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Post-crisis discourse and organizational change, failure and renewal

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Abstract

Purpose – To examine the post 9/11 communication of the bond-trading firm, Cantor Fitzgerald and its CEO Howard Lutnick, according to the discourse of renewal framework.

Design/methodology/approach – This case-study of the discourse of renewal draws upon the messages and statements made by the company and its employees following the 9/11 attacks. The discourse of renewal framework emphasizes provisional responses, prospective statements, and the role of the leader as a symbol of stability in the face of a crisis.

Findings – This study provides support for viewing crisis as change-inducing events with the potential to fundamentally alter the form, structure and direction of an organization. Renewal discourse helped the company survive an attack where over 600 employees were killed and the company offices completely destroyed. While a crisis inevitably create severe harm, it also has the potential to serve as a renewing force for the organization.

Research limitations/implications – Few examples of post-crisis discourse of renewal have been examined in the literature and more research is needed. Work needs to identify the conditions necessary for this kind of discourse.

Practical implications – Organizations may have the opportunity to fundamentally reframe a crisis, focusing on the opportunities that arise from these events.

Originality/value – This paper explores both organizational crisis and organizational discourse from unique positions. Discourse is positioned as the means whereby crisis can become a positive force for change

Keywords Disasters, Organizational change, Narratives, Social dynamics

Paper type Research paper

Crisis and disaster studies have become increasingly popular as scholars come to terms with the seminal nature of these events (Greenberg, 2002; Pauchant and Mitroff, 1992; Perrow, 1999; Seeger *et al.*, 2003). Long-term efforts at strategic planning, innovation, restructuring and organizational redesign can be wiped away by corporate scandals, defective products, toxic spills, employee violence, plant explosions, or terrorist attacks. Moreover, the effects of such disasters can impact an organization's image and linger for decades. In some cases, the entire industry is tarnished as occurred following

the Bhopal Union Carbide disaster and the Exxon Valdez Oil spill. Crises and disasters, however, can also serve as powerful forces of organizational change, learning, normative readjustment and, in some cases, renewal. Crisis, for example, may point out fallacious assumptions, unforeseen interactions and vulnerabilities. Crisis may also precipitate consensus, cooperation and support (Seeger and Ulmer, 2001, 2002; Ulmer and Sellnow, 2002). In almost all cases, major crises and disasters are equivocal events that place severe demands on sensemaking (Weick, 1988). The ways in which participants, stakeholders and leaders frame and make sense of these events, as reflected in post-crisis discourse, shape both the nature and degree of change.

In this analysis, we outline this view of organizational crises as significant change-inducing events. We explore question regarding how the organizational discourse following a crisis shapes the resulting change. We argue that a primary factor in the nature of crisis-induced change is the post-event discourse offered by visible leaders. Specifically, a discourse of renewal can sometimes emerge following major crises. First, we explore the nature of organizational crisis. Second, three primary approaches to crisis and change are described: normative readjustment, organizational learning and the discourse of renewal. The case of the bond-trading firm of Cantor Fitzgerald, and the discourse of its CEO, Howard Lutnick, following the World Trade Center disaster, is used to illustrate the role of post-crisis discourse in organizational change. Our purpose it to explore the discourse of renewal that occurred in this case and extend an understanding of the larger role of such discourse in changes that occur in the aftermath of major crises.

Organizational crisis

Crises are increasingly common parts of the larger organizational and social landscape of modern life. Whether imposed on the organization by outside forces, such as the events of 9/11, or initiated by management behavior and decisions, such as the case of Enron, crises are sources of profound significance, often precipitating radical, rapid and occasionally positive change. Crisis may become critical lessons for organizations regarding shortsightedness, greed, over reliance on technology, indifference, hubris, or mere stupidity. They may also create unprecedented levels of cooperation and support; help the organization shed outdated assumptions, technologies and products and point out directions for growth and renewal.

Organizational crises have been described as "specific, unexpected and non-routine, organizationally-based event or series of events which creates high levels of uncertainty and threat or perceived threat to an organization's high priority goals" (Seeger *et al.*, 1998, p. 233). Weick (1988, p. 305) characterizes crises as "low probability/high consequence events that threaten the most fundamental goals of the organization. Because of their low probability, these events defy interpretations and impose severe demands on sensemaking". Established structures, routines, procedures, rules, relationships, norms and belief systems often break down or are judged as insufficient given the conditions of the crisis. In this way, crises are high uncertainty events that challenge the ability of managers to predict their consequence. Pauchant and Mitroff (1992, p. 12) distinguish between incidents (events of limited duration), accidents (systemic disruptions that do not affect basic assumptions and meanings), conflicts (disturbance of symbolic structures) and crisis ("a disruption that physically affects a system as a whole and threatens its basic assumptions, its subjective sense of

self, its existential core"). Crises are the primary threat to organizational stability making organizations vulnerable to other crises, takeovers, declines in market share, or even bankruptcy (Smart and Vertinsky, 1977; Pauchant and Mitroff, 1992).

