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Managing Effective Communication After a Crisis

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Abstract

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MS, Walden University, 2014

BS, Walden University, 2012

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Despite the effects of natural disasters on small business owners, the owners'

communication strategies to alleviate loss to their companies' profitability remain

problematic. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive multiunit case study was to

explore what communication strategies some small business owners developed and

implemented for facilitating resuming their business operations after a natural disaster.

The targeted population consisted of 2 small business owners located along the Belmar

Boardwalk in Belmar, New Jersey. The conceptual framework for this study was

Coombs' situational crisis communication theory. The case data collected were from

semistructured interviews and company documents. Employing member checking and

methodological triangulation increased the assurance of the study's credibility and

trustworthiness. The data analysis consisted of separating the data into groupings,

identifying major groupings, assessing the information within the major groups, and

developing thematic interpretations. The 4 validated themes that emerged were

communication, community, disaster recovery, and stakeholders (employees). The

findings from this study may contribute to social change by providing communication

strategies that small business owners can use to mitigate losses from disasters, and

facilitate businesses' and communities' recovery for reducing further losses.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to my husband James, to the loving memory of my father

Maceo Keeling Sr., my mother Doretha Keeling, my daughter Inessa, my son

Christopher, Elijah, Matthias, family, and friends, thank you for all your love and

encouragement throughout my doctoral process. I could not have completed the journey

it without you.

Jeremiah 29:11-13

Acknowledgments

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Communication has an emotional impact on how individuals and teams coordinate, share knowledge, and accomplish tasks. A deficiency in communication following the disruption resulting from a crisis event can result in increased downtime, loss of revenue, and interference with the recovery process (Khan, Barton, & Fellows, 2013). Findings from this qualitative descriptive multiple unit case study provide details of how small business owners have developed crisis plans and effective communication strategies that facilitated recovery from a natural disaster.

Background of the Problem

A disaster is an event that affects multiple areas of our lives, disrupts communication, and causes death (Zahran, Tavani, & Weiler, 2013). Depending on the type and size of a natural disaster, local business owners and regional government officials may need financial assistance from the federal government (Mann, 2014). Disasters can result in economic loss and death (Christensen, Lægreid, & Rykkja, 2013). Specifically, weather-related catastrophes can impair and disrupt, infrastructure, environment, economy, national morale, and government functions (Wiederhold, 2013). These disruptions are exacerbated when some small business owners fail to have effective crisis communication strategies in place to respond. The absence of crisis communication strategies during a crisis event affects (a) the amount of personal control the organizational leaders have over the crisis, (b) impedes the recovery process, (c) affects the company's performance, and (d) may interfere with retention of key stakeholders (Coombs & Holladay, 1996, 2002; Khan et al., 2013).

In 2011, approximately $380 billion in costs resulted from natural disasters around the world (Wahlstrom, 2012). Ninety weather-related catastrophic events occurred in the United States from 1980 to 2008, and the cost for recovery exceeded $700 billion (Mann, 2014). In the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy in 2012, some New Jersey business owners and government officials challenged concepts and theories related to collaboration and the implementation of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (Sanders, 2014). The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act was important to small business owners because providing health care to employees was an added expense. After a natural disaster, the cost of providing health care for employees while rebuilding the business could be an insurmountable task for a small business owner.

Problem Statement

Poor communication was the reason for some failures to quickly recover from disasters such as Hurricanes Sandy and Katrina and the World Trade Center attack on 9/11, which resulted in a significant cost to business owners (Economics & Statistics Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce, 2013). New Jersey business owners lost over $100 billion in revenue in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy (Economics & Statistics Administration U.S. Department of Commerce, 2013). Weather-related catastrophic events resulted in $56 billion in economic loss for business owners (Mann, 2014; National Climatic Data Center, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 2009). The general business problem was that some small business owners were unable to communicate effectively to facilitate resuming their business operations after a natural disaster, which adversely effected profitability. The specific business problem was that

some small business owners lacked communication strategies for resuming business operations to minimize the effects of a natural disaster on their companies' profitability.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive multiple unit case study was to explore what communication strategies some small business owners developed and implemented for facilitating resuming their business operations that minimized the adverse effects of a natural disaster on their companies' profitability. The targeted population consisted of small business owners located along the Belmar Boardwalk in New Jersey who developed and implemented communication strategies for resuming business operations following Hurricane Sandy in 2012. The specific population for this multiple unit case study was at least two small business owners who were (a) present when the crisis occurred and (b) developed and implemented communication strategies to resume their business operations while minimizing the adverse effects of the natural disaster on their companies' profitability. The implications for positive social change include communication strategies that may mitigate loss for small business owners, employees, and families after a natural disaster.

Nature of the Study

Qualitative research is appropriate when a need exists to collect data through open-ended questions (Fairweather & Rinne, 2012; Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012; Upjohn, Attwood, Lerotholi, Pfeiffer, & Verheyen, 2013), as was the case for this study. Using the qualitative research method may lead to improvements in the practice of business. Quantitative researchers use variables and statistics to provide measures or

observations for testing a theory (R. K. Yin, 2014), but this qualitative case study is descriptive. A mixed method approach was not appropriate because no need existed to analyze data from both qualitative and quantitative perspectives within the study (R. K. Yin, 2014).

The case study design provides guidance for researchers to understand the complex social phenomena that includes the concept of repeating interviews with the same participant to gain in-depth data (R. K. Yin, 2014). In a case study design, researchers ask *how* and *what* questions (R. K. Yin, 2014). The case study design consists of a real-life, contemporary context or setting (R. K. Yin, 2014).

Ethnography, narrative theory, and phenomenological designs were not appropriate for this study. Ethnography involves the discovery and description of a cultural group (Fetterman, 2010). The narrative is a design in which researchers describe human actions through stories (Dailey & Browning, 2014). Phenomenology involves exploring how individuals experience a phenomenon (Tomkins & Eatough, 2013).

Research Question

The overarching research question for this study was: What communication strategies do small business owners use to facilitate resuming their business operations following a natural disaster and for minimizing the adverse effects on their companies' profitability?

Interview Questions

The following 5 interview questions were created for this qualitative descriptive multiple unit case study. The first question was an initial probe. Questions 2 through 4 were concept questions, and Question 5 was the wrap-up question.

1. What communication strategies did you develop to support a rapid recovery after Hurricane Sandy?

2. What communication strategies worked best to mitigate the loss of profitability?

3. What was the timetable for the strategies to produce positive results?

4. How did your strategic crisis communication process minimize or enhance the recovery time?

5. What would you have done differently in designing and implementing the strategic and operational planning stages for a weather-related disaster?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is the situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) (Coombs & Holladay, 1996). Coombs and Holladay (1996) contended that business owners must show resilience and the capability of handling crisis events. Coombs and Holladay noted that researchers can use SCCT to determine how communication affects people's perceptions and reactions to a crisis. The three constructs of the SCCT are (a) the severity of the crisis, (b) the amount of personal control that organizational leaders have over the crisis, and (c) the company performance history (Coombs & Holladay, 1996, 2002). Situational crisis communication theory pertains to

this qualitative multiple unit case study because small business owners can use SCCT to develop a disaster recovery strategy. The strategy consists of determining tangible measures that assess the severity of a crisis, the amount of personal control small business owners have over a crisis, and the rebuilding of the company performance history. These three constructs are the underpinnings for effective communication strategies after a crisis. Small business owners can benefit from understanding crisis communication as a strategy to mitigate loss and support the recovery process with transparency and trust (Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Heath, 2005; Coombs & Holladay, 1996).

Operational Definitions

Contingency planning and disaster recovery: Contingency planning and disaster recovery is a process through which business owners develop strategies to handle crisis events that impede daily activities or normal operations (Scarinci, 2014).

Crisis: A crisis is an unexpected organizational event that creates levels of uncertainty and threatens a company's daily routines and goals (Dayton, 2004).

Crisis management: Crisis management refers to the process a business owner or organizational leader uses to handle an unanticipated, catastrophic event (Dayton, 2004).

Mass care: Mass care refers to an extensive variety of philanthropic exercises whose users can provide life-maintaining administrations such as crisis protection, reconsolidation, distribution of crisis supplies, and accurate data (Mintz & Gonzalez, 2013).

Natural disaster: A natural disaster is a sudden calamitous event resulting from atmospheric and other geological imbalances. Characterizations of natural disasters include chaos, disruption of operations, confusion, and even death of employees (Morrison, Titi Oladunjouye, & Dembry, 2014).

Reputation management: Reputation management refers to the perceived image of a company based on a collection of past actions taken by that company's leaders (Fink, 1986).

Situational crisis communication theory: Situational crisis communication theory has three variables that influence the reputational effect of a company in crisis: (a) initial crisis responsibility, (b) crisis history, and (c) prior relational reputation (Coombs, 2007).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions and limitations are elements that are beyond the control of the researcher. Assumptions are specifics that I accept are true but cannot substantiate. Limitations are not within my control as the researcher. Delimitations are in my control as the researcher and provided boundaries for the study.

Assumptions

Assumptions are facts that I assume are true but cannot verify. To avoid misrepresentation, researchers must identify and address potential assumptions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). I assumed the participants were truthful and not biased in their answers. Another assumption was that the semistructured interview questions and company documents would lead to sufficient data to answer the central research question of the study. I also assume that professional and social change would occur because of

the communication strategies that were developed and implemented to mitigate loss for businesses and families after a natural disaster.

Limitations

Limitations include potential weaknesses that are not within the control of the researcher (Bailey, 2014; 2010; Moll, 2012). In this qualitative descriptive case study, the primary limitation was the availability of only a limited number of small business owners who quickly returned to business after Hurricane Sandy devastated Belmar, New Jersey.

Delimitations

Delimitations are restrictions or boundaries that researchers impose to focus the scope of a study (Moll, 2012). A delimitation of the study included the geographical location, which included businesses in Belmar, New Jersey. The study only included research on small business owners who had developed and implemented communication strategies for facilitating resuming their business operations, which minimized the adverse effects of a natural disaster on their companies' profitability.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because I explored communication strategies that contributed to achieving resuming business operations for at least two small business owners in Belmar, New Jersey who minimized the adverse effects of Hurricane Sandy on their companies' profitability. The success of small business owners is vital in any community (Taneja, Pryor, & Havek, 2016). According to Taneja et al. (2016), a community's economic vitality is dependent on the success of small business owners.

The results of this study could lead to improved crisis preparedness, decreased response time, and reduced costs of the recovery process.

Contribution to Business Practice

The contribution from this study to the practice of business may be an improved understanding of how to develop crisis communication plans, how to execute those plans, and disaster recovery efforts. In addition, based on the results from the study, small business owners around the world might reconsider how the communication strategies developed by the small business owners of Belmar, New Jersey helped them respond, rebuild, and limit the loss of revenue after Hurricane Sandy. These communication strategies from the small business owners may change how information retrieval and information sharing occurs during the recovery phase. Other benefits from conducting this study include new insights for business practices and better preparation for a natural disaster.

Implications for Social Change

Trust diminishes chaos and promotes calm and hope after a natural disaster. Getting back to normal life is the focus for everyone affected by a crisis. The possible contribution to positive social change includes communication strategies that mitigate loss for small business owners and promote communities coming together to begin the recovery process and reduce further loss.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The lessons learned from not being ready for a crisis are powerful (Mutch & Marlowe, 2013). Being ready includes having and sustaining relationships with

stockholders, stakeholders, media, and the community. Mutch and Marlowe (2013) wrote about the human experiences of the 2010 Canterbury earthquakes in New Zealand. Mutch and Marlowe described the trauma of the actual event and noted the voices of the groups of people that remained unheard severely hampered recovery efforts.

Organization of the Review

The literature review begins with a brief description of being ill-prepared for a crisis, (b) information regarding the search strategy, (c) a summary of frequencies and percentages of peer reviewed articles, (d) the application to the applied business problem, (e) a critical analysis and synthesis of Coombs Situational crisis communication theory, (f) contrasting theories, and (g) potential themes pertaining to the SCCT phenomena. The literature review was a systematic way for identifying, evaluating, and interpreting the work of researchers, scholars, and practitioners in a chosen field (Fink, 1998). The prevailing trends in the literature review consisted of crisis communication, precrisis and postcrisis planning, catastrophic events, recovery efforts, business continuity planning, crisis management, and community. The new reality of crises is the effects of natural disasters like Sandy tend to cascade (Samson, 2013).

Search Strategy

The purpose of the search strategy was to illustrate its application to the business problem. Sources obtained from searching business and management databases within the Walden University Online Library primarily composed the depth of my research inquiry. I conducted a critical analysis and synthesis of potential themes associated with Coombs situational crisis communication theory, and I used key search words in the

Business Source Complete database. Other databases I searched included (a)

ABI/INFORM Complete database, (b) Science Direct, (c) ProQuest, (d) Emerald

Management Journal, (e) government databases, (f) Google Scholar, and (g) SAGE

Premier. The key word search included combinations of *situational crisis communication*

theory, crisis communication, decision making, leader–employee engagement, disaster-

recovery coordination, planning, stakeholders, and *emergency management.*

Summary of Frequencies and Percentages of Peer Reviewed Articles

The review of the professional and academic literature for this study included a

critical analysis and synthesis of the various sources, an explanation of the organization

for the review, and the strategy for searching the literature. This study contains 172

sources, of which 93% are peer-reviewed, and 87% are within 5 years of expected CAO

approval in 2016. Illustrated in Table 1 are the percentages of all sources including peer-

reviewed journals, dissertations, and seminal books. Other sources in Table 1 are

websites, papers, an reports, which compose 7.0% of total references.

