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From Image Restoration to Renewal: Approaches to Understanding Postcrisis Communication

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Crisis communication is a burgeoning field with multiple exigencies for managing crisis situations. This article provides an examination of the major developments in the diverse and dynamic area of crisis response discourse, paying particular attention to the role of communication in managing crises. Among the frameworks discussed, the discourse of renewal (DR) is positioned as an alternative and extension of the available strategies for crisis response. Finally, we describe implications for crisis communication research based on the application of this new framework.

Keywords: Crisis; Renewal; Image Restoration; Crisis Response Strategies

Inquiry into the communication dimensions of crises and disasters has taken a variety of forms, employed many methods, and been guided by diverse theoretical frameworks from several fields. This includes a wide-ranging body of research on image restoration and apologetic discourse (Benoit, 1995; Hearit, 1995; Coombs, 1998) and significant research into the communication dimensions of emergency evacuations and warnings (Mileti & Fitzpatrick 1992; Mileti & Peek, 2000; Mileti & Sorenson, 1990; Perry & Lindell, 2006). In addition, a very large and interdisciplinary body of work has developed in the area of risk perception and communication (see Morgan, Fischhoff, Bostrom, & Altman, 2002; Slovic, 2000). Recently, scholars have sought to expand the parameters of both risk and crisis communication (see Heath & O'Hair, 2009). This includes efforts to merge work in risk and crisis communication, expand research into public health crises and account for an explosion of powerful

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new technologies. One aspect of this work, known broadly as the discourse of renewal, seeks to move beyond work in image restoration to better understand the ways in which more inclusive communication processes between organizations and communities may help reconstitute a system after it experiences a crisis. Discourse of renewal focuses on the constitutive nature of discourse and the natural tendencies of organization and communities to self organize following crisis or disaster (Seeger, Sellnow & Ulmer, 2003; Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger, 2007). Discourse of renewal seeks to move beyond issues of blame and responsibility to "recognize opportunities... and set new standards for service" (Ulmer et al., 2007, p. 319).

In this article, we describe in general terms the role of communication in crisis and briefly outline some of the major developments in this diverse and dynamic area of scholarship. We review literature on postcrisis communication including image restoration and restorative rhetoric, and position the discourse of renewal framework as an alternative and extension. Finally, we describe some implications for crisis communication research based upon this new framework for understanding crisis communication.

Crisis and Crisis Communication

Crises are generally recognized as specific "non-routine events in societies or their larger subsystem (e.g., regions or communities) that involve social disruption and physical harm" (Kreps, 1988). Recently, a group of very dramatic crises including 9/11, hurricane Katrina, and the H1N1 flu outbreak has accelerated the research agenda in crisis studies. Disasters and crises usually include three defining characteristics: (1) high levels of uncertainty, surprising or unanticipated occurrences, (2) severe threat to high-priority goals and values, and (3) short or very restricted time for a response (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2003). An organizational crisis can also be described as a specific, unexpected and non-routine event or series of events that disrupt the status quo and basic assumptions regarding what constitutes normal (Seeger et al., 2003). Crises have also been described as "focusing events" creating an opportunity to advance a particular issue agenda in the public domain (Birkland, 1997).

Communication is generally recognized as a key emergency management and response activity serving a variety of important functions before, during and after a crisis. These include: (1) clarifying risk and encouraging preparedness; (2) announcing evacuations and issuing warning; (3) providing information to the general public; (4) enhancing coordination, cooperation and logistics among response agencies; (5) facilitating mitigation on the part of the public and affected communities; (6) helping make sense of the disaster; (7) reassuring, comforting and consoling those affected; (8) recreating order and meaning; (9) providing general information to the larger public; and (10) facilitating renewal, learning, and disseminating lessons. In a number of cases, communication processes were significant factors in the onset of a crisis and in some cases, faulty or deficient communication made a crisis much worse.

From the perspective of communication, a crisis creates high levels of uncertainty with key stakeholders and thus an intense need for immediate communication about

important information. Often, the established channels of communication (print, television and Internet) are degraded at the very time communication is most critical. A significant proportion of the telecommunication capacity for lower Manhattan, for example, was located in the World Trade Center. The Red River floods that inundated Fargo, North Dakota, in 1999, destroyed the local newspaper, including its historical archives. At the same time, the non-normal conditions and high uncertainty created by a crisis or disaster increases the need for and importance of information. This explains the condition sometimes described as an information vacuum; where there is an intense and critical need for information at the very time when information is scarce. This phenomenon also accounts for the application of new social networking technologies to crisis communication. These technologies can be both robust and immediate.

