Gibb mentioned, "A

process like this, I think, invigorates an institution and leads to greater commitment by the faculty and staff" (quoted in Biemiller, Sept. 23, 2012).

Even faculty members felt invigorated, as evidenced in these two passages:

> The subcommittee's enthusiasm for its work follows years in which many professors felt powerless… The faculty had a sense of frustration. Inertia just sort of sapped morale. You live in a culture of austerity only so long before you adjust to it. - Assoc. Prof. Michael Cornelius (quoted in Biemiller, Sept. 23, 2012)

> Being a member of the President's Commission on the Future of Wilson, we will be able to survive. We will work with everybody on this campus and we will survive. We're looking forward to a much stronger campus and college. - Assoc. Prof. Freya Burnett (quoted in Hall, nd.)

The sentiments expressed in the preceding comments appeared to point to a new sense of optimism surrounding the Commission and its work among stakeholders that replaced a prior sense of despair. Words such as "energized," "invigorates," "enthusiasm," and "looking forward," all suggested that a hopeful, revitalized spirit had spread to the College's stakeholders and encouraged them to be optimistic in the unfolding recovery process. As further observed in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*:

> Indeed, the recommendations have united almost all of the faculty behind Ms. Mistick, who got a standing ovation at a faculty meeting in December - an event that several professors said was unusual in light of the faculty's history of tense relations with Ms. Mistick's predecessor. (Biemiller, Feb. 4, 2013)

The stakeholders' sense of security, as addressed in the sixth research question, appeared to be impacted by the leadership's messages in several ways, namely open and honest communication, having a recovery plan and adherence to deadlines.

Regardless of how difficult it may have been for stakeholders to hear, President Mistick suggested that being open and honest about the situation increased stakeholders' sense of security by aiding in their understanding of the gravity of the circumstances, why the new vision was needed, and how it could help alleviate the crisis. Prior to Mistick's appointment, Wilson College's worsening financial situation was largely hidden from alumnae (Biemiller, Feb. 4, 2013). For Mistick, it appeared that transparency was the first step in helping stakeholders make sense of the situation:

> Even if we all want to hear the hopeful message, and we all want to hear the good news, we all in our hearts, you know, know when things aren't entirely, when we need to make some changes. We know when things aren't rosy, when they're not perfect. And so, um, if the leader just gives you those positive messages, you might let other feelings sort of stay in the subconscious. But if your leader is really forthright with you, I think it helps you deal with why you need to change in some ways. So, um, I think that was helpful here in bringing our community together. (Mistick, personal interview, July 10, 2013)

It is probable that having "everything on the table," as suggested earlier, helped to foster the open, frank discussions that were needed among Wilson's stakeholders. This candor on the part of President Mistick, regarding both the positive and negative aspects of the crisis, likely demonstrated a commitment to the stakeholders and further articulated the need for inclusion in the overall recovery process.

As President Mistick suggested, formalizing a solid recovery plan after so many years of struggling to move beyond the difficult financial situation was another key step in bolstering the sense of security among the College's stakeholders:

We had a desire to be bigger, but we really didn't have a plan for how to be bigger. And now we have a very solid plan. People know how we are approaching getting there. They know that we have pretty much the same targets that we've talked about before, but now we have a way of tracking our progress and we have a methodology, a plan for how to get there. You know, we had a strategic plan that we wanted to get to 1,000 students, but it didn't say how we were going to get there. (Mistick, personal interview, July 10, 2013)

Having a plan for moving the organization beyond the crisis likely demonstrated to stakeholders that recovery, and ultimately renewal of the organization, was now possible. Rather than hoping for the crisis situation to improve, a clearly defined plan would have the potential to give stakeholders a sense of security, ultimately increasing their sense of optimism in the organization.

Interestingly, according to President Mistick, it was the firm adherence to deadlines that perhaps had the biggest impact on stakeholders' sense of security:

I'd also go to meetings where people would say, 'oh my goodness, it's in the *Chronicle,* it's in the local paper, people in my church, at the local grocery store are saying are you going to have a job next year at your institution?' And if people let that anxiety to set in to your workforce, to your faculty, your staff, then you'll lose people. I don't want to lose people that are here… If you don't set a deadline and you don't get to finish it, then that anxiety takes over. And, as it was,

it was hard for everybody here to deal with that anxiety. It is messy and it's

uncomfortable and unpleasant, but, you know, we had to do something. But, at

least having a deadline, people knew that the decision was going to be made at a

certain point. (Mistick, personal interview, July 10, 2013)

One of the greatest impacts on a person's sense of security is perhaps the amount

of uncertainty and ambiguity surrounding a given situation. In a smoldering crisis

situation, such as exemplified in the Wilson College case, uncertainty and ambiguity are

likely high among stakeholders, potentially increasing the crisis threat for the

organization from within by decreasing the individual's overall sense of security in the

situation. President Mistick suggested, however, that the imposition of defined,

incremental deadlines in the recovery process aided in keeping the stakeholders together

by presenting clear benchmarks in the decision process. These deadlines potentially

reduced uncertainty and ambiguity in the crisis resolution process, further bolstering the

collective sense of security among stakeholders.

The seventh research question asked if positive outcomes emerged as a result of

the crisis, and what they may have been. As is the case in so many crises situations,

President Mistick suggested that one of the greatest outcomes of Wilson College's

situation was that there was a new closeness among the stakeholders because they had

weathered the crisis together:

You know, I think that we've all been through it together. When you go through

a crisis together, you do get to be closer, and it's great to tap into that. There is

a sense of family and community in a small community like this. Tapping in to

that sense of family will help us get through the beginning parts of this and the

implementation. (Mistick, personal interview, July 10, 2013)

The preceding statement pointed to the notion that collectively sharing this

common experience, a difficult experience, brought the organizational members together

and created a more familial bond among them. That bond, Mistick proposed, would serve

as a positive base for the stakeholders moving forward through the realization of the

recovery plan.

Another positive outcome from the Wilson College crisis was the stakeholders'

sense of the role that every individual could play in the recovery process:

So, I think that all of those possibilities are there because people will see that

they have a role in it. They'll see that they are critical to making it work, whether

you are a housekeeper or the grounds crew or a faculty member, you all have a

role, everybody's got a role and sort of this say in the future of the institution.

(Mistick, personal interview, July 10, 2013)

This passage made a powerful statement regarding both the opportunity and the

responsibility for wide-scale involvement on the part of the stakeholders in shaping the

future of their own organization. It would appear that there could be no greater positive

outcome for a crisis situation than placing the future success of the organization in the

collective hands of its stakeholders.

Finding 4: President Mistick Delivered Leader-Based Messages. The final two

research questions focused on the impact of both personal and organizational values on

the leader's messages. Question eight inquired as to the means by which the leader's

messages were reflective of their personal core values and beliefs as opposed to simply

mirroring the organization's values, while question nine sought to illicit the organizational factors that aided the leader in their messaging. The fourth finding from both of these questions suggested that messages delivered by President Mistick were, in fact, leader-based and set the tone for the organization's crisis response actions.

Two of the key personal values that President Mistick espoused throughout the crisis recovery process included the need to be firm in decision-making as well as the need to be optimistic about the plan, even in the face of anxiety among stakeholders. As Mistick explained:

> You have to keep some perspective on things. And you have to be firm. You've got to let it not get you down, and you've got to be firm. You have to be firm that we made the right decisions for the right reasons; we know this is going to work out. And they need to constantly hear that from you as the leader. They needed to hear that from me, over and over and over and over again. And I did it in town halls I can't tell you how many times. I've done it for the faculty. If you don't do it like every week, then they start getting nervous. So, then you've got to go back and do it again. (Mistick, personal interview, July 10, 2013)

Another key value that this preceding passage pointed to was Mistick's patience in repeatedly delivering the same message to stakeholders. She appeared to recognize the need to be repetitive in her messaging and also demonstrated a willingness to do so. This patience that Mistick exhibited in delivering the same message over and over again likely aided in enhancing the consistency of the message and further helped to reinforce the necessary course of action for the recovery process.

There were several instances where President Mistick's personal beliefs and values were often in line with the organization's values, and other points where the two potentially differed, as evidenced in the following:

Certainly you bring your personal values to any position, and I want to see the institution be a thriving institution too. I certainly saw the capacity for the institution to do that. I saw that it was an institution that wanted to survive. I think at that particular point, personal values and my own personal beliefs sort of meshed together with the institution. Where they differ is that… is that's an overriding concern for me - that the institution survive a long time and be in a position to thrive, not just during my tenure here but when I'm gone and the next person is sitting in this seat. Some of the folks that really would like to have seen us stay a single-sex institution, I think, could have cared less about that. They were much more concerned just about that mission part. And, for me, that would not have been a successful outcome. (Mistick, personal interview, July 10, 2013)

In this passage, Mistick suggested that she would not allow the organization's value of being a single-sex educational institution supersede her own belief as to the necessary path to success for the institution, that of changing over to a coeducational school. President Mistick would have rather seen the school thrive as a result of transformational changes to its original vision, than remain true to an outdated mission and die. These statements suggested that Mistick's own personal values potentially had a great impact on setting the tone for the recovery, and ultimately, shaping the future of Wilson College.

The final research question asked about the organizational factors that may have aided the leader in the creation of their messages. One such factor that undoubtedly shaped Mistick's approach was the governance structure of the College:

And you really do have to have a partnership with the trustees. You really have to have a partnership; you can't do this alone. Absolutely can't do this alone. If your belief was really strong and their belief was that strong, then I don't think it would succeed. It's almost impossible to have a unanimous opinion with changes this significant. (Mistick, personal interview, July 10, 2013)

The fact that Wilson College operated with a shared board governance structure appeared to have led President Mistick to seek consensus among the trustees and work jointly as partners in the crisis recovery process. This passage pointed to the notion that while personal values and beliefs certainly played a critical role in shaping Mistick's messages, she also recognized the need to work in concert with the board and collectively resolve the crisis situation.

President Mistick further suggested that an additional organizational factor that helped shape her messages and overall crisis approach was the environment in which Wilson College existed:

I recognized that it was a small community and that we were going to need to really have a transparent process if we were going to bring people along. Um, I think that really helped. It helped to develop trust with the community early on. And I think from the moment I came here, I was very open about the challenges that were here, very open about the good things that are here as well. (Mistick, personal interview, July 10, 2013)

President Mistick was also quoted in a comment about the organizational environment in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, saying:

'I had an idea about the kind of process that I wanted. I had talked to a number of schools that had had significant change. Some had done it with an executive committee behind closed doors.' At Wilson, she [Mistick] thought, that wouldn't work, not after devoted alumnae had already saved the place once. (quoted in Biemiller, Sept. 23, 2012)

These passages suggested two important organizational factors that further influenced President Mistick: the small, close-knit community that surrounded the College and the active and involved stakeholders that supported Wilson. Both of those factors appeared to lead Mistick to choose an open and transparent process by which to handle the crisis recovery. This approach, perhaps, was the most appropriate in honoring the commitment to the school that had already been made on the part of the stakeholders while at the same time building trust among the stakeholders. It is this transparent approach that led to the fifth finding of the case.

Finding 5: President Mistick Delivered Transparent Messages. The fifth finding in this case recognized an emergent theme that became evident during data analysis, that of transparency. While not specifically articulated as one of the four original characteristics of discourse of renewal, the category of transparency was added to the coding framework during data analysis as a data-driven approach in response to material collected in the case (Schreier, 2012). The data was organized into one of three subcategories: transparent handling of the crisis and/or recovery process, transparent messages, and stakeholder response to transparency.

The category of transparency represents openness with stakeholders in regard to what is happening in the crisis situation, including stakeholders in the recovery process and delivering messages that are clear and forthright. It appeared that the Wilson College leadership in general, and President Mistick specifically, approached the entire crisis recovery with keen attention to transparency, even inviting the press to observe the process. As reporter Lawrence Biemiller observed, "In an unusually public process, Wilson's administrators and trustees have tried to make a solid data-driven case for changes they say are absolutely essential to the college's fiscal future" (Biemiller, Feb. 4, 2013), and "What else is unusual is the openness that Ms. Mistick and the trustees have encouraged - even inviting *The Chronicle* to follow the discussion and talk with anyone involved" (Biemiller, Sept. 23, 2012).

Both of these statements came from a reporter with *The Chronicle of Higher Education* who was granted broad access to the College's faculty, staff, students and trustees over a six-month period to record and report on the process that Wilson was working through with their crisis recovery. Admittedly, this was a bold move on President Mistick's part as this kind of access had the potential to show the flaws in the process as well as the strengths:

> I think what's really important is that you've got to keep the dialog going. You can't shut down. I think there is a question of transparency; it's one thing that really inhibits change. There is a positive position that everything is wonderful here and come and be a part of a perfect institution in a perfect world. And most places are not, but it's hard to see your flaws in public. (Mistick, personal interview, July 10, 2013)

Mistick's stance was that a lack of transparency inhibits change. While it may be human nature to tuck the unpleasant aspects of a situation into a dark corner, Mistick appeared to embrace transparency by bringing all issues out into the light and opening up the dialog about the process as well as the crisis situation. Recall from the earlier discussion on establishing a vision for Wilson that Mistick did not shy away from discussing the gravity of the crisis situation with stakeholders, including the declining enrollment, budget deficits, deferred physical maintenance and the bond issue. This frank, honest approach appeared to aid Mistick in establishing a standard of transparency that carried over to all aspects of the recovery process.

In addition, Mistick and the leadership sought to be inclusive in the decision-making process by reaching out to students and even alumnae who may have been unable to attend meetings on campus. As reporter Lawrence Biemiller observed:

> The debate over coeducation had been building for several months, online as well as in a series of open meetings scheduled by the commission to keep the college community apprised of its progress and to solicit suggestions. As laid out by Ms. Mistick, the commission process was meant not only to take advantage of many of Wilson's best minds but also to bring alumnae and students along for what were clearly going to be tough decisions…. In meetings that were streamed online for Wilson alumnae who couldn't make it to Chambersburg, commission members outlined the challenges Wilson faces (Biemiller, Feb. 4, 2013)

These passages further helped to demonstrate the College's desire for transparency in the handling of the crisis recovery process, again pointing to the establishment of the Commission as another piece of the process. Mistick recognized that

involving stakeholders in the discussion was the only way to proceed with the recovery, even if that meant airing disagreements: "I think we gave everyone an opportunity to be engaged… though I know some may not like the outcome. This is really about all of us, and there's going to be some noise about that" (quoted in Biemiller, Feb. 4, 2013). Furthermore, Mistick mentioned, "I'm happy when there is good conversation and dialogue and questions. That allows people to come along on the journey with you" (quoted in Biemiller, Sept. 23, 2013).