Table 1

Type, Total, and Percentages of References

Reference type	Total	% of total references	Less than 5 years	Greater than 5 years
Scholarly and peer-reviewed journals	160	93%	150	10
Other Sources (i.e., seminal books, papers and reports, government, company, and international websites)	12	7%	0	12
Total	172	100%	150	22

Application to the Applied Business Problem

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive multiple unit case study was to explore how some small business owners developed and implemented communication strategies for facilitating resuming their business operations following a natural disaster and minimized the adverse effects on their companies' profitability. In October 2012, Hurricane Sandy devastated the New Jersey coast and the city of Belmar. My critical analysis and synthesis of the literature pertaining to SCCT includes supporting and contrasting theories and potential themes pertaining to SCCT phenomena using other researchers' perspectives.

Critical Analysis and Synthesis of Coombs's SCCT

The quality of crisis communication strategies may support rapid recovery efforts (Palttala & Vos, 2011). Situational crisis communication theory is evidence-based management that joins business needs and social concerns (Coombs, 1999, 2007, 2010; Coombs & Heath, 2005; Coombs & Holladay, 1996, 2002). Since 2002, Coombs's concepts of SCCT evolved from how communication affects people's perceptions and reactions to a crisis to a vital strategy for mitigating loss and supporting a rapid recovery for businesses.

The three constructs of SCCT are (a) understanding the severity of the crisis, (b) the personal control organizational leaders have over the crisis, and (c) the company performance history (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). Situational crisis communication theory is relevant for small business owners because weather-related disasters are increasing around the world. Having a strategy for mitigating loss is important.

Furthermore, small business owners and communities cannot thrive without situational crisis communications (Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Lando, 2014). As private businesses grow, the public pressure for some small business owners to address pressing social and environmental concerns intensifies (Coombs, 2010; Coombs & Holladay, 2002). Having effective communication strategies after a natural disaster is vital (Wiederhold, 2013).

Two general uses of the term crisis communication are (a) as information and (b) as a strategy (Coombs & Heath, 2005). The literature review for this study was relevant and thematically structured. The purpose of using a thematic structure was to link the three constructs of SCCT with decision making, leader employee engagement, disaster recovery, planning, and stakeholders' effective crisis communication strategies. As the researcher, I guide the reader to observe the larger themes related to the phenomena. The study's thematic elements are (a) understanding the severity of a crisis through crisis communication, (b) decision making, (c) leader–employee engagement, (d) disaster recovery coordination, (e) planning, and (f) stakeholders.

The findings from this qualitative case study may lead to improvements in the practice of business. The literature review includes summarizations comparing and contrasting all the sources that relate to my research topic. Based on the research and review of the literature, small business owners dealing with crisis events can use communication strategies as tools to aid in the recovery process. Situational crisis communication theory includes constructs to form the channel of communication between members of the company and people outside the company after a crisis (Coombs, 2007, 2010; Coombs & Heath, 2005; Coombs & Holladay, 1996, 2007).

The initial reason for developing SCCT was to protect a company's reputation. However, SCCT is also effective as a tool for managing crisis communication, planning, emergency response-recovery coordination, leader-employee engagement, and decision making (Adrot & Figueiredo, 2013; Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 1996; 2002). Crisis communication has four stages of relevance: prevention, preparation, response, and learning (Coombs & Heath, 2005). These four stages provided a useful framework for studying the intrinsic details of crisis communication (Coombs & Heath, 2005).

Contrasting Theories

Benoit's (1997) image restoration discourse and crisis communication theory is dissimilar to Coombs's SCCT because the essence of image repair discourse is the art of persuasion. Persuasion serves to control communication during crises. Benoit and Czerwinski (1997) used strategies such as denial and evasion of responsibility within messages as available options for crisis communication. The premises of the image restoration discourse theory were to (a) understand the nature of the offense by holding the accused responsible for an action and (b) acknowledging the wrongdoing as offensive (Benoit, 1997; Benoit and Czerwinski, 1997). Fink's (1986) crisis management theory was also different from Coombs's SCCT because Fink combined crisis management and crisis communication theories into one theory. Fink focused on how business owners could predict a crisis, insulate it, and cope with it. Ennis's (2015) study was an extension of Benoit and Czerwinski's research. Ennis was primarily associated with risk management, but Ennis's research evolved to include *reputation* management. Ennis wrote that business executives concentrated more on the reputation of their companies.

Potential Themes Pertaining to SCCT Phenomena

Bouaiss, Lafontaine, and Viviani (2013) reported that education was a major part of dealing with environmental crises. Bouaiss et al. (2013) described industrial accidents and environmental crises as being the same and used stakeholder theory as the conceptual framework for the research. The stakeholder theory was used as a lens to explore complex perspectives regarding value (Harrison & Wicks, 2013). S. Yin and Jing (2014) contended that crisis and disasters are not the same.

S. Yin and Jing (2014) described a disaster as a natural event or an event caused by humans. A disaster can be either sudden or progressive in nature; however, the effects are always severe and exceed an organization's ability to respond (S. Yin & Jing, 2014). A crisis is a serious threat to the basic structure of values and norms of a system (S. Yin & Jing, 2014). I support Dayton's (2004) argument that *crisis* and *disaster* in the context of time constraints and uncertain circumstances both require critical decisions. This premise is part of the context for my study.

Both Dayton (2004) and S. Yin and Jing (2014) noted that their opinions differed. However, the researchers provided a lens to understand how people assess crisis threats. The three researchers focused on the interactions between people and the changing crisis to determine if contradictions exist between the technical aspects of crisis planning. A necessary function of crisis communication and planning is decision making (Chen, Chen, Vertinsky, Yumagulova, & Park, 2013; Coombs, 2010; S. Yin & Jing, 2014).

Decision Making

Decision making based on ethics and ethical behavior is vital for any type of business. Research in the field of behavioral ethics includes moral choice making as normal and purposeful (Welsh & Ordonez, 2014). The personal control a small business owner may have over a crisis is difficult to determine (Coombs & Holladay, 1996; Kemp, Kennett-Hensel, and Williams, 2014). Kemp et al. (2014) noted emotions are a large part of crisis decision making. Damage, whether human induced or natural, may cause people to admit their lack of control of the situation and hamper the decision-making process.

Natural disasters leave people with a variety of negative emotions (Khan et al., 2013). Even though Kemp et al. (2014) explored emotion and consumption intake by individuals in the event of an impending natural disaster, their findings relate to behavior and decision making. Kemp et al. described how an individual's perceptions of failing to control the situation adversely affect the person's responsiveness and functioning. When a natural disaster occurs, limited or no control in crisis management is a reality.

Fischbacher-Smith and Fischbacher-Smith (2014) defined crisis management as formal communication networks involved in escalating and managing organizational crises. The need for information sharing for rapid and efficient crisis communication is paramount. A new framework is emerging that indicates informal human interaction is a conduit for information and knowledge exchange (Fischbacher-Smith & Fischbacher-Smith, 2014). In addition, the new framework illustrates how small business owners who do not notice these interactions can potentially experience a crisis.

Dobó (2014) noted that during and after a disaster, the ability to communicate effectively with the affected population can break down. Dobó's comment aligned with Fischbacher-Smith & Fischbacher-Smith's (2014) discussion that decision making must come from different individuals and may follow different rules. Natural disasters force actions and necessitate decisions. In most cases, a paradigm shift may occur. Dobó focused on compliance as a defense and on creating the conditions for recovery.

In 2011, policy makers in Hungary created a new law concerning disaster management (Dobó, 2014). The law pertained to legal responsibilities and protocols in the event of a crisis. Important parts of protocol are training, learning about methods for communication and the appropriate use of crisis communication. Crisis preparation activities must be ongoing, even when there is no perceived threat (Dobó, 2014).

All populations and geographic areas are vulnerable to natural or human-induced disasters (Ayyub, 2014). Ayyub (2014) noted that having a poor infrastructure and a large population makes the United States susceptible to many natural disasters. People in the United States are ill-prepared for natural disasters and are likely to fail during recovery efforts. Ayyub noted that enhancing system resilience at all levels would support quick recovery after a disaster. Starr, Rudman, and Whipple (1976) described *resilience* as the ability to bounce or spring back into shape or position to recover strength or spirits quickly.

In contrast to Dobó's (2014) qualitative study, Ayyub's (2014) research was quantitative and included the variables of reliability and risk. However, both Dobó's and Ayyub's work supported the basis of a sound decision-making process as a part of crisis

communication. Both Dobó and Ayyub asked what promotes sound decision making during or after a crisis. Provoking conflict does, according to Drummond (2015), who challenged individuals to view conflict as debilitating, constructive, and transactional. In contrast to Coombs's SCCT, Drummond stated that provoking individuals and groups to consider extreme scenarios of a crisis may lead to effective decision making and safer practices.

Decision making takes time. If the company's crisis plans existed for a long time without changes or updates, the plans are likely useless. Small business owners must ensure appropriate measures are in place. A critical look at auditing can support the decision-making process before and after a major weather-related crisis (Drummond, 2015). Researchers' findings reveal auditors can give fabricated reports (U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, 2013). Some auditors may not want the reputation of being bureaucratic or intrusive. Nevertheless, audits are necessary and can provide small business owners with critical information to make sound decisions before and after disasters.

Drummond's (2015) study is different from the work of Dobó, Ayyub, and Coombs, as Drummond emphasized the need for safer environments by provoking conflict in the decision-making process and challenging the presumed facts about a business safety plan. A leader who places too much confidence on something that appears to be secure leaves the leader vulnerable when a crisis occurs (Drummond, 2015). Safety for companies requires that owners be willing to doubt what everyone else regards as fact.

Malilay et al. (2014) described disaster epidemiology as a source of trustworthy information for decision making in the evolution of disaster management. However, epidemiological methods are not currently a part of disaster response nor are they communicated to response leaders. The gap in epidemiological methods with disaster response is hampering the decision making process and slowing the response time for recovery efforts for small business owners and communities.

When a human-induced or natural disaster affects small businesses, community decision makers must address various risks and trade-offs in the decision-making process (Haimes, 2012). Haimes's (2012) research is dissimilar to Coombs's SCCT because Haimes focused on (a) the influences of subsystems on planning, reaction, and recovery from natural disasters, and (b) the significance of the systems of systems in modeling. Because a disaster can affect humans, technology, and physical infrastructure, a new way of thinking for decision making is necessary. In Haimes's study, Leontief's input-output model grounded the research for interdependent subsystems. The subsystems are interconnected and interdependent humans, technology, and physical infrastructures referred to as *systems of systems*.

Resurreccion and Santos (2013) also noted that natural or human-induced disasters involve disruptions. These disruptions may affect the production of goods and services. The similarity between Haimes's (2012) work and Resurreccion and Santos's research is that both viewed the disruptions in technology, physical infrastructure, goods, and services as interdependent systems. Also, Haimes's research and Resurreccion and Santos's studies included descriptions of uncertainty in inventory levels, and both

researchers assessed the economic impact disaster events have on these interdependent systems.

Meyer, Broad, Orlove, and Petrovic's (2013) study is unlike previous studies mentioned in this section. Although the study was quantitative, Meyer et al. explored the adaptation of decision making in the context of a natural disaster using simulation. The fact that current knowledge on collecting information and making decisions about impending disasters is insufficient served as a driver for the study, and the insufficiency is because natural disasters are infrequent (Meyer et al., 2013).

Siegrist and Sütterlin's (2014) study is dissimilar to Meyer et al.'s (2013) research, even though both are quantitative. Siegrist and Sütterlin focused on biases, risky decision making based on risk perception, and whether the crisis was human induced or natural. The 133 participants viewed human-induced crises as worse than natural disasters and revealed a predisposition for making dangerous choices (Siegrist & Sütterlin, 2014).

Leader-Employee Engagement

Crisis communication can entail a business or a personal issue. Utilizing effective communication strategies when dealing with people, can promote trust. In the age of increasing disasters, natural or human induced, Mazzei and Ravazzani (2015) explored internal crisis communication strategies and the characteristics of the strategies for catalyzing communication in preserving relationships of trust. Although Mazzei and Ravazzani's research is quantitative in nature, communication applies to all types of

relationships. Crises induce changes in attitude, social behavior, and economic performance (Khan et al., 2013).

The quality of relationships between the leader and their employees is the underpinning of effective communication (Geertshuis, Morrison, & Cooper-Thomas, 2015). Geertshuis et al. (2015), conducted a study focused on the quality of relationships between 107 supervisors and their subordinates. The results of the study indicated that the leader-employee conversation is limited. The conversation is limited because of the restrictions the leader and employee place on one another. Hence the old adage; *it is not what you say; it is the way that you say it* - is relevant.

