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Building Organizational Resilience Through Strategic Internal Communication and Organization–Employee Relationships

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the impacts of internal strategic communication and relationship management with employees for organizational resilience in effective internal crisis communication, thereby filling a gap in crisis communication research. Specifically, it provides empirical evidence for how organizational resilience in a crisis can be achieved through strategic internal communication and relationship building with employees. A nationwide survey ($N = 830$) was conducted among full-time employees in the United States. The results revealed the important mediating role of organization–employee relationships (OER) between resilience and its antecedent, demonstrating that OER is a strong underlying factor in understanding how two-way symmetrical

communication indirectly impacts organizational resilience. Thus, this study extends the scope of current crisis communication theories to emphasize managerial efforts directed at organizational resilience. Practical insights for developing organizational resilience include managers investing in two-way symmetrical communication and positive employee relationships before a crisis occurs.

KEYWORDS:

Internal crisis communication, two-way symmetrical communication, organization–employee relationships, organizational resilience

Organizational crises are unpredictable events characterized by low probability and uncertainty (Ulmer et al., 2015). In a crisis, employees not only want to find out what is happening but also expect to receive accurate, adequate, and timely information from their organization (Heide & Simonsson, 2014). In this sense, the role of internal communication is essential in crisis situations when there is a high level of communication ambiguity and a strong need for sensemaking (Strandberg & Vigsø, 2016). For effective internal crisis communication, in other words, organizations should understand employees as the most important publics to be communicated with (Frandsen & Johansen, 2016).

However, to date, employee-centered internal crisis communication remains relatively unexplored because crisis communication scholars have focused predominantly on how communication can be used to protect an organization's image and reputation among external publics (e.g. customers) (Falkheimer & Heide, 2015; Kim, 2018). For this reason, scholars have called for new approaches in crisis communication research that consider the internal publics (i.e. employees) to enhance theoretical developments beyond reputation management for an external public (Frandsen & Johansen, 2016; Strandberg & Vigsø, 2016).

In the same vein, some researchers have suggested a focus on resilience-oriented crisis communication, adopting the concept of *resilience* (i.e. capacity to bounce back) and highlighting its beneficial role in crisis communication (Grunig, 2011; Olsson, 2014). Resilience-oriented crisis communication views communication as a way of providing individuals with the information that is critical for them to survive and thrive in a crisis; that is, it relies upon dialogue (i.e. two-way symmetrical communication) (Olsson, 2014). This study examines organizational resilience and its antecedents – two-way symmetrical communication and the quality of organization–employee relationships (OER) – within the context of internal crisis communication. Hence, this study's purpose is to provide empirical evidence for how organizational resilience in a crisis can be achieved through strategic internal communication and relationship building with employees.

Literature review

Organizational resilience and internal crisis communication

An organizational crisis is defined as a major and nonroutine event that may harm an organization and its publics; it is an unexpected event caused by a failure of communication management and calls for high-level strategic decisions (Grunig, 2011; Ulmer et al., 2015). An organizational crisis is characterized by threat, surprise, and short response time; at the same time it holds the potential for positive communication processes and outcomes (Ulmer, 2012). In this sense, scholars have demonstrated that a crisis event can provide an opportunity for communication with publics in mutual sensemaking processes and that effective communication can help publics protect themselves from the impact of the crisis event (e.g. Ulmer et al., 2015).

Specifically, researchers have increasingly suggested adopting the concept of organizational resilience in studies of crisis communication and highlighted its role in effective crisis communication and management (Frandsen &

Johansen, 2016; Olsson, 2014). In terms of internal communication, organizational resilience reflects organizational members' dynamic processes that facilitate a coordinated response and information sharing as well as collective sensemaking in a crisis (Buzzanell, 2018). Sensemaking in an organizational crisis is established through communication with internal publics; that is, the actual facts of an organizational crisis do not have meaning until they are discussed and contextualized (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2011). During a crisis, employees who have a need to understand what happened can contact co-workers within their units and create meaning and understanding based on each other's interpretations (Heide & Simonsson, 2014).

In this regard, Olsson (2014) argued that receiver-oriented communication – providing information for internal publics (i.e. employees) – can maximize survival in the event of a crisis and instill resilience into the organization (i.e. resilience-oriented crisis communication). Frandsen and Johansen (2016) maintained the importance of resilience, noting that it is a strategic, proactive, and process-oriented perspective on crisis management that emphasizes organizational members' interactions through communication, which plays a key role in organizational resilience.

Conceptual background: organizational resilience

Resilience, a term that originally referred to *bounce/jump back*, has been studied in a number of ways across several different disciplines¹ (King et al., 2016). Initial studies in crisis management conceptualized *organizational resilience* as *the ability to bounce back* following adverse events, indicating the robustness of an organizational system and infrastructure (e.g. Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003). However, the current perspective on organizational resilience, from a more holistic view, has become increasingly focused on whether employees, as resilient systems within an organization, have the capacity for ongoing development beyond their ability to bounce back and restore normal functioning in the face of or after adversity (Kuntz et al., 2017).