As evidenced above, transparency in messaging applied not just to the leadership in this case, but also to the stakeholders. Open dialogue and discussion seemed to be the standard by which the process evolved, and the stakeholders appeared to respond favorably to that openness:

> 'Everybody got to feel that their voices counted,' says Mr. Gibb, 'and faculty and staff members made it clear how much they liked that approach.' - 2012 Board of Trustees Chair John Gibb (Biemiller, Sept. 23, 2012)
>
> There was more transparency and clarity about the state of the college during the commission process than during the entire decade preceding. - Assoc. Prof. Larry Shillock (Biemiller, Feb. 4, 2013)

Case 1: Summary of Findings

The Wilson College case represented a small, private institution that faced a smoldering financial crisis that grew over a 40-year period. The leadership's messages met three of the four message characteristics postulated by Ulmer, Seeger and Sellnow's discourse of renewal (2007), specifically prospective, optimistic and leader-based. The fourth message characteristic, provisional, was not met. Additionally, a fifth

characteristic, transparency, was added to the initial theoretical framework as a result of data analysis in this case.

Clearly, Wilson College continues to work through a recovery process that could take years to fully achieve. The transformative changes outlined in the college's renewal plan will likely be implemented incrementally to allow for adjustments in operations, logistics and management practices. For example, while the College began admitting men into the traditional undergraduate program in Fall 2013, on-campus housing will not be offered to male students until Fall 2014 at the earliest in order to allow the College to make changes to the current housing arrangements.

As evidenced in Table 4, overall enrollment numbers have continued to decline at Wilson College. However, there exist a few bright spots that require further explanation. The combined first year/new undergraduate traditional student numbers have increased steadily since 2011, albeit slightly. In addition, the Fall 2013 first year/new undergraduate totals included the addition of three male students to the traditional undergraduate ranks, a first for the college. Furthermore, while the total College headcount continued to decline over the past four academic years, the decline slowed to 4.8% from Fall 2012 to Fall 2013, the smallest annual decline noted since 2010.

Table 4

*Wilson College Enrollment Summary**

	Fall 2010	Fall 2011	Fall 2012	Fall 2013
Traditional Undergraduates	317	322	316	308
First Year/New Undergraduate Students	127	92	96	100**
Total College Headcount	796	746	695	662

Note. *Summary statistics provided by Regina Parson, administrative assistant to President Mistick, on 9/20/13. **Includes 3 male students.

This case placed a great deal of emphasis on organizational renewal as a means for overcoming crisis. As President Mistick attested, there existed a strong need for the organization to undergo a strategic, transformative process in order to surmount the financial crisis that had been going on for so long at Wilson College. However, that transformative process did not occur without some hurdles along the way in the form of protests and petitions on the part of some students and alumnae. Still, from a macro view of the crisis development, prospective visioning, optimism, strong leadership and transparency all played a critical role in helping the college embark on a recovery process that has yet to be fully realized.

Case 2: Western Carolina University - Residence Hall Fires

Western Carolina University is a mid-sized, coeducational, public university located in the town of Cullowhee, North Carolina, roughly fifty miles west of Asheville ("Fast Facts," 2013). Originally founded in 1889 as a semi-public secondary school, it was later chartered by the state legislature as a four-year teachers' college in 1929, and finally adopted the current name of Western Carolina University in 1953 ("Heritage and

History," 2013). There are currently just over 9,500 students enrolled at the 600-acre

campus, which includes 13 residence halls ("Fast Facts," 2013).

Pre-Crisis Stage

In the fall of 2003, Western Carolina University students had likely settled in to

the routine of a new school year and a new semester by the time October had arrived.

That routine was disrupted, however, in the early morning hours of Tuesday, October 28

when a fire broke out in the fifth floor bathroom of one of the residence halls on campus,

Scott Hall ("University Response," 2003). At the time, Scott Hall housed 680 students,

all of who were evacuated that morning in their pajamas when fire alarms woke them and

alerted them of the danger (Farmer and Tvedt, 2005). After a resident assistant

extinguished the fire, local fire officials and campus police determined that a plastic

trashcan and several rolls of toilet paper in the bathroom stalls were purposely set ablaze

("University Response," 2003). The residents returned to their rooms, attributing the

incident as an annoying college prank and nothing more (Farmer and Tvedt, 2005). Still,

the University took the incident seriously and called in the State Bureau of Investigation

to assist campus and local police in their investigation ("University Response, 2003).

A second fire alarm sounded in Scott Hall at nearly the same time the next

morning, on Wednesday, October 29. Once again, sleeping students were roused from

their beds and evacuated from the building. And, once again, officials determined that the

fire was contained to a burning trashcan in the same bathroom on the fifth floor of the

residence hall (Farmer and Tvedt, 2005).

Crisis Stage

After a second fire in as many days, both of similar circumstance and location, the campus was now on high alert. Campus security officials stood guard for the remainder of the night in Scott Hall to maintain the safety of the students. However, security officials were released at dawn, believing the threat was over (Farmer and Tvedt, 2005). The third fire broke out around 8:15 on the morning of Thursday, October 30, again on the fifth floor of Scott Hall. However, this time, it was a bed that was burning in the room of one of the resident assistants, the same resident assistant who reported the first bathroom fire two days prior (Farmer and Tvedt, 2005).

In what many public relations professionals would likely view as bad timing, 46 executives and reporters from the *Asheville Citizen-Times* newspaper were gathering on campus on the morning of October 30 for a briefing by University Chancellor John Bardo on the success and growth the University had been experiencing in recent years (Garbordi, 2003). Rather than cancel the meeting, however, Bardo used it as an opportunity to not only tell the story of Western Carolina University in general, but to also keep the press apprised of the crisis situation and what steps the University was taking to handle the situation and maintain the safety of the students (Farmer and Tvedt, 2005).

The ongoing investigation continued throughout the remainder of the day on October 30, and a suspect was in custody by late afternoon that same day ("Suspect has Confessed," 2003).

Post-Crisis Stage

Chancellor Bardo, already knowing that a suspect was being questioned, called a meeting of the Scott Hall residents in the late the afternoon on October 30 to brief the students on the evolving situation and reassure them that their safety was the paramount concern of the University (Farmer and Tvedt, 2005). However, the residents of Scott Hall were still understandably anxious to go to sleep on that fourth night. One student asked Bardo if he would feel safe in the Hall, and Bardo responded that he felt the situation was so safe that he and his wife would spend the night with the students in Scott Hall (Farmer and Tvedt, 2005).

Chancellor Bardo then instructed senior staff to set up a phone bank for University officials to personally reach out to the parents of each student living in Scott Hall, apprise them of the situation, and express assurance that the students' safety was their primary concern (Farmer and Tvedt, 2005).

Later that evening, the Chancellor held another briefing for the residents of Scott Hall to inform them that there was a student in custody who had confessed to setting all of the residence hall fires. Bardo made a similar announcement on the campus radio station and urged students to "get back to class and get back to normal as soon as possible" ("Suspect has Confessed," 2003). The relieved students of Scott Hall reportedly prepared a bedroom for Bardo and his wife that night, complete with a stuffed bear on the bed, and even stood guard outside the room for the night (Farmer and Tvedt, 2005).

The next day, on Friday, October 31, Bardo held the last campus-wide briefing, once again alerting students that the suspect who had confessed to the crimes was in police custody and no longer posed a threat to the campus. Bardo also sent a follow-up

email to the entire University community thanking them for their help during the crisis situation (Farmer and Tvedt, 2005).

The arsonist was resident assistant, Kelly Nicole Ritsema, the same resident assistant who made the first call to police and whose bed was set ablaze in the third fire. Ritsema was charged with "two counts of first-degree arson, two counts of first-degree burning of an educational building, one count of attempted first-degree arson and one count of attempted burning of an educational building" ("Student to be Charged," 2003). She was later convicted and received a five-year probationary sentence, which included six months of house arrest and was forced to pay restitution for damaged property to both the University and any affected students (Farmer and Tvedt, 2005). Ritsema's motives were not publically discussed or documented as part of this case.

Case 2 - Data Analysis & Findings

The analysis of the Western Carolina University case focused on the collection of three main types of data, namely a personal interview with the university's former Associate Vice Chancellor of Public Relations, print news coverage at the local level about the crisis in particular and the organization in general, a retrospective journal article about the handling of the crisis co-written by a University professor and the University's head of public relations at the time, and organizational documentation in the form of newsletters, press releases, op-ed pieces and website updates. It is important to note that former Western Carolina University Chancellor John Bardo, who led the organization at the time of the 2003 residence hall fires, declined to be interviewed for this study as he retired in 2010. However, the former head of public relations, Leila Tvedt, who worked with Chancellor Bardo during the crisis, was interviewed for the study.

The data analysis process was once again a mix of both concept-driven and data-driven approaches (Schreier, 2012) aimed at understanding how the issue of organizational renewal is encouraged through the discourse of renewal in post-crisis communications. The same coding frame that was used in the first case was also employed in this case. The initial main categories of the coding frame were concept-driven and based on the four main theoretical foundations of the discourse of renewal, namely provisional, prospective, optimistic and leader-based messages (Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow, 2007). The addition of the fifth category of transparent messages was carried over from the first case. The coding frame's sub-categories were data-driven and largely based on the actual material collected. Five main findings emerged from this case study.

1. Chancellor Bardo delivered provisional messages.

2. Chancellor Bardo delivered prospective messages.

3. Chancellor Bardo delivered optimistic messages.

4. Chancellor Bardo delivered leader-based messages.

5. Chancellor Bardo delivered transparent messages.

A comprehensive discussion of the findings with further details to support and explain each finding follows.

Finding 1: Chancellor Bardo Delivered Provisional Messages. The study's first research question asked to what extent the organizational leader's messages were provisional, meaning they provided an immediate, unrehearsed or spontaneous response to the situation. The second research question sought to understand how the organization's board of advisors responded to the leader's messages. While no data was available to directly answer the second research question, the initial finding to this case

was that Western Carolina University's chancellor, John Bardo, did engage in in provisional messaging during his crisis communications.

Recall from the earlier discussion on discourse of renewal in Chapter 2 that provisional messages constitute statements that are spontaneous in nature and represent an immediate response to a situation, as opposed to a strategically pre-planned response (Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow, 2007). As Leila Tvedt, Western Carolina University's former head of public relations, explained:

> They hadn't had a crisis communication team…they didn't have anyone who had been trained in crisis communication… Did he [Bardo] go off script? Not really, because we didn't have a script. I mean we were all kind of winging it at the time. The only time we sat down and wrote a script was when he said 'in order to reach out to the parents we need the names of every student who lives in that dorm, and then I'm going to get my chancellors together, and this is what you're going to say when you get these people on the phone.' In essence, that was the only script we had. (Tvedt, personal interview, June 19, 2013)

As is evident in this passage, there was no pre-planned message that Chancellor Bardo or the communications staff relied upon for the majority of crisis communications with stakeholders, with the exception of the script used for parental phone calls. Furthermore, as this statement highlighted, the University also had no crisis response team or plan in place at the time of the residence hall fires. Therefore, each step they took in the crisis response process was unrehearsed, spontaneous, and provisional.

A second factor that pointed to the provisional nature of Chancellor Bardo's response could be seen in his willingness to meet with the assembled press

representatives as previously planned, and included immediate responses to their questions regarding the ongoing crisis at the time. As *Asheville Citizen-Times* Editor Robert Garbordi (2003) explained:

> Bardo, however, walked into that room -- not before he spent time at the scene of the fire and talking with and helping his students, but he still came. He spoke from the heart about the students and his personal and professional relationship with them. He spoke with respect for them as young adults in the pursuit of learning. Then he answered questions in what became an impromptu press conference.

Rather than shying away from face time with the press, Chancellor Bardo appeared to embrace the meeting as an opportunity to speak spontaneously from the heart about his care and concern for his students, and openly answered questions about the ongoing crisis situation without the benefit of a crisis plan or prepared statements to rely on in his messaging.

A third piece of evidence that suggested a provisional response on the part of Chancellor Bardo was his idea to set up a phone bank to reach out to the parents of those students living in Scott Hall. In today's crisis preparedness environment, and with a crisis communications plan previously in place, this activity would be an already established bullet point in the overall crisis plan. However, ten years ago without such a plan at Western Carolina University, this was a spontaneous idea on the part of the leadership:

> The Chancellor next made an extraordinarily proactive decision. Certain that parents were worried about the safety of their children and sensing the need to reach out to parents, he instructed his senior staff to coordinate a phone bank to

contact the family members of every student living in Scott Hall that evening. Using a script prepared by OPR, a group of volunteers, including vice chancellors, deans, department heads and faculty members, spent approximately three hours calling between 500 and 600 homes. (Farmer and Tvedt, p. 30, 2005)

Finally, and perhaps the most provisional of Chancellor Bardo's actions during the three-day crisis, Bardo and his wife agreed to sleep in the Scott Hall residence hall with the students as a way of calming their fears. As Leila Tvedt explained:

And it was a wonderful moment to be there. I've had two experiences in my professional life that gave me that kind of a kick that that's the way it should be and hearing the students say, 'well if it's so safe would you spend the night there?' and there was just kind of a pause, and, 'yes, I will. My wife and I will be there tonight.' That was just exactly perfect. (Tvedt, personal interview, June 19, 2013)

This appeared to be a purely spontaneous response to an immediate challenge posed by one of the students. Bardo's reply was likely based on his own personal core values and beliefs, acting in a manner that put his stakeholders first. As Bardo himself later commented: "Anything that affects the health and welfare of one of our kids is like affecting the health and safety of one of my own kids. I reacted with the same intensity as a parent" (Farmer and Tvedt, 2005).

These two preceding passages overwhelmingly substantiated what was likely the most provisional of Chancellor Bardo's responses during the three-day crisis. However, as evidenced in this discussion, Bardo's working without a script, impromptu press

conference and phone bank creation also suggested frequent provisional responses to the University's crisis, thus supporting the first finding in this case.

Finding 2: Chancellor Bardo Delivered Prospective Messages. The study's third and fourth research questions sought to determine if the organization's messages were prospective in nature during the crisis. The third research question asked how the leaders' messages helped to focus the stakeholders' energies in a forward-moving direction, and the fourth research question asked how the leader established a vision for the future of the organization and on what it was based. The second finding in this case was that Chancellor Bardo delivered messages that were prospective in nature, meaning that they were future-oriented and sought to move the organization forward beyond the crisis.

