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Elodie S. Fichet

Creativity Readiness in Crisis Communications:

How Crisis Communicators' Ability to be Creative is Impacted at the Individual, Work Team, and Organizational Levels

Elodie S. Fichet

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Reading Committee:

Gina Neff, Co-Chair

Kathleen Fearn-Banks, Co-Chair

Nancy Rivenburgh

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Abstract

Creativity Readiness in Crisis Communications:

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Elodie S. Fichet

Chairs of the Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Gina Neff and Prof. Kathleen Fearn-Banks
Department of Communication

In recent years, the global environment in which modern organizations operate has been dominated by a 24-hour news cycle, rapid information flows, demanding increased sensitivities to diverse populations, and intense scrutiny upon every level of the organization. The evolving informational habits have heightened the pressures on organizations and how they deal with crises, which has reshaped the field of crisis communication. In this complex and global environment, the ability to be creative has been named one of the key components to differentiation and survival. Based on a necessary paradigm shift for crisis communication, where uncertainty and chaos are embraced, I argue that organizations that are Creativity Ready have the ability to be more adaptive and better prepared to respond to unexpected situations. Thus, this study sought to understand how crisis communicators strike a balance between crisis planning and the necessity of being flexible and creative in the face of crises. By designing and applying of the Creativity Readiness construct to branding discourse related to creativity as found on corporate websites and Twitter feeds, as well as crisis communicators interviews, this study maps out to what extent crisis communicators

operate in an environment conducive of creative behaviors. Overall, it was found that, in crisis communication, creative work happens mostly out of necessity—at times when plans fail or are simply not enough to appropriately deal with a crisis. Crisis communicators and their organizations have not yet truly carved out a space where creativity is fostered, supported, and expected.

Keywords: communication, public relations, crisis communication, creativity, innovation, organizations, idea management, information management, technology

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Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

"A couple years ago, you wouldn't worry about the president tweeting at you and how this would affect your business—or potentially destroying it; 'Attack by President' wasn't a tab in your crisis plan."

—Participant 15, May 2017

"Well, I suggest you gentlemen invent a way to put a square peg in a round hole. Rapidly."

—NASA Flight Director Gene Kranz, to engineers working to fix the lunar module's CO_2 filter problem, in *Apollo 13*

1.1 CONTEXT

Modern organizations operate in an eternally connected, global environment dominated by a 24-hour news cycle, rapid information flows, demanding increased sensitivities to diverse populations, and intense scrutiny upon every level of the organization. Indeed, over the last decade, innovative technologies (from social media to new hardware) have transformed how organizations communicate. Nowadays, online communication has become omnidirectional, meaning that it is top-down (organizations to constituents), bottom-up (constituents to organizations), and horizontal (constituents to constituents)—where members of a community can communicate and organize.

Yet reshaped informational habits have also affected how companies deal with their customers, and organizations face a pressing need to stand out and differentiate themselves from competitors. The rapid flow of information means that a seemingly minor faux pas can quickly become a major crisis. The power to readily share and consume information can turn into a curse,

as the swift spread of misinformation leads to the propagation of negative stories (Fearn-Banks, 2011; Hiltz, Kushma, & Plotnick, 2014; Liu, Fraustino, & Jin, 2014). At the basic level, a disgruntled customer is just one tweet away from having a direct impact on an offending organization. As Brad Phillips of Phillips Media Relations said, "You need to be prepared for today's media culture, in which a tweet can become newsworthy and a news interview can become tweet-worthy" (Philips, 2013, p.9). Given the global media landscape, no crisis is isolated or local for any company.

The quick propagation of information has raised the bar when it comes to crisis management and communication. To remain at the cutting edge of crisis communication practices, crisis managers and communicators need to leverage the resources available to them and keep up with how and where their audiences are communicating. Organizations need to not only be ready to efficiently respond to challenges, but also, in many cases, to be creative to set themselves apart from competitors. In the words of Gene Kranz, to be ready to "invent a way to put a square peg in a round hole. Rapidly."

Over the last two decades there has been a clear evolution in the realm of crisis communications. As Coombs (2007) notes, with the rapid evolution of new media, the practice of public relations (PR) has been getting ahead of research. Crisis research needs to keep up with emerging practices in order to map, understand, and inform evolving crisis communication activities—in turn, serving both academic and professional audiences. There has been an increased emphasis on the critical role of planning and anticipation when it comes to successful efforts in crisis response (Olaniran, Williams, & Coombs, 2012). However, the lack of substantive consensus in both the academic and practical realms on what successful planning actually entails, "inhibits

the emergence of an optimal management discipline to help organizations navigate this [crisis communications] critical area" (Jaques, 2012, p.18; Olaniran, Williams, & Coombs, 2012).

On the other hand, one might argue that, given the variable nature of crises, striving to attain a clearly defined "optimal crisis communication management" could be imprudent. Crises are, by definition, chaotic and ever-changing—all the practitioners interviewed for this study have expressed such a thought. This has required crisis communication practitioners to re-evaluate their traditional approach, depart from usual the plans and tap into (new) resources in order to manage crises. As a result, Gilpin and Murphy (2008) have "urge[d] a paradigm shift for crisis management in which uncertainty, adaptiveness, and improvisation replace certainty, goal-orientation, and control" (p. 177)—the latter now considered a thing of the past.

At the time of this study, few crisis communication researchers had gone beyond conceptually advocating for a different mindset and more flexibility in the practice of crisis communication. Suggestions of embracing uncertainty, being able to adapt, and improvise are hardly concrete or reassuring to crisis communicators; their sole goal is to limit the crisis life cycle to a minimum and get back to "business as usual." Therefore, additional research has been needed to give more direction and tools to crisis communicators while moving the conversation forward when it comes to what the field of crisis communication looks like and how it will evolve. While creativity has been named an asset for any organization to keep up with evermore demanding markets (see e.g., Seelig, 2012) thus far, as seen in the literature and as Sommer and Pearson (2007) have argued, there has been limited research on creativity in relation to crisis communication.

Indeed, "crisis communication" and "creativity" do not make an obvious word association. While creativity is often recognized as the territory of fields involved in brand development, promotion, and management—such as marketing and advertising (e.g., Nyilasy & Reid, 2009;

Wang et al., 2013)—crisis management experts have acknowledged the value of creativity in crisis management planning and response for decades (Pearson & Sommer, 2011). Nonetheless, the literature addressing this marriage remains scarce, as pointed by several scholars in the field (e.g., Eriksson, 2014) and backed up by an extensive literature review.

Then, the broad goal of this study is to understand how, in the evolving field of crisis communication, crisis communicators are striking a balance between planning and the necessity of being flexible and creative in the face of crises. This study does not seek to establish cookie-cutter methods, but rather to map out the current state of the field of crisis communication around creative practices while proposing a Creativity Readiness construct in order to inform and assist practitioners involved in crisis communications and management.

1.2 Research Questions and Methodology

1.2.1 *Study Approach*

In a quickly evolving field due to increasing pressures, this study examines how public relations firms' and crisis communicators' ability to be creative is affected by different dimensions, on different levels, proposed in the Creativity Readiness construct discussed below. This research also seeks to map out current practices (with special attention to PR firms and crisis communicators), attitudes, (self-) perceptions, behaviors, and reported work team and organizational practices related to creativity.

This study takes a mixed-methods approach primarily based on a modified grounded approach. The basic premises of this approach are based on organizational research methodology advocated by several scholars proposing grounded, interpretivist approaches, or the tracing of social connections. A second methodological element was adopted from Fredriksson, Olsson, and Pallas (2014), where the authors proposed to look at crisis communication with a neo-institutional

framework. This framework accounts for the evolution and changes that are occurring within the field of crisis communication. Therefore, the framework allows us “to understand the way organizations perform crisis communication in constrained environments” (Fredriksson, Olsson, & Pallas, 2014, p. 79). In other words, creativity within the field of crisis communication is bound by institutional context instead of being an activity free from circumstances where crisis communicators act untethered. Finally, for the analysis of the creative forces on the individuals and the group within the organization the Interactionist Perspective of Organizational Creativity was used as guide (Woodman, Sawyer, & Griffin, 1993). This perspective is based on the premise that “creativity is a complex interaction between the individual and their or their work situation at different levels of organization” (Anderson, Potocnik & Zhou, 2014, p.1301). Thus, this perspective correlates creative behaviors, individuals, and the organizational environment, and allows us to draw connections in the analysis. Furthermore, the Interactionist Perspective of Organizational Creativity informed the structure of the Creativity Readiness construct by providing the baseline for the structuration of the levels as well as the dimensions—detailed in Chapter 2.

Consequently, I created the Creativity Readiness construct based on four areas of research: creativity, crisis communication, organizational branding, and organizational research. Through a careful survey of the literature of these different areas, I identified the dimensions that are influential on individuals' ability to be creative. I narrowed down these dimensions to be specific to the context of crisis communicators' work—again, based on crisis communication literature. These dimensions are, intrinsic motivation, creative confidence, improvisation, time pressure, suspension of judgment and psychological safety, autonomy in the work, leadership behavior and support, group diversity, brainstorming, creativity goals, overall attitude toward creativity, and the

use of information and idea management technology. I compiled these dimensions to create the construct and organized it into four different levels, namely: individual, work team, organizational, and multilevel. In turn, I used this construct to design this study, inform data collection choices, and guide interview questions. I then applied this construct to two data sets: (1) the branding discourse related to creativity as found on corporate websites and Twitter feeds; and (2) crisis communicators interview data. What is observed in the data is (a) how creativity is perceived and discussed, and (b) how creativity is a method of accomplishing *something* but also an output, such as creatively reaching a known goal, or creating a creative communication end product. This study's methods are explained in further detail in Chapter 3.

1.2.2 *Argument*

By looking at how crisis communicators view and discuss creativity within and outside their practices, this study sought to shed light on how practitioners strike a balance between designing, implementing, updating, and evaluating crisis plans, while continuing to think creatively. Thus, by targeting the different levels at which creative forces occur, the Creativity Readiness construct allows us to assess the conditions in which crisis communicators operate. I posit that to be Creativity Ready, the dimensions mentioned above need to work positively together at each level.

I argue that Creativity Readiness is a valuable way to both assess and improve crisis communication practices in the dynamic environment in which we live. As mentioned above, organizations need to keep abreast of the way their diverse audiences are communicating, need to be able to quickly respond to unexpected curveballs the evolving media landscape is throwing at them, while setting themselves apart in an ever-more competitive market environment. Thus, I contend that an organization that demonstrates a high degree of Creativity Readiness will be better

positioned to tackle crises with creative improvisation and adaptiveness, and will therefore maintain a greater competitive edge.

Beyond the mapping and assessment of the current state of the field of crisis communication, the Creativity Readiness construct was created with the aim to be utilized by organizations. A simplified version of this dissertation (i.e., white paper and infographic) will be presented and made available to individuals and organizations who wish to evaluate their Creativity Readiness, and possibly implement solutions to foster a (more) fruitful environment for creative work and its benefits.

1.2.3 *Summary of Key Findings*

Through systematic analysis of both data sets and the application of the Creativity Readiness construct, this study found that creativity does play a critical role in crisis communications. However, overall, creativity in crisis communications is more of a noncanonical practice than a canonical one—meaning that creativity happens when it is necessary versus as something that has been pre-established as part of the plan. In other words, creativity comes as part of crisis communications work and comes in as a crutch (when plans and tried and trusted methods fail) not as something that is openly valued and desired.

In order for creativity to occur, however, several dimensions from the Creativity Readiness construct need to work positively together—namely, ability to improvise, psychological safety and suspension of judgement, and leadership behavior. Therefore, they are more rooted at the individual and work team level than any other level (organizational or multilevel).

There is no real consensus among crisis communicators as to when in their processes creativity matters most (i.e., in the brainstorming/planning phase, during a crisis, or in the postcrisis evaluation). Nonetheless, when crisis communicators and organizations are Creativity

Ready, it is more likely that creative ideas will be considered and applied. Overall, individuals can be most creative in crisis communication when there is room and support for them to be so.

In general, large public relations firms tend to market themselves as creative and, given the organizational approach to creativity put forth in this study, they may have more capacity for Creativity Readiness. However, at this stage, there is no clear correlation between organizations that market themselves as creative and creativity goals internally.

In general, there is little reflection around creativity and crisis communication by crisis communicators. Their practices come more or less naturally to them, without them thinking about them (or trying to change them). They do not have a drive to break down their practices, thus they remain fairly blackboxed. Consequently, to crisis communicators, creativity is mainly a tool that is used out of necessity when plans fail or are insufficient.

1.2.4 *Chapters Overview*

The next chapter provides a literature review of the different research areas involved in this study. Chapter 3 describes data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 proposes an analysis of the Creativity Readiness construct at the individual level. Chapter 5 offers an analysis of the Creativity Readiness construct at the work team level. The organizational level of the construct is discussed in Chapter 6 whereas Chapter 7 covers the multilevel aspect of the Creativity Readiness construct. A review of the construct as well as limitations and future research are addressed in Chapter 8.

Further documentation is located in the appendices—namely, the PR firms list, the Python tweet scraping code, the content analysis codebook, the informed consent for the study, recruitment messaging and material, interview protocol, and author vita.

Chapter 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

To lay the foundation for this study on creativity and crisis communication, I first introduce crisis communications and contextualize the field within the current media landscape. Second, I present what is known about creativity research: the genesis of creative ideas, how creative forces operate, what fosters or hinders creative forces, and creativity's relevance to crisis communication. Third, I explain and frame organizational creativity and its branding as an intangible asset that is an inherent part of the corporate strategy in order for the organization to prosper. Fourth, I describe the marriage of crisis communication and creativity, which stems from a shift in crisis communications paradigms. I describe, as several scholars have pointed out, the evolution of the digital world and new media, which has rapidly changed the field of crisis communication: for instance, a move toward embracing ambiguity, uncertainty, and lack of control. Fifth, I present an overview of organizational structuration and its impact on practices, and also the difference between canonical (plans) and noncanonical practices (improvisation). I also discuss how technology affect both structuration and practices, and how information and idea management technology are linked to creativity. In other words, this section discusses the modus operandi versus the opus operatum that occurs within the organization when it comes to crisis communication. Sixth, based on the literature mentioned above, I present the Creativity Readiness construct I designed, with a description of the dimensions impacting crisis communicators' ability to engage in creative practices.

2.1 CRISIS COMMUNICATION

Most scholars and professionals looking at crisis communications open their papers, books, articles, presentations, or conversations with some variation of the common adage: “It’s not whether or not a crisis will happen, it’s *when* it will happen.” Many experts also provide their own definition of what a crisis is; Heath and Millar (2004) listed approximately 20 definitions of “crisis.” Among these definitions, the most widely accepted is likely that of Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer (1998), where a crisis is defined as “specific, unexpected, and non-routine events or series of events that [create] high levels of *uncertainty* and *threat* or perceived threat to an organization's high priority goals” (p. 233).

Crises can take many shapes and forms. They can be intentional or unintentional, foreshadowed or unforeseen. They can be of little consequence or disastrous and jeopardize the existence of the organization; but crises almost always provide avenues for lessons learned and improvement—for the organizations or persons themselves, or for the external agents who can learn from others’ mistakes and adapt their practices to strengthen community resilience, thus improving their reputation and legitimacy. Crises are times when complex and sometimes testing decisions must be made by the agents at hand to prevent, mitigate, or resolve negative outcomes of trying circumstances. Their potentially high impact and likelihood for disruption mean that crises need to be prepared for *before* they occur; solely reactive crisis response, when time pressure and stress are heightened, is bound to be inefficient and problematic (Fearn-Banks, 2011). Regardless of their nature and size, all organizations should have a crisis plan in place and be ready to respond to quickly developing situations. Thus, managing agents need to plan how they will communicate with their different publics through *crisis communication* activities.

Crisis communication is a branch of public relations and derives from crisis management. PR is primarily concerned with an entity's reputation and building positive relationships with its different audiences. Crisis management is the fairly all-encompassing strategic planning for crises that allows companies to be in better control of unexpected situations. It includes resources management, strategic management, financial sustainability, and crisis communication. Consequently, crisis communication is "the dialogue between the organization and its public(s) prior to, during, and after the negative occurrence, [which] details strategies and tactics designed to minimize damage to the image of the organization" (Fearn-Banks, 2011, p. 2).

In both the professional and research realms, an emphasis is often put on the design of specific plans and their execution. This emphasis means that an organization needs to anticipate its strengths and vulnerabilities in order to create and implement strategies in the event of a crisis. Indeed, comprehensive crisis communication is crucial for organizations to maintain their reputation because, unlike a court of law, the court of public opinion will usually deem the entity facing the crisis *guilty* before it is proven *innocent* (Fearn-Banks, 2011). As a result, the entity will need to build a strong case for itself through its communication tactics. When a major negative event occurs, the publics look to leaders (often "official voices") for information, assurance, and support (Andrews et al., 2016). Seeger (2006) states that the overarching goal of crisis communication is to lessen and contain harm, but that each crisis can bear a variety of goals, which can sometimes contradict each other. When crisis communication is done well, it has the potential to eliminate or at least to alleviate the negative impacts of a crisis—be they human, emotional, material, environmental, or financial—and in turn, restore or even improve the entity's image and reputation.

Thus, to achieve the best possible results, organizations need to understand the structure of the crisis, both theoretically and contextually. Fearn-Banks (2011) breaks a crisis into five stages: (1) detection, (2) prevention/preparation, (3) containment, (4) recovery, and (5) learning. Briefly, (1) detection comprises monitoring strategies for potential warnings; (2) prevention/preparation includes both external and internal measures—for instance, establishing relationships and actively communicating with different publics, nurturing transparency, training employees (safety, media relations), while also fostering stellar operations management and crisis preparation through streamlined plans and possible scenarios for events that cannot be prevented; (3) containment comprises the actions taken to limit the crisis from worsening or spreading; (4) recovery is the (at least partial) resolution and return to normalcy; and (5) learning includes postcrisis reflections, adaptations, and improvements made to the plan to prevent future similar crises or improve their detection. In essence, to tackle each stage accordingly, crisis communication requires strategic planning, proactive strategies, and strategic response, along with a continuous evaluation and update of crisis plans (Seeger, 2006). In addition, many scholars contend that crisis communication is about the use of standardized measures for issues management, planning, decision-making, and performance, leading to predictable effects (Fredriksson, Olsson, & Pallas, 2014; Gilpin & Murphy, 2008).

In addressing the different stages of a crisis, the dimensions and goals of crisis communication become inherently context- and entity-specific. For instance, Olsson (2014) proposes a typography of crisis communications contingent on the nature of the organization and the kind of information that needs to be shared (reproduced as Figure 1 below).

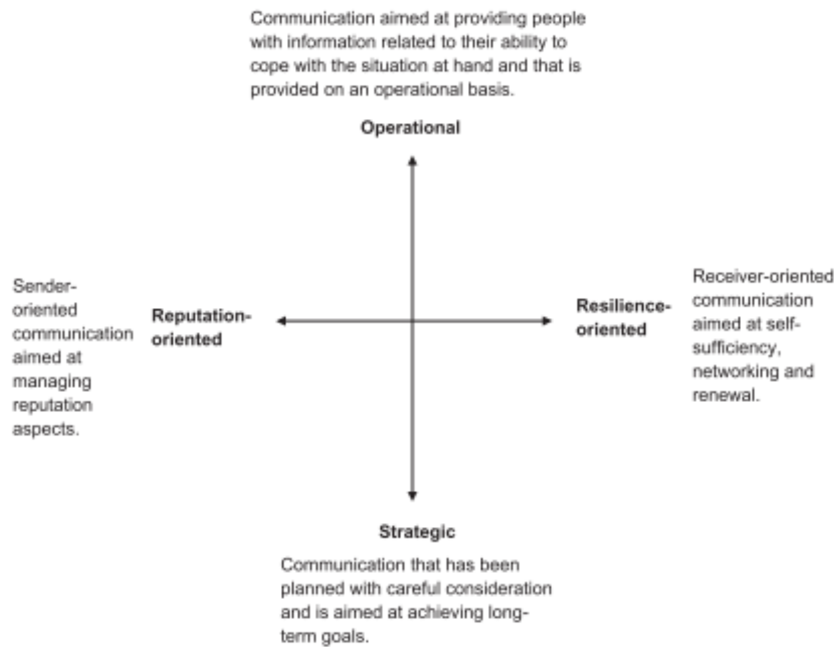

Figure 1

Olsson (2014) crisis communication divided into operational vs. strategic and reputation- vs. resilience- oriented communications

Olsson (2014) places types of communications on a two-dimensional spectrum. The first spectrum is operational versus strategic communication, where operational communication is intended to provide practical information (e.g., alerts; safety messages) to help people deal with and manage the situation (e.g., a product recall; safety alerts), and where strategic communication is intended to maintain the entity's long-term goals (e.g., through the framing and dialogue with certain publics or stakeholders). The second spectrum is reputation-oriented versus resilience-oriented communication, where reputation-oriented communication seeks to maintain or improve the entity's image (e.g., with an apologia or image restoration tactics), and where resilience-oriented communication seeks to help publics recover transcrisis and postcrisis (e.g., how and where to file an insurance claim; emotional support groups).

Essentially, “standard” crisis communications from PR firms will tend to focus more on strategic and reputation-oriented communication (with the exception of recalls or crises involving life-threatening factors), while crisis communications from emergency management teams will tend to focus more on operational and resilience-oriented communication. In any case, it is important to remember that the intricate nature of crises makes them fundamentally unpredictable and dynamic, and therefore rigid approaches are likely to be poorly fitted to the exigencies of the specific situation (Seeger, 2006). In other words, crises may necessitate types of communications from all four corners of Olsson’s (2014) quadrant or a blend of two or three. As a result, Turner (1976) points out that due to the inherent complexity of crises, they result in information and communication demands that can fall outside the established channels of communication in such a way that the usual, well-oiled channels of communication become insufficient to carry the necessary messages to the different publics involved. Indeed, whether during the planning, response, or recovery phase, often tried-and-trusted methods or simply going “by the book” falls short, and situations can be addressed only through creative and sometimes improvised, “out-of-the-box” responses.

As a result, scholars have proposed an array of crisis communication best practices intended to guide successful crisis communication practices. Through an extensive literature review, Veil, Buehner, and Palenchar (2011) identified 10 best practices. The core ones are “partnering with the publics,” “listening to their concern,” “communicating with honesty and candor” but also with concern and empathy, “accepting uncertainty and ambiguity,” and promoting the publics’ “self-efficacy” by allowing them to organize (p. 112). The definitions, structure, communication approaches, and best practices described above broadly form the basic tenets of crisis communications.

Over the last decade, new media technologies—particularly social media—have reshaped our informational habits and therefore have affected how crisis communication is practiced, where social media is "an umbrella term that is used to refer to a new era of web-enabled applications that are built around user-generated or user-manipulated content, such as wikis, blogs, podcasts, and social networking sites" (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2010). Social media sites allow for interactive communication and content exchange among users, who at the same time are able to switch roles between information consumers and producers (O'Reilly, 2007) thus leading to omnidirectional communication. Due to their affordances and penetration, social media sites have become typical channels for receiving and sharing news. Studies have shown that most adults in the United States see the Internet as a go-to source for reliable news (Austin, Liu & Jin, 2012). Thus, during crisis events, these platforms often are appropriated by organizations, affected publics, official responders, and media professionals for the purpose of receiving and sharing crisis-related information (e.g., Andrews et al., 2016; Palen & Liu, 2007; Starbird et al., 2010). While there is beauty in being able to readily share and consume information, the speed and ease of sharing information can also be a curse with the rapid spread of misinformation, and the eruption and propagation of rumors (Andrews et al., 2016; Fearn-Banks, 2011; Hiltz, Kushma, & Plotnick, 2014; Liu, Fraustino, & Jin, 2014). Thus, while social media can *help* in responding to a crisis, it can also *cause*, *worsen* or *extend* the crisis.

Therefore, organizations' official accounts need to be part of the online conversation in order to be able to monitor and oversee what is being said about them and, in response, manage their reputation (Andrews et al., 2016). As a result, both scholars and practitioners recognize that "integrating social media into crisis communications is essential" (Baron, 2015) and conclude that organizations should not ask whether they need to integrate social media into their crisis

management plans, but rather should examine *how* they will integrate them (Jin, Liu, & Austin, 2014). Importantly, the mere adoption of social media tools does not guarantee results unless the tools are adequately implemented and adopted specifically for crisis management (Ki & Nekmat, 2014). Thus, present crisis communication practices are challenged by the continuous emergence of social media channels, necessitating that standard practices continually evolve and adapt (Freberg, 2012) —sometimes even in the heat of a crisis.

Although the variety of (more or less established) channels and the quick spread of information through social media can be seen as an advantage to crisis communicators who need to reach their publics as quickly as possible, the challenges posed by these ever-evolving technologies are not negligible and can feel ostensibly overwhelming. Failing to integrate social media into crisis communication plans and practices would be a gross oversight of the changing informational landscape, in addition to leading one to potentially neglect to consider *all* affected publics. To address these concerns, both theoretical and empirical foundations can help inform crisis communicators and optimize social media affordances, while managing possible drawbacks.

In this vein, this study seeks to further inform the field of crisis communication and to assist its practitioners in considering and harnessing information and idea management technology and creativity in a useful manner. While technology enables users to reach a large audience in crises, it simultaneously provides space for creativity, which in turn might end up being necessary to respond to a crisis efficiently and with enough differentiation from other organizations that it positively affects the organization's reputation. Furthermore, this study seeks to fill a research gap around crisis communicators internal practices versus crisis communication outputs and publics' perceptions, which has been extensively covered in the literature (see Austin, Fisher Liu & Jin,

2012; Bonsón & Flores, 2011; Coombs, 1998; Liu, Austin & Jin, 2011; van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2013, among others).

2.2 Creativity

Creativity is an essential component to the sustenance and evolution of civilizations, as it "allows [one] to thrive in an ever-changing world and it unlocks the universe of possibilities" (Seelig, 2012, p. 4). Perspectives, understanding, and explanations of creativity have shifted over the years—even over the millennia (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999)—but have continuously, it seems, generated a keen interest and scholarships from a variety of fields and subfields (e.g., neurology, psychology, history, management, communication, among others). Nonetheless, to this day, there are several misconceptions around creativity. Before moving further in this study, it is important to understand and define creativity. Often, the words *creativity* or *creative* are associated with the world of the arts: something that is *artistic*. This limited association, however, misses the larger picture. Indeed, there seems to be a consensus among creativity scholars that creativity can be defined as simply *something* (a) novel or original and (b) potentially useful to the individual or the larger social group (Amabile et al., 2002; Carson, 2010; Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; among others). Furthermore, as explained by Man (2001), "creativity" and "innovation" are often used interchangeably in lay language but the two terms' definitions are not equivalent. Mumford, Medeiros, and Partlow (2012) specify that, "Creativity refers to the generation of ideas while Innovation refers to implementation of these ideas" (p. 30). Going further, Anderson, Potocnik, and Zhou (2014) proposed an integrative definition of creativity and innovation:

> Creativity and innovation at work are the process, outcomes, and products of attempts to develop and introduce new and improved ways of doing things. The creativity stage of

this process refers to idea generation, and innovation refers to the subsequent stage of implementing ideas toward better procedures, practices, or products. Creativity and innovation can occur at the level of the individual, work team, organization, or at more than one of these levels combined but will invariably result in identifiable benefits at one or more of these levels of analysis. (p. 1298)

Thus, creativity and innovation differ but are strongly related. In other words, creativity is the idea or concept and innovation is the realization of that idea or concept. Nonetheless, in everyday language, creativity and innovation still tend to be used to mean the same thing: something *new* and *useful*.

Another creativity myth is around the birth of a creative idea. In his book, *Where Do Good Ideas Come From: The Natural History of Innovation,* Steven Johnson (2010) explains that creative ideas and innovations rarely come from a specific, sudden moment, often qualified as a "flash," "stroke," "epiphany," "eureka," or "ah-ha" moment. To him, the basic assumption that an idea is a single thing is misleading if not flat wrong. Creative ideas and innovations come from the compiling and combining of several ideas; Albert Einstein called it the "combinatorial" concept (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; Seelig, 2012; Taylor & Callahan, 2005). Most important ideas have long incubation periods, which Johnson calls "the slow hunch." He extensively illustrates this point with an analysis of Charles Darwin's diaries and how Darwin actually slowly arrived at the Theory of Evolution. Thus, for the occurrence of creativity, these premises lead us to Johnson's description and application of biologist Stuart Kauffman's concept of the "adjacent possible," which can be defined as one's ability to gradually reach insights in unexplored territories. Johnson describes it as a path (a road less traveled) that can be taken to reach *new* and *useful* lands. He uses the analogy of a palace to demonstrate how the adjacent possible theory works: You need to come into one

room, explore it and find a door to go to the next room; in the next room, you explore it, find another door to go to yet another room, and so forth. While there have been instances of geniuses who have sprinted down the hall, rarely does one reach a remote room if they have not gone through the *adjacent* ones first. The adjacent possible concept, Johnson explains, is just as much about "limits as it is about openings" (p. 36). Johnson's extension of Kauffman's adjacent possible concept asks how one can create environments that nurture creativity and innovation and proposes that, to allow the incubation to happen, hunches need to mix with others' hunches, "to think big thoughts [and] not to sit around in glorious isolation" (p. 42).

Yet another creativity misconception is that creativity is an innate trait: you are either born with it or you are not; this belief is erroneous as well (Carson, 2010; Hennessey & Amabile, 2010; Johnson, 2010; among others). A creative mind and design thinking are skills that can be acquired and honed. It starts with *believing* that you can be creative, and then with developing your *creative confidence*, as Kelley and Kelley (2013) explain. Insecurity about creative abilities, however, is usually what prevents people from thinking creatively and therefore they avoid thinking creatively and solely rely on familiar methods and outputs.

Another prevalent fallacy is the myth of originality, which posits that a creative idea belongs solely to the person who thought of it. Johnson argues, however, that "openness and connectivity may, in the end, be more valuable to innovation than purely competitive mechanisms" (p. 21); in other words, the sharing of creative ideas, instead of greedily keeping them to oneself, is what drives, nurtures, and concretizes creative outcomes, which can in turn become innovations. He adds that "good ideas may not want to be free, but they do want to connect, fuse, recombine. They want to complete each other as much as they want to compete" (p. 22). Johnson connects this idea to the myth of the "lone-creator," where ideas need to "swarm" and recombine, and thus

the isolative individual state cannot be the most prolific environment. He endorses the idea of having a "liquid network," which essentially is a widening collection of minds that could generate good ideas—because the more ideas are generated, the higher the chances one (or a few) will be good (Carson, 2010; Seelig, 2012).

