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Melted Wax, Unbroken Wings

A comprehensive study on the practical uses of creative storytelling within the context of the fight or flight setting of aviation crises.

Diogo Mendes

Dissertation written under the supervision of Professor

Ricardo Ferreira Reis

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1 Abstract

Title: Melted Wax, Unbroken Wings, A comprehensive study on the practical uses of creative storytelling within the context of the fight or flight setting of aviation crises.

Author: Diogo Mendes

Keywords: storytelling, narrative, crisis, aviation, commercial airline, organizational strategy.

Storytelling is here proposed as a viable strategy within the context of business adaptive strategies in crisis, as a method that makes use of inherent qualities and assumption within the human psyche and its reception to the use of narrative and story for sensemaking and guidance during crises. To this end, *Melted Wax, Unbroken Wings* sets out with the intention of uncovering to what extent storytelling is a viable method to be employed by organizations and leaders during turbulent times, where a special focus is given to the aviation industry as a medium of grounding the theory discussed into practicality, and give context to already practiced uses of creative storytelling in the industry. This paper made use of a large body of academic literature, used in collecting accounts and strategies for organizational storytelling during crises events, as well as first-hand accounts and case studies on its usage in the commercial airline industry. The study concluded that storytelling goes beyond viable as a tool to be used by organizations during crises, with vast support and numerous accounts of its implementation proving successful, with the consensus of many aligning with the idea that one cannot opt out of organizational storytelling; instead, they can passively follow emerging narratives or actively shape them toward desired goals and objectives.

2 Resumo

Título: Melted Wax, Unbroken Wings, Um estudo abrangente sobre os usos práticos da narrativa criativa no contexto do cenário de luta ou fuga de crises de aviação.

Autor: Diogo Mendes

Palavras-chave: storytelling, narrativa, crise, aviação, companhia aérea comercial, estratégia organizacional.

Storytelling é aqui proposta como uma estratégia viável no contexto das estratégias adaptativas de negócios em crise, como um método que faz uso de qualidades e pressupostos inerentes à psique humana e sua recepção ao uso de narrativa e história para dar sentido e orientação durante crises. Para tal, *Melted Wax, Unbroken Wings* propõe-se com o intuito de desvendar até que ponto storytelling é um método viável a ser utilizado por organizações e líderes em tempos turbulentos, onde é dado especial enfoque à indústria da aviação como meio de ancoragem. A teoria discutida em termos práticos contextualiza os usos já praticados da narrativa criativa na indústria. Este artigo fez uso de um grande conjunto de literatura acadêmica, utilizada na coleta de relatos e estratégias para storytelling organizacional durante eventos de crise, bem como relatos em primeira mão e estudos de caso sobre seu uso no setor de aviação comercial. O estudo concluiu que o storytelling vai além da viabilidade como ferramenta a ser utilizada pelas organizações durante as crises, com vasto apoio e numerosos relatos da sua implementação a revelarem-se bem sucedidos, com o consenso de muitos alinhando-se com a ideia de que não se pode optar por não contar narrativas organizacionais; em vez disso, podem seguir passivamente narrativas emergentes ou moldá-las ativamente em direção às metas e objetivos desejados.

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3 Introduction:

Academic research has long flirted with the inherent potential of storytelling and its possible applications outside the most obvious fields, with leadership and business academia exploring this narrative extensively post the turn of the millennia (Gkalitsiou & Kotsopoulos, 2023). As a medium, storytelling is one deeply rooted in tradition and culture, often being identified as one of the pillars that represent these, attributing to the near mythical application and power of it as a means of communication; sensemaking and sense-giving. As a knowledge sharing tool, stories are capable of diffusing events, opinions, facts, and emotion in a manner that is easily perceived by those actively engaging and listening, as well as memorable in a manner that can be later reproduced by the audience. Stories of one's understandings and experiences are able to persuade and break past barriers often imposed and prevalent in other knowledge sharing mediums that prevent one from overlooking past prejudices and consider new ideas.

These attributes are often highlighted in the aforementioned business and organizational academia and applied in different aspects that are deemed reciprocal to storytelling methods such as leadership training and validation, data visualisation, branding and communication, and marketing, however, its present application and perceived potential in the field of crisis management is one that should be highlighted.

The first act to crisis management is to highlight and define the actors and characterize the events and experiences that can be assigned as crises to which, Claudia Auer defines an organisational crisis as one that is delineated by “... (threatening) high-priority values of the organization, (...), presents a restricted amount of time in which a response can be made, and (...) is unexpected or unanticipated by the organization“ (Auer, 2016).

The aforementioned characteristics attributed to storytelling have their performance highlighted when deployed in the crisis management theatre as the narrative process is able to create a singular plot from the discordant lines around a crisis, with a disruptive efficiency that is able to push through towards transformative solutions while being easily wielded and applied by those in places of opportunity (Eray, 2018).

One of the industries that sees itself often marred in both crisis and the centre piece of errant stories is that of the commercial airlines worldwide. An industry that prides itself in performance indicators such as reliability and safety is also made vulnerable to these aspects if they do not meet expectations. These can range from client dissatisfaction when a flight service gets delayed or cancelled, to national tragedies that affect the lives of thousands and

have vast rippling effects. This creates a high floor of aptitude for the organizational entities in the airline industry, as well as the need for an effective and dynamic crisis adaptability strategy that is able of allowing the company to fly away from otherwise disastrous crashes.

4 Literature review

Studied uses of storytelling as a management tool often include practices such as the creation and sustainment of trust, better management of responsibility attribution and the ability to shape opinions and perceptions during times of crisis. Authors Lee H. and Jahng M. R. express that the inherent effectiveness of storytelling lies within the ability to appeal to the instinct of the recipient, boosting the ability to process information, while conveying it in a trustworthy and authentic manner, defending the practice of storytelling as one intrinsically adapted to the field of crisis management (Lee & Jahng, 2020).

Within the topic of maintaining trust, Lee H. and Jahng M. R. explain this trait of storytelling through their narrative engagement theory, in which, it elucidates that stories enhance the message at times of crisis due to their escapist and empathic nature by involving individuals in the storyline both personally and emotionally. The authors affirm that this method of delivering a crisis message has a higher likelihood of having the audience adopt and be persuaded by it, facilitating a deeper understanding and connection to the crisis event.

Another aspect of the trust element brought about by storytelling is deeply associated with the organizational cornerstones of credibility and reputation. These elements, often in the forefront of crisis management, be it as causes or by product, tend to be in contention when it is vital to control and manage crises, as they foster the willingness and confidence in risk taking, organizational reliability, honesty, and integrity, as well as influence supportive behaviour intentions towards the organisation. By utilising storytelling in crisis responses, organizations leverage verisimilitude and vivid narratives to highlight positive and corrective action and align with public endorsement.