As mentioned previously in the first finding of this case, Bardo admittedly viewed himself in a kind of parental role when interacting with students during this crisis situation (Farmer and Tvedt, 2005). Naturally, as a parent would, Bardo likely sought to provide reassurance to the student body that everything would be all right and that they would be taken care of through this difficult situation As Leila Tvedt explained:

> He [Bardo] is personally a very confident person. He knew that the campus needed reassurance. And, I think he was confident that they would get to the bottom of it… You can assure them that we're in it, that we're doing the best we can, we're gonna get to the bottom of it. (Tvedt, personal interview, June 19, 2013)

Tvedt suggested privately that Bardo was able to offer that assurance to the students because there was a sense of who was responsible for the fires among those

involved in the situation, though initially there was not enough evidence to make a case against that individual (Tvedt, personal interview, June, 19, 2013). Still, in any difficult situation, people need reassurances from an authority figure that the circumstances will be resolved and that collectively, we will all get through this; and that appeared to be the message that Bardo delivered to the impacted students.

Tvedt also stressed that the students, and the University community in general, could see that the leadership was proactively working to protect the students going forward through this crisis. Chancellor Bardo held three campus briefings for students over the three days of the crisis in an effort to keep them updated on the status of the investigation, he had heightened security for the residence hall and there was a visible police presence on campus (including campus, local and state investigators) (Farmer and Tvedt, 2005). All of these actions likely reinforced the initial message that the situation would be resolved.

An additional prospective approach utilized by Bardo was that once the crisis was over and the confessed arsonist was in custody, Bardo urged students to move forward from the incident and not dwell on what had happened. Bardo took to the airwaves over the campus radio station to deliver his message to students, saying, "get back to class and get back to normal as soon as possible. The incident is over and I don't anticipate any more like it" ("Suspect has Confessed, 2003). Bardo appeared to recognize the need to help students, and likely the entire University community, to focus their energy in a forward-looking direction and move on rather than continuing to dwell on what had happened and live in fear of it happening again. This attitude likely established a return to normalcy as the new vision for the University going forward from the crisis.

Bardo's messages in these examples were clearly prospective in that they helped move the students forward through the crisis by offering reassurances that the situation would be quickly resolved, that actions were being taken to ensure the resolution of the crisis and that eventually the campus would return to a state of normalcy, thus supporting the second finding in this case.

Finding 3: Chancellor Bardo Delivered Optimistic Messages. The next three research questions were aimed at understanding how the organizational leader conveyed a sense of optimism to the stakeholders through the crisis situation. Research question five asked how the leader's messages instilled a sense of optimism in stakeholders and when that optimism emerged. Question six asked how the leader's messages impacted the stakeholders' sense of security during and after the crisis, and question seven sought to uncover any positive outcomes that emerged as a result of the crisis. The third finding in this case was that Chancellor Bardo delivered optimistic messages during the residence hall crisis situation.

Undeniably, the most optimistic message that Bardo appeared to send to the students came when he committed not just himself, but also his wife, to spending the night in a residence hall that had had three fires in as many nights. This unprecedented response got the attention of stakeholders across campus, and even those visiting campus. As *Asheville Citizen-Times* Editor Robert Garbordi (2003) later said: "Chancellor Bardo not only 'talked the talk,' but he 'walked the walk' - amazingly, right into the dorm room to sleep for the night. It's no surprise students stood guard for him; he'd done it for them."

Bardo assured the students that they were safe and would be protected, and then he demonstrated that assurance by staying with them for the night. At that moment, it was likely that the students felt a new sense of optimism in the situation because the organizational leader would not have placed himself and his wife in harm's way without confidence in the safety of the situation.

Another optimistic approach that Bardo and his team took when communicating with the students was always stressing the importance of the students' safety in everything the University did to handle the crisis situation. Leila Tvedt explained what the crux of Bardo's message was during the crisis:

> The message was very obvious. We are concerned about the students' safety, and I guess the message was always - and Dr. Bardo was very good about hammering this home - the message was always 'the safety of our students is our paramount concern.' That was the main message… And I think people appreciated that. (Tvedt, personal interview, June 19, 2013)

While this commitment to the safety of the students may be seen as a trite response given the situation, it likely gave the students a sense of security in the midst of the crisis enabling them to take comfort in the fact that all that could be done was being done and they would be protected going forward. That reassuring message was delivered consistently to the students to ease their fears: "We are doing everything we can to find out what's going on, what happened, who did this. And we will do everything we can to keep you safe" (Tvedt, personal interview, June 19, 2013).

That message of safety and concern appeared to have impacted the students' sense of security in the situation and gave them optimism in its ultimate resolution, as

evidenced by their willingness to return to the residence hall each night. Leila Tvedt confirmed this by saying the following:

I think the best proof of that is that kids kept going back into that dormitory. As far as I know, I didn't hear of any student who was so traumatized that they decided to leave and say, 'I'm going home.' And so in that sense, yes, I would have to say that there was some confidence in the University getting to the bottom of this. (Tvedt, personal interview, June 19, 2013)

Additionally, that sense of security appeared to have spread to another stakeholder group: the parents of those students living in Scott Hall. Recall that Bardo set up a phone bank to reach out to the parents of all the affected students to inform them of the situation and assure them that their children were being taken care of. The parents reportedly took comfort in that action:

The volunteer callers reported that the parents and relatives were pleased to have been contacted, and, even though it was not clear the crisis was over, they were relieved to hear that the University was doing all it could to ensure students' safety. (Farmer and Tvedt, p. 30, 2005)

Finally, as referenced in research question seven, an optimistic stance often stresses the organizational opportunities that result from a crisis situation. In reference to outcomes from the Western Carolina University crisis, Leila Tvedt commented:

Two things, I would say one is negative. You just assume that on this beautiful, wonderful, friendly, open campus that everyone is safe and secure and sane. And the realization that, you know, there always is this sort of cloud that it could

happen. And that was the negative. The positive was that when it does, we'll all

pull together. (Tvedt, personal interview, June 19, 2013)

Tvedt frames the crisis as having both a significant negative and positive outcome

for the University, that being the realization that they were not as immune as they thought

they were to danger and threats; and yet in spite of any threats to their safety, they would

collectively come together and get through it. Some might argue that having that

heightened awareness of the reality of modern life on a college campus potentially lifted

the collective veil of naiveté and ultimately provided the campus community with a

greater awareness of their safety and security going forward. That was likely not an

entirely negative outcome for the community.

Second, as is often the case in crisis situations, the experience seemed to bring the

community closer together and gave them confidence in their ability to handle future

threats successfully. That closeness and confidence is often seen after a crisis situation, as

was suggested in the Wilson College case as well.

In summation, it appears that this case represents an emphasis on optimism in

both the messages and actions of its leader by Bardo's willingness to stay in the residence

hall, the University's continued commitment to student safety and security, the students'

willingness to return to the residence hall, and the parents reassurances and outreach from

the leadership. Combined, this evidence supported the third finding.

Finding 4: Chancellor Bardo Delivered Leader-Based Messages. The last two

research questions in this study sought to determine how the leader set the tone for the

organization in weathering the crisis by providing a course of action to follow. Research

question eight asked how the leader's messages were reflective of their own personal

core values and beliefs and question nine inquired as to the organizational factors that may have aided the leader in the creation of messages for stakeholders. The fourth finding in this case was that Chancellor Bardo's crisis messages were leader-based.

As the leader of Western Carolina University, Chancellor Bardo made it a habit to continually be out and visible among the students, faculty and staff on campus. As Leila Tvedt explained: "You know from talking with any organization that the leader sets the tone and he [Bardo] set the expectations for his vice chancellors that he would be out and about. And yes, it was part of who he was" (Tvedt, personal interview, June 19, 2013).

As this statement suggests, Bardo was already a visible leader on campus prior to the onset of the crisis situation, so it was likely not unusual or unexpected that he continue that visibility during the crisis situation. Professor Betty Farmer and Leila Tvedt (2005) confirmed this assumption with the following statement:

Chancellor Bardo arrived soon on the scene at Scott Hall [after the second fire] and talked with distraught students, individually and in groups. The Chancellor's presence had a calming influence and the students seemed reassured by his personal attention even though he could not explain what was happening or promise them that the crisis was over (p. 28).

As was evident from these passages, the tone that Bardo appeared to set (both pre-crisis and during the crisis) was one of availability, accessibility and visibility on his part. As was stated, Bardo's presence and attention had a calming effect on the students as they likely saw him as a strong and caring leader who was looking out for them, both collectively and individually.

However, Bardo's leadership style appeared to be more than just representing the position he held within the organization. For Bardo, it seemed like it was much more personal than that:

> The health and safety of everyone on this campus is my primary concern. I think of every one of the students at Western as my kid, and I worry about their well-being as if they were my own children. ("Student to be Charged," 2003)

This statement, perhaps more than any other, seems to demonstrate the depth of how Bardo's messages and actions were reflective of his own personal core values and beliefs, as opposed to merely those associated with his position in the organization. Furthermore, as Leila Tvedt suggested in a personal interview, Chancellor Bardo's willingness to speak to the gathered press representatives so openly was also reflective of his personal values and beliefs:

> Here's the thing about Bardo. He didn't do it [speak to the press] saying, 'oh good, we'll get good press and editorials saying what a great university we are.' He did it because it was the right thing to do… He knew that it was the right thing to do. (Tvedt, personal interview, June 19, 2013)

As evidenced in these two passages, Bardo's own personal convictions appeared to have a greater impact in his messages and actions during the crisis situation than any other organizational factors may have had. As such, there was no evidence to answer research question nine, as organizational factors seemed to play a lesser role in Bardo's message creation.

Finding 5: Chancellor Bardo Delivered Transparent Messages. The fifth finding in this case, transparency, was reflective of the additional category that was added

to the original coding framework as a data-driven approach in response to material collected in the cases (Schreier, 2012). The category of transparency represented openness with stakeholders in regard to what was happening in the crisis situation, including stakeholders in the recovery process and delivering messages that were clear and forthright. Chancellor Bardo's messages appear to have been transparent during this crisis.

Bardo initiated a series of three public meetings held at the center of campus over the course of the crisis as a means of keeping the stakeholders informed of the ongoing situation and reinforcing his concern and empathy for them (Farmer and Tvedt, 2005). At the conclusion of the first two meetings, a time was given as to when the next briefing would take place. Leila Tvedt provided the thinking behind this strategy of transparency by saying:

> We need to do briefings twice a day whether we have anything to say or not. And you need to inform your various audiences. It's not enough just to put out a press release and hope that it will go away. You need to reach out to your own faculty and staff. You need to reach out to students. Yes, you need to address the media, but they aren't your only distribution tool. (Tvedt, personal interview, June 19, 2013)

Personally reaching out to the stakeholders, particularly the ones most impacted by the crisis - in this case, the students - appears to lend an element of transparency to the organizational response of this crisis. Keeping the students informed of the situation as it evolved likely bolstered their sense of confidence in the leadership's ability to handle the crisis and aided in their own personal sense of security.

Additionally, it was reported that Chancellor Bardo's interactions with the students were raw and unrehearsed. Farmer and Tvedt (2005) suggested that Bardo often shared his personal frustration and anger in response to the crisis situation, as well as empathy and concern for the students. He was open and honest and "did not sugar coat the truth" (Farmer and Tvedt, p. 31, 2005). That level of transparency in his message was likely something that greatly impacted the students' view of Bardo, further endearing him to them as a kind of father figure.

A third example of transparency was seen with the initiation of the phone bank as a means of reaching out to the parents of affected students. As Farmer and Tvedt (2005) explained: "The Chancellor recognized parents as an important stakeholder and did not rely on the media and the web to provide information, but proactively provided information to them directly (Farmer and Tvedt, p. 30, 2005).

As this passage suggests, Bardo reached out again to stakeholders, this time the parents, in a gesture of transparency keeping them informed and included in the crisis response as it unfolded. It wasn't a pre-recorded phone message, an email, or a letter; it was actual people in a position of authority on campus calling parents individually to keep them in the loop of what was happening and addressing their individual questions and concerns.

A final piece of evidence of the transparent handling of this crisis could be seen with Chancellor Bardo's response to the press representatives from the *Asheville Citizen-Times*. Recall that the group was on campus for a routine briefing on the achievements of Western Carolina University, and it just so happened that their visit coincided with this three-day residence hall fire crisis. Rather than avoid discussing the "elephant in the

room" that day, Bardo addressed it outright. In fact, he started the meeting off with information about the fires and turned the encounter into an impromptu press conference (Farmer and Tvedt, 2005). As Leila Tvedt explained:

> Instead of trying to cover it up or hide it, instead of giving his 'Western's a great university,' on the second day he went in and confided in them, 'I need to tell you what's going on on campus.' And that's gutsy. (Tvedt, personal interview, June 19, 2013)

Case 2: Summary of Case Findings

This case represented a small-scale physical crisis, one involving only one floor of one building over a period of roughly three days. Still, Chancellor Bardo demonstrated the four message characteristics of discourse of renewal, and the fifth additional characteristic of transparency, even in this limited scope crisis.

Organizational renewal was not emphasized in this case because the crisis itself did not dictate a need for it. However, what this case did demonstrate was the impact that a passionate leader could have on his stakeholders when he makes their cares and concerns paramount to his own. Bardo was out among the students when they needed him most for information, reassurance, comfort and stability during this crisis example. His willingness to provide that kind of personal level of care aided the stakeholders in overcoming their own fears and instilled additional levels of trust in Bardo as their leader.

Chancellor Bardo retired from Western Carolina University in July of 2010, but not before leaving a lasting mark on the campus (Ostendorff, 2010). From his arrival in 1995 until his departure in 2010, Bardo oversaw a boost in enrollment from 6,500 students to nearly 9,500 students as well as the completion of 14 new buildings on

campus, including five additional residence halls (Studenc, 2011). Since the 2003

residence hall fire crisis, Western Carolina University has enacted a crisis management

team and holds regular crisis and disaster preparedness drills.

Case 3: Tulane University - Hurricane Katrina Disruption

Tulane University is a mid-sized, coeducational, private research university

located in the city of New Orleans, Louisiana. The institution was originally founded in

1834 as the Medical College of Louisiana and became part of the public University of

Louisiana in 1847 ("Facts," n.d.). After a sizable donation by the wealthy merchant, Paul

Tulane, in 1884, the school became a private university and changed its name to Tulane

University ("History," n.d.). Women were admitted to the University two years later in

1886 ("History," n.d.). There are currently about 13,500 total students, approximately

1,175 faculty members and roughly 3,000 staff employees, making Tulane University the

largest single employer in New Orleans ("Facts," n.d.; "About Tulane," n.d.).