Implied in these notions of crisis is a fundamental suspension or disruption of organizational stability and status quo. This includes systemic disorder, high uncertainty, lack of a clear interpretive frame and inadequate understanding of what has happened and the larger implications (Weick, 1988; Turner, 1976). During crises, organizational systems, including communication systems, are disrupted in fundamental ways. Operations may cease, leaving facilities closed and key personnel distracted, incapacitated, missing, or dead. During the 9/11 terrorist attacks, for example, key personnel were missing, broadcast, radio and cellular telephone communications systems were cut and transportation systems were seriously disrupted. Sometimes disruption is quickly contained and the system rapidly returns to a normal state of operations. In fact, the concept of business continuity has recently emerged as a primary goal of crisis management. Systems disrupted in this manner are less stable, vulnerable to criticism and susceptible to further crises. Moreover, crisis disrupts basic belief structures, premises and assumptions of members (Pauchant and Mitroff, 1992). This fundamental questioning often concerns well-established beliefs about risk and its relationship to the organization, norms for risk avoidance and probabilities for the failure of these norms (Turner, 1976). Such questioning may further destabilize the system. During a crisis and its aftermath, organizational members, crisis stakeholders and the public often experience intense emotional arousal, stress, fear, anxiety and apprehension that they seek to resolve. This intense emotional arousal may result in a rejection of the systems and structures that are seen as associated with the event or causing the event. Following the Valdez Oil spill, many consumers returned their Exxon credit cards and air travel dropped off precipitously following the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Models of crisis and change

Although organizational change is a robust area of inquiry, the focus is primarily on planned, strategic change (Kotter and Schlesinger, 1979). Strategic change is broadly conceptualized as a planned adaptive process allowing organizational systems and participants to adjust and behave differently to accommodate new contingencies, technologies, values, processes and personnel (Barczak *et al.*, 1988; Cummings and Huse, 1989; Mintzberg, 1984; Kanter, 1983). Communication is an important part of the strategic change process overcoming resistance, reducing uncertainty, persuading employees to embrace the change and facilitating employee participation (Rogers, 1995; Lewis and Siebold, 1998). Additionally, some scholars have pointed to the important role of symbolism in organizational change (Pfeffer, 1981; Fairhurst and Starr, 1996). Transformational leadership, for example, has emphasized the role of the leader's articulated vision as a factor in change (Eisenbach *et al.*, 1999). Other investigations have focused on the role of language and metaphor in organizational change (Oswick and Montgomery, 1999; Fitzgibbon and Seeger, 2002).

A variety of perspectives and models suggest that crisis may also be understood as a force of organizational change. For example, it may serve as attention-getting events, forcing management to focus on a problem that may have previously been neglected. Crisis may also free up scarce resources that otherwise would not be available to solve

a particular problem. Managers and public officials often describe events or problems as "crises" in order to call widespread attention to the problem and free up resources. From a broader perspective, the change-inducting aspects of organizational crisis may be examined from at least three theoretical perspectives: as an example of normative readjustment to severe systemic breakdown (Turner, 1976); as a case of organizational learning (Sitkin, 1996); or as an instance of renewal discourse (Seeger and Ulmer, 2001, 2002; Ulmer and Sellnow, 2002).

Normative readjustment
Turner (1976) offered a model of crisis as the consequence or outcome of inadequate risk recognition, or a "failure in foresight". These "intelligence failures" are functions of a wide variety of organizational and cultural phenomena (Turner, 1976, p. 381). He suggested that "disaster occurs because of some inaccuracy or inadequacy in the accepted norms and beliefs". Beliefs and norms about hazards, precautions and risks allow organizational members and managers to successfully resolve most problems. Crisis occurs, however, when problems judged as insignificant or irrelevant interact with precautionary norms and standards considered adequate. Prior to 9/11, for example, few had even considered a scenario involving hijackers turning airplanes into guided missiles. Moreover, the airline protection procedures and protocols were considered adequate to avoid these kinds of risks. At any given point, Turner argued, this accepted and dominant set of beliefs about risk and the attendant norms, standards and procedures help constitute a sense of normal operations. In fact, most crises are effectively resolved through these routine and normal structures.

The onset of a crisis through a dramatic trigger event illustrates the inadequacy of pre-existing beliefs and assumptions regarding risk and challenges norms, structures and procedures for risk avoidance. Turner describes this process as a sudden collapse of beliefs about the world, its risks and hazards and normal procedures and structures of risk-avoidance. This collapse, then, makes room for initial and rapid ad hoc adjustments and initiation of new norms and procedures. As the crisis event evolves and becomes contained, a full cultural adjustment regarding beliefs and avoidance norms occurs so that they are once again compatible with the new post-crisis insights and understandings. The final resolution of a crisis also requires some general consensus about cause, blame and responsibility. Often, a formal inquiry or assessment into the crisis is undertaken by outside agencies to identify a plausible "incubating network of events" associated with the crisis (Turner, 1976, p. 382). These findings and recommendations, then, are used to change core organizational procedures and policies in ways that reflect new understandings of risk (Ray, 1999).