Minds need to be connected for information and inspiration to flow and for "cross-pollination" to occur, which in turn can fashion great ideas (Carson, 2010; Mumford et al., 2012; Seelig, 2012). This cross-pollination can start with groups or organizations. Johnson gives the example of Building 99, Microsoft's research division in Redmond, Washington, where incisive minds form a liquid network, where "information spillover is a feature, not a flaw" (p. 65) and where serendipity is free to occur. Johnson discusses the concept of *exaptation*, where "an organism develops a trait optimized for a specific use, but then the trait gets hijacked for a completely different function" (p. 154). These exaptations are what help creative thinkers connect and explore 'more rooms in the palace'. Taking yet one more step on the levels of creativity and innovation, at the systemic level, Johnson deplores that the adjacent possible concept often is compromised in implementation by restrictive legal and popular wisdom barriers: "patents, digital rights management, intellectual property, trade secrets, proprietary technology" (p. 123) and other lay 'protective' and isolating behaviors performed at the individual or group level. These restrictive mechanisms assume that in the long-run innovation will increase if they happen behind closed doors and will allow innovators to amass consequential financial rewards, which will inspire other innovators to do the same. As mentioned previously, the issue with this idea is that it does not allow for the cross-pollination of ideas and therefore dries up the requisite liquid networks. Essentially, Johnson argues and demonstrates through a matrix where innovations since 1800 are plotted according to the system they were conceived in: market/individual;

market/network; nonmarket/individual; nonmarket/network[1] (p. 229), and that the most beneficial system for innovations is a nonmarket, networked system, meaning that a large collective collaborates on an idea and has the intention to let the innovations flow freely (i.e., not looking to capitalize from sale or licensing of the innovations). This approach can be seen most recently with Tesla's CEO, Elon Musk, making their companies' technology available to all in hopes of sparking interest in other organizations for the use of sustainable resources and fighting global warming as a collective. In adjacent possible terms, Musk shares the "keys" to the many rooms Tesla and SpaceX have already explored for others to continue exploring and opening many more rooms for themselves in the palace of innovations. Fundamentally, as Page (2007) put it, "when a collection of people works together to solve a problem and one person makes an improvement, the others can often improve on this new solution even further. Problem-solving is not the realization of the states but the process of innovation in which improvements build on improvements" (p. 340). In effect, for Page and Johnson, creative problem-solving is a mosaic of thoughts and ideas coming from a diverse group of people.

Moving beyond the definition of creativity, general myths, and misconceptions, we can now dive deeper into creativity research. Past the initial "big questions" asked within modern psychology in the 1950s with J.P. Guilford as the catalyst of increased interest in scientific research around creativity, creativity research has blossomed through a collection of different topics, perspectives, and methodologies (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010; Mumford et al., 2012; Taylor & Callahan, 2005). Hennessey and Amabile's *Annual Review of Psychology* (2010) compiled and

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[1] Where "individual", means that a single inventor or a small, coordinated team. "Networked" means a collective, distributed process, with a large number of groups working on the same problem. "Market" means that the inventor(s) planned on capitalizing directly from the sale of licensing of their invention. "Non-market" means that inventors wished their ideas to flow freely and for free (Johnson, 2010, pp. 219-220).

classified a vast array of these works on creativity from different fields and subfields, through polling of colleagues, and extensive (one might say exhaustive) literature research and review. They argue that the purpose of the review is to move toward a systems view of creativity. Hennessey and Amabile state that "more progress will be made when more researchers recognize that creativity arises through a system of interrelated forces operating at multiple levels, often requiring interdisciplinary investigation" (p. 571). Essentially, they are arguing not for a homogenization of the field, but for a better way for creativity research streams to communicate and inform each other. This would also avoid further fragmentation often caused by researchers from different fields (psychology, management, communication, and such) working in a vacuum and failing to draw from the analyses of their "cousin researchers." Therefore, their review was used as a creativity-research anchor for this dissertation.

To echo Hennessey and Amabile's (2010) concerns around fragmentation, lack of crossover between disciplines, as well as competing findings and nuances in results, it becomes important to broadly map out the creativity research field before moving further along.

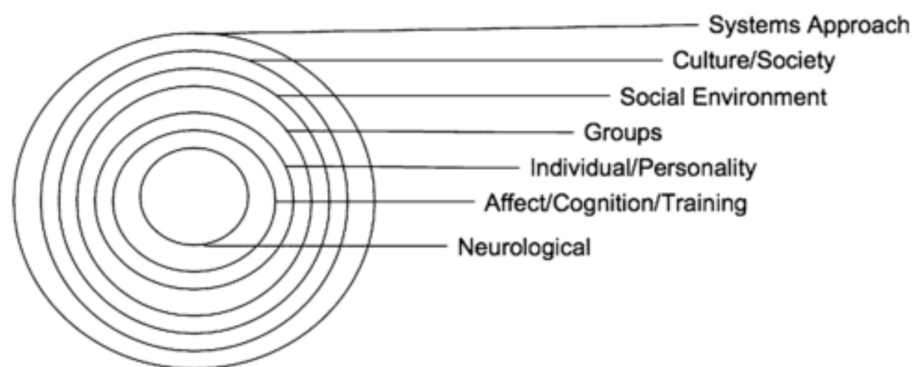

Figure ***2***
The increasingly large concentric circles in this simplified schematic represent the major levels at which creativity forces operate
(Hennessy & Amabile, 2010)

I begin this review of creativity research with an examination of the different levels at which creativity forces operate. Hennessey and Amabile produced a clear diagram of these forces (reproduced above as Figure 2). This diagram starts with the neurological level, concerned broadly with how creativity functions in the brain and what parts of the gray matter get activated or deactivated beyond our conscious control (which Carson, 2010, gave a more accessible account in their book *Your Creative Brain*). Then, they gradually expand the scope and inclusion of the realms where creativity acts: from individual, to groups, to environment, to society, to systems. In other words, what Hennessey and Amabile demonstrate is twofold: (1) the actual contexts or realms where creativity *acts* and (2) the streams (within fields and subfields) of research looking at these realms—often separately and with more or less consensus. Then, they look at these levels one by one and provide a review of the major research streams and findings for each, including subfields. In doing so, they seek to reconcile the different levels of creativity research by informing creativity researchers (no matter what levels, fields, or subfields they are in) about what others are doing in order to expand the understanding of creativity as a phenomenon. Once again, the beauty of the multiplicity of approaches can also be a curse if the discoveries made do not cross domains and analytical levels (Hennessey and Amabile, 2010). They close by saying that it is only if (or when) creativity researchers work together that we will gain a better, more encompassing understanding of the mysteries of creativity. Given that this study was primarily interested in organizations and crisis communicators, the focus was placed on the "social environment" circle, within which organizational, group, and individual creativity falls. It then became interesting to dive deeper into what forces or dimensions affect these particular circles.

2.2.1 *Main Dimensions Affecting Organizational Creativity*

There are several dimensions that impact creativity at the social environment, group, and individual level. While there are many conditions that can nurture creativity, there are also several significant obstacles that can stifle it. Creativity research findings, however, do not agree unanimously on the specific effects of these dimensions. For instance, Byron, Khazanchi, & Nazarian (2010) contend that creativity loves constraints and that *some* stressors can enhance creativity by "creating a demand for creative solutions and by providing the cognitive stimulation and motivational arousal that are necessary for creative thinking" (p. 201). However, they add that stressors can also affect finite mental resources and compel available cognitive resources to matters appearing more urgent than creative ones. In essence, their conclusion can be summed up in a reconciliatory statement that usually the effect of obstacles is curvilinear and that both stances above are true up to a point. Obstacles to creativity can range in outcome from annihilating to generative, and in nature from internal (e.g., self-doubt) to external (e.g., lack of managerial support in taking risks). Stressors affect the different levels at which the creative forces operate within the organization.

One of the most studied, and most complex, dimensions is the effect of *time pressure* on creativity. While Amabile, Hadley, and Kramer (2002) find time pressure ("working under the gun") to be detrimental to creativity, several scholars see this as an oversimplification of this stressor's effect. For example, Baer and Oldham (2006) find an "inverted U-shaped" (bell curve) relation between time pressure and creativity, essentially showing that time pressure was conducive to creativity up to a certain extent, but then stifled creativity depending on the type of time pressure and the context in which it occurred. When time pressure is an inherent part of a task or job, however, its relationship with creativity seems to be affected. Indeed, Pearson and Sommer

(2011) find time pressure to be a positive stimulant to creativity in crisis communication contexts. Knowing that crisis communicators are essentially trained professionals and thrive on the presence of a crisis (as raw as that may sound), it is particularly interesting to look at how their ability to be creative gets affected in more stressful, time-pressured environments.

Another dimension that affects creativity is *leadership behavior and support.* Madjar, Oldham and Pratt (2002) demonstrated that creative performance of employees was significantly related to support for creativity from both work (supervisors, coworkers) and nonwork (family, friends) influences. Farmer, Tierney, and Kung-McIntyre (2003) showed that creativity is at its highest when the organization values creative work. Furthermore, Amabile et al. (2004) found that perceived support from management positively affected creativity: such as recognizing good performance, giving constructive feedback, and valuing creative work. For instance, Seelig (2012) explains that infrequent feedback is more stress-inducing and would diminish creativity for fear of receiving a negative review at the end of the year, while more frequent feedback lets employees "check in" more often and thus has the potential to allow creativity to happen. Seelig adds that to encourage exploration and creativity, both success and failure should be rewarded, while inaction should be punished. In other words, leadership cannot create a creative culture, but it can foster it (Kelley & Kelley, 2013).

The dimension of *suspension of judgment or delayed judgment* is one of the dimensions that allow creativity to occur. When people had the ability to keep an open mind and accept ideas as they come, delaying value attribution (Carson, 2010), ideas get the chance to flourish and inspire versus being shot down quickly. As Estanyol and Roca (2014) stipulate that, a working environment that discourages judgmental attitudes and eliminates negativity will foster confidence and *psychological safety,* the other side of the coin and a related dimension. Indeed, *psychological*

safety is also shown to have a positive impact on creativity. Lovelace, Shapiro, and Weingart (2001) demonstrated that team members' ability to be creative was affected by perceived level of freedom to speak up when doubts arose and new ideas were proposed. Psychological safety was found to be crucial for creativity in organizations because creativity involves so much risk taking, experimentation, and frequent failure, as highlighted by Edmondson and Mogelof (2006) in their study on psychological safety in innovative teams. For instance, Mueller, Melwani, and Goncalo (2012) have exposed fear of uncertainty as an underlying obstacle that can dramatically stifle creativity. Indeed, they posit that although people desire creative ideas, they often reject them, especially when safe, unoriginal options are readily available. As a result, this inconsistency and possible lack of control result in decreased psychological safety (George, 2007). Gibson and Gibbs (2006) also found that when where people believed that others in their group would respond positively when new ideas were proposed is an environmental condition in which people tended to be more creative. Thus, often combined (see Estanyol & Roca, 2014) *suspension of judgment* is the act of delaying value attribution to an idea and is related to *psychological safety* in the sense that it fosters it.

Autonomy in one's work was also listed as a moderator of creativity within the organization. Feeling a degree of ownership and having leeway to act freely tends to enhance creativity (Alge et al., 2006; Hennessey & Amabile, 2010). Once again, constructive feedback and limited (nonintrusive) work monitoring were found to have a positive effect on employee creativity (Zhou, 2008). In the context of autonomy, in order for creativity to be fostered, Seelig (2012) posits that the right balance must be struck: without rules, there are no boundaries to be pushed, yet with too many rules, there is no room for creativity.

The dimension of *intrinsic motivation* also impacts creativity (versus extrinsic motivations, such as a monetary reward). Essentially, enjoyment, interest, and personal challenge need to be present in the individual to enhance creativity (Dewett, 2007; Hennessey & Amabile, 2010; Shin & Zhou, 2003). Being intrinsically motivated was demonstrated to be beneficial to the desire and ability to be creative.

A related dimension is *creative confidence*, which simply states that if you view yourself as a creative person, you are much more likely to come up with innovative ideas (Carson, 2010; Hennessey & Amabile, 2010; Kelley & Kelley, 2013; Seelig, 2012). Creative confidence is applied to any tasks and is an "enhancement of your creative problem-solving practices . . . where the only basic requirement is the belief that your innovation skills and capabilities are not set in stone" (Kelley & Kelley, 2013, p. 9). Everyone is the "creative type" as it is a natural part of thinking, not a rare gift. Essentially, it is an evolutive mindset versus a fixed one, and instead of having a paralyzing fear of failure, you see experience as a way to learn and grow. Kelley and Kelley add that in order for an organization to nurture and yield creativity, it needs to foster creative confidence among its employees.

Another important and complex dimension is *group diversity*. Page (2007) posits that "often diversity merits equal standing with ability and that sometimes—although not every time—even trumps ability" (p. 5). The author moves beyond the obvious such as race, gender, and ethnicity when defining diversity and expands it to diverse experiences (e.g., friendships; vacations; trauma). Page explains that "collections of people with diverse perspectives and heuristics outperform collections of people who rely on homogeneous perspectives and heuristics" in solving problems creatively (p. 340). Different perspectives are valuable to the group because a problem will be viewed in a variety of ways. Different heuristics are valuable to the group because

people will bring varied approaches and techniques to solving a problem. These differences add value to situations and enhance the ability to be creative. Page adds that when a diverse group agrees on a common goal, differences tend not to create conflicts. Seelig (2012) reinforces this idea by stipulating that having more warm bodies to take on a challenging task is favorable, as long as everyone is "aligned and moving in the same direction" (p. 139). Overall, the literature suggests that there is no real consensus among scholars on the impact of diversity on the creativity of a group. In their review of creativity research, Hennessey and Amabile (2010) present several studies that found cognitive diversity could have both a positive and a negative impact on creativity depending on the context (Kurtzberg, 2005; Mannix & Neale, 2005; Polzer et al., 2002). However, Page's research demonstrates that a strategically assembled diverse group with relevant knowledge will consistently outperform a homogenous group of experts (Page, 2007).

The setting of *creativity goals* also plays an important role in supporting creative endeavors. Hennessey and Amabile (2010) cite Shalley's 2008 study on goal-setting within the organization: "If managers would like their employees to be more creative, they need to find ways to encourage employees to undertake creative activities. A major way to do this is by creating role expectations either by setting goals or making creative activity a job requirement" (p. 583). Seelig (2012) adds that if an organization seeks to foster creativity, it needs to make that value explicit in its attitude and culture. Therefore, the organization and employees need to have a positive attitude and an understanding of the value of creativity. They need to choose creativity and be willing to challenge the status quo (Kelley & Kelley, 2013).

When it comes to creative processes, *brainstorming* has been argued to improve idea generation. Osborn (1957) introduced the concept and designed rules, namely: (a) generate as many ideas as you can, (b) delay judgment on one another's ideas, (c) use wildcards and allow for

"crazy" or "peculiar" ideas, and (d) expand and build on existing ideas; for example, use the "yes and…" improvisation technique (Carson, 2010; Feinberg and Nemeth, 2008). While several studies have shown that these rules of brainstorming tend to improve group performance relative to a control group given no specific rules (Parnes & Meadow, 1959; Paulus & Brown, 2003), research on the effectiveness of brainstorming has yielded mixed results (Kurtzberg & Amabile, 2010; Litchfield, 2008; Mongeau, 1993).

Lastly, superfluity (the quantity of ideas) and backtracking (the revisiting of ideas) is essential to the creative process. Historically, this process occurred using a Commonplace Book––often symbolized by a little black notebook where people recorded random thoughts and ideas for later use (Commonplace Books, n.d.). Commonplace Books allowed their users to record, backtrack, and combine observations and ideas. Examples exist from many realms of creative endeavor (from science to design, to poetry, to recipes).

In recent years, technology, specifically that of information and idea management, has greatly enhanced the ways in which knowledge can be compiled and organized for later use. Today, for example, paper notebooks have partly been replaced by notetaking applications on computers or other portable smart devices. In addition, Selker (2005) explains that speed and facility of computer use are important to allow users to work on creative endeavors without being slowed down by processes performed manually (e.g., taking handwritten notes, as well as transcribing, organizing, filing, and sharing the notes with collaborators). Indeed, in terms of process, knowledge management is key. Information and ideas need to be recorded, archived, and readily shared with others. In this way, technology not only facilitates the collection and management of ideas, but communication and collaboration among people working cooperatively on projects (Hewett, 2005; Lee & Chen, 2015). With his own work, Johnson refers to the software

DEVONthink, which saves documents, organizes them, uses tags or labels to categorize them, and creates connections or groupings for its user. Furthermore, Selker (2005) adds that the increasing tendency of geographically dispersed teams may have enhanced the importance of the Internet in creativity and innovation.

2.3 Organizational Representations of Creativity and Innovation Through Corporate Branding

Many scholars contend that creativity plays an important role in the creation of a competitive advantage for organizations (e.g., see Cooper, 1998; Janssen, 2005; Kleysen & Street, 2001). Parjanen (2012) explains that "an organization's success and survival depend on its ability to create new knowledge and innovation" (p. 110). Indeed, knowledge is an organization's most valuable resource because it "embodies intangible assets, routines, and creative processes that are difficult to imitate" (Parjanen, 2012, p. 110). The nature of the organization, task, or job affect the level of creativity required and its importance; however, Gilson and Shalley (2004) assert that every job has room for it.

In an organizational setting, Cook (1998) also emphasized that companies that develop a culture of creativity get benefits beyond direct sales and profit—for instance, they gain in terms of social benefits, harmonious team work, and increased motivation of employees. As a result, the ability for an organization to be creative is considered an important asset: both in effectiveness and in competitive advantage (Leonard & Sensiper, 1998; Parjanen, 2012; Woodman, Sawyer, & Griffin, 1993). To this point, Gilson and Shalley (2004) maintain that the immutability of problem-solving in an organization has been shown to be detrimental to the permeation of new ideas and creativity. Indeed, they add that in order for creativity and innovation to occur, there needs to be a certain level of internal drive, or a mindset, within the organization to push through challenges and

embrace the risks associated with creative endeavors. Therefore, although valued by firms, creativity faces another challenge, with "ever more panoptic and detailed ways of accounting for work being installed, a kind of double bind emerges" (Star & Strauss, 1999, p. 23) where several challenges associated with systematically identifying and quantifying creativity render the task of accounting for it difficult. Moreover, an inherent part of creativity is that it is "intertwined with risk and uncertainty" (Wang et al., 2013), where risk is defined as "the probability that undesirable outcomes will occur" (Sitkin & Pablo, 1992). Thus, creativity, although seemingly beneficial from the monetary and social benefit perspectives, does not come *free* of risk and potential backlash. As a result, as much as organizations wish for creative solutions, they tend to avoid placing themselves in situations with results more uncertain than they are comfortable with (Fredriksson, Olsson & Pallas, 2014).

Deuze (2007) explains that in the creative industry (media production, advertising, public relations, among others), it has been shown that employees care deeply about their work. This finding suggests that employee perspectives and performance of duties can be affected by their perception of how creative their work is—assuming that caring equates to dedication and, ultimately, quality of work. Along these lines, Mumford, Medeiros, and Partlow (2012) insist that creativity needs to be an inherent part of the corporate strategy, from the company's vision to its end products. Creativity, therefore, should not be limited to brainstorming sessions, but rather needs to become entrenched in the organization's vision; in a work setting, perception strongly determines behavior and thus performance (Jensen & Schultz, 2009). Mehta et al.'s (2014) study supports this point: the authors found several factors allowing for creativity to happen. One of the factors is the setting of an appropriate creative culture within the organization. Jensen and Schultz (2009) state that "the ultimate objective of corporate branding is to secure an enduring and

consistent identity internally and image externally in an innovative and flexible way" (p. 469). They conclude that corporate branding is a triangulation of vision, image, and culture. This conclusion suggests that an organization's important and differentiating values will permeate through its branding discourse. For example, the online bank Simple[2] was created to offer a simpler way of online banking. On its website, its slogan is clear: "Your Money Made Easy. The Way banking should be: free, mobile, simple." These differentiation claims and branding are applied to the design and workings of Simple, therefore we can see how its vision permeated through, and is applied to, its branding discourse.

In the case of creativity, the literature suggests that if an organization's branding triangulation elements are coherent, a firm that describes itself as being creative and innovative would necessarily have a positive perception of creativity and innovation, and possibly strive to incorporate these values in its culture and practices. Thus, contributing toward it being Creativity Ready.

2.4 Crisis Communication and Creativity

Public relations professional literature often highlights "key values" or "must-have skills" for PR professionals and PR firms. The concepts of creativity and innovation are often named as a central asset for both professionals and organizations. For instance, back in 2016, Benzi Stone, chairman and CEO of Saxum explained, "[PR professionals] will have to be bold, thoughtful and creative because innovations in technology will continue to create new specialty shops and niche experts within our discipline" (Jacobs, 2008). Since 2012, the annual *The Holmes Report* presents research on creativity and public relations to shed light on the attitudes towards creativity in the

[2] These remarks can be observed at www.simple.com

PR profession. In its 2017 edition, *The Holmes Report* posited that, within PR firms, creative directors are now "calling the shots." It added that agencies are formalizing the position (the number of agencies employing a creative director has increased from 37% in 2012 to 56% in 2017) and are becoming increasingly comfortable with letting creative directors lead ideas and solutions despite clients' reticence, which is, as the report explains, an important shift since the study started in 2012 (*The Holmes Report*, 2017).

In the context of PR and crisis communication, to be effective, creativity should have "impact, quality, style and relevance and ideas must be new, unique and relevant" (El-Murad & West, 2004). Diving deeper into crisis communications specifically, Sommer and Pearson (2007) add that such ideas are defined as "unusual, uncommon, unconventional or unique from past decisions and reflects responses to new or unique choices for solving a problem in a crisis" (Sommer & Pearson, 2007; Ford & Gioia, 2000). Indeed, in this context, creativity serves a specific purpose, which has been pre-established (e.g., protecting an organization's reputation). Consequently, for this study, I used the definition of what creative crisis communications are (mentioned above) from Sommer and Pearson (2007) and Ford and Gioia (2000).

As previously discussed, the digitalization of communication and tools has reshaped crisis communication. In his study, Eriksson (2014) points out that new work methods have emerged within the field of crisis communication, challenging "old" or "classical" ones. Ericksson describes the classical approach to crisis communication as involving rigid strategies, planning, and tactics in the digital landscape. In other words, this approach is based on mapping the organization's course toward its overall destination—and therefore guiding the organization members' work—in specific, structured, and rehearsed manners. This type of approach has been criticized and deemed unrealistic: indeed, Eriksson contends that sticking to a classical approach can be "destructive" (p.

510) and unrealistic given the current communication landscape. For example, in his study, Eriksson explains that when it comes to the use of social media in crisis communication, a rigid plan (e.g., extensive vetting of information before posting) would tie the hands of crisis communicators, slow down the process of addressing issues online, and give way to rumors (Andrews et al., 2016)—which is incompatible with today's communication expectations.

In turn, the new approach involves less planning but more proactive mental training and acquiring skills that allow professionals to move toward accepting the ambiguity, uncertainty, and lack of control that are inherently part of crisis situations (Eriksson, 2014; Falkheimer & Heide, 2010; Robert & Lajtha, 2002). Therefore, several scholars and professionals name "improvisation theater" as the ideal training for new crisis communication practices, and the resulting focus on communication, collaboration, creativity, presentation, and leadership (Finch & Welker, 2003; Lynch, 2009). In other words, the new approach advocates for crisis communicators to be comfortable with uncertainty and chaos (Gilpin & Murphy, 2006, 2008, 2010), and in turn to see themselves as "jazz musicians improvising in acute situations based on creativity and earlier experiences" (Fredriksson, Olsson, & Pallas, 2014, p. 69).

Following this philosophy, we can see improvisation and creativity as going hand in hand. Improvisation may become a necessary part of crisis communicators' toolkit in order to respond to (at least partly) unexpected situations and in turn creates a context for creativity to occur. So far, according to the literature, when scholars have found evidence of creativity and improvisation, they are most commonly at the tactical level: for example, when organizations switch to social media strategies for content dissemination, versus using traditional media channels (see Eriksson, 2014). Therefore, it becomes interesting to see where else in the process creativity and

improvisation play a part and whether or not crisis communicators and organizations are willing to let creativity be a part of their work—in other words, being Creativity Ready.

2.5 Organizational Structuration

Now that crisis communication, creativity, new technologies, and the perception of creativity through corporate branding have been laid out, it is important to look at the context in which crisis communication practices and creative forces occur (or do not occur): the organization.

2.5.1 *Structuration of the Crisis Communication Field*

The field of crisis communication has become institutionalized and as for other fields, it bears normative systems and understandings that dictate when and how it should be practiced. Therefore, organizations' structures, processes, as well as performances in crisis situations are to be understood as responses to social requirements and expectations rather than isolated improvised actions made by organizational members (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Fredriksson, 2014; Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

For that reason, organizations have the tendency to mimic each other's actions in order to diminish risks, uncertainty, and to be understood and accepted (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 2008). Striving for understanding, acceptance, and limiting variations is heightened in times of crises as, by nature, these occurrences tend to shake the organization and infuse chaos and uncertainty in the day-to-day practices. As Fredriksson, Olsson and Pallas (2014) explain, when a crisis hits, "organizations act to reduce these uncertainties by the incorporation of solutions, units, models and patterns of behavior that are perceived as rational, efficient, necessary, and morally correct" (p. 70). The sole purpose is to cater to stakeholders' expectations and maintain legitimacy, credibility, and authority (Fredriksson, Olsson & Pallas, 2014; Power, 1997, 2007). As a result,

plans, pre-existing strategies, and tried and trusted methods tend to be preferred over new ones. Improvisation is part of these methods as much as it is already allowed in the institutional context––essentially a part of the crisis communicator's work (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006)

Organizations' actions are dictated by organizational norms present in its constituents' work (processes, strategies, methods…etc). One of the most prominent norm when it comes to crisis communication is planning and control—as explained in section 2.1 on crisis communication. Indeed, the crisis communication plan is one of the pillars of crisis communication and a must—a norm—in order to response to crises adequately (Fredriksson, Olsson & Pallas, 2014). Thus, crisis communicators are expected to know and apply the many norms of their profession. Nonetheless, as explained by Fredriksson, Olsson and Pallas (2014) there are also several "implicit assumptions" or noncanonical (unofficial) practices that are embedded in their work. For instance, the institution of crisis communication does not dictate practitioners' actions but limit alternatives within the organization. Thus, by hiring an experienced crisis communicator (they have often been in the field of public relations for many years) organizations essentially strive to secure the performance of these norms and limit uncertainty (Engwall, 2009). However, organizations are not immutable entities: if noncanonical practices are proven to serve a specific purpose in a way that is preferable to usual methods, these practices might become normalized down the line. In other words, as Fredriksson, Olsson and Pallas (2014) argue, "institutional practices are reproduced by self-activating social processes and repetitive social behavior rather than by observable enforcement" (p. 72). Thus, the application Creativity Readiness construct allows us to observe both self-activating social processes and observable enforcement by looking at both crisis communicators' discourse and organizational attitude toward creativity.

2.5.2 *Organizational Structuration and Technology*

As discussed above, the use of technology, notably information and idea management technology finds its place when it comes to nurturing creative ideas. It is then interesting to think about how this kind of technology is considered (and potentially used) within organizations. In their definitional 1992 article, *The Duality of Technology: Rethinking the Concept of Technology in Organizations,* Orlikowski proposes a new theoretical model to study the relational effects that technology and organizations have on one another. The basic premise of their argument is that the thus-far dichotomic approach to how technology and organizations interact, where technological determinism and social constructivism are opposed, is flawed. In response, she proposed a "reconceptualization," reconciling both perspectives by creating a more dialectical one, which she called the structuration model of technology. Her argument posits that human actors are moderated by the organizational structure, but also reinforce it through their practices, where these human actors are "actors [who] are knowledgeable and reflexive" (Orlikowski, 1992, p. 404).

In her model, Orlikowski (1992) clarifies the impact of human agency: it can intentionally or unintentionally affect technology and the resulting organizational structuration. In other words, both technology and human agents can have more or less obvious and more or less direct effects on each other at different levels. For instance, Orlikowski explains that technology is "interpretively flexible" because it is affected and influenced by "the different actors and socio-historical contexts implicated in its development and use" (p. 406). Therefore, appropriations and uses of technology can greatly vary depending on the diverse meanings with which human agents endow them. For instance, Barley's 1986 study of the implementation of CT scanners in two different radiology departments demonstrates that technology can have different structuration effects depending on the context in which they are implemented. Thus, this study instantiates

Orlikowski's (1992) structural model and provides yet another argument for the importance of the context in which technology and organization interact. In other words, in the context of information and idea management technology useful to creativity, the structuration of the organization (e.g., crisis communicators' canonical practices) will be affected but possibly differently from one organizations to the next. Through interview data and the application of the Creativity Readiness construct, these differences become evident and further inform the evolution of the field of crisis communication.

Orlikowski's argument, though, seems to remain too neatly bound *within* the organization and does not account enough for the ubiquitousness of technology in our daily life. The use of technologies on the personal level, meaning *outside* of the organization, may affect the technology–organization interaction in unexpected ways and could again be highly contextual in terms of sociopolitical grounding, but also affected by actual individual factors. Technology can be seen as structuring but is not institutionalized because it resides *outside* of the organization. As advocated by Orlikowski, the human agent is knowledgeable and reflexive and here, yet is just *outside* the organization's structuring. Essentially, the question arising revolves around how technologies are used *outside* of the organization (actually used, not just their perception or symbolic value, as discussed in Vuori, 2012) and how they affect the bounded organizational and technological structuration. In the context of crisis communicators, the personal use of information and idea management (much like DEVONthink) can affect their perception of creativity and professional practices.

This leads us to the study by Seely, Brown, and Duguid (1991) on an important aspect of organizational structuration: the difference between canonical and noncanonical practices, or in other words, the modus operandi versus the opus operatum. Canonical practices are instructions

and guidelines present in the official organizational documentation (namely: manuals, project management guidelines, programs), whereas noncanonical practices are unofficial ways of performing a task—a task that might work sometimes better than canonical practices. Seely and coauthors explain that these sometimes obscure idiosyncrasies play an important role in the formal and informal structuration of the organization. Thus, their study supports a deeper understanding of technology development and use beyond the "official" practices to provide a better understanding of the (eventual underground) structuration of the organization and also an avenue to investigate the impact of the ubiquitousness of technology within but also, importantly, *outside* of the organization. To get at not only the use of technology useful to creativity within the organization but also outside of the organization, the interviewees were prompted to discuss their use of information and idea management technological tools in their personal life as well.