Public relations professionals and public information officers are often called upon during a crisis to represent the needs of specific organizations associated with the crisis and to disseminate information to the public about what is happening, how it occurred, what actions are being taken, and what the public should do. For example, the public may be advised to avoid certain products, commodities, or locations, boil water, seek medical attention, and shelter in place or evacuate. Specific information about what is happening and how the crisis is developing is usually featured in news media coverage (Walters, Wilkins, & Walters, 1988). Increasingly, both response agencies and the public are using new technologies, such as Google maps, Twitter and Facebook to meet their crisis communication needs. The web may also be a source for crises as Domino's Pizza discovered when an employee posted a Youtube video showing adulteration of food. Response groups and government agencies must not only communicate with the public, but also must communicate and coordinate with each other. Following the World Trade Center attack, for example, fire fighters, police and other emergency personnel were unable to communicate with one another due to incompatible telecommunication equipment. Some emergency response personnel did not receive the order to leave the collapsing World Trade Center (Libenau, 2003). This event has led to new standards for communication and interoperability among emergency personnel. Representatives, leaders or spokespersons for organizations associated with a crisis are usually called on to offer explanations and accounts for the crisis. One way these accounts have been examined is from the perspective of image restoration strategies for addressing these postcrisis communication exigencies for repairing damaged reputations.

This process of image restoration is most often framed as apologia, or a genre of public apologetic discourse (Benoit & Lindsey, 1987; Benoit & Brinson, 1994). Following accusations of wrongdoing, such as those often made in the aftermath of a crisis, organizations must engage in defense and image restoration (Hearit, 1995). Image restoration theory has grown from a specialized area of genre criticism in rhetorical analysis into a comprehensive body of theory and research detailing the postcrisis communication strategies organizations use to repair the damage done by some perceived wrongdoing (see Benoit, 1995; Coombs, 1999; Hearit, 1995). These image-restoration strategies are most often associated with organizations perceived to

have caused or contributed to a crisis or those organizations that have somehow failed to mount an effective response to a crisis. These strategies are grounded in a belief "that communication (words and actions) [sic] affect how stakeholders perceive the organization in crisis" (Coombs, 1999, p. 121). William Benoit (1995) has developed the most comprehensive and widely applied typology of image restoration strategies. This framework is based on the assumption that image and reputation is a valuable commodity for individuals and organizations, that image threats occur frequently, and that communication can help repair image.

Benoit's five image-restoration strategies include denial, evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness of the event, corrective action, and mortification. Within these five categories are some 14 distinct rhetorical strategies.

Denial may involve simply refuting responsibility for an event or shifting the blame from the organization to other outside individuals or agencies. Organizations may evade responsibility for a crisis by claiming they were provoked, lacked sufficient information (defeasibility), experienced an accident, or that, despite the crisis, they were acting with good intentions. The category of reduction of the perceived offensiveness of the crisis event includes three strategies: bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence. Bolstering may "mitigate the negative effects" of the wrongdoing by strengthening the audience's "positive" feelings toward the organization (Benoit, 1995, p. 77). Differentiation occurs when the communicator "attempts to distinguish the act performed from other similar but less desirable actions" (Benoit, 1995, p. 73). Transcendence as a strategy involves suggesting "a different frame of reference" for the act in question (Benoit, 1995, p. 74). To these, Benoit adds minimizing the crisis, attacking the accuser, and compensating the victims. In taking corrective action, the accused pledges to follow one of two alternatives: "restoring the situation to the state of affairs before the objectionable action and/or promising to 'mend one's ways' and make changes to prevent the recurrence of the undesirable act" (p. 79). Mortification occurs when the accused accepts responsibility for its wrongdoing and asks to be forgiven. Image restoration has generated a rich body of case-based research and provided a very detailed picture of the image restoration exigency organizations face in a postcrisis context (Benoit, 1997, 2000, 2006). Benoit's work remains the most comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding postcrisis communication.

