

**GUIDING ORGANIZATIONS THROUGH
TRANSFORMATIONAL
CHANGE AND
CRISIS**

by

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ABSTRACT

With sensemaking as a framework, the researcher used document analysis and semi-structured interviews to examine the main institutional logics, culture, and values used in communication from university leaders related to changes in response to crisis. Qualitative data from analysis of written communication from the first four months of the COVID-19 pandemic and interviews with presidents and chief communication officers (CCOs) were consolidated to address the research questions: (1) What sensemaking strategies do university leaders employ to frame organizational events and actions? and (2) Are institutional logics and culture used within leadership communication related to university presidents' framing of the change process, and if so, how are they related?

Participants were limited to the presidents and chief communication officers of institutions within a large university system in the southern United States. Focused interviews with six university presidents and four CCOs and written communications from eight universities comprised the data set. The following conclusions were drawn from the findings:

- Through content analysis of 118 artifacts (presidential communication issued between March 2020 and June 2020), the researcher found eight individual codes used to communicate changes necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic: Health and Safety, Caring, Retention, Student Centered, Challenge, Change, Online Instruction, and Continuity of Learning.

- Interviews with university presidents and CCOs yielded data that coalesced in six themes: Caring, Change, Retention, Reaction, Values, and Sensemaking.
- In interviews, CCOs and presidents stated that they were aware of the presence of institutional values in leadership communication related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the changes it necessitated; however, the majority did not indicate that the inclusion of values and culture was conscious.

The diagnostic data gathered in this study may be used in a prescriptive manner to craft communication related to changes in response to crisis. Based on the findings, concrete and actionable recommendations are provided on how to use sensemaking in communication to help stakeholders comprehend the necessary changes when crisis is encountered.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Colleges and universities throughout the world were forced in early 2020 to move to online delivery of classes and implement work-from-home arrangements for faculty and staff members to slow the spread of COVID-19. As of March 2023, the novel coronavirus had infected more than 102 million individuals and killed more than one million people in the United States (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022). The pandemic precipitated a crisis that has caused transformational change on campuses, requiring the implementation of new modes of learning and communication to continue providing educational opportunities for students (Busteed, 2021).

When a university undergoes a significant change, ensuring that this change is accepted at all levels of the organization is a principal goal if the transformation is to succeed. Crises in an organization can bring about transformational change, and leadership communication is necessary to help the organization find its way through associated challenges (Ulmer et al., 2011). Even when a crisis is not the cause of transformational change, leadership must help stakeholders comprehend their role and the need for change within the organization (Kezar & Bernstein-Serra, 2020).

To ensure that the changes needed to keep students, faculty, and staff healthy and productive throughout a pandemic, established organizational culture and logics as well as current best communication practices should be used jointly to create the connection between leadership messages and acceptance of change in an organization (Coverley & Valentine, 2014; Kezar & Eckel, 2002). In addition, communication theories focused on interpersonal behaviors and change management can be used to frame sensemaking within an organization that is going through crisis or change (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Kezar, 2013).

Statement of the Problem

The problem investigated in this study was the method university leaders utilize to help stakeholders accept change that is caused by crisis. During a time of organizational transformation in response to a perceived crisis, communication frequency from both named and perceived leaders, known as change agents, can impact employee perception and acceptance of changes (Rogers, 2003). Frequency of communication, however, is not the only factor that impacts transformation acceptance. The use of specific words and phrases can impact the acceptance of the uncertainty accompanying crisis and the change that happens afterwards (Kendall & Tannen, 2001; Weinberg et al., 2015). Specific words and phrases often focus on convincing the organization to work as a collective to achieve the goal of the change, and they help ensure the transformation is accepted and implemented (Tannen, 1990).

Higher education leaders must utilize sensemaking techniques and include established organizational culture to persuade stakeholders that change is not so far removed from the organization's culture and values to help them embrace the possibility

of change (Coverley & Valentine, 2014; Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Kraft et al., 2018).

However, finding the solution to this challenge of ensuring that the change is accepted is limited by resources, acceptance of established culture, and the very rigid, change-averse culture inherent in higher education (Cho & Taylor, 2019; Fernandez & Rainey, 2006; Kezar & Bernstein-Serra, 2020; Stensaker, 2015). Though the current challenge for chief communication officers (CCO) and university leaders is successfully executing change related to COVID-19 and the continuing pandemic, change management and the sensemaking function connected to change and crisis will continue to be relevant for organizations (Fisher et al., 2016; Fulmer & Ostroff, 2016). As universities continue to grow and change, leaders will continue to need to use communication effectively to integrate change in change-averse cultures (Stensaker, 2015). Change management will continue to be a problem for all organizations, especially those organizations focused on higher education (Kezar & Bernstein-Serra, 2020).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the main institutional logics, culture, and values used in presidential communication related to changes that are precipitated in response to crisis (Blaschke et al., 2014; Parsells, 2017; Rogers, 2003; Weick et al., 2005). The connection between the use of sensemaking and organizational logic and culture in presidential communication at institutions of higher education is an area ripe for study.

Research Questions

This study found answers to the following research questions:

RQ#1: What sensemaking strategies do university leaders employ to frame organizational events and actions?

RQ#2: Are institutional logics and culture used within leadership communication related to university presidents' framing of the change process, and if so, how are they related?

Significance of the Study

During crisis or change, institutional leaders often expect change in stakeholder behavior. During the pandemic, university campuses sent both students and employees home to work and study in order to protect individuals from the spread of the virus. This behavior and others were foreign for 4-year universities that deliver educational opportunities to traditional-age students in primarily a face-to-face format. The connection between organizational culture and values used in leadership communication can be used to help university stakeholders comprehend (make sense) of expected behaviors. The research delivered concrete and actionable advice related to how sensemaking should be used when change management is needed or when crisis is encountered.

Assumptions

Within this study, the researcher, who is a chief communication officer for a university, assumed that all universities made sweeping changes to preserve the health of faculty, staff, and students during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the researcher assumed that university presidents working in conjunction with university CCOs

communicated with their stakeholder groups more during the pandemic. The researcher also assumed values, culture, and logics are used regularly in institutional communication, especially communication designed to inspire change within an organization. Finally, the researcher assumed that all universities have individual cultures that are defined by their stakeholders and reinforced through thought, words, and actions (Bolman & Deal, 2017).

Delimitations

To complete this study of sensemaking within leadership communication, the researcher has imposed several delimitations. These delimitations were designed to restrict the scope and focus of the study and to make the study achievable (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). First, the researcher delimited the study to the exploration and explanation of change management related to crisis and using institutional culture and values.

As a further delimitation, written communication from the first 4 months of the pandemic focused on change resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic comprised the first dataset for the study. The second dataset was comprised of interviews with presidents and CCOs. By fixing the boundaries of this study on communication related to change and those related to this specific change in particular, the researcher necessarily excluded normal communication, where more sensemaking and normally focused institutional logics may be found (Brown, 2021; Rowlinson et al., 2014). The study included public, 4-year universities in a large university system in the southern United States, a delimitation that may impact the transferability of the study's results.

The study was also delimited to communication from university presidents, excluding communication from other levels of the organization. This delimitation limited

the voices from other levels of the institution. This delimitation was necessary to restrict the amount of communication analyzed to a reasonable level (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019).

The choice to include universities that function within a university system limited the discoverable institutional logic within communication because each university also communicated information according to requirements and restrictions of the system itself. This limitation did not, however, influence the true institutional logic unearthed in this study.

A final delimitation was the use of qualitative methods rather than quantitative or mixed methods. This limitation restricted the researcher's ability to gauge the effectiveness of sensemaking strategies. In essence, the use of qualitative methods limited the ability of the researcher to see if sensemaking was successful and if stakeholder action occurred.

Limitations

The study included several limitations that restricted the researcher's insight into answers to the research questions. Volume, frequency, and the substance of communication for each of the sampled institutions varied. These variances resulted in representational disproportionality within the written communication examined in the study. Two limitations exist that are related to the interview portion of information gathering. Interviews took place two years after the pandemic began, possibly impacting the interview subjects' memories of those events. In addition, the researcher trusted but was not able to determine the veracity of answers to interview questions.

Theoretical Framework

The framework of sensemaking, or making sense of changes that are occurring in a system or organization, offers many opportunities to examine leadership communication during transformational change or crisis (Cornelissen, 2012; Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). This theoretical framework describes the process designed to help individuals within the organization deal with the ambiguity and uncertainty that accompany change and find their position within the organization's new social order (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). Within this study, sensemaking is an appropriate framework because leaders needed to convince stakeholders to take specific actions that did not necessarily coordinate with the institutions' mission, values, and culture.

Definitions

Change management is a framework that describes the process of implementing change in an organization. Urgency, communicating vision and necessity for the change, and incorporating established organizational culture and structure are integral to the process (Kotter, 1995).

Crisis communication is communication focused on a threat that requires a quick response time and that helps stakeholders make sense of the crisis and engage in actions focused on self-efficacy (Hermann, 1963; Ulmer, 2012).

Diffusion of innovation is the process that describes the communication of a change or innovation over time through members of an organization or social system (Rogers, 2003).

Organizational culture includes values and beliefs that individuals in an organization share. These values govern acceptable behavior within that organization (Schneider et al., 2012).

Organizational communication is communication used to engage members of an organization in a social order to achieve collective goals (Allen et al., 1993).

Organizational logic includes structures and belief systems, such as values, that are used to guide the actions of an organization as well as the actions of its members (Chauvel & Despres, 2004; Thornton et al., 2012).

Sensemaking is communication and activity used to help members of an organization find sense and their role and place within that organization (Weick, 2012).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

As institutions approach the process of transformational change, leaders must communicate efficiently and effectively, particularly when change in the institution is precipitated by a crisis event (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Coombs, 2007; Longstaff & Yang, 2008; Ulmer et al., 2011). When a change is made, leaders must work to help members of the organization make sense of the changes, or they will not be accepted and acted upon. During a time of organizational transformation and the seeming crisis that accompanies it, leadership communication can impact employee perception and acceptance of changes (Rogers, 2003; Ulmer et al., 2011). To increase the likelihood that change will be accepted, leaders must communicate the desired changes and frame them within an established organizational logic or culture so that individuals can understand them and carry out the advocated-for change (Brown, 2021; Kezar, 2013; Stensaker, 2015).

By communicating unfamiliar information in a culturally responsive and respectful way, higher education leaders may ensure their stakeholders are able to accept and make changes as needed (Coverley & Valentine, 2014; Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Kraft et al., 2018). The use of particular words and phrases that are oriented to an established organizational culture can impact the acceptance of the uncertainty that accompanies crisis and the change that inevitably happens afterwards (Kendall & Tannen, 2001; Weinberg et al., 2015). As Cornelissen (2012) stated in his study on sensemaking in

emergencies, familiar language and metaphors are useful in reducing anxiety about uncertain situations.

In order to understand the process of using communication to facilitate change within higher education organizations, this study will utilize the sensemaking theory as a frame (Brown, 2021; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Weick, 1995). This chapter contains an examination of that framework, as well as a discussion of prior research on crisis communication, change management, and organizational culture and identity. Comprehension of these research topics is integral to understanding the sensemaking frame and how it is used in leadership communication, and those form the foundation for this research study (Balogun et al., 2015).