Pre-Crisis Stage

Incoming freshmen eagerly arrived on the campus of Tulane University on

August 27, 2005, likely anticipating the start of their first college experience away from

home. However, that experience was short-lived as Hurricane Katrina was projected to

hit the city of New Orleans in just a few days. Tulane University President Scott Cowen

welcomed the incoming class of 2009 and then promptly instructed them to evacuate the

campus ("Katrina Remembered…Survive," n.d.). At the time, the expectation was that

the storm would be too severe for the University to remain open, but that normal

operations would resume later that week. The initial message that was sent to students,

faculty and staff was that the University would likely reopen on August 31, with classes

resuming on September 1 ("Katrina Remembered… Survive," n.d.).

Hurricane Katrina made landfall just 30 miles east of New Orleans in the early

hours of August 29, 2005. President Cowen and several emergency personnel had

decided to remain on campus through the storm ("Katrina Remembered… Survive,"

n.d.). By that evening, Cowen's message to the University community was that the worst

of the storm had passed, damage was being assessed and classes would resume no earlier

than September 7. Because the University's main website and email system were non-

operational at this point, Cowen directed students, faculty, and staff to the University's

emergency website and a special hotline number for further updates ("Katrina

Remembered… Survive," n.d.).

Crisis Stage

Cowen's decision to remain on campus proved to be a mistake when the city's

levee system failed on August 30, and was hit with massive amounts of water from the

Gulf of Mexico. As Cowen recalled, "And then all hell broke loose… we lost power,

water pressure and all communications" ("Katrina Remembered… Survive," n.d.).

Cowen further reported on the desperate situation, saying, "I, along with our senior

financial officer and senior communications officer, was stranded on the second floor of a

building on a flooded campus for four days with no electricity, water, food, sewer, or

reliable means of communication" (Cowen, April 21, 2006).

The Tulane community was told that day that the campus had sustained heavy

damage, the city was virtually devastated, and recovery efforts on campus would be

delayed. Cowen's message at the time was: "We have started the process of assessing the

condition of our campus facilities and determining how long it will take to reopen"

adding, "Given the uncertainties, we cannot determine at this time when employees and

students should return to campus" ("Katrina Remembered… Survive," n.d.). Despite the

devastation facing the university, Cowen's closing statement to the Tulane community

that day expressed hope, optimism and encouragement, saying, "we are determined to

move forward as quickly as possible and make Tulane University an even stronger and

healthier institution. We have been in New Orleans for 171 years and we look forward to

another century in this great city" ("Katrina Remembered… Survive," n.d.).

Cowen and his team finally had to flee Tulane as the city continued to succumb to

the devastation of rising waters, lack of public utilities, and looting. Yet all roads were

closed in and around the city and there was no means for easy transport. In what had to

be a harrowing experience, Cowen later reported that he and the team seized a boat, hot-

wired a golf cart, "borrowed" a dump truck and finally hopped on a helicopter that was

donated by a wealthy alum in order to make their escape (Reingold, 2006). Together, the

group landed in Houston where Cowen's chief of staff had secured a block of hotel

rooms, which were now operating as Tulane's home base (Cowen, April 21, 2006).

While the students, faculty and staff of Tulane were safe, the administration had

no way of knowing where any of them actually were, and worse yet, had no way of

personally reaching them. As Cowen (April 21, 2006) later commented, "We had 6,000

employees scattered to the winds with no way to contact them." All of the computer file

backups were still in New Orleans, leaving the administration to have to rely on a single

campus directory and the emergency website, which allowed employees to check in and

register their new contact information (Cowen, April 21, 2006).

On August 31, 2005, The American Council on Education encouraged other colleges and universities to aid the higher education institutions in the New Orleans area by offering to enroll and house displaced students for the fall semester ("Katrina Remembered… Rebuild," n.d.). Cowen was touched by the outpouring of support from institutions all across the United States, later saying: "Enrolling our students as visitors at no additional cost to the student beyond his or her original Tulane tuition is an incredible act of philanthropy on the part of my colleague presidents" (Cowen, Sept. 8, 2005).

As news of the magnitude of the destruction of New Orleans spread, it was clear that Tulane would not be able to open in the near future as originally hoped. However, four days into the disaster, Cowen and his team optimistically announced that Tulane would re-open for the spring 2006 semester in January (Cowen, Sept. 5, 2005). With a reopen date set, the University community could now begin to focus on the process of recovery.

Post-Crisis Stage

Cowen and the senior administration returned to campus in October of 2005 while the cleanup and recovery process continued ("Katrina Remembered… Rebuild," n.d.). President Cowen was able to move back into his on-campus home on November 1st, as students and parents filtered on and off campus throughout the month to see the condition of the campus and collect personal belongings (Reingold, 2006; "Katrina Remembered…. Rebuild," n.d.).

As the physical damage assessments came in from around the Tulane campus, it became clear that there was a future for Tulane, however, a number of strategic decisions would have to be made in order to achieve that future (Reingold, 2006). In all, Tulane

University had sustained roughly $200 million in structural damages and another $100 million in operating losses as a result of the storm and subsequent campus shutdown and had to make some tough choices (Santora, 2006). Initially, the administration decided to lay off 243 full-time staffers in early November of 2005, later adding to that number with nearly 250 more positions by December (Reingold, 2006; Santora, 2006).

The Board of Tulane approved a bold Renewal Plan on December 8, 2005 that would require Tulane to be more focused on its undergraduate offerings while enacting steps to help secure its future operations ("Tulane University Announces…," 2005). President Cowen commented, "the situation we faced this fall required us to take quick and decisive action to secure the future of the university…" ("Survival to Renewal," n.d.).

The plan included eliminating programs that had not attained, or did not have the potential to attain, "world-class excellence" including three engineering programs, the computer science program, the exercise and sports science program and eight of its sixteen athletic programs ("Tulane University Announces…," 2005; Siegel, 2005; "Tulane University - A Plan…," 2005). In addition, the plan called for a stronger emphasis on the School of Medicine's research and educational programs, with less focus on clinical offerings within the community ("Tulane University Announces…," 2005). A final change to the curriculum was the addition of a community service requirement for all students entering Tulane University in the fall of 2006 and beyond that would require participation in the rebuilding of New Orleans ("Tulane University - From Recovery…," n.d.).

Tulane University began the spring semester on January 17, 2006 with 88 percent of the full-time student body returning to campus, a number that came as a pleasant surprise to everyone (Cowen, April 15, 2006). As President Cowen later remarked in an interview: "…After the storm, we figured we would be lucky if we would have 65 percent of our students back. Under normal conditions, the rate of students coming back each semester is at 94 percent. So, we will take the high 80s. I would call it a nice miracle" (Santora, p. 20, 2006).

The dramatic school year ended in May with former United States Presidents George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton as the distinguished speakers at Tulane's 2006 commencement ceremonies. Later that same month, Tulane University partnered with the National Trust for Historic Preservation in hosting a multi-day conference focused on the rebirth and renewal of New Orleans as the parallel rebirth and renewal of Tulane University began to take shape ("Katrina Remembered…Renew," n.d.). President Cowen reported that Tulane had received nearly 21,000 applications for the fall 2007 entering class of students with only 1,400 available spots (Cowen, April 15, 2006). Enrollment numbers continued to increase for the subsequent school years as well, with Tulane reporting a 55 percent increase in freshman enrollment in the Fall of 2006, and a staggering 39,763 high school senior applications for 1,400 freshman seats for the Fall of 2009 ("Tulane University Expects…," May 7, 2007; "Tulane University in New Orleans…," Jan. 29, 2009). It appeared that Tulane had successfully weathered the crisis, though not without having learned some important lessons the hard way.

In his 2006 editorial in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, President Cowen reflected on some of the changes to the existing crisis plan that were made at the

University following this crisis experience. Chief among those changes was establishing a remote location backup for all IT data and services, instructing faculty, staff and students to immediately access the university's emergency website in the case of a widespread campus emergency, and identifying a single remote location where the emergency management team should report to after a crisis (Cowen, April 21, 2006).

Case 3 - Data Analysis & Findings

Data analysis of the Tulane University case concentrated on the collection of three main types of data, including transcripts of audio messages, live chats and speeches delivered by President Cowen, organizational documentation in the forms of press releases and archived website updates, as well as print and broadcast news coverage at the local and national level of both the crisis in particular and the institution in general. Aside from a brief personal communication with a former Tulane employee, no personal interviews were conducted for this particular case study, as University officials declined to participate at this level. However, officials did direct the researcher to the wealth of documentation and information stored in the University's archived website dedicated to the Hurricane Katrina crisis on campus.

Consistent with the two prior cases in the study, the data analysis process for this case utilized both a concept-driven and data-driven approach as prescribed by Schreier (2012). The objective was to examine and understand how the issue of organizational renewal was encouraged in this case through the use of discourse of renewal in the organization's crisis and post-crisis communications. The same coding frame employed in the first two cases of the study was also used for this case, and included the four concept-driven categories of provisional, prospective, optimistic and leader-based

messages that comprise the foundation of discourse of renewal (Ulmer, Seeger and Sellnow, 2007), as well as the addition of the fifth, data-driven category of transparent messages. As such, the case findings related back to the five message categories, and included the following:

1. President Cowen delivered provisional messages.

2. President Cowen delivered prospective messages.

3. President Cowen delivered optimistic messages.

4. President Cowen delivered leader-based messages.

5. President Cowen delivered transparent messages.

The following text provides a detailed discussion of the findings with emphasis on further case details to explain and support each finding.

Finding 1: President Cowen Delivered Provisional Messages. The first research question of this study sought to determine to what extent the leaders' messages were provisional in nature, representing a spontaneous and unscripted or rehearsed message. The study's second question asked how the institution's board of advisors responded to those initial messages. Data analysis from both questions combined led to the initial case finding that President Cowen did engage in provisional messaging.

From the onset of the crisis situation, President Cowen regularly delivered updates on the evolving situation to the Tulane community. These messages, while mostly of an informative nature, were often emotive as well and represented an immediate, unrehearsed response on Cowen's part. Consider the following from Cowen (August, 30, 2005) as the campus was plunged into darkness: "It is difficult to describe what this situation feels like for those involved. It is surreal and unfathomable."

By mid-September, Cowen expressed gratitude for the outpouring of support from the Tulane community and made a personal commitment to resolve the situation: "Your patience, understanding and expression of generosity during these difficult times are what sustain us. We will not let our University, our city or you down, this I promise" (Cowen, Sept. 12, 2005). Cowen's message took a comforting turn in late September when he closed with the following sentiment: "I ask for your continued patience. We all want to go home and we will, soon" (Cowen, Sept. 19, 2005).

The majority of these early messages and updates from Cowen were created by him, based on his own emotional response to the situation, and not crafted by the institution's communication department. As Tulane's director of public relations, Mike Strecker, explained: "He [Cowen] consulted with us daily on his messages to the scattered Tulane community and the media… we counseled him to speak from his heart and not follow some formulaic script" (Strecker, 2007).

These examples suggested the use of provisional messaging on Cowen's part in the early days and weeks following the crisis onset. With his team scattered in all directions and reliable communication with the outside world lacking, Cowen's early personal messages were likely born out of necessity in that he was unable to consult with his communications team. Later, when the group had reconnected in Houston, Cowen's personal messaging was encouraged by the communications team as a means of remaining sincere and forthright with stakeholders who had become accustomed to relying on Cowen for informational updates and comforting words of encouragement.

A second source of evidence of Cowen's provisional messaging was represented in the announcement of the restart date for the new semester in January of 2006. Recall from the earlier case discussion that Cowen and the administration set the January 2006 reopen date just four days into the disaster. As Cowen later commented, "We had no idea how we would do that but we felt we had to set a date to provide a sign of hope (quoted in Zweifler, 2013).

This passage was certainly provisional, as it appeared to indicate that the decision as to when to reopen the campus was not based on a strategic plan for the University, but rather on the need to provide an immediate response to the situation. Rather than waiting for a complete assessment of the recovery situation that was ahead of them to make a calculated restart date, Cowen set the restart date first and then made sure that the logistical issues were resolved in time to meet that date.

The second research question asked how the board or advisors responded to Cowen's initial messages. While not directly addressed in the data, there was evidence suggesting the board played a lesser role in response to President Cowen's approach throughout the recovery process.

Fast Company Reporter Jennifer Reingold (2006) noted in her interview and retrospective coverage of President Cowen's handling of the Hurricane Katrina crisis that the sheer magnitude and time sensitive nature of the situation provided Cowen with more latitude in initial decision-making than would typically be the norm in higher education. As Reingold (2006) observed: "While no one would ever wish the horror of a Katrina on anyone, it gave Cowen the clout to move faster than any university administrator in memory. Other university presidents respect that decisiveness."

There was very little reference to involvement on the part of Tulane's board during the early weeks of the crisis in any of the data. It appeared that the board was less involved in operational functions during this time, but became more involved in strategic decisions as the Renewal Plan came to life.

In summary, finding one was supported by three main pieces of evidence. First, Cowen's messages to the Tulane community did not follow a script. Second, the announcement of the reopen date was not based on a strategic plan, but rather on the instinct that people needed something to look forward to. And finally, the magnitude of the crisis allowed Cowen more latitude in immediate decision making with less reliance on broad consensus from an administrative board.

Finding 2: President Cowen Delivered Prospective Messages. The study's third research question sought to explain how the leader's messages took a prospective stance by focusing the stakeholders' energies in a positive, forward-moving direction. The fourth research question asked how the leader established a vision for the future and on what that vision was based. The second finding in this case was that President Cowen's messages were often future-focused and aided in moving the organization past the crisis; thus, they were prospective in nature.

While the early establishment of the spring reopen date was provisional, it was also prospective in that it helped the Tulane community collectively focus on where they were going to be in four months. It represented a light in the future that they could move toward that would lead them out of the shadow of the hurricane crisis. President Cowen expressed confidence when he spoke of this date, which likely helped the stakeholders feel assured that it would, in fact, happen: "Based on everything I know today, Tulane

University will be open this spring for our faculty, staff and students. Let me assure you that my optimism is based on facts, not wishful thinking" (Cowen, Sept. 14, 2005).

> Tulane University plans to start the spring semester as originally scheduled on January 17, 2006 – a date that marks not only the start of classes, but a renaissance for the Tulane University academic community. Commencement will be held on Saturday, May 13, 2006. (Cowen, Sept. 28, 2005)

In this second passage, Cowen added two more pieces of information to his reopen date message. First, he began to establish an expectation with the word "renaissance" that Tulane University would not just open in January, but be reborn and revitalized, suggesting that the school would be stronger than before the storm. Second, he established a firm graduation date that likely acted as another concrete commitment to the recovery from the crisis and the return to "normal" campus functions.