Coombs' (1999) strategies of image restoration are similarly grounded in threats to image but are more closely associated with postcrisis public relations. His response typology accounts for the most common strategies on a continuum between defensive and accommodative responses to crises. The first two strategies involve denial that a crisis exists. Attacking the accuser is the most extreme defensive stance, whereby the organization "confronts the person or group who claims that a crisis exists" (p. 123). Organizations, for example, sometimes threaten lawsuits as part of their attacks on the accuser. In denial, Coombs' second defensive strategy, the organization contends "that there is no crisis" or that "the organization has no responsibility for the crisis" (p. 125). Offering an excuse is a third defensive posture. Excuses enable organizations to deny "any intention to do harm" or to claim that "the organization had no control of the events that led to the crisis" (p. 123). Coombs places justification at the center of

his defensive versus accommodative continuum. Justification is similar to Benoit's (1995) minimization strategy. When applying justification, an organization "accepts the crisis but tries to downplay the perceived severity" (p. 125). Coombs warns, however, that justifying arguments may create the problematic perception that the organization is "trivializing victim concerns" (p. 125). Ingratiation, the first of Coombs' accommodating strategies, is similar to what Benoit calls bolstering. Organizations ingratiate during crises by praising a stakeholder or by emphasizing "good deeds of the past" (p. 123). A second ingratiating strategy, corrective action, parallels Benoit's category of the same name. Organizations enact corrective action by "seeking to repair the damage from the crisis" or by taking "steps to prevent a repeat of the crisis" (Coombs, 1999, p. 123). Coombs' final strategy, full apology, is the most ingratiating. A full apology occurs when the organization publicly takes full responsibility and "asks forgiveness for the crisis" (p. 123). Some forms of victim compensation may also be included in this strategy.

A third approach to the problem of image restoration has been described by Keith Hearit (1995, 2006). He notes that apologia is a "response that seeks to distance institutional actors from their wrongdoing and rearm adherence to key social values" (Hearit, 1995, p. 10). Hearit (1995) observes that efforts at image restoration often include some form of denial or diffusion of responsibility and an effort to reconnect with the values that have been transgressed. This "epideictic" and "value centered discourse" is designed to help relegitimize an organization following a crisis (p. 11). Moreover, apologia is "a response to criticism that seeks to present a compelling competing account of organizational accusations" (Hearit, 2001, p. 502). Hearit (2006) has offered "five distinct prototypical stances that company officials make use of to defend their actions: denial, counterattack, differentiation, apology, and legal" (p. 15). These strategies are used principally for an organization to account for its actions after a crisis.

Rowland and Jerome (2004) suggest that the lack of consensus among scholars such as Benoit, Coombs, and Hearit regarding the defining characteristics of image restoration discourse when applied to organizations is that two purposes are served by this form of discourse; image repair and image maintenance. Image addresses the specifics of an accused wrongdoing while maintenance concerns the strategic portrayal of the rest of the organization as caring, just and generally legitimate. In some cases, these purposes "collapse on one another" (p. 195). Drawing on argument theory, Rowland and Jerome proceed to describe three strategies for this latter form: (1) concern for victims, (2) bolstering values, and (3) denying intent to do harm.

These various models of image restoration have generated significant research and contributed significantly to a larger understanding of postcrisis communication exigencies and strategies. They have also provided guidelines for practice in public relations and political communication. Coombs' framework has been extended into a more general situated crisis communication theory, a contingency approach that seeks to link strategies to specific contextual variables (Coombs, 2004). Benoit's framework has been applied broadly to corporate, government, and political contexts.

Image restoration theory comes very close to serving as a general model of postcrisis communication.

While image restoration theory has generated a significant and well-researched body of scholarship, it is not without limitations. Burns and Bruner (2000), for example, note that image restoration reflects "a more static or linear view of rhetoric," that does not always capture the dynamic nature of claims and counter claims. They call for image restoration research that is more dynamic and receiver oriented. Benoit has responded to these observations by noting that the approach cannot capture the complex multiple audiences and dynamics of a crisis. Like many theories based in rhetorical criticism, image restoration theory also suffers from the effort to describe a set of static and finite categories for what is inevitably a very dynamic process.