Theoretical Framework

When an organization undergoes change or crisis, members of that organization must reconcile their prior beliefs with the new reality precipitated by the change or crisis (Cornelissen, 2012; Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). This process was first defined as sensemaking – literally making sense of changes that are occurring in a system or organization – by psychology professor Karl Weick in the mid-1990s, and it became a theoretical framework for the organizational process designed to help individuals within the organization deal with the ambiguity and uncertainty that accompany change (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Parsells, 2017; Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). Sensemaking is responsive to the needs of members of the organization, and it can often be reciprocal between both leaders and followers (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Kraft et al., 2018).

Sensemaking is inherently focused on an individual finding order in a social structure (Baxter & Eyles, 1997; Kraft et al., 2018; Maitlis, 2005; Patriotta & Gruber,

2015). The theory is an appropriate framework for a study focused on determining how leadership helps members of a higher education organization find structure and their place within an organization when dealing with change processes or crisis events (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Coverley & Valentine, 2014; Weick et al., 2005). Sensemaking theory also centers on message interpretation and the actions taken after sense is made (Mantere et al., 2012; Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005).

Sensemaking is both a communicative and action-oriented process designed to ensure acceptance and the successful implementation of change (Blaschke et al., 2014; Bogdan & Bilken, 2011; Parsells, 2017; Rogers, 2003; Weick et al., 2005). According to Cornelissen (2012) and Kezar (2013), sensemaking is a fluid, continuous process that is used to co-construct organizational identities, and this process often utilizes metaphors to facilitate desired action within an organization. Higher education leaders are charged with ascribing meaning to a change or crisis and with leading their stakeholders, whether they be students, staff, alumni, or community members, to take certain action (Brown, 2021; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Sensemaking helps individual members of an organization find their places in the social structure, but finding these places often only happens through leadership communication (Kraft et al., 2018; Parsells, 2017; Spence et al., 2007; Weick, 1995). A person's identification as a member of the social order in an organization is paramount to the success of sensemaking (Bundy et al., 2013; Gioia & Thomas, 1996).

One challenge with using sensemaking as a theoretical framework for change communication for organizations is that the theory assumes that all individuals within the organization approach communication and the organizational culture with the same

perceptions and expectations (Cho & Taylor, 2019; Sluss et al., 2012). Newcomers to the organization may experience cognitive dissonance with communication, and then sensemaking efforts have the opposite effect. They serve to confuse these stakeholders because the change and accompanying communication disagree with the accepted pattern of the established organizational culture and values (Cho & Taylor, 2019; Kezar & Bernstein-Serra, 2020). In addition, researchers found members of an organization may not accept leaders' attempts to make sense of crises or changes if resources such as funds, personnel, or attention are not evenly distributed within organizational units (Cho & Taylor, 2019; Fernandez & Rainey, 2006). Sensemaking can also be problematic when applied to higher education institutions because these organizations can be focused on maintaining the status quo to the point of ignoring the need for change in an established culture (Stensaker, 2015).

Crisis Communication and Change Management

During crisis or change, stakeholders in the process seek information to help them make sense of what's happening or to tell them what to do (Cortazzi, 1993; Spence et al., 2007; Ulmer et al., 2011). However, a research gap exists when one examines change management and crisis in institutions of higher education (Kezar, 2013). This gap can be tied to change resistance, leadership characteristics, or lack of strategic focus on making change using established business processes (Degn, 2015). Therefore, published studies on crisis and change from business, nonprofit, and governmental studies can help with understanding how the sensemaking process happens within organizations (Shams & Belyaeva, 2019). Communication during both crisis and change management use similar

processes (Yue & Walden, 2022). This literature review will examine prior research in both areas.

Diffusion of Innovation

The theory of diffusion of innovation was born as an explanation and guide for acceptance of agricultural innovations and has grown to encompass the study of acceptance of everything from new fashions to technological innovations (Daniel & Klein, 2014; Denzin, 1971; Rogers, 2003; Singhal, 2006). Diffusion is now used to guide marketing and advertising efforts as well as health communication (Walter, 2016). Diffusion of innovation is one of many sociocultural frames for the examination of communication and its impact on partners in dialogue, whether that communication be spoken or written, and the frame can be applied to any idea that needs to be accepted and implemented (Rogers, 2003; Singhal, 2006).

Sensemaking related to the innovation that needs to be accepted – or the change that needs to be implemented – is framed in two ways: in relation to the return on the investment of the innovation and in relation to acceptance within the social order (Ansari et al., 2010; Daniel & Klein, 2014; Rogers, 2003). Practices and ideas will often be adapted to fit an organization's culture or values, and this adaptation makes stakeholders more likely to see them as making sense and worthy of adoption (Ansari et al., 2010; Daniel & Klein, 2014; Denzin, 1978). Changes must be salient for stakeholders, and opinion leaders, who are often also formal organizational leaders, must be persuasive and communicate the value of the change effectively (Bundy et al., 2013). Jay (2013) found that leaders must be willing to accommodate a stakeholder's interpretation of the change in order to make sense of it and take action.

When working through the process of innovation, it is important for leaders to consider both thought and emotion for their stakeholders (Choi et al., 2011). Kezar (2000) discovered that female leaders in particular were more able to balance the two types of needs for their stakeholders, both in normal times and in times of change or crisis. In organizations where creativity is encouraged and emotional needs are met, diffusion of innovation happens quickly and effectively (Berman & Kim, 2010; Desmond, 2014). Unfortunately, public organizations, including institutions of higher education, are often not the most open to a culture change that encourages innovation and creativity (Berman & Kim, 2010). Blaschke et al. (2014) also found strategic communication of change is cyclical, top-down and bottom-up, in order to persuade stakeholders to make sense of and accept the innovation. These micropatterns of movement in the diffusion of innovation allow for organizational change in cycles (Blaschke et al., 2014).

Diffusion of innovations does not always happen through leadership; interpersonal relationships help to move individuals to make sense of change, accept it, and move forward with action (Fetterman, 1988; Gondo & Amis, 2013; Rogers, 2003; Spence et al., 2007). In addition, new media channels provide their own form of influence (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Leonardi et al., 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1981; Patriotta & Gruber, 2015; Spence et al., 2007). Gondo and Amis (2013) discovered that early adopters of innovations serve as sensemakers and storytellers; they work to persuade others to adopt the change.

Crisis Communication

Research on crisis communication centers on the opportunity for leaders to apply interpersonal communication theories like the prospect of renewal through crisis (Ulmer & Pyle, 2021; Ulmer et al., 2011). The study of crisis communication is rich with discussion of the impact of disinformation and the challenges of educating various populations on proper health behaviors and measures of self-efficacy (Moon et al., 2016; Parsells, 2017; Smith & Wanless, 2020). The flow of information that surrounds a crisis, whether from someone in a leadership position or those who work in an organization and are perceived as opinion leaders, provides ground for study and debate during each crisis or change in an organization (Bolman & Deal, 2017).

Approaches to crisis communication can range from image repair to interaction with members of the media (Avraham, 2017; Ulmer & Pyle, 2021). Among the studies that examined crisis and communication during transformational experiences, like the Hurricane Katrina crisis, communication and action – the integral elements of sensemaking – are framed by interpersonal influence and cooperation within an organization (Garnett & Kouzmin, 2007; Kezar, 2013).

Interpersonal Influence and Crisis

Leadership communication during a crisis is also framed in terms of social acceptance and how challenges themselves can endanger the reputation of leaders and organizations (Brown, 2021; Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Coombs, 2007; Longstaff & Yang, 2008; Patton, 2015; Ulmer et al., 2011). Veil et al. (2008) frame crisis communication in terms of the responsibility of communicators to assist with sensemaking and self-efficacy when time is short and accurate response is crucial to ensure change acceptance and

implementation. Audiences for these leadership communications will necessarily have strong relationships with the leaders who deliver them in order to make sense of the crisis communication and act appropriately (Ulmer et al., 2011). Within the literature, intentional change management is often considered differently from change that is precipitated through crisis, but in both instances, where there is no acknowledgement of established culture and audience needs, reputation and the success of change or crisis response are endangered (Eckel et al., 1998; Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Phillips & de Wet, 2017).

Interpersonal Influence, Culture, and Change

Battilana and Casciaro (2013) tied the effectiveness of change agents' efforts within their organizations to those individuals' ability to overcome resistance. This ability has connections to communication, construction and culture of the organization, and the relationships these individuals create. Strong relationships with fence-sitters who are noncommittal help propel changes toward implementation, and strong ties to resisters who are actively oppositional help change agents achieve their goals only if the change is not likely to cause a significant variation in the way the organization functions (Battilana & Casciaro, 2013).

Higher Education Culture

In what few higher education studies exist, research has shown that institutions are often resistant to change and that radical, transformational change is an unfamiliar concept (Kezar, 2013; Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Reidsema et al., 2013; Rubin, 1982). Sensemaking, an integral part of change management, requires a leader's knowledge of the organization and a consideration of the organization's current culture and values

(Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Mumford et al., 2007). During change, institutions of higher education can be too focused on external stakeholders and programs to the detriment of internal audiences and established culture (Coverley & Valentine, 2014; Salmons, 2015; Stensaker, 2015).

Within the literature, research shows that where there is no acknowledgement of established culture and audience needs, reputation and the success of change or crisis response are endangered (Balogun et al., 2015; Eckel et al., 1998; Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Taylor & Medina, 2013). According to Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991), change communication must make sense to audiences, and a suitable frame for the change helps with acceptance and action. Change demands action, just as the sensemaking cycle is completed through audience action (Brown, 2021; Weick, 1993). Weick et al. (2005) also noted that change communication and sensemaking within an organizational culture help to create a shared understanding of participants' roles within that culture.

Higher Education Change Management and Future Study

While the research is abundant on the use of sensemaking in relation to organizational change in businesses, the study of sensemaking within this context in higher education has only recently begun to appear as an area for research. Higher education's unique culture and resistance to change are areas ripe for future study (Kezar, 2013; Stensaker, 2015). Public higher education organizations are also understudied in relation to organizational culture and communication, perhaps because of their larger scale when compared to private and religious educational institutions (Bastedo et al., 2014; Brown, 2021). Finally, though study has been conducted into changes in higher education because of strategic initiatives, researchers have missed the opportunity to

study scaled culture change that occurs because of a shared crisis event – an event that demonstrates a large-scale challenge to the established culture is needed (Kezar & Bernstein-Serra, 2020; Kezar & Eckel, 2002).

Kezar (2013) analyzed prior research on the topic to find avenues for future academic study. The authors determined that there is a need for research focused on higher education leaders in general, but specifically related to how the change management function manifests in an environment that is inherently averse to change (Kezar, 2013). Among current recommendations for future study are investigating how different types of institutions and their leadership teams are impacted by institutional culture (Brown, 2021; Kezar, 2013). Future research should also focus on the unusually long length of leadership tenure in higher education and how leadership and change teams in higher education tend to depend on the president's personality and strengths (Kezar, 2013).