The Geertshuis et al. (2015), study is similar to Coombs and Holladay (1996) study of SCCT because communication affects people's perceptions and reactions to a crisis. The perceptions and reactions of employees after a crisis are important. The leader–employee relationship is a vital piece of the recovery process. Morrison et al. (2014) studied the effectiveness of a chief executive officer in handling disaster readiness for a company. Although the primary theme was disaster preparedness, Morrison et al. explored the perceptions of employees regarding leadership engagement. The relationship is the primary underpinning of leader–employee engagement (Khan et al., 2013). The success or failure of the leader engagement process with employees depends on communication (Khan et al., 2013). Poor communication can contribute to increased downtime and loss of revenue, interfere with retention of key employees, and impede the recovery process. As described by Khan et al. the effectiveness of the leader–employee engagement after a crisis event determines the success of the recovery.

Dunn and Eble (2015) debated that critical discourse analysis techniques be included to crisis communication theory's framework to ensure the message of corporate leaders or their position of power does not marginalize or silence alternative communications. Dunn and Eble suggested that current crisis communication theory centers on the company to the exclusion of employees and the community. In addition, the researchers posited that adding critical discourse analysis (CDA) to standard crisis communication theory would create a new approach that could amend that imbalance. Research on crisis communication has increased since 2009. Wood (2015) indicated that the growing pressure for people in leadership at the corporate level is to manage operational and communication elements of crises and minimize the damage. Leaders have the important task of addressing crises at two levels. The first at the strategic level entails management. The second at the operational level involves the subordinates (Boin & Renaud, 2013). Gaps may materialize because of communication deficiencies between these two levels.

A key component of SCCT as a strategy is how leaders safeguard reputational assets after a crisis (Coombs, 2007). The framework of SCCT contains tools for perceiving how employees will react to a crisis. Moreover, the SCCT framework contains guidance for researchers. The researchers can identify how employees will respond to the strategies for managing the crisis (Coombs, 2007).

A crisis can damage a company's performance as well as its reputation (Coombs & Holladay, 1996). Moreover, a crisis can affect how employees interact with small business owners (Carey & Perry, 2014). For small business owners to determine how

much personal control they have over a crisis, the owners must consider the stakeholder. A crisis can harm employees physically, emotionally, and financially (Coombs, 2007). A leader's actions affect the relationship with the stakeholders (Coombs & Heath, 2005; Khan et al., 2013).

Leadership success with stakeholders is a result of common courtesy and the Studer principles, which are popular in the health care industry (Interview with Mario J. Garner", 2015). The Studer principles are (a) regular communication from senior leadership to employees, (b) rewards and recognition for employees who go beyond minimal requirements, and (c) senior leaders visiting employees regularly, and staying available in real time at all times (Studer, 2004). Health care professionals are vital for assisting society through public health crises, natural disasters, and catastrophes (Valdez & Nichols, 2013).

Similar to Coombs (1996), Valdez and Nichols (2013) revealed how communication affects people's perceptions and reactions to a crisis. A review of the literature revealed that some health care professionals are unwilling to work during a natural disaster. One reason may be the dynamics of leader–employee engagement. Valdez and Nichols investigated some motivational tools to discover how to ensure health care workers would report for duty when needed most. Valdez and Nichols, Dar, Buckley, Rokadiya, Huda, and Abrahams (2014) revealed why some medical professionals choose not to work during public health crises or natural disasters. One reason medical professionals may not report to work during times of crisis could be the relationship with their leaders.

Dar et al. (2014) outlined a few methods and concepts for mainstreaming health in disaster risk reduction and considered barriers faced in the health care sector. In contrast to Dar et al., Cowart (2014) wrote about why employee morale matters. The morale of stakeholders becomes vital to recovery efforts after a natural disaster. Small business owners have the responsibility to engage their workers in a manner that is conducive to building and maintaining good relationships before, during, and after a crisis (Khan et al., 2013).

Employee morale and retention are interdependent on leader–employee engagement (Cowart, 2014). Employee morale and retention are key aspects for recovery after a crisis. The ability of small business owners to understand what is in the hearts and minds of their employees during times of crisis requires communication. Knowing what is in the hearts and minds of employees is vital to the recovery process. The right channel of communication can motivate employees to support the recovery process after a crisis.

Business owners or others in positions of leadership must be aware of the *engagement cliff* (Cowart, 2014). The engagement cliff is where the current work environment appears fine. However, the leaders do not communicate with or engage the employees. Leaders must pay attention, greet, and engage the employees before any occurrence of a crisis if the leaders wish to maintain employee engagement when a natural disaster occurs.

Slack, Corlett, and Morris (2015) explored employee engagement from the point of view of corporate social responsibility. Though Slack et al.'s research is relevant to employee engagement and corporate social responsibility, communication is a major part

of employee morale and retention of key organizational stakeholders. Despite the implication of employees in relation to corporate social responsibility, few researchers have explored employee engagement with corporate social responsibility and the barriers related to this topic.

Although Tuckey and Neall's (2014) research on workplace bullying may not initially appear relevant to this study, the authors' focused on the effects of bullying in the workplace and viewed bullying, employees' job performance, morale, and mental health as symbiotic. The study included 221 retail industry workers who answered a self-report survey (Tuckey & Neall, 2014). The results of the study indicated that bullying decreases coworker support, lowers employee morale, and leads to emotional exhaustion. Bullying also depletes workers' energy and erodes both personal and job resources (Tuckey & Neall, 2014). In the event of a crisis, this type of culture will hamper post recovery efforts.

In contrast to the research of Tuckey and Neall (2014), Robinson and Schroeder (2015) explored continuous improvement (CI) with employee engagement and other factors. Continuous improvement originated in Japan and is called *Kaizen* (Robinson and Schroeder, 2015). The exploration of CI has emerged at all levels of government in New Brunswick, Canada. Jane Washburn developed a balanced scorecard program in which she integrated CI with employee engagement and job performance (Robinson & Schroeder, 2015). The results of the integration yielded higher income, better customer satisfaction, and improved employee engagement.

Continuous improvement encompasses four key elements: (a) build employee-driven CI into the core management system, (b) take full advantage of financial crises, (c) conduct a measured rollout, and (d) use multiple methods for different types of problems (Robinson & Schroeder, 2015). Another approach for expanding CI initiative to support employee engagement is daily process management. Daily process management is a team-based approach to monitor and improve the work in each area.

Kaplan, LaPort, and Waller (2013) studied emotions and the effectiveness of teams in crises. The researchers observed the impact of emotions and the positive emotional effect on team members not experiencing a crisis compared to a team in crisis and the effectiveness of that team when negative emotion is present (Kaplan et al., 2013). A common theme that links Kaplan et al. and King (2002) is the belief that agility in teams is necessary to handle crises. With good leader–employee engagement, the disaster recovery process and coordination is easier.

Disaster Recovery and Coordination

Sustaining or rebuilding a company's performance history after a natural disaster is necessary for long-term sustainability (Coombs, 2007, 2010; Coombs & Heath, 2005; Coombs & Holladay, 1996, 2002). Alcantata (2014) utilized Emergency Management (EM) as a framework that consists of small business owners and communities working together to rebuild after a disaster. After Typhoon Haiyan devastated the Philippines Alcantara studied the response by the Philippines government regarding its EM principles. The Philippines government staff analyzed two areas. The first area was the public administration sector, and the second area was the defense sector (Alcantata,

2014). The study entailed exploring the Philippines government's response before, during, and after the typhoon occurred and the EM principles concerning the Philippines government's response to the crisis. The researcher sought to identify and recommend effective communication strategies to link with the EM principles. Emergency management is comprehensive, progressive, risk driven, collaborative, coordinated, flexible, and professional (Alcantara, 2014).

From a different lens, Auf der Heide (1989) described how problems arise from disconnects between communication and coordination during a natural disaster. The reasons for the problem is that information sharing relates to the interoperability of the technology used to communicate information and the content of the information communicated (Libenau, 2003). Similar to Libenau (2003), Khan et al. (2013) indicated that effective communication after a crisis is dependent on two areas: technology and relationships. These two areas affect the coordination and execution of recovery. Technology increases the speed in which people communicate (Libenau, 2003).

In contrast to SCCT, Crawford, Langston, and Bajracharya (2013) described disaster response and recovery from the stance of project management. Disaster response and recovery coordination through numerous projects with traditional project management approaches are time-consuming and inflexible (Crawford et al., 2013). In a crisis environment with high uncertainty, swift reactions for stakeholders are vital. To understand the role of project and stakeholder management in managing disasters, identifying improved disaster resilience opportunities is necessary (Crawford et al., 2013).

In an innovated approach to disaster recovery and coordination, Lee (2013) described how architects are critical in humanitarian endeavors. Lee used an architectural lens to view disasters and based his study on the empirical research and fieldwork on expert responses to three recent disasters: Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the 2010 Canterbury earthquake, and the 2010 Haiti earthquake. Architecture is a social equalizer, and architects can make sustainable buildings accessible to a society that is undergoing massive recovery from a disaster (Lee, 2013).

When natural disasters occur, mass care is paramount (Mintz & Gonzalez, 2013). Mass care is an extensive variety of philanthropic exercises through which providers give life-maintaining administrations, for example, crisis protection, reconsolidation, distribution of crisis supplies, and obtaining better data. The majority of these services come from nongovernmental organizations and local government (Mintz & Gonzalez, 2013).

Based on the lessons learned in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005, the American Red Cross joined efforts to expand national mass care capabilities (Mintz & Gonzalez, 2013). This partnership supported the survivors of catastrophic events and enhanced the integration of volunteers and nongovernmental organizations. The efforts resulted in the creation of the National Mass Care Council in 2010, with representatives of federal and state agencies, voluntary organizations, and the private sector working together in a transparent manner to develop a unified approach to mass care. Coombs's (2007) SCCT researchers separate crisis response strategies into three categories: *reject, weaken*, and *restore*.

Coombs's (2007) SCCT response strategies characterized as *reject* refers to the *no default to apology*. The no default to apology is an overreaction from the leader that causes the employee concern. Leaders overreacting may result in expensive consequences. In addition, overreaction to a situation does not increase protection or repair a reputation. *Weaken* is the leader taking responsibility, and *restore* entails an apology or compensation.

Crises include more than natural disasters; for example, terrorist attacks, which are human induced, also cause crises (Rimstad, Njå, Rake, & Braut, 2014). During a crisis, leaders can use the network theory for information movement from one communication center to another (Rimstad et al., 2014). Network theory supports Coombs's SCCT because SCCT includes guidance for investigating how the social structure of connections around a person, gathering, or association influences convictions or practices (Montenegro, 2014). Stresses are natural in social structure, and network theory analysis is a set of techniques for distinguishing the extent of those stresses.

In 2011, after a terrorist attack in Norway, Rimstad et al. (2014) collected data and used the data as a base for managing during the operation. Rimstad connected and coordinated information from each rescue service at the incident command center. Important data reached the commanders through informal methods that were helpful to the recovery efforts (Rimstad et al., 2014). Studies by Dobó (2014), Fischbacher-Smith & Fischbacher-Smith (2014), and Rimstad et al. (2014) included the common theme that informal methods of information sharing and exchange are necessary in the event of a crisis.

Natural disasters are unique events with a common conclusion (Smith & Sutter, 2013). The common conclusion may have involved death and destruction. The author's qualitative study included participants from using purposive sampling. In May 2011, the Joplin tornado affected each participant in the study. Interviews took place with local officials, community leaders, small business owners, and residents. While examining the response-and-recovery efforts in the aftermath of the Joplin tornado and Hurricane Katrina, Smith and Sutter (2013) contended that after the natural disasters, the government exacerbated recovery efforts. Moreover, the actions of the private sector served as examples of the resourcefulness and the ability to rebuild quickly. The planning process for disaster recovery and coordination entailed collaborative efforts among many resources.

Planning

The need to collaborate after a natural disaster has become a growing trend in the planning process around the world (Chen et al., 2013). Leaders from different countries are adopting policies that emphasize the importance of partnerships for disaster resilience (Chen et al., 2013). The overarching research questions Chen et al. (2013) asked led to investigating how to form and sustain, which included (a) effective collaborative arrangements involving governments, businesses, nongovernmental organizations, and communities to ensure the development of disaster resilient communities and (b) governance institutions that can effectively mobilize geographically dispersed disaster response resources with continuous ownership. Chen et al. reviewed case studies of alternative intersectoral collaborative arrangements formed to (a) promote the

development of resilient communities and critical physical and social systems, (b)

mitigate or respond to emerging crises, and (c) facilitate postdisaster recovery and teach.

Similar to Chen et al. (2013), Griswold (2013) outlined three primary actions to

integrate evolving online communities into disaster response. The three actions are (a)

start by understanding the motivations of virtual volunteers, (b) identify the social media

platforms and online communities most likely to influence organized response

operations, and (c) establish a monitoring or engagement program with the identified

communities. The popularity of social media networks and online communities provides

new ways for the public to collaborate in disaster response.