Incorporating storytelling into crisis management is an effort involving creating compelling narratives, often integrating leaders' personal experiences and perceptions into organizational goals and vision. This strategy has the benefit of humanizing the organizational approach taken, emphasizes values, fosters empathy, and communicates crisis details. However, this also leads to one of the authors' concerns for the storytelling method regarding the ethical considerations of such an emotionally charged approach.

As opposed to a more direct and empiric method of crisis management, storytelling leans less on data driven models (although a similar approach will later be deliberated), instead playing with the aforementioned empathic and persuasive aspects of narratives. While storytelling proves effective in mitigating perceptions of severity, the authors recommend balancing

emotional narrative with informative content, adjusting evidence-based information alongside narrative, as the persuasive intent behind storytelling can evoke scepticism, risking the spread of misinformation or concealing responsibility.

4.1 Sensemaking of data through storytelling

In the academic space of data-driven communication, the introduction of storytelling and visualisation make it a powerful tool for crisis settings. This combination allows for management to communicate facts and information effectively, thus facilitating the decision-making process by leaders (Airaldi et al., 2021). The evolution of data visualization has been synonymous with tackling the challenges posed by the size and complexity of modern datasets, offering a means to communicate, interpret and showcase findings in a compelling manner.

Data-driven stories is a concept described as narrative based and containing data, visually presented, or supported by messages, approached with the incorporation of annotations and narrations, ensuring that the communicated information and data is both comprehensive and enduring (Airaldi et al., 2021). The narrative elements exist to engage the audience emotionally through the use of storytelling techniques and improve retention and apperception of information.

Authors also offer several best practices for storytelling and visualisation derived from their own research on the subject. These practices are categorized into: Narrative, Design, Interaction, No Manipulation, and Appropriate Charts. The Narrative category is characterized by the significance given to the order of event sequences and the inclusion of basic story elements. Design focuses on visualization practices, such as the consistent use of colours, highlighting crucial information, eliminating clutter, and utilizing text and annotations. Interaction emphasizes user engagement and general interest in the message and content. No Manipulation underscores ethical considerations, advocating for the fidelity and accuracy of presented data. Finally, Appropriate Charts stresses the importance of choosing simple graphics to convey information effectively.

Within the same source, the authors defend this approach to categorized storytelling through their Visual Literacy Assessment Task (VLAT) and Memorability Experiment (ME) on user comprehension when shown engaged with data-driven narrative. Users exhibit enhanced

performance in tasks such as Identifying Values, Finding Extremes, Determining Ranges, Making Comparisons, and Identifying Trends. Notably, narrative strategies contributed to increased user interaction, elimination of visual clutter and enhancing information comprehension.

The authors then highlight the possible challenges faced by prospective developers adhering to these practices, underscoring the need for institutionalising guidelines for the inception and development of the process, further arguing that the main hindrance for the method lies in lack of knowledge and preparation on data visualization and storytelling techniques by developers, rather than time constraints. Institutionalising these practices would ensure that the transformative power of storytelling and visualisation is fully maintained, unlocking the full potential for deeper understanding and interpretation of datasets and communication.

4.2 Leadership training

Organizational leadership dynamics often depend on internal communication to wield the power and legitimacy needed to engage the workforce in strategic initiatives, either aligned with the organizations overarching strategy, or in pivotal crisis scenarios, which contributes to the potential of organizational storytelling as a tool to this end (Aplin, 2010).

Those handling internal communication function as orchestrators for employee engagement assume the role of transforming the company's vision into a narrative that resonates at all corporate levels. Leaders play a crucial role in linking day-to-day functions and operations of individuals and teams towards the broader organizational objectives hence, organizational storytelling displays itself as a potent tool to bridge said connection.

Aplin S. defends that organizational storytelling is a deliberate and purposeful strategy for leaders to convey messages, issue calls to action and instil a sense of purpose among teams and individuals, offering a much greater strategic value than the often-perceived lone advantage of offering entertainment and the creation of a pleasant work environment. The authors emphasizes that storytelling serves as a means for leaders to identify and address business challenges and crises, transforming abstract concepts into relatable narratives that resonate with employees.

This further extends into crisis management where the primary goal is often the restoration of normalcy rather than fostering change and challenge transformation during crisis responses

into sustained organizational transformation. Common strategies encompass goal development, environment analysis, strategy formulation and evaluation, and implementation and control (Urlick et al., 2021). A critical aspect of crisis leadership is effective communication, with leaders taking responsibility for clear and cohesive messaging in complex and unknown environments, often mired in psychological stress and instability.

Organizational leaders find themselves at the forefront, tasked with making sense of crises and facilitating effective internal communication. Sense-giving narratives, emphasizing flexibility and improvisation, contribute to building trust and commitment among employees (Yeomans & Bowman, 2021).

Credibility and trust in leadership is another by-product mentioned by author Aplin S. of effective organizational storytelling. Conventional expressions such as “my door is always open” or “there are no silly questions” gain conviction and assurance when imbued with personal stories, with the use of narratives by leaders not only able to communicate values but also reinforce their commitment to an open and communicative organizational culture.

To fully appreciate the transformative process, the internal communication unit and strategy play a vital role. Aplin S. reports findings that, to engage the workforce, particularly senior leaders, in the new strategy, there is a required partnership between communication and HR departments. This collaboration ensures that the program is not only initiated effectively but also well-received by leaders, with leadership training in storytelling techniques becoming an essential component, equipping leaders with the skills to motivate and engage their teams in the company's future vision.

The author then expresses the choice for leaders in business and organizations is not whether to engage in storytelling or not, but how to do so strategically and skilfully. The nuances of storytelling can either be wielded unwittingly and clumsily or reinforced with intention and finesse. The imperative is to recognize storytelling not merely as a communication tool but as a strategic asset, capable of influencing organizational culture, employee engagement, and the successful implementation of strategic initiatives.

4.3 Communication management

Within the study of organizational and communication management, crisis is an often-broached topic, emerging as a critical aspect demanding of a framework to navigate

unexpected and threatening situations. Author Auer C. characterizes a crisis as an event that: jeopardises high- priority values of the organization, imposes a limited timeframe for response and, catches the organization off guard, constituting an unforeseen or unanticipated challenge (Auer, 2016). This triad of value, time and surprise threats target an organization's identity and missions, creating a vulnerability at the core of organizations which can trigger a cascade of consequences necessitating swift and effective action within a restricted timeframe.

To this end, the author presents diplomatic communication efforts as a valued strategic response to these high-stakes situations, excelling at managing and mitigating the impact of a crisis on an organization's reputation, operations, and stakeholder's relations. To best make use of this strategy, the author highlights the dynamic nature of communication management and its relation with the unpredictable nature of crises and the imperative use of swift and well- coordinated action, while the structured approach of crisis management help navigating organizations through tumultuous times.