Organizational Culture and Logics

Research also focuses on organizational culture and logic, the values or messages of an organization, as a way to explain sensemaking within those organizations (Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Liu et al., 2020). Weick et al. (2005) noted that sensemaking within an organizational culture helps to create a shared understanding for participants in that culture, and Stensaker (2015) argued that organizational culture provides a promising frame for future study in higher education. Within organizations, identity, logic, and brand are often tied to leadership, particularly in higher education (Bastedo et al., 2014; Brown, 2021; Kraft et al., 2018). Leaders' values, especially in relation to advocating for change, are important to acceptance of that change (Bastedo et al., 2014). In fact, the

sharing of certain values and organizational logics is not objective; some logics will be shared while others will not (Cho & Taylor, 2019; Kezar & Bernstein-Serra, 2020).

Frames, values, and culture provide a rich toolkit for leadership communication within the organization (Begley, 2004; Brown, 2021; Liu et al., 2020). These elements are reflected in writings, process, and policy-making for organizations (Bastedo, 2009; Kezar & Eckel, 2002). However, Blaschke et al. (2014) discovered culture and values can be isolated from policy- and decision-making in certain institutions. Strategic communication, the construction and sharing of communication in order to achieve a desired goal, is dependent on the reproduction of institutional values to be successful (Cho & Taylor, 2019), and strategic communication works alongside organizational framing to help with sensemaking in organizations (Bundy et al., 2013). The use of metaphors that make sense to stakeholders – words that “fit” the organization – is imperative for a leader’s change communication (Cornelissen, 2012). These organizational messages and metaphors must be used repeatedly and consistently in order to bring stakeholders into agreement with the messaging (Blaschke et al., 2014; Leonardi et al., 2012). When a leader shares his or her vision for the future and is able to help stakeholders frame a new idea within an old frame through communication, the initial portion of the transformation process is considered a success (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Fernandez & Rainey, 2006; Kotter, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). The change is only completely successful, however, when stakeholders act on the leader’s request (Weick et al., 2005).

The leaders of an organization, however, should not be the only determiners of an organization’s culture or values. Coverley and Valentine (2014) advocated for co-

construction to determine institutional culture and values. They discovered that leaders and stakeholders working together are a greater indicator of higher education leaders' respect for established culture and communication styles and thus acceptance of change when necessary (Coverley & Valentine, 2014; Liu et al., 2020). When this respect is shared, significant change is legitimized (Brown, 2021; Kezar, 2000). Reidsema et al. (2013) also found that organizational cultures in institutions of higher education is slow to change, and stakeholders are dependent on respect for the established organizational culture and values to make significant changes. Acknowledgement of the emotional and cognitive functions that are necessary for stakeholders to embrace their positions in a changing social order is an important part of that respect (Cornelissen, 2012). Kezar and Bernstein-Serra (2020) also advocate for aligning changes with established culture and values within an organization in order for transformation to be accepted.

In their seminal work on organizational culture and frames, Bolman and Deal (2017) asserted that culture and frames, which are inherent in institutions, serve to protect stakeholders from uncertainty. Organizational culture and values frame decision-making and can help orient stakeholders with the relevance of change (Bastedo et al., 2014; Brown, 2021; Cornelissen, 2012; Weick et al., 2005). At the heart of a leader's work to help followers make sense of changes is the need to help an individual find his or her place and role within the organization's social order (Brown, 2021; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Weick, 1995).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Institutional logic and culture are tied to change management in organizations, the purpose of this study is to examine the main institutional culture and values used in presidential communication related to changes in response to crisis (Blaschke et al., 2014; Parsells, 2017; Rogers, 2003; Weick et al., 2005). The study focused on finding answers to the following questions in an instrumental fashion:

- What sensemaking strategies do university presidents employ to frame organizational events and actions?
- Are institutional logics and culture used within leadership communication related to university presidents' framing of the change process, and if so, how are they related?

This section of the dissertation further defines the methods used for the qualitative instrumental case study.

Sample Selection

Site Selection

The purposive sample of institutions within a large university system in the southern United States is representative of other similar institutions; it shed light on the

language related to institutional culture that is used in change-management leadership communication.

This sample included 4-year universities that primarily serve undergraduate students in face-to-face classes. They are located in close proximity to one another. These institutions have full-time chief communication officers (CCOs) who provide advice and counsel on communication for each university's associated leaders. In addition, these institutions are located in a state that is typically politically conservative (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022).

This purposive sample was chosen from institutions impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic that meet the following criteria: 4-year, primarily serving undergraduates, and primarily deliver instruction in a face-to-face setting. Eight, 4-year institutions that serve mainly traditional undergraduate students in face-to-face settings were identified within a large system in a southern state. The sample offered the opportunity to engage with information-rich sources and the individuals who serve as presidents and CCOs were willing to engage in the research project (Etikan et al., 2016; Mwita, 2022; Shufutinsky, 2020).

The sample of eight institutions' written communication provided a wealth of data for analysis and provided the opportunity to gain greater insight and construct thick descriptions of the organizational culture used to communicate change. Each institution's president and CCO were then invited to participate in interviews to help determine what is typical within the institutional culture and values of each university as well as the process that defined the construction of written communication for each university. The researcher's connections with colleagues and their interest in the research outcomes

allowed easier and more efficient collection of data and related cultural information to help create a description of change management processes used by leadership.

Enrollment at the sampled institutions ranged from 5,291 at the smallest to 16,046 at the largest. Exact enrollment figures are listed in Table 1; institutional names have been anonymized.

Table 1

Enrollment at Sampled Institutions

<u>Institution</u>	<u>Enrollment</u>	<u>Percent Undergraduates</u>	<u>Percent Graduate Students</u>
Institution A	6,451	91.1	8.9
Institution B	13,497	92.6	7.4
Institution C	10,950	90.4	9.6
Institution D	7,964	81.8	18.2
Institution E	6,285	89.1	10.9
Institution F	16,046	84.1	15.9
Institution G	5,291	83.6	16.4
Institution H	8,726	77.1	22.9

Participants

After the sites were selected, presidents and chief communication officers of the selected universities were identified and approached about participation in the interview portion of the study. Six presidents and 4 CCOs agreed to be interviewed. Interviewed university presidents and CCOs had served their universities for varying times; those figures are listed in Table 2. This information was collected from the various institutional websites. The range in terms demonstrates the diversity in the sample of university leaders and CCOs as well as their probable familiarity with the institution's culture and values.

Table 2

Institutional Tenure of University Presidents and Chief Communication Officers included in Sample

<u>Institution</u>	<u>President</u>	<u>Chief Communication Officer</u>
Institution A	5	
Institution B	13	11
Institution C	1	
Institution D	6	
Institution E	4	22
Institution F	14	2
Institution G		2

Data Collection

Data sources were written presidential communication issued to external and internal stakeholders as well as semi-structured interviews with leaders and CCOs serving the sampled universities. The written communication between March 2020 and June 2020 was obtained from the universities' websites as publicly available documents. In addition, each CCO submitted written information he or she believed was important but not publicly available. The researcher used document analysis as a primary source and semi-structured interviews as a secondary source. Coordination between document analysis and the current institutional culture as reported by presidents and CCOs communication was used to triangulate institutional values expressed in written communication.

Written Communication

Presidential communication is often the method used to frame changes for organizations (Brown, 2021; Kezar, 2013). The COVID-19 pandemic precipitated a crisis

that required the implementation of new modes of learning and communication in order to continue providing educational opportunities for students. In addition, leaders were required to issue large numbers of communications through varying channels in order to convey important information designed to help stakeholders find ways to implement increasing measures of self-efficacy to deal with the pandemic (Ulmer et al., 2011). For this study, only written communication delivered via email between March and June 2020 to campus stakeholders was analyzed.

The sample of leadership communication from March 2020 through June 2020 yielded ample data to conduct content analysis on the communication. However, the numbers of communications issued during the first 4 months of the pandemic varied widely according to the institution (Table 3), and the variances in publicly available leadership communication restricted content analysis. In addition, during the early pandemic, one of the institutions experienced a large catastrophic weather event, which diverted attention from COVID-19 and the required changes.

Table 3

Number of Presidential Communications at Sampled Institutions

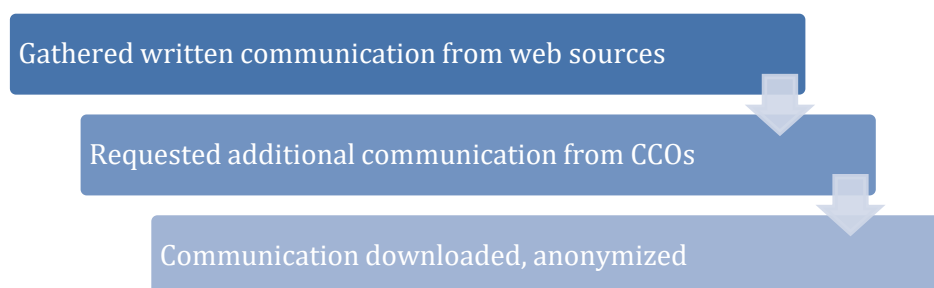
<u>Institution</u>	<u>Number of Communications between March 2020 and June 2020</u>
Institution A	0*
Institution B	16
Institution C	25
Institution D	24
Institution E	29
Institution F	8
Institution G	9
Institution H	7

Note: *Institution A had no publicly available communications and submitted no additional information.

These documents were downloaded, anonymized, and maintained on a thumb drive for future use in analysis. The communication gathering process is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Written Communication Gathering Process



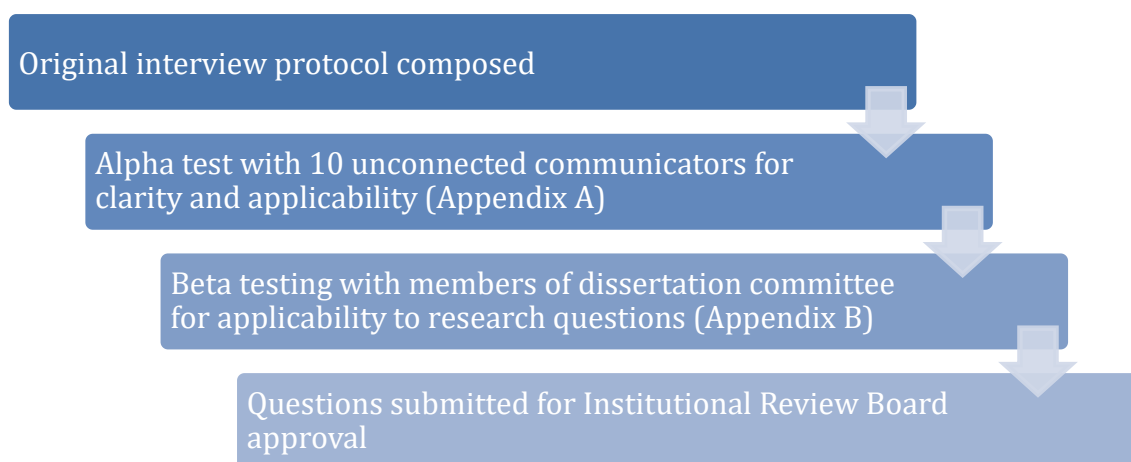
Interviews

Semi-structured interviews following protocols outlined by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) and Stake (1995) with presidents and CCOs from each of the institutions sampled yielded additional information on university culture and each institution's communication processes. Before the interviews, the researcher conducted alpha testing by reviewing the separate protocols for both presidential and CCO interviews with 10 communication professionals who are not connected to the study. This alpha testing was employed to determine whether the interview questions (Appendix A) would yield appropriate answers or if they could be confusing to the interview subjects. After pilot interviews, both the protocol and questions were subjected to beta testing with members of the dissertation committee to determine whether the interview questions would help provide answers to the study's two research questions. After consultation, the questions were

finalized (Appendix B) and submitted as part of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process. This process is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Interview Protocol Development Process



Both CCOs and presidents from the institutions featured in the written communication samples were solicited to participate in synchronous online interviews using Zoom that yielded recordings for later analysis. Each possible participant was emailed (Appendices C and D) to explain the research purpose and problem, and to request participation in a semi-structured interview. Before each interview, the researcher obtained informed consent and written permission to use the interviews for research. Participants were also given a list of terminology (Appendix E) important to the study and interview questions to make the interviews as efficient as possible.