In this regard, scholars have maintained that *organizational resilience* is a *dynamic process* in which organizational members (i.e. employees) display positive adaptations through which they increase the competitive advantages of their organization in the aftermath of a crisis (King et al., 2016; Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011). An organization's resilience can be generated by resilient employees who demonstrate not only their ability to recover from a crisis, but also their capacity to utilize and proactively develop personal and workplace resources (King et al., 2016). In doing so, employees can show continual adaptation through their own psychological resources and through the development and enactment of resilient behaviors (Kuntz et al., 2017). Thus, current research has insisted that employees are the most important part of a resilient organization and their skills, abilities, and behaviors are the critical source of an organization's capacity for organizational resilience (Kuntz et al., 2017; Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2019). Hence, this study defines organizational resilience in a crisis-specific situation as *the capacity employees have, which has been promoted and supported by the organization, to positively cope, adapt, and thrive in response to a crisis.*²

Organizational resilience: employees' competence, self-efficacy, and communication behaviors

Crisis management researchers have demonstrated that organizational resilience consists of the organizational members' (i.e. employees') psychological resources such as *competence* and *self-efficacy* (e.g. Masten & Reed, 2002; Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003) and ability or capacity to engage in *communication behaviors* when responding to a crisis situation (e.g. Agarwal & Buzzanell, 2015). As such, this study proposes organizational resilience as a multidimensional concept³ in terms of internal crisis communication. Hence, organizational resilience in this study focuses on employees' *competence, self-efficacy, and communication behaviors* for problem-solving, which have been found to be critical sources of capacity for organizational resilience in the internal context of an organizational crisis (e.g. Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011).

Specifically, scholars have argued that organizational resilience is more likely when individuals have experiences that add to their competence (especially the ability to learn) and self-efficacy, motivating them to succeed in

their future endeavors (Masten & Reed, 2002). For this reason, employees' *competence* and *self-efficacy*, which increase the likelihood of positive adjustment, are suggested as factors to consider when assessing organizational resilience in effective internal crisis communication (Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003).

Employees' competence refers to the ability that employees have to identify the potential for improvement within the company and the knowledge, understanding, and skills necessary to perform the standards required for employment, including solving problems (Meyer et al., 2015). As a similar concept, employee competencies (or competency) are defined as the employees' knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics that are needed for effective performance in their jobs (Campion et al., 2011). In an organization, employees can demonstrate their competence by applying their competencies – individual or combinations of knowledge, skills, and abilities – in a goal-directed manner (Bartram, 2012).

Resilience researchers have argued that developing a sense of competence as well as improving application of competency or competencies can help individuals gain control over key tasks and, in turn, respond more effectively to challenging situations (i.e. creating organizational resilience in a crisis) (Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003). Other scholars have maintained that resilient people become more competent by paying close attention to 'knowledge and resources that relieve, lighten, moderate, reduce, and decrease surprises' during unexpected events (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001, p. 69). Furthermore, Lengnick-Hall et al. (2011) suggested that combinations of individual-level knowledge, skills, and abilities (competency or competencies) can collectively enable an organization to be resilient. Taking a synthesis of competence and competencies, *employees' competence* for organizational resilience in this study is defined as *individuals' beliefs in their capabilities to perform activities with skill and apply knowledge, understanding, and skills when performing to the standards required in a crisis situation*.

Scholars have demonstrated that efficacy is a key dimension of resilience as it refers to individuals' beliefs that their organization has the ability to cope with a crisis or turbulent situation (e.g. Carmeli et al., 2013). In this sense, the self-efficacy concept, especially change-related self-efficacy, can be defined as the beliefs that organizational members have about their capacity to perform particular tasks successfully (Bandura, 1977). Specifically, individuals who have a high level of self-efficacy not only respond actively to negative feedback or bad news with increased effort and motivation (Bandura & Cervone, 1986), but also tend to view situations as learning experiences or opportunities to demonstrate skills rather than as traps or threats (Ashford, 1988). Thus, self-efficacy can contribute to resilience by fostering or restoring the capacity for adaptability (e.g. motivating employees to succeed in their future endeavors) and positive functioning (e.g. viewing the situation as a learning experience) (Lundberg et al., 2012). Therefore, this study defines *employees' self-efficacy* as *employees' psychological beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over their own level of functioning in a crisis situation*.

Regarding *communication behaviors* for organizational resilience, Weick (1993) suggested that organizational members' capacities for problem-solving and communication behaviors (e.g. seeking and exchanging crisis information) are sources of resilience for organizational members who need to comprehend and respond to crises in their organization. Other scholars have indicated that behavioral capabilities for communicative processes reflect resilience because such capabilities enable organizational members to bounce back and reintegrate during and after detrimental workplace experiences (i.e. a collective exchange for the construction of resilience) (Buzzanell, 2018) as well as ensure organizational resilience through continual adaptation, well-being, and growth at work (Kuntz et al., 2016).

Furthermore, communication research has demonstrated that employees' *voluntary communication behaviors* such as information acquisition and dissemination can account for resilient communicative behaviors through sensemaking and sensegiving processes that reflect organizational resilience in the context of a crisis

(Kim, 2018; Lundberg et al., 2012). Specifically, scholars have contended that information-seeking behaviors can function as *voluntary employee communication behaviors* for organizations by actively searching for and obtaining valuable organization-related information from internal and external constituencies (sensemaking process⁴) (Kim, 2018; Kim & Rhee, 2011). This sensemaking process among employees in a crisis situation means that employees are actively searching for shared meaning through information-seeking behaviors in order to better understand what is happening within their organization (Colville et al., 2013).

Thus, *information-seeking behaviors* (active information acquisition) account for the sensemaking process because they reflect proactive information collection that helps to build *cognitive blocks* in a problematic situation (Kim et al., 2010). In this sense, a recent study proposed a new concept, *employee communication behavior for sensemaking*, by adopting positive information-seeking behaviors to explain employees' resilient behavioral capabilities (i.e. sensemaking process) in a crisis situation (Kim, 2018). This study adopts the concept, defined as *employees' active and voluntary communicative behaviors used to create a shared understanding of information by searching for and obtaining valuable and positive organization-related crisis information from internal and external constituencies*.