The author repeatedly makes note of the unpredictable nature of crises, with topics on anticipating the unexpected and preparing for the unforeseen. While some crisis, like accidents, manifest themselves as surprises, other may foretell themselves, allowing for varying degrees of preparation and readiness. As such, the author recommends a crisis management approach that prioritises a proactive mindset and dynamic communication strategy to effectively address and navigate these challenges.

4.4 Prepare for Media scrutiny:

Crisis management is not purely constricted to internal organizational matters, as particular public events may spill into the public eye, causing organizational actors to momentarily lose control over the narrative with an always present risk of succumbing to the overwhelming force of events. This is most true when mass media is adept at crafting compelling images and still frames of the narrative, turning social and public perception into a battleground and a crisis onto itself.

The concept of "meaning-making" present in crisis management academia encapsulates the endeavours of leaders in mitigating internal, public and political uncertainty caused by crises in constructing a persuasive narrative for the crisis' origins, its unfolding, repercussions,

resolution strategies and assignment of blame (Boin et al., 2009). Leaders in contention with public attention engage in competition with other communication actors to shape public perception and opinion, recognising the heightened importance of capturing public attention and maintaining credibility.

Credibility that, within the context of this densely mediated “political” context, stands as a fundamental organizational asset, that is tenuous to create, but able to rapidly and unceremoniously be taken away. Past performance records are vulnerable to rapid erosion as emerging account of crisis event unfold; organizational leaders, far from being accepted as reliant sources of unbiased information, often become the target of intense public criticism; journalist and news organisations seize the opportunity to “score” with compelling narratives catered to captivate audiences. As such, the public in the role of by-standers, spectators, seekers of information and/ or victims of the crisis event, become a crucial focal point for communication efforts.

During crises, the public’s interest and engagement surges, creating receptivity to information emerging from legitimate sources. Additionally, this heightened interest also sharpens the public’s awareness for discrepancies and inconsistencies within communications, especially if themselves highlighted by critical press. Due to the pace and pressure behind reportive action by all affected parties and media, the need for normal communication infrastructures struggle to cope, leading policymakers into reactive “firefighting” mode that risks losing sight of the bigger picture (Boin et al., 2009).

The degree of preparedness becomes a critical factor, impacting the speed and coherence of crisis response. Lack of preparedness places leaders in the position of trailing behind rather than shaping the crisis story, making multi-actor, multi-level coordination of outgoing information essential. Public relation teams and leaders act as barriers between management and the media, facing challenges often with limited knowledge about the issue at hand. A common dynamic is also the prioritisation in protecting crisis actors over facilitating dialogue, which can create distrust and fault-finding interpretations that exacerbate losses of credibility and opinion.

Organizations disclosing unflattering facts voluntarily before media exposure may be credited for openness, while delayed disclosure may be perceived as an attempt to obfuscate and manipulate the narrative. As such, the timing of messages emerges as a crucial factor influencing perception alongside the content of the narrative. Similarly, leaders risk falling

into a credibility trap through ill-advised notions, compromising trustworthiness and further credibility by adopting myopic readings, denying inconvenient aspects of reality, or making imprudent public commitments.

4.5 Pre-emptive Scenario planning

In the realm of crisis management uncertainty is a common scenario, with tools and strategies indispensable for navigating and grappling complex uncertain futures in high demand. As organizations struggle with uncertainties, the approach of scenario planning offers a unique framework that avoids attempting to predict the future, instead involving crafting prospective stories that explore how critical uncertainties may interact in unexpected ways (Bowman et al., 2013).

Scenarios, in this context, are not mere predictions; they are narratives that distil uncertain futures into a few studied stories about different possible futures. This process transforms traditional scenario planning into a storytelling discipline, recognizing the profound impact stories have in compelling attention and promoting retention.

Stories, as a medium for communication, possess a psychological impact that surpasses graphs and data (Bowman et al., 2013). They provide order and meaning to events, allowing individuals to recount, reassess and anticipate experiences. The nature of stories, with its emotive and entertaining qualities, aid in the human process of making sense of the world around them by employing sequencing and mutually reinforcing logic, aiding to its plausibility.

Stories integrate events into meaningful plots, introducing novelty and suspension of disbelief, making them relatable and memorable, extending past the individual and into institutional “consciousness” and memory, capable of outlasting the individual recollections themselves. The relevance of scenario planning becomes more pronounced with the nature of crises that tend to introduce ambiguity, confusion and speculation. With its emphasis on crafting narratives on an unknown future, scenario planning allows participants to co-authors, craft and perform stories, creating an emotional connection to the narratives capable of transcending pure reasoning. However, it is not merely about the diffusion of stories but the nuanced integration of creative, emotive and meaningful approach that goes beyond short-term considerations.

4.6 Emotions and Ethics

Recent times, marked by a deluge of crises, demand a paradigm shift in how organizations approach management and organization. The prevailing challenges extend beyond mere technical and operational facets, instead requesting methods that prompt a re-evaluation of organizational roles and the processes through which the individual imbues their actions with meaning. Stories serve as a potent medium that opens “windows into the emotional, political and symbolic lives of organizations” (Fotaki et al., 2020), underscoring the importance of narratives and storytelling in understanding the lives of others sympathetically, emphasizing engagement with lived experiences rather than passively acquaint to them, allowing for better interpretation and enhancing the understanding of complex events.

However, this method of organizational management has its critiques in the realm of ethics and manipulation, as the extent of storytelling research often fails in offering a counter-narrative to the overly positivistic tone of management science. This critical perspective juxtaposes sensemaking with subversion, communication with manipulation, power with dissent and identification with alienation (Fotaki et al., 2020).

Additional concerns include the oversight of in situ considerations, biased towards specific timeframes and insufficient attention to underrepresented groups and themes. The prevalence of social media in the post-truth era amplifies the need for storytelling research and adoption to adapt contemporary developments and engaged with the multifaceted aspects of modern organizations.

Regarding practical approach, organizational storytelling often adopts a linear conception of time and structure, typically following a past-present-future sequence, inhibiting a comprehensive understanding of organizational sensemaking and accommodation of multiple accounts across multiple timeframes. To counterattack this, the efficacy of storytelling interventions should be dependent on more fluid and nuanced temporal structures and frameworks.

With the advent of technological advancements and continued globalization of communications, opportunities emerge to explore social media storytelling and storytelling manipulation, particularly relevant in the post-truth era. Criticism extends to the inclusivity of organizational storytelling, prompting considerations for the voices of underrepresented identities such as disabled workers and LGBTQ+ individuals. Exploring storytelling’s

emotional dimensions, including organizational empathy, emerges as a need in politically sensitive and contemporary organizational structures.