2.6 DESIGNING THE CREATIVITY READINESS CONSTRUCT

After careful analysis of the literature around crisis communication, creativity, the different dimensions affecting it within an organization, organization structuration around institutionalization of the crisis communication field, and the impact of technology, I designed a construct that brings together these elements: Creativity Readiness. The goal was to apply this construct to different types of data in order to observe how these elements are embodied within the field of crisis communication. **Creativity Readiness is the presence of attitudes and practices that promote conditions conducive to creative idea generation and application within an organization. It** is essentially the *readiness* and *willingness*, or the organization's attitude, toward behaviors fostering creativity and the possible generation of creative processes and outputs. This construct becomes particularly relevant when looking at crisis communicators who (should) have an established crisis plan but may need to respond more creatively to obstacles

as a particular crisis unfolds. In the case of this study, it is not centered solely on attitudes and practices during a crisis but also focuses on attitudes and practices prior to and after a crisis, incident, or issue. In other words, the construct encompasses the entirety of crisis communication practices, from planning to response to lessons-learned, and the practitioners' ability and willingness to infuse creativity at every stage.

In addition, Mueller, Melwani, and Goncalo (2012) suggest "the field of creativity may need to shift its current focus from identifying how to generate more creative ideas to identifying how to help innovative institutions recognize and accept creativity" (p. 17). Through the methodology detailed thereafter, the output of my research intends to get at Mueller and coauthors' goal and help crisis communicators and their organizations become more aware of the creative avenues and identify what makes them possible. Therefore, this dissertation examines how organizations and crisis communicators perceive and apply creativity: whether it is considered and expressed as an important or inherent part of the field of crisis communication and, in turn, whether or not they engage in creative practices.

As described above, creativity scholars have identified several dimensions or factors that affect creative forces within the organization. In order to organize and analyze these dimensions, they were broken into four levels in which they act: the individual, the work team, the organizational, and multilevel as advocated by the conceptual paper of Anderson, Potocnik, and Zhou (2014). These dimensions have been adapted to apply directly to the field of crisis communication and crisis communicators' work. The four levels and subsequent dimensions are as follows:

2.6.1 *Creativity Attitudes and Behaviors at the Individual Level*

As its name indicates, the individual level focuses on crisis communicators as persons performing a specific job within a specific environment. It is the smallest unit of analysis level.

2.6.1.1 Individual Factors

Intrinsic motivation. The individual has a genuine interest and is driven by internal rewards (versus external, such as a monetary reward) in working in crisis communication and in problem-solving crisis communication challenges.

Creative confidence. The crisis communication professional's self-perception is as a creative person (or a person who is capable of being creative) and has an evolutive mindset (versus a fixed one), where he or she believes that it is possible to nurture creativity.

2.6.1.2 Situational Context

Improvisation. This concept means the ability and/or necessity to compose, execute, or arrange something in response to a crisis that was not part of the established plan.

Time Pressure. The influence of time pressure may be one of the most complex in the organizational creativity literature. Time pressure appears to be able to both enhance and hinder creativity, but only up to a certain point (in an inverted-U relation, as Baer and Oldham (2006) explain). Given that crisis communicators are trained individuals who are familiar with time-constrained and stressful environments, scholars have found that time pressure could be a creativity-stimulant for crisis communicators, or it can also have little effect on their ability to be creative (Pearson & Sommer, 2011).

2.6.1.3 Social Context

Suspension of Judgment and Psychological Safety. Both factors were grouped as they are two sides of the same coin and are often discussed together—where suspension of judgment allows for greater psychological safety. Together it is the ability to keep an open-mind and accept ideas as they come without attributing value (whether good or bad) and creating an environment where new ideas are received positively. It facilitates an environment where uncertainty and risk-taking are accepted. Essentially, it is feeling safe to bring in novelty without judging and fearing judgment.

Autonomy in the work. The individual has a degree of ownership in and control over their work. Thus, workers tend to be more intrinsically motivated and, in response, are more likely to fully engage their cognitive processes in solving problems.

2.6.2 *Creativity Attitudes and Behaviors at the Work Team Level*

This second level focuses on crisis communicators within their team both in terms of their environment—within the team, the conditions in which they perform their practices—and in terms of processes—within the team, how they perform their practices.

2.6.2.1 Environmental Context

Leadership Behavior and Support. The group attitude toward creativity needs to be a positive one. Creative performance of employees is related to support for creativity from both work (supervisors/coworkers) and nonwork (family/friends) sources. Leadership needs to value and support creative work.

Group Diversity. Group diversity in terms of perspectives and heuristics is highly contextual in that it can have either a positive or a negative impact on creativity depending on how it is managed, as well as people's attitudes toward its benefits. It also appears that as long as team

members have a common understanding of the end goal, group diversity can have a positive effect on creativity.

2.6.2.2 Processes

Brainstorming. As an early step in crisis planning, proper brainstorming combines a relaxed, informal approach with lateral thinking, and the valuing and recording of all ideas. With the guiding of no idea is a bad idea, all ideas are valued and recorded, no matter how they first sound.

2.6.3 *Creativity Attitudes and Behaviors at the Organizational Level*

The organizational level focuses on the organization as bounded entity in which crisis communicators perform their work. It is the largest unit of analysis level.

Creativity Goals as Representation of Creativity Through Corporate Branding. If an organization seeks to foster creativity, it needs to make it explicit in its attitude, culture, and vision. Branding is part of the organization's vision, telegraphing what it stands for and how it positions itself within the market. Branding itself as creative is an indicator that the organization has or seeks to have a positive attitude and an understanding of the value of creativity.

Creativity Goals as Part of the Organization's Values. The organization needs to make explicit its goal to be creative and innovative known to its constituents. Essentially, it has to demonstrate to its employees that creative work is cherished in order to foster a context conducive of creativity.

2.6.4 *Multilevel Approach to Creativity Attitudes and Behaviors*

The multilevel encapsulates multiple factors from different levels, such as individual and situational factors combined. In this construct, it combines the overall attitude and perception of

creativity as expressed by crisis communicators but also seeking to be representative of the field of crisis communication, as well as technology used by individuals, teams, and the organization.

Overall Attitude Toward Creativity. The perception of what creativity is and what role it plays in crisis communication planning, response, recovery, lessons learned, and other aspects of the different stages of a crisis constitute an organization's general attitude toward creativity.

Information and Idea Management Technology. This genre of technology encapsulates hardware, software, and devices. It allows for efficient collection, archiving, modeling, and sharing of information and ideas, as well as means for communication and collaboration among groups.

For clarity, the Figure 3 below illustrates how the Creativity Readiness dimensions fit within each level.

Individual	Work Team	Organization	Multilevel
Intrinsic Motivation			
Creative Confidence	Leadership Behavior/Support	Creativity Goals:	Overall Attitude Toward Creativity
Improvisation	Group Diversity	Representation of Creativity Through Corporate Branding	Information and Idea Management Technology
Time Pressure	Brainstorming		
Psychological Safety/Suspension of Judgment			
Autonomy in the work			

Figure 3
Creativity Readiness by Level

Now that the Creativity Readiness construct has been described, the description of the most basic main stages of crisis communication: planning, response, and lessons learned is illustrated in Figure 4. It illustrates that proactive plans and strategies are developed to respond to crisis

situations. These crisis situations are made of expected (planned for) situations and potential, at least partly, unexpected developments. The proven approaches can be applied to expected situations but may fail unexpected developments which leads to potential delays in response, short-comings, failures, losses of reputation or business as explained by Eriksson (2014). Once the crisis has petered off, lessons-learned—if a postmortem is indeed done, as shown by the greyed-out arrows—can lead to improved approaches to add to the plan and a potential replication of worthy solutions in future crises. In this model, the absence of Creativity Readiness prevents the organization from being flexible and adapting to the situation as well as embracing uncertainty through improvisation and creativity.

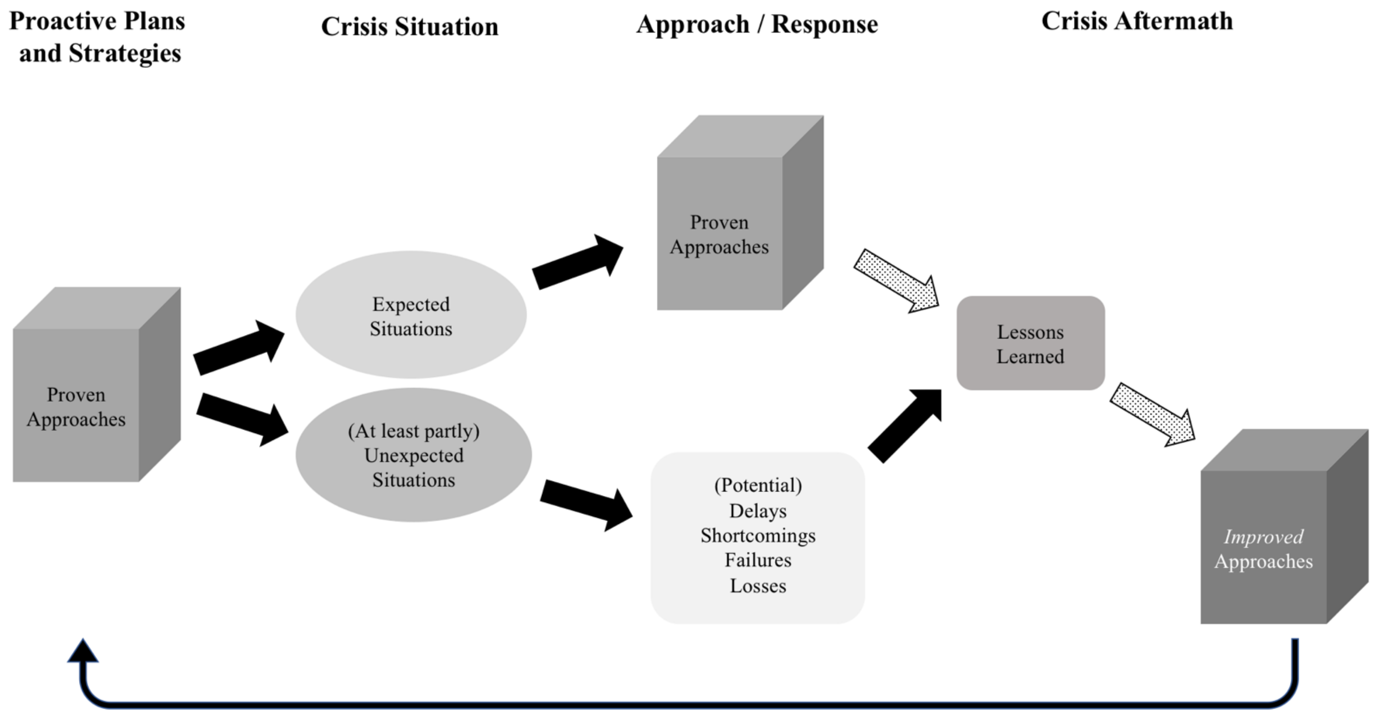

Figure 4
Theoretical Structure of Crisis Planning, Response and Aftermath without Creativity Readiness

In Figure 5 (next page), Creativity Readiness is present. The organization is Creativity Ready by allowing creative forces to occur at *any* stage of the crisis. When it comes to the timing of when creativity occurs, several authors (e.g., Paulus, 2002) have shown that it is more of a cyclical and iterative process of ideas and implementation. Thus, Figure 5 below seeks to illustrate the context in which crisis communicators, whose organization is Creativity Ready, operate, based on crisis planning, response, and lessons learned stages. As shown by its presence at different stages, the Creativity Readiness construct is a moderating variable that affect the extent to which creativity is allowed in the cycle. In essence, Figure 5 shows that crisis communicators start with established proactive plans and strategies (e.g., a variety of crisis scenarios such as "If product X gets recalled, then…"). These plans potentially include both proven approaches—things that have worked in the past—and creative ideas possibly generated due to an organizational environment of Creativity Readiness (e.g., willingness to brainstorm for creative ideas at every step of the process). Indeed, crisis communicators must tend to aspects of a crisis that they might not have been encountered before or advocate for creative ideas that they think will be effective in managing a crisis.

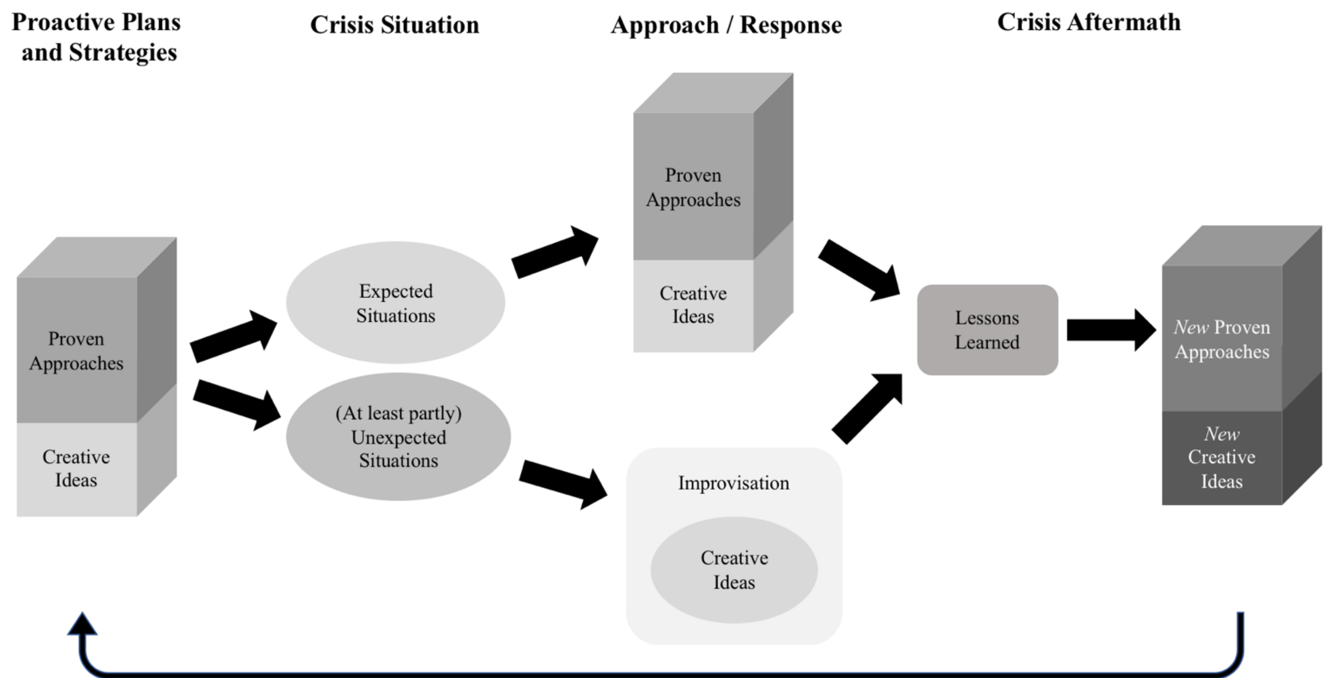

Figure 5
Theoretical Structure of Crisis Planning, Response and Aftermath with Creativity Readiness Present

For example, creative ideas could include a novel and useful way to leverage a specific channel or media tool, such as, for instance, the social network Snapchat[3]. Here, the organization's Creativity Readiness moderates the creative ideas component of the proactive plans and strategies. Again, when a crisis hits, the situation can be looked at from two angles: what was expected (and prepared for) and what was not, or at least not entirely. What was expected will be treated based on proactive plans and strategies, while what was not (entirely) expected will lead to improvisation and the potential generation of creative ideas. Again, the organization's degree of Creativity Readiness moderates the creative ideas component in the cycle.

[3] A multimedia messaging application created in 2011 ("What is Snapchat?," 2018)

Once the crisis has been mitigated or resolved, crisis communicators debrief and examine lessons learned from the case. This reflexivity may lead to new proven approaches and new creative ideas which might, in turn, modify proactive plans and strategies and be used on other crises—and the cycle continues. Essentially, when faces with new or unforeseen challenges, new practices may arise; these noncanonical activities may then get institutionalized and normalized (e.g., “Messages through Snapchat reached an audience we would not have reached otherwise, let’s use Snapchat each time from now on!”). Once again, the occurrence and normalization of these creative practices are moderated by an organization’s Creativity Readiness.

2.6.5 *Introduction of the Research Questions and Data Sets*

By applying the Creativity Readiness construct to two separate data sets—namely (1) the branding discourse related to creativity as found on corporate websites and Twitter feeds, and (2) interviews of crisis communicators, I sought to address the following overarching research question:

To what degree do crisis communicators perform in organizations that promote the conditions conducive to creative responses—at the individual, work team, and organizational levels?

In order to get granular details on crisis communicators’ perception and behaviors around creativity at each level and the dimensions affecting them, over thirty-four in-depth interviews were carried out. To thoroughly answer the following sub research questions were addressed:

RQ_a – What can we learn from how crisis communicators discuss the different Creativity Readiness dimensions?

RQ_b – Which dimensions are most impactful on crisis communicators’ creativity?

RQ_c – At what stages of crisis communication does creativity play a greater part–if at any?

Then, in order to get at the high-level overall attitude and perception around creativity, the inquiry involved the assessment of PR firms' branding discourse. The goal was to see whether or not they market themselves as being *creative* and/or *innovative* organizations—in other words, whether or not creativity and innovation are *goals* and values these firms use to brand themselves; regardless of whether they *actually employ* these values in their practices. I note again that in lay terms, organizations often use the terms *creativity* and *innovation* interchangeably. To assess whether PR firms have *creativity goals* through their branding discourse, the data used comprised a selection of PR firms' corporate website pages branding discourse. Based on the literature mentioned above and the value placed on creativity and innovation in public relations (see *The Holmes Report*, 2017), the following hypothesis ensues,

H_{1a} – Creativity and innovation will be used as branding values for public relations firms.

From a branding perspective, because PR firms target companies directly, they fall under business-to-business rather than business-to-consumer practices and therefore it is more likely that they will use their corporate website as a vehicle of their image, rather than their social media channels as explained by Brennan and Croft (2012). Indeed, there is a differentiation between static content (website) and dynamic content (social media). On one hand, an organization's website is its official storefront, showcasing its mission, vision, services, and such. On the other hand, social media is not intended primarily for marketing and branding. As Kohli, Suri, and Kapoor (2015) explain, "consumers carry on discussions and exchanges, paying scant attention to branding or marketing" (p. 35). Thus, an organization's social media channels, such as Twitter, are not a constant avenue for self-promotion but rather an avenue for building 'conversations' with the organization's audiences (Bonsón & Flores, 2011). Therefore, one might say that an organization's website is a high branding context, while its social media channels are a lower branding context.

Essentially, an organization's website is where they say who they are, and Twitter is where they dynamically reinforces their branding discourse and values. As a result, if an organization discusses creativity as being a key aspect to its practices, they will share content that is related to creativity (which goes to H_{1a}). Therefore, with concerns for consistency in their branding strategy,

H_{1b} – The greater amount of mentions of *creativity* and *innovation* on the corporate website, the greater mentions there will be on the firm's Twitter account.

The impact of the organization's size is often raised in the literature. When it comes to its effect on creativity and innovation, however, there does not seem to be a consensus among scholars. Murray and Worren (2010) point out that through the examination of a variety of studies, small firms might hold a superior ability to innovate partly due to their flexibility, a higher ability to adapt and improve, and less difficulty in accepting and implementing change (Damanpour, 1992; Gong et al., 2013). This ability held by smaller firms contrasts with large firms' "systemic problems in transforming their extensive knowledge base to stimulate new innovations" (Murray & Worren, 2010), despite their advantages of greater financial means and buffer, greater knowledge pool, and a more established and expansive customer base.

On the other hand, for those aforementioned reasons, Damanpour (1992) also explains that these affordances provide a leeway to tolerate the potential loss due to unsuccessful innovations, thus giving more room for creative and innovative behaviors. As Desai (2008) explains, a certain level of risk-taking is essential for organizations to maintain a competitive edge. In his study, Desai showed that managers in firms threatened by organizational failure tend to focus on survival and become more conservative (versus creative), as risks taken to repair performance shortfalls could instead lead to failure. Therefore, this suggests that the size of the organization might only be one effect on creativity and innovation; whether the organization is striving or in "survival mode"

could be another one. Therefore, given their size and the greater impact failure would have on them,

H_2– The concepts of *creativity* and *innovation* will be more present in the branding discourse of global/large agencies than in small//boutique PR firms.

Overall, the research questions and hypotheses work toward assessing the Creativity Readiness of crisis communicators and their organizations. The specific methodology is detailed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3. METHODOLOGY

For this study, I chose a qualitative research design, which is ideal for a careful and detailed observation of discourse, perceptions, attitudes, and practices. In order to get at the perception and attitudes as well as the behaviors and practices of crisis communicators around creativity, I used a mixed methods approach that was essentially a modified grounded approach to analyze qualitative data from different sources. This grounded approach is modified by not entirely separating qualitative data collection and analysis.

In order to guide the study design and data collection, the first phase of this dissertation involved carefully surveying the literature around crisis communication, creativity, organizational branding, and organizational structuration. This yielded the previously discussed Creativity Readiness construct. This, in turn, guided the type of data I collected and applied this construct to, in order to observe how these elements are embodied within the field of crisis communication. The approach remained grounded as I also let the data inform the composition of the Creativity Readiness construct in order for it to be modified, corrected, and improved. Furthermore, the basic premises of this modified grounded approach are based on organizational research methodology advocated by several scholars supporting methodological arguments proposing grounded, interpretivist approaches, or the tracing of social connections.

For instance, Flyvbjerg (2006) advocates for *phronesis*, a research approach based on “practical common sense” and “prudence” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 371) through the understanding of particulars versus universals, which, he argues is most relevant to *praxis*. *Praxis* is defined as practice, distinguished from theory. Such an approach has as its objective “to perform analyses and derive interpretations of the status of values and interests in organizations aimed at organizational change” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 373) in order to anticipate and inform where

organizations might be going next and what research can do about it. Essentially, Flyvbjerg (2006) advocates for epistemological and ontological approaches blending interpretivism, pragmatism, and critical paradigms—where researchers do not (and cannot) separate themselves from their own values. Flyvbjerg justifies the theories employed by examining their consequences and the value created, and power is placed at the core of the analysis.

Flyvbjerg's (2006) argument for a *phronetic* approach complements Orlikowski's (1992) model in that it is a methodology aimed at "transcend[ing] the dualisms of agency/structure, hermeneutics/structuralism, and voluntarism/determinism [where] research focuses on both actors and structures, and on the relationship between the two" (p. 380). Flyvbjerg (2006) also advocates for high level of details, the importance of context, of minutiae and of understanding the "how" before the "why." As C.W. Anderson explains, it is sometimes necessary to give up on universal applicability and generalization in order to dig into a particular place and understand how it *is* (Anderson, 2013). For that matter, in-depth interviews were selected as one of the methods of data collection.

Another methodological element was adopted from Fredriksson, Olsson, and Pallas (2014), where the authors propose to look at crisis communication with a neo-institutional framework. This framework allows us to understand organizational behaviors as situated in and influenced by other organizations and wider social forces. This framework accounts for the evolution and changes that are occurring within the field of crisis communication. Therefore, it allows us "to understand the way organizations perform crisis communication in constrained environments" (Fredriksson, Olsson, & Pallas, 2014, p. 79). In other words, creativity within the field of crisis communication is bound by institutional context instead of an activity free from circumstances where crisis communicators act in a vacuum. Fredriksson, Olsson, and Pallas (2014) posit that

employing a neo-institutional framework to crisis communication research helps reveal the link between crisis communication practices and their institutional environment, which in turn provides researchers with a more accurate depiction of the possibilities and limitations afforded by crisis communicators. Thus, this study used this neo-institutional framework in order to understand how crisis communicators are perceiving and applying creative practices within the bounds of the crisis communication field.

When it comes to analyzing the creative forces at the individual, work team, organizational, and multilevel, the Interactionist Perspective of Organizational Creativity (IPOC) was used (Woodman, Sawyer, & Griffin, 1993). The IPOC "stresses that creativity is a complex interaction between the individual and his or her work situation at different levels of organization" (Anderson, Potocnik & Zhou, 2014, p. 1,301). Within the IPOC, the situation is composed of individual factors (e.g., intrinsic motivation), teamwork factors (e.g., group diversity), and organizational factors: the combination of individual and team factors as well as overall perceptions of creativity. This perspective provides a framework to observe creativity interactions within an organizational context that is compatible with Flyvbjerg's (2006) phronesis and Fredriksson and coauthors' (2014) neo-institutional framework approaches. These combined approaches lead this study's methods.

Creativity Readiness as a construct allows us to assess ongoing organizational and environmental configurations that can impact the ability of individual crisis communicators and work teams to be creative in their work. To evaluate the different dimensions at different levels (individual, work team, organizational, and multilevel), I decided to look Creativity Readiness from multiple perspectives: through PR firms' social media presence, through the firms' website choices, and through crisis communicators' interview data. I define creativity in its most basic

form: something new and useful in order to observe the dimensions affecting creative forces and thus apply the Creativity Readiness construct. What is observed, essentially, in the data is creativity as a method of accomplishing something but also as an output—for example, creatively reaching a known goal, or creating a creative communication output. I posit that for an organization to be Creativity Ready, these different dimensions, at varied levels, need to work positively together.

The second phase of this study was networking and conducting casual informational interviews with PR professionals involved in crisis communication or crisis management. This phase served the purpose of establishing credibility in order to make the formal interview approach easier, but also served to allow me to hear PR professionals' raw insights on creativity and crisis communicators' practices. These insights were cross-referenced with the literature detailed in Chapter 2 to develop a specific and directed interview protocol. Essentially, these interactions were to ensure that the potential gap was bridged between academic-speak (or perspective) and the professional world (or jargon). Thus, with the end goal of informing the professional realm of crisis communication, the interview protocol had to be designed with the crisis communicator in mind. I designed the interview protocol not only for it to be easily understood, but also as groundwork in "marketing" this dissertation and its purpose, and to entice professionals to eventually read it.

The third phase of this study was to create two data sets. The first one is composed of 46 PR firms' corporate website pages and a selection of their tweets. This first data set was used to assess these firms' branding and whether "creativity" or "being creative/innovative" is a part of it. The second data set is composed of 34 in-depth semistructured interviews of crisis communicators.

3.1 Website and Twitter Data Collection

In order to be able to grasp different aspects of their branding discourse in both static and dynamic environments, data were collected from PR firms' websites and Twitter feeds. A list of PR firms was compiled. This list consists of the Top 20 PR firms in the United States sourced from *The Holmes Report's* Global Top 250 PR Agency Ranking (*The Holmes Report*, 2016) as well as all the PR firms in Seattle not already present in the Top 20 PR firms.

The list of PR firms in Seattle was produced through search engine inquiries with the keywords "public relations firm Seattle" and "strategic communication firm Seattle." Using the same keywords, multiple searches were conducted on different platforms such as the Yellow Pages, Glassdoor, Twitter, and LinkedIn. The search was stopped when redundancy of results occurred; this yielded a raw list of Seattle PR firms. Then, several exclusions were applied. I removed firms that did not have either a website or a Twitter account active in the last 6 months, and also excluded firms outside of Seattle (such as Tacoma, 30 miles away or Edmonds, 18 miles away) in order to avoid a potential skew of the local branding culture. I also excluded firms not mentioning that they offer crisis management or issues management services. The Seattle firms added 26 firms to the Top 20 global firms, for a total of 46 firms. For each of the final 46 firms (see Appendix A for the full list), website and Twitter data were collected.

3.1.1 *Website Data Collection*

Website data was collected on a single day in October 2017 from the PR firms' corporate websites. Each corporate website associated with a PR agency is a unit of analysis. To maintain the ability to perform a systematic comparative analysis of the firms, it was decided to use only specific webpages within each corporate website, namely, the home page, the about page, the "why us" page and the employee/team description page, or their equivalent. These are the units of

observation. The pages were all captured using the Internet browser widget Google Chrome FireShot. This tool virtually scans the entire page as is and produces a PDF. Each PDF was imported in Atlas.ti version 8, read, and coded by two trained coders according to the codebook explained below. The first trained coder was the author of this dissertation, the second trained coder was a graduate student in communication whose contribution was compensated.

3.1.1.1 Limitations

Not all websites are created equal. There are different layouts, different ways of organizing and presenting information (e.g., mission, vision, services, and such), and more or less details in each section. Therefore, an effort was made to ensure that the same type of information was collected, with a consistent focus on if and how the organization discusses creativity and innovation.

3.1.2 *Twitter Data Collection*

Tweets were collected using Twitter REST Application Programming Interface (API) with a Python code (see Appendix B for full code) on a single day in November 2017. Both the first 100 tweets and the last 100 tweets were collected. The first 100 tweets were collected in order to be able to capture the early branding of the PR firm, which captures essentially when they first got on Twitter and needed to introduce themselves to their audience. The last 100 tweets were collected in order to capture the current and more extemporaneous discourse. The specific data captured for each tweet included the PR firm's handle, the date and time, the text of the tweet, the retweeted status (whether true or false) and if true, the original author. A total of more than 9,000 tweets were collected. These tweets were split into two groups: the local Seattle PR firms and the global PR firms. The tweets were all imported into two Excel sheets to be coded by the two trained coders and the codebook mentioned above.

3.1.2.1 Limitations and Issues

The Twitter data collection faced a few technical difficulties that could not be resolved because the problem resided within the API and not within the Python code. For certain Twitter handles, the exact first 100 tweets could not be collected because the API would not go back to the very creation of the handle. For example, the collection would start on October 2014, instead of June 2014 when the handle was created. Additionally, and this happened more often when it came to the Seattle PR firms, certain handles would not render exactly 200 tweets, but instead yielded a few less. This was either because some handles did not tweet as much or because of a glitch in the API that could not be resolved; the issue was still present each time a new collection was launched to test out possible solutions. This was accounted for and corrected in the manipulation and handling of the data for the analysis.

3.1.3 *Codebook*

A codebook was created to operationally define the variables used in this study and to instruct the coders of the coding protocol (see Appendix C for the codebook). The primary coder (author) coded the majority of the data and the secondary coder (communication graduate student) was used to ensure intercoder reliability among two random selections of 20% of the Twitter data (approximately 1,800 tweets) and 20% of website data (23 website pages), as recommended by Lindlof, Taylor and Bryan (2011). Intercoder reliability was calculated using Krippendorff's alpha, a statistical measure of agreement that corrects for chance agreement and disagreement. The intercoder reliability was 90.5% for website data and 91.5% for Twitter data.

The coding occurred in two phases. The first phase focused on PR firms' website data and the second phase focused on the same PR firms' tweets. The first phase included careful observation and analysis of PR firms' corporate website-specific pages. A unit of analysis was one

webpage and each webpage was coded for the following: (a) presence of creativity concept, (b) presence of innovation concept, and (c) presence of implied creativity or innovation. As explained in the literature review, both creativity and innovation were coded, as they are often used interchangeably in everyday speech. Creativity and innovation were coded differently, however, as although they are linked, they are not the same to scholars. This was also to allow for the possibility of using the data set in other studies and looking more closely at the different use of the terms creativity and/or innovation.

To test the hypotheses, the following variables were created and defined operationally as follows:

3.1.3.1 Creativity Concept

Conceptual Definition. New ideas: regardless of whether they stem from "old" ideas approached in a new way or are entirely new ideas, these are original solutions to complex, novel, ill-defined, or poorly structured problems. These ideas are, or hope to be, useful.