In addition, image restoration tends to reify a view of rhetoric as strategy and a tendency to view accusations of wrong doing as problems of image as opposed to issues of substance. Strategic responses creates the impression of some calculated and premeditated activity designed to create a particular outcome, in this case changing the perception that has developed in response to an accusation of wrongdoing. While this is obviously not the intent of image restoration theory theorists, the application of these strategies, particularly within public relations practice, has potential to contribute to the perception of public relations as spin. In this way, the strategies of image restoration theory can be used to mask, confuse and diffuse responsibility for wrongdoing and to limit and avoid accountability. Hearit and Borden (2006) note that from the perspective of ethics, apologetic discourse should be about reconciliation (p. 58). They suggest that ethical approaches to apologia should be "truthful, sincere, timely, voluntary, address all stakeholders, and contextually appropriate" (p. 64). Moreover, strategic efforts to restore an organization's image within the context of destruction and loss following a crisis may be judged very negatively. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, for example, it was revealed that FEMA administrator Michael Brown had regularly consulted his press secretary about appropriate dress, including whether he should roll up his sleeves and wear a tie when he was discussing response efforts. Brown seemed much more concerned about image than about the substance of his response. This response was judged very negatively given the level of destruction and harm caused by the hurricane and the inadequate response by FEMA.

The postcrisis communication exigencies are not limited, however, to image restoration. Other communication and public relations needs are also important, particularly when dealing with disasters and crises that have broader impact and which are not closely associated with a specific organization. Postcrisis communication also may focus on the substantive issues of repair, recovery, rebuilding and helping victims as well as restoring the images of organizations following a crisis; this set of actions is constituted under the communication crisis rubric of discourse of renewal

Discourse of Renewal

The *discourse of renewal* framework introduced earlier seeks to go beyond the parameters of image restoration to address the communication exigencies associated

with rebuilding, recovery and revitalization. Discourse of renewal is grounded in larger value dimensions of organizations, communities and stakeholder relationships, and in the needs that develop following a crisis. Stakeholder theory includes an understanding of mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their constituencies (Ulmer et al., 2007). Humanistic ethics of support and care and values associated with social responsibility and social justice often motivate disaster response (Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow, 2007). In addition, chaos theory has prompted scholars interested in postcrisis communication to examine the opportunities that follow any crisis or disaster (Sellnow, Seeger, & Ulmer, 2002). Finally, discourse of renewal is a framework that articulates with the rhetorical genre of the jeremiad and the tradition of *restorative rhetoric*.

Similar to discourse of renewal, restorative rhetoric shifts postcrisis communication from reducing the offensiveness of the occurrence and maintaining a positive image to facilitating dialogue between the public and crisis leaders, and helping victims and the general public to make sense of the crisis event. Restorative rhetoric involves a more generative and spontaneous dialogue that is shaped not just in response to the crisis itself, but by contextual and social dimensions that layer the crisis event and influence response to it. For instance, issues of race and class during the failed response to Hurricane Katrina layered New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin's accusations of government failure and his discourse to restore order in New Orleans. His response was a spontaneous outpouring based on both the suffering and loss and the failures in government response. Two key components that underlie restorative rhetoric: (1) while there are often identifiable victims of these events, there is a wider public/audience that is also traumatized and therefore, must be included in the response dialogue and; (2) crisis sensemaking is a dynamic, transactive process, neither linear, nor unidirectional as traditional image restoration theory frameworks might suggest. While the crisis leader plays a major role in framing the occurrence, what is taken away from it is generated through that leader's ability to identify with the concerns and needs of the public. The key purposes of restorative rhetoric then are to restore faith in a system by reconnecting with a core set of values and beliefs, to facilitate healing of those directly affected by the crisis and wider audiences who serve as witnesses to the destruction, to create a sense of security during the resolution of the crisis, and to establish a vision for the future. Restorative rhetoric follows stages that are similar to phases of crisis management. These include: (1) initial reaction, (2) assessment of the crisis, (3) issues of blame, (4) healing and forgiveness, and (5) corrective action and rebuilding (Griffin & Allison, 2007).

As with image restoration, discourse of renewal specifically addresses the public discourse that follows a crisis, or postcrisis communication. While image restoration typically focuses on issues of wrongdoing, accusations of responsibility and questions about cause, blame, and accountability, the discourse of renewal framework is focused on a different set of postcrisis communication exigencies. Discourse of renewal as a form of discourse occurs where wrongdoing is not the primary or most salient exigency. Beyond the need to repair image and address questions of cause and blame, organizational managers, public officials, community leaders and public

relations officers often must also generate support for rebuilding and rejuvenating damaged equipment, facilities, infrastructure, and relationships. They face the challenge of creating consensus around efforts to rebuild, recreate, and reconstitute organization. Although the discourse of renewal is closely associated with the framework of restorative rhetoric, the latter is a more general paradigm of communication with applications in political and religious contexts (Bostdorff, 2003). Moreover, restorative rhetoric has close conceptual connections to the rhetorical tradition of the jeremiad and efforts to publicly connect social criticism with spiritual and social renewal through a form of political and religious discourse (Bercovitch, 1978). Discourse of renewal, in contrast, has been described within the specific rhetorical contexts of disasters and crises, usually large in scale with immediate or potential impacts on the larger community. Discourse of renewal addresses both the immediate audience of these affected by the crisis and a larger mediated audience of observers who have the potential to provide support.