4.7 HR management

Organizational storytelling emerges as a powerful communication tool, especially in the context of crisis management. Conceptual papers explore the use of storytelling to alleviate the stress and anxiety experienced by employees and leaders during crises, which do not only help to make sense of a crisis but also facilitate their adaptation to changes, aiding in creating a crisis ready mentality, cultivated through storytelling's aspects of continuous understanding, learning and sensemaking (Kopp et al., 2011).

There is an emphasis on the role of storytelling in constructing a plot around disruptive occurrences, mitigating discordance created by crises. A studied approach proposes storytelling as an integral part of Human Resources development, applicable before, during and after the crisis (Kopp et al., 2011). Organizational stories, created by a sole figure or co-created, include an emotional depth, making it transformative, healing and a means of articulating workplace actions, able of conveying fundamental values and aiding in retaining historical events. Particularly in crises, stories based on the "hero" or "survivor" archetypes have a substantial impact on leadership and employee morale. These stories help shape organizational culture, acting as cultural artifacts and contributing to the mythopoeic narrative of the organization.

Human Resource development includes organizational roles such as problem solving, change agent and meaning making, find alignment with storytelling's potential for workplace navigation and human capital leverage. One framework designed for such an application considers a group of dimensions in organizational stories with potential for utility and impact in crises. These range from "Colour" to "Fulfilment" aspects, with Colour representing structural elements, considerations, and final intentions, and Fulfilment addressing more emotive and gratification needs (Kopp et al., 2011).

Certain templates offered included Descriptive Story (Low Colour, Low Fulfilment) as the most basic narratives with low staying power; Anecdotal Story (High Colour, Low Fulfilment) with a moderately high staying power due to their comedic, tragic or ironic colour, but ultimately do not address the needs of organizational members; Script Story (Low Colour, High Fulfilment) that, while it does not serve to entertain, it serves a specific purpose for the employee such as reducing stress and uncertainty, with high staying power as they

tend to be told and applied to new hires; and Epic Story (High colour, High Fulfilment) as a story that both appeals to the employees' sense of amusement as well as need fulfilment with high staying power as, despite the story evolving with every recounting, the fundamental principles stay intact.

4.8 Public response to different types of narrative

In navigating a crisis event, effective storytelling serves as a potent tool as per the principles of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) (Clementson & Beatty, 2021). The dichotomy presented of the different methods in on-topic narratives and nonnarrative is especially prevalent on the former, which has the capacity to alleviate public blame, enhance the organization's attributes and fortify the company's image. However, a cautionary note arises when the spokesperson resorts to narrative spinning, as this strategy implies heightened public attribution of blame to the organization.

Crises, especially those deriving from employee behaviour and not aligned with corporate policy, demand a more nuanced response. The challenge lies in restoring public faith and trust, which often lies contingent on the organization's communication strategy, with the initial media interactions becoming pivotal, setting the tone for blame mitigation and reputation salvaging strategies.

The aforementioned inherent human inclination towards storytelling is harnessed through narratives that present a cohesive sequence of event in a dynamic setting. People naturally gravitate towards stories as they provide a means of understanding the complexities of any given situation. Stories, with their familiar structures of characters, settings, and plots, resonate with their audience, facilitating comprehension, retention and the extraction of valuable lessons.

Narratives have the advantage in public relations and understanding, with their ability of constructing a reality without necessitating specialised knowledge from its audience, further emphasised in crises situations, where timely responses are imperative and engaging narratives can fill the void left by the unavailability of statistical and analytical information. As crises prompt searches for cause and explanations, organizations must proactively construct narratives to shape the public's perception and counter divergent storylines.

Continuing the principles of SCCT, there is an underlining ethical imperative in crisis communication, emphasizing truthfulness, reassurance, and expression of concern for those

affected. While ethical narratives contribute to positive reputation building, the theory advises against immediate acceptance of responsibility as the intended effects may be dashed by inappropriate public response. On the other hand, organizations wary of legal and financial implications, may engage in evasive manoeuvres such as narrative spinning to appear responsive without admitting fault, having clear ethical implications (Clementson & Beatty, 2021).

4.9 Tackle targeted public anger on the organization and leaders:

In crisis management, the theory of crisis response narratives underscores the importance of ethical storytelling for effective communication with the public. The fundamental principle is to “tell a truthful story”, recognising the persuasive power of narratives in shaping public perceptions during crises (E. Clementson & Xie, 2020). However, the authors also acknowledge that a balance must be struck as storytelling may be perceived as deceptive when compared to straightforward communication devoid of embellishment.

In crisis situations, anger is a prevalent negative emotion that poses a significant challenge for organizations and leader. The defendant must craft narratives that address the public’s outrage without exacerbating the underlying anger towards them. Unethical spin narratives, designed to evade responsibility and manipulated public perception, can intensify anger and erode trust thus, ethical storytelling emerges as a crucial aspect of crisis communication.

Theory suggest that ethical storytelling is more effective than unethical spin narratives in building public trust and favourable attitudes, with the nuance of approaching this strategy with an emphasis on analytical and imperative research and minimising embellishment in crisis narratives, as more sceptical audiences may react negatively to persuading attempts. As such, there is a suggestion on role of anger as a focal point for strategizing in crisis communication that highlights the need for crisis managers to carefully encode messages with suitable details responsive to public concerns, while exhibiting fewer embellishments and colour present in other storytelling strategies (E. Clementson & Xie, 2020).

4.10 As used by the public for sensemaking in crisis events

The contemporary public media landscape is characterised by saturation and consumption culture within digital platforms, which has transformed the dynamics of news storytelling. While news pages now offer an unprecedented access to vast quantity of information in scope and depth, the storytelling functions traditionally attributed to journalism have become diluted

in the digital age, with the advent of digital media ushering in a new era where news stories flourish in platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and others.

Public storytelling on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter is created and consumed openly to a wide audience, with creators leveraging this medium to narrate their lived experiences, engage in dynamic processes of debating and validating their outlook through positions reflected in the stories of others. However wide and public, these platforms still maintain a fixed cultural milieu, shaped by their emerging values, practices and expectations of the networking society. The impact of digital culture on storytelling extends into realms such as political activism, performative practices, and the construction of desired audiences. Networked users now play a pivotal role in shaping news narratives, transitioning from passive consumers to active creators in the digital public sphere. This shift grants them the power to influence public agenda and mobilize collective action, a privilege that once was exclusive of more curated, mainstream media (Egbunike, 2023).