In addition, previous research has suggested that employees sometimes respond to a crisis by actively sharing information within and outside of their organization through *information-forwarding behavior*, which legitimizes and calls attention to their problem-solving skills (e.g. Kim et al., 2010). Specifically, Mazzei et al. (2012) found that employees voluntarily and actively transmitted positive information about their organization (safety commitment) to external publics (the family of the victim) in a manufacturing plant accident crisis. Heide and Simonsson's (2014) study showed that employees can become ambassadors who actively distribute crisis information, answer questions, and have discussions with co-workers, customers, suppliers, journalists and so forth in crisis situations. Lee (2019) also found that employees can actively distribute positive messages (*advocates*) or criticize their company, causing further problems (*adversaries*) during an internal crisis. Recently, Kim and Lim (2020) substantiated that timely and responsible responses from organizational management can lead employees to actively share their constructive ideas with their leaders, thereby helping them to cope with an organizational crisis situation. Organizations can benefit from employees who practice such information-forwarding behavior as part of effective crisis management since these actions transmit valuable organization-related information to internal and external constituencies (Kim & Rhee, 2011).

Such information-forwarding behavior can also explain the process of attempting to influence sensemaking because voluntary and proactive information givers actively disseminate crisis information to others in crisis situations (Heide & Simonsson, 2014). In crisis communication this process has been described as *sensegiving*, which refers to attempts to affect the *meaning construction of others* toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Accordingly, Kim (2018) proposed a new concept of *employee communication behavior for sensegiving* based on active information-forwarding. This new concept is adopted in this study, which refers to *employees' active and voluntary communicative behaviors to influence others' sense by forwarding valuable and positive organization-related crisis information to internal and external constituencies*.

Antecedents of organizational resilience in the context of internal communication

Scholars have demonstrated the strategic value of employees, exploring factors that drive internal communication effectiveness, such as two-way symmetrical communication and the OER (Men & Stacks, 2014; Park et al., 2014). Existing studies have indicated that, in the context of internal communication, such factors can be antecedent factors affecting employees' resilient communication behaviors (e.g. Kim & Rhee, 2011) and psychological beliefs (i.e. competence and self-efficacy) (e.g. Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2013).

Two-way symmetrical communication

Internal symmetrical communication – especially two-way symmetrical communication – has been lauded as an excellent system of internal communication (Lee & Kim, 2020). In terms of strategic management, the symmetrical model highlights how individuals, organizations, and publics use communication to adjust their ideas and behaviors, rather than to control or manipulate how the other party thinks or behaves (Men & Stacks, 2014). Following the symmetrical model, a two-way symmetrical system of communication makes an organization ‘more effective by building open, trusting, and credible relationships with strategic employee constituencies’ (Grunig, 1992, p. 559). Thus, two-way symmetrical communication can be built by an emphasis on ‘trust, credibility, openness, reciprocity, network symmetry, feedback, adequacy of information, employee-centered style, tolerance for disagreement, and negotiation’ (Grunig, 1992, p. 558). Through two-way symmetrical communication, furthermore, the organization can ‘promote mutual understanding, resolve conflict, and establish respect’ with its employees by encouraging communication symmetry (Park et al., 2014, p. 542). In this sense, two-way symmetrical communication is considered to be the most effective way by which to communicate with strategic internal publics (i.e. employees) (Kim & Rhee, 2011).

Two-way symmetrical communication refers to *the willingness of an organization to listen and respond to the concerns and interests of publics*, with the aim of building dialogue and promoting mutual understanding between the organization and its employees (Grunig, 1992). In the context of internal communication, two-way symmetrical communication fosters a participative culture that provides employees with more opportunities for dialogue, discussion, and discourse on issues (Men & Stacks, 2014). A participative culture nurtures employees’ confidence (i.e. competence) and aids their development, resulting in participative decision-making and sharing of power (Aldoory & Toth, 2004). Thus, two-way symmetrical communication allows employees to participate in the decision-making process, leading to organizational effectiveness (Kang & Sung, 2017).

Two-way symmetrical communication also emphasizes a ‘two-way information flow, understanding, responsiveness to employees’ needs and concerns, and tolerance to different voices’ (Men & Stacks, 2014, p. 306). In this regard, two-way symmetrical communication can enhance employees’ empowerment, according to Grunig’s (1992) definition of empowerment as the symmetrical concept of power. Two-way symmetrical communication enables employees to collaborate in order to increase their power and benefit within the organization (Men & Stacks, 2014). Since employees’ empowerment is frequently defined as competence and self-efficacy (e.g. Chiles & Zorn, 1995), the positive association between two-way symmetrical communication and resilience is reasonably expected. In addition, two-way symmetrical communication, as the key antecedent, influences the quality of the OER, which leads to employees’ positive communicative actions, especially information-seeking and information-forwarding actions for their organization (i.e. communication behaviors as sensemaking and sensegiving processes) (Kim & Rhee, 2011).

More importantly, resilience scholars have emphasized that organizational resilience necessitates open communication (i.e. two-way symmetrical communication) with employees (Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2019). According to Lengnick-Hall et al. (2011), organizational resilience needs a climate of open communication to help employees feel confident in their ability to share information and observations, leading to quick and situation-specific responses in unexpected situations. Kuntz et al. (2017) also highlighted the importance of open communication to suggest ways in which it can ‘enable resilient behaviors and ensure effective responses to challenges’ (p. 235). Moreover, Brajawidagda et al.’s (2017) study illustrated how a two-way timely and spontaneous dialogue can exert a positive impact on the dynamic and adaptive process in the level of resilience after a crisis situation. Consequently, this study posits the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Two-way symmetrical communication between an organization and its employees will be positively associated with organizational resilience in a crisis situation.