While significant research has examined image restoration and disaster information, comparatively little attention has focused on the role of communication in this clean-up, recovery, and rebuilding phase. Research into this postcrisis renewal process builds from organizational discourse, natural postcrisis organizing process, and the rhetorical traditions described above. In some postcrisis contexts, a form of natural cooperation and healing emerges that is not primarily concerned with strategic portrayals of causation and blame or with restoring a damaged image or reputation. These contexts more typically are associated with disasters and crises that have broader community impact and which are not closely associated with a specific organization. Moreover, contexts where issues of wrongdoing are not the primary or most salient conditions may be more conducive to renewal. Some communities and organizations are able to almost immediately embark on rebuilding or renewal following a crisis. These organizations are able to constitute a frame or larger meaning for the event that is empowering and motivational to those affected by the crisis and which engenders cooperation and support from others, including external stakeholders.

Elements

Seeger and Ulmer (2001) initially proposed a renewal based framework in their exploration of Aaron Feuerstein, owner of Malden Mills, a textile firm in Lawrence, Massachusetts, and Milt Cole, owner of a lumber company in Logansport, Indiana. In both cases, these CEOs responded to the destruction of their factories by fire, not by apologizing, investigating, shifting blame, or denying responsibility, but by immediately and publicly committing to continue paying workers and rebuilding their destroyed facilities. These immediate announcements of decisions to rebuild were made even though the economic viability of these enterprises was seriously undermined. The responses offered by Feuerstein and Cole were widely reported in the press as powerful examples of management virtue and commitment to the community (Seeger & Ulmer, 2001). This immediate, personal and public pledge to rebuild and

maintain support for employees eliminated protracted arguments over causation and blame and moved instead to future plans and prospects. The potential harm caused by the events was contained and reduced because employees were not asked to endure financial hardship while waiting for the organizations to reopen. In addition, the events themselves as well as the CEOs selfless responses took on the status of significant events, promoting important lessons about community, commitment, and cooperation. In fact, Feuerstein was invited to State of the Union address by then President Clinton and held up as a model of management ethics (Ulmer, 2001).

Following the initial description from these cases, discourse of renewal has been associated with several theoretical perspectives. First, it is associated with the tendency of systems to self-organize following some severe disruption or bifurcation. According to the principles of chaos theory, this is a natural feature of complex systems which has been associated with the tendency of systems to evolve to more highly ordered states (Seeger et al., 2003). Several disaster researchers have also noted that implicit in any disaster are opportunities. The emergence of these opportunities, in what is sometimes called the silver lining effect, is usually obscured by an overwhelming sense of loss and destruction. If these opportunities can be identified and brought to the forefront of public communication in compelling and persuasive ways, renewal often follows.

As noted earlier, discourse of renewal is also grounded in rhetorical traditions and the need to make sense of loss and disaster. The traditional role of the leader or CEO as a comforting and guiding figure following a crisis is well established. The leader is a spokesperson in these cases, representing the needs and perspectives of communities and organizations. Bostdorff (2003) examined the rhetoric of President Bush following 9/11 and drew parallels to the Puritan tradition of covenant renewal discourse. Bostdorff (2003) traces covenant renewal discourse to the Puritan era where leaders sought to reinvigorate the community's commitment to core values. Following a general falling away from faith, these early Puritan communities had experienced a series of calamities and sought to make sense of these events and reorder their beliefs through a return to founding values. The Christian ideal of a sacred covenant with God and forgiveness for transgressions from the covenant create this opportunity for renewal and a return to a state of grace. According to Christian traditions, this process represents a kind of spiritual rebirth where one is freed from prior sins and constraints. Discourse of renewal draws on these rhetorical traditions and the associated core values. Faith, commitment to community and stakeholders, and the humanistic need to help those harmed by the crisis, are used as a basis for support and rebuilding. In addition, leadership virtues, including credibility, honesty and commitment, have also been associated with renewing discourse. While Hale, Dulek, and Hale (2005) suggest that crisis events often involve rapid, decisive action by the crisis leader, Schoenberg (2005) contends that a crisis management leader must also be a good communicator. The leader often emerges as the individual who can best connect with the public, build trust, and create a vision for the future. It is often this vision, offered by a credible leader, that serves as the basis for postcrisis renewal.

