

Expanding the Parameters of Crisis Communication Research and Practice: CERC, Meaning Making and Renewal



Matthew Seeger, Ph.D.

Matthew.Seeger@Wayne.edu

Wayne State University

Department of Communication

Center for Emerging and Infectious Disease

Detroit, MI 48202

Traditions in Crisis Communication Research and Practice

1. Warning & Alert Messages: Sirens, EBS
2. Coordination: Command & Control, NIMS
3. Image Repair: Apologia



Expanding the Parameters: Three New Approaches

1. CERC - Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication
2. Crisis Narratives
3. Discourse of Renewal

Origins: The Purple Aces Tragedy

On December 13, 1977, at 20:22 EST, a DC-3, carrying the University of Evansville basketball team, crashed on takeoff at the Evansville Regional Airport. The plane was on its way to Nashville taking the team to play the Middle Tennessee Blue Raiders. Some 23 people died including players, coaches and staff.



Crisis:

. . . An event or series of events concentrated in space and time in which a society or relatively self-sufficient division of a society, undergoes severe danger incurs such losses . . . That the social structure is disrupted. . . (Fritz, 1961).

. . . characterized by surprise/high uncertainty, threat to high priority goals, and a restricted response time (Sellnow & Seeger, 2015).

- Complex social, economic, political, and physical event
- Situated Event: Space, Time, Informational Context, Social Space, Culture, History
- Natural + Human Factors
- A time/experience of, dislocation, confusion, disruption, chaos and meaning deficit
- Epistemic moment of learning, transition and change
- Moral and Ethical Moment: Revealing core values and beliefs, Demonstrating priorities, Requiring a response
- Threat and an Opportunity

Uncertainty and Meaning Deficit

What is happening?

What should I do?

What will tomorrow look like?

Will everything / everyone be OK?

Who / what caused this?

Who is to blame?

How can this be fixed?

“Things break” Charles Perrow (1984)

Things wear out

Mistakes are made

Unobserved and ignored risks

Unforeseen interactions

Poor decisions

People try to do harm

Systems become overly complex



Flint Water Contamination - 9/11 - Ebola - Three Mile Island
- Hurricane Katrina - West Virginia Water Contamination –
Maple Leaf Foods – Super Storm Sandy - Enron – General
Motors Ignition Switches – Toledo Cryptosporidium
Contamination- Chernobyl Disaster - H1N1- Aurora, Colorado
Massacre - SARS – US Airways Flight 1549 / Capt. Sully
Sullenberger - Joplin Missouri Tornado - Fargo/Red River
Floods – Exxon Valdez - German Wings – Malaysian Airlines
Flight 370 – TWA Flight 800 – Boston Marathon Bombing-
Jack In the Box e coli –California Drought - Sandy Hook School
Shooting - Catholic Church Sex Abuse Scandal – Chipotle Food
Contamination – 2015 Avian influenza outbreak – Zika Virus –
Immigration Crisis –FIFA – Sony Pictures Hack – Takata Air
Bag Recall – MERS Outbreak – Volkswagen Emissions Crisis

Consensus of the scientific community is that disasters are occurring with more frequency.