Quality of the OER

The OER means 'the degree to which an organization and its employees trust one another, agree on who has the rightful power to influence, experience satisfaction with each other, and commit oneself to the other' (Men, 2014, p. 261). Thus, the definition indicates that relational quality should be assessed by four indicators (i.e. trust, control mutuality, relational satisfaction, and relational commitment) that have been extensively tested and explored by relationship management scholars (e.g. Men & Sung, 2019). Trust means the degree of one party's level of confidence and willingness to open to the other party, while control mutuality is about the degree of agreement on the rightful power to influence. Relational satisfaction refers to the degree of positive feeling based on experienced satisfaction by each party with respect to the other, and relational commitment focuses on the extent of one party's belief that it is worth spending energy to maintain and promote the relationship (Hon & Grunig, 1999).

When it comes to internal crisis communication research, understanding OER is essential because trusting relationships with employees can help an organization not only reduce misalignments of internal crisis communication during a crisis (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2011) but also strengthen its potential to manage the crisis situation (Falkheimer & Heide, 2015). Thus, researchers have highlighted the role of relationships as an integrated framework for the study of internal crisis communication as internal crisis communication must begin with an understanding of the relationship between an organization and its internal publics (i.e. employees) (Frandsen & Johansen, 2016; Kim & Rhee, 2011).

Relational perspectives have been closely linked to resilience in organizations as employees with a high-quality relationship with their organization are more likely to develop resilience (Carmeli et al., 2013; Meneghel et al., 2016). Scholars have found that good management practices, especially supportive organizational climate, and organizational relationships are strong antecedents for resilience (Kakkar, 2019). Specifically, Gittell et al. (2006) demonstrated that strengthening the quality of relationships between employees and their organization can create coping resources for organizational resilience that help the organization not only respond cohesively to a crisis in innovative ways but also recover organizational performance quickly after the crisis. Carmeli et al.'s (2013) study also indicated that the quality of relationships with top management teams can cultivate organizational resilience by facilitating open-discussions about issues, collective sensemaking of them, and relevant information gathering (seeking) and effective sharing. Recently, Meneghel et al. (2016) found that employees who have high-quality relationships with supervisors and top management can better prepare to quickly bounce back after setbacks because such relationships not only reinforce feelings of belonging and trust, but also foster employees' control and self-concepts. Similarly, Kakkar (2019) suggested organizational leaders should maintain high levels of trust and reciprocity in relationships with their employees as effective ways to enhance resilience. Hence, the quality of OER can facilitate organizational resilience.

In communication management literature, two-way symmetrical communication has been found to be the key antecedent for building trusting relationships because its effectiveness facilitates dialogue between management and employees, thereby nurturing quality OER (e.g. Kim & Rhee, 2011; Men & Sung, 2019). Since the symmetrical communication model relies on 'honest and open communication to have both parties understand each other,' two-way symmetrical communication inherently focuses on long-term relationship building based on mutual understanding (Park et al., 2014, p. 12). Men and Sung (2019) found empirical evidence of a positive effect of two-way symmetrical communication on the quality of OER and suggested that internal communication professionals should develop a two-way and responsive symmetrical communication system to cultivate mutually beneficial OER. Other scholars have also corroborated how two-way symmetrical communication can exert strong effects on employees' trust, control mutuality, commitment, and satisfaction with their organization in different contexts such as social media related behaviors (Lee & Kim, 2020) and in the retail workplace of South Korea (Kang & Sung, 2017). Therefore, this study posits the mediating role of OER

between organizational resilience and its antecedent factor, leading to the following hypotheses and research question:

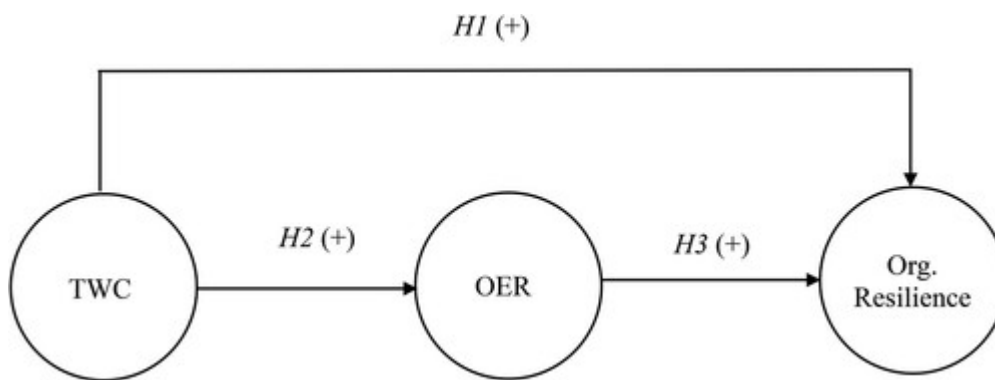
Hypothesis 2: Two-way symmetrical communication between an organization and its employees will be positively associated with the quality of OER in a crisis situation.

Hypothesis 3: The quality of OER will be positively associated with organizational resilience in a crisis situation.

Research Question 1: To what extent will the quality of OER mediate the effect of two-way symmetrical communication on organizational resilience in a crisis situation?