Organizational learning
Organizational learning has recently emerged as a popular framework for understanding organizational adaptation at both the microscopic and macroscopic levels (Cohen and Sproull, 1996; Sitkin, 1996). Specifically, learning theorists argue that organizational histories sometimes take on the status of critical learning events. Crisis events, even though they are relatively infrequent and non-normative, may be experienced richly throughout the organization in ways that precipitate learning and change. Cohen and Sproull (1996) argue that when histories are viewed as critical events, they are dissected, elaborated, discussed and repeated examined to extract

meaning (Sitkin, 1996). Crises, particularly when their impact is severe and where mistakes or "faulty learning" are the cause, often become critical events and opportunities for learning (Sitkin *et al.*, 1999). The story of Chrysler's near bankruptcy in the early 1980s, for example, took on the narrative structure of a saga as it was told and retold. For those Chrysler employees who survived, the story was a way of reinforcing the mistakes of the past and a mantra for how to avoid them in the future (Fitzgibbon and Seeger, 2002). Detailed investigations in the courts, by commissions or by other governmental bodies, are common features of high-profile crises (Seeger, 1986). Such postmortems are undertaken not only to apportion responsibility, liability and blame, but also to ensure that the lessons of the crisis are learned and that similar events do not occur again. Investigative boards and commissions "collect, synthesize, summarize and disseminate information; identify causes and associated factors; suggest ways in which future crises may be avoided" (Ray, 1999, p. 189-190).

Sitkin (1996, p. 542) has even suggested that failure "is an essential prerequisite for learning" as it stimulates basic organizational experimentation. Crises are beneficial to organizations to the degree that they promote specific learning outcomes. First, failure calls attention to a previously under-recognized problem. Second, failure promotes ease of recognition and interpretation by giving clear definition to a specific kind of problem. Third, failures, particularly large-scale failures, stimulate the search for solutions by demonstrating the associated costs. Fatal airline crashes stimulate an intensive effort to identify the probable cause because the high cost in lost lives, legal liability and reduced profitability. Fourth, crises are motivational often resulting in a spirit of cooperation and commitment to rebuild among employees, managers and members of the community. Fifth, failure may result in an adjustment of risk tolerances. Sitkin (1996, p. 549) suggests that such adjustments enhance risk tolerance or modify and refine understanding of risk. A sixth outcome of failure related to organizational leaning is that it stimulates "increased variation in organizational response repertoires". Finally, organizational failure promotes experimentation and practice leading to a systemic "orientation that is more flexible and adaptive" (Sitkin 1996, p. 550). Crises as critical incidents and as failures represent important opportunities for learning outside more established learning routines and structures.

Crisis and renewal

A third view regarding the role of crisis and change focuses on the ways post-crisis discourse constitutes prospective meaning among stakeholders. This work, known as the discourse of renewal, builds from organizational discourse and discourse analysis in an effort to go beyond traditional understandings of post-crisis discourse. Traditional approaches focus almost exclusively on strategic portrayals of responsibility, blame, scapegoating, denial of responsibility, justification and related strategies (Allen and Caillouet, 1994; Benoit, 1995; Coombs, 1995). In some post-crisis contexts, however, a form of cooperation and healing emerges that is not concerned with strategic portrayal of causation and blame or with restoring a damaged image or reputation. Some organizations are able to almost immediately embark on rebuilding or renewal following a crisis. These organizations are able to constitute a frame for the event that is empowering and motivational to those affected by the crisis and which engenders cooperation and support from others. It is also important to note that change discourse can have an impact on an expansive context of stakeholders

(O'Connor, 2000). Although the discourse of renewal in this analysis is directed toward external stakeholder such discourse can also have a powerful impact on internal stakeholders and broader audiences (Seeger and Ulmer, 2001). O'Connor (2000, p. 176) explains the contextual factors that may impact change discourse suggesting that "organizational change is an act of sensemaking (Weick, 1995) that dialogues across large expanses of time (linking the past, present and future) and space (linking the organization, its parent company, its workers and its competitors)". In this case, we view the context of the discourse of renewal as impacting and overlapping to other audiences even though the primary direction of the discourse is to larger audiences external to Cantor Fitzgerald. Moreover, renewal discourse links the past, before the crisis, the present, the crisis itself and the future a new rejuvenated organization.

Seeger and Ulmer (2001), for example, explored Aaron Feuerstein, owner of Malden Mills, a textile firm in Lawrence, Massachusetts and Milt Cole, owner of a lumber company in Logansport, Indiana. In both cases, these CEOs responded to the destruction of their factories, not by apologizing, investigating, shifting blame, or denying responsibility, but by immediately and publicly committing to continue paying workers and rebuild their facilities. They did so even when there was little economic justification for this action. The responses offered by Feuerstein and Cole were widely reported in the press as powerful examples of management virtue and commitment to the community (Seeger and Ulmer, 2001). This public pledge to rebuild and to maintain support for employees eliminated protracted arguments over causation and blame and moved instead to a future plans and prospects. The potential harm caused by the events was contained and reduced because employees were not asked to endure financial hardship while waiting for the organizations to reopen. In addition, the events themselves as well as the CEO's self-less responses took on the status of significant events, promoting important lessons about community, commitment and cooperation. In fact, Feuerstein was invited to State of the Union address by then President Clinton and held up as a model of management ethics.