In times of disaster, Wiederhold (2013) described the important role of

social media in easing fear and stress. The three functions social media for effective

channeling of communication when disasters occurred are (a) information relay, (b)

targeting the right group to receive information, and (c) effective postdisaster strategy

implementation. Social media became one of the essential disaster planning tools to help

control fear and anxieties caused by disasters (Wiederhold, 2013).

Howard (2013) used social media networks as partners in the event of a natural

disaster. Social media sites are the first place people access to share thoughts or vent

(Howard, 2013). Through vigilant monitoring of social media, small business owners'

potentially could identify emerging problems or address risks before a crisis occurs.

Samson (2013) shared the new concept of business continuity planning (BCP) for

crisis communication. Business continuity management is a comprehensive program

enabling business owners to respond quickly and effectively to unplanned interruption.

The focus was on mitigating the loss of revenue, reputation, compliance, and expense management affected by a crisis. The findings from the study partially aligned with Coombs and Holladay's (1996) SCCT and Benoit and Czerwinski's (1997) model of image restoration.

The business continuity plan is more than crisis management (Samson, 2013). The crisis management plans for Hurricane Sandy were not sufficient. The new reality of crises is the effects of storms such as Sandy tend to cascade. For instance, the networks for transportation and communication failed during and after the storm. Supply chains and vendor connections suffered. The storm's devastation reached the global community. Wall Street shut down for 2 days, Northwest ports and airports experienced disruptions, and power outages wreaked havoc. Hurricane Sandy is one example of how weather-related catastrophes cost businesses billions of dollars in revenues.

Business continuity planning addresses recovery efforts, facilitates the restoration process, and supports effective communication (Samson, 2013). A good business continuity plan includes details for establishing a governance and program management structure to align with decision making and communication structures. In the aftermath of a crisis, BCP includes postcrisis evaluation and reporting (Samson, 2013). In addition, BCP includes an outline on how the crisis plans prepare business owners for future events, and outsider assessment reports.

Hallegatte (2014) estimated the cost of potential disasters, and included indirect economic consequences as an important input in the design of risk management strategies. The adaptive regional input-output inventory model is a tool to assess indirect

disaster losses and to analyze their drivers. An input output structure signifies production bottlenecks and input scarcity (Hallegatte, 2014). Next, Hallegatte introduced inventories as an additional factor in the production system.

Hallegatte (2014) shared how the modeling strategy distinguishes between necessary supplies such as electricity and water that are not suitable for storing. Moreover, their scarcity could paralyze all economic activity. Therefore, small business owners can replace the supplies that are not essential in the production process, and whose scarcity is problematic, with imports. The application of Hallegatte's model to Hurricane Katrina in Louisiana revealed two periods in the disaster aftermath: the first year, during which production bottlenecks were responsible for large output losses, and the rest of the reconstruction period, during which bottlenecks were an issue and output losses were lower. The researcher indicated in the study findings that policy options failed to mitigate disaster-related output losses (Hallegatte, 2014).

Parrinello (2013) addresses post recovery planning on a large scale. On January 14, 1968, in the Valley of Belice in Sicily, Italy, an earthquake destroyed four rural communities. Post recovery planning of this particular case was massive and extended over a 10-year period. The project, referred to as a *city-territory*, failed due to an inadequate international planning culture and practices (Parrinello, 2013). The four communities devastated by the earthquake were among the poorest in the region.

The *city-territory* region was referred to as *backward* and had no industrial activity, peasants comprised the majority of the population (Parrinello, 2013). The population was illiterate, unemployed, or underemployed. Residents had no running

water, and animals and the general population lived in close spaces. Infrastructure was poor, and to promote reconstruction, regional and national authorities focused on rebuilding the environment through societal and economic change.

Part of the failure resulted from regional and national government leaders not considering the impacts of the cultural climate, social expectations, public policies, and the economic situation (Parrinello, 2013). Natural disasters cause major crises in material and cultural order and thus require a new way of thinking. When reorganizing social life, planning is often part of the reorganization process.

De Souza, Yukio, and Dollery (2015) viewed postdisaster planning differently. It takes money to rebuild, and De Souza et al. contended that postdisaster reconstruction must include rapid coordination for gathering information, intergovernmental participation at the local level, and ongoing administrative structure. De Souza et al. based this premise on the work of Dollery, Kortt, and Grant (2013). Local government systems across the industrialized world have local infrastructure deficiencies in many areas (Dollery et al., 2013). To limit some of the deficiencies, postdisaster reconstruction for local infrastructure must involve the transfer of funds from central and regional to local governments. Postdisaster recoveries entail a need for urgency because of the potential for unforeseen circumstances.

Paul and Hariharan (2012) viewed planning through the lens of emergency preparedness, the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS), and decision making under uncertainty. Natural disasters affect human life and can carry severe economic losses (Auf der Heide, 1989; Lando, 2014; Lee; 2013; Mann, 2014; Wahlstrom, 2012).

Remembering that disruptions in supply chains hamper recovery efforts is important

(Hallegatte, 2014; Paul & Hariharan, 2012). The SNS, created in 1999, supports states

and communities responding to public health emergencies (National Association of

County and City Health Officials, 2007).

The theme for Paul and Hariharan's (2012) study is planning for disasters and

having the resources ready and available when needed. The three obstacles facing the

SNS are (a) delays by States in requesting federal assets, (b) the federal process that

releases assets only upon declaration of disaster, and (c) the time it takes to distribute

supplies quickly from the SNS (Paul & Hariharan, 2012). Only efficient planning can

address these three obstacles.

In contrast to Paul and Hariharan's (2012) study, Neumann (2013) recalled the

effect Hurricane Sandy had on the election process on the East Coast. Neumann

described the lasting power outages, airport closures, and many small businesses without

off-site backup. The PATH Trans-Hudson line from Newark to New York's World Trade

Center closed for over a month. Many people were unable to vote. Proactive planning is

necessary by local and national election officials before another disaster impedes the

election process (Neumann, 2013). Neumann called for a new way of thinking regarding

the connection between election integrity and environmental emergency preparedness.

Emergency communication planning can be useless (Bland, 2013). Bland's

(2013) stance on crisis communication planning in the event of a crisis differed from Paul

and Hariharan's (2012) and Dollery et al.'s (2013) studies. Bland (2013) suggested that

some measure of planning is a necessary part of preparing for a crisis, but noted the

process of crisis planning entails balance. Achieving that balance will involve common sense, agility, and empathy. Crises are unpredictable, Bland contended that detailed and rigid plans are a waste of time and energy.

The planning stages should involve the entire team (Bland, 2013). Crisis communication planning is a team effort. Teams create a realistic set of questions with a focus on finding the answers. Finding the answers to these questions will support the evolution of crisis plans (Bland, 2013).

Contrary to Bland (2013), Buschlen and Goffnett (2013) used higher education as the basis for effective disaster planning and recovery. Disasters and the need for humanitarian relief will increase in the future (Buschlen & Goffnett, 2013). The emerging role of higher education can support response and recovery efforts. The focus centered on disaster-based leadership training, and Buschlen and Goffnett noted the critical need for developing skilled disaster relief leaders in both curricular and cocurricular venues.

The results of Buschlen and Goffnett's (2013) study indicated that leaders in institutions of higher learning can provide two functions for disaster planning and recovery. The two functions are (a) providing experiential learning opportunities to offer a critical service for immediate disaster relief and (b) developing the skills of future leaders. In this qualitative study, Buschlen and Goffnett offered critical assessments methods for exploring how leaders lead in times of disaster.

Christensen et al. (2013) explored terrorist attacks that occurred in Norway on July 22, 2011. Christensen et al. viewed leaders in action from a different lens than Buschlen and Goffnett (2013) employed. Although the authors of both studies explored

leaders in action in the context of a disaster, Christensen et al. focused on political and police leadership. Christensen et al.'s study was similar to Benoit and Czerwinski's (1997) research, as Christensen et al. emphasized meaning making, which refers to the way leaders react in the media toward the public. Managing the message is the central theme in both studies. Christensen et al. extended his research on crisis communication to include the complex dynamics of structural and cultural influences and symbolic factors.

Salman (2014) agreed with Chen et al. (2013) that collaborating in times of crisis and disaster emergencies supports better outcomes for recovery. Salman focused on Snowstorm Alexia and collaborations at different levels in times of crisis. Salman considered if people should individually take all the responsibility to manage crises and emergencies to protect themselves and their belongings, if organizational leaders should join efforts with other organizational leaders within the same or different sectors, and if governments should seek external collaboration for the ultimate goal of securing their economies.

The questions posed by Salman (2014) were all part of the collaboration process. Salman's work in part supported Coombs's SCCT constructs because Salman considered collaboration and loss of control in times of crisis. In contrast to Salman, Coombs and Holladay (1996), and Benoit and Czerwinski (1997), Schlegelmilch and Albanese (2014) expanded the practice of business intelligence in the context of emergency preparedness.

Schlegelmilch and Albanese (2014) defined business intelligence as a set of technologies used for collecting, assimilating, analyzing, and transforming primary data to improve decision making. Although the definition refers to quantitative research, it fits

qualitative research as well. Schlegelmilch and Albanese applied business intelligence to EM to facilitate decision making in the framework of disaster prevention, planning, response, and recovery.

Unlike Schlegelmich's (2014) study, Simpson, Clegg, and Pina e Cunha (2013) focused on compassion as an ongoing part of organizational procedures and strategies, and Coombs (1999) agreed that compassion is an important issue in the crisis management community. Similar to Coombs's SCCT, Simpson et al. understood compassion as one of the crisis communication strategies that can reduce legal damages if issues occur before or after a crisis.

Like Coombs (1999), Simpson et al. (2013) suggested the compassionate and the apologetic approaches are habits company leaders should adopt. The work of Khan et al., 2013 settles this premise. Khan et al., Coombs, and Simpson et al. agreed that compassion is complex and connects with social relational practices.

The study by Simpson et al. (2013) involved observing the employees affected by the Brisbane floods of 2011. The observations of the employees revealed that crisis management should not be a reactionary process. Rather, the process should be continuous, as also noted in the research of Dobó (2014) and Robinson and Schroeder (2015).

Stern (2013) offered support to Coombs's SCCT and Buschlen and Goffnett's (2013) and Christensen et al.'s (2013) studies because Stern and other researchers (i.e., Benoit and Czerwinski, 1997, and Boin, 't Hat, Stern, & Sundelius, (2005) considered crisis communications in the context of human-induced or natural disasters into five

categories. The five categories are challenges centered on (a) sense making, (b) decision making and coordination, (c) meaning making, (d) ending, and (e) learning.

Being prepared for a disaster as a leader entails understanding these five challenges (Stern, 2013). In the wake of such crises (i.e., the Boston Marathon bombings, Hurricane Katrina, and Sandy), strong, effective leadership is necessary. The preparation can evolve during and after an event (Bland, 2013; Buschlen & Goffnett, 2013; Stern, 2013). Taneja, Pryor, Sewell, and Recuero's (2014) work aligned with others researchers (i.e., Bland, 2013; Johansen, Aggerholm, & Frandsen, 2012). Gaining the right balance through interconnectedness will ensure a high level of engagement and aid in the planning and recovery process (Taneja et al., 2014).

Stakeholders

Stakeholders have an important role for small business owners, as they must determine the amount of personal control the small business owner may have over a crisis. Stakeholders are a part of a company's performance history (Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Heath, 2005; Coombs & Holladay, 1996, 2002). In a study on crisis management in the context of teams, Waller, Zhike, and Pratten (2014) determined that crisis management teams have vital roles in many normative models of crisis communication.

Crisis management education does not address the nature of crisis teams nor the capabilities necessary for them to be effective after a crisis (Waller et al., 2014). Team capabilities play key roles for crisis teams as team members' face evolving crises (Waller et al., 2014). Business resiliency and stakeholder management are the key

components for handling a crisis (Carey & Perry, 2014). Waller et al. (2014) facilitated

separate roundtable discussions at the City and Financial Conference in London on

January 29, 2014, and shared how the theme of those discussions centered on business

resiliency and stakeholder management. Waller et al. summarized the discussions held at

the event and added their insights into the subject of who stakeholders are and the

different means and messages to communicate with various stakeholders.

The traditional models for crisis management are outdated (Khan et al., 2013).

The disturbance of relational systems after a crisis requires further research. Further

research is needed because of the uncertainty of crises. In addition, because crises are

ambiguous, stakeholders are vital to the recovery process. Moreover, uncertainties can

last long after the initial crisis is over. Dysfunctional patterns of behavior and

performance are the result of the uncertainties (Khan et al., 2013). Because business

practices are relational, crisis management must go beyond the initial crisis with

solutions. Natural disasters are high impact events that threaten small businesses and can

send traumas to both relational and operational systems.