Based on the literature, this study proposes a theoretical model (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. A proposed model of organization resilience and its antecedents. TWC: Two-way symmetrical communication, OER: organization–employee relationships.



Method

Participants

To recruit individual employees who work for a variety of medium and large U.S. corporations and to conduct the survey,⁵ the online survey firm, Qualtrics, was used. Qualtrics maintains 1.8 million panel members in the United States and has been frequently used for employment research (Brandon et al., 2013). Deleting 14 missing data ($N = 14$), the total sample for this study was 816 ($N = 816$). The age of the participants ranged from 19-to 67-years- old with an average age of approximately 37-year-old ($M = 36.87$, $SD = 10.21$). Of the participations, 50.5% ($n = 412$) were female, while 49.5% ($n = 404$) were male. Regarding race/ethnic group, 68.7% ($n = 560$) of the participants were White, followed by 10.8% ($n = 88$) Asian, 10.0% ($n = 82$) Black, 7.2% ($n = 59$) Hispanic/Latino, and 3.3% ($n = 27$) of other races. Almost 60% participants (59.6%, $n = 486$) had a bachelor's (33.6%, $n = 274$) or a post-graduate degrees (26.0%, $n = 212$), while approximately 40% had a two-year associate degree (29.0%, $n = 237$) and 11.5% ($n = 93$) had a high school degrees or less.

Procedure

The participants received an online survey link, which contained an informed consent form and a questionnaire. A pretest ($N = 100$) was conducted to ensure the quality of the data and instruments (e.g. script and question accuracy, believability, and clarity) and to check the length of time to complete the survey. Since no issues were found with the pretest, the main test ($N = 830$) was implemented. The participants in both the pretest and the main test were different, and they were paid four dollars and eight cents as compensation.

After obtaining consent, participants were asked to identify the industry sector of their current employment. The 16 major industry sectors from which they could choose were based on the information from the Bureau of Labor Statistics in the United States Department of Labor.

The respondents then answered questions measuring two-way symmetrical communication (TWC) and the quality of OER. To measure organizational resilience in a crisis situation, brief scenarios were presented as examples of a crisis situations, with several sentences tailored to the respondents' industries. In survey-based research, using a script is often recommended to help the respondents understand the questions (Fowler, 2009). The 16 hypothetical scenarios were created and reviewed by a freelance journalist with more than a decade of professional experience. The hypothetical scenarios were based on actual crises to ensure ecological validity.

Each scenario was a similar length (50–60 words) and involved an internal locus for the crisis situation (i.e. preventable crisis) by explaining that the main cause of the crisis could be attributed to their organization. Compared with other types of crisis events (e.g. natural disasters or technical-error accidents), a preventable crisis (e.g. human-error accidents) with strong attribution of crisis responsibility to the organization, is likely to be perceived as a crisis situation for the participants' organizations (Coombs, 2019). Participants' perceptions of their organizational crisis were assessed by a question (the cause of the crisis was something my company could have controlled) using a 7-point scale. Mean score was 5.31 ($SD = 1.49$). A binary regression analysis showed that their perceptions were not significantly different with respect to the organization's sizes ($\beta = -.06, p = .09, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.17, 0.01]$). (e.g. Today, it is reported that a theft incident of goods occurred in your company. The exact extent of injury and property damage is under investigation. The speculated cause is your company's poor security systems, including malfunction of locks, lights and alarms.). Participants were assigned scenarios in accordance with the industries that they indicated at the beginning of the survey. All participants then answered the same questions, measuring four dimensions of organizational resilience: self-efficacy, competence, and communication behaviors for sensemaking and sensegiving. Demographic information was asked at the end of the survey.

Measures

The questions were mostly adopted from previous research. All of the items used a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7).

TWC was measured using seven items ($\alpha = .94$) (e.g. our company encourages differences of opinion) from Men and Sung's (2019) measures originated from Dozier et al.'s (1995) scales. For OER, this study used Hon and Grunig's (1999) four-dimensions: trust (six items, Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = .94$) (e.g. My company treats people like me fairly and justly), control mutuality (five items, $\alpha = .95$) (e.g. My company really listens to what people like me have to say), commitment (five items, $\alpha = .95$) (e.g. I feel that this company is trying to maintain a long-term commitment to me), and satisfaction (five items, $\alpha = .95$) (e.g. Both the organization and I benefit from the relationship).

For organizational resilience, this study measured four different dimensions, using employee competence, self-efficacy, and communication behaviors for sensemaking (CBSM) and sensegiving (CBSG). To ensure dimensionalities, the exploratory factor analysis for organizational resilience revealed four factors with 41 items retained (oblique rotation with PROMAX): competence with 14, self-efficacy with 13, CBSM with eight, and CBSG with six.

Competence was measured using 14 items ($\alpha = .96$) from Spreitzer's (1995) competency and Leoni's (2012) key competencies (e.g. I would be confident about my ability to do my job regarding the crisis). Self-efficacy was measured using 13 items drawn from Ashford's (1988) change-specific efficacy and Avery and Park's (2016) crisis efficacy ($\alpha = .96$) (e.g. Wherever this crisis takes me, I am sure I can handle it). Kim's (2018) scales originated

from Kim and Rhee's (2011) employee communication behavior (ECB) were adopted to measure CBSM and CBSG. CBSM was measured using eight items ($\alpha = .94$) (e.g. I would voluntarily check people's feedback on the crisis), and CBSG was measured using six items ($\alpha = .90$) (e.g. I would write positive comments or advocate posting for my organization on the Internet).