A post crisis discourse of renewal is characterized by four features (Seeger and Ulmer, 2001). First, this discourse is prospective, seeking to describe activities related to future goals and development as opposed to retrospective seeking to explain or interpret what happened in the past. Discourse of renewal focuses, therefore, on organizational discourse as expression and the means by which a new organizational reality is created. Whether by a CEO or other organizational members, organizational discourse immediately following a devastating crisis reiterates the cyclical relationship between espoused values and the expression of shared values (Grant *et al.*, 1998). Typically, post-crisis discourse has a retrospective focus, primarily because the organization is looking back to explain and justify past acts. In contrast, renewal discourse focuses on the future; how the crisis induced-limitations can be overcome and what new opportunities can be explored. Second, discourse of renewal focuses on the ability of the organization to reconstitute itself from a blank slate, without previous constraints or artificial limitations. Seeger and Ulmer identified this form of discourse through the investigation of industrial fires. Fires typically create almost complete destruction and there is often little left to build upon. While this may be particularly devastating from one perspective, from another it creates an entirely free context within which to reconstruct the organization. New equipment, facilities, procedures and methods may all be constructed. The resulting organizations may be more

profitable than before the crisis. A third characteristic of this discourse is its provisional rather than strategic nature. Most often, post-crisis discourse involves a carefully constructed strategy to avoid increasing legal liability or enhancing the expectations of various stakeholders. Public relations professionals are consulted to create ambiguous statements that limit additional liability. Post-crisis discourse of renewal is more natural and honest, typically a monologic approach and often grounded in what the CEO wishes or hopes might happen. This form of discourse may even be drive by senior executive's internal value systems and patterns of conduct. While a strategic response and a provisional response are not mutually exclusive, the latter is more authentic, genuine and immediate.

Ulmer and Sellnow (2002) examined the role of discourse of renewal following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks. They found that communication focused on stakeholder commitment, commitment to correction of security lapses and core values. Stakeholders such as the New York Police Department and the New York Fire Department received "Surprisingly few complaints of incompetence or irresponsibility" following 9/11 (Ulmer and Sellnow, 2002, p. 363). In addition, in terms of correction, organizations such as the airlines that were impacted by the crisis "committed to making whatever changes were needed to regain the confidence of the American people". In terms of core values, governmental, public and private organizations openly communicated "greater goals of independence and freedom" in their "post-crisis advertisements" (Ulmer and Sellnow, 2002, p. 364).

Finally, the discourse of renewal reaffirms the CEO or leader's role as the interpreter or framer of meaning following a crisis (Fairhurst and Starr, 1996). The CEO occupies a prominent place and following a crisis is often called on to explain and interpret what happened. She or he has the opportunity to offer an initial interpretation when the uncertainty surrounding the crisis is often still quite high. After a loss of sensemaking induced by a crisis, the CEO begins to construct a singular and coherent organizational discourse that contributes to the development of a new shared meaning (Grant *et al.*, 1998). In some cases, this post-crisis interpretation may be compelling and constitute extraordinary efforts by followers to rebuild and recreate the organization.

Method

This study employs a case study method to develop, in rich detail, descriptions of how the events, decision-making processes and external communication of Cantor Fitzgerald were portrayed in the media coverage following the 11 September 2001 crisis (Yin, 1984). Case studies are widely employed in the examination of crises (see Turner, 1976; Perrow, 1984; Benoit, 1995; Sellnow *et al.*, 2001). In this study, we focus specifically on the role of Cantor Fitzgerald's actions and messages to create a post-crisis discourse of renewal. In this manner, the Cantor Fitzgerald case serves as an exemplar of how post-crisis communication can function to create a mediated message of organizational renewal. Thus, the data for this study include transcripts of television interviews conducted with Howard Lutnick and national and international coverage by major print media sources for the 18 months following the 9/11 tragedy. We also employ various accounts of the case published in the general and business press. Key events in the case and coherent themes of communication are described from the perspectives of organizational crisis and renewal. Specifically, we examine the scale of harm associated with this event, the initial framing of the crisis by Lutnick, the

reservoir of good will generated for the company and the ways in which questions of cause and blame functioned. Observations regarding Lutnick's messages and the associated change at Cantor Fitzgerald's are discussed and highlighted.

Cantor Fitzgerald

Cantor Fitzgerald (CF) is an international brokerage firm that operated out of the 101-105th floors of Tower One of the World Trade Center. CF "is responsible for transacting \$200 billion of securities a day, or \$50 trillion a year, more than the American and New York Stock Exchanges and Nasdaq combined" (Barbash, 2003, p. 7). The firm specializes in bond trading and on 11 September 2001, was the largest and most productive bond brokerage firm in the world, employing 1000 workers. CF was known as a daringly competitive firm on the edge: "sometimes a sharp elbowed firm, regulators have more than once accused Cantor of cutting too close to the edge of market rules" (Henriques and Lee, 2001b, p. C01).

Bernie Cantor, the founder of CF, was a colorful and well-liked leader of the organization before his passing in 1996 (Henriques and Lee, 2001b, p. C01). He was an avid collector of Rodin sculptures and had more than 80 pieces on display including *The Thinker* and *The Three Shades* (Barbash, 2003). However, after he died, struggle for control of the company became a critical incident for CF as some saw Howard Lutnick's bid for the chairmanship as "insensitive" (Henriques and Lee, 2001b, p. C01). Reports suggest that both Cantor's wife and Lutnick hurled "lacerating insults" during the court proceedings (Henriques and Lee, 2001b, p. C01) However, Lutnick eventually took control of the company. Lutnick's personal qualities before the crisis were described as having a "single mindedness, determination to make money and a certain ruthlessness about how to do it" (Hill *et al.*, 2001, 10). In nine years, he moved from the bottom up at CF and, by age 29, had held positions as a bond broker all of the way to Chief Executive.