Climate change

Population dislocation

Societal disruption

Interactive systems

Aging infrastructure

Cascading events

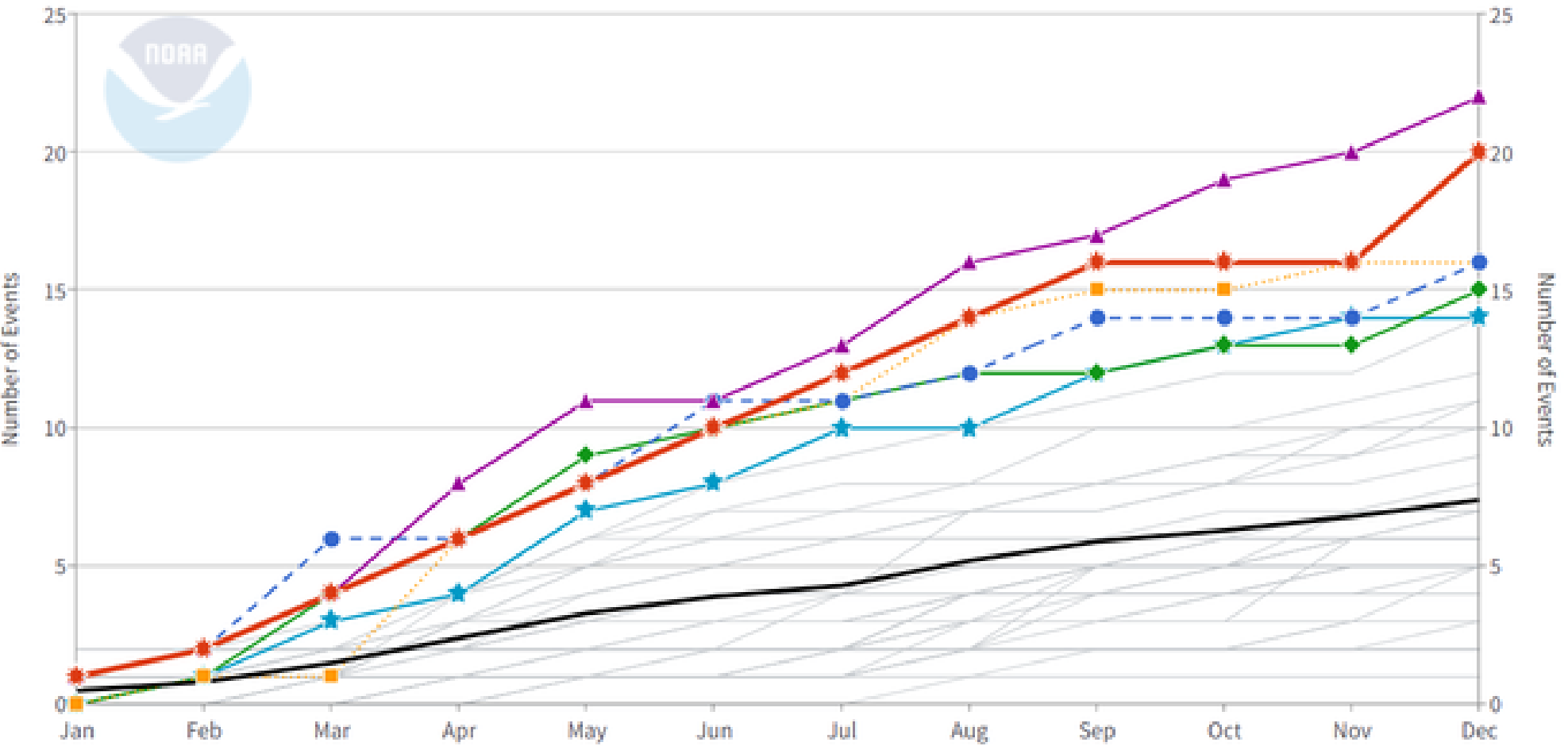
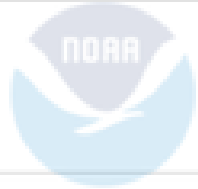
Stressed natural resources and systems

Technological and system complexity



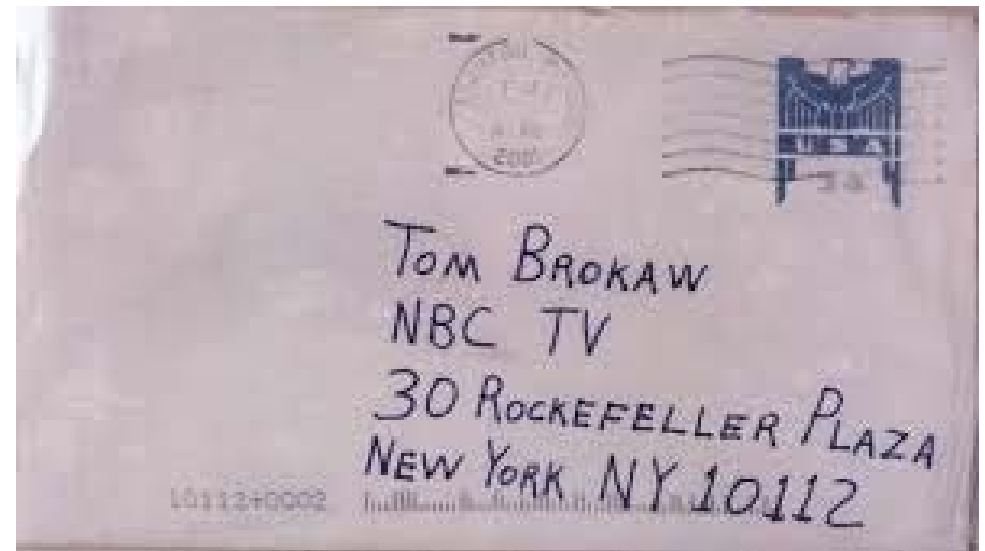
1980-2021 United States Billion-Dollar Disaster Event Count (CPI-Adjusted)