Results

Hypothesis testing: two-step structural equation modeling

Structural equation modeling (SEM), specifically a two-step procedure including measurement and structural phases, was utilized as the primary statistical analysis for hypothesis testing (Hair et al., 2010). In the measurement phase, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) based on the EFA results was conducted in order to analyze and select the best measurement items for each construct. In assessing the validity of the measurement model, the CFA model achieved an acceptable model fit, $\chi^2 (2164, N = 816) = 6470.41, p < .001, \chi^2/df = 2.99, CFI = .93, TLI = .92, RMSEA = .05, SRMR = .07$ in terms of joint criteria from Hair et al. (2010) (i.e. sample ($N \geq 250$) & number of indicators ($m \geq 30$): $\chi^2/df \leq 3.00, TLI \geq .90, SRMR \leq .08$ with $CFI \geq .92$, and $RMSEA \leq .07$ with $CFI \geq .90$). In addition, the construct validity and composite reliability of all of the measurement items were successfully achieved in terms of Hair et al.'s (2010) golden rule for construct validity (standardized loading estimate $> .50$, convergent validity: average variance extracted (AVE) $> .50$, discriminant validity: AVE $>$ average shared squared variance (ASV)) and for composite reliability ($CR > .70$).

To test the hypotheses, SEM using a bias-corrected bootstrapping procedure ($N = 2000$) with 95% confidence intervals was conducted to estimate the proposed structural model that included TWC, OER, and organizational resilience. Prior to the hypothesis testing, the paths in the second-order factors – OER and organizational resilience – were assessed. This study confirmed that all of the paths were positively and statistically significant in regard to representing the latent factors (OER and organizational resilience). The four dimensions of trust ($\beta = .99, p < .01, 95\% CI [0.99, 1.00]$), control mutuality ($\beta = .97, p < .01, 95\% CI [0.96, 0.98]$), commitment ($\beta = .95, p < .01, 95\% CI [0.94, 0.97]$), and satisfaction ($\beta = .95, p < .01, 95\% CI [0.94, 0.96]$) successfully represented OER. Organizational resilience was represented by the four factors of competence ($\beta = .94, p < .01, 95\% CI [0.88, 0.97]$), self-efficacy ($\beta = .92, p < .01, 95\% CI [0.88, 0.95]$), CBSM ($\beta = .69, p < .01, 95\% CI [0.61, 0.75]$), and CBSG ($\beta = .71, p < .01, 95\% CI [0.63, 0.79]$).

Regarding the structural model specifying hypotheses (H1-H3), TWC's association with organizational resilience (H1) was not statistically significant, $\beta = .17, p = .20, 95\% CI [-0.09, 0.42]$, but TWC was positively associated with OER (H2), $\beta = .94, p < .01, 95\% CI [0.92, 0.95]$. In addition, OER was positively associated with organizational resilience (H3), $\beta = .55, p < .01, 95\% CI [0.47, 0.62]$. Therefore, H1 was not supported, but H2 and H3 were supported. To answer RQ1, this study tested the mediation effects of OER quality between TWC and organizational resilience. The indirect effect of TWC on organizational resilience through the quality of OER was statistically significant, $\beta = .51, p < .01, 95\% CI [0.43, 0.58]$. Thus, this study found that the quality of OER positively mediated the effect of TWC on organizational resilience.

The SEM model achieved an acceptable model fit, $\chi^2 = 6472.49, df = 2165, \chi^2/df = 2.99, p < .001, CFI = .93, TLI = .92, RMSEA = .05$, and $SRMR = .07$, in terms of joint criteria from Hair et al. (2010) (see Table 1 and Figure 2).

Figure 2. Results of structural model of organizational resilience and its antecedents through bootstrapping ($N = 2000$). For the sake of brevity, only the path model is demonstrated – error terms of indicators and disturbances of endogenous variables were omitted in the figure. n.s.: Nonsignificance. OER: organization–employee relationships, TR: trust, CM: control-mutuality, CT: commitment, ST: satisfaction. COM: competence, SE: self-efficacy, CBSM: employee communication behavior for sensemaking, CBSG: employee communication

behavior for sensegiving. Model fit indices: $\chi^2 = 6472.49$, $df = 2165$, $\chi^2/df = 2.99$, $p < .001$, CFI = .93, TLI = .92, RMSEA = .05, SRMR = .07. ** $p < .01$.

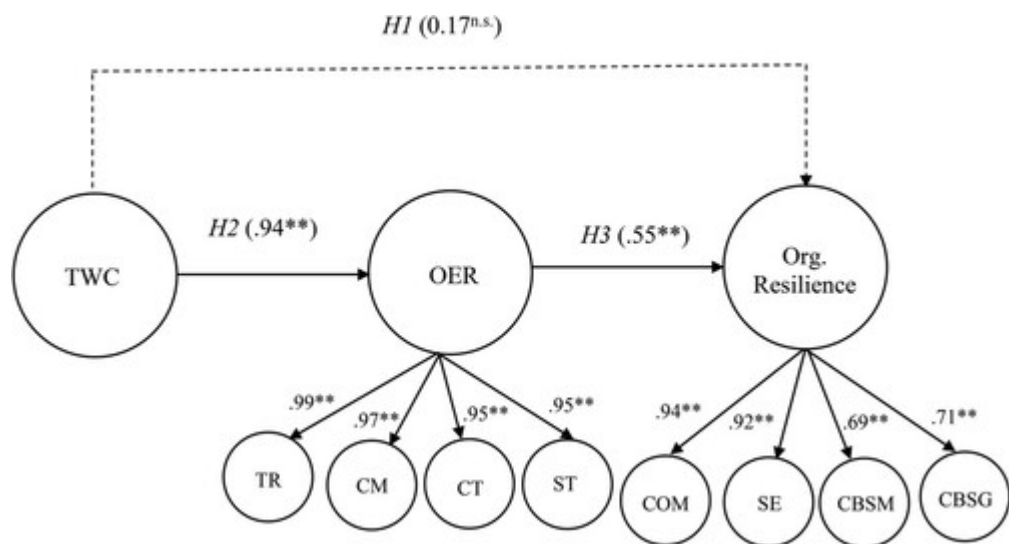


Table 1. Hypothesis testing in the proposed SEM model using Bootstrapping ($N = 2000$).