When the plane hit the World Trade Center just below the 101st floors of the World Trade Center, most of the CF employees were trapped above the initial impact. As a result 658 CF employees died, a large number of whom were hired by Howard Lutnick (Barbash, 2003). The Bond-trading firm lost a greater percentage of its employees than any other single company impacted by 9/11. Lutnick survived only because he was taking his son Kyle to his first day of kindergarten. His only brother, Gary Lutnick, was killed.

In the aftermath of the crisis, Howard Lutnick became the face of the tragedy for CF and a personification of the losses Wall Street had suffered. What follows is a discussion of Lutnick's novel response to his firm's tragedy. We argue that his high profile monologic response was instrumental in changing the company and in saving it. We suggest that Lutnick's post-crisis communication was a kind of renewing discourse that allowed a new CF, as attested by novel decisions and actions, to emerge from the wreckage of the World Trade Center.

Howard Lutnick's response to the 2001 terrorist attacks

Scale of harm

Scale of harm concerns the impact or the relative seriousness of the crisis. Organizational crises often have devastating effects on the organization and sometime impede the fundamental ability of the organization to operate. Ironically, those crises

that produce more harm are likely to create more opportunity for change. The scale of harm for CF was particularly intense. The company's headquarters were housed in the World Trade Center and almost 700 employees lost their lives due to the attacks. Equipment and many records were lost, even though CF had established a back-up facility in New Jersey following the earlier 1993 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center (Henriques and Lee, 2001a). By any objective measure, however, the entire organization was decimated. With only 300 remaining employees to handle both the effects of the crisis and the day-to-day work many, including Howard Lutnick, did not believe it would be possible for the company to continue (Barbash, 2003).

The damage also extended to survivors. Barbash (2003, p. 8) explains the emotional impact for Howard Lutnick and CF: "Of the wives, thirty-eight were pregnant, fourteen of them for the first time. Forty-six of the lost were engaged to be married; there were at least two weddings planned for the following weekend. Worst of all, these were young people with young families, some with three and four children. Nine hundred and fifty-five sons and daughters lost a father or mother". The funerals and grieving process alone would take months along with telephone calls to grieving spouses, family members, parents and other relatives. The sheer volume of correspondence, insurance forms, death certificates and paperwork, was overwhelming for Lutnick and the surviving members of the firm.

One of the first television interviews that Lutnick gave was with ABC's Connie Chung. At this time, he publicly communicated the cumulative emotion and impact of the crisis he was experiencing.

> Crying uncontrollably, Lutnick told Chung he hasn't gone to hospitals to search for his brother. Asked why, he heaved sobs and held up his list of 700 names. Here's everybody I got! He wailed. Find somebody on this list. Because if you find someone on this list, then I got to call them. I get to give somebody else some hope, some dreams. Maybe, maybe they get to kiss their kids. It's, it's – I'd love to find my brother, but I'd love to find, I'd love to find their brother, or their wife, or their husband, or anything, anything.

This sincere emotional outpouring from a CEO known for his tough approach captured the attention of the nation.

The roughly 300 surviving employees were not in the WTC buildings for a variety of reasons including picking up dry-cleaning, vacation, stopping for coffee, dropping off children, or simply caught in traffic (Barbash, 2003). All those CF employees who had made it to work on time died in the attack. Such overwhelming devastation required that Lutnick, as CEO, speak out about the events and about how he planned to respond. While most observers suggested that given the scope of harm, CF was for all intents and purposes dead, Lutnick offered an entirely new and compelling reason for the company to rebuild.

Initial framing of an equivocal event

Widely acknowledged in the crisis literature is that initial public responses are critical to sensemaking, framing and uncertainty reduction concerning the event and the future. Those impacted by the crisis typically face tremendous stress and uncertainty. Weick (1993, p. 634) characterizes these events as cosmological episodes in which "people suddenly and deeply feel that the universe is no longer a rational, orderly system". For this reason, organizational leaders must provide a resonating message, narrative or frame that is meaningful to stakeholders and engenders their support.

Such support communicated through monologic organizational discourse is critical to organizational renewal.

Following the devastation of 9/11, surviving employees and customers of CF needed information about the state of the organization. Employees needed to know how to proceed in terms of their jobs and customers needed to know how, or if, their orders of 11 September 2001 would be processed. Poorly functioning computer systems and therefore electronic communication systems, coupled with partially destroyed human resource, organizational and transaction files exacerbated internal communication. Lutnick took several public stances and commitments that served to frame the event for surviving employees and their families, for the general public, the media, customers and even competitors (Barbash, 2003). What is salient about Lutnick's initial statements is that they are intense, emotional and provisional. They served as meaningful and powerful public commitments that immediately framed the event for CF's stakeholders.