The second piece of evidence that suggested a prospective approach to Cowen's messages was how Cowen ended each of his early messages with date and time of when his next communication would be. For example: "The next update will be posted at 10 a.m. on August 27" (Cowen, Aug. 26, 2005). And "The next update will be posted at 6 p.m. on August 27" (Cowen, Aug. 27, 2005). Also, "I will have another Live Chat through this website at 5 p.m. central time on Friday to answer questions you may have about any Tulane University issue" (Cowen, Sept. 14, 2005).

The announcement of these ongoing updates likely helped the Tulane stakeholders focus on the next piece of news that was coming out about the ongoing situation and answered questions about how the situation was being resolved. This approach put the emphasis on "what's next" as opposed to wallowing in "what now."

A third factor that pointed to a provisional nature in Cowen's messages was found in his ability to aid the stakeholders in focusing on the institution's immediate needs and priorities as a means of moving the organization through the crisis situation by highlighting what was required to be accomplished right away. This prioritization started with his staff. Tulane's Vice President for Development, Luann Dozier, commented:

> Scott would say, 'We have 1 million things on our plate, but what are the top-five things that need to get done today?' You go and come back with the recommendations and move on. So you could see progress every day. (Reingold, 2006)

Numerous messages were delivered by President Cowen to the Tulane community as the crisis and recovery efforts unfolded that helped the stakeholders grasp what the most pressing and immediate objectives were for them as a whole. For example, "Our first priority during this time is the safety of our faculty, staff and students… Our second priority is to secure our facilities… Our third priority is to develop a recovery plan" (Cowen, Aug. 30, 2005).

On September 1, 2005, President Cowen provided additional details on the most pressing objectives the University faced, itemizing the top three issues:

> 1.) Attend to the needs of our faculty and staff who remain on campus. They are safe but living conditions are not good. We evacuated the entire uptown campus safely. As of today, only a core team of public safety and facilities personnel remain. We are in the process of evacuating personnel from the Health Sciences Center downtown. Additionally, we are trying to continue to supply provisions to the remaining staff on-site at the Primate Center in Mandeville. All of the students

who were evacuated to Jackson State University in Mississippi have returned to their homes or are in the process of returning to their homes. 2.) Re-establish our communications with constituencies ASAP. In particular, we will be giving guidance within 48 hours about our plans for this semester. I understand everyone's anxiety but we need additional time to assess the situation in New Orleans. 3.) Begin the recovery process. The campus did sustain some damage, though it generally fared very well during the storm. There are many downed trees, some buildings sustained water damage, and some roofing tiles were damaged. The necessary repairs are manageable. The dorms are intact and students' belongings are safe. (Cowen, Sept. 1, 2005)

President Cowen provided another itemized update on September 3, 2005, saying: "Time is of the essence and we have to focus on the most pressing issues to stabilize the University and resolve the most urgent issues facing our employees and campuses."

Cowen went on to list the key focus areas, including:

- Identifying and resolving the urgent issues facing our employees

- Restoring communications and our IT systems

- Finalizing our housing and office space needs in Houston

- Establishing task forces to deal with recovery and follow up issues (e.g. questions from students)

- Attending to the needs of those still located on our campuses

- Working with our insurance carriers and FEMA to document our losses

- Addressing the personal needs of those Tulane staff who relocated to Houston

to assist in our rebuilding effort. (Cowen, Sept. 3, 2005)

As evidenced in the preceding passages, the top priorities changed on a daily basis as the crisis situation evolved and more information became available. Rather than allowing his staff, students, and faculty to become overwhelmed with tackling what must have seemed like an impossible situation, President Cowen kept the stakeholders focused on moving forward by laying out specific benchmarks for that process in a manner that encouraged a step-by-step approach, thus breaking the impossible down into manageable pieces.

A fourth example of Cowen's prospective messaging was his use of rhetoric that encouraged the campus community to move forward together in a state of "oneness," recognizing them as a cohesive unit that was in the crisis situation together and would emerge from it together. Several examples of this prospective nature follow: "We are determined to move forward as quickly as possible and make Tulane University an even stronger and healthier institution" (Cowen, Aug. 30, 2005). And, "Yet, we have survived, we have recovered, and we have charted a path for the future that promises great things for this University we all love" (Cowen, Jan. 12, 2006).

> I am here today to tell you, the students, faculty, staff, alumni and friends of
> Tulane, that regardless of what challenges we face we have no intention of letting
> this disaster destroy our legacy and dream of world-class academic excellence.
> (Cowen, "To the Tulane Community…," 2005)

Today starts a new chapter in our story, one that I expect will be better and even

more promising than what came before it. You represent that beginning and from

what I have seen of you so far, there is nothing we cannot achieve together.

(Cowen, Jan. 12, 2006)

Within each of the preceding passages, Cowen anchored his message with the use

of the word "we" rather than directing the message at "you." While a seemingly minor

grammatical point, the use of "we" created a sense of cohesion and community within his

messages that likely helped stakeholders who were geographically scattered across the

country still have a sense of being tied together through their common Tulane bond.

Another prospective aspect of these preceding messages was the affirmation that

"we," collectively, would be moving forward. With these statements, President Cowen

not only recognized that the Tulane community had been through this situation together,

but that together they were heading in a forward-moving direction that promised

prosperity for Tulane in the future.

A final example of prospective messaging on President Cowen's part could be

found in his messages about a new plan for Tulane University in the aftermath of

Hurricane Katrina. The messages often created images of change and rebirth for Tulane,

stating that the new vision was based on responding to the disaster: "The situation we

faced this fall required us to take quick and decisive action to secure the future of the

university; however, in the coming months all of you will play an important role in

shaping that future (Cowen, "Survival to Renewal," 2005).

Additional messages by President Cowen included the following:

Our plan represents the most significant reinvention of an American university in more than a century… It is a plan borne out of a disaster but it reflects a university willing to change, to overcome adversity, to take control of its destiny and to face the future with determination and confidence. It reflects a university that loves New Orleans and understands its leadership role in rebuilding the city as its largest employer. As Tulane excels, so will New Orleans. As New Orleans shines again, Tulane will bask in that light. (Cowen, "To the Tulane Community…," 2005)

In the future, Tulane will be defined, in part, by its unique relationship with the culturally rich and diverse city of New Orleans, and by the city's recovery from Hurricane Katrina. Tulane will also be shaped by its relationship with other institutions of higher education in the city. ("Tulane University - From Recovery…," n.d.)

The next couple of years will be ones of transition, but also of excitement as we see our blueprint for Tulane become reality. (Cowen, April 15, 2006)

Each of these preceding passages emphasized the future ("shaping that future," "face the future," "in the future," "the next couple of years"), all in an apparent effort to encourage stakeholders to continue to share in a future-oriented focus. In these messages, the new plan was held up as something that would help the Tulane community realize that future.

The Renewal Plan itself was also prospective in that it laid out a plan that the University hoped would bolster its operations in the wake of the immense financial

setback from the storm. The Plan received board approval on December 8, 2005 ("Tulane University - From Recovery…," n.d.). The plan introduction follows:

> The leadership of Tulane University has used the recovery period following Hurricane Katrina to take a hard look at the storm's immediate and future financial impact and how we can reshape and renew the University to respond to that impact. What must not be lost as we respond to our post-Katrina economic situation are our long-term goals:
>
> > • Diligence in retaining our institutional quality and working to heighten that quality;
> >
> > • Dedication to providing an unparalleled, holistic undergraduate experience for our students;
> >
> > • Continued strengthening of core research areas and graduate programs that build on our strengths and can achieve world class excellence; and
> >
> > • An absolute commitment to using the lessons learned from Katrina to help rebuild the city of New Orleans and to then extend those lessons to other communities. ("Tulane University - From Recovery…," n.d.)

Recall from the earlier case background discussion that there were some negative consequences of the plan as well, including the termination of nearly 500 employees, the elimination of five academic programs and the discontinuation of eight athletic programs; all of which adversely impacted a number of Tulane stakeholders, including staff, faculty, and students ("Tulane University - A Plan…" 2005). Many in the Tulane and greater New Orleans community expressed concern over these cutbacks. President Cowen responded to those concerns saying:

The reorganization was born out of the disaster of Katrina. Katrina forced us to have to develop a new vision and strategy for our future while also addressing any financial challenges we had. This required us to make some very difficult decisions – decisions that secured the University's future both academically and financially. (Cowen, "Live Chat with President Cowen," December 9, 2005)

What people lost sight of is we wouldn't have done anything if were not for Katrina. The hurricane forced us to make some very tough decisions and we decided to do that as strategically as possible for academic and financial reasons. I understand where people would be disappointed and angry but nobody should question our motives. We had no other choice if we were going to survive as an institution. (quoted in Santora, 2006)

In these passages, President Cowen defended the plan by placing blame on the storm, something for which no one was responsible. While at first glance this messaging tactic seemed less than prospective, it still reinforced the notion that Tulane had to adjust their operations and move forward because of this disruption, thereby shifting the blame to the storm rather than Tulane.

In summary of the second finding, President Cowen delivered prospective messages by several means with the establishment of a re-start date, by announcing when stakeholders could expect the next emergency update in the early days of the crisis, through the discussion of priorities and immediate needs of the organization, by communicating a sense of "oneness" and cohesion among the stakeholders and encouraging them to move forward, and through the creation of the Renewal Plan.

Finding 3: President Cowen Delivered Optimistic Messages. The study's fifth, sixth and seventh research questions addressed the optimistic nature of the messages. Question five asked how the leader instilled a sense of optimism in the stakeholders and how soon that optimism emerged. The sixth question sought to understand how the leader's messages impacted the stakeholders' sense of security through the crisis, while the seventh question asked if any positive outcomes emerged as a result of the crisis. The third finding of this case was that President Cowen did deliver optimistic messages throughout the crisis and recovery stages.

One of the means by which Cowen infused optimism in his messages was by presenting an air of certainty and confidence when he communicated with stakeholders, even in the midst of extremely uncertain times, as referenced in the following passages: "Tulane University is a great institution with loyal students, faculty, staff and alumni. We will recover from this event and be stronger because of it" (Cowen, August 31, 2005), and "…Out of this tragedy we will be stronger, we will be wiser, and we will do whatever it takes to replace despair with hope; acquiescence with action; disorientation with focus… Despite the circumstances, we will prevail for all of you and the wider community" (Cowen, September 12, 2005).

In each of these messages, President Cowen displayed absolute confidence in the stakeholders' ability to recover from the storm as well as a definite certainty that such a recovery would occur. In addition, he made these declarations at the outset of the crisis itself. Cowen did not say, "we hope to prevail," or "we hope to recover," but rather, he definitively stated, "we will." This confidence on Cowen's part likely impacted the sense of optimism among the stakeholders in a positive way.

A second method by which Cowen instilled optimism through his messages was by making a conscious decision to focus on the future of Tulane University in a positive vein, referencing the analogy of "light" three times. First, Cowen says: "There is light at the end of the tunnel. Our focus is on the light and not the darkness" (Cowen, August 30, 2005). The second reference ties the University to New Orleans, saying: "As Tulane excels, so will New Orleans. As New Orleans shines again, Tulane will bask in that light" (Cowen, "To the Tulane Community," 2005).

Cowen's third reference to light came as he was reflecting on the days just after the storm:

> As I flew out of New Orleans toward Houston after being stranded for four days, I realized that I could either focus on the darkness, or I could try to see beyond it and focus on the light. I chose the latter.… (Cowen, April 21, 2006)

In each of the preceding passages, Cowen used the reference to "light" as a means for demonstrating not just optimism to the Tulane community, but the need to make a conscious choice - that of choosing optimism over despair in the crisis situation. It appeared that he might have used these stories of his own personal choice of optimism as a way of encouraging the stakeholders to make a similar optimistic choice in their own approach to the recovery process.

A third theme of optimism that was evident in his messages was the way in which President Cowen framed the crisis situation and recovery as a new chapter in Tulane's history. Rather than allowing stakeholders to feel that this event marked the end of the Tulane story, Cowen suggested that it served as a new beginning for the University: "For 171 years the Tulane community has been a leader in New Orleans and the region. We

are now being called upon to play this role again in a way unforeseen by anyone one week ago" (Cowen, September 6, 2005).

Additional messages that suggested renewal in the wake of crisis included:

Our University was founded 172 years ago as the Medical College of Louisiana as a result of disaster. In that case, it was the 1834 outbreak of yellow fever… Another disaster has befallen us, but Tulane will again turn its response to that disaster into an advantage, giving it an even more promising future. (Cowen, January 12, 2006)

Where is there a better place in the country--what school better than Tulane to really get an education? And then you can be part of the largest recovery project of a city in the United States probably since the Civil War. Well, that's what education's all about, what goes on in the classroom and outside the classroom. (quoted in Seigel, December 9, 2005)

The message expressed in each of these passages pointed to a new experience, a new part of the University's history that was unfolding before the Tulane community, certainly an optimistic stance.

The sixth research question focused on how the leader's optimistic messages demonstrated a commitment to taking care of the stakeholders, thereby positively impacting their sense of security during and after the crisis. One of President Cowen's early messages appeared to be aimed at offering initial assurance to the stakeholders:

As I suspect you all know, there is no contingency plan that could ever be developed to respond to what the area and the University are experiencing. However, all of us at the University are totally committed to doing whatever it

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takes to get the University operational as soon as possible. (Cowen, August 30, 2005)

This message recognized the enormity of the crisis situation that Tulane faced, yet still made a commitment to get the University back on its feet by doing whatever it took, thereby offering reassurance to the stakeholders.

A second passage that pointed to a commitment stakeholders' sense of security came from President Cowen in early January of 2006 after the Renewal Plan had been unveiled:

You have been in our hearts and minds since the Katrina odyssey began. Even though it may be hard to understand at times, our every decision has been with you in mind and with the ultimate goal of protecting the long-term wellbeing of the institution that unites us all - Tulane University. ("Survival to Renewal," n.d.)

This message appeared to be aimed at the stakeholders directly by emphasizing that "you," presumably both individually and collectively, were the focus of the decisions made, and those decisions were designed to uphold the greater good, namely the University itself. The implicit meaning here suggested that while the decision may have adversely impacted some individuals, there was security in knowing that it would support the greater good of the University, which ultimately bound all of the stakeholders together.

Yet another message that spoke to the security of the stakeholders was found in the following passage delivered by President Cowen at the January Convocation:

I see a single group of people - students, parents, faculty, staff and administrators - who are forever linked because of three common bonds we share. First, we are

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all Tulanians! The second thing that bonds us is our experience with Hurricane Katrina. You have faced adversity and overcome it, you have witnessed disaster and learned from it, and you returned to Tulane to continue where you left off pre-Katrina despite the fact that it might have been easier to go somewhere else. Each one of you in your own way has shown courage, adaptability, and strength of character—all key attributes for a successful life. And that brings me to the third bond we all share—we have the opportunity of a lifetime ahead of us because of the disaster we have just come through. (Cowen, January 12, 2006)

Like his prospective messages in the previous finding, this message also spoke to the notion of "oneness" and cohesion that existed among the stakeholders. This passage suggested that the stakeholders were forever bound together because of the experience they had shared, a disaster that they had risen above and conquered, thereby positively impacting their sense of confidence and security. Cowen built on this sense of oneness in the last sentence by ending on an optimistic note when he suggested that, together, they had the "opportunity of a lifetime" awaiting them.