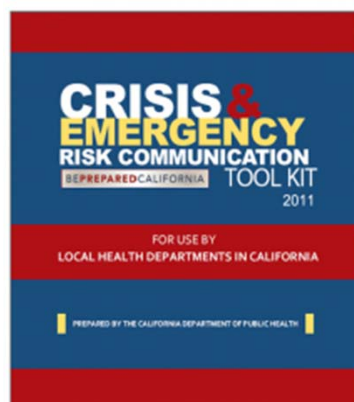
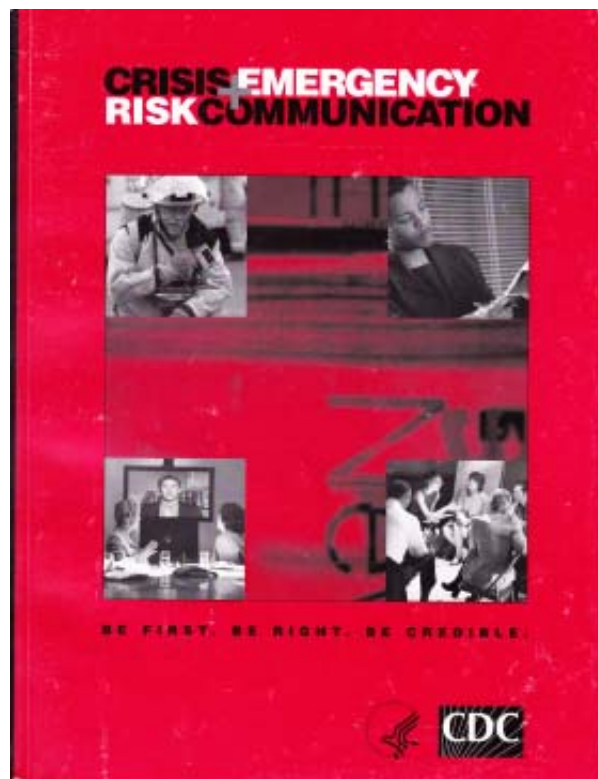
★ 2019 (14)
 ◆ 2016 (15)
 ■ 2011 (16)
 ● 2017 (16)
 ▲ 2020 (22)
 ◆ 2021 (20)
 — Average (7.4)



Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication: Origins

- **H5N1 Avian Influenza in Hong Kong (1997)**
- **Anthrax Contamination of Letters (2001)**





Origins

- Public Health as “First Responder”
- Public Health and Risk Communication
- Little attention to Crisis Communication
- Communication essential to effective public health response

LP1

Slide 15

LP1

I don't see developmental models in slides, but don't think we need either since we have only 1 hour and plenty of slides to get through.

Laura Pechta, 3/27/2011

Seeger, M. W., Reynolds, B., & Sellnow, T. L. (2020). Crisis and emergency risk communication in health contexts: Applying the CDC model to pandemic influenza. In *Handbook of risk and crisis communication* (pp. 493-506). Routledge.

Veil, S., Reynolds, B., Sellnow, T. L., & Seeger, M. W. (2008). CERC as a theoretical framework for research and practice. *Health promotion practice, 9*(4_suppl), 26S-34S.

Seeger, M. W. , (2008). Sellnow, T. *Crisis Communication and the public health*. Hampton Press: Cresskill, NJ.

Reynolds, B. & Seeger, M. W. (2005). Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication as an integrative model. *Journal of Health Communication Research*.