On 13 September, when Lutnick spoke with ABC's Connie Chung, he talked of trying to go up to the offices on floors 101-105 to see if he could get just one employee out but he could not make it "due to the collapse of Tower 2 … Smoke all but overwhelmed him" (Russakoff and Eunjung Cha, 2001, p. A24). Chung then asked Lutnick about his missing brother and he provided a powerful and emotional response that was replayed in the media over the next several months. He then offered a fundamentally new justification for CF as a profitable enterprise that grew directly out of the devastation; "There is only one reason to be in business – it is because we have to make our company be able to take care of our 700 families", he said sobbing. "700 families. Help them. 700 families. I just can't say it. I can't say it without crying. That's my American Dream now" (Russakoff and Eunjung Cha, 2001, p. A24).

Howard Lutnick's emotional response to the crisis immediately gave stakeholders a clear and compelling vision for CF's future. His comments garnered immediate and widespread media attention. The emotional story of a CEO of a major bond-trading firm that had lost the majority of its workforce played well on television, particularly against the backdrop of the WTC attacks. In addition, Lutnick's statements gave a human face to the tragedy. The impact of the event was personified in Lutnick; a quintessential Wall Street CEO. Employees also had a vision of CF's future. From these statements, employees knew that they would be working to fill orders and by so doing provide for the families affected by the crisis. Initial public statements in the face of high uncertainty and confusion can be particularly compelling in generating support and commitment.

Beyond CF's employees and grieving family members, Lutnick also spoke to his customers and competitors. Following the crisis, he assured customers that CF would still be in business. The very idea of Wall Street reopening however was jarring. Barbash (2003, p. 32) reported that "When the members of the Bond Market Association decide the market will open Thursday, [Lutnick did not] say they are callous or that his best friend and his only brother are dead. He listen[ed] in amazement to their plans and thinks of all he needs to keep the firm from going under". On the morning of Tuesday, 11 September 2001, CF had conducted "nearly twenty five hundred trades worth billions of dollars" (Barbash, 2003, p. 33). CF would have to be able to cover these transactions if the company was to continue. In some cases CF had executed trades, while clients had not carried through on the deals. CF, in these

cases, was left owing money. Lutnick also spoke to competitors and customers explaining that they would try to maintain the transactions from before 9/11 and fulfill trades when the markets reopened. The surviving members would work in honor of those who passed away and to support their families.

The reservoir of goodwill
Although Lutnick's dramatic and emotional response certainly resonated with CF's audiences following 9/11, his reputation prior to 11 September was not untarnished. He was known for walking close to the regulatory edge with some of his business practices and was widely recognized for his single-minded competitive toughness. However, following the events of 9/11 and his emotional commitment to the families of victims, Lutnick was widely touted as a hero and a responsible businessperson. Research on crisis management suggests that stakeholders are highly attracted to virtuous emotional responses and are likely to become advocates for the crisis stricken organization, providing both support and good will from which the organization can draw (Seeger and Ulmer, 2002; Ulmer, 2001; Ulmer and Sellnow, 1995).

When Lutnick spoke about the crisis, he provided public commitments about CF's future and the role of customers in supporting that future. He noted, "if every money manager of a pension fund just gave us a little bit of business, then maybe we'll survive" (Dunne, 2001, p. 39). On Monday 17 September, CF saw tremendous support from customers seeking to boost CF and its business. Lutnick explained that:

> Monday was an amazing thing to witness. All of the accounts – money managers, mutual funds, hedge funds – they reached out to help us. They pumped us up with so much business, and we had one of the busiest days ever. And when I went home that night, I told Alison, "I think we're done. Because we cannot process the trades, and we've got no margin of error here. We were crushed with kindness, I thought" (Barbash, 2003, p. 60-61).

Many people who saw Lutnick on television also gave money. It is not uncommon for organizations to receive personal donations following crises. Malden Mills for instance, received personal donations for years after Aaron Feuerstein paid worker salaries for months while the plant was being rebuilt (Ulmer, 2001). Personal contributions illustrate the power of initial compassionate responses to organizational crises. These responses often reach beyond their intended publics and impact citizens, competitors and government. Later on, CF would receive loans from the federal government to rebuild. Compelling stories about the vision of the organization are integral to establishing and receiving good will from stakeholders.

It is important to note that even though CF received much support following the crisis, the bond industry is both complex and cutthroat. Lutnick characterized the difficult and complex new atmosphere following 9/11. He explained that his first discussions with competitors were anything but personal.

> These are guys I do business with regularly. Spoken to on countless occasions. Had dinner with. You would expect "I am so glad to hear your voice Howard". Or "I'm so very, very, sorry". But they could not say those things because they had long-standing agendas. If they said, "I'm sorry", then the next thing out of their mouths would have had to be – "Is there anything I can do for you?" What they did was eliminate the personal ... Essentially they said, "Howard, I understand that bad things have happened to you, but this is a business conversation. And in this business conversation you're screwed" (Barbash, 2003, p. 45).

Clearly, CF was in a very precarious position with regard to its competitors even though Lutnick experienced many advantages from his initial response and the good will that followed. However, it is also evident that competitors had to deal with the complexity of the situation in their own way. By focusing on business, they were able to avoid putting their own organizations at risk and were able to meet their own goals. One could also imagine that these business relationships have endured long-standing battles and disagreements. As a result, one could expect that in a highly competitive business that some competitors would maintain the status quo and some may even try to capitalize off of the disaster.