There was evidence that President Cowen was justified in his optimism during the crisis situation as positive outcomes and opportunities emerged as a result of Tulane's experience. Reflecting on the hurricane disaster in an interview with *Fast Company* reporter Jennifer Reingold, Cowen framed the hurricane disaster experience in the following way: "I wouldn't wish this on anybody. But out of every [disaster] comes an opportunity. We might as well take the opportunity to reinvent ourselves" (Reingold, April, 2006).

One of the ways in which Tulane University reinvented itself was through the addition of a new community service graduation requirement for its undergraduate students. As stated on Tulane's recovery website:

> We will take advantage of the extraordinary opportunities in community-building resulting from Hurricane Katrina by requiring all students entering in Fall '06 and after to participate in community-service work and help to rebuild the city of New Orleans, prior to graduation. ("Tulane University - From Recovery…," n.d.)

President Cowen suggested that this opportunity was borne out of a direct need among Tulane stakeholders to help the surrounding community as well as the greater New Orleans community's assistance to Tulane, both of which resulted in a fundamental change in the University's core culture:

> At first, Tulane's experience with public service could best be described as 'give and take.' Following Katrina, the university received an outpouring of assistance as it rebuilt its campus. At the same time, Tulanians fanned out in the New Orleans community to help rebuild their beloved city. Those experiences triggered a profound and permanent change to the culture of Tulane University. In 2006, Tulane became the first national research institution to integrate public service into its core curriculum for undergraduates. Now, the entire University community - the schools of Architecture, Business, Law, Liberal Arts, Medicine, Public Health and Tropical Medicine, Science and Engineering and Social Work - is committed to public service…. Katrina could have destroyed Tulane. Instead it empowered us to take up the banner of community engagement and to set an

ambitious and unprecedented agenda: Tulane University intends to set the standard for public service for the next generation of universities. (Cowen, "Tulane Empowers," n.d.)

It appeared that what started as an outpouring of support from students to the community in the wake of a natural disaster evolved into an even more positive outcome in the form of an official service program on campus, later becoming a graduation requirement, and ultimately changing the culture of the University as a whole. Cowen, in an interview with *The Chronicle of Higher Education* Reporter Seth Zweifler (2013), credited the hurricane for bringing about positive changes to Tulane University: "The culture of Tulane has changed dramatically. We've developed a culture of civic engagement, particularly in New Orleans, and I doubt that shift would have occurred had it not been for Katrina."

Another way that Tulane reinvented itself following the crisis was by refocusing the University's mission, particularly as it pertained to the undergraduate experience. This move was not one that had been part of any master plan for the institution prior to the hurricane, but was a direct result of the hardships Tulane faced in the storm's aftermath. The following message appeared on Tulane's recovery website:

> The economic pressures caused by Hurricane Katrina required Tulane to examine every part of our organizational structure and look at ways the academic areas could be reorganized. We must maximize organizational efficiency and at the same time become a smaller university more focused on areas in which we have established strengths. ("Tulane University - From Recovery…," n.d.)

President Cowen (2006) framed this strategic adjustment as an opportunity borne out of the storm as it provided the impetus to streamline the University:

The third post-Katrina accomplishment at Tulane that provides hope for the future is the prospect of the increased focus and clarity of purpose that is resulting from the University's Renewal Plan… The plan calls for a smaller, more focused University, with a renewed emphasis on undergraduate education and the creation of a new, inclusive undergraduate college that will be called the Newcomb-Tulane College.

A final positive outcome that appeared to emerge as a result of the crisis was the opportunity for the stakeholders to harness their experience, energy and desire to help in a way that had the potential to make a profound impact, not just on their community but on themselves as well. As President Cowen suggested at the January 2006 convocation ceremony:

Right here, right now, you are in the unique position of really making a difference in people's lives. This experience will stay with you the remainder of your life and serve you well no matter what you do. No other student body in the country has this opportunity. (Cowen, January, 2006)

This message was more than a motivational speech geared to the student body for Cowen. He internalized the message and sought out opportunities for him to be able to make a difference as well:

I am excited at the prospect of being able to make a difference in the world, of being in this place, at this time, where unprecedented possibilities exist to confront some of the problems facing not only this city but our larger society.

And I am grateful, in a way I could not have appreciated before Katrina, to be part

of the higher-education community that met our needs not only with compassion

but also with action. (Cowen, April 21, 2006)

Cowen channeled his enthusiasm into multiple volunteer projects within the city

of New Orleans. More recently, when the devastating storm Hurricane Sandy hit another

area of the country, Cowen saw an opportunity to reach out to impacted institutions in the

northeastern United States and offered support and advice from his own experience on

how to thrive after devastation. As reported by Seth Zweifler (2013) in *The Chronicle of

Higher Education*:

When Hurricane Sandy pummeled the Northeast last fall, Mr. Cowen reached

out to college presidents and public officials, offering advice on disaster

management. After the storm, Tulane sent a team of architecture students and

faculty to collaborate with the New Jersey Institute of Technology on community

revitalization. Mr. Cowen, who hopes to return to teaching, says those efforts are

a sign of Tulane's commitment to public service. 'It goes to show,' he says, 'that

something good can come out of even the worst tragedy.'

As evidenced in this finding, President Cowen delivered optimistic messages to

the Tulane community through his confidence and certainty, his ability to help focus the

stakeholders' attention on moving forward in a positive direction, and framing the

recovery as an exciting new chapter in Tulane's rich history. In addition, Cowen and

Tulane University recognized the inherent opportunities that resulted from the storm

crisis and elevated those opportunities into positive outcomes for the institution and the

community as a whole.

Finding 4: President Cowen Delivered Leader-Based Messages. The eighth and ninth research questions focused on the means by which the leader set the tone for the organization throughout the crisis and post-crisis stages. Question eight sought to understand how the leader's messages were reflective of their own personal core values and beliefs, while question nine sought the organizational factors that likely aided in the creation of the leader's messages. The fourth finding for this study was that President Cowen did deliver leader-based messages during and after the crisis at Tulane University.

As evidenced in the preceding finding, President Cowen often expressed strong personal emotions in his messages to the Tulane community, including frustration, sympathy, and optimism. He also engaged in personal reflection through his messages, offering an insight into his own core values and beliefs. In the following passage, written in mid-September of 2005, Cowen seemed to express nostalgia and a longing for life as it was before the storm:

> Not a single day goes by when I don't think about our campuses and the ambience of New Orleans - walking among the oak trees uptown and listening to the rattle of streetcars on St. Charles Avenue. I miss being able to walk to P.J.'s on Freret to get an iced mocha and walk my dog in Audubon Park. These routines provided the comforts of home and can't be replicated anywhere else. (Cowen, September 19, 2005)

This passage spoke to some of the things that Cowen personally valued, the beauty and rhythm of the city, a favorite local business, the comfort of a walk in the park with his dog. In a similar vein of personal reflection, President Cowen publically shared

what he learned from the crisis experience in an editorial in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*:

> There were the usual lessons you hear people speak of after a catastrophic event, and I learned that the reason you hear them so often is that they are true. You realize how short and precious life is. You recognize that you should never take even the simplest things for granted. You clearly see what's important - or not - in your life. (Cowen, April, 21, 2006)

These messages were clearly not strategic, organizationally-driven messages, but rather ones that were deeply personal to Cowen himself and reflective of his own core values and beliefs.

Another hallmark of President Cowen's personal attributes was his self-assured personality. Cowen met regularly with students, faculty, and staff throughout the crisis recovery process. He spoke with leaders of the local community, alumni and others in academia. It was often reported that through these conversations Cowen demonstrated a genuine concern for the stakeholders and, at the same time, a determination and resolve to push forward (Boyatzis and McKee, 2006). As one former undergraduate student later reported in an article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* article, Cowen's "calm, yet authoritative demeanor instilled confidence in students, faculty and staff" (Zweifler, 2013).

In a personal spotlight article in *Fast Company* magazine, one of Cowen's colleagues at Case Western Reserve, management professor Richard L. Osborne, further commented about how Cowen approached adversity, saying: "He's a pretty bold guy who

only takes yes for an answer… He does it with grace, but he's very persistent" (Reingold, April, 2006).

The one organizational value that appeared to play a recurring role in President Cowen's messages was pride in Tulane's early beginnings and long history. Cowen referenced that history often in his messages saying: "For 171 years the Tulane community has been a leader in New Orleans and the region" (Cowen, September 6, 2005), and "It took Tulane 172 years to become one of the most respected and highly regarded universities in the nation" (Cowen, "To the Tulane Community," n.d.), and finally, "Our university was founded 172 years ago as the Medical College of Louisiana as a result of disaster" (Cowen, January 12, 2006).

This reference to Tulane's history only appeared a few times in Cowen's messages, but demonstrated a clear organizational influence on how he encouraged resilience among the stakeholders by rooting their experience as building on the institution's past.

In summary of the fourth finding, President Cowen's messages were largely leader-based in that they were more reflective of his own personal beliefs and values than of those of the organization itself.

Finding 5: President Cowen Delivered Transparent Messages. The fifth and final finding in this case represented the addition of an emergent category of messages, transparent, which was added to the original coding frame during initial data analysis. As Schreier (2012) suggests, the qualitative researcher often uses a data-driven approach during analysis to capture emerging themes that are garnered from the material collected in the case, reflecting those themes through modifications to the original coding scheme.

As a category, transparent messages in this study represented those messages in which the leader displayed an open and honest approach with stakeholders as well as an overall transparent handling of the crisis situation in general. It appeared that President Cowen not only delivered transparent messages throughout the crisis situation, but and also handled the crisis in an open and clear manner.

The messages presented in the previous four findings, representative of the four categories of discourse of renewal, also served to paint a picture of an overall theme of transparency when viewed at a macro level. President Cowen was clear and forthright when describing the ongoing crisis situation and the immediate priorities that the University faced. He was sincere and honest when he discussed the financial impact of the storm and the difficult decisions that the University had to make regarding cutbacks in programs and personnel. Cowen was open and at times emotional when he described the gravity of the crisis situation and his own longing for a return to normalcy. He was frank about documenting what the University went through during the crisis, granting numerous interviews in the years since the storm and even archiving all of the timelines, messages and strategies relating to the crisis and recovery in dedicated webpages adjacent to the main Tulane website.

President Cowen's overall handling of the crisis response was also transparent in many ways. Very early on in the crisis, Cowen initiated a variety of opportunities for the Tulane community to communicate with him directly to get their questions and concerns addressed, including chats, updates and meetings. He held live, weekly, interactive web-based chat sessions that were widely promoted in advance to the Tulane stakeholders, allowing individuals to pose questions to Cowen directly. In addition, written transcripts

of those chat sessions were posted on the Tulane website within a few days after they occurred (Cowen, Sept. 9, 2013).

Cowen also made a point to post regular status updates on Tulane's emergency website to keep the Tulane community informed of what was happening on campus and how those events impacted them collectively and individually. As previously mentioned in the second finding, Cowen ended most of those early messages with the exact date and time of when his next update would be posted so that stakeholders always knew when additional information would be available (Cowen, August 27, 2013).

In addition, President Cowen and his leadership team held a number of town hall meetings across the country in locations where populations of Tulane students and faculty had relocated after the storm in an effort to facilitate ongoing communication about the recovery and build camaraderie among the stakeholders. Cowen reported on one of those town hall meetings in late September of 2005, saying:

> Yesterday I held a Town Hall meeting in Dallas with over 100 Tulane students and parents who are in the area. I was impressed and gratified by their loyalty and commitment to Tulane and everyone's desire to return to campus in the spring. Questions covered a myriad of topics from tuition to environmental health issues to expected living conditions in New Orleans in January. I sincerely believe everyone felt the session was informative and productive. (Cowen, September 24, 2005)

As evidenced in the above discussion, timely communications with stakeholders appeared to play a critical role in President Cowen's overall crisis response tactics. However, Cowen's openness in the process even extended beyond the crisis response

itself. Since 2005, President Cowen has been candidly open and honest about the impact

that Hurricane Katrina had on both him personally and the University. He boldly

authored a 2006 editorial in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* in which he openly

addressed what he saw as failures on his part during the crisis response, as well as

victories, and summarized the entire experience into a kind of "lessons learned" report for

his colleagues (Cowen, April 21, 2006).

Just as he had been in his original crisis response messages, President Cowen

willingly expressed his emotions upon reflecting on some of the organizational lessons

learned through the crisis:

> It is with mixed emotions that I review what we have learned. The experiences
>
> of Katrina have changed every single person who lived through it in different but
>
> fundamental ways. Lessons born of disaster, both institutional and personal, are
>
> by their very nature hard lessons. On the institutional side, we have learned that
>
> the emergency plan that Tulane had in place was relatively sound, as far as it
>
> went, but it didn't go far enough… Now we realize our plan didn't consider the
>
> possibility of catastrophic damage, of not being able to resume business at the
>
> University for a protracted period of time. (Cowen, April 21, 2006)

Other institutional lessons that Cowen reported included not letting the "captain

go down with the ship," the recognition that the "University is not a shelter," the need in

advance of a disaster to "identify a remote location to which an emergency administrative

team should report soon after the event," the need to "be as physically self-sufficient as

possible," and the importance of staying "true to your mission" (Cowen, April 21, 2006).

Cowen's final lesson learned, as he reported in the editorial, was reminiscent of

an earlier theme that he had used in his crisis messaging: "Progress lies in how you handle the darkness and the light" (Cowen, April 21, 2006). He expanded on that thought by saying:

> All of us who went through Katrina learned a lot about ourselves, at our very core. I don't know where the ability to stay focused and positive through a disaster comes from - whether it is just hard-wired into some of us by genetics or it's a byproduct of our belief systems and environment. It's difficult for any of us to know how we'll respond to a crisis until we're tested. (Cowen, April 21, 2006)

Coincidently, Cowen alluded to what ultimately became the impetus behind this very study: understanding how leaders respond in crisis situations of varying scopes and magnitudes. Indeed, that is the underlying thought behind much of the research done in organizational crisis communications today.

As demonstrated in the preceding discussion of this finding, President Cowen was transparent in both the messages he delivered throughout the crisis situation and in his overall handling of the crisis response. His transparency extended beyond the crisis through his willingness to discuss his lessons learned as a result of the situation.