Interviews were conducted at the participants' convenience on Zoom, and the interviews were recorded between Oct. 13 and Dec. 1, 2022. Each interview was transcribed, and the transcriptions were emailed to the individual participants for their

review. Each subject had the opportunity to make corrections for accuracy in the responses as necessary.

Data Analysis

Data collection yielded two different types of information salient to the research study – written communication and interviews. Each of these types was analyzed separately, with the written communication and interviews answering the study’s research questions. Following the initial analysis of both types of data, common themes emerged that related to the values and culture used in presidential communication related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Written Communication

Content analysis of written leadership communication related to the COVID-19 pandemic sent between March 2020 and June 2020 helped determine patterns and dominant institutional messages used to engage in sensemaking for the organization. Written communication during this time period was aimed at helping community members make several changes:

- begin focusing on health and safety of others;
- move coursework and non-academic work online;
- practice specific health and safety measures – masks, handwashing, and distancing; and
- begin return to campus procedures.

In order to develop common categories from the artifacts used in the study, first-level content analysis used computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) to organize common themes from the artifacts. Before the computer-assisted

organization began, the artifacts were stripped of individual formatting in order to create similarly formatted documents and were anonymized.

The documents were then uploaded to ATLAS.ti (version 23.0.1), an analysis tool that uses artificial intelligence and natural language processing to find common themes from the written artifacts. The software begins with the researcher's insights on language targets and then identifies further instances of the selected language. The researcher first reviewed each written communication, looking for language tied to the COVID-19-required changes outlined above. Then, the researcher identified common language, including numerous mentions of health and safety, change, and students among written communication from all the selected sites.

Because the university system outlined three themes for focus in all communication, the researcher started the analysis process with those codes in mind. Thus, included in every communication should be mentions of maintaining health and safety, continuity of learning and research, and maintaining institutional viability. Through the iterative coding process, which incorporated constant comparison, the codes of Health and Safety, Change, Student Centered, Caring, Challenge, Continuity of Learning, Online Instruction, and Retention emerged. Each of these messaging patterns or themes appeared at least 10 times throughout the written communication. Messaging within the leadership communication led to the themes discussed in Chapter 4.

Interviews

Alongside the analysis of communication artifacts associated with change management related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher conducted interviews (Appendix B) with university presidents and chief communication officers for several of

the sampled institutions. Interviews were solicited from all 8 presidents and all eight CCOs. Only six presidents and four CCOs agreed to be interviewed for the study.

These interviews were recorded, transcribed for analysis, and anonymized. Participants reviewed their interviews for clarification and approved again of the use of their interviews in the research study according to participant validation protocol (Lindheim, 2022).

The interview transcripts were then uploaded to ATLAS.ti (version 23.0.1), and the researcher began to work with the software to find common themes from the interview transcripts. Because a focus of RQ#2 was determining how university leadership framed the change process and communication, the researcher first reviewed the transcripts searching for the same type of language and codes found in the written communication. However, the researcher also looked for mentions of culture, sensemaking, and values. The codes that met a threshold of 20 mentions were:

- caring,
- change,
- reaction,
- retention,
- sensemaking, and
- values.

Trustworthiness

Within qualitative studies, validity and reliability are judged differently than in quantitative inquiry (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). Rigor, as defined by Lincoln and Guba (1986), is the aim of any qualitative inquiry. Thus, this study's goal was to ensure

credibility, applicability, consistency, and confirmability (Alexander, 1982; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Williams, 1986; Yilmaz, 2013). In addition, qualitative methods allow for diversity and flexibility in an inductive study (Shufutinsky, 2020).

The purposive sample allowed an examination of written artifacts and interviews from 4-year universities that primarily serve undergraduates and function in a large university system in the southern United States. The results of the study should be transferable to universities within the southern United States and may also be transferable to 4-year universities within the United States as a whole, as every institution faces similar challenges when faced with implementing change. However, political differences in various areas of the United States may impact the results' transferability to other regions. The study's results likely could not be transferred to universities outside the United States because the experiences and political landscape in other countries may be vastly different from that in the United States.

The researcher consulted members of the dissertation committee and communication scholars from other universities in the data-analysis process as content themes emerged in order to verify if the study was progressing logically (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For instance, when interviews revealed the possibility of finding additional themes, one dissertation committee member said to begin searching for instances of those themes in the written communication. Thus, the members' input focused the analysis and discussion of salient themes throughout the process.

Triangulation

Separate examination of written artifacts and interview results as well as the combination of results from these data sets helped verify pertinent institutional messaging points in COVID-19-related communication and create a unified case study for all the sites sampled. This study used both multiple sources of data and multiple methods to ensure greater reliability of the analysis, and triangulation helped ensure internal validity and reliability of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake, 1995).

The use of multiple methods of data collection allowed the findings in one form of analysis to be compared to the findings from the other. Thus, finding the same common themes through interviews reinforced the accuracy of themes drawn from the written communication artifacts. The use of multiple sources of data allowed comparison and verification of findings from the original artifact analysis. In addition, the iterative coding process helped create a richer description of the leadership communication processes used during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Researcher Positionality

The researcher currently serves as chief communication officer at a 4-year university in the southeastern United States. In this role, she assists with the processes of change management and creating communication throughout the organization for both internal and external stakeholders. Throughout the process, the researcher worked to remain objective while being aware of the challenges involved with losing objectivity while working to find both the answers to the pertinent research questions and actionable intelligence from the study. Her discipline-specific knowledge, however, benefited the study's focus and results.

The researcher believes it is necessary to use institutional values, culture, and logics in communication, especially communication designed to inspire change within an organization. However, she avoided the notion that all communicators use messages and metaphors to achieve sensemaking strategically (Ulmer et al., 2011). As each sample institution had its own culture and messaging, she also avoided the notion that one method of using organizational culture and logics is more valid and valuable than another.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

During crises, leaders must often introduce changes in order to help the organization continue to make progress and continue the institutional mission (Rogers, 2003; Ulmer et al., 2011). This qualitative study was designed to examine the main institutional messaging related to culture and values (logics) used in presidential communication related to changes that are necessary during crisis. Both written communication and interviews revealed the extent to which sensemaking was used to describe change and justify the need for that change. The expected outcome for both CCOs and presidents was that stakeholders would make the requested change, whether that was working from home or engage in online instruction.

Through an analysis of both written communication and interviews from both university leaders and CCOs at 4-year, primarily undergraduate-serving institutions, common messages were found that helped to assist with sensemaking among various stakeholder groups. Within this section of the dissertation, all institution, president, and CCO names have been anonymized. Thus, Institution H coincides with President H and Communicator H, and so on.

Findings

Because sensemaking is focused on an individual finding order in a social structure, the theory is an appropriate framework for a study focused on determining how leadership helps members of a higher education organization find structure – and their places within an organization – when dealing with change processes or crisis events (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Coverley & Valentine, 2014; Kraft et al., 2018; Maitlis, 2005; Patriotta & Gruber, 2015; Weick et al., 2005). Sensemaking theory also centers on message interpretation and the actions taken after sense is made (Mantere et al., 2012; Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). Thus, messaging that leaders utilize to encourage changes is an appropriate way to frame change communication.

Written Communication

Among the eight, 4-year, undergraduate-serving, residential institutions sampled for the study, 118 communications were issued from the beginning of March 2020 to the end of June 2020. Each institution issued varying numbers of written communications and later made those available on the institutional website focused on COVID-19. Those numbers ranged from 0 to 29 publicly available communications; one institution made none of their written communication available for this study (Table 3). This study found patterns of messages and metaphors that helped to explain institutional culture. These messages were focused on helping institutional stakeholders make sense of and accept required changes (Brown, 2021; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The terms Health and Safety, Change, and Student Centered appeared frequently in the first pass through the written communication. In the written documents, the phrase “health and safety” appeared 118 times; it was included in every communication issued

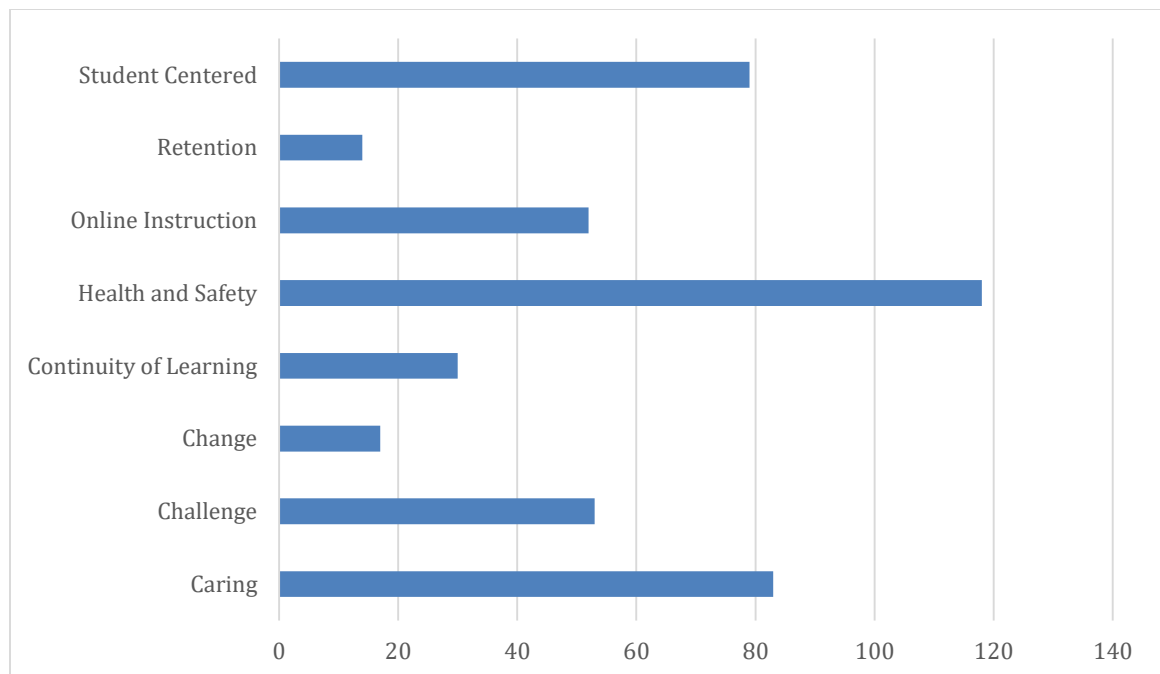
throughout the 4-month time period. Even though the time period was full of change, the word “change” was only used 17 times, and “student centered” was used 79 times in the sampled documents. During the coding process, five more prominent codes surfaced:

- caring,
- challenge,
- continuity of learning,
- online instruction, and
- retention.