Navigating the complex, multilayered context of digital storytelling presents a considerable challenge, with the task of sieving through a deluge of information to discern the truth becoming an Herculean act, and with digital storytelling being often critiqued by its perceived lack of authenticity and association with the amplification of fake information. Despite this, nuanced insight would suggest that social media showcases the potential of providing genuine and valuable content to both the narrators and the audiences, as audiences have increasingly turned to digital narratives as a means of sensemaking, self-representation and creative responses to challenges, with the latter playing a key role in times of crisis.

These stories serve not only as a personal account of lived experiences as mentioned, but also as a source of agency, connectedness, and empowerment for those who engage with them. The communal sharing of stories becomes a powerful tool for fostering a collective understanding and response to complex realities posed by crises, as human psychology suggest that reading and engaging with stories is a very efficient manner of perceiving and retaining information, requiring minimal cognitive effort by the audience, and ensuring a high level of information recollection, with individuals becoming involuntarily persuaded by narratives that resonate with personal experiences (Hou, 2023).

Participatory storytelling, therefore, serves as a catalyst for the development of shared sensemaking within a community. It becomes a tool through which individuals collectively organize their past, explain their present circumstances, and imagine possibilities for the

future. This shared narrative construction not only helps communities make sense of the challenges posed a crisis but also strengthens their resilience and ability to navigate an uncertain future.

In the organizational realm, storytelling becomes a potent tool, able of shifting the focus from the rational to the emotional, reflecting the reflexive logic of the audience. The narrativization of events therefore emerges as a powerful lever for changing and manipulating public perception towards alignment with an organization's aims, if one is able of reining in control from public hands, allowing for a rare respite in control over the narrative in an otherwise uncontrollable crisis.

4.11 Different methods and stories applicable to different situations/ crises

The management of crises, particularly those self-inflicted, demands a careful crafting of narratives to navigate the turbulent airs of public opinion. One such case is that of United Airlines, caught in the throes of a crisis it had, to some extent, orchestrated themselves. Faced with the need to respond, the airline embarked on a series of apologia, a discourse of defence aimed at contextualizing its actions (rooted in the Greek word apologia, denotes a speech in defence, distinguishing it from a straightforward apology, which involves acknowledging guilt and seeking forgiveness) (Hearit, 2021). This series of apologia can be seen as constituting "blame narratives," a term that encapsulates the collective justificatory messages employed by the airline. The resolution of the crisis, as the United case exemplifies, hinged on the creation of a blame narrative that resonated with its passengers and the broader public.

Scholars have identified various strategies within apologia, such as denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, and corrective action. Similarly, in crisis management, organizations often deploy other tactics such as denial, diminishment, and rebuild strategies. However, these approaches, while focusing on message strategies and efficacy, lack a nuanced understanding of the broader socio-cultural context. A narrative approach to crises is one reliant on fidelity and coherence, aligning with the socio-cultural milieu of its environment and presenting consistent facts, with its effectiveness not solely based on message strategy but extending to delivery and empathic qualities.

The prevailing narrative structure in crisis management often follows the rise and fall plot, wherein the protagonist (organizations/ leadership) faces a downfall and endeavours to

counter it with a rise/fall/rise plot. This narrative seeks to repair a damaged image by the element of aspiration and expectation of subverting the current crisis but may incur the opposite effect as audiences may become sceptic towards the organization's sincerity if identifying that the apology is primarily a strategic manoeuvre rather than one with moral reflections (Hearit, 2021).

Therefore, the strategic adoption of narrative and story lies not solely in employing the right message strategy, but in crafting a narrative that authentically resonate with its target audience in a manner that recognises the complexity and holistic nature of the crisis. Furthermore, misguided strategies and missives may dilute the impact of better resonating and well performed apology, necessitating a strategy beyond a reductionist approach to organizational storytelling.

4.12 Stories as communication tools during times of change & increase trust in organisation internally and externally

A topic often approached in organizational dynamics academia is the constant need for innovation in institutional approaches built on creating a cohesive and favourable identity with shared values and goals. The method of storytelling proposed involves tapping into the collective wisdom and insight of the employees themselves, fostering a sense of inclusion, belonging and ownership, becoming a catalyst for dialogue and allowing every organizational member to be heard and seen (Langer & Thorup, 2006).

The landscape of communication in organizations has witnessed the emergence of various concepts aimed at instilling confidence, particularly in the face of risks and complexity during crisis events. While corporate branding and integrated communication focus on specific facets of organizational communication, storytelling takes a holistic approach, with storytelling communication advocating for a unified organizational voice and endeavours to convey a dynamic but consistent identity through a comprehensive and inclusive narrative. This also acts as a counter to the pitfalls of monophonic communication (communications deriving from a sole person/ homogenous group) of traditional strategies, which often lead to increase insecurity, dissonance, crisis of confidence and rumour mongering, with the rigid adherence to top-down communication strategies of a singular voice denying the independence and innovation potential of employees and hindering the sharing of knowledge and stifling experimentation.

The need for coordination and discipline in organizational communication is acknowledged, but the challenge lies in how these concepts are implemented. Issues such as monitoring, the desire for standardization, and the imposition of a uniform identity by management may present challenges with the underpinnings of these practices. As such, a paradigm shift is proposed, viewing an organization not as a singular entity with a management-driven voice but as an orchestra comprising diverse instruments and voices, with the polyphonic (decentralised communication where various internal and external voices are integrated) perspective advocating for the facilitation and coordination of all voices, creating harmony by acknowledging and celebrating the unique qualities of each (Langer & Thorup, 2006).

The success of organizational change is a continuous process that hinges on building trust, reducing insecurity, and preventing rumour mongering, requiring open and collective planning based on dialogue. A polyphonic approach therefore involves joint information sharing, a clear timetable for change, and co-production of the organization's vision and strategic goals, emphasizing the shift from sender-dictated communication to employee-based polyphonic communication, embracing diversity, fostering individual expression, and maintaining an ongoing dialogue. This strategy relies less on achieving rapid results but about engaging in a long-term, resource-intensive process. It necessitates a shift from talking about values to talking with employees, treating their stories as valuable resources, and fostering a sense of ownership among them.

5 Results

5.1 Impact of Ethical Storytelling on Passenger Trust in Airline Crisis Communication:

In the turbulent skies of crisis management within the airline industry, the role of storytelling emerges as a pivotal tool for influencing passenger trust. The theoretical underpinning of crisis response narratives mentioned in the literature review section showcase the significance of ethical storytelling for effective communication with the public.

One such example that showcases the intricate dynamics of how ethical storytelling shapes passenger trust during a crisis within the airline sector was the handling of flight QF32's near disaster by Australian centenary airline company Qantas. The Airbus A380 was, at the time of the accident in 2010, a frontrunner in innovation and the pinnacle of global aviation, with this particular plane being the "Nancy Bird Walton", the flagship of Qantas fleet, on a voyage that coincided with the company's 90th birthday and very nearly ended Qantas' reputation as the world's safest airline (Sheehan, 2010).