Case 3: Summary of Findings

This final case represented the most physical of the three included in this study as it involved widespread damage to campus property and a major disruption of the University's normal operations. As with the previous case, this case exhibited the use of all four of the message characteristics found within discourse of renewal with the addition of "transparency" as the fifth category.

It should be noted that a greater emphasis was placed on electronic communications in this case than in the other two cases. Early crisis messages were delivered exclusively through electronic means (including website updates, live web chats, and later email messages) due to the fact that the stakeholders were displaced from campus and scattered across the country. Electronic messaging was a vital tool in the early crisis communications; without it, Tulane University might not have survived the crisis.

Organizational renewal was an emergent theme in this case, much like it had been in the Wilson College case. Tulane University found itself in need of transformational changes in order to recover from the financial hardships brought on by the hurricane. President Cowen often stressed the need for a new vision and adjusting the institution's focus as a means for overcoming the crisis. It appeared that much of what drove Tulane's recovery was leader-based, emanating from President Cowen's persona as well as his results-driven focus and determination.

President Cowen announced his plans to retire in June of 2014 earlier this summer, commenting that his time at Tulane University during the Hurricane Katrina aftermath marked some of his most "gut-wrenching decisions" (Zweifler, 2013). Cowen's legacy at Tulane University will likely always be tied to the crisis.

Revisiting Assumptions from Chapter 1

It is helpful at this stage in reporting to revisit the initial researcher assumptions that were stated in Chapter 1 (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008). These assumptions were based on the researcher's professional experience and prior research. The following

discussion of those assumptions is presented in light of the findings and analysis discussed in this chapter.

The first assumption in this study was that discourse of renewal provides an alternative choice in crisis and post-crisis communications, one that enables the leaders of nonprofit organizations to engage their stakeholders during and after an organizational crisis through language of renewal, thereby encouraging the organization to emerge from the crisis stronger and more united. This assumption held true according to the findings across the cases. The leaders at each of the three case institutions refrained from utilizing more traditional crisis communication strategies, namely apologia, image restoration or situational crisis communication theory, and instead relied upon themes of renewal in their messaging. While the outcome of the Wilson College case is still undetermined at this time, the findings demonstrated evidence in both the Western Carolina University and Tulane University cases that the leadership's use of renewal discourse aided the organizations in handling the crisis situation and helped them to emerge stronger and more united.

The study's second assumption was that the researchers behind the discourse of renewal theory unduly limited its potential application in the field by restricting its applicability to only those crises that represented a physical destruction of the organizational facility. This assumption also held true according to the findings across the cases. With some minor modifications, as discussed in Chapter 4, the discourse of renewal theory was applicable in crises that represented both physical and non-physical examples. Two key examples of this applicability were presented in the Wilson College and Western Carolina University cases.

The third assumption in this study was that the use of discourse of renewal in crisis and post-crisis communications was applicable in a broader range of organizational structures than what the original theorists have postulated. This assumption was also supported in the findings as use of the theory was evidenced in all three cases, none of which represented organizations in private enterprise, the only organizational structure the theorists envisioned using discourse of renewal.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed case-by-case reporting of the study's findings, followed by a review of the initial study assumptions from Chapter 1. When viewing the findings from a macro level, it appeared that the use of discourse of renewal was found across the three cases despite representing both differing types of crises and organizational structures than what were stipulated in the founding theorists' original conclusions on the matter, though perhaps interpreted in a slightly different manner. As noted in the first two findings, a fifth message category of transparent messaging was added to the theoretical framework, and one case did not demonstrate the use of provisional messaging. However, when examined as a whole, discourse of renewal characteristics were found among the three cases. Additionally, strong leadership skills also emerged as a determining factor in how each crisis was handled.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

A critical objective of this study was to examine whether the crisis rhetoric was limited by the kinds of crises or disasters that occurred at each of the three cases or by the specific organizational contexts in which they occurred. Recall from the literature review in Chapter 2 that Ulmer, Seeger and Sellnow (2007) envisioned organizational renewal as most likely under four explicit conditions that were dependent on crisis type, stakeholder relationships, corrective action and change, and the type of the organization. This study's focus was on two of those conditions: crisis type and organizational type.

Study Summary

A common thread throughout all of the case studies on discourse of renewal to date has been that the crisis involved a devastation of the physical presence of the organization. Whether through floods, fires, or acts of terrorism, massive destruction often created a context most conducive to renewal, providing for a symbolic and physical cleansing as it were (Ulmer, Seeger and Sellnow, 2007). The final condition that Ulmer, Seeger and Sellnow (2007) identified as necessary for renewal concerns the type of organization. The authors contended that private companies have fewer constraints than publicly held companies, and that increased autonomy is what enables the organization's leadership to engage in spontaneous renewal discourse without first having to consult with stockholders.

Each of the three cases in this study represented organizations that were not owner-operated, but rather fell under the heading of nonprofit institutions of higher education, thereby exploring the manifestation of discourse of renewal in a different organizational context than originally conceived by the founding theorists. In addition, each case in this study represented differing types of crisis: a non-physical financial crisis in the case of Wilson College, a limited physical crisis at Western Carolina University, and a major physical disruption at Tulane University. Exploring the crises across multiple crisis types provided a fuller understanding of the use of discourse of renewal in varying crisis contexts.

The findings presented in the previous chapter explored whether each of the four categories of discourse of renewal (provisional, prospective, optimistic, leader-based) were utilized in the leadership's messages at each case institution, and how those categories were manifested within the messages themselves. A fifth category of transparency was added during data analysis. A comparative examination across the cases found that all five of the message categories were used in each case, with the exception of the category of provisional messaging which was not used in the Wilson College case.

The following discussion details the conclusions that were drawn from the study's findings.

<div align="center">**Study Conclusions**</div>

Conclusion 1: Transparency Should be a Critical Message Characteristic of Discourse of Renewal Theory

A key finding from this study was the importance placed on the use of transparent messaging throughout each of the case examples. This category of messaging was so

frequently referenced in the data that it was added as a formal message category during the early coding process. What was particularly startling, based on its prevalence across these three cases, was that the founding theorists of discourse of renewal did not include transparency as a fifth category in their original schema. An analysis of this omission yielded a potential possibility related to the types of organizations studied.

The three primary cases highlighted in the initial discourse of renewal studies by Ulmer, Seeger and Sellnow all represented privately held companies with no stockholders, including Cantor Fitzgerald, Malden Mills and Cole Hardwood. The Cole Hardwood case further represented an example of a founder-controlled company. As the theorists purported, privately held companies were more likely to be able to engage in discourse of renewal because they were not beholden to stockholders in setting the direction for the company. Still, these companies had stakeholders in the form of employees, vendors, and regulators whom would have a vested interested in company operations and decisions, and would have likely benefitted from transparent communications regarding their respective crises situations.

However, transparency has not been historically held up as a virtue of doing business in the private sector. In a 2009 article in the *Harvard Business Review*, authors O'Toole and Bennis reported on an informal survey they conducted among 154 private business executives and found that 63 percent would describe their organizational culture as "opaque" (O'Toole and Bennis, 2009). Furthermore, Anderson, Duru and Reeb reported in a 2009 study that among large, publically traded companies, founder and heir run firms were significantly more opaque than their management appointed run counterparts (Anderson, Duru and Reeb, 2009). In light of this discussion, perhaps the

original cases studied by Ulmer, Seeger and Sellnow represented business models that were not conducive to transparency due to their lack of stockholders.

Still, even amongst privately held companies, the opaque means of operations may be coming to a close as the information age has created a transparent-driven environment. Indeed, transparency has emerged as what communication guru Shel Holtz calls "one of the foundational principles of business" (Holtz, p. 17, 2008). A cursory search for "transparency" on the research database, Business Source Primer, recently yielded nearly 8,000 related articles written in the past five years alone in trade journals, magazines and newspapers. As O'Toole and Bennis (p. 56, 2009) concluded, "no organization can be honest with the public if it's not honest with itself."

Following this line of reasoning then, the type of organizational structure may be of little or no importance when considering whether the company should engage in transparent messaging or not. Acknowledging that while the three cases specifically examined in this study were nonprofit organizations, and therefore more accountable to oversight boards, may not offset the overall importance placed on transparent messaging that was found in this study but absent from the original discourse of renewal studies. Aside from pointing to a difference in organizational leadership type, however, no other plausible explanation for this finding could be explained.

In light of this discussion, and the current emphasis on transparency in corporate actions within the business sector, the study's first conclusion is that a fifth message category of transparency should be added to the formal discourse of renewal theory.

Conclusion 2: Provisional Messaging is Contextually Bound

The Wilson College crisis case was not found to exhibit examples of provisional messaging on the part of its leader, President Barbara Mistick. An analysis of this case in comparison to the other two cases in the study produced several potential possibilities for the omission of provisional messaging at Wilson College.

First, the Wilson College case represented a smoldering financial crisis that had been ongoing for several decades, and thus represented no immediate physical threat or danger to individuals involved in the case. Without an immediate threat to manage there likely was less need for split-second decision making on the part of the College's leadership, thus enabling President Mistick the time to more strategically plan out her messages in advance and less need for spontaneous reactions.

In contrast, the Western Carolina University and Tulane University cases represented physical crises that were immediate in nature, evolving on a daily basis. In both of these examples, the leaders had to respond quickly to ever-changing situations without the luxury of both time and information in forming more thoroughly planned responses. Spontaneity became more prevalent in these cases. In this scenario then, perhaps the physicality of the crisis type did play a role in the use of discourse of renewal in these case examples.

A second possibility for the absence of provisional messaging in the Wilson College case may have again been due to the crisis type, though not as defined by physicality. Wilson College's crisis was strategic in nature, meaning that its focus was on the more long-term viability of the organization and naturally required involvement from the board of directors to help set the goals and objectives for the institution going

forward. Major changes were needed to help the College emerge from its crisis, and those changes represented strategic-level issues. Thus, the messages delivered by President Mistick throughout the crisis reflected more of a strategic and planned stance rather than an immediate, spontaneous response.

In contrast, the crises at Western Carolina University and Tulane University both represented operational crises, at least in the early stages when most provisional messaging took place. An operational focus to the crisis meant that the decisions being made were more directly linked to the day-to-day operations of the institution, and less so on long-range strategic decisions. As the leader of the institution, those operational decisions and subsequent messages about those decisions would likely have fallen on the president of each institution rather than becoming a board issue. At Western Carolina University, for example, the crisis was completely operational as it was contained to only one floor of one building. In the earliest days of the crisis at Tulane University, the focus was also on operational issues including evacuations, school closings and the reestablishment of technology and communication functions. Later, strategic decisions likely came into play, as more governance involvement was required in crafting the renewal plan, however the initial crisis represented an operational one.

Framing a crisis as "operational" or "strategic" in nature is not well supported in the literature. Coombs (2012) describes crisis types as clusters defined by their level of organizational responsibility, including victim cluster, accidental cluster and preventable cluster. Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger (2011) divide crisis types into two causal categories: intentional and natural. However, there are no major works discussing crises as either operational or strategic.

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A third possibility explaining the absence of provisional messaging may have been the crisis timeline itself. Recall that Coombs (2012) breaks down a crisis into three stages: pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis. In both the Western Carolina University and Tulane University crises, the presidents were already in place when the crises began. As previously noted in the findings, the provisional messages delivered by the institutions' presidents were more prevalent in the early stages of the crises than later in the crises. By contrast, Wilson College's President Mistick did not join the institution until the organization was already mid-crisis, thus missing out on the early crisis stage. It is conceivable that provisional messaging was only appropriate during the early stages of the crisis when less time and information were available to craft a more strategic message.

A fourth possibility for the absence of provisional messaging in the Wilson College case may have been a result of the size of the school itself. Of the three institutions studied, Wilson College represented the smallest organization with roughly 700 students and just 75 faculty members. It is plausible that a smaller institution could potentially have had a more hands-on board of directors that sought more control in the messaging delivered to stakeholders, thereby holding President Mistick more accountable to the board for her messages and making her less likely to speak on her own.

A fifth and final possibility may have simply been differences in personal style. Recall that President Mistick commented that she liked to be prepared when delivering messages to stakeholders, whereas Presidents Bardo and Cowen were often described as take-charge leaders who responded on a more emotional level. Perhaps the leaders'

personality and personal communication style played more of a role in determining their use of provisional messaging.

Thus, this study's second conclusion is that the use of provisional messaging in crisis response is contextually bound by any one of several situations including the crisis type, the crisis timeline, the organization's size or the personal style of the organization's leader. More exploratory research is needed in this area to draw a more specific conclusion as to exactly which of the contexts is most likely to determine the use of provisional messaging in crisis response.

Conclusion 3: Leadership Critical in Overcoming Crisis

Not surprising, the leadership at each institution was instrumental in setting the tone for their organization's crisis response and recovery. Personal core values appeared to be the guiding force behind each president's leadership approach, lending an element of legitimacy to their leadership style. Each president's concern for the organization as a whole seemed personally driven more so than merely reflective of the responsibility of the jobs they held.

In a bold move, two leaders went so far as to adjust the mission of the organization as a result of their crises in order to ensure the organization's longevity. Both Wilson College's President Mistick and Tulane University's President Cowen suggested that they put their own personal convictions ahead of the school's traditional organizational values when it came to invoking necessary changes to their respective missions. That kind of leadership takes confidence and conviction.

Presidents Mistick and Cowen's actions in adjusting the organizational mission in light of crises were reminiscent of the discussion on chaos and change theory from

Chapter 2. Recall from that earlier discussion that the crisis lessons from chaos and change theory (von Bertalanffy, 1968; Lewin 1951) suggested that organizations must be willing to let go of their current construction of reality in order to change and transform into a newly self-organized system. Furthermore, the discussion proposed that when confronted with crisis, the leadership could maximize that opportunity as a defining moment for the organization and encourage organizational growth and renewal as a result of the crisis (Ulmer, Seeger and Sellnow, 2011). Indeed, both Presidents Mistick and Cowen demonstrated a willingness to release their preexisting organizational paradigms and utilize the crises as an opportunity to redefine the organization and encourage a renewed sense of growth and direction.

The literature on effective organizational leadership in general is abundant; though much less has been written about effective crisis leadership, as the field is still rather new. Still, there are some common threads across the literature aimed at preparing organizational leaders to better handle inevitable crises.

One such tenet encourages leaders to make wise and rapid decisions in crisis situations, suggesting that while leaders may seek to abdicate decision-making to a group of advisors, it is often the leader who possesses the most comprehensive perspective on the organization and is thus able to respond the fastest and in the best interest of the organization in crisis (James and Wooten, 2005). Furthermore, as Brumfield (2012) and others contend, stakeholders take their cues from the organizational leader's decisiveness or ambivalence and respond either with trust or apprehension.