Questions of cause and blame and the nature of the event
Owing to the nature of crises, organizations often must account for cause and attribute blame for the event. Issues of cause, blame and responsibility are typically played out in image restoration that often dominates all aspect of post-crisis discourse (Allen and Caillouet, 1994; Benoit, 1995; Coombs, 1995). However, there are times when cause and blame do not surface as primary rhetorical imperatives following crisis. These cases create room for a discourse of renewal to emerge. The events of 9/11 as terrorist attacks initiated by outside forces did not create questions regarding CF's blame or responsibility. The overriding theme in these cases concerned rebuilding and renewal and moving beyond the crisis. These statements give stakeholders hope and illustrate that the organization has a strategy for moving beyond the crisis. This discourse was not uncommon following 9/11 particularly within the Wall Street community.

On 13 September, for example, Morgan Stanley Dean Witter ran a full page *Wall Street Journal*, ad, signed by its chairman, Philip Purcell. The ad stated that many of its employees had made it home but some had not (Barbash, 2003, p. 43): "Thanks to our network of over 60,000 people throughout the world, including those in New York City, our assets and all of our clients' assets are completely safe. And we are ready to begin as soon as the markets reopen". CF also began running advertisements some of which met with mixed reviews. Carmen (2002, p. B01) explains that "A Slate columnist has raised the question of whether Cantor's new ad campaign, in which surviving employees somberly address the public, flaunts 'the pain and loss of the firm as a form of emotional blackmail and suggesting that doing business with Cantor Fitzgerald is a way of helping those who suffered a great loss on Sept. 11'".

It is important to understand the context in which these advertisements emerged. Once the threat of more attacks was over, trading firms like Morgan Stanley and CF needed to tell their customers that they were going to move forward. These advertisements were necessary to let customers know that their investments were safe and that when the markets opened each customer's assets would be managed as usual. In situations where cause and blame are not in question, the primary rhetorical imperative becomes moving beyond the crisis and resuming normal operations. Most often, it is the CEO that must convince stakeholders that the organization is ready for business. While such statements may seem crass and insensitive given the scale of the loss, they are necessary for the continuance of the organization.

Crisis leaders and crisis stakeholders
Much of the crisis literature focuses on the role of leaders and their communication with stakeholders. This research discusses the form and content responses required to

calm employees and those directly impacted by the crisis. Form refers "to how a crisis response should be presented" (Coombs, 1999, p. 126). Content involves "the actual messages contained in the crisis response" (Coombs, 1999, p. 127). Key issues related to form involve visiting the scene of the crisis and providing clear and accurate messages to stakeholders. Content recommendations typically involve meeting the informational needs of stakeholders following the crisis such as explaining how problems the organization is experiencing will be resolved.

Lutnick's original positive and supportive framing of the event had a powerful impact on stakeholders, particularly family members who relied on CF employees for support. In one of his many public remarks he explained, "We have a new class of partner here – these families, he said with his voice choking 'I have to take care of these families'" (Laurence, 2001, p. 8). This emotional response provided the key ingredients according to form recommendations. Lutnick was out in front of his stakeholders showing concern about their well being. In addition, Lutnick at first met regularly with grief stricken families. Initially, he did an excellent job of keeping families informed about the crisis and how CF was going to move forward. Barbash (2003, p. 38) observed that he spoke to families twice a day "and while others avoid putting their grief into words, [he spoke] frankly about what he went through".

However, as time went on Lutnick spent less time with families and more attending to CF's business needs. This was a severe miscalculation as cable television host Bill O'Reilly began to question grieving widows about the nature of their CF settlements. By 12 November 2001, *USA Today* publicly noted that Lutnick had "poorly communicated with victims' families" about specifics related to the crisis (Knox, 2001, p. 1B). Some criticized Lutnick for "his decision to take victims off the payroll on 15 September, while rescuers still searched the rubble" (Knox, 2001, p. 1B). Implied within these criticisms was whether Lutnick was backtracking on his promises.

Lutnick, however, moved to provide $1 million of his own money to start a foundation for victims (Dunne and Sapsted, 2001). In addition, though the company stopped paying salaries after 15 September, Lutnick committed to paying company-provided life insurance even without death certificates. In lieu of continuing salaries, Lutnick committed to pay out 25 per cent of CF's profits for the next five years (Barbash, 2003, p. 67). In all CF provided "life insurance for all of its employees, with a maximum benefit of $100,000". Moreover, CF noted, "families will receive workers compensation payments, social security benefits, will retain 401K plans and in some cases will receive stock options" (DeMarco, 2001, p. 36).

A year after 11 September 2001, CF had made significant profits and Lutnick kept his word to the victim's families. He announced that that CF will "make $100 million and give $25 million to these families. We gave bonuses of $45 million before Thanksgiving to each and every one of those families. You know, this is our life. This is our commitment. It is our mission because these were our friends, our real, real friends" (Insana and Herera, 2002). Lutnick had operated in a manner consistent with his earlier public commitments to provided compensation. He did so by resurrecting a company essentially destroyed by the attacks.

Discussion

The events of 9/11 initiated profound social and organizational changes to a wide variety of organizations and institutions. Clearly, for airlines, travel companies,

government agencies and financial services organizations, this was a significant event that included both powerful lessons and immediate imperatives to change. No organization was more directly affected than CF. Despite being essentially destroyed, the company emerged from the wreck of the World Trade Center and reconstituted and renewed itself around a new *raison d'etre*; that of helping the families of victims. This was a radical departure for a firm previously known for its cutthroat approach to competition and a relentless drive for profits.