On November 4, 2010, Qantas Airways Flight QF32, enroute from Singapore to Sydney, was put in a critical situation just six minutes after take-off when the number two engine experienced a multitude of failures. It is here that the airline's management took control of the narrative and gave specific focus on the crew's professionalism, led by Captain Richard de Crespigny, that skilfully navigated a series of challenges, including severe damage to the hydraulics system, fuel leaks, and various other mechanical failures, highlighting the crew's adherence to safety procedures, and the airline's commitment to passenger safety (SMH, 2012).

Additionally, it was stated that the crew, facing the possibility of a disastrous outcome, demonstrated an abundance of caution by taking the decision of bringing the aircraft down for a safety landing rather than passively wait above open waters in wait of outside guidance. The A380 had sustained multiple damages, including an open gash in the wing, fuel leaks, and problems with the fuel distribution system amongst the tanks in the wing, with limited control over fuel balance and numerous critical components compromised, culminating in the crew preparing for a high-speed landing at Singapore's Changi Airport. The incident prompted investigations into the Rolls-Royce Trent 900 engine that had caused the initial cascade of events that saw the Nancy Bird Walton's second engine failure, highlighting that the issue originated in its manufacturing rather than Qantas's maintenance practices. Despite the extensive damage and the complexity of the situation, Captain de Crespigny and his crew

successfully landed the aircraft, avoiding a potential catastrophe that was to be Australia's biggest airline tragedy. Qantas extensively used this series of events in their narrative, emphasizing transparency and accountability, while highlighting the crew's exemplary training and professionalism in playing a crucial role in averting disaster, while showcasing the importance of rigorous training standards in the aviation industry.

In the circulation of the stories on the crisis, Qantas also shared their willingness of allowing the crew of the A38 flight to take a break from their duties and, in the months following the incident, Captain de Crespigny took that hiatus, seeking psychological support to cope with the stress and evaluating his readiness to return to flying, ultimately returning to the cockpit. This narrative key allows the audience to connect and identify with the narrator, creating a persuasive narrative which aims to draw the audience into adopting the speaker's perspective and adding further credibility and trust to the company.

A more recent event happened in 2018 as Southwest Airlines Flight 1380 bound for Dallas faced a life-threatening incident when its left engine broke mid-flight, causing the plane to bank sharply to the left at an angle exceeding 40 degrees. A fan blade in the engine broke, leading to a shattered window in row 14. Passenger Jennifer Riordan was partially sucked out of the plane and later died from blunt impact trauma, with the crew, led by Captain Tammie Jo Shults and First Officer Darren Ellisor, successfully executing an emergency landing in Philadelphia, an hour after the initial take-off in New York's La Guardia airport (Karimi & Almasry, 2018).

The organization informed that the engine had undergone a recent visual inspection, and that the investigation revealed evidence of metal fatigue at the blade attachment that caused the accident and collaborated with the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) to examine why the issue was not detected earlier, planning an aggressive ultrasonic inspection campaign for the entire Southwest Airlines fleet.

Southwest Airlines then CEO Gary Kelly tackled the outcry of public inquiries and blame-seeking by taking a transparent and empathetic approach to communicating with the public. The message focused on the safety measures in place, expressed condolences and support for the victim's family, and provided regular updates as the incident was being investigated, an approach that was aimed at building trust amidst a tragic incident.

Trustworthiness and public attitudes toward the organization thus emerge as crucial mediators in crisis storytelling. When organizations opt for ethical and transparent narratives over deceptive spins, the public perceives greater trustworthiness and forms more favourable attitudes toward management and the organization, creating critical distinction that suggests a clear path for crisis managers – to encode their stories with suitable details and without dishonest embellishment. On the other hand, unethical "spin" narratives, designed to evade responsibility and manipulate public perception, are often taken in lieu of adopting this theory by organizations. This often has organizations and leaders engaging in diversionary tactics, attempt to portray their status positively, leading to a breach of trust, the crux in the call for ethical storytelling in crisis management, as was the example of United Airline's very public fallout with the public following the event on Express Flight 3411 on April 9th, 2017.

The catalyst for this crisis was an overbooking issue, prompting the airline to seek volunteers willing to relinquish their seats for United personnel. Despite escalating compensation offers and a night's stay at a hotel, no passengers stepped forward. United, left with no alternative, resorted to a random computerized selection process. While the first two chosen complied, Dr. David Dao and his wife refused, citing his medical responsibilities. As the situation intensified, a third passenger accepted a \$1000 voucher, but Dr. Dao persisted, invoking the intervention of Chicago Department of Aviation authorities. Shockingly, officers forcibly removed him, with reports suggesting an unsettling display of laughter during the ordeal. Dr. Dao, after briefly reboarding, bore the physical toll of a broken nose, missing teeth, a concussion, and the necessity for reconstructive surgery. The incident, captured on cell phone footage, went viral on social media, thrusting United Airlines into a week-long crisis that raised serious questions about the airline's prioritization of profits over passenger well-being.

In response to the crisis, United Airlines adopted various narrative strategies to manage the blame stemming from the controversial incident. CEO Oscar Munoz initially issued a statement expressing regret and apologizing for the need to "re-accommodate these customers." However, this "non-apology, apology" denied the airline's responsibility, framing the event as an unfortunate occurrence rather than a crisis. Munoz minimized the incident's severity, using terms like "upsetting" to suggest the airline's distress while subtly casting doubt and blame on the passenger's behaviour.

The crisis escalated further when Munoz, in a letter to employees, shifted blame away from the airline, adopting a justification stance. He minimized United's role, asserting that the

situation worsened when a passenger refused to deplane, necessitating the involvement of Chicago Aviation Security Officers. Munoz praised his employees, attempting to deflect responsibility. However, this narrative approach backfired, fuelling public outrage and international scrutiny.

Recognizing the inadequacy of the initial response, Munoz transitioned into damage control mode, adopting a revised blame narrative that included a well-performed apology. Despite this effort, United Airlines faced a \$1.4 billion decline in market value, underscoring the severity of the crisis. Munoz continued his apology stance through media appearances, acknowledging the company's guilt and framing the incident as a systemic failure. Despite a full refund offer and policy changes, United's stock continued to decline, signalling enduring financial repercussions.

The crisis took another turn when Dr. Dao's lawyer held a news conference, expressing continued displeasure and levelling accusations against United. In response, the airline issued a fifth statement, reiterating apologies, acknowledging the severity of the situation, and outlining corrective actions.