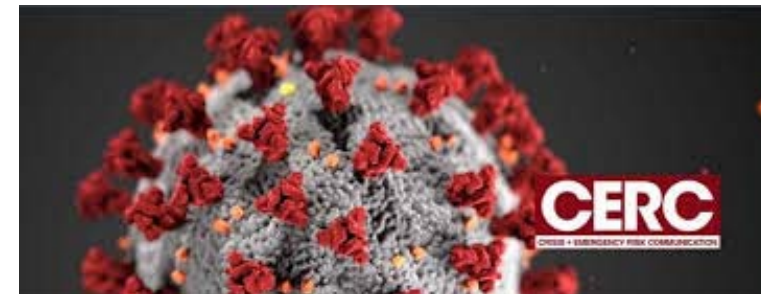
CERC

Crisis + Risk

- CDC developed CERC “to address the emergency risk communication response and training needs of the public health infrastructure” (Courtney, Cole, & Reynolds, 2003).
- Trained to over 100,000 public health professionals
- CERC is an integrative framework
 - Risk and Crisis
 - Practice and Theory (Tool kits)
 - Public Health and Response Network

Crisis + Risk = CERC

- Connects risk and crisis communication within a developmental approach to crisis events impacting public health ZD5
- Offers a comprehensive and integrated approach to preparedness, response and recovery
- Includes research informed tools, templates and checklists
- Provides a larger conceptual framework for public health crises preparedness and response



Slide 18

ZD5

removed periods from points since not sentences

Zemmel, Dany, 2/3/2022

Risk Communication

- Messages of known probabilities of negative consequences, how they may be reduced; addressing technical understandings (hazards), cultural beliefs (outrage)
- Principally persuasive, i.e., advertising, education campaigns
- Frequent/routine
- Sender/message centered
- Based on what is currently known, i.e., scientific projections
- Long-term (pre-crisis) Message preparation, i.e., campaign
- Technical expert, scientist
- Personal scope
- Mediated; commercials, ads brochures, pamphlets
- Controlled and structured

Crisis Communication

- Messages regarding current conditions regarding an event; magnitude, immediacy duration and control/remediation; cause, blame, consequences
- Principally informative, i.e., news disseminated through media or broadcast through warning system
- Infrequent/nonroutine Receiver/situation centered
- Based on what is known and what is not known
- Short-term (crisis) Less preparation, i.e., responsive
- Authority figures/emergency manager, technical experts
- Personal, community, or regional scope
- Mediated; press conferences, releases, speeches, websites
- Spontaneous and reactive

Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication (CERC) Lifecycle



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Risk messages ● Warnings ● Preparations ● Build and test communication systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Uncertainty reduction ● Self-efficacy ● Reassurance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ongoing uncertainty reduction ● Self-efficacy ● Reassurance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Updates regarding resolution ● Discussions about cause ● Discussions of new risks/new understandings of risks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Discussions of adequacy of response ● Consensus about lessons learned ● New understandings of risks
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**“130,000 – 210,000 AVOIDABLE COVID-19
DEATHS – AND COUNTING – IN THE U.S.”**

**By Irwin Redlener, MD; Jeffrey D. Sachs, PhD; Sean Hansen,
MPA; Nathaniel Hupert, MD, MPH October 21, 2020**

The Washington Post

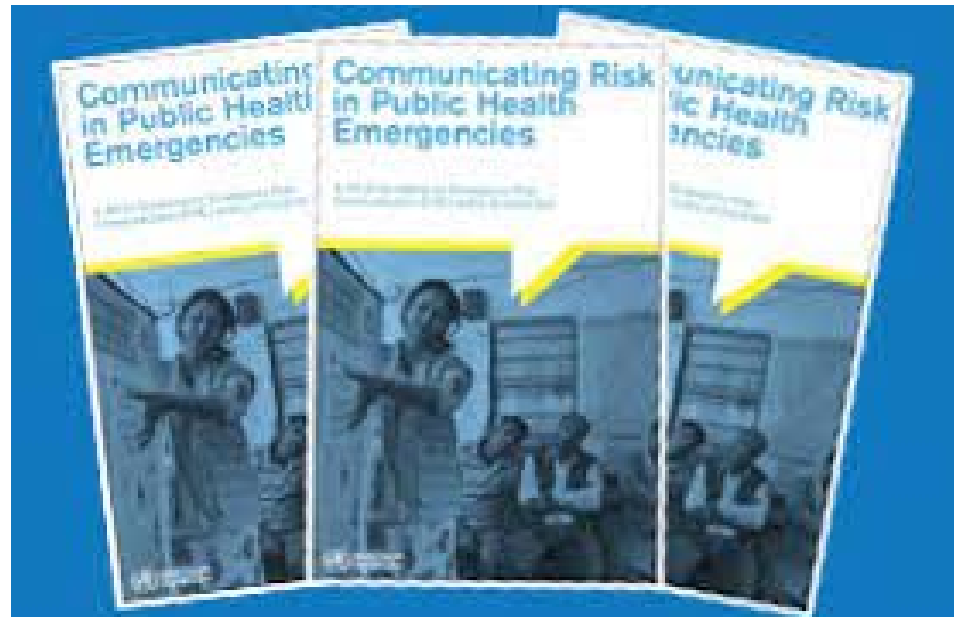
Democracy Dies in Darkness

Trump is breaking every rule in the CDC's 450-page playbook for health crisis

The communication chaos on coronavirus is eroding the most powerful weapon we have: Public trust