Operational Definition. This definition includes any mention of any word with the prefix *creativ-* and any idea expressing the concept of creativity (as aforementioned, "as *something* (a) novel or original and (b) potentially useful to the individual or the larger social group"). It can also include words such as cleverness, creative problem-solving, imagination, imaginativeness, ingeniousness, ingenuity, innovativeness, invention, inventiveness, original, originality, new, fresh, and never-done-before, as defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary ("creativity," 2017). Creativity might not be clearly stated, but rather simply discussed or mentioned.

3.1.3.2 Innovation Concept

Conceptual Definition. This concept encompasses the action or process of implementing a new idea, product, concept, etc.—something considered a "better solution." It is applied creativity.

Operational Definition. This definition includes any mention of any word with the prefix *innovat-* and any idea expressing the concept of innovation. It can also include new methods, new measures, modernization, novelty, breakthrough, revolution, novelty, and newness, as defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary ("innovation," 2017). It can be objective or subjective. Innovation might not be clearly stated, but rather simply discussed or mentioned.

Explicit Versus Implicit Creativity/Innovation. Explicit creativity/innovation is expressed in the ways detailed above; in other words, it leaves no room for uncertainty as <creativity> and/or <innovation> are mentioned in the text. Implicit creativity/innovation is not directly stated but rather shown through creative/innovative apparatus. It could be in the way the information is presented: for example, through an uncommon website design or visual. Essentially, implicit creativity/innovation involves an element that implies inventiveness and difference.

3.2 Interviews: Participants Approach and Data Collection

As aforementioned, the preliminary approach to this inquiry was to informally meet with crisis communicators in order to establish rapport and build credibility (for both the researcher and the study itself). Based on insights yielded from these informal meetings, etiquette and informed consent for the participant approach were developed. Informal meetings also helped ground the interview questions in the literature detailed in Chapter 2 (see Table 1 below). IRB approval was sought and obtained in March 2017 (reference: STUDY00000580, see Appendix D for recruitment

material and Appendix E for informed consent form). In order to select participants, I used convenience, purposive, and snowball sampling strategies (Morris, 2015).

Specifically, I first used my existing professional relationships in Seattle to connect with PR professionals involved in crisis communications and to conduct interviews with them. Then I attended two professional conferences: The International Crisis and Risk Conference (ICRC) in Orlando, Florida, in March 2017, and the International Crisis Management Conference (ICMC) in Boston, Massachusetts, in April 2017. While there, I established contacts with crisis communicators and/or crisis managers, and extended my network to the East Coast. Concurrently, I used cold-calling on LinkedIn or through emails listed on PR firms' corporate websites to reach out to crisis communicators from the list of PR firms used in Chapter 4 (see Appendix A). It is important to note that the sample was determined in part by the interviewees themselves: professionals who believed they had something to tell me about based on my approach's talking points or the informed consent form.

The interview protocol (see Appendix F) was designed to last for 45 minutes with the possibility to contract it to 20 minutes if the participant's involvement was dependent on a shorter time commitment. The interviews were in-depth and semi-structured to allow for reflexivity and for participants' perspectives about creativity, improvisation, technology, and examples (storytelling) to be freely expressed. First, the broad purpose of the study was reiterated to the participant. The participant was asked to briefly walk the researcher through their career and how they came to work in crisis communications. Next, they were asked questions about general processes: crisis planning and response ("How do you work on proactive crisis plans? How do you respond to crises? Walk me through the process and the different stages.").

Following these warm-up questions, the participant was asked questions about their "creative processes," essentially asking for details about what a typical crisis communication meeting is like, whether the team brainstorms, if ideas flow without judgment, and what would happen if someone brought up an out-there idea. The participant was then asked questions about their work setting, for instance level of autonomy, whether one could take risks, how the team got along, and the makeup of the team (e.g., "Do people in your team have the same educational background? Did they take the same career path? Do they have the same cultural background? Do you feel like you have different ways of thinking about things?"). Additional questions included how they felt their work setting affected their work, in order to discuss diversity of cultures and thoughts without actually using the word "diversity." Finally, I asked questions about creativity at work. Prior to asking those, creativity was introduced and defined by the interviewer:

> I'm going to ask you question about your practices around creativity. What I mean by creativity is the use of the imagination or original ideas, the generation of something new and novel, but also useful. Essentially, when you have to think outside of the box and come up with a new solution to the situation at hand.

The first question asked was whether or not the participant had ever needed to improvise during a crisis. Then, the participant was asked to answer more explicit questions about creativity:

> Do you employ creative public relations practices? Do you feel being creative plays an important role in crisis communication? Why, why not? In what ways? At what stage of a crisis does creativity play the biggest part? Is there a stage at which it's more prominent? What do you feel constrains or fosters your creativity within your work environment? How does time pressure affect your creativity?

Finally, a question about technology was asked to either clarify (if it had been mentioned before) or discuss whether it played a role at any stage of crisis planning and response, and how information and idea management technology affects their ability to be creative, if at all.

The interviews were carried out in person as much as possible in a quiet and private coffee shop, a conference room in the participant's workplace, or over the phone. The interview process lasted from April 7, 2017, to December 7, 2017. All participants agreed to have the interview audio recorded. In determining how many interviews should be carried out, data saturation was my guide (Morris, 2015). I terminated the interview data collection process for this study when I would consistently hear recurring themes on my research questions; doing more interviews would have added content but would not have changed the results. Data saturation was reached around 30 interviews but four more interviews were carried out for a total of 34 interviews. To follow up on specific points raised during the interview, several participants willingly shared corporate documents with me. For example, crisis plan templates or approaches, postmortem documentation on crises, details about corporate tools (software, applications, and such).

It is noteworthy to specify that no cognitive assessment of participants or highly specific personal questions (e.g., personality traits) around creativity were asked. I sought to apply the Creativity Readiness construct in order to map out crisis communicators' attitudes and practices by looking at firms and their members (practitioners), thus at the attributes that professionals associate with themselves from a social assessment and their cultural understandings—in other words, their own culturally formed notions of where creativity comes from and how it is affected. I did not look at the granularity of the cognitive or personality level. Furthermore, I would hope for this construct to be applied by professionals without them having to conduct personality tests.

3.2.1 *Limitations and Issues*

Not all Top 20 U.S. firms are represented in the interviews since several people from these firms were not willing to spare an hour of their time to be interviewed. Even more so with boutique firms—they already seemed to be spread very thin and could not spare time.

Most participants were at the senior level. Some of them were at a high level and would not truly get their 'hands dirty' in the crisis anymore. For example, I was only able to interview one crisis communicator who was at a more junior level. They were much more involved in the minutiae of crisis data collection and portions of the processes, such as negative press monitoring.

Furthermore, in drawing conclusions, I have to be mindful in connecting the data from websites and Twitter with what interviewees from those firms said to maintain confidentiality of their responses.

Table 1

Creativity Literature Dimensions and Corresponding Interview Questions

Context	Dimension	Description/Quote	Main References	Related Interview Questions
Individual	Intrinsic Motivation	Enjoyment, interest, and personal challenge need to be present in the individual to enhance creativity.	Shin & Zhou (2003) Dewett (2007) Hennessey & Amabile (2010)	- Walk me through how you got into crisis communication. - Is there a sense of play in your work?
	Creative Confidence	Openness to experience (inventive/curious vs. consistent/cautious) ++ Conscientiousness (efficient/organized vs. easy-going/careless) Extraversion (outgoing/energetic vs. solitary/reserved) Agreeableness (friendly/compassionate vs. analytical/detached) Neuroticism (sensitive/nervous vs. secure/confident) --	Kelley & Kelley (2010)	- Would you consider yourself to be a creative person? - How do you feel you are creative? - Give me an example of the last creative thing you did in your professional life? In your private life? Walk me through the example. - (Remember a time you were creative). Was it successful or not? Why would you say so? How did you measure this success? Who else was involved in assessing the success of the situation?
	Improvisation	Less planning and more proactive mental training and acquiring skills that allow professionals to move toward accepting the ambiguity, uncertainty, and lack of control. "Improvisation theater" as the ideal training for new crisis communication practices	Eriksson (2014) Falkheimer & Heide (2010) Finch & Welker (2003) Lynch (2009) Robert & Latjha (2002)	- Have you ever needed to improvise during a crisis? If so, walk me through the example. - When, would you say, you have to depart from pre-established plans and be more creative/improvise?
	Time Pressure	The influence of time pressure may be one of the most complex in the organizational creativity literature.	Sommer & Pearson (2007) Hennessey & Amabile (2010) Pearson & Sommer (2010)	- How does time pressure affect your job? - How does time pressure affect your creativity? Do you feel like time pressure boosts it or hinders it?
		Polychronicity is an individual-difference variable: the number of tasks with which an individual prefers to be involved at the same time. Participants exhibited higher creativity in the task condition that matched their individual preference, and perceived time pressure mediated these effects.	Madjar & Oldham (2006)	
		Inverted-U relation between time pressure and creativity for employees who scored high on the personality trait of openness to experience while simultaneously receiving support for creativity.	Baer & Oldham (2006)	
		In general, the effects of time pressure on creativity were negative. However, the type of time pressure was important.	Hennessey & Amabile (2010)	
	Psychological Safety/Suspension of Judgment	Psychological safety is crucial for creativity in organizations because creativity involves so much risk-taking, experimentation, and frequent failure.	Edmondson & Mogelof (2006)	- In your team/department, do you feel ideas get to flow without judgment? - When you are having a meeting or a brainstorming session, if someone brings up a crazy idea, what happens? (for e.g. what if we're attacked by aliens?) - Do you feel like you can take risks in your job?
		Ability to keep an open mind and accept ideas as they come, delaying value attribution Working environment that discourages judgmental attitudes and eliminates negativity will foster confidence and psychological safety, the other side of the coin and a related dimension.	Carson (2010) Estanyol & Roca (2014)	
		Team innovativeness depended on how free members felt to express task-related doubts and how collaboratively or contentiously these doubts were expressed.	Lovelace et al. (2001)	
	Autonomy in the Work	Feel a degree of ownership in and control over their work, they will be more intrinsically motivated and thus more likely to fully engage their cognitive processes in solving problems in the work.	Alge & colleagues (2006)	- How autonomous do you feel in your job? Do you feel a degree of ownership and control over your work? - Do you feel like you can take risks in your job?

Table 1 ***(continued)***

Creativity Literature Dimensions and Corresponding Interview Questions

Context	Dimension	Description/Quote	Main References	Related Interview Questions
Work Team	Team Leader Behavior/Support	Positive predictors included showing support for the person's actions or decisions, providing constructive feedback on the work, and recognizing good performance. Negative predictors included checking on assigned work too frequently, failing to disseminate needed information, and avoiding solving problems.	Amabile & colleagues (2004)	- What's your interaction with your supervisor? - Do you feel like you are being supported, asked, pushed, or prevented from being creative? In what ways? / Do you feel supported by your supervisor (your family)? - Are you encouraged (by your superiors, the firm's culture or else) to use technological tools or did it happen more organically?
		Creative performance of employees was significantly related to support for creativity from both work (supervisors/coworkers) and non-work (family/friends) sources.	Madjar & colleagues (2002)	- In your team/department, do you feel ideas get to flow without judgment? - When you are having a meeting or a brainstorming session, if someone brings up a crazy idea, what happens? (for e.g. what if we're attacked by aliens?) - What's your interaction with your supervisor? - Do you feel like you are being supported, asked, pushed, or prevented from being creative? In what ways? / Do you feel supported by your supervisor (your family)? - [In the years that you have worked in crisis communication, have you seen a change in how creative you have been?] You were encouraged/dissuaded to be?
	Group Diversity	"When a collection of people work together to solve a problem and one person makes an improvement, the other can often improve on this new solution even further. Problem-solving is not the realization of the states	Page (2007)	- Do people in your team have the same educational background? The same career path? The same cultural background? Do you feel like you have different ways of thinking about things? Tell me about them specifically. - How does that affect the work?
		Group diversity creates social divisions, with negative performance consequences.	Mannix & Neale (2005)	
	Brainstorming	Argued to improve idea generation	Carson (2010) Feinberg & Nemeth (2008) Osborn (1957)	- How does your team brainstorm?
Organization	Creativity Goals	*Something* (a) novel or original and (b) potentially useful to the individual or the larger social group. If an organization seeks to foster creativity, it needs to make that value explicit in its attitude and culture. Therefore, the organization and employees need to have a positive attitude and an understanding of the value of creativity. They need to choose creativity and be willing to challenge the status quo.	Carson (2010) Csikszentmihalyi (1997) Lapierre & Giroux (2003) Kelley & Kelley (2013) Mumford et al. (2012) Seelig (2012)	- Is there a sense of play in your work? - Do you employ creative public relations practices? - Do you see that transferring to crisis communication? - Do you feel being creative plays an important role in crisis communication? Why, why not? In what ways? - At what stage of a crisis does creativity play the biggest part? - What do you feel constrains or fosters your creativity within your work environment? - In the years that you have worked in crisis communication, have you seen a change in how creative you have been? You were encouraged/dissuaded to be?
Multilevel	Overall Attitude Toward Creativity	The perception of what creativity is and what role it plays in crisis communication planning, response, recovery, lessons learned, and other aspects of the different stages of a crisis constitute an organization's general attitude toward creativity.	Carson (2010) Kelley & Kelley (2013) Seelig (2012)	- What do you feel constrains or fosters your creativity within your work environment? - In the years that you have worked in crisis communication, have you seen a change in how creative you have been? You were encouraged/dissuaded to be?
	Information and Idea Management Technology	Aggregate of relevant information. Tagging. Organization. Structure Creates connections for user.	Johnson (2010)	- About technology, do you feel any of these tools help you be creative? In what way? - In general, how do you keep track of your ideas (knowledge management)? - Are you doing creative things with the technology? - Are you encouraged (by your superiors, the firm's culture or else) to use those or did it happen more organically? - Is there a protocol around how you are supposed to use them? Do you follow it? In general, how do you keep track of your ideas (information management)?

3.2.2 *Participants Profiles*

The participant pool was made of eighteen females and sixteen males who were currently (or up until recently) working in crisis communication. Thirteen participants worked for a PR firm and catered to clients from various industries, fourteen did in-house public relations/crisis communications for an organization, and the remaining six were consultants providing services to companies of various sizes. The public relations firms' participants discussed their work with client-organizations which were facing crises, not crises their public relations firm could be involved in.

Their expertise varied: from Global Managing Communication Director to Account Executive involved in crisis communication planning and research. Their broad job titles, organization type, and industry are summarized in Table 2 below. Some had worked on national, even worldwide-known, crises (e.g., massive technology product recall, food contamination) and others on smaller, local ones (e.g., transportation accident). Their education and background were fairly homogenous: general public relations, political communication, journalism, with three outliers who came from the military or the aviation industry.

Note that in order to further guarantee the confidentiality of participants, I opted to use the singular gender-neutral pronoun *they* throughout.

Table 2

Interview Participants Summary

Participant	Broad Title	Organization Type and Industry
1	Principal & Writer	Boutique PR Firm
2	Health Communication Specialist	Large Health Organization
3	Crisis Management Consultant	Consultant
4	Communications & PR Assistant Director	Medium Insurance Organization
5	Strategic Communication Consultant	Consultant
6	Crisis Communication Consultant & Instructor	Consultant
7	VP of Media Relations & Communications	Large Education Organization
8	Head of Communications	Large Construction Organization
9	Crisis Communication Managing Director	Large PR Firm
10	Crisis Communication Associate	Large Education Organization
11	Chief Communications	Small Non-Profit Organization
12	Chief Global Communication	Boutique PR Firm
13	Senior Communications Manager	Large Technology Organization
14	Director of Communications	Large Technology Organization
15	Communications Specialist	Consultant
16	Vice President Communications & Marketing	Medium Community Outreach Organization
17	Principal & Communications Specialist	Boutique PR Firm
18	Communications Specialist	Boutique PR Firm
19	Communications Specialist	Large Utility Organization
20	Vice President	Large PR Firm
21	Director of Crisis Communications	Large PR Firm
22	Partner & Crisis Communications Specialist	Large PR Firm
23	Director of Risk & Crisis Communications	Large PR Firm
24	Account Executive	Large PR Firm
25	Manager of Global Crisis Communication	Large Travel Organization
26	Director of Public Relations	Large Transportation Organization
27	Crisis Communications & PR Specialist	Large Global Health Non-Profit
28	Global Communications Specialist	Large Technology Organization
29	Communications Specialist	Boutique PR Firm
30	Communications Specialist	Consultant
31	Senior Vice President	Large PR Firm
32	Communications Specialist	Consultant
33	Crisis Communications Director	Large PR Firm
34	Director of Communications	Large Electronic Commerce Organization

3.2.3 *Method of Analysis*

In analyzing my data sets, I applied the Creativity Readiness construct detailed above. To perform an analysis of the website data, codes were exported from Atlas.ti and tallied up in Microsoft Excel. The results were input in a table and then visually represented in descending order for the Top 20 Public Relations firms and for Seattle PR firms, separately. For further analysis, the median for creativity mentions was calculated for both groups.

For the Twitter data, codes were tallied up. For each account, the total number of tweets was added up. The number of mentions of Creativity and Innovation were then divided by the total of tweets for each handle. These totals were multiplied by 100 to get the percentage. Essentially, the points of analysis are the percentage of each firm's total tweets coded as containing a Creativity or Innovation code. The results were visually represented for analysis.

To perform an analysis of the interview data, each interview was professionally transcribed. Interviews were then imported into the software Atlas.ti for coding. I took a modified grounded approach to code for the different dimensions of the Creativity Readiness construct but also let close readings of the data uncover other patterns and potential new dimensions. Three passes of close reading were conducted in order to check and confirm each preceding observation. For analysis and discussion, the most relevant quotes were selected from the data. Elements that could help identify the individual or the organization were removed to preserve participants' confidentiality.

Chapter 4. CREATIVITY READINESS AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Creativity Readiness at the individual level is the first level the construct is being applied to, where crisis communicators are persons performing a specific job within a specific environment (the organization). This is the first step in answering the research question: To what degree do crisis communicators perform in organizations that promote the conditions conducive to creative responses—at the individual, work team, and organizational levels. Thus, this chapter looks at how the individual dimensions play out in the day-to-day experiences of crisis communicators and what we can learn from them. Specifically, *What can we learn from how crisis communicators discuss the different Creativity Readiness construct's dimensions?* (RQ_a) *Which dimensions are most impactful on crisis communicators' creativity?* (RQ_b)

The data set used for this analysis is from the 34 semi-structured interviews of crisis communicators I conducted. I analyze each dimension within the Individual Level. First, dimensions belonging to individual factors are assessed—namely, intrinsic motivation and creative confidence. Then, dimensions belonging to the situational context are assessed—namely, improvisation and time pressure. Finally, dimensions belonging for the social context are assessed—namely, suspension of judgment and psychological safety, and autonomy in the work.

I then close this chapter's results section with some additional analyses that stem from observations beyond the Creativity Readiness construct and propose modifications that need to be considered at the Individual Level.

4.2 Findings

4.2.1 *Individual Factors*

4.2.1.1 Intrinsic Motivation

As explained in Chapter Two, intrinsic motivation plays an important part in individual's ability to be creative. Being driven by a genuine interest—an internal reward—yields more creative behaviors than extrinsic motivation (such as a monetary reward). In order to assess crisis communicators' intrinsic motivation, I opted for indirect questions versus direct ones, reasoning that it is unlikely that a participant would openly confide in an interviewer that they are doing something solely for the money, even if their participation was guaranteed to remain confidential. Often, the theme of intrinsic motivation arose naturally while discussing their career path and current day-to-day job (these were used as warm-up questions to put the interviewee at ease and to get them started talking about themselves). Interestingly, in discussing how they got into crisis communications, most participants said that it "sort of just happened this way" or they "just kind of fell into it." For over 85% of them, they started working in communications, and when a crisis erupted, took charge and did well or enjoyed it. Only four interviewees directly chose (while in college, for example) to study or move toward crisis communications. They usually expressed being naturally drawn to it because they discovered an interest. Indeed, most crisis communicators I interviewed noted that "it takes a certain kind of person to work in crisis communication," and that it comes with a fair amount of stress and dedication.

Overall, the crisis communicators I interviewed expressed being satisfied with their job and enjoying the variety of tasks they work on: "You know what, one of the things I love about this profession and this firm is that there almost is no such thing as a day-to-day routine" participant 16 exclaimed. Participant 7 emphatically explained, "It's just… it's never the same which is why

I love my job, but it is also why I have to really need think outside-of-the-box." Or again, "I have done some very interesting work that makes me smile when I think about it" (participant 23). Five participants similarly noted that the burn-out rate in the field is high given the consistently high stress level and the need to be connected and available 24/7: "you'd be surprised how many crises happen at 5 p.m. on a Friday, or the night before you're supposed to go on vacation, you got to love what you do in order to last," participant 20 noted. Such comments on the nature and demands of the job were common in the data.

In almost all the interviews, passion and excitement about crisis work could be felt. They spoke with emphasis and often joyfully got carried away in stories. Over half of the interviewees openly expressed being happy and excited to discuss their work in crisis communications and having an opportunity to be reflexive about what they do and how they do it. One in particular, who had worked on a global crisis for a major product malfunction that necessitated a recall, associated the interview with "talk therapy" and felt that it was "cathartic to be able to recount what happened and discuss it [with the interviewer]" (participant 28).

Generally, the crisis communicators I interviewed seemed to truly enjoy their work; participant 5 even noted "my best day is maybe a company's worst day. It's like an adrenaline thing. It's a total driver." The enjoyment of variety, challenges, and adrenaline seemed to all be reasons why these professionals came to and stayed in crisis communications.

4.2.1.2 Creative Confidence

Believing that you are creative or that creativity is not a fixed trait but a skill that can be honed is often the first step in actually *being* creative. In other words, having confidence that you can be creative makes you more creative. When interview participants were asked whether or not they considered themselves a creative person, only three said yes. However, when they thought

beyond whether or not they are creative individuals, they made interesting observations that actually *showed* they took creativity into consideration and strove to incorporate it in their work. For instance, a partner and crisis communications specialist at a Large PR firm said, “I try to, myself, keep a good balance of knowing how much I can handle in terms of my workload, so that I'm always having those opportunities to be creative” (participant 22). Adding to that, a director of crisis communication at a large PR firm explained, “something that would stifle creativity you know internally to yourself would probably be not challenge yourself to new ideas and new thoughts” (participant 21). This shows that although these crisis communicators did not necessarily have the words to discuss the concept of creative confidence, it is something that they do consider in their work and think of as an ability. It is something that you can work on, or “challenge yourself” to do—like a skill. Another crisis communications director at a large PR firm (participant 33) put creative thinking and creative confidence in opposition to linear thinking. They said,

> For a linear thinker, crisis situations are just a nightmare, where there are just things way off the line… they just want to get things back on that line. So, if you want to have any kind of creativity, you have to be able to think outside of the box. I try to do just that. I’m not a linear thinker, I couldn’t do that job otherwise.

This professional implied that striving to be creative and having confidence that you *can* be creative is deterministically part of their line of work. To them, an inability to see creativity as a skill and a part of your day-to-day tasks in dealing with crisis would make you unfit for a job in crisis communications. In parallel, a senior communications specialist (participant 32) expanded on that idea and posited that wanting and believing that you are creative goes beyond what you apply to your job, instead, it is a mindset and how you see the world. In turn, you can bring it in to your work. They explained,

> Since I'm aware of change, since I'm aware of what's happening, since I'm aware that I've got to get better, that probably means I'm more creative… because I'm thinking, at least I'm thinking about it. I am fortunate that I have a son who uses these platforms [Snapchat and Instagram], so he knows all of it. We talk about it a lot. So, I would say that simple exposure to the possibilities makes you more creative. I tend to look at things and see "how does this change things?" It's really a question of being, you know, constantly thinking ahead, constantly trying to get a sense of where pieces connect or where these aren't connecting, but also knowing how are things going to play out.

Essentially, this participant pointed out that seeking to stay on top of trends and tools (with their son's help) was an asset and allowed them to be creative in their work. This demonstrates that they had a certain level of creative confidence and indeed, saw it as a skill, as "I've got to get better" illustrates.

Hence, although close to 90% of the crisis communicators interviewed did not openly and directly express their belief that they are inherently creative individuals, through sometimes unrelated questions, they showed that they at least see creativity as an acquired skill that they strive to use and develop in their work.

4.2.2 *Situational Context*

4.2.2.1 Improvisation

As explained in Chapter Two, the literature points to improvisation as a key component of 'new' crisis communications practices. The ability to embrace uncertainty, chaos, and to think on your feet in order to design solutions to unforeseen problems is argued as a crucial quality for crisis communicators. Prior to asking any question about creativity, I asked interview participants whether or not they had ever needed to improvise during a crisis. Interestingly, this was the

question that received the most amount of emphatic “yes” answers. Participant 31, from a large PR firm, said: “Always! I’ve probably worked on hundreds of crises over the past years. They're similar to each other, but each one is completely different.” Another one from a large transportation organization (participant 26) exclaimed, laughing,

> That's a ridiculous question. Every minute by minute I will say you know you've got your plan obviously, right? But there are only so many things that you can do, you never know… I've had some crises where there was no way I could have ever guessed they were even coming.

Through participants’ responses it becomes clear that improvisation and the need to be flexible plays an inherent part of crisis communication practices. A principal at a boutique PR firm (participant 17) even insisted on the fact that,

> [Improvisation] *is* crisis communication, and I think that the number one thing that I’ve learned in doing crisis communications is that you can develop the general guidelines for advising clients through their crises, but they’re all different. A lot of it is improvising and knowing enough about your client’s needs and objectives and sensitivities to be able to advise them, but also being able to think quickly on the fly to figure out the best way to communicate around what’s happening.

This participant denoted that improvisation is embedded in crisis communication and not a usual aspect of it. Being prepared is still a must but knowing that things will need to be adapted for your “client’s needs and objectives” is crucial. For optimal crisis response, planning is necessary, but 31 participants out of 34 described the nature of crisis communications as including a certain level of uncertainty that requires thinking on one’s feet and adapting to the situation. A Crisis Communications Director at a large PR firm’s (participant 33) observation summarizes what

all 34 interviewees expressed: “We believe that 99% of all crises are identifiable in advance. I did say 99% of all crises. There's 1% where you still sit there and go ‘Wow. I could never have imagined that one in my wildest dreams’.” In other words, crisis planning can only go so far and requires improvisation when circumstances are not what you imagined them to be.

In their discussion of improvisation and flexibility, eight participants started linking these ideas to creativity—for example, a Director of Communication at a large technology company (participant 14) said,

> We can do our best to have thought through various responses, and so where you need to be creative during the process, and where you need to show innovation is that you are open to taking all of that planning and tweaking it as needed.

Again, this ability to be reflexive during the process and be able to adapt plans as needed was a recurring theme across most interviews. Nonetheless, the director of communication at a large eCommerce organization (participant 34) clarified where improvisation occurs, to them:

> I don't know that I've ever improvised on process in the midst of a crisis. You kind of know what you got to go do—get the facts, figure out what the truth is. I don't know that I've changed any of that stuff up. You're always improvising a little bit and watching the news cycle change shape. Then figuring out how, tactically, you're going to keep it moving in the direction you want it to move or getting smaller as quickly as you can, because often, you just want to be finished with a crisis.

Of all interviewees, participant 34 was the only one who emphasized when and how improvisation occurs to them: in the tactics, but not in the process. This idea was not seen across other interviews as 11 participants expressed having improvised on processes specifically, simply because the established ones were not working—using a different team member for a task;

skipping the press release and doing a live interview filmed with a cellphone; media training via Skype a representative different that the one planned for; among others. Participant 24 illustrates that with a specific example,

> During a crisis, we have these heat maps that are produced by Meltwater [a tool for media intelligence and social monitoring] where it shows the amount of stories published in certain countries. It'll be like "50 stories published in China" but I know for a fact that a lot of the stories that Meltwater is pulling in aren't relevant. There's no way that I can remove those stories from that graph. The first time that happened, I had to quickly jump into the Painting tool and alter the graph manually through Microsoft Paint and then try to get that to the client as quickly as I can with the updated and correct data. […] I probably could've gotten in touch with a Meltwater representative who would've been able to talk to their development team and get the problem fixed the next day. That's just not acceptable when I need to get something out in the next thirty minutes.

This participant then reported having used that process (using Microsoft Paint) on several occasions and in different ways to correct the content and esthetics of reports they had to send to their managers or clients during a crisis. This illustrates that the process has to be improvised on and modified to fit their goals.

Fundamentally, interviewees made clear that improvisation is an essential part of crisis communications and that, in order to be an efficient (possibly, successful) crisis communicator, one needs to be ready to diverge from pre-established plans and pivot in order to best serve the situation. In other words, it was stressed that an inability to improvise would not be compatible with practicing crisis communication.

4.2.2.2 Time Pressure

With a 24-hour news cycle, the rise of fake news, and grassroot journalism, every minute is valuable in a crisis situation. As explained in Chapter Two, several scholars have looked at the impact of time pressure on one's ability to be creative. Working "under the gun" is usually argued to be detrimental to creativity (Amabile, 2010). However, time constraints are integral to crisis communication, making the effect of time pressure on crisis communicators' creativity particularly interesting to observe. Interestingly, there was a clear pattern among interview data where crisis communicators explained striving in stressful situations; that is when many expressed having their "creative juices flowing." For example, participant 34 asserted, "But now I definitely feel like when there is a time crunch, that's when I am at my best. I have always felt that way and it's probably why I am good at what I do… why I have been successful." Much like mentioned earlier, a crisis situation is "an adrenaline thing. It's a driver" for 16 of the crisis communicators I interviewed. The senior vice president at a large PR firm (participant 31) even remarked,

> When the crisis is running, when the adrenaline's pumping, and the synapses in the brain are really pulsing, that's when I find I am and my people are at the most creative. When the adrenaline's running and you're looking to solve a particular problem is when the creativity's really working. The more condensed the time, the greater the intensity of focus, and therefore, we're coming up with more things in rapid-fire.

For this participant as well, time pressure is a boost to them and their "people's" creativity due to an increased focused on the tasks at hand. Although the majority of the interviewees conveyed that time pressure positively affected their ability to be creative several tempered this concept. The vice president of a large PR firm (participant 20) described the effect of time pressure on creativity as cyclical half-bell curves:

> It's growing at quite a rapid pace, the creativity. Then it becomes a cliff, where it drops right off, because you've got to make decisions. You've got to make decisions, and move on, and execute, and then once you've executed, then the bell curve would start again, start climbing up. You're allowed to be thinking more creatively about things. But then again, there are going to be decisions made. There comes a point where the company has got to arrive at a decision: "This is what we're doing." Now it's execution, so we drop off a cliff on the creativity because we're now executing. Once we've executed, then the creativity can start to build again.