Hs	Parameters					β	S.E.	Critical Ratio (z)	p	95% CI
Direct effects										
H1	TWC		→		Org. Resilience	.17	.13	1.46	.201	[-0.09, 0.42]
H2	TWC		→		OER	.94	.01	21.34	.001	[0.92, 0.95]
H3	OER		→		Org. Resilience	.55	.04	12.66	.001	[0.47, 0.62]
–	Trust ^a		→		OER	.99	.01	–	.001	[0.99, 1.00]
–	Control Mutuality		→		OER	.97	.01	29.73	.001	[0.96, 0.98]
–	Commitment		→		OER	.95	.01	33.01	.001	[0.94, 0.97]
–	Satisfaction		→		OER	.95	.01	31.53	.001	[0.94, 0.94]
–	Competence		→		Org. Resilience	.94	.02	16.77	.001	[0.88, 0.97]
–	Self-efficacy		→		Org. Resilience	.92	.02	15.19	.001	[0.88, 0.95]
–	Information Seeking ^a		→		Org. Resilience	.71	.04	–	.001	[0.61, 0.75]
–	Information Forwarding		→		Org. Resilience	.69	.04	12.67	.001	[0.63, 0.79]
Indirect effect (mediation effect)										
RQ1	TWC	→	OER	→	Org. Resilience	.51	.04	–	.001	[0.43, 0.58]

Note: β : Standardized Loading Estimate, S.E.: bootstrap standard errors, CI: confidence intervals, TWC: Two-Way Symmetrical Communication. OER: The quality of organization–employee relationships, Org. Resilience: Organizational Resilience.

^a Paths from trust to OER and from competence to organizational resilience were constrained into 1 because OER and organizational resilience are constructed by second-order factors.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to provide empirical evidence for how organizational resilience in a crisis can be achieved through strategic internal communication and relationship building with employees. This study aimed to test the structural relationship between organizational resilience and two-way symmetrical communication (TWC) as well as show the important mediating role of OER in structural relationships.

When considering a specific mediator, OER, the antecedent factor of TWC did not result in significant direct effects on organizational resilience. Instead, TWC affected organizational resilience indirectly and positively through OER. Thus, a full mediation effect of OER was found in the proposed model, indicating that TWC with employees can strongly and indirectly increase organizational resilience through employees' positive relationships with the organization during a crisis. This finding could be explained by proposing that the internal communication factor on its own would be insufficient to generate organizational resilience, especially for employees' competence and self-efficacy during a crisis. Previous research found that honest and open communication through TWC between an organization and its employees can enhance employees' communication behaviors for sensemaking and sensegiving in a crisis (Kim, 2018). Thus, the result showed that a TWC strategy – although it is based on trust, openness, reciprocity, feedback, adequacy of information, employee-centered style, and tolerance for disagreement – may not facilitate employees' competence and self-efficacy in the organizational crisis.

However, this study substantiated the important role of strategic internal communication for effective internal crisis communication by demonstrating how TWC can contribute to OER and, subsequently, result in organizational resilience. Specifically, creating open and two-way communication environments for employees – as well as providing employees with accurate, timely, balanced, and unequivocal information – can build better relationships and, in turn, a more resilient organization during a crisis. In particular, this finding indicates that an organization, advocating for TWC and providing its employees with more opportunities for dialogue, discussion, and discourse about organization-related issues, can contribute to building and maintaining the quality of OER. In turn, the quality of OER not only enhances employees' beliefs in their skills and knowledge, which can then be applied to solve problems, but also encourages employees' voluntary communicative behaviors to seek out and forward positive organization-related information in times of crises. Thus, this study confirms that OER facilitates an adaptive process with enabling conditions (i.e. competence, efficacy, and communication behaviors for sensemaking and sensegiving) that is important for organizational resilience in a crisis (e.g. Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003).

To ensure the positive effect of OER on organizational resilience, these findings highlight the need to build OER through an employee-centered symmetrical communication worldview that stresses the importance of employees' feedback and participation, as well as true concern for employees' needs and interests. Such an employee-centered symmetrical communication system can be facilitated by communication channels, including employee hotlines, employee one-on-one meetings, and listening through interactive new media, ensuring the quantity and quality of the information that employees receive through the system (Men & Sung, 2019). A true employee-centered symmetrical worldview can help an organization consider employees' interests to be as important as its own in a time of crisis and, in turn, cultivate quality OER. Subsequently, the quality of OER can facilitate a more resilient organization through employees' competence and resilient communication behaviors in crisis situations.

Thus, this study suggests that practicing TWC and cultivating quality OER can be used strategically for effective internal crisis communication, in turn generating organizational resilience. Questions of how strategic internal communication works through TWC and why it is effective within an organization have not been fully examined empirically in crisis communication research. In addition, previous crisis communication research has not fully

explored how the quality of OER can play a significant role in creating coping resources for organizational resilience in crisis situations and, in turn, leading to organizational effectiveness. In this regard, this study extends previous research on internal communication focusing on TWC and OER to organizational resilience in crisis situations, illuminating the values of strategic internal communication and relationship management with employees to enhance capacity for organizational resilience.