Each of these themes appeared with varying frequency (Figure 3).

Figure 3

Themes Found in Written Communication

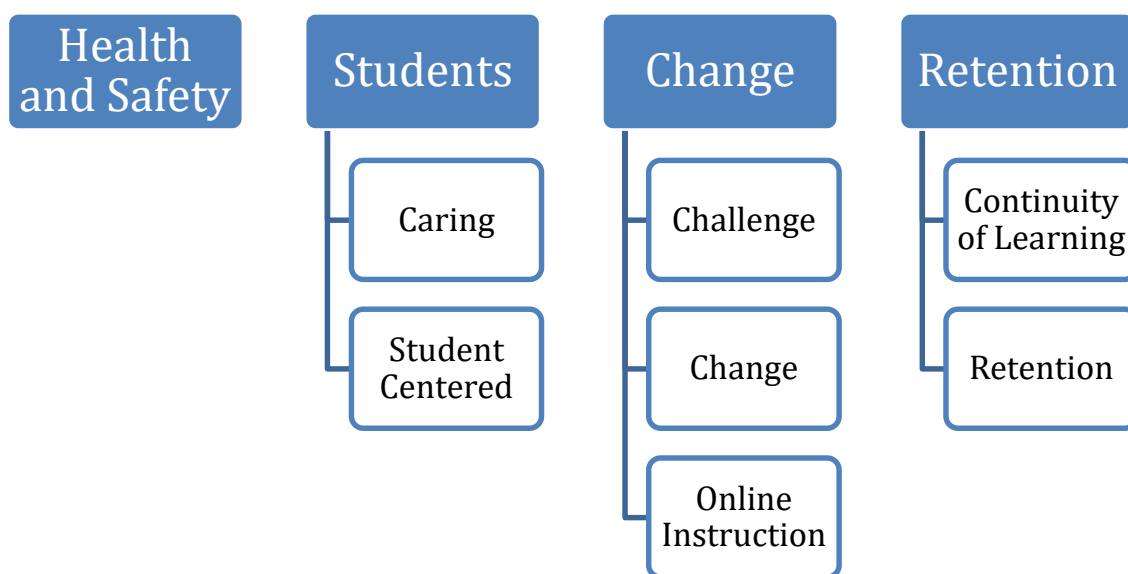


Following the initial coding, the following categories emerged (Figure 4):

- Health and Safety;
- Students – Caring and Student Centered codes;
- Change – Challenge, Change, and Online Instruction codes; and
- Retention – Continuity of Learning and Retention codes.

Figure 4

Categories Created through the Coding Process



Category 1 – Health and Safety

Each of the sampled written communications showed a clear focus on communicating messages of health and safety. Every change necessitated by the pandemic – from moving to online instruction to following social distancing guidelines to wearing masks – was framed as a way to ensure that all university stakeholder groups would be safer and healthier if they embraced these changes.

March 13, 2020, was a pivotal day in the COVID-19 timeline. On that day, the Trump administration declared a state of emergency, and in the home state for each of the sampled institutions, the governor closed all schools and issued a stay-at-home order (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022). As the president of Institution B said in a March 13, 2020, communication, “Please rest assured that we are doing everything possible to minimize disruptions; however, the health and well-being of the [Institution B] family guides our decisions at every step.”

Institution H’s president also framed the move to online instruction as necessary to show caring and concern for the larger community in his March 13, 2020, communication:

Our priority is the health and safety of the campus community. By moving face-to-face classes online, this will allow us to help prevent community spread of the virus and will also help us to protect friends and family from exposure.

The use of this frame continued throughout the stay-at-home and return-to-campus periods. President C noted in his June 5, 2020, communication, “The purpose of the phased approach to reopening businesses and institutions is to move toward normal operations while working to ensure the safety and wellbeing of personnel and the public as the state and its entities reopen.” At Institution D, the president noted health and safety as well as a reliance on medical expertise in a May 7, 2020, communication focused on the institution’s guiding document when stakeholders began returning to campus:

The University’s COVID-19 Task Force has spent considerable time and energy on assembling a draft of our Return-to-Campus Guide, which will help shape our actions in the coming weeks and months ... The document prioritizes safety, amid

business continuity, and is supported by science-based recommendations from multiple authorities ... I hope this plan further demonstrates that our primary focus continues to be the safety and health of our students, faculty and staff. I want to thank each of you for your role in that.

Each institution also employed signage, sneeze shields, floor markers, hand-sanitizer dispensers, and other visible reminders of the necessary changes for health and safety. As President F said in a communication explaining upcoming changes connected to a return to campus:

I want to assure you that when we say that the health and safety of our University family is our primary concern, we mean it. Ensuring your wellbeing during times such as these requires systematic and thorough planning, and that's what we're working every day to do.

Category 2 – Students

The themes of Caring and Student Centered were combined in the Students code group. These themes appeared a total of 162 times, with caring and student-centered messaging dominating leadership communication. In fact, these two themes were so intertwined that they often appeared together as shown in a March 17, 2020, communication from President E:

We often say that [Institution E] is a family. We need to embody that sentiment now more than ever. Students, I encourage you to reach out and help other classmates. Employees, if you are in a position to help a coworker with a heavy workload, reach out to them. We all need to be working as one team through this

process. My hope is that we make it through this as a more efficient university to better cater to our students' needs.

Communication from the beginning of the pandemic, while the greatest number of changes were being made, often brings the two themes together. This March 18, 2020, communication from President B reminds the campus community to have patience – to show caring for one another:

Again, I ask everyone to be patient, to respond to others in a calm and caring fashion, to stop and think about the fact that everything that is different right now is different for the reason that we all need to help preserve the health and safety of ourselves and our fellow citizens while still providing our students with the opportunity to continue making progress toward achieving their educational goals.

This statement also uses messaging focused on retention efforts, a theme that appeared more frequently as campuses began to reopen. This theme will be discussed under the Retention grouping.

Category 3 – Change

Communication and messaging focused on Challenge, Change, and Online Instruction were grouped within the theme of Change. From the initial communication related to the pandemic and throughout each president's messages related to the required changes, communication centered on change and working to help stakeholders become more comfortable with the uncertainty that accompanies crisis and change (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Parsells, 2017; Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). These codes appeared a total of 122 times in the 118 sampled written artifacts.

In his March 20, 2020, communication, President D acknowledges the extraordinary nature of the pandemic when he says, “This week ... has been unlike any other in its history. We are all trying to manage the anxiety and uncertainty that these unprecedented events have provoked.” On March 30, 2020, President F also concedes the difficulty in dealing with change and reminds stakeholders that the state “has experienced moments of uncertainty before, and we have always emerged stronger because of the selflessness of the people who are proud to call the state home.” Each of these statements was made to remind audiences that uncertainty is a part of dealing with the crisis, but stakeholders have the abilities to cope with the challenge.

President E, in his March 23, 2020, communication focuses framing the changes by sharing empathy and support with students:

Conditions and circumstances change daily as we all work together to stay safe, and to help you, our students, continue your educational journey. My number one goal is to see that you complete this semester and graduate on time. With that in mind, I want to focus today’s message on our graduating seniors and graduate students. My goal is for you to receive your degree and enter into the careers for which you have been preparing.

By using the themes of Change and Challenge with students, President E is sharing messages of self-efficacy, a hallmark of crisis and change communication (Ulmer et al., 2011).

One of the most sweeping changes that the pandemic required was the move to online instruction as a result of the stay-at-home order issued March 13, 2020. The theme of Online Instruction appeared 52 times throughout the 118 written communications

issued. Much of the communication about the theme of Online Instruction was linked to other themes such as Health and Safety, Student Centered, and Change. In his May 1, 2020, written communication, President B noted the challenges with online instruction and aligned the struggle with Health and Safety messages:

One of the big challenges for us all has been the disruption of normal campus operations and the related transition to remote delivery of classes. While this change was not something that either our faculty or students necessarily wanted, it was essential to help ensure everyone's health and safety.

Category 4 – Retention

A smaller but still relevant theme in presidential communication between March and June 2020 was Retention. Within this theme, messages focused on Retention and Continuity of Learning were featured 44 times in 118 written messages to stakeholders. This theme did not emerge until a closer examination was completed after presidential interviews revealed that retention was of great concern for university leadership.

A May 29, 2020, message from President C centers on efforts to “return to normal” in order to maintain the university’s business continuity. He says, “We are continuing to focus extensive attention on plans for a return to in-person classes and traditional campus activities for the fall semester and also on recruitment and retention of students for the 2020-21 academic year.” This message in particular reminds campus stakeholders of the importance of helping “continuing students in their return to campus in the fall and [attracting] new students to the university.” President E reminded students in his March 23, 2020, communication: “My number one goal is to see that you complete this semester and graduate on time.”

Messages centered on retention also featured registration reminders and mentions of the universities' function and mission, as seen in this March 26, 2020, communication from President F:

Though the University community is separated, we must come together to protect our academic and research missions and to continue our operational functions. By planning now, we can ensure continuity in these critical areas should colleagues become ill and unable to perform their duties.

President E also reminded campus stakeholders of the importance of maintaining business operations in his March 11, 2020, message, "The health and well-being of our campus is paramount, but second in importance is the continuity of learning in situations like this."

Summary

University presidents used eight individual themes to help stakeholders understand and implement the necessary organizational changes – Health and Safety, Caring, Retention, Student Centered, Challenge, Change, Online Instruction, and Continuity of Learning. The researcher placed each of these themes into an appropriate category – Health and Safety, Students, Change, and Retention.

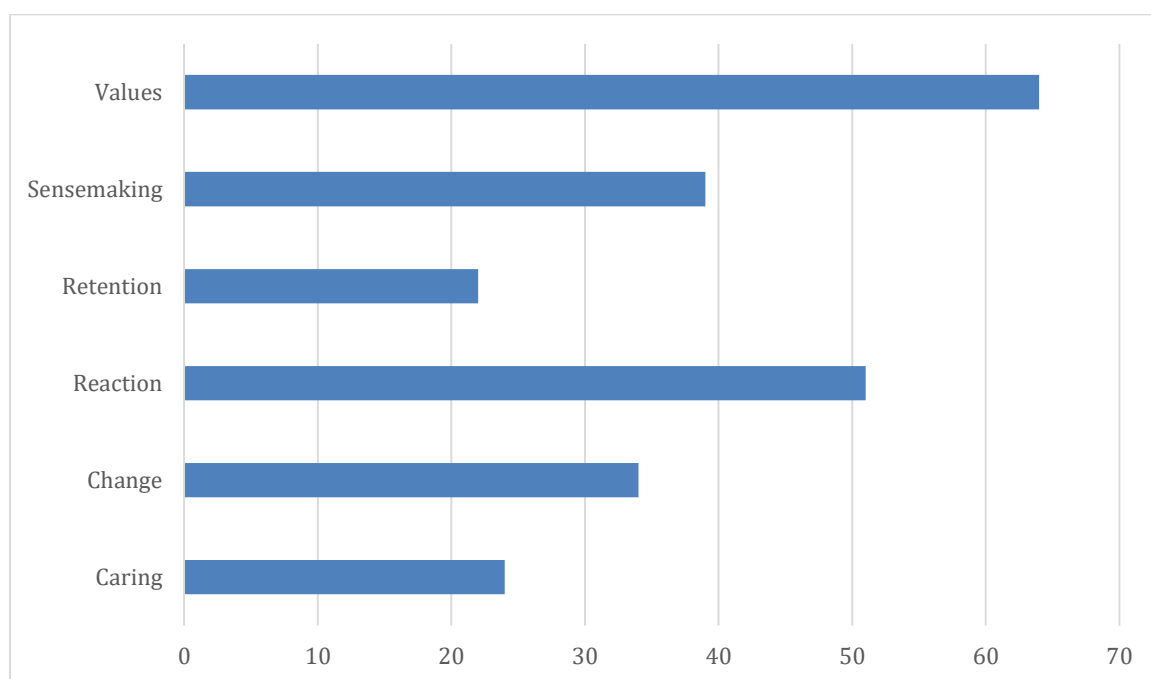
Interviews

Interviews with six university presidents and four CCOs helped determine the answer to RQ# 2. Both president and CCO responses revealed the extent to which the institutional communication assists with sensemaking for COVID-19-related change management according to the institutional culture already in place.