This participant acknowledges that although creativity can be present during a crisis, it is affected by time pressure recurrently: when decisions need to be made and executed, they say. Their response is interesting as it points to a few things that no other participants have noted clearly. First, this participant describes creativity as something that starts and stops, and that cannot possibly be constant—which is evident, yet rarely discussed. They also point out that these cliffs where creativity suddenly drops to make way for decisions could be to allow for more situational observations in order to assess whether or not creativity is needed at the next stage. Essentially, if the curve will climb again or if it will plateau and the usual methods will be sufficient. Furthermore, this participant's explanation could be seen as complementing Baer and Oldham's (2006) inverted U-shaped (bell-shaped) relation between time pressure and creativity, where, as time pressure rises creativity rises, up to a certain point, and then drops–because the pressure monopolizes cognitive abilities necessary for creativity to occur. In this case, this pressure could also be the need to make a decision, not necessarily a limited bandwidth to be creative as posited by Baer and Oldham (2006).

Overall, time pressure is indeed a complex dimension affecting creative forces. While there was no true consensus among the crisis communicators interviewed, the majority insisted that time pressure was a drive and a booster of their (and their team's) creativity. This suggests that the nature of their work has prepared them to endure trying times where creativity still needs to be a must in order to achieve the desired results.

4.2.3 *Social Context*

4.2.3.1 Psychological Safety and Suspension of Judgement

Through a variety of direct and indirect questions, I got a sense of whether ideas could flow freely within these individuals' work environments and whether they were able to suspend their judgment in order to welcome new ideas and avoid attributing value right away. Participant 9's comment basically summarizes what we know from the research in this area, "I think that's one of the big things, but I find that you can't be afraid to fail and that will really foster your creativity. If you are afraid to fail…you know if your supervisors or something is going to come down on you for messing up you're a lot less likely to try new things."

For the most part, over half of the interviewees expressed feeling fairly safe to share ideas and propose new things—each time, with some reservations. Through coding, it became evident that in-house crisis communicators felt freer to express their ideas compared to ones working in PR firms. For example, a health communication specialist for a large health organization (participant 2) recalls a crisis meeting: "I think it was really nice that everybody's idea was kind of heard. And we went through the risks and benefits of everyone's idea." On the other hand, a communication specialist from a Boutique PR firm (participant 18) explained "you have to be careful what you propose when you have to make decisions quickly… you can't waste time with wacky *what ifs.*" Because of the possible reputational and monetary repercussion of a wrong move,

especially during a crisis, resources appeared to be one of the moderating variables of new ideas. It also appeared that there were understood boundaries as to what could be proposed. When asked how crazy ideas are treated in their large health organization, participant 2 explained,

> It's not really one way or the other I would say… there are definitely parameters, but I feel like I can partner with people in the organization that I've built relationships that trust me and trust my judgment. That takes time.

These "parameters" seem to be understood rather than clearly stated. Essentially, the data suggests that crisis communicators have to be mindful of the different actors and stakeholders in planning and responding to a crisis. This moderates what they can or cannot propose. Participant 34 at a large eCommerce organization's response reinforces this argument,

> Ideas don't really get shot down very much here—you might get a "Hey, that's interesting, but probably less likely," and maybe that goes into the part at the bottom, the things we get to if we have time—but you take a complete list out of the room. People will come after you if you say something that's just wrongheaded, but that's true everywhere, I hope.

The language used to express that saying something wrongheaded would have consequences, "people will come after you," is strong and rather threatening. It is not that something considered wrong would be simply reprimanded: it would be 'chased.' This seemingly points to a climate that does not entirely welcome ideas that could lead to failure or at least does not simply wave them off with a slap on the wrist. Further illustrating that point, the director of risk and crisis communication at a large PR firm's (participant 23) response goes against the idea that there is a suspension of judgment "in this business" by stating,

> Silly ideas get shot down quickly, but that's not a constraint. That's just part of the nature of the business, that we operate in very time-constrained situations where you need to sift through things very quickly, and democracy in a crisis is way overrated. You got to make decisions and keep moving forward, so have a thick hide, I don't think anything like that would constrain it.

In this response as well, we see a severity in the language with “shot down” and “democracy in a crisis is way overrated” implying that time is of the essence and ideas differing from the norm, that cannot be assessed as useful right away do not have their place during a crisis. It suggests that given the circumstances, in many cases, crisis communicators, even if they have a potential new and useful solution to a problem in the heat of the moment, they might not feel safe to share it in such climate.

Overall, the data shows that there is a limit to psychological safety and suspension of judgment. Ideas that are proposed still need to be considered ‘on track’ or ‘reasonable’ or they might get either discounted, put at the bottom of the pile, or shot down. This implies that a crisis communicator needs to understand what these unspoken boundaries are in order to understand in what context creative ideas can or cannot happen.

4.2.3.2 Autonomy in the Work

When it comes to autonomy in the work, patterns did not clearly emerge from the data. Over 90% of the crisis communicators interviewed held senior positions, working closely with the C-suite (i.e. top senior executives, such as the Chief Executive Officer, Chief Financial Officer, Chief Operating Officer, and such) or had been consultants for many years. They had years of experience and inherently had a certain level of trust from management, however, what was made evident from examples and answers to other questions was that in crisis communication, there is

not inherently very much autonomy in one's work. You have to respond to clients and stakeholders' needs. There are defined expectations: protect the organization's reputation, find solutions to limit the crisis's lifecycle, repair the organization's image, go back to business as usual. Essentially, your actions as a communication professional are carefully looked at and assessed—not as an 'over the shoulder' constant check but as 'these are our goals and we're expecting results.' The dimension of autonomy in the work was closely related to (and discussed with) psychological safety and leadership behavior.

4.3 DISCUSSION

In applying Creativity Readiness to crisis communicators at the Individual Level, the prevalence of certain trends in the dimensions became evident. At a high level, the interview data supports many of the ideas discussed in the crisis communication and creativity literature. To answer to what degree, do crisis communicators perform in organizations that promote the conditions conducive to creative responses—at the individual, work team, and organizational levels—I unpack the above findings by looking at *what can we learn from how crisis communicators discuss the different creativity Readiness construct's dimensions* (RQ_a), focusing on the Individual Level.

Given the demands of crisis communication work, the intermittent intensity, and the necessary dedication (e.g., working whenever a crisis occurs) it appears that crisis communicators tend to self-select. If they continue working in crisis communication after multiple crises, it is because they enjoy the work (as most of them expressed) and are at least partly intrinsically motivated. Throughout the interviews none of the participants used phrases or made statements implying "it's just a job" or "it pays the bills." While it might not be true for all of them, overall this is what they self-reported and what the data showed. Nonetheless, it is important to keep in

mind that the interview was voluntary, and no retribution was offered to participants, thus we can presume that most crisis communicators who responded positively have a sense of pride about what they do and enjoy discussing their work.

When it came to creative confidence, 90% of crisis communicators interviewed did not see themselves as innately creative individuals. One reason for this could be that many of them associated "creativity" with the fallacious definition of something "artistic" while creativity's basic definition, as explained above, is simply something new and useful. In order to fully understand the implication of creative confidence, this data would need to be compared to a larger study looking at people's attitude toward their own creativity—essentially, how do participants' attitudes toward their own creativity compare with the publics'? Nonetheless, when discussing creativity, it appeared that many of the crisis communicators interviewed believed that they can act creatively and saw it as a skill (versus an inborn trait), which is the first step to creative confidence.

The most striking dimension at the Individual level was that of improvisation. Questions around this topic received the most emphatic responses. Indeed, improvisation was seen as an inherent part of crisis communications; not only was it commonly referenced, but it was often deemed to be necessary. Participants explained that while planning is a crucial part of crisis communications, improvisation is unavoidable, and in order to thrive and accomplish your goals as a crisis communicator, you need to be not only expect improvisation but also be comfortable with it. Despite this, the ability to improvise in times of crises must then be understood as something that is often restricted in the institutional context rather than an activity that is divorced from underlying circumstances and taken on by singular and autonomous actors, as explained by Fredriksson, Olsson, and Pallas (2014). So far, according to the literature, when scholars have found evidence of creativity and improvisation, it was most commonly at the tactical level (short-

term techniques to achieve long-term goals), for example, when organizations switch to social media strategies for content dissemination or announcements instead of using traditional media channels, such as a press release (see Eriksson, 2014) versus at the operational level (the processes through which objectives are reached). Only one participant stated that he had never improvised in the process, only in their tactics; most others had been faced with situations where they had to improvise in the process (operations) as well. Nonetheless, operational improvisation was more situated in details (e.g., using Microsoft Paint in an emergency) rather than an overhauling of the entire process. Therefore, tried and trusted strategies, models, and practices tend to be used and reproduced in times of crisis while the ability to improvise is a precondition inherent, or not, in the individual's institutional context. Essentially, improvisation will go as far as the institutional context of crisis communication allows it to go and will be a recourse primarily used when plans fail to satisfy the needs and objectives of a crisis and its stakeholders.

In discussing time pressure, an inherent part of crisis communicators' work, responses were nuanced. While Pearson and Sommer's (2014) study showed that crisis communicators do not seem to be affected by time pressure, there still appears to be a limit to how much time pressure crisis communicators' creativity can endure. It is inherent to the job and often becomes a habitual state of work. Sixteen participants expressed time pressure being a boost versus a hindrance to their creativity, which backs up previous studies and places crisis communicators closer to Baer and Oldham's (2014) study with the inverted U-shaped graph results versus Amabile's (2010) study "under the gun" where time pressure inhibits creativity.

As stipulated by Lovelace et al. (2001), a high comfort level and freedom to speak up yields more creative behaviors. At the individual level, it appeared that psychological safety and suspension of judgment played a crucial role in determining whether or not crisis communicators

would engage in creative practices or if they would shy away from creativity. In the context of crisis communication, it appeared that there were limits to psychological safety and suspension of judgment. The main issue was that these limits were usually unspoken and were simply expected to be understood by crisis communicators. The participants themselves had a hard time defining these limitations during the interview. Although several participants were adamant that certain things would be shot down for the sake of time or resources, it seemed to be highly contextual. This suggests that there is little suspension of judgment during a crisis since ideas would be evaluated as they are proposed in a sort of triage.

Departing slightly from suspension of judgment and psychological safety, interestingly, throughout the interviews, when participants were asked what stifled creativity, over half of them gave a one-word answer: "fear." Mueller et al. (2012) note that fear of uncertainty often stifles creativity. However, when prompted to expand on their answer ("fear of what?") most participants struggled to explain: "fear…just fear in general" or would enumerate: fear of failing, of negative consequences, of speaking up. This reinforces the idea that psychological safety at the individual level is highly important and often not present. As Seelig (2012) suggests, both success and failure need to be rewarded; it is inaction that should be punished. This practice was only described in two of the interviews: at a health protection organization and at a large technology firm.

For crisis communicators, autonomy in their work is often limited as well. Given that their objectives are to deliver on stakeholder expectations, which are made even more prominent during a crisis, they need to maintain legitimacy, credibility, and authority. Therefore, there is rarely much room for autonomy. Yet over half of the participants stated that with experience and expertise, they have the autonomy to do their job and deliver results—there is leeway in how they do it, as long as they achieve the desired results. However, because of a fear of failure, it appears that many

participants only used such leeway in cases where was no other option because the tried method has failed.

To start answering RQ_b—*What dimensions are most impactful on crisis communicators' creativity?*—I take a step back after having assessed the first level at which creative forces occur. It becomes interesting to see how certain dimensions are already part of the nature of crisis communicators' work, and therefore not as pertinent to observe closely when looking at Creativity Readiness. As discussed, intrinsic motivation tends to come with the job itself as crisis communicators self-select. Keeping job availability in mind, crisis communication is a niche; for those who do not enjoy it, other avenues in PR are often available. In the same vein, time pressure is an inherent part of the crisis communicator's work, therefore it is almost always present. Crisis communicators seem to have evolved to adapt to these circumstances and do not seem to let them dictate their ability to be creative. Much like a window cleaner should probably not be afraid of heights, crisis communicators should be able to deal with time pressure. Similarly, autonomy in the work is dictated by the work itself—there is usually a clear structure and expectations for crisis communicators. Thus, many dimensions of the Creativity Readiness construct are embedded in the nature of the work.

Thus far, the conclusion we can draw on the Creativity Readiness of crisis communicators and their environment is that crisis communicators are conscious of the need to be able to be creative and think of their feet or improvise when needed. However, few of them see creativity itself as an asset that they should continue working on—like they would master the use of a new tool, such as a new social media platform. Creativity is mostly just there and is, for most, unconscious. It is simply part of what they do.

Finally, it is interesting to note that improvisation and psychological safety stood out in the research as the most important aspects of the Individual Level. Improvisation is clearly an inherent part of crisis communication—being unable to improvise would make you a poor crisis communicator. Therefore, to dial down the construct and unpack improvisation, it becomes pertinent to understand in what specific ways crisis communicators are improvising and what specific situations make them improvise. In contrast, psychological safety appeared murky and mostly lacking. Thus, it becomes interesting to ask: what, specifically, makes up psychological safety? How can we unpack communicators' fears and how these fears play out? Many of these issues are addressed by looking at a crisis communicator's leadership and work team, which are dealt with in the next chapter.

Chapter 5. CREATIVITY READINESS AT THE WORK TEAM LEVEL

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I present the results of the second level at which the Creativity Readiness construct was applied: The Work Team Level. This level focuses on crisis communicators within their team both in terms of their environment—within the team, the conditions in which they perform their practices—and in terms of processes—within the team, how they perform these practices. Thus, this chapter looks at how work team level dimensions impact the ability to be creative in a work team environment. I observe each dimension within the Work Team level starting with the environmental context—namely leadership behavior and support, and group diversity. Then, I observe crisis planning, response, and recovery processes in order to frame brainstorming. In assessing these dimensions, this further informs to what degree crisis communicators perform in organizations that promote the conditions conducive to creative responses. Essentially, whether or not the work team level holds open the possibility for creative ideas generation and application, making them Creativity Ready. In order to do so, RQ_a (*within the construct, what can we learn from how crisis communicators discuss the different Creativity Readiness construct's dimensions)* and RQ_b continue to be used as guides (*What dimensions are most impactful on crisis communicators' creativity?*).

5.2 FINDINGS

5.2.1 *Environmental Context*

5.2.1.1 Leadership Behavior and Support

Leadership behavior and overall support has been shown to have a crucial impact on whether or not employees feel they can be creative. Indeed, within the organization, one of the most favorable conditions to creativity is working in a supportive environment (West & Sacramento, 2014) where employees are not put under unreasonable constraints and are free to express themselves and even to fail. This support needs to come predominantly from top management levels. Throughout the interviews, this was one of the most discussed dimensions, whether or not participants were prompted to discuss leadership behavior. Again, participant 9 summarizes the points often made,

> If you are afraid to fail, if you're going to get… you know… your supervisors or something is going to come down on you for messing up, you're a lot less likely to try new things.

Thus, leadership behavior and support are vital to psychological safety—the conscious fostering of an environment is conducive to creative work. Therefore, it becomes a moderating variable of creativity: fostering, or stifling, or even inhibiting it. A senior communications manager (participant 13) stated,

> Management is one of the key fosterers of creativity… are you granted the space to think creatively, to act creatively, take risks? And do you feel like you're in a situation where if you take a risk and things don't go quite as planned, do you feel like you're going to get your head cut off or do you feel like you'll be okay? We try and foster an environment

> where people feel comfortable taking–not stupid risks–but smart ones where we are relatively sure we're making the right decision.

Supporting the creativity research discussed previously, this participant clearly states that management plays an important part in determining what (creative) behaviors are accepted and whether or not the inclusion of new and potentially useful ideas will be welcomed at from leadership. The distinction between "stupid" and "smart" risks is clearly subjective and hard to concretely define. This suggests that, as a crisis communicator, it is expected that you know what a "stupid" risk would be. For that reason, receiving feedback from leadership becomes crucial in order to know whether or not your practices are valued and appreciated. Indeed, providing frequent developmental feedback is also a significant factor, since stakes become greater the less often you receive feedback, which can generate stress and diminish creativity (Seelig, 2012). For example, participant 19 from a Boutique PR firm explained,

> I think what fosters it is having leadership that wants and invites ideas and innovations to the table. I think it's led by that leader, and especially in a crisis situation, it's going to be that team leader that once you do the recap and briefing from the crisis situation is encouraging people to provide ideas and has that atmosphere where people feel comfortable doing that. I think it's someone who doesn't promote an open dialogue or doesn't provide an environment where they're offering that opportunity to people to give their feedback but also to give feedback to people as well. Sometimes there's a leader that is "It's my way or the highway," they're not going to get that creativity. It's going to be—people are just going to follow suit.

In other words, encouraging an open dialogue is important to fostering an environment that welcomes creativity. It became apparent in the data that the impact of leadership behavior on

people's ability to be creative is significant. The director of communication at a large technology firm (participant 14) explained the consequences of lack of support from leadership,

> People are petrified—they will get fired if they work in a big company, unless they've got support right up through the food chain. I am very blessed to work for a company that's, like, if you can make this better, try. They believe that failure is something—that's also because we've got a wonderful CEO right now. He's actually said this, "failure is how you learn."

Once again, this participant noted the importance of one's manager's opinion of their work. They also specified that this is not only important with your direct manager but upper management as well, namely, the company's Chief Executive Officer (CEO). An organization's leadership coming forth with the mentality that "failure is how you learn" should somewhat reassure employees that succeeding is wanted but failure is part of that process and is accepted.

Overall, over 70% of interviewees felt like their leadership was supportive of new ideas as long as these ideas were an improvement on current practices. Broadly, these new ideas need to have a clear, and quickly identifiable value and purpose. Nonetheless, the data suggests that most crisis communicators working in-house or for a PR firm almost expected to have a leader that welcomes creativity and innovation. The global communications specialist at a large technology firm's (participant 28) comment illustrates this point,

> You can always have these one-off leaders who refuse to take any ideas, but I like to believe that the market weeds them out. I think in a place where new ideas are appreciated, then creativity is welcome from anywhere if it's going to change the result for the better, but your managers' behavior will provide the acceptance of risk-taking. And that you can't get on the fly—it's part of the company or not. If you had to spend

three hours convincing five different VPs, you're done. You might as well not try and be creative and think outside the box.

The participant associated creative work with risk-taking—this idea that with novel ideas come a certain degree of uncertainty (given that these ideas have never been tried in such manner before) and thus, not only does the individual trying them out need to be comfortable proposing and implementing them, but leadership needs to be as well.

Another interesting point raised is the idea of understanding. Beyond welcoming and being supportive of creative ideas, 11 participants raised the importance of management buy-in. In other words, do management (direct or upper) understand your work and what you (need to) do? About a third of participants explained that if you are not only supported but understood by your supervisors, and that you need to constantly explain yourself and the actions you take, this will dramatically affect your ability to be creative. Participant 25 reinforced this issue by stating,

> At the managerial level there has to be an awareness that your effectiveness… in responding to an unanticipated event, it's going to be measured by what people know you're doing. And if you're not ready to help people really understand what you're doing, your effectiveness is going to be questioned.

Essentially, if the basics of what tasks you need to carry out as a crisis communicator (from planning to recovery) are not entirely understood by your supervisors, and you need to explain yourself step of the way, this leaves very little room for creativity—if at all. Participant 34 working for a large eCommerce organization paraphrased this issue,

> What definitely constrains it is lack of an understanding of roles and responsibilities, and what I mean by that is, that can be with the communications team. It could be with the

executive team. Usually, if there's not a clear chain of command, it can slow down your ability to think on your feet and be creative.

What this participant highlighted was that understanding your own roles and responsibilities but also having your work team and upper management understand them as well, allows you to do your job, rather than worrying about the team structure. Having this understanding prevents a potential waste of time defining your role and explaining your actions. There is value in establishing yourself as a competent crisis communicator first in order to be able to have the leeway to be creative—both because you are supported but also because it frees up the bandwidth necessary, as participants described.

Nonetheless, sometimes, it is this very lack of understanding of the crisis communicator's role that warrants creative behaviors. A creative behavior can help a crisis communicator get around possible obstacles within a team or with leadership in order to deal with a crisis. A consultant (participant 5) summarized this by saying "sometimes you have to be creative because, again, there's dichotomy between what you do and what they think you should do... someone not directly involved with crisis communication, they… there's no reason to expect them to exactly understand [communication needs]." As a result, in certain circumstances, the individual or team might need to think creatively to get around the obstruction—especially if the situation is dire or time pressure prevents them from taking the necessary steps to explain and break down their actions to their managers. Six interviewees noted situations where they had to work around an obstruction, often within the organization itself, such as with the organization's counsel or lawyers, whose goals (e.g., protecting the firm from lawsuits; avoiding admitting fault) are at odds with the goals of crisis communicators (e.g., rapid response; transparency; apologia). However, four pointed out that a lack of understanding from leadership led to a need to problem/solve in more

unconventional ways to resolve the crisis. This was nicely illustrated in an anecdote one participant shared with me. As a global communications specialist for a large technology firm (participant 28), they were responsible for leading the crisis communications efforts during a major product malfunction requiring a worldwide recall. They had to work with several different offices, in different countries, involving colleagues from different cultures and with varying levels of public relations expertise. Working from the U.S. offices of this organization, their practice of crisis communication was based on the institutionalized norms of (American) crisis communications—if a company faces a crisis that endangers day-to-day business, it needs to respond to it as quickly as possible. However, the head of the organization was convinced that the crisis would blow over and told them to simply wait since things would resolve themselves. As days went by, with more product malfunctions and bad publicity, the crisis snowballed. The global communication specialist knew the company had to act in order to prevent further damage to the brand. After many failed attempts to convince their organization's head, they made the unprecedented step of asking the president of a global partnering PR firm to accompany them to the organization's headquarters in order to convince the head of organization to unroll a crisis response plan. With that outside help, together they both managed to convince the head of the organization. After days of waiting, the organization finally used their plan, and the crisis was on its way to be mitigated and later resolved. The global communication specialist confided that they had never had to do that and was relieved that it had worked. They explained that this was an unexpected way they had to be creative and think of possible solutions to a leadership issue that seemed insurmountable at first.

The data shows that leadership behavior and support is an essential a drive to be creative. While leaders cannot impose creativity, they can absolutely foster it and create an environment that welcomes it. Moreover, a clear understanding of what a crisis communicator's role entails is

central to creative work. It provides the baseline for what needs to be accomplished and how to get there. On the other hand, ironically, a lack of understanding or support can also lead to creative behaviors in order to get around obstacles and fulfill your role as a crisis communicator.

5.2.1.2 Group Diversity

As explained in Chapter 2, the study of the impact of group diversity is highly contextual and can have both a positive and a negative impact on creativity. While diversity in heuristics and perspectives can provide an array of potential solutions, it can also create a misalignment between group members if not managed well. When asked about the makeup of their work team, most crisis communicators reported working in fairly homogenous teams (e.g., similar educational background and career path, but also similar race and ethnicity). However, a fourth of participants expressed striving for diversity and exchanges of ideas across teams. The partner and crisis communications specialist at a large PR firm (participant 22) explained,

> I do a lot of work sort of keeping various teams kind of interacting. So, we're a firm where we've got a lot of people who do a lot of different kinds of things, so a lot of crisis planning and response, and that sort of constantly mingling of all of the teams and what they're doing with clients, you know, really doing cutting edge things, I think it inspires people, but probably more importantly it's just a very really tactical way to learn about how we can continue to break the mold.

The data makes it evident that this participant saw the value in letting ideas mix and mingle—that having a liquid network is beneficial to being innovative and "doing cutting-edge things." This has the benefit of avoiding ideas becoming siloed and is an important foundation for creative work. This also shows that there is an understanding that the combining of ideas is beneficial.

Within many organizations, employees are bound to interact with others with different expertise and skills sets, for example, scientists. The health communication specialist at a large health organization explains that he has to continually interact and work with scientists doing research on different health hazards and disease outbreaks. As research shows, when diversity in heuristics is too great, it creates friction between the members of the group and can actually stifle creative work. However, at this health organization, participant 2 felt that, since they have a common goal—namely to protect from and inform the population about health hazards—their diverse approaches work together. Nonetheless, it did not come free of effort or nurturing. They explain,

> I really do enjoy the team mentality of, like, that conversation that we have sitting around the table. Because I think what I have been able to do is to show the scientists that they have a lot of really great ideas too. And what I have been kind of preaching as I go and talk to … other scientists … is, like, 'you guys have a stake in this. You are not just sitting by and letting me as a communicator tell you what we are going to do or say. Now you are part of that conversation, so speak up.' … I think people that aren't communicators are afraid of communication. Then, once I use their study and it gets published I send it to them saying "look, that's your work!"

In this case, the scientists and communicators have to work together in order to serve the population: one with facts and results, the other with appropriate messaging and dissemination. They come from different angles with perhaps different ideals of how things would be discussed and handled, but they are able to work together because they have a clear understanding of the end goal. This positive working relationship is also reinforced, as the communicator explained, by feedback when he sends them news media articles using their research. Essentially, this validates

each other's roles in the crisis resolution process and nurtures an environment that is diverse and functional.

Valuing diversity can not only be done within the organization but also outside of it. Participant 12 noted that they like looking elsewhere to see how crises are being dealt with outside of their organization. By picking stories apart and analyzing how crises were dealt with can be a source of inspiration. They explain,

> I think it's a diversity of perspectives, diversity of expertise and not just a willingness, but an eagerness to find out what other people are doing not just here, but other places too… We'll look at situations that we've worked on or situations that we just think had a positive outcome out in the industry and we'll reverse-engineer everything to figure out how did Company X get to that outcome, what was the timing, what was the [statement], what was sort of essential in getting them from point A to point B.

Here again, there was an understanding of the importance of diversity of perspectives and expertise when it comes to cutting edge crisis communications, not only within their organization but also outside. This participant does that by looking at other companies and as they explain, "reverse-engineering" crisis response in order to analyze what others (organization outsiders) are doing and how they are doing it. This shows that this participant attributes value to different (read diverse) standpoints. This serves the purpose of potentially diversifying your solutions but also staying on top when it comes to competition, which leads to another important aspect of diversity. Indeed, as previously discussed, one of the new challenges for organizations and PR firms, is the ever-expanding global markets made up of highly diverse communities with their own cultures and sensitivities. Ensuring that your team is aware and to some extent a reflection of your customers is important, as explained by participant 15,

> You get better ideas from a set of people that more resemble your customers and our customers are people who shop online, and while we are all people who shop online, we [the communications team at this organization] don't look like America, or Europe, or Asia, or—It's a constant battle you're fighting.

Essentially, this participant points out that in order to better serve your clients, customers, and community, ideally your work team needs to be as diverse as customers are. Given that as a public relations professional, your publics are rarely homogeneous, crises can impact every type of person. Thus, it is not only diverse heuristics that come as a benefit but also a team that has a grasp on the diversity of the audience.

Overall, diversity serves several purposes: combining ideas to create new ones, diversifying your solutions by looking outside of your organization and enhancing your ability to incorporate creative thinking in your practices, and serving your audiences better by striving to be as diverse as they are.

5.2.2 *Processes*

5.2.2.1 Brainstorming

In order to follow the neo-institutional approach advocated by Fredriksson, Olsson, and Pallas (2014) and understand in what context brainstorming happens, it was important to look at how crisis communicators design and execute crisis plans. As explained earlier, strategic planning is one of crisis communication norms, thus participants were prompted to discuss the specifics of how they plan for crises and develop strategies. Overall, there was a consensus that, “Nobody wants the crisis to be chaos” (participant 8), and that the goal is to *not* extend the life of the crisis. Therefore, each organization strove to be proactive, both internally and when dealing with clients.

The entirety of participants explained working on anticipating possible crisis scenarios and designing a crisis plan around them. However, a fifth of them shared that they were not as proactive as they would like to be and often had to come up with plans once faced with a situation. For example, participant 8 shared, "I would say nobody does enough of it [planning]. There are some things where—at [my organization] they call it looking around corners" explained the director of communication at large eCommerce organization (participant 34). All 34 participants explained that having a plan is a requirement and a safety net in order to know where you are going and which roles each actor in the crisis team will serve. Twenty-nine crisis communicators described the lack of a plan or other uncertainty as an uncomfortable situation. Again, the head of communications for a global construction company (participant 8) illustrated that with a parallel to United Airlines' poor handling of the forced removal of a passenger in 2017[4],

> I use airlines as an example–they didn't have a crisis plan for what happens for when law enforcement drags someone off the plane while people are using an iPhone camera. I guarantee you their PR people would have... if you sat them down and told them take the human factor out and just look at the functional factor responding to your crisis: 'would you rather have the guy dragged down the aisle like that or would you rather have a plane crash?' They would all take the plane crash.

This shows that for most of a crisis communication team, having a clear plan around anticipated situations was less stressful than the unknown. In other words, a known and prepared-for crisis, such as a plane crash for an airline (taking loss of life out of the equation), would be

[4] On April 9th, 2017, a passenger on United Airlines Flight 3411 bound for Louisville, Kentucky was forcibly removed from the plane. This passenger, David Dao, had refused to relinquish his seat for a United employee when it was announced that the flight was overbooked. Dao was then dragged off the plane by security and suffered several injuries, including a concussion. The scene was filmed with an iPhone and quickly went viral on social media.

more straightforward to deal with than an unprecedented situation where a passenger was dragged off the plane for refusing to relinquish their seat.

When it comes to the planning process itself, it slightly varied by company. Most public relations firms and consultants had a structured planning process while it was kept more casual with in-house crisis communicators. A communications and PR assistant director (participant 4) described,

> We don't have proper meetings for [crisis planning] as much, we just kind of have ongoing discussions with team members. We have Yammer which is kind of like Slack, we have – obviously we have email. But like the United [Airlines crisis] thing, I mean I posted some things in Yammer saying like hey, here is the situation, it's really interesting to think about the way that's [being dealt with].

This shows that in some cases planning is less organized and more of an on-going informal activity as opposed to a clearly established process. While the nature of the organization generally affects the level of proactiveness, it also appears to be rooted in crisis communicators themselves. On the other hand, one in-house crisis communicator for an online travel agency (participant 25) stood out with their approach to crisis planning,

> We brainstorm almost every week. We have a weekly team meeting so every week something comes up like 'okay, how would we respond to that' so we discuss it as the team to see, you know, how we would handle it versus how [the other organization] handles it. We want to think about these things because every event out there is different.

This crisis communicator expresses needing to keep abreast of the current news world in order to continuously anticipate possible situations their organization could face. This weekly

brainstorming is part of a constant updating of planning and informal tabletop exercise in order to keep their 'crisis response muscles' working.

Nonetheless, the general crisis communication philosophy is anchored in carefully assessing the client's/organization's weaknesses through an audit or brainstorming, and then designing anticipatory processes and appropriate responses to mitigate crisis situations. The senior vice president for a large PR firm (participant 31) summarizes the general approach to crisis planning and stock questions they ask themselves and their clients,

> What we do, typically, is we work with them [clients] and sit down and think about, what are the threats that you currently see? What keeps you up at night? Sometimes they're very aware of what those threats are and other times they're not. Sometimes it takes an audit of the organization to figure out, what are the threats—not only from a communications perspective or a product perspective, but what else is happening with the organization that has become a threat?