Howard Lutnick's public and compelling response to the devastation of his firm is consistent with the four features of discourse of renewal described earlier. He framed a vision of the firm's future, offered specific commitments and generated support from a wide variety of stakeholders. The discourse of renewal emphasizes the role of the leader in framing the meaning of a crisis event. The opportunity to frame the meaning of the event in terms of a new *raison d'etre* for CF was enhanced by the scale of harm. Lutnick was able to generate and capitalize on the good will created by the disaster. His discourse was both prospective and reconstitutive. CF was recreated out the 9/11 rubble as Lutnick offered a prospective vision of what this reconstructed company would do. The fact that the cause for this disaster was external to CF, and that blame was not an issue, also created a context more conducive to a discourse of renewal. Rather than arguing about blame and cause, Lutnick was able to ask for help and talk about the future. The prospective orientation helped create identifiable goals that individual CF employees as well as other stakeholders could work toward. Lutnick's articulation of a new *raison d'etre* for the firm gave employees, customers and members of the community a focus for their efforts and an outlet for the natural need to do something constructive. Finally, the discourse surrounding CF was provisional in that Lutnick's emotional outpouring of loss and a need to take some action was neither strategic nor pre-planned. The obvious emotional pain, personal loss and sincerity of his response bolstered Lutnick's credibility, even while some critics suggested that he was exploiting the disaster.

Four factors in the case of CF and Lutnick's discourse of renewal warrant special attention. First, the public commitment made by Lutnick on network television the day after the event was significant in generating support and, later, in constraining the organization. Weick (1988) described public commitments as powerful enactments, difficult to deny or undo. The very public and unusual commitment to use company profits to offset the harm cased by an attack on the company created widespread support and goodwill. It also provided a new meaning for the firm's profit-making endeavors. Later, when it appeared that CF might move away from these goals, Lutnick reiterated his public commitments.

A second factor concerns the discourse of renewal framework. In its earlier formulations, discourse of renewal argued that a pre-event reservoir of good will among key stakeholders is necessary for organizations to promote renewal following a crisis. CF did not enjoy such a resource and in fact was known as a firm that emphasized profitability above all else. The nature of the event and the scope of harm, however, overwhelmed this negative reputation and created an outpouring of public sympathy and support. Essentially, the crisis wiped away CF's previous reputation and created an opportunity for Lutnick to recreate his image.

A third conclusion concerns the value basis of renewal discourse. In general, discourse of renewal is grounded in a larger set of values and ethics, such as

commitment to community and employees and a sense of corporate social responsibility. In the case of CF and the 9/11 attacks, the values that emerged and supported a discourse of renewal concerned helping the victims and reducing the harm to families. The values Lutnick proposed for a renewed CF moved beyond mere profit-making.

Fourth, the organizational discourse examined here involves messages primarily communicated through public or external communication channels. While Lutnick did meet with surviving employees individually and in small groups, few public records of these meetings exists. Moreover, as with many crises, internal channels of communication were disrupted or destroyed. Lutnick, as with many CEOs facing crisis, was forced to turn to public channels of communication. In addition, it was key in this case for Lutnik to not only convince his employees that the company could survive, but to garner wide spread support from external groups, especially customers and regulators.

Finally, it is important to point out that Lutnick's discourse of renewal might be perceived by some as exploiting the crisis and the victims of the 9/11 disaster. In particular, advertisements announcing that CF was back in business were judged by some as in poor taste. Lutnick's tearful request that money managers send CF business so the company could help the families was also critiqued as self-serving. At the time, other organizations, including some charitable groups, faced similar charges. Discourses of renewal often are susceptible to these kinds of charges. Lutnick's personal loss and obvious sincerity, however, helped diffuse these criticisms. His behavior was ultimately judged as an example of responsible social conduct in the face of a devastating loss.

Conclusion

Crises are likely to become increasingly common events in the life of organizations. Managers, therefore, will be required to respond to the radical changes, disruptions and uncertainty imposed by crisis. Conventional wisdom suggests that crises are primarily negative events creating severe hardship and organizational decline. The ability of organizations like CF to survive, rebuild and even renew themselves will depend on the ability to learn from these events, create a new sense of normal and constitute compelling and meaningful discourses that promote cooperation, support and renewal. This discourse of renewal creates an opportunity after a crisis to fundamentally re-order the organization down to its core purpose. Crises, in these cases, create not only severe devastation, but a unique opportunity for systemic change and fundamental re-invention. In normal times, such fundamental change would require long-term strategic efforts as well as major investments of time and resources without guaranteed success. Crises, however, disrupt the status quo in basic ways allowing for new assumptions, methods and organizational values to emerge. Many outdated assumptions, impediments, inertia and political resistance to change are removed during a crisis. Attention and energy are focused on the immediate and obvious need. While CF remains a company cut from the tough tradition of Wall Street, its culture and mission has been fundamentally altered by the events of 9/11 and the resulting effort to provide support to the families. For CF, 9/11 was not only a time of destruction and loss, but also a time of change and renewal.

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