On April 27, 2017, United Airlines announced policy changes in response to the crisis, aiming to prevent similar incidents. These changes included stricter conditions for passenger removal, higher financial incentives for volunteers, discontinuation of law enforcement involvement, and a reduction in overbooking. Simultaneously, a confidential settlement was reached between Dr. Dao and United, commended for corporate accountability and concluding the series of events surrounding the crisis, marking the dénouement of the crisis.

In hindsight, the United Airlines crisis of Flight 3411 serves as a paradigmatic case study of the complexities involved in managing a blame narrative during a crisis. The incident exposed the delicate balance between corporate image, customer trust, and financial repercussions, emphasizing the enduring impact of a mismanaged crisis on an organization's standing.

This underhand method of storytelling is prone to negative reactions by the public specially anger, a prevalent negative emotion in crisis communication that tends to escalate during aviation crises. Accused entities must carefully formulate messages to avoid enflaming existing anger as the discussed theory of crisis narratives emphasizes the need for organizations to tell ethical stories to mitigate public anger successfully. These reactions however are not only prevalent in “spin” narrative strategies as, per the topic broached in the

literature review section, the act of storytelling itself may risk being perceived as deceptive when compared to straight forward information dissemination. Yet, a silver lining emerges - when a spokesperson provides unembellished answers, public anger toward the organization diminishes. By acknowledging the scandal without adornment, the public's emotional response softens thus, the narrative journey of crisis communication is a delicate balance between telling the story truthfully and avoiding unnecessary embellishments that may fuel public resentment.

5.2 Polyphonic Communication in Aviation Change Management:

In the dynamic and complex landscape of the aviation industry, crisis communication plays a pivotal role in maintaining trust, mitigating potential damages, and legitimizing strategies as was discussed in the literature review section. The traditional monophonic approach, characterized by a single authoritative voice delivering a uniform narrative, is being challenged by the need for more inclusive and diverse communication strategies, juxtaposed by the proposed concept of a polyphonic approach to storytelling in aviation crisis communication, recognizing the multifaceted nature of organizational voices and perspectives.

Historically, the aviation industry has grappled with crises ranging from safety incidents to public relations challenges. The monophonic approach, which is dominated by top-down communication from management, has limitations in addressing the diverse needs and perspectives of employees and other stakeholders, while the polyphonic perspective, on the other hand, envisions the organization as an orchestra of voices, each contributing to a harmonious narrative during times of crisis.

A fundamental aspect of the polyphonic approach involves fostering open dialogue and collaboration among various organizational voices, encouraging participation from all levels of the organization, including front-line staff, ground crews, and management. This inclusivity not only reflects a commitment to transparency but also acknowledges the valuable insights that diverse perspectives can bring to the crisis communication process.

One company that has adopted this strategy and involved employees in the decision-making process was Southwest airlines, attributing organizational storytelling to the successful change experienced. Southwest Airlines has cultivated a unique corporate culture that

prioritizes the well-being and happiness of its employees, a philosophy rooted in the belief that the business of business is people, according to the company's founder, Herb Kelleher. Southwest has expressed that their strategy of being human and vulnerable is behind their substantial yield dividends, putting employees' happiness and to a well-defined culture that emphasizes the development and improvement of the originality, identity, and personality of its people (Razzetti, 2020).

The company's emphasis on engagement and commitment creates a unique environment that is challenging for competitors to replicate in the manner of how it prioritizes employee happiness over customer satisfaction, customers over stakeholders, and humour over corporate behaviour, with Southwest's use of humour, exemplified in its "Bags Fly Free" marketing campaign, has not only been successful but challenging for others to imitate.

The emotional culture at Southwest Airlines of bringing heart and humour to the workplace has created a psychologically safe environment where employees feel valued, and their voices are welcome with Southwest's focus on relationships, shared goals, shared knowledge, and mutual respect fostering a culture that inspires effective coordination and collaboration across teams.

Southwest Airlines upholds its culture through various customs, including humorous safety announcements, Cultural Blitzes to show appreciation to flight crews, weekly shout-outs to commend exceptional employees, and annual celebrations such as Spirit Parties, Chili Cook-offs, and Southwest Rallies. The airline's commitment to preserving its culture is evident in its servant leadership model, where managers act as coaches, supporting employees to solve problems and providing constructive feedback.

Southwest Airlines' culture narratives encompass meetings, leadership transparency, rules and norms designed with employee input, and a decision-making approach that empowers employees to take responsibility. The values of “a warrior spirit, a servant's heart, and a fun-loving attitude” permeate every aspect of Southwest's operations, ensuring a culture that aligns with the company's purpose (Makivsky,2013).

Change communication within the aviation industry as a whole often involves significant organizational shifts, whether in response to safety concerns, market fluctuations, or technological advancements. In these scenarios, a polyphonic storytelling approach recognizes that every employee is a potential storyteller, contributing to the collective

narrative of the organization. By providing employees with opportunities to express their views, share experiences, and actively engage in the storytelling process, organizations can enhance the authenticity and resonance of their crisis communication.

One of the key advantages of a polyphonic storytelling approach is its potential to build trust and confidence among stakeholders. In an industry where public perception is crucial, the genuine voices of employees can serve as powerful instruments in conveying authenticity and sincerity. When stakeholders witness a diversity of voices aligned in the narrative, it creates a more comprehensive and believable story that resonates with the complexity of the crisis at hand. One such example of the usage of organizational storytelling towards shaping a company's identity and fostering a positive workplace culture is Delta Airlines, as recognised with consistent recognition by Glassdoor's "Best Places to Work" awards for several consecutive years (Delta News Hub, 2023).

Executive Vice President and Chief People Officer Joanne Smith emphasized the company's commitment to recruiting and engaging talent to propel the company towards their set goals and objectives, achieving their 2018 goal of attracting and retaining 5,000 new staff and aligning with their dedication and commitment to the importance of employee feedback in guiding the company's values and goals.

Delta's CEO Ed Bastian adds insight into his leadership perspective in the awards and adds depth to the organizational narrative strategy, emphasizing that Delta's leadership values employee satisfaction as a key metric of success, as the accolade is one measure solely on voluntary and anonymous feedback from employees, reinforcing the authenticity of the recognition. The importance of employees' voices is reinforced by Delta's commitment to considering both positive and negative insights, which demonstrates a culture that values continuous improvement and growth through open dialogue across the organization's hierarchy.

Delta's resilience in the recent global crisis that severely affected the commercial airline industry. Showcases the factor in the transparent and honest feedback provided by Delta's employees in being instrumental in steering the company's decisions, fostering improved communication, and enhancing organizational well-being. Delta's commitment to climbing together, as evidenced through weekly town hall meetings, exemplifies the narrative of a company that values its employees' contributions in navigating challenges and a testament to the power of organizational storytelling, as through genuine narratives shared by its

leadership and employees, Delta crafts a compelling story of success, resilience, and a commitment to fostering an exceptional workplace culture.