Theoretical and practical implications

This study provides empirical evidence for how resilience-oriented crisis communication can be achieved through strategic internal communication (TWC) and relationship building with employees. It focuses on an effective internal crisis communication system that adopts a dynamic process-oriented perspective emphasizing employees as a system of organizational resilience. In this regard, this study extends the scope of current crisis communication theories to emphasize managerial efforts directed at organizational resilience that helps an organization positively cope, adapt, and thrive in response to an organizational crisis.

By relying on rhetorical strategies, mainstream crisis communication theories predominantly focus on the post hoc nature of crisis response strategies with external publics. In contrast, this study suggests that proactive crisis communication through managerial efforts with employees, such as two-way symmetrical communication and positive relationships with employees, should be developed before a crisis occurs. Such proactive crisis communication efforts would enhance and foster employees' competence and self-efficacy as well as their communication behaviors for sensemaking and sensegiving, thereby leading to a resilient organization. By adopting these strategies, organizations can cope better with crises.

Scant theoretical attention, to date, has been paid to employees in crisis communication. Accordingly, this study contributes to an important emerging focus on the need for organizations to communicate effectively with their employees in crisis situations. By understanding employees' competence, self-efficacy, and communication behaviors for sensemaking and sensegiving in crisis situations, this study expands the scope of previous theoretical efforts chiefly focused on relationship and internal communication factors.

Practically, this study provides suggestions for crisis communication managers on how to foster organizational resilience for effective crisis management. These findings support previous research that has suggested face-to-face meetings and on-going dialog (i.e. employee-centered communication programs) to facilitate and enhance positive relationships for organizational resilience (e.g. Meneghel et al., 2016). More importantly, this study suggests that managers should put more effort into creating an open and two-way symmetrical communication environment in which the employees' concerns and expectations are considered, while implementing employee-centered communication programs, thereby leading to good quality relationships with employees (Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2019). Such relationships can help the organization to be more resilient during and after a crisis.

In addition, specific organizational crises that communication managers or practitioners have to manage are often unanticipated and, as such, are sometimes neglected in the extant crisis mitigation and preparedness resources (e.g. crisis plans) (Frandsen & Johansen, 2016). In this sense, crisis communicators should focus on a more flexible crisis management process (enhancing resilience capacity) that retains organizational resources to positively adjust to such unanticipated events and to respond to ongoing changes during and after a crisis (Darkow, 2019).

Limitations and suggestions for future research

Despite its theoretical and practical implications, this study has several limitations. First, this study relied on employees' self-report data to evaluate TWC, OER, and organizational resilience. Data collected only from the

employees' perspectives could create a bias. Future research could include controls against such bias by introducing more objective measures (e.g. evaluations from internal supervisors) (Meneghel et al., 2016).

Second, this study remains US-centric research as it relied on an American-oriented body of crisis communication literature and collected data from employees working the major industries in the United States. Diers-Lawson (2017) pointed out that American-centric research 'fails to reflect the needs and global reality of crisis communication today' (p. 2). To reflect more diversity, non-American perspectives should be taken into consideration in future research.

Third, this study did not evaluate how sufficiently participants paid attention when they provided their responses throughout the survey process. Although the survey firm screened out participants who did not promise that they would thoughtfully provide their best answer for each question, there should have been questions to check for inattention in order to exclude those respondents from this study.

Fourth, findings about two-way symmetrical communication as a beneficial system for the organizations could be challenged in the business practice. Two-way symmetrical communication could be unrealistic and unattainable for the practice of internal communication (Stoker & Tusinski, 2006). Future research could also examine the extent to which two-way symmetrical communication through different programs and channels during and after a crisis can contribute to organizational resilience.

Lastly, this study did not consider other factors that could impact organizational resilience. Previous studies (e.g. Kakkar, 2019) have demonstrated the positive associations between leadership and employee resilience. Future research should consider the perspective of organizational leaders in internal strategic communication and relationship quality with employees to examine how leadership influences organizational resilience in a crisis.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes

- 1 The term resilience in this study refers not only to the process or phenomenon of positive adjustment despite adversity, but also is distinguished from psychological resilience, meaning a trait or dispositional capacity, which has been described as *resiliency* in the literature (King et al., 2016).
- 2 This definition is not limited to outcome-centered perspectives focusing on bouncing back but rather entails the integral, capability-based notion of organizational resilience that 'opens up a wide range of opportunities to achieve a new normal' by responding to ongoing changes during and after a crisis (Darkow, 2019, p. 151).
- 3 Resilience scholars have commonly suggested multidimensional concepts for organizational resilience (e.g. Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011). However, no agreement has been reached for the conceptualization of organizational resilience regarding its dimensions and measurements in literature (Bouaziz & Smaoui Hachicha, 2018).
- 4 This study takes Maitlis and Christianson's (2014) integrated approach to the sensemaking concept that people who belong to an organization will respond to events by taking cues from their environment and using those to interpret a situation and take action with respect to it.
- 5 Since a larger number of employees are more likely to attentively manage internal communication than a smaller number of employees, larger organizations with more than 250 employees were chosen (Park et al., 2014). Also, internal communication practices are less salient in small organizations (i.e. employee number < 250) as they have different organizational dynamics compared to large organizations (Men, 2014).

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