By [Carolyn Y. Johnson](#) and [William Wan](#) March 14, 2020 at 9:50 a.m. EDT

"For those of us in this field, this is profoundly and deeply distressing," said Matthew Seeger, a risk-communication expert at Wayne State University. "I'm fearful we've continued to undermine our belief that subject matter experts are people we should listen to," said Seeger, the Wayne State professor. "We've done a good job over the last couple decades of undermining science and telling people scientists aren't to be believed."



Crisis and Narrative: Origins

***“I want to tell
someone what
happened.”***

***“Please listen to my
story.”***



Seeger, M., & Sellnow, T. L. (2016). *Narratives of crisis: Telling stories of ruin and renewal*. Stanford University Press.

Crisis as a Narrative Space

1. Meaning deficit
2. Information vacuum
3. De-Narration
4. Suspension of established modes of sensemaking
5. Competing interpretations and perspectives

Functions of Stories

1. Impose order: events are ordered in a sequential manner to create larger meaning structures that may be rooted in larger belief systems
2. Explanation: patterns of association such as cause and effect logic that explains what happens, why it happens, who makes it happen, when it happens, and how people should respond to these events
3. Sensemaking: through interaction and the application of interpretation scheme we make sense, construct meaning of equivocal situations

Crisis Narratives

Accounts

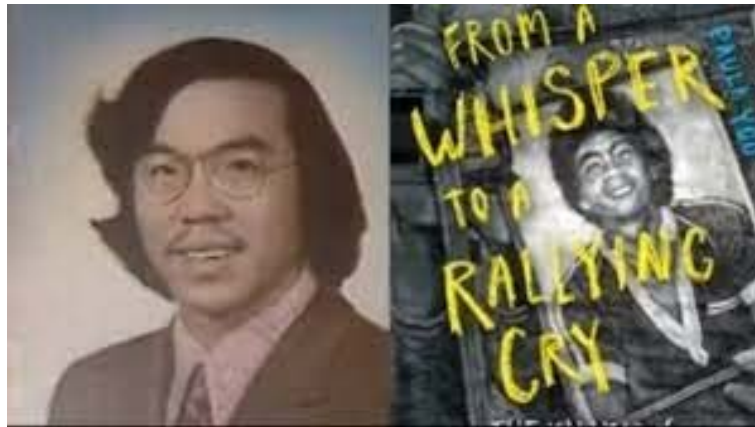
Blame Narratives

Renewal Narratives

Victim Narratives

Hero Narratives

Memorial Narratives



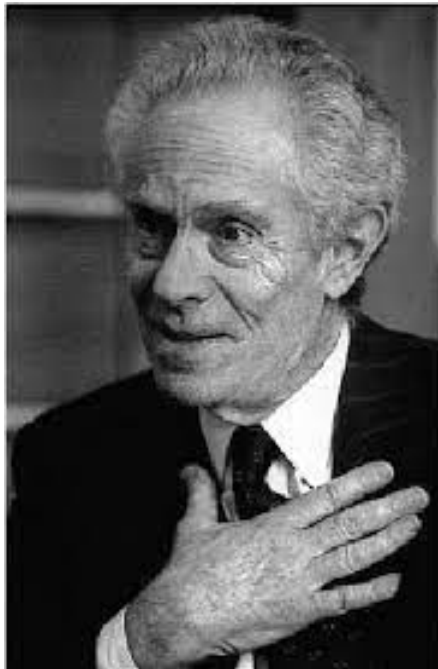
Pyle, A. S., Fuller, R. P., & Ulmer, R. R. (2020). Discourse of Renewal: State of the Discipline and a Vision for the Future. *The handbook of applied communication research*, 343-361.

Seeger, M., & Ulmer, R. (2002). A post-crisis discourse of renewal: The cases of Malden Mills and Cole Hardwoods. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 30(2), 126-142.