Six separate themes were identified during the analysis of these interviews: Caring, Change, Retention, Reaction, Values, and Sensemaking. The presence of Retention as a theme in this data source influenced further analysis of written communication. Frequency of each of the codes are shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5

Themes Found in Interviews with Presidents and CCOs



Some of the codes echoed those found in the universities' written communication. However, the interview protocol (Appendix B) asked specific and directed questions about each institution's values and reactions to the changes implemented as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. These questions also attempted to determine if presidents and CCOs engaged in sensemaking during the change management and communication process. The questions also focused on the messages or institutional values and culture (institutional logics) used in sensemaking.

Theme 1 – Caring

Each interview subject shared the need to incorporate caring in leadership communication tied to the COVID-19 pandemic. As President B said, “We're all still part of the same family. We're all still together, even though we're apart physically. And so, you know, there were a lot of communications like that where we just really tried to reassure people.” President E echoed this sentiment in his interview, saying, “We try to always put our people first, whether it's caring for them in the midst of a pandemic, making sure they have the food and resources they need, making sure they have the hot spots, making sure faculty have Wi-Fi at their house.”

Several presidents and CCOs noted that caring is one of their institution’s core values, and the frequency with which messaging related to caring occurred in interviews – 24 times within 10 interviews – supports that assertion. In addition, language related to caring occurred in written communication 83 times; its appearance was second only to messaging about health and safety. President B continued his discussion of caring as an important point for messaging:

A lot of our communications, of course, would start with issues relative to safety. And, of course, that's fundamental to caring if you care about your faculty, staff and students, the first thing you want to do is make sure they're safe.

Several of the CCOs also noted the idea that caring for oneself was an important behavior for presidents and CCOs to model and talk about. Caring for self became an important way to ensure audiences could retain and act on messages of self-efficacy when a quick response was crucial to ensure health and safety. When asked about nonverbal communication strategies that incorporated the messaging of caring,

Communicator F said, “So I found myself making myself a little bit more vulnerable ... because I was on stage. I was modeling mental health; I was modeling vulnerability. I was modeling emotion.” Communicator G said she remembered reading a communication issued through Institution G’s student affairs unit and thought it summed the challenges perfectly while incorporating messaging about caring for oneself:

If you were to try to find a statement to try to sum up the care and the understanding ... the ability to know the challenges, it would be, “Life is a lot right now, and that's OK. Here are these resources here to help you.” We know you're dealing with this. A lot of it was the follow-up when it came to mental health resources, making sure that we were very vigilant about using HERFF funds and COVID-19 recovery funds.

President E also noted the importance of showing empathy, the ability to share the feelings of others. “Sometimes people just want someone to listen to them, and they want to complain,” he said, “and they want you to at least empathize with them to the degree possible that you know what they're going through.”

Theme 2 – Change

Codes focused on change appeared 34 times in the interview sessions. Usually, the conversation about change focused on the discomfort associated with changes such as moving quickly to online instruction or work from home arrangements that were forced by the pandemic. These changes were taxing for the traditional, undergraduate-serving and residential universities to execute. President B related the challenge and pain related to communicating those quick changes when he said, “We shut everything down and sent

everybody away and struggled to communicate about that effectively with people both before and after we actually hit that date where we were all supposed to be remote.”

However, not all changes were perceived negatively within universities. Several presidents and CCOs noted they had worked to prepare for catastrophic weather events before the pandemic, and this preparation served them well. Others noted that the pandemic-driven changes would benefit their universities. President D noted:

You know some of the lasting changes that we've implemented. We now have a pretty comprehensive telework policy for the entire campus that is still in place.

We have lots of technology in place so we're able to more easily maneuver

between online and hybrid and on-campus courses, which is, I think, a good thing.

Communicator E noted that his campus was preparing for the inevitably needed storm response with a special online course portal, and their efforts were rewarded:

I worked with my web manager and said, “Hey, let's get this fast tracked, because this could potentially come down as a need.” So we did do that, and it really worked to our benefit when the time came ... or the time got closer for us to all just go home, you know. It was a very short window.

The challenges presented by swift change, as Communicator G noted, were a way for the university to grow. “There were some growing pains,” she said. “There were some growing pains in trying to transition people to online instruction, but I think it was kind of a forced growth.”

Theme 3 – Retention

Though retention as a messaging point was only mentioned 22 times in the 10 interviews, both presidents and CCOs spoke extensively about nonverbal actions that

were tied to retention efforts – either directly or indirectly. From delivering laptops and Wi-Fi hot spots to students to changing the university’s homepage, the interviews showed that most institutions changed their basic operations to focus on retention efforts.

Communicator E noted, “We ceased from recruiting at that point and went into survival mode to make sure that our current students were able to continue learning.” These efforts were often tied to the institutional value of caring for stakeholders during the challenging pandemic times, but the messaging had a secondary focus on retention for current students.

Communicator F said discussions on retention were often tied to current students and their parents and other stakeholders who were engaging in debate about the value of a postsecondary education. Communicator F added, “We're feeling even more pressure in constituent relations to make people feel like they are getting something valuable for their money. It was a redrawing of the maps, a rethinking. What is our role to our revenue-providing customers?” This idea of ensuring the value of higher education was echoed in the interview with President C:

Then the value piece ... we just tried to make sure that our students understood that, whether we were delivering a course in a face-to-face format or delivering a course in an online format, the material that was being covered was exactly the same, just the format that the students learned in was going to be a little different.

Shifting campus employees to a work-from-home situation also created issues for retention, according to several of the interviews. Communicator G said current students who are used to almost instant response because of their familiarity with social media became disgruntled with the lack of attention, complained, and threatened to withdraw

because of it. “That's the challenge,” she said. “How to deal with the students who are trying to drop courses and couldn't get anyone on the phone. It's one of those things. We're just in a situation where people expect instantaneous response.” Communicator E, however, noted that there were definite ways to improve retention through communication:

For instance, we had a student who was from San Francisco, and we found out that he was actually walking three miles to the local library to go and get Internet access. So when we found that out, we worked with our foundation. We tried to identify those students that we could send hotspots. We got the foundation to purchase hotspots, and we sent those to them so that they could have the access to continue their school work.

Thus, in some instances, presidential communication was able to strengthen retention efforts.

Theme 4 – Reaction

University presidents and CCOs provided the most vivid and abundant responses when asked about community reaction to COVID-19 communication. These reactions often taught CCOs where improvement in organizational communication should happen, according to several interviews. Communicator B said he thought the challenges could be attributed to communication overload:

As you know, communication is not communication until the message is received as it needs to be received. Me just saying the words doesn't mean communication is happening, and so I think towards the back end, it kind of got to that, people were no longer paying attention.

While a majority of the feedback for both presidents and CCOs was positive, President C tied University C's positive feedback to the institution's value of transparency:

I can say that the faculty senate and the faculty seem to be pleased with how we handled the transition back to campus. Again, because we were very, very transparent about what would be required ... We didn't have a whole lot of folks who seemed to be displeased with how informed they were being kept. And as a result of that, I think people were comfortable.

President A, whose institution suffered a catastrophic weather event a few months into the pandemic, noted that there was not a lot of feedback, but his community was suffering through another crisis. However, "We didn't have a lot of questions from students or parents coming forward," he said, "which kind of gave us an indication they were getting the message."

Much of the feedback, many of the interview participants said, was related to the politicized nature of the pandemic and the state's response to it. "Vaccines became available," President F said. "The anti-vaxxers started responding, so you had to lay out pretty clearly why you were doing what you were doing." President C noted that the other viewpoint was apparent when hearing from many faculty upon return to campus:

There was a considerable amount of pushback that very first semester after the faculty started to have to report back to campus and started to have to teach face-to-face classes. People have since adjusted. You don't hear so much of that now.

Reaction from various stakeholder groups, a number of the university leaders said, was moderated when the choice to implement change was explained.

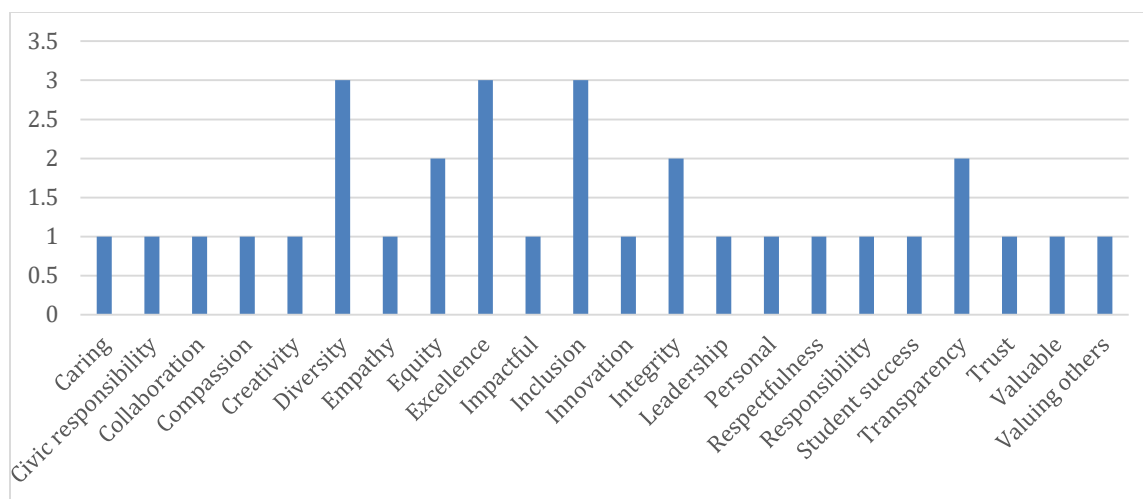
Theme 5 – Values

Through interviews, even when questions did not specifically focus on questions of institutional culture or values, it was the leading theme. The interviews included 64 messages related to values. In fact, both presidents and CCOs brought the discussion of values into other questions dealing with changes or stakeholder response to those changes.