A postcrisis discourse of renewal is characterized by four dominant features: prospective focus; the opportunities inherent in the crisis; provisional rather than strategic responses; and ethical communication grounded in core values (Seeger & Ulmer, 2001; Seeger, Ulmer, Sellnow, & Novak, 2004; Ulmer & Sellnow, 2002). Unlike image restoration theory, discourse of renewal is prospective in that it describes activities related to future goals and development as opposed to retrospectively seeking to explain, justify or interpret what happened in the past. Most often, postcrisis discourse looks back in an effort to strategically manage impressions of a crisis including cause. In particular, the retrospective focus of most crisis discourse involves strategic portrayals of the chain of causal events that led to the crisis. These portrayals are designed to bolster strategic portrayals of blame and responsibility. Discourse of renewal, in contrast, focuses on ways to move forward in constructing or reconstructing new, and better organizational forms. Often, the discourse begins with an implicit or explicit rejection of backward-looking perspectives and moves immediately to the rebuilding process. This is followed by a vision of the future designed to create consensus and commitment among a diverse group of stakeholders. In this way, the outpouring of good will and support that typically emerge after a crisis are immediately leveraged for forward progress.

Second, discourse of renewal focuses on the inherent opportunities created by a crisis. Ulmer, Sellnow, and Seeger (2007) have suggested that a discourse of renewal must overcome the threat-bias that characterizes most crises. Doing so is necessary to seeing the opportunities that may emerge from a crisis. Many crises create room or space for organizations and communities to reemerge, re-envision or reconstitute themselves without previous constraints or historical limitations. In this way, a crisis may result in a new beginning, a rebirth and a new point of departure for operations. Discourse of renewal was first described in investigations of large-scale industrial fires. Fires typically create almost complete destruction generating a clear space upon which new growth can emerge. In fact, in natural ecosystems, fires are often seen as processes necessary to remove dead wood, underbrush and old growth, while creating clear and fertile spaces for new growth. For organizations, this may mean new equipment, facilities, procedures, methods, and relationships with important stakeholders. The resulting organizations may be more streamlined, rational and profitable than before the crisis.

The Chrysler near-bankruptcy crisis of the 1980s and the bankruptcy crises of Chrysler and General Motors in 2009 all resulted in significant downsizing and repositioning of products, methods and relationships. The 1980 Chrysler near-bankruptcy crisis was accompanied by a renewal discourse through the charismatic new CEO, Lee Iacocca. The company was able to move out of stagnation and decline into a stage of repaid growth, change and profitability (Seeger, 1986). While it is not yet clear how the most recent round of auto company bankruptcies may play out, the accompanying public discourse is grounded in themes of renewal and the reordering and repositioning of core activities. Moreover, this recent economic crisis has created unique opportunities to move away form unprofitable operations, relationships and commitments.

In addition to the opportunities associated with growth there are also important opportunities to learn from a crisis (Sitkin, 1996). Often, discourse of renewal is associated with a very explicit call to learn from the mistakes of the past and make something positive from the pain and loss. A crisis provides an opportunity for an organization, group or community to learn and grow while it confronts problems or deficiencies in its operations or response. It is important to note that organizations do not have to directly experience a crisis in order to achieve renewal. In fact, an organization can learn vicariously from other organizations experiencing a crisis. Organizations can engage in learning and renewal based on serious threat (Ulmer et al., 2007). For instance, organizations may witness others in their industry experience a crisis and capitalize on the opportunity to learn from this failure (Tolkein, Seeger, & Batteau, 2005). Similarly, organizations may have near misses or potential threats that may become opportunities to learn and better prepare for future crises. In short, renewal focuses on the opportunities to learn from crisis in order to strengthen the organization, its operations and response capacity. During the rebuilding stage the organization is likely to describe how it has learned from the event and will use this learning in its future operations.