Seeger, M. W., Ulmer, R. R., Novak, J. M., & Sellnow, T. (2005). Post-crisis discourse and organizational change, failure and renewal. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*.

Discourse of Renewal: Origins

**Cole Hardwoods
Malden Mills**



Reframe & Reimagine the Post-crisis Phase

Processes not adequate

Recovery not sufficient

Centralized response inadequate

- Post- Crisis Learning
- Post-Traumatic Growth
- Whole-Community Response
- Organization and Emergent Organization



Renewal: “Never let a good crisis go to waste.”

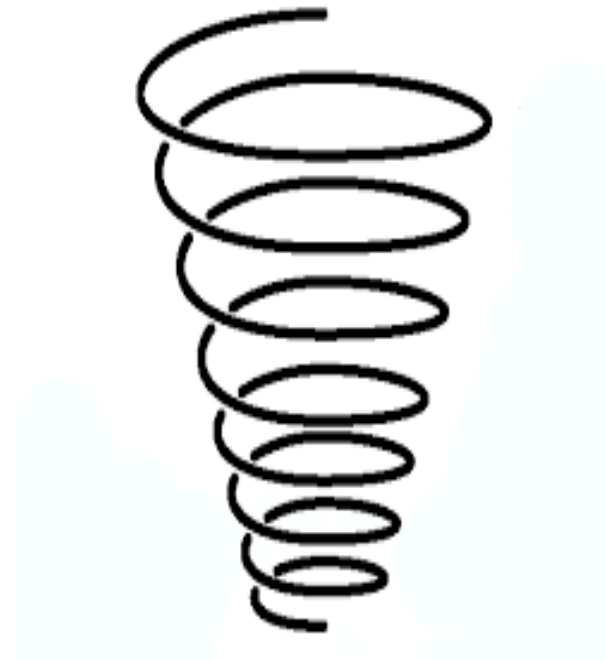
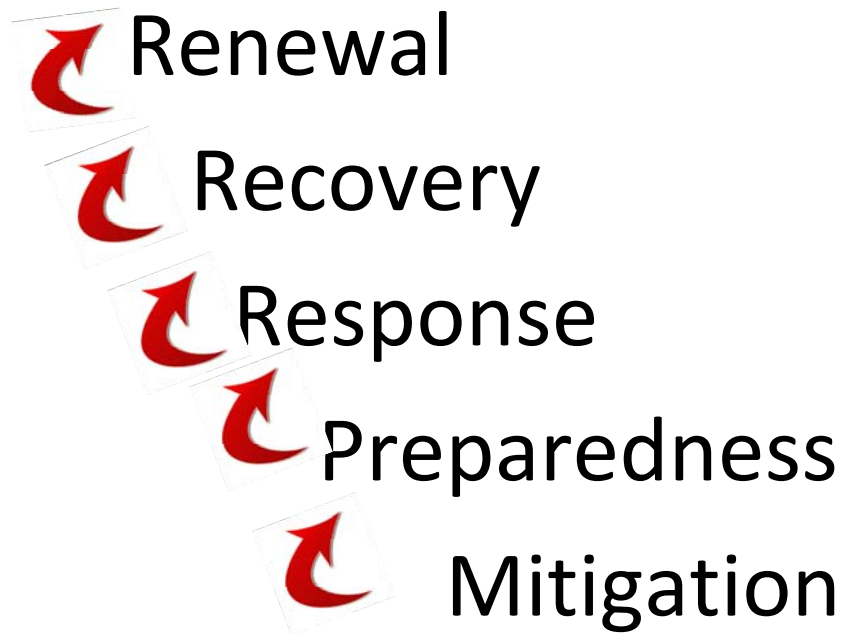
“A process leading to seeing, understanding and moving beyond the immediate harm created by a crisis to leverage systemic opportunities for positive change that can be collectively-embraced by a group, organization and /or community.”