The focus on small businesses must include a larger concentration on

stakeholders. Leaders may unconsciously isolate themselves when a crisis occurs

(Morrison, 2013). Executive leaders operating in isolation might be an unintentional issue

that has an impact upon resource allocation when preparing organizations to react to a

sudden natural disaster (Morrison, 2013). Two forms of isolation that are of particular

interest are upper executive detachment from management and indifference to groups

external to daily operations.

Executive leaders need to expand their attention to establishing a more inclusive strategy by engaging employees at all levels directly (Morrison, 2013). However, Ruggiero and Vos (2013) had a different premise and described current knowledge on communication related to crisis management in the case of terrorism incidents. Terrorism incidents are parallel to natural disaster events, as crisis communication refers to communication with everyone who supports crisis management (Ruggiero & Vos, 2013).

Both internal and external stakeholders of companies use crisis communication to support crisis management (Ruggiero & Vos, 2013). The scientific literature on terrorism communication by Ruggiero and Vos (2013) has evolved since 2003. The attempt to identify the challenges associated with communication in such crises was the first of its kind to date. Crises, in general, are complex and challenging.

Understanding crisis events entails having clear and concise communication (Ruggiero & Vos, 2013). Discourse, mistrust, and unexpected behavior in stressful times requires credible information from business owners. People directly affected by a crisis need detail instructions to control panic. Ruggiero and Vos (2013) shared how important crisis communication is to the recovery process.

For instance, leader stakeholder communication supports the need for trust and ethical behavior after a crisis. Ruggiero and Vos (2013) used a broad scholarly foundation containing human behavior, ethical aspects, and the need for leadership to be socially supportive. Being socially supportive includes showing empathy and facilitating sense making to strengthen civic resilience. A strategy suggested by Ruggiero and Vos is preparedness for a crisis should include a wide educative approach.

Another strategy noted in Ruggiero and Vos's (2013) study is having diverse groups participate in the crisis response. The needs of public groups are different in a crisis. People usually do not have firsthand experience dealing with major crisis events such as the World Trade Center crisis (Ruggiero & Vos, 2013). The public and employees of other companies relied on the media to interpret the risks involved.

Ruggiero and Vos (2013) contended that inconsistent and unverified information from businesses and the media is inappropriate and unacceptable. Precrisis education and training for small business owners, the public, and stakeholders are necessary. Small business owners, stakeholders, and citizens need relevant information regarding the next steps after a crisis. A lack of coordination among response organizations, the public, and employees of companies calls for collaboration before a crisis event. These efforts often fail after a crisis because of legal and professional constraints.

Riddell's (2013) work is important to the expansion of crisis communication and reputation management. Riddell described how engaged employees support the recovery efforts of a company in crisis. However, when a crisis occurs, it is common during the decision-making process to ignore the voice of employees. Employees and the small business owner should be a company's first line of defense in crisis and reputation management. Riddell explored the relationship between the leader and employee working together to build a culture that will sustain a company in times of crisis. Four strategies in the event of a crisis are (a) act quickly but stick to the facts, (b) be visible, (c) be honest and credible, and (d) use all available communications channels (Riddell, 2013). These

four strategies will support building a culture for sustaining small business owners in times of crisis (Riddell, 2013).

Transition

Section 1 included the background of the problem, problem statement, purpose statement, and the nature of the study, which justified my choosing the qualitative method and multiple unit case study design. Section 1 also included interview questions (see Appendix A), the conceptual framework, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the study. Section 1 concluded with the significance of the study and a review of the professional and academic literature. The literature review included a focus on previous literature relating to the following sections and subsections: Coombs's SCCT, decision making, leader–employee engagement, disaster recovery coordination, planning, and stakeholders. Section 2 includes (a) the business project purpose, (b) the role of the researcher, (c) the participants, (d) a description of the research methodology and design, (e) population and sampling, (f) ethical research, (g) data collection instruments and technique, (h) data organization technique, (i) data analysis, and reliability and validity. Section 3 begins with an introduction that includes the purpose statement, research question, and findings. Section 3 also includes an application to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, and researcher reflections.

Section 2: The Project

Weather-related disasters in the United States are increasing (Mann, 2014).

Therefore, it is paramount for small business owners to have strategies that facilitate

learning and serve as a framework for evaluation, analysis, and decision making in crisis

communication (Palttala & Vos, 2011). Developing communication strategies for

resuming business operations, which can minimize the adverse effects of a natural

disaster on their companies' profitability, is vital.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive multiple unit case study was to explore

what communication strategies some small business owners developed and implemented

for facilitating resuming their business operations that minimized the adverse effects of a

natural disaster on their companies' profitability. The targeted population consisted of

small business owners located along the Belmar Boardwalk in New Jersey who

developed and implemented communication strategies for resuming business operations

following Hurricane Sandy in 2012. The specific population for this multiple unit case

study was two small business owners who were (a) present when the crisis occurred and

(b) developed and implemented communication strategies to resume their business

operations while minimizing the adverse effects of the natural disaster on their

companies' profitability. The implications for positive social change include

communication strategies that may mitigate loss for small business owners, employees,

and families after a natural disaster.

Role of the Researcher

I used semistructured interview questions, took notes, and collected company documents. I was the primary data collection instrument as described by Hammersley, 2013; Pezalla, Pettigrew, & Miller-Day, 2012. A key aspect of my role as the researcher of this study was to respect the participants' rights (Boblin, Ireland, Kirkpartick, & Robertson, 2013; Rowley, 2012; Stuckey, 2014). In addition, my role as the researcher of this qualitative multiple unit case study was to choose the appropriate procedures to complete the research, which included (a) the appropriate research methodology and design, (b) recruiting potential participants, and (c) collecting and analyzing the data (Seidman, 2013). The data collection process for this study included conducting semistructured telephone interviews and collecting the company's crisis communication strategy documents.

The results for a qualitative study must be stable and comparable over time to secure reliability (Harland, 2014). I used five semistructured interview questions for one-on-one telephone interviews. One-on-one interviews involve a profound exploration of particular or sensitive topics (Stuckey, 2014). The interview protocol and questions are located at Appendix A. Engaging in the exhaustive interviews is evidence of the participants' involvements and their perspectives of this particular topic (Boblin et al., 2013). The participant's responses to the five semistructured interview questions are located at Appendix B.

Regarding my relationships with the topic, the participants, or area of the research, I am not currently a manager nor have I worked for a business in New Jersey. I

did not know any small business owners or business leaders in the area, because I lived in Wesley Chapel, Florida. This topic was of particular interest to me because I plan to teach and write about crisis communications in the future.

The role of ethics in this study was paramount. The ethical principles and guidelines for the protection of humans appear in the *Belmont Report* (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). I followed the three basic ethics of research involving human subjects in my study. The three ethics are the principles of (a) respect of persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice.

Humans have flaws, and biases may affect a study (Grant, Rohr, & Grant, 2012; Nelson, Onwuegbuzie, Wines, & Frels, 2013). As the researcher, I attempted to diminish error and researcher bias as stated by Leedy and Ormrod (2013). To minimize bias, I did not react to the interview responses (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). I also did not personally know the participants, which helped to diminish personal bias during the interviews. I used an interview protocol (see Appendix A) to safeguard my role as the researcher as suggested by Pezalla et al. (2012), and I followed the same protocol with each participant. Following each interview, I used the protocol to ensure I did not overlook any steps (Pezalla et al., 2012). Seidman (2013) noted that qualitative researchers rely on interview protocols as a tool to achieve cohesion and added to the stability and reliability of the study.

Participants

I recruited participants through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling refers to selective or subjective sampling (Pezalla et al., 2012; Rowley, 2012). I gained access to the participants after obtaining approval from the Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB). Once approved, I selected the potential participants from a public list provided by the City of Belmar's Municipal Directory. Next, I sent the consent form through e-mail to the prospective participants. The participant consent form contained the intent of the study. The participant(s) reviewed and replied *I consent* via e-mail to join the study.

I selected two small business owners from the Belmar community who met the eligibility criteria and who replied to my e-mail *I consent* to join the study. The appropriate process involved obtaining written permission before interviewing and collecting data (Strauss & Corbin, 2015). The participants were willing to share information regarding what communication strategies facilitated resuming their business operations that minimized the adverse effects of a natural disaster on their profitability. Covell, Sidani, and Ritchie, (2012) stated that the sequence of data collection influences the responses to open-ended questions.

I contacted the small business owners via telephone to schedule the telephone interview with times and dates that were convenient for them as suggested by Brown et al. (2013). At that time, I informed the participants that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. One strategy for establishing a working relationship with participants is through honesty and trust (Rowley, 2012). Rubin and Rubin (2012) noted that the process of establishing trust with

the participants was important and influenced the outcome of the study. I sought to assure that each participant felt confident that I would protect his or her confidentiality and anonymity, which strengthened our working relationship. Researchers (Fusch and Ness, 2015; Granot, Brashear, & Motta, 2012; Walker, 2012) described data saturation as the process of conducting the interviews with each participant until no new information emerged. The interview process with each participant continued until I determined no new information emerged and data saturation was evident. Data saturation was a key element for this study because replication in categories is important, as replication is the manner a researcher verifies and ensures comprehension and conclusion validity as confirmed by the research of (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Research Method and Design

Understanding which research method and design was appropriate for this study was critical. A qualitative research method is a means for exploring and understanding individuals or groups ascribed to a social or human problem (R. K. Yin, 2014). The purpose of this qualitative multiple unit case study was to explore how some small business owners developed and implemented communication strategies for facilitating resuming their business operations that minimized the adverse effects of a natural disaster on their companies' profitability. Qualitative researchers seek answers to a central question and subquestions (R. K. Yin, 2014).

Research Method

I selected a qualitative research inquiry for this study. Qualitative researchers focus on a small number of participants and on gaining in-depth insights into their

perceptions and lived experiences (Tomkins & Eatough, 2013). Qualitative inquiry has a broad use in explaining behavior, attitudes, and constructs (Kapoulas & Mitic, 2012). The justification for selecting qualitative research was that qualitative researchers require a different approach to data collection, analysis, and interpretation from traditional quantitative approaches (Bailey, 2014). Qualitative procedures include (a) purposive sampling, (b) collecting open-ended data, (c) analyzing text or pictures, and (d) interpreting the findings (R. K. Yin, 2014). The reason for not selecting a quantitative or a mixed method inquiry was that addressing my study's purpose required using open-ended semistructured interview questions with participants and reviewing company documents as a means of gathering research data. In addition, qualitative researchers collect data by observing behaviors, reviewing documents, and interviewing participants to record their viewpoints (R. K. Yin, 2014).

Qualitative researchers explore all problems and social situations (R. K. Yin, 2014). Although the mixed method approach includes both qualitative and quantitative techniques in a multiple study, this study did not involve evaluating or comparing variables. All quantitative and some mixed method approaches require reducing and analyzing data using data sets and statistical tests (Bansal & Corley, 2012). A qualitative study was most appropriate for exploring how some small business owners developed and implemented communication strategies to resume their business operations while minimizing the adverse effects of the natural disaster on their companies' profitability.

Research Design

A multiple unit case study design was most appropriate for this qualitative research study. The justification for my selection was that decisions were a part of the focus for this study. Hurricane Sandy affected decisions on the implementation of certain communication strategies developed by two small business owners located in Belmar, New Jersey. Case study research refers to a need to comprehend complex social phenomena (Harland, 2014) or serves as the central tendency to illuminate a decision or set of decisions (R. K. Yin, 2014).

According to Boblin et al. (2013), R. K. Yin's research was postpositivist and Stake's was constructivist. Certain components of both these worldviews are part of who I am as a researcher. Researchers use the research design to explore research questions and draw conclusions for a study to formulate a model or report (Da Mota Pedrosa et al., 2012). Ethnography, phenomenology, and case study comprise the main designs for qualitative research studies (Cronin, 2014).

In an ethnographic study, the researcher explores cultural groups, culture sharing, behaviors, and activities regarding culture over time (Hazzan, 2014). My study was not about a culture or community over time; therefore, an ethnographic study design was not appropriate. Researchers conduct a phenomenological study if they seek to interpret lived experiences from the perspective of others (Tomkins & Eatough, 2013). Some researchers seek to understand experiences, behaviors, attitudes, processes, and opinions from others using interviews (Rowley, 2012). Although I explored the lived experiences of the participants through interviews, I did not focus on the meanings of these lived

experiences to the participants. I also used company documents. It may have been difficult to reach data saturation in a phenomenological study that only involved finding small business owners who have developed and implemented strategies to communicate and resume their business operations that minimized the adverse effects of Hurricane Sandy on their companies' profitability. Therefore, a phenomenological design was not an option.

To reach data saturation, researchers must find exhaustive evidence about participants' involvements and perspectives of a particular topic (Chikweche & Fletcher, 2012). I used a purposeful sample of participants until data saturation occurred, as suggested by Coenen, Stamm, Stucki, and Cieza, (2012). Data saturation occurs only when interviewees do not add or change any information during the repeating interview process (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). I also used member checking to ensure data validity.