Implementing a polyphonic approach, however, requires a shift in organizational culture and communication practices. It necessitates a departure from rigid top-down structures toward more collaborative and participatory frameworks. By harnessing the diverse voices within the organization, this approach has the potential to not only navigate crises more successfully but also to strengthen the overall resilience and reputation of aviation entities in an ever-changing landscape, with the aviation industry standing to benefit significantly from embracing a polyphonic storytelling approach in crisis communication, as it aligns with the evolving expectations of transparency, inclusivity, and authenticity in the contemporary business environment.

5.3 Long-Term Impacts of Storytelling on Airline Reputation:

In the aviation industry, where safety, reliability, and public perception are paramount and with aviation entities often undergoing significant changes driven by technological advancements, regulatory shifts, or market demands, the long-lasting effects and consequences that emerge from the implementation of storytelling and change communication strategies are of critical importance. Storytelling becomes a powerful tool not only in communicating these changes but also in shaping the narrative surrounding the organization's evolution, influencing the organizational culture, stakeholder relationships, and the industry's perception over the long term.

One of the primary long-term implications of storytelling in aviation is its role in shaping organizational culture. When stories are crafted to align with the values, vision, and mission of the aviation company, they contribute to the establishment of a narrative-driven culture with employees, stakeholders, and even customers becoming part of a shared story that defines the organization's identity, creating a narrative continuity over time that fosters a sense of belonging and unity, and creating a resilient foundation for the organization.

Delta Airlines exemplifies this approach through their usage of Delta SkyMiles, as not merely a loyalty program but as a strategic element contributing to their long-term impact, reputation, image, and overall success. The program is able of extending beyond the notions of a customer loyalty program, as it serves the organization's goal in fostering enduring

relationships with its customers, with the uniqueness of Delta's storytelling laying in its ability to align the SkyMiles program with the company's core values. Through promotional campaigns and communication strategies, Delta consistently emphasizes the idea that SkyMiles is more than a rewards program; it is a symbol of appreciation for customer loyalty. By strategically leveraging SkyMiles as a symbol of the company's commitment to excellence and customer-centricity, this narrative transcends the functional aspects of a loyalty program and becomes a story of shared experiences and mutual loyalty between the airline and its passengers, as Delta often makes usage of incorporating customer testimonials, success stories, and memorable travel experiences enabled by SkyMiles. These stories become a part of the company's larger narrative, emphasizing its dedication to enhancing the customer journey and creating moments that extend beyond the confines of air travel (Qantas AU, 2023).

The impact of Delta's organizational storytelling with SkyMiles is evident in the way it enhances the overall reputation of the airline, as customers do not merely buy tickets, they invest in a relationship with a company that values their loyalty and is committed to making their travel experiences exceptional. Delta's emphasis on long-term impact through SkyMiles is also reflected in its strategic partnerships and collaborations, by aligning with other brands and services that expand the narrative around SkyMiles, positioning it as a versatile currency that unlocks a world of possibilities beyond air travel. This strategic expansion of the SkyMiles narrative not only enhances the loyalty program's value but also reinforces Delta's image as an innovative and customer-focused airline.

The long-term implications of storytelling in aviation tend to extend to stakeholder relationships, as airlines, manufacturers, and other industry actors rely heavily on the trust and confidence of passengers, investors, regulatory bodies, and public opinion, with consistent and authentic storytelling contributing to the construction of a trustworthy image, which, when maintained over time, solidifies the organization's reputation. Conversely, inconsistent or misleading narratives can erode trust and have enduring consequences for the aviation entity that are not as easily reversed, especially in an era where social media and instant communication shape public discourse, as the longevity of storytelling impact is particularly pronounced. Positive stories shared by passengers or employees can become enduring testimonials that influence the choices of future customers, while mishandled communication during a crisis can leave a lasting stain on an organization's reputation. Hence, the long-term implications of storytelling and change communication in aviation necessitate a strategic and

forward-thinking approach, with aviation companies acknowledging that storytelling and change communication are ongoing processes with constant evaluation, feedback loops and adjustment to narratives as necessary, rather than isolated events.

6 Conclusion

This study was inspired in its development by a previous study I conducted on the nature of organizational storytelling and my desire to continue that narrative, as well as other pieces such as Kindra Hall's *Stories that Stick: How Storytelling Can Captivate Customers* that, despite not actively contributing to this work's bibliography, has kept my interest in organizational storytelling all this time, and something I had hoped to emulate here. This dissertation equally aimed to showcase the different managerial roles that storytelling is able to adapt to and highlight an aspect that is often only spoken in a dismissive or esoteric tones and demystify an element that is deeply human.

This paper was restrained in its scope by the nature of the assignment as a crisis-focused piece with special attention to the commercial airline industry and, as such, it suffered from a few limitations (not necessarily only due to this setting), but equally showcased the opportunity for further research in connecting fields.

The first limitation that was made apparent during the process of research and writing comes in the form of a "magic in a bottle" metaphor that seems prevalent in storytelling academia and might have seeped through into this work, as, when discussing the use and application of storytelling, this was often mentioned as an isolated technique that is able to be used when needed, and within the same breath be again superimposed by traditional organizational methods when the desired effect has been done. There were many attempts in this essay where I tried to subvert this narrative, expressing the usage of stories as a continuous and ever present boon for organizational management, but such a feat was made difficult due to the nature of the topic of crisis as this includes recurring themes of contingency plans, subverting the idea of maintaining status quo and consistent organizational methods in favour of more transformative and intrusive strategies, where storytelling techniques are let out of the metaphorical bottle, just to be trapped in again after the crisis event is over.

Another limitation that might have had a part to play in the dissertation, as well as outside of it to the body of literature selected and reviewed, is that of a personal confirmation bias towards the value of storytelling. This topic in particular has been one that has greatly interested me, creating the possibility of having tempered my judgement in the selection and interpretation of sources, where positive and affirming viewpoint possibly taking precedence over opposing, or neutral talking points. I tried to mitigate this cognitive bias by consciously taking note of any opposing or addending themes and ensuring these were mentioned in the

literary review and results section. Despite that, very few such topics were present in my research, which may indicate a wider prevalence of this predilection.

One of the contradicting points however, showed a possible venue for future study in this topic, as some authors made note of the possible unethical usage of storytelling as a naturally persuasive technique that plays with aspects of the human psychology, which in itself, creates a paradox wherein if one is aware of this aspect of storytelling and consciously depicts the usage of it as manipulative, the opposite becomes true, where the usage of storytelling is instead counterproductive in persuasive efforts.

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