- Developed from chaos, complexity organizational learning theory
- Process or re-organizing, self-organizing or emergent organizing
- Meaning making as point of convergence

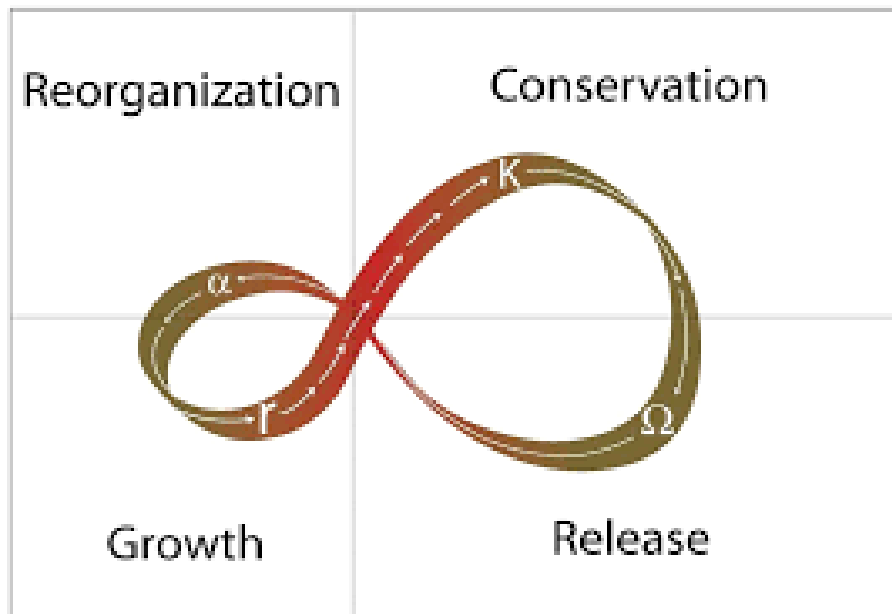
Traditional Emergency Management Process



Crisis & Renewal



Panarchy is a framework natural rules that seeks to rationalize the interplay between change and persistence, growth and decline, chaos and order ... a theory or adaptive evolution (Gunderson and Hollings, 2002).



Engineering Resilience

Eco-system Resilience

Resilience



Renewal

“Bounce Back”

Modest Disruption

Stability

Adaptation

Resilience Strategies

“Bounce Forward”

Major Disruption

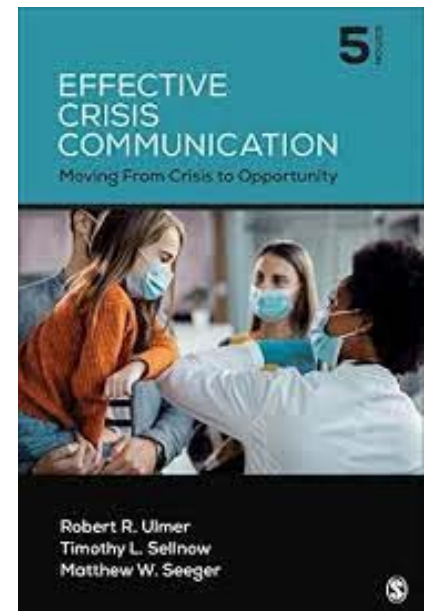
Change

Transformation

Renewal Strategies

Points of Convergence Resilience & Renewal

- Both emerged from efforts to understand successful response.
- Both focus primarily on the post-crisis condition.
- Both seek to understand how a crisis is a force of personal, organizational and social change
- Both seek to connect the post-crisis condition to the pre-crisis condition



Elements of Renewal

1. Pre-Event Relationships
2. Based in shared values
3. Spontaneous, Honest Response
4. Strong, Visible, Vocal Leadership
5. Points of Attraction
6. Forward Looking (Prospective vs Retrospective)
7. Optimistic, Compelling, Shared Vision

Summary and Next Steps

Expanded Understanding of Crisis Events

Crisis as Transformative, Evolutionary, Epistemic

Multi – Trans Disciplinary

Global

Mega-Crises

Current Methods, Protocols are Inadequate



Zahran, S., McElmurry, S. P., Kilgore, P. E., Mushinski, D., Press, J., Love, N. G., ... & Swanson, M. S. (2018). Assessment of the Legionnaires' disease outbreak in Flint, Michigan. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 115(8), E1730-E1739

Nowling, W. D., & Seeger, M. W. (2020). Sensemaking and crisis revisited: the failure of sensemaking during the Flint water crisis. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 48(2), 270-289.

The Washington Post

Democracy Dies in Darkness

PROFESSOR SHOT TO DEATH DURING EXAM IN DETROIT

Dec 11, 1998

A college professor giving final exams last night was fatally shot by a man who opened fire with a rifle, reloaded and fired again before fleeing.

Andrzej Olbrot, a 52-year-old Wayne State University engineering professor, died at Detroit Receiving Hospital shortly after the shooting, authorities said.

Questions & Discussion