Population and Sampling

In this qualitative multiple unit case study, the population selected included a purposive sample size of two small business owners who experienced Hurricane Sandy in Belmar, New Jersey's and demonstrated they utilized successful communication strategies to resume their business operations while minimizing the adverse effects of the natural disaster on their companies' profitability. Researchers have indicated there is no required number regarding population sampling (Dworkin, 2012), although data saturation is a requirement (Baker & Edwards, 2012; Robinson & Schroeder, 2015). To achieve data saturation, I used member checking, methodological triangulation, and a transcript review to validate the participants' responses (Chikweche & Fletcher, 2012;

Denzin, 2012; Wilson, 2014). Some researchers had suggested that the interview process

must continue until no new themes emerge (Gorissen, van Bruggen, & Jochems, 2013).

Harper and Cole (2012), Andraski et al. (2014), and Marshall and Rossman (2016) noted

that member checking was the process of participants reviewing and approving all

aspects of their interpretation of the information they had provided. The concept of

purposive sampling was to focus on participants with specific characteristics who were

able to assist in answering the research question (Chikweche & Fletcher, 2012). The

purposive sample aligned with the study's central research question.

Ethical Research

I followed the three basic ethics of research involving human subjects: (a) respect

of persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice (National Commission for the Protection of

Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979; R. K. Yin, 2014; Vainio,

2012). Also, I e-mailed a consent form explaining the intent of the study to the

participants. The participant consent form was for the participants to review and reply *I*

Consent via e-mail to join the study. The participant consent form included my IRB

Approval number 06-16-0201760, the interview questions and an explanation that I

would audio record the interviews. In addition, the consent form contained the text

outline that participants could withdraw from the study at any time.

The consent form also contained text that informed the participants that the study

involved examining company documents. The consent form revealed that there was no

compensation or incentives for participating in the study. I called the participants and

asked each to schedule an interview date and time that was convenient for them in an

effort to make the participants feel comfortable. In addition, ethical issues and adhering to protocol were paramount when conducting interviews (Block & Erskine, 2012; National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979; Vainio, 2012).

Being responsible at all times for data gathering, data storage, and data analysis was paramount in protecting the rights of the participants and preserving their privacy (R. K. Yin, 2014). The data will remain on a password protected external hard drive for 5 years. As required, my locked filing cabinet ensures all written data remains safely stored. After 5 years, I will properly destroy all the data. I protected all the people involved in this study and ensure that they were aware that I guarantee the confidentiality of both the participants and their organizations. I referred to the participants as P1 and P2. I also shared the study's findings with the participants via email.

Data Collection Instruments

I was the primary collector of data in this qualitative multiple unit case study. My IRB approval number is 06-16-16-0201760. As the data collection instrument, I set the appropriate boundaries and protocol for this study as suggested by Stuckey (2014). Stuckey wrote that unrestrained communication increases with the right (i.e., protocol) code of behavior from the researcher. As the researcher, I collected data from open-ended semistructured interview questions, took notes, and reviewed company documents (Grant et al., 2012; Ivey, 2012; Murthy, 2013). The participant's responses to the 5 semistructured interview questions are located at Appendix B as evidence.

Data for case studies have six origins, and a minimum of two are necessary to complete a case study (Tsang, 2013; R. K. Yin, 2014). The six potential origins are (a) archival records, (b) direct observations, (c) documentation, (d) interviews, (e) participant observation (i.e., site visits), or (f) physical artifacts (R. K. Yin, 2014). I used open-ended semistructured interviews, took notes, and company documents as primary sources of data collection for the study. The semistructured interview process involved using prepared questions that identified and explored themes in a consistent and systematic manner including using detailed follow-on inquiries for obtaining additional details from participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

After the Walden IRB granted approval, I received email replies of *I consent* from the participants. As suggested by Akhavan and Dehghani, (2015), I collected company documents, conducted interviews, took notes, and compared the knowledge gained from the interviews with the emerging themes from all the data sources. Assessing and comparing knowledge acquisition techniques are productive for data collection (Akhavan & Dehghani, 2015). Methodology triangulation entails using more than one kind of data to study a phenomenon (Houghton et al., 2013; R. K. Yin, 2014). The methodology triangulation approach is beneficial in providing confirmation of findings, and using additional data sources, facilitated assessing validity and enhanced understanding of studied phenomena (Houghton et al., 2013).

I collected company documents that consisted of crisis communication strategies, crisis plans (preparedness, response, and reactions). Company documents included details of the event and covered a protracted time span (R. K. Yin, 2014). Harland (2014) and R.

K. Yin (2014) noted printed documents and other materials are pertinent to address researchers' needs to mine data.

The interview protocol for the data collection instrument is located at Appendix A and enabled me to assure the reliability and validity of the study. Member checking is important in a qualitative study, as it assures the validity and reliability of the research findings (Andraski, Chandler, Powell, Humes, & Wakefield, 2014; Harland, 2014). Member checking is a participant validation technique for demonstrating the credibility of a study's findings, conclusions, and recommendations (Harper & Cole, 2012).

To complete a transcript review, the participants perused their interview transcripts for any errors or missing information (Houghton et al., 2013; R. K. Yin, 2014). The review served as a process for validation because there were no scores to calculate or variables in the study. Methodology triangulation is an approach to validate a study's findings (R. K. Yin, 2014). Data cleansing serves to address threats to validity and to facilitate member checking (Harvey, 2015). Data cleansing entails discovering and removing data that do not conform to the search criteria. Data cleansing involves removing all unrelated data (Brown, 2013; Harvey, 2015). After the data cleansing was completed, I entered the verified interview transcript data into the computer by using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo 11 Plus. The data analysis software was the means for identifying word frequencies, identifying emerging themes, and interpreting meanings as noted by (Saldana, 2013; Schreier, 2012).

Data Collection Technique

The data collection techniques for this study were telephone interviews, note taking, and company documents (R. K. Yin, 2014). I conducted semistructured interviews using the interview protocol (see Appendix A). During the semistructured interview, I restated why the participant and I were meeting and introduced the set of questions that explored the phenomenon. Interviews capture the lived experience of participants (Stuckey, 2014).

Before the interview(s) began, I again e-mailed each participant a copy of the participant consent form. I began each interview with polite conversation before asking the first interview question, as suggested by Grant et al. (2012). I audio recorded the telephone interviews in a private area with the participant present. I stopped each interview after data saturation occurred. Saturation occurs only when the interview data and document review data become repetitive (Grant et al. 2012). The time allocated for each interview did not exceed 30 minutes. After the interview was completed, I collected the company documents. Because the interview was by telephone, I requested each participant to fax or email the documents.

Transcription of the recorded interview began after the interviews were over. After the transcriptions were complete, I sent the transcription to the appropriate participant via e-mail and asked each participant to review the transcript for accuracy, as suggested by Aust et al. (2013). Upon the completion of the transcript review by participants for accuracy, I began the data analysis phase.

The qualitative data collection technique is useful when (a) researchers cannot directly observe participants, (b) participants can provide historical information, (c) researchers want to control the line of questioning, (d) researchers want to obtain the language and words of participants, and (e) serving as written evidence that saves researchers time and money for transcribing (R. K. Yin, 2014). The disadvantages of using the qualitative data collection technique for a study are (a) not all participants are equally articulate or perceptive, (b) the data may be unavailable for public or private access, and (c) may provide indirect information filtered through the views of interviewees (R.K. Yin, 2014).

Data Organization Technique

The second principle in qualitative studies is the way researchers organize and document the data (R. K. Yin, 2014). Saldana (2013) explained how to plan, organize, and use codes for analyzing the data collected in the study. Since the interviews took place via telephone, I used the QuickTime Player audio record option on my desktop computer. I tested the device before the meeting to ensure it worked properly.

I took notes using a pen and a small notepad of paper to record the day, time, and location of the interview. Field notes are vital in research (Ivey, 2012; Murthy, 2013). Although Murthy (2013) was referring to ethnographic research, field notes were equally important during the interview process of this qualitative research multiple unit case study. I organized all the data used in this study from books, journals, or research logs by managing and maintaining the data on a master citations references database on my personal computer and on two different flash drives. The collection and storage of all

data conformed to IRB requirements. I was the only person who had exclusive access to all the data. I stored electronic data on a password protected USB Flash drive, and will keep the drive secure for 5 years. The data were stored in a lock cabinet drawer for 5 years. After the 5 year period has expired, I will destroy all data (i.e., paper and electronic) by erasing the USB Flash drive and shredding the paper data.

Data Analysis

I created the interview questions to align with the central research question. In addition to conducting interviews, for enabling methodological triangulation, I collected company documents in the form of crisis communication strategies, and crisis plans (i.e., emergency response, and recovery plans). Methodology triangulation is beneficial for confirmation of findings, more comprehensive data, increased validity and enhanced understanding of studied phenomena (Horne & Horgan, 2012). The participants for this study were small business owners who developed and implemented communication strategies for facilitating resuming their business operations, which minimized the adverse effects of a natural disaster on their companies' profitability.

Schreier (2012) described the logic and sequential order of the data analysis process. Immediately after conducting the interviews, I (a) transcribed the interview recordings, (b) e-mailed each participant a copy of the transcript, and (c) asked the participant to review the transcript. Member checking ensures the meaning and word choice are accurate (Bailey, 2014). After the participants confirmed the interview data and my interpretations were accurate, I uploaded the audio recordings into my computer. The NVivo 11 Plus software for PCs will support the analysis of the data.

The transcribing of the audio recordings and coding process, the NVivo 11 Plus software was suitable for the study. The transcribing feature in the NVivo software can replay the recording in slow motion so I could type the participant responses word for word. Data cleansing followed, which was the process of removing all irrelevant data that do not conform to the search criteria, as described by Brown et al. (2013) and Harvey (2015).

I began coding and analyzing the remaining interview data in the computer using NVivo 11 Plus software. The codes created for the participants and the interview data were *P1* and *P2*. The codes for the documentation collected were *Document 1* and *Document 2*. I used NVivo 11 Plus software to identify key themes, and word frequencies from the data. Yin (2013, 2014) identified five stages of data analysis: (a) collecting the data, (b) separating the data into groupings, (c) regrouping the data into themes, (d) assessing the information, and (e) developing conclusions. I correlated the key themes with the extant literature and new studies since writing the proposal and the conceptual framework.

Reliability and Validity

Confirming the reliability and validity of a study requires first understanding the difference among the research methods (Aust et al., 2013; Wilson, 2014). Quantitative research entails gathering information from a variety of data points. Quantitative research involves statistical data and variables (Wilson, 2014). According to Street and Ward (2012) the focus in qualitative research is depth and identifying a single phenomenon. In

addition, as described by the researchers (i.e., Street and Ward (2012) reliability and dependability in qualitative research are synonymous.

Reliability

Confirming reliability and validity is challenging in some case studies when a limited number of participants exist (R. K. Yin (2013). In my qualitative multiple unit case study, I demonstrate the research as (a) dependable, (b) credible, and (c) transferable, thereby establishing the study's confirmability. I assured the validity of each element through member checking, participant transcript review, and methodological triangulation of the interviews and company documents.

The strategies and processes for assuring the reliability and validity of my study were concentrating on key themes, determining the limits of the research, and self-evaluation (reflection, not being affected by the action). In addition, methodological triangulation, thick and rich descriptions, and member checking by obtaining feedback and communicative validation assured the quality of the research (Street & Ward, 2012).

Validity

According to Burchett et al. (2013) enabling others to assess the validity and reliability of qualitative data is essential to determine the stability and creditability of findings, conclusions, and recommendations. Munn et al. (2014) confirmed that the concept of dependability aligned with reliability. Authenticity, trustworthiness, transferability, and credibility all have an association with qualitative validity (Burchett et al., 2013). Member checking was another means for validating dependability, creditability, transferability, and confirmability (R. K. Yin. 2014). As suggested by

Harper and Cole (2012), I determined data saturation occurred after the information

became repetitive and no new information appeared. The sample size of two participants

was suitable for conducting methodological triangulation with the interview responses

and company documents. Member checking and a transcript review facilitated reaching

data saturation and for assuring the reliability and validity of the study results.

Transition and Summary

Section 2 included the purpose statement, the role of the researcher, a description

of the participants, and a detailed justification of the research methodology and design. I

described the population and sampling method; ethical research; data collection

instruments, technique, and organization; and data analysis techniques. Section 2

concluded with a discussion of the methods and techniques for ensuring the reliability

and validity of my study. Section 3 begins with an introduction that includes (a) the

purpose statement and the research question, and the presentation of the findings follow.

Section 3 also includes (b) an application to professional practice, (c) implications for

social change, (d) recommendations for action, (e) recommendations for further research,

(f) researcher reflections, and (g) the conclusion.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

Small business owners are responsible for the majority of job creation and economic growth in the United States (Neumark, Wall, & Junfu, 2011; U.S. Small Business Administration , 2014). In the event of a natural disaster, consistent communication, goods, and services are vital to the community (Cook, 2015). After Hurricane Sandy had devastated Belmar, New Jersey, the entire business community experienced disruptions in economic and social functions.