A third characteristic of this discourse is its provisional rather than strategic nature. While image restoration has been understood as a strategic response to crisis, discourse of renewal emerges from a more natural instinct to rebuild or reconstitute order following loss. Initial descriptions of discourse of renewal grounded this instinct within the more general entrepreneurial drive, where the impulse to create and innovate drives the development of organizations. Postcrisis image restoration strategies most typically involve a carefully constructed strategy to avoid increasing legal liability or enhancing the expectations of various stakeholders. Public relations and legal professionals are consulted to create strategically ambiguous statements designed to limit additional liability. Postcrisis discourse of renewal, in contrast, is more natural, honest, and instinctive typically emerging from a leader's wishes or hopes regarding what might happen. After a loss of normalcy induced by crisis, leaders are often expected to construct a coherent organizational discourse that contributes to the development of a new, shared understanding (Grant, Keenoy, & Oswick, 1998). In some cases, this postcrisis interpretation may be compelling and constitute extraordinary efforts by followers to rebuild and recreate organization. This form of discourse may be driven by value systems and patterns of conduct and relationships. While a strategic response and a provisional response are not mutually exclusive, the latter is more authentic, genuine and immediate.

Finally, discourse of renewal is grounded in ethical communication and value-based approaches. Bostdorff (2003) noted that covenant renewal discourse is characterized by a recommitment to core defining values. Hearit's model of image restoration similarly emphasizes values, particularly, "honesty, responsibility and self-control" (2006, p. 212). Ulmer and Sellnow (2002) examined the role of discourse renewal following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. The communication focused on stakeholder commitment, commitment to correction of security lapses, and core patriotic and American values. In terms of core values, governmental,

public, and private organizations openly communicated "greater goals of independence and freedom" in their "postcrisis advertisements" (p. 364). The cases of Malden Mills and Cole Hardwoods discussed earlier were grounded in commitments to community, workers, and customers. In their analysis of renewal discourse following the destruction of the bond trading company, Cantor-Fitzgerald in the World Trade Center attacks, Seeger, Ulmer, Novak and Sellnow (2005) found strong appeals to help those hurt by the crisis. The need to rebuild the company was framed in terms of helping the widows and orphans of those who had lost their lives.

Discourse of renewal has been applied to a number of crises, including the Chrysler near bankruptcy crisis of 1982, Schwan's response to a Salmonella outbreak in 1994, the fires at Malden Mills and Cole Hardwoods, the fire that engulfed Clarke College in 1984, the Y2K technology threat, the destruction that followed the 9/11 attacks, and a case of contaminated food. It has also been applied to a radical transformation of a technology organization (Wastell, McMaster, & Kawalek, 2007). Coombs (2009) has described discourse of renewal as an important extension of the larger genre of image restoration theories. He notes further that discourse of renewal is limited in its applicability to very specific contexts and forms of crises. It is important to note that discourse is not the typical response to a crisis. As such, discourse of renewal provides a framework for examining a broader range of crises and associated postcrisis communication. Reierson, Sellnow and Ulmer (2009) suggest that discourse of renewal is a response to the complexities of a crisis situation and the effort to find some positive meaning and a sense of direction within the uncertainty and loss of a crisis. Moreover, discourse of renewal moves away from notions of postcrisis communication as a premeditated strategy designed to limit harm and avoid accountability often by masking or diffusing responsibility.

Conclusion

Crises and disasters of all kinds are increasingly common and communication professionals must play central roles in responding to these events. Postcrisis communication has been approached from several perspectives including image restoration theory and apologetic discourse, from the perspective of the jeremiad and from the framework of covenant renewal discourse. Much of the current communication-based research on postcrisis communication emphasizes the role of strategic responses in repairing an organization's damaged image following a crisis. This approach is characterized primarily by image restoration theory and its various iterations. The emerging framework, the discourse of renewal, emphasizes a provisional and prospective response, correcting and learning from problems and mistakes, moving forward, and communicating from a value position. The discourse of renewal also focuses on the opportunities inherent to crisis events rather than the threats. The discourse of renewal is closely associated with the larger tradition of restorative rhetoric. As Coombs (2009) suggests, discourse of renewal may be limited to specific contexts and limited kinds of crises and disasters. Considered along side the more established image restoration theory approaches, a more complete view of

the complex and dynamic process of postcrisis communication is emerging. Communication is not only critical to image repair following a crisis but also plays a central role in recovery, rebuilding, and renewal.

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