When asked what their institutional values were, every respondent was able to name at least three different values. The most frequently cited values were excellence and diversity or some variation of diversity such as equity or inclusion. Almost every president or CCO cited one of these two values (Figure 6).

Figure 6

Reported Institutional Values with Relative Frequency



Each interview subject also noted that the value of equity gained importance in communication as the pandemic progressed. Each university's communication, many said, focused on the importance of caring for all students. That value was shown through

nonverbal actions like ensuring students had access to technology or increased support from staff and faculty members.

President D noted that, although diversity, equity, and inclusion are among the university's values, deficits in execution were seen:

I think the pandemic showed us that there are many inequities that we didn't recognize, and so making sure everyone had hotspots and Wi-Fi and the information technology necessary. That was just one example of – we need to provide that to make sure there is an equitable experience.

Communicator B noted that exhibiting values is particularly challenging when the campus community is scattered. For his university, written communication became a way to share their value of caring:

The caring really did bubble to the top. And again, I think that's what [President B] was so focused on – communicating regularly, communicating with precision, because that illustrates our concern for you and that illustrates that we're still about not trying to hide anything.

Interview participants also noted that leaning on their values as communication guides is not a new behavior inspired by the pandemic. Instead, as Communicator E said, “It is something that we always go back to when having those conversations with community leaders and stakeholders about who we are as a university, and what we stand for, and what our values are.”

Theme 6 – Sensemaking

Presidents and their CCOs understood the importance of helping stakeholders inside and outside the university understand the reason for pandemic-related changes. Of

change communication, President D said using his institution's values in messaging was one of his primary concerns. "We needed to provide our plans and describe how our operations would fit the protocol," he said, "and at the same time focus on our values."

He also acknowledged that incorporating the reasoning behind decisions is important to stakeholders – especially when institutional values will help them make sense of the changes. "Generally when changes happen, I think it's important to communicate why," he said. "What's causing this? What's necessitating the change? And be fully transparent about it. You get a much better reaction and much better result."

Communicator F noted that her university's culture was centered around the idea that leaders make the decisions and communicate the reason for those decisions. "There's a very strong sense here that leaders make decisions," she said, "and we are waiting for them to make the decisions." Though the university culture and the logic behind waiting for a president to lead through the challenges was foreign to her, it illustrates the importance of sensemaking through leadership communication when an institution is going through changes. Communicator G echoed the belief that university stakeholders waited for the president to make and communicate decisions: "I think he understood that it's important that they hear from the overall leader saying 'I understand, and we're all going through this together. And here's what we plan to do.'"

President B acknowledged that his communication helped stakeholders make sense of changes required because of COVID-19. "We're doing all of these things," he said. "We always try to frame the communication around those core values in that way." He went on to say that making sense for different audiences could look somewhat different:

It's a little bit different discussion for the faculty than it was for the students. It's the same grade accommodations, and it was the same overall message within that framework, but they need to hear the rationale from their perspective. You know, as a student, why is this appropriate? Why does it make sense from a faculty perspective? Why is it appropriate? Why does it make sense? Why is it fair? And so, I think to me the shift in communication for your audiences frequently, especially during COVID, was about that purpose. You're trying to make it make sense from their particular perspective. It's not a different message.

President B also noted that sensemaking will use different language depending on their communication needs. “The different members of the campus community will receive and interpret a message differently based on their particular perspective and background and everything,” he said.

Summary

Interviews with six university presidents and four CCOs yielded data that coalesced in six different themes – Caring, Change, Retention, Reaction, Values, and Sensemaking. The Values theme yielded a rich picture of the ways that college presidents exhibited their institution’s culture and values through communication and self-reported action.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered a crisis on college campuses throughout the world. In order to respond to the crisis, universities had to send students home from residential-living facilities, faculty and staff had to learn to work from home, and learning communities had to engage in online instruction. Each of these changes was transformational for a traditional 4-year university that primarily serves undergraduate students (İpek & Karaman, 2021). When a university undergoes a significant change, ensuring that this change is accepted at all levels of the organization is a principal goal if the transformation is to succeed (Brown, 2021; Kezar, 2013; Stensaker, 2015). Crises like the COVID-19 pandemic bring about transformational change in an organization, and leadership communication is necessary to help the organization find its way through the associated challenges (Ulmer et al., 2011).

Many of the required changes were completely foreign to students, faculty, and staff in 4-year, primarily undergraduate-student-serving institutions. University leaders need to help their stakeholders understand why changes are necessary and appropriate (Damschroder et al., 2022). Written communication was used to share information on how individuals were expected to respond, and university leaders used sensemaking to help stakeholders build a bridge.

between current university culture and behaviors necessitated by the crisis (French & Holden, 2012).

Because institutional culture and values (institutional logic) are tied to change management in organizations, this case study examined the primary institutional messaging used in presidential communication related to changes precipitated by crisis, specifically the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the study investigated the connection between the use of sensemaking and organizational culture in presidential communication at institutions of higher education.

In this study, written leadership communication issued between March 2020 and June 2020 and interviews with presidents and CCOs were analyzed in order to determine if there is a connection between university culture and sensemaking. The use of specific words and phrases that are inherent to an organization's culture – institutional logics – can impact acceptance of the change that must happen (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Brown, 2021). This study found that leaders either consciously or unknowingly employed sensemaking strategies in order to convince their stakeholders to engage in new behaviors. This chapter will focus on findings from the research, conclusions from those findings, and suggestions for future research.

Summary of Findings

Through content analysis of 118 artifacts from presidential communication issued between March 2020 and June 2020, the researcher found eight individual codes were used to communicate to stakeholders to implement changes necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Those codes were Health and Safety, Caring, Retention, Student Centered,

Challenge, Change, Online Instruction, and Continuity of Learning. These codes were grouped into the categories of Health and Safety, Student, Change, and Retention.

Analysis of written communication from 8 universities in a large university system in the southern United States revealed that leaders utilized 8 codes within 3 categories to communicate the need for institutional change in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. None of these categories operated independently of the others. Instead, they worked as a unit to help achieve sensemaking for university stakeholders and persuade them to adopt behaviors to adapt to the pandemic.

Health and Safety was the primary focus for leadership communication, especially at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. All of the required behaviors from university stakeholders involved modifying actions – working from home, online education, and other changes – in order to help stakeholders stay safe and healthy). These messages of self-efficacy are one of the primary reasons institutions engage in crisis communication (Ulmer et al., 2011). In addition, framing changes within the theme of Health and Safety and connecting those changes to medical advice assists with sensemaking for behaviors that do not connect to the established institutional culture. One would expect to find this theme frequently in written communication from March 2020 to June 2020 because institutions were all making radical changes related to the pandemic (Leoste et al., 2021).

Messages categorized in the Student thematic group, which included the themes of Caring and Student Centered, also featured prominently in written presidential communication. Each of these themes ties to the connection students should feel to their universities – being a part of the university “family” – or the mission that faculty and

staff should work toward achieving, ensuring students make positive progress toward their degrees (Leoste et al., 2021). By linking behavioral changes to the institutional mission and values, university presidents were able to persuade stakeholders that their adapted behavior – wearing masks, engaging in online classes, or working from home – is in congruence with the essential function of the university. This framing helped stakeholders avoid cognitive dissonance when they thought about the required behaviors and then put those behaviors into action (Liu et al., 2020).

The Change messages group, which included the themes of Challenge, Change, and Online Instruction, featured examples of communication that used language as an attempt to alleviate uncertainty for institutional stakeholders. Many of the written communications focused on the discomfort that accompanied the institutional response to the pandemic, and leaders sought to show empathy for their stakeholders through messaging within this theme. Leaders also sought to inspire stakeholders while framing change as an opportunity to improve processes and outcomes for students.

Messages that focused on Retention, which included themes of Continuity of Learning and Retention, reminded students of the reasons they were pursuing college degrees in the first place. This messaging directed students' attention on displaying the behaviors that would help them – and their communities – get beyond the pandemic. Retention messaging also reminded faculty and staff of the business function for a university. While the universities within the sample are all public institutions and receive state funding, tuition dollars make it possible for the institutions to remain viable. By framing adherence to changed behaviors as necessary for the universities to remain open,

institutional leaders remind faculty and staff of their responsibility to students and their communities.

Sensemaking is focused on an individual finding order within a social structure, like a university (Kraft et al., 2018). The messaging themes used by university presidents to help their stakeholders find their place within a changing organization included Health and Safety, Student, Change, and Retention. Health and Safety messaging framed stakeholders as members of a larger community whose members depend on one another in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Student messaging and the related Retention messaging reminded students that their job while in college is to obtain a degree and work toward their careers. Retention and Student messages focused faculty and staff on their roles as facilitators for the university mission of educating students for productive careers. University leaders also worked to remind faculty and staff of their obligation to students, to retaining them and ensuring that the educational mission of the university continued beyond the pandemic. Finally, messaging in leadership communication that focused on Change reminded all university stakeholders that their role within the institution was to continue to make progress, despite the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Interviews with six university presidents and four CCOs yielded data within six different themes – Caring, Change, Retention, Reaction, Values, and Sensemaking. These themes help determine the answer to RQ# 2.

Each interview subject was able to share a list of values that university stakeholders claim as their own. These values comprise an important part of an institution's culture, and they help to form the framework for leadership communication

that focuses on change (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Liu et al., 2020; Ulmer et al., 2011). By aligning changes with the established culture and values, changes are more likely to be accepted and implemented (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). Interviewed presidents and CCOs cited the following values as an important part of their institutional culture: caring, civic responsibility, collaboration, compassion, creativity, diversity, empathy, equity, excellence, impactful, inclusion, inclusiveness, innovation, integrity, leadership, personal, respectfulness, responsibility, student success, transparency, trust, valuable, and valuing others.

Connections in the Data

After these values were compared to the themes in the written communication, several parallels emerged. Caring – and the synonyms compassion, empathy, respectfulness, and valuing others – appeared as a prevalent theme in both written leadership communication and interviews. In addition, the stated values that center on diversity, including equity and inclusion, denote caring for all individuals in an organization and offering them the appropriate opportunities to achieve academic or career success. Both presidential and CCO interviews also compared behaviors like integrity, transparency, and trust within communication to the theme of caring for university stakeholders. Leaders said their commitment to transparency in communication was connected to showing their care for campus stakeholders.

The stated values of collaboration, creativity, impactful, and innovation are all connected to presidential messaging focused within the theme of Change. In interviews with university leaders and CCOs, behaviors that demonstrated innovation and creativity, such as moving quickly to implement online instruction or connecting students with the

resources they needed to pursue educational continuity, were discussed. Collaboration between presidents and their CCOs and other members of their leadership teams, as well as those from other institutions, was mentioned as well. Each interview subject discussed behaviors that required university stakeholders to embrace change as well as their new roles during the pandemic. In addition, some interview subjects noted that, although there was pain involved with the innovation, changes precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic brought their institutions into a more modern way to approach education. These innovative behaviors served as important indicators of the connection between the institutional values and messages that were focused on Change.

The stated values of excellence, leadership, and valuable are connected to the messaging theme of Retention found within written communication. Presidential communication that illustrated Retention messaging explained the appropriate behaviors for faculty and staff that would help each institution retain students and continue with business operations. In addition, more subtle Retention messaging reminded students of their roles in the university. In addition, some communication focused on Retention told stakeholders that certain expected behaviors had not changed. As a part of their roles, faculty and staff members were expected to continue their work and students were expected to continue making academic progress.