Before Hurricane Sandy occurred, the City of Belmar was a popular vacation destination because of the city's natural and recreational resources. Small business owners made up approximately 90% of all business activity in Belmar (Small Business Administration, 2014). The city's boardwalk and town offered shops, restaurants, an active arts scene, sporting events, festivals, and a variety of family-oriented activities. Belmar was among the most popular surf spots on the East Coast, frequently hosting surfing events and competitions.

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive multiple unit case study was to explore how some small business owners developed and implemented communication strategies for facilitating resuming their business operations that minimized the adverse effects of a natural disaster on their companies' profitability. Belmar, New Jersey is located along the Jersey Shore facing the Atlantic Ocean to the east, with the Shark River on the north and west sides of the community (Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions [ANJEC], 2008). During the interview, with Participant 1 (P1) described the city of

Belmar after Hurricane Sandy as a *plugged bath tub*. Evaluating a crisis event (i.e.,

Hurricane Sandy) and coordinating the suitable communication procedures necessitates

strategies that included how stakeholders may react to the crisis as described by Coombs

and Holladay (1996). Two small business owners from Belmar, New Jersey, accepted the

task of evaluating, developing, and implementing communication strategies that

facilitated resuming their business operations quickly, which minimized the adverse

effects of a natural disaster on their companies' profitability.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question for this study was: What communication

strategies do some small business owners use to facilitate resuming their business

operations following a natural disaster and for minimizing the adverse effects on their

companies' profitability? Of the three data sources collected (i.e., semistructed

interviews, note taking, and company documents), the majority of data captured was from

the participant interviews. Data saturation occurred when the interview data and

document review became repetitive and no new information was added as discussed by

Grant et al. (2012). I entered the interview data and the information from the company

documents into Nvivo 11 Plus, a qualitative data organization software tool. Through the

data analysis phase of the study I identified four themes: (a) communication, (b)

community, (c) disaster recovery, and (d) their stakeholders (employees).

Emerging Themes From Data Collected: A Critical Analysis Relating to the Findings

The first theme that emerged from the data analysis involved communication as a vital means for building and maintaining strong relationships of trust. The second theme encompassed community. The commitment, dedication, and love for the community of Belmar residents inspired the two small business owners to recover quickly from disaster. The third theme was resilience during disaster recovery. The fourth and final theme entailed the stakeholders. These four themes align with Coombs' SCCT, the conceptual framework used for this study.

Participants and Their Businesses

The participants in this study included two small business owners. The small business owners were (a) a bar and restaurant owner, and (b) an owner of multiple businesses. All the participants' businesses were located in Belmar, New Jersey. The 30-minute interviews took place via audio-recorded telephone conference with Internet connection without interruption. I adhered to the three basic ethics guidelines of research involving human subjects: (a) respect of persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979), and I followed the interview protocol (see Appendix A).

Participants Educational and Professional Backgrounds

P1 completed his college education with a degree in business management (see Table 2). P1 is a bar and restaurant owner who started his business over ten years ago. In the next interview, with Participant 2 (P2*)* mentioned having a degree was in fashion

merchandising management (see Table 2). P2 is the owner of multiple businesses which

have been in operation for more than 7 years.

Table 2

Educational Background of the Participants

Participant Responses	Quantity	Percentage of Total
High School Graduate	0	0
No College	0	0
Some College	0	0
Graduated College	2	100%

Alasadi and Sabbagh (2015) indicated that many individuals with a business background start their own businesses. I asked P1 and P2 in separate interviews five semistructured, open-ended interview questions using the interview protocol as a guide (see Appendix A). When P2 was asked interview question 2 ("What communication strategies worked best to mitigate the loss of profitability?"), she stated her previous business failed. P2 also stated that one day she would own multiple businesses, and the communication strategies for mitigating loss of profitability would be relevant to the multiple businesses. In addition, P1 stated that he had a business background prior to starting his business. Before concluding each interview, I asked each participant to email or fax me their company documents. Once I received the company documents, I acknowledged receipt of the documents with each participant via email. The company documents were (a) crisis communication strategies, and (b) crisis plans (preparedness, response, and recovery).

Table 3

Professional Backgrounds of the Participants

Participant Responses	Quantity	Percentage of Total
Previously Owned a Small Business	1	
Business Background	1	
No Business Background	0	
Total	2	100%

Emergent Theme 1: Communication

During the interview with P1, he stated that "sometimes as leaders we forget to talk with our employees." P1 described communication as a way to establish an understanding of people. P1's statement aligned with Mazzei and Ravazzani's (2015) research findings regarding internal crisis communications. Communication is the overriding action that can produce a successful outcome and build relationships of trust (Khan et al., 2013). While conducting the interview with P2, she stated there were four principles she used during the recovery process with her employees. The first was using a variety of media (i.e., cell phone, Facebook, and Twitter). With the use of technology, the leader can effectively communicate with their stakeholders and people around the world. Khan et al. (2013) and Libenau (2003) agreed that effective communication after a crisis is dependent on two areas: technology and relationships.

What P2 mentioned was intriguing. P2 indicated as the leader, she communicated with her stakeholders in different ways (e.g., through dress, facial expressions, and tone of voice). P2 described her actions as "calming." She informed me that what she learned about fashion was an individual's attire spoke in volumes. P2 noted that the color of the

clothing, how an individual wears the clothing, and the tone of voice used while wearing a certain design can evoke specific emotions.

Second, P2 stated she constantly communicated in verbal and in visual messages with stakeholders. Her work environments, organizational structures, company policies, salary, and benefits consistently communicated visual messages. Those visual messages to the members of her organization are in line with comments made by Mario J. Garner regarding the Studer principles (Interview with Mario J. Garner, 2015).

Third, she communicated through relationships. P2 talked using technology (i.e., Zoom or Skype). She spoke with stakeholders as friends. She communicated her care and concern, which cultivated the way for an intimate relationship. The employees of small businesses are like families as described by P2. Researchers (Geertshuis et al., 2015; Khan et al., 2013) wrote that the nature of relationships determines the nature of the communication.

Fourth, P2 noted that her communication was consistent with stakeholders. She described all her verbal and visual communication as consistent with her character, and the conversations she had with different people were never contradictory. P2's actions were appropriate for building transparency and trust (Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Health, 2005; Coombs & Holladay, 1996).

While being consistent in conversation and character after a natural disaster is a goal for which to strive, this small business owner (P2) was careful to be consistent with communication. The communication with her employees both in terms of content regarding the message and the authenticity of her character were the same. Immediately

after Hurricane Sandy devastated Belmar, P1 recalled that the city's leadership team members were present with a consistent message and available to help before and after the crisis.

Martin (2015) described all interactions (i.e., personal, professional, or community activities) as progressions for communicating and processing information. Martin explored the role of high-profile disasters, natural and human-induced. Furthermore, Martin noted that by gaining an understanding of communication the failures could shorten the disaster recovery process. Although Martin's study is grounded theory, it is the underpinning for crisis communication.

Emergent Theme 2: Community

Participant 1 stated that the some city officials and members of the community came together before Hurricane Sandy devastated their town. The city officials of Belmar discussed the crisis plans for the entire city with business owners and some members of the community. Participant 1 also mentioned that his business reopened 48 hours after the crisis. Medina (2016) wrote that a proactive approach for disaster risk management is paramount. Medina (2016) also noted that preparation for all sectors of the community must occur prior to the disaster situation.

Morrison (2015) described the strategies developed by private-sector companies' for disaster preparedness as limited. Some private sector companies' fail to plan for a natural disaster and their employees, families, and community infrastructures undergo adverse effects. Participant 2 stated in her interview that new ideas were required for addressing the effects Hurricane Sandy had on their town and her businesses. Morrison

(2015) confirmed that a different approach for preparing for natural disasters must happen prior to the actual occurrence.

In addition, Morrison (2015) indicated that by planning ahead businesses could resume operations quickly after the disaster. Collaborating with governmental organizations (i.e., City Hall, and Public Works, etc.) and the community can limit potential community-wide disaster impacts and streamline the recovery process (Castillo, Cook, & Ozturk, 2014). Morrison and Medina (2016) study findings confirmed that a proactive systematic approach to disaster recovery planning brings small business owners, government officials, and communities together for a rapid recovery. Participant 1 stated that because the city officials', community, and some small business owners came together prior to Hurricane Sandy's arrival their network systems experienced minimal disruption.

Emergent Theme 3: Disaster Recovery

Jenkins (2016) stated to understand the aftermath of a natural disaster the use of metaphor was necessary. The metaphor is vital in the recovery process because the people affected by the disaster need to know what recovery will look like and how the recovery process will occur (Jenkins, 2016). During the interview *P1* used several metaphors (i.e., *that storm was a monster, and after Hurricane Sandy had occurred, we had to show resilience through the recovery process*). In addition, P1 stated immediately after Hurricane Sandy had occurred he did not know what recovery would entail. Abramson et al. (2015) suggested that to counterbalance social and individual vulnerabilities from natural disasters *citizens' resilience* is needed. Citizens' resilience is

preparing communities in advance to promote factors that can influence an individual's well-being and capacity to adapt to adversity.

Participants' 1 and 2 discussed in each interview how dealing with the adversity of the recovery process included the entire community coming together. The sharing of resources, information, and encouragement from other small business owners and the community was paramount. P1 stated the coming together of the community occurred before any federal government assistance materialized. P1 stated that the coming together of the community promoted rapid recovery.

Alcantata (2014) noted that Emergency Management (EM) is a useful framework for small business owners and the community to come together to successfully rebuild quickly after a disaster confirms P1's statement. P2 in her interview described the resilience of the community. She also described the long process it took before federal assistance reached the city of Belmar. She noted that by the time assistance from the federal government had arrived her business had already reopened. P2's statement confirmed the study findings of Smith and Sutter (2013), that the federal government only exacerbates recovery efforts.

Abramson el al. (2015) described how political interest has expanded for cultivating the Resilience Activation Framework (RAF) in both individuals and communities faced with the issues of recovery after a natural disaster. The foundation of the Resilience Activation Framework (RAF) renowned for recognizing forms of adaptability (e.g., the capacity to withstand, adjust, or recuperate rapidly from a

calamity). In addition, RAF is known for individual and group flexibility characteristics, and the components, which encourage the initiation of those flexibility characteristics.

The foundation of the Resilience Activation Framework (RAF) is associated with engaging social resources that facilitate the activation of resilience in people during disaster recovery. Abramson el al. (2015) described resilience as *the capacity of systems to withstand or recover from significant disturbances*. Not only did the two small business owners in Belmar New Jersey have to embrace resilience after Hurricane Sandy, but they also had to rebuild their businesses for their stakeholders and the community they serve.

Emergent Theme 4: Stakeholders

The findings of this qualitative descriptive multiple unit case study are congruent with Coombs situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) and I found SCCT appropriate for use as a disaster recovery strategy. Stakeholders have an important role in supporting the small business owner. The small business owner and their stakeholders must determine the amount of personal control they have after the crisis. Both the small business owner and the stakeholders are a part of the company's performance history as described by Coombs and Holladay (1996).

Coombs's SCCT entailed matching the strategic crisis response to the level of crisis responsibility (Coombs & Holladay, 1996, 2002). In addition, researchers (i.e., Coombs, 1999, 2007, 2010; Coombs & Heath, 2005; Coombs & Holladay, 1996, 2002) argued that SCCT is an evidence-based management that linked business needs and social concerns. The two small business owners of Belmar had to develop and implement

the appropriate actions to take after Hurricane Sandy occurred. The appropriate actions

included (a) understanding the severity of the crisis, (b) how much personal control they

had regarding the devastation to their businesses, and (c) rebuilding their businesses

quickly to limit further loss of their companies' profitability.

Carey and Perry (2014) contended that business resiliency and stakeholder

management were the key components for handling a crisis. Participants' 1 and 2 along

with their stakeholders' made themselves available immediately after the storm occurred.

Both small business owners reopened their doors for business quickly and credited the

speedy recovery to their employees.

Participant 1 and 2 in separate interviews stated they and their stakeholders met

for the precrisis education meetings that the city officials conducted. The participants,

maintained frequent communication immediately after the storm. Riddell (2013) explored

the relationship between the leader and the employees working together to build a culture

that will sustain a company in times of crisis. The findings of Riddell's work indicated

that four strategies in the event of a crisis were successful. The four strategies were (a)

act quickly but stick to the facts, (b) be visible, (c) be honest and credible, and (d) use all

available communication channels.

Comparison of Findings With Findings From Previous Research and Conceptual Framework

Previous researchers (e.g., Dunn and Eble, 2015) also concluded that critical

communication analysis techniques are part of the crisis communication framework,

which ensures the message of the leaders or their position of power does not marginalize

or silence alternative communications. Khan et al. (2013) indicated that effective communication after a crisis was dependent on two areas: technology and relationships. These two areas affect the coordination and execution for recovery. The small business owners (i.e., P1 and P2) utilized (a) tactical measures to assess the effects of Hurricane Sandy on their businesses, (b) assessed the amount of personal control they had over the crisis, and (c) responded quickly reopening their businesses to perform the function of serving the community.