What most crisis communicators expressed in various ways was that crisis planning involves a vulnerability assessment with interviews and brainstorming, followed by the development of a plan in a collaborative and iterative way. Participants noted that sometimes it happens in a room with a whiteboard where they list possible incidents, play out the life of a possible crisis and sometimes even go all the way to written messaging to given crises. When discussing the development of crisis plans, a consultant (participant 32) with over twenty years of experience in public relations and crisis communications raised an interesting point,

> Most crisis communication plans look backwards—they're all based on lessons learned from previous actions. They always have a little bit of a tendency to fight the last battle, instead of getting ready for a new one. And when you live in an environment where

> things are constantly changing, and the technology is changing very rapidly, and it is changing how we create and assimilate information very rapidly, a lot of times, you know, [patching] up a little crisis plan isn't the best way to go about what you have to do today. So, the [better] plan is to write the whole plan from scratch. Otherwise, what ends up happening is you live an unexamined life and your plan atrophies and it never catches up. So, it is a challenge for organizations to take it forward and it's a challenge for communicators to take what they see happening around them in their day-to-day world and take it back to a crisis plan.

As a crisis consultant working with a variety of clients, they have noticed and internalized the changing nature of the field of communication and the need to be thinking not only about one organization's last crisis, but also outside, it in order to diversify their vision and effectiveness. Essentially, this participant advocated for striving to remain aware of the changing environment and think unconventionally through consistent brainstorming in order to avoid being surprised by unexpected and challenging situations.

Thus, in most cases brainstorming is embedded in the planning process. It was cited as a must in the early drafting of a crisis communication plan, especially for public relations firms that need to do a vulnerability and risk assessment of an organization they just started working with—as detailed above by the president of a large PR firm (participant 16). This was also noted as being a time ripe for creativity because, as previously mentioned by a study participant, 99% of crises can be anticipated but there is always a level of uncertainty as to what might happen or how things will unfold during a crisis. Therefore, brainstorming serves the purpose of trying to close that gap by generating ideas that could lead to possible scenarios. A crisis consultant (participant 3) and

author who works with a variety of clients from different industries made the following remarks about brainstorming:

> It's a fun time—we're talking about risk, so it's weird to say it's a fun time, but it's a creative time with them and we're looking at—we're talking about anything from "Hey, if we experience a cyber security incident, what kind of hacks could we have?" straight through to, "What if one of these crises were live-streamed? Is that a risk?" interesting conversations… so I can ask the same question three different times and get three different answers, and that's how I focus on guiding it.

Much like this participant, over 50% of the others noted the sense of play that comes with brainstorming. At the planning phase, it is a time where ideas run more or less freely (see psychological safety). It is also a time where your ability to anticipate crises is tried and tested. For that reason, participant 30 noted running mini-drills each month where he would work with their clients on hypothetical scenarios where they would have to brainstorm what strategies would work best. This served the purpose of making sure that new possible crises where continually thought of and that their crisis plan would be kept up to date. In the same vein, another one noted having thought a lot about the United Airlines crisis and having come up with different ways he would have dealt with it if he were on the United Airlines communication team. They also explained bouncing ideas off of other team members in casual conversations. These remarks from several crisis communicators showed that through casual or more formal brainstorming sessions, they sought to create some reflexivity and essentially keep themselves, and their clients, on their toes. Essentially, this free generation of ideas was discussed as a valuable exercise to maintain their edge—much like athletes would train even when they are not competing.

While brainstorming was mostly discussed as an activity performed during the planning phase of crisis communication, sometimes it turned out that it needed to happen *during* a crisis. Only four study participants named times where brainstorming was used in the midst of a crisis, but participant 2's story stood out in illustrating the benefits of brainstorming in a work team as the crisis was unfolding. Here, they describe being faced with a challenge during an E. coli outbreak related to flour contamination and eating cookie dough:

> So, we knew that salmonella could be transmitted through the eggs and cookie dough. But people didn't realize that the flour itself could be contaminated. And so, there was a lot of creative thinking around how we could message that, and I basically had to tell the team like, this is a hard message to sell because people aren't going to stop eating cookie dough, right? Cookie dough is delicious, everybody does it—I do it—so it was interesting because we stopped to think about it, and we were like maybe we should focus our message more on parents protecting their kids, right? So people are at higher risk for E.coli with really bad outcomes, like kidney failure. Maybe we should be messaging more of that, tugging at the parent strengths versus trying to change a 25-year-old's mind about eating cookie dough, right? And so, we started reaching out to Parent Magazines, to parenting blogs, and other channels where we knew we could reach parents and kind of talking about the risk for kids. Maybe it's great to have kids help you in the kitchen but make sure they wash their hands after they play with the dough. And I think that was a successful way of us kind of thinking outside the box instead of being so rigid of like, "no one should eat cookie dough. . . no one should eat it, it's bad for you, it's going to kill you," . . . that just pushes people away. If I had followed my normal protocol, it would've been messaging to everybody like "this is bad, you shouldn't do it." By stopping to think

about a more creative messaging, we're more successful by tailoring our message at least to a higher risk group.

This anecdote, along with a few other ones related by participants from different firms and industries, goes to show that while brainstorming is an inherent part of planning and is a creative time for crisis communicators to come up with scenarios, it is also present during crises when adjustments needs to be made. In this case, as the participant says, if they had followed the normal protocol, their messaging would not have been as efficient. They had to pause, sit down, and have a conversation to brainstorm the possible new avenues they could handle the message and reach the appropriate audience.

Overall, brainstorming was named a common and important part of crisis communications. It is a time where creativity is welcome, and often needed, to anticipate and problem-solve. Interestingly, crisis communicators do not always recognize brainstorming when they do it. Four noted through remarks or anecdotes that they used it throughout the crisis cycle—as illustrated by the E. coli contamination which required a different kind of messaging to reach the populations that were most at risk. Because of its more casual nature, brainstorming seemed to be a time where suspension of judgment and thus psychological safety were more present. It is a time where ideas are not set in stone (yet) thus team members are able to share more freely and propose new things. Interestingly, as discussed by participants, the way brainstorming is performed is not the kind of brainstorming Osborn advocated for—with clear rules to suspend judgement as detailed in Chapter 2—in most cases it is more of a conversation where ideas are welcomed but not necessarily "protected." In other words, crisis communicators have the possibility to share more imaginative ideas but without any guarantee that they will not be judged and disregarded early on in the process.

5.3 DISCUSSION

As we continue to assess to what degree do crisis communicators perform in organizations that promote the conditions conducive to creative responses, we observe that much like in any other field, there are a variety of norms surrounding crisis communication: these are implicit rules and assumptions about crisis communicators work. Leadership does not always dictate these norms but does limit alternatives and binds practices within a specific frame and structure. As mentioned in Chapter 2, although valued, creativity is "intertwined with risk and uncertainty" (Wang et al., 2013) where risk is defined as "the probability that undesirable outcomes will occur" (Sitkin & Pablo, 1992). Thus, while leadership might desire creative ideas, managers often reject them, especially when safe options that have proven to yield desired results are available (Mueller et al., 2012). These aspects were made clear in the data when discussing leadership behavior especially when put in perspective of psychological safety. Several interviewees mentioned having managers (direct or higher up) who value creativity and innovation; and that leaders who do not were (hopefully) "weeded out." However, when compared to crisis communicators' discussion of psychological safety, the presence of a double bind becomes evident. While leadership expresses wanting or welcoming creativity, there are often unspoken specific circumstances under which creativity can occur. However, as we saw in the previous chapter, these norms or limitations are implicit and not clearly defined. We then see the dichotomy explained by Mueller et al. (2012) emerge, where idealistically creative ideas are wanted but also often overruled. Thus, crisis communicators' actual practices and their leadership seem to live in two different worlds, where the latter does not provide the ideal environment for creative work to more systematically occur free of rebuke. Also, as the data showed, it is sometimes the barriers raised consciously or unconsciously by leadership that force crisis communicators into a "creative corner" in order to

surpass them. Overall, we learn that leadership plays an important part in employees' ability to be creative in several different ways: by fostering creativity or by creating challenges that require creative thinking in order to surmount them.

When it comes to group diversity, the data shows that, in general, participants did understand the value of diversity and strove to have a "liquid network," as Johnson advocates for. In most cases, participants expressed making efforts to prevent ideas from becoming siloed and seeking out different perspectives—within or outside of their organization. Importantly, group diversity was recognized as also being useful when it came to better serve customers and being able to respond to crises optimally. Diverse communities come with diverse challenges—ones that may not resemble one's own, as a crisis communicator. Thus, being mindful of this diversity at various levels was expressed as being conducive of (or even necessary to) the generation of creative ideas to, essentially, do more optimal work and remain at the cutting edge of the field. From the data, we learn that although diversity was considered to be of value to crisis communication work, it was more of a "nice to have" or something that would occur with the team already formed versus a clear strategy in their processes or even at the team formation process.

Brainstorming is regarded as favorable to creative ideas because it is a time where you should: (1) generate as many ideas as possible, (2) delay judgment on one another's ideas, (3) use wildcards and allow for "crazy" or "peculiar" ideas, and (4) expand and build on existing ideas, as proposed by Osborn (explained in Carson, 2010; Feinberg and Nemeth, 2008). However, the crisis communicators interviewed did not seem to do brainstorming "by the book." It was most often used as a part of early planning when different possible scenarios were discussed. This was one of the few times where a sense of play was expressed ("it's a fun time") and creativity was freer to exist ("it's a creative time"). Among several anecdotes in the data, one participant clearly

demonstrated using brainstorming in the midst of a crisis, while discussing with their team what the most appropriate messaging would be for an E. coli outbreak. Surprisingly, we learn participants did not see brainstorming as necessarily being a good thing for overall creativity. Brainstorming was simply part of the process that could, in fact, be detrimental to creativity down the line. An account executive involved with crisis communications at a PR firm (participant 24) explained,

> Creativity is constrained when everything's templatized. We brainstorm and create templates. Then we have templates, and we have things we've done before, and I think when you get so used to that, it can feel very hard to break free, or very challenging to think about doing it a different way. When you have these templates, you think, "This is the universe that I'm in, and these are the things I need to address," and you get caught in that line of thinking, and it's easy to just get stuck there.

Therefore, while useful to the planning process, and a valuable time where it is more accepted to propose inventive ideas because the stakes are lower than in the midst of a crisis, extensive brainstorming could lead to over-reliance on templates developed in that process, which could squash creativity down the line. Whether or not this is detrimental to crisis communicators' work is arguable since the preferred *modus operatum* is to have plans and know what you are doing going into a crisis. Overall, we learn that brainstorming is one of the practices embedded in crisis communication that crisis communicators do not necessarily think about or apply by the book. It is simply a process that is called upon when ideas have to be generated—in essence it is more likely lead by "let's think this through" rather than "let's come up with as many ideas as possible and go from there." It is often not directly associated with creativity or it is not a process that is necessarily meant to consciously bring about creative ideas.

In analyzing how crisis communicators discuss these different dimensions at the team work level, we learn that some dimensions are more impactful on crisis communicators' creativity than others (RQ_b). In this case, crisis communicators seem to be most aware and affected by leadership behavior and support. Because leaders shape the environment in which crisis communicators work in, they participate in reinforcing institutional norms by determining which practices are canonical (official) and which noncanonical (unofficial) ones are accepted.

Thus far, the conclusion we can draw on the Creativity Readiness of crisis communicators and their environment is that much of what fosters creativity is known and rather well understood by crisis communicators—namely, positive attitude toward creativity by leadership; team diversity—but that most of it happens as part of their day-to-day work. There does not seem to be a consistent and systematic way to foster the team level dimensions that provide avenues for creative work.

Chapter 6. CREATIVITY READINESS AT THE ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I present the results of the third level at which the Creativity Readiness construct was applied: The Organizational Level. The organizational level focuses on the organization as bounded entity in which crisis communicators perform their work. It is the largest unit of analysis level. Thus, this chapter looks at how the dimensions of the Creativity Readiness construct impact the ability to for individuals to be creative within the organization—namely creativity goals as representation of creativity through online corporate branding but also as part of the organization's values through crisis communicators' reported experiences. It continues to answer the research questions: *What can we learn from how crisis communicators discuss the different Creativity Readiness construct's dimensions?* (RQ_a) *Which dimensions are most impactful on crisis communicators' creativity?* (RQ_b).

First, I assess Creativity Goals through representation of creativity in branding on public relations firms' websites and Twitter to get at each hypothesis—namely (H_{1a}) Creativity and innovation will be used as branding values for public relations firms; (H_{1b}) The greater amount of mentions of *creativity* and *innovation* on the corporate website, the greater mentions there will be on the firm's Twitter account; (H_2) The concepts of *creativity* and *innovation* will be more present in the branding discourse of global/large agencies than in small//boutique PR firms. Then, I assess the Organizational Creativity goals through interview data.

6.2 FINDINGS

6.2.1 *Creativity Goals: Representation of Creativity in Branding on Websites and Twitter*

Creativity serves an important role in the fostering of a competitive advantage for organizations and needs to be ingrained in the corporate strategy from the company's vision to its deliverables, as Mumford et al (2012) explained. In that regard, corporate branding plays a part in affirming organizations identity both internally and externally as it is a trifecta of vision, image, and culture (Jensen & Schultz, 2009). Thus, an organization having creativity goals is likely to make it clear that creativity is valued in its vision, attitude, and culture (Seelig, 2012) and demonstrates to its employees that creative work is cherished. As one PR firm retweeted, "@NW_Mktg_Guy: A brand is nothing, but a promise delivered.... And lipstick on a pig is nothing more than lipstick on a pig." Thus, in order to deliver this "promise," its tenets need to be known and consistent in the organization's behavior. Therefore, observing how public relations firms use creativity and innovation as part of their branding provides us with to clue of how creativity and innovation are considered internally.

6.2.1.1 Creativity on Public Relations Websites

6.2.1.1.1 Hypothesis H1a

As explained earlier, an organization's website is its storefront. In most cases, a website explicitly presents who they are (e.g., mission and vision) and what they do (e.g., services, portfolio, clients). Thus, the branding discourse intends to showcase the organization and differentiate it from its competitors in more or less subtle ways. We have seen that the ability to be creative (and innovative, used interchangeably) is seen as a key asset for professionals and organizations. To highlight Stone's, CEO of Saxum, once again, the new generation of public relations professionals will need to be creative in order to keep up with the evolution and

proliferation of technology. In response, my first hypothesis was that, to keep up with the market's progress and demands, public relations firms who have to position themselves as "creative" and "innovative" organizations. Thus,

H_{1a}—Creativity and innovation will be used as branding values for public relations firms.

I began with an assessment of public relations firms' branding discourse around creativity on their website. Each instance of the mention—directly or indirectly as explained in the codebook—of creativity or innovation was coded and then tallied. The results are shown in Figure 6. The data clearly shows that creativity and innovation are used as part of most public relations firms, validating hypothesis **H_{1a}**. With the exception of three firms (one large: FTI Consulting, and two boutique firms: Communiqué PR, and The Kelley Group), all PR firms observed mentioned creativity explicitly or implicitly as a key value to who they are as a business and how their practice is framed. For example,

- APCO, on their front page: "Our mission is to enable clients to achieve their objective through insightful counsel, authentic advocacy and **creative** communications."
- Allison PR, on their About page: "We are hundreds of **change makers** who aren't afraid to turn **ideas** upside down and ask, "is that all you've got?""
- Edelman, on their front page: "We think **differently** from our competitors, which has enabled us to remain true to our entrepreneurial heritage and lead the way in **redefining**, expanding and elevating the role that PR plays. –Daniel Edelman"
- Ketchum, on their About page: "Fearless **creativity**? We reward it."
- Porter Novelli, on their front page: "Since **imagination** drives bigger, better thinking, we create the culture, and conditions that make **inspiration**, curiosity and **ingenuity** the norm."

Therefore, we see that creativity and innovation (used interchangeably in lay language) are a definite part of public relations firm's branding discourse as it is explicitly used on their website and showcased as an asset, something they strive for, reward, make the norm.

6.2.1.1.2 Hypothesis H_2

When it comes to firm size and ability to be creative and innovative, there is no consensus in the literature. Murray and Worren (2010) affirm that small firms may hold a superior ability to innovate partly due to their flexibility, a higher ability to adapt and improve and less difficulty in accepting and implementing change while larger firms are often limited by systemic problems that prevent them from stimulating creativity—despite having financial means as buffer in case of failure. However, Damanpour (1992) on the other hand explains that having the final means to absorb a failure gives freedom to larger firms that smaller ones cannot have. Both sides had compelling arguments, however, given the competition in public relations firms, in the forming of my hypothesis, I sided with Damanpour and posited that given their size and financial means, larger firms would more extensively include creativity in their branding discourse:

H_2—The concepts of *creativity* and *innovation* will be more present in the branding discourse of global/large agencies than in small//boutique PR firms.

As shown in Figure 6 below, it is clear that overall Global PR firms tend to more often brand themselves as creative and/or innovative than local firms. APCO, Allison PR, and WE were the top contenders. The median for Global firms was 9 while the median for local firms was 3. This validates Hypothesis 2 that larger firms tend to use creativity and innovation as a branding element more than smaller PR firms.

Interestingly, the two large firms that insisted the most on focusing on and being experts in crisis communications—Finsbury and Burson Marsteller—appear lower on the graph. They both did not use creativity as a branding component as extensively as other large firms. This suggests that as early on in this dissertation, crisis communication and creativity are not an obvious (and possible reassuring) marriage.

Smaller public firms rarely used creativity and innovation as part of their branding discourse. While other branding elements were not systematically coded, it appears that "familiarity," "attention," and "working closely" with clients was preferred over the mention of cutting-edge methods and practices. In a sense, a "no-nonsense," streamlined branding was more common in the branding of small firms.

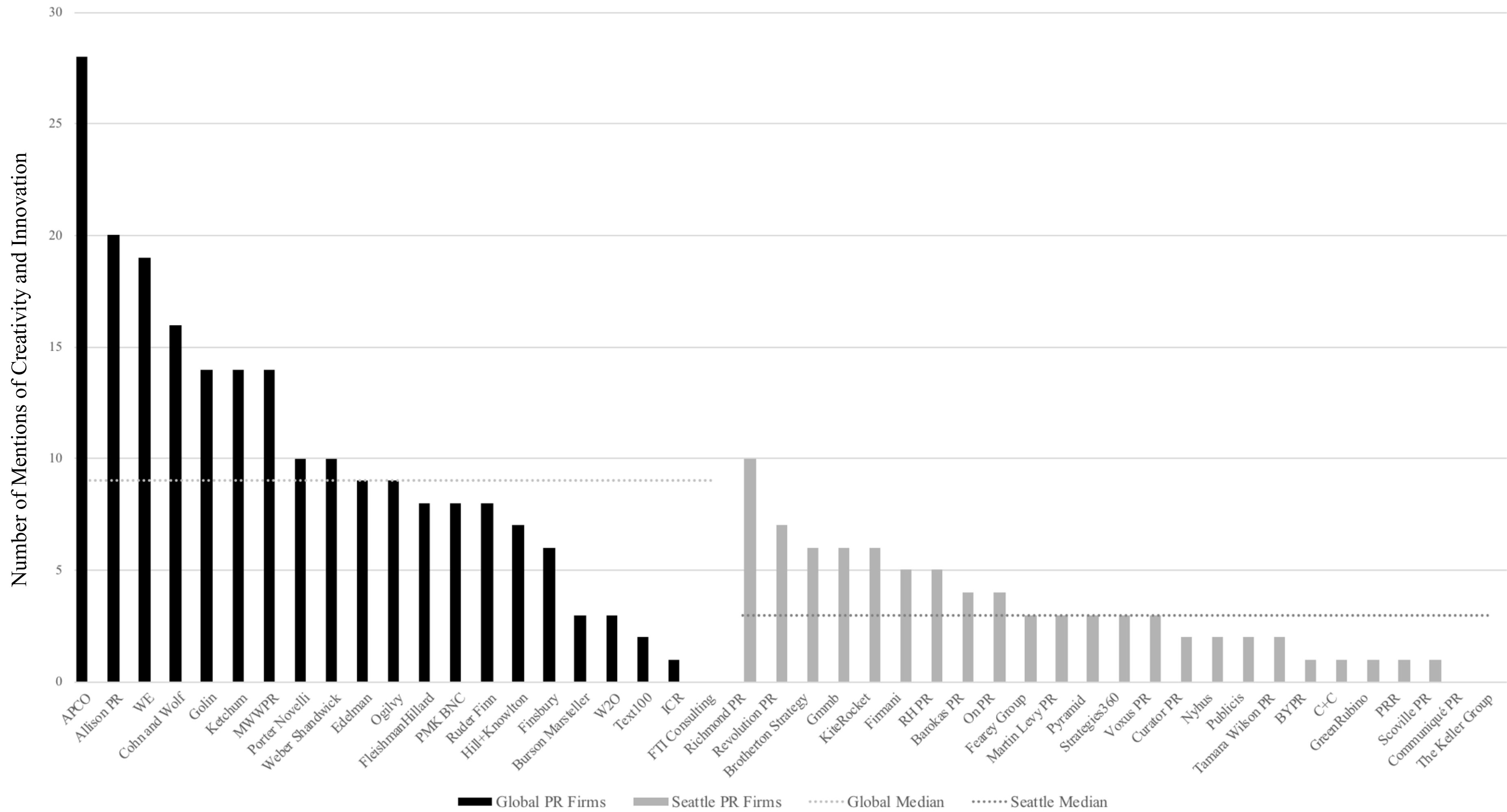

Figure 6

Global vs. Seattle Public Relations Firms Website Creativity Branding Discourse

6.2.1.1 Creativity in Public Relations Firms' Tweets

6.2.1.1.1 Hypothesis H_{1b}

While social media channels, such as Twitter, are not constant platforms to self-promote, organizations use them to build conversations and exchanges with its audiences (Bonsón & Flores, 2011). Thus, social media channels are a way to maintain and reinforce branding where organizations enact who they are (e.g., hip, cool, trustworthy, attentive) while websites, given the static nature of their information, contain more branding elements (e.g., mission and vision). Essentially, an organization's website is where they present who they are, and Twitter is where they personify who they are. Having a social media presence is aimed at reinforcing the brand and making sure that you are part of important conversations around your brand (Fearn Banks, 2011). Thus, going off of Hypothesis 1a, I posit that if an organization discusses creativity as being a key aspect to its practices, it will share content that is related to creativity (which goes to H1a). Therefore,

H_{1b} – The greater amount of mentions of *creativity* and *innovation* on the corporate website, the greater mentions there will be on the firm's Twitter account.

The purpose in looking at consistency in branding discourse around creativity is to gain a greater understanding of how the organization is enacting their values. It is safe to assume that the people who designed and create website content are not the same people that manage social media. Therefore, the branding strategies need to have been communicated to the person in charge of the organization's social media monitoring and engagement. In other words, if a firm explicitly values creativity and innovation, these branding elements must have been incorporated in the social media strategies.

Table 3 below showcases a sample of tweets that were coded as containing creativity or creativity themes. At first glance, we can notice that national PR firms' tweets are more explicitly discussing creativity and even contain the concept of creativity confidence with "Creativity isn't the domain of just one department. There's no gene for genius," tweeted by @Text100. Tweets from local PR firms are more passively mentioning creativity (this was representative of all tweets from local PR firms). They are praising creative practices but not discussing the idea of creativity. Then, as shown through Figure 7 and 8, we noticed that global PR firms are still the ones mentioning creativity more heavily compared to local PR firms. However, while many of the firms which used creativity as part of their branding discourse on their website still mention creativity in their tweets, there is no clear correlation between website and Twitter content.

Table 3
National and Local Tweets

Account	Date & Time	Tweet Text
		National PR Firms
@HKStrategies	06/04/13 16:01	Creativity is essential to success in any discipline or industry. Are these fears holding you back? http://t.co/9U7MZacDIo #RecommendedReads
@Ogilvy	12/15/17 21:58	Life is the raw material of creativity. Everything you see, hear, smell or experience is absorbed and stored in memory https://t.co/Lk4lhr2Rri
@ text100	11/27/17 13:32	Creativity isn't the domain of just one department; there's no gene for genius - these things are within all of us https://t.co/TnoGxh92qh
@RuderFinn	10/17/17 20:57	Having flexibility in PR also helps to solve problems and tell stories in innovative ways @prsatristate https://t.co/lPJhtwPgZE
		Seattle PR Firms
@Strategies360	04/23/09 22:57	S360 continues to grow, adds Creative https://app.e2ma.net/app/view:CampaignPublic/
@PyramidComms	08/23/17 16:00	Bravo, @Pickathon and @Portland_State! We love this creative way to address community issues: https://t.co/Z8LEUtlq6f
@PublicisSeattle	11/21/13 22:01	Today's Creativity Pick: The Ten Most Interesting Tweets of the Moment, All in One Place http://t.co/8QjAEBqSNM
@firmaniPR	02/11/17 23:10	Let's take a look at the #writingstyle of @SCOTUSNGorsuch. Creatively original or an offense to #APStyle - thoughts? https://t.co/eF2qDqSrr1

In other words, a correlation between representation of creativity through corporate branding on PR firms' website and Twitter cannot be clearly established. Nonetheless, as a group, national PR firms are the ones who, throughout their branding, discuss creativity much more. Based on this observation, it becomes apparent that the dimension of creativity goals as expressed through branding (i.e., desiring creativity and making it explicit) is stronger in national PR firms than in local ones which prioritize other values in their branding.

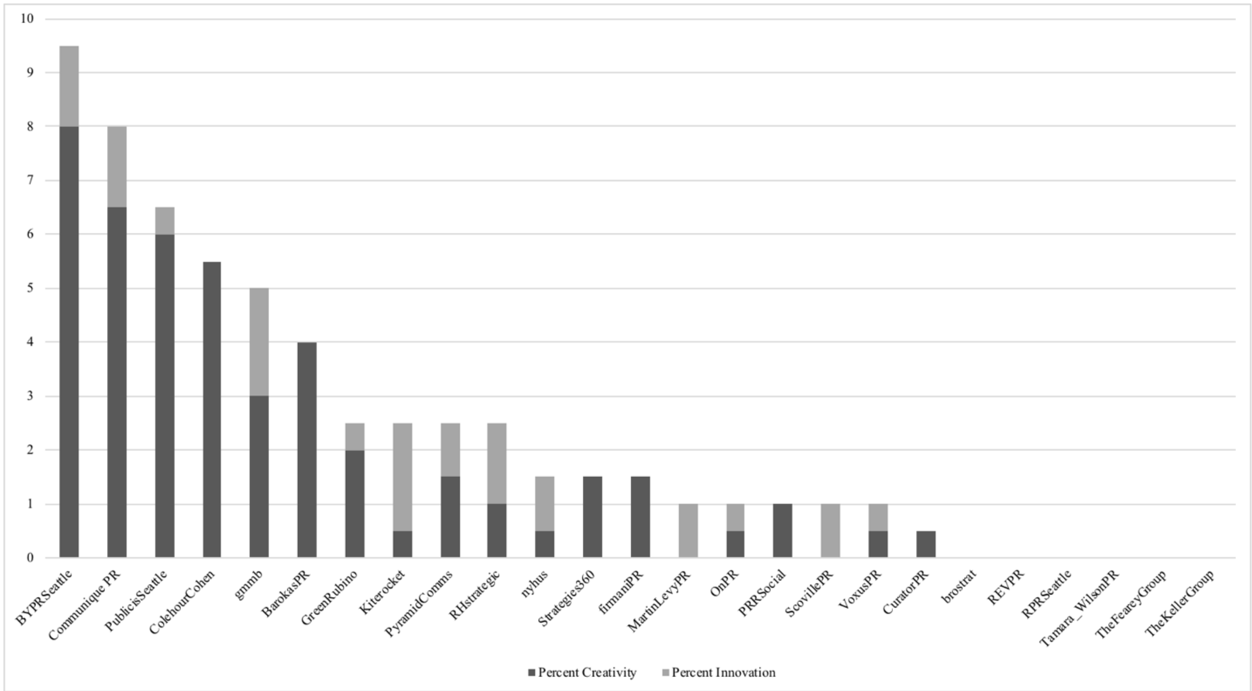

Figure 7

Seattle Public Relations Firms Creativity Branding Discourse on Twitter

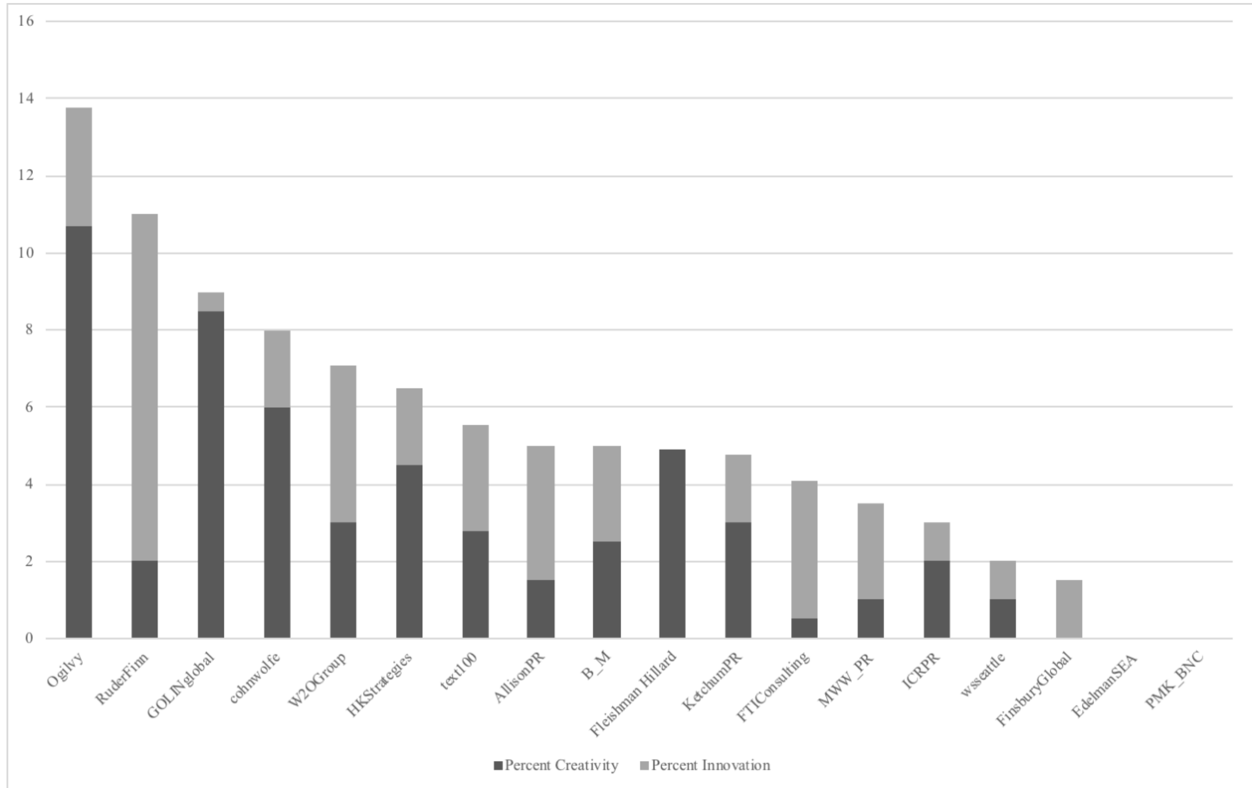

Figure 8

National Public Relations Firms Creativity Branding Discourse on Twitter

6.2.2 *Organizational Creativity Goals in Interviews*

To gain more of an insider look at creativity goals within organizations, versus as part of their branding, I asked participant direct questions about perceptions and behaviors around creativity in their organization. The purpose was to assess whether or not the organizations that each crisis communicator worked in valued creativity and had it as part of their values—essentially, if they had creativity goals. In relation to creativity goals, I also asked questions around what stifles and boosts creativity.