All three case leaders appeared to demonstrate strong, confident, decision-making abilities in handling their crises, thereby setting the tone for their organizations. Wilson

College's President Mistick recounted the importance of being firm in her decision-making by ensuring that once decisions were made, they were not second-guessed so as to not derail the recovery process. Western Carolina University's Chancellor Bardo demonstrated swift decision-making when he initiated the phone bank for communicating to parents and when he instinctively decided to stay in the residence hall with the students. Tulane University's President Cowen demonstrated his calm, yet authoritative decision-making style when he framed the changes to Tulane's curriculum as a reinvention of Tulane that would provide stakeholders with an opportunity to make a profound impact on the New Orleans' community. Each leader handled their respective crises in their own way, but each also demonstrated a commitment to decisive action, and the stakeholders appeared to respond to that.

Until recently, the literature on crisis leadership was aimed primarily at a business audience. However, a 2007 article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* highlighted the increasing demand for crisis-savvy leaders among colleges and universities. Reporter Paul Fain suggested that the shift in leadership priorities was the result of the increasing glare from a 24/7 national news media and that college search committees have put a stronger emphasis on hiring presidents with crisis management skills (Fain, 2007). Numerous college and university presidents were quoted in the article as supporting this shift, adding that even in daily operations, presidents should "emulate the efficient and decisive managerial skills of successful corporate chiefs," acting more like CEO's than academics (Fain, 2007).

Thus, a third conclusion is that the leadership's handling of the crisis, as opposed to the scope or magnitude of the crisis itself, is a key determining factor in the organization's ability to emerge stronger and more united following a crisis threat.

Conclusion 4: Broader Scope Exists for Discourse of Renewal

The final finding from this study was that the use of discourse of renewal as a form of crisis and post-crisis communications appeared to encourage organizational renewal in varying crisis contexts at higher education institutions. All three crises represented differing crisis types (operational and strategic, physical and non-physical) at institutions outside of the recommended organizational structure, yet all three seemed to demonstrate the effective use of discourse of renewal. This finding is at odds with Ulmer, Seeger and Sellnow's (2007) initial thinking behind the use of discourse of renewal whereby they conceived its use in physical crises at private enterprises.

Therefore, the final and most prominent conclusion of the study is that a broader scope exists for the use of discourse of renewal than was originally conceived. In answering the grand research question of this study, the issue of organizational renewal was encouraged through the discourse of renewal in nonprofit institutions of higher education in much the same way that it was recognized to occur at private enterprises, namely through the use of the four key message characteristics of provisional, prospective, optimistic and leader-based communications. However, the leaders at these higher education institutions utilized a fifth messaging category, transparency, which was not included in the original theory. Finally, the physicality of the crisis was largely irrelevant in the overall use of renewal language.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are several recommendations for further study based on the findings, analysis and conclusions from this research. In order to gain a broader understanding of the use of discourse of renewal, additional studies related to organizational structure, crisis type and crisis timeline should be conducted.

A wider net should be cast in future discourse of renewal studies to include organizations of varying operational structures. These should include public or governmental organizations, additional nonprofit service organizations, and those organizations that are publically traded. A study similar to this collective case study should be conducted within each of these organizational types, culminating with a cross-case analysis between the varying organizational types to explore how discourse of renewal is further utilized in these differing organizational contexts.

Additional studies should also be undertaken to further explore the use of discourse of renewal in a wider variety of crisis types, including both physical and non-physical crises, as well as the varying degrees of crisis severity. This research should be completed to more fully explore the effectiveness of discourse of renewal in different crisis contexts.

Finally, a quantitative content analysis should be conducted to determine if certain categories of discourse of renewal messages are used more frequently than others during each of the crisis stages. Specifically, an analysis of when provisional, prospective, optimistic and transparent messages are delivered over the course of the crisis and recovery phases would aid in a greater understanding of the motivations behind each message type in crisis communications.

Chapter Conclusions

This chapter provided a summary of the study as well as a discussion of the four key study conclusions. In addition, three recommendations were made for further research studies aimed at further understanding the use of discourse of renewal in crisis and post-crisis communications.

A key goal of this study is that the findings are applicable for leaders and practitioners in the field as a collection of cases where an alternate approach to crisis was employed resulting in greater organizational resiliency. These case explorations provide the communications professional with a broader context in which renewal discourse can potentially be employed, both in terms of the type of organization and the type of crisis, thereby expanding on the original parameters of the theory itself.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A - Invitation Letter

Indiana University of Pennsylvania
www.iup.edu

Department of Communications Media
Stouffer Hall, Room 121
1175 Maple Street
Indiana, Pennsylvania 15705-1058

p 724-357-2492
F 724-357-5503
www.iup.edu/ commmedia

November 14, 2012

President Scott S. Cowen
Tulane University
218 Gibson Hall
6823 St. Charles Avenue
New Orleans, LA 70118-5684

Dear Dr. Cowen,

I write to ask you to consider participating in a research study on crisis communication. Specifically I am requesting the opportunity to interview you and your colleagues about Tulane University's handling of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, and how your institution emerged stronger as a result of your crisis communication efforts. This letter serves as a formal invitation for you to participate in this qualitative study.

As a Ph.D. candidate enrolled in the Communications Media & Instructional Technology Doctoral program at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, I am conducting this study as part of the completion of the doctoral dissertation. The purpose of this study is to understand the utilization of Discourse of Renewal as a means for encouraging organizational sense making and learning, and viewing the crisis as an opportunity for growth.

Study Premise
Post-crisis communication has traditionally taken a retrospective stance, focusing primarily on image restoration and placement of blame. In contrast, Discourse of Renewal places emphasis on moving the organization forward by stressing spontaneous, forward-looking, optimistic and leader-based communication to stakeholders, much like what you and your organization appear to have engaged in following the destruction of Hurricane Katrina and its disruption to the University.

Data Collection
Should you consent to participate in the study, as the researcher, I am requesting access to a number of data sources relating to the crisis, including documentation (letters, memoranda, speech transcripts, news clippings, etc.), organizational archival records (including public use information on organizational demographics, maps or charts of the organizational facility, etc.), personal interviews (with you and key organizational administrators, employees, volunteers and other stakeholders), and physical artifacts (including organizational newsletters/newsmagazines, photographic evidence of the crisis, etc.). My expectation is that it will be my responsibility to gather these materials so as not to tax your office or staff in any way.

On-site data collection will occur at your convenience, likely in the early spring of 2013 (late February/early March), and will last no longer than two business days.

Personal Interviews
Together, you and I will determine specifically who will be interviewed from the organization. Each interviewee will be provided with the informed consent form (see attached) prior to their interview. Should

the individual subjects agree to participate in the study, the formal informed consent form will be signed and dated by both the researcher and the interviewee.

Interview questions will be focused on the motivations behind the key renewal messages delivered by the organization and its leadership as well as the critical responses to those messages on the part of the organization's key publics, including the board of directors, the employees, students and other stakeholders.

Confidentiality
The goal of this qualitative case study is to be able to share the in-depth data derived from the subjects. The subjects' responses will not remain confidential. However, the source of those responses will be kept confidential, as their responses will be considered in combination with those from other participants (with the exception of the responses of top leadership which may be identified). Subjects will be notified via the informed consent form that the results of this study may be shared with other academics, professionals in the field, city or state policy makers, and the public-at-large through a variety of dissemination venues including drafts read by dissertation committee members and other faculty, academic journal articles, live or recorded presentations, newspaper or magazine articles, online articles, books or commentaries. The subjects will be encouraged to discuss with the researcher any apprehension they may have regarding the distribution of their data so as an alternative consent may be drafted specifically addressing those concerns.

Participation and Risk
You and your organization's participation in this study are completely voluntary, and you may discontinue participation at any time. Expected risks are minimal. The subjects will be asked about specific, non-confidential, communication messages that have already been delivered as a result of an already-experienced organizational crisis.

I will telephone you on Tuesday, November 20, 2012 to follow-up to this letter, answer any questions that you may have, and determine if we may continue with the study with your permission. If you agree to be a part of the study, a formal letter stating your institution's willingness to participate in the study will be required as part of the Institutional Review Board protocol at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

Should you need to reach me in the meantime, you can do so via email at k.k.barone@iup.edu or via phone at (717) 580-3087. My dissertation chair is Dr. B. Gail Wilson at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and is available via email at bgwilson@iup.edu and via phone at (724) 357-3210.

A copy of this letter has also been sent to your email address, and to your Chief of Staff via email and postal mail to ensure delivery.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this research opportunity.

Sincerely,

Karen K. Barone

Karen K. Barone,
Doctoral Candidate
Indiana University of PA
(717) 580-3087

Appendix B - Sample Informed Consent Form

--- PRINTED ON IUP LETTERHEAD FOR ACTUAL STUDY ----

Sample Informed Consent Form

You are invited to participate in this research study. The following information is provided in order to help you to make an informed decision whether or not to participate. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask.

The purpose of this study is to understand the use of Discourse of Renewal as a means for encouraging organizational sense making and learning, and viewing crisis as an opportunity for growth. This study is being conducted by Ph.D. candidate enrolled in the Communications Media & Instructional Technology Doctoral program at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) as part of the completion of the doctoral dissertation.

This study is a case study of how your organization handled its recent crisis and emerged stronger because of it. You have been invited to participate based on the recommendation of your organization's leader. Your participation is completely voluntary, and will in no way impact your position with the organization. Participation in this study will require approximately 60 minutes of your time where you will be asked general and specific questions relating to the organization's recent crisis and how the leadership of the organization handled that crisis. The focus of the questions will relate to the specific messages that the leadership communicated to you as a stakeholder following the crisis and how you felt those messages impacted the organization. Your responses will be considered in combination with those from other participants.

The results of this study (including anecdotal narratives, event timelines, and additional data sources) may be shared with other academics, professionals in the field, city or state policy makers, and the public-at-large through a variety of dissemination venues including drafts read by dissertation committee members and other faculty, academic journal articles, live or recorded presentations, newspaper or magazine articles, online articles, books or commentaries. Your responses will not remain confidential, however you as the source of those responses will be kept confidential. You are encouraged to discuss with me any apprehension you may have regarding the distribution of your data so as an alternative consent may be drafted specifically addressing those concerns.

All data will be retained for at least three years in compliance with federal regulations. Physical data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's personal office. Electronic data will be stored on a password-protected IUP network drive that only the researcher has access to (i.e. H drive). Upon completion of the doctoral dissertation, the researcher will transfer the information to the secured IUP network drive of Dr. B. Gail Wilson, CMIT Ph.D. coordinator, who will keep it for the remainder of the three years.

You and your organization's participation in this study are completely voluntary, and you may discontinue participation at any time. Upon your request to withdraw, all information pertaining to you and your case will be destroyed.

Please contact Karen Barone at (717) 580-3087 or k.k.barone@iup.edu if you have any questions about this study. Thank you for your participation. **This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Phone: 724/357-7730).**

Research Advisor: Dr. B. Gail Wilson, Communications Media Department, Indiana University of PA, Stouffer Hall, Room 121, 1175 Maple Street, Indiana, PA 15705-1058. Phone: (724) 357-3210.

Sample Informed Consent Form (continued)

VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM:

I have read and understand the information on the form and I consent to volunteer to be a subject in this study. I understand that the results of this study may be shared with other academics, professionals in the field, city or state policy makers, and the public-at-large through a variety of dissemination venues including drafts read by dissertation committee members and other faculty, academic journal articles, live or recorded presentations, newspaper or magazine articles, online articles, books or commentaries. I understand that I have the right to withdraw at any time. I have received an unsigned copy of this informed Consent Form to keep in my possession.

Name (PLEASE PRINT): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Phone number where you can be reached: _____
Email address where you can be reached: _____
Best days and times to reach you: _____
_____

I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research study, have answered any questions that have been raised, and have witnessed the above signature.

Investigator's Signature: _____
Date: _____

Please contact Karen Barone at (717) 580-3087 or k.k.barone@iup.edu if you have any questions about this study. Thank you for your participation. **This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Phone: 724/357-7730).**

Research Advisor: Dr. B. Gail Wilson, Communications Media Department, Indiana University of PA, Stouffer Hall, Room 121, 1175 Maple Street, Indiana, PA 15705-1058. Phone: (724) 357-3210.

Appendix C - Interview Protocol

To what extent were the leaders' messages provisional (spontaneous and unrehearsed)?
1. Were your main messages planned in advance or more spontaneous?
2. Did you speak from a script or go "off the cuff" when you delivered this message?
3. If you went "off the cuff," were you surprised by what you said?
4. What was the goal behind this key message to stakeholders?

How did the board or advisors respond to the leaders' initial messages?
5. What kind of a response did the Board of Directors give you to your messages?
6. If the message was spontaneous, was there support or push back from the board regarding the message?
7. Overall, was your ability to lead and take decisive action hindered or enhanced by the existence of a Board of Directors? Why?

How did the leaders' discourse take a prospective stance, focusing the stakeholders' energies in a positive, forward-moving, direction as opposed to look back at whom was to blame?
8. What was the vision that you tried to get the campus to rally around in the midst of the crisis?
9. Where did that vision come from? What was it based on?

How did the leader establish a vision for the future, and on what was it based?
10. Was this your ideal vision or the collective vision of the "leadership team?"
11. How far out into the future did the new vision extend?
12. At what point did you become concerned about the logistical issues relating to the achievement of that future?
13. Was that vision realized?

How did the leaders' message instill a sense of optimism in their stakeholders and how soon after the crisis did that optimism emerge?
14. As you saw it, what possibilities were now available to the school that hadn't been there before the crisis?
15. Where did your optimism come from? Why did you feel optimistic in this crisis situation?
16. How did your stakeholders frame the event after your messages? Did they also adopt your optimistic attitude?
17. Was there a change in the stakeholders' view of the crisis, and if so, when did that occur?

Did positive outcomes emerge as a result of the crisis? If so, what were they?
18. Did the crisis bring about positive outcomes?

How did the leaders' messages impact the sense of security among stakeholders during and after the crisis?

19. How did you help your stakeholders (students, employees, parents) make sense of what was happening and feel secure in the midst of a difficult situation?

In what ways were the leaders' messages reflective of their own personal core values and beliefs as opposed to merely mirroring the organization's values and beliefs?

20. How did your own personal values and beliefs influence the content of the messages you delivered?
21. How did the organization's values and beliefs influence your message?

What organizational factors do leaders attribute to aiding in the creation of their post-crisis messages?

22. What other factors influenced your message and the overall ways in which you handled the crisis?

NOTE: Research questions are in bold, interview questions are numbered.