The data collected and analyzed from the participants were evidence that SCCT involved two general uses for crisis communication: (a) as information and (b) as a strategy described by Coombs and Heath (2005). In addition, both *P1* and *P2* identified the three basic constructs of SCCT by assessing, what was in their control, and responding quickly to reopen the businesses to perform services for their community.

The findings from this study align with those expected from Coombs situational crisis communication theory. In addition, the findings align as a disaster recovery strategy and align with findings from the literature. Rapid disaster recovery for the small business owners depends on effective communication strategies and their employees (Khan et al., 2013). The concept of SCCT has evolved from how communication affected people's perceptions and reactions to a crisis into a viable disaster recovery strategy for mitigating loss and supporting rapid recovery for small businesses (Cook, 2015; Coombs, 2007). According to Samson (2013), the crisis management plans for Hurricane Sandy were not sufficient. Samson's statement was true in the context of the overall devastation the storm caused in multiple states.

However, for the two small business owners in Belmar, their crisis plans were sufficient. The participants (e.g., P1 and P2) reviewed their crisis plans and checklist prior to the arrival of the storm. Author Swanciger (2016) wrote small business owners must examine their business continuity plans (BCP) or create one before the occurrence of a natural disaster.

Swanciger (2016) wrote being prepared in the event of a catastrophe was not an option. Swanciger outlined specific tasks the small business owner should complete during the planning stages for addressing actual events. The specific tasks Swanciger outlined were (a) review your insurance policy because adjustments may be necessary, (b) assign communication responsibilities and appoint a public spokesperson (employee) to contact the insurance company, and (c) maintain strong relationships with stakeholders. The three specific tasks noted by Swanciger confirmed Samson's (2013) findings that BCP addresses how developing efficacious crisis plans prepares business owners for recovering from disasters.

Application to Professional Practice

The findings of this study apply to the professional practice of business because the findings are congruent with business needs and social concerns. In addition, the practice of business regarding crisis communication is evolving. According to Hiller, Bone, and Timmins (2015), a new approach has emerged concerning business continuity planning (BCP). The new approach for BCP includes combining IT disaster recovery, crisis communications, and emergency response strategies into a singular, seamless approach (Hiller, Bone, & Timmins, 2015). Although Hiller, Bone, and Timmins's

research is in the context of healthcare system resiliency, the central focus was on disaster plans and mitigating the cost of healthcare downtime.

Situational crisis communication theory as a disaster recovery strategy has improved business practices for many small business owners in Belmar, New Jersey. The findings of this study are relevant because the findings contained practices that integrate SCCT, disaster recovery, crisis communication, and emergency planning. Kachgal (2015) stated that various departments (e.g., risk management, crisis communication, IT systems, or human resources) usually do not have one leader. The small business community has an advantage because the small business owner is typically the leader for all departments. Kachgal described best practices as strategically linking multiple areas of business under a singular leadership team to create synergy for business resilience in the event of a disaster as also noted by Chen et al. (2013).

Implications for Social Change

The implication for social change is small business owners in the United States are responsible for the majority of the country's economic growth through job creation (Small Business Administration, 2014). Job creation, innovation, and social change are drivers for sustainability, value creation for organizations, institutions, and communities. Job creation is vital for (i.e., organizations, institutions, and communities) because all three entities influence the wellbeing of people from different cultures and societies (Taneja et al., 2016).

According to Hahn et al. (2015) a new framework is emerging based on the integrative view on business sustainability. Hahn (2015) indicated a need for

simultaneous integration of economic, environmental, and social dimension without,

emphasizing one over any other. The findings from this study could affect and catalyze

thoughts, actions, and behaviors of society because natural and or human-induced

disasters affect the economic, environmental, and the social dimensions of our lives.

Recommendations for Action

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive multiple unit case study was to explore

the communication strategies some small business owners developed and implemented

for facilitating resuming their business operations, which minimized the adverse effects

of a natural disaster on their companies' profitability. I urge small business owners and

leaders from large corporations to use the best practices of these two business owners to

minimize the adverse effects of a natural disaster on their companies' profitability. Even

though this study is specifically structured for small business owners, leaders of large

corporations can benefit from the study findings. Crisis communication is not limited to

small business owners and their stakeholders. Crisis communication also entails

managing reputation (i.e., the company's performance history) (Coombs & Holladay,

1996; Coombs & Heath, 2005; Kaul et al., 2015).

Kaul et al. (2015) wrote how communication patterns are evolving along with

collaboration, and innovation, creating new domains of interactivity for companies and

stakeholders. Kaul et al. mentioned using social media for managing corporation's

reputation, including crisis communications. Kaul et al. concluded there was no one

formula appropriate for all crises. However, leaders of large corporations must consider

that there are no definitive methodologies available to date, and for optimal results further

research is essential. The results of this study are scheduled for distribution via literature, conferences, social media, and training in the United States and abroad.

Recommendations for Further Research

In this qualitative descriptive multiple unit case study, the primary limitation was the availability of only a limited number of small business owners who quickly returned to business after Hurricane Sandy devastated Belmar, New Jersey. Researchers conducting similar studies based in different geographical locations with teams from the United States and abroad will add to the existing literature. The United States is part of the global community, weather-related catastrophes are increasing in the world, and there is a need for robust solutions regarding this phenomenon (Ayyub, 2014). I suggest research teams from the United States and other countries conduct joint studies focused on crisis communication strategies that could strengthen international relationships regarding global disaster preparedness and recovery.

Reflections

The doctoral study process enriched me as a researcher. As the researcher of this unique study, I was reminded to stay true to my mission. The mission of a researcher is to be authentic, diminish error, and personal biases (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Diminishing error and bias as the researcher entailed not reacting to the interview responses as described by Bloomberg and Volpe, (2012). Humans have flaws, and biases that may affect a study (Nelson et al., 2013).

I used the interview protocol (see Appendix A) and mitigated biases by not having any preconceived beliefs about the participants' responses as confirmed by Boblin

et al. (2013). I also did not know the participants, which diminished personal bias. During the interview process with the small business owners, I was captivated by their resilience, and love for the community. The dedication and passion displayed from each of the small business owners were intriguing. I view small businesses differently and now make efforts to support the small business owners in my community. Supporting small businesses can strengthen the economy of the communities they serve both before and after a crisis.

Conclusion

Disasters, natural or human-induced, can be unexpected and overwhelming. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive multiple unit case study was to explore what communications strategies some small business owners developed and implemented for facilitating resuming their business operations, which minimized the adverse effects of a natural disaster on their companies' profitability. The two small business owners in Belmar, New Jersey, showed their resilience, and love for their community by preparing for Hurricane Sandy early (see Appendix B). In addition, they understood the larger picture for business sustainability and profitability.

Business sustainability and profitability come in tangible and intangible ways. For small and large businesses to remain profitable before and after a natural disaster they must embrace new and unique ways of doing business. Leaders (e.g., small business owners and CEO's) have the responsibility to build relationships at every level of the organization that will produce new leaders in times of crisis. Relationship building occurs over time, not when something happens.

In the planning stages for crises, leaders must view the varied (i.e., risk management, crisis management, response and recovery) categories equally (Hahn, 2015). All the categories (i.e., risk management, crisis management, response and recovery) possess a common theme, stakeholders. Crisis planning is the essential responsibility of the small business owner and the corporate leader to identify and include their stakeholders, and members of the community in which they serve. The process of crisis planning is an act of building good relationships of trust *before* a disaster occurs.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol and Questions

I. Introduce self to participant(s).

II. Present consent form, go over content, and answer questions and concerns of participant (s).

III. Give participant copy of consent form.

IV. Turn on recording device.

V. Follow procedure to introduce participant(s) with pseudonym/coded identification, note the date and time.

VI. Begin interview with question #1; follow through to final question.

VII. Follow up with additional questions.

VIII. End interview sequence; discuss transcript review and member checking with participant(s).

IX. Thank the participant(s) for their part in the study. Reiterate contact numbers for follow up questions and concerns from participants.

X. End protocol.

Interview Questions

1. What communication strategies did you develop to support a rapid recovery after Hurricane Sandy?

2. What communication strategies worked best to mitigate the loss of profitability?

3. What was the timetable for the strategies to produce positive results?

4. How did your strategic crisis communication process minimize or enhance the recovery time?

5. What would you have done differently in designing and implementing the strategic and operational planning stages for a weather-related disaster?

Appendix B: Interview Questions and Responses From Participants

Participant 1 and Participant 2 in separate interviews were asked 5 semistructured interview questions; their responses are used as evidence listed below.

Interview Questions and Responses from P1 and P2

1. What communication strategies did you develop to support a rapid recovery after Hurricane Sandy?

Well, I talked with an Emergency Manager (EM) of a large city when I found out Sandy was coming. The EM told me that the emergency preparedness plan has four components: hazards mitigation, disaster preparedness, response management, and business recovery. He said I needed to review and obtain appropriate insurance coverage, get a building inspection done by a licensed contractor or architect to enact protective measures (i.e., add impact resistant glass, bracing doors, or roof-to-wall connections, etc.).

Next, I needed to get my employees and business ready, we did not have much time. I talked several times with my employees within a twenty-four hour period before Sandy's arrival. I had my employees take preventive measures (e.g., move computers and expensive materials or equipment away from windows). I also moved heavy and delicate non-electronic items to lowers shelves.

My manager stored vital documents (i.e., plans, legal papers, etc.) to an off-site secure location. We always backed up vital records and files (i.e., billing, payroll records, and client lists) on a regular basis and stored them off-site, so this was an easy and short process. We (referring to himself *P1* and the manager) videotaped and took digital

pictures using our cell phones and a camcorder of the costly equipment and items that would be hard to replace for insurance purposes. I talked about what we could expect before, during, and after the storm (even though I was not sure what that would look like). After that, I told my employees to take precautions at their homes to protect themselves and their families.

2. What communication strategies worked best to mitigate the loss of profitability?

Everything I just said in answering the first question. Our crisis plans outlined who would do what in the event of a crisis. In addition, two employees and I had a contact list of all the employees' addresses, email, phone numbers, and two lists of our suppliers. We made contact with all the employees' right after the storm to make sure everyone and their families were okay.

I informed the employees I would post information on our website and social media. After that, I went to the restaurant to access the damage, took pictures, and contacted the insurance company. I provided the insurance company with the before and after pictures of the business and copy of video we took. We contacted a few of our suppliers to get needed supplies into support the community. Our city was devastated and in need of fresh water, food, and others materials.

3. What was the timetable for the strategies to produce positive results?

Immediately, I was open for business within 48 hours by using generators and the help of my employees, their families, and the community.

4. How did your strategic crisis communication process minimize or enhance the recovery time?

My strategic crisis communication plan was built overtime through relationships. The people that work for me are like my family; we are a family. I care for them, and they know it. They showed how much they care for me by showing up right after the storm occurred to get to work.

Planning for a crisis is necessary, but plans are pointless if there is no support. Each of our employees had issues with damage to their homes and they still came out to get the restaurant reopened. I know because of the rapport we have with each other our recovery time was boosted. You know, during that time I realized that communication was everything, and that changed me forever.

5. What would you have done differently in designing and implementing the strategic and operational planning stages for a weather-related disaster?

I would include the employees in the planning stages especially with decision-making. I made all the decisions and told everybody what to do. I was in panic mode, running around, trying to do this, and trying to do that. I never asked my team what they thought or what suggestions they might have had. After all the clean up a couple of employees told me they felt left out during the recovery, I said wow!

Participant 2 (*P2*) was asked the same 5 semistructured interview questions; her responses are listed below.

Interview Questions and P2 Responses

1. What communication strategies did you develop to support a rapid recovery after Hurricane Sandy?

Our town is located between two bodies of water the Atlantic Ocean and the Shark River. My thoughts were not what to do if a powerful storm occurred, but what to do when a big storm comes. I knew my team had to be ready. The first thing was to anticipate the crisis. Second, I needed to identify my crisis communications team. Third, train and appoint a spokesperson to speak for me. After that, establish a contact and monitoring system. Next, assess the situation, keep the information or message clear, succinct, and often.

2. What communication strategies worked best to mitigate the loss of profitability?

I had the right insurance coverage for each business because I checked before Sandy's arrival. In addition, another great communication strategy that worked was quickly assessing the damage and keeping the communication lines open with my employees, community, and the insurance company.

3. What was the timetable for the strategies to produce positive results?

In two weeks all my shops were back open for business.

4. How did your strategic crisis communication process minimize or enhance the recovery time?

We prepared for the worst, took pictures before and after the storm came. We documented all the contents and equipment in all the shops. Me, the employees, people from the insurance company, and some people in the community stayed in constant communication with the each other. Everyone shared information, came together to collaborate, and revised plans (when needed) for better execution of our strategic plan to get back to business fast. It was a group effort and the recovery happened quickly.

5. What would you have done differently in designing and implementing the strategic and operational planning stages for a weather-related disaster?

I would conduct crisis training using worst case more often, now during our monthly get-togethers I go over the crisis plans and ask the employees for suggestions or any changes they think are needed.