Through their answers, many recognized that corporate culture is a determinant of one's ability to be creative. Participant 17 working for a boutique PR firm explained,

> Company culture is one thing that fosters creativity. You know a lot of companies are trying to do things differently. I know there are some industries that are very much, you know, by the book. And then there are others that are you know like a lot of tech companies that are very much in to kind to attract creative minds and kind of foster that whole environment that you know that you if you come and work for us that you got a, you know, more of, more latitude, more free range to try to do things out and not be afraid to fail.

As pointed out by this participant, creativity fostering does not only come from leadership behavior but from corporate culture as a whole. According to them, entire organizations in specific industries tend to be more creative than others which go "by the book" when it comes to crisis communication. Essentially, these companies have made explicit their creativity goals by enticing "creative minds" to come work for them. Creativity goals are then part of their vision and hiring strategy. Going further, a partner and crisis communication for a large PR firm (participant 22) ties the company vision with corporate practices in their organization by stating "I mean we tend to

focus on innovation and continuous improvement for ourselves and for our clients. So, creativity is generally part of that equation." This shows that creativity is recognized as a valuable asset to the organization and is part of their strategy, not only for their clients (external) but themselves as well (internal). Essentially, they wish to keep their creativity goals consistent throughout. Interestingly, this participant worked for a PR firm that ranked lower that most others on Figure 6.

Several participants recognized that creativity needed to be part of practices due to the evolution of the field of crisis communication. Participant at a large PR firm (participant 9) describes this concept,

> We're always looking to stay on the cutting edge of PR. I've been doing this for a long time. The way we handle crises today is significantly different than it was 10 years ago and quite frankly it's significantly different than it was in some ways than it was six months ago. We deal with a lot of sort of urgent [client] corporate issues like particularly in kind of the world of President Trump and the speed at which crises can develop particularly on social media it's really sort of significantly changed how companies need to approach this. Sort of keeping that edge is always important. We'd have to think—we have to always think, you know, try and keep a few steps ahead of our clients, a few steps ahead of the trends in the industry, I think when you start to lose that creative edge, you start to get a little complacent and that's where things don't end up in a good place.

According to this participant, who summarizes the changing landscape of crisis communication, not incorporating creativity in your crisis communication practices could mean that you would start to lose your creative edge and lose your competitiveness, and thus not "end up in a good place." To them, failure to recognize that creativity goals need to be an inherent part of your strategy would negatively affect your business. While these ideas were expressed by

several other participants in similar ways, for instance “I think the keeping a sort of creative spark, that edge, it’s absolutely critical to what we do” many of them were not necessarily from PR firms that ranked high in the mentions of creativity on their website and Twitter handle.

Not all crisis communicators could boast working in an organization that had a creativity-oriented mentality. When asked “Do you ever talk about thinking outside of the box or being creative?” participant 24 from a large PR firm, which clearly brands itself as creative on their website, responded “I don't want to say no, because maybe they have but I just haven't picked up on it. I don't think it's much of a priority. I don't think it's a huge priority.” Interestingly, we see that here again, there is no real consensus among crisis communicators and organizations. While some large PR firms brand themselves as creative and have implemented creativity goals in their strategies, others might brand themselves as “creative,” but this value is not advocated internally. Therefore, based on the data, it appears that creative goals represented through corporate branding on website and Twitter does not seem to be strongly correlated with actual practices.

6.3 Discussion

As discussed above, given the changing nature of crisis communication and the new challenges it faces (e.g., “the president tweets at us”), creativity is one thing that can set organizations apart and help them maintain an edge over their competition. Indeed, creative processes that are hard to imitate are an intangible asset (Parjanen, 2012). However, this intangible asset needs to be fostered and well-communicated to the organization’s constituents (Lapierre & Giroux, 2003; Seelig, 2012). In other words, if an organization seeks to foster creativity, it needs to make that value explicit in its attitude and culture (Seelig, 2012) and its employees need to have a positive attitude and an understanding of the value of creativity in their work. Essentially, the

organization needs to choose creativity and be willing to challenge the status quo (Kelley & Kelley, 2013).

The data collected from PR firms' websites backed up the idea that most public relations firms strive to be creative in their work. Although all of these firms said to offer crisis communication services, it is not possible to make inferences about creative crisis communication practices specifically, but externally, these organizations branded themselves as wanting and rewarding creativity, which validates H_{1a}. While firms tended to mention creativity and innovation more on Twitter if they did on their website, there is no clear correlation between website and Twitter content, which does not support H_{1b}. The data shows that while national PR firms seem to value creativity more, there is no clear correlation between how much they discuss creativity on their website and how much they mention it on Twitter. This could be an indicator that creativity is more of a "storefront" value showcased on their website to market themselves, but not something that is truly part of the organization's discourse, at least not in their day-to-day branding.

When it comes to individuals discussing their organizations, we learn that there is again no real consensus around creativity goals. Nine interviewees stated that their firms (or they, themselves, if they held managerial positions) sought to make clear that creativity was of value to the organization and their clients because of the evolving nature of crisis communications. This is a positive aspect as, according to Pearson and Sommers's (2011) experiment with crisis managers, "the teams that began their preparations and planning with creative intentions were more likely to achieve novel outcomes. Teams with little or no creative intentions described difficulties in dealing with unusual possibilities. They said they relied mostly on conventional industry responses" (p. 32). In applying the construct, we learn however that crisis communicators' whose organization

explicitly values creativity does not necessarily feel more supported or pushed to be more creative or to see it as an expected part of their work.

Interestingly, Wang et al. (2013) explains that, in agency-client relations, creativity and innovation can be influenced by the risk-aversion level of the clients—not just the firm—and thus impact the practitioners' work. They add, "the clients may not be fond of risky ideas and the associated uncertainty in possible market responses" (Wang et al., 2013; West, 1999). Thus, agency creativity is likely to also be influenced by the client's inclination to embrace risk. Furthermore, Koslow, Sasser, and Riordan (2003) observe "it is not the size of the budget but the client's willingness to take a risk and to believe in the agency's work that drives agency and campaign creativity. If the client holds back, so does the agency." Interestingly, based on the interview data, none of the participants mentioned this challenge in working with clients. This is not to discount Wang et al. (2013)'s study but it goes to show that according to the data here, creativity goals seem to be primarily set within the organization, not externally by clients. Or, on the flip that, that is actually affects crisis communicators' practices regardless of whether or not the organization brands itself as seeking and supporting creativity and innovation. Nonetheless, challenges created by clients were not mentioned in participants' responses.

At this stage, through the application of the Creativity Readiness construct, we see that most organizations brand themselves as creative, however, internally, their emphasis on creative work seems often more random or individual-based than systematic or organization-based. Without connecting specific participants to website data to maintain confidentiality of participants, firms that tended to emphasize creativity in their brand, did not necessarily have stronger creativity goals internally. While not divorced from each other, the two aspects are not clearly linked in crisis communicators' mind.

It is interesting to note that it does not seem that creativity goals at the organizational level has a substantive impact on crisis communicators' practices around creativity. In order to further evaluate when creativity goals might impact crisis communicators more directly, the next chapter takes a step back and discussed how crisis communicators themselves see creativity within their organization and team work level: at the multilevel.

Chapter 7. MULTILEVEL APPROACH TO CREATIVITY READINESS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In this last data chapter, the Creativity Readiness construct at multilevel is discussed. The multilevel encapsulates multiple factors from different levels, such as individual and situational factors combined. In this construct, the multilevel combines the overall attitude and perception of creativity as expressed by crisis communicators as well as informational and idea management technology used by individuals, teams, and the organization. Once again, the data set used for this analysis is from the 34 semi-structured interviews of crisis communicators I conducted. By taking a step back and letting more than one level in the analysis, the multilevel seeks to gain a better understanding of the overall forces affecting crisis communicators' ability to be creative within their organizational context. In this chapter, the questions used during the interview tended to be more direct to openly discuss creativity, its impact, and presence (or absence) in their work but also at what stage in the crisis cycle it tended to be more present or useful (RQ_c).

7.2 FINDINGS

7.2.1 *Overall Attitudes Toward Creativity*

In applying the Creativity Readiness construct and in the analysis of crisis communicators' attitudes toward creativity, several categories emerged. In many instances, the interviewee wanted to clarify or redefine creativity, then their perception of it would emerge, to finally explain its importance or relevance during the crisis life cycle.

7.2.1.1 (Re-)Defining Creativity

The focus of the interview, namely crisis communication and creativity, was known to the participants from the outset, therefore they were already primed to thinking about their beliefs and practices in these two areas. When the interview reached questions about creativity, I proposed the most basic definition of creativity as a starting point, namely something that is *new* and *useful*, and that could very well be incremental, as long as it had not been done before.

Discussing creativity and crisis communications made a few interviewees fairly uneasy in the sense that they noted that they saw creativity as something “artsy” and not simply as something “new and useful.” Therefore, many wanted to redefine creativity in order for them to highlight how it fits within crisis communications. As a communications specialist (participant 30) was reflecting on the definition of creativity I offered them, they stated,

> Those two things [new and useful]. . .like really thinking them out, like when I think of creative, I think like thinking outside of the box like, I think experience is something good to draw on but also not treating the current event in front of us like something we dealt with in the past. I think it’s looking at the facts as we have them and see the crisis as its own thing, basically.

This participant explains that while going through several crises gives you the experience to know how to deal with them, there is a need to see the event at hand as unique and avoid simply applying responses from the past. To them, looking at the facts and dealing with the crisis while considering new and potentially useful ideas is how creativity applies to crisis communications.

Participant 29 also described it as, “really a question of being, you know, constantly thinking ahead.” Essentially, anticipating and future casting, and making sense of moving pieces. However, what is expressed here is not incompatible with creative processes and outputs. It is a

way of reframing what is important in that participant's view. This uneasiness or initial uncertainty about the marriage between creativity and crisis communication was common to several interviews and in most cases paired with a self-reflection at the end where the interviewee would admit not having ever thought deeply about creativity in their work. This required them to reflect and analyze their attitudes and practices as they were being interviewed.

7.2.1.1 The Importance of Creativity

After the definition of creativity was clarified and agreed on, participants were asked whether or not they saw creativity as being important in crisis communications. Almost all of them affirmed that it was. Among those who concurred that it indeed was important, opinions ranged from being an "absolute must" to simply "good to have." A manager of global crisis communication at an online travel agency (participant 25) remarked, "If you are the type of person who needs to follow procedure by the book and going off script scares you, crisis communications is probably not the area you want to be in. You've got to be able to definitely think creatively." Another participant working at an insurance company (participant 4) described, "I think creativity and instinct are two of the things that are most important in crisis communications. Because if you can't be thinking creatively and, on your feet, and then have a gut instinct about how something might play out, and trust that, you're missing something." To this participant, creativity, instinct, and gut feelings in future casting go together in dealing with a crisis. Although hard to delimit and define, these are expressed as central to effective crisis communication.

Creativity was also defined as part of the work you need to do as a crisis communicator if you want stellar results: the "harder part," as participant 3 explains,

> From a creativity standpoint, I think there's a constant focus on always kind of looking around corners and that's I think what we try and do for our clients a lot is, it can be

> tricky, but it's not rocket science to figure out how do you get through the immediate issues involved in a crisis. The harder part is how do you do it in a way where the company looks really, really spectacularly strong on the back end of all of this. That often requires creativity.

Creativity is also an inherent part of crisis communication because of the sheer variety of situations, as has been mentioned throughout this dissertation. A Health Communication Specialist (participant 4) explains,

> I think creativity is a huge part of my job because every situation, I can't treat any situation the same way I did the last, because there are just so many new factors with every investigation that we encounter.

The same idea was often represented in the data across industries and individuals holding different positions. For instance, a crisis management consultant (participant 15) also stated,

> You definitely have to think outside of the box and you have to be open to the fact that there's new risk emerging every day, and there's new demands and expectations from stakeholders, so you need to be open to all of those different changes and adaptable and flexible.

Although creativity was named an inherent part of their job, another crisis management consultant emphasized that what often fosters creativity is desperation. Essentially, creativity tends to come into play the moment you are cornered in a situation that clearly requires a new way of thinking.

When practices shifted from reputation-based to operations-based (as shown in Olsson's [2014] spectrum), crisis communicators tended to distance themselves from creativity. Situations that require immediate safety information directed to the public (such as winter storm related

information) were often devoid of creativity. Creativity tended to reappear in the recovery phase of operation-based situations, where reputation management became more prominent once again.

Nonetheless, none of the participants argued against creativity playing at least a small part in crisis communication.

7.2.1.2 Creativity Timing

Participants were asked in what part of their work or at what stage of a crisis they felt creativity occurred or when they would be most open to creative processes and/or outputs. There was no consensus on this question. Several participants explained that creativity happens *outside* of the heat of the moment: in the planning or recovery phase. A crisis consultant and author (participant 3) explained,

> I think there are two phases for creativity and innovation. I think it's prior to being in the middle of a storm, and I think it's after the storm, during the post mortem phase. It is not during the storm.

As clearly stated by this participant, to them, creativity does not happen during the storm, possibly because it requires more time than is allowed during the 'storm.' Participant 21 from a large PR firm agreed that creativity and innovation should occur outside of the crisis, but that one should not be afraid to adjust (and be creative) if something is not working during the crisis. They explain,

> I would say that big creativity and big innovation should happen in their scenario planning, brainstorming and the norming phase when things go back to normal. But you shouldn't be afraid to course correct in the middle of something if you think—people should not be risk averse to trying stuff because you might have to.

Many participants seemed to rule out creativity from the heat of the moment, several of them were adamant that in the midst of a crisis was not the time to be creative. Participant 11 from a nonprofit organization explained,

> But if somebody was sitting in the meeting room in the heat of the moment in the crisis, like well guys, that's how we always do this and maybe we should try something new, something be like look, you're either moving the ball forward right now, or you're not. I mean if you want to go into the certain skunk works here you go do that, but we've got a crisis here.

It is interesting that this participant not only saw creativity as not being useful during a crisis, but actually went the further step of seeing it as potentially detrimental to the process. In the heat of the moment is not the time to think or propose new ideas, according to them—it has to be ideas that have been proven or vetted beforehand, unless the plan is failing. Participant 25 also stated,

> I do think there's often a lot of resistance to trying new things in the midst of a crisis, because people worry that a bad outcome is amplified because the stakes are higher, versus if you come up with a new way to launch a device. It's different than [if] you come up with a new way to talk about a security breach, and it turns out to be a terrible idea—then you got a deeper hole to dig out of.

This goes to show how risk averse crisis communicators are during a crisis. They need to limit the life of the incident and avoid potentially "digging a deeper hole" for themselves by trying solutions that are new and not yet proven useful. Essentially, creativity comes in only out of dire necessity as you are not interested in trying to reinvent the wheel during a crisis—improvements

can come later on, as this participant from a large technology organization (participant 14) explained,

> In a crisis, you don’t want to sit down and disrupt the world with how amazing you are on crisis response by coming up with some silver bullet. You need to contain the crisis. Afterward, if you think hey, maybe it will be easy the next time if we did this, that’s the time to get creative.

Participant 1 from a boutique PR firm tempered the idea that creativity has no place during a crisis by nuancing how and why creativity would be needed:

> I think there's a time and a place for creativity. I think that’s what I like about this industry, you have more of an ability to kind of come up with things that are outside of the box, which is interesting and also very challenging. But I think when you’re responding to a crisis, you need to be creative to an extent, you need to understand how your creativity will impact any risks that are associated with the crisis or any business risks or any legal risks. So, it has to be within reason, but I think it’s always important to be pushing yourself to think outside of the box and see if there’s anything better that you can do in this situation versus another situation you’ve been in.

Essentially, risks need to be measured and anticipated; however, to them, it is important to recognize when you need to move away from the plan (or the template) and try something that could be more suited to the crisis at hand. Instead of being stuck to the tried and trusted approaches, in some cases a creative solution could serve the circumstances better. Nonetheless, the risk associated with a new idea is often enough to deter a crisis communicator from going for it.

Another time when creativity could "more safely" come into play is once the crisis is resolved. Nine participants argued that after the crisis has been resolved is a time ripe for creativity. As participant 2 said,

> There's been situations where after a crisis has occurred and it's been handled, that's when we put a certain effort forward to showcase how that's been addressed, for example with food contamination crises, we invite people in—whether it be influencers or the media—to take a new look at the food. So, I'd say usually once the crisis is over is when we can be more creative.

These differing opinions show that there is no real consensus over when creativity is most useful in a crisis. Some say in the brainstorming/anticipatory stage, a few say in the heat of the moment when you need to improvise, and others in the post-mortem, when you look at lessons learned and rethink your plans for the future. Finally, one participant even said "creativity is simply always at work."

7.2.2 *Information and Idea Management Technology*

Based on the literature, technology was often named as something that could enhance and boost creativity by unburdening users from certain menial tasks, allowing technology to create connections that may not be obvious to users, specifically information and idea management technology (e.g., DEVONthink). Participants were asked a few questions about such technology as I wanted to let them tell me what they are using and what they would like to use, versus superimposing technology to my data. Overall, when it came to creativity, information and idea management technology did not play a big part in crisis communicators' work. Many shared some variation of participant 7's exclamation that, "We have so few technological tools at [our

organization]" or basic tools, "We work with brainstorming and that kind of thing. We use, just typical corporate technology just, you know, to track on spreadsheet, you know, PowerPoint presentations" (participant 1). Essentially, they used what any other department of the organization would use: the Microsoft Office Suite or messaging applications such as Slack. Importantly, the head of communication at a global construction firm (participant 8) noted,

> A tool is only as good for communications as the people will use it. Bonfire [a group video chat] was kind of a brilliant idea it just didn't get adopted. I mean from a crisis standpoint I could use Bonfire, but like if other people don't have the app, I mean then you add a little step to your crisis response, "hey, download this app."

As they express, implementing new technology in the middle of crisis is likely more trouble than it was worth it. Overall several did not express a need for more technological tools. Participant 27 explained that they had "no real technology for crisis communication," which implies that there is "real technology" that exists but they just do not possess it. When prompted on what "real technology" would be, participant 27 explained,

> I think some of those tools—just by virtue of centralizing some information—allow you to look at it differently, and sometimes the outcome of that will be more creativity in how you approach storytelling, etc., but it'll remain to be seen how creative it lets us be for something like a crisis. I think the high value will be it removes friction, and the tech can give you repeatability. And the more repeatability you have, the more efficient. So, it frees up time to be creative.

In the same vein, participant 13 explained what goals such tools could help them achieve when it comes to crisis communication and creativity: information management, idea

management, knowledge management, more freedom, and an ability to be more strategic. They explain,

> I think technology gives you the ability to preserve a record of process, and actual data and knowledge. I think it can enable greater collaboration. I think it can enable greater speed. I don't know that it enables more creativity. The only way I would see it is sort of indirect—like, if it frees us up from something minutiae, we have an opportunity to be a bit more strategic. Anything you take off the plate means I can fill up more strategy in that part of the plate.

This idea of making connections and freeing up time to give room for creativity were the main merits of having technological tools in crisis communication. Because crisis communication is evolving to be more data driven, having the tools to collect and organize data could be a way of fostering creativity. A crisis communication consultant (participant 6) explained,

> I think a lot of the insights, we just make assumptions about the insight for our certain clients, but when you have the data staring at you and saying something different, you are given a little bit more license, like, "Okay, if this is true, then we might need to do something we haven't done before," and then that's when we get a little more creative, I think. I think that, more than anything fosters the most creativity.

In other words, information and idea management technology could reveal patterns that the "naked eye" might not have seen and thus allow for new (creative) strategies to emerge. The specific requirements (beyond making these connections and freeing up time) were not discussed. Essentially, any tool that could perform these actions would work. Participant 31 detailed this idea by explaining,

> You need to identify tech and use it in creative ways. I think that, you know, you can look at a piece of technology and go, "okay, it's used for that thing" and you may say, "but I can use that for something else. I can use that in a different way." For example, like using a marketing tool for crisis communications and being able to use this for not just one brand but development in a way that scalable that you can use for multiple brands. And you can use a small team to get you know hit tens of thousands of people across a wide variety of brands with the same communication and assess them in a different way.

Essentially, this participant is saying that some tools that could be useful to crisis communication do not have to be specific to the field as long as they can be applied in a useful way. For example, looking to marketing tools could be useful for crisis communicators as the idea of brand monitoring in marketing mirrors the idea of monitoring what is being said about your organization during a crisis.

Several crisis communicators had recognized the usefulness of technology and had started implementing technological solutions—from simple to complex. In explaining that crisis communicators should find more ways to quantify what they see, a crisis communication consultant (participant 32) explained that he had started compiling articles and creating their own knowledge management system:

> I have a file on my computer where I just put every article I read, I read about incidents, so I can keep track of them and see how they were dealt with. The role of communicators to take what they see in their day-to-day life and bring it into crisis communication plans test yourself or when you don't really keep up with the new technology around you, like what—how do you do it as a professional or what do you recommend to your clients?

This is a great example of using technology to keep abreast of new developments in crisis communications to stay competitive in their PR practices. As this participant explained earlier with their son helping with Snapchat and Instagram, he feels that this ability to absorb and process the tools audiences use (from an audience member perspective) helps them be more creative.

At a more complex level, at the time of this study, two organizations had designed or were in the midst of designing their own knowledge management technological tools. The director of communication at a large technology company (participant 14) explained,

> We use technology to innovate, we have been creative in the process, we've learned from something that's actually outside of our industry, which is the 9-1-1 concept. We obviously had to be creative and fine tune it, innovate it to meet our needs. For us we needed something that we could build on our technology.

This participant looked outside their organization to see what worked well and how it could be implemented to help crisis communicators create connections and free up time, as stated earlier. They identified the 9-1-1 system as a possible source for lessons in how their company could better respond to crises. Thus, they designed a tool resembling this system for their own organization and was creative in the process by adapting it to their organization's own needs: they went to 9-1-1 operators, leaders in emergency management, firefighters, and other crisis communicators. They explained that it was a long process to implement and fine tune but the tool, but in the end, now that it was fully integrated, not only was it a creative project as a whole, but the tool is also a booster of their creativity thanks to the data it collects and the patterns that emerge from it.

Participant 34 explained that they were using Salesforce to design a tool specific for crisis communications. They described,

> We're going to build a little bit of an issue tracker, and we're going to use Salesforce to do it. That's really just to keep track of the things that either we know about and haven't broken yet, or that have broken and that we have messaging for, or some of the planning for if we wanted to get ahead of stuff that hasn't happened yet. I like the idea that if it's something big, we all have the opportunity to make it smarter simultaneously. So, "I just talked to the New York Times, they said this," or, "I just talked to the Journal, and they said this. This message is resonating. This message is not." If you have a common place and it enables real-time collaboration—because sometimes teams are geographically distributed, or just even people are at meetings or whatever when this stuff breaks—having a single point where a discussion can be ongoing and alive, I think helps us be more creative in less time.

Once again, as this participant explains, information and idea management technology does not necessarily yield creative results directly, but it is a crutch to help communicators be more creative by freeing up time and creating connections. It can also track ideas to highlight what has been done, what has worked, and what has not. This could prove useful when proposing new ideas since they would be based on data and may be more readily accepted as they would come with a rationale.

Overall, the use of technology among participants varied dramatically. While many did not have specific tools and did not feel the need to have more, others were actively seeking out or designing technological tools to help them in their process. Of those, many linked these tools to more freedom, which would in turn allow for more creativity to occur. However, these examples were mostly seen in global firms that had the means and internal human capital to design and maintain them.

7.3 DISCUSSION

As we continue to look at how crisis communicators discuss the different dimensions of the construct, we observe that when creativity was brought up during the interview, it became apparent that the fallacious definition of creativity as being something "artsy" and not simply as something "new and useful" was ingrained in many crisis communicators' minds. Therefore, five sought to redefine creativity in order to make sure that it fit their work. Essentially, being creative in crisis communication is being able to anticipate possible scenarios ("always kind of looking around corners"), being able to think on your feet when the crisis hits, and pivot if you need to, get to the business back to normal as quickly as possible. For that reason, there was an overall agreement that creativity is important to crisis communication as it is part of the job—it is part of anticipating, brainstorming, pivoting plans, improvising, and rebuilding. However, to answer question RQ_c on creativity timing, there was no consensus on when creativity comes into play the most. While many said at the beginning and end of a crisis, quite a few others noted that the heat of the moment was when creativity was the most needed. Thus, the data supports the cyclical and iterative process of ideas and implementation as shown in Figure 5. Creative ideas can develop at any time and be (or not) implemented in plans for future uses. They may be present at all stages of a crisis or at none. It is highly contextual and depends on the different dimensions of the Creativity Readiness construct.

In addition, the data shows that creativity plays a part in crisis communication but is more often than not regarded as something discretionary. It is a means to an end (limiting the crisis' life cycle) so it is performed as a necessity, rather than at as something introduced for its own sake to "spice up" practices. Creativity is wanted where it is needed, not for the sake of being creative, new, innovative, or different.

When it comes to technology, it appears that what has been developed so far for crisis communications specifically so far has been exaptations of other tools (e.g., the 9-1-1 system; marketing monitoring tool; Salesforce data and knowledge management). Furthermore, it appears that technology, when applied to crisis communication and the ability to be creative, has often come from outside of the organization (see examples named above). For instance, the crisis consultant mentioned above explained looking outside of the organization to keep abreast of technology and getting help from their son to familiarize themselves with what new technologies are out there. This, along with the 9-1-1 system example, demonstrates that technologies used *outside* of the organization affect the bounded organizational technological structuration, and as Brown and Duguid (1991) explain, these sometimes, obscure idiosyncrasies play an important role in the formal and informal structuration of the organization. Though it is worth noting that the technologies must be actually used, not just perceived for their symbolic value, as discussed in Vuori (2012)—which the Bonfire example above represents.

Based on these observations, we can draw the conclusions that crisis communicators are aware that creativity plays a part in their work but in the sense that it might be important in resolving a crisis. As creative practices are more often than not imposed on crisis communicators they tend to happen when they need to happen, without a clear consensus on its patterns (before, during, after the crisis). Furthermore, and in relation to its more organic nature, creativity in crisis communication has not really been supported by the creation of specific information, idea or knowledge management tools. Rather these tools serve different purposes—such as knowledge management to increase speed of response—which in turn can serve creative endeavors, by, for example, freeing up time and allowing for creativity to occur.

It is interesting to note that it appears that directly understanding how crisis communicators perceive creativity, its importance, and its timing is of value to mapping out where creativity stands in the field of crisis communication. The fact that most crisis communicators mentioned not having truly thought about creativity and what part it plays in their work is indicative that creativity, although recognized as being an inherent part of crisis communication, does not (yet) hold a place of its right in the field. This is also demonstrated by the lack of specific technology uses to bolster creative work. Therefore, given their descriptive values of how the field is evolving, the dimensions of attitudes toward creativity and technology are two important pieces of the Creativity Readiness construct. A longitudinal assessment of attitudes toward creativity and the evolution of the use of information and idea management technology are interesting indicators of how creativity is going to increasingly—or not—become a part in crisis communications practices.

Chapter 8. TOWARD A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF CREATIVITY IN CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

8.1 REVIEW OF THE DATA AND THE CREATIVITY READINESS CONSTRUCT

Over the last decade, with new media and the consequently rapid flow of information, the bar has been raised for crisis communications. The challenges associated with reshaped informational habits and omni-dimensional communication have resulted in an urge for “a paradigm shift for crisis management in which uncertainty, adaptiveness, and improvisation replace certainty, goal-orientation, and control” (Gilpin & Murphy, 2008, p. 177). However, while crisis communication research has advocated for more flexibility in the practice of crisis communication, few scholars have gone beyond suggesting embracing uncertainty, being able to adapt, and improvise—Veil et al. (2011) have made it one of their ten best practices for crisis communicators. We can imagine crisis communicators responding to this statement by saying “easier said than done.”

While creativity has been named an asset for any organization to keep up with evermore demanding markets (see e.g., Seelig, 2012) there has been limited research on creativity in relation to crisis communication (Sommer & Pearson, 2007). “Crisis communication” and “creativity” do not make an obvious word association but crisis management experts have acknowledged the value of creativity in crisis management planning and response for decades (Pearson & Sommer, 2011). Therefore, this study sought to understand how crisis communicators are striking a balance between planning and the necessity of being flexible and creative in the face of crises, and essentially to answer to what degree do crisis communicators perform in organizations that

promote the conditions conducive to creative responses—at the individual, work team, and organizational levels.

In order to do so, I designed a construct that brings together elements shown by research to be favorable to creativity in the organization within the context of crisis communication: Creativity Readiness. **Creativity Readiness is the presence of attitudes and practices that promote conditions conducive to creative idea generation and application within an organization.** This construct was applied to the branding discourse around creativity of organizations' website and Twitter feeds, as well as crisis communicators interviews. It was to assess the *readiness* and *willingness*, or the field's attitude, toward behaviors fostering creativity and the possible generation of creative processes and outputs. By applying the construct, we learned how crisis communicators discuss the different Creativity Readiness construct's dimensions (RQ_a), which dimensions are most impactful to creative work (RQ_b), at what stages creativity plays a greater part (RQ_c), and essentially to what degree do crisis communicators perform in organizations that promote the conditions conducive to creative responses—at the individual, work team, and organizational levels.