Finally, the messaging theme Student encompasses the stated values of responsibility and student success. Presidential messages that focused on showing caring for all members of the community showed stakeholders their role in the organization involved assuming responsibility for all members of the community. In addition, messaging that reminded stakeholders of their shared experience in service of the

institution and community connected them to one another. As President E implored the campus community:

Students, I encourage you to reach out and help other classmates. Employees, if you are in a position to help a coworker with a heavy workload, reach out to them. We all need to be working as one team through this process. My hope is that we make it through this as a more efficient university to better cater to our students' needs.

This statement is an exemplar of communicating the values of an institution and helping members of that community find their place within a “new normal.”

In interviews, both university presidents and CCOs explained their institutional culture and values (logics). A review of written messages and their themes with these values in mind shows ample evidence of the use of institutional culture to help stakeholders make sense of their existing and changed roles in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendations for Practice

In their interviews, CCOs and presidents said they were aware of the presence of institutional values in leadership communication related to the COVID-19 pandemic and required changes. A majority did not state, however, that the inclusion of values and culture was conscious. Leadership communication should more consciously focus on culture as a reason for change and offer a connection between the two (Thornton et al., 2012; Yue & Walden, 2022). Communication related to change, whether the changes are crisis-related or more routine, should establish that the needed or required changes harmonize with the campus culture. If the changes do not correspond with the current

institutional culture, then communication must focus on the reason for changes that disagree with the established culture (Haavisto & Linge, 2022; Heide & Simonsson, 2021). In these instances, leaders should advocate for a change in the culture itself in order to ensure their culture and behaviors agree.

In addition to employing communication that consciously uses sensemaking and institutional culture, leaders throughout the institution should use opportunities to associate institutional values with everyday behaviors (Haavisto & Linge, 2022). By calling attention to the connections between institutional culture and logic and subsequent actions, leaders will offer positive reinforcement of behaviors that agree with institutional culture. There are a number of ways to accomplish this goal. Leaders should invest in values-focused award programs and recognition in order to help stakeholders make greater sense of expected behaviors.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study sought to determine the extent to which sensemaking through institutional culture and logic is used in leadership communication. However, sensemaking also involves determining if the words inspire the appropriate action (Mantere et al., 2012; Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). Thus, future study could focus on whether leadership communication during the COVID-19 pandemic was effective in persuading students, faculty, and staff behaved in the desired and recommended ways.

In addition, each university involved in the study is located in a politically conservative area. The political climate was particularly charged throughout the COVID-19 pandemic (da Fonseca et al., 2021). A study conducted with leaders of universities in more liberal areas could add to the knowledge on the use of sensemaking in leadership

communication. Comparison of the leadership communication from these institutions and communication from the current institutions would provide a rich opportunity for incorporation of those lessons.

Finally, research on the recipients of leadership communication related to change would be useful for future leadership communication work. Determining how stakeholders connect their own behavior to institutional values and culture would help future leaders determine how to persuade stakeholders to engage in desired behaviors.

Conclusion

The current study connects leadership communication issued in response to a crisis to sensemaking through the discovery of institutional culture and values within those written communications. University presidents and their collaborating CCOs utilized messages related to Health and Safety, Students, Change, and Retention in order to help institutional stakeholders understand the changes in behavior they needed to adopt in response to the COVID-19 crisis. In order to help with these sensemaking processes, presidents framed each institution's values and culture in their communication.

Leadership communication that utilizes sensemaking can often help stakeholders comprehend the necessary changes. When that framing is consciously used, the communication can be more effective and change can be more successful. Leaders who successfully implement sensemaking will lead their institutions through change more effectively.

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APPENDIX A

PILOT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Presidential Interview Questions

- How do you feel COVID-19 has called for change in your institution?
- How did your institution communicate those changes?
- What are your institution's values?
- Do you feel those values are connected to the changes within your institution?
- How do you help your stakeholders make sense of the changes that have occurred?

CCO Interview Questions

- How do you help prepare communications for your leaders?
- Has this process changed during COVID-19?
- What changes did your leadership have to communicate during COVID-19? Were these changes congruent or divergent from your institutional logics?
- What institutional logics – cultural values and messages – do you try to instill through presidential communication?
- How has the presidential communication related to COVID-19 been accepted in your campus community?

APPENDIX B

FINAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Presidential Interview Questions

- Describe the changes made at your institution as a result of the pandemic, particularly in the early stages from March through June 2020.
- What channels did you use to communicate those changes to students, staff, faculty, and the larger community?
- How often did you communicate with students, staff, faculty, and the larger community?
- Describe your institution's guiding values or principles.
- In what ways were those values reflected in the changes your institution made because of the pandemic?
- How did you help your stakeholders make sense of the changes that occurred during the pandemic?
- What feedback did you receive indicating how your campus community reacted to presidential communication related to the pandemic?

CCO Interview Questions

- In what ways are you typically involved in preparing communications for your university leaders?
- Did your role in preparing communications for your university leaders change during the pandemic?
- Describe your institution's guiding values.
- In what ways did you use these values in presidential communication about the pandemic?

- Describe how changes made at your institution because of the pandemic were communicated.
- Did these changes accommodate your established institutional culture or not?
- What feedback did you receive indicating how your campus community reacted to presidential communication related to the pandemic?

APPENDIX C

EMAIL TO PROSPECTIVE PRESIDENTIAL INTERVIEW

SUBJECTS

Good morning. I hope this email finds you well and enjoying the fall semester at the University X.

My name is Tonya Oaks Smith, and I am a doctoral student in Louisiana Tech University's Educational Leadership – Higher Education Administration program. I also serve as Executive Director for Louisiana Tech's Office of University Communications.

I am currently in the data collection phase of my dissertation work, titled Guiding Organizations through Transformational Change and Crisis.

Your participation in this study will provide valuable insight into how leadership communication incorporates institutional culture during change management and crisis. More detailed information is available in the attached document.

If you are willing to participate in this study, your participation will involve a 60-minute recorded interview that will be conducted through Zoom or face-to-face. The interview will be conducted on a day and time that are convenient for you. You will have the opportunity to review a transcript of your interview to make any additional comments or edits.

The study will explore institutional logic and culture and their tie to presidential communication related to changes that are precipitated by crisis. In this case, I will conduct a content analysis on publicly available messages delivered to university stakeholders in the first three months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In order to triangulate data points from my artifact examination, I hope to interview 4-year university presidents and chief communication leaders about their conscious or unconscious uses of institutional logic and culture in communication from the early part of the pandemic.

The interview will be recorded. Data collected will be coded and will not include a participant's name, your institution's name, or any personally identifiable data. Your participation will have no impact on your specific organization. No data will be included in the study until the interview transcript has been reviewed and approved. All information will be kept confidential.

If you are willing to participate in this study or have any questions, please let me know. If you choose to participate, please reply to this email. If you prefer to communicate via telephone, please contact me at 318.548.0877.

You may also contact Dr. Laura Bostick, who is supervising this research study, at 318.257.2046 or via email at lbostick@latech.edu.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you soon!

Respectfully,

Tonya Oaks Smith

APPENDIX D

EMAIL TO PROSPECTIVE CCO INTERVIEW SUBJECTS

Good afternoon. I hope this email finds you well and enjoying the fall semester!

My name is Tonya Oaks Smith, and I am a doctoral student in Louisiana Tech University's Educational Leadership – Higher Education Administration program. I also serve as Executive Director for Louisiana Tech's Office of University Communications.

I am currently in the data collection phase of my dissertation work, titled *Guiding Organizations through Transformational Change and Crisis*.

Your participation in this study will provide valuable insight into how leadership communication incorporates institutional culture during change management and crisis. More detailed information is available in the attached document.

If you are willing to participate in this study, your participation will involve a 60-minute recorded interview that will be conducted through Zoom or face-to-face. The interview will be conducted on a day and time that are convenient for you. You will have the opportunity to review a transcript of your interview to make any additional comments or edits.

The study will explore institutional logic and culture and their tie to presidential communication related to changes that are precipitated by crisis. In this case, I will conduct a content analysis on publicly available messages delivered to university stakeholders in the first three months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In order to triangulate data points from my artifact examination, I hope to interview chief communication leaders from four-year institutions about their conscious or unconscious uses of institutional logic and culture in communication from the early part of the pandemic.

The interview will be recorded. Data collected will be coded and will not include a participant's name, your institution's name, or any personally identifiable data. Your participation will have no impact on your specific organization. No data will be included in the study until the interview transcript has been reviewed and approved. All information will be kept confidential.

If you are willing to participate in this study or have any questions, please let me know. If you choose to participate, please reply to this email. If you prefer to communicate via telephone, please contact me at 318.548.0877.

You may also contact Dr. Laura Bostick, who is supervising this research study, at 318.257.2046 or via email at lbostick@latech.edu.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you soon!

Respectfully,

Tonya Oaks Smith

APPENDIX E

DEFINITIONS

1. *Change management* is a framework that describes the process of implementing change in an organization. Urgency, communicating vision and necessity for the change, and incorporating established organizational culture and structure are integral to the process (Kotter, 1995).
2. *Crisis communication* is communication focused on a threat that requires a quick response time and that helps stakeholders make sense of the crisis and engage in actions focused on self-efficacy (Hermann, 1963; Ulmer, 2012).
3. *Diffusion of innovation* is the process that describes the communication of a change or innovation over time through members of an organization or social system (Rogers, 2003).
4. *Organizational culture* includes values and beliefs that individuals in an organization share. These values govern acceptable behavior within that organization (Schneider et al., 2012).
5. *Organizational communication* is communication used to engage members of an organization in a social order to achieve collective goals (Allen et al., 1993).
6. *Organizational logic* includes structures and belief systems, such as values, that are used to guide the actions of an organization as well as the actions of its members (Chauvel & Despres, 2004; Thornton et al., 2012).
7. *Sensemaking* is communication and activity used to help members of an organization find sense and their role and place within that organization (Weick, 2012).

APPENDIX F

HUMAN USE EXEMPTION LETTER



Office of Research and Partnerships

MEMORANDUM

TO: Tonya Oaks Smith
 FROM:  Dr. Walter Buboltz, Professor/Elva L. Smith Endowed Professor
buboltz@latech.edu
 SUBJECT: Human Use Committee - Review DECISION
 DATE: August 17, 2022

In order to facilitate your project, an EXPEDITED REVIEW has been completed for your proposed study:

HUC No.: 22-109

TITLE: Guiding Organizations through Transformational Change and Crisis

HUC DECISION: Exempt from Full Review

According to the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46, your research protocol is determined to be exempt from full review under the following exemption category(s):

It has been determined that your study meets the requirements for exemption **45 CFR §46.104(d) (2) (i)**:

(2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), **survey procedures**, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if **at least one of the following criteria is met**:

(i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects;

Additional comments from Reviewer: Collected information is viewed by the researcher only. Responses are anonymized. The study does not involve treatment or physical contact.

Thank you for submitting your Human Use Proposal to Louisiana Tech's Institutional Review Board.

P.O. Box 8597 | Ruston, LA 71272-0034 | O: 318.257.2871

A member of the University of Louisiana System and an equal opportunity university.