Applying Creativity Readiness as a lens, we learned that overall, creativity is a necessary add-on to crisis communications, but that it is mainly used when plans fail or fall short—essentially when communicators are "desperate." There is little evidence that creativity is deliberately made part of crisis communication from planning, response, and recovery. Creativity is part of practices at times because it serves a specific purpose in a specific context, but it does not appear to be conscientiously carved into crisis communications for its own sake despite its presence in branding—it happens through the requirements of crisis communication. When participants remarked wanting to stay at the cutting edge of PR, they name creativity as an asset, whereas the

data showed that to remain at the cutting edge of PR, speed, excellence, and efficiency are more critical—whether or not they include creativity is secondary. Thus, creativity will be part of crisis communications only if it enhances speed, excellence, and efficiency, not at their cost.

We also learn that there was no real reflection from participants on creativity. For most, it was the interview itself that triggered some thinking around what creativity means to them, their team, and their organization. Nonetheless, it became evident that creativity *is* part of their job, as it is part of the some of the norms of institutionalized crisis communications: for example, idea generation during brainstorming for planning. Since credibility is maintained through the performance of certain organizational-bound norms (Fredriksson et al. 2014), these norms tend to oscillate toward tried and trusted methods, not necessarily toward originality.

When creative work is necessary or wanted, we learned that several dimensions of the Creativity Readiness construct are most impactful on crisis communicators' ability to be creative. Overall, suspension of judgment and psychological safety, as well as leadership behavior were noted as being most influential. Crisis communicators were most sensitive to how their managers (or their manager's manager) would respond to ideas considered to be creative and departing from usual ones. It was interesting to observe that the most impactful dimensions are at the individual and work team levels versus at the organizational level. In other words, it is not about how the organization, as a whole, sees or discusses creativity (as part of their branding, for instance) but it is about how the people you work with see and react to creativity. It is attitudes and practices at the individual level and in the team work environment that most contribute to an organization's Creativity Readiness.

Based on a comparison of branding discourse related to creativity as found on corporate websites and Twitter feeds, and interview data, there seems to be a quasi-inexistent correlation

between branding or vision, and internal promotion of certain practices. Several crisis communicators noted that their leadership was creative and innovative, and supportive of both, but overall, when it came to psychological safety, there was little reassurance that new ideas would not be (harshly) shut down for the sake of resources, efficiency, and time management.

While there was an agreement that creativity plays a part in crisis communication, there was no consensus as to when—which suggests again that creativity is a tool and not a set goal. In other words, creativity happens where it *needs* to happen. It is not a matter of stage. However, in few instances when creativity was more "calculated," meaning that creative ideas were wanted, it did appear to be more welcome outside of the heat of the moment—during brainstorming, for instance. When it happens out of desperation, creativity comes into play during the crisis but as a means to an end, not as a practice that is fostered. Essentially, this shows that creative thinking is another tool in the crisis communicator's toolbox. To use an analogy, in the event of a fire (crisis), if the large bucket (the plan) has a hole and cannot put out the fire, then the smaller bucket (creative practices) might be used. The smaller bucket cannot guarantee that it will put out the fire but at least it does not have a hole.

The conclusions we can draw are that among crisis communicators, there has been little thinking around their work and the presence of creativity, apart from a few people interviewed. Their environment is not necessarily ripe for explicit support of creative endeavors. Creative work seems to mainly happen as noncanonical practices. Practices that may or may not work, that are not official, and may or may not be adopted and normalized down the line. Although, with most anecdotes, creative work was rarely discussed as something that would be normalized down the line (e.g., use of Microsoft Paint; calling on the president of a large PR firm for help; targeting parents specifically when it came to cookie dough eating). These are mostly contextual and based

on necessity in the moment. Canonical practices of creativity are mostly ones that exercise “crisis response muscles” (e.g., consistent brainstorming with colleagues on outside crises; mini-drills with clients, and such). Nonetheless, these practices were embedded outside of the heat of the moment and were a nice to have.

After reviewing the data, the Creativity Readiness construct could be improved by focusing more on the individual and team work levels. This is what is most closely related to crisis communicators’ ability to be creative and what can be targeted to observe and possibly improve. As Parjanen (2014) explains, creativity in the organization is not innate and needs to be fostered and maintained in order to exist. Additionally, individuals are usually the ones who are considered expert and most in touch with their work, thus they would be the most suitable sources to develop strategies to foster creativity within the organization. Indeed, the data suggested that the highest level studied here (organizational) is overly broad, and too distant from day-to-day practices to directly impact crisis communicators themselves. The data also suggested that even in organizations that have creativity and innovation as crucial elements in their vision are not necessarily the ones who foster creativity or are creativity-ready. This suggests that in order to foster creative work, actions need to go from bottom to top, rather than top to bottom within the organization.

8.2 Implications and Future Research

8.2.1 *Implications*

While there is no “optimal” crisis communication management since by definition crises are chaotic and ever-changing, organizations perform crisis communication in constrained environments (Fredriksson et al., 2014). Thus, while scholars have suggested that crisis communicators embrace uncertainty and ambiguity and focus less on planning and more on mental

training (see Eriksson, 2014), several organizations still struggle to do so. Indeed, for some, there seems to be a dichotomy between what the reality of what “new” crisis communications require versus how they are currently practiced. The assessment of Creativity Readiness is a step in the direction of more conscious practices that would include creativity and would allow organizations to respond to crises with less restraint—embracing uncertainty—and more agility. Although it is a textbook example, the United Airlines (mentioned earlier) was dealt with poorly and possibly not just because there were some real shortcomings from the communications team but also quite probably because it had never been faced before. For many organizations, the inability to embrace the unknown is going to increasingly problematic. The ones who are going to survive are the ones that do the work in order to create an environment that is comfortable and supportive of improvisation and stepping outside of plans. This is where the Creativity Readiness construct can guide organizations—as a framework to provide a favorable environment for creativity and staying at the cutting edge of public relations, specifically crisis communications.

As Mueller, Melwani and Goncalo (2012) suggest “the field of creativity may need to shift its current focus from identifying how to generate more creative ideas to identifying how to help innovative institutions recognize and accept creativity” (p. 17). Indeed, by designing the Creativity Readiness construct, this study sought to understand how crisis communicators perceive and enact creativity. This is the first step to Mueller et al. (2012) suggestion in order to show to the field of crisis communication (whether in-house or in a PR firm) that there needs to be several dimensions positively occurring to accept and allow for creativity. Thus, this construct can serve organizations as well as individuals to further understand and assess their Creativity Readiness. The interview questions used to collect data will be adapted to a simpler version of the construct (shorter and

more straightforward for the professional world) that could be used by individuals and organizations.

8.2.2 *Future Research*

To delve deeper into the most impactful dimensions of the Creativity Readiness construct, further research could look into ways that the environment might be supporting creativity that were not reflected in this study's participants stories. At this stage, there is still a lot that cannot be said about organizations themselves, their culture and how creativity might in fact be fostered in other ways—possibly subtler—that participants of this study did not recognize. Indeed, more data—such as an ethnography—would be needed in order to fully flesh out organizational practices, which might show something quite different from interviews.

Another avenue would be to look more closely at what definitively affect psychological safety of crisis communicators specifically. As we saw, time pressure—compared to other professions that may not be as intense—did not have a debilitating effect on crisis communicators, at the contrary, in most cases. Therefore, it would be interesting to see what elements of psychological safety are determinants of crisis communicators' ability to be creative.

Given how crisis communicators discussed how they needed the ability to be creative and to improvise, further research could also address how creativity could be infiltrated into crisis communications. Essentially, asking, how could reflexivity in times of crisis, embracing chaos, and improvisation could be fostered, not just within organization but at the university level, in the training future crisis communicators.

Finally, as the data suggested that technological tools were rarely considered and still often either new or in development, it would be interesting to conduct a study comparing two crisis communication teams with different information and idea management technological tools and

observe the effect on their creativity—a crisis communication-creativity spin-off of Barley's study of CT scanners implementations.

Crisis communication is evolving along with new challenges. Thus, being Creativity Ready—essentially, adopting a more reflexive mindset through creativity might be one of the ways organizations can foster the appropriate environment for crisis communicators to "invent a way to put a square peg in a round hole. Rapidly."

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APPENDIX A: PUBLIC RELATIONS FIRMS LIST

Top Global PR Firms Based in the U.S.

Name	Website	Handle	Present in Seattle
Edelman	http://www.edelman.com/	@EdelmanSEA	Yes
Weber Shandwick	http://www.webershandwickseattle.com/	@wsseattle	Yes
FleishmanHillard	http://fleishmanhillard.com/	@Fleishman	Yes
Ketchum	https://www.ketchum.com/	@KetchumPR	No
Burson-Marsteller	http://www.burson-marsteller.com/	@B_M	No
Hill+Knowlton Strategies	http://www.hkstrategies.com/	@HKStrategies	Yes
Ogilvy PR	https://www.ogilvypr.com/	@ogilvypr	No
Golin	http://golin.com/	@GOLINglobal	No
Cohn & Wolfe	http://www.cohnwolfe.com/	@cohnwolfe	No
FTI Consulting	http://www.fticonsulting.com/	@FTIConsulting	Yes
Porter Novelli	http://www.porternovelli.com/	@PN_SEA	Yes
APCO Worldwide	http://www.apcoworldwide.com/	@apcoworldwide	Yes
Finsbury	http://www.finsbury.com/	@FinsburyGlobal	No
WE Communications	http://waggeneredstrom.com/	@WaggenerEdstrom	Yes
W2O Group	http://www.w2ogroup.com/	@W2OGroup	No
Ruder Finn	http://www.ruderfinn.com/	@RuderFinn	No
PMK*BNC	http://www.pmkbnc.com/	@PMK_BNC	No
Text100 Corp	http://www.text100.com/	@text100	Yes
MWWPR	http://www.mww.com/	@MWW_PR	No
ICR	http://www.icrinc.com/	@ICRPR	No
Allison+Partners	http://www.allisonpr.com/	@AllisonPR	Yes

Seattle PR Firms

Name	Website	Handle	Just Seattle
Barokas Public Relations	http://barokas.com/	@BarokasPR	No
Belinda Young PR	http://bypr.com/	@belindayoungpr	No
Brotherton Strategies	http://www.brothertonstrategies.com/	@brostrat	Yes
ByPR	http://www.bypr.com/	@BYPRSeattle	Yes
Colehour & Cohen	http://www.colehourcohen.com/go/	@ColehourCohen	No
Communiqué PR	http://www.communiquepr.com/pages/index.php	@CommuniquePR	Yes
Curator	http://www.curatorpr.com/	@CuratorPR	Yes
Firmani & Associates	http://www.firmani.com/	@firmaniPR	Yes
Gmmb	https://gmmb.com/	@gmmb	No
GreenRubino	http://www.greenrubino.com/	@GreenRubino	Yes
KiteRocket	https://www.kiterocket.com/about/	@kiterocket_	No
Martin Levy PR	http://martinlevypr.com/	@MartinLevyPR	Yes
Nyhus	http://www.nyhus.com/	@nyhus	No
On PR	http://onpr.com/	@OnPR	No
PRR	https://www.prrbiz.com/	@PRRSocial	No
Publicis Seattle	http://publicisseattle.com/	@PublicisSeattle	No
Pyramid Communications	http://www.pyramidcommunications.com/	@PyramidComms	No
Revolution PR	http://www.revolutionpr.com/	@REVPR	No
RH Strategic	https://rhstrategic.com/	@RHstrategic	No
Richmon PR	https://www.richmondpublicrelations.com/	@RPRSeattle	no
ScovillePR	http://scovillepr.com/	@ScovillePR	Yes
Strategies 360	https://www.strategies360.com/	@Strategies360	No
Tamara Wilson PR	http://tamarawilson.com/	@Tamara_WilsonPR	Yes
The Fearey Group	http://www.feareygroup.com/	@TheFeareyGroup	Yes
The Keller Group	http://thekellergroup.com/	@TheKellerGroup	Yes
VoxusPR	http://www.voxuspr.com/	@VoxusPR	Yes

APPENDIX B: PYTHON CODE FOR TWITTER APIS

```
import tweepy
import time
import sys

from twitter_authentication import CONSUMER_KEY, CONSUMER_SECRET,
ACCESS_TOKEN, ACCESS_TOKEN_SECRET

TWEET_COUNT = 100

def scrape_tweets(screen_names_file, output_file):
  auth = tweepy.OAuthHandler(CONSUMER_KEY, CONSUMER_SECRET)
  auth.set_access_token(ACCESS_TOKEN, ACCESS_TOKEN_SECRET)
  api = tweepy.API(auth)

  with open(output_file, "w", encoding="utf-8") as output_handle:
    output_handle.write("\t".join(["User", "Created At", "Retweet",
"Retweet Author", "Retweet Screen Name", "Text"]) + "\n")

  for screen_name in get_screen_names(screen_names_file):
    try:
      print("Retrieving tweets for %s" % screen_name)
      print_tweets(get_tweets_start_end(api, screen_name), output_file)
    except tweepy.TweepError as error:
      print("Error retrieving tweets for %s" % screen_name)
      print(str(error))

def get_screen_names(input_path):
  with open(input_path, encoding="utf-8") as input_handle:
    for screen_name in input_handle.readlines():
      yield screen_name.strip('\n')

def print_tweets(tweets, output_file):
  with open(output_file, "a", encoding="utf-8") as output_handle:
    for tweet in tweets:
      print(format_tweet(tweet), file=output_handle)

def get_tweets_start_end(api, screen_name):
  last_id = -1
  buffer_size = TWEET_COUNT
  # first, return the TWEET_COUNT most recent tweets
  for status in get_tweets(api, screen_name, buffer_size):
    last_id = status.id # track the most recent id we see
    yield status

  # tweepy has no way to ask for the oldest tweets, so we
  # will use a rolling buffer to keep taking TWEET_COUNT tweets
  # until we are out of tweets. When the buffer fills,
  # we start from the beginning.
```

```
  buffer_pos = 0
  old_tweets = [None] * buffer_size # initialize old_tweets to size of
TWEET_COUNT
  next_tweets = list(get_tweets(api, screen_name, buffer_size, max_id =
last_id - 1))

  while len(next_tweets) > 0:
    for status in next_tweets:
      last_id = status.id
      old_tweets[buffer_pos] = status
      buffer_pos += 1
      if (buffer_pos >= buffer_size):
        buffer_pos = 0
    next_tweets = list(get_tweets(api, screen_name, buffer_size, max_id =
last_id - 1))

  # first yield the oldest items
  for status in old_tweets[buffer_pos:]:
    if status != None:
      yield status
    else:
      break

  # now yield the newest items
  for status in old_tweets[:buffer_pos]:
    if status != None:
      yield status
    else:
     break

# returns the latest tweets, up to count, for the given screen_name,
starting after max_id (if specified)
def get_tweets(api, screen_name, count, max_id = None):
  # first check if we are rate limited
  remaining =
api.rate_limit_status()["resources"]["statuses"]["/statuses/user_timeline"
]["remaining"]
  if remaining <= count:
    rate_limited()

  for status in limit_handled(tweepy.Cursor(api.user_timeline, screen_name
= screen_name, max_id = max_id).items(count)):
    # incrementally return each tweet, instead of returning them all at
once
    yield status

# formats a tweet into a tab-separated string
def format_tweet(tweet):
  retweet_author_name = ""
  retweet_author_screen_name = ""
  is_retweet = False
  tweet_text = tweet.text

  if hasattr(tweet, "retweeted_status"):
```

```
    retweet_author_name = tweet.retweeted_status.author.name
    retweet_author_screen_name = tweet.retweeted_status.author.screen_name
    is_retweet = True
    tweet_text = tweet.retweeted_status.text

  tweet_text = tweet_text.replace("\n", " ").replace("\t", " ")

  return "\t".join([tweet.user.screen_name, tweet.created_at.strftime("%Y-
%m-%d %H:%M:%S"), str(is_retweet), retweet_author_name,
retweet_author_screen_name, tweet_text])

# handles rate limiting errors while processing tweets by sleeping for 15
minutes and trying again
def limit_handled(cursor):
  while True:
    try:
      yield cursor.next()
    except tweepy.RateLimitError:
      rate_limited()
      continue
    except StopIteration:
      break

def rate_limited():
  minutes = 15
  print("Rate limited, sleeping for %s minutes (rate limit reset window)."
% minutes)
  print("Press Ctrl+C or Cmd+C at any time to stop.")
  for i in range(minutes):
    time.sleep(60)
    minutes_left = (minutes - 1) - i
    print("%s minutes left." % minutes_left)


if len(sys.argv) > 2:
  scrape_tweets(sys.argv[1], sys.argv[2])
else:
  print("Usage: tweet_scraper.py input_file output_file")
  print("    input_file: the file with new-line separated screen names to
fetch tweets for.")
  print("    output_file: the file to write the retrieved tweets to.")
```

APPENDIX C: CODEBOOK

Project Summary and Introduction

My argument is that in the eternally connected, high information flows and global environment that we live in, organizations face the pressing need to successfully stand out and differentiate themselves from competitors. The rapid flow of information keeps organizations under scrutiny and any *faux pas* or blatant crisis can very quickly become problematic. For that reason, to remain at the cutting edge of crisis communication practices, crisis managers/crisis communicators need to leverage the resources available to them and keep up with how their audiences are communicating. Crisis communication is an interesting field in part because of the reliance on plans while emerging situations often require creativity and improvisation around established plans. Thus, my research looks at organizations' Creativity Readiness or whether or not crisis communicators' organizations are willing to allow for creativity in practices. I am interested in how obstacles can stifle crisis communicators' ability to be creative in their environment (at the individual, work team, and organizational levels).

Creativity and Innovation

Fortunately, there seems to be a consensus among creativity scholars that creativity can be defined as *something* (a) novel or original and (b) potentially useful to the individual or the larger social group (Amabile, 2002; Carson, 2010; Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; Lapierre & Giroux, 2003; Mumford et al, 2012; Seelig, 2012; Taylor & Callahan, 2005; among others). As explained by Man (2001), "creativity" and "innovation" tend to be used interchangeably, however, the two terms' definitions are not equivalent. Mumford, Medeiros and Partlow (2012) specify that, "Creativity refers to the generation of ideas while Innovation refers to implementation of these ideas" (p.30).

Thus, creativity and innovation differ but are strongly related. In other words, creativity is the idea or concept and innovation is the realization of such idea or concept.

The coding involves the assessment of Seattle's Public Relations firms branding discourse and whether or not they market themselves as being *creative* and/or *innovative* organizations. In other words, whether or not creativity and innovation are values these firms use to brand themselves. For the sake of this study and to attempt to capture as accurately as possible organizational branding, both <creativity> and <innovation> will be coded and allowed to be used interchangeably, although instances of each use will still be recorded separately.

CD = Conceptual Definition

OD = Operational Definition

Creativity Concept

CD. New ideas: whether they stem from 'old' ideas approached in a new way or are entirely new ideas. Original solutions to complex, novel, ill-defined, or poorly structured, problems. These ideas are, or hope to be, useful.

OD. Any mention of any word with the prefix *creativ-* and any idea expressing the concept of creativity (as aforementioned, "as *something* (a) novel or original and (b) potentially useful to the individual or the larger social group"). It can also include words such as: cleverness; creative problem-solving; imagination; imaginativeness; ingeniousness; ingenuity; innovativeness; invention; inventiveness; original; originality; new; fresh; never-done-before; as defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary ("creativity", 2017). Creativity might not be clearly stated but simply discussed or mentioned. Make sure your coding includes all these instances.

Innovation Concept

CD. The action or process of implementing a new idea, product, concept…etc. Something considered a 'better solution.' It is applied creativity.

OD. Any mention of any word with the prefix *innovat-* and any idea expressing the concept of innovation. It can include: new methods; new measures; modernization; novelty; breakthrough; revolution; novelty; newness as defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary ("innovation", 2017). It can be objective or subjective. Innovation might not be clearly stated but simply discussed or mentioned. Make sure your coding includes all these instances.

Explicit versus Implicit Creativity/Innovation. Explicit creativity/innovation is expressed in the ways detailed above – in other words, it leaves no room for uncertainty as <creativity> and/or <innovation> are mentioned in the text. Implicit creativity/innovation is not directly stated but rather shown through creative/innovative apparatus. It could be in the way the information is presented. For example, an uncommon website design or visual. Essentially, an element that implies inventiveness and difference.

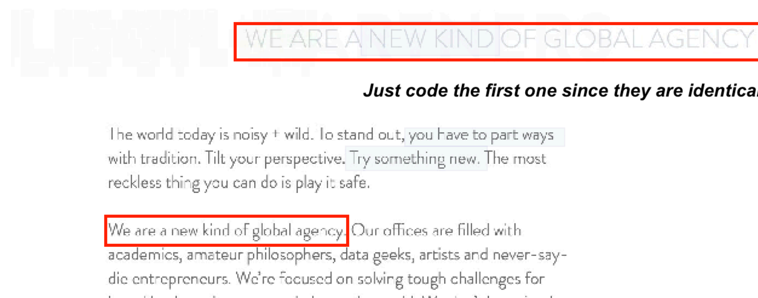
Part I: Coding for Corporate Websites

For part I of the coding, each corporate website associated with a public relation agency is a unit of observation. Each page: the home page, the about page, the 'why us' page, and the employee/team description page–or equivalents–are units of analysis. The websites pages are provided to coders as PDF files (unit of analysis) in individual agency folders (unit of observation). The coders then open each page using the software Atlas.ti version 8. The instances of each concept are coded. For example, the coder would code "*Firm A* is a firm that nurtures creativity" as "Creativity" and "*Firm A* strives to revolutionize public relations" as "Innovation." Instances such as "*Firm A* nurtures entrepreneurial spirits that drive changes" as "Implicit Creativity/Innovation."

On a separate but attached document in Atlas.ti 8, coders will also produce memos discussing the other ways (other than discourse) that <creativity> and <innovation> are expressed (with, for example, a remarkable website layout design).

Notes:

- On websites ignore Twitter widgets: tweets posted on the page–these are coded separately.
  - Ignore phrases repeated. For example, the title of a section (see screenshot below)



- If the phrase being coded goes over two lines, just select the first half (first line).

Part II: Coding for Tweets

For part II of the coding, tweets collected with Twitter APIs are imported into a Microsoft Excel Sheet. The table show the authoring handle, date, retweet value (true or false), and the tweet's text. Coders input in a fifth column the code. Namely, C for Creativity, I for Innovation, E for Implicit Creativity/Innovation and N for Null or absence of codes.

APPENDIX D: RECRUITMENT OPENER

LinkedIn Message Template

Dear [Name] – My name is Elodie Fichet and I am a Ph.D. student at the University of Washington, Seattle. For my dissertation, I have been carrying out interviews with PR professionals working in crisis comm and I would be thrilled to be able to interview you! Happy to send more information.

Talking Points Used During Approach/Recruitment of Participants for Interviews

My name is Elodie Fichet. I am a Ph.D. candidate in communication from the University of Washington. As you might already know, for my dissertation work, I am conducting observations on public relations professionals' practices around crisis communication. This means that I will observe and record (in written form) relevant information to your work as a firm employee involved (directly or remotely) in responding to crises.

I am interested in your perspective on the matter and would like to interview you. You will be interviewed for approximately one hour though the time may be more or less. This interview will be conducted out of work hours and in location other than the firm (for example, a nearby coffee shop will be selected at your convenience). I will audio-record the interview to make sure that I do not miss anything important you say. These recordings will be stored in a password protected file and only I, the principal investigator, will have access to them.

The interview may include questions about practices around crisis management/response, technology use (professional and personal), creativity, innovation and organizational culture.

Remember that your participation is voluntary. Allow me to provide you with the information statement containing a detailed description of the study.

APPENDIX E: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

(Sent to Potential Participant After Initial Contact)

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
INFORMATION STATEMENT FOR VERBAL CONSENT FOR INTERVIEWS AND OBSERVATIONS
Crisis Communicators, New Communication Technologies, and Creativity

Researcher:
Elodie Fichet
Ph.D. Candidate, Dept. of Communication
efichet@uw.edu
(949) 878 6049

<u>Researcher's statement</u>
I am asking you to be in a research study for my dissertation. The purpose of this statement is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. Please listen carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, what I would ask you to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When I have answered all your questions, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent."

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine the practices performed by public relation professionals working in crisis communication in order to understand how they are making choices involving creativity and new technologies (and to what extent).

STUDY PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in the observation, you will be observed in the context of your work and interactions with other staff in relation to crisis communication practices. These observations will be performed for several hours a week and will span over the course of 35 weeks. Observations information will be recorded in written form. Please note that you are free to ask that I not observe and/or leave the setting.
If you agree to participate in the interview, you will be interviewed for approximately one hour, though the time may be more or less. This interview will be audio-recorded for the purpose of transcription accuracy. The interview may include questions about practices performed by public relation professionals working in crisis communication in order to understand how they are making these choices involving creativity and new technologies (and to what extent). You may refuse to answer any question asked to you and/or ask to terminate the interview.

RISKS, STRESS, OR DISCOMFORT

Your responses are being recorded, and so thus any potentially damaging responses you make could be revealed. Breach of confidentiality is a risk to being in the study if your study information, including any audio recordings, were accidentally given to or were taken by someone who should not have it. Precautions are being taken to minimize this risk. Recordings of your responses along with your position will be transcribed but your name will not be kept. However, if you have any concern that a response could be potentially damaging, please do not share it with the interviewer.

BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

By participating in this study, you can help academics achieve a greater understanding of the factors shaping cutting edge crisis communication practices and thus advance the field of public relations, and crisis communications. It may also allow you to reflect on your own practices and if there are ways to grow and be more fulfilled as a professional.

The broader anticipated benefits of this research for society are improved crisis communication practices. It will also add insight on how (in what ways) such communication could be fostered in order to yield better results, possibly improve employee satisfaction and higher return on investment (both capital and monetary) from the firm and the client's perspective.

OTHER INFORMATION

You may refuse to participate and you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

CONTACT INFORMATION

In the event of a research-related injury, you may contact the lead researcher:

Elodie Fichet
Ph.D. Candidate, Dept. of Communication
efichet@uw.edu
(949) 878 6049

Subject's statement

"This study has been explained to me. I volunteer to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have questions later about the research, I can ask the researcher listed above. If I have questions about my rights as a research subject, I can call the University of Washington's Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098."

A copy of this statement will be offered for your record.

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Verbal introduction:

First of all, thank you for taking time to talk with me today. To begin, I would like to explain the purpose of this study and answer any questions you may have about it.
I would like to record our conversation, only to make sure I don't miss anything important you say and so I can focus on our conversation rather than on taking notes. These recordings will not be shared with anyone else but me and the person helping me transcribe them. The audio file will be destroyed after transcription. But first I want to make sure it's acceptable with you that I record this interview. Would you confirm this is acceptable?

I am interested in practices performed by public relations professionals working in crisis communication and how they prepare for and respond to crises. I will ask you questions about your practices, habits, workplace atmosphere and such. Feel free to use concrete examples and cases as much as you'd like.

Please do not hesitate to ask questions at any time during our conversation. I also want you to feel free to elaborate as much as you wish and at the end introduce areas that I might not have asked about that you feel would be useful for the study.

Before we carry on, do you have any questions?

General

1. Tell me a little bit about your career path.
    a. How you got where you are at now.
    b. Notable cases you've worked on.
    c. How many years of experience in crisis communication.
2. How long have you been working for your organization?
3. What is your position there? Day to day job?
4. How do you work on proactive crisis plans? Walk me through the process.
5. Do you work on a team? (Who is part of the crisis communication team?)
    a. Who is involved in the decision-making process? Who makes the final call?
6. How do you respond to crises? Walk me through the process and the different stages.
    a. Can you tell me about the last crisis you worked on?
7. What happens after a crisis has been "resolved" or mitigated: do you debrief?
    a. Can you tell me about the process/the last debrief you had?
    b. (How) do you re-evaluate what you would do differently next time?

Creative Processes

8. What is a typical (crisis communication) meeting like?
9. How do you come up with the different crisis scenarios that your organization (or the org you're serving) might face?

10. How does your team brainstorm?
11. In your team/department, do you feel ideas get to flow without judgment?
12. When you are having a meeting or a brainstorming session, if someone brings up a crazy idea, what happens? (e.g. what if we're attacked by aliens?)
13. Is there a sense of play?
14. Do you ever get to experiment?
15. How do you use technology in these processes?
16. How does time pressure affect your job?

Relational-setting

17. How autonomous do you feel in your job? Do you feel a degree of ownership and control over your work?
18. Do you feel like you can take risks in your job?
19. What's your interaction with your supervisor?
    a. Do you feel like you are being supported, asked, pushed, or prevented from being creative? In what ways? / Do you feel supported by your supervisor (your family)?
20. For your meetings, do you sometimes meet in places other than the office?
21. Do you go to events or happy hour, and such, with your colleagues?
    b. Do you discuss ideas there?
22. [Diversity] Do people in your team have the same educational background? The same career path? The same cultural background? Do you feel like you have different ways of thinking about things? Tell me about them specifically.
    c. How does that affect the work?

Creativity at work – Direct

[I'm going to ask you question about your practices around creativity. What I mean by creativity is the use of the imagination or original ideas; the generation of something new and novel, but also useful. Essentially, when you have to think outside of the box and come up with a new solution to the situation at end.]

23. Have you ever needed to improvise during a crisis? If so, walk me through the example.
24. *Would you consider yourself to be a creative person?*
    a. *How do you feel you are creative?*
    b. *Give me an example of the last creative thing you did in your professional life? In your private life? Walk me through the example.*
    c. *(Remember a time you were creative). Was it successful or not? Why would you say so? How did you measure this success? Who else was involved in assessing the success of the situation?*
25. Do you employ creative public relations practices?
    a. Do you see that transferring to crisis communication?
26. Do you feel being creative plays an important role in crisis communication? Why, why not? In what ways?
27. At what stage of a crisis does creativity play the biggest part? In your opinion, is there a stage at which it is more prominent?
28. What do you feel constrains or fosters your creativity within your work environment?

29. When, would you say, you have to depart from pre-established plans and be more creative/improvise?
30. How does time pressure affect your creativity? Do you feel like time pressure boosts it or hinders it?
31. In the years that you have worked in crisis communication, have you seen a change in how creative you have been? You were encouraged/dissuaded to be?
32. About technology, do you feel any of these tools help you be creative? In what way?
    a. In general, how do you keep track of your ideas (knowledge management)?
    b. Are you doing creative things with the technology?
    c. Are you encouraged (by your superiors, the firm's culture or else) to use those or did it happen more organically?
    d. Is there a protocol around how you are supposed to use them? Do you follow it?

33. Is there anything we have not discussed that you would like to add? / Which question did I not ask?

34. Would you be able to recommend a crisis communicator I should interview? More junior?

VITA

Elodie Fichet is a public relations and crisis communication scholar. Prior to pursuing her doctorate at the University of Washington, Seattle, she earned a master's degree in Media and Communication from the International University in Geneva, Switzerland, from which she graduated Magna Cum Laude and valedictorian in 2010. She also earned a bachelor's degree in Art History and Archeology from the Université Lumières Lyon II, in Lyon, France in 2009. Aside from her studies, she has worked in communication and public relations. Most recently, as social media manager, she designed and implemented communication and social media strategies for